

**Re-envisioning Sexuality Education in Aotearoa New Zealand:
Thinking with Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak's Aesthetic
Education to Queer the Field**

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Abstract

This study situates itself in relation to on-going conversations about the future of sexuality education in Aotearoa New Zealand. It is philosophical and literary in its emphasis, even as it concerns itself with policy analysis and critique.

In response to concerns that school-based sexuality education in New Zealand finds itself in somewhat of a stuck place, this thesis looks to the possibilities opened up for sexuality education by Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak's aesthetic education—a pedagogical orientation and practice which deploys literary reading in an effort to train the imagination to know differently, thereby, bringing about a sustained and uncoercive rearrangement of desires. By thinking closely with Spivak's aesthetic education—and by supplementing it with Leo Bersani's conceptualization of sex as a modality of the aesthetic, including the choreographic—this thesis theorizes sexuality education in ways that seek to move it beyond the perspectives of physical education, health and wellbeing, to which historically it has been tied. In doing so, the thesis re-envisionsexuality education as a utopically focussed field—one which by positioning queerness as 'horizon' nurtures the potential to desire differently, more, and better.

As it explores Spivakian approaches to literary reading, this study draws upon the work of a number of philosophers, mainly from the Continental tradition, as well as queer, cultural, educational, literary, and literacy theorists, who prompt and inform reparative readings of a number of literary texts—most by queer cis male New Zealand authors. When, in the course of this thesis, literary texts are read alongside and athwart policy and review documents of the Ministry of Education and the Education Review Office, it is in the hopeful/hopeless expectation that 'something' queer might result from a proximity that always inclines towards conceptual cross-hatching.

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Preface

In a paper dealing with school-based queer straight alliance as a utopic site of learning, Kathleen Quinlivan introduces the beautiful but provocative image of “butterflies starting a tornado” (Quinlivan, 2014, pp. 272, 279)—an image brought to her attention in a face-to-face interview with ‘Marie,’ one of a number of high school students participating in a case study which Kathleen was conducting as “part of a wider research project funded by the New Zealand AIDS Foundation and the University of Canterbury” (Quinlivan, 2014, p. 275). Throughout this paper, as she entertains the possibility of butterflies creating mayhem, Kathleen playfully inhabits and performs José Esteban Muñoz’s notion that “we must dream and enact new and better pleasures, other ways of being in the world, and ultimately new worlds” (Muñoz, 2009, p. 1). In doing so, Kathleen not only affirms the role of the imagination and of the aesthetic in the generation of queer utopias as a form of “‘educated’ hope”—a hope which she describes as “the dreams of an emergent group dwelling in the region of a critically hopeful ‘not yet’” (Quinlivan, 2014, p. 274)—but also attests to the importance of allowing this sort of utopic thinking to inform empirically focused sexuality education research in general.

If, in her paper, Kathleen draws attention to how young people participating in school-based queer straight alliances willingly risk disappointment in order to create “the possibility of ways of knowing and being which utilise a notion of queerness as primarily about futurity and hope” (Quinlivan, 2014, p. 281), she also, I suggest, prompts sexuality educators and researchers to do the same. That is, she urges those of us working in the field to leave safe positions behind in order to inhabit the uncomfortable in-between spaces of the ‘not-yet’ and the ‘perhaps,’ and, as Lauren Berlant puts it, “to occupy these dark times not only with anger, depression, and exhaustion, but also with inventiveness, reimagined collectivity, intellectual energy, persistent curiosity—and fierce . . . attention” (Berlant, 2019, pp. 4–5).

As Kathleen shows us, we do well to attend fiercely to the image of butterflies starting a tornado. For, it “speaks to the ways in which aesthetic practices can provide sites of wonderment for re-visioning the world” (Quinlivan, 2014, p. 279)—and, I add, for re-imagining a sexuality education that exceeds the over-simplifications of health and wellbeing.

It is Kathleen's vision that has provided much of the inspiration for this thesis—an endeavour which, in its own way, attempts to open up “an anticipatory space of hope . . . characterized by indeterminacy, both in terms of affect and methodology” (Quinlivan, 2014, p. 274). Given that my thesis is itself an exercise in queer utopic thinking, my wish is that those who read it will be provoked to play with queer theory—especially within the mode of the aesthetic and through the reading of literary texts—as they conduct their own experiments in “‘educated’ hope” (Quinlivan, 2014, p. 274).

INTRODUCTION

Getting Underway

Sexuality Education, the Aesthetic, and the Queer

The most pernicious presupposition today is that globalization has happily happened in every aspect of our lives. Globalization can never happen to the sensory equipment of the experiencing being except insofar as it always was implicit in its vanishing outlines. Only an aesthetic education can continue to prepare us for this, thinking an uneven and only apparently accessible contemporaneity that can no longer be interpreted by such nice polarities as modernity/tradition, colonial/postcolonial. Everything else begins there, in that space that allows us to survive in the singular and the unverifiable, surrounded by the lethal and lugubrious consolations of rational choice. (Spivak, 2012, p. 2)

Queer is a continuing moment, movement, motive—recurrent, eddying, *troublant*. The word ‘queer’ itself means *across*—it comes from the Indo-European root *-twerkw*, which also yields the German *quer* (transverse), Latin *torquere* (to twist), English *athwart*. (Sedgwick, 1993, p. xii)

Overview

As its title suggests, this doctoral thesis, *Re-envisioning sexuality education in Aotearoa New Zealand: Thinking with Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak’s aesthetic education to queer the field*, concerns itself with sexuality education in Aotearoa New Zealand, including calls to widen its terms of reference in ways that are “playful, experimental, hopeful (yet hopeless), and thus decidedly *queer*” (Allen, 2018b, p. 6).

In the chapters that follow, I will unfold the central argument of my thesis—namely, that Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak’s project of aesthetic education,¹ supplemented by Leo Bersani’s conceptualization of sex as a modality of the aesthetic, is able to queer and, thereby, contribute productively to a re-envisioning of sexuality education in Aotearoa New Zealand. If Spivak’s emphasis is on literary reading as a means of uncoercively rearranging desires, hence, exercising the imagination to know in different ways, Leo Bersani’s conceptualization of sex within the modality of the aesthetic—especially in

¹ Spivak’s understanding of aesthetic education is explained, developed and applied mainly in the twenty-five essays that constitute the chapters of her *An Aesthetic Education in the Era of Globalization* (2012). However, it is a notion that appears elsewhere in Spivak’s work, most recently in her book *Readings* (2014) which deals with the ethics of reading.

choreographic terms—suggests that it is possible for us to aestheticize our lives as we “unlearn . . . our extant modes of being in the world” (Tuhkanen, 2018, p. 20). Spivak and Bersani, whether read separately, together, or in conjunction with other theorists, have the potential, I believe, to contribute to a re-theorizing of sexuality education. Rather than encouraging us to repeat and improve on “what is currently intelligible and comfortable (to humans),” they stir us “to escape stagnation of thought and practice in sexuality education” (Allen, 2018b, p. 5). By engaging the aesthetic, especially through their encounters with literary texts,² Spivak and Bersani, in their different ways, gesture towards a future where “queerness is a structuring and educated mode of desiring” (Muñoz, 2009, p. 1). If Spivak and Bersani teach us that a close reading of a literary text can “dislodge us from a particular affective conditioning” (Snaza, 2019, p. 134)—one that limits our ability to be other than what we are—they do so by encouraging us, as we read, to let go of our fear of the unanticipatable, the random, and the unknown. Reading in this way prepares us to reach out and to receive the other—for, in learning to read otherwise, we may learn to be otherwise. Thus, the work of Spivak and of Bersani clearly expands the range of both theoretical and pedagogical tools available to researchers and educators wanting, not only to challenge present normativities, but also to think utopically and to conceptualize a sexuality education capable of nurturing the potential “to desire differently, to desire more, to desire better” (Muñoz, 2009, p. 189).

International and Neoliberal Contexts

In attempting my own re-envisioning of the field of sexuality education in Aotearoa New Zealand, I am mindful that “across the world there are a wide range of different approaches to delivering sexuality education” (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, 2015, p. 12). Indeed, what *The New Zealand Curriculum* (2007) calls sexuality education is known variously—in other places and/or theoretical contexts—by such designations as sex education, sex and relationships education (SRE), health and sexuality education, comprehensive sexuality education (CSE),

² Spivak recognizes that “in the thinking of a borderless world today, we have to use the imagination through literary training in the broadest sense, including the filmic, the videographic, the hypertextual, learning to read in the broadest sense” (Spivak, 2014, p. 4). In this thesis, for practical purposes, I restrict myself to the reading of written texts, mostly fiction.

family life education, and life skills education. Yet, despite their different emphasises and nuances, the programmes that these terms refer to all involve “teaching about sex, sexuality, sexual health and respectful or healthy relationships in schools” (Sundaram & Sauntson, 2016, p. 3). Thus, while Abstinence-Only-Until-Marriage (AOUM) programmes may differ significantly from more comprehensive approaches to sexuality education—for example, in their attitudes to contraception and the use of condoms in the prevention of the spread of HIV—nevertheless, “core elements of these programmes bear similarities, and incorporate some or many aspects of CSE” (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, 2015, p. 13).

The fact that sexuality education provision and curricula “are being discussed, debated and problematised with an increasing sense of urgency around the world” (Sundaram & Sauntson, 2016, p. 2) should come as no surprise given that in many countries there is pressure on sexuality education both to deliver “a more holistic ‘whole school’ approach” (Thomas & Aggleton, 2016, p. 15) to sexual health and wellbeing, and to broaden its focus to take account of sexual rights as well as sexual health. In the half-century since Western Europe “pioneered the introduction of school-based sexuality education” (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, 2015, p. 19)—this in an effort to improve public health—school-based sexuality education in many places has certainly become a more conducive (but also a more contested) space for attending to “issues of gender and sexual equality and plurality within education” (Sundaram & Sauntson, 2016, p. 2).

It is also the case, in New Zealand and elsewhere, that school-based sexuality education over recent decades has become progressively “steeped in neoliberal ideology and confined by neoliberal ‘best practices’” (Bay-Cheng, 2017, p. 344). If, on the one hand, neoliberalism, wherever it operates, promotes individual responsibility—thereby, producing subjects willingly “seduced by their own perceived powers of freedom” (Davies & Bansel, 2007, p. 249)—on the other, it works to ensure that its subjects’ sexualities are governed by market forces which manipulate and commodify “the human capacity for sensation and affect” (Hennessy, 2000, p. 72). Debates, discussions and problematizations concerning the provision and delivery of school-based sexuality education within Aotearoa New Zealand—and about the future of the field itself—cannot, therefore, ignore the “neoliberal sanctification of individual choice and valorization of personal responsibility” (Bay-Cheng, 2017, p. 345) which shape many

of the pedagogical theories and practices that currently hold sway in sexuality education classrooms. Nor has the discursive reframing of sexuality education in relation to the promotion of wellbeing—which has been a feature of New Zealand schools in recent years—happened in isolation from “enduring international conversations” (Sundaram & Sauntson, 2016, p. 3) about young people, schools, and sexuality education. While in the past it may have been possible for sexuality educators in Aotearoa New Zealand to turn a blind eye to global perspectives on such topical issues as gender and sexual violence, consent, sexual diversity and homophobia, same sex-marriage, religious and cultural plurality, pornography and sexualisation, or the responsibility of teachers in regard to child protection and safeguarding, this is no longer the case.

However, while recognizing the need for research to inform all aspects and areas of sexuality education, including “across countries and contexts” (Sundaram & Sauntson, 2016, p. 3), in this thesis it is not my aim to compare and contrast the situation in New Zealand with what is happening in other Anglophone countries—although school-based sexuality education programmes here and elsewhere are required to do their bit “to produce the new student/subject who is appropriate to (and appropriated by) the neoliberal economy” (Davies & Bansel, 2007, p. 247). Furthermore, while I acknowledge the powerful influence of neoliberalism on sensual pleasure and human desire—a negative impact that is especially evident in its ability to position both sexuality and knowledge as forms of consumption—I see little point in comparing and contrasting the impact of neoliberalism on sexuality education in New Zealand with its effect on sexuality education in other contexts and locations. This study is more a philosophical and literary exploration than an exercise in comparative policy critique. Rather, my intention is to approach sexuality education from oblique angles—that is, indirectly. By attending to the singular and unverifiable elements of sexuality education in New Zealand, to the differences that make a difference—those seemingly “random, incoherent, and unpredictable” (Jagose, 2015, p. 36) moments or details that resist systematization and universalization—I seek to subvert the certainties of ideologies, including neoliberalism, which work to “reduce the complexity of those differences and foreclose countless other ways to apprehend and negotiate them” (Fawaz, 2019, p. 6).

Mine, then, is a queer way of operating that attempts to give rise to generous interpretations and accounts capable of honouring the multiplicities covered by the

umbrella of ‘human sexuality.’ While the readings of sexuality and sexuality education that this thesis offers are conducted in the context of unprecedented globalization, insofar as they remain faithful to the insights and theorizations advanced and enabled by Spivak’s aesthetic education, they eschew “the lethal and lugubrious consolations of rational choice” (Spivak, 2012, p. 2) provided by neoliberalism, instead, opting for the adventures and surprises opened up by literary reading.

Reimagining and Rethinking Sexuality Education

As I reimagine and rethink the field of sexuality education in Aotearoa New Zealand, I do so principally, in the light of Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak’s project of aesthetic education with its emphasis on “reading literature closely to exercise the imagination” (Spivak, 2012, p. 12), but also through the work of queer theorists, among them Leo Bersani, who argues that “sex can also be one of the modalities of the aesthetic” (Bersani, 2010, p. 70), especially, when it is framed choreographically as the arrangement of “relations between bodies in time and space” (Klien, Valk, & Gormly, 2008, p. 7).

I am assisted in this task by a great many philosophers and theorists—Butler, Deleuze and Guattari, Derrida, Foucault, Grosz, Kristeva, Levinas, and Sedgwick some of the big names among them—who, in refusing “a dogmatic image of thought—the ordinary and unexceptional, the given, the normal, the foundational” (St. Pierre, Jackson, & Mazzei, 2016, p. 102), have inspired and equipped me to attempt a queering of six literary texts, each of which has exerted a strong pull on me, in the case of some, over many years. With the exception of Edith Howes’ *The Golden Forest* (1930) and D. H. Lawrence’s *Women in Love* (1920/1992), which are discussed, respectively, in chapters two and five of this thesis, the works that I have chosen to write about are mostly novels, and all by New Zealand cis male writers who either identify themselves and/or have been described by others as gay or queer—James Courage’s *A Way of Love* (1959), Witi Ihimaera’s *The Uncle’s Story* (2000), William Taylor’s *Pebble in a Pool* (2003), and Douglas Wright’s *ghost dance* (2004). This is, in part, because I wish to honour authors who either had the courage to write about homosexuality in an era when sex between consenting adult males was a criminal offence in Aotearoa New Zealand and elsewhere, or who dared to put their name to books that dealt sympathetically with same-sex relationships at a time when hostility towards queer people and those who advocated for them was still widely tolerated.

My over-riding reason, however, for choosing to write about these texts through the frame of queer theory is not due to a naïve confusion that the term ‘queer’ can be used unproblematically “as a synonym for ‘lesbian and gay’” (Jagose, 2015, p. 28), let alone from any desire to claim ‘queer’ as a fixed identity, or to apply it to a discreet body of knowledge. Rather, it springs from a conviction that each of these books, if read through the lens of Spivak’s aesthetic education and/or in the light of Bersani’s “onto-aesthetics, which is also an onto-ethics” (Tuhkanen, 2014b, p. 2)—that is, in order to “train the imagination to construct knower and known for knowing in different ways and understand that this does not define the truth of things” (Spivak, 2016a, p. 367), but also with “boundless attention to strange relationalities” (Jagose, 2015, p. 36)—is able, in its own way, to complicate and queer understandings of sex and sexuality education. This happens, as my readings of these texts show, through “the continual unhinging of certainties and the systematic disturbing of the familiar” (Giffney & Hird, 2008, p. 4). For, just as it is able to make the strange ordinary by relating the unknown or the less known to the known, literary reading also works to make the ordinary strange whenever it places language in the service of otherness.

If, as you will come to see, Spivak’s project of aesthetic education promises an undoing of those habits by which human beings mark out territory in the world as their own through what she calls “imaginative training for epistemological performance” (Spivak, 2016a, p. 367), Bersani’s work implies something similar—a retraining “in the *aestheticization of our lives*” through an unlearning of “our extant modes of being in the world” (Tuhkanen, 2018, p. 20). However, while Spivak’s aesthetic education holds that the imagination may be trained and desires uncoercively rearranged through literary reading and other engagements with the aesthetic, Bersani’s call for an engagement with what amounts to a process of self-aestheticization springs from a conviction that we are “choreographed into being”—each human personality the product of “a specific aesthetic of handling” (Bersani, 2018, pp. 54, 55).

In applying the ideas of Spivak and Bersani to sexuality education—the former, emphasizing the role of the imagination in bringing about “epistemological change that will rearrange desires” (Spivak, 2012, p. 2), the latter attending to “how we have, over time, moved ourselves and how others have moved us, through space” (Bersani, 2018, p. 55), thus, formalizing ourselves as works of art—my intention is to open up a field, one which is unduly dominated by the perspectives and methodologies of health,

physical education, and the social sciences, to new modes of thought, including those made possible through literary reading.

By encouraging ways of thinking that are queer—not only insofar as these “refer to the nonnormative, which is a disturbance, veering, or destabilization of stability” (Colebrook, 2018, p. 265), but, also, because they are concerned with opening new spaces or reclaiming others, rather than defining, normalizing or institutionalizing them—I seek to prompt sexuality educators and researchers to cast their eyes towards “a horizon of possibility whose precise extent and heterogeneous scope cannot in principle be delimited in advance” (Halperin, 1995, p. 62). Such an approach, while relying on the facility to unhitch the term queer from “its conventional resonance as a container for human sexual nonnormativities,” also allows for a practice of reading whereby the queer is positioned “both alongside and athwart” (Luciano & Chen, 2015, p. 189) other ideas and practices—including, as is the case here, the theorizations of Spivak and Bersani—in the hopeful/hopeless expectation that ‘something’ interestingly different might result from a proximity that always inclines towards conceptual cross-hatching. For, to state, as Sedgwick does, that the queer tends “toward ‘across’ formulations” (Sedgwick, 1993, p. xii) is to recognize that the queer is always and everywhere already transversing the human in multiple ways—and, in doing so, drawing other fields away from themselves. My contention is that Spivak’s aesthetic education and Bersani’s conceptualization of sex as a modality of the aesthetic, if given the room to work across sexuality education, have the potential to transverse and twist the field in ways that are not only “multiply transitive”—especially so if they have already themselves been queered—but also generative of an “immensely productive incoherence” (Sedgwick, 1993, p. xii), certainly, in regard to gender and sexuality, but across all identifications and identities, whenever and wherever attempts are made to exceed or invert established binaries.

In claiming that incoherence—including the bafflement or bewilderment that accompanies incomprehension and the breakdown of knowledge—is productive is to align myself with Kumashiro’s view that “education is not something that involves comfortably repeating what we already learned or affirming what we already know” (Kumashiro, 2002, p. 63), but requires that we risk unlearning and all the anxieties that go with it. This is especially the case with sexuality education where common sense views of the world are necessarily disrupted whenever normativities associated with

such taken-for-granted notions as gender and sexuality are examined and challenged. It is not surprising, then, that sexuality education classrooms always tend to be sites of potential discomfort and crisis for both teachers and students—and that the temptation when disruption looms is for those caught in the pedagogical relationship to ‘play it safe,’ and retreat from genuine teaching and learning in an effort to avoid “troubling” (Kumashiro, 2002, p. 63) what they already know and hold dear. Yet, rather than resist the changes that disruption inevitably brings, aren’t sexuality educators better to admit, as Kumashiro observes, that “teaching and learning really take place only through entering and working through crisis” (Kumashiro, 2002, p. 63)?

It is in the light of Kumashiro’s provocation—and Allen’s proposal that we “undo dominant meanings around sexuality and *make it strange*” (Allen, 2015, p. 768) by deconstructing ‘common sense’ views of it—that I argue the merits of allowing the theorizations of Spivak and Bersani to infiltrate and queer sexuality education. For, these two theorists can teach sexuality educators to live affirmatively with both crisis and the strange by showing us that “desiring to learn involves desiring difference and overcoming our resistance to discomfort” (Kumashiro, 2002, p. 63). While, of course, there are always limits to the level of disruption that schools and other educational institutions will tolerate in the face of queer challenges to “normative modes of pedagogy around sexualities” (Allen, 2015, p. 769), my hope is that once equipped with ideas and perspectives gleaned from the likes of Spivak and Bersani, sexuality educators will be more willing to run the risk of approaching familiar and recurring concepts in *The New Zealand Curriculum* (2007) and documents such as *Sexuality Education: A guide for principals, boards of trustees, and teachers* (2015)³ from odd

³ Throughout the period during which this thesis was researched and written, the 2015 guidelines were in place, and it is these that I reference throughout. In September 2020, the Ministry of Education issued a set of “refreshed guidelines” (Ministry of Education, 2020a, 2020b, p. 7)—spread over two documents covering years 1–8 and years 9–13—with the stated intention of distributing these to schools in Term 4 of the same year. Produced in response to the 2018 Education Review Office report into sexuality education in schools, *Promoting wellbeing through sexuality education*, the new guidelines encourage schools to “adopt a whole-school approach to strengthening their programmes in relationships and sexuality education” (Ministry of Education, 2020a, 2020b, p. 6). As can be gleaned from the key learning outcomes for each curriculum level, the revised guidelines ground themselves on the notion of wellbeing in the context of a fast-changing world, while attending more closely to Te Tiriti o Waitangi and the promotion of human rights than the version they update. Like the

angles, that is, slantwise—thus, taking seriously Kumashiro’s argument that “learning is about disruption and opening up to further learning, not closure and satisfaction” (Kumashiro, 2002, p. 43). By seizing upon, for example, such taken-for-granted notions as “positive sexuality’, ‘personal identity’, ‘self-worth’, ‘wellness’ and ‘safety management’ (see Ministry of Education, 2007, p. 23), and bringing these in close proximity to Spivak’s aesthetic education and Bersani’s conceptualization of sex as a mode of the aesthetic, queer cross-hatchings—the sorts of ‘across’ formulations that Sedgwick speaks of—may happen, producing, perhaps, a sexuality education that is less didactic, more disconcerting, but always working “in the hope of a good world in the aporetic mode of ‘to come’” (Spivak, 2012, p. 33).

Before attending closely in the chapters that follow to the re-envisioning and re-theorizing of sexuality education in Aotearoa New Zealand, it is important, at this stage, that I acknowledge calls for improvements in the delivery of sexuality education in our schools, where, as the Education Review Office—commonly known as ERO—admits in its *Promoting wellbeing through sexuality education* (2018), “overall, curriculum coverage remains inconsistent” (Education Review Office, 2018, p. 5). Many of the current efforts to get sexuality education to lift its game centre on “gender and sexuality diversity” (Education Review Office, 2018, pp. 13, 36, 38, 44)—a key area of emphasis in the Government’s push for “high quality sexuality education” (Education Review Office, 2018, pp. 3, 41)⁴. Yet, with the exception of six references to the valuable role played by queer-straight alliances, strangely missing from ERO’s forty-nine page document—which “paints a picture of where our schools are at today” in regard to sexuality education, and “showcases the practices of a group of schools effectively meeting the challenges of our current context” (Education Review Office, 2018, p. 3)—is any mention of the educational possibilities opened up by queer

2015 guidelines, those about to be rolled out fall short of the sort of re-envisioning of sexuality education through the aesthetic and the queer that this thesis calls for.

⁴ For instance, “greater visibility and celebration of diversity” (Education Review Office, 2018, p. 3), “accepting and celebrating diversity” (p. 39), “acceptance and celebration of diversity” (p. 41), “awareness of diversity” (p. 14), “respecting diversity” (p. 14), “normalise diversity” (p. 36), “tolerance of diversity” (p. 38), “valued diversity” (p. 15), “value diversity” (p. 45), “supported diversity” (p. 39), and “affirm diversity” (pp. 42, 49) are some of the phrases used by the Education Review Office (ERO) in their recent document, *Promoting wellbeing through sexuality education* (2018), to emphasize the diversity theme in its many variations.

perspectives or approaches. Queer theory’s potential “as an enabling intersectional rubric that might potentially correct the majoritarian perspectives” (Jagose, 2015, p. 29)—which ERO’s focus on diversity in its own way seeks to address—goes unrecognized in a document which prefers to keep the queer at arm’s length. This is, perhaps, because of a fear that too close a proximity of the queer to such noble goals as the “inclusion of sex-, gender- and sexuality-diverse students” (Education Review Office, 2018, pp. 10, 12, 15) in sexuality education programmes, as well as through school policies, practices and procedures, may confuse those established if unwritten boundaries separating the unwanted/unmanageable from the acceptable/desirable.

If, as Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick holds, “queer is a continuing moment, movement, motive—recurrent, eddying, *troublant*” (Sedgwick, 1993, p. xii), no wonder it is often seen as an unwanted intruder, always ready to put a dampener on the positivity (see Education Review Office, 2018, pp. 2, 3, 4, 10, 23, 26, 40, 43, 44, 45, 48, 49) promoted by *The New Zealand Curriculum* (2007) in its approach to health and sexuality education. Yet, queer perspectives, including those made possible by the work of Spivak and Bersani, because of their willingness to attend to unusual and unexpected relationships, have the ability to “offer expansive and dissonant interpretations of inclusion” (O’Donnell, 2015, p. 1)—and other concepts that figure large in health and sexuality education. This is because they “multiply the ways in which something is seen and understood,” while remaining “attuned to the genesis of ideas and concepts” (O’Donnell, 2015, p. 1). For example, applying Spivak’s notion of reading as *teleiopoiesis*—“a reaching toward the distant other by the patient power of the imagination” (Spivak, 2012, p. 404)—to the concept of inclusion, suggests that an inclusive relation will be read as having an outward orientation, in that such a relation is directed toward the other as other, rather than concerned with drawing the other to the self. Likewise, Bersani’s conceptualization of a “nonunifying centrifugal mobility, one in which forms may appear to resist assimilation, even to confront each other defensively across their boundaries” (Bersani & Dutoit, 1993, p. 138), if permitted to queer and complicate notions of inclusion, may prompt the reinvention of a relationality that better refuses the sorts of territorialisation of sexuality that conceptualizations of inclusion usually imply. Rather than imagining inclusion as pulling ‘the diverse’ and ‘the different’ into what may be described as “a narrative center never firmly established in the first place” (Bersani & Dutoit, 1993, p. 190), Bersani’s onto-

aesthetics envisions benefits that may result from our learning to “*disorient ourselves in the world*” (Tuhkanen, 2018, p. 55).

My aim, then, is not so much to urge sexuality educators to introduce queer-themed content into their classrooms, for instance, in the form of YA literature that is representative of the LGBTQ+ rainbow, or which tackles heterosexism and queerphobia face on—although there is certainly a place for this—but to encourage teachers to take what is already very close at hand, not only the curriculum and its various texts, but also their own and their students’ experiences, as well as the culture of the school and the wider culture, and dare to run across or twist these with the queer. If, over the years, queer’s “most frequent deployment has been in the service of defiance and reprimand,” my interest lies more in the generative possibilities of “the more intimate and complicit gesture of moving *athwart*” (Wiegman & Wilson, 2015, p. 11)—that is, transversely, from side to side—in an effort to stimulate and further multiply transitive movement, both of bodies and thought.

In attending to this queer movement, this “lateral mobility” (Bersani, 1990, p. 26), one cannot help but engage with what Karen Barad terms “the practice of diffraction”—those “patterns of differences that make a difference” (Dolphijn & van der Tuin, 2010, p. 49)—a way of working to which Spivakian and Bersanian approaches also attune us. This happens, not only as we are positioned to recognize that the relation between the queer and the human is “contingent rather than stable,” but also when we are prompted to produce a sexuality education where teachers and students are better placed to “read up from particular situations” (Luciano & Chen, 2015, p. 189), instead of announcing universal truths from on high. Such an attunement—ethical as well as aesthetic—and the queer reading that it makes possible in the context of sexuality education, comes with the realization that “our attention can and should be mobile” (Bersani, 1990, p. 204). It also chimes with Spivak’s much repeated advice that we do well to attend to “the singular and the unverifiable” (Spivak, 2012, pp. 2, 324, 332, 397, 430). This is a task for which Spivak’s aesthetic education—including “the mysterious fun of literary reading” (Spivak, 2012, p. 303)—and Bersani’s articulation of self-aestheticization prepare us.

Looking Ahead

In the chapters that follow, I build upon the argument which I have outlined in this introduction, namely, that Spivak’s project of aesthetic education, with its emphasis on literary reading as a means of training the imagination for epistemological performance, and supplemented by Bersani’s conceptualization of sex as a modality of the aesthetic, is able to queer and reinvigorate the field of sexuality education.

The fourteen chapters are grouped into four parts. Insofar as “tending captures the double sense of leaning or reaching toward something while cultivating and helping it thrive” (Fawaz, 2019, p. 7), each of the four chapter groupings or parts *tends* toward a different aspect of the argument. This structural arrangement, while drawing attention to the choreographic nature of much of the thinking in this thesis—thinking which as it activates the imagination to move in the direction of the distant and unreachable other repositions the choreographic “as a set of dispersive and generative strategies” (Joy, 2014, p. 27)—also affirms “the incalculable, unforeseeable, protean or . . . veering character of desire” (Royle, 2017, p. 85, footnote 36).

The five chapters in **PART ONE** tend toward the laying out of an “open mesh of possibilities, gaps, overlaps, dissonances and resonances, lapses and excesses of meaning” (Sedgwick, 1993, p. 8) that comes about through the juxtaposition and interweaving of queer theory, Spivak’s aesthetic education, Bersani’s positioning of sex as a modality of the aesthetic, and Foucault’s articulation of an aesthetics of existence and care of the self. Indeed—at least to some extent—queer theory and the work of Spivak and Bersani may be read as “riffing” (Spivak, 2012, p. 185) on the ideas of Foucault. On the one hand, these and other theoretical orientations supply “cognitive tools for grappling with the very discursive conditions that enable or foreclose our own ways of tending toward some things and not others” (Fawaz, 2019, p. 9)—thereby, equipping efforts to re-envision sexuality education in Aotearoa New Zealand. On the other, two literary texts—*The Golden Forest* and *Women in Love*—allow me to “make invisible possibilities and desires visible,” as I (at)tend to scenes of reading with “fascination and love” (Sedgwick, 1993, p. 3).

Chapter one, by attending to calls for the re-envisioning of sexuality education in Aotearoa New Zealand, argues that queerness, if positioned as ‘horizon,’ opens up sexuality education to ways of thinking that keep hope alive and feed

the utopic impulse. In the context of sexuality education, the aesthetic serves the utopic whenever the arts, including literature and literary reading, are deployed in anticipation of making possible new ways of being, doing and relating.

Chapter two provides me with the first of six opportunities in the course of this dissertation to think ‘through’ a literary text—*The Golden Forest* by New Zealand educator and author, Edith Howes (1872-1954). By working with Kathryn Bond Stockton’s notion of the queer child growing sideways (Stockton, 2009) and emphasizing those occasions in Howes’ novel where wonder is provoked through the experience of queer, it becomes possible, I believe, for sexuality educators to rethink “their desire for (or fantasies of) coherence” (O’Rourke, 2013, p. 193)—an urge which manifests itself in the field of sexuality education as a compulsion to plan, and one which too often leads to stuckness.

In **chapter three** I turn to Michel Foucault’s theorizations of *ars erotica* and *scientia sexualis*, as well as Anne Carson’s study of eros in classical literary and philosophical texts (Carson, 1998), to argue that although the ancient erotic lexicon of eros cannot simply be co-opted for today’s sexuality education, the erotic still makes its presence felt in today’s sexuality education classrooms, especially in those assemblages and figurations that we call queer. With this in mind, I propose that literary reading of the type practised by Spivak and Bersani is able to queer sexuality education, not only by enabling queer voices to be heard, but also by contributing to what Foucault calls an aesthetics of existence or care of the self—an undertaking that is at the heart of sexuality education, and one which trains readers in the art of listening for and to the queer.

In **chapter four** I take up the notion of self-*bricolage* in order to investigate the role that reading queerly might play in the queering of sexuality education, especially when the reading subject is conceptualized or imagined as a queer self-*bricoleur*. Although the New Zealand Ministry of Education seeks to promote wellbeing through sexuality education, it underestimates the role that reading—in particular the reading of fiction—can play in students’ ethical formation. In acknowledging that reading is able to change pedagogical relations and practices, I argue that it is helpful to employ the concepts of self-

bricolage and *self-bricoleur* when attempting to make sense of the ways in which truth is performed in relation to the self while using the technology of reading to queer sexuality education.

Chapter five serves as a queer interruption. There, I give an account of myself, not only in an attempt to attest at the personal level to the validity of arguments that lie at the heart of my thesis, but also to write the relation I have to myself and present it to the reader as a form of *self-bricolage* that witnesses to the queer. This piece, which attempts to map the relation between my first-time reading of D. H. Lawrence's *Women in Love* and the way I live my life as a queer man now, stands as testimony to the part played by literary reading in my formation as an *aesthetico*-ethical subject. Thus, I affirm the pedagogical power of literary reading in my life and its role in my own sexuality education.

The four chapters that form **PART TWO** tend toward sexuality education via two concepts/practices that are at the heart of Spivak's aesthetic education—the persistent attempting of collectivities to come through self-abstraction, and the enactment of a pedagogy of hospitality that necessitates an interruption of the self. Once again, I (at)tend to the reading of literary texts—Courage's *A Way of Love* and Ihimaera's *The Uncle's Story*—in order to demonstrate that sexuality education may be productively approached by way of Spivak's aesthetic education.

In **chapter six** I examine Spivak's claim that her aesthetic education, in that it concerns itself with the literary reading of texts, can become the means by which collectivities to come are persistently attempted. I do this in the context of a re-envisioning of sexuality education that attends to aesthetic perspectives and practices which provide opportunities for wonderment and re-imagining the world. By resisting the contingencies of the here and now, and refusing the determinations of health and wellbeing, sexuality education remains open to the possibilities that literary reading provides.

In **chapter seven**, through a reading of James Courage's pre-gay-liberation novel, *A Way of Love*—a reading that takes into account both queer theory and queer pedagogy, as well as Spivak's own project of aesthetic education—I set out to show how an experience of the ways in which collectivities are imagined and attempted in a work of fiction can become an opportunity for self-

abstraction or self-synecdoche, and, hence, a means for attempting (queer) collectivities to come.

Chapter eight focuses on the role of the imagination in Spivak's aesthetic education, including her theorization of the ethical in ways that owe much to Levinas and Derrida. If Spivak's notion of *teleiopoiesis* enacts a pedagogy of hospitality, it also has plenty to offer sexuality education where we are challenged to make room for our own and others' queer and compromised selves. In dealing with such notions as alterity, hospitality, interruption and suspension, especially as they figure in Spivak's pedagogy—and in relation to literary reading—I prepare the way for a micrological reading of Witi Ihimaera's *The Uncle's Story* in the chapter that follows.

Chapter nine puts under the microscope a key passage from Ihimaera's novel, one which describes an act of sexual penetration involving two men. My intention is to lay out and interrogate the desires that are staged by the text, especially in the light of Derrida's question: 'Is not hospitality an interruption of the self?' Attending to this question raises important concerns for sexuality educators about the ways in which hospitality is—and isn't—performed in the context of sexual relations, including in relation to the issue of consent. As well as inviting a richer, more complex appreciation of the notion of hauora—often described as a Māori philosophy of health and wellbeing—than that which is currently on offer in mandated sexuality education programmes in Aotearoa New Zealand, the concept of hospitality makes possible the imagining of utopic collectivities, such as 'the gay tribe,' which, operating in the space between the personal and the political, accommodates the singular, the unverifiable, and the queer.

The chapters in **PART THREE** serve as a pivot, marking as they do a swinging away from Spivak's aesthetic education—although it is never really out of sight—and a veering in the direction of Bersani's theorizations. By positioning sex in relation to the aesthetic, as Bersani does, it becomes possible to tend to the possibilities that choreographic thinking opens up for sexuality education, especially through the reading of a text such as Douglas Wright's *ghost dance*, which unravels "the very logics of

prohibition, devaluation, and unknowing that so powerfully direct us all to *tend in the same way*” (Fawaz, 2019, p. 8).

In **chapter ten**, I argue the benefits of supplementing Spivak’s aesthetic education with Leo Bersani’s take on the Foucauldian notion of the aestheticization of existence or self-aestheticization—including his positioning of sex as a modality of the aesthetic. This is with the intention of enabling the imagining of a sexuality education that is not only less tightly bound to the epistemological and more concerned with ontological possibilities, but one also capable of keeping desire as well as meaning on the move.

Building on Bersani’s argument that choreography and the choreographic are central to any reimagining of new relational modes and of an aesthetico-ethical approach to relations between the self and the world, **chapter eleven** focuses on three sex scenes from Wright’s *ghost dance*. In seeking to demonstrate how a literary memoir in its treatment of sex as a modality of the aesthetic is able to position its readers as aesthetic rather than as psychoanalytically defined subjects in the world, I draw upon Bersani’s idea of choreographing a self, as well as Julia Kristeva’s theorizations of *chora* and *choreia*, in order to build a case for the exploration and activation of choreographic thinking in the context of sexuality education.

As the focus of its chapters widens to include Deleuzo-Guattarian as well as psychoanalytical perspectives, **PART FOUR** (at)tends to literary reading as a pathway toward opening up “new possibilities for responding to what is on the move” (Royle, 2011, p. viii), especially desire. When desire is theorized in multiple ways, sexuality education becomes a more productive space, one where “the variability and unpredictability of meaning that can attach to erotic and social relations” (Fawaz, 2019, p. 10) may be explored in ways that take better account of powerful negative affects—including shame—that often circulate in classrooms. A reading of the opening section of William Taylor’s *Pebble in a Pool* suggests how such a reparative response may be cultivated.

With reference to the work of Spivak, Bersani and Wright, and in the context of sexuality education, in **chapter twelve** I consider the ability of literary reading to mobilize desire and keep meaning on the move in ways that models of health

and wellbeing, which are sometimes unthinkingly imported into classrooms to meet students' needs, often fail to do. In doing so, I seek to present literary reading as a pedagogical space where risk and revolt can be experienced and mediated, but only to some extent contained.

In **chapter thirteen**, while endorsing the enactment of pedagogies of desire, especially in the area of sexuality education, I argue the benefits of theorizing desire in multiple ways—psychoanalytical and Deleuzo-Guattarian among them—in order to keep meaning on the move. If different theorizations of desire permit it to do different things and, therefore, to produce different results, then attending through its mapping to the ways in which desire underlines movement is a worthwhile practice, especially when considering the dynamics of sex and the re-envisioning of sexuality education.

One of the significant challenges that sexuality educators face is how to deal adequately in the classroom with those affects which they and their students experience or perceive as 'negative'. In **chapter fourteen**, I suggest how Spivakian, Bersanian, Deleuzo-Guattarian, and queer theorizations around desire and its movement—including its relation to literary reading—might helpfully inform the treatment of shame, among the most intense of affects or negative feelings requiring “depathologization” (Cvetkovich, 2012, p. 5). In doing so, I make reference to the opening sentences of William Taylor's YA novel, *Pebble in a Pool*.

PART ONE

Chapter One

Re-envisioning Sexuality Education in Aotearoa New Zealand through the Queer and the Aesthetic

When the path is clear and given, when a certain knowledge opens up the way in advance, the decision is already made, it might as well be said there is none to make: irresponsibly, and in good conscience, one simply applies or implements a program. Perhaps, and this would be the objection, one never escapes the program. In that case, one must acknowledge this and stop talking with authority about moral or political responsibility. The condition of possibility of this thing called responsibility is a certain *experience and experiment of the possibility of the impossible; the testing of the aporia* from which one may invent the only *possible invention, the impossible invention*. (Derrida, 1992, p. 41, italics in original)

Overview

In this chapter I will explore assertions that sexuality education in New Zealand is “in something of a stuck place” (Quinlivan, 2018, p. 116). In doing so, I will consider the ‘stuckness’ of sexuality education, not as evidence of deficit, but as an indicator of the field’s untapped potential. As I see it, sexuality education is a site replete with pedagogical possibilities for the queering of the imagination and the building of “alternative attachments within” (Berlant, 2019, p. 4). For, while it is certainly possible to employ queer to “dismantle a world that has been built to accommodate only some, we can also think of queer use as a building project” (Ahmed, 2019, p. 221)—one that takes seriously the “desire for both larger semiabstractions such as a better world or freedom but also, more immediately, better relations within the social that include better sex and more pleasure” (Muñoz, 2009, p. 30). Thus, the use of queer in the context of sexuality education is, as I see it, a utopian exercise, not only because like other utopian projects it is deeply concerned with “how to reorganize and redirect desire in society” (Bradley & Kennedy, 2020, p. 424), but to the extent that it also involves the performance of collective futurities which position “queerness as horizon” (see Muñoz, 2009, pp. 19–32), while, at the same time, eschewing normalcy in the here and now.

Although there is nothing particularly new in the claim that “utopian educational thinking, that is, thinking aimed at better worlds,” is both stimulated and expressed to

great effect in the aesthetic mode, it is largely under-acknowledged that much of the untapped educational potential of literature and the various arts relates to their ability to serve as “rich sources for imagining and understanding the horizons of possibility in human action” (Roberts & Freeman-Moir, 2013, pp. xii, 87). Given that “the aesthetic provides the affective ballast and concrete means to induce exuberant futures” (Berlant, 2010), then encounters with the aesthetic through “narrative text, painting, sculpture, drama, poetry, architecture, and music” (Roberts & Freeman-Moir, 2013, p. 87) deserve to be taken much more seriously by educationalists in their efforts to promote utopian thinking within an increasingly negating present. In the context of the queering of sexuality education, the aesthetic serves the utopic whenever literature and the arts are deployed in the hope of creating conditions that lead to “new ways of being and relating, and provide a glimpse of a different and more gorgeous kind of future” (Quinlivan, 2014, p. 279).

If, as Quinlivan suggests, the very idea of a queer utopia is “generative” (Quinlivan, 2014, p. 272), then it is productive, I believe, not only to survey the history of sexuality education in this country with ‘a queer eye,’ but also to read those literary texts that are entangled with it in one way or another in the hope of being carried “beyond the given and taken for granted” (Roberts & Freeman-Moir, 2013, p. xiii). Such an undertaking—which in its own way contributes to “a recovery of utopian discourses” (Roberts & Freeman-Moir, 2013, p. xii), by challenging us to remain alert to emergent ways of being, doing, and relating as we attend to historical and/or literary texts—requires us to do more than attend to the dismantling of homo- and hetero- normativities. It is an enterprise less concerned with pursuing a model of social perfection or designing and implementing utopian programmes, than with fanning the flames of “the utopian impulse” (Roberts & Freeman-Moir, 2013, p. x).

As I begin my task, I cannot help but be mindful of the Ministry of Education’s current drive to improve the delivery of sexuality education in New Zealand primary and secondary schools, in particular, through more vigilant attention to programme planning and implementation. Nevertheless, I wish to make it clear that I have no intention of aligning my work to the Ministry’s agenda for sexuality education, nor of affirming the finding of a recent Education Review Office report that “the most common barrier to effective implementation [is] a lack of specific planning for a comprehensive approach to sexuality education” (Education Review Office, 2018, p.

7). Rather, my hope is that this thesis will be read as an exercise in critical utopic thinking, especially, in the light of calls from researchers, including L. Allen (2011, 2018b) and Quinlivan (2014, 2018), who argue for a more extensive re-imagining and re-conceptualizing of school-based sexuality education in Aotearoa New Zealand than that foreseen or planned for by the Ministry of Education or the Education Review Office.

The Problem with Sexuality Education

In recent years, sexuality education researchers in Aotearoa New Zealand have made a case, not only “for moving formal sex ed. classes beyond their current stuck place” (Quinlivan, 2018, p. 115), but also for lifting the field of sexuality education out of the doldrums of what has been described as “its interminable preoccupation with whether content is appropriate, when to teach it, and who is best to do so” (Allen, 2018b, p. 5). While many sexuality educators in schools seem happy enough putting their efforts into improving the delivery of sexuality education by faithfully following the Ministry of Education’s directives—that is, “by increasing its ‘effectiveness’ in relation to its stated objectives”—other more critical voices continue to call for a re-envisioning of sexuality education “in ways that reconfigure and exceed its current boundaries” (Allen, L., 2011, p. 1).

If demands for a re-imagining of sexuality education may be taken to indicate an increasing level of dissatisfaction with the standard of sexuality education programmes in schools—programmes which for the most part seem to adhere too closely to sexuality education’s historical and enduring aims of regulating moral conduct as well as promoting sexual health through the reduction of unintended pregnancies and STIs/STDs—they also point to a need to reconceptualise sexuality education in ways that shift it beyond its present frame as “one of seven key areas of learning in the health and physical education learning area of *The New Zealand Curriculum*” (Ministry of Education, 2015, p. 12). For, while the current push by the Ministry of Education to improve the health and wellbeing of young people through the provision of better quality sexuality education is clearly well-intended,⁵ this initiative, in itself, does little

⁵ The Education Review Office has identified that, in particular, “the needs of Māori or Pacific students, international students, students with strong cultural or religious beliefs, students with additional learning needs and students who were sex-, gender- or sexuality-diverse” (Education Review Office, 2018, p. 5) are not being met by sexuality education programmes in schools.

to encourage those responsible for delivering school-based sexuality education programmes to think about sexuality outside the health-wellbeing paradigm, or to address the important issue of what constitutes young people as sexual subjects. An emphasis on health and wellbeing, neither creates an awareness among sexuality educators of “the implications of theories underlying practices in the sexuality education classroom” (Quinlivan, 2018, pp. 3–4), nor does it encourage them to experiment with a range of theories in their own interactions with young people—two measures that Quinlivan proposes as a productive counter to an immobilized sexuality education. As Allen and Quinlivan argue, the time is now ripe for “conceptualising and engaging sexuality education in radically new ways” (Allen, L., 2011, p. 1), including exploring “possibilities for conceptualising and practising in the sexuality education classroom ‘otherwise’” (Quinlivan, 2018, p. 7).

Doubtless, there are many ways of advancing the process of putting theories into practice in sexuality education classrooms. For instance, while Allen “experiments with new materialist ideas in an attempt to decentre the human and bring matter to the fore in sexuality education research and practice” (Allen, 2018b, p. 20), Quinlivan advocates “a conceptual (un)learning of sorts,” one which asks teachers and researchers not only to critique those theories underlying current practices in sexuality education, but also to work collaboratively to experiment with a range of contemporary theories in an attempt to explore “diverse young people’s lived experience of sexualities, genders and relationships” (Quinlivan, 2018, p. 7). Other approaches, sympathetic to earlier research by Fine (1988), emphasize “the value of creating more space in the curriculum to talk about pleasure and desire in ways that are meaningful and relevant to young people” (Allen, Rasmussen, & Quinlivan, 2014, p. 2).

What these various initiatives share is a dissatisfaction with those types of sexuality education—including many school-based sexuality education programmes informed by “normative pedagogical practices which privilege rationality, cognition, and neoliberal investments in success” (Quinlivan, 2018, p. 21)—that focus overly on assessment, measurement and academic achievement in an effort to get things ‘right,’ in order to contain, or at least manage, what Jen Gilbert argues is “the wildness of sexuality” (Gilbert, 2014, p. xiii). However, while it has been acknowledged that neoliberal influences and pressures tend to obscure and devalue the relational, the affective and the material aspects of sexuality education, it is important to note that these same

influences and pressures also work to suppress what Fredric Jameson terms “the desire called utopia” (see Jameson, 2007, especially pp. ix–233). This suppression is aided by the marginalization of aesthetic approaches to sex and sexuality, including those that seek to create “the possibility of ways of knowing and being which utilise a notion of queerness as primarily about futurity and hope” (Quinlivan, 2014, p. 281).

To the neoliberal mind, William Morris’s question, “how shall we live then?” (Roberts & Freeman-Moir, 2013, p. 1)—a question that appears to underpin and drive all utopic thinking and any “investigation of the nature of Utopian desire and the substance of its hope” (Jameson, 2007, p. 85)—is deemed irrelevant because the answer is already obvious. In a neoliberal culture or society people are expected to find meaning and satisfaction when, “as self-interested actors,” they put “the production and exchange of material goods at the heart of the human experience” (Steger & Roy, 2010, p. 12). The urge to engage in aesthetic practices “as necessary modes of stepping out of this place and time to something fuller, vaster, more sensual, and brighter” (Muñoz, 2009, p. 189) makes little sense to those, who, conditioned by neoliberalism, see the consumerist, free-market, globalizing economy as “an indispensable tool for the realization of a better world” (Steger & Roy, 2010, p. 11). However, if utopian thinking around sex and sexuality, like other manifestations of utopian desire, is characterized by “a consistent affirmation of the openness and indeterminacy of the world,” (Bradley & Kennedy, 2020, p. 427), then one of the most serious and pressing responsibilities facing sexuality educators and researchers today is that of keeping alive the possibility of a sexuality education *yet to come*—a task which Google and other digital technologies, with their algorithmic computations and controls that predetermine fields of possibility, are incapable of performing, despite their allure.

Therefore, given the great influence that both neoliberalism and technologization have exerted in recent decades on education, in this country and elsewhere, it is hardly surprising that New Zealand educational policy, for the most part, fails to acknowledge, not only “the importance of contemplating futures other than those driven by the imperatives of global capitalism” (Roberts & Peters, 2008, p. 7), but also “the loss of the sense of the futural” (Bradley & Kennedy, 2020, p. 428) in what is proving to be an increasingly toxic digital environment. Thus, guidelines from the Ministry of Education (2015, 2020a, 2020b) for the delivery of sexuality education in New Zealand primary and secondary schools appear to offer little encouragement or scope for utopic

thinking—either of the kind that regards “utopia as more an attitude and a mode of being than a clearly detailed plan or doctrine” (Roberts & Freeman-Moir, 2013, p. xii), or for the more obviously Muñozian sort of utopic imagining which positions queerness as an “educated mode of desiring that allows us to see and feel beyond the quagmire of the present” (Muñoz, 2009, p. 1). Ignoring the utopian impulse—which for so long has been a vital if often unacknowledged force in Western educational thought, discernible, for instance, in the work of Plato, Rousseau, Dewey, and Freire—the Ministry turns instead to planning and strategizing in order to advance the progress of a sexuality education that is firmly anchored in the here and now. Ours is a sexuality education which aims to be “relevant” (Ministry of Education, 2015, pp. 4, 5, 12, 14, 24, 33) and “meaningful” (pp. 5, 25, 26, 28)—one which seeks to “engage, empower, and inform” (p. 5) today’s young people, rather than waste time scanning the past for insights, or generating “a future-focused dream of ways of knowing and becoming differently” (Quinlivan, 2014, p. 277) through arts-based activities and aesthetic encounters.

In attempting to respond to the Ministry’s call for a sexuality education that is marked by ‘relevance,’ ‘meaning,’ and ‘engagement’—often at the expense of ‘astonishment,’ ‘exuberance,’ and ‘vibrancy’—schools find themselves on the horns of a dilemma. This manifests itself in the perceived need to somehow contain “the wildness and unpredictability of sexuality” (Quinlivan, 2018, p. 5)—which many believe is provoked and stirred whenever sex is given an airing in pedagogical contexts—while at the same time opening up opportunities for discourse on matters as pressing and unruly as pleasure and desire. Any sexuality education worth its salt, then, will not only acknowledge sex “as a source of delight and trouble,” but also as “something that hovers at the limits of articulation” (Halley & Parker, 2011, p. 4), for, as Gilbert explains, sexuality is “always too much for our conceptual and affective apparatuses” (Gilbert, 2014, p. xv). The requirement to (at)tend to and manage those aspects of sex and sexuality—however relevant, meaningful or engaging they might be—which are unable to be easily explained or comfortably incorporated into established patterns of thinking, feeling and behaving, makes the sexuality education classroom a challenging and fraught site both for teachers and students. Thus, in requiring that complex and potentially ‘hot’ issues, among them sexual and gender identity, sexual orientation, heteronormativity, consent and coercion, sexualisation and pornography, and emotional and social learning, be addressed in school sexuality education programmes, the

Ministry of Education—knowingly or not—is inviting trouble, especially, given that “educational breakdowns, conflicts, and controversies” are bound to surface whenever “underlying antagonisms between the wildness of sexuality and the purposes of schooling” (Gilbert, 2014, p. xiii) are exposed.

As a study of the history of sexuality education in New Zealand shows, sexuality education in our schools has never been free from controversy because what happens in sexuality education classrooms always “draws an emotive response entangled with religious and political philosophy” (Smyth, 2000, p. 10). Consequently, because sexuality education has always been closely linked with schooling’s socializing function—that is, to “the ways in which, through education, we become part of existing traditions and ways of doing and being” (Biesta, 2013, p. 4)—it has always been tightly monitored, especially by those who believe the very purpose of education is undermined whenever “its practices, procedures, rules, structures, and relations” (Gilbert, 2014, p. x) are threatened by sexuality’s unruliness. Thus, although on the one hand, the Ministry appears to behave “as if *we* knew the meaning of sex” (Halley & Parker, 2011, p. 4) by naturalizing it—sexuality education in New Zealand, the Ministry tells us, “takes a positive view of sexual development as a natural part of growing up” (Ministry of Education, 2015, p. 4)—on the other, it seeks to control what is said and done in sexuality education classes through a regime of planning. Indeed, what is valued most by the Ministry—it is listed first in its 2015 guide for those involved with sexuality education in schools and is also given emphasis in the refreshed 2020 version—is “holistic, well-planned sexuality education programmes, taught by informed and up-to-date teachers” (Ministry of Education, 2015, p. 4). Despite what else it recommends, the Ministry’s repeated emphasis on more and better planning in sexuality education works to affirm understandings of sex that are “all but indistinguishable from a repetitive marching-in-place” (Halley & Parker, 2011, p. 5). In other words, sexuality education in Aotearoa New Zealand—premised as it still is on the emergence and development, over time and through fairly predictable stages, of individuals with relatively stable psycho-sexual identities—appears to do little to “satisfy anyone who has a taste for queer” (Halley & Parker, 2011, p. 5).

By promoting planning so insistently, the Ministry advances what Gert Biesta terms “a ‘strong’ pedagogy” (Biesta, 2016, p. 91)—one which seeks to guarantee the outcomes of its own educational interventions by directing students along clear and given

educational pathways towards destinations that are already predetermined and predicted. But, this perceived ‘strength’ comes at the expense of both queer and utopic thinking. As a reading of Derrida (1992, p. 41) suggests, a ‘strong’ sexuality education, one that is overly concerned with programme design, application and implementation, works to foreclose rather than open up possibilities—one can’t ‘escape’ the programme the epigraph to this chapter warns—leaving little room for the exercise of responsibility on the part of teachers or students. Thus, while it may be the case that “education carries an orientation toward freedom within itself” (Biesta, 2016, p. 130), an undue emphasis on planning in sexuality education—as in other areas of the curriculum—announces that the important educational decisions have already been made. It also misleads teachers and students into thinking that there is little scope or need for the exercise of responsibility—“something we can take upon ourselves” (Biesta, 2013, p. 22), but can never impose on others or produce in them. In a neoliberal-technological educational culture where planning and predetermined outcomes prevail, a preoccupation with accountability—being answerable to someone for something—will obscure the need for “educators to take responsibility for their actions and activities and, more specifically, for what their actions and activities are supposed to bring about” (Biesta, 2016, p. 50).

In this thesis, following Biesta’s line, I argue, not that sexuality education “become strong, secure, predictable, and risk-free” (Biesta, 2013, p. 3), but, rather, attempt to capitalize on the benefits that flow from “the weakness of education” (Biesta, 2013, p. 3), including the possibilities that emerge from the often surprising ‘mismatches’ between educational ‘inputs’ and ‘outputs’—‘mismatches’ which given the wildness of sexuality are, perhaps, even more readily apparent in sexuality education classrooms than at other pedagogical sites. For, it is in the slippage zone, the gap that opens up between stated educational intentions and the unforeseen consequences of intended pedagogical activity, that “the very condition that makes education possible”—its weakness—prompts “an affirmation of what is wholly other, of what is unforeseeable from the present” (Biesta, 2013, pp. 4, 38). Thus, in supporting a ‘weak’ rather than a ‘strong’ sexuality education, I make a case for refusing the easy enticements of those pedagogies, which in chasing certainty, rely on a symmetrical relationship between cause and effect. Instead, I argue for a sexuality education that is open to the impossible—“*not* that which is not possible, but that which cannot be foreseen as a

possibility” (Biesta, 2009, p. 31). For, as Derrida puts it, it is only by experiencing and experimenting with “the possibility of the impossible”—that is, by entertaining the utopian impulse which prepares the way for the incoming of the new—that “one may invent the only *possible invention, the impossible invention*” (Derrida, 1992, p. 41).

A sexuality education open to the advent of the new will not concern itself with “the reproduction of what already exists” (Biesta, 2013, p. 140). Happily acknowledging the limitations of predetermined learning outcomes, such a sexuality education will work to reorient teachers and students “toward futures that are far less foreclosed, far less preplanned” (Snaza & Weaver, 2015, p. 7), than what is on offer in many classrooms—and what many teachers, parents and students are currently comfortable with. By permitting, for example, taken-for-granted notions about what it means to be human and sexual to be interrupted and disturbed, a ‘weak’ sexuality education will not only help us to “give up the idea that human subjectivity can in some way be educationally produced” (Biesta, 2016, p. 91), but also to avoid “humanism’s greatest repetition compulsion: the desire to plan” (Snaza & Weaver, 2015, p. 3).

In advocating for a ‘weak’ sexuality education, I am not suggesting that sexuality education should altogether abandon its focus on health and wellbeing—or its concern with planning—but that notions of health, wellbeing, and planning, as they are currently found in sexuality education, be reimagined so as to create the possibility of ways of knowing, being and thinking that are capable of producing new and queerer subjectivities, including those shaped and formed by the impulse for utopian thinking.

Sexuality Education, Utopic Thinking, and the Fear of Undecidability

As I will go on to show in the chapters that follow, Spivak’s contribution to utopic educational thinking can be seen in her commitment to open-ended pedagogical practices that are always haunted by the ‘undecidability’ of the future—the notion that given “the force of the ‘perhaps’” (Spivak, 2012, p. 421) nothing might come from all our planning. Reflecting on Spivak’s statement that “the fear of undecidability is the planner’s fear” (Spivak, 2003, p. 47), Nathan Snaza observes that “our long-standing commitment to subordinating pedagogy to preplanned ends” (Snaza, 2013, p. 50) results in anxiety—both when the securities promised by predetermined learning outcomes themselves prove to be elusive, and if we find ourselves ‘at sea’ in the face of unfamiliar or open-ended pedagogies. As Snaza recognizes, Spivak performs an

invaluable service in reminding us that when it comes to pedagogy “there are no certainties, that the process is open” (Spivak, 2003, p. 26). For, “real answers come in the classroom and are specific to that changeful site” (Spivak, 2003, p. 26)—they can never be determined in advance, and it is irresponsible to claim, as neoliberalism does, that this is the case. In a statement that has important pedagogical implications, Derrida—whom Spivak in many ways echoes—suggests that when “one simply applies or implements a program” (Derrida, 1992, p. 41) ethics is conceived not so much as a matter of responsibility, but more as the application of various technologies for practical purposes and with the purpose of attaining particular results.

Yet, as I am arguing, the New Zealand Ministry of Education remains wedded to a ‘strong’ sexuality education that is focussed on lifting its performance by a renewed commitment to more and better planning, in particular through an ‘unpacking’ of “Health and Physical Education achievement objectives with a sexuality education focus” (Ministry of Education, 2015, p. 15). This attempt at decidability seems to pull against the possibility of a sexuality education that “explores the productive possibilities of queer ways of being and knowing that don’t fit conventional neoliberal notions of success” (Quinlivan, 2018, pp. 38–39), or which cultivates “an optimism for opening new possibilities for ways of thinking and being” (Allen, 2018b, p. 29) through the queer. If the Ministry’s preoccupation with planning is clearly evident in its drive to ensure that teachers “deliver effective, quality sexuality education programmes” (Ministry of Education, 2015, p. 3), it is also apparent in its expressed desire to produce subjects capable of strategizing their own behaviours, relationships and lives. Indeed, the Ministry’s 2015 guide on sexuality education for principals, boards of trustees, and teachers not only “aims to help schools to plan and deliver sexuality education” (Ministry of Education, 2015, p. 3), but also gives priority to planning in its suggested learning intentions for student. The latter is especially evident in the Ministry’s own explication of the Health and Physical Education achievement objectives at curriculum levels two through to six.⁶ In short, while sexuality education programmes in New

⁶ For example, the Ministry’s suggested learning intentions state that students are expected to show that they understand and are able to implement the following aspects of planning at the various learning levels of the Health and Physical Education curriculum: “planning and demonstrating ways to enhance family, classroom, and wider school relationships” (Ministry of Education, 2015, p. 15) at level two; “identifying risks and planning safety strategies” (p. 15) at levels two and three; “planning strategies for supporting self and others in online

Zealand schools are clearly expected to “reduce risk and risky behaviours,” this goal is to be achieved by way of a “holistic and comprehensive approach” (Ministry of Education, 2015, p. 5) which emphasizes informed sexual decision-making and empowerment through planning and strategizing. In addition, students will “reflect on friendships and plan strategies for positive and supportive relationships” as well as “plan strategies to support inclusion, diversity and respect in friendships” (Ministry of Education, 2015, p. 22). Furthermore, in the event that planned strategies “for positive and supportive engagement” are unable to be successfully implemented, “strategies for seeking help and support will be planned” (Ministry of Education, 2015, p. 23). The Ministry of Education’s new guidelines follow the same trajectory—but with a more explicit emphasis on planning for wellbeing. For example, students are expected to “make plans to support their own wellbeing and that of others,” as well as “plan actions to enhance communication and wellbeing in a range of situations” (Ministry of Education, 2020b, pp. 35, 38).

While the Ministry of Education’s emphasis on well-planned and implemented teaching and learning programmes draws attention to one factor which recent research (see Byers, Sears, & Foster, 2013; Poobalan et al., 2009) suggests may improve the sexual health and wellbeing of young people, it is also indicative of an eagerness on the Ministry’s part to direct ‘planners’—whether teachers or students of sexuality education—to pursue various pre-determined goals and desired outcomes, especially in relation to health and wellbeing. Although the Ministry is cognizant that successful sexuality education programmes “are not focused solely on dangers, risks, and prevention but explore the meanings associated with sex and sexuality for individuals and society” (Ministry of Education, 2015, p. 25), its strong emphasis on planning suggests, nevertheless, an underlying nervousness. This arises, perhaps, from a desire to mitigate the irruption of the unexpected and the unwanted in sexuality education classrooms—a possibility perceived by the Ministry as posing a threat rather than gifting an opportunity to sexuality educators and their students. The Ministry’s focus on

environments” (p. 17) at level four; “identifying a wide range of issues in intimate relationships and planning strategies for positive outcomes” (p. 18) at level five; “planning and carrying out actions which support diverse gender and sexual identities” (p. 18) at level five; “identifying risks and planning for safe engagement in a range of social contexts [for example at parties]” (p. 19) at level six; and “planning strategies and demonstrating interpersonal skills for responding to needs and challenges” (p. 19) at level six.

planning, while doubtless intended to provide clarity as to the purpose and direction of sexuality education—for instance, by tying it tightly to health and wellbeing—runs the risk of ignoring complexities and foreclosing possibilities by uncritically adopting “a series of assumptions of how bodies are *supposed to function*, as a thesis of what bodies are for (and who they are for)” (Ahmed, 2019, p. 205).

As a consequence of this narrowing, the desire “to play with our organs, to roam over each other’s bodies” (Ahmed, 2019, p. 205) is barely tolerated—and certainly not welcomed—by a sexuality education which is tasked with the management of sexual experimentation and risk through planning and strategizing. Desire and pleasure are generally silent casualties in this process—eros and the erotic lexicon are neither articulated nor accommodated in mandated health and sexuality education programmes. Also neglected in this overly-prescriptive sexuality education—one that is more concerned with predetermined outcomes than with performing “a pedagogy of openness to the possibility that one might learn as much or more from the loose as from the tight” (Berlant, 2019, p. 1)—are “*forces of encounter*” (Seigworth & Gregg, 2010, p. 2), including those affective movements, signified by such notions as plenitude and wonder, which feed the desire for utopia.

If, on the one hand, sexuality education’s concern with planning and plans fails to contain or account for “a body’s *capacity* to affect and to be affected” (Seigworth & Gregg, 2010, p. 2), on the other, it also tends to have the stultifying consequence of both affirming existing norms and generating new ones. This is because sexuality education as it is currently focussed cannot avoid mapping pathways to a future that is unable to be thought other than in relation to present normativities—not just those of gender, sexual orientation, race and identity, but also more recent neoliberal criteria, such as accessibility, assessability, affordability and accountability, promoted in the name of educational advancement. Given the responsibility of educators to respond to what Berlant identifies as “the ethical pressure to figure out repair in the face of intensifying world disrepair” (Berlant, 2019, p. 4), a sexuality education that is utopically oriented cannot afford to be either timidly conservative or naively optimistic, but must distinguish between “abstract and concrete or educated hope” (Chambers-Letson, Nyong’o, & Pellegrini, 2019, p. ix), as it prepares teachers and students to think otherwise in the face of seemingly insurmountable obstacles. It is only a hope that is “grounded and consequential” (Muñoz, 2019, p. 207) that can provide us with “ways to

occupy these dark times not only with anger, depression, and exhaustion, but also with inventiveness, reimagined collectivity, intellectual energy, persistent curiosity—and fierce . . . attention” (Berlant, 2019, pp. 4–5).

However, as I propose in this thesis, sexuality education’s potential to offer “hope in the face of heartbreak” (Muñoz, 2019, p. 207) will be realized not by any amount of planning or strategizing, which tends to deliver more of the same, but, through a “training of the imagination” (Spivak, 2012, pp. 4, 10, 118, 345)—itself a preparation for utopic thinking. This process, as it unfolds both in Spivak’s aesthetic education and through Bersani’s positioning of sex within the modality of the aesthetic, involves teaching the subject to ‘play’ in order to develop “flexible epistemological performance” (Spivak, 2012, p. 353). While for Spivak, as you will see, literary reading is a privileged site, a ‘playground’ where cognitive processes are able to be activated, exercised and redirected in unique ways that facilitate the suspension and displacement of belief—and train the imagination—it is also a place of encounter where cognitive and affective processes cannot be easily separated. Furthermore, if to attend to the queer is “to build alternative attachments within” (Berlant, 2019, p. 4), then it is also a “necessary, impossible, and interminable task” (Spivak, 2012, pp. 373–374), one that is exemplified and performed by Spivak’s aesthetic education, especially in its call for the “uncoercive rearrangement of desires” (Spivak, 2012, pp. 108, 373, 382, 387)—an on-going operation that involves both cognitive and affective detachments and reattachments.

In the context of a sexuality education such as ours, exposing what Spivak terms “the grounding presence of the sheer selfishness of reproductive heteronormativity” (Spivak, 2012, p. 98), or what Bersani describes as “the ways in which our bodies are culturally mapped, and in particular how their boundaries are drawn” (Bersani, 1996, p. 46), is no easy task. This is, as Spivak argues, not only on account of the fact that reproductive heteronormativity is “the broadest and oldest global institution” (Spivak, 2012, p. 437), but, more specifically, because sexuality education’s entangling of the notions of ‘health,’ ‘wellbeing’ and ‘sex’ cannot not work to affirm reproduction as a ‘natural’ good, presenting as it does “the bodies of each sex . . . as directed toward the other” (Ahmed, 2019, p. 205). Reproductive heteronormativity, therefore, not only operates “as a form of intended functionality” (Ahmed, 2019, p. 205)—and as a “motor” (Spivak, 2012, p. 409) that moves people along well-trodden paths in life—it also gives

rise to various forms of “reproductive futurism” which serve to project and preserve “the absolute privilege of heteronormativity” (Edelman, 2004, p. 2) from one generation of humans to the next.

Thus, although neoliberalism and consumerism have in recent decades worked in tandem to assimilate *some* expressions of queer sexuality into the mainstream by allowing the occupants of certain more ‘benign’ queer spaces to be “seen as ‘normal’ by heteronormativity,” this is always on condition that they “play the ‘game’ of the dominant culture” (Giffney, 2008, p. 72). Conversely, those queers who ‘can’t fit’ or ‘won’t fit’—because their particular needs, interests or behaviours don’t align with outcomes intended by the majority—are badly served by plans and projects which seek to extend the hegemony of the normal by bringing more varieties of queer into a common fold. In circumstances where polymorphic desire “confuses identity, transgresses borders and confounds telos” (Runions, 2008, p. 102), efforts made by well-intentioned sexuality educators and students to reach out and accommodate a greater range of variables of sex, gender, race etc.—but always from within a framework which tacitly assumes, although it may not explicitly affirm, the dominance of reproductive heteronormativity—are bound to be frustrated. When this happens, there is merit, I believe, in resisting the urge to seek a remedy for an ineffective or malfunctioning sexuality education through a recommitment to planning. While the temptation to plan with renewed vigour and a sharper focus is understandable in such circumstances, other queerer approaches—ones capable of uncovering “bloom-spaces” (Seigworth & Gregg, 2010, p. 9) in what appears to be a desert littered with double binds—are, perhaps, more productive.

For, if, as Spivak argues, “sexual difference and reproductive heteronormativity (RHN) are the irreducible” in human cultures, operating as they do “upstream from straight/queer/trans,” then these factors—especially given their pivotal role as “the chief semiotic instrument[s] of negotiation” (Spivak, 2012, p. 123)—will always tend to produce double binds that no amount of planning is able to successfully eliminate or sidestep. Thus, for as long as it is conceptualized from within the frame of reproductive heteronormativity, homosexual sex—especially anal sex—will be problematic for those planning sexuality education programmes. This is so because in exposing “the permeability of bodily boundaries,” male with male sex also exposes “the factitious nature of sexual differences” (Bersani, 1996, pp. 46, 47). Thus, rather than trying to

resolve these binary oppositions through what amounts to assimilation—the absorption of queer into normal, gay into straight, and the production of various forms of homonormativity—may not our energies be better spent on the impossible but hopeful task of cobbling together a good-enough sexuality education, a piece of *bricolage*, that nonetheless works to develop perspectives capable not only of equipping us to playfully, if somewhat uncomfortably, inhabit double binds, but also of nurturing unlikeness, and of “honouring the ‘anomalous’ and the ‘irregular’ without reducing them to something familiar or ‘manageable’” (Bagemihl, 1999, p. 262)? In the context of calls for the reinvigoration of sexuality education, literary reading—especially, the reading of fiction—has the ability to advance the process of reimagining in that it “takes us into the impossible possible of the ‘perhaps’” and “‘not yet,’” positioning us as we read beyond the frame of “‘either-or’” (Spivak, 2012, pp. 117, 457) thinking. In other words, literary reading provides us with the means of queering sexuality education, especially insofar as it taps into and queers “a utopian impulse detectable in daily life and its practices” (Jameson, 2007, p. 1).

In the case of sexuality education, the utopian impulse—which, according to Ernst Bloch, can be discovered even “in unsuspected places, where it is concealed or repressed” (Jameson, 2007, p. 3)—commonly finds expression in “the vertical, forward-motion metaphor of growing up” (Stockton, 2009, p. 11), a notion that underpins much educational thought. Indeed, a lot of the effort that the Ministry of Education, the Education Review Office, boards of trustees, and teachers put into the planning of sexuality education works to ensure that young people and their teachers understand human development as progressive—and that they strategize accordingly. Talk of “changes in growth patterns” and “stages of growth and development” (Ministry of Education, 2015, p. 15) are supported by and, in turn, reinforce the notion of ‘growing up’ as something natural and inevitable. However, while this *uber-*metaphor encapsulates and represents a taken-for-granted form of utopic thinking—one which drives and determines much of the planning that surrounds sexuality education—it fails to account not only for the transmission of utopian desire along queerer lines and by more transgressive metaphors, but also for the idea that “the temporal life of the body already resituates the utopian impulse” (Jameson, 2007, p. 6), sending it along unpredictable trajectories that resist prescribed futures.

To admit, as Lee Edelman does, “that we are inhabited always by states of desire that exceed our capacity to name them” (Edelman, 1995, p. 345) is to acknowledge that taken-for-granted concepts, such as growing-up, are always and already susceptible to queering by the utopic impulse. Therefore, if, as Sara Ahmed argues, queer use is creative and attuned to “the variations that are possible when you are not selected and rewarded for going the right way” (Ahmed, 2019, p. 219)—that is, when one has been disabused of the notion that it is possible to grow-up ‘naturally’ or ‘straight’—then those times and situations when things don’t go according to plan, where growing up happens too early, too late, or not really at all, take on a new meaning, becoming occasions for “finding in the paths assumed to lead to cessation a chance of being in another way” (Ahmed, 2019, p. 208). Kathryn Bond Stockton, in proposing that the child is “the act of adults looking back” (Stockton, 2009, p. 5), invites us, I believe, to reimagine the process of sexual development not as a ‘growing up,’ but as a “growing sideways”—a figuring of “a different kind of claim for growth and for its intimate relations with queerness”—a reimagining which holds the potential for “lateral contact of surprising sorts” (Stockton, 2009, p. 11), not least, by transversing demographics of age and gender, as well as ethnic, religious, geographic, and economic backgrounds. I am suggesting, in other words, that sexuality education be reoriented and recalibrated to generate the queer by attending to “the singular and the unverifiable” (Spivak, 2012, pp. 2, 324, 332, 397, 430), especially as it emerges from that “densely populated” (Ahmed, 2019, p. 156) space which opens up during the implementation of any plan. In other words, possibilities appear in the widening of “the gap between what is supposed to happen and what does happen” (Ahmed, 2019, p. 156). It is in this way that the slippage zone becomes bloom-space!

Whereas sexuality education, as it is officially and currently envisaged, anchors its *raison d’être* in the notion of growing up—and plans accordingly—queerer approaches to sexuality education, contrariwise, attend to the gaps that inevitably open up between planning and implementation, in particular to those spaces which teachers and students tend to dismiss as irrelevant or unproductive because there things are “used in ways other than for which they were intended or by those other than for whom they were intended” (Ahmed, 2019, p. 199). Queer—thought and deployed in this way—becomes a tool not only for reconfiguring personal disappointments, but also for creatively addressing a double malaise afflicting the wider field of sexuality education: firstly, a

stagnation in research and practice linked to the inability of the tools of *critique* to move sexuality education out of the impasse it currently finds itself in, and, secondly, a “chronic negativity” generated by an “orientation that encourages certain kinds of interpretation while leaving little room for others” (Anker & Felski, 2017, pp. 11, 15). Yet, it is in these seemingly forbidding circumstances—where in the name of various forms of critique, genuine as well as pseudo, certain versions of truth are invoked in order to attack and destroy what are perceived as “competing conceptions of meaning” (Anker & Felski, 2017, p. 14)—that queer is able to productively work to end the sorts of stalemates that dog some of sexuality education’s most important and pressing issues. This happens, not by utilizing “the x-ray gaze of the paranoid impulse,” but through a queer type of utopic thinking which mobilizes queer’s own reparative potential—that is, its ability “to assemble and confer plenitude” (Sedgwick, 2003, p. 149) on selves and communities, even in the most unlikely contexts—all the while insisting “on something else, something better, something dawning” (Muñoz, 2009, p. 189).

From a Spivakian perspective, the invitation to assemble and confer plenitude—but always, as Muñoz says, in the light of “a forward-dawning” (Muñoz, 2009, p. 1) queer futurity—calls for a playful but not unserious reading of both texts and the world. Such an engagement, one “that *produces* rather than *protects*,” implies “a proliferation of always different, always postponed meanings” (Spivak, 2016b, pp. xcvi, lxxxviii). For, it is in the rich multiplicity of meanings generated by reading that “often we can glimpse the worlds proposed and promised by queerness in the realm of the aesthetic” (Muñoz, 2009, p. 1). When applied to the re-imagining of the field of sexuality education and deployed utopically in/through aesthetic practices, including the reading of literary texts, such notions as plenitude, not only counter “instances of immobilized reception”—by preparing for the “possibility of receptive exchange” among subjects and texts—but also encourage what Bersani describes as an acceptance of “the vicissitudes of somatic and psychic receptiveness to the world” (Bersani, 2018, p. vii). Sexuality education conceived reparatively, that is, as the assembling and conferring of plenitude, thus, becomes a site where multiplicity is encountered and received, a space, therefore, where “receptive bodies” (Bersani, 2018, p. viii) are constituted and trained, not through the incorporation of others into our own conceptual frameworks, but by a practice such as *teleiopoiesis* (Spivak, 2012, pp. 369, 404, 428, 566, endnote 16, 578,

endnote 9, 581, endnote 15)—which by performing the impossible but necessary task of “touching the distant other with imaginative effort” (Spivak, 2012, p. 428) safeguards the specificity of the other through the ongoing reconfiguration of discourse. For, as Bersani observes, “becoming an individual in our post-natal life is to discover otherness, that is, our difference from the human and nonhuman objects that are the necessarily alien world into which the individual subject is born” (Bersani, 2018, p. x). As I argue in the course of this thesis, it is through aesthetic encounters, including literary reading, that “the possibility of metaphorically crossing borders into foreign territory” (Sorensen, 2010, p. 32) emerges and is entertained. For, in this process, as desires are uncoercively rearranged, an aesthetic education that draws sexuality education away from itself—making it queer to itself—is enacted.

Some Concluding Remarks

Insofar as a commitment to an abundant life—the assembling and conferring of plenitude—goes hand in hand with theorizations of queer that stress its “multiply transitive” tendencies, it is important to recognize that abundance itself is sustained by queer’s own propensity to produce incoherence “*across genders, across sexualities, across genres, across ‘perversions’*” (Sedgwick, 1993, p. xii). Such a disposition, in that it encourages and entails the generous if admittedly haphazard activity of scattering abroad “the seed of meaning” (Spivak, 2016b, p. lxxxix)—rather than directing, containing or restricting its distribution—not only feeds “the desire of a reparative impulse,” but also challenges those labouring in the field of sexuality education to “develop and disseminate the richest reparative practices” (Sedgwick, 2003, pp. 149, 150).

If queer functions performatively “in a present created and sustained by the effortful acts—productions and interventions—that embody it” (Barber & Clark, 2002, p. 2), it is also productive to imagine queer unfolding as a moment of possibility within its own strange temporality. In this way, Muñoz’s conceptualization of “queer futurity, where the future is a site of infinite and immutable potentiality” (Muñoz, 2009, p. 127), finds itself at (queer) cross-purposes with Edelman’s notion of “reproductive futurism” (Edelman, 2004, p. 2). The latter, of course, implies a much bleaker outlook—a scenario in which queer is only ever able to refuse and obstruct, never productively accommodate or work around, heteronormative time or space—because under the terms

of reproductive futurism there is “‘no future’ for queers,” as heteronormativity ceaselessly recycles itself “through the figure of the Child” (Giffney, 2008, pp. 60, 56).

While it has been argued that Edelman’s “polemical engagement” with heteronormativity seeks not only to limit “the reach of the human” (Edelman, 2004, pp. 3, 152), in order to make room for the inhuman, but also to advance a sort of “queer apocalypticism” (Giffney, 2008, p. 58) that refuses to invest in the future of heteronormativity, my approach—as you will see in the next chapter—is more playful. Rather than mount a direct attack, as Edelman does, on the figure of the Child—a strategy surely designed *not* to make new friends among sexuality educators—I endeavour to open up “a space for childhood queerness” (Bruhm & Hurley, 2004, p. xiv). This I do by thinking with Stockton’s notion of the queer child growing sideways as I read Edith Howes’ *The Golden Forest*.

Chapter Two

Growing Sideways in Golden Forest

We have seen sex arise. From amoeba to man it winds in exquisite progression of unfolding. Beside it, its extension and fulfilment, marches the equally exquisite progression of birth, which with variety and marvel carries life for ever onward and upward. (Howes, 1932, p. 16)

Now, my own suspicion is that the universe is not only queerer than we suppose, but queerer than we *can* suppose. (Haldane, 1971, p. 298)

Overview

If, in the previous chapter, I argued that sexuality education as it is currently conceptualized in Aotearoa New Zealand emphasizes planning and strategizing at the expense of both utopic and queer thinking, I also suggested that the utopic impulse, like the impulse to queer, may be discerned in the most unlikely corners of educational thought—for example, in the often taken-for-granted notion of growing-up, which from the beginning has shaped the direction of sexuality education in this country. Now, taking up the notions of reparativity and plenitude—and thinking with them utopically alongside and athwart Stockton’s conceptualization of the queer child growing sideways—I advance my case that there has always been something queer about the history of sexuality education in New Zealand.

It is in the spirit of stirring the utopian impulse, then, that I turn with a queer eye to Edith Howes’ *The Golden Forest*—a book for boys which gives fictional form to the author’s utopic hope that a sex education which is “universal, a detail of ordinary education, part of human care,” will not only mean “a tremendous advance in social life and happiness, supplying as it does an ideal,” but might also bring about “one of those sudden forward leaps that sometimes diversify the long, slow drawl of evolution” (Howes, 1932, pp. 130, 131). For Howes, the materials for teaching and learning new ways of being and relating are “strewn in profusion about the world” (Howes, 1932, p. 130). In other words, hers is a place-based sexuality education premised on abundance and plenitude. Yet, insofar as Howes turns to fiction—mindful of our desire for them and the pleasure we derive from them, she fashions stories in an effort “first to give form to, and then take possession of, a variety of truths, both literal and figurative” (Mahy, 2000, p. 35)—hers is an education very much within the mode of the aesthetic.

The Great Experiment

First published in 1930, and described at the time as “a work for boys who are old enough to wonder about the problems of fatherhood” (“Miss Edith Howes: A Book for Boys,” 1930, p. 21), *The Golden Forest* follows in the wake of the success of Howes’ earlier book for girls, *The Cradle Ship* (1916), an internationally acclaimed “landmark attempt to provide children with sex education” (Murray, 1996, p. 235). Although barely remembered today, *The Golden Forest* still makes for interesting and productive reading, in part, because it invites readers to consider the entanglement of utopic thinking and the desire to plan in the context of implementing a sexuality education, one which aligns with what Howes proclaims—in an eponymously titled book for adults—as “the Great Experiment” (Howes, 1932). Simply put, Howes’ is a sexuality education premised on the notion that children, by experiencing the natural world first-hand, as well as through the study of the natural sciences, may not only come to know and understand nature’s myriad workings, but also learn to cooperate with what she calls “Nature’s aim,” becoming “responsible thereafter for helping, not hindering, that tremendous purpose” (Howes, 1932, pp. 131, 134). As Howes explains:

. . . gradually and without self-consciousness being made acquainted with facts of life and with their purpose, production of the best, children are made ready for the facts about their own being, ready to recognize the need for maturity and the production of the best in human life. (Howes, 1932, p. 130)

Howes’ lofty belief that science gives us “confidence to stand upon our own feet, and move forward without fear, realizing that all life is one, and that we are one with life” (Howes, 1932, p. 3) is reflected in her approach to sex which is similarly positive, concerned as it is with producing the best. Just as Howes sees life as evolution—as “experiment after experiment, achievement after achievement, in ever mounting series . . . rising in complexity, in beauty, in power”—so, too, does she conceptualize sex as winding in “exquisite progression of unfolding . . . extension and fulfilment . . . onward and upward” (Howes, 1932, pp. 4, 16).

If *The Golden Forest* exemplifies in fictional form Howes’ optimistic rallying cry of “Forward with Nature” (Howes, 1932, p. 131), it is on this basis that I propose that it is a helpful text through and against which to ‘think’ Stockton’s notion of the queer child as the child who grows sideways. Moreover, it is a text which invites

consideration in any re-evaluation of the history of sexuality education in this country where, as we have seen, “a positive view of sexual development as a natural part of growing up” (Ministry of Education, 2015, p. 4) is still largely assumed. Given the many anomalies and irregularities that are generated through a reading of *The Golden Forest*—both those arising from circumstances specific to the book’s production and those that are always already present in any sexuality education—Howes’ novel provides an opportunity to experience the queerness of the slippage zone. For instance, readers do well to attend to the gaps that open up and often widen between Howes’ pedagogical intentions—which are all to do with imparting “the most momentous information, the most necessary guidance” (Howes, 1932, p. 129)—and the unforeseen consequences of attempting to do so while straddling the genres of what are now called children’s and YA fiction. If, as I have suggested, *The Golden Forest* provides today’s readers with an opportunity to imagine the possibilities of a queerer sexuality education, one which concerns itself with lateral rather than vertical movement, with growing sideways rather than with growing-up, it does so by directing their attention to that “perpetual state of wonder and desire,” which seems to the eminent New Zealand writer Margaret Mahy, “the truest state with which to confront the universe” (Mahy, 2000, p. 40). For, while the queering of sexuality education tends to undo planning—through the crafting of sidelong movements that upset or delay expectations—the nurturing of moments of wonder and desire stimulates the utopic impulse in ways that make possible the re-visioning of the world.

In *The Golden Forest*, as we will soon see, Howes attends to moments of wonder and delight in order to advance what she regards as a progressive sexuality education—albeit one which from our perspective seems to promote a highly idealized image of the family “as having an innate structure which is tampered with only at great peril, and which continues to assert itself through time and space and in defiance of death” (Mahy, 2000, p. 66). Yet, if Howes’ insistence that “present happiness and a golden future wait on forethoughtful living” (Howes, 1932, p. 138) doesn’t, at first sight, appear to promise the sort of stuff that makes for either a queerer pedagogy or a queerer sexuality education, nevertheless, what she sets out to teach about sex, reproduction, family relationships and human care in *The Golden Forest* veers in unexpected directions because of the queer manner in which she presents her ideas. Thus, inadvertently and despite herself, Howes contributes to that “kind of beautiful and

provocative mayhem” (Quinlivan, 2014, p. 281), which is a feature of queer utopic thinking.

Circulating at a time when any opportunities for sex education available to young people in New Zealand lay outside the bounds of the formal school curriculum—“the syllabus and school texts reflected the middle-class policy of silence on sexual matters” (McGeorge, 1977, p. 133)—*The Golden Forest* draws the attention of today’s readers to the undeniable queerness of the history of sexuality education in this country. For, a sexuality education not permitted a regular place within the official school curriculum until 1989—and, then, for the most part, anxiously surveilled as “one of the most contested and controversial curriculum subjects” (Allen, L., 2011, p. 7)—is a sexuality education which, by being forced to grow sideways, surely ends up growing queerly.

If sexuality education’s queerness in relation to ‘normal’ school subjects is apparent in its belated inclusion in the curriculum, and that only after HIV/AIDS “precipitated significant change in the country’s head-in-the-sand approach to sex education” (Smyth, 2000, p. 172), it is also evident in its complex and often fraught relationship with literary texts, including *The Cradle Ship* and *The Golden Forest*. These were written, as Howes readily admits, in the hope of permanent benefit to those children, who otherwise would have been deprived of an accurate and balanced understanding of sex—“that mysterious and imperative force which carries on the [human] race” (Howes, 1932, p. 133). Thus, while there are plenty of other peculiarities that distinguish sexuality education in its current form from more regular areas of the school curriculum in Aotearoa New Zealand,⁷ what remains a persistent but mostly unacknowledged feature of its history—both before and after it became a recognized school subject here—is sexuality education’s tendency to be pulled in a sideways direction, that is, off the instructional track, by works of fiction like *The Golden Forest*.

Written at a time still shadowed by “intense social obsessions with sexual impropriety, prostitution, masturbation, venereal disease and uncontrolled motherhood and

⁷ These distinguishing peculiarities include: sexuality education’s focus on the body rather than the mind, its inclusion under the umbrella of health and physical education rather than as a stand-alone subject, the limited number of hours allocated to teaching it at each level each year (between twelve and fifteen in most schools), underdeveloped assessment and evaluation practices, and the requirement that schools consult with their communities at least once every two years about the health and sexuality education programmes that they plan to deliver.

childhood” (Belich, 2001, p. 158), *The Golden Forest* provided boys with the opportunity to learn about sex in a way that differed markedly from the usual sort of instruction typically given in a private setting “by an authoritative adult, father, clergyman, physician or principal” (Watson, 2015, p. 113). If such instruction tended to go down one or other of two paths—either taking the “social purity” line, which set out to “bring about social change through abstinence outside marriage” (Watson, 2015, p. 113), or reflecting the “social hygiene”/“sex hygiene” model, which provided “sex instruction aimed primarily at avoiding disease” (Watson, 2015, p. 114)—Howes moved sex education sideways in the direction of the aesthetic. This she did by using fiction to present a detailed pedagogical plan, a “graduated course of instruction in fundamental facts” (Howes, 1932, p. 130). As Heather Murray explains, “believing that facts were easier to learn when woven into a story or song, Howes . . . learned to observe and record phenomena, which she then described in the context of imaginative writing” (Murray, 1996, p. 235). By positioning her sexuality education closer in relation to science and the aesthetic than to the overtly didactic, Howes found a creative and more palatable way of introducing basic information not only about sex and reproduction, but also what she termed “human care” (Howes, 1932, pp. 116–141) to young people whose “outlook is misted over with perplexity, especially when the body is ripening sexually and when new and powerful feelings disturb the mind” (Howes, 1932, p. 132). At the same time, Howes, by deploying fiction to present her message, was able to forestall accusations of promoting self-mortification—as many authoritative adult males did—or, of turning a blind eye to situations where self-indulgence prevailed due to ignorance.

If, indeed, Howes wrote *The Golden Forest* in an attempt to ensure that young males were properly equipped for life—she was of the opinion that often “boys especially, whose need is urgent, went into the world armed with nothing more than a silly snigger” (Howes, 1932, p. 129)—her clear allegiance is to the possibilities opened up by a sexuality education that does its level best to be faithful both to science and to the imagination. Thus, *The Golden Forest* supports the view that fiction, insofar as it has the aim of “acquainting children with the facts of life, broadening their minds along the right channels” (“Miss Howes’s New Book,” 1930, p. 4), must entertain as it instructs. But, in bringing science and the imagination together to achieve this goal, Howes has to

grapple with the propensity of instruction to pull against entertainment and of entertainment to subvert instruction.

‘Wonder must be part of truth’

While Howes’ treatment of sex in *The Golden Forest* is undoubtedly influenced by the various social purity and social/sex hygiene movements active in New Zealand in the early decades of the twentieth century, her novel is much more than a thinly disguised primer on the role of the male in human reproduction, a fictional work which under the guise of entertainment seeks to instruct boys and young men in the facts of life. For, although *The Golden Forest* does indeed warn in a very veiled way of the dangers of sexual impurity—the depletion of vitality and the squandering of vital forces, presumably, through masturbation and sex outside the marital relationship—Howes’ emphasis is educative and socially constructive, rather than punitive or moralistic. If, for Margaret Mahy, “wonder must be part of truth—not completely coinciding with it of course, a part of truth which our physical systems are anxious to conceal” (Mahy, 2000, p. 40), then Howes, it seems, shares a similar perspective. For, in presenting her principal character, young Jack Rendy, as both endlessly curious and in a more or less perpetual state of excitement about the singularities of the world, Howes lays out the conditions for her own piece of utopic thinking, one that owes at least as much to the imagination as to the natural sciences.

On the one hand, although *The Golden Forest* contains many elements typical of adventure stories popular with Kiwi boys at the time of its writing, on the other, the characters, setting and storyline which Howes has chosen to carry her message serve to queer rather than straightforwardly reinforce the idealized image of heteronormative family life which she intends to promote. In fact, the ‘natural’ environment of Golden Forest, the site of Jack’s scientific and aesthetic education, is certainly more attractive, stimulating and stable than “the meaner streets of London” (Howes, 1930, p. 1), from where Jack has been transplanted after years of neglect and abuse by an alcoholic father. As a review in *The Otago Daily Times* explains:

The story is of a little London waif, Jack Rendy, who is discovered by a wealthy naturalist, a Mr Morne, and taken to his coastal retreat in New Zealand, in which he has a veritable paradise for animals of all kinds—and, incidentally, for small boys in search of adventure. Jack’s only kindly recollections are of his

mother, long since dead, and a friendly neighbour in his London slum; his father he feared, and he translated this fear into a distrust of all fathers, human and animal. It is Mr Morne's task to cure him of his hatred of the male parent, and to disclose to him a new conception of life in which parenthood is seen to be a noble and interesting thing. ("Miss Howes's New Book," 1930)

So, there is more going on here than adventure. As the story of *The Golden Forest* unfolds, readers and Jack learn that he is being prepared by Mr Morne for a "special work" (Howes, 1930, p. 27), the exact nature of which will be revealed in the fullness of time. As it turns out, Jack is "the subject of an experiment" (Howes, 1930, p. 241)—a pedagogical experiment—the purpose of which finally becomes clear near the novel's end when Mr Morne announces:

I went out searching for a homeless boy, and I found you. I told you I had a use for you. . . . If I found you teachable, if the experiment proved a success, I would write to your schoolmaster and he would send out one by one other boys who would be glad of a home and would be likely to make good. (Howes, 1930, p. 241)

As Mr Morne goes on to explain, his experiment has worked out well, exceeding his highest expectations:

You have more than made good, Jack. From the first you were grateful, and your gratitude was shown in hard work, in the wholehearted giving of yourself, which is a finer thing than any words. Yours is not one of those small natures that take all and give nothing in return. (Howes, 1930, p. 241)

But what exactly is the nature of Mr Morne's experiment? And what is the plan that Jack has apparently fulfilled so well by the novel's end?

At the heart of Mr Morne's pedagogical endeavour is the fortification, strengthening, and cleansing of Jack by knowledge (Howes, 1930, pp. 242, 244). As I have suggested, the premise upon which Mr Morne's educational efforts are based—the notion that an accurate and appropriately communicated knowledge about sex protects boys and young men from moral corruption—was garnering growing support from moral campaigners during a period in New Zealand's history when male sexuality "was believed to be the major driving force behind social impurity" (Watson, 2015, p. 113).

In a similar vein, it is not surprising that Mr Morne's plan—and, indeed, Howes' own ideas—align in some respects with the views of eugenicists who since the early years of the century had been calling for “lessons in ‘sex hygiene’” (McGeorge, 1977, p. 135) as a means of combating the spread of masturbation, venereal disease, and extra-marital pregnancies and births. If the over-all intention of eugenicists was the strengthening of family life and the production of “a vigorous race” (McGeorge, 1977, p. 135), this was driven by a fear that New Zealanders of British ancestry were imperilling the future health and wellbeing of the young nation by reproducing at too slow a rate or through inter-marriage with people not of European stock.

Yet, Mr Morne's plan, revealed to Jack over the span of four years in the intensely homo-social and intergenerational environment of Golden Forest, is a decidedly queer one in that it *does* teach about the traditional heteronormative family and sings its praises, but from the perspective of an outsider, one for whom the traditional family structure has not brought happiness. If Mr Morne's plan lends itself to being read queerly, it is not only because the Child as he conceptualizes it is “a carefully controlled embodiment of noncomplication” (Stockton, 2009, p. 5) within a similarly non-complicated family, but because his plan is unable to encapsulate or contain Mr Morne's own affective history or potential. For, while it does indeed seek to instruct Jack in the facts of life and disclose to him the responsibilities of fatherhood, the plan, as Mr Morne presents it, is driven not by ideology, but springs from the grief and remorse of a widower and father whose only son had died at the age of twenty after having “wasted himself, his youth, his young manhood” (Howes, 1930, p. 238) in the pursuit of what today we term “risky behaviours” (Ministry of Education, 2015, p. 5). Mr Morne—absent father, roaming “the wild places of the earth . . . year after year” (Howes, 1930, p. 238) in the pursuit of the natural sciences—blames himself for his son Charlie's death. “I should have been there to train him, to open his eyes to the laws of nature and the punishment meted out to those who don't obey them” (Howes, 1930, p. 239), he says. But Mr Mourne's education of Jack is more than an exercise in “the teaching of control” (Howes, 1930, p. 239). It is also his attempt to make amends for his own neglect of Charlie, an undertaking which he describes as “my great comfort” (Howes, 1930, p. 241). In this way, Mr Morne's plan may be read utopically and reparatively as an “ongoing affectual composition of *a* world” (Seigworth & Gregg, 2010, p. 3).

Although Mr Morne's plan for Jack is the prototype of a much grander scheme to "save [boys] from themselves" (Howes, 1930, p. 240), it is a plan which in its implementation exceeds Mr Morne's pedagogical intentions insofar as it "*produces* rather than *protects*" (Spivak, 2016b, p. xcvi). This excess—which works "to assemble and confer plenitude" while resisting "the paranoid impulse" (Sedgwick, 2003, p. 149) that characterized most sex instruction in the early decades of the twentieth century—makes its potential felt in the capacity of Jack's body "to affect and to be affected" (Seigworth & Gregg, 2010, p. 2). The plan's affective consequences, which are beyond Mr Morne's expectations, are most obviously evident in the intensity of Jack's response to all that he encounters at Golden Forest. It is, as if, for Jack, "there is always a chance for something else, unexpected, new" (Clough, 2010, p. 224).

If the term 'queer,' as Eve Sedgwick deploys it, refers "to 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," then Mr Morne's plan, which is based on the assumption that nature is organized "into a seamless and univocal whole" (Sedgwick, 1993, p. 8) fails to contain or explain the excesses and the exceptions which Jack encounters at Golden Forest. While Mr Morne certainly provides Jack with the encouragement, the opportunities and the training he needs to observe the world around him at close quarters, his plan—his wanting things to signify monolithically—can never determine Jack's response to what he encounters. Thus, in explaining to Jack what he understands to be "Nature's plans for parentage," Mr Morne insists that "all life is one and . . . we must work with the plan and not against it if we would not be broken and cast aside" (Howes, 1930, pp. 239, 240). Nevertheless, while for Mr Morne, exceptions always prove the rule, and singularities must always give way to universalities, Jack's response to the sort of education Mr Morne provides tends to upset this very principle, as Jack is drawn to revel in the particularities, the multiplicities, and the variety of Golden Forest. In this way, Jack's is an education in the queer.

Given his considerable abilities as a teacher, Mr Morne soon leads Jack "through strange gates into new worlds where things took on a significance they had never held before" (Howes, 1930, p. 30). If Mr Morne's pedagogical intention is nothing less than to lay before Jack the "plan of birth and parenthood" (Howes, 1930, p. 241) which runs

through all life “from amoeba to man” (Howes, 1930, p. 240)—a plan which equates, in part at least, to today’s health and sexuality education—the teaching methods he uses work against the sort of monolithic signification that he seeks. For the education Mr Morne provides for Jack is an education that is firmly placed-based and experiential, arising from the environment of Golden Forest, its abundant flora and fauna. If in the mornings there are formal lessons, the acquisition of “a knowledge of the best books” (Howes, 1930, p. 30)—Latin, as well as natural history and laboratory work—in the afternoons Jack is free to wander Golden Forest, in reality a vast working estate, “more like a zoo than a sheep station” (Howes, 1930, p. 17). Jack’s instructions from Mr Morne are to take part in the work when he wishes, but above all to observe from the men working there how things are done and to find out all he can by “roaming and learning [his] way about the place” (Howes, 1930, p. 28).

While the subject of Mr Morne’s experiment is Jack, its pedagogical emphasis is extrospective rather than introspective: “To watch life, to follow it up from its simple beginnings, to try to find out even the least of its mysteries!—there is nothing else so enthralling, so full of wonder and adventure, so rich in reward” (Howes, 1930, p. 35). As Mr Morne explains, “we may best begin to know ourselves by first knowing something of the other creatures that inhabit this truly wonderful world, for they are one with us” (Howes, 1930, p. 31). As Jack wanders Golden Forest, “happy and interested, listening, watching, asking a question now and again, but usually content to be silent” (Howes, 1930, p. 65), he learns to wonder. “A wonderful, wonderful world!” (Howes, 1930, p. 65), he exclaims. Jack’s gaze is “enthralled”; he is “very much astonished”; there are “so many engrossing things to do” (Howes, 1930, pp. 31, 32, 49), we are told. Jack encounters and acknowledges abundance wherever he goes: “Golden Forest! What a place! What a collection of marvels!” (Howes, 1930, p. 27).

To emphasize this point, Howes presents Jack and her readers with exhaustive, but not exhausting, lists and beautifully crafted descriptions of Mr Morne’s floral and faunal collections, including detailed accounts of the various plants and creatures therein (see Howes, 1930, pp. 29, 82, 145–146). Indeed, by encouraging Jack to look at life, to observe things closely, Mr Morne trains Jack’s ‘queer eye’—that is, his ability to give “boundless attention to strange relationalities” (Jagose, 2015, p. 36), to attend to what Karen Barad calls those “patterns of differences that make a difference” (Dolphijn & van der Tuin, 2012, p. 49). It is in this way that Jack learns to allow himself to be

captivated and entranced by singularities and peculiarities, those unusual things that don't appear to fit established patterns, which buck trends and pull against Mr Morne's notion of nature's univocality. As Jack exposes himself to queerness, he learns to be comfortable with being somewhat disoriented in the world and begins to see the possibilities that open up in such situations. "What queer things there are in the world!" (Howes, 1930, p. 85), he announces.

If Jack's propensity is to find queerness in the flora and fauna around him, to alight on the differences that make a difference and to delight in them, Mr Morne seizes upon that which he perceives to be queer for another purpose. Put simply, Mr Morne deploys queer to defend normativities (physical, moral and social). He does this on the basis that the normal is derived from nature and is in tune with it—an argument which he uses not only in support of his plan for education in parenthood, but also to defend the notion that exceptions in nature establish the rule. In other words, for Mr Morne, any whiff of queerness is an opportunity to bolster and praise what is normal. When, for example, Jack observes a female Goby fish attempting to eat her own eggs and a male fish preventing her from doing so, Mr Morne takes this opportunity to lecture Jack on the queerness of "unmotherly mothers" (Howes, 1930, p. 85) and to explain that in nature male creatures sometimes take on the protective maternal role. In doing so, however, Mr Morne inadvertently exposes and undermines the fragility of his own argument. For rules only work when they work—there are always excesses that cannot be contained by rules' parameters.

If Mr Morne's plan to educate Jack in the rise of sex from amoeba to man may be understood as a personal campaign to bring Jack into line with the taken-for-granted notion of 'growing-up,' it may also be conceptualized in terms of Mr Morne's own belief in the "benign publicity" (Stockton, 2009, p. 12) of innocence and the closely aligned idea that "children are defined and longed for, according to what *they* do not have" (Kincaid, 2004, p. 10). Mr Morne's commitment, then, is to the notion of a progressive transition from childhood 'innocence' to an adult state where erotically aware men and woman are able to recognize and protect in children that 'innocence' which they themselves have somehow 'lost' in their own growing. Yet, despite the comprehensive nature of Mr Morne's plan—and his announcement that Jack has surpassed all expectations—Jack's response to the plenitude and abundance of Golden Forest suggests that his growth is more markedly side-ways than vertical, more

typically queer than straight. For Jack's attention is always being pulled in the direction of those things in nature that don't fit the rules—he is willing to be surprised by them and wonders in their presence. His, I suggest, is a diffractive practice in that he reads the world “attentively and carefully . . . for differences that matter in their fine details” (Dolphijn & van der Tuin, 2012, p. 50).

While Jack is clearly at home with queer's plenitude—that is, with queer's propensity to generate an “immensely productive incoherence” (Sedgwick, 1993, p. xii)—he also comes to recognize that shifts in perspective and changes in intensity generate their own “queer, almost unearthly beauty added by distance and height” (Howes, 1930, p. 203). This awareness, then, is part and parcel of developing not only a queer eye, by attending to those patterns of difference that make a difference, but also of learning to frame the world in aesthetic terms:

It was the deepening of colour that made the difference. The greens were vivid emerald; inlet and sea, and even the little river, were the most intense and wonderful blue, such blues as Jack had never seen. (Howes, 1930, p. 203)

Some Concluding Remarks

In 1927, three years before *The Golden Forest* was published, the biological scientist J. B. S. Haldane voiced his suspicion that “the universe is not only queerer than we suppose, but queerer than we *can* suppose” (Haldane, 1971, p. 298). Thus, it is not altogether surprising that Howes in her novel takes the opportunity to remind readers of the queerness of the world: “Queer thing, this growing! . . . Queer thing, life” (Howes, 1930, p. 183), Jack's friend Andy tells him. If, on the one hand, it is Jack's willingness to experience and think things “both alongside and athwart” (Luciano & Chen, 2015, p. 189)—that is, in “‘across’ formulations” (Sedgwick, 1993, p. xii)—which prompts me to suggest that Jack's orientation towards the world is queer, on the other, it is his openness to new learning that invites speculation as to how Jack might behave if he ever were to be transplanted from Golden Forest into a twenty-first century sexuality education classroom in New Zealand. Would he retain his sense of wonder and what might he make of the planning?

As Muñoz suggests, “queer utopias can be glimpsed in the pleasurable ‘astonishments’ of the aesthetic” (Quinlivan, 2014, p. 277). It is up to sexuality educators, then, to make what they will of *The Golden Forest*, and of Jack Rendy's delight as he looks “naturally

on the things of nature” (Howes, 1930, p. 241), not only as they work to challenge present hetero-normativities, but also, perhaps, as they seek to engage with the aesthetic in ways that enable “glimpses of a queer futurity” (Quinlivan, 2014, p. 277). This is possible even in a sexuality education that can never completely shake off the compulsion to plan. If a sexuality education given over to planning resists reaching out from what is “present and actual to something else, something glimpsed in the imagination” (Carson, 1998, p. 52), it also always runs the risk of being undone by the queer and the utopic, including those pleasurable ‘astonishments’ that Quinlivan speaks of and which Jack Rendy experiences at Golden Forest.

In the chapter that follows, I attend to the ancient erotic lexicon—which provides insight into the workings of what today we call queer—not only in order to make the most of the proximity of eros and the aesthetic, but also to imagine a sexuality education that opens out into an aesthetics of existence, one capable of keeping alive the possibility of new forms of relationships.

Chapter Three

Sexuality Education, Eros, and Aesthetics of Existence

Michel Foucault: “What I meant was that I think what the gay movement needs now is much more the art of life than a science or scientific knowledge (or pseudo-scientific knowledge) of what sexuality is. Sexuality is part of our behavior. It’s part of our world freedom. Sexuality is something we ourselves create—it is our own creation, and much more than the discovery of a secret side of our desire. We have to understand that with our desires, through our desires, go new forms of relationships, new forms of love, new forms of creation. Sex is not a fatality: it’s a possibility for creative life.” (Foucault, 1996a, p. 382)

Overview

In proposing that Spivak’s project of aesthetic education and Bersani’s reframing of sex as a mode of the aesthetic are able to undo taken-for-granted meanings about sexuality and open up possibilities for making sexuality education strange again, I am mindful that what today we term sexuality—and for the most part theorize in relation to health, medicine and the various sciences—was once figured in the Western literary and philosophical tradition within the modality of the aesthetic, that is, as the erotic.

By drawing upon Michel Foucault’s notions of *ars erotica* and *scientia sexualis*, as well as Anne Carson’s exploration of eros in classical literary and philosophical texts, in this chapter I argue that the erotic still makes its presence felt in sexuality education classrooms, especially, I suggest, through the figurations that we call queer. This is so, despite the fact that the lexicon of eros, originating as it did in the workings of ancient literary and philosophic imaginations, cannot easily be repurposed for today’s sexuality education. For, if queer emerges as we attend to “the art of making sex speak” (Doherty, 1996, p. 138), that is, by turning the affects which we connect with sex into narratives, it also presses for a hearing whenever we attend to the art of *listening* to sex speak, including through the practice of literary reading. With this in mind, as I explore the potential of literary reading—especially of the type practised by the likes of Spivak and Bersani—to queer sexuality education, I detail my intention to conduct close readings of a number of literary texts in an effort not only to enable queer voices to be heard, but to train readers in the art of listening for and to the queer.

By emphasizing the propensity of queer, not only to unhinge certainties and disturb the familiar through what Eve Sedgwick describes as its cross-wise movement—movement that is transgressive as well as transverse—I assert queer’s importance in what Michel Foucault calls “an aesthetics of existence” (Foucault, 1984/1992, pp. 12, 89). For queer has a part to play in the pursuit of an *ascesis*—a knowledge of the self that demands the adoption of a set of self-practices—in a committed and sustained effort to unbind the self from the self. Indeed, because queer “cuts across every locus of agency and subjectivity” (Sedgwick, 1993, p. xii), it is well-placed to perform the releasing of the self from the self that Foucault calls for. Given that Spivak’s aesthetic education and Bersani’s conceptualization of sex as a mode of the aesthetic are in tune with Foucault’s notion of the care of the self—all three theorizations imply a process of on-going subjectification, a continual disassembling and reassembling of the self that refuses to privilege the epistemological over the aesthetic or the ethical—I maintain, as you will see, that Spivak and Bersani, like Foucault, advance a form of aesthetico-ethical self-*bricolage* that is both informed by, and generative of, queer perspectives and practices.

Eros and Sexuality Education

Before there was sexuality there was eros. Before there was sexuality education there were the erotic arts. Long before sex became the property of science, or was thought in terms of health and wellbeing, what we now term sexuality was figured within the modality of the aesthetic as the erotic—a mode of interacting with the world that celebrates “the pleasure of finding ourselves harboured within it” (Bersani, 2010, p. 153), while accepting, even welcoming, the inescapable risks and dangers attendant upon doing so. Thus, although sex and sexuality as categories of thought are largely inventions of the nineteenth century—the Oxford English Dictionary (OED), for example, gives 1797 as the date of the first recorded occurrence of the term ‘sexuality’ in written English—a rich historical archive attests to the fact that “from its earliest records, Western culture has been replete with the stories and images of eros, and there has been no shortage of teachings and treatises dedicated to the topic” (Bartsch & Bartscherer, 2005, p. 1).

Taking its name from Ἔρως, the often winged Greek god of love, whose mission it was “to trouble the hearts of men” (Grimal, 1986, p. 153), either by wounding them with his arrows or inflaming them with his torch, the concept of eros as it has developed over

time has been consistently linked to physical longing and sexual pleasure, but, more recently, also to the queer. If, as we have seen, the queer is always *troublant* or disturbing, it is eros that “makes the familiar ground of our now queered sexual knowledge strange again, restoring its rifts, its instabilities, and its flaws” (Huffer, 2016, pp. 110–111). In other words, it is the erotic, with its origins in unreason and divine madness, that still manages to pull the rug out from under any attempts to domesticate sex or explain its unintelligibility away by subjecting it to “the rational language of sexuality” (Huffer, 2016, p. 110). As Anne Carson argues, Greek lyric, tragic and comedic poetry consistently presents eros as “an experience that assaults the lover from without and proceeds to take control of his body, his mind and the quality of his life” (Carson, 1998, p. 148). It is in the context of this madness—“the best and noblest of all the forms that possession by god can take” (Plato, ca. 370 B.C.E./1997a, p. 527), Socrates declares—that Greek thinkers, including Plato, debated the educative significance of erotic *mania* in relation to the chaos that the loss of self-mastery inevitably brought with it. If—in Plato’s *Phaedrus*—Socrates concludes that “in fact the best things we have come from madness, when it is given as a gift of the god” (Plato, ca. 370 B.C.E./1997a, p. 522), this is because madness from a god, including erotic disturbance, enables human beings to share in the god’s life and gifts. Contrariwise, self-mastery and self-possession are no guarantees of success or quality, for, as Socrates observes, “self-controlled verses will be eclipsed by the poetry of men who have been driven out of their minds” (Plato, ca. 370 B.C.E./1997a, p. 523). Thus, from the beginning, erotic madness—with its attendant violence—is closely intertwined with both literary production and representation:

The poets represent eros as an invasion, an illness, an insanity, a wild animal, a natural disaster. His action is to melt, break down, bite into, burn, devour, wear away, whirl around, sting, pierce, wound, poison, suffocate, drag off or grind the lover to a powder. Eros employs nets, arrows, fire, hammers, hurricanes, fevers, boxing gloves or bits and bridles in making his assault. No one can fight Eros off. (Carson, 1998, p. 148)

Yet, as the aforesaid archive also serves to remind us, eros and the erotic arts have always been closely linked with the broader question of how might philosophy and literature assist us to entertain “passionate or erotic relations with ourselves and with others” (Rajchman, 1991, p. 1). Eros, thus positioned, belongs to thinking and the

imagination as much as it belongs to sexuality, to desire as well as to pleasure, and to the pursuit of truth and an ethical way of living that goes beyond the acquisition of knowledge. As Carson puts it:

There would seem to be some resemblance between the way Eros acts in the mind of a lover and the way knowing acts in the mind of a thinker. It has been an endeavour of philosophy from the time of Sokrates to understand the nature and uses of that resemblance. (Carson, 1998, p. 70)

If working with the imagination pushes the subject to depart from secure ways of thinking and fly in the face of reason in order to accommodate new and potentially overwhelming insights, then coming under the sway of eros leads the same subject to forsake the stability of familiar ground on the basis of an uncertain promise that a more hopeful and pleasurable future—one different from any previously imagined or planned for the self—is possible. Such a future, then, “might involve going astray, getting lost, or even becoming queer” (Ahmed, 2006, p. 21). To claim that eros is bound up with ‘becoming queer’ in ways that exceed questions of sexual identity or orientation—“queer is by definition *whatever* is at odds with the normal, the legitimate, the dominant” (Halperin, 1995, p. 62)—is to affirm that unrestrained erotic desire is heedless of all norms, always ready to veer away from the straight and narrow path, from what is morally and socially acceptable. Because “to think deeply about eros requires that one pay heed to many voices and a plurality of expressive modes” (Bartsch & Bartscherer, 2005, p. 2), all of which work to pull the feeling and thinking subject hither and yon, it follows that eros is inevitably entangled with variety, paradox and ambivalence.

While Plato’s *Symposium* (ca. 385 B.C.E./1997b) exemplifies the best attempts by Greek rationalist philosophers to come to terms with the complex demands of eros, specifically the polyvocalities of “erotic love, or better, passionate desire” within male sexual and social relationships, it also affirms and explores such relationships “as a potentially positive vehicle for education” (Sheffield, 2006, pp. 2, 3). This is the case, not only because, when properly ordered, the *erastes* (the lover) / *eromenos* (the beloved) binary was believed to provide an appropriate conduit for the transmission of virtue from one generation of Athenian—male—citizens to the next, but also because relationships thus configured furnished those involved with opportunities to reflect on

the ways in which desire shapes human choices, leading them through the pursuit of the *kalon*, the ideal physical or moral beauty, into the realm of the aesthetic. In this educative process, the imagination, like eros from which it cannot be successfully disentangled, clearly plays an important if often unstated role. For it is the imagination which enables the lover to stretch his mind to contemplate beautiful things and, thereby, ascend through various stages of learning “like rising stairs . . . so that in the end he comes to know just what it is to be beautiful” (Plato, ca. 385 B.C.E./1997b, p. 493). Thus, in establishing a “connection between an erotic relationship, an appreciation of the *kalon*, and a striving for virtue” (Sheffield, 2006, p. 17), Plato, while making the point that our desires, to the extent that they embody both our beliefs and values, are a significant component of our ethical lives, directs readers to frame erotic relationships in aesthetic as well as ethical terms. In doing so, he gives to eros an aesthetic significance that moves it beyond the physical. As David Halperin observes, in the context of Platonic eros, “desire ultimately aims not at bodily contact but at self-transcendence” (Halperin, 2005, p. 52).

Carson is also keen to tie eros to the aesthetic. In arguing that “the most astounding thing about eros” is its operation “by means of an analogous act of imagination” (Carson, 1998, p. 61), she claims that eros always behaves paradoxically, incessantly reaching across gaps and discontinuities, generating juxtaposing opposites which the imagination then attempts to resolve through metaphor. Eros, in other words, acts queerly. As she acknowledges eros’ ability to move us in the direction of that which we desire—“whether in the future as hope or in the past as memory”—Carson affirms that “imagination is the core of desire” (Carson, 1998, pp. 63, 77), operating as it does in the mode of the aesthetic, through acts of reading and writing as well as the other arts, to extend desire’s reach. If imaginative effort resembles erotic action, it is because all kinds of thinkers and artists—like lovers—are drawn beyond “what is known and present to something else, something different, something desired” (Carson, 1998, p. 86), towards something ultimately impossible to grasp or capture.

The work both of the imagination and of eros is activated by “a desire to bring the absent into presence” (Carson, 1998, p. 111). This not only involves collapsing “far and near” (Carson, 1998, p. 111), but also bringing together past and present—endeavours that have traditionally been regarded as the work of the imagination within the domain of the aesthetic. It is disappointing, if not surprising, therefore, that the imagination and

eros have been marginalized by the modern science of sexuality and its off-shoot sexuality education – both of which to a large extent are driven by bio-medical influences. If, in the period between Descartes and Freud, sexuality emerges both as a discourse in its own right and a distinct field worthy of scientific study, it is only at the end of the nineteenth century with the formulation of the paradigms of psychoanalysis—“a melding of hard science and hermeneutics” (Bartsch & Bartscherer, 2005, p. 2)—that “eros is eventually swallowed up by *bio-logos*” (Huffer, 2009, p. 136), that is, the urge to convert biological instincts into knowledge. With the determination that all erotic phenomena have their genesis in nature and biology, the notion of eros is easily dismissed as pre-scientific, “not-quite-rational” (Huffer, 2013, p. 451), and, hence, deemed to be outmoded. At best, eros is relegated to a minor if somewhat mysterious role in the “prehistory of the ‘primal’” (Rajchman, 1991, p. 108) by the likes of Freud and his followers. In a parallel process, the imagination comes to be regarded as a similarly untrustworthy pathway to any sort of truth because it, too, is aligned with unreason and the aesthetic rather than with science and the rational.

The Will to Knowledge, the first book of Michel Foucault’s massively influential three-volume, but incomplete, project on the history of sexuality, throws a helpful light on what appears to be an on-going dynamic of de-eroticization. In delineating “two great procedures for producing the truth of sex” (Foucault, 1976/1998, p. 57) that have operated throughout history, Foucault seeks to explain the apparent eclipse of the erotic in Western societies. If in Foucault’s opinion, the West has concerned itself—increasingly so in recent centuries—with the production of a *scientia sexualis*, a science of sexuality that is premised on “the desire not so much to *have* sex as to understand it” (Taylor, 2017, p. 11), it has done so at the expense of an *ars erotica* where “truth is drawn from pleasure itself” (Foucault, 1976/1998, p. 57) rather than from the proliferation and categorization of any knowledge pertaining to sexuality. From a Foucauldian perspective, the West’s attempt to understand sexuality in relation to power through the advancement of a *scientia sexualis*—a move that casts aside “the ancient erotic lexicon” (Huffer, 2016, p. 108) cultivated over many centuries in “China, Japan, India, Rome, [and] the Arabo-Moslem societies”—is best interpreted as an effort to keep pleasure, “evaluated in terms of its intensity, its specific quality, its duration, its reverberations in the body and the soul” (Foucault, 1976/1998, p. 57), secret. In other words, eros is presented as “a disappearance” (Huffer, 2013, p. 449). For, as Huffer

explains, with the emergence of a science of sexuality, “eros becomes the name for that which is lost in the moral rationalization of modern sexuality as the site of our intelligibility” (Huffer, 2013, p. 449). In this process, the aesthetic lexicon, so closely bound to the erotic, also falls from favour in discourses of sex and sexuality.

In the face of this apparent loss of eros, while there may be a strong temptation to retreat to the historical archive in order to retrieve “those bodily practices or forms of relation that resemble what we think eros might have once been” (Huffer, 2013, p. 449), such an approach, Foucault suggests, is based not only on a nostalgia for a culture that imposed severe constraints and inequalities on non-citizens—slaves and women among them—but also on a misconception that it is possible “to recuperate an original form of thought and to conceive the Greek world apart from Christian phenomena” (Foucault, 1996d, p. 469). No matter how attractive they seem, attempts to capture an erotic past are doomed to failure because in chasing eros we are forced not only to confront eros’ otherness, but also “the alterity of a history ruptured by epistemic breaks that cannot be bridged” (Huffer, 2013, p. 449). Though, while we are unable to access, either directly or entirely, lost forms or expressions of eros, what still remains is the possibility of returning to the Greeks in order to bring about “a shaking up of the ground on which we think and live” (Foucault, 1996d, p. 470)—this by deploying eros as a concept to “think about thinking as a practice of change” (Huffer, 2010, p. 263).

By conceiving of “an alternative thinking and practice of life within the subjectivated living called biopower” (Huffer, 2009, p. 130), traces of the erotic may still be discerned everywhere by those with ‘a queer eye’, thus testifying to the ability of the erotic to evade those forces that seek to organize and control life as bios. For, despite its best efforts to dismiss eros “as the unintelligible form of a fading unreason” (Huffer, 2013, p. 449), the *scientia sexualis*, nevertheless, produces and cultivates an eros and an *ars erotica* peculiarly its own. This is apparent in *scientia sexualis*’ efforts to manage people’s sexual lives by way of inducements to self-revelation—for example, through its calls for them to confess in a great variety of fora, if no longer their sexual sins, then their sexual desires and practices—and in its enquiries “into people’s intimate lives, into the secrets of their bodies and souls” (Taylor, 2017, p. 37). If the processes of eroticization brought into play by a science of sexuality are most clearly observed in the medicalization of sexuality, and in sexuality’s very susceptibility to domination by the forces of the new religions of psychoanalysis and psychiatry, they are also apparent, as

Foucault suggests, in specifically pedagogical situations where “saying no to all wayward or unproductive sexualities” has “traced around bodies and sexes, not boundaries to be crossed, but *perpetual spirals of power and pleasure*” (Foucault, 1976/1998, p. 45). It is in the context of the attractions, evasions, and incitements circulating in pedagogical relationships that the queer carries out the work once performed by eros—making sexuality strange again by persisting in movement that is both transversal and transgressive.

Given that educational institutions are “delineated areas of extreme sexual saturation” (Foucault, 1976/1998, p. 46)—spaces that generate discourse explicitly informed by an authoritative *scientia sexualis*, or at least discourse bearing some semblance to the quasi-scientific—it is inevitable that sexuality education classrooms operate as theatres of self-revelation. In other words, they tend to feature and advance, either directly or indirectly, such scrutinizing activities as analysis and self-analysis; the taxonomizing and labelling of sexualities, both normal and deviant; and the treatment of sexuality, not only as central to health and wellbeing, but also as key to explaining human nature, character and identity. However, although *scientia sexualis*’ promotion of “the use of clinical language allowed sex to become a pedagogical domain—sex education—while remaining in the bounds of professional propriety” (Taylor, 2017, p. 26), the science of sexuality has never succeeded in completely eliminating eros from the sexuality education classroom. For, as Huffer argues, eros always manages to “re-emerge, in the historical present, as an atemporal rupture,” that is, “as the lightning-quick flash of a ‘mad’ mode of knowing” (Huffer, 2013, p. 449).

The fact remains that sexuality education classrooms are spaces where intimacies may be shared and sexual secrets sometimes exchanged, where “the interplay of powers and pleasures” (Foucault, 1976/1998, p. 46) is stimulated through a self-revelation of one sort or another—or, perhaps, through the refusal to participate in such discourse. For example, one subject’s act of confession—whereby a set of sexual possibilities, positions or perspectives is claimed for the self as others are resisted—in turn, incites “the proliferation of specific pleasures and the multiplication of disparate sexualities” (Foucault, 1976/1998, p. 49) among other subjects who themselves are mimetically drawn either to self-exposure or to keeping hidden certain aspects of themselves. In such a milieu, the fleeting opportunities and risks arising from that ‘madness’ attendant upon a mode of knowing stimulated by eros should not be disregarded, but queerly and

expectantly put to use by a pedagogy which allows itself to be “conditioned by the remuant” (Bojesen, 2016, p. 17), that is, by the provisional. By taking account of that which is “changeable, restless and fickle,” a remuant pedagogy recognizes that “risk and fate are always visitant” (Bojesen, 2016, p. 17)—especially, I would suggest, in those sexuality classrooms where outcome oriented and value-based pedagogies dominate to the extent that the uncertainties and vagaries associated with the queer movement of eros are either blindly ignored, anxiously suppressed, or unconvincingly explained away.

If, in the light of Foucault’s argument, it is fair to conclude that psychological, psychiatric and pedagogical discourses about sex have flourished since the nineteenth century because—like the *scientia sexualis* which produced them—they were “profoundly complicit with storytelling, embracing a theory of desire based on an insatiable hunger and striving that binds it indissolubly to narrative forms” (Doherty, 1996, p. 138), then this observation has significance for twenty-first century sexuality education classes in New Zealand and elsewhere. For, notwithstanding calls for “experiments with new materialist ideas in an attempt to decentre the human and bring matter to the fore in sexuality education research and practice” (Allen, 2018b, p. 20), there is much to be gained, I believe, from attending both to “the art of making sex speak, of transforming its affects into stories” (Doherty, 1996, p. 138), and to the art of *listening* to sex speak, which is developed through literary reading.

However, my argument is not so much that the reading of fiction is beneficial because it submits human desire to “the rigours of hermeneutic interrogation” (Doherty, 1996, p. 138), enabling reading subjects, for example, to recognize and understand the processes by which sexual discourses constitute their identities. Rather, I emphasize that desires may be rearranged, and eros—in the guise of queer—brought into play through an engagement with literary texts, particularly fiction. All this becomes possible in the context of a broader, more expansive approach to sexuality education, one that aligns with the work of what have been called the new humanities—which, as Derrida reminds us, are tasked not only with rethinking the future of thinking, but also with making ready the way for “an *irruption* that punctures the horizon” (Derrida, 2001, p. 53), that is, an interruption of expectations and conventions for which literary reading prepares us. In this, I am mindful of Eve Sedgwick’s call for reparative rather than paranoid approaches to reading the world and its texts. Like Sedgwick, I do not

claim that every bad thing can be repaired or turned into a pleasure, but that readers of the world and of texts benefit from an openness to the possibility of pleasure even amidst the most seemingly negative situations. Thus, readings premised on the notion that pleasure may be gained from the recognition that desires are always shifting, never permanent, do more than honour eros as “bittersweet” (Carson, 1998, p. 3); they validate—and are in turn validated by—a sexuality education that remains existentially affirmative, especially insofar as its pedagogy “is ultimately and can only ever be the teaching of existence and can never offer a *way out* of existence, even if it can change that which is” (Bojesen, 2016, p. 21).

Aesthetics of Existence, Care of the Self, and Sexuality Education

In taking on the task of reimagining sexuality education through the aesthetic and the queer, I wish to make it clear that I do not want to eliminate ethical or epistemological perspectives from the field, but rather seek to reframe these concerns in the light of the Foucauldian argument that “we must create ourselves, our lives, as a work of art guided by aesthetic values and stylistic criteria that make other kinds of experience possible” (Ambrosio, 2008, p. 252). As I do so, I am mindful of W. B. Yeats’ insistence: “Myself must I remake” (Yeats, 1938/1992, p. 348). Tellingly, Spivak lifts these words from Yeats’ poem, ‘An Acre of Grass,’ for the title of her own study of the life and works of the eminent Irishman, thus, emphasizing the elderly poet’s attempts—through his close attention to language and aesthetic form—at “the forging of a new personality to meet death” (Spivak, 1974, p. 167). While I follow Foucault’s line that an ethical self-formation—that is, “an exercise of the self on the self, by which one attempts to develop and transform oneself, and to attain to a certain mode of being” (Foucault, 1996c, p. 433)—is neither hardly separable conceptually and in practice from what he styles as “an aesthetics of existence” (Foucault, 1984/1992, pp. 12, 89), nor from the pursuit of knowledge of the self, I am also conscious that like Yeats, Spivak and Bersani in their different ways attest to the invaluable role performed by literature in the practice of self-making and re-making.

In drawing heavily on Foucault in my efforts to rethink sexuality education through the aesthetic and the queer, I do so in the light of his project on the history of sexuality, which, as Gautam argues, has been “decisive in setting the agenda for a history of sexuality not only in the West, but for much of the rest of the world” (Gautam, 2016, p. 2). More specifically, Foucault’s project attempts to explain the experience of sex and

sexuality in Western culture, including their emergence and development as historically given objects, as well as their “instances and transformations” (Foucault, 1976/1998, p. 12) in discursive production. If, as we have already seen, volume one, *The Will to Knowledge*, focuses on the ways in which power constitutes sex and sexuality through apparatuses of control, especially discourse—confession, admission, statements of truth, for example—volumes two and three, *The Use of Pleasure* and *The Care of the Self*, emphasize “the unbinding of the self” (Caillat, 2015, p. 19) through the practice of care of the self. In turning my attention to the Foucauldian concept of self-care, it is with the intention not only of making links between Foucault’s work on sex and the potential contribution of Spivak and Bersani to the reimagining of sexuality education, but also of positioning myself as a queer researcher and queer self-*bricoleur* in relation to the work that I undertake in this thesis.

If, in Foucault’s view, Descartes’ *Cogito* privileges self-knowledge over care of the self, thus, establishing self-evidence as the only valid basis for philosophical inquiry, it also leads to the unhappy rejection of aesthetics—as well as erotics and spirituality, too—as legitimate pathways to the truth. In his own later work, including the second and third volumes of his history of sexuality as well as various interviews, Foucault challenges this assumption by arguing that in Antiquity, “caring for oneself, finding one’s pleasure in oneself, being the friend of oneself” (Roach, 2012, p. 30) were foundational to morality and, therefore, every bit as important as self-knowledge in an aesthetics of existence. This is because, in Foucault’s view, aesthetics function as “a medium of the self’s relation with itself” (Gautam, 2016, p. 210).

While Foucault’s resurrection and rethinking of the notion of care of the self as a way of life, including its *telos* of self-mastery, has sometimes been criticized for advancing “an egoistic or resigned retreat into individualism” (Roach, 2012, p. 30), such a negative assessment of Foucault’s position fails to take account of his argument that among the Greeks and Romans care of the self, although always the responsibility of the individual, was seen as having incalculable social benefits. For, as Foucault explains, “a person who took proper care of himself would, by the same token, be able to conduct himself properly in relation to others and for others” (Foucault, 1996c, p. 437). In a similar vein, Foucault warns that care of the self “cannot in itself tend toward so exaggerated a form of self-love as to neglect others or, worse still, to abuse one’s power over them” (Foucault, 1996c, p. 438).

Given, then, that for Foucault, notions such as an aesthetics of existence and the care of the self imply that the way we live—including our behaviour and the nature of our relationships with others—will take a particular shape or form which is “the aesthetic dimension of ethical practice” (Ambrosio, 2008, p. 256), they also delineate spaces where “practices of freedom by which one could define what is sexual pleasure and erotic, amorous and passionate relationships with others” (Foucault, 1996c, p. 433) are able to be explored. Thus, in the context of an aesthetics of existence or the care of the self it becomes possible and necessary that work which addresses matters of sex and sexuality be undertaken “by the self upon itself” (Besley, 2005, p. 79). Because it strives for freedom—a certain mode of being—rather than for the release of “a hidden self or inner nature or essence” (Besley, 2005, p. 79) that is somehow trapped, repressed, or alienated, such work must not be confused with liberation.

In noting common threads running through Foucault’s notion of an aesthetics of existence, Spivak’s project of aesthetic education, and Bersani’s reconceptualization of sex as a mode of the aesthetic, I suggest that Spivak and Bersani, like Foucault, not only think the ethical in relation to the aesthetic, but also align themselves, at least tacitly, with the Foucauldian premise that the Delphic Oracle’s injunction to ‘know yourself’—*gnōthi seauton*—demands the adoption of a set of self-practices enabling one to ‘take care of oneself’ or be concerned with oneself, *epimeleisthai sautou* (see Foucault, 2000b, p. 226). Underlying the various practices of self-care promoted by Foucault—“models proposed for setting up and developing relationships with the self, for self-reflection, self-knowledge, self-examination, for the decipherment of the self by oneself, for the transformations one seeks to accomplish with oneself as object” (Foucault, 1984/1992, p. 29)—is a form of *ascesis* that is neither coercive nor renunciative, but which, nevertheless, always seeks “‘to release oneself from one self’ (*se dépendre de soi-même*)” (Rabinow, 2000, p. xxxviii) by rearranging desires and displacing unproductive habits. If, as Rabinow suggests, Foucault’s *ascesis* is best explained as “disassembling the self”—because this term “highlights the material and relational aspects of this exercise”—it is important to note, as Rabinow goes on to elaborate, that this *ascesis* implies “a form of continual self-*bricolage*” (Rabinow, 2000, pp. xxxviii, xxxix). For, at any point in time and space the self is being formed and reformed through an ongoing “making and re-making of subjectivity” (Baker, 2015, p. 1).

This self-*bricolage*, however, in no way implies a process of self-discovery—there is no essential self to be found—rather, it suggests that the subject is involved in its own construction, not only by appropriating methods, strategies and resources from the concrete possibilities which present themselves in any given situation, but also by inventing new tools along the way or improvising with old ones as circumstances dictate. As Lévi-Strauss, the French anthropologist and ethnologist who rejigged the concept of *bricolage* in order to account for what he saw as typical patterns of mythological thought, explains, “the elements which the ‘bricoleur’ collects and uses are ‘pre-constrained’” (Lévi-Strauss, 1962/1966, p. 19). The same holds true for all engaged in *ascesis*, who must be ready to adopt and adapt whatever “practices of the self” or “forms of self-activity” are available to them for “the forming of oneself as an ethical subject” (Foucault, 1984/1992, p. 28). Given that ethical subjectivity requires “an elaboration of the self by the self, a studious transformation, a slow and arduous transformation through a constant care for the truth” (Foucault, 1996b, p. 461), it is fair to say that this process involves the sort of self-examination and self-struggle that finds a parallel in artistic endeavour. By emphasizing that genuine self-care requires that attention be given to aesthetic as well as to ascetical practices—in fact, from a Foucauldian perspective, *ascesis* and aesthetics are barely separable—Foucault, in advancing the premise that sexuality is as much an aesthetic as it is an ethical concern, establishes a foundation upon which I build an argument of my own: namely, that sexuality education presents itself as a suitable nexus for “the development of what might be called a ‘cultivation of the self’” (Foucault, 1984/1990, p. 43), including through literary reading. This, I suggest, is because the field of sexuality education is well-positioned to encourage the practice of a type of self-*bricolage* that is able to take advantage of the theoretical tools provided by Spivak and Bersani, as well as of the many useful conceptual ‘implements’ sourced from other thinkers and writers, literary and philosophical.

If the creative arts “have historically been a domain of self-enquiry, self-exploration and, so called, ‘self-transformation’” (Baker, 2015, p. 2), then Foucault’s insistence in his later work (exemplified in the epigraph the heads this chapter) that sexuality is not only a discourse that forms us, but “something that we ourselves create—it is our own creation, and much more than the discovery of a secret side of our desire” (Foucault, 1996a, p. 382) should be understood as a deliberate attempt to position sexuality as an

aesthetic as well as an ethical practice. In claiming that “with our desires, through our desires, go new forms of love, new forms of creation” (Foucault, 1996a, p. 382), Foucault not only affords desire a crucial role in the production of the new, but also appears to reject his own earlier and somewhat negative articulation that “sexuality is a fissure—not one that surrounds us as the basis of our isolation or individuality but one that marks the limit within us and designates us as a limit” (Foucault, 2000a, p. 70). In directing us away from any part that sexuality might play in delimiting the self, Foucault presents us instead with the possibility of creating new forms of social and cultural life through the sexual decisions we make.

Sexual choices, for Foucault, are aesthetic, insofar as they give form to “relationships of differentiation, of creation, of innovation” (Foucault, 1996a, p. 385). For gay people, Foucault argues, these “new forms of life, relationships, friendships in society, art, culture and so on” come about not so much by claiming an identity as by affirming “a creative force” (Foucault, 1996a, p. 383) that eschews essentialism. In presenting sexuality this way—as an enterprise better appreciated as “the art of life than a science or scientific knowledge (or pseudo-scientific knowledge)”—Foucault dares us to recognize sexuality as a queer force, for example, by calling for “the desexualisation of pleasure” through sadomasochistic practices (S/M), which to the extent that they “produce pleasure with very odd things, very strange parts of our bodies, in very unusual situations, and so on” (Foucault, 1996a, pp. 382, 384) become tools of queer *ascesis*, queer self-*bricolage*. In emphasizing that the Foucauldian subject is produced through an ongoing *ascesis*, I do so with the intent of exploring what a queer *ascesis* might look like, not only in regard to cultivating a queer self, but also in the context of the queering of sexuality education, especially through its exposure to the ideas of Spivak and Bersani. However, before considering the contributions of Spivak and Bersani to this line of thinking and the practices associated with it, it is helpful to examine the role that “technologies of the self” (Foucault, 2000b, pp. 223–251) play in Foucauldian self-care.

Technologies of the Self and Practices of Self-Care

When Foucault employs the term ‘technologies of the self,’ he does so in relation to those practices which allow “individuals to effect by their own means or with the help of others a certain number of operations on their own bodies and souls, thoughts, conduct, and way of being, so as to transform themselves in order to attain a certain

state of happiness, purity, wisdom, perfection, or immortality” (Foucault, 2000b, p. 225). In other words, technologies of the self serve the *telos* of self-transformation, including the realization of “new forms of relationships, new forms of love, new forms of creation” (Foucault, 1996a, p. 382). However, while Foucault regards not just S/M but also what he calls “good drugs” (Foucault, 1996a, p. 384) as legitimate technologies for use in the cultivation or care of the self—especially when subjects experiment with pleasure and its possibilities so as “to create a new cultural life underneath the ground of our sexual choices” (Foucault, 1996a, pp. 382–383)—not all technologies of the self and their associated practices are as controversial or as potentially dangerous. Thus, in suggesting that the notion of technologies of the self is helpful when attempting to reimagine sexuality education queerly, I do so without any intention of advocating for the inclusion of S/M practices in teaching and learning programmes in New Zealand schools, or of opening up discussion about the use of ‘good’ drugs as a safe means of creating new pleasures. Instead, I take up Foucault’s notion of technologies of the self and the practices of self-formation which they support because, as Besley argues, they imply a way of constituting the self that flies in the face of “an instrumental understanding of technology” (Besley, 2005, p. 78)—a persuasively dominant model in neoliberal education.

Being both aesthetic and ethical in their reach—aesthetic, in that they attend to the self or subject not as an essence or substance, but as “a form . . . not primarily or always identical to itself” (Foucault, 1996c, p. 440); and ethical, because they “emphasize practices of freedom” (Foucault, 1996c, p. 433)—Foucault’s technologies of the self and practices of self-formation stand in sharp contrast to much of what happens in education today. Indeed, although *The New Zealand Curriculum* (2007) and its parallel document for Māori-medium schools, *Te Marautanga o Aotearoa* (Te Tāhuhu o te Mātauranga, 2007), both “start with visions of young people who will develop the competencies they need for study, work, and lifelong learning and go on to realize their potential” (Ministry of Education, 2007, p. 6), they appear to place the emphasis less on subjectification—which concerns itself with “the ways in which students can be(come) subjects in their own right and not just remain objects of the desires and directions of others” (Biesta, 2017b, p. 28)—than on extending the domains of qualification and socialization. This being so, like Besley, I hold that Foucault’s “model of the care of the self in relation to practices of freedom” (Besley, 2005, p. 86) provides schools with a

sound philosophical basis for the sorts of aesthetico-ethical approaches and investigations that may very well prove fruitful in addressing issues of subjectification, especially in the context of a sexuality education that is required to promote and support “the wellbeing of the students themselves, other people, and society” (Education Review Office, 2018, p. 5). But this is only the case if sexuality educators are prepared to read documents such as *The New Zealand Curriculum* and ERO’s *Promoting wellbeing through sexuality education* against the grain—by faithfully attending to the work of piecing together bits of old things in new ways, and always with the intention of generating divergent rather than convergent meanings in order to queer what they find between their covers.

In proposing that Foucault’s technologies of the self and practices of self-formation are able to assist in the reimagining and queering of sexuality education, I recognize that these also provide an invaluable reference point for the exploration of Spivak’s aesthetic education and of Bersani’s notion of sex as a modality of the aesthetic. For, despite their different emphases and nuances, the approaches adopted by all three theorists in regard to sex and sexuality are, broadly speaking, “aesthetico-ethical” (Baker, 2015, p. 2). If, as O’Leary explains, “for Foucault, the ethical practice which is called for by our contemporary situation is aesthetic quite simply by virtue of the fact that it involves, as do all artistic practices, the giving of form” (O’Leary, 2002, p. 131), this is also true of Spivak and Bersani, who in their pursuit of the aesthetico-ethical are careful to attend to form or structure, distinguishing these, as they both do, from related concepts such as essence, identity and content. Thus, attention to form provides both Spivak and Bersani with a mechanism, not so much for harmonizing the ethical and the aesthetic, but for managing any perceived necessity of having to prioritize the one over the other.

Spivak’s aesthetic education, for example, attends to the ways in which a literary work advances its argument through “figuration or figuring-forth,” that is, “through its form, through images, metaphors, and indeed its general rhetoricity” (Spivak, 2012, p. 38). In describing her own project as a persistent and formal effort to train the imagination in the classroom, Spivak expresses her conviction that the imagination is prepared for epistemological performance not through “information command” (Spivak, 2012, pp. 1, 62) or retrieval, but by acquiring a facility in the forms and structures of language, including the role of literature in constructing the human subject as “an island of

linguaging” (Spivak, 2012, pp. 492, 493). Just as her aesthetic education speaks of “a structure of responsibility”—and addresses “structures of feeling and desires,” rather than dealing directly with affects—so it is reliant on readers making “a serious linguistic effort to enter the epistemic structures presupposed by a text” (Spivak, 2012, pp. 190, 131, 452). For Spivak, the imagination upon which her aesthetic education depends is itself a structure, albeit one which remains always “unverifiable” (Spivak, 2012, p. 104).

If Spivak’s aesthetic education takes account of the unavoidable double bind encountered in the relationship between “an unconditional ethics and an open aesthetics,” this is because in claiming “ethics as experience of the impossible—therefore incalculable” (Spivak, 2012, pp. 18, 349), she recognizes that ethical concerns are primarily a matter of relationship rather than of knowledge. Preparation for “the mysterious responsibility of ethics” (Spivak, 2012, p. 233) is preparation for living in relation with the unknown and unknowable. Hence, Spivak attends carefully to instances where there is no apparent or assumed relation, speaking often of “relationship without relationship” (Spivak, 2012, pp. 9, 365), “relationship without relation” (Spivak, 2012, pp. 11, 380), or “relations without relations” (Spivak, 2012, p. 470). Encounters with the aesthetic train the imagination to approach the unknown and unknowable other—and, in doing so, teach the subject to patiently inhabit the tensions of the double bind rather than rush to sacrifice the ethical in the name of the aesthetic, or the aesthetic in the name of the ethical. For Spivak, then, the aesthetic gives form to the impossible by permitting us to think the double bind. Although challenging, such ideas are well worth grappling with, for in opening up sexuality education to the possibility that selves can be made and remade through “techniques of self-othering toward new collectivities” (Butt, 2015, pp. 1, 4), they also ensure that Foucault’s notion of care of the self is framed in such a way that the personal and the individual are conceptualized in the light of that which is always other, always beyond, always yet-to-come. Thinking along these lines serves as preparation for living in relations without relations, that is, of living queerly. Thus, Spivak contributes in her own unique way to Foucault’s legacy.

Similarly, Bersani, in speaking of “a new relational mode that might be the result of an aesthetic subjectification,” points to the need to develop perspectives and practices that would enable a subject to lose himself “in order to find himself again (but now

unidentifiable) disseminated among the appearances of the visible world” (Bersani, 2010, p. 69). In doing so, Bersani is, perhaps, mindful of Foucault’s warning that it is not possible simply to translate technologies of the self that are found “in pagan and early Christian practice” (Foucault, 2000b, p. 224) into modern life—both thinkers recognize that fresh approaches are necessary. Bersani in his own pursuit of new relational modes clearly sees the benefit in abandoning the concept of “a psychological subject” (Bersani, 2010, p. 70)—which since the time of Freud and through the discourse of psychoanalysis has worked to reinforce the belief that sexuality is somehow constitutive of what is assumed to be a subject’s deep or core identity. By exploring in his own writing “how art can in effect position us as aesthetic rather than psychoanalytically defined subjects within the world”—an investigation which leads him to the conclusion not only that sex can be conceptualized as a modality of the aesthetic, but that the aesthetic subject is “a mode of relational being that exceeds the cultural province of art and embodies truths of being” (Bersani, 2010, p. 142)—Bersani is able to challenge the received notion that the subject is “a stable individualizing entity” (Bersani, 2010, p. 70), while at the same time calling for the sexual subject’s recultivation as an aesthetic subject. As Bersani sees it, the ‘beyond’ of sexuality is located in the aesthetic. In order, therefore, to facilitate the repositioning of sex as a modality of the aesthetic, Bersani forges his own set of technologies of the self. These he theorizes in terms of movement and spatial relations.

Like Spivak’s concept of *teleiopoiesis* or her notion of ‘relations without relations,’ Bersani’s attempts at delineating a self-aestheticization—one that reconceptualizes sex in relation to the aesthetic—imply an outward orientation, rather than a movement that is directed inwards; an extension or expansion, not a contraction or withdrawal; a depersonalizing of the self, not a self-discovery; a dispersal of the subject, not an intensification. If the predominant dynamic of Bersani’s process of self-aestheticization is markedly centrifugal, that is, it necessitates in its dispersive, outward projection the “relinquishing [of] established foci of attention” (Tuhkanen, 2014b, p. 17), this is because centripetal movement—which causes the subject to contract and withdraw into itself in an effort to establish or reaffirm a core identity—results in the subject missing out on the “pleasurable and diversified extensibility of the body in space” (Bersani & Dutoit, 1998, p. 64). Thus, for Bersani, just as “centripetal and centrifugal forces . . . at times define, and at times destroy, personhood” (Love, 2014, p. 47), so also do they

provide him with a conceptual apparatus that allows for the refiguring of sex as a modality of the aesthetic and in choreographic terms. This is because they enable sex to be thought of as movement—physical, psychic and social—away from the centre and towards the peripheries.

Just as the ability to manipulate language is a key tool in Spivak’s efforts at “training the imagination for epistemological performance” (Spivak, 2012, p. 122), so, too, is it indispensable in Bersani’s process of evacuating and relativizing the centre. For, as Bersani admits, language is “*dangerously* centrifugal,” countering as it does centripetal movement, which marks “an obsession with the very notion of centres or sources themselves” (Bersani, 1970, p. 22). Thus, in a literary work, when language is “maximally diversified” (Bersani, 1970, p. 20), room is made for the re-fashioning of the self—both the writing ‘self’ and the reading ‘self’—as multiple and mutually contesting. This is, in part, because literary reading, by provoking “a certain depersonalizing of the personal,” creates opportunities for self-invention through “the pleasures of centrifugal play” (Bersani, 1970, pp. 20, 23). Such play is always queer because it veers from the centre—and looks back at it slantwise.

Some Concluding Remarks

Clearly, Bersani’s ideas about the depersonalizing of the self, the dispersal of the subject, and movement from the centre towards the margins have serious implications for a sexuality education like ours which clings to an understanding of wellbeing that insists on students “positively expressing their identities” (Education Review Office, 2018, p. 3). If, like Foucault and Spivak, Bersani challenges us to rethink notions such as “safety” (Education Review Office, 2018, pp. 10, 13, 14, 27, 33, 39, 41, 44), the need to be “secure” (pp. 4, 27, 32), and “belonging” (pp. 13, 23, 27, 36, 37)—which in New Zealand schools and in their health and sexuality programmes are inevitably closely tied to issues of wellbeing—this is, as we have seen, because in Bersani’s view identities are never stable, nor are subjects ever really safe or secure. Any belonging is only provisional. This is a lesson that literary reading is able to teach us, especially when carried out in the service of the queer.

This chapter and the next are closely linked. Here I have argued that Spivak and Bersani each participate in distinct ways in Foucault’s project of an aesthetics of existence and care of the self, including through their attention to “an ongoing assembly

and disassembly of subjectivity” (Baker, 2015, p. 2)—this in the context of an aesthetico-ethical orientation/practice that has the potential to open up sexuality education to the queer. In doing so, my intention has been to prepare the way for the chapter that follows, which revisits the notion of self-*bricolage* in order to investigate the role that reading queerly might play in the queering of sexuality education, especially when the reading subject is conceptualized or imagined as a queer self-*bricoleur*. My wish is that the reading subject, the queer self-*bricoleur*, will not remain impervious to erotic influence—that is, to “the breath of desire” (Carson, 1998, p. 49) which is Eros.

Chapter Four

Queer Self-*Bricolage* and Reading Queerly in the Queering of Sexuality Education

All knowledge, whether one knows it or not, is a species of *bricolage*, with its eye on the myth of ‘engineering.’ (Spivak, 2016b, p. xxxviii)

The experience of reading literary texts through the prism of queer theory can also be understood as a component in an ethics of the self that can inform (re)constitutions of subjectivity as part of an ongoing queer self-making (or self-*bricolage*). (Baker, 2015, p. 8)

Overview

In this chapter I explore the triad—or what Anne Carson might call the “three-point circuit” (Carson, 1998, p. 16)—of reading queerly, queer self-*bricolage*, and the queering of sexuality education.

Like writing queerly, reading queerly, insofar as it disturbs taken-for-granted notions of stable, unified subjects enduring through time, is an invaluable tool in the sort of work of aesthetico-ethical self-*bricolage* that Foucault, Spivak and Bersani variously undertake. If self-*bricolage* is useful in the reimagining of sexuality education, in part, I suggest, because Spivak’s aesthetic education and Bersani’s notion of self-aestheticization each generates its own distinct process of self-*bricolage* that is capable of producing queer subjectivities, so, too, is the notion of the queer self-*bricoleur* helpful when it comes to opening up possibilities as to how we might see and position ourselves in relation to the research that we do, whether as readers of literary and theoretical texts, or as a thesis writers.

In claiming that self-*bricolage* is a queer activity, I do so because the self-*bricoleur*’s work of patching together some sort of provisional ‘whole’ from a diverse assortment of bits and pieces found at hand is an apt figure, not only for describing the way that queer people make something of their lives in the absence of a pre-existing blueprint for queerness, but, also for explaining the efforts made by those seeking to read and write queerly, whether as teachers or students in sexuality education classrooms, or as postgraduate researchers. Whatever the context, in order to operate as a queer self-*bricoleur* one must develop ‘a queer eye’—that is, the ability to see possibilities for

becoming more than what we already are. As Elizabeth Grosz explains, these possibilities become visible, not through any effort to shore-up human identity, but by attending to “the ways in which difference stretches, transforms, and opens up any identity to its provisional vicissitudes, its shimmering self-variations that enable it to become other than what it is” (Grosz, 2011, p. 91).

Later in this chapter, I turn to two ideas which, I believe, are invaluable for conveying the productive strangeness of reading and researching queerly, especially in the context of the re-envisaging of sexuality education. If the concept of ‘self-taste’—originally articulated by Gerard Manley Hopkins as a subversion of Descartes’ *Cogito*, but later also taken up by Derrida—suggests something of the impossibility of sensing oneself as anything other than other, then the notion of the playful dissemination of meaning is also useful, assuming as it does an open as opposed to a closed hermeneutics. In other words, it is the willingness to accept the risk of being queer unto oneself—generously spilling and scattering “the seed of meaning” (Spivak, 2016b, p. lxxxix) abroad, rather than fruitlessly attempting to direct, contain or restrict its distribution—that underlies productive efforts to read or research queerly in the field of sexuality education.

‘Writing’ and ‘Reading’ the Self in the Context of Sexuality Education

Bersani and Spivak, insofar as they are concerned with self-formation, or subjectification as Biesta puts it—Spivak, for example, by exposing and disrupting those processes whereby the reading subject is “consolidated and sedimented” (Spivak, 2012, p. 39), Bersani, by allowing language to “violate an ineffable, ‘essential’ self” (Bersani, 1970, p. 21)—hold to the Foucauldian view that writing and reading are among those technologies and practices of self-formation which having their origins in Antiquity retain their significance today. Philosophers of education closer to home do so, too. Tina Besley, for example, maintains that if schools cultivate “the importance of ‘writing’ and ‘reading’ the self alongside conversational or dialogical forms of ‘talking’ or confessing the self,” then students would be better equipped “to ethically constitute themselves” (Besley, 2005, p. 86) as they ‘work’ on themselves. This applies, I would add, in the context of sexuality education, which *The New Zealand Curriculum* views “as a lifelong process” (Ministry of Education, 2015, p. 12)—and surely, therefore, a highly appropriate if not a privileged forum for addressing issues of on-going self-formation or subjectification through the technologies of reading and writing.

Yet, while a document such as *Promoting wellbeing through sexuality education* certainly emphasizes the importance of providing, collecting, disseminating and sharing “information” (Education Review Office, 2018, pp. 4, 10, 17, 29, 34, 42, 43, 44), it gives no strong indication that sexuality education involves self-formation in the Foucauldian sense. Sure, a number of requirements relating to student wellbeing are clearly stated in the document: for example, that sexuality education “better meet students’ needs” (Education Review Office, 2018, p. 8); that it draw on, be informed by, or respond to “student voice” (pp. 1, 10, 13, 17, 22, 25, 26, 29); and that it empower both “student activism” (pp. 1, 22, 33) and “student leadership” (pp. 1, 11, 17, 22, 33, 35, 36). But, there is no attempt to theorize the subject or the subject’s self-formation outside the framework of promoting wellbeing—nor is the notion of wellbeing itself problematized. On the one hand, the Education Review Office acknowledges that in recent years “the social and technological context around sexuality and sexuality education has shifted quickly and profoundly” (Education Review Office, 2018, p. 18), leading to many instances of student bullying through social media, internet websites, and other spaces opened up by digital technology, as well as to problems arising from students’ exposure to online sexual violence and pornography. On the other hand, ERO, in its recommendations to schools, turns a blind eye to the many benefits provided by the traditional technologies of reading and writing. Yet, writing and reading, although often overlooked in education’s rush to instrumentalize—or demonize—newer, flashier technologies, remain invaluable practices of freedom which still have an important role to play in students’ moral education and ethical formation. This is especially so when adherence to linear progression, predetermined goals, and other forms of coercive practice associated with “games of truth” or “truth games” (Foucault, 1996c, pp. 432, 433) are abandoned in favour of what Foucault presents as the performance of truth in relation to the self, including “the critical work that thought brings to bear on itself” (Foucault, 1984/1992, p. 9).

In supporting the view that writing and reading are practices of freedom by which the subject is able to uncoercively perform the truth in relation to the self, I do so because each in its own way provides the subject with an opportunity “to choose one action or direction over another,” that is, “one subjectivity and/or life trajectory over another” (Baker, 2015, p. 3). For, each technology—like its paired other—offers the possibility of ethical formation, but only when in its deployment “it is informed by reflection”

(Foucault, 1996c, p. 435) that is also reflexive. Thus, following Besley's lead in re-emphasizing in the context of school counselling the benefits of "forms of bibliotherapy, diaries, journal writing, personal narratives, autobiographies and biographies, together with the educative impulse of all forms of fiction, poetry and drama or role-play—both in film and television—that focus on the self" (Besley, 2005, pp. 86–87), I wish to extend the applicability of these forms and practices to the field of sexuality education. This I do on the basis of their ability to assist subjects to constitute themselves "in an active fashion through practices of the self" (Foucault, 1996c, pp. 440–441), including creative as well as critical thinking. However, given the scope of my thesis—with its stated intention of focusing on literary reading as a means of exercising the imagination and uncoercively rearranging desires in the context of sexuality education—I attend mainly, but not exclusively, to the reading of fictional texts, which *The New Zealand Curriculum* (2007) neglects in favour of forms of reading that reinforce "communicative competence" (Ministry of Education, 2007, p. 24) rather than stretch the imagination. Nevertheless, it must be said that because reading and writing are two modes of a single process—the one technology implies the other and is ultimately inseparable from it—I will at times discuss writing, if only in order to make sense of reading as a practice of freedom and self-care.

In the light, then, of the work undertaken by Spivak and Bersani, which, as we have seen, positions self-formation as an aesthetico-ethical practice, it becomes possible and necessary to promote reading and writing on account of their ability to form the self aesthetically as well as ethically. This is so in the context of sexuality education where these two technologies—alongside those of "listening, reflection, and practical experimentation" (Ambrosio, 2008, p. 265)—may be utilized to form and reform the self as a pedagogical subject. For, when considered in ascetic terms, writing and reading provide both sexuality educators and students with powerful tools "for transforming their pedagogical relations and practices" (Ambrosio, 2008, p. 265). If, for Foucault, writing serves as a tool for ethical self-formation by providing "a way of working on the self in a deliberate, focused, and purposeful manner," it, at the same time, also assumes an aesthetic purpose, insofar as it positions the subject "as a work of art and the self as an artefact, as an ongoing work-in-progress" (Ambrosio, 2008, pp. 263, 263–264). Similar possibilities for aesthetico-ethical formation are found in reading, which figures the subject neither as the passive recipient of knowledge, nor of

values that are transmitted from or through a given text, but as an active participant in what has been described as “a performative moment of *transtextual* connection between discursive subjectivities and the embodied subjectivity of the reader” (Baker, 2015, p. 9). If, through engagement with a literary text, the reader finds himself caught up in a new or unfamiliar discourse, he also enters a space of possibility where, through the practice of self-*bricolage*, he is able to work on reconstituting himself.

While it is naïve to think that we are able to “lose ourselves entirely” through writing and reading, it is equally imprudent, I believe, to turn our backs on the opportunities that these technologies give us “to alter, or even jettison, some of the cultural inscriptions we necessarily acquire as finite and historically constituted subjects” (Ambrosio, 2008, p. 265). This is especially so when it comes to the queering of subjectivities—that is, the emergence of subjectivities not so much in reaction to (hetero)normativity, but from a willingness to risk veering for the sake of veering and to delight in the strangeness of lateral mobility. This sort of queer sideways movement becomes possible when reparative rather than paranoid approaches to writing and reading are adopted. Thus, while writing as an instrument for aesthetico-ethical self-formation may make use of the insights of queer theory to fabricate new discourses and queer existing ones, it will also work reparatively “to constitute new (and radical) queer subjectivities” (Baker, 2015, p. 6). Although the queer may emerge “in the performative moment of production or writing” (Baker, 2015, p. 7), it will also make its presence felt in the act of reception, that is, in the reading process, writing’s ‘other’. Here, it is useful to invoke the figure of the *bricoleur*, as Spivak does, in order, I suggest, to explain the emergence of new subjectivities through literary reading.

As Spivak explains, the *bricoleur* whom Lévi-Strauss presents to us in *La Pensée Sauvage* (1962)—later translated into English as *The Savage Mind* (1966)—“is a man who undertakes odd jobs and is a Jack of all trades or is a kind of professional do-it-yourself man” (Spivak, 2016b, xxxvii). But, unlike the engineer, who works from a blueprint and with clear aims and objectives, the *bricoleur* improvises as he goes, picking up bits and pieces that are at hand, in the hope of assembling from the things that he has found around him, something useful, something quirky, or, perhaps, even something strangely beautiful. Having emerged from an unfolding creative process, and, therefore possessing neither the advantages nor the limitations associated with having a pre-established purpose or form, what is produced by the *bricoleur*—the

bricolage—is always, in the end, somewhat surprising, but also odd, interestingly off-centre, and, often, slightly wonky. In a sense, the *bricolage* is never really finished, but always an emergent construction.

In claiming that the practice of literary reading, a key plank in Spivak’s project of aesthetic education, is also able to be employed to queer sexuality education—an area of the school curriculum in Aotearoa New Zealand that is usually approached with great seriousness rather than with any sense of play—I am mindful of Spivak’s conceptualization of knowledge itself as *bricolage*. “All knowledge, whether one knows it or not, is a species of *bricolage*” (Spivak, 2016b, p. xxxviii), she says. As a self-described *bricoleur*, Spivak regards knowledge not as “a systematic tracking down of a truth that is hidden but may be found,” but rather, in Derridean terms, as the opening up of “the field ‘of *play*, that is to say, of infinite substitutions in the closure of a finite ensemble’” (Spivak, 2016b, p. xxxviii). Insofar as I am committed to multiplying “possibilities for conceptualizing and practising in the sexuality education classroom ‘otherwise’” (Quinlivan, 2018, p. 7), I am, like Spivak, “more concerned with the productivity of theory than with sticking to one approach which may lead to one answer, meaning or solution” (Abdalkafor, 2015, p. 186). It is in this context, then, that I find the concept of *bricolage*—more precisely that of self-*bricolage*—very useful when advancing the case for reading queerly in relation to sexuality education.

As the epigraphs for this chapter indicate, in subscribing to the view that literary reading advances knowledge, including in regard to sex and sexuality, I do so not only in the light of Spivak’s argument that meaning-making is the work of the *bricoleur* rather than the engineer, but also because, as Brian Opie suggests, the reading of fiction “permits release from the strictures of instrumental reason, realism and objectivity, opening a freedom to enquire which is limited only by the resources of form, genre and language available to a writer” (Peters, 2019, p. 1287). In other words, the practice of reading is generative of queer subjectivities when it frees readers from ties that bind them to the familiar and the habitual, allowing them, instead, “to imagine other trajectories, other possibilities” (Baker, 2015, p. 12) for selves that are no longer thought of as stable or normal. Insofar as reading facilitates “a decoupling of identity from notions of the natural” (Baker, 2015, p. 7), it also opens readers up to the indeterminacy of interpretation, a precondition both for the queering of sexuality

education and for the shaping of a more playful approach to meaning-making in general.

Queer Self-*Bricolage* and Queer Research

As I have indicated, one of my reasons for attending to the concept of self-*bricolage* in relation to Foucault's work—a notion first suggested by Rabinow (2000), but also explored by Dallas Baker (2011, 2015) in the context of queer becoming, queer self-making, and queer performativity through the practices of writing and reading, including in relation to Practice-Led Research (PLR)—is to argue that self-*bricolage* is a useful conceptual tool in the reimagining of sexuality education. Another is that both Spivak's aesthetic education and Bersani's notion of the aestheticization of the self imply a process of continual self-*bricolage* which generates the queer in ways that resonate with Foucault's take on *ascesis* or self-disassembling. However, it is a more personal motivation, one closely linked with how I position myself as a researcher who through the process of research also seeks to 'remake' myself, that leads me to adopt the term queer self-*bricoleur* in relation to the research that I do. In this light, the somewhat personal piece which follows this chapter can be seen as an attempt to give an account of myself as a researcher—one who, while engaged in the processes of reading (both literary and theoretical texts) and writing (this thesis), works in a queer and on-going way as a self-*bricoleur*.

What is queer about the work of *bricoleur*-researchers is not just the products they patch together—in my case this thesis—but the decisions and selections they make during the process. For the work of queer *bricolage*, which necessarily encompasses queer self-*bricolage*, requires that *bricoleurs* develop 'a queer eye'—if not 'for the straight guy,' then for the complex possibilities that lie before them in "the proliferation of difference" (Luciano & Chen, 2015, p. 187) that is waiting to be found in the already existing, the seemingly ordinary and the apparently normal. Only having first seen queer possibilities can *bricoleurs* attempt to assemble the diverse parts at hand into some sort of 'whole'. In the case of a theoretical researcher like me, this not only calls for a willingness to work "between and within competing and overlapping perspectives and paradigms" (Denzin & Lincoln, 2018, p. 12), but also requires the courage to risk veering off well-trodden paths. At best, this sort of work can be a hit and miss affair, offering, as Spivak likes to put it, "no guarantees" (Spivak, 2012, pp. 16, 54, 484, 500, 502, 507). Given that any structure assembled by the *bricoleur*-researcher is only ever

provisional, the success or value of queer *bricolage* in the context of the research process lies not in its permanence nor in its polish, but in its ability to stimulate a curiosity—maybe, a sense of wonder—that provokes others to new thought, further creativity, encouraging them, perhaps, to become queer *bricoleur*-researchers themselves. In the case of the queer self-*bricoleur* who also happens to be researching sex and sexuality education, a necessary engagement with the “hopeful and interminable” (Spivak, 2012, p. 72) process of remaking the self will be accompanied, if not always by feelings of sheer pleasure, then, at the very least, by a willingness to see strangeness in everything, including in the commitment to embrace sex as “a possibility for creative life” (Foucault, 1996a, p. 382).

In presenting myself as a queer *bricoleur*-researcher, I do so conscious that the theoretical *bricoleur*, as well as reading broadly, must become familiar with “the many interpretive paradigms (e.g., feminism, Marxism, cultural studies, constructivism, queer theory) that can be brought to any particular problem” (Denzin & Lincoln, 2018, p. 12). Of course, I am more at home with some of these interpretive tools than with others, and certainly feel more confident applying them to the reading of literary texts than deploying them in other contexts. Nevertheless, what excites me most about the *bricolage* is the opportunities it provides to “bring together multiple knowledges to form new epistemological and ontological interactions” (Kincheloe, 2004b, p. 37), including the possibility of queering them. If a familiarity with the notion of intertextuality—which affirms that “all narratives obtain meaning not merely by relationship to material reality but from their connection to other narratives” (Kincheloe, 2004b, p. 27)—is useful in reaching an understanding as to how a piece of verbal *bricolage* such as this thesis hangs together, it also goes a long way to explain my inclusion of the many hundreds of different quotes from a very wide range of sources, both primary and secondary, that are found throughout its pages. My delight in locating these quotes—some by famous figures, others by relatively unknown commentators—selecting and thinking about them, and weaving them into an argument of my own, has sustained me in the sometimes arduous process of thesis writing.

Having said this, of all the theoretical implements that are available to a *bricoleur*-researcher like me—one who readily picks up ideas and perspectives from literary and philosophical discourse, processing them mainly through textual analysis, rhetorical analysis, semiotics and hermeneutics, as well as submitting them to approaches

consonant with various areas of philosophy, including Continental philosophy and the philosophy of education—two of the trickier tools to learn to play with are ‘queerness’ and ‘queer theory.’ This is because “the[ir] slipperiness and mercurial dynamism . . . breaches the boundaries of definition even in the moment of defining it—a being, a doing, a method” (Alexander, 2018, p. 277). In other words, heavy-handed or misjudged attempts at deploying queer and queer theory will fail if they do no more than perpetuate homonormativity, or serve as placeholders for “a potentially infinite coalition of political subjects” that is “not reducible to a lesbian/gay demographic” (Jagose, 2015, p. 29). It is better that queer and queer theory be understood as “invocational, gesturing toward the possibility of [their] own future emergence” (Jagose, 2015, p. 30).

Bryant Keith Alexander, in claiming that for the researcher the value of queerness and queer theory lies in their ability to attend to “the reality of alterity that penetrates the suppressed and supplanted presence of difference that always and already exists in daily operations,” points in the direction of “*queer worldmaking*” (Alexander, 2018, p. 278), the process of opening up spaces and perspectives from which the world can be viewed anew. Yet, if queerness and queer theory are indispensable tools for the queer worldmaker, the same holds true for the queer *bricoleur* who opens up previously unimagined spaces and perspectives by producing what he can—no matter how odd—through improvisation with whatever is available to him. Given that both types of queer ‘maker’ work open-endedly, relying, as they do, on processes that involve them to a great extent in creative thinking and practice, their use of queerness and queer theory eschews prescription, favouring experimental deployments of the various tools at hand. While acknowledging that the notions of queer worldmaking and queer *bricolage* have much to contribute to the rethinking of sexuality education—and that both can be put to work in sexuality education programmes and classrooms—I am mindful that in this context there is always a tendency for thought to coagulate because too many teachers and students cling to the notion that “the nature of beings and existents” (Alexander, 2018, p. 279) is largely fixed. Therefore, if, in my advocacy of Spivak’s aesthetic education and Bersani’s self-aestheticization, I emphasize the importance of literary reading in the process of queer self-*bricolage*—that is, in the facilitation of the emergence of new subjectivities—I do so not because I believe that reading has no part to play in queer worldmaking, but because reading queerly, insofar as it is “a

subjectivity-centred creative practice [that] disrupts the notion of subjectivity as stable, lasting and unified” (Baker, 2015, p. 12), is an effective preparation for queering the world. Like the practice of writing queerly, which involves “a deliberate inscription and dissemination of non-normative discursive subjectivities” (Baker, 2015, p. 5), reading queerly not only cultivates “a queered aesthetics of existence” (Baker, 2015, pp. 6, 7, 12, 13), but also, in the long run—that is, text by text—contributes to the queering of the world as selves are made strange to selves through literary reading.

Like the *bricoleur*, who “makes do with things that were meant perhaps for other ends” (Spivak, 2016b, xxxvii)—and like Spivak herself, who in her own deconstructive readings of literary texts makes “strategic use of different theoretical tools” (Abdalkafor, 2015, p. 186) gathered from a wide range of sources beyond literary theory and pedagogy, including feminism, anthropology, Marxism, psychoanalysis, postcolonial studies, and cultural studies—I attempt, in this PhD thesis, to put together my own piece of *bricolage*. By taking up a number of Spivak’s own theorizations and practices, most especially those associated with her notion of aesthetic education, as well as supplementing these with Bersani’s notion of the aestheticization of existence, especially sex—and, by exposing these to queer perspectives—I seek to rearrange and apply them to sexuality education, a field for which they were not originally intended.

To this end, and because the things at hand which are potentially useful to the *bricoleur* include an indiscriminate assortment of theories and practices—in my case conceptual tools acquired through academic study and many years working as a teacher, resource writer and education advisor—my approach to research more often than not also takes advantage of the notion of concept-as-method, which prods me “to take the risk of thinking differently; of throwing off the shackles of preexisting, methodologies [*sic*] that constrain us; and of not knowing what ‘to do’ next” (Lenz Taguchi & St. Pierre, 2017, p. 647). Hence, in using the various tools available to me, I see little point in insisting on a sharp demarcation between theories and practices—for “there is no dividing line between the empirical and the philosophical” (Kincheloe, 2004a, p. 10) in the work that I do—but prefer to enter what is a field of infinite play by emphasizing the creative, the original and the pleasurable, rather than the fixed and the stable.

Acknowledging, as a *bricoleur*-researcher, that “there is no tool that does not belong” (Spivak, 2016b, xxxviii), I pick up queer theory and happily use it across Spivak’s theorizations of aesthetic education in the reading of literary texts. In doing so, I am

encouraged by Kincheloe's observation that "*bricolage* can also imply the fictive and imaginative elements of the presentation of all formal research" (Kincheloe, 2004a, p. 1), including the sorts of figuration or figuring-forth that occur not only in literary reading but also in thesis writing when these are thought of in aesthetic terms.

Reading and Researching Queerly—Self-Tasting and Playfully Disseminating

Having argued that literary reading, as well as the research process itself, can be productively thought in terms of queer *bricolage*—and mindful that such work involves the on-going assembling, disassembling and reassembling of subjectivities by the reading or researching *bricoleurs* themselves, more specifically as forms of queer self-*bricolage*—I now turn to the curious notion of 'self-taste' and the role played by the playful dissemination of meaning in all this.

While it is the case that "queerness works by contiguity and displacement, knocking signifiers loose, ungrounding bodies, making them strange" (Dinshaw, 1995, p. 76), this is especially so in matters of sex where the wildness of our desires and inclinations constantly threatens the integrity of the self, reminding us that we are not in equilibrium, never in possession of ourselves, but always stretching and being stretched to become something different, something else, something other. Given "the incalculable, unforeseeable, protean or . . . *veering* character of desire" (Royle, 2017, p. 85, footnote 36), it is not surprising, then, that in its perpetual mobility "desire itself remains potentially antinormative, incompletely assimilable to the ego, and hence inimical to the model of the person, fundamentally impersonal" (Dean, 2000, p. 238). If, as Derrida reminds us, "to be is to be queer" (Derrida, 2005, p. 703), then this, perhaps, is so because our own attempts at self-awareness are a matter, not so much of thinking, as Descartes famously argued, but of 'tasting'—when 'tasting' is understood as the ability "to sense oneself in the sense in which one lets oneself be affected also by a feeling or a sensation" (Derrida, 2005, p. 690), the willingness to allow oneself be affected in a way that is only imaginable through selftaste, the auto-affection of touch. As Gerard Manley Hopkins, subverting the Cartesian *Cogito*, puts it: "I taste myself, therefore I am, and when I taste myself I find myself utterly different from everything else whatsoever" (Miller, 1963, p. 271).

This experience of selftaste, which itself is inextricably entangled with the uncanniness of being strangely alone with oneself, of being other to oneself at any point in time or

space, of being *unheimlich*, prompts the recognition that “my own selftaste is a queer thing in a disjointed queer and now” (Dunne, 2013, p. 57). It seems to me that such an awareness—of “belonging without belonging” (Dunne, 2013, p. 56)—provides the basis not only for a queer ontology, but also for a queer aesthetics in which desire, emerging as it does “in a multiple form, whose components are only divisible *a posteriori*, according to how we manipulate it” (Hocquenghem, 1972/1993, p. 50), performs much of the queering. This experience of being queer unto oneself, but also of finding others to be queer, is undoubtedly associated with the unruliness of sex. It is also one of the paradoxical consequences of literary reading that the text invites its reader to taste what is “impossible, but desired” (Royle, 2017, p. 87), that is, to enter a fictional world which though unshareable—living as it does in the imagination of the author—nonetheless, offers itself to the reader in all its teasing unknowability:

“Would that you might taste me. Would that you might taste my selftaste.”
(Royle, 2017, p. 87)

In apparent defiance of “the abyss of insularity between one selftaste and another selftaste (or ‘othertaste’),” the act of reading tempts the reader with the promise of accessing the selftaste of another, that is, “an other’s taste of itself” (Brower, 2019, p. 60). As I have suggested, to the extent that language operates according to a metaphysics of absence, where signs represent concepts and things that are not actually present, “reading consists of a strange paradox in which readers imagine themselves to be entering the mental world of the author precisely in the author’s absence” (Coleman, 2009, p. 78). However, if the queerness of the reading event—it is an experience which at one and the same time is both intimate and alienated—is accepted and welcomed, readers soon develop the confidence and skills to construct their own mental images of the world from the words on the pages in front of them. Over time, as trust deepens and commitment to the reading process grows, readers begin to enjoy the uncertainties that arise from the necessary “play of presence and absence” (Spivak, 2016b, p. lxxviii) which reading entails. If on the one hand, literary reading demands a certain *kenosis* or self-emptying, the willingness to remain open to “the experience of being led out of oneself” through imaginative engagement with a text, on the other, it also involves the “projection of an ‘I’ between our eye and the page” (Coleman, 2009, pp. 71, 92). This ‘I’ is not the ego, but the reading self which emerges from undecidability, from the play of presence and absence that structures the act of reading.

To affirm, then, that literary reading is characterized by a certain undecidability is to assert that the reader-text relationship “entails the experience of a *suspended* relation” (Royle, 2003, p. 15). This deferral—the experience of the impossible—necessarily steers the reader away from making definitive, once-and-for-all claims about a text’s meaning. Thus, an attentive and committed reader, while remaining ever-faithful to the protocol of the text, is always open to the possibility that the meaning of a text—this includes its characterizations, motifs, representations, situations, and themes—will always be other than what it is. If literature “asks the reader to participate constantly in the construction of texts, and to discover in the texts themselves the rules for reading and understanding” (Rice & Schofer, 1983, p. xiv), it also requires him to work interminably to deconstruct texts and the structures implied therein, which as Spivak explains, calls for “a reading that *produces* rather than *protects*” (Spivak, 2016b, p. xcvi)—an insight, which, as we have seen, Sedgwick expresses in terms of the reparative and the paranoid. Deconstructive approaches to reading, “by inaugurating the open-ended indefiniteness of textuality,” not only “offer a way out of the closure of knowledge” (Spivak, 2016b, p. ci), but also create an intoxicating brew of pleasure and fear—this as readers free-fall into the abyss of textuality, which proffers, “not an exact and controlled polysemy, but a proliferation of always different, always postponed meanings” (Spivak, 2016b, p. lxxxviii). This process prepares and positions readers to meet the unknown and unknowable other. The productive reading of a text, therefore, calls for “the playfully disseminating rather than proprietorially hermeneutic gesture of interpretation” (Spivak, 2016b, p. lxxxix). Such an approach, while certainly provocative, signals that productive readings are the result of generously spilling and scattering “the seed of meaning” (Spivak, 2016b, p. lxxxix) abroad, rather than the consequence of penetrating a text in order to pin down or restrict its meaning.

If deconstructive reading is dismissed by many as a negative and hope-less activity, this is not only because it overturns important and long-established protocols of reading, especially in the fields of literature and philosophy, but because the notion of deconstruction is itself identified with a desire to destabilize or even destroy structures in the ‘real’ world. Yet, Derrida, in stating that “destabilization is required for ‘progress’ as well,” makes the point that “the ‘de-’ of *deconstruction* signifies not the demolition of what is constructing itself, but rather what remains to be thought beyond the constructivist or destructionist scheme” (Derrida, 1988, p. 147). In other words,

deconstruction, as the likes of Derrida and Spivak see it, is hope-filled, in that it occasions an opening up to the impossible, to what has not yet been thought or imagined, including to a future that refuses to be the inevitable consequence of a working out of ideas or an implementation of programmes that belong to the present, if not to the past. If such a future is unknowable—and taken-for-granted notions including the natural, the spontaneous and the commonsensical cry out for deconstruction—then the task of reading becomes the exposure of “the enigmatic relationship of the living to its other and of an inside to an outside” (Derrida, 2016, p. 76). Such an exposure involves the rendering of the familiar unfamiliar, this with the intention of it “being thought and activated *otherwise*” (Royle, 2009, p. 118).

Some Concluding Remarks

As Spivak has suggested, we readers read both protectively and productively—in fact, depending on the circumstances that determine a particular scene of reading, as we work our way through a text we will find ourselves shuttling between these two modes of relating to otherness. If protective or resistant reading works to safeguard the familiar, including those established structures which support the claim that literature somehow reveals the ‘truth,’ productive reading requires a much greater level of “somatic and psychic receptiveness to the world” (Bersani, 2018, p. vii). Thus, the latter mode of reading takes seriously the “will to ignorance” (Spivak, 2016b, xcvi), a perspective that calls for a certain distrust of oneself—of one’s own abilities and mastery of language—on the reader’s part. Such an attitude, although at first uncomfortable to live with, gradually equips the reader to play easefully with the unknowable as she deconstructs the schemas which are at work in texts, “not in order to reject and discard them, but to reinscribe them otherwise” (Spivak, 2016b, xcvi).

A reader, of course, faces many challenges and risks when grappling with the unknown and the unknowable—with the forever undecidable and the deferred. Not least of these is the constant need to stay alert to any tendency to assume the presence of hidden truths and meanings lurking among and behind the words of a text, truths and meanings waiting to be revealed by a skilled and devoted reader. However, as Judith Butler sees it, the greater danger lies not so much in playing with the unknowable, but in our refusal as readers to read receptively:

. . . it is the resistance to reading that is the greatest risk, for it leaves us clutching forms of knowledge and language that are the sign of our unknowingness. Better to tarry attentively with the unknowable—that is the wager here” (Butler, 2016, p. xxiv)

It is on the basis of the possibilities that arise, firstly, from this willingness to tarry attentively with the unknowable, but, secondly and just as importantly, from “a textual energy that sets itself against congealment” (Spivak, 2016b, p. xciv) and which challenges “immobilized reception” (Bersani, 2018, p. vii), then, that I argue in this thesis that literary texts, fiction especially, are untapped and underutilized resources when it comes to sexuality education. This is the case not because of any role that literary texts might have in a narrowly focussed dissemination of biological or technical information, nor for their promotion of moral, medical or health propaganda, but, rather, for their ability to “provoke perceptual shifts and subsequent corporeal response” (Dinshaw, 1995, p. 76) in their readers. In particular, I emphasize the potential of literary reading both to facilitate an exploration of sexuality’s queerness and to generate a queerness of its own. That is:

. . . fluidity, über-inclusivity, indeterminacy, indefinability, unknowability, the preposterous, impossibility, unthinkability, unintelligibility, meaninglessness and that which is unrepresentable . . . (Giffney & Hird, 2008, p. 4)

In the next chapter—which ‘arrives’ as a queer interruption—I attend to a particular scene of literary reading, which more than forty years ago queered my own sexuality education in many of the ways that this present chapter has described and explored. As I recall and patch together this earlier reading, I am aware that I am also involved in an exercise of (queer) self-*bricolage*.

Chapter Five

A Queer Interruption—Giving an Account of Myself

There are no guarantees for the good reader, never any ways of knowing that one is even becoming a good reader. There are only ever new beginnings, as if we were Sisyphus-like learning to read all over again each day. (Dunne, 2013, p. xxiv)

Rereading a book or poem, like revisiting an imagined landscape, similarly depends on the to-and-fro movement of retreat and conservation, forgetting and memory: the movement that we call reflection. In this sense, the book (or poem, or landscape) functions as a link—as what Wilfred Bion (in ‘Attacks on Linking’) calls the linking junction of thought. (Jacobus, 1999, p. 82)

To Begin With

If, as Spivak says, “we cannot not want to tie up all the loose threads in any world” (Spivak, 2012, p. 453)—including the world of the self—it is understandable, therefore, that I wish to give an account of myself, which, as Judith Butler puts it, amounts to “a kind of showing of oneself, a showing for the purpose of testing whether the account seems right, whether it is understandable by the other, who ‘receives’ the account through one set of norms or another” (Butler, 2005, p. 131). In other words, while this interruption may be read as my attempt to demonstrate the validity of arguments that lie at the heart of this thesis—arguments which were introduced and developed in the preceding chapters—it is also the writing of a relation I have to myself, a form of *self-bricolage* that witnesses to the queer. Furthermore, it is the writing of a relation that emerges as an address to an other—that is, to you, the reader—a relation which modulates itself in its writing according to the extent of this writer’s ability to imagine the strangeness of the manner of its reception.

Insofar as it requires a self-delimiting, a self-defining, a self-deciding, and a willingness to act upon the self, this piece of somewhat personal writing seeks more than ‘self-awareness’. Rather, the self-monitoring, the self-testing, the self-improving and the self-transforming that reflexive work such as this calls for—no matter how adequately or inadequately achieved—serve a moral purpose, the pursuit of “a certain mode of being” (Foucault, 1984/1992, p. 28), which, as Foucault argues, is inseparable from the cultivation of forms of ascetical self-activity. If, as you will see, this piece tries to account for my efforts to map the relation between my first reading of D. H.

Lawrence's *Women in Love* and the way I live my life as a queer man now—which, of course, encompasses matters of sex and sexuality—it also presents itself as an exercise in “self-formation as an ‘ethical subject’” (Foucault, 1984/1992, p. 28). It stands, moreover, as a testimony to the part played by literary reading in my formation as an *aesthetico*-ethical subject, for, as I have argued, literary reading trains aesthetic as well as ethical responses. In seeking, then, to account for my belief that an engagement with a literary text has the capacity to shape aesthetico-ethical subjectivities, I affirm the pedagogical power of literary reading in my life, trumpeting its importance here, especially in relation to my own sexuality education.

The account of myself that I present here involves an attempt to access something of my first reading of *Women in Love*—an endeavour that is premised on the possibility of a reader being able to return to a literary text again and again so as to reengage and relearn with it through a process of reflection. The words of Éamonn Dunne and Mary Jacobus that head this chapter give some indication of what a reader adventurous enough to want to participate in this rather queer but rewarding process should expect.

Giving an Account of Oneself

I've been known to say that I learnt more about sex from D. H. Lawrence than from any other writer. In making this claim, I do so not on the basis of my reading of his infamous *Lady Chatterley's Lover* (1928/2013)—which in its unexpurgated form had in 1960 been the subject in the United Kingdom of a high-profile and eventually unsuccessful obscenity trial against Penguin Books; this because of its explicit descriptions of sexual activity and its use of four-letter words—but on the strength of my first encounter with *Women in Love*, a novel which unsettled my body, stirred my imagination and got me thinking, not only about sex and sexuality, but also desire, in ways that no other book had done before and few have done since.

With my first reading of *Women in Love* was planted the seed of a conviction that “the capacity to be alone in the presence of an object” (Jacobus, 1999, p. 5), such as a book, especially a work of fiction, is an invitation to open oneself up to the possibility of being surprised, disconcerted, and even astounded. This is not only on account of the fact that reading “implies a change of state or orientation, and even gender” (Jacobus, 1999, p. 7), but because the act of reading is unavoidably marked by a hospitality towards the unexpected other—however that other comes, whatever form that other

takes. If my first reading of *Women in Love*—a reading that emerged out of a certain set of unrepeatable circumstances which constellated at a particular time and place in my life—was a weird experience, this was in part because of the strange possibilities, insights, understandings, feelings, and affects that ‘arrived’ as a result of exposing myself to an incoherence born of the realization that the other is never reducible to the status of the same. It was also due, I believe, to the peculiar nature of reading, which, as Dunne describes it, is “perpetually peripatetic, perverse, perambulatory, and never even present to itself” (Dunne, 2013, p. xxiv). In other words, reading offers no easy comforts, no guarantees of success, no reassurances to the reader that he is getting better at it. But, paradoxically, the less ‘at home’ a reader feels with a text, the less likely he is to take it for granted. It is at the point of frustration that a reader must decide either to cast the book to one side or take the time and do the hard work that will enable him to appreciate its strange surprises. This experience, the consequence of what Eileen A. Joy calls “weird reading” (Joy, 2013, pp. 28–34), I later came to frame in terms of the ‘queer’—a protean notion which I have returned to again and again, and from different angles, in the course of this thesis.

In choosing to interrupt my dissertation with a reflection on my first reading of *Women in Love*—a novel which over the years I have read many times and, indeed, in 1979, studied in-depth while completing a paper on the modern novel for an MA in English Literature at the University of Canterbury—I do so with the intention of conveying something of my first encounter with this powerful text. If, on the one hand, it is no easy task to recall what I felt and thought when I first read Lawrence’s novel more than forty years ago, on the other, it is even more difficult to sort and side-line memories of subsequent readings of the book, including those where I consciously employed various tools of literary analysis, or was aided by the writings of literary critics and theorists in my efforts to understand and appreciate such a rich text. Thus, in offering this reflection on the part that my first reading of *Women in Love* played in the queering of my education—including my queering as an aesthetico-ethical subject by Lawrence’s ideas about desire, sex and sexuality—I do so not because of any need for “the cold comfort of hermeneutical finality” (Dunne, 2013, p. xxiii), but, rather, in an attempt to keep the memory of my original reading alive and kicking.

Shadowed by a double bind—the imperative to forget in order to remember—I am tempted, at first, to try to eliminate from my mind all memories of subsequent readings

of *Women in Love* in an effort to keep to the fore my original response to Lawrence's novel. But, on further consideration, I realize it is not possible to retreat entirely from later textual explorations. Nor is it desirable, I believe, to do so. For, insights gleaned from subsequent readings, including those generated during my formal study of the novel, paradoxically, give rise to the desire and equip me with the skills to productively put to use what remains in my memory of that first reading of *Women in Love*. If, as William Bion says, a book enables a linking function of thought, *Women in Love*—including my ongoing and often intense efforts to grapple with the text, “working through, sifting out, peering into and being guided by [the] words on the page” (Dunne, 2013, p. xxiii)—has over many years served as an important touchstone in my thinking about sex and sexuality, attesting as it does to my abiding faith in the ability of literature and literary reading to contribute in a unique and compelling way, not only to an understanding of sex, but also to the pedagogy of sexuality education.

Thus, given the well-nigh impossibility of conserving my first reading of *Women in Love*, isn't it better, I tell myself, to welcome the advice that “the more one reads the more one notices the possibilities of other readings, competing readings, readings that undo the salutary certainty of predestination” (Dunne, 2013, p. xxiv)? With this thought in mind, and the benefit of hindsight, I put to work my later readings of *Women in Love*, not to dismiss the first one, nor to somehow preserve it in aspic, but to revisit and reconstruct it. In so doing, I create a sort of simulacrum of the original reading—but one which resists efforts to cover up the traces of intrusions made by later readings—in an attempt to account for my conviction that literary reading can be a valuable form of sexuality education. Such work is best approached in the anticipation that for the good reader “there are no guarantees,” but “only ever new beginnings” (Dunne, 2013, p. xxiv). When a committed reader opens a text like *Women in Love* in this spirit, she may, like me, learn to read anew.

If as Jacobus observes, reflection relies on both retreat and conservation, forgetting and memory, then my concern here is not “to recover past times and lost objects” (Jacobus, 1999, p. 83)—a first reading of *Women in Love* and an old life, now (almost) beyond this reader's grasp—but to carry out a reparative and inventive operation, the scope of which surpasses any attempt to highjack reading in order to preserve memories of a former life upon which a present identity is founded. Rather, in emphasizing the reparative, I am mindful that through the act of literary reading “the reaching action of

desire is attempted again and again in different ways” (Carson, 1998, p. 28)—and that it is in this very action of reaching that desire performs its reparative work, preparing the way for the incoming of the new. For, “good reading teaches one to unlearn one’s habits of reading, to see again, anew, even in the texts we feel we know” (Dunne, 2013, pp. xxiv–xxv). In this way, through the rearrangement of desire—which involves the exercise and extension of desire’s reach—reading becomes less paranoid and, hence, more open to surprise as “the reparative reader ‘helps himself again and again’” (Sedgwick, 2003, p. 150). This orientation towards self-help is seen in the reparatively positioned reader’s willingness “to organize the fragments and part-objects she encounters or creates” (Sedgwick, 1997, p. 24), primarily, in order to work on the self, and to conduct what Foucault calls “a practice of the self” (Foucault, 1996c, p. 432). For reading, “whether considered as a process, a representation, or an ideology” (Jacobus, 1999, p. 9), assumes a range of concepts that form the basis for much of our thinking around notions of the subject and subjectivity. If ideas about presence and absence, inner and outer, self and other, cognitive and affective figure significantly in discourse relating to both reading and subjectivity, so, too, does desire. Indeed, as the reader works her way through the lines of a text, especially a work of fiction, “desire deconstructs the Cartesian opposition between mind and body, radically destabilizing the difference that holds them apart” (Belsey, 1994, p. 34). Through this process, desire opens the way for subjectivity’s reshaping.

Because desire, however it is theorized, belongs neither to body nor to mind, but exceeds both structures, it is able to speak powerfully of sex and sexuality, positioned as these are “uneasily poised between the biological, the social and the psychic” (Weeks, 2011, p. 198). If, as Weeks observes, “desire is a term that lies at the heart of sexuality” (Weeks, 2011, p. 39), it is also, I suggest, a notion, which, because it brings along with it instability and unpredictability, comes into productive play not only when conceptualizing and thinking about the subject and subjectivity, but in the theorization of reading as well.

***Women in Love* and the Queering of My Education**

I read *Women in Love* for the first time back in 1975. It was near the end of the summer holidays before the start of my first year of BA studies at the University of Canterbury. I was eighteen years old and somewhat hesitantly coming to terms with my own sexuality. While I was still reluctant to identify openly as gay, despite the fact that by

then the term was beginning to be embraced in a more positive way by many who had previously thought of themselves as belonging to the category ‘homosexual’, I certainly wasn’t prepared to go so far as to label myself queer at a time when the ‘q’ word retained strong connotations of sexual deviancy—and was almost always used pejoratively.

If, during the nineteen-seventies, ‘progressive’ publications such as *The Little Red Schoolbook* (Hansen & Jensen, 1972) and *Down Under the Plum Trees* (Tuohy & Murphy, 1976) provided me and many other New Zealand adolescents and young adults with much needed access to information about a whole range of sexual relationships and activities deemed perverse by many in the community—information that was seldom readily available from parents and other authorities—it was *Women in Love* which gave me new insight into the complexities of desire and encouraged me to begin to think more optimistically and adventurously about sex and sexuality, including the many dimensions and varieties of sexual experience. Given that “the queer empties out the natural, the essential, empties out the conventional foundations of representation and identity” (Dinshaw, 1995, p. 89), it is fair to say that my first reading of *Women in Love*—an event, as I recall, that unfolded over a number of nights in the privacy of my bedroom—was a very heady and disorienting experience. Not only did this bookish encounter expose me to the sense of what it is to feel *oneself* queer, it also contributed significantly to the queering of my education, marking, as it did, an important step in my training (my *educare*)⁸ in the art of accommodating and cultivating the peculiar and the strange—something not taught in any school or university at that time—but also heralding a drawing out or leading on (my *educere*), that is, my coming out as a young gay man.

It is true to say that *Women in Love* provided a strong liberating counter to the narratives about sex which circulated around my Catholic home and single-sex secondary school, where solicitous parents and priest-teachers armed with the Catechism presented sex as a beautiful and enduring mystery—the meaning of which, if I was patient, would be unfolded over time within the institution of Christian marriage.

⁸ Two Latin root words (*educare* and *educere*) are identifiable in regard to the etymology of the term ‘education’. If *educare* (meaning ‘to teach or to drill’) implies a step by step approach to the handing on and acquiring of knowledge, *educere* (meaning ‘to lead or to draw out’) suggests a realization of one’s potential, a coming into one’s own.

But, it wasn't Lawrence's didactic advocacy for a sexual ethics that aligned closely with Nietzsche's very uncatholic notion of living dangerously beyond good and evil that won me over. Rather—although I could not find words for it at the time—the attraction of Lawrence's novel for me lay in its ability to open up textual spaces where “a new, anti-conventional relationship between desire and non-legitimized forms of sexuality” (Tilghman, 2008, p. 90) could be imagined and articulated. In particular, *Women in Love* allowed me not only to think about my own sexuality more freely, but also to interrogate more closely the notions about sex which I had inherited from those around me. In a sense, my first reading of *Women in Love*—a text where verbal ejaculations relating to desire and sex greatly outnumber physical orgasms—marked my decisive insertion into a process involving “the transposition of desire into sexual discourse and of sexual discourse into *more* sexual discourse” (Craft, 1994, p. 45). In fact, I can't imagine myself writing as I am now—thereby, stitching together words about desire, sex, sexuality education, the ethical, the aesthetic, and literary reading into a “patchwork of intervention and contingency” (Spivak, 2012, p. 39), this to be incorporated into “the web, the weave, the garment (text) woven from the threads of the ‘already written’ and the ‘already read’” (Allen, G., 2011, pp. 5–6)—without first having had this seminal reading experience.

It was mainly through the interactions and interlocutions of the central characters in *Women in Love*—the quartet of Ursula and Gudrun Brangwen, Rupert Birkin and Gerald Crich, along with the “nerve-worn” (Lawrence, 1920/1992, p. 9) Hermione Roddice—that I somehow grasped that Lawrence was laying out a case, a process, if not a programme, for self-formation. What impressed me was not only the seriousness with which Lawrence treats desire, sex and sexuality, but his willingness to make these hitherto taboo subjects topics of novelistic discourse. At a stage in my life when I was acutely aware that I was strangely other to myself, my reading of Lawrence's novel enabled me to be less afraid of my own otherness—after all *Women in Love* is replete with otherness. This reading also prompted me to cultivate a capacity to see life in more fluid terms, to open myself up to a future that wasn't thought of as foreclosed, one that was imagined as processual rather than tied to a particular destination. As I was to read many years later, when life is thought of as a journey or a process, identities become “spaces to be navigated, revisited, revised and elided on a moment-to-moment basis” (Giffney, 2009, p. 7), not territories to own or occupy. Travellers on life's journey, I

came to believe, do well not to appropriate or possess others, but, rather, to acknowledge and accept their unreachable otherness.

Back in 1975, the time was not yet ripe for me to articulate and entertain concepts such as ‘queer-becoming’ or ‘queering queer’—let alone experiment with queer theory, a term which wasn’t widely used until the nineteen-nineties. However, as a result of my first reading of *Women in Love*, I was certainly encouraged to question and think beyond notions of stable identity or fixed relations produced by categorization according to gender, sexual orientation, race, class or religion. Thus, when Birkin, for the most part Lawrence’s mouthpiece in *Women in Love*, expresses his desire for “a strange conjunction” with Ursula, “not meeting and mingling . . . but an equilibrium, a pure balance of two single beings;—as the stars balance each other” (Lawrence, 1920/1992, p. 142), I was receptive to his signalling of a new way of relating, a form of relational intimacy characterized by stillness and impersonality, rather than the assertion of identity. As is suggested by his use of this star-balance metaphor, Birkin—as I would later discover from my reading of Jacques Derrida, Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, and Leo Bersani—is operating here in the relational-mode-of-the-yet-to-come, attempting to engage not only Ursula’s imagination, but also the imaginations of readers like me who are prepared to go wherever the text takes them, thus, willingly risking the uncoercive rearrangement of their desires. Such is the invaluable work that fiction performs in “training the imagination for epistemological performance” (Spivak, 2012, pp. 122, 134, 197, 465). This work, of course, does not easily happen if “reading is predestined, directed, goal-oriented, and prejudicial” (Dunne, 2013, p. xxiii).

It hardly mattered to me that within the fictional world of *Women in Love* occasions of contentment and clarity—freedom from desire—seemed to come to Birkin and Ursula rarely and fleetingly. What was important was that Lawrence was generous enough to give his characters opportunities to taste such (im)possibilities. Of even greater significance, was the fact that *Women in Love* seemed to lay before me, its actual if not always its implied reader, the same (im)possibility of living in equilibrium—that is, free from the insistence of desires pushing me in one direction or pulling me in another—which the novel offers its characters. Yet, Lawrence’s expectation that readers would follow Birkin’s lead and reimagine sex as a type of connectedness that seeks balance rather than amalgamation or union—“fusion, fusion, this horrible fusion of two beings” (Lawrence, 1920/1992, p. 303), Birkin proclaims—is generally

uncharacteristic of a novel which more often than not presents desire and sexuality in vitalistic terms, that is, as constantly on the move, propelled by an immaterial and unmeasurable force. Thus, we read of “mysterious life-flow” (p. 307), “life-motion” (p. 307), or of “a rich new circuit, a new current of passional electric energy” (p. 308).

Although for Lawrence, balance, equilibrium and stillness are defining features of an idealized “strange conjunction” (Lawrence, 1920/1992, p. 142) between the sexes, it is necessary to acknowledge that by his own recognition these conditions are not to any degree achieved in the actualities of this world, belonging as they do to the yet-to-come. For, as Lawrence makes clear, men and women are still in the process of becoming—“the singling away into purity and clear being, of things that were mixed” (Lawrence, 1920/1992, p. 195), he calls it. In the meantime, until this refining is complete, “sex is that which remains in us of the mixed, the unresolved” (Lawrence, 1920/1992, p. 195). According to the sexual logic at work in *Women in Love*, sex is significant not because it leads to self-transcendence—in fact, Birkin wants sex “to revert to the level of the other appetites, to be regarded as a functional process, not as a fulfilment” (Lawrence, 1920/1992, p. 193)—but only insofar as it is capable of dissolving and disintegrating those structures that inhibit or block energy flows, including the movement of desire. As Birkin puts it, desire leads to freedom when its path is unhindered by “the merging, the clutching, the mingling of love” (Lawrence, 1920/1992, p. 194).

If *Women in Love* promotes the release of the passional as a necessary counter, not only to what Lawrence regards as the deadening impact of mechanical repetition in all areas of life—including what he believes is the wearisome and mindless nature of much heterosexual activity—but also, more broadly, to “a moribund universe dominated by dissolution, by devolution and disintegration” (Howe, 1977, p. 52), then this, perhaps, is to be expected of a novel written under the shadow of the destructions wrought by the Great War. Yet, despite its depiction of a world obviously breaking down and moving ever-closer to complete chaos, for me, a first-time reader, it is the attention and respect that *Women in Love* affords desire and its polytropic movement—in particular, desire’s entanglement with the dynamics of both normative and non-normative expressions of sexuality—that I found intriguing. For Lawrence’s treatment of desire struck a chord with what my own youthful (in)experience told me, namely that desire

does easily wander from established and sanctioned tracks and that sex *is* a very queer thing indeed.

If he appears to affirm in his characters those manifestations of desire that advance variety and generate otherness, Lawrence also clearly rejects any efforts to repress, channel or coerce it—including strategies that promote the verbalization of unconscious desire—which he believes are designed to serve predetermined goals and satisfactions. Thus, not only does Lawrence have his exemplary characters—I’m thinking, especially, of Birkin and Ursula here—entertain such esoteric notions as “paradisaal unknowing” (Lawrence, 1920/1992, p. 244) and “the Dionysic ecstatic way” (p. 245), he also allows them to explore anal eroticism and homoeroticism as pathways to “equilibrium” and the “pure balance of two single beings” (p. 142). In this way, Lawrence’s characters enact very different modes of desire from those expounded in pioneering sexological texts by the likes of Krafft-Ebing, Hirschfeld, Havelock Ellis and Freud, who were preoccupied with categorizing and classifying aspects of sexuality through the application of methods and approaches borrowed from medicine and science. Because Lawrence always sides with the instinctive and the intuitive—he calls these blood-consciousness or knowledge found “in the blood” (Lawrence, 1920/1992, p. 37)—it came as no surprise to me that in a novel where “*Blutbrüderschaft*” or blood brotherhood is posited as a way of dealing with “the problem of love and eternal conjunction between two men” (p. 200) that desire is frequently linked with blood and its shedding, so much so that sexuality is often entangled with violence, including murder.

While I would later encounter and come to appreciate other perspectives on Lawrence’s treatment of desire and sex in *Women in Love*—for example, Anna Powell’s observation that Lawrence seeks to mobilize the erotic in order to “combat the imposition of a cold and affect-less ‘reason’ on the sexual sphere” (Powell, 2011, p. 52), or Carolyn Tilghman’s assertion that in challenging the early twentieth century “valorization of sentimentality, compulsory heterosexuality, and middle-class respectability” (Tilghman, 2008, p. 90), Lawrence is calling for the libidinization of the social—what I remember most powerfully about my own first reading of his novel is the intensity with which my desire, clearly erotic, but also more than sexual, carried me ever “forward, onward, through the text” (Brooks, 1992, p. 37). Although, as I have indicated, this first reading of *Women in Love* was in one sense a solitary affair—I not only read on my own, but also largely kept my thoughts and feelings about the book to

myself—I also had some awareness that “however isolate the scene of reading, no one ever reads alone” (Craft, 1994, p. 143). If, back in 1975, I was happy that my reading of *Women in Love* brought me into the welcome company of Lawrence’s characters and ideas—features of the novel that I was miraculously able to assemble from the words on the pages in front of me—what came to me much later was the realization that “reading inserts every reader into a serial proliferation (of, to mention a crucial few, signs, sounds, silences, mediations, practices, commodities, other readers and writers)” (Craft, 1994, p. 143), and the conviction that no one reader, no matter how dedicated or careful, can ever really probe such multiplicity. These insights were to bring me a queer sort of comfort.

If I also sensed from my first reading of *Women in Love* that Lawrence’s novel not only tells of desire through the story it unfolds, but also arouses and makes use of desire “as dynamic of signification” (Brooks, 1992, p. 37), this was because I recognized that my own desire as reader is an essential component in the process of interpretation or meaning-making, especially when it comes to the reading of fiction. Thus, I became consciously aware, perhaps, for the first time, that desire is “central to our experience of reading narrative” (Brooks, 1992, p. 37)—and, therefore, indispensable to the “never-ending weaving” (Spivak, 2012, p. 241) and unpicking of meaning that happens whenever we engage with a fictional text, and choose to play in that gap between presence and absence which the text opens up. Yet, at the same time, what I found both compelling and surprising about *Women in Love* was its ability to release in my body powerful sensations and affects that my mind was quick to link to a gamut of emotions—anticipation, surprise, excitement, exhilaration, love, apprehension, fear, anger, hate, confusion, among them. Strangely, while I had no trouble identifying and thinking about the emotions that the novel gave rise to, I could neither easily name nor adequately describe to myself the sensations and affects that somehow seemed to connect me with pressing immediacy to the fictional world of *Women in Love*, where desire and sex, along with all manner of other forces, fluxes and flows, appeared to operate at the heart of things. I was later to discover that my struggle to think clearly about the relationship between affects, emotions, beliefs and ideas could be explained by the notion that affects and sensations are ultimately unassimilable, operating beyond existing social codes and, therefore, unable to be “semantically or semiotically ordered” (Massumi, 1995, p. 85).

I maintain that the reason why *Women in Love* gripped me so powerfully at this first reading wasn't because the novel was prompting me to recognize and recall affects and sensations that I had experienced before. Rather, it seemed to me that the very scene of reading was a site of generation for these phenomena, which coming into existence, flowed between the book and my body, wherein they circulated. When I attempt to recall these sensations and affects, which I now understand as “visceral forces beneath, alongside, or generally *other than* conscious knowing” (Seigworth & Gregg, 2010, p. 1)—and, therefore, largely “disconnected from circuits of meaning” (Marsden, 2019, p. 185) that narrative relies on—I associate them with a sense of ‘in-between-ness,’ that is, with that gap between presence and absence which reading so queerly, but fruitfully, exploits. As Seigworth and Gregg argue, “there is no pure or somehow originary state for affect” (Seigworth & Gregg, 2010, p. 1). Yet, the scene of literary reading, insofar as it manages to open up a space from which “vital forces insisting beyond emotion” (Seigworth & Gregg, 2010, p. 1) push us to move, think, and extend ourselves—or hold us back from doing so—is as privileged a site as any from which to launch an investigation into “how affects as pre-subjective, visceral forces come to be captured and confined in particular bodies in the first place” (Marsden, 2019, p. 185). As I have indicated, because literary works are able to “communicate affects that circulate independently of the consensual and conventional semiotic codes” (Marsden, 2019, p. 185), it will come as no surprise that affects are ‘recognized’ and make their presence ‘felt’ at the scene of reading, not through any ability to determine meaning, but by such qualities as intensification and diminution, acceleration and the deceleration—that is, through changes in/to/upon bodies as they move through time and space.

While it was obvious to me as a first-time reader of *Women in Love* that the pervasive and seemingly unstoppable forces and affects that appeared to emerge from its pages were unable to be adequately defined or consistently contained and controlled by the novel's characters, it was only later that I would discern that what Lawrence was attempting to achieve—and what was happening to me as I read the novel—could be explained in Deleuzian terms as “the liberation of sensations and affects from their imprisonment in bodies that are over-determined by molar identity-formation” (Ansell Pearson, 1999, p. 196). At the time, however, I was content to be blown away by what I recognized as Lawrence's hyperbole—his exaggeration and over-intensification of feelings, thoughts and perceptions, to the extent that these features seemed to become

unmoored from particular characters and assume a weird life of their own—as, for example, is the case when Gudrun reaches out to pass her sketch-book to Gerald:

And as if in a spell, Gudrun was aware of his body, stretching and surging like the marsh-fire, stretching towards her, his hand coming straight forward like a stem. Her voluptuous, acute apprehension of him made the blood faint in her veins, her mind went dim and unconscious. (Lawrence, 1920/1992, p. 114)

If I was struck by the care with which Lawrence places his characters within a realistic and highly determined social order—the characters in *Women in Love* are drawn from all levels of British society and operate across a broad canvas of settings indicative of the first decade of the twentieth century—I was also disconcerted, at first, by Lawrence’s treatment of these same characters not so much as individual subjects with their own distinct and coherent psychological identities and desires, but rather as provisional assemblages, constellations first formed then pulled apart by the massing, un-massing and re-massing of energies within and around them. Thus, while Lawrence’s depiction of the novel’s key locations—the Midlands mining town of Beldover, the colliery owner’s home, an aristocratic country house, bohemian London, and the Tyrolean Alps—remain faithful to the familiar protocols of nineteenth century fictional realism, he often up-ended my readerly expectations by persistently undermining the conventional notion that fictional characters are to be understood as autonomous and self-directed entities. Lawrence, I realized in hindsight, despite his stated desire for balance and equilibrium, positions his readers in such a way that they view the novel’s characters as sites or fields upon and through which all manner of forces move and play. Hence, he shows no hesitation, not only in blurring the usual boundary separating a character’s conscious and unconscious experiences, but also in attending to the movement or flow of vital forces between one character and another. For example, a minor character, Pussum, is able “to infuse herself” into Gerald’s bones “as if she were passing into him in a black, electric flow. Her being suffused into his veins like a magnetic darkness, and concentrated at the base of his spine like a fearful source of power” (Lawrence, 1920/1992, pp. 66–67). Because minds as well as bodies are subject to flux, characters readily “lapse out” (Lawrence, 1920/1992, p. 38), “lapse into unknowingness” (p. 38), or “swoon” (p. 325). Gudrun, for example, experiences “a keen paroxysm, a transport” (p. 8) at her first glimpse of Gerald, while Gerald’s “ultimate consciousness” is torn, “letting through the forever unconscious, unthinkable

red ether of the beyond, the obscene beyond” (p. 236), at the sight of a gash made on Gudrun’s arm by a vicious rabbit.

Kinetic Forces/Choreographed Bodies

In his endeavours “to treat character as a complex of changing impulses,” including his attentiveness “to moment-by-moment alterations in relationships that define the self,” Lawrence clearly rejects the coherence and stability of personality, thus aligning himself with modernist attempts to theorize character “through a vitalist prism” (Moses, 2014, p. 2). Yet, I sensed even at that first reading of the novel that Lawrence in choosing to present his characters in kinetic terms—that is, by emphasizing “movement rather than stasis . . . process always underway rather than position taken” (Seigworth & Gregg, 2010, p. 4)—was straining to do more than focus his readers’ attention on the ways in which characters are subject to the movement of forces both within and beyond themselves. I certainly found my own attention curiously drawn towards those episodes in the text where Lawrence’s characters negotiate and manoeuvre their way in and through the spaces they occupy.

It is at such moments that Lawrence seemed to purposively invite me to consider his characters both as self-choreographers and as choreographed by others—this by prompting me to take account of the ways in which bodies “move toward, away, into, around each other” (Royle, 2016, p. 272), regardless of whether the movement is conceived primarily in material, psychic or social terms. Thus, while on the one hand, I recognized that characters in *Women in Love* are conduits for forces that at times bear little relation to what I understand as human, on the other, I also perceived, if only vaguely, that some of them, at least some of the time, are permitted by Lawrence to engage with the world choreographically. As they move through the novel, characters consciously seek to organize the ways in which bodies relate to one another in space and time—that is, they concern themselves with “the act of framing relations between bodies; ‘a way of seeing the world’” (Klien, Valk, & Gormly, 2008, p. 7). It is not too much of a stretch to claim that I sensed, although I couldn’t clearly express it then, that Lawrence’s exemplary characters, Birkin and Ursula, were striving for what I would later learn from Leo Bersani is “an aesthetic and, more specifically, a choreographic construction” (Bersani, 2015, p. 6) of life. This aesthetic-choreographic construction takes account of the desire for equilibrium or balance in its various modes, including the sexual, and incorporates those efforts to achieve that sought-after “strange

conjunction” (Lawrence, 1920/1992, p. 142) wherein “‘relatedness’ and ‘otherness’ are complementary rather than in opposition” (Kondo, 2001, p. 71).

Given Lawrence’s efforts to present the characters in *Women in Love* in relation to processes underway rather than positions taken, it made sense, I thought, not only to think of his characters in terms of their orientation towards the forces, flows and fluxes that they find themselves caught up in, but also according to whether their movements and the desires that prompt them are directed or choreographed predominantly towards creation or destruction, life or death. Lawrence aligns certain characters, most clearly Birkin, who looks forward to a “new cycle of creation after—but not for us” (Lawrence, 1920/1992, p. 167), but also Ursula, with the forces of life. Others, including Hermione, Gerald and Gudrun, because they submit to mechanical ways of feeling, thinking and acting which involve them in the disintegration of “the vital organic body of life” (Lawrence, 1920/1992, p. 446), are unable to escape the thrall of death, despite their protestations otherwise. In this context, then, sex is significant, not in itself, but insofar as it is deemed by Lawrence to be the expression of a character’s will either to live or to die—a desire also located in the physical or psychological attempt by one character to struggle with and overpower another.

Lawrence never fails to draw his readers’ attention to the kinetic elements at work in the various settings and scenes of *Women in Love*—for example, the Crich’s mining operation at Beldover where even the talk “vibrated in the air like discordant machinery” (Lawrence, 1920/1992, p. 111); Gudrun “pulsing and fluttering rhythmically with her feet, making slow, regular gestures with her hands and arms” (Lawrence, 1920/1992, p. 160) as she dances with the cattle at Willey Water; or “the dark blood and mess pumping over the face of the agonised being” (Lawrence, 1920/1992, p. 328) as Thomas Crich, Gerald’s father, succumbs to death at Shortlands. However, at that first reading of *Women in Love*, two incidents accentuated for me the strikingly different consequences that can result from Lawrence’s positioning of his characters—or, if you prefer, their positioning of themselves—in relation to the forces of life or of death that move in, through and around them. The first of these is Hermione Roddice’s near-fatal assault of Rupert Birkin, her erstwhile lover; the second, the naked wrestling match between Birkin and Gerald Crich.

If Hermione's attack on Birkin with a lapis lazuli paper-weight is presented by Lawrence as the inevitable outcome of forces that work to overpower her—"terrible shocks ran over her body, like shocks of electricity, as if many volts of electricity suddenly struck her down"—her own overwhelming need to eliminate any obstacle, human or otherwise, that stands in the path of one for whom the inhuman force of will is all that ultimately counts suggests that aggression and thrust rather than negotiation and manoeuvre are the primary determinants of Hermione's actions in a world where "a thousand lives, a thousand deaths mattered nothing now" (Lawrence, 1920/1992, p. 99). Thus, as I read it, Hermione's violent behaviour—"her consummation of voluptuous ecstasy" (Lawrence, 1920/1992, p. 99)—is symptomatic of an inability to choreograph and craft movement synergistically, that is, in productive relation to those whom she meets as she moves through the various spaces of encounter provided by the novel. Hermione's realization that Birkin's presence is a "wall" that "she must break down" (Lawrence, 1920/1992, p. 98) implies, as Bersani says, that in her "any possibility of receptive exchange is erased by the passion for absolute control" (Bersani, 2018, p. vii). If successful choreography requires "somatic and psychic receptiveness to the world," then, Hermione's "unstoppable destructive movement" towards Birkin must be counted as an instance, *in extremis*, of "willed nonreceptivity" (Bersani, 2018, pp. vii, ix, viii)—a refusal to 'dance' that exceeds, and cannot be explained in terms of, the usual entanglement of tensions and relaxations that occurs between bodies which are, at one and the same time, both receptive and resistant.

While Hermione, by demanding that those whom she encounters become consenting agents of her will, exemplifies nonreceptiveness, the nude wrestling match between Rupert and Gerald, which dominates the whole of the 'Gladiatorial' chapter of *Women in Love*, provides Lawrence's male characters with the opportunity to explore what Bersani calls "receptive bodies" (Bersani, 2018, p. viii)—this by opening up choreographic possibilities made available through an aesthetic framing of sex. To me as an eighteen-year-old—already a dedicated bibliophile, but still a closeted lover of men—Lawrence's description of two naked men wrestling "swiftly, rapturously, intent and mindless," before constellating at a certain point in the process as "a tense white knot of flesh gripped in silence between the walls of old brown books" (Lawrence, 1920/1992, p. 264), was at that first reading both strongly homoerotic in its appeal and clearly choreographic in its emphasis. In this chapter, where action quickly succeeds

action, my attention, all those years ago, was focussed on the multiplicity of moves by which one wrestler seems “to interfuse his body through the body of the other” (Lawrence, 1920/1992, p. 264).

As the movements of one wrestling man are converted and counteracted by those of the other, the unfolding of the process appeared to me to be determined not by brute strength, but by “physical intelligence” (Lawrence, 1920/1992, p. 264). For, while there is “struggle together,” there is also the discussion of methods, the practising of grips, and a growing familiarity with “each other’s rhythm” that allow Birkin and Gerald to attain “a kind of mutual physical understanding” (Lawrence, 1920/1992, pp. 263, 264), which culminates in the two men lying on the library floor with the one warmly clasping the hand of the other. If this wrestling match triggered in me an especially memorable frisson—in part, I think, because the action happens in a library—I believe that the power of its erotic charge is somehow intensified “through the play between receptivity and resistance” (Bersani, 2018, p. xi) which characterizes the somatic and psychic negotiations that structure this highly choreographed scene.

When I first read ‘Gladiatorial’, although I was undoubtedly struck by the ability of the words on the page to stimulate affects and emotions that seemed to move in sync with the sentences and paragraphs that passed before my eyes, it was the give and take of the wrestling bodies, and the “possibility of receptive exchange” (Bersani, 2018, p. vii) which they suggested, that attuned me to the episode’s aesthetic qualities, directing me to pay closer attention, in particular, to the form that movement takes, rather than linger over the congealments that result from stasis. By signalling, in this way, “not a monumentalizing of the self, . . . but a renewable retreat from the seriousness of stable identities and settled being” (Bersani & Dutoit, 2004, p. 9), Lawrence’s choreographic treatment of movement complicated and queered the very sexual fantasies that it had aroused in me in the first place, prompting me to consider and reconsider whether in fact it is ever possible to draw a hard and fast line between sex and the aesthetic.

Lawrence’s skilful unrolling of the wrestling session between Birkin and Gerald, while demonstrating that erotic aggression is able to be productively channelled through formal attentiveness—that is, if the possibilities opened up when movement is approached choreographically are recognized and exploited—also emphasized for me that “aesthetics is not a break, per se, from the problems posed by bodies-in-relation”

(Snediker, 2014, p. 170), but rather an opportunity to rethink how such problems are framed. By directing me to imagine sex in aesthetic terms, that is, to think choreographically, Lawrence brought home to me at that first reading of *Women in Love* the advantages of configuring sex and the aesthetic, whether literally or figuratively, in relation to one another.

On the Way to an Aesthetic Education

During the course of my first encounter with *Women in Love*, if, as I have tried to suggest, the words on the pages of my tattered Penguin paperback copy of the novel became both a focus and a conduit for longing—a vehicle which enabled me through the act of reading to risk what I later learned from Derrida was the impossibility and unutterability of selftaste and othertaste—my engagement with Lawrence’s text was also preparing me to think more explicitly about the lifelong process of making, unmaking and remaking ‘myself’.

Although many factors—personal, familial, educational, religious and cultural—contributed to this, my first reading of *Women in Love* certainly enabled me to experience time more queerly. While it is tempting to claim that this reading of *Women in Love* marked an important step in a process of queering, such a statement does not do justice to those “queer temporalities, visible in the forms of interruption” (Freeman, 2010, p. xxii), which persistently challenge the dominance of *chronos*, that is, time conceived as seamless linear progression, time marching forward as if in unison. If a commitment to becoming queer implies that “time can produce new social relations and even new forms of justice that counter the chrononormative and chronobiopolitical” (Freeman, 2010, p. 10), then a text like *Women in Love* provided me, its reader, with plenty of opportunities to resist the pull of *chronos*. For, is it not so that the practice of literary reading, in its training of the imagination to engage in *teleiopoiesis*—“a reaching toward the distant other by the patient power of the imagination” (Spivak, 2012, p. 404)—suggests many possibilities for “living in relation to indeterminately past, present, and future others” (Freeman, 2010, p. xxii)? As it directed me to attend to the ways in which the queer interrupts what Walter Benjamin calls “homogeneous empty time” (Freeman, 2010, p. xxii), Lawrence’s novel also worked to disturb chrononormativities which determined that there was a ‘right’ time for education, for entering the workforce, for buying a house, for marrying and having children—chrononormativities that were not a good fit for a young gay person like myself! More

importantly, my reading of *Women in Love* seemed to bring me “closer to the time of *kairos*, the moment of opportunity” (McCallum & Tuhkanen, 2011, pp. 8–9), opening my eyes to the unusual, the strange and the weird, encouraging me to think and act more confidently outside and beyond taken-for-granted and normalizing categories.

If it is the case that in the years since my first reading of *Women in Love* I have come to think and act more queerly, this is linked to various dispositions and practices which I have acquired or developed, often as a result of ongoing ‘educative’ encounters with the aesthetic. Not only has my queering through the aesthetic prompted me to learn to appreciate the singular and the unverifiable—while developing my facility to entertain multiple readings of books, myself, and the world—it has also taught me to avoid essentializing, unifying, and universalizing. By advancing my ability to negotiate rather than attempt to resolve polarizing binaries, and to seek out ideas and concepts that open up thought instead of closing it down, queer ways of being, knowing and doing have enabled me to attend to what something does or produces in preference to focussing unduly on whether it is right or wrong, true or false.

Clearly, my exposure to *Women in Love* led me to a greater awareness of the role played by desire and the imagination in my attempts to open up and reach out “to the difference of the other” (Coleman, 2009, p. 15), especially through reading. But, what I took much longer to appreciate was the extent to which intellectual history evidences “an astonishing array of vastly different, strongly embattled, and oftentimes mutually exclusive assessments” (Schlutz, 2009, p. 3), not only pertaining to the imagination, but also to desire. With the help of queer theory, instead of seeing this as a problem, I learned to enjoy problematization—the defamiliarization of common sense. However, it was only in more recent years, after being introduced to the work of Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak during a paper on critical approaches to global citizenship education taught by Dr Vanessa Andreotti, that I was able to acknowledge that my engagement with *Women in Love* had moved me a significant distance along the path of what Spivak calls an aesthetic education, a process which, she argues, changes how we acquire and structure knowledge. If, in Derridean terms, I was drawn through my initial and subsequent readings of *Women in Love* to imagine the (im)possibility of “an auto-affection of touching” and “the kind of intimate tactile sensitivity that is enigmatically called *taste*” (Derrida, 2005, p. 690), was I not, as Spivak, proposes, also “productively undoing” my own understanding of sex and sexuality by entering and engaging with

Lawrence's text, "without accusation, without excuse, with a view to use" (Spivak, 2012, p. 1)?

While my reading of *Women in Love* yielded to me something of my own selftaste, it also positioned me to accede to the sense of another selftaste—the othertaste of the novel's characters in whom it has been said "irreconcilable human affects must meet, mingle, and interpenetrate" (Craft, 1994, p. 141). For, although Lawrence's fictional men and women were altogether-close to me, they remained, at the same time, strangely unknown and unknowable, much like my own queer sexuality. If, at that first reading, *Women in Love* miraculously gifted me with a strong taste of sex and for sex—both selftaste and othertaste—it was always the taste of sex mixed with blood, dirt, mud, fire, water, ice or death; sex more often bound up with violent homicidal and suicidal impulses that compelled and repelled, that invited both identification and repudiation. Only rarely did the sex there taste unequivocally of life, of unreserved affirmation. Yet, the intense storm of affectivity unleashed by this first encounter with *Women in Love* encouraged me to re-imagine sexuality in more open-ended and creative terms, that is, as a somewhat chaotic experience, both exciting and scary—as opposed to the more predictable linear progression with pre-determined purposes or goals that many sexuality education programmes, especially those that put a strong emphasis on the *telos* of sex, tend to favour. If I am now at a point where I can confidently claim that literary reading is of immeasurable value in the context of re-envisioning sex and sexuality education, it is because my reading of *Women in Love* convinces me that fiction prompts us "to cross a horizon into another life" (Lawrence, 1924/1971, p. 142). As I have suggested, it also works to form and reform subjectivities—and to queer them.

Caught up in the intensity, exhilaration and immediacy of the moment, and recognizing that my first readerly engagement with *Women in Love* had played a key part in shaking up my desires, I hoped and, eventually, did dare to live differently, out of the closet. However, it was only later, when I was immersed first in the study and then in the teaching of English literature that I was able to give serious and sustained attention to how Lawrence, through the skilful and purposeful manipulation of language, managed to engineer this significant shift within me. For, at the time of my first reading of *Women in Love*, while I certainly sensed the power of Lawrence's writing, thoughts of rhetorical poetics and the intricacies and subtleties of figuration—metaphor, metonymy,

synecdoche, hyperbole, irony, litotes, for example—were far from my mind and largely escaped my consideration. Nevertheless, the work of rhetorical poetics—the equation of “the rhetorical, figural potentiality of language with literature itself” (de Man, 1979, p. 10)—to which *Women in Love* and other great works of literature exposed me, provided me with what Derrida helpfully calls “the figure of some *contact* with oneself” (Derrida, 2005, p. 690). This figure, a structure of thought without which it is impossible to imagine being affected by a sensation, feeling or emotion, allows for the type of aesthetic education envisaged by Spivak, one which rearranges desires, and keeps meaning on the move. For, it is only when readers allow themselves to be captured and occupied by the figurative, which happens after they willingly enter the ground or space of figuration opened up by a text and choose to play there, that the imagination is trained to construct knower and known differently.

While it is clear that Lawrence skilfully utilizes the force of language in a handful of the greatest twentieth century novels written in English, what is not so obvious—although we are told by Ursula in *Women in Love* “that words do not convey meaning, that they are but a gesture we make, a dumb show like any other” (Lawrence, 1920/1992, p. 180)—is that Lawrence treats language less as a conduit of knowledge, than as a necessary tool for self-transformation. Indeed, for Lawrence, the ability of language to contribute to the making, unmaking and remaking of the self—the writing self and the reading self—springs from language’s libidinal force and its ability to produce dynamic effects, including its projection of “a mobile, transitional self, continually subject to fluctuation and change, forever readapting itself to fresh psychic impulses from within and without” (Doherty, 2001, pp. 30–31). Given that the forces and flows of life can only be partially and inadequately conveyed by language, which, paradoxically, both reveals and conceals the nature of their movement, Lawrence’s willingness to take up the challenge of using words to express the impossibility of what one of his biographers calls “the felt life of physical experience” (Worthen, 1991, p. 181)—desire, sex and sexuality included—is to be celebrated, suggesting as it does his commitment to ‘unfixing’ the self, keeping it open, flexible, and to my mind, queer.

If “to recognize in paranoia a distinctively rigid relation to temporality, at once anticipatory and retroactive, averse above all to surprise, is also to glimpse the lineaments of other possibilities,” then an opportunity to read *Women in Love* is an invitation, I believe, to read reparatively, that is, to remain open to what is other in the

text, thus, avoiding “a paranoid optic” (Sedgwick, 1997, pp. 24, 25). My experience of reading *Women in Love* for the first time, though particular and unique to me, nonetheless “highlights the importance of literature as a pedagogical tool that ‘teaches’ us about the world and our place in it” (Dimitriadis & Kamberelis, 2006, p. 189). This being the case, works of literature when read in pedagogical settings, including in the context of sexuality education, deserve to be read in ways that accentuate and maximize their reparative potential. This, as I have suggested, implies a willingness on the reader’s part to be open to the queer.

As you will see as this thesis unfolds, it is literature’s pedagogical potential—released when literary reading is approached deconstructively and queerly—that animates not only Spivak’s project of aesthetic education, but also the work of Bersani and other queer theorists who argue that sex and sexuality be conceptualized in aesthetic terms. Literature’s pedagogical significance, thus, is closely linked with its ability to reparatively position readers not only to imagine futures that may be very different from the present, but also to entertain the notion that the past “could have happened differently from the way it actually did” (Sedgwick, 1997, p. 25). Key to developing a reparative orientation towards literary reading, and, hence, the capacity to read reparatively, is a willingness to embrace “the open-ended indefiniteness of textuality,” which offers “a way out of the closure of knowledge” (Spivak, 2016b, p. ci). Given that reparativity is premised on both difference and deferral—in contrast to paranoia’s insistence on sameness and closure—it is closely bound up with desire, which, as Spivak’s aesthetic education reminds us, is itself “a deconstructive and grammatological structure that forever differs from (we only desire what is not ourselves) and defers (desire is never fulfilled) the text of ourselves” (Spivak, 2016b, p. ci). If I talk about desire a lot in the pages that follow, this is because, to my mind, desire is a great force for queering the aesthetico-ethical subject. And what better pedagogical site is there to experience queering than the scene of reading!

Some Concluding Remarks

When I first read *Women in Love* I didn’t quite know what to make of the novel’s ending. I desired, or thought I desired, a clear-cut conclusion, one that somehow resolved the remaining tensions in the otherwise exemplary Birkin-Ursula relationship. But, what Lawrence gave me on the subject of love, I felt, left me hanging, if quietly so. Today, I take a different view of this scene, enjoying, as I now do, the ‘up-in-the-

airness' of a situation brought about by the instability and unpredictability of desire. As Lawrence's dialoguing duo of Birkin and Ursula finally run out of steam, halt their flow of words—thus, leaving unresolved their consideration of the (im)possibility of Birkin's desire for an "eternal union with a man" (Lawrence, 1920/1992, p. 475)—a space of opportunity is opened up for the reparatively positioned reader to work in a space where desire shows itself forever differing, forever deferring.

When Birkin refuses to capitulate to Ursula's insistent demand that his own desire for sexual union with a man is "obstinacy, a theory, a perversity," he not only keeps alive, at least within his own head, the possibility of a relationship with a male, but also enables the reader to imagine a queer space where the possibility of "another kind of love" (Lawrence, 1920/1992, p. 475), a love that resists what Birkin sees as the mindless habits of heterosexual intercourse, can be voiced and explored:

"You can't have two kinds of love. Why should you!"

"It seems as if I can't," he said. "Yet I wanted it."

"You can't have it, because it's wrong, impossible," she said.

"I don't believe that," he answered. (Lawrence, 1920/1992, p. 475)

Through his "I don't believe that"—a differing and a deferring—Birkin keeps the door open to possibility and surprise, even if just a little, both for himself and for the reader.

If I conclude this queer interruption, and Part One of this thesis, with the reminder that the narrowest of gaps leaves enough space for queer to playfully do its work, then this is also to gesture in the direction of the chapters that follow in Part Two. These chapters, which remain firmly focussed on Spivak's aesthetic education, attest to the ability of Spivak's thought not only to open up spaces where it is possible to attempt (queer) collectivities to come, but also to position pedagogy, literary reading and sexuality education in relation to a hospitality that welcomes interruptions by the queer. With Spivak, there are always new possibilities and opportunities to be surprised!

PART TWO

Chapter Six

Sexuality Education—(Queerly) Attempting Collectivities to Come

For me, the “philosophico-literary”—the aesthetic in aesthetic education—is the means for persistently attempting collectivities to come. (Spivak, 2012, p. 464)

When we seem to have won or lost in terms of certainties, we must, as literature teachers in the classroom, remember such warnings—let literature teach us that there are no certainties, that the process is open, and that it may be altogether salutary that it is so. (Spivak, 2003, p. 26)

Overview

If, as Muñoz insists, “we must dream and enact new and better pleasures, other ways of being in the world, and ultimately new worlds” (Muñoz, 2009, p. 1), then a re-envisioned sexuality education in Aotearoa New Zealand—a sexuality education that is prepared to indulge in queer utopic thinking will risk disappointment in order to create the possibility of ways of being, knowing and doing that deploy queerness primarily in relation to futurity and hope. Such an endeavour is sustained not just by individual commitment, but, as Quinlivan reminds us, through “the dreams of an emergent group dwelling in the region of a critically hopeful ‘not yet’” (Quinlivan, 2014, p. 274). In other words, it is by (queerly) attempting collectivities to come that the contingencies of the here and now are side-lined in favour of “aesthetic practices which can provide sites of wonderment for re-visioning the world” (Quinlivan, 2014, p. 274). Thus, queer is positioned both as horizon and as “exuberance” (Jagose, 1996, p. 101).

In this chapter, then, I seek to throw light on Spivak’s claim that aesthetic education, in that it concerns itself with the reading of literary texts—not only in the humanities classroom, but also, I propose, as a way of reimagining and rethinking sexuality education—becomes the means by which collectivities to come are attempted. This is in the context of a sexuality education which, as it refuses the confines of health and wellbeing, remains open to the possibilities that literary reading provides.

Much is to be gained in the sexuality education classroom, I believe, from attending to queer encounters in the fictional realm. If, as Tarc claims, Spivak’s own praxis is premised on the possibility that “students might begin to respond ethically to ‘Others’ violently affected in a world deeply divided by the self/other dichotomy,” then it is fruitful “to imagine education as the means by which other possibilities for becoming

human exist” (Tarc, 2005, pp 843, 834). Literature and literary reading, as Spivak reminds us in the second of the epigraphs at the head of this chapter, play an important part in such an education by directing us away from certainties and opening up other (im)possible ways of being human—and sexual. While this work is not without its risks—and is always undertaken without any guarantee of success—Spivak’s efforts suggest that “in the collective struggle for shared meanings, in the classroom, one begins to practise a love of Others sustained through response, through committed engagement and through return” (Tarc, 2005, p. 846). The practice of this hard-won love, including in the context of sexuality education, is especially important if teachers and students are to negotiate the dichotomies and double binds produced by sexual difference and the tyranny of reproductive heteronormativity (RHN).

While Spivak’s comments about queer, queerness and queeredness are scattered throughout her work, and tend to be made in passing rather than systematically argued, a more serious consideration of the applicability of queer theory to Spivak’s project of aesthetic education and its pedagogical emphasis—and, in turn, of her aesthetic education to sexuality education—is, nevertheless, warranted. This present chapter, then, is mainly theoretical in its emphasis, providing discussion and analysis of queer theory and reflection on queer pedagogy as they come into play with Spivak’s project of aesthetic education. Drawing on the work of Deborah Britzman, who, like Spivak, is deeply engaged with what it means to learn and to unlearn—that is, with the queering of pedagogy—I attempt to illuminate Spivak’s approach to teaching and learning.

Spivak’s Classroom—A Site of Potential Collectivity

A number of commentators have written of the importance for Spivak of the humanities—which she regards as an indispensable site for “persistently attempting collectivities to come” (Spivak, 2012, p. 464). Swift, for example, while suggesting that the humanities classroom has in recent years become increasingly significant for her as “site of a potential collectivity” (Swift, 2011, p. 93)—a space where the narratives and knowledge claims associated with globalization can be examined and resisted—argues that the type of aesthetic education which Spivak practices and promotes, both among teacher trainees from subaltern communities in West Bengal and students in elite American Universities, collapses the distinction between teaching and learning. Spivak herself is explicit in her claims that humanities education is “a collective project where people work in small, decentralized ways rather than something that is extended from

this end of the world [Columbia University, New York, where she currently holds the position of University Professor] to the rest of it” (Spivak & Shaikh, 2007, p. 174).

In a similar vein, Snaza, commenting on Spivak’s pedagogical practice, observes that “she produces an account of classroom temporality that does not operate according to linear, humanist presuppositions” (Snaza, 2015, p. 49). He argues that for Spivak the classroom is always open to future possibilities in that it is a site of hope and change where selves are made, unmade and remade in ways that run counter to the neoliberal educational agenda with its emphasis on standardization, ‘best practice,’ and controllable outcomes. For Spivak, if the classroom is a political space, it is not because overtly political projects are initiated and developed there, but on account of “the kinds of attention and attunement we practice together in classrooms” (Snaza, 2015, p. 50). In other words, the sorts of classroom practices—including literary reading—that bring about the rearrangement of desires are themselves powerful forms of politicization, especially insofar as they work against the construction of stable, predictable human subjects, linear notions of time, and de-contextualized and disembodied approaches to learning. If the rearrangement of desires that takes place in classrooms—sexuality education classrooms included—is in itself a form of politicization, then, the importance of this process lies not so much in any concrete outcomes that it may produce, than in its potential to open up “an anticipatory space of hope . . . characterized by indeterminacy, both in terms of affect and methodology” (Quinlivan, 2014, p. 274). For, it is from this often uncomfortable in-between space that collectivities may emerge. Thus, while pedagogical encounters give rise to hope, they are also marked by apprehension and anxiety—this because there is never a guarantee that any collectivity, no matter how much it is longed-for, will ever be realized in a form that matches our desires.

From a Spivakian point of view, then, good classroom teaching is not primarily concerned with communicating predetermined knowledge, but “about becoming-with students . . . through the production of emergent collectivities around questions without answers or solutions” (Snaza, 2015, p. 60). Such a perspective not only provides those seeking a rethinking of sexuality education with the theoretical means to undertake this important task, but also encourages them to resist the sorts of foreclosures and stalemates that are produced by an overreliance on planning. Literary reading, especially, of fiction, has an important role to play in the reconceptualization of

sexuality education along these lines in that it teaches us “to alter one’s openness to a world and to embrace the difficulty of ceding subjective, personal agency” (Snaza, 2015, pp. 54–55)—pre-requisites for any reconfiguration of sexuality education that seeks to invoke “a relationship between the human and the natural worlds that is ‘in excess’ of capitalist globalization” (Majumder, 2017, p. 20). Acknowledging such a relationship both requires and enables a rethinking of sexuality and sexuality education in ways that challenge us to “imagine ourselves as planetary subjects rather than global agents, planetary creatures rather than global entities” (Spivak, 2003, p. 73). While the process of rethinking and reimagining sexuality education in such terms has its own attendant anxieties, it also brings with it many opportunities, prompting us to affirm the value of that which we cannot control as well as kindling in us the hope that is needed for change to happen. Spivak performs a valuable service by showing that “what we need . . . is less a new mode of education than different ways of attending to the encounters to which we are already exposed” (Snaza, 2015, p. 60). In this, she gestures in the direction of a queerer sexuality education, one with a planetary horizon.

Queer Theory in Spivak’s Aesthetic Education

Of the many double binds that Spivak concerns herself with in *An Aesthetic Education in the Era of Globalization*—self and other, body and mind, caste and class, race and class, metropolitan minority and postcolonial majority, mother tongue and global idiom, ‘truth’ and ‘rhetoric,’ the uselessness of human life and the push to be useful, among them—it is those arising out of sexual difference and reproductive heteronormativity which she claims are the most powerful, pervasive and enduring. This is because RHN, as “the broadest and oldest global institution,” provides us with “a complicated semiotic system of organizing sexual/gendered differential” (Spivak, 2012, pp. 437, 124) that establishes its own seeming irreducibility. By positioning itself “upstream from straight/queer/trans,” RHN brings us into a double bind “through the variety of our sexualities” (Spivak, 2012, p. 124).

Spivak’s project of aesthetic education, in seeking to expose sexism in its many forms and on multiple fronts, directs us to perform “a post-normative queeredness” (Spivak, 2012, p. 3), one which, perhaps, still bears the trace of an “originary queerness” (Spivak, 2012, p. 190) that contains—and is contained by—RHN. In that Spivak’s aesthetic education has as its purpose “the training of the imagination in epistemological performance through a rearrangement of desires” (Spivak, 2012, p.

125), it appears to have much in common with queer thought, which if it is “to have any specificity at all . . . must be characterized by becoming, the constant breaking of habits” (McCallum & Tuhkanen, 2011, p. 10). Berlant’s description of desire as “a state of attachment to something or someone, and the cloud of possibility that is generated by the gap between an object’s specificity and the needs and promises projected onto it” (Berlant, 2012, p. 6) speaks both to Spivak’s aesthetic education and to queer theory in that both concern themselves with opening up possibilities in spaces that are generally taken to be normative and hegemonic. However, while “queer theory is a critical inquiry into the alignments of sex, gender and desire that are in the service of normative forms of heterosexuality, the heteronormative, that saturates the social and cultural order” (Graham, 2014, p. 6), it is also “a site of struggle” where “an ensemble of knowledges, many of them contesting knowledges” (Hennessy, 2000, p. 53) come together in discourse. Yet, as Annamarie Jagose explains, although queer is “the point of convergence for a potentially infinite number of non-normative subject positions” (Jagose, 1996, p. 101), it differs from those political movements which cling to fixed and exclusive notions of identity.

In that queer unconditionally renounces all claims to sovereignty, “chafes against all regimes of normalization” (O’Rourke, 2006, p. 30), and opens itself to futurity so as to remain hospitable to the impossible, it not only resonates strongly with many of Derrida’s ideas—which are suffused throughout many of queer theory’s key texts—but also sits easy with Spivak’s deployment of the notion of “position without identity” (Spivak, 2012, pp. xv, 31, 32, 33, 431, 432, 435, 439, 465, 501, 583, endnote 36), a concept somewhat akin to that of ‘structure without content’. Indicative of Spivak’s propensity for this type of logic-testing theorizing is her assertion that gender, “thought of as an instrument of abstraction . . . is in fact a position without identity” (Spivak, 2012, p. 31). This idea, Spivak readily acknowledges, comes directly from queer theorist David Halperin who theorizes queer as “an identity without an essence” (Halperin, 1995, p. 62).

Indeed, Spivak’s aesthetic education, as a means of persistently attempting collectivities to come, supports queer understandings and approaches to education, and, in turn, is supported by them. Spivak herself has spoken of “the idea of the use of queer theory as an instrument making an argument, rather than a contained sector of critical work” (Fondazione Unicampus San Pellegrino, 2013)—an understanding that she also

applies to psychoanalysis, which she approaches neither as a descriptive taxonomy, a clinical practice, nor as a key to understanding gendering and sexual difference, but rather as a theory to think with, through, and against. Thus, in the same way that Deborah Britzman uses psychoanalysis to ask whether contemporary pedagogy can come up with ethical responses capable of refusing “the normalizing terms of origin and fundamentalism” (Britzman, 2012, p. 292), so Spivak employs psychoanalysis and queer theory to perform a pedagogy capable of bringing sexuality and the aesthetic into productive proximity. For, like Britzman, Spivak finds it “useful to read queer theory not as a set of contents to be applied, but as offering a set of methodological rules and dynamics useful for reading, thinking, and engaging with the psychical and social of everyday life” (Britzman, 2000b, p. 54, endnote 6). This approach is helpful, including in the context of the re-envisioning of sexuality education, not only when “considering the play of ambivalence in constituting experience,” but also while investigating “the fault lines of ideas” (Britzman, 2000b, p. 54, endnote 6) that dominate discourse pertaining to sex and sexuality.

Like other deconstructive ways of attending, Spivak’s work has an obvious applicability to sexuality education, which—because of sexuality’s wildness and its tendency to provoke opportunities for recognitions and misrecognitions—is not short of moments “where meaning breaks down, defies its object, and unconsciously reverses its intentions (Britzman, 2000b, p. 54, endnote 6). Literary reading, as performed by Spivak’s aesthetic education, gainfully makes use of the sorts of recognitions and misrecognitions that sexuality stirs up. By opening up a space where it is possible for the subject to be taken beyond the self and its confines, it allows the subject to experience something of the mutability of personality, identity, selfhood—and sexuality. As Britzman observes, Spivak—whether in her approach to reading, thinking, or engaging—“is not asking that ‘identity’ be restored to a nice ontology, a site of uniqueness or comfort, a font of self-esteem, or a celebration of individuality” (Britzman, 2012, p. 292). Rather, as Spivak herself make clear, she is wanting readers to attend closely to “cases of exorbitant normality” (Spivak, 2012, p. 162), whether in the area of gender and sexuality, or elsewhere. This is in order to queer them.

Pedagogy—Spivakian and Queer

While Spivak is widely celebrated as “a literary theorist, a postcolonial critic, a translator, feminist, Marxist, and deconstructionist extraordinaire” (Ray, 2016, p.

1528), in her work she has always drawn attention to her role as teacher, whether in the elite universities of the USA or in the rural schools of Bangladesh and China. As “a teacher who remains ethically responsible to pedagogy” (Ray, 2016, p. 1529), Spivak has concerned herself—with increasing urgency in recent years—with changing readers’ minds and desires while pursuing an ethical relation with the other. To a large extent, her energy has been spent on persuading teachers and students to exercise their imaginations through literary reading. For Spivak, “because it enables self-othering, the literary is, as always, the place where self-transformation may occur” (Sanders, 2006, p. 22). However, while she has never styled herself as a philosopher of education—Spivak is too much of an individualist, and, perhaps, too eccentric, to claim allegiance to any particular school or system of educational thought—she, nonetheless, as Henry A. Giroux acknowledges, has contributed significantly to the redefining of “the meaning of critical pedagogy” (Giroux, 1992, p. 2), especially, I suggest, in the field of critical literacy. While she is certainly interested in education in the wider sense, Spivak’s own efforts have, for the most part, have been focussed on the practice of reading—hence, her project of aesthetic education.

Sangeeta Ray, commenting on Spivak’s preoccupation with “teaching as a form of learning,” argues that pedagogy is the motivating force behind much of Spivak’s work—“the art of teaching; the implications of teaching; the negotiations between subjects during teaching” (Ray, 2009, p. 29). Key to Spivak’s pedagogy is the structure we term the imagination. Indeed, the pedagogical goal of Spivak’s aesthetic education—the uncoercive rearrangement of desires for epistemological performance—involves what, in Deleuzian terms, can be described as the deterritorialization and the reterritorialization of the imagination. For Spivak, the rearrangement of desires “is not imposed by the teacher but takes place in a manner analogous to the reading of texts” (Simmons, 2014, p. 141), a process which she figures as a “a kind of no holds barred self-suspending leap into the other’s sea” (Spivak, Lyons, & Franklin, 2004, pp. 207–208). As Spivak herself reports, “the idea of teacher has been one that allows me to do that jumping into the other’s space” (Spivak et al., 2004, p. 216)—especially, at the scene of reading. Concerned as she is with seeking out aporia and opening up debate, rather than with finding lasting solutions to specific problems, Spivak’s teaching, nevertheless, remains “hopeful and interminable” as it “presupposes and looks forward to a future anterior of achieved solidarity and thus nurses ‘the present’” (Spivak, 2012,

p. 72). Such teaching, especially when it activates the literary imagination, is utopically focussed, allowing us to “figure the impossible” (Spivak, 2012, p. 116) without neglecting the often painful realities in front of us. It is the sort of teaching that has the potential to contribute to a re-envisioning of sexuality education. For, by setting as horizon a (queer) future that isn’t a repetition of today’s ‘same,’ it gestures “towards the possibilities for creating a more open, connected, and loving world” (Quinlivan, 2014, p. 277).

In that Spivak’s pedagogical approach involves “unlearning learning in order to ask: What is it to learn?” (Spivak, 2012, p. 162), her own work and queer pedagogy share similar perspectives and approaches—and pose similar questions. For, like Spivak’s aesthetic education, queer pedagogy concerns itself with the deconstruction of knowledge, and the role of the teacher in this task. As de Castell and Bryson remind us, rather than addressing the generation of knowledge and its transmission, queer educators must show “an interest in the *destruction* of knowledge, rather than in its creation” (de Castell & Bryson, 1998, p. 235).

However, ‘destruction,’ as it is employed in the context of the queering of education, including sexuality education, is not to be understood as a nihilistic operation, but rather as an affirmative practice that proceeds out of love, and with the intention, made explicit by Spivak, of “giving rise to new ways of reading, writing, teaching in the strongest sense” (Spivak, 2012, p. 72). As Shlasko notes, in addition to speaking “to education stakeholders’ treatment of queers (*n.*) and queerness, of identity and normalcy,” queer pedagogy performs a valuable service by “interrogating mainstream pedagogies” (Shlasko, 2005, p.125) so as to first expose and then overturn their hidden premises. While queer pedagogy, especially in the context of sexuality education, is mistakenly seen by many as primarily corrective in its focus—providing “inclusion strategies” (Shlasko, 2005, p.127) for marginalized queer students, for example—its scope is much wider, including the exploration of the role that desire and pleasure play in relation to learning, and the interrogation of education’s complicity in the suppression of knowledge.

If the aim of queer pedagogy is to “constantly multiply the possibilities of knowledge” (Shlasko, 2005, p.128)—by challenging the normative—then its emphasis will not be on answers but on questions, including what makes something thinkable or unthinkable.

As Britzman puts it, “queer theory offers education techniques to make sense of and remark upon what it dismisses or cannot bear to know” (Britzman, 1998a, p. 214). Spivak’s aesthetic education attempts something similar. In that her project pays due attention to the incalculable in education and values the imagination as “our inbuilt instrument of othering, of thinking things that are not in the here and now, of wanting to become others” (Spivak, 2012, p. 406), Spivak’s pedagogical intention is not just to challenge and subvert that which is taken for granted, but, rather, to create the conditions necessary for utopic thinking. As she says, “‘norm’ . . . is not an endorsement, but a description that frames my struggle against sexism” (Spivak, 2012, p. 124). However—as Spivak affirms in her statement that opens this chapter and resonates throughout it—in this struggle, which deploys the aesthetic as “the means for persistently attempting collectivities to come” (Spivak, 2012, p. 464), queerness always belongs as much to the ‘not-yet’ as to the present.

Britzman, in proposing a queer pedagogy that “worries about and unsettles normalcy’s immanent exclusions” (Britzman, 2012, p. 293), argues that in addition to being transgressive in regard to matters of affection and desire, such a pedagogy will question the production of essentialist subject positions by considering the constitution of selves that are performed by subjects in queer relation. Directed in an ethical response towards the other, Spivak’s pedagogical approach, insofar as it seeks to activate encounters that uncoercively rearrange desires, works in a similar way to Britzman’s, destabilizing and decentering “reproductive heteronormativity (RHN) as the broadest global institution” (Spivak, 2012, p. 438).

If, for Britzman, pedagogies that claim to be queer must move beyond the strategies of providing information and seeking attitude change in an effort to include and take account of LGBTQ+ and other marginalized voices in the curriculum, the same holds for Spivak. Though promoting tolerance, such strategies, in that they rely on the binary of sameness/otherness, “may in actuality produce the grounds of normalization” (Britzman, 2012, p. 298) which they set out to challenge. Thus, Spivak sees the teaching of tolerance as “today’s soft option” (Spivak, 2012, p. 393)—easy in theory but difficult in practice. A more urgent pedagogical need is the admittance of “the unthinkability of normalcy” (Britzman, 2012, p. 298) and the consideration of how it is continually reconstituted in our discourse. Spivak, in speaking of the need to unmoor normality, refuses to be persuaded by arguments that more and better ‘information’ can

do this job. Rather than relying on twin myths—firstly, that “information neutralizes ignorance” and, secondly, that it is “a mirror of the real”—Spivak aligns with Britzman who proposes that queer pedagogy rethink “the everyday normative . . . as producing the grounds of estrangement and new forms of ignorance” (Britzman, 2012, p. 299).

Like Britzman, Spivak is sceptical of the status afforded ‘information’ in neoliberal pedagogies, including the claim that the provision of accurate information relating to a particular issue will lead to attitudinal change. In this light, the emphasis that sexuality education programmes in New Zealand schools give to ‘information’ and the faith that they place in its efficacy—whether expressed in the requirement that “detailed information on student needs, learning and progress” (Education Review Office, 2018, p. 10) be collected and reported on, or in efforts to minimize harm on occasions such as school balls “by providing students with information about how they can keep themselves safe before, during, and after the event” (Ministry of Education, 2015, p. 27)—need to be questioned.

Indeed, throughout the more than 600 pages of her *An Aesthetic Education in the Era of Globalization*, Spivak wrestles with what an aesthetic education can do in a world where “information command has ruined knowing and reading” (Spivak, 2012, p. 1). For Spivak, providing information without attending to the historical circumstances of its production is a useless exercise. While it may be a worthy aim, for example, to deploy sexuality education to establish a more inclusive world for girls, women and queer people, a lot more than “information retrieval” (Spivak, 2012, p. 128) is needed. In Spivak’s view, a much more difficult but very important thing to come to grips with is the notion of “perspectival normativity,” the requirement that we “perspectivize the idea of normality” (Spivak, 2012, p. 178). No amount of dissemination of information on its own will assist with the deconstruction of perspectivization. However, paying attention “to the difference between information control and learning to read, information or anything” (Spivak, 2012, p. 517, endnote 57) will. In Spivak’s view, good teaching, focussed as it is on reading in what have traditionally been called the humanities, plays an invaluable role in opening the mind to other epistemes. It will be more concerned with the ‘how’ than with the ‘what,’ with the form of teaching rather than its content:

The substance of teaching informs or is informed by [the] form. I am not talking about ‘what’ because that is the problem: people think that just giving a lot of ‘what’ actually does work *as* teaching. The trouble to teach is no longer undertaken. (Spivak & Shaikh, 2007, p. 175)

In Spivak’s view, it is not that the ‘what’ is lacking in importance in teaching—the problem is that “we cannot stop with the ‘what’ . . . we have to think about *how* the teaching is being done” (Spivak & Shaikh, 2007, p. 175). This is necessary if the sexuality education classroom is to be embraced not only as a site where desires are rearranged for epistemological performance, but also recognized as a space where “sexuality moves through educational objects and pedagogical relations in unpredictable ways” (Gilbert, 2014, p. xiv), stirring as it goes a wide range of affective responses. Snaza, in observing that Spivak “foregrounds the paradoxical temporality of teaching” (Snaza, 2015, p. 53), draws attention to her claim that one of the most important aspects of classroom encounters is their ability to attune us to “non-linear temporality” (Snaza, 2015, p. 60), thereby, altering our embodied attention, rearranging our desires, and, in the long run, our politics. Spivak’s insight that the pedagogical encounter is attentive to “the mattering of time, the ways in which time comes to *matter*” (Snaza, 2015, p. 49) resonates with queer’s emphasis on time as *kairos*—the moment of opportunity—rather than time as *chronos* or sequential ordering. In positing the notion of queerness, not as a state of being or as an identity, but as a way of becoming, queer theory provides the basis for a queer pedagogy that enthusiastically engages “in questions of becoming as the processes of unforeseeable change” (McCallum & Tuhkanen, 2011, p. 8). By conceptualizing time as *kairos*, it becomes possible not only to imagine collectivities to come, but also to attempt them—including through the practice of literary reading, which has the ability to make the demands of chronological time matter less than the opportunities that emerge from the page in front of the reader’s eyes.

Queer Reading Practices

Shlasko recognizes that “as an aesthetic, queer looks for and enjoys potentially subversive content in cultural texts of any media” (Shlasko, 2005, p. 124). Yet, in attending to queer pedagogy’s insistence on queer reading, it is necessary to make an important distinction between the inclusion in the curriculum of texts about or from the point of view of queer subjects, and “reading queerly” (Shlasko, 2005, pp. 129, 130).

Reading queerly, to which Shlasko gives priority, involves “seeking out the queer or potentially queer meanings in a text” (Shlasko, 2005, p. 129.), whether or not the text is explicitly queer, either in its subject matter or in the perspectives that it presents.

Whatever the text, a queer reading will attempt to draw out those multiple meanings and implications that refuse normalcy. A queer reading will point out internal contradictions in the normal—wherever and whenever it is found. Insofar as queer ways of reading are more concerned with what readers do with a text, than with the text in itself, they promote “the sense of reading as a self-reflective practice” (Shlasko, 2005, p. 130). Thus, queer ways of reading affirm that “texts change readers, and readers change texts” (Shlasko, 2005, p. 129). Meaning is always on the move.

If queer theory acknowledges “the intrusion of exorbitant normalcy and the ways such normalcy ignores the everydayness of queer identifications, pleasures, practices, and bodies” (Britzman, 2012, p. 294), then queer reading practices operating within queer pedagogy eschew the comfort of sameness and the sort of self-affirmation that comes at the expense of excluding that which is other. Queer ways of reading, to the extent that they make space for the undecidable and the unknowable—that which cannot be disciplined or controlled—promote “the proliferation of one’s own identificatory possibilities” (Britzman, 2012, p. 297), rather than a return to the confines of a familiar and comfortable ‘self.’ Thus, they become “an imaginary site for multiplying alternative forms of identifications and pleasures” (Britzman, 2012, p. 297)—a site, also, where difference is claimed as the very condition that makes community possible.

Spivak’s aesthetic education travels a similar trajectory in that the potential for change that is activated by literary reading is released as self-synecdoche or self-abstraction, a process which enables readers to respond to calls to attempt collectivities to come through a *teleiopoiesis*—that is, by trying to reach and touch the distant other through imaginative effort. While difference—the surplus of subjectivity—must always be put aside to claim collectivity, difference, nevertheless, makes its presence felt in the realization that imagined collectivities, even queer ones, are never attainable in the here and now. There is always the need to position queerness as horizon.

By promoting reading as “the habit of mind that can be open to experience ethics as the impossible figure of a founding gap, of the quite-other” (Spivak, 2012, p. 111), Spivak undertakes her own version of queer reading. Simmons’ claim that Spivak’s

teleiopoiesis—insofar as it leads to a recognition that “the gap between the ego and the Other will never be bridged” (Simmons, 2014, p. 142)—brings with it both a loss of certainty and a certain humility, also applies to queer reading practices. For, both Spivakian and queer approaches invite readers to attempt to learn by switching off or silencing their own voice. By incessantly nudging readers to think in ways that admit the possibility that neither self nor other ‘owns’ a stable identity—and that neither is ‘normal’—both imply an imagination that works “with the Other through the Other’s eyes as much as possible” (Simmons, 2014, p. 142).

Some Concluding Remarks

Spivak and Britzman raise important questions about how difference should be read and engaged, not only in relation to Spivak’s aesthetic education or the process of reading queerly that Britzman theorizes, but also in the context of a re-envisioned sexuality education that seeks to develop the potential to desire differently, more, and better. By taking seriously the proposition that “something queer can happen to anyone when one attempts to fix and unfix identity” (Britzman, 2012, p. 301), sexuality educators and researchers are better prepared to explore ways in which pedagogy might engage with alterity. These include thinking through the notion that in the other one reads difference and self-difference not identity. Insofar as reading acknowledges “difference within identity” and avoids equating interpretation with “a confirmation or negation of identity” (Britzman, 2012, p. 303), it becomes a means of disrupting the inside/outside binary and other hierarchies that still persist in sexuality education, underpinned and protected as they are by often unexamined conceptualizations of sexual identity, gender identity, and personal identity embedded in the curriculum (see Ministry of Education, 2015).

While reading is “always about risking the self, about confronting one’s own theory of reading, and about engaging one’s own alterity and desire” (Britzman, 2012, p. 304), it also throws a light on the ways in which education, including sexuality education, sometimes limits how life is imagined and lived, both individually and collectively. If queer ways of reading encourage the urge to learn “about one’s own otherness, one’s own unconscious desires and wishes, one’s own negations” (Britzman, 2012, p. 305), then Spivak’s aesthetic education, by attending to the practice of *teleiopoiesis*, harnesses a pedagogy capable of imagining a sociality that exceeds the dominant and the hegemonic—one which by opening up the reader to utopic possibilities becomes a

means for (queerly) attempting the sorts of collectivities to come that are a feature of a sexuality education hospitable to its own re-envisioning.

If the theorization of Spivakian pedagogical practices and ways of reading presented in this chapter has contributed to an understanding of Spivak's persistent attempts at (queer) collectivities to come, then the chapter that follows will put these theorizations to work at a scene of reading where they encounter the singularities and specificities of a literary text. In an effort to explore ways in which collectivities to come can be imagined and attempted in fiction, it will attend to James Courage's *A Way of Love* as it makes use of ideas introduced in the present chapter.

Chapter Seven

A Queer Reading of *A Way of Love*

I put aside the surplus of my subjectivity and synecdochize myself, count myself as the part by which I am metonymically connected to the particular predicament, so that I can claim collectively, engage in action validated by that very collective. (Spivak, 2012, pp. 436–437)

. . . I nevertheless suffered a certain homesickness for the company of those who lived, as I did or had done, in more or less full self-acceptance of their own natures as members of what I may call without exaggeration our immense league—members who were scattered and for the most part strangers to one another, but who shared a common erotic compulsion, a common form of social difficulty, often a common glossary, and who rejoiced in the anonymity of cities. (Courage, 1959, p. 145)

Overview

In this chapter, through a reading of James Courage’s pre-gay-liberation novel, *A Way of Love* (1959)—one that takes into account both queer theory and queer pedagogy, as well as Spivak’s own project of aesthetic education—I set out to show how an experience of the ways in which collectivities are imagined and attempted in a work of fiction can become an opportunity “to release the possibility of self-abstraction, self-synecdoche” (Spivak, 2012, p. 440), and, thus, become a means for attempting (queer) collectivities to come. In my exploration of *A Way of Love*, I pay particular attention to those queer moments and spaces which “extend a welcome to the impossible” and give witness to the potential of queer “to reshape material realities in unanticipatable ways” (O’Rourke, 2006, pp. 22, 29). For, it is at these moments and in these spaces that it becomes possible to imagine transformative collectivities and solidarities to come, and that the way is opened up for their emergence or arrival—unforced and unannounced. Thus, the ethical reflex is trained.

Although produced and published in Great Britain, *A Way of Love* has the distinction of being “the first overt story of same-sex love written by a New Zealander” (Burke, 2008, p. 101). Because it deals with the issue of male with male sex in a sympathetic and sensitive way, Courage’s novel achieved considerable notoriety at the time of its publication and was effectively banned under the censorship laws that operated in New Zealand prior to the establishment in 1964 of the Indecent Publications Tribunal. If

during my exploration of *A Way of Love* I attend to ways in which the novel's characters, especially its narrator, attempt (queer) collectivities to come through a process of self-synecdoche, in doing so, I will veer towards those singularities which, by proliferating identificatory possibilities, gesture in the direction of the queering of sexuality education in Aotearoa New Zealand—a matter that is addressed in the chapters that follow.

However, before laying out my reading of *A Way of Love*, I wish to make it clear that I use the term 'queer,' not primarily as a synonym for gay, lesbian, transgender, transsexual, or intersexed, but more often to designate a subject position, a politic or a certain aesthetic flavour. In line with Halperin's historicist approach to the construction of sexuality, the label 'gay' rarely appears in my discussion of *A Way of Love*. It would be both misleading and universalizing to apply the term to a period in history, the nineteen-fifties, when it was not commonly used by men who engaged in sexual activity with other men to describe themselves. On the other hand, as I will explain, at the time the novel was written and set, the term 'homosexual' was being more readily adopted, both by men—especially from the middle classes—who were sexually oriented towards other men, and by society generally. This term is used where appropriate.

As I approach *A Way of Love*, I am mindful that “literary criticism is itself *performative*, insofar as it is a discursive *practice* that creates, reiterates and conceals certain norms and normal ways of reading” (Rigby, 2009, p. 474). I seek to read Courage's novel ethically in that I take responsibility for my response to the text and for the consequences of my act of reading (see Miller, 1987, p. 43). As I read (queerly), I also adopt a historicist approach to the construction of desire and sexuality, one that recognizes their irreducible specificity—in Spivakian terms, their singularity and unverifiability—in relation to a time and place distant from my own. In the case of *A Way of Love*, I attend to the performance of male homosexual desire in England in the decades after World War II.

Some Background

In order to prepare the way for my reading of Courage's novel, I first provide sufficient historical background to support an informed understanding of the book's treatment of male homosexuality.

Set in nineteen-fifties London, where Courage had for the most part lived since leaving New Zealand in 1932, *A Way of Love* is profitably read against the background of the work of the Wolfenden Committee which in 1954 was tasked by the British Parliament to investigate the perceived ‘threat’ of homosexuality. Its establishment came in the wake of a number of high-profile and widely-publicized court cases throughout the British Isles, but mostly in London, involving the arrest, conviction and imprisonment of adult men for engaging in consensual sex with other adult men.

German in origin, the term ‘homosexuality’ entered the English language relatively late in the nineteenth century when practitioners of the new ‘science’ of psychiatry employed it to denote “a distinctive classification of sexual behavior, sexual desire, and sexual subjectivity” (Halperin, 2012, p. 43). As it was originally applied and understood, the concept ‘homosexual’ pathologized same-sex sexual desire—which was considered to be but one manifestation of the more pervasive problem of gender inversion. Indeed, it was an inborn reversal of gender traits that was believed to prompt males to act or dress as females and females to act or dress as males.

However, into the twentieth century, as psychiatry grew in influence, the term homosexual gained greater currency among the wider population, and homosexuality itself came to be seen as a condition to be dealt with by clinicians, rather than a sin to be forgiven by priests, or a crime to be punished by the courts. In the years after World War II, as homosexuality assumed greater significance “as a contemporary urban problem” that affected most metropolitan centres, but especially London, “the ontology of queer male behavior” (Hornsey, 2010, p. 26) and its moral status were hotly debated, mainly among the educated classes. By the nineteen-fifties calls had grown louder for homosexuals to be treated not as criminals, but as unfortunates suffering from a psychiatric disorder that had its origins in social factors. An increasingly common belief was that homosexuals were the victims of “environmental disturbances, which had arrested their ability to enter proper sexual relationships” (Hornsey, 2010, p. 27). High on the list of social disruptions that ‘caused’ homosexuality were “the psychological failings of the impoverished ‘broken’ home” (Hornsey, 2010, p. 26) with its hostile or absent father and its over-protective, possessive mother.

While the characters in *A Way of Love* make passing conversational references to Freud and to key features of Freudian psychology—including “an unresolved Oedipus

complex” (Courage, 1959, p. 40)—the novel omits any overt mention of the Wolfenden Committee or its 1957 Report recommending the decriminalization of homosexual behaviour between consenting adults in private. Courage, however, was well aware of the Wolfenden Committee’s work—and of the British Government’s lack of action in response to its Report—as a letter written in 1958 to fellow New Zealand author Frank Sargeson reveals: “I’m very afraid that we’ll all have to remain felons—or dishonest boyos—in our lifetime” (Sargeson & Shieff, 2012, p. 268).

Yet, what *A Way of Love* does do is provide a narrative that evidences the quiet but subversive queering by Courage’s fictional felons and boyos of “the deities of family, home and marriage,” which “were all the more venerated” (Ackroyd, 2017, pp. 216–217) in the years following the end of the Second World War—a period hailed by many as marking a return to normalcy after the deprivations of the Great Depression and the ravages of war. Courage’s novel, “rather than contributing to a collective or essentialised conception of nonnormative identity,” invites readers to view identities queerly—“as they are in everyday life: complex, subjective and multiple” (Burke, 2008, p. 96).

Admittedly, Courage’s focus is somewhat narrow. Instead of attempting to deal with the “diverse agglomeration of different identities, lifestyles, and ways of engaging with the city” (Hornsey, 2010, p. 3) that was a feature of London’s sizeable population of queer males, Courage concerns himself for the most part with those queer men—by and large from the middle-classes or with aspirations in that direction—who valued and sought “public discretion, domestic propriety, and companionate monogamy” (Hornsey, 2010, p. 8). By focussing “not just on what made them different but also on those values they shared with men and women of their class” (Houlbrook, 2005, pp. 203–204), Courage not only emphasizes the respectability of the queer men who populate *A Way of Love* but, in doing so, seeks to distinguish them in the reader’s mind from other queer men—cottagers and queans, for example—who were perceived by the general public to be disorderly or criminal, and judged, therefore, as threats to the common good. By positioning his middle class homosexual men firmly within the bounds of conventional morality, Courage builds a case for the decriminalization of homosexual activity that is consistent with the recommendation of the Wolfenden Report, which advocated for what has been called “a legitimate private ‘homosexual’ space” (Houlbrook, 2005, p. 262).

As he creates a fictional world where respectable queer men perform their sexuality within the confines of private homes—and where the likelihood of arrest, though present, is not as great as it would be in public or semi-public spaces—Courage works carefully to protect readers from having to consider and legitimize any form of commercial sexual activity between men. Nor does he expose them to the cruising of bars, parks and public lavatories by males on the lookout for sex with other males. Any references in the novel to sexual activity that is either initiated or transacted in public or semi-public spaces casts such behaviour in a negative light:

And picking up a body for the night from some queer bar or other is altogether too precarious—to say nothing of a taste of ashes in the mouth. (Courage, 1959, p. 39)

By emphasizing the respectability of homosexuality, especially its alignment with middle class morality and domesticity, Courage, like the Wolfenden Committee, was, unwittingly or otherwise, “marking out boundaries and firming up binaries—establishing which emerging construction of a homosexual type should be released from the law’s grasp” (Lewis, 2016, p. 205). In other words, he is concerned with producing what today is called the politics of homonormativity—“a politics that does not contest dominant heteronormative assumptions and institutions, but upholds and sustains them” (Duggan, 2002, p. 179). Nevertheless, within the tight frame in which *A Way of Love* operates—and, maybe, because of it—there is much that is queer and of interest in Courage’s novel.

The Synecdochic Performance of Queer Collectivity

In order to understand how that which is queer in *A Way of Love* is able to find expression and make itself felt or count in the absence of institutional validation, it is helpful to acknowledge, as Spivak does, that “the repetition of singularity that gives multiplicity is the repetition of difference” (Spivak, 2012, p. 436). However, in order to achieve agency, that which is queer—the singular, the non-normative, the unfixed—ends up ‘sacrificing’ itself to presume and perform collectivity through a process of self-synecdoche spelt out by Spivak in the quote that heads this chapter.

In relation to the sort of synecdochic performance of collectivity that Spivak describes, it is important to note that “the term queer does not designate identity, but alliance” (Butler, 2015, p. 70). Queer alliances come about “through a self-synecdoche that can

be withdrawn when necessary rather than confused with identity” (Spivak, 2012, p. 439). This is because the synecdoche and the metonym—the figure to which synecdoche is most closely related—are inherently unstable, subject to change, and open to renegotiation as subjects move through time and space. Considered in the light of Muñoz and Quinlivan’s insistence that it is most productive to approach the notion of queer collectivity utopically—as ‘horizon,’ not something belonging to a specific time and place—Spivak’s aesthetic education is best thought as a path towards collectivities to come, rather than as a mechanism for endorsing particular collectivities in the here and now. In other words, while sometimes useful as a term of affiliation, the designation ‘queer’ never adequately or completely describes that to which/whom it is applied, whether synecdochized as a collective or not. The attempts at self-synecdochizing which we see in *A Way of Love* are, therefore, better understood as the result of a commitment to queer as utopic—however provisional or restricted in scope that commitment is—rather than to any notion of essential or universal queerness.

Told in the first person from the point of view of Bruce Quantock, a successful forty-nine-year-old architect, *A Way of Love* is the story of “a man who must obviously have had his opportunities with women—and who has preferred to make his choice elsewhere” (Courage, 1959, p. 44). The plot of the novel is built around Bruce’s involvement with Philip Dill, a younger man, sexually inexperienced, unsure of himself, and new to London, whom the narrator first meets by chance when cheek literally collides with jaw at a Festival Hall concert. As Bruce describes it, “the contact . . . was an astonishment to us both—a kind of detonation between strangers” (Courage, 1959, p. 11).

In telling the story of what happens “when two men find their love in one another”—of his and Philip’s two-year affair; “how it began and how it ended” (Courage, 1959, pp. 159, 9)—Bruce not only comes to terms with the complexities that shaped their relationship, but also throws a light on the ways in which their respective (and very different) approaches to desire, sex and queer worked either to open the way for collectivities to come or foreclosed on such possibilities. By exploring the extent to which Bruce, Philip, and to a lesser degree the other characters who populate *A Way of Love*, choose either to “self-synecdochize to form collectivity”—or resist such a pull—it becomes possible to reflect on the extent to which the collectivities that are

performed “take difference itself as [their] synecdochic element” (Spivak, 2012, p. 437).

The default position of the many male characters in *A Way of Love* who are sexually attracted to other men is aloneness—physical, mental, and emotional. This manifests itself, either positively or negatively, as solitude or loneliness: “We are all separate beings” (Courage, 1959, p. 14), Bruce tells himself. It is their experience of separateness and aloneness, rather than any ideological or political motivation, which moves men who are sexually drawn to other men to embrace the queer, self-synecdochize, and claim connection to an abstract whole. Bruce, for example, despite “health of body” and “the material blessings of a comfortable house and a reasonable income” (Courage, 1959, p. 36), is deeply unhappy. Writing of the pain of finding himself in his empty home, “alone again with the lamp, my paper and the point of my pen,” Bruce dreads the frustration of going “alone to my bed” (Courage, 1959, pp. 26, 58). He ventures on solitary walks in Devon and Brighton as an antidote to what he prefers to think of as “a passing loneliness” (Courage, 1959, p. 35), albeit a loneliness that is increasingly difficult to ignore. In acknowledging that his way of life is “too apt to be conditioned by a certain deviation” from the norm—which he judges “as neither a crime nor an unjustified indulgence”—Bruce is prompted to admit to himself that “in my soul I was alone and I sought not to be alone” (Courage, 1959, p. 36). Yet, while refusing the double trap of self-justification and self-pity, Bruce is able to convince himself: “Let it be sufficient that I am as I am . . .” (Courage, 1959, p. 14).

In dismissing the authority both of criminology and psychiatry in respect to his sexuality—“there shall be no excursions into psychology here” (Courage, 1959, p. 14), Bruce tells us—he not only claims a certain queerness by resisting the hold of these heteronormative structures, but also an existential loneliness that is aligned to a depathologized type of melancholia. This melancholia, as Muñoz argues, is an integral feature of ordinary life for those, including queers, who belong to “communities under siege” (Muñoz, 1999, p. 74). However, in that it can be deployed “to map the ambivalences of identification and the conditions of (im)possibility that shape . . . minority identities” (Muñoz, 1999, p. 74), melancholia serves a positive purpose as a mechanism that assists in the restructuring of identity. To varying degrees, many of the queer characters in *A Way of Love* experience melancholia, especially as a consequence

of adopting disidentification as a “strategy of resistance or survival” (Muñoz, 1999, p. 5) against the hegemony of heteronormativity.

Disidentification enables a subject to simultaneously refuse both assimilation and rebellion in regard to the dominant ideology. As Muñoz puts it, “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, p. 12). For example, ‘Mr White,’ one of the small number of homosexual men who agreed to be interviewed by the Wolfenden Committee [on Thursday 28 July, 1955], in explaining that the world of his queer companions “covers a very wide field” who are “all completely at ease in one another’s company” (Lewis, 2016, p. 219), emphasizes the homosexual male’s ability to cross class and social boundaries with ease. The thought of this worries society, not because individual heterosexuals are endangered, but because the structure of reproductive heteronormativity, which is tightly entangled with the hegemony of class, is threatened. As ‘Mr White’ explains:

. . . homosexuals almost entirely do not move in circles or classes; they move in an accepted pattern through society. They do not pay very much attention to social status or where they come from or where they are going to; and I think that is one of the reasons why society is rather alarmed about them, that they do not adhere to the ordinary social prejudices and distinctions. It is quite possible that a peer may be attached to a farm labourer or an able seaman to a university professor, and I have known an eminent novelist who lived in a great state of devotion with a London policeman . . . (Lewis, 2016, p. 218)

By living openly as a homosexual, ‘Mr White’ clearly announces his refusal to assimilate into heterosexual society. At the same time, he is in no position to denounce the dominant heteronormative ideology of an inhospitable and class-ridden British society for what it is. In order, therefore, to argue the injustice of legislation that entraps and criminalizes men committing homosexual acts in Great Britain, ‘Mr White’ must do so on the basis of what he admits is “a deformation of character” (Lewis, 2016, p. 219)—that is, the ‘arrested’ nature of his own emotional and social development. To the extent that he pathologizes himself in order to decriminalize homosexuality, ‘Mr White’ performs a disidentification—“a survival strategy that works within and outside the dominant public sphere simultaneously” (Muñoz, 1999, p. 5). In performing this

disidentification before the Wolfenden Committee, ‘Mr White’ is effectively “reworking . . . those energies that do not elide the ‘harmful’ or contradictory components of identity” (Muñoz, 1999, p. 12). The characters in *A Way of Love* enact similar survival strategies—not before a parliamentary committee—but on a more intimate scale, in a domestic setting, and in the presence of men who love men.

If Muñoz’s notion of disidentification highlights “the survival strategies the minority subject practices in order to negotiate a phobic majoritarian public sphere” (Muñoz, 1999, p. 4)—one which either punishes or silences those subjects who don’t fit the fantasy of what a normal citizen is supposed to be—Spivak’s strategy of self-synecdoche involves “the putting aside of difference” (Spivak, 2012, p. 436) in order to perform collectivity. Both practices contribute to the process of queer world-making—disidentification allows subjects to endure public hostility by “recycling and rethinking encoded meaning” (Muñoz, 1999, p. 31) through the performance of queer, often in private but porous spaces, while self-synecdoche enables a subject to become metonymically connected to a particular situation through identification with a group, a ‘whole.’ Thus, disidentification and self-synecdoche each play their part in opening the way for collectivities to come. We see both processes at work in *A Way of Love*.

It is Bruce’s recognition that it is physical desire which draws him to bond with other men—although, often, not without an accompanying melancholia—that enables him to feel himself “no longer alone” (Courage, 1959, p. 52) in the world. It is this same awareness that also allows him to stave off self-atrophy. As Bruce affirms at the novel’s end, sexual desire has its own validity whether or not it leads to love: “I cherish physical desire for its own sake, for its power to alleviate the solitudes of my kind and as it may expand into love” (Courage, 1959, p. 255). But to what extent does *A Way of Love* show that it is necessary, as Spivak says, “to put aside difference and self-synecdochize to form collectivity” (Spivak, 2012, p. 437) in order for physical desire to flourish and for love among men to grow strong? And, more broadly, what is the relationship between self-synecdoche and disidentification in Courage’s novel?

As readers follow Bruce from place to place around London, he introduces them to various queer individuals, collectivities and subcultures, leading them through these encounters to an understanding of “a more emotional and felt form of metropolitan sensibility” (Hornsey, 2010, p. 29). Bruce insistently and unashamedly asserts a bond

with those whom he meets, those whom he describes as “men of my kind”—a bond experienced in “no ordinary thirst but . . . a persistent longing, a yearning of the whole flesh” (Courage, 1959, p. 13).⁹ Like Bruce, these men claim “more or less full self-acceptance of their own natures,” self-synecdochizing to form collectivity, figuring themselves as part of what Bruce terms “without exaggeration our immense league” (Courage, 1959, p. 145)—a synecdochic metaphor which is contextualized and explained in Courage’s epigraph to this chapter.

By asserting membership of “the company of those who lived, as I did, or had done,” Bruce not only claims the right to seek out those who are akin to himself, “those whose natures offer the same or similar tastes, aversions, artistic or physical preferences” (Courage, 1959, pp. 145, 14), but also affirms the possibility of a collectivity to come based on erotic desire among men—and in so doing performs it. Samuel R. Delany, describing his first visit to the St. Mark’s Baths in New York in the early nineteen-sixties, offers a perspective similar to that of Courage’s narrator:

. . . what *this* experience said was that there was a population—not of individual homosexuals, some of whom now and then encountered, or that those encounters could be human and fulfilling in their way—not of hundreds, not of thousands, but rather of millions of gay men, and that history had, actively and already, created for us whole galleries of institutions, good and bad, to accommodate our sex. (Delany, 2004, p. 293)

Courage and Delany both emphasize the positive role that sexual desire plays in performing and creating queer collectivities, which, “by surpassing the solitary pervert model and accessing group identity” (Muñoz, 2009, p. 64), challenge heteronormativity and its institutions. What makes such affirmations, such performatives queer is the realization, as Muñoz puts it, that “queerness is essentially about the rejection of a here

⁹ Throughout *A Way of Love*, men like Bruce, who erotically desire other men, are referred to collectively but variously as: “friends of my own persuasion” (Courage, 1959, p. 36); or “of your persuasion” (p. 44); “a strange race, a people apart” (p. 44); “of a certain kind” (p. 48); “the kind . . . I happen to be” (p. 79); “your kind” (p. 95); “friends of an understood kind” (p. 107); “members of my kind” (p. 141); “the wider companionship of my kind” (p. 145); “the company of my kind” (pp. 153, 246); “friends of my own kind” (p. 173); “our persuasion” (p. 180); and as “others of my kind, my circle” (p. 238).

and now and an insistence on potentiality or concrete possibility for another world” (Muñoz, 2009, p. 1).

The queerness that is claimed by Bruce and his companions is not a solid identity or “a stable foundation, it is rather a performance, a shifting signifier” (Morris, 2003, p. 197). It amounts to what Spivak refers to as a “position without identity” (Spivak, 2012, pp. xv, 31, 32, 33, 431, 432, 435, 439, 465, 501, 583, endnote 36), being the homosexual pole of the heterosexual/homosexual binary within the construction of heteronormativity. Yet, the performance of queerness also releases what in Spivakian terms is “the possibility of self-abstraction, self-synecdoche” (Spivak, 2012, p. 440)—a possibility premised in this context on the repetition of difference rather than sameness. For example, by stating unapologetically that he is “no stranger in the land of Sodom” (Courage, 1959, p. 53), Bruce is not only refusing the Biblical injunction against homosexuality and the Christian code of sexual ethics based upon it, but is also staking a claim to a reterritorialized space in the ‘to come’—a queer space—for himself and other sexual strangers. Though Bruce’s attempt at queer world-making through the refiguration and subversion of Sodom may be considered a minor gesture, it nevertheless provides “glimpses of an actually existing queer future in the present” (Muñoz, 2009, p. 61)—one that permits inhabitancy, if not possession, of spaces hitherto regarded as off-limits.

Muñoz’s insight that “queerness exists for us as an ideality that can be distilled from the past and used to imagine a future” (Muñoz, 2009, p. 1) helps readers to recognize and appreciate the many queer potentialities that suffuse the world of *A Way of Love*—a world not only where sexual intimacies between men are implied rather than explicitly described, but one, also, where sex takes place “in spaces that [are] underscored as emphatically private and circumspect” (Burke, 2008, p. 101). While the demands of Bruce’s professional and public life give a solidity to his existence—“an anchor holding me to the sea-bed of the overt and the practical”—his on-going allegiance is less to the conventions of his own time than to what he describes as “a companionship that had served me well enough in the past” (Courage, 1959, pp. 24, 145). In other words, Bruce embraces the sort of non-heteronormative assembly which, in Muñoz’s view, offers “a vast lifeworld of queer relationality, an encrypted sociality, and a utopian potentiality” (Muñoz, 2009, p. 6). Thus, Bruce’s allegiance to the sexual companionship which he experiences among men makes possible the sorts of

collectivities to come that Spivak says take difference, here sexual deviancy, as their synecdochic element.

Private Spaces of Queer Performativity

It is the private, indoor spaces of people's homes—rather than London's clubs, bathhouses or public lavatories—that in *A Way of Love* provide relatively safe meeting places for Bruce and queer men like him, drawn for the most part from the middle classes. Such spaces provide an opportunity for men—from a range of occupations, including the military and the police, and covering the age spectrum—to come together in shifting combinations, varying in size and makeup, in order to socialize and, perhaps, initiate sexual intimacies. As Henning Bech argues, “the city is not merely a stage on which a pre-existing, preconstructed sexuality is displayed and acted out; it is also a space where sexuality is generated” (Bech, 1987/1997, p. 118). Thus, regardless of whether queer men gather on “the first floor of a converted town house of Italianate dignity” (Courage, 1959, p. 15), in “the upper rooms of a ramshackle house near King's Cross” (pp. 27–28), or in a “mews flat in Marylebone” (p. 36), it is in these private but porous spaces that “the essential need for an understanding of queerness as collectivity” (Muñoz, 2009, p. 11) is enacted and reinforced. There the notion of ‘queer’ is performatively deconstructed—“redeployed, twisted, queered from a prior usage” as a means of shaming, accusing, pathologizing and insulting men who desire sex with other men—and repurposed by these same men to create a site of resistance where “an enabling social and political resignification” (Butler, 2011, pp. 173, 176) becomes possible. In these spaces the idea of ‘homosexual’—entangled as it so often is with queer—is similarly deconstructed and reterritorialized as it is unmoored from its origins in psychiatry and pathology, and used affirmatively to construct what many are happy to label a homosexual identity. Bech explains the process in this way:

Being together with other homosexuals allows one to mirror oneself in them and find self-affirmation. It allows one to share and interpret one's experiences. It allows one to learn in more detail what it means to be homosexual: how to act, what to think, thus lending substance to one's proclaimed identity, as well as assimilating certain techniques that may help bridge the gap between this identity and one's actual experiences and conduct. (Bech, 1987/1997, p. 116)

The private spaces of *A Way of Love*, thus, serve a pedagogical purpose, for it is within them that the queer men who gather there, prompted initially and for the most part by sexual desire, learn how to be queer. If, as Vygotsky claims, “learning results from people participating in contexts where semiotically-mediated social interaction is facilitated,” and that it involves “participation in shared practice and is mediated by the sociocultural” (Brown, 2005, p. 2), then the spaces where men who desire men gather become pedagogical sites characterized by the sharing of queer ways of thinking, knowing and doing, through various interactions, discursive practices, pedagogical scaffolds etc. that are typical of sites of learning. By inhabiting these sites, Bruce and his kind experience a sexuality education appropriate to their kind—one that is place-based and, by necessity, experiential, where “a learner constructs knowledge, skill, and value from direct experiences” (Knapp, 2008, p. 13).

Private homes become the setting for dinners, teas, themed parties, and other occasions, both formal and informal, where queer “badinage” (Courage, 1959, p. 37) finds its expression not only in conversation but also in song and musical performance, tableaux vivants, floor shows, cabaret and ballet. For example, a Winter Carnival is established by the draping of walls “with some kind of coarse white net” upon which sequins are sprinkled “to simulate the snowflakes”; a host and his guests—all males—ready themselves “for a cabaret turn” where they might take the part of “one of the principal actors” (Courage, 1959, p. 51); the staging of a “mock rehearsal,” a pas de deux from *Swan Lake* featuring “a prima ballerina of strapping virility,” devolves—not unexpectedly—into “a travesty of balletic disasters, interrupted by furious squeaks, wheezes and rheumatic groans from the two performers” (p. 54); and the same Swan later metamorphosizes into “a transparently dressed girl with a parasol, a cartwheel hat, and grotesquely large feet in white shoes” who sings in “aspiring falsetto” (p. 57):

Nobody knows, they only guess,

Why I stroll through the Park in a chiffon dress . . . (Courage, 1959, p. 57)

As Butler observes, such acts of gender miming and parody support the argument that gender itself is an impersonation—“the construal of gender-as-drag” (Butler, 2011, p. 175). In that many acts of queer performativity fit the category of drag, including those that take place in Courage’s novel, they are subversive—but not always unproblematically so—and only insofar as they mirror and expose “the mundane

impersonations by which heterosexually ideal genders are performed and naturalized” (Butler, 2011, p. 176). The extent to which the various drag acts and impersonations are successful in achieving this is, of course, open to debate.

While these queer gatherings and performances happen in private and behind closed doors rather than in public spaces, they, nevertheless, witness to the fact that men who sexually desire men “have learned to find each other; to map a commonly accessible world; to construct the architecture of queer space in a homophobic environment” (Berlant & Warner, 1998, p. 551) and, thus, attest to the possibility of queer world-making. The pervasive nature of queer and its discombobulating affects are not lost on Courage’s characters. As Randal, a visitor to the city, says:

‘Everybody’s queer,’ the American suddenly drawled. ‘That’s the truth—everybody in London’s queer. It gets me kinda confused.’ (Courage, 1959, p. 216)

While queer theorists Berlant and Warner (1998) focus primarily on queer world-making and “the radical aspirations of queer culture building” as they pertain to public spaces, it is important to acknowledge that queer world-making happens in any space—including the fictional spaces of *A Way of Love*—where “the heterosexual couple is no longer the referent or the privileged example of sexual culture” (Berlant & Warner, 1998, p. 548). The private spaces of *A Way of Love*, the spaces within which the novel’s queer world emerges and is nurtured, have their own “entrances, exits, unsystematized lines of acquaintance, projected horizons, typifying examples, alternate routes, blockages, incommensurate geographies (Berlant & Warner, 1998, p. 558). Much of what happens behind the closed doors of *A Way of Love* can, therefore, be understood as anticipating and preparing the way for queer collectivities to come—the post-gay-liberation types of queerness evident in ACT UP, Gay Pride parades, and other public manifestations of queer seen in more recent decades, all of which continue to bear the traces of their queer past.

If queerness is “a temporal arrangement in which the past is a field of possibility in which subjects can act in the present in the service of a new futurity” (Muñoz, 2009, p. 16), then the décor, furnishings, and ornamentation of the private spaces of *A Way of Love*, and the conversation and behaviour that take place in them, assume a utopic significance, not just because they reference and give witness to a queer past—mythical

or historical—where men took men as lovers, but on account of the contribution they make to the formation of queer collectivities to come. This happens through their validation of a queer present, no matter how fragmentary or fleeting, and the hope they hold out for a queer future. As Burke observes, “the novel gestures toward a plethora of . . . queer personages ranging from modern individuals, such as Tchaikovsky, Proust, and Gide, to Hellenistic figures—for example Eros, Ganymede and Sappho” (Burke, 2008, p. 107). Certainly, a queer sociality is encrypted in the objects found in the houses and rooms that Bruce and his kind inhabit. A “complete set of Gide” (Courage, 1959, p. 43), positioned prominently in Bruce’s bookshelves, codedly announces his sexual orientation to those in the know, while the potted hyacinth on his mantelpiece—a plant named after the divine Hyacinthus, “so beautiful that Apollo fell in love with him” (Grimal, 1986, p. 218)—prompts a comparison between Bruce and Philip’s partnership and that of the two male gods and lovers. Bruce finds the hyacinth’s strong scent “disturbing” (Courage, 1959, pp. 35, 41), perhaps an intimation that his relationship with Philip will come to grief—just as Hyacinthus’ liaison with Apollo ended with his own bloody, if accidental, death.

It is worth emphasizing again that *A Way of Love* makes no reference either to public events of the day or to political matters that might impact on the lives of homosexual men. Nor does it “articulate notions of ‘queerness’ within frameworks that reflect emergent queer politicisation and the ethnic model of gay identity” (Burke, 2008, pp. 97–98)—as Witi Ihimaera’s *Nights in the Gardens of Spain* (1995) and *The Uncle’s Story* (2000) do in later decades. For example, while a rereading of Plato’s *Symposium* by Bruce’s old university friend and lover, Victor, provides an opportunity to consider “that marvellous encomium Socrates utters about our kind of love” (Courage, 1959, p. 87), it results not in a serious theorization of the nature of male same-sex love, but in the rather queer conclusion—gently subversive as it is—that despite “all that merging of physical and spiritual beauty between the lover and the beloved . . . they must have had terrific romps with their boyfriends without caring tuppence about any spiritual relationship afterwards” (Courage, 1959, p. 88). A recognition of shared queer aspirations with the Greeks—and the intuition that a queer thread, or at least the trace of one, runs through history—is implicit in Victor’s observation that “still, like us they did hanker for something different” (Courage, 1959, p. 88). Such a comment—despite or perhaps because of its seeming superficiality—betrays a queer aesthetic which not

only “lets us feel that this world is not enough, that indeed something is missing,” but also “contains blueprints and schemata of a forward-dawning futurity” (Muñoz, 2009, p. 1).

The strongest and most overt protest against heteronormativity and the status quo in *A Way of Love* is in fact directed at the British literary establishment and, by implication, the censorship laws which exclude or limit the presentation of homosexuality in a sympathetic light for fear of public scandal. This comes in the form of a lively dinner table conversation where the matter of the invisibility of queer characters in English fiction—where “murder’s considered a proper subject while love between two men definitely isn’t” (Courage, 1959, p. 110)—surfaces. While a strong desire is expressed “to read a novel about queers that treats us as human beings like other people” (Courage, 1959, p. 110), this may be understood as expressing not only the frustration and anger of the book’s queer characters, but the author’s own well-grounded fear that *A Way of Love* faced rejection by potential publishers on the grounds of its ‘indecent,’ or after publication risked being withdrawn from sale for the same reason.

Refusing the Queer, Refusing Self-Synecdoche

As we have seen, Bruce, in claiming membership of the “immense league” of men like himself who share “a common erotic compulsion” (Courage, 1959, p. 145), readily and freely self-synecdochizes to form collectivity. But in the absence of any public validation of homosexuality, “difference itself” becomes the “synecdochic element” (Spivak, 2012, p. 437) that establishes the group which Bruce claims as his own. Philip, however, for much of the span of his relationship with Bruce, is “not willing to commit himself to membership of a league he saw fit to disdain, while sharing not the least of their compulsions” (Courage, 1959, p. 145). His refusal to self-synecdochize on the basis of his sexual desires results in Philip’s loss of agency—for, as Spivak reminds us, “agency presumes collectivity” (Spivak, 2012, p. 436).

The intensity of Bruce’s attraction to Philip, which is generated at their initial, accidental encounter, is attributed by Bruce to “the hungers of a nature I happen to delight in sharing with other animals” (Courage, 1959, p. 254). Indeed, he honours the male body, “that envelope of man . . . for its pleasures and its carnal beauty” (p. 10). Bruce, in describing Philip, emphasizes his partner’s inherent animality—most often expressed in terms of feline imagery. For example, readers are told by Bruce of “the

animal fact of his [Philip's] body" (p. 205) and of "a sort of animal impasse" (p. 239) that he and Philip experience in a moment of tension between them. Recalling their first meeting, Bruce describes Philip's "youthful face as resentful, as lost and as ignorant of its charm, as that of some tiger-cub surprised behind the bars of a cage" (Courage, 1959, p. 12). He repeatedly refers to Philip's "young face" (p. 41) and "the golden glare of the eyes directed at mine" (p. 11) as "tigerish" (pp. 11, 41, 95, 127, 188). Most tellingly, when Philip leaves his own accommodation to live in Bruce's house, Bruce figures Philip's move as an emancipation of "this beloved creature, this young tiger I was releasing from his lair or his cage." (p. 120). But released where and for what purpose?

Bruce certainly recognizes the resonances between his own aloneness—past and present—and that of Philip. On seeing Philip's dismal furnished room in Earls Court for the first time, Bruce is reminded of his own painful loneliness as a young man new to London: "I felt a shrinking in my soul, a sympathy for this lad beside me who might be as I had been" (Courage, 1959, p. 78). Yet, Bruce's "releasing" of Philip from the confines of his "furnished room in digs" (Courage, 1959, pp. 120, 77) seems to offer more than the possibility of an end to loneliness. In Spivakian terms, it is an invitation to Philip to self-synecdochize on the basis of an instinctive animality and a sexual desire for other males, both hitherto largely unexplored and unexpressed by the young man. Throughout *A Way of Love*, Courage carefully and subtly establishes a metaphorical connection between the repression of erotic desire by men who are sexually attracted to men and the confinement of animals in cages. At key points in the novel, "the cough and roar of the lions or the harsh yell of the cranes" (Courage, 1959, p. 24), which are enclosed at the neighbouring zoo, can be heard by Bruce from his bedroom window. In stating that such sounds "bring the jungle to my bedroom windows" (Courage, 1959, p. 24), Bruce is opening the way for a range of possible interpretations, all of which must account for animal and human desires that have been neutered or debased. By the end of the novel the animal cries emanating from the zoo are of such intensity as to convey extreme levels of frustration and menace, signifying, perhaps, Philip's inability to follow his desires and Bruce's anger that Philip cannot do so.

In all this, Bruce clearly recognizes that his particular relationship with Philip, though monogamous, "had its deepest roots in a common gratification of the senses" (Courage,

1959, p. 254), that is, in a desire that necessarily extends beyond the boundaries of any private life with Philip to include friends and strangers who also claimed membership of that vast league of men who desired other men. In contrast, Philip, believing Bruce to be the one man who'd make him happy for ever, insists from the beginning that their affair be "strictly something between ourselves, a matter à deux" (Courage, 1959, p. 107), that is, a private relationship that operates within a carefully circumscribed domestic space. Expressing the view that Bruce is only interested in physical attraction, Philip is emphatic that he wants nothing to do with Bruce's "friends of an understood kind" whom he believes "scornful, rapacious, terrifying" (Courage, 1959, p. 107). As Bruce sees it, Philip is afraid that "he would instantly find himself branded as 'one of *them*, because of *us*'" (Courage, 1959, p. 107).

Paradoxically, the partnership that at first seemed to offer Philip and Bruce the possibility of escape from aloneness and loneliness becomes closed-in on itself, one of self-imposed isolation. This relationship—disconnected as it is from others—is repeatedly figured as a "private island" separated from the greater landmass: "You might be on an island, Mr Quantock, just the two of you" (Courage, 1959, pp. 173, 140), observes Rose, their housekeeper. On the rare occasions when the pair attempt to socialize with others, the effort is described as "an excursion into foreign country, a trip away from our island" or as an "expedition away from our 'island'" (Courage, 1959, pp. 165, 212). In refusing to associate with friends of Bruce's kind, Philip is effectively refusing the queer, thus, blocking "a portal into worlds" which Muñoz describes as "fuller, more sensual, brighter, vaster" (O'Rourke, 2014, p. 34). By avoiding queer spaces Philip is also refusing the life-giving opportunities which they provide.

Finding himself "unreasonably anxious not to lose the wider companionship of [his] kind," Bruce experiences the separation from the company of men like himself as "restriction . . . frustration . . . homesickness" (Courage, 1959, p. 145). While it is fair to say that Philip eventually allows Bruce to introduce him to a few of his queer friends, it is only when Philip is faced with the likely breakdown of their relationship that he belatedly and futilely makes a determination to *try* to integrate with Bruce's community:

. . . he [Philip] had felt that he must try to assimilate himself into the little world I shared with others of my kind, my circle. If he tried hard enough, he had told

himself, he could do it; he could turn himself into ‘one of those’. He would try all means; the assimilation might only be a matter of experiment. (Courage, 1959, p. 238)

Sara Ahmed’s insight that “(hetero) norms are investments, which are ‘taken on’ and ‘taken in’ by subjects” (Ahmed, 2014, pp. 146–147), is a useful point from which to begin an exploration of Philip’s understanding of and attitudes towards queer collectivities. If, as Ahmed argues, “heteronormativity functions as a form of public comfort by allowing bodies to extend into spaces that have already taken their shape,” then it is possible to understand why Philip—a man who is surely erotically attracted to another man—is, at the same time, so strongly drawn to heteronormativity as “a form of comforting” (Ahmed, 2014, p. 148). Although Philip tries hard to find comfort in heteronormative scripts, his wish to assimilate, to be absorbed into the heteronormative, nevertheless, reveals a desire to aspire to an impossible ideal, one that his relationship with Bruce suggests he is failing to live up to. Philip’s desire for the comfort of heterosexuality is articulated most clearly in his stated intention to *try* to marry, although he has no particular woman in mind: “I want to marry, one day, Bruce. I want to try—and you can’t stop me” (Courage, 1959, p. 240).

Philip is comfortable with the ideal of heteronormativity, even though he is often personally ill at ease within heterosexual spaces. Obversely, he is contented when alone with Bruce, but awkward in the company of Bruce’s queer friends. As Ahmed observes, “whilst being queer may feel uncomfortable within heterosexual space, it does not then follow that queers always feel comfortable in queer spaces” (Ahmed, 2014, p. 151).

Queering the Heteronormative?

Bruce, on the other hand, despite his professional success and apparent social poise, expresses “a discomfort with the scripts of heteronormative existence” (Ahmed, 2014, p. 151). For example, his contact with his family—that is, with his sister, Louise, her husband, Percy, and their two children, Jules and Virginia—is irregular and fleeting. As he says, theirs is “another world altogether” (Courage, 1959, p. 27). Louise, for her part, is unable to imagine, let alone comprehend, the ‘otherness’ of Bruce’s life. She regards the absence of a significant female in her brother’s life as a serious lack:

‘How can a man live in a house by himself? There’s something missing—hairpins on the carpet, a magazine left half open, a sprinkle of face-powder on the edge of the wash-basin upstairs.’ And she looks at me searchingly, silently. (Courage, 1959, p. 29)

On the rare occasions when Bruce is persuaded by Louise to visit her family at their farm in Suffolk, he hurries back as soon as he can to his “different world of London” (Courage, 1959, p. 31)—and to the company of his queer friends. As Bruce’s situation shows, it is “the bonds between queers, that ‘stop’ queer bodies from feeling comfortable in spaces that extend the form of the heterosexual couple” (Ahmed, 2014, p. 155). Ahmed, in proposing that “the effects of ‘not fitting’” are “a form of queer discomfort,” suggests that the unease that is experienced in heteronormative environments—the traditional family unit, for example—is generative insofar as it is “*about inhabiting norms differently*” (Ahmed, 2014, p. 155). In other words, ‘not fitting’ becomes productive when it queers the heteronormative. Ahmed’s point that queer is not so much concerned with transcending the normal, but with opening up pathways in life “that do not ‘follow’ those norms through” (Ahmed, 2014, p. 155) is poignantly illustrated in the queering of the relationship between Bruce and his adolescent nephew, Jules. Of all the relationships in *A Way of Love*, that which develops between uncle and nephew is in many ways the queerest—queerer, perhaps, than Bruce’s self-synecdochic relationship with the immense league of men of his own kind, and, clearly, queerer than his relationship with Philip, which in its domestic arrangements follows heteronormative lines. It is a relationship that presents itself as becoming-pedagogical, and, yet, one also strangely lacking in desire.

During a Christmas visit to Louise and her family in Suffolk, Bruce finds twelve-year-old Jules gazing at him “with candour and a love utterly devoid of desire” (Courage, 1959, p. 32). After briefly meeting Jules’ eye, Bruce’s averts his face. For Bruce—a man who above all values physical desire for “its power to alleviate the solitudes of my kind and as it may expand into love” (Courage, 1959, p. 255)—the sudden realization that love can seemingly arrive without desire is deeply discomforting, propelling his decision to return early to his empty house in London where he experiences an acute attack of loneliness. This Bruce seeks to alleviate, as is his habit, in the company of his own kind. Yet, Bruce is inextricably drawn to Jules, who, as Louise reports, loves

spending time with his uncle. During a long-promised visit with Jules to the zoo, Bruce reflects:

Two more years, three perhaps, and this child would be aware of himself as a man, the emotions of a lifetime ahead announcing themselves in a clear or tentative word uttered to another. What did I wish for him, this adult-to-be? Abundant happiness, abundant love certainly. (Courage, 1959, p. 170)

Thus, Bruce imagines an interpellation-to-come—the hailing of his nephew into adulthood by various affective forces, some strongly insistent, others less so. Like a good fairy godmother, Bruce calls down blessings of love and happiness upon Jules, but refuses to take any steps that might one way or another influence his nephew either to assimilate into the heteronormative or to resist it. In no way does he wish to advance Jules’ “necessary and delicate unfolding” (Courage, 1959, p. 170), which must be shaped by other forces and encounters.

For Bruce, there is no thought of exposing his nephew to “possibilities of living” (Ahmed, 2014, p. 155) that flout established norms. Yet, in asserting what amounts to a suspension of involvement in matters relating to Jules’ development, Bruce does not recuse himself entirely from a pedagogical role in Jules’ life. Bruce’s stance in regard to Jules is a stepping back, a postponement, rather than an abandonment of responsibility. A queerness is felt in the space between the said and the unsaid, in the agreement reached between uncle and nephew not to exchange a kiss on parting:

‘Listen, Jules—you mustn’t mind if I don’t kiss you goodbye in front of your mother.’

He continued to look out of the taxi window at the buses, undisturbed. ‘I don’t like people kissing me,’ he said.

‘That settles it then. When shall we meet again?’

‘When I’m older, I suppose. Or some time. I’ll come to see you when I’m in London.’

‘If ever you need any help I can give you . . .’ (Courage, 1959, pp. 170–171)

The queerness suggested here is “posited not as an identity or a substantive mode of being but as a way of becoming” (McCallum & Tuhkanen, 2011, p. 8). As such, it is not discernible within linear time or *chronos*, but makes itself felt in a temporality that is understood as *kairos* or opportunity. While their parting conversation indicates a

‘wait and see’ attitude, a suspension, on the part of both Bruce and Jules—and conceals a caution that the time is not yet right for the pair to forge a closer bond—the foundation for a path to a mutually beneficial relationship has, nevertheless, been laid.

Later, at Louise’s instigation, and following the breakdown of his relationship with Philip, the time is right for Bruce to respond affirmatively to the invitation to take a more active and overtly pedagogical role in Jules’ life:

. . . let me be allowed to make my declaration: so far as I am able I shall give to Jules the guidance of a dispassionate philanthropy none the less valid because neutral in desire. (Courage, 1959, p. 255)

In drawing the reader’s attention to his resolve to guide Jules and promote his welfare— but without desire—Bruce seems to suggest that it is both necessary and possible to exclude desire from what amounts to a pedagogical relationship. Hence, he is eager to stress that any future relationship with Jules would be “something frankly different in kind” (Courage, 1959, p. 255) from that with Philip. However, while Bruce’s assertion that his interest in Jules is free of erotic interest may be construed as self-protective— especially given the wide-spread, but groundless fear that homosexual men set out to corrupt youth and children—it can also be perceived as a move on Courage’s part to shore up the respectability and moral probity, not only of his narrator, but also of the body of homosexuals whom Bruce exemplifies.

But, does Bruce’s claim that it is possible to be dispassionate or neutral in any relationship with his nephew hold up? Or, is there a fault line running through it that serves as evidence of a queer encounter of ideas—“where meaning breaks down, defies its object, and unconsciously reverses its intentions” (Britzman, 2000b, p. 54, endnote 6)? If, as Britzman states, “sexuality is the first condition for human curiosity and hence the first condition or force of learning,” and that “without sexuality, the human would not desire to learn” (Britzman, 2000b, p. 38), then, it would seem that Bruce is mistaken in his belief that the erotic can be corralled off from the pedagogical—or that it is beneficial to do so. For without eros, our ability to live “a vital intellectual and social life,” and “our capacity to attach passionately to knowledge, other people, and life projects” (Britzman, 2000b, p. 36) are greatly diminished.

Bruce’s declaration that as far as he is able he will dedicate himself dispassionately to Jules’ wellbeing, heralds, then, a fraught venture—one which by positioning eros “as a

threat in need of containment” (Britzman, 2000b, p. 34), rather than as a potentially life-giving force, limits the relationship’s possibilities. Bruce’s partnership with Philip having ended, where will his desire—which Bruce affirmed so positively and consistently throughout the novel—find its expression? At the end of his narrative, Bruce’s silence as to where he stands in regard to any on-going self-synecdochization into that immense league of men who share “a common erotic compulsion” (Courage, 1959, p. 145)—which may or may not also be Courage’s silence—is telling.

Let’s turn to Spivak for enlightenment. As Simmons observes, “Spivak is sceptical of all collectivities that form a synecdoche” (Simmons, 2014, p. 142), for while synecdoches are necessary for agency, their formation also demands the putting aside of the surplus of subjectivity. In other words, in the formation of a collectivity, not all parts of a subject can be included in the ‘whole.’ Inevitably, much is lost. Hence, for Spivak, the value of self-synecdoche lies not in any concrete achievements that might be produced—a collectivity achieved tends to reproduce its own limitations and injustices—but in its ability to imagine and open up utopic possibilities through the figuration of collectivities to come.

To further his relationship with Jules it appears that Bruce believes he needs to put aside self-synecdoche and disassociate himself from that collectivity which he calls “our immense league” (Courage, 1959, p. 145). However, in doing so, Bruce not only refuses to admit a queering of his relationship with Jules, but also forecloses on possibilities opened up by any rearrangement of desires that permits the imagining of the proximity of eros and the pedagogical. By acceding to his sister’s warning that at the age of fifty he “must look time in the face,” Bruce chooses to view the future as “enemy” (Courage, 1959, p. 255). Thus, instead of positioning queerness as ‘horizon’—and, thereby, conceptualizing queer futurity as “infinite and immutable potentiality” (Muñoz, 2009, p. 127)—Bruce, as he concludes his story, appears to abandon efforts at attempting (queer) collectivities to come. There is, as he stoically acknowledges, “a lack, a vacancy” (Courage, 1959, p. 255) in his life.

Some Concluding Remarks

As I have attempted to show, James Courage’s *A Way of Love* may be read queerly, but also in ways that are consistent with Spivak’s project of aesthetic education, which sees the philosophical-literary as “the means for persistently attempting collectivities to

come” (Spivak, 2012, p. 464). In this chapter, I have drawn attention to ways in which Courage’s characters—depending on their willingness or reluctance to attempt collectivities to come—either embrace self-synecdochization or refuse it. In the next, I will focus on Spivak’s espousal of a pedagogy of hospitality which attends to the risky and uncertain work of welcoming and responding ethically to the other. Given that “hospitality implies letting the other in to oneself, to one’s own space” (Still, 2013, p. 13)—thereby threatening the domain and the integrity of the self—the practice of literary reading, which by its very nature demands an openness to the text, becomes an act of hospitality.

Chapter Eight

Spivak's Aesthetic Education—Pedagogy and Hospitality

The text puts us in a position, if we are reading carefully and following signals, to know what to look for when we are reading. It makes us ready to read in a certain way. Yet it is also necessary to remember that the expression or staging of a desire does not mean that the desire is fulfilled in the text. . . . To be able to lay out the desire so that the reader can participate in the desire is the first step. . . . The text shows a desire but not a fulfilment. A declarative becomes a question. The reader learns to read. The reader sees what the text is preparing her/him for, and then begins reading The next step is not to freeze the readings—readers who are going to become teachers! (Spivak, 2014, pp. 56–57)

Overview

Though complex and demanding, the work of Emmanuel Levinas—“one of the most profoundly original Western philosophers in the twentieth century”—provides a rich and rewarding archive for scholars wanting to position teaching and learning, not only in relation to “the new and the strange” (Zhao, 2016, pp. 323, 324), but, more especially, in response to that which arrives as radically other.

In this chapter I argue that a Levinasian ethics of alterity¹⁰—the ethical encounter of the other—drives Spivak's pedagogy, causing her to postpone the epistemological in order to indefinitely prevent the construction of the other “as object of knowledge,” and leading her to persistently prioritize that which is singular and unverifiable over “a nonspecific, pluralized otherness” (Spivak, 2012, pp. 316, 342). This approach, which has the ability to disturb and dismantle habitual ways of knowing and thinking, also has much to offer sexuality education, where, as in other fields, an emphasis on mastery of information has had a detrimental impact on knowing and reading. As we will see,

¹⁰ Spivak, in invoking Levinas as “the generic name” that covers those, including Derrida—and, I think, Biesta—who hold the view that “the eruption of the ethical interrupts and postpones the epistemological” (Spivak, 2012, p. 316), does so in order to advance her own argument: namely, that efforts to construct the other “as object of knowledge” (Spivak, 2012, p. 316) may be persistently interrupted and undone by way of her aesthetic education. Spivak's interest in Levinas—at least in relation to her own project—is, therefore, quite specific, ignoring as she does other aspects of his thought that are relevant to education. In concerning herself with “the figuration of the ethical as the impossible” (Spivak, 2012, p. 104), Spivak, like Levinas, locates ethics as more a matter of relation than of knowledge.

insofar as Spivak's pedagogy opens "hospitality into teleopoiesis" (Spivak, 2012, p. 302), activating the imagination to think "a borderless world of unconditional hospitality" (Spivak, 2014, p. 3), it also performs what has been described as "a new understanding of hospitality" (Westmoreland, 2008, p. 1)—one provoked by Derrida's question in response to the death of Levinas: "Is not hospitality an interruption of the self?" (Derrida, 1999a, p. 51). Such a question deserves to be posed in the context of a sexuality education that asks to be re-envisioned, one which is willing to attempt its own rethinking by daring to imagine the interruption of the self as a (queer) utopic enterprise.

As Spivak's aesthetic education suggests, "the mind's immune system" (Spivak, 2012, p. 383)—which all too often keeps us "imagining the object of hospitality only as the begging stranger at the door" (Spivak, 2000, p. 26)—is broken down by the sort of training that is performed by literary reading, especially when it is hospitable to alterity, interruption and suspension. This insight, which drives Spivak's pedagogical endeavours, has, I suggest, much to offer a sexuality education that seeks to become more than what it is.

The Patient Power of the Imagination

If the imagination plays a key role in Spivak's aesthetic education and figures significantly in her theorization of the ethical, it also, I suggest, has important work to do in the re-envisioning of a more hospitable sexuality education—a rethinking that acknowledges the otherness of sexuality and takes seriously the place of the aesthetic in the theorization of an ethically responsive and queerer field. This is because the imagination enables aesthetic encounters—including literary reading—to prepare "that space that allows us to survive in the singular and the unverifiable" (Spivak, 2012, p. 2), not by promoting a drive for knowledge but, rather, by revealing "the absence of a match between who we imagine the other to be and the wholly other that cannot be approximated" (Sharpe, 2014, p. 516).

Spivak's project of aesthetic education, in that it involves "reaching toward the distant other by the patient power of the imagination" or "touching the distant other with imaginative effort" (Spivak, 2012, pp. 404, 428)—and strives for a response from that distant other—articulates and seeks to enact "an ethics of alterity" (Ray, 2009, p. 80). Yet, the distant or wholly other is not necessarily far-off in spatial or temporal terms,

for, as Spivak explains, “the most proximate is the most distant, as you will see if you try to grab it exactly, in words, or, better yet, to make someone else grab it” (Spivak, 2012, p. 406). This is particularly so in relation to our sexuality, an aspect of ourselves that we position as question, but which in its “foreignness—often understood as sexuality itself—refuses to be known” (Gilbert, 2014, p. xix). Long-time scholar Jeffrey Weeks describes researching and writing about sexuality as “a bit like jumping blindfold into a deep, dark pool of murky water” (Weeks, 2011, p. xi). Spivak, as we have seen, tellingly figures reading in similar terms—as a leap into the other’s sea.

As it shapes an ethics of alterity, the imagination also cultivates an attitude of hospitality that is invaluable when swimming in the often murky waters of sexuality education. If Spivak, like Derrida, asks that we embrace hospitality as an interruption of the self, this is because welcoming the other, responding ethically to the other, demands it. Yet, hospitality is always a risky and uncertain business, especially in the context of a re-envisioned sexuality education, one which in attempting to imagine a queerer world not only demands better conditions for queer students, teachers and whānau, but also insists that “we must make room as well for our unintelligible selves” (Gilbert, 2014, p. xxiv). Thus, when a sexuality education that acknowledges excess and embraces complexity is accused of inviting damage to “the integrity of the self, or the domain of the self” (Still, 2013, p. 13), then we need to be aware that this charge may conceal an unwillingness to admit that the ‘selves’ which participate in the pedagogical relations that make up sexuality education are, as Gilbert argues, already compromised—“riddled by contradictions; injured, in part, by sexuality” (Gilbert, 2014, p. xxv).

In a sense, an ethic of hospitality operating inside as well as outside sexuality education challenges educators to “construct structures that are ‘auto-immune’—bodies that break down their own immunities against the coming of the other” (Caputo & Cook, 2016, p. ix). It also “assumes a decentred subjectivity” (Ruitenberg, 2016, p. 9) that is at odds with modernist understandings of the human subject, including those which support ethical frameworks centred on autonomy, virtue and wellbeing—structures that largely determine current approaches to sexuality education, but which for the most part neglect perspectives that seek “to account for things in non-anthropocentric mode,” or which bring about what Jackson and Mazzei term “a posthumanist becoming” (Allen, 2018b, pp. 18, 67).

Education—An Interruption

The aim of Spivak’s project of aesthetic education, as we have seen, is to bring about “an epistemological change that will rearrange desires” (Spivak, 2012, p. 2). As if in tune with Biesta’s call to “engage with the question of whether what we desire is desirable, not only for our own lives, but also for the lives we try to live with others on a planet that has limited capacity for fulfilling all the desires projected onto it” (Biesta, 2017b, p. 4), Spivak seeks to dismantle habitual ways of thinking and knowing, thereby, “resisting a humanist episteme that presupposes the other to be identical with the self” (Sharpe, 2014, pp. 515–516).

Spivak, like Biesta, holds that genuine education necessitates “an *interruption* of our desires” (Biesta, 2017b, p.16). Her careful use of the adjective ‘uncoercive’ to describe the rearrangement of desires which necessarily occurs as a consequence of an authentic education—her own project of aesthetic education, for example—signals not that classrooms are free of psychological “shoving and pushing” (Spivak, 2014, p. 81), but that an interruptive education must always take account of “a ceaseless future anterior, something that will have happened without our knowledge, particularly without our control, the subject coming into being” (Spivak, 2012, p. 243). The lesson from this is that no matter how well we plan as teachers we cannot determine the future. The best we can do is take account of its undecidability! Biesta makes a similar point to Spivak. By describing teaching as *dissensus*, he links teaching to the incommensurable—“a future way of existing of the student” (Biesta, 2017b, p. 6) that is foreseen neither by the student nor by the educator.

The emphasis that both Spivak and Biesta afford the interruptive in education reveals an indebtedness to Levinas. Biesta, for example, in arguing that “the fundamental educational gesture is that of interrupting and questioning development” (Biesta, 2017b, p. 17), follows Levinas’ line, which holds that the experience of our subjectness always comes as an interruption of immanence. Similarly, Spivak acknowledges that her aesthetic education builds on the work of Levinas in that it is premised on the proposition “that the eruption of the ethical interrupts and postpones the epistemological” (Spivak, 2012, p. 316). If, as has been claimed, “Levinas’s theories of subjectivity and teaching lead us to reconsider the very nature of education, what and who education is for” (Strhan, 2012, p. 2), then Spivak and Biesta, through their staging of teaching as an interruptive practice, one that attends to the impossibility of education

in the Derridean sense, challenge what has become “*the* prevailing, contemporary educational imaginary”—that education is a student-centred and -driven enterprise “where it is ultimately for learners to construct their own understandings and build their own skills” (Biesta, 2017b, p. 45). Under this regime, the main job of an educator, including the sexuality education teacher, is to set up the means for learning to happen, often by facilitating “participatory processes” with “learners interacting with each other” (Ministry of Education, 2015, p. 26). Underpinning this pedagogical approach is the belief, often unstated and unquestioned, that the universe is “*immanent* to my understanding”, and that it is, therefore, possible through my efforts to comprehend information and facts “to bring the world ‘out there’ back to me” (Biesta, 2017b, pp. 46–47).

Sexuality education as it is officially mandated in Aotearoa New Zealand is not free from this emphasis, with the Ministry of Education helping schools to plan and deliver to students sexuality education programmes “that connect with their lives, are relevant, interactive, and student-centred” (Ministry of Education, 2015, p. 5)—as well as up-to-date. While there are pluses in having a student-centred sexuality education—including the involvement of students “in setting content and in contributing to pedagogical decisions” (Ministry of Education, 2015, p. 5)—there are negatives as well, especially if a preoccupation with student-centred learning diminishes those approaches to teaching that “open up other possibilities for students to exist in and with the world” (Biesta, 2017b, p. 5). Of particular concern to Spivak are those types of education which intentionally or unintentionally work to limit “the radical interruption of ethical hope” (Spivak, 2012, p. 227) by cultivating forms of narcissism that confuse self-recognition with self-knowledge.

Imaginative Activism and the Other

Although “ethical values” are one of the “personal and interpersonal skills and related attitudes” (Ministry of Education, 2015, p. 12) that students are expected to develop in the course of their sexuality education, a reading of the Ministry of Education’s *Sexuality Education: A guide for principals, boards of trustees, and teachers* (2015)¹¹

¹¹ While ethics and ethical concepts/standpoints are, perhaps, contextualized more effectively in the 2020 guide (see Ministry of Education, 2020b, pp. 8, 30, 31, 37, 39) than in the 2015 version, they still remain largely untheorized. The Ministry’s confident assertion that “students are ethical decision makers and guardians of the world of the future” (p. 26) would benefit from

suggests that ethics are seriously under-theorized by those who determine the direction of sexuality education in Aotearoa New Zealand. This is this case despite the requirement that students at senior levels compare and contrast ethical standpoints in regard to such matters as sex, gender and intimacy, as well as analyse ethical issues that influence gender, relationships, sexuality and sexual health (see Ministry of Education, 2015, pp. 19, 21). The Ministry's stipulation that school programmes "acknowledge the sexual diversity of New Zealand communities" (Ministry of Education, 2015, p. 11) is all well and good, as is its attention to equity, respect and human rights. However, good intentions do little to compensate for the absence of the sorts of theoretical tools that would assist teachers and students to grapple ethically with issues of difference—let alone in ways that allow queer utopias to be glimpsed through the aesthetic.

In a similar vein, it is telling that the Education Review Office attempts to advance its agenda of promoting and supporting student wellbeing through sexuality education without reference to ethics, an important aspect of education which has traditionally been couched in terms of such notions as good, duty, right, obligation, choice and virtue. At a time when, as the Education Review Office acknowledges, "there is an increasing awareness of issues around sexual harassment, the fundamental importance of positive consent, and much greater visibility and celebration of diversity" (Education Review Office, 2018, p. 3), it is unfortunate that ideas of wellbeing are not being exposed to what Louisa Allen terms a "multi-dimensional" (Allen, 2018b, p. 5) ethics—ethics which theorize their own ongoing productive entanglement with ontology and epistemology.

It seems that a number of sexuality education researchers working in the New Zealand context—including those seeking to queer sexuality education research or to cultivate an openness to the politics of pleasure (see Allen et al., 2014; Quinlivan, 2018)—are open to ethics being theorized in ways that allow it to do more than provide students with opportunities to "develop attitudes of respect and of care and concern for themselves and other people" (Ministry of Education, 2015, p. 14), or to acquire the ability to frame sexuality issues in terms of responsibilities and rights. Louisa Allen, for example, working from a feminist new materialist perspective, explicitly positions

an exposure to the sorts of queer criss-crossings that become possible whenever theory is permitted to serve an "imaginative activism" (Spivak, 2014, p. 80)—including that advanced by Spivak's aesthetic education through its attendance to literary reading.

“ethics and justice” (Allen, 2018b, p. 19) at the heart of sexuality education research and teaching. By attending to the materiality of the body and relinquishing “a concern for mastering the field through acquisition of knowledge” (Allen, 2018b, pp. 5, 13), she attempts a sexuality education which in acknowledging the inseparability of ethics, ontology and epistemology resists the pull of neoliberalism and other ‘stuck’ ways of thinking and doing.

Spivak’s aesthetic education, like Allen’s feminist new materialist approach to sexuality education, refuses methods of education “in which desired outcomes are known in advance and steps to achieve them pre-determined” (Allen, 2018b, p. 133). In their work, both rely on ‘inventive’ pedagogies which attempt to inaugurate an ‘event’—that is, the incoming of the unexpected, the uninvited, the singular, the unverifiable, and the unprogrammable. However, while Allen pursues a pedagogy that “does not pre-exist the material encounter” (Allen, 2018b, p. 133), Spivak favours—but does not restrict herself to—a pedagogy derived from the Levinasian notion that the ethical “comes to us from the interhuman relationship” (Levinas, 2017, p. 91).¹² Following Levinas’ line that “the only absolute value is the human possibility of giving the other priority over oneself” (Levinas, 2017, p. 96)—sometimes as the only alternative to dehumanization and violence—Spivak maintains that the best preparation for an ethical encounter with the unknown other is through an aesthetic education. This, she argues, involves “an obstinate attempt at a formal training of the imagination in the classroom” (Spivak, 2012, p. 118).

While Spivak steadfastly resists providing a schematic programme detailing how she would do this, the fragmentary accounts of her own classroom practices that emerge from her interviews, essays and lectures suggest that her pedagogical direction is not only shaped by a Levinasian ethics, but is also very much concerned with the process of what Biesta terms *subjectification*—the means by which students become “subjects in

¹² Spivak, in her essay ‘Imperative to Re-imagine the Planet’ (Spivak, 2012, pp. 335–350), attends to the notion of planetarity in order to argue that the human possibility of giving the other priority over oneself must extend to the prioritization of the nonhuman other. By insisting that we rethink ourselves “as intended or interpellated by planetary alterity,” Spivak invites us to position ourselves in “a dialogic of accountability” (Spivak, 2012, pp. 347, 350). This requires us to re-imagine ourselves not as global entities or agents, but as planetary accidents and creatures.

their own right and not just remain objects of the desires and directions of others” (Biesta, 2017b, p. 28). Thus, Spivak’s pedagogy, like Biesta’s, is “intimately bound up with the ways in which we engage with and respond to what and who is other, with what and who speaks to us, addresses us, calls us, and thus calls us forth” (Biesta, 2017b, p. 3).

In arguing that Spivak’s pedagogy is insistently mindful of alterity, it is necessary to state that in her teaching and classroom encounters Spivak makes no claims to *know* the other. Rather, as Sharpe notes, Spivak “cautions against letting our intellectual enterprise be guided by a will to knowledge that equates the ethical with a desire to know” (Sharpe, 2014, p. 516). Refusing always to construct the other as an object of knowledge, Spivak advocates instead for what she calls “imaginative activism” (Spivak, 2014, p. 80) in an effort to change epistemological performance. She seeks to do this by demanding what seems impossible—“that the other must be imagined as both self and other” (Sharpe, 2014, p. 516). By deliberately prompting her students to ‘think’ this aporetic structure—a structure expressed by way of a catachresis or strained metaphor—Spivak shifts their attention to the mismatch “between who we imagine the other to be and the wholly other that cannot be approximated” (Sharpe, 2014, p. 516). Our response to this double bind, Spivak emphasizes, must be negotiation rather than resolution.

Thus, although Spivak acknowledges that as teacher her “brief always is to enter the other’s space”—and that “the idea of teacher has been one that allows [her] to do that jumping into the other’s space” (Spivak et al., 2004, pp. 205, 216)—she insists that this interruption comes about not by way of knowledge, let alone information, but through the imagination. As she says, “my idea of entering the other’s space calls for the imagination at its most active” (Spivak et al., 2004, p. 207). For Spivak, the imagination plays a vital role in developing “the impulse towards the ethical” that “has to be activated away from the underived selfishness which operates in all creaturely life” (Spivak, 2014, p. 3). The imagination works most directly and effectively in the context of what, in the widest sense, is a literary education that “trains the imagination to step out of self-interest” (Spivak, 2014, p. 4) in order to think a world—and a sexuality—without borders. By “engaging with the imagination in the simplest way,” we as readers learn to “suspend our own interests into the language that is happening in the text, the text of another traced voice, the voice of the presumed producer of the

text” (Spivak, 2014, p. 4). Insofar as reading demands a leap of the imagination, it also requires faith and humility. For, it is no easy thing “to meet the world without preconceived notions of what we will find there” (McCarthy, 2015, p. 30)—even if the world that we meet emerges from the words of a literary text.

As Lyons and Franklin observe, in Spivak’s view “teaching and the classroom are sacred, or close to sacred” (Spivak et al., 2004, p. 218). This is not on account of any ritual or ceremony that teaching might entail or enact, but because it involves an encounter with the wholly other that defies and exceeds all strategy, manoeuvring, negotiation and reason. In that teaching, for Spivak, is “a situation where the otherness of the other, the mysteriousness of the other” is always taken to be unavoidable and irreducible, she sees herself as being “more at the mercy of the teaching situation than someone who is planning moves” (Spivak et al., 2004, p. 218).

Given that deconstructing the other as an object of knowledge is an important aspect of Spivak’s pedagogy, it is not surprising that her approach is both to “teach and unteach at the same time in the classroom” (Spivak et al., 2004, p. 220). As Spivak describes it, “I make a statement and immediately counter with possible objections to the statement” (Spivak et al., 2004, p. 220). The imagination plays an important part in this ‘unteaching’ in that it is its task “to place a question mark upon the declarative”—especially those statements that confidently assert themselves as *fact*—and to refocus attention “upon the detail that often escapes the attention of people who work to solve what seem to be more immediate problems” (Spivak, 2014, p. 5). In choosing to describe her work in terms of “the micrology of practice” (Spivak, 2014, p. 5), Spivak points to the need to pay attention and afford value to the little things, the seemingly insignificant aspects of gender, sexuality and class, for example, that are often dismissed as being unimportant or peripheral, except to the likes of women, servants, and queers. As Spivak sees it, “a literary education can direct one to noticing these otherwise ignored details” (Spivak, 2014, p. 7).

Spivak, by yoking the notions of teaching and unteaching, and insisting on “unlearning learning in order to ask: What is it to learn?” (Spivak, 2012, p. 162), aligns herself with the pedagogics of unlearning, an educational orientation that “signifies both growth and the undoing or reversing of that growth” (Cochran-Smith, 2003, p. 25). In this way, Spivak challenges us to “think about the way that learning happens as a disruptive,

unsettling, or better, an interruptive force” (Dunne, 2016, p. 17). Insofar as she both teaches and unteaches, she fulfils Dunne’s criteria of a worthy teacher:

Good teachers are teachers who suspend knowledge, who open up the abyss. They’re the ones that know that counselling Enlightenment values of self-reliance and autonomy initiate an inescapable double bind. ‘Listen to me but don’t listen to me.’ ‘Listen to me: Think for yourself!’ (Dunne, 2016, p. 20)

While uncertainty is usually perceived as a privation or lack, the pedagogics (of unlearning), which Spivak advocates, ascribe value to the concept and practice of suspension. This is so because suspension “enables uncertainty to appear as something other than a negative form of knowing” (McCarthy, 2015, p. 23)—and so prepares the way for the arrival of the unexpected. Thus, it also marks “the possibility of always becoming otherwise” (McCarthy, 2015, p. 26).

In the context of a sexuality education such as ours, which historically has been more concerned with “exhortations to practice safer sex”—because “bodies are deemed in need of risk-management” (Allen, 2014, p. 89)—than with creating possibilities for becoming otherwise, many will be threatened by the prospect of a reimagined sexuality education. For, if the scope of sexuality education is to widen and its horizons shift, then long- and firmly-held notions about the need to control corporeality must be unlearned. In their different ways, Allen and Spivak attend to this unlearning, and, thus, make it possible to think a sexuality education without borders—corporeal or imaginary. If Allen’s efforts to “demonstrate student bodies as sexual beyond mindful ‘will’” (Allen, 2014, p. 92) attest to a way of unlearning that locates agency in the body’s materiality, then Spivak’s aesthetic education sidesteps the ‘will’ by developing receptivity/hospitality through *teleiopoiesis*, thereby training the imagination to move beyond self-interest while prompting us to re-think agency as “permission to be figurative” (Spivak, 2012, p. 437). This permission comes with entering the text.

Entering the Text

Given that information is never enough—in sexuality education as elsewhere—and the use of literature as “evidentiary authentication” (Spivak, 2014, p. 165) a misappropriation, Spivak maintains that the best shot at changing habits of mind is a literary education, whereby “one inserts oneself inside the text of the other, not as her/himself,” but in an attempt to “ventriloquize” (Spivak, 2014, p. 31) or take on the

voice of the other. This insertion or ventriloquization is made possible through literary reading, which, as Derrida explains, involves “a *suspended* relation to meaning and reference” (Derrida & Attridge, 1992, p. 48). Thus, in addition to facilitating what Samuel Taylor Coleridge famously referred to as the “willing suspension of disbelief” (Coleridge, 1817/2000, p. 314), literary reading allows us to experiment with “different positionalities (including a position of naiveté) in order to understand something of positioning itself” (McCarthy, 2015, p. 27). For this to happen, it is necessary that Spivak’s formula for reading—“not to excuse the text, nor to accuse the text, but to use the text by entering into its ‘protocol’” (Bruns, 2011, p. 124)—be observed. Spivak’s insistence that the reader enter the protocol of the text springs from her belief that “the text puts us in a position, if we are reading carefully and following signals, to know what to look for when we are reading” (Spivak, 2014, p. 56). It is the text itself that prepares and guides us to read in a certain way.

While texts do many things, from the perspective of Spivak’s project of aesthetic education and its potential to contribute to a re-envisioning of sexuality education, their most important function is, perhaps, “the expression or staging of . . . desire” (Spivak, 2014, p. 56)—a process which Spivak addresses in the epigraph to this chapter. In this regard, texts are most effective when they are able to position desire in such a way that readers can participate in it. Such participation is possible because of “the transactional nature of reading” (Spivak, 2012, p. 323)—that is, the “reciprocal, mutually defining relationship” (Rosenblatt, 1986, p. 122) which develops between the reader and the literary text. As the relationship between reader and text proceeds in “a to-and-fro spiral” (Rosenblatt, 1995, p. 26), each is continually affected by the contribution of the other. Through literary reading and the teaching of literary reading—processes by which a text becomes “a transactional space”—the reader-student is prepared “for the ethical reflex” (Spivak, 2014, p. 50). Spivak’s understanding of the text as transactional space clearly echoes Donald Winnicott’s articulation of the concept of transitional space as “an intermediate area of *experiencing*, to which inner reality and external life both contribute” (Bruns, 2011, p. 26). While any text is transactional—to the extent that it has the potential to teach the reader how to read it and the world—literary texts are especially so, not only because they focus the reader’s attention on the use of form and technique as well as on content, but because in communicating a sense of ‘voice’ they

also evoke the sensory, thereby creating the possibility of arousing a strong affective response in the reader.

In that it occupies “the third space between an individual’s inner world and the external world, as both self and not-self simultaneously” (Bruns, 2011, p. 30), a literary text becomes a transitional object, but one that has a transactional function. Guided by the words on the page, which come from the external world, the reader constructs images, sounds, and events that live in the inner world of the imagination. In giving herself over to the text, that is, by suspending her desire to read the text in a habitual, pre-programmed way, the reader allows the text to take her in a certain unforeseen direction. In this way, reading “invites one to be uncomfortably at home with one’s unthinkable thoughts of self in the words of others” (Mishra Tarc, 2015, p. 92). As we read—and respond positively to the invitation proffered by the text—“we experience a transferable quality of our mind, as our dreams, desires, memories, and experiences intermingle in thoughts of others” (Mishra Tarc, 2015, p. 79). Given that boundaries between self and other, inner and outer, become fluid in the transitional/transactional space, the activity of literary reading that occurs there is “capable of deeply influencing readers’ experiences of difference and patterns of relating to otherness” (Bruns, 2015, p. 34). As Mishra Tarc sees it, Spivak’s project of aesthetic education and its training of the imagination provides educators with the opportunity to “reorient literacy as the process by which we might become differently human” (Mishra Tarc, 2015, p. 52)—and, I suggest, differently sexual. In support of Spivak, who warns teachers and future teachers engaging with texts “not to freeze the readings” (Spivak, 2014, p. 57), Mishra Tarc argues that we need to read literature in ways that keep meaning on the move as we “learn how to use literacy to think and story anew our lives and the lives of others” (Mishra Tarc, 2015, p. 55).

Spivak’s commitment to the teaching of literary reading—including her insistence that for the reader and the teacher this process involves “sustained training into suspending oneself in the interest of the other person or persons” (Spivak, 2014, p. 6)—calls for a certain trust, an attitude of openness and receptivity on the part of both. In this regard, it is helpful, once again, to contrast the orientation implied by Spivak’s aesthetic education with “the constructivist ‘hegemony’ in education,” which presumes that all knowing is “the result of the activity of an intentionally constructing mind” (Biesta, 2017b, p. 33). Given her call for imaginative activism to supplement knowledge,

Spivak, like Biesta, clearly recognizes the limitations and dangers of constructivist pedagogies which all too often not only refuse to allow the ethical “to interrupt or suspend the epistemological” (McCarthy, 2015, p. 27), but are also wary of teacherly interruption and the notion of “putting something in the student’s trajectory” (Biesta, 2017a, p. 88). Spivak’s rejection of constructivist approaches to the teaching of literary texts is motivated to a large extent by her unease with those theories of reading which affirm that “the learner is presumed to be mastermind and manipulator of language,” or privilege the self as “the sole producer of one’s capacity to think, speak, and write” (Mishra Tarc, 2015, p. 48). In this, Spivak sides with Derrida, who, in taking the view that it is language that constructs us and contains us, speaks of language as *monolingualism*: “an absolute habit,” which I am unable to challenge, “except by testifying to its omnipresence in me” (Derrida, 1998, p. 1).

Following Derrida’s argument that language constitutes us—in that “it dictates even the ipseity of all things” (Derrida, 1998, p. 1) to us—Spivak proposes that “if we can grasp that all human children access language that is ‘outside,’ as mother tongue” (Spivak, 2014, p. 86), then we might also be able to grasp the notion that we become human in response to an outside call which precedes us. In articulating this position, Spivak strengthens the case for her own aesthetic education which attends to the development of the ethical response “created epistemologically as a collectivity of minds” (Spivak, 2014, p. 96). This, she admits, is a challenging task, one requiring persistent effort, because in an educational environment determined largely by neoliberalism, collectivity is constantly undermined by individualism and competition. Despite this uncertainty, Spivak remains committed to the opportunities that literary reading provides for attempting collectivities to come in the classroom, where—she both hopes and doubts—“there is ‘the good teacher,’ ‘the good student,’ on the way to collectivity” (Spivak, 2012, p. 4).

For Spivak, then, the focus of the literature classroom is not “an active and reflexive use of the mechanics of the language,” but the shaping of “the mind of the student so that it can resemble the mind of the so-called implied reader of the literary text, even when that is a historically distanced cultural fiction” (Spivak, 2012, p. 36). Thus, Spivak’s teaching of literary texts is premised on the notion that as we read a text and encounter its singular use of language we open ourselves up to being constructed—as well as deconstructed—by it. Deconstruction, then, is not a destructive process. As

Spivak points out, “what people forget is that there is a C-O-N in the middle of that word” (Spivak, 2014, p. 135).

Mishra Tarc, in claiming that “we have not yet come to think of reading as a process by which the self and the world can be made, ruined, repaired, and remade in the span of a few hours or days” (Mishra Tarc, 2015, p. 92), hints at the possibilities that Spivak’s approach to reading offers. Because, in Spivak’s view, “literature buys your assent in an almost clandestine way and therefore . . . is an excellent instrument for a slow transformation of the mind” (Spivak, 2012, p. 38), it follows that any attempt “to act out the text as the text of the other” is best done gradually, carefully, and humbly, but “without the desire to reclaim” (Spivak, 2014, pp. 31, 39) what is other for the self. In this, Spivak’s approach resembles that of Biesta who maintains that in educational work the emphasis needs to be on “slowing down rather than speeding up, so that it becomes possible to pay attention, first of all, to one’s desires” (Biesta, 2017a, p. 89). As Spivak acknowledges, it is only when deceleration happens that it becomes possible for us “[to] not think about our experience as the context for everything” (Spivak, 2014, p. 84). This urge to reference everything to ourselves, she says, is “the desire which we need to rearrange first as we are getting educated” (Spivak, 2014, p. 84). Unless we do so, Spivak argues, we stay trapped within our own justified self-interest—a dangerous position in which to be because it leads to self-righteousness and, ultimately, violence against the other.

In the context of a re-envisioned sexuality education, one that is both queerer and more utopic, literacy as Spivak practices it becomes a tool for both deconstructing and storying anew our sexual lives and those of others—this in ways that “resist, reclaim, invent, oppose, defy, make trouble for, open up, enrich, facilitate, disturb, produce, undermine, expose, make visible, critique, reveal, move beyond, transgress, subvert, unsettle, challenge, celebrate, interrogate, counter, provoke and rebel” (Giffney & Hird, 2008, p. 5). If deconstruction helps us to avoid positioning ourselves at the centre of everything—or of seeing our ‘truth’ as everyone else’s—storying ourselves anew keeps alive the flame of the utopic impulse both within us and in our sexuality education. Not only do the opportunities for re-storying that literacy provides create an environment conducive to queer self-*bricolage* and a platform from which to position queerness as horizon for the human, they also open up possibilities for conceptualizing sexuality

education as a space for “queering the non/human” (see Giffney & Hird, 2008), including through literary reading.

Hospitality and the Text

Derrida in observing, on the one hand, that for Levinas hospitality involves an unconditional and absolute “tending toward the other, attentive intention, intentional attention, *yes to the other*,” while noting, on the other, that it depends on the existence of barriers that allow it to be “regulated in a particular political or juridical practice” (Derrida, 1999a, pp. 22, 48), draws attention to the aporetic thinking which, he believes, reveals itself in Levinas’s conceptualization of hospitality. While ethics require that we always remain receptive to the possibility of unconditional hospitality—that is, our orientation must be one of complete openness to the wholly other, to the unanticipatable and unwelcomable guest—at the same time, we are uncomfortably aware that we are subject to political, social, economic and cultural forces that shape and determine the particular laws that control the thresholds of our multiple and plurivocal communities. While this is glaringly obvious in relation to matters such as migration, citizenship, and asylum, it is also apparent when the question of ‘queering the state’ (see Duggan, 1994, pp. 1–14) is raised. If the conception of an unconditional, absolute hospitality that always welcomes the stranger (including the sexual stranger) and recognizes the singularity of every visitor is clearly consistent with the Levinasian principle that “the Other is transcendent to politics, law, rights, and typologies” (Simmons, 2014, p. 89)—and, thus, is always able to interrogate these categories—then conditional versions of hospitality will always be susceptible to deconstruction and prone to being unsettled by “the structure of transcendence” (Simmons, 2014, p. 86). At the same time, the practicalities determining the provision of hospitality in “its immanent manifestation or everyday meaning” (Simmons, 2014, p. 86) will always pull against transcendent notions of hospitality and seek to bind it with conditions.

Spivak, recognizing that Levinas reaches an impasse in his efforts to bridge the gap between ethics, “understood as a responsible, non-totalizing relation with the Other,” and politics, which is necessarily concerned with “the plurality of beings that make up the community” (Critchley, 2014, p. 220), does not attempt to resolve the aporia of hospitality. Seeking instead to preserve from Levinas “the discontinuity between the ethical and the epistemological” (Spivak, 2012, p. 317), she deals with the aporetic nature of hospitality by deploying her aesthetic education to train readers “to exercise

the imagination to play the double bind” (Spivak, 2012, p. 12). In playing the double bind, Spivak attempts not to manage or undo it, but, rather, to use or ab-use it productively. To this end, she asks readers to “think hospitality or recognition” in ways that no longer “begin and indeed end with the migrant” (Spivak, 2012, p. 302), but which widen its scope to include pedagogical practices, among them the reading and teaching of literary texts.

If Derrida’s question posed as a farewell to Levinas invites us to consider hospitality as an interruption of the self, then the receptivity that is demanded of the reader as she encounters a literary text may be understood as hospitality extended to everything that comes in the form of an interruption to the self by way of the text. Such receptivity—or hospitality—in that “it involves and requires a willingness to risk self-dispossession . . . is not so much about becoming open as it is about becoming *unclosed* to something or someone” (Kompridis, 2013, p. 20). If receptivity is understood as a type of spontaneous but reflective responsiveness, then it becomes possible to imagine hospitality not only as answerability, but as necessary for change, including the sort of rearrangement of desires which Spivak’s aesthetic education seeks.

While receptivity or hospitality involves an answerability to the text, that is, an “openness to that which is unfamiliar or unsettling, a spontaneous readiness to follow a line of flight or descent” (Kompridis, 2013, p. 20), Spivak’s aesthetic education implies the reciprocity of hospitality in the process of readerly formation—where the reader is both “host and guest with respect to a text” (Still, 2013, p. 51). In the transitional/transactional space that is reading, the reader allows herself to be welcomed by the text, while at the same time welcoming it “without prejudice, into [her] heart” (Still, 2013, p. 51). This welcoming, as Spivak explains, is not concerned with excusing or accusing the text, but with developing a critical intimacy that is faithful to the text’s protocol. Reading in this way takes on an intertextual quality that does more than prompt the recognition that written or spoken texts feed into or influence other written or spoken texts—and, in turn, are fed or influenced by them. Insofar as readers accept or refuse elements from the texts that they read, that is, they are hospitable or not towards them, they become intertextual by allowing their reading to shape their narration of themselves and others. Tellingly, Spivak figures this ongoing process of intertextuality in choreographic terms, as one text “weaving itself with another, the dance” (Spivak, 2012, p. 319). However, if reading sometimes seems less of a dance

and more of a struggle—above all a struggle to be hospitable to the other, especially when the other’s call for recognition comes in an unfamiliar guise—this is to be expected because when it come to the practice of reading “there are no guarantees” (Spivak, 2012, pp. 500, 507).

Spivak, in her own reading and teaching of reading, is ever sensitive to the nuances and shifts in meaning that appear when students become aware of the differences between the textual-figural and the ‘real’—and risk playing in the gap between the two. As we have seen, in rejecting the claim that we can “somehow learn to resolve double binds by playing them” (Spivak, 2012, pp. ix, 1), Spivak makes a case for her aesthetic education, and “the training of the imagination that can teach the subject to play” (Spivak, 2012, p. 10), thereby, uncoercively rearranging desires. At the same time, she also advances a pedagogy of hospitality that opens up “that space that allows us to survive in the singular and the unverifiable, surrounded by the lethal and lugubrious consolations of rational choice” (Spivak, 2012, p. 2). For in this hospitable and transactional space—made possible by literary reading and premised on the notion of intertextuality—that which is singular and unverifiable is permitted to interrupt and disrupt the rational.

Levinas, Spivak, and Literary Engagement

As I have argued, Spivak’s project of aesthetic education, including its pedagogical direction, has been influenced to a significant extent—both directly and via Derrida’s critique—by Levinas’ alteritarian ethics, which affirm that “radical difference signifies a relation of obligation, a sense of responsibility that exceeds my grasp and my comprehension” (Drabinski, 2013, p. xii). If the call of the other presses me to respond to the other, it also shapes my subjectivity. Given, however, that in Levinas’s view any attempt to engage with literary texts in the pursuit of the ethical is both problematic and risky, Spivak’s claim that a training in literary reading “makes the muscles of the ethical reflex stronger” (Spivak, 2014, p. 57) is in need of further scrutiny.

Claudia Eppert, for example, notes that “Levinas’ own disparagement of literature, art, and criticism shadows new considerations of the educational possibilities for these fields of engagement” (Eppert, 2008, p. 67), including, therefore, for Spivak’s deployment of the imagination in her project of aesthetic education. Indeed, like Plato, who banished poetry from his Republic because he believed that it prevented those who

wrote it from attaining the truth, Levinas holds that literature and other art forms are deceptive to the extent that they claim to know and/or represent the other. There is also a danger, one to which Spivak herself is alert, that literature and the arts will produce “a hyper-narcissistic orientation toward the self” that results in “unthinkable consequences for scapegoated and dehumanized ‘Others’ of the world” (Mishra Tarc, 2015, p. 121). Notwithstanding these reservations, Levinas’ work does provide “a justification of a variety of approaches to literature,” including “a new and different way of attending to the ethical in the textual, and of the responsibility inherent in reading” (Eaglestone, 1997, p. 7). In particular, Levinas permits a poetic or literary imagination that “responds to the surprises and demands of the other,” and “never presumes to fashion an image adequate to the other’s irrecoverable transcendence” (Kearney, 1995, p. 111). Thus, while his condemnation of the poetic imagination, especially when used to “incarcerate the self in a blind alley of self-reflecting mirrors,” must serve as a warning against any illusory and assimilationist claims—for example, that the imagination’s task is to work to reduce alterity to “its own remembered or anticipated fantasies” (Kearney, 1995, p. 110)—Levinas’ own theorizing, nevertheless, opens the door for the sort of work that Spivak undertakes.

Given that Spivak in her approach to literary reading is mindful of Levinas’s injunction that “criticism must be sensitive to the way in which language reveals the other and our responsibilities to the other” (Eaglestone, 1997, pp. 7–8), then her own aesthetic education may be seen as exemplifying one way of attending to the ethical through literary reading. Spivak is not unaware of the risks in what she does. While insisting that all teachers—but, especially those concerned with literary reading—are “activists of the imagination” (Spivak, 2014, p. 54), she also understands that the imagination falls easy prey to solipsism. Hence, she remains committed to an aesthetic education that works “to train the imagination, so that it can become something other than Narcissus waiting to see his own powerful image in the eyes of the other” (Spivak, 2014, p. 54). Spivak’s attention to the ethical can be seen in her deployment of *teleiopoiesis* as a way of countering solipsism. Schwab, in arguing that “literature provides, at its best, a heteronomous experience that achieves a movement to the other that never returns to the same” (Schwab, 1996, p. 45) appears to support Spivak’s position.

While there is “a remarkable congruence between Spivak and Levinas in trying to imagine the other ethical subject who cannot be comprehended” (Ray, 2009, p. 91), an important distinction between Levinas’ approach to alterity and Spivak’s—one that impacts significantly on the latter’s pedagogical orientation—can be discerned in the way each approaches the articulation of “the absoluteness of the other, the sense in which the other approaches from outside and beyond my will” (Drabinski, 1997, p. 159). On the one hand, Levinas, in explaining that the wholly other (*l’Autre*) “shows a face and opens the dimension of *height*, that is to say, it *infinitely* overflows the bounds of knowledge” (Levinas, 1996, p. 12), emphasizes the human subject’s experience of a power that both exceeds the self and is never able to be contained by it. Spivak, on the other, eschews notions of elevation and implications of transcendence by persistently positioning the other as coming from ‘below.’ In doing so, she underlines not only what she sees as Levinas’ failure to challenge dominant ideologies of gender and sex, but also the need to interrogate what she believes is his argument that “the erotic accedes neither to the ethical nor to signification” (Spivak, 2009, p. 186).

In acknowledging that the desire for authentic ethical engagement is both enabled and disabled by our admission that there is much that can’t be communicated or made clear in our relationship with the other, Spivak is not claiming that ethics are impossible, but, rather, that “the ethical situation can only be figured in the ethical experience of the impossible” (Spivak, 2012, p. 98). In other words, radically alterity—or the wholly other—“must be thought through imaging” (Spivak, 2012, p. 97), not by logical argument. If Spivak’s intention as a teacher of reading is to train her students to be receptive to the other coming from ‘below,’¹³ her pedagogical approach has an applicability beyond the context of its initial articulation—the education of students in the elite universities of the United States. While her hope may be that “these children of the superpower” disabuse themselves of the notion that “they are the reason why history happened and they can help the whole world” (Spivak, 2012, p. 297), her

¹³ The urgency of Spivak’s call to students and readers to attend to what is happening ‘below’ them—that is, use their imaginations to reach out to the distant other ‘below’—can be seen in her frequent use of such imperatives and encouragements as: “imagine those from below, who would be citizens” (Spivak, 2012, p. xiv); learn to “use the European Enlightenment from below” (pp. 3, 345); “‘ab-use’/‘use from below’” (p. 11); “try to learn to learn from below” (p. 97); “learn to learn from below how to teach the subaltern” (p. 217); and “learn to learn from below, *from* the subaltern, rather than only study him (her)” (p. 439).

aesthetic education—especially in its theorization and activation of *teleiopoiesis*—has much to offer sexuality education, which, as Gilbert argues, is in need of “theories of sexuality that can enfranchise teachers and students alike” (Gilbert, 2014, p. 102).

Some Concluding Remarks

Of course, reaching out and touching the distant other with imaginative effort requires the reader to accept that she will make mistakes—mis-takes—with whatever text she is reading. As Spivak tells us: “I assume that the passing of a text into my grasp is a mis-take, of course” (Spivak, 2012, p. 28). Yet, we must take such mis-takes to be productive, including in the context of a sexuality education attempting to be hospitable to its own re-envisioning—one that does not get bogged down by “conflicts about queerness,” but sees them “as opening up spaces for teaching and learning” (Gilbert, 2014, p. 102). In this context, the passing of a text into a reader’s grasp by way of a mis-take is an act of hospitality, not only insofar as the reader is receptive to unlearning, but also to the extent to which she welcomes whatever arrives unannounced as guest with the text. A sexuality education mindful of this dynamic will be more attentive to learning *incomes* than to learning *outcomes*, to the presence and arrival of the queer than to the production and maintenance of normativities.

If Spivak’s aesthetic education prompts us to think hospitality in ways that extend to literary texts and the pedagogy of literary reading, it also pushes sexuality educators and researchers to ask the unavoidable question: What does it mean to think hospitality in the context of sexuality education? As you will see, the chapter that follows—by building on the theoretical work of this chapter and employing Spivakian notions of hospitality in its reading of Witi Ihimaera’s *The Uncle’s Story*—sets out to address this question as it seeks to make more room for the utopic and the queer in sexuality education.

Chapter Nine

A Micrological Reading of Penetration in *The Uncle's Story*

It is the negotiability of senders and receivers that allows teleiopoiesis, touching the distant other with imaginative effort. The question of negotiability, like all necessary impossibilities, must be forever begged, assumed as possible before proof. (Spivak, 2012, p. 428)

Overview

So as to throw light on the ways in which Spivak's pedagogy concerns itself with alterity, hospitality, interruption, and suspension, it is my intention in this chapter to conduct what Spivak would call a micrological reading of an act of sexual penetration that takes place in Witi Ihimaera's *The Uncle's Story* (2000)—and of the double bind which results from it. This particular double bind, which arrives as an imperative to choose between the demands of culture and those of sexuality, cannot be resolved. However, like other double binds that arise in relation to sex, sexuality and sexuality education, it may be able to be negotiated, as the epigraph to this chapter suggests, if a hospitality that is open to *teleiopoiesis*—"touching the distant other with imaginative effort" (Spivak, 2012, p. 428)—is assumed and activated.

My reading, metaphorically speaking, puts under the microscope a key passage from Ihimaera's novel, one which describes an act of sexual penetration between two men. I do this in order "to be able to lay out the desire[s]" (Spivak, 2014, p. 56) that are staged by the text, to participate in them as a reader, and to interrogate them, especially, in the context of the question posed by Derrida: "Is not hospitality an interruption of the self?" (Derrida, 1999a, p. 51). By choosing to deal with a text where, as a consequence of what is understood to be a transgressive sexual act between males, extreme demands are placed on hospitality—which in the context of *The Uncle's Story* is conceptualized in relation to the traditional Māori understanding and practice of *manaakitanga*—I am pushed to come to terms, in one way or another, with three ethical imperatives: "the demand to address a guest one cannot ask to know; the demand to protect the home one must surrender to the guest; and the demand to reciprocate outside a paradigm of reciprocity" (Ruitenbergh, 2016, p. 22).

If these ethical demands raise important questions for sexuality educators about the ways in which hospitality—"by definition a *structure* that regulates relations between

inside and outside” (Still, 2013, p. 11)—is (and isn’t) performed in the context of sexual relations, they also point to the possibility of theorizing sexual ethics within a much wider framework than that established by the Ministry of Education, which emphasizes the acquisition of attitudes such as respect, care and concern, and the development of “personal rights and responsibilities, including consent” (Ministry of Education, 2015, p. 12). At the same time, attending seriously to hospitality in sexuality education invites a richer, more complex appreciation of the notion of hauora—including its inextricable relationship with the foundational concepts of whanaungatanga, manaakitanga, and kotahitanga¹⁴—than that which is currently on offer in mandated programmes. Hospitality also makes room in sexuality education for the imagining of utopic collectivities, such as “gay tribe” (Ihimaera, 2000, p. 131), which, operating in the space between the personal and the political, accommodates the singular and the queer.

I recognize that by introducing an indigenous fictional voice into the conversation, as I do in this chapter, I am bringing a new dimension to my argument—one which carries its own demands and requires careful handling. This is so because, as Linda Tuhiwai Smith explains, any study of Indigenous literature or philosophy from a non-Indigenous perspective brings with it “a cultural orientation, a set of values, a different conceptualization of such things as time, space and subjectivity, different and competing theories of knowledge, highly specialized forms of language, and structures of power” (Smith, 1999, p. 42). These work together to simplify and standardize complex events, ideas, relationships and stories.

Ideally, then, I would want to engage in a more comprehensive and nuanced discussion of the tensions, gaps and possibilities that become visible when Māori ways of understanding and being in the world are placed alongside and athwart other ideas that circulate in my thesis. However, I acknowledge that given the constraints of time and space I am unable to do this to any great extent. Nevertheless, it is important to state that insofar as I explore Indigenous concepts, I do so with the intention, not only of explicating key themes in Ihimaera’s novel, but also of problematizing the ways in which the Ministry of Education and the Education Review Office promote aspects of

¹⁴ Whanaungatanga is concerned with building relationships; manaakitanga encompasses an ethic of caring; while kotahitanga describes an ethic of bonding (see MacFarlane, 2004).

mātauranga Māori—a non-traditional term for Māori ‘knowledge’ that “arose contiguous with the arrival of the biblical world view in Māori communities of the 19th century” (Royal, 2012, p. 32)—in the context of sexuality education.

Given that Māori, queer, and Spivakian notions often come into proximity and, indeed, rub against each other in this chapter, readers may wish to draw their own conclusions about the degree to which these are mutually hospitable and/or prompt us “to imagine future potentials” (Driskill, Finley, Gilley, & Morgensen, 2011, p. 22)—not just for queer and Indigenous theories and practices, but also for the field of sexuality education in Aotearoa New Zealand.

The Uncle’s Story—An Introduction

In *The Uncle’s Story*, which has as its basis the Tāwhaki cycle of myths, Witi Ihimaera makes use of the literary device of “a story within a story” to present what have been described as “the coming out narratives of two Maori gay men” (Tawake, 2006, p. 373). Sam and Michael Mahana—an uncle and his nephew, a generation apart—both face rejection by their whānau, especially their fathers, when their sexuality is revealed.

However, it is only after Michael—“the 1990s protagonist” (Kennedy, 2011, p. 129) and “a gay Tāwhaki” (Ihimaera, 2019, p. 272)—is cast out of the family because of his self-declared homosexuality that he comes to learn of the existence of Uncle Sam, his father’s brother, who to all intents and purposes had been erased from the family’s memory following his death in a car crash in 1971. From Uncle Sam’s diary, given to Michael by his Auntie Pat—Sam’s younger sister—Michael finds out that Sam, a Vietnam War hero, had experienced extreme physical and emotional brutality, then banishment from the whānau, at the hands of his father, Arapeta. This follows Arapeta’s discovery that Sam and Cliff Harper, an American helicopter pilot who had saved Sam’s life in action, are lovers. By intertwining the stories of Michael and Sam in his narrative, Ihimaera invites readers not only to consider “the parallels and differences between the treatment of homosexuality in their respective times” (Majid, 2010, p. 218), but also to ponder the implications of Michael Mahana’s claim that “Maori people are among the most homophobic in the world” (Ihimaera, 2000, p. 343)¹⁵—and that he wasn’t supposed to exist.

¹⁵ Ihimaera made the same claim—outside fiction—while presenting the Joseph Keene Chadwick lecture at the University of Hawai’i in 2000. He reports his friend and colleague

It has been argued that “historically, Maori society, as with other Indigenous populations, was characterized by its acceptance and celebration of sexual diversity” (Aspin, 2011, p. 113), including of takatāpui—those Māori who identify with diverse genders and sexualities.¹⁶ However, Ihimaera—himself a gay Māori man—speaking through the voices of his gay characters Michael and Sam, is emphatic that from the beginning Māori have always regarded sexual relationships between men as flying in the face of the preordained order governing relationships between the sexes. As Sam explains to Cliff, the consequences for men who violate tapu by having sex with other men are “too fearful to contemplate” (Ihimaera, 2000, p. 156):

You relinquished the mana, the tapu, the ihi or life force and the wehi or dread that the dynamic of being a man depended on, to maintain your power relationships with the world. You brought noa upon yourself, the loss of sacredness, and, without sacredness, you were prone to punishment, dishonour, banishment and death. (Ihimaera, 2000, p. 156)

In the light of Derrida’s question: “Is not hospitality an interruption of the self?” (Derrida, 1999a, p. 51), my intention is to explore the double bind that lies at the heart of *The Uncle’s Story*—an interruption of the self that is understood by one generation as “the collision between cultural expectations and [the] desire for self-fulfilment” (Fox, 2008, p. 161), but which has its origins decades earlier in Cliff Harper’s penetration of Sam Mahana’s anus.¹⁷ If, on the one hand, it is a double bind inscribed in the body of Sam—a hospitality that arrives in the form of a penetration to interrupt the self,

Ngahuia Te Awekotuku saying to him: “You know that our people are among the most homophobic in the world” (Ihimaera, 2002, p. 123).

¹⁶ For example, Elizabeth Kerekere argues that “the open sexuality enjoyed by Māori women and men [prior to colonization] clashed with the puritanical mind set of settlers and missionaries” (Kerekere, 2015, p. 13). After 1858, when Aotearoa came under the British legal system, most whānau continued to accept takatāpui behaviour, but “kept it hidden from public view to protect their takatāpui members” (Kerekere, 2015, p. 14).

¹⁷ Other readings of *The Uncle’s Story* emphasize such diverse themes as: the “plea for the acceptance of gay men and women” (Majid, 2010, p. 218) within Māori society; the emergence of “the notion of a gay tribe” (Tan, 2014, pp. 367, 376, 377, 379, 383; Valle, 2017, pp. 199, 201, 202) and the challenges this presents within Māoritanga; “society’s struggle against essentializing notions of identity based on racial or sexual criteria” (Tawake, 2006, p. 375); “the complexities and intricacies of fictional representations of Māori women’s identities” (Bingel, Krutz, Luh, & Muetze, 2011, p. 56); and “local-local interaction on a global scale between indigenous peoples” (Kennedy, 2011, p. 134) in regard to the struggle for gay rights.

bringing dreadful consequences to him and driving the actions of two generations of the Mahana whānau—on the other, it is a double bind made explicit in Auntie Pat’s twice-stated question to Michael:

‘What matters most to you, Michael? Being Maori or, or being gay?’ (Ihimaera, 2000, p. 28)

‘What matters most, Michael, being Maori or being gay?’ (Ihimaera, 2000, p. 256)

If Michael Mahana, by leaving his whānau, running away to Wellington, and eventually becoming an international activist for the rights of LGBTQ+ Indigenous People, is able to resist the urge to resolve in a definitive way the double bind in which he finds himself—and, thus, evade a situation where “nobody should be made to choose” (Ihimaera, 2000, p. 256)—his Uncle Sam cannot play the double bind in this way. By submitting to physical punishment for what Arapeta and the weight of Māori tradition determine is his sexual transgression, Sam opts “to honour his father and his culture” (Ihimaera, 2000, p. 256).

Sam’s ability to absorb rather than flee the consequences of his action—while at the same time refusing to repent of “something that doesn’t feel wrong” (Ihimaera, 2000, p. 259)—is linked to his growing realization of the undecidability of the double bind which he knows he must inhabit. Yet, in allowing Arapeta to repeatedly lacerate his body, urinate on his open wounds, and drive him from the whānau forever, Sam’s “punishment had gone far deeper than skin,” opening up in him “a seething rage against Arapeta and all he represented” (Ihimaera, 2000, pp. 262, 260). This defiance rising within Sam finally finds its expression in a definitive refusal to submit any longer to what he now understands as his father’s abuse. Having freed himself from Arapeta’s physical clutches, Sam sets off to begin a new life with Cliff in America, but dies in an accident on the way to their planned reunification at Auckland Airport.

If in choosing to conduct a micrological examination of that passage in *The Uncle’s Story* which deals with the anal penetration of Sam by Cliff—and Sam’s “moment of revelation” (Ihimaera, 2000, p. 246) which comes from it—I do so not just because this incident has such far-reaching inter-generational consequences in Ihimaera’s novel, but, in order to explore the aporia of hospitality in relation to an event that is so decisively interruptive of the self. In doing so, I will also suggest that Sam’s death, although

accidental, nevertheless makes sense—and is, perhaps, inevitable—especially given the ways in which desire, including how it relates to hospitality, is expressed or staged. As well as making connections between this and other sites of penetration in *The Uncle's Story*, I will look very briefly at another passage in the novel, one which concerns itself what I term penetration's 'other.' If this passage "shows a desire but not a fulfilment" (Spivak, 2014, p. 56), it gestures, nevertheless, in the direction of an (im)possible fulfilment for other Sams, Cliffs and Michaels who "must bring a new promise to life and a new music to the impulse of history" (Ihimaera, 2000, p. 371). In other words, penetration's 'other' instances an attempt at utopic thinking which positions queerness as horizon.

While recognizing that Spivak's aesthetic education requires that close pedagogical attention be paid to desire and its rearrangement through literary reading, I maintain that this can only happen if the narrative and the symbolic logics that operate within a work of fiction are carefully explored and understood. Committing to "the micrology of practice" (Spivak, 2014, p. 5)—by focusing, in this case, on penetrative acts in *The Uncle's Story* and looking closely at small and sometimes easily overlooked textual details associated with them—is one way of doing this. Such an approach has the added benefit of keeping the meaning of the text on the move, especially as successive micrological examinations are able to adopt different foci as they approach the text from new angles. There are many details in the novel that are worth looking at closely, and as Bersani puts it, "a new emphasis on the *peripheries* of our desiring attention would not only diversify desire but would also keep it mobile" (Bersani, 1978, p. 7). Thus, every reading of a text as rich as *The Uncle's Story* becomes an opportunity to de-centre, and to learn afresh "to multiply our discontinuous and partial desiring selves" (Bersani, 1978, p. 7).

Sam's Moment of Revelation

Cliff was in orgasm, his body shuddering and spilling over. The shock of it forced Sam to breathe out, let go—and he reached a kind of understanding. A moment of revelation. He opened himself up, made himself vulnerable. With a groan he too was pulsing a river.

'Sam, yes—'

They were both laughing and crying at the same time. Nothing else mattered, past, present or future. All there was, was *now*.

This was the secret embrace at the end of the day.

And they had found it. (Ihimaera, 2000, pp. 246–247)

The above description of the respective orgasms of Cliff Harper and Sam Mahana following the penetration of Sam's anus by Cliff's penis marks the climax of three pages of what is some of Ihimaera's most sexually explicit and intensely lyrical writing. What is being described here is the outcome of a long seductive inter-play between Sam and Cliff that began in the war zones of Vietnam many months earlier, only to reach its consummation on a ladder in Arapeta Mahana's barn in Waituhi.

To read this passage micrologically, it is necessary to enact Spivak's injunction "to lay out the desire so that the reader can participate in the desire" (Spivak, 2014, p. 56). Given that it is Sam who is caught in the putative double bind of being both Māori and gay—and that it is this very same double bind which generates the major fault-line running through the narrative of *The Uncle's Story*—my focus, then, is on Sam's desire rather than Cliff's. What does Sam desire? In what ways is Sam's desire rearranged? What is the desire in which the reader participates? Is the reader's desire uncoercively rearranged? And for what epistemological purpose? Let's begin to lay out the desire at this site of penetration and gently interrogate it a little.

For Sam, his entry into the barn with Cliff and the wind's closing of the barn door behind them are the work of Fate, from which "there is no going back" (Ihimaera, 2000, p. 244). He must keep moving forward and "hope against hope there was a way of escape from whatever destiny lay in front of him" (Ihimaera, 2000, p. 244)—the degradation that he fears will come to him if he participates in the sexually transgressive behaviour which he so desires. If, at first, Sam seems to resist Cliff's efforts to penetrate him, he soon groans, whimpers, and gasps at Cliff's touch—and is "gone, gone, gone beyond the point of no return" (Ihimaera, 2000, p. 245). Despite the initial pain of penetration—"the sheer agony of the act"—Sam "opened himself up and made himself vulnerable" (Ihimaera, 2000, p. 246) to Cliff. In exposing himself in this way, Sam commits himself to a form of hospitality that both initiates and signals an interruption of the self that has far-reaching consequences.

In order to make sense of the claim that for Sam his penetration by Cliff is an hospitable act, it is necessary to acknowledge that within the structure of hospitality or manaakitanga someone or something on the outside is always brought within. In other

words, hospitality always involves the crossing of thresholds—and with Sam’s penetration a significant threshold or boundary has been crossed. While hospitality is “a way of theorising the relation between the same and the other, the self and the stranger,” it is also foundational in the sense that “to be fully human, is to be able to alter, to be altered” (Still, 2013, pp. 12–13). Because hospitality implies opening oneself to the unknown other it is, therefore, interruptive of self. As such, it is potentially both life-giving and extremely dangerous.

When Sam opens his anus to be penetrated by Cliff’s penis he exposes himself to more than physical sensation—pleasure or pain. By transgressing “the order of the Maori world” (Ihimaera, 2000, p. 155), Sam knowingly makes himself susceptible to a multiplicity of forces that have the power to destroy not only himself, but Cliff also. But in doing so, he also discovers new potential in the joy and the tears that he finds in the “*now*” of “the secret embrace” (Ihimaera, 2000, p. 247) which he and Cliff share. This experience of the greatest intensity, where “nothing else mattered, past, present or future” (Ihimaera, 2000, p. 247), is possibilized by the “structure of *reciprocity*” (Still, 2013, p. 15), which is inscribed in the very notion of hospitality. Within this structure there is always the potential for guest to become host and host to become guest, and for guest and host to figure different modes within the one hospitable interaction. In Sam and Cliff’s embrace—the penetration of one by the other—and in Cliff’s affirmative cry of ““Sam, yes—”” (Ihimaera, 2000, p. 247) the reciprocity which is the origin of all hospitality can be discerned.

Derrida, with reference to Levinas, describes the process of hospitality as a “movement without movement” where “the welcoming of the other” (Derrida, 1999a, p. 23) demands acceptance of the other’s infinity. The dynamic of hospitality, which Derrida articulates in its transcendent or absolute form, can be seen in its particular or conditional expression in Sam’s welcoming of his penetration by Cliff. Derrida’s reminder to consider the concept of welcome as “the first gesture in the direction of the Other” and to think “the possibility of the welcome” (Derrida, 1999a, p. 25) before anything else, is certainly useful when attempting to make sense of the revelation that follows Sam’s orgasm, and in untangling and laying out the desires contained therein.

After Cliff enters Sam—“easing in, sliding in until he was up to the hilt”—his thrusting causes Sam to be so overwhelmed by vertigo that he feels himself “nearing

unconsciousness” (Ihimaera, 2000, p. 246). Sam believes he is “tumbling through Te Po, The Night, and falling through Te Kore, The Void” (Ihimaera, 2000, p. 246). His fear is that he will be consigned to “*eternal darkness*” (Ihimaera, 2000, p. 246). In trying to make sense of what is happening here, it is helpful to be aware that while Te Kore has sometimes been defined in purely negative terms as ‘nothingness’ or ‘chaos,’ other sources speak of the Void as “an original Māori ground of existence” or as “potential being” (Mika & Stewart, 2016, p. 308).¹⁸ Although it remains unorganized, in Te Kore there is “unlimited potential for ‘being’” (Barlow, 2001, p. 55).¹⁹ Across Te Kore, Sam discerns “a pinpoint of light” (Ihimaera, 2000, p. 246)—a trace of potentiality, perhaps! As something starts “to build in Sam, something made up of Cliff’s rhythmic movements,” Sam now hears from within a temple—Buddhist, surely—voices calling in welcome, “*Haramai, Sam*” (Ihimaera, 2000, p. 246). Echoes from the past. As a monk ministers to him, Sam sights “something sliding down the pillars of the temple, coiling wet and glistening” (Ihimaera, 2000, p. 246). Sam addresses, what he realizes is a cobra and—as his ‘you’ and ‘me’ become a ‘we’—establishes a certain mutuality between himself and the snake: “*You and me, cobra, let us enjoy our brief moment in the sun*” (Ihimaera, 2000, p. 246).

In contrast to the Judeo-Christian scriptures, where the presence of any type of snake is generally indicative of the presence of evil, Buddhist traditions hold the cobra in benign regard for shielding the sleeping Buddha from both rain and sun as he slept. In the context of *The Uncle’s Story*, however, it is helpful to refer back to an earlier dream that Sam had while in the jungles of Vietnam. In the course of this dream, angry cobras advance on Sam, repeatedly striking at his defences, “opening him up in all his vulnerability” (Ihimaera, 2000, p. 96). What is significant about these cobras is

¹⁸ For example, as Anne Salmond reports it, the early ethnologist Edward Tregear noted in 1891 that Te Kore, although described as “the Void or negation,” contains “the potentiality of all things afterwards to come” (Salmond, 2017, pp. 11, 420, endnote 10).

¹⁹ The Void, understood as potential for ‘being,’ figures significantly in Eastern and Western philosophy. According to the Buddhist philosopher Nāgārjuna, the Void or emptiness is “the only ontological possibility for the world of empirical existence” (Hamilton, 2001, p. 97). The idea that the Void or Nothingness is the condition of possibility for ‘being’ is a foundational premise in the ontology of Continental philosophers including Heidegger, Sartre, and more recently, Badiou. If, for example, Heidegger insists that nothingness is the basis for any discussion of Being, Badiou maintains that any ‘situation’ or ‘entity,’ viewed from an ontological perspective, is “only a modality of the void” (Deranty, 2006, p. 603). For Badiou, to speak the truth about knowledge, then, is to describe its particular connection with the Void.

not that they represent evil or good—or duality—but that in exposing Sam to vulnerability, they also open him up to potentiality. Like Te Kore, cobras attest to the undecidable, to the risks and opportunities within the structure of hospitality. Whether or not the welcoming call of “*Haramai*,” that Sam hears within Te Kore, The Void, suggests hopeful promise or hidden threat, it is a salient reminder to Sam and to the reader that within the structure of hospitality “the other, whoever and whatever that it is, always comes in the form of undecidability” (Caputo & Cook, 2016, p. xi).

Immediately before climaxing, Sam “began to feel a sun exploding within him, showering Te Kore with light” (Ihimaera, 2000, p. 246). Significantly, this illumination of The Void, which accompanies Sam’s penetration and orgasm, finds an echo in the account of the Great Separation where the many children of Ranginui and Papatūānuku—who, hitherto, had been “squeezed within whatever cracks they could find” (Ihimaera, 2000, p. 343) between the bodies of the tightly embracing Primal Parents—eventually, and only with great effort, manage to push them apart. This being done, as Michael Mahana tells it, “the light came flooding in,” and the children of Rangi and Papa “were able to walk upright upon the bright strand between” (Ihimaera, 2000, p. 343).

In explaining this myth, which exists in various versions and is open to many interpretations, Michael emphasizes “that fighting for space and for light, the universal image for knowledge or enlightenment or freedom, is the continual challenge for all peoples who cannot see the sky” (Ihimaera, 2000, p. 343). Thus, Sam’s description of the sun exploding within his anus and flooding Te Kore with light, when read alongside the story of the Great Separation, may be understood both as a metaphor for intense sexual pleasure and as an intimation that Sam has received new knowledge from Te Kore, The Void. In welcoming what he experiences in his anus and by accepting this experience as revelation, Sam affirms that knowing, rather than being an intentional constructive process initiated by an individual subject, is “enabled by and *necessarily* requires otherness” (Roth, 2011, p. 20). Sam, in recognizing his body’s “capacity to be affected” (Roth, 2011, p. 20) through penetration, acknowledges the thoughts and insights that come to him from outside—and which demand to be received as ‘guest.’ In other words, Sam finds himself in a position where he is no longer “the most important arbiter of the outer world” (Mika, 2012, p. 1088).

As we have seen, Spivak's aesthetic education, in that it attempts to train readers to become aware of those situations where they "construct the other as object of knowledge" (Spivak, 2012, pp. 316, 374), works by way of interruption. Penetration, for Sam, is epistemically interruptive in that it prompts him not only to know different *things*, but also to know in a different *way*—an immanent sort of knowing, "whereby a living/lived body comes to know what it can do in an immediate rather than semiotically mediated way" (Roth, 2011, p. 18). If Sam's sense of self is also dramatically interrupted by his penetration, this is not only because cultural taboos against anal intercourse are violated, but also because the penetrated male body is generally conceptualized as both passive and powerless. However, if, as Guy Hocquenghem suggests, anal pleasure is "a way of undermining all sexual categorizations"—in that it affirms "the polymorphous potential of desire" (Kemp, 2013, p. 6)—Sam's penetration not only brings him to new ways of desiring, but, in doing so, prompts him to begin to 'know' outside the parameters determined by the binary understandings of gender and sexuality which he has inherited. In other words, Sam's penetration is an interruption which, in Spivakian terms, has rearranged his desires uncoercively "for flexible epistemological performance" (Spivak, 2012, p. 353). This interruption prepares Sam for the in-coming of a different sense of self.

If Sam Mahana's identity is understood as a possibilization—through the reproduction and transformation in his lived experience of the resources of culture that he has received primarily from his whānau and iwi—then Sam's penetration is an interruption of that process, signalling, as it does, a break with his past. In Wolff-Michael Roth's view, a subject's development comes about through encounters with what is other. By way of these encounters, which Derrida and Spivak call interruptions, "the living/lived body, comes to be further affected and changed" (Roth, 2011, p. 17). This affectedness is possible because of "radical passivity," an "originary experience, which not only enables agency but also accompanies it" (Roth, 2011, pp. 17, 19). Rather than urging us to withdraw from engagement, radical passivity disposes us to expose ourselves—and, thereby, allow ourselves to become susceptible to being affected by that which is other. Radical passivity, as Roth sees it, is a prerequisite or ground for all knowing, because "it is only after having been affected that we can begin to think, classify, and relate the experience to something else" (Roth, 2011, p. 18). It is by recognizing and accepting

the paradox of radical passivity—that knowledge can only be acquired through submission to the unknown—that knowing becomes possible.

Sam's penetration, precipitated by his willingness to make himself vulnerable to being affected by the unknown other, leads directly to a revelation. The "kind of understanding" (Ihimaera, 2000, p. 246) that Sam arrives at in this moment stretches beyond the realization that he and Cliff must enjoy their brief moment in the sun because there is only *now*. It also extends to Michael, who reflecting on his Uncle Sam's experience, observes:

Having a man inside you changed you. It was as if the penetration reached not only some physical centre but also some small room within which your identity lay. The masculine identity of the man inside the room had been constructed by his society. His very being had been imprinted with codes which guided him and said, 'This is what a man does and this is what a man does not do.'

(Ihimaera, 2000, pp. 248–249)

As I have suggested, while Sam's penetration by Cliff has seeded within him an awareness of a new emergent sense of self, a different way of being male, Sam also realizes that he must endure the negative consequences demanded by his culture for having done what is forbidden. It is Sam's father, Arapeta, who takes it upon himself to be Sam's judge, jury and executioner in the face of what he sees as Sam's transgression.

Letting Daddy and Atua in

The serious threat, both physical and psychical, that Arapeta poses to his son is foreshadowed in Ihimaera's narrative long before Sam becomes sexually involved with Cliff—and Arapeta's discovery of the nature of their relationship. During Sam's time in Vietnam, he experiences a series of "phantasmagorical images" (Fox, 2008, p. 163) which reveal the complexity of his relationship with his father. Admittedly, there are elements of both affection and eroticism in the initial embrace that Sam imagines taking place between himself and Arapeta. However, Sam's fantasy soon becomes a terrifying and nauseating nightmare when Arapeta penetrates Sam orally, violently plunging his left arm deep into his son's throat until the hair of his armpit grazes Sam's lips. As he tries to shove his right hand in as well, Arapeta cries: "'Open wide, son, and let Daddy in'" (Ihimaera, 2000, p. 97).

It is possible to read this shocking passage as a symbolic representation of “the lack of space for self that Sam experiences as a result of his father’s excessive dominance” (Fox, 2008, p. 163). However, in the context of an exploration of hospitality as an interruption of the self, it is more productive to contrast Sam’s repugnance in the face of this violent and forced—though imagined—penetration by his father with his later actual penetration by Cliff. While Sam welcomes Cliff into himself, he tries to “vomit his father out of him” (Ihimaera, 2000, p. 97).

In order to begin to make some sense of Arapeta’s persecutory attitude towards Sam and his homosexuality, and to understand Ihimaera’s perspective on the origins in Māori culture of the codes which are imprinted on men, which guide them and instruct them in what a man does and what a man does not do, it is helpful to turn to the story of the god Tāne’s fashioning of the first woman, Hine-ahu-one. Up to this time all of the gods had been male. As Sam tells it, having followed Papatūānuku’s directions “to make a woman from the red earth,” Tāne then attempted to penetrate Hine-ahu-one with his penis, but “didn’t know which orifice to use” (Ihimaera, 2000, p. 218). After attempting to enter her armpits, ears, eyes, mouth, nose, and “even her anus,” Tāne finally finds Hine-ahu-one’s vagina—“and sanctified it with the full inward thrust of his penis” (Ihimaera, 2000, pp. 218, 219). In some versions of this myth, Sam reminds us, Tāne’s brothers joined in as well.

While this account is usually read as an explanation for the mechanism by which “male to female union was . . . sanctioned by the gods”—and as a justification for why “any other kind of union could never be countenanced” (Ihimaera, 2000, p. 155)—it is possible to interpret it in a way that pays much closer attention to the haphazard manner in which Tāne tries to penetrate Hine-ahu-one. Such a reading works not only to show “how humankind is not nice to women and queers in different ways, and to see how this operates a structure of approved violence” against them, but, also, to destabilize what Spivak calls “the grounding presence of the sheer selfishness of reproductive heteronormativity” (Spivak, 2012, pp. 123, 98) which the myth appears to affirm. Rather than suggesting that the efforts of Tāne—and, perhaps, his brothers—to fuck Hine-ahu-one are the result of male gods doing what they are supposed to do in order to implement some preordained plan, the alternative reading which I propose suggests that the male gods are operating in a random, albeit violent, way and don’t really know what they are doing.

Tāne's attempts to enter every orifice of Hine-ahu-one's body are justified within the structure of the myth on the grounds that they explain the origin of the various secretions that issue from these parts. Yet, Tāne and his brothers' trial and error approach to sex implies the undecidability or queerness of an originary sexuality that preceded "the full inward thrust" (Ihimaera, 2000, p. 219) of Tāne's penis into Hine-ahu-one's vagina—an act that institutes both reproductive heteronormativity and heteropatriarchy. As Ihimaera highlights in his description of Arapeta's ill-treatment of his wife, Florence, on their wedding night, the behaviour of Tāne and his brothers provides a template for the perpetration of abuse by men of women—and, by "the chain of equivalences binding these two abject bodies" (Kemp, 2013, pp. 1–2), of *woman* and *queer*—by heterosexuals of homosexuals. For Florence, "something strong and good had died . . . when Arapeta had abusively thrust his penis into her every opening as if she was made of dirt" (Ihimaera, 2000, p. 232).

Arapeta, in proclaiming that "when a man takes a woman to be his wife he is re-enacting a tradition that goes back to the very first woman, Hine-ahu-one" (Ihimaera, 2000, pp. 235), asserts his right, in imitation of Tāne and his brothers, to poke his penis into any orifice on his wife's body. Somewhat paradoxically, and wanting to have his cake and eat it too, Arapeta in the same breath claims the vagina as a privileged site of penetration—this on the basis that it is through a woman's vagina that "a man achieves his immortality" by the generation of a son, and, in so doing, defeats Hine-nui-te-pō, "the formidable Goddess of Death" (Ihimaera, 2000, p. 235).

Reproductive Futurism

Arapeta's affirmation that a man lives forever through the generation of a male line, and in this way is able to overcome Hine-nui-te-pō—a complex figure, both "maleficent *and* maternal" (Perris, 2015, p.86)—is indicative of his entanglement in "a system steeped in reproductive futurism which permeates all social, political and cultural structures" (Giffney, 2008, p. 63). As Edelman argues, having bestowed "the imprimatur of meaning-production on heterogenital relations," reproductive futurism, in an effort to repress the conscious self's awareness of the death drive, proceeds to locate 'meaning' in a future that is "endlessly postponed" (Edelman, 2004, p. 13). In Edelman's scenario, the figure of the Child becomes both a representation of human society's denial of the death drive and "the wish fulfilment of its desired immortality" (Giffney, 2008, p. 65). In *The Uncle's Story* reproductive futurism can be seen at work

safeguarding, above all else, the continuation and the continuity of whakapapa—“the genealogical descent of all living things from the gods to the present time” (Barlow, 2001, p. 173). Arapeta’s efforts to destroy all traces of Sam after his death, including wiping his name from the memory of the whānau by deleting it from the whakapapa book, are an attempt to consign him to Te Kore, The Void. In disconnecting Sam from “the umbilical cord of whakapapa,” Arapeta does his best to send his son “head over heels like a spaceman trailing his severed lifeline through a dark and hostile universe to oblivion” (Ihimaera, 2000, p. 322).

Michael Mahana, in stating that “this was how it was done to all gay men and women” (Ihimaera, 2000, p. 322), not only rejects claims that Māori generally treated takatāpui benignly, but identifies a process of negation that can be usefully illuminated by Edelman’s concepts of the sinthomosexual and sinthomosexuality. As Carla Freccero reports it, Edelman (2004) argues that within reproductive futurism, homophobia arises because “homosexuality comes to stand in for the antisocial force of the (death) drive that threatens the fantasy of futurity and meaningfulness” (Freccero, 2006, p. 332).

Thus, in a homophobic culture, sinthomosexuality and the figure of the sinthomosexual are made to represent all that is antisocial, all that is associated with death, and all that stands in the way of “the belief in meaning and futurity” (Freccero, 2006, p. 332).

Arapeta’s governing and totalizing fantasy that a man attains immortality and defeats death through the begetting of a line of male descendants is only sustained by the demonization of his own son as a sinthomosexual—one who because of his perverse sexual orientation is deemed to have no stake in the future of humanity. Given that in Arapeta’s eyes the fact that Sam has been penetrated determines that he must now be defined in negative terms—as non-heterosexual, non-reproductive, and non-male. Sam is judged as having nothing to contribute to the future of the whānau or the mana of the whakapapa, and, therefore, is made to figure the death drive. Thus, the mechanism of reproductive futurism—which is dependent on the maintenance of reproductive heteronormativity as an “agency of validation” and “the currency to measure human dignity” (Spivak, 2012, pp. 130, 322)—vilifies homosexuality in order to manufacture “the assurance of meaning in fantasy’s promise of continuity” (Freccero, 2006, p. 332).

It comes as no surprise, then, that Arapeta calculates validity and human worth in the currency of sperm. While Turei, Sam’s mate who died in battle, is mourned because “the sperm that was in him from his father has died with him, and there will be no

further issue,” Sam is excoriated by his father for wasting sperm that is “sacred” (Ihimaera, 2000, pp. 173, 257) in an intrinsically non-productive sexual act. Arapeta believes that men like Sam who “abuse the sperm which is given to man for only one purpose” (Ihimaera, 2000, p. 257) desecrate the memory of those who were killed in battle with their seed unspent within them. In asserting this position so forcefully, he draws attention not only to the inseparability of sex and death in his own conceptualization of masculinity, but also to the interchangeability of the roles played by the erect penis and the fighting club in the generation of male mana. In Māori society, as Sam explains to Cliff, “a man’s cock . . . as much as the fighting club, personified all that a man was” (Ihimaera, 2000, p. 155).

But, how does Arapeta’s accusation that Sam has misused his sperm stand up to scrutiny? Let’s examine Arapeta’s argument in the light of Spivak’s directive to her students when reading texts to “locate the precise claim for the veridical, respect it and then go for the excuse/accuse/use dance” (Spivak, 2014, p. 162). On the one hand, Arapeta holds firm to a reproductive futurism which insists that sperm is sacred because its telos is the begetting of children. On the other, as we have seen, sperm issues freely from the penises of Tāne and his brothers, secreting itself in unsanctioned orifices, including the mouth, nose, armpits, ears, eyes and anus of Hine-ahu-one—or, in the case of Tunui-a-te-ika, a lesser atua, shooting high into the Solar System to form Halley’s Comet. Arapeta, we know, sees himself as acting in imitation of the gods, as the thrusting of his penis into every opening on Florence’s body demonstrates. Ihimaera’s text, especially in its presentation of Arapeta, provides readers with “contradictory instructions” (Spivak, 2014, p. 164) of the sort that Spivak maintains suggest the operation of a double bind. The fissure in Arapeta’s thought and behaviour regarding sperm comes into sharp focus when we consider that while he holds sperm to be tapu—because it is essential for the continuation of the whakapapa and the whānau—his degradation of his own wife in imitation of Tāne and his brothers risks wasting and, thereby, desecrating his own sacred sperm. Arapeta not only abuses the woman his sperm will fertilize, but, years later, also the child generated in that act.

Playing the double bind—in this case, the contradictory messages and instructions about sperm which we as readers receive from the character of Arapeta in Ihimaera’s text—it is important to note “how the text pushes [us] towards a decision, coaxes [us] to break the double bind” (Spivak, 2014, p. 164) by inviting us to attribute a definitive

significance not only to sperm, but also to both the penetrative and non-penetrative sexual acts that distribute it, either purposively or at random. Spivak's aesthetic education, however, leads us in a different direction—to acknowledge that what we are seeing is “a desire represented in a text . . . not its fulfilment” (Spivak, 2014, p. 165). Furthermore, it asks us to clear a space for undecidability. By drawing attention to “the undecidability of the future” (Spivak, 2012, p. 421), Spivak challenges us to read Arapeta's proclamations about sperm and his own particular alignment with reproductive futurism as (failed) attempts to over-determine the meaning of sex and sexuality. Spivak, in directing us to pay attention to what is singular and unverifiable in a text, asks us to resist as much as possible the temptation to universalize and to locate meaning in the universal. By acknowledging, as Spivak suggests we do, “the double bind of the universalizability of the singular, the double bind at the heart of democracy, for which an aesthetic education can be an epistemological preparation” (Spivak, 2012, p. 4), it is possible to appreciate the merits of Edelman's claim that sex generates difference and always resists whatever meaning we attempt to attach to it:

“. . . sex is the machinery of difference, inherently meaningless in itself, on the basis of which an imaginary meaning is posited nonetheless; like the zero *as* zero, it denotes a negativity whose every conceptualization, appearance, or image works to efface it” (Edelman, 2017, p. 154).

However, the negativity that Edelman attributes to conceptualizations of sex, should not be read as a rejection of queerness, which, he argues, “refers to what never accedes to representation in itself” (Edelman, 2017, p. 157). Rather, it is an acknowledgement that sex, which is always queer despite the best efforts to locate it within a predetermined system of meaning, opens onto “the space of the imageless, the impossible, the unthinkable” (Edelman, 2017, p. 157). Edelman's insistence on thinking queerness in relation to negativity and negation is not so much a denial of queer's usefulness as a refusal—in the face of reproductive futurism—to give queer a positive value or role in affirming “hope itself as affirmation” (Edelman, 2004, p. 4). If my reading of Te Kore, the Void, as Ihimaera writes it in *The Uncle's Story*, is infected a little by Edelman's notion of negation, this is because, as I see it, Te Kore becomes for Sam Mahana the space wherein he experiences “the negativity inherent in knowledge as such” (Edelman, 2017, p. 129). Te Kore, in other words, provides Sam with what Indigenous

philosopher of education Carl Mika terms an experience of nothingness, “linked with the learning of one’s own vulnerability towards the All” (Mika, 2017, p. 71).²⁰

As I have argued, following his penetration, Sam comes to an acceptance of his own vulnerability—a revelation, which like his orgasm, seems to come from Te Kore, the Void. In proposing that this overwhelming experience enables Sam to dwell—if briefly—in a state of suspension, a “*now*” (Ihimaera, 2000, p. 247) where distinctions between past, present, or future disappear and cease to matter, I wish to suggest that Sam’s new awareness makes it possible for him to accept the inevitability of the punishment which he had earlier predicted. This punishment—for an act of penetration that heralds negative consequences not just for Sam, but also for his whānau and for Cliff—Sam feels he must endure rather than flee.

Figured as a sinthomosexual in a culture with such strong investment in reproductive futurity, Sam sees no clear way to be both Māori and gay. He finds himself caught in a double bind that he can neither resolve nor continue to inhabit without bringing great suffering and even death upon himself. While Edelman—more than thirty years after Sam’s ‘death’—urges queers to say, “fuck the whole network of Symbolic relations and the future that serves as its prop” (Edelman, 2004, p. 29), Sam is equipped neither by his culture nor by his personal circumstances to act on such an imperative. Realizing that one interruptive act brings about others, what Sam *does* do is bear the consequences of his own hospitality—of opening up the home of his body to the otherness of anal penetration.

Other Hospitalities

If it is provocative to align Sam’s opening of his anus to Cliff with Derrida’s understanding of hospitality as an opening to “the absolute, unknown, anonymous

²⁰ Much more can be said about Te Kore and the distinctively Māori approach to the ‘Void’ that it signifies, including its contribution to theorizations of Ako—a concept commonly, but too narrowly, translated as teaching and learning. Ako has a much greater reach, implying as it does “a state of susceptibility in the face of the world and the dialogue between all things” (Mika, 2017, p. 67). Understood as an experience of “uncertainty within the flux of the world and its collapse within the self” (Mika, 2017, p. 65), Ako is not separable from Te Kore and the possibility of nothingness. If teaching and learning processes are about coming to terms with “the self’s implication by the world” (Mika, 2017, p. 65), then Sam Mahana’s encounter with Te Kore, understood as an engagement with Ako, involves a chipping away or reshaping of the self by other entities.

other” (Derrida & Dufourmantelle, 2000, p. 25) without regard for the consequences—no matter how interruptive of the self—nevertheless, I do so in order to bring Sam’s hospitality in relation to other hospitalities in Ihimaera’s novel.

More than any other character in *The Uncle’s Story*, Arapeta, as patriarch of the Mahana whānau, has a particular responsibility for ensuring that manaakitanga—hospitality, generosity and kindness—is expressed to visitors. Indeed, when Cliff first arrives in Waituhi, Arapeta welcomes him extravagantly, and appears to do everything that is required to make his guest feel at home: ““The hospitalities of the house are yours. Nothing is good enough for the man who saved my son’s life . . . ”” (Ihimaera, 2000, p. 215). And while it is true that Arapeta “always prided himself on being a generous host” (Ihimaera, 2000, p. 215), it soon becomes obvious that Arapeta’s hospitality is driven by egotism and personal vanity, providing him, as it does, with an opportunity to boast about his own war-time exploits. To borrow Spivak’s words, he is “Narcissus waiting to see his own powerful image in the eyes of the other” (Spivak, 2014, p. 54). Arapeta’s highly conditional hospitality, which depends on guests meeting their host’s expectations and needs, makes no room for the alteration of the self. He is incapable of providing authentic hospitality because he is resistant to interruption, impenetrable, unable to accept that “the arrival of the guest may change the space into which this guest is received” (Ruitenbergh, 2016, p. 29). When Arapeta discovers that Sam and Cliff are lovers he accuses Cliff of treachery and threatens him with a death, which he justifies as utu—a reciprocal action carried out so as to restore balance.

As the history of Western literature attests, to invite people into your home is “to give them the power to complicate your life right up to the act of taking it” (Heffernan, 2014, p. 1). In marked contrast to Arapeta’s highly conditional hospitality stand the actions of an elderly Vietnamese couple who offer Sam a meal knowing that in doing so they are setting themselves up for execution by the enemy. For these two old villagers, the code of hospitality must be maintained regardless of any risk to themselves: “*You are a boy. You were hungry, like all boys, and all boys must eat*” (Ihimaera, 2000, p. 91). The hospitality given to Sam by the old man and woman is unconditional and consequential—bringing about an interruption that leads directly to their deaths at the hands of the Vietcong. By inviting the outside inside in such an absolute way the old people are doing the unbearable, that is, they are accepting “the risk of the other coming and destroying the place, initiating a revolution, stealing

everything, or killing everyone” (Derrida, 1999b, p. 71). In the light of the unconditional and exemplary hospitality extended to Sam by the old Vietnamese couple, it is worth pondering how best to make sense of Arapeta’s complete and total rejection of his own son. If hospitality is an opening up in order to allow that which is other—that which is outside—to enter, then Arapeta’s expulsion of Sam from the whānau, given that it involves turning a familiar into a stranger, is a reversal of this process. There is a warning in this—the distant other is not always physically distant. We may find the other among ourselves and we may be other to ourselves.

In challenging us to use the power of the imagination to patiently reach toward the distant other, Spivak’s aesthetic education directs us to apply *teleiopoiesis* to that which is other, but also close at hand, including ‘ourselves’—especially in those odd and uncanny moments when we may sense that “the unified and autonomous subject . . . is an illusory effect of discourse, a convention by which we identify a single locus of action” (Ruitenbergh, 2016, p. 12).²¹ Ihimaera takes care to characterize Sam as having some sense or inkling of this rather queer process at work within himself, especially in those moments which I term penetration’s ‘other’—those rare occasions marked by permeability and diffusion, rather than by the sharp and violent intensities that are associated with penetrative interruptions.

Penetration’s ‘Other’

Before drawing this chapter to a close with some thoughts about how ideas that have emerged from my reading of *The Uncle’s Story* might contribute to a re-envisioning of sexuality education in Aotearoa New Zealand, I first wish to comment briefly on an episode from *The Uncle’s Story* that is illustrative of the phenomenon of penetration’s

²¹ Carl Mika, in addressing the significance of movement *towards* or into the night—a trope often linked in Māori thought with the undecidability and potentiality of Te Kore—explains that such movement implies that “the indefinite self is engaged with travelling through a state of uncertain being” (Mika, 2012, p. 1083). Thus, there are strong resonances between the movement *towards* or into the night that Mika speaks of and the movement implied by Spivak’s *teleiopoiesis*, especially given that both are in the direction of the unknowable—that which cannot be “grasped by, or encountered through, cognition alone” (Mika, 2012, p. 1083). Just as Spivak’s aesthetic education attends to the imagination in order to “attempt to access the epistemic” (Spivak, 2012, p. 10), so Mika argues for an Ako, which, by acknowledging the Māori language “as a metaphorical means of communication” (Mika, 2012, p. 1083), is better able to tolerate gaps in understanding and value the mysterious. Likewise, exposure and attention to the queer serves not only to establish “more supple epistemological frameworks” (Sedgwick, 1993, p. 5), but also leads to epistemological adventures.

'other'. The incident referred to takes place in Vietnam during Sam's time of military service.

Sam, in order to find protection from heavy rain, approaches the threshold of a temple where a massive golden Buddha is housed. Weighed down by thoughts of the old couple's death, and trying to make sense of his erotic feelings for Cliff, Sam is afraid that if he enters the temple he will be "unmasked, unclothed in the sight of God" (Ihimaera, 2000, p. 158). But, as he turns and starts to step away, Sam senses the Buddha exhaling and breathing upon the rain. With "every raindrop from Heaven" holding within it "a tinkling bell," it seemed to Sam that "the entire landscape resounded with the harmonics of life" (Ihimaera, 2000, p. 158). Awestruck, Sam responds to the call of the temple pavilion for him to approach: "*Haramai, Sam*" (Ihimaera, 2000, p. 158). As he crosses the threshold—"the paepae"—Sam senses "the imminence of a kind of peace that was also a mystery" (Ihimaera, 2000, p. 158). The temple pavilion opens up to welcome him just as a wharenuī back in Aotearoa would.

Here the thrusting, the perforation, the piercing, the pricking and the probing that are characteristic of penetrative or interruptive acts—whether sexual or soldierly—are entirely absent. Penetration's 'other'—a permeability or diffusion—is suggested by the gentle exhalation of the Buddha's breath, the softness of the rain, the tinkling bell, and a landscape redolent of life's concordance. While there is an invitation here, a calling onward, what, perhaps, is most noteworthy is that "all the world seemed to recede around him and away from him," leading Sam, despite his fears and anxieties, to receive in the Buddha's presence "an absolution" (Ihimaera, 2000, p. 160)—and a reassurance that all would be well.

Of course, the deep peace that Sam encounters at the temple is fleeting, and he is soon back among his soldier mates dealing with the traumas of war and the complexities of his sexual attraction and growing love for Cliff. But his experience of penetration's 'other'—where "the wind breathed through Sam, in, out, in, out" (Ihimaera, 2000, p. 162)—has provided Sam not only with an oasis of calm, albeit temporary, in the midst of turmoil, but also, I suggest, with a glimpse of "the worlds proposed and promised by queerness in the realm of the aesthetic" (Muñoz, 2009, p. 1). Sam has been given the opportunity to receive the respite he needs to refresh his spirits and build his strength in preparation to face the challenges ahead. This educates Sam to remain open to the

unexpected blessings and consolations of life—despite there being no obvious escape from the double bind in which he finds himself. Like the legendary hero Tāwhaki, who climbs to the heavens by holding fast to the tendrils of a vine, Sam must risk the perils of following his own “suspended way” (Ihimaera, 2019, p. 237)—the way of being both Māori and gay.

In so far as he allows himself to remain vulnerable or susceptible “in the face of the world and the dialogue between all things” (Mika, 2017, p. 67), Sam participates in a process of Ako premised on “mystery and unknowability” (Mika, 2012, p. 1081). The education Sam receives—by way of his anal penetration, his encounter with Te Kore, and his time at the Buddhist temple—entails a learning that springs from “the fragility associated with the dual nothingness and positivity of a thing” (Mika, 2017, p. 69). If it is an education in the double bind and in the queer, it is also an education that flies in the face of a conceptualization of mātauranga that “fixes things in the world” (Mika, 2012, p. 1081). Sam’s learning is not “an epistemological knowing of the world” (Mika, 2012, p. 1081), nor does it give him certainty and authority of the sort that Arapeta claims. Rather, it attunes him to “a Maori worldedness” (Mika, 2017, p. 71) where the ‘I’ is always in the process of being constituted by that which is not known—“the living momentum for the universe and all things within it” (Mika, 2012, pp. 1081–1082) which derives its potential from Te Kore.

Sexuality Education—Hauora and Wellbeing

As we have seen, Spivak’s aesthetic education attempts to use the imagination to negotiate rather than eliminate double binds through “the persistent establishment and re-establishment, the repeated consolidating in undoing, of a strategy of education and classroom pedagogy” (Spivak, 2012, p. 66). If, in my micrological reading of a passage from *The Uncle’s Story*, I have traversed the double bind of being Māori and gay, especially as it is performed and exemplified in Sam’s penetration by Cliff, I have also drawn attention to the fissures in Māori understandings of male-with-male sex as they present themselves in Ihimaera’s treatment of the story of Tāne and Hine-ahu-one—which, as Ihimaera shows in his characterization of Arapeta, have served down the generations as a template for the abuse of women and queers by men. The abusive elements in the Tāne and Hine-ahu-one myth—and Arapeta’s willingness to pattern his own destructive behaviour after Tāne’s—would come as no surprise to Spivak, who

argues the irreducibility of sexual difference and reproductive heteronormativity, which she positions upstream of culture.

If for Ihimaera, “growing up Māori has come to mean growing up and across the fractures in time and space within our culture”—as well as coming to terms with a postmodern world—it has also involved claiming those spaces in which it is possible “to transform and continue the process of becoming” (Ihimaera, 1998, pp. 15, 16). To this end, Ihimaera uses his fiction to “give the gift of belonging” (Ihimaera, 2016, p. 16) to takatāpui and to others. He does this by deploying traditional Māori concepts in ways that empower those whose stories have “often been suppressed by Māori” (Ihimaera, 2016, p. 15).

The Ministry of Education and the Education Review Office also turn to Māori concepts in their drive to “support the development of sexuality education resources and programmes that address the needs of diverse populations currently underserved by existing provision” (Education Review Office, 2018, p. 20). While acknowledging the benefits of introducing all New Zealand students to what they describe as “the hauora model, which includes physical, social, mental, emotional, and spiritual aspects” (Ministry of Education, 2015, p. 3) of wellbeing, the Ministry and ERO are particularly committed to using this approach to produce more equitable health outcomes for Māori students and their whānau.²² In its conceptualization of hauora, the Ministry of Education draws heavily, but not exclusively, on Mason Durie’s model of Te Whare Tapa Whā (see Durie, 1994) in an attempt to provide a Māori perspective on wellbeing that supports its own promotion of a holistic, but largely unexamined, understanding of sexuality. Yet, rather than grapple with hauora’s metaphysical and cosmological dimensions, including its inseparability from whakapapa and its source in the Māori creation myths, the Ministry presents hauora in more straightforward terms as “the good life” (Ministry of Education, 2015, p. 9). And, although in its 2015 guide for schools on sexuality education the Ministry affirms that “hauora is always relational,” its relationality is presented schematically, and as occurring “within and across”

²² Evidence cited by the Education Review Office (2018, p. 18) for the need to improve the health and wellbeing of Māori includes the following: “Māori are more likely to become teen parents than non-Māori”; “Māori women aged between 15 and 19 have a higher rate of abortions than any other ethnicity of the same age group”; and “gonorrhoea and chlamydia are 2–3 times more common in Māori women aged 15–19.”

(Ministry of Education, 2015, p. 9) the four elements or dimensions of wellbeing that appear in Durie’s model.²³ Hauora’s interdependence with whanaungatanga, manaakitanga and kotahitanga is ignored in this document—as it is in the 2020 guide which reaffirms “a holistic approach to sexuality education as defined by the hauora model” (Ministry of Education, 2020a, p. 10, 2020b, p. 12).²⁴

However, originating as it does in “the breath or wind of the spirit which was infused into the process of birth to animate life” (Marsden & Royal, 2003, p. 60), hauora is not unproblematically interchangeable with ‘wellbeing,’ and bears little relation to the “relentless neoliberal preoccupation with happiness and health” (Quinlivan, Rasmussen, Aspin, Allen, & Sanjakdar, 2014, p. 397) that currently underpins much of the thinking around sexuality education in New Zealand schools. Removed from its cosmological context, and stripped of its complexity and multi-dimensionality—and, therefore, of much of its usefulness as a theoretical tool—hauora, as it is understood and practised in neoliberal sexuality education classrooms, takes its place in a ‘fixed’ and tidy mātauranga, the plausibility of which depends on “*an orderly regard of things in the world*” (Mika, 2012, p. 1080). As such, hauora “provides no future for young people beyond the autological subject” (Quinlivan et al., 2014, p. 398).

Given the Education Review Office’s willingness to both define and identify negative outcomes for Māori—while at the same time borrowing and dumbing-down the Māori notion of hauora to frame their own understandings of health and wellbeing—two questions are worth considering. Firstly, to what extent do health and sexuality education programmes in Aotearoa New Zealand deploy hauora “in ways that re-instantiate and privilege normative European ways of knowing” (Quinlivan et al., 2014, p. 395)? And, secondly, having been emptied of much of its power, does hauora have anything to offer a re-envisioned sexuality education?

In response to the Education Review Office’s call to “support teachers to deliver a mātauranga Māori sexuality education programme that meets the needs of Māori

²³ These are te taha hinengaro / mental and emotional wellbeing; te taha whānau / social wellbeing; te taha tinana / physical wellbeing; and te taha wairua / spiritual wellbeing.

²⁴ The Education Review Office (2018, p. 45), however, does present “evaluation, inquiry and knowledge building . . . grounded in whanaungatanga and manaakitanga” as an indicator of effective practice, but fails to attend to the relationship between these concepts and hauora in ways that addresses their ontological connection.

whānau and students” (Education Review Office, 2018, p. 44), it is not surprising that sexuality educators are looking to do so in ways that shift their gaze beyond the oft-quoted negative health statistics for Māori. The willingness of sexuality education teachers to adopt hauora as an antidote to negativity is understandable, however, their readiness to embrace hauora primarily as a tool “to craft healthy and happy citizens” (Quinlivan et al., 2014, p. 396) may not only disguise a reluctance on the part of educators to address the injustices and social inequalities which lie behind the depressing figures, but also their failure to recognize that “government policy likes to see Māori concepts perform along a set of expectations bounded by Western ontology” (Mika & Stewart, 2017, p. 144).

While there is now an increasing demand from sexuality educators for classroom resources that reflect the belief that “sexual diversity has been an essential component of Maori society in the past and that this diversity continues into Maori society today” (Aspin, 2011, pp. 116–117), this is not unexpected, especially given that sexuality education programmes in Aotearoa happily link hauora with the acceptance of gender and sexuality diversity—but often without addressing the complicating perspective that for Māori “the roles of man to woman were established by primal myth” (Ihimaera, 2002, p. 124). In a similar vein, Māori “who identify with diverse genders and sexualities such as whakawāhine, tangata ira tāne, lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans, intersex and queer” (Kerekere, 2015, p. 2) are increasingly willing to be known as takatāpui. This is to be welcomed, not least because the notion of takatāpui enables identity to be thought in ways that don’t force a choice between prioritizing sexuality or gender and being Māori. However, the attendant complexities and challenges should not be ignored—especially those concerning whakapapa, which establishes the interrelatedness of all things, linking the self with the world and enabling a person “to negotiate the terrain of both seen and unseen existence” (Smith, 2000, p. 45). As Mika puts it, “the self’s well-being is dependent on the nature of whakapapa, with the entire self being determined by everything that exists, perceptible or otherwise” (Mika, 2017, p. 69). However, because “the primal myths made no allowance for gay man and women” (Ihimaera, 2002, p. 124), takatāpui are left with no whakapapa of their own to connect them to the atua. As a consequence, takatāpui are not only deprived of the means of finding their way in the world, but also “invisibilised” (Ihimaera, 2002, p. 124).

Thus, to argue that the takatāpui identity provides young Māori with “opportunities to discover and change” (Kerekere, 2015, p. 8)—this by giving them “unfettered access to culturally appropriate descriptors of sexual identity” (Aspin, 2011, p. 120) from the ancestors—is to address only one aspect of a concept that has a complex and not undisputed history. It is necessary, therefore, in the context of sexuality education to ensure that educators, when “seeking alternatives to the western concepts of sexuality” (Aspin, 2011, p. 119), take care not to simplify or romanticize the notion of takatāpui. Neither should the term be used in ways that offer an easy alignment with neoliberal understandings of hauora. For, while the notion of takatāpui is a powerful theoretical tool for investigating and problematizing “the sexual and cultural components of one’s identity” (Aspin, 2011, p. 118), this remains the case only as long as its complex and sometimes problematic relationship with other aspects of Māori tradition and history is recognized.

Some Concluding Remarks

If Witi Ihimaera invites readers of *The Uncle’s Story* to attend to Sam’s anal penetration by Cliff—in the wider context both of the Tāne/Hine-ahu-one myth and its re-enactment down the generations by Arapeta and other abusive men—this is in order to make gay Māori visible. In doing so, he brings to light the double bind, the requirement to choose between being gay and being Māori, that structures his novel. Reading Ihimaera’s book in the context of sexuality education and micrologically—that is, as Spivak’s aesthetic education directs us to do—we are able to attend to the ways in which hospitality is (and isn’t) performed through anal penetration, an act which, as Ihimaera explains, was generally viewed as “anathema” and only “applied to captured prisoners to desecrate their mana” (Ihimaera, 2002, p. 125). As we do so, we also come to a more complex and richer understanding of hauora than that which is available from mandated sexuality education resources, including the Te Whare Tapa Wha model and its four-sided wharenuī which tend to template hauora rather than present it as a dynamic force.

By attending to the fissures in Arapeta’s thought and actions—not only regarding the sacredness of the sexual act, but also his measurement of its validity in the currency of sperm, the means by which whakapapa is maintained—readers’ desires are rearranged in ways that build upon and broaden traditional understanding of hauora and whakapapa. As they observe the protocol of Ihimaera’s text, readers are positioned to

accept an extension of the concept of whakapapa to include the notion of the gay tribe, which Michael Mahana explains in terms of “belonging to a great new gay family” (Ihimaera, 2000, p. 296). Such a collectivity, which is inclusive of all takatāpui, emphasizes a whakapapa not determined by bloodlines, but by “descent from ancestors with sexual and gender fluidity” (Kerekere, 2017, p. 2). If Ihimaera, through Michael, is pointing to “the way to win back the family” (Ihimaera, 2000, p. 296)—and to claim the mana of takatāpui—he is also engaging in the sort of thinking that sets queerness as horizon. It is necessary, as Ihimaera argues in another forum, for gay Māori men and other takatāpui, too, to work to build “a brave new world” (Ihimaera, 2002, p. 126):

They have to construct a culture. They have to construct a tribe for themselves. They have to construct traditions, a history, a place to stand on and to do battle from. (Ihimaera, 2002, p. 126)

Ihimaera’s perspective is utopic. What we glimpse as we read *The Uncle’s Story* is the possibility of a collectivity to come. This brave new world is possibilized not by treating the past as if it were a golden age to be imitated in the present, but through re-inhabiting aspects of Māori tradition and reworking them in ways that allow for the imagining of a queerer and better future. Such a future “won’t just happen—it will have to be created” (Ihimaera, 2000, p. 131), as Michael’s friend, Roimata, reminds him. Sam, Michael and Roimata are all engaged—in various ways and to varying degrees—in a struggle to resist “the fixing effect of mātauranga” (Mika, 2012, p. 1080). Given that in *The Uncle’s Story* traditional understandings of sexuality carry much greater weight than the perspectives that emerge from their own lived sexual experience, these characters are all forced to rethink their ongoing relationship with the world.

Likewise, the re-envisioning of sexuality education in ways that allow it to refuse the domestication, not just of hauora, but of other interrelated and interdependent concepts, is a task that must be persistently worked at. Efforts to attend closely, micrologically, to *The Uncle’s Story*—in particular, to the shifts in epistemological orientation that become possible when Ihimaera’s novel is read hospitably in the light of Spivak’s aesthetic education and with the uncertain ‘knowledge’ that potentiality emerges from the nothingness of Te Kore—show how this can be done. Such mindful work comes with no guarantees, but does bring with it the satisfaction of contributing to the project of rethinking sexuality and sexuality education through the aesthetic. This happens as

we engage the imagination while remaining faithful to the singular and the queer. In this way, we are able affirm that “sexuality is an ever-changing component of the world in which we live” (Aspin & Hutchings, 2007, p. 419)—as it always has been.

The closing of this chapter—and with it Part Two of this thesis—signals a shift in focus. Part Three, which follows, veers in the direction of Leo Bersani, who, by positioning sex as a modality of the aesthetic, not only supplements Spivak’s aesthetic education, but also opens up possibilities for the reconceptualization of sexuality education in choreographic terms, including through literary reading.

PART THREE

Chapter Ten

Supplementing Spivak's Aesthetic Education

. . . I have not forgotten Derrida re-citing Rousseau: the supplement is dangerous because it opens us to the incalculable. (Spivak, 2012, p. 190)

. . . a new emphasis on the *peripheries* of our desiring attention would not only diversify desire but would also keep it mobile. Peripheral seductions would no longer be discarded because they can't be related to a dominant interest; even our dominant interest—our 'centers' of desire—would have merely a provisional, peripheral appeal. *The desiring self might even disappear as we learn to multiply our discontinuous and partial desiring selves*" (Bersani, 1978, p. 7).

Overview

Because the task of aesthetic education, like the work of sexuality education, "requires not only cognitive but emotional labour" (Boler & Zembylas, 2003, p. 111), in this chapter, I argue the benefits of supplementing Spivak's aesthetic education with Leo Bersani's notion of the aestheticization of existence—or self-aestheticization—including his positioning of sex as a modality of the aesthetic. I do this with the intention of enabling the imagining of a sexuality education that is not only less tightly bound to the epistemological and more concerned with ontological possibilities, but one also capable of taking greater account and advantage of "the contingency and mobility of desire" (Bennett & Royle, 2016, p. 251).

In looking to Bersani to supplement Spivak, I am not only providing "an addition from the outside," but also, as Derrida would argue, "supplying what is missing"—something that "is already inscribed within that to which it is added" (Bernasconi, 2015, p. 19). As Spivak acknowledges in the epigraph to this chapter, supplementation is a potentially dangerous business because that which is being supplemented always runs the risk of becoming unrecognizable—other to itself. My intention in exploring the potential of Bersanian approaches to contribute to Spivak's aesthetic education, including its deployment of desire, is to shine a light on the ways in which Bersani's aesthetic perspectives—in addition to his theorizations of sex—are capable of keeping, not only meaning, but also desire on the move. If, in the process, I distort Spivak's aesthetic education in unexpected or unwelcome ways, it is a risk I am prepared to take because supplementation, despite its attendant dangers, also opens up new possibilities.

With these thoughts in mind, I begin this chapter by taking a closer look at desire as it figures in education, including sexuality education.

The Place of Desire in School Curricula

Given that “the shape, or morphology, of desire is something that must resist definite parameters and be open to constant amendment” (Todd, 2012, p. 5), it is not surprising that attempts to theorize desire or sketch its contours, including in the sexuality education classroom, must grapple with the impossibility of having to represent the unrepresentable. However, while the question of “desire’s inclusion in sexuality education . . . remains an issue for contemporary program policy, design, and delivery” (Garland-Levett & Allen, 2019, p. 522), it is important to acknowledge that the place of desire in school curricula is the concern not just of sexuality education, but of pedagogy generally. This is so because desire ‘manages’ or structures “the limits as well as the possibilities for our receptivity to difference” (Todd, 2012, pp. 8–9). In short, desire is a precondition for all learning, even though it makes its presence felt—and is policed most obviously and anxiously—in pedagogical spaces where sexuality education takes place.

If desire—like pleasure—doesn’t merit a mention in mandated sexuality education curricula in Australia, Canada, England, Ireland, and New Zealand (see Garland-Levett & Allen, 2019, p. 523), then this is not simply because its inclusion is often opposed on traditional religious, cultural, or moral grounds. Rather, neoliberal educational policy with its emphasis on “linear, end-product-driven teaching” works either to silence desire or to co-opt it for its own purposes, thus undermining “the desire to teach, and to teach students to desire learning” (Davies & Bansel, 2007, p. 257). While sexuality educators are, perhaps, more aware of the “problematics of desire” (Garland-Levett & Allen, 2019, p. 521) in relation to the ‘othering’ of certain sexualities, religious beliefs and cultures, they are generally oblivious to the ways in which school-based sexuality education is “shaped by what the state desires, demands and enables” (Davies & Bansel, 2007, p. 250).

As I have argued, Spivak’s aesthetic education, recognising as it does that “the world needs an epistemological change that will rearrange desires” (Spivak, 2012, p. 2), is characterized by pedagogical principles and practices that are attentive to alterity, hospitality, interruption, and suspension. Thus, her aesthetic education is a useful tool

with which to interrogate neoliberalism's programme for education—an agenda from which sexuality education is not excluded—including the reconfiguration of universities and schools to produce “highly individualized, responsabilized subjects who have become entrepreneurial actors across all dimensions of their lives” (Davies & Bansel, 2007, p. 248). However, while Spivak's aesthetic education in its challenge to “individualism and competition” (Spivak, 2012, p. 154) certainly gives due emphasis to the rearrangement of desires for epistemological performance, it does tend to skirt around the issues that arise when students engage in the sort of intellectual work that requires them to “radically re-evaluate their worldviews” (Boler & Zembylas, 2003, p. 111). Such is the case, for example, when during the course of school-based sexuality education programmes students become aware of the privileging of marital heterosexuality, or of the role that desire and sexual pleasure play in the formation of sexual subjectivities. World views are similarly re-evaluated when—perhaps, through sexuality education—young people come to realize that neoliberalism shapes “the way in which we understand what matters, and the ways we can be manipulated and controlled through what we understand as mattering” (Davies, 2018, p. 118).

While attempting to address how best to think of desire and its relation to “the affective dimensions connected to learning” (Todd, 2012, p. 1), including in the context of Spivak's aesthetic education and its pedagogy, it is helpful to consider Spivak's relationship with psychoanalysis—a field of thought for which desire is a central, though disputed and elusive concept, one that “gives rise to its own elision and impossibility” (Azari, 2008, p. 9). I will do this before turning to Leo Bersani's work on desire, sexuality, and the aesthetic subject, “not to undermine but rather to possibly contribute [to] and complicate” (Gershon, 2015, p. 15) Spivak's project of aesthetic education. I will also touch on the work of literary and educational theorists, especially those who engage to varying degrees with the psychoanalytical tradition and/or with queer theory, among them Sharon Todd, Shoshana Felman, Judith Butler, Deborah Britzman, and Heather Love.

Pedagogy and Desire—Some Thoughts

Desire—including sexual desire—and pedagogy have always been entangled. As Todd observes, “the importance of desire for education has a long history” (Todd, 2012, p. 1) which stretches back to the beginnings of Western philosophy. While Plato links education with eros—meaning “desire in general, connected to but distinct from both

human sexuality and rationality” (Hull, 2002, p. 19)—Aristotle, in his *Metaphysics*, announces the universality of the desire for learning: “All men by nature desire to know” (Aristotle, ca. 350 B.C.E /1984, p. 1552).

The notion that education must concern itself both with the search for knowledge and the love of wisdom is, thus, premised on the belief that education has its origins in desire and the acknowledgement that “lack, absence, or ignorance” (Todd, 2012, p. 2) creates a longing or want which demands satisfaction. Given this scenario, desire, paradoxically, becomes a necessary mechanism in the production of that which it must satisfy. Drawing on the work of Jacques Lacan and Luce Irigaray, Jane Gallop argues that “the Platonic ideal of pederasty” provides an “undoubtedly . . . useful paradigm for classic Western pedagogy” (Gallop, 1982, pp. 119, 118) because it supports the widely held belief that it is the teacher’s job to instil or insert desire for knowledge into the student: “A greater man penetrates a lesser man with his knowledge. The student is empty, a receptacle for the phallus; the teacher is the phallic fullness of knowledge” (Gallop, 1982, p. 118).

Spivak’s aesthetic education, with its aim of uncoercively rearranging desires, clearly challenges the phallic paradigm—as it does the notion of education as “controlling the other through knowledge production” (Spivak, 2012, p. 467). In this, Spivak is broadly sympathetic to Paulo Friere’s concept of “‘*conscientização*,’ famously translated as ‘conscientization’” (Spivak, 2012, p. 536, endnote 19), and to his critique of ‘banking education’—“the mere transfer of knowledge” (Dale & Hyslop-Margison, 2010, p. 51). If Friere presents what is, perhaps, the most widely recognized critique of classical Western pedagogy’s tendency to imagine teacher-student relations as top-down, “one-directional, penetrative and incisive” (Todd, 2012, p. 3), it is a critique which also defies those models of sexuality education that place undue emphasis on giving young people “access to information” about health and sexuality, but without providing them with “opportunities to think about, question, and discuss” (Ministry of Education, 2015, p. 4) it. In particular, Friere’s advocacy of a lateral, dialogical pedagogy between the teacher-student—a process whereby knowledge emerges from the practice of freedom and, in turn, results in reflection and carefully considered action—provides a stimulus to educationalists to consider “a reconfiguration of the place of desire in the pedagogical encounter” (Todd, 2012, p. 3), including, I suggest, in the context of sexuality education.

In emphasizing the “contingent, multiply determined, and constantly shifting” character of the human subject, feminist, critical, postcolonial, queer and other post-structural educational theorists have drawn attention to ways in which desire both shapes and is shaped by the social-cultural, arguing not only that pedagogy needs to be rethought “as a process that gets tangled up in the nexus of social relations,” but also that it should operate in ways that enable human agents to “desire against the grain of dominant representations, languages, and meanings” (Todd, 2012, pp. 3, 4). By considering teacher-student interactions as performative, pedagogy comes to be seen as both a cultural and a symbolic practice which, among other things, inscribes gender, sexuality, race and ethnicity on its subjects. In so doing, it also ‘performs’ and generates the conditions under which teachers and learners produce and participate in desire. The development of psychoanalytic approaches to pedagogy and increased attention to “the affective investments produced in our learning encounters,” not only suggest that desire and affect are “structurally operational in what gets learned, by whom, and how” (Todd, 2012, p. 5), but also attest to the importance of emotion, eros, and sexuality in pedagogical situations. As Britzman puts it, “eros, a design of sexuality, is the beginning of education as well as an announcement of our potential” (Britzman, 2010, p. 325).

Supplementing Spivak’s Desire

Recognizing that desire—in particular its uncoercive rearrangement—is central to Spivak’s project of aesthetic education and its pedagogy, and given the recent flurry of interest in exploring the relationship between desire and pedagogy,²⁵ it is, perhaps, surprising to discover that Spivak makes little effort to theorize or problematize it. Rather, she tends to employ the concept of desire narrowly, and only in relation to the epistemological and epistemic. She writes, for example, that “the goal of teaching such a thing as literature is epistemological but also epistemic: transforming the way in which objects of knowledge are constructed; perhaps also shifting desires in the subject” (Spivak, 2012, p. 41).

²⁵ For example, essays by Derek Briton, Shoshana Felman, Laurie Finke, Helen Harper, Kaarina Kailo, Gae Makwood, Rebecca A. Martusewicz, Erica McWilliam, Judith P. Robertson, and Sharon Todd—gathered and edited by Todd (2012)—provide a range of perspectives on what constitutes desire and its place in the process of teaching and learning.

In announcing that her aesthetic education is concerned not only with changing the ways in which we construct knowledge, but also with rearranging desires in the subject, Spivak seems intent on limiting the scope of her pedagogical work, including with literary texts, to the cognitive, thus avoiding any reference to the affective dimension and desire's imbrication in it. If, on the one hand, Spivak, in her deployment of desire resists the work of Freud—arguably, “the most influential philosopher of desire in the twentieth century” (Bennet & Royle, 2016, p. 250)—on the other, she refuses to be steered by Foucault's work on sexuality which explores the role that desire plays in shaping social and institutional discourses and practices across historical periods. In distancing herself from both psychoanalytical and historical treatments of desire, Spivak may be trying to avoid getting bogged-down in debates about whether or not desire is contingent on lack, while, at the same time, making it clear that her aesthetic education is concerned with desire's structural role in the production of knowledge rather than with desire's psychic or social origins. Nevertheless, in choosing to confine her discussion of desire to the epistemological and the epistemic, Spivak misses an opportunity to explore how, in the context of literary reading, what we know and what we imagine are inextricably entangled with affect. This entanglement is manifest in affect's propensity to rearrange desires in relation to knowledge and its production.

Of course, readers discover in literary texts why and how characters desire one another, and as a particular fictional narrative progresses are able to follow what happens to those desires. At the same time, literary texts also produce desires in their readers—for instance, the desire to keep reading, the desire for understanding, and the desire that the story will end happily at least for the characters we like. As Peter Brooks explains:

We can, then, conceive of the reading of plot as a form of desire that carries us forward, onward, through the text. Narratives both tell of desire—typically present some story of desire—and arouse and make use of desire as dynamic of signification. (Brooks, 1992, p. 37)

Given that among the desires that reading is capable of producing or stimulating are those which the reader may seek “to exclude from consciousness, to not admit to knowledge”—for example, desires associated with uncomfortable and unwanted thoughts or feelings—Spivak's aesthetic education, like other pedagogical engagements, invariably, “has to deal not so much with *lack* of knowledge as with

resistances to knowledge” (Felman, 2012, pp. 25, 26). Thus, as Felman argues, the prime focus of the teacher must not be the handing on of pre-packaged knowledge, but the countering of what Lacan terms “the passion for ignorance” through “the creation of a new *condition* of knowledge—the creation of an original learning-disposition” (Felman, 2012, pp. 26, 27). Spivak’s aesthetic education is undoubtedly concerned with preparation for “epistemological revolution” through its persistent “work of displacing belief onto the terrain of the imagination” in an effort “to access the epistemic” (Spivak, 2012, pp. 26, 10). It also assumes that certain expressions of desire are “at the crux of the perpetuation of social and psychic violence, as well as violence to the earth and to other sentient and nonsentient beings” (Martusewicz, 2012, p. 98). However, Spivak’s project does not stray beyond the epistemological and epistemic to explore “the multivalent ways desire can be understood as a productive, creative, and sometimes . . . violent aspect of our encounters” (Todd, 2012, p. 6), not only with other people, but with literary texts as well. Thus, Spivak’s aesthetic education itself *resists* the opportunity to explore the relationship between the affective dimension and *resistance* to knowledge, and, in doing so, effectively ignores the role of affect in the creation of a new *condition* of knowledge. Given the importance of the imagination in Spivak’s project, it is worth considering whether Spivak’s reluctance to engage with the affective creates resistance to the working of the imagination or contributes to its activation, especially in the act of reading.

Spivak and Psychoanalytical Approaches to the Reading of Literary Texts

Spivak, in her teaching of literary reading relies on what Felman, following Lacan, terms a strong “textual knowledge” (Felman, 2012, p. 27). This knowledge, which encompasses “the functioning of language, of symbolic structures, of the signifier, knowledge at once derived from—and directed towards—interpretation” (Felman, 2012, p. 27), makes both psychoanalysis and teaching possible. As Felman argues, it is textual knowledge that enables dialogic teaching/learning, providing as it does “the analytical structure of insight” which brings analysands, students and teachers to the recognition that knowledge is neither substantial, nor the possession of an individual, but something that always “comes as a surprise” (Felman, 2012, p. 28) from the other through mutual dialogue.

Knowledge, which Lacan theorizes as “*knowledge which does not know itself*,” is, thus, untotalizable, and can only be articulated by reference to the concept of the

unconscious—a mechanism premised on the notion that human discourse can “never be entirely in agreement with itself” (Felman, 2012, p. 24). This is the case because the human subject is not autonomous, does not have self-mastery, but always operates in relation to the other. By appealing to the mechanism of the unconscious, it becomes possible to speak of humans—and their fictional representation—in terms of interiority. Thus, we are able to speak of people in ‘real’ life and characters in books as having not only emotions, but also a ‘hidden’ psychic life that underlies or extends beyond the conscious mind, existing as “an island of separateness within rationality and common sense” (Bourassa, 2009, p. 7), and operating according to its own internal structures or laws. Spivak, who “cannot imagine a world without psychoanalysis, at least as an item on the roll of techniques for reading narrative as ethical instantiation” (Spivak, 1994, p. 66), admits that the “site of *unconsciousness*” (Spivak, 2012, p. 352)—that which is repressed or hidden from sight in a particular discourse—may be successfully opened up by a literary reading. However, she stresses that “this is not a recommendation for the psychoanalytic investigation of literature or society” (Spivak, 2012, p. 352) because ‘unconsciousness’—a textual or literary figure—must always be distinguished from the unconscious.

Spivak’s attitude towards psychoanalysis is clearly ambivalent. If, on the one hand, she acknowledges that she has “always felt uneasy about the use of psychoanalysis in cultural critique”—because its provenance is specific to a particular culture—on the other, Spivak is sympathetic to feminist approaches that are “actively contestatory” (Spivak, 2012, pp. 219, 220) in their use of psychoanalysis to understand sexual difference and gendering. In acknowledging that “the desire of psychoanalysis is to tap the para- and pre-logic that produces the subject’s logic, and also the logic of the subject’s illogic,” Spivak affirms that psychoanalysis recognizes no originary unity underlying the drives of ego and sexuality, “but only a riddle, the grounding riddle or *Grundrätzel* of biology” (Spivak, 2012, p. 221). As Spivak sees it, psychoanalysis itself is founded on an aporia, one which Freud himself acknowledged in his “mature reflection upon the impossibility of an adequately justified psychoanalysis” (Spivak, 2012, p. 235). Hence, Spivak’s interest in psychoanalysis lies not in any claim, either supported or disputed, that it be recognized as a ‘science,’ but in psychoanalysis’ usefulness “as a challenge to systematic moral philosophy” (Spivak, 2012, p. 221). In other words, it is as a cultural critic and literary theorist—not as a clinical

practitioner—that Spivak taps the potential of psychoanalysis to unpick received narratives and, in so doing, produce “malleable situational lessons” (Spivak, 2012, p. 221) through encounters with a wide range of texts.

In this regard, Spivak’s approach has been described as “reading psychoanalysis from the so-called margins” (Spivak, 1994, p. 41) in an effort to encourage social agency. For example, in her rereading of Ovidian, Freudian, and Lacanian accounts of the Narcissus-Echo myth, Spivak endeavours “to ‘give woman’ to Echo, to carve her out of traditional and deconstructive representation and (non)representation, however imperfectly” (Spivak, 2012, p. 218). As she does so, Spivak not only provides readers with the opportunity to participate in the potential undoing of Narcissus—“an icon of mortiferous self-knowledge”—but also shows that insofar as Echo becomes inserted or suspended inside the text of Narcissus, not as herself, but as one ‘ventriloquizing’ the other, she in some strange way models not only the work traditionally ascribed to women, but also the task of aesthetic education, which is “to borrow and anticipate the speech of the other” (Spivak, 2012, pp. 224, 218).

Spivak, in explaining the role of psychoanalysis in relation to the reading of literary texts, speaks of “an ideology of ‘applying’ in critical practice a ‘theory’ developed under other auspices” (Spivak, 1982, p. 209). For Spivak, psychoanalysis, employed beyond the clinical context, not only becomes a tool to undermine “the implicit assumption that literature is an autonomous activity of the mind” (Spivak, 1982, p. 208), but also a means to challenge widely-held beliefs about the foundations of literary pedagogy. This happens by naming “frontier concepts” (Spivak, 1982, p. 224) that push against the boundaries of formal criticism, while introducing a psychoanalytical vocabulary—along with its accompanying ideologically charged metaphors—into literary criticism. However, it is psychoanalysis’ ability to raise questions about overt meaning in a text, to illuminate the interplay of presence and absence, fulfilment and non-fulfilment in relation to the operation of desire within a text, and to engage the reader in “the sub-individual zone of sense-making” (Spivak, 1994, p. 65) that Spivak identifies as among its strongest contributions to literary pedagogy and her project of aesthetic education. Spivak clearly aligns herself here with Mishra Tarc, who argues that psychoanalysis, like literature, “offers an inventive vocabulary and allegorical structure with which to view the workings of the mind” (Mishra Tarc, 2015, p. 14).

Given the dialogic nature of psychoanalysis and its application, both in the clinical and pedagogical contexts, I suggest that it may be an avenue worth pursuing by those wishing to open sexuality education up to a pedagogy of hospitality or wanting to position it as a space in which it is possible to imagine collectivities to come through the practice of literary reading. But, as Spivak's own ambivalences towards psychoanalysis suggest, such a journey must not be taken uncritically—even when it is motivated by calls for a re-envisioning of sexuality education in ways that take advantage of literary reading's ability to rearrange desires.

Bersani, Desire, and the Aesthetic Subject

Walter Gershon, in attempting both to add to and, perhaps, complicate Spivak's project of aesthetic education—and the role of literary reading within it—voices his concern that “a call for aesthetic education would focus so heavily on epistemological pathways to knowledge” (Gershon, 2015, p. 11) at the expense of the sensual, the affective, and the ontological. In arguing for an aesthetic education that moves outside the frame of the double bind and into the sensual, not losing the frame but noting its traces or “trajectories of affect,” Gershon seeks to limit aesthetic education's dependence on “an epistemological set of understandings that oppresses ontological possibilities” (Gershon, 2015, pp. 14, 13). In the light of Gershon's observations, Spivak's project of aesthetic education—especially insofar as its pedagogy of hospitality seeks to expose readers to all that literary texts have to offer, including potentially destabilizing and “discomforting truths” (see Boler & Zembylas, 2003, pp. 110–136)—would do well to take account of the trajectories of affect that accompany epistemological movement or change, and which contribute to “the whole messy is-ness of being/knowing/doing/is” (Gershon, 2015, p. 15). This is because it is in the transactional space of the pedagogical exchange that desires are uncoercively rearranged while “manifold forms of attachment and disassociation” (Britzman, 2000a, p. 36), affective as well as epistemological, are re-enacted. It is in response to Gershon's argument that I now turn to Bersani to supplement Spivak.

Throughout his long career as a literary and social theorist, Leo Bersani has explored the workings of desire, “formulating a series of influential theses about sex,” while “methodically working through a philosophy of art” (Glavey, 2010, p. 317). If, on the one hand, Bersani insists on the potential of sex, particularly in its nonnormative modes, to set off an experience of *jouissance* that “shatters the self out of a dangerous

security about its own sexual identity” (Bersani, 1978, p. 9), on the other, he directs us to rethink sex in terms of the aesthetic.²⁶ This rethinking, Bersani argues, makes it possible not only to associate sensual pleasure with “a new relational mode that might be the result of an aesthetic subjectification” (Bersani, 2010, p. 69), but also to position sex as a modality of the aesthetic. Thus, notwithstanding claims that many of his ideas about sex align with Edelman’s articulation of the negative or anti-social thesis in queer theory—for example, his notion that homo-sex is anti-identitarian and anti-communitarian—Bersani, especially insofar as he connects sex with the aesthetic, is profoundly relational in his focus. However, because he is concerned with forms of sociability that are characterized by “epistemologically useless connections” (Bersani, 2015, p. 81)—which are forged at the expense of self-coherence—Bersani’s interest in relationality is often overlooked. Yet, as Michael O’Rourke observes, shuttling as it does between questions of self-reflexivity and inter-relationality, Bersani’s work “has everywhere been committed, like Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick’s, to recreating the world and letting it be” (O’Rourke, 2012, p. 36, endnote 3).

Bersani’s more recent preoccupation with the aesthetic subject—in particular, his theorization of similitude as a means of creating “a capacity for non-coercive forms of relationality” (Glavey, 2016, p. 25), along with his advocacy of “impersonal intimacy” (Bersani & Tuhkanen, 2014, pp. 294, 295) as a new way of relating—suggests fresh sensual, affective and ontological possibilities for Spivak’s project of aesthetic education. His theorizations, including his figuring of “a non-desiring relation to the world” (Jöttkandt, 2011, p. 237), support Spivak’s pedagogy of hospitality and her own efforts to open up possibilities for the imagining of collectivities to come. If, as Spivak says, “the supplement both supplies a lack and adds an excess” (Spivak, 2012, p. 349), then Bersani’s work productively supplements Spivak’s aesthetic education, exposing it to the incalculable in ways unforeseen by Spivak—including, I suggest, its deployment in the field of sexuality education.

²⁶ It is important in this context to acknowledge that aesthetic experience—but, carefully distanced from the sexual and the erotic—has long been valued as a means of loosening one’s fixation on the self in order to pursue the ethical. Philosophers Arthur Schopenhauer and Iris Murdoch, for example, claim a role for the aesthetic in the development of cognitive empathy on the grounds that aesthetic encounters are able to educate us in “becoming more adept at decentering on our own perspective and recentering on those of others” (Clifton, 2017, p. 22).

Clearly, Bersani's shift "from a psychoanalytic version of the subject whose desire testifies to a primordial lack to a version of the subject whose attempts at relationality stem from an original relatedness" (Goldberg, 2009, p. 7) serves as an important reference point when comparing Bersani's theorization of the aesthetic subject and Spivak's aesthetic education. However, it would be a mistake to neglect Bersani's earlier work on character and desire in literature—including his exploration of the possibility of "deconstructing the self" through the reinstatement of a pre-Freudian "psychology of fragmentary and *discontinuous* desires" (Bersani, 1978, p. 6)—as this suggests a potentially fruitful pedagogical path towards the activation and mobilization of desire through literary reading, both in relation to Spivak's project of aesthetic education and in the context of the re-envisioning of sexuality education.

Given that my focus in this thesis is the potential of Spivak's aesthetic education—supplemented by Leo Bersani's conceptualization of sex as a modality of the aesthetic—to queer and, thereby, productively contribute to a re-envisioning of sexuality education in Aotearoa New Zealand, it is important to explore Bersani's theorization of desire and sex, including his positing of "sameness as the root of a sexuality that is not a matter of lack but of the fullness of material existence" (Goldberg, 2009, p. 6). It is with Bersani's understanding of desire, therefore, that I start before turning to his work on the aesthetic subject and new relational modes of being, including the potential of his notion of impersonal intimacy to contribute to the work of "persistently attempting collectivities to come" (Spivak, 2012, p. 464) in the rethinking of sexuality education.

As I have argued, Spivak's aesthetic education asks that knowledge structures and claims be interrupted and postponed through the practice of *teleiopoiesis*—that mechanism of self-othering which enables a move toward the distant but unreachable other by way of the imagination. In this way, Spivak maintains, desires are uncoercively rearranged and the subject prepared for ethical performance. If, for Spivak, epistemological and epistemic change comes about through the activation of the imagination, then for Bersani—who is equally insistent that that epistemological appropriation be rejected in favour of an "ethically viable conceptualization of otherness" (Tuhkanen, 2014c, p. 147)—any exploration of desire, including its mobility, must begin with the physical body, and its intra-relational and inter-relational possibilities. Such exploration will take account of "spatial proximity and physical

connectedness” (French, 2014, p. 137). Bersani’s notion of otherness—“articulated as relay stations in a process of self-extension” (Bersani, 1996, p. 7)—may be profitably thought of alongside Spivak’s *teleiopoiesis*. However, although both concepts imply a movement outward, a stretching of and beyond the self, a reaching towards not confined to, or by, the here and the now, Spivak privileges the imagination as an instrument of extension while Bersani emphasizes the extensibility and receptivity of the body.

In contrast to Spivak, who asks us to ‘think’ sex and sexuality almost exclusively in structural terms—for example, she observes that “the first difference we perceive materially is sexual difference,” which then “becomes our tool for abstraction, in many forms and shapes” (Spivak, 2012, p. 31)—Bersani, sees sex as a prime site for the exploration of desire. As he draws our attention to the singularity and “heterogeneity of our desiring impulses,” Bersani proposes, as his epigraph to this chapter indicates, that “*the* desiring self might even disappear as we learn to multiply our discontinuous and partial desiring selves” (Bersani, 1978, p. 7). Here, Bersani acknowledges a debt to Deleuze and Guattari, reading their *Anti-Oedipus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia* (1983)—originally published as *L’Anti-Oedipe* in 1972—as a philosophical pastoral of “pre-Oedipal desire,” on the grounds of its depiction of “an Arcadia of polymorphous perversity” (Bersani, 1978, p. 7). If Spivak challenges us to reach out to the distant and unreachable other by the power of the imagination, Bersani—most noticeably in his essays on AIDS and homo-sex—seems more interested in how we connect with the proximate other through sexual encounter.

What links Spivak and Bersani most closely is their insistence that epistemological appropriation must be resisted and refused—this because of a shared conviction that violence results from thwarted efforts to master the other epistemologically. For Spivak, who recognizes that “violence is part of desire, pleasure, education,” the most effective way to address it is to maintain efforts to displace belief “onto the terrain of the imagination” (Spivak, 2012, pp. 125, 10), thereby, accessing the epistemic from an unexpected quarter. In other words, violence is best approached indirectly and by way of an aesthetic education. Bersani, in arguing that the success of our attempts to deal with violence may well depend “on our fundamental imagination of violence: how we define it, on whether or not we allow ourselves to be fixated by it, on how we see its relation to other kinds of experience” (Bersani & Dutoit, 1985, p. 125), proposes that

becoming-human calls for digression rather aggression. Neither Spivak nor Bersani believe that the problem of violence, including violence's foundation in the desire to know and master the other, is able to be tackled head-on. As Snediker observes, for Bersani, it is more a matter of circumnavigating than of "'solving' aggression" (Snediker, 2017, p. 159). This circumnavigation requires more than an acknowledgement that desire is free-floating. Thus, in promoting digression as an antidote to violence, Bersani urges us to resist forms of education that cause us "to feel uneasy about our perceptual and affective mobility," and to seek, instead, "a re-education in the *moves* of a consciousness less constrained by the orders of narrativity" (Bersani & Dutoit, 1985, p. 125), less determined by epistemological consistency, and less amenable to an exaggerated ego. For Bersani, sexual encounter, in addition to mobilizing desire, provides opportunities for learning new counter-hegemonic ways of relating. This, he argues, is because it opens up spaces where coherence is stretched—maybe to breaking point—and familiar or comforting narratives no longer hold.

Sex, the Aesthetic, and New Relational Modes of Being

Across the decades, what has remained consistent in Bersani's approach to the theorisation of desire has been his willingness to critically engage with the various arts—literature, film, sculpture, and painting—in ways that "deconstruct immutable structures of representation and mobilize the play of forms and readings" (French, 2014, p. 128). Bersani's argument that art has the ability to destabilise not only the structures that condition our habitual ways of perceiving and thinking about 'reality,' but also the "appropriative relation of the self to the world" (Bersani, 2006, p. 163)—a relation generally affirmed by psychoanalysis—aligns with his theorization of sex and the aesthetic "as experiences that shatter the self's rigidly defended contours" (Lamm, 2011, p. 250). However, whereas the self-shattering that happens in sex is the consequence of "an object-destroying *jouissance*" (Bersani, 2006, p. 164), encounters with works of art and literature serve to position us across time and space as aesthetic subjects in the world.

For Bersani, one of the great merits of the aesthetic is that it reveals to us that "we correspond to the world in ways that don't necessitate or imply the world's suppression" (Bersani, 2006, p. 174). Insofar as "art diagrams universal relationality," it also attests to the possibility of our "nonprojective presence in the world" (Bersani, 2006, p. 164). And, although the human subject is always potentially prey to the

illusion that otherness can be suppressed through *jouissance*, the aesthetic insists on gesturing toward the pleasure of discovering that it is within otherness that we are “harboured” (Bersani, 2006, p. 174). Through the aesthetic it becomes possible for the human subject to learn “not exactly to satisfy desire but to see a desire everywhere” (Bersani, 2006, p. 166). Developing the capacity to locate desire outside the self—without claiming desire for the self—is an important step towards feeling at home with otherness. It is in this way that we learn to lose the self, only to find it again “disseminated among the appearances of the visible world” (Bersani, 2010, p. 69).

If, for Bersani, the aesthetic is an “ontological laboratory,” this is because aesthetic encounters open up spaces where it is possible to experiment with “many models of relationality” (Bersani & Dutoit, 1998, p. 63), including the reimagining of the subject as a self-spread-widely—across literary texts, for example. Bersani’s notion of the disseminated self invites comparison with Judith Butler’s notion of the “unbound” body—the body which “in its acting, its receptivity, in its speech, desire, and mobility” is always “outside itself, in the world of others, in a space and time it does not control” (Butler, 2010, p. 52). If, for Butler, the realization that one never fully possesses or completely controls one’s body is what makes “passionate encounter” (Butler, 2010, p. 54) possible, then a similar insight shapes Bersani’s approach to desire. In his efforts to theorize desire in ways that resist assimilation or negation of the other, especially in the pursuit of knowledge, Bersani queers Freud’s insistence that desire, though “intrinsically free-floating” (Bersani, 2010, p. 159), must nevertheless be directed to attach itself to a suitable object. Bersani, however, finds it more productive to conceptualize desire as a “choreographic mobility” capable of shaping “an aesthetic and, more specifically, a choreographic construction” (Bersani, 2015, p. 6), than as movement that seeks attachment. Thus, in thinking what amounts to a “choreographic being-together,” Bersani imagines the possibility of an intimacy generated by “nonpurposive pleasures of touch” that are capable of resisting “subject-object dualism in notions of the relation between the self and the world” (Bersani, 2015, pp. 12, 4).

Bersani’s reformulation of desire, made possible by desire’s untethering from the human subject, enables the thinking of a new type of sociability “uncontaminated by desire” (Bersani, 2010, p. 45). Like Foucault, Bersani first experiments with the psychoanalytic subject and the intensities of *jouissance* to test the limits and viability of “social relations no longer structured by fixed positions of dominance and submission,

of superiority and inferiority” (Bersani, 2010, p. 134). Later, however, in turning to the aesthetic, Bersani looks beyond *jouissance* in order to “institute a relationality grounded in correspondences, in our at-homeness in the world’s being” (Bersani, 2006, p. 171).

By emphasizing Bersani’s espousal, especially in his more recent work, of “ever-proliferating new relational modes and forms of being,” Michael O’Rourke underscores Bersani’s claim that “everyone relates to everyone else through formal correspondences” (O’Rourke, 2012, p. 36, endnote 3). Similarly, Tim Dean concludes that over the years Bersani has increasingly come to conceptualize relationality as “irreducibly aesthetic” (Dean, 2010, p. 387). In proposing that aesthetic rather than sexual subjectivity has become Bersani’s preferred mode of relating to the world beyond the self, Dean argues that Bersani’s concern with processes of self-extension rather than self-shattering reveals a prioritizing of “the ethics of ontological relatedness” (Dean, 2010, p. 391) over those approaches to ethics that emphasize epistemological relations. Thus, although it is often thought that Bersani is preoccupied with immobility and aporia, “his is, perhaps primarily, an ontology of becoming” (Tuhkanen, 2014a, p. 74).

Like Spivak, Bersani throws out a challenge to those following the well-trodden path of thinkers, including Descartes, Freud and Proust, who “have accustomed us to thinking of our connection to otherness in terms of epistemological appropriation and possession” (Bersani, 2015, p. ix). In maintaining that art, including literature, “reveals continuities of being that discourage our desire to master otherness by means of knowledge” (Dean, 2010, p. 391), Bersani is clearly on the same wavelength as Spivak who, as we have seen, insists that an ethical response to the other postpones as well as interrupts the epistemological—“the undertaking to construct the other as object of knowledge” (Spivak, 2012, p. 316). Thus, Bersani’s call for “the decomposition and recomposition of intelligibility in aesthetic space” (Dean, 2010, p. 391) as a strategy to inhibit consumerist approaches to art in a culture where the aesthetic is largely regarded as redemptive, may be heard as a reiteration of Spivak’s demand that knowledge claims be interrupted and postponed through the practice of *teleiopoiesis*. Rather than bridging the gap between the self and the other, Bersani, like Spivak, draws attention to “the inadequacy of representation *in the very need for an appeal to the imagination*” (Sharpe, 2014, p. 516).

If, for Spivak, the necessity to call upon the imagination in the face of the insufficiency of representation is evidenced, for example, in the figure of catachresis—where an analogy is established but without foundation in either the literal or the historical—the practice of *teleiopoiesis*, which is facilitated by catachresis, does not necessarily imply an ontological rift or “an irreducible gap of *being* between the human subject and the world” (Bersani, 2015, p. xi). Rather, *teleiopoiesis*, like the imagination itself, addresses the instability of epistemological structures by taking productive advantage of their susceptibility to the incalculable and the unforeseeable. In fact, Spivak’s aesthetic education, insisting as it does on “an epistemological preparation into the possibility of a relationship without relation” (Spivak, 2012, p. 11) through the reflexive rearrangement of desires, acknowledges that there are connections that always resist appropriation and explanation by the-human-mind-demanding-to-know. Thus, as Morton observes, Spivak’s notion of relation without relation supports “an aporetic model of an ethical dialogue,” drawing attention as it does to “the impossible experience of an encounter between the self and the inaccessible presence of the other” (Morton, 2007, p. 134). What Spivak describes as “the abject relationship without relation to planetarity” (Spivak, 2012, p. 380) is but one instance of an ‘impossible’ connection.

Spivak’s conceptualization of relationship without relation invites consideration of Bersani’s argument for connectedness amidst otherness. Like Spivak, Bersani appeals to the trope of hospitality to present his case. However, in contrast to Spivak—who following Levinas and Derrida presents hospitality as a welcoming of the other, an interruption of the self by the other—Bersani approaches things from a different angle, asking us to view the world not as a hostile place, but as a home or locus of hospitality where “individual bodies and the desires they seek to satisfy” (Bersani, 2015, p. 89) are already accommodated. However, such a change in perspective requires “a modification of our fundamental terms of thought” (Bersani, 2015, p. xii), including a loosening of our attachment to knowledge as the primary mode of relating to the world. As Bersani sees it, access to this “hospitable otherness” to which we already belong comes with the acknowledgement of “the oneness of being—of our intrinsic connectedness to the otherness at once external, and from a psychoanalytic perspective, internal to us” (Bersani, 2015, pp. xi, xii). Rejecting Cartesian dualisms that separate mind from non-mind and conscious from unconscious, Bersani argues for “the

assumption of a commonality of being among the human subject and both the human and the nonhuman world” (Bersani, 2015, p. 62). Thus, rather than prioritizing the ethical encounter with the other that is made possible by the interruption of self in hospitality, as Spivak does, Bersani stresses that the subject is never not in a relation of correspondence to, and with, the world. If Bersani sets out to deconstruct “the prestige of knowledge,” it is on the basis of “an aesthetic ethic of correspondences between the self and the world” (Bersani, 2015, p. 5)

In seeking to counter a relationality that emphasizes difference with one that attends to tentative similitude, Bersani asks that we engage in the activity of “positing uncertain likeness” (Bersani, 2015, p. 81). In other words, he invites us to view similitude, not as something concrete or fixed, but as a virtuality—an likeness that is “just emerging—unfinished, unrealized” (Bersani, 2015, p. 82). By acknowledging that correspondences come and go from consciousness before they are fully formed, it becomes possible to “try out different positions and extensions” (Bersani, 2015, p. 82) without concern for thought’s incongruities, inaccuracies, and faults—the characteristics of the divided subject.

Bersani’s argument that the human subject is “continuously intersected by nontotalizable virtual connections” (Bersani, 2015, p. 82), becomes the basis for his “refusal to recognize the boundaries, self-sufficiency, and even the reality of the isolated ego” (Love, 2014, p. 40). It is also the key to understanding his advocacy of new forms of intimacy that involve a rethinking, displacement and dispersal of the human subject, including desire. New types of intimacy, which are effected by self-extendibility rather than a paranoid intensity, are observed in “a kind of cartography of the subject, a tracing of spatial connectedness” (Dean, Foster, Silverman, & Bersani, 1997, p. 8) which becomes possible through the aesthetic encounter.

For Bersani, the value of the aesthetic, including the literary, lies not in any “consolation for what is lacking in life” (Love, 2014, p. 41) that it might provide—he rejects “the notion of art as salvaging somehow damaged experience” (Bersani, 1990, p. 7)—but rather in art and literature’s ability to position us in the world as aesthetic rather than as psychoanalytically defined subjects. Particularly significant from the perspective of Spivak’s aesthetic education is Bersani’s theorization of the displacement, dispersal and spatialization of the human subject, including our desires.

Bersani's work supplements and supports Spivak's aesthetic education most clearly, not only in its elaboration of the "mobility and immobility of desire" (Dean et al., 1997, p. 3), but also in its elaboration of the notion of impersonal intimacy, both as a new relational mode and a pedagogical concept applicable to the re-envisioning of sexuality education.

Bersani and Sexuality Education

Bersani, like Spivak, is an extensively published literary and cultural theorist who for many decades has taught in top-line North American Universities. While neither is a philosopher of education in the strictest sense, each has contributed ideas that enable education, including sexuality education, to "resist the coercive designs more or less hidden" (Bersani, 1986, p. 67) in projects such as neoliberalism. For Bersani and Spivak, reflections on pedagogy emerge primarily from their teaching of literary reading in humanities faculties which have in recent years become increasingly marginalized and trivialized within neo-liberal universities—universities which Bersani calls "factories of knowledge" (Bersani & Tuhkanen, 2014, p. 296) and Spivak describes as adjuncts to "international civil society" (Spivak, 2012, p. 1).

While Bersani's ideas on pedagogy and the place of literary reading within it are less developed than Spivak's—and are often presented with rhetorical flourish—they certainly work in support of calls for sexuality education to embrace "a pedagogy of being-doing" as they challenge "entrenched and politically invested" (Allen, 2018b, p. 141) views about the field. Just as Spivak promotes what she calls "imaginative activism" (Spivak, 2014, p. 80) in her pedagogical encounters—this in an effort to change epistemological performance by persistently resisting the urge to construct the other as an object of knowledge—Bersani, in his teaching and reading of literary texts, seeks to institute new ways of connecting that enable us to locate ourselves aesthetically in the world rather than as psychoanalytically determined subjects.

Louisa Allen, in drawing attention to "the great pleasures in thinking with new materialism" (Allen, 2018b, p. 141) in sexuality education classrooms, alerts us to the need to discover pleasure in thinking otherwise, including, I suggest, through literary reading—and as we re-envision sexuality education. For, like new materialism, literary reading directs our attention to the queerness that is to be found in "unexpected and unfamiliar phenomena" (Allen, 2018b, p. 141)—and away from a preoccupation with

contraception and safer sex. Bersani's collapsing of the ontological and the aesthetic—he sees art and literature as concretizing the ontological—opens the way for the discovery of “new pleasures of the body,” not by rational reflection, but through literary reading and imaginative effort which make possible “otherwise inconceivable states of availability” (Bersani, 2015, p. 93).

Unsurprisingly, given their long-time commitment to the teaching of literary reading and to literature in general—especially the European canon—both Bersani and Spivak regard pedagogical encounters with literary texts as ideal occasions, not only “to learn otherwise” (Spivak, 2012, p. 164) through the subversion of the familiar and the expected, but also as opportunities for self-abstraction or self-synecdoche. As Spivak says, it is by self-synecdochizing that a subject is able to establish a metonymic connection with a particular situation, and, in so doing, claim collectivity. If, for Spivak, the teaching and reading of literary texts—including, I suggest, in the context of sexuality education—become the means by which collectivities to come are attempted, for Bersani, teaching and literature offer “a rare opportunity to experiment with some of the shifts in modes of connecting” (Bersani, 2010, p. 200) that he is committed to, in particular the proliferation of impersonal intimacy within and through groups of people. While teaching allows for “a certain type of group-work” and experimentation in modes of connectedness that might gradually disseminate into society, literature, too, has an effect “on the way in which people instinctively and intuitively relate and connect” (Bersani, 2010, pp. 200, 201). In maintaining that teaching and literature “can train us, among other things, in a kind of impersonal intimacy, an intellectual and nonpermanent friendship” (Bersani, 2010, p. 201), Bersani positions pedagogy as a mode of extensibility, a mechanism which enables us not only to try out all sorts of positions in the world, but also to widen “our connective field” (Bersani, 2015, p. 82) beyond the human. This positioning—which preserves “the materiality of the subject and of the world” (Bersani, 2015, p. 89), but within the aesthetic mode that both eschews the representational and resists the stiffening of ‘reality’—opens the door to “the possibility of thinking-doing sexuality education differently” (Allen, 2018b, p. 25).

In elaborating on what may fairly be termed his pedagogy of impersonal intimacy—including the place of literary reading in it—Bersani reveals that his own approach to teaching has much in common with key aspects of Spivak's aesthetic education. In the

same way, for example, that Spivak insists on speaking of her project in terms of “training of the imagination”/“training the imagination” (Spivak, 2012, pp. 10, 118, 122, 125, 134, 197, 345, 451, 465), or “training in literary reading” (Spivak, 2012, pp. 281, 325, 328, 353), Bersani emphasises the need for “training in impersonal communities” (Bersani & Tuhkanen, 2014, p. 295). Thus, he describes his work in the classroom as a training in how to move differently in the world. Bersani is clearly less concerned with the educative process’s provision of systematic instruction in particular skills than with the role of pedagogy in promoting forms of ascesis, both of the self and of the community. By acknowledging his indebtedness to Foucault’s articulation of “the cultivation of the self” (Foucault, 1984/1990, pp. 37–68)—including the practice of *parrhesia* or frank-speech—Bersani attempts to advance the possibility of collaborative ways of relating through “methods, routines, practices and disciplines that a person undertakes more or less consciously in an attempt to alter his or her own subjectivity” (McWhorter, 2006, p. 224). This ascesis seeks not to deny “the material inscriptions in our body of a universe to which we belong,” but rather to make us more attentive to those correspondences with the nonhuman “that most profoundly situate us outside ourselves” (Bersani, 2015, p. 89). In the same way that Spivak insists on the training of the imagination as a condition of epistemological and epistemic change, Bersani, mindful of Foucault, calls for a training in what amounts to the extension and dispersal of the self. This training in “the psychic condition of possibility” (Bersani, 2011, p. 107) is necessary if new relational modes capable of operating within the contradiction of sameness and difference are to emerge.

In describing “pedagogy and friendship” as “modes of extensibility” (Bersani, 2010, p. 201), Bersani not only acknowledges the inevitable entanglement of the two, but also gives wings to the notion that the aesthetic enables us to imagine new forms of intimacy, pedagogical and companionable, which take us beyond ourselves as they attest to the possibility of queer collectivities to come. If, as Bersani observes, “our fictions express, elaborate and disguise our desires; they sublimate desire,” then any pedagogy that claims to serve the cause of impersonal intimacy and initiate new forms of sociality through literary reading will seek to uncover the ways in which “literature hallucinates the world in order to accommodate desire” (Bersani, 1978, pp. 271, 314). At the same time, it will also attend to the disruption of “those processes by which we make a continuous *story* of our desires” (Bersani, 1978, p. 315). Spivak’s advocacy of

self-abstraction and self-synecdoche is clearly illustrative of her project's commitment to the uncoercive rearrangement of desires, including the projection of the self into collectivity primarily through *linguistic* figuration. In contrast, Bersani's embrace of impersonal intimacy—of self-extension as a means of depersonalizing and socializing desire—is best understood in *spatial* terms. Hence, as Heather Love notes, in his literary and aesthetic analyses Bersani often “situates his critical objects in space, as concrete, sensuously realized entities that are in and of the social world, not set apart from it or ‘above’ it” (Love, 2014, p. 40).

If, for Bersani—as for Spivak—the practice of impersonal intimacy allows for the creation of pedagogical spaces where teachers and students can engage the imagination to “learn to let go” (Spivak, 2003, p. 34), it also resists the privatization of experience by positioning sexuality as a social and aesthetic phenomenon. By conceptualizing sexuality as happening in “complex, dynamic spaces of interaction, inhabited by multiple individuals relating in time” (Love, 2014, p. 46)—rather than as something that operates at the psychological or individual level—Bersani challenges us to consider ways in which sex and the aesthetic are configured in relation to one another. A sexuality education that takes Bersani's thought seriously and concerns itself with bodies-in-relation is one that will, therefore, also attend to the extensibility of bodies in space both as a social and as an aesthetic occurrence.

While Spivak's aesthetic education emphasizes working towards “the formation of collectivities without necessarily prefabricated contents” (Spivak, 2003, p. 26), Bersani proposes “that we *be*—differently—or a little more than the way in which we are” (Bersani & Tuhkanen, 2014, p. 296). In doing so, he shows that he is preoccupied with the ontological in ways that Spivak, whose efforts are more geared to the deconstruction of “the millennially established structures of feeling and desires” (Spivak, 2012, p. 131), isn't. If one of the most significant questions that Spivak's aesthetic education poses to sexuality educators is “what is it to learn, these lessons, otherwise?” (Spivak, 2012, p. 162), then, in assessing Bersani's contribution to Spivak's project it is important, as this chapter draws to a close, not only to consider how the application of Bersani's onto-aesthetics supplements Spivak's work by allowing us to learn from it otherwise, but also the ways in which Bersanian approaches might work to queer sexuality education.

Some Concluding Remarks

As I have emphasized throughout this chapter, Bersani has remained committed over many decades to the exploration of desire and sexuality, especially within the various modalities of the aesthetic that are possibilized through the reading of literary texts and engagements with works of art. Among Bersani's most significant contributions both to Spivak's project of aesthetic education and to the queering of sexuality education, I suggest, is the complication and queering of the notion of desire that his theorization of desire and its mobility makes possible. As Ann Wordsworth observes, Bersani's work is a recognition of "improvisatory and unbound desire; a possibility that reader and writer also might evade the classifications of orthodox, psychological and moral structures" (Wordsworth, 1980, p. 91). Not only does Bersani suggest new ways in which Spivak's notion of the uncoercive rearrangement of desire might be 'thought,' he also opens up possibilities for aestheticizing the ontological, especially when sex is understood as a modality of the aesthetic and sexuality education is imagined as a laboratory for its aestheticization.

If the prospect of aligning Spivak's project of aesthetic education with sex and sexuality sounds a dangerous enterprise, it is, perhaps, because the sort of supplementation that Bersani's work on desire provides, inevitably, introduces excess into Spivak's project, thereby opening the door to the incalculable. As we have seen, this is the case because the body, the vector of sexual desire, does not ultimately own or control itself—it is unbound. To entertain such a prospect in the context of sexuality education is both exciting and scary—because sex is aporetic, propelling our desire to know while at the same time limiting our ability to take control of how and what we know. As Jen Gilbert reminds us, "sexuality drives understanding but is never commensurate with our understanding of it" (Gilbert, 2014, p. xv).

Drawing on Bersani's ideas and those of other theorists, the next chapter turns to the memoir of choreographer/dancer Douglas Wright in order to build an argument for the reframing of sexuality education in choreographic terms.

Chapter Eleven

Sex in the Modality of the Aesthetic—A Choreographic Approach to Sexuality Education

The aesthetic is not confined to works of art; sex can also be one of the modalities of the aesthetic. (Bersani, 2010, p. 70)

[Leo Bersani to Nicholas Royle] So choreography seems to be me [*sic*] absolutely central in trying to reimagine new relational modes. Although how you get from that to more ordinary life situations is something to work on. (Royle, 2016, p. 272)

Overview

As I continue my exploration of the potential of Spivak’s aesthetic education—supplemented by Bersani’s notions of interpersonal intimacy and of an aesthetic ethic of relations between the self and the world—to generate pedagogical approaches that keep not only meaning but also desire on the move, I pursue Bersani’s claim, stated at the head of this chapter, that sex can be a modality of the aesthetic. This is in line with my already well-rehearsed argument that Spivak’s project of aesthetic education is able to queer and, thereby, productively contribute to a re-envisioning of sexuality education in Aotearoa New Zealand.

In this chapter, through a reading of three sex scenes from Douglas Wright’s memoir *ghost dance* (2004), I seek to demonstrate how a literary work in its treatment of sex as a modality of the aesthetic is able to position its readers as aesthetic rather than psychoanalytically defined subjects in the world, in this instance, by drawing upon “the idea of choreographing a self” (Royle, 2016, p. 271)—a notion first introduced by Bersani in an interview with Nicholas Royle as a way of countering and reformulating the concept of personality in aesthetic terms, but further developed in his collection of essays *Receptive Bodies* (2018). As Bersani explains:

Our uniqueness, our individuality is the form of how we move and over time how we have moved ourselves and how others have moved us through space. A personality is a specific ‘aesthetic of handling’. (Royle, 2016, p. 272)

In support of Bersani’s position, and to illuminate Wright’s treatment of sex as a choreographed—and, therefore, an aesthetic—practice, I make reference to the inter-related concepts of *chora* and *choreia*, especially as they have been theorized by Julia

Kristeva in “the conscious attempt to bridge the gap between thought and the moving, dancing body” (Chiaroni, 2017, p. 30). In doing so, I take on board the argument that “while allied to dance, choreography is not dance per se” (Manning, 2013, p. 75). Rather, as Erin Manning suggests, the choreographic may be understood more broadly as a technique which, in Guattarian terms, enables a heteropoeisis, that is, “a self-generating practice of difference” (Manning, 2013, p. 76). This I do in order to make a case for the exploration and activation of choreographic thinking in the context of sexuality education.

If, as Bersani says, choreography is “absolutely central in trying to reimagine new relational modes,” then my attempt in this chapter to rethink sex and sexuality in choreographic terms may be seen as a response to Bersani’s invitation—issued in his interview with Nicholas Royle and stated in the second of the epigraphs at the head of this chapter—to apply a choreographic imagination to “more ordinary life situations” (Royle, 2016, p. 272). Thus, with the help of Wright’s *ghost dance*, I prepare the way for a sexuality education where desires can be mobilized and rearranged through the sort of choreographic thinking made possible by literary reading.

Why the Choreographic?

In choosing to focus on Wright’s descriptions of sexual acts, I do so not only because they clearly emphasize the choreographed and choreographic aspects of sexuality—the ways in which bodies “move toward, away, into, around each other” (Royle, 2016, p. 272)—but also because, as Bersani argues, choreography provides a non-verbal pathway to the reimagining of new relational modes, new possibilities of connectedness, new forms of intimacy. Such reimagining is the task of a queerer, more utopically driven sexuality education.

Given that Wright’s own work as a choreographer is “characterized by the unstable tension between exorbitant movement and disruption, between force and fragmentation,” I acknowledge that in his writing as well as in the dance that he has choreographed, the very desire which Wright presents as fuelling creativity also “disrupts the assumptions that prop up our identity and our constructions of the world” (Wilcox, 2009, p. 27). As *ghost dance* shows, Wright’s is no easy journey to new relationality—pilgrims on this difficult road are warned that they “cannot take any short cuts or skip any difficult sections of the route” (Wright, 2004, p. 7).

In recognizing that “the phenomenological intertwining of presence and body that dance brings about as it moves” can produce the “generative space of thought” (Lepecki, 2004, p. 2), I also accept that other modalities of the aesthetic—for example, music, which especially in its fugal form works to bring about “the polyphonic complication of the ‘subject’” (Tuhkanen, 2018, p. 27)—are likewise capable of evoking an ungraspable, unstoppable otherness that prompts us to rethink connectedness and relationality. As Kristeva observes, fugal compositions such as Bach’s, suggest “an acknowledged and harrowing otherness” that has been inscribed “in an original play being developed, without goal, without boundary, without end” (Kristeva, 1991, p. 3). Like dance, these contrapuntal pieces seemingly refuse to ground themselves on fundamentals and are always on the move. Yet choreography, because it concerns itself with what is inescapably embodied, presents itself as an obvious starting point for the conceptualization and exploration of sex as a modality of the aesthetic. Sexuality education may become the ‘laboratory’ where this experimentation can happen.

Efforts to develop an aesthetic subjectivity that “eschews psychologically motivated communication and replaces such communication with families of form” (Bersani, 2006, p. 168)—of which the choreographic is but one example—deserve greater attention in the face of demands to “re-envision sexuality education in ways that reconfigure and exceed its current boundaries” (Allen, L., 2011, p. 1). Emphasizing, as they do, the importance of providing students “with possibilities for understanding themselves as sexual subjects” (Allen, L., 2011, p. 14), calls for the re-envisioning of sexuality education seek to do more than advance effectiveness in addressing such ‘problems’ as STIs/STDs, unintended pregnancies, sexual coercion and violence, and the proliferation of digital pornography. It is in the context, then, of ‘seeking to do more’ with sexuality education that I put the case for conceptualizing sex as a modality of the aesthetic. In proposing that sex be thought and positioned within a modality that allows for the accounting of “all possible modulations of connectedness” (Royle, 2016, p. 272) as choreographic, I hope to actualize the rearrangement of desires that Spivak’s aesthetic education promotes. For, as the sexual is conceptualized in terms of the aesthetic, not only is the imagination trained in epistemological performance, but possibilities for new ways of being sexual and ethical subjects also emerge—subjects, for example, who in relating to others and the Other register an ‘aesthetic of handling.’

This aesthetic, first established in the mother-infant relationship, precedes and only subsequently gives way to an aesthetic of language and thought. As Christopher Bollas, who first conceptualized the notion, explains:

. . . the aesthetic of handling yields to the aesthetic of language, and it is at this point that the experience of being yields and is integrated with the experience of thinking. (Bollas, 1978, p. 388)

The re-envisioning of sexuality education that becomes possible when sex is thought in relation to the aesthetic—including ‘the idea of choreographing a self’ and the notion of an ‘aesthetic of handling’—is in tune with other approaches to re-imagining the field, including efforts to map “flows of movement involving humans and things in the sexuality education classroom,” not in order to ask what movement means or demonstrates about sexualities, but to attend to “the becoming of sexuality education as event” (Allen, 2018a, p. 347). Spivak prefers to describe such a becoming as the inauguration of an “event-to-come”—an event that “escapes performative conventions” (Spivak, 2012, pp. 177, 209) and which is realized only beyond the frame of the here and now. The thinking of sex and sexuality within and through the mode of the aesthetic also aligns well with the workings of concept-as-method, an approach to research premised on the proposition that “concepts—acts of thought—are practices that reorient thinking, undo the theory/practice binary, and open inquiry to new possibilities” (Lenz Taguchi & St. Pierre, 2017, p. 643). However, while Lenz Taguchi and St. Pierre apply concept-as-method to social science and educational inquiry that typically makes use of quantitative, qualitative and mixed methodologies, my intention here is to employ it in the context of literary reading, not only to rethink sex as a modality of the aesthetic—in particular, the choreographic—but to open up possibilities for such an approach in the reimagining of sexuality education as a utopic site of learning where queerness is positioned as horizon.

In doing so, I also seek to convince that queerer understandings of and approaches to sex and sexuality become available when sexuality educators and researchers are attentive to the potential contribution of the humanities—art, literature, drama and dance, especially—to a learning area that has been thought and taught in New Zealand state schools, for the most part, under the umbrella of Health and Physical Education, or, in the case of some state-integrated schools, Religious Education. While arguing

that the concept of sex as aesthetic, when deployed persistently and interminably, becomes a method that allows sexuality educators to rethink sexuality education, I hold to the hope that queerness—if it is invited into the classroom as Gilbert suggests—might become a means of learning to “tolerate our own sense of strangeness” and “endure the humiliations of surprise” (Gilbert, 2014, p. 93) that are always part and parcel of the work of sexuality education.

Chora and Choreia

Since Socrates first suggested the existence of a hypothetical and indeterminate place beyond the city’s walls to which those who did not deserve the shelter of Athens’ citadel were to be sent and received, the notion of *chora*, which in the *Timaeus* (Plato, ca. 360 B.C.E./1997c) is imagined as “all-receiving, as the receptacle of all generation, the *in which* and *from which* of all generation” (Sallis, 1999, p. 113)—because it protects and nurtures as well as receives—has figured significantly in the Western philosophical and literary tradition, especially as a means of explaining how things come into being in the world. The idea of *chora* has continued to exert a strong influence into our own time, notably through the work of theorists such as Derrida and Kristeva, especially insofar as it “transforms our senses of beginning, creation, and invention” (Rickert, 2007, p. 252) in regard to material, virtual, affective and rhetorical spaces.

On the one hand, Derrida, in resisting the many interpretations that have over the centuries attempted to pin a specific meaning or attribute a particular form to what he terms *khōra*—that which “can ‘offer itself’ or promise itself only by removing itself from any determination” (Derrida, 1995, p. 94)—associates *khōra* with irreducible difference that can never be given a definitive value. Derrida, while remaining silent on any link between *khōra* and dance—*choreia*—nonetheless, references choreography in his work, especially as a way of figuring the instability of gender and sexual identity. In appealing to the choreographic trope in order to articulate and perform the “indeterminable” multiplicities and mobilities of sex and sexuality—he speaks of a choreography that “can carry, divide, multiply the body of each ‘individual,’ whether he be classified as ‘man’ or as ‘woman’ according to the criteria of usage”—Derrida expresses the “desire for a sexuality without number,” a possibility prepared for by the invention of “incalculable choreographies” (Derrida & McDonald, 1995, p. 154). Derrida’s call for “a choreographic text with polysexual signatures” (Derrida &

McDonald, 1995, p. 154) is answered, as we will see, in Wright's efforts to position sex as a mode of the aesthetic, not only in the dances he choreographs, but also through the narration of his own sexual history in choreographic terms. This choreographic telling emphasizes in its unfolding the multiplicities and mobilities of sex, but always juxtaposed or entangled with the "darting, swerving and leaping" (Wright, 2004, p. 198) movements of contemporary dance.

Kristeva, on the other hand, explains *chora* in psychoanalytical terms, both as the pre-verbal space or phase characterized by the inchoate instinctual drives and their stases theorized by Freud, and as the extra-linguistic functioning that is the necessary other of all signification and language. For Kristeva, because *chora* is identified with the semiotic—the release into language of instinctual drives and energies which interrupt language's symbolic function, its ability to refer—*chora* is understood not only to precede figuration, but also to underlie and unsettle it. Insofar as *chora* is associated with that which cannot be signified or made intelligible, it remains mysterious in much the same way that sex does. As a site of generation, *chora* is linked to the maternal body but also to the origins of dance—that is, to the "*choreia* of choreography," both in respect to rhythmic physical movement and "the dance of thought" (Chiaroni, 2017, p. 29). Having identified poetry and dance along with other art forms "as practices erupting on the border of *chora* and society" (Hall, 2012, p. 49), Kristeva then conceptualizes them as representing "the flow of *jouissance* into language" (Kristeva, 1984, p. 79). Thus, in her alignment of dance—*choreia*—with *chora*, Kristeva provides an invaluable key to the appreciation of Douglas Wright's choreography, which both invites and challenges us to recognize in the dance, "not only systematic, formalized movements in a completed piece" (Hall, 2012, p. 51), but also a kinaesthetic process arising out of the instincts and drives of the body, and finding expression and order in the articulation of steps, rhythms, gestures etc. in space and time. For Kristeva, dance requires and reveals the intersection of the semiotic and the symbolic, neither fully including nor excluding one or the other. Happening as it does "between bodies in time and space" (Klien, Valk, & Gormly, 2008, p. 7), dance can never be immobilized and its meaning is always impossible to capture for definitive analysis. As Wright himself says: "Dance is famously ephemeral; if unperformed the works survive as an echo, on video, in memory, or in name only" (Wright, 2004, pp. 241–242).

For both Kristeva and Wright, choreography becomes possible when the body is experienced and understood as *chora*, a space which allows for and nurtures the generation of movement. In explaining his own beginnings as dancer and choreographer, Wright presents his body as *chora*, a womb or site of incubation for both the dancer and the dance:

From the earliest time I can remember I was always dancing. I still don't know what possessed me; perhaps the fluttering white moth laid its eggs in me and my dancing was a kind of hatching. (Wright, 2004, p. 158)

There was already a dance waiting like a fist inside me. (Wright, 2004, p. 203)

In so doing, Wright echoes the ancient understanding of *chora* as “the Receptacle, the matrix or mother of all becoming” (Rickert, 2007, p. 255), a notion which Kristeva places in dialectical relation to that of the rational, which she identifies with the masculine, that is, to laws, norms and structures. Wright, in claiming the maternity and semiotics of *chora*, positions himself in tangential relation to those codes of language and behaviour linked to the symbolic and the masculine—codes which Kristeva describes as “embodiments of the Idea” and “nothing more than the thought of archivists, archaeologists, and necrophiliacs” (Kristeva, 1984, p. 13). It is these non-generative codes, personified by Wright's rugby playing Dad, which ensured that “in Tuakau, South Auckland, in the early 1960s a dancing boy was frowned on with a frown handed down for generations” (Wright, 2004, p. 158).

For Wright, as for Kristeva, the understanding of the body as *chora*—a space out of which movement is produced—allows not only for the emergence of dance as a physical form, but also for choreographic ways of thinking. In other words, dance and choreography emerge at those points in space and time where an aesthetic of handling intersects with an aesthetic of language. Kristeva, in reviewing her own contributions to contemporary thought speaks of the articulation and development of such iconic notions as “*intertextuality, strangeness, the significance of language, the subject-in-process, abjection and reliance*” in terms of dance and the choreographic—that is, as “nimble movement of incorporated thought” (Kristeva, 2013, p. 1). It is, Kristeva argues, by acknowledging “our possibility—or not—of creating new languages: new literature, new painting, new dances” (Kristeva, 2013, p. 2), as well as by drawing upon the insights provided by the human sciences, that we might begin to address what she

perceives as the crisis of our multiple, and often seemingly competing, ethnic, familial, national, religious and sexual identities. It is in dance and choreographic thought that Kristeva recognizes the possibility of what Dante termed the *transhumanar*—going beyond or exceeding the human:

I hope it will be dance that speaks one of the new languages of the human comedy. Dance as a radical gesture of this *transhumanar* which humanity needs (Kristeva, 2013, p. 2)

For Kristeva, dance’s ability to make a unique contribution to the transhumanization process springs from its genesis at the intersection of body and meaning, the moment where the semiotic disrupts the symbolic, a point of both *jouissance* and negation. Yet, as a trans-linguistic experience, dance also informs and accompanies thought by providing a way of understanding and practising “concepts, disciplines and genres” (Kristeva, 2013, p. 1). In a similar vein, Spivak, in commenting on a passage from the *Nāṭya Sāstra*, a second or third century Sanskrit Hindu text on the performing arts that deals with “how to transform the body into a space of writing and turning,” observes that “the yoking of dance to the body is in order proficiently to lead toward what is signified by the body as a collection of *akṣara* or letters” (Spivak, 2012, p. 84)—that is, language. In noting the crossing over of movement into thought that takes place in dance, Spivak registers both *jouissance* and its negation, the inevitable violence that occurs whenever the symbolic is interrupted by the semiotic. In other words, dance exceeds any possibility that the choreographic might simply represent or mean something.

If, for Kristeva, dance “might be the ‘language’ that we look to as we search for illumination of some of the more perplexing chapters in our ‘human comedy’” (Chiaroni, 2017, p. 30), for Bersani, choreography is “absolutely central in trying to reimagine new relational modes” (Royle, 2016, p. 272). In the light of the theorizations of Kristeva and Bersani, Wright’s memoirs exemplify a conscious effort by a dancer/choreographer—who due to illness gradually loses command of his body—to leap with the written word into “the gap between thought and the moving, dancing body” (Chiaroni, 2017, p. 30). In his attempt to negotiate this gulf, Wright choreographs his own passage around and through the sorts of unavoidable and impossible aporia and double binds which Spivak’s aesthetic education reveals and

addresses through *teleiopoiesis*—movement toward the distant and unreachable other via the imagination. Insofar as Bersani, Wright and Spivak, in their different ways, seek extensibility, they enact what may be called “pedagogies of crossing” (Alexander, 2005). This is because in their extending out/moving toward they inevitably “cross the fictive boundaries of exclusion and marginalization” (Alexander, 2005, p. 7)—and queer them.

If dance—whether it involves the moving body, or the pen in the nimble movement of incorporated thought—appears to provide a way of laying “the ghost of the undecidable in every decision” (Spivak, 2012, p. 104), it is also an event that discloses itself only in its performance. Given that it is impossible to remain in a double bind—a decision to move, to go this way or that is always called for—dance and the choreographic provide both a way of figuring the experience of the impossible which, as Spivak tells us, “*is* the condition of possibility of deciding” (Spivak, 2012, p. 109), and a means of easing the burden of responsibility that comes with confronting aporia.

For Wright, dance is radically comic. This is because it is a performance in the face of the absurdity of the human condition—the interminable shuttling between impossible positions that we recognize not only in Spivak’s uncovering of aporia, but also in the “oscillation between the semiotic and symbolic, between rejection and identification” (Oliver, 1993, p. 11) that so much of Kristeva’s writing explores. Bersani, insofar as he narrativizes “the paradoxical relations of form and content” in the various aesthetic works which he explores in his essays, does so “in a surprisingly comic mode” that “gives way to a therapeutic vision of non-destructive relationality” (Kurnick, 2014, p. 65). Comedy, for Bersani, is located in the realization that “a new possibility of connectedness comes out in the very expression of the impossibility of connectedness” (Bersani & Tuhkanen, 2014, p. 283). It is in the context of the possibility/impossibility of new relational modes that Bersani gestures in the direction of the *transhumanar* through a re-envisaging of sex, conceptualized and managed as choreography—“bodies examining ways to sort of move toward, away, into, around each other” (Royle, 2016, p. 272). In this process, while sexuality is most obviously evoked “by the intriguing ways in which the bodies intertwine” (Royle, 2016, p. 272), it is, at the same time, also implied in their rejection and parting.

It is with these thoughts in mind that I now turn my attention to Douglas Wright's *ghost dance*, firstly, to situate this book of memoirs in the context of the global AIDS pandemic, an overwhelming and traumatic event that forced gay men to confront the unavoidable relationship between sex and death, before undertaking a close reading of three scenes therein. My intention is to show how a dancer/writer, by treating sex choreographically, is able to position it as a modality of the aesthetic.

***ghost dance*—A Testimony**

As Ann Cvetkovich observes, “within queer culture, memoir has been a particularly rich genre for documenting the AIDS crisis, providing gay men with a forum to articulate what it means to live in the presence of death and record their lives before it is too late” (Cvetkovich, 2003, p. 210). If Gary Fisher, Derek Jarman, Paul Monette, and David Wojnarowicz are some of the internationally recognized gay men who dealt with issues of preservation and loss by writing memoirs that testified to “the experience of living and dying with AIDS” (Cvetkovich, 2003, p. 211), Douglas Wright is, arguably, the highest profile gay New Zealander with HIV to have done so. However, unlike the vast majority of his fellow gay memoirists who died in the first decades of the global AIDS pandemic, Wright, largely thanks to antiretroviral drugs, remained creatively active until his death late in 2018.

Wright's two books of memoirs, *ghost dance* (2004) and *Terra Incognita* (2005) serve as testimony to “this post-modern plague” in which “people died in almost festive droves, some of them my friends and lovers” (Wright, 2004, p. 15). Composed as they are of “bits and pieces of a memory that has been overwhelmed by occurrences that have not settled into understanding or remembrance, acts that cannot be constructed as knowledge nor assimilated into full cognition, events in excess of our frames of reference” (Felman, 1992, p. 5), memoirs such as Wright's bear witness not only to the devastation wrought by AIDS, to human survivability and persistence, but also to the irrepressibility and unpredictability of desire, sexuality and creativity. If, as Cvetkovich argues, “Freud's ideas about trauma and sexuality are spectacularly juxtaposed with gay male cruising and anal sex” (Cvetkovich, 2003, p. 61) in Bersani's work, then Wright's memoirs reveal that there are very many ways in which the complex linkage between sex and the traumatic is enacted and conceptualized in sexual interactions among men. Richard Canning, in noting that “a discontent at the relationship between center and margin . . . has been pivotal to Wright's choreography” (Canning, 2009, p.

334), draws attention to a question voiced by Wright in response to the AIDS-related death of an ex-boyfriend: “When does a side-effect become central?” (Wright, 2004, p. 17). In *ghost dance*, Wright subverts dominant narratives about AIDS and male-with-male sex by placing at the centre of his narrative that which usually occurs on the margins. By doing so—at least for the duration of Wright’s memoir—what is considered normal is pushed into the shadows, while the queer, the digressive and the perverse aspects of sex and sexuality are brought to the foreground and given room to move. To the extent that Wright in his memoir attends to the queer, he also theatricalizes and aestheticizes it—this by allowing queer to perform in social spaces where we see it working alongside and athwart his own efforts to choreograph a self.

The three scenes of sexual activity from *ghost dance* which I have chosen to examine, each in its own way provides an opportunity for Wright to self-aestheticize. The scenes are presented by Wright in reverse chronological order, thus giving emphasis to the author’s assertion that “*ghost dance* is not a conventional autobiography with a linear progression through one life, but a faithful record of the journeys I felt compelled to make into my own past” (Wright, 2004, p. 11). The sex scenes, which also involve varying degrees of actual or threatened trauma, attest to Wright’s ability not only to choreograph the events of his own unfolding life, but also to his commitment to “the idea of choreographing a self” (Royle, 2016, p. 271)—the latter evidenced in Wright’s retrospective selection and re-organization of these events through his narration.

In the first of the sex scenes, Wright tells of experiencing an uncontainable level of sexual arousal which brings him to a “state of extreme ecstasy” (Wright, 2004, p. 62), spiritual as well as sexual. The situation Wright describes occurs not long after his positive HIV diagnosis late in 1989 or early in 1990 and during a Buddhist meditation course near Christchurch. Wright’s second account is of a night spent at a gay bathhouse in New York City in 1984, a time when “the distant rumblings of a mysterious gay illness were mere background noise easily drowned out by the thunder of acclamation” (Wright, 2004, p. 90). For Wright, it is the sight of “skeletal bodies laid out on the pallets” (Wright, 2004, p. 93) in the cubicles at the bathhouse that brings him face to face with the reality of what at the time was being referred to as a ‘gay cancer’. The third passage concerns itself with twelve-year old Douglas’ initiation into the world of sex with adult males in and around the men’s toilets at Auckland’s Ponsonby

Road bus station. As the adult Douglas explains, “up until then sex was a mystery but now I knew what some people did; a veil lifted” (Wright, 2004, p. 161).

Sex Scene One—Meditating with Mr Goenka

This first scene of sexual activity that Wright presents us with takes place within a formal pedagogical context—a meditation class guided “by the pre-recorded voice of the founder of the Vipassana Foundation, a Mr Goenka” (Wright, 2004, p. 55), who instructs, warns, exhorts and explicates in an effort to pass on the Dharma received by the Buddha. Wright is clearly impressed by Mr Goenka, who speaks with authority as he explains the Buddha’s insights into the link between human suffering and desire. While the ancient meditation technique in which class members are instructed is offered as “gift” (Wright, 2004, p. 55), its systematic acquisition proves to be a laborious task, as Wright and his fellow meditators struggle to spatialize their bodily desires and sensations onto an imaginary but expansive landscape:

. . . inch by screaming inch we, or rather our minds, crawled like pilgrims over the vast topography of a country whose tempestuous history was locked deep within. (Wright, 2004, p. 56)

Sensations experienced are not to be judged, but, rather, visualized and perspectivized—observed as if figures in the distance by the meditators who then shift their focus and mentally move on. As the meditation course progresses Wright comes to believe that he is getting better at dealing with his mind’s tendency to stray:

Now I had a map, the painstaking journey over my body was becoming more familiar and increasingly I was able to observe the sensations I encountered without either craving them if they were pleasant, or trying to push them away if they were not. (Wright, 2004, p. 60)

It seems that Wright is developing an ability to see himself, not so much as a fixed subject—“a private core at the centre of an expanding universe”—but as a rendering of “complex, dynamic spaces of interaction” (Love, 2014, p. 46). While focusing meditatively on his chest, for example, he is able to explore the sensations which he experiences in that cavity of his body, going over “the area again with my fine-toothed mind combing it very slowly and carefully” until he visualizes himself—with “an indescribable relief”—excreting out of the chest-orifice “what felt like bucketfuls of thick, black tar that I knew was the essence of grief” (Wright, 2004, p. 61). If, at times,

Wright struggles “to remain impartial,” as Mr Goenka instructs, he does his best to play “the role of witness” (Wright, 2004, p. 61) to the sensations that move in, on, and through his body. In Bersanian terms, Wright is learning that “modes of relationality in human life are ‘deduced from’ our perceptions of spatial relations” (Bersani & Dutoit, 1998, p. 63). More precisely, “they are imitations of our body’s experience of space” (Bersani & Dutoit, 1998, p. 63). As he employs the figurations made available through language to suggest or evoke affects that cannot be pinned down by words—that is, to signify what ultimately escapes signification—Wright remains alert not only to what affect theorists describe as “an intensity that rigorously exceeds language” (Massumi, 2015, p. 73), but also to the impossibility of ever separating affect and language. It is not a matter of positioning affect in opposition to language, for, as Massumi says, “it is just as obvious that there is an affective dimension to language” (Massumi, 2015, p. 150). Thus, Wright, in attempting to describe “an indescribable relief” (Wright, 2004, p. 61) writes:

This was no hazy, suggestive feeling, it was as real as shitting and afterwards, under the spangled sky, my chest felt newborn, as light as a feather on a breath. (Wright, 2004, p. 61)

Here Wright is both *concretizing* his experience of relief by tying it through simile to the physical act of defecation and *etherealizing* it by comparing it to the lightness of a feather drifting in air. Yet, also discernible in Wright’s description of what is ultimately indescribable is a sense of outward movement, of going beyond the self, of expanding into a more capacious space, “of entry into a hospitable otherness to which we have always (if unknowingly) belonged” (Bersani, 2015, p. xi). Wright’s focus and awareness shift from what is happening within the confines of his ribcage—“a curious bulging, something welling up” (Wright, 2004, p. 61)—to the lightness of being made possible when one’s roof is the stars. We see in Wright’s experience “the experimental initiation of a connection, or a correspondence” (Bersani, 2010, p. 166) made possible through extensibility, but expressed in language.

This notion of self-extension—of “self-expansiveness, of something like ego-dissemination” (Bersani, 2011, p. 106)—can be seen most powerfully in Wright’s account of his intense sexual arousal during one meditation class:

It would be an understatement to compare it with a thousand orgasms, a thousand rushes of heroin, even years of continual praise experienced simultaneously in one body over the course of approximately 30 seconds. The duration of the event is, in any case, almost impossible to gauge. (Wright, 2004, p. 61)

Wright's claim that what he experiences here exceeds any possible eventuality covered by Mr Goenka's rules and warnings suggests, as Talburt and Rasmussen argue, that sexuality is "irreducible to the names we use to find and make it" (Gilbert, 2014, p. xv). In seeking to describe his experience of *jouissance*—that which he terms "inconceivable" (Wright, 2004, p. 61)—Wright engages in Spivakian *teleiopoiesis*, moving towards what is unreachably other, the sexual, through imaginative effort. Thus, Wright describes the space given over to sexual arousal as extending or expanding beyond the genitals to include the spine, which in turn becomes a site of orgasm that shoots ejaculate through the top of his head. While the metaphors that Wright employs to express sexual arousal and release, such as those of "a fat, juicy snake" or "gushes of blinding light" (Wright, 2004, p. 61), or a volcano erupting, are fairly standard tropes for such subject matter, what is significant is that the room and the other people meditating in it are described by Wright as "splattered with holy come" (Wright, 2004, p. 62), an image that suggests an expansive or extensive sexuality, one that has escaped the confines of a particular body to occupy a space that is no longer personal but intra-personal. If, as Bersani claims, "intrinsically violent desire is desire in search of an object" (Bersani, 2015, p. 8), then the sort of objectless sexuality that Wright presents here as having arrived unannounced and unexpected to interrupt Mr Goenka's meditation class is better understood as "a kind of movement from which desire is absent" (Bersani, 2015, p. 10). Sexuality, thought in this way, is generative of possibilities that "can be a source of pleasure or nonpleasure" (Gilbert, 2014, p. xxii).

Inseparable from the "state of extreme ecstasy" that Wright experiences is "a feeling of joy, almost celebration," which overwhelms him in the face of what he now recognizes as "mystery" (Wright, 2004, p. 62). After a long period of dissatisfaction and hard on the heels of his HIV diagnosis, Wright has reached a point where he is "simply grateful to be alive and wanted to give thanks" (Wright, 2004, p. 63). Nevertheless, over time, as the intensity of his experience begins to fade—and despite his teacher's warning not

crave the return of the ecstatic—Wright, does his best to manufacture a repeat performance. Although he is unsuccessful in this, Wright is given “the milk of loving-kindness” (Wright, 2004, p. 63), both for his enemies and for himself, one final gift from the meditation course. Back in Wellington, “brimful of something so unfamiliar it took me a while to comprehend” (Wright, 2004, p. 63), Wright begins planning and choreographing *Gloria*, his next dance work.

At this point, and through their juxtaposition, the reader is invited to make a direct link between Wright’s experience of sexual bliss, his reception of the gift of loving-kindness, and the genesis of *Gloria* (1990), a work expressing Wright’s gratitude for the cycle of life. Danced to and against the music of Antonio Vivaldi’s *Gloria* RV589—a liturgical song of praise in celebration of the birth of Christ—Wright’s work was attacked by morals groups who objected strongly to the presence of nudity, especially when Alun Bollinger’s film version was first broadcast on New Zealand television in 1990. Yet, in the context of his *oeuvre* as a whole, *Gloria* is best understood as one of Wright’s “apprentice works,” providing, as Wright says, “a bridge for me to the works that are really my own” (Whyte & Wright, 1996, p. 43), to more mature pieces that contain his “hallmark stunning choreography, provocative imagery and disturbing themes” (Little, 2006, p. 233).

However, what is most significant about *Gloria*, both in the light of this sex scene from *ghost dance* and for my argument, is the way in which Wright positions this work as the outflowing of an expansive, self-extending sexuality that moves beyond the confines of his body, beyond the four walls of the meditation room, and—in due course—comes to occupy not just the performing stage, but spreads throughout “the entire universe” (Wright, 2004, p. 63). Like “the milk of loving-kindness” (Wright, 2004, p. 63), with which it is inseparably entwined, sexuality, as Wright choreographs it at this point in his memoirs, escapes the very margins of the page on which he writes to become a creative force that permeates the world. In Bersanian terms, sexuality, as Wright presents it here, is no longer configured in inevitable relation to the Freudian subject, but “transformed through the deflection of the psychologizing and epistemophilic impulse toward a disinterested form of contemplation and an awareness of physical presence and spatial proximity” (French, 2014, p. 136). This expansive understanding of sexuality becomes possible with the recognition that “the body is the mind’s most intimate world,” extending, as it does, “both physically and ontologically, into the

world that surrounds it, and into the universe inhabited by that world” (Bersani, 2015, p. 94).

Sex Scene Two—At the Bathhouse

In Wright’s account of a night spent at a gay bathhouse in New York City in 1984, choreographic elements—steps and movements indicative not of individual desire and mobility, but of the formation of a machinic assemblage, “a great, pulsating monster of conjoined flesh” (Wright, 2004, p. 94)—figure throughout. In a milieu that offers an extensive menu of sexual possibilities, but where “dancing was the only thing banned” (Wright, 2004, p. 95), there is no intimation of expansiveness or extensibility, only of repetition and claustrophobia. There is nothing in what Wright gives us in this scene that evidences impersonal intimacy or “the new subjective and relational models” (Roach, 2012, p. 127) which Bersani once associated with the *jouissance* of anonymous male with male sex. Rather than witnessing to any disruption of routine and predictable ways of relating, what happens in the bathhouse is presented by Wright in such a way as to suggest the overdetermined nature of the site. If the unexpected does occur, for example, when Wright breaks into uncontrollable laughter or starts to dance, suppression or expulsion from the venue inevitably follows.

The attention paid by Wright to the mechanical aspects of sex, often juxtaposed with images suggestive of both animality and physical pain—penises pistoning in and out of mouths, the methodical pinching and piercing of flesh with steel needles, a man with arm elbow-deep in another man’s rectum, “as if a vet was helping a distressed animal give birth,” or a bare arse stuck in the air “like a half-skinned rabbit” (Wright, 2004, p. 94)—situates the visitors to the sex venue as details on a crowded canvas by Hieronymus Bosch, perhaps, *The Garden of Earthly Delights*. Like Bosch, Wright brings his figures into close physical proximity with one another within a series of adjacent spaces, each populated by the sexually exotic, fantastical, alluring, and terrifying. From “a swaying, tinkling roof-garden” to “rooms almost pitch black, somewhere deep in the bowels of the earth” (Wright, 2004, p. 93), participants and onlookers play their part in constructing and deconstructing various assemblages of sex and death, of heaven and hell. If in shifting combinations, men cluster together, “reverently watching,” egging-on the participants “in a many-throated roar,” or simply “intent around something” (Wright, 2004, pp. 93, 94) such as a ritualized sexual practice, their focus never holds for long before they disassemble and regroup to

worship at another point within the environs of the bathhouse. However, as Bersani would see it, while “a kind of sociality of proximate bodies may be entertained here,” in the context of the incipient AIDS pandemic it must be deemed a sociality incapable of “neutralizing the epistemological disaster of psychological supposition and paranoia” (French, 2014, p. 137).

Fortified by alcohol and/or dope, which he believes makes him “invisible and impervious to danger” (Wright, 2004, p. 93), Wright likens himself to a sleep-walker, moving quietly and unobserved through the spaces of the sex venue. He pictures his body “gradually dissolve” and imagines that he is reduced to “just one hovering eyeball drifting through veils of smoke” (Wright, 2004, p. 94). On sighting, through wide-open cubicle doors, “skeletal bodies laid out on the pallets,” Wright wonders if he has “inadvertently opened a secret connecting door and wandered into the funeral parlour” (Wright, 2004, p. 93) next door. By conceptualizing sex and death as adjacent spaces—the one giving ready access to the other if only we dare to open the door between—Wright comes to acknowledge that “a ‘gay cancer’ out there” is “now right in front of [him]” (Wright, 2004, p. 93). Machinic assemblages, which Wright had earlier observed forming, now begin to break up:

There were holes in the black walls and out of these holes severed, moving body parts floated disembodied in the air, like the dismembered fragments of one butchered body trying to find each other to reconnect. (Wright, 2004, p. 94)

If Wright’s hovering eye registers in the flickering eye-whites of a man whose flesh is being systematically and repeatedly penetrated by steel needles the *jouissance* of “an ecstatic saint in a nest of fire” (Wright, 2004, p. 94), then the only response he can give to the overwhelming intensity of his experience at the bathhouse is to dance:

I stood in the corner and began to dance to a music that was so low and sinister it was like the slowed down, played backward sound of Tibetan monks chanting from *The Book of the Dead*. (Wright, 2004, pp. 94–95)

This sex scene ends abruptly with the barman ejecting Wright from the venue after Wright persists in dancing despite repeated warning not to do so. While Wright’s dance is clearly linked with death, what is uncertain is whether the movements he makes signify a surrender to death, or an affirmation of life in defiance of mortality. The text presents Wright’s movements as mechanistic, repetitive and ponderous—in sync with

the music that he can't help responding to. It also allows readers to see Wright's determination to dance in another way—as one gay man's protest, or act of witness, in the face of the enormity of the dawning AIDS pandemic.

Sex Scene Three—At the Bus Station

Keren Chiaroni, drawing on material from Leanne Pooley's documentary film, *Haunting Douglas* (2003), describes the young Douglas Wright's realization of the “spatial awareness involved in learning the language or the ‘designs’ of the dance” (Chiaroni, 2017, p. 31) in this way:

Douglas Wright spoke of his discovery of the world of dance as being like receiving a pass into a ‘select society with its own language and rules’. A world of signs which offered him, as a self-destructive and angry young man, much-needed structure, and ‘a map of positions that showed me exactly where I was. (Chiaroni, 2017, p. 31)

If, in learning the language of dance, Wright discovers how he has to position himself in relation to “a definite front, side and back” (Chiaroni, 2017, p. 31), the same is also true of his own initiation, around the age of twelve, into the world of sex with adult males. In emphasizing the choreographic movement of the men cruising in and around the public toilets at Auckland's Ponsonby Road bus station, Wright attends to “the intricate, almost invisible mating dance they were performing” (Wright, 2004, p. 161):

This dance includes sly glances alternating with direct looks, tiny movements and gestures of the head, eyes and hands, and ritualistic pacings with meaningful pauses up and down in front of the chosen one. They were like spies with coded signals or some kind of human chameleon that had developed ingenious methods of camouflage to outwit its vigilant predator. (Wright, 2004, p. 161)

For Wright, “up until then sex was a mystery” (Wright, 2004, p. 161). However, with his sexual initiation—his participation “in this secret ritual” (Wright, 2004, p. 161), as he calls it—Wright is inducted into a system of signs, a gay semiotics, which allows him to join in and interpret the sexual activity that is occurring around him. It is on this basis that Wright is able to claim that a veil had been lifted. Just as his initiation into the world of dance brings the young Douglas into a particular sub-culture with its own rules and language, so, too, does his entry into a network of gay sex require him to

learn “some extraordinarily detailed choreography to convince my adult victims I wasn’t police ‘bait’ before they consented to abuse me” (Wright, 2004, p. 161). If Wright details his own acquisition of an extensive range of movements, gestures, glances, paces and pauses as a necessary pre-condition for successful cruising, he does so in order to establish that his is a willing participation in the performance of the mating dance. By representing himself as an agent soliciting consent from adults, whom he describes as his victims, Wright challenges the dominant consent paradigm operating in intergenerational sexual encounters, which defines the child or youth through his inability to consent and the adult—always predator—as “consent’s transgressor” (Fischel, 2016, p. 7).

In shining the spotlight on his own emerging sexual autonomy—his aspiration to exercise “the right to desire, to have wanted sex”—Wright prompts readers to question dominant cultural metaphors of ‘innocence’ and ‘incapacity’ that present youthful bodies as “either pure and therefore imminently contaminable, or as already sexualized and therefore not salvageable” (Fischel, 2016, pp. 99, 98). Tropes of the innocent child or youth, and of the child or youth not yet competent to give consent, which serve to block the development of sexual agency and decision-making abilities, and at the same time sexualize young people by promoting the eroticization of subjects invested with seductive appeal on the basis of sexual prohibition, are certainly destabilized by Wright’s account. Yet, to claim that we see in the young Douglas an emergent sexual autonomy premised on agency, desire and volition, and cultivated through social relations, is neither to deny his dependency on adults more powerful than himself nor to turn a blind eye to his vulnerability to harm—for “sex frequently takes place in worlds and relations of inequality” (Fischel, 2016, p. 114).

What is clear from Wright’s narrative is that the greatest threat to his flourishing, as he sees it, comes not from the potentially exploitative adult men he cruises, but from those who exemplify what Joseph J. Fischel describes as peremption: “*the uncontrolled disqualification of possibility*” (Fischel, 2016, p. 132). In young Douglas’ case, peremption is best exemplified by his father:

Dad, a former halfback for Counties, said to my mother as I wafted past, ‘Christ Pat, get him out of my sight!’ and I responded by dancing wherever and whenever I could. Now, in the playground, at playtime and lunchtime, I

improvised wild expressive dances in full view. And after school in our backyard with only Mum as a witness as she did the dishes in the kitchen, I continued. (Wright, 2004, p. 158)

Douglas' Dad, rather than affirming and fostering his son's inclination to dance, seeks—albeit unsuccessfully—to stifle it. Moreover, the father's refusal to tolerate the sight of a dancing boy signals an attempt to disqualify young Douglas' emerging sexual autonomy—an autonomy intimately bound up with dancing. As an instance of peremption, what is implied here is a narrowing of space, “a *cramped* rather than an exploited existence” (Fischel, 2016, p. 143). Dad's inability to make room for his queer son to develop his own sexual autonomy—all said and done the father is shaped by the demands of compulsory heterosexuality and a homophobic culture—helps explain why Douglas looks to older, more experienced gay men, not just for sexual contact, but for a degree of companionship as well. Thus, Wright's decision to present his own and others' illicit and potentially dangerous sexual activity in spatial, choreographic terms may be read not only as an act of defiance, but also as an affirmation. Young Douglas' is an expansive response to attempts to limit and cramp his life. More specifically, his seeking out of older men for sex marks his rejection of the male heterosexual culture of his father—which has neither time nor place for a dancing boy—and signals his entry into various queer spaces where successful sex is the result of clever and careful choreography.

As an aesthetic activity that shuns the personalization of desire—by resisting attempts to psychoanalyse or psychologize it—Wright's choreographic response to life attests to a propensity to queer both sex and dance in ways that echo Bersani's call to aestheticize the one in terms of the other. If “an elementary lesson of both deconstruction and queer theory is that the ‘inside’ of any position will inescapably be haunted by its constitutive ‘outside’” (Savoy, 2011, p. 244), then the skilled and intricate choreography which Wright performs as he cruises for sex both deconstructs and queers the abuser/victim binary through inversion. Wright's willingness to risk negotiating on his own terms a typical Spivakian double bind—in this case the consent/abuse binary—reveals a preference on Wright's part to opt for indeterminacy and mobility rather than coherence and immobility. His is an effort to survive and thrive in spaces that otherwise would be uninhabitable. Wright's refusal, for example, to submit to the sort of dualistic thinking which insists that consent given by a minor is always evidence either of coercion or of

the subject's lack of knowledge and understanding similarly suggests, as Fischel argues, that to "think of consent as a spectrum instead of a switch" (Fischel, 2016, p. 102) might facilitate the negotiation of complexities associated with the issue of intergenerational sex. This happens through the creation of a more commodious space for nuanced thought that resists "an uncomplicated division between incapable children and volitional adults" (Fischel, 2016, p. 103). Wright further queers the matter by presenting consent not as a verbal negotiation between desiring subjects—that is, as a conversational contract where 'yes means yes' or 'no means no'—but as dependent on, and signalled by, the successful acquisition and deployment of choreographic literacy; the learning of a language where desire and choice are expressed through certain bodily movements and gestures that are observed, imitated, initiated and combined in all sorts of ways to create what amounts to a dance. As Fischel explains: "The consent token need not be verbal. It can include body language, particular forms of conduct, and mutual initiation" (Fischel, 2016, p. 117). How much of the deconstructive queering of the concept of consent is the work of the highly instinctive and intuitive twelve-year-old dancer, and how much that of the reflective and reflexive middle-aged narrator retrospectively choreographing a life, of course, remains a matter of conjecture!

Having chosen to convey details of his sexual encounters with older men that some readers will find disturbing, Wright opts to presents these experiences—which are often at one and the same time both pleasurable and unpleasant—as positioning him as an aesthetic rather than as a psychoanalytically defined subject in the world. Thus, while paying close attention to jarring or disturbing details, either features of the spaces where the sexual encounters take place or of the bodies of the men that Douglas is having sex with, Wright's text directs readers away from forming judgements about activities usually deemed emotionally damaging or morally dubious. This it manages to do by side-lining the psychological and the ethical and emphasizing aesthetic subjectivity instead. For example, operating within the modality of the aesthetic, Wright describes in a rather matter of fact way, certainly without alarm, the dinginess of a run-down boarding house with its "couch decomposing against a wall the colour of a bruise," and the "fetid mouth" (Wright, 2004, pp. 160, 161) of a man with missing front teeth who resembles his father. While he freely highlights the incongruous—"once I drank stout in bed with a bald-headed man old enough to be my grandfather while we watched rugby on TV" (Wright, 2004, p. 161)—what he chooses to single out

for emphasis about the encounter is not any actual or threatened harm, but his hatred of rugby. Such observations suggest Wright's attentiveness to "broken intimacies," that is, to those "moment[s] of failed or interrupted connection" (Love, 2007, p. 24), which, Bersani argues, are "grounded in the very contradictions, impossibilities, and antagonisms" (Bersani, 1996, p. 108) that attend desire.

In discovering sex and learning about himself by cruising public toilets—"this was how I found out what I was"—Wright comes to see that he is "so disgusting" (Wright, 2004, p. 161). This negative self-realization is queer, not because Wright's sexual activity is with men per se, but because he "instinctively knew" that it was his dancing—"a giveaway clue" (Wright, 2004, p. 162)—which by marking him as different from other boys, also condemned him to the squalid locations where much of the sex happened, places of darkness where men emptied their bowels and bladders. In other words, homo-sex and dancing come together in what Bersani calls a family of form or "regime of correspondences" established by "a kind of looping movement between the two" (Bersani, 2010, p. 147). Thus, it is as a dancing boy that Wright first finds himself excluded from heteronormative narratives of belonging and becoming. It is also as a dancing boy that Wright comes to realize that it is his queer sexuality and his ability to aestheticize his experiences that equip him to resist and survive the smothering, stultifying consequences of peremption.

Young Douglas' sense of shame—which Wright typically spatializes by giving it a home in public toilets where other people go to crap—occasions an intricate description of a well-frequented lavatory cubicle at the bus station which "seemed to be carved out of solid rock in an underground cave with moss of a poisonous green growing in nooks and crannies and water constantly trickling down walls covered in rude words and drawings" (Wright, 2004, p. 161). What is interesting about this description is not only the close attention that Wright pays to the physical details of this space of excrement and sexual encounter—this in an attempt to create in the reader a sense of a toxic subterranean chamber devoid of healthy life—but also his attentiveness to the crude graffiti on the walls which arouses his curiosity and invites semiotic analysis. For Wright, while dance and sex each has its own set of signs—its language, rules and steps which ensure that participants are able to position themselves and move (or not move) in relation to others—both are connected, as are other aesthetic modalities, "with the drives and instincts of the body" (Chiaroni, 2017, p. 29) from which they cannot be

separated and through which we relate to the world. As Hecquet and Prokhtoris (2007) argue, it is through our body, which is “the effect of certain meaningful inscriptions/translations—and of change” that “our rapport with the world, and so also with works of art” (Chiaroni, 2017, p. 28) passes.

If, for the young Douglas, the urge to dance is insistent and irrepressible, a desire which moves through his body as if “[he] was caught in a kind of hurricane and nothing could stop [him] from responding” (Wright, 2004, p. 159), dance also provides him with a model for “an aesthetic ethic of correspondence” (Bersani, 2015, p. 5) between himself and the world. Whenever this emergent aesthetico-ethic is under threat of erasure, for example, when Douglas is treated with silence and shamed for his dancing—“SISSY SKITING” (Wright, 2004, p. 159), as it is cruelly tagged by some—he experiences a sense of contraction and diminishment that can be averted only through the self-affirmation found in dance. As he explains, “it was as if my body was getting smaller and smaller, hotter and hotter with the shame and anger of it so that dancing became a way of not disappearing or burning up entirely. (Wright, 2004, p. 159).

The same holds true for young Douglas’ experience of sex. If on the one hand, he seeks a rapport with the world through sex—and the promise and potential it holds for self-extension, for expanding his sense of self as he occupies and aestheticizes a variety of spaces—on the other, when Douglas experiences shame or disgust, his world contracts until it is no more spacious than a toilet cubicle. What is remarkable is that whatever the space, no matter how big or small, whether welcoming or unfriendly, he persists in choreographing his moves within it. It is in this way that Douglas is able “to explore alternatives and to look for a way out of the usual traps and impasses of binary formulations to locate all the in-between spaces that save us from being snared by the hooks of hegemony” (Halberstam, 2011, p. 2). In other words, he becomes adept at what Judith Halberstam’s book of the same title calls ‘the queer art of failure’ (Halberstam, 2011).

Some Concluding Remarks

The three sex scenes from Wright’s memoirs which I have discussed in this chapter reveal the author’s willingness to present desire as “fragmentary and *discontinuous*” (Bersani, 1978, p. 6), multiple and mobile. His self-theatricalization in sexual encounters that are strongly choreographed, and his willingness to present desire and

the erotic as “moving through but not concretized in sex practices” (Roach, 2012, p. 133) indicate a readiness on Wright’s part to experiment with forms of sociality or sociability that are remarkably in tune with Bersani’s notion of impersonal intimacy—in absolute terms, “a form of relationality uncontaminated by desire” (Bersani, 2010, p. 45), but one which subject to conditions resists the attempts of normativizing structures to organize desire. If, as we have seen, Wright, like Bersani, concerns himself with movement and processes whereby “the unconscious ruptures the contours of the self,” he is also aware of the ways in which “being with others disperses and spatializes” (Love, 2014, p. 45) the self.

Tuhkanen, in attempting to identify and describe the sort of ‘swerving’ movement, which he sees as characteristic of the queerness of Bersani’s thought, figures a dance that departs from and cuts across established lines. In this, he invites comparison between Bersani, the literary and cultural critic, and Wright, the professional dancer and choreographer who, as we have seen, persistently thinks the movements of desire and sex in choreographic terms. The new forms of relationality envisaged by Bersani—and which Wright attempts in his work—imply “a lateral mobility,” a movement “*to the side of objects*” (Bersani, 1990, p. 26), that is, “a digressive, transversal dance of desire that is not impelled by the need to assimilate an established choreography but moves for the mere pleasure of soliciting company, of crossing a line” (Tuhkanen, 2014b, p. 16).

Wright’s description of dance as “darting, swerving and leaping . . . lunging” (Wright, 2004, pp. 198, 199) implies a subject/narrator who is prepared to veer ‘off-centre’—that is, move towards “an experience or event of difference, of untapped and unpredictable energy” (Royle, 2011, p. 4). Such veering is indicative of Wright’s propensity to approach the work of choreographing a dance, a narrative, or a life from queer angles. Given that queering, like veering, offers “a different ‘slant’ to the concept of orientation itself” (Ahmed, 2006, p. 4), it comes as no surprise that “veering is intricately entwined with the emergence and history of what we called ‘queer’” (Royle, 2011, p. 9). Thus, it is helpful to take veering into account when explaining the impossibility of separating Wright’s choreography, both for the stage and with the pen, from its queer context.

In presenting us with queer notions of dance and sex, Wright affirms that the desire that runs through both is ultimately unable to be contained within any established

choreography. Like Bersani's work, Wright's choreography opens up the possibility of new forms of relationality—or impersonal intimacy—that are produced in “the swerving movement of nonannihilative desire” (Tuhkanen, 2014b, p. 16). Literary reading also has a key role to play in this process, including in the rethinking and reimagining of a sexuality education that is willing to entertain new forms of relationality as it attends to the queer movement of desire.

If, as Louisa Allen claims, “paying attention to flows of movement is an unusual focus for critical sexuality education research” (Allen, 2018a, p. 347), it is also the case that the movement of desire tends to be overlooked by sexuality education researchers and in classrooms. Thus, in echoing Allen's statement that “*movement is a materialising force in the becoming of sexuality education*” (Allen, 2018a, p. 356), I wish to emphasize that the movement of desire is integral to the becoming of sexuality education. As Spivak and Bersani argue, desires can be mobilized and rearranged through the sort of choreographic thinking that literary reading and other aesthetic encounters inaugurate. This applies at least as much to sexuality education as it does to other areas of education.

Part Four of this thesis, which follows, focuses on literary reading, especially in the context of sexuality education, as a means of opening up new possibilities for attending to that which is on the move, desire as well as meaning.

PART FOUR

Chapter Twelve

Sexuality Education, Risk-Taking, and Literary Reading

When students have opportunities to engage critically with sexuality education they are capable of thinking . . . with a high degree of sophistication. (Education Review Office, 2018, p. 41)

Overview

In the context of sexuality education, and with reference to the work of Spivak, Bersani and Wright, I reflect in this chapter on the ability of literary reading to mobilize desire and keep meaning on the move in ways that models of health and wellbeing—which sexuality education teachers often unthinkingly “import into the classroom in order to meet students’ needs” (Quinlivan et al., 2014, p. 400)—rarely do. At the same time, I seek to present literary reading as a pedagogical space where risk and revolt may be experienced, mediated, and only to some extent contained.

Desire in a Sexuality Education Concerned with Safety

As I have argued throughout this thesis, the practice and teaching of literary reading that Spivak’s project of aesthetic education promotes offers the possibility of rearranging desires uncoercively through the deployment of the imagination. This possibility extends to sexuality education, where matters of desire are inextricably entangled with matters of sex. However, in the context of New Zealand’s school-based sexuality education—which presents sexuality as ‘natural’ while attending to the ‘positive’ aspects of growing up—desire and its mobility will always be problematic, especially given that sexuality education in its theorizations and practices usually “evokes a linear education model in which knowledge is cumulatively attained on a journey toward maturation” (Garland-Levett, 2017, p. 125). This is so because desire, in the queerness of its movement, never ceases to evade the linear and confound progress!

Under such an educational regime, if something seems to go ‘wrong’ with a young person’s ‘natural’ sexual development—whether because of the intrusion of unwelcome and disruptive forces such as harassment, abuse, violence, and pornography, or as the result of other “broken negotiations with the world” (Bersani, 1986, p. 41)—sexuality education, having failed as a prophylactic, is readily repurposed as a repair shop tasked

with doing its best to redeem, reconstruct, restore, and reclaim that which has been damaged. When this happens—and as it shifts its focus, not only to “identifying risks and planning safety strategies” (Ministry of Education, 2015, pp. 15, 16), but also, however subtly, to policing desires—sexuality education tends to back away from its responsibility to “offer youth a facilitating environment for experiences of revolt” (Gilbert, 2014, p. 42).

Paradoxically, the more sexuality education concerns itself with safety, the less willing it is to seriously entertain the attraction of risk and revolt to young people for whom these interpretive practices are important aspects of meaning-making. Preferring to frame safety in terms of strategy and action, rather than as a matter of perception and interpretation, sexuality education programmes in Aotearoa New Zealand tend to underplay “the psychological functions of risk in a person’s life” (Gilbert, 2014, p. 38). Indeed, the Ministry of Education’s warning that sexuality education programmes “should engage, empower, and inform young people rather than focus on risk” (Ministry of Education, 2015, p. 5) ignores the positive contribution that certain sorts of risk-taking can make to mental health. As Douglas Wright’s *ghost dance* illustrates, peremption—the foreclosing of possibilities—can be just as damaging to the self as risky sexual behaviour or revolt in the face of damaging norms.

In order to ensure that students “thrive and become confident, connected, actively involved, life-long learners” (Ministry of Education, 2015, p. 7), sexuality education has in recent years come to rely increasingly on various—mostly visual—cultural models of health and wellbeing which the Ministry of Education promotes on the grounds that they support a holistic approach to sexuality education.²⁷ While such models may be appealing, especially to sexuality education teachers seeking to address in a straightforward way “the diverse needs and strengths of students” (Ministry of Education, 2015, p. 3) from the various communities of Aotearoa New Zealand, they have their limitations. While claims are made for their dynamism, usually on the basis

²⁷ In addition to the Tapa Whā model already mentioned, other Māori models identified by the Ministry of Education as helpful in the context of sexuality education include: Te Pae Mahutonga; Te Wheke; the Powhiri Model; Te Uruuru Mai a Hauora; the Waka model of whānau, hapū, and iwi health; and the Wero model for teaching respectful and safe processes (see Ministry of Education, 2015, p. 9). Pasifika models include: the Fonofale model; the Kakala model; and the Tivaevae model (see Ministry of Education, 2015, p. 10).

of an interactive relationship between their various parts (see Ministry of Education, 2015, pp. 10–11), such models, though presented with good intentions, often work to prevent a deeper engagement with the rich epistemologies they appear to present in such a clear and attractive manner. Because of this, they tend to freeze both meaning and desire rather than keep them on the move. In failing to acknowledge that “the encounter with the Other [is] always an encounter with the unrepresentable” (Halberstam, 2013, p. 183), such models simplify and reduce complex cultural understandings in order to fit them into a pre-existing format or onto a template—thus limiting queer possibilities as they try to tidy up meanings and contain desire.

Mobilizing Desire through Literary Reading

What Bersani adds to Spivak’s project of aesthetic education by way of his reading of canonical literature is a highly articulate and sophisticated examination of the different ways in which desire is both mobilized and immobilized in relation to the human subject as that subject is represented and treated in texts. In seeking to deconstruct desire—“an area of human projection going beyond the limits of a centered, socially defined, time-bound self, and also beyond the recognized resources of language and confines of literary form” (Bersani, 1978, p. ix)—Bersani draws attention to various mobilizations and immobilizations of desire in literary texts and the possibilities these open up for reimagining the world, and, I suggest, for re-envisioning sexuality education. For instance, the socially definable and verbally analysable self, the self that is subject to psychic shattering, the transcendent, universal or free self, the partial or marginal self, and the disseminated or scattered self (see Bersani, 1978, p. x) are just some of the manifestations of the self that Bersani has chosen to explore in relation to desire’s movement over many decades of literary reading. While he has advanced this study via authors as diverse as Artaud, Austen, Balzac, Baudelaire, Beckett, Brontë, Eliot, Flaubert, Genet, Gide, James, Lawrence, Proust, Racine, Rimbaud and Stendhal, Bersani has also done so through films directed by the likes of Almodóvar, Godard and Resnais.

If, as we have seen, an overriding commitment for Bersani earlier in his career was the exploration of “radical psychic mobility” (Bersani, 1978, p. x)—which he locates not only in sexual *jouissance*, but also in the ecstasy that accompanies violent, destructive and dehumanizing acts—more recently, this concern has morphed into a preoccupation with notions of self-extensibility or self-expansiveness. Nevertheless, desire, however it

is explained and theorized, remains key to an understanding of Bersani's thought. In support of his own work, Bersani draws attention to Deleuze and Guattari's suggestion that "a new emphasis on the *peripheries* of our desiring attention would not only diversify desire but would also keep it mobile" (Bersani, 1978, p. 7). One implication of this position is that "peripheral seductions" (Bersani, 1978, p. 7) should be valued for their own sake, rather than sacrificed on the altar of expediency because they do not align with a dominant point of view—for instance, in the context of a re-envisioned sexuality education.

As Bersani sees it, desire is able to "both clarify adventures in psychic mobility and throw some new light on the comforts and the dangers of the structured self" (Bersani, 1978, p. xi). It is in the practice of literary reading that this happens, for, as Bersani explains, the literary imagination plays a key role in the mobilization of desire where, as we have seen, it makes possible the uncoercive rearrangement of desires that is central to Spivak's aesthetic education. From Bersani's perspective, the literary imagination does this in two ways—the one pulling against the other. If, on the one hand, the literary imagination "reinstates the world of desiring fantasies as a world of reinvented, richly fragmented and diversified body-memories," on the other, "it also gives ample space to those processes by which we make a continuous *story* of our desires" (Bersani, 1978, p. 315). While the former encourages self-extensibility or self-expansiveness, the latter teaches us "to give up the intensities of an infinitely desirable hallucinated world for the somewhat disappointing enjoyments of fulfilled desires" (Bersani, 1978, p. 315). In other words, much is sacrificed in the shaping of a consistent and comprehensive narrative.

Much of Bersani's more recent thinking around the notion of choreographing a self is sparked by the idea that "our uniqueness, our individuality is the form of how we move and over time how we have moved ourselves and how others have moved us through space" (Royle, 2016, p. 272; Bersani, 2018, p. 55). In effect, it is an extension of his own work on the mobility of desire. As such, it needs to be understood in the context of Bersani's on-going preoccupation with the dismantling of notions of stable subjects and psychologically coherent characters, not just by physical movement, but also through the rearrangement of desire that becomes possible with the practice of literary reading. For literary reading, if approached as an aesthetic rather than as a transactional experience, is able to move students beyond "stock responses"—those "passive forms

of automatic reflex, reinforcing what is already known rather than paving the way for what might be known”—into what Northrop Frye claims is “a different world of understanding altogether” (Bogdan, 1986, pp. 52, 57).

However, it must be acknowledged that the work of literary reading as Bersani approaches it is potentially both an exhilarating and a discomfiting business, particularly for those—adolescents and young adults included—who lack “the ‘certitude of identity’ that comes from a position of relative power” (Bruns, 2011, p. 76). If there is a risk for students in “releasing themselves to enter into the alternative world of a literary text” (Bruns, 2011, p. 76), the extent of that risk will depend on the “fluidity of boundaries between self and the world, ordinary existence and imaginative experience, consciousness and repression of consciousness, identity and loss of identity” (Bogdan, 1992, p. 192). Because exposing oneself to everything a literary text has to offer presents undeniable risks and opportunities for teachers as well as students, especially in the already-fraught context of sexuality education, there is always a need for careful pedagogical mediation. Sexuality educators are wise to “tread lightly through such vulnerable territory” (Bruns, 2011, p. 77). However, though they must be mindful of students’ varying abilities to cope with the destabilization brought about by literary reading, teachers should not turn away from the work of challenging students to be risk-taking readers. For the potential rewards are at least as great as the dangers, especially if the work of bringing about the “the expansion of the self’s boundaries” (Bruns, 2011, p. 76) takes place in a pedagogical environment that is supportive of students’ uncertainties, one where teachers are acutely aware that young people are embodied readers “affected by the specificities of . . . feeling, power, and location” (Bogdan, 1992, p. 192).

Given that “the work of adolescent development places the adolescent at risk,” then sexuality education, if it is to help rather than hinder young people, must “orient itself around narratives of sexuality that can take seriously youth’s struggle to reconstruct their experience” (Gilbert, 2014, pp. 43, 42). Literature is a valuable source of such stories, especially for those teachers who are prepared to rethink sex, sexuality, and sexuality education through their own reading of literary texts. While there are certainly sexuality educators who make use of literature to attend to their own needs and strengths—and those of their students—what must be reclaimed for sexuality education are those narratives that interrogate the stories we tell ourselves, or which enable us to

“examine the desires we bring to our meanings of external reality that we are not allowed in real life encounters with others” (Mishra Tarc, 2015, p. 16). If risky narratives, among them stories that pick at notions of identity, are used with students in sexuality education classrooms, the teaching that occurs around them “must be able to meet the sense of homelessness that attends transitions and break-aways in learning” (Robertson, 1999, p. 290). In other words, “principles of care” (Robertson, 1999, p. 290) need to be applied. Yet, although making meaning from risky stories is hard work and often hurts, it is important to remember that pain is indicative of growth—extension and expansion—rather than stagnation.

As we have seen, Douglas Wright’s *ghost dance* is one such risky narrative. In giving us an account of his much younger self—a sexually active twelve-year-old boy responding to the challenges of life by dancing wherever and whenever he could—Wright not only provides us with an example of a boy resisting peremption, but also invites us to consider understandings of intergenerational sex that look beyond “the twinned spectres of ruined innocent children and pathological predators” (Fischel, 2019, p. 174). As we engage with Wright’s self-narrative, we are patiently groomed to reconstruct our own self-narratives in ways which, as well as making space for our own unintelligible selves, “narrate renewed forms and contents of human existence” (Mishra Tarc, 2015, p. 19).

Making Room for the Queer and the Choreographic

Through the spaces it opens up, literary reading has a particular contribution to make to a re-envisioned sexuality education—one where the notion of impersonal intimacy suggests new ways of approaching “some of the most exhilarating, passionate and devastating experiences in a person’s life,” while at the same time providing “an opportunity for thinking that exceeds the moral panics that coalesce around sexuality in childhood and adolescence” (Gilbert, 2004, pp. 233, 235). From a pedagogical perspective, then, the practice of literary reading not only offers the sort of “training in impersonal communities” (Bersani & Tuhkanen, 2014, p. 295) that Bersani seeks, but also provides a space where, as Spivak reminds us, the possibility of collectivities to come can be kept alive through the imagination. To the extent that it offers training in ambiguity and multiplicity, literary reading is a valuable asset for those educators willing to entertain a re-envisioned sexuality education—one which is willing to be queered.

If, on the one hand, as many claim, “there is no room for ambiguity” when it comes to adolescent sex education—otherwise what possibility is there of averting the serious physical, emotional, social and spiritual risks and consequences of sexuality?—on the other, ambiguity is recognizably and undisguisedly “part of the fabric of sexual relations” (Gilbert, 2004, p. 235). Thus, as Gilbert affirms, sexuality education calls for a type of teaching “that is itself ambiguous even as it insists on the ambiguity and multiplicity of meaning” (Gilbert, 2004, p. 235). In other words, an education that is open to and generates the queer is needed. Citing Herbert Tucker (2003), Gilbert reminds us that a teaching that is mindful of ambiguity “requires that students recognize that *‘the other is also there’*” (Gilbert, 2004, p. 235). Spivak and Bersani, with their shared concern for protecting otherness from epistemological colonization—a stance exemplified in Spivak’s notion of relations without relationship and in Bersani’s figuration of nonrelational relatedness through “a homo-ness that joins sameness and difference” (Goldberg, 2009, p. 16)—are sympathetic to teaching ambiguity methodically through reading in the same persistent and undramatic manner that Tucker describes. While Tucker speaks of working “via gradual absorption towards changes of mind that may in the long run modify mental habits” (Tucker, 2003, pp. 444–445), Spivak and Bersani emphasize that such work doesn’t just happen, but involves persistent ‘training,’ whether of the imagination or in impersonal relations. In an important sense, literary reading is a training ground for change!

If, on the one hand, Bersani’s efforts to encourage an impersonal intimacy uncontaminated by desire set a pedagogical direction capable of clearing the way for the emergence in sexuality education classrooms of the sorts of collectivities to come that Spivak imagines as possibilities, on the other, his exploration of desire has the potential to supplement and queer Spivak’s aesthetic education—and any contribution that her project might make to the re-envisioning of sexuality education in Aotearoa New Zealand. In making these claims, I am mindful both of Dean’s argument that for Bersani “sex and safety are fundamentally incompatible; indeed, sex is defined by its incommensurability with safety” (Dean, 2000, p. 164), and of Halberstam’s observation that “the sexual instinct . . . constitutes an oppositional force to what Bersani terms ‘the tyranny of the self’” (Halberstam, 2013, p. 177). Given that Bersani maintains that sexuality’s value lies in its ability to “demean the seriousness of efforts to redeem it” (Bersani, 2010, p. 29)—for example, through our efforts to find meaning, coherence

and a sense of mastery in the construction of sexual identities—his work may aptly be described as ‘counter-intuitive.’ This is so because it overturns any understanding that we might have of “the interconnectedness of intimacy, romance, and sexual contact” (Halberstam, 2013, p. 177), emphasizing instead sex’s selfishness and destabilizing potential.

If sexuality education cannot help avoid ambiguity and multiplicity, not only by inviting queer in, but also as it makes more room for the queer that is already there, it benefits, too, from the sorts of counter-intuitive approaches that emerge from Bersani’s reflections on sex and desire. As Bersani points out, nowhere does the need for counter-intuitiveness become more apparent than in our efforts to capture, pin down and make sense of desire—especially in order to maintain the illusion, not only that desire immobilized is desire fulfilled, but that desire immobilized, or at least contained, somehow serves to create a stable and coherent subject.

Bersani’s suggestion of “the possibility of desublimating desire (and, correlatively, of deconstructing the self)” (Bersani, 1978, p. 6) assumes particular significance in the context of sexuality education where, as *The New Zealand Curriculum* (2007) informs us, “students build resilience through strengthening their personal identity and sense of self-worth” (Ministry of Education, 2015, p. 13). Spivak, with her persistent notion of “position without identity” (Spivak, 2012, pp. xv, 31, 32, 33, 431, 432, 435, 439, 465, 501, 583, endnote 36), and Bersani, with his paradoxical “concept of nonidentitarian sameness, that is, homo-ness” (Roach, 2012, p. 130), surely challenge sexuality educators to think beyond such simplifications.

Underpinning my earlier discussion of three sex scenes from *ghost dance* is an implicit advocacy for the practice of literary reading as a means of rethinking sex in the modality of the aesthetic, in particular, in relation to the choreographic. Such an approach, I believe, not only opens us possibilities for the re-envisioning of sexuality education in Aotearoa New Zealand, but also enables the generation of pedagogical perspectives that work to keep desire and meaning on the move—as they escape simplification by queering the obvious—in ways that the pre-packaged models of health and wellbeing provided by the Ministry of Education often fail to do. Louisa Allen, in proposing that we think more about “the mapping of movement” in sexuality education classrooms in Aotearoa New Zealand and elsewhere, does so in the broader

context of calls for the development of “a sexual choreography of schooling” which would attend to “flows of movement” (Allen, 2018a, p. 347), both of humans and of things, within educational institutions.

Allen’s approach, in that it seeks to decentre the human in such a way that room is made for the emergence of vibrant non-human matter, is avowedly post-humanist and materialist. While sympathetic to Allen’s work, especially to the extent that along with similar projects (see Springgay & Zaliwska, 2015) it aims to “create conditions for innovative and sustainable pedagogical change” (Allen, 2018a, p. 353), my focus here is on the practice of literary reading. If Allen’s paper attempts to “create a rhythm with words that echoes some sense of movement’s flow” (Allen, 2018a, p. 353), my aim is to explore ways in which the literary reading of texts might open up sexuality educators and researchers to a choreographic understanding of movement as a force in the thinking, and, therefore, the becoming of sexuality education. In doing so, I take up the argument that YA texts are important sources of sex and sexuality education (see Bittner, 2012; Gilbert, 2004), and, therefore, worthy of serious attention when attempting to queer sexuality education classrooms.

Apropos of the sexuality education of adolescents, Gilbert observes that “we rarely ask youth to read novels even though we may recognize that the ‘ruse of eros’ is central to adolescents’, as well as our own, adventures in sexuality” (Gilbert, 2004, p. 234). This rings true in the New Zealand context where fiction—if it is read at all, either formally or informally, in connection with sexuality education—is generally seen as an avenue “to address the complications of love and identity,” or as a means of assisting young people to “make healthy choices in their sexual lives” (Gilbert, 2004, pp. 233, 234–235). Given these assumptions, it is not surprising that LGBTQ+ fiction for young adults, like other YA literature directed at historical ‘outsiders,’ has been hailed, on the one hand, as a way of enabling those who have been excluded to “see their own faces reflected in the pages of a book” (Jenkins & Cart, 2018, p. 3)—and, thus, be reassured by the knowledge that one is not alone in the world—and, on the other, as a potential “informal educational source of sex and sexuality” (Bittner, 2012, p. 358).

In New Zealand, the YA fiction that concerns itself with LGBTQ+ themes and is available in schools has tended for the most part to follow international trends by emphasizing queer visibility, that is, the voluntary or involuntary ‘coming out’ of

LGBTQ+ characters.²⁸ In such stories, the reader's interest is engaged and sustained through the "dramatic tension arising from what *might* happen when the invisible is made visible" (Jenkins & Cart, 2018, p. xiv), as well as by the invitation to identify with the LGBTQ+ character(s) who is/are usually sympathetically drawn. Relatively fewer books, though more in recent years, have emphasized the themes either of LGBTQ+ assimilation into supportive communities or of the emergence of queer consciousness.

While arguing for the inclusion of an aesthetic dimension to sexuality education—especially through the positioning of sex as a modality of the aesthetic and the rethinking of sex as a choreographed practice—I am, at the same time, aware of the silence of *The New Zealand Curriculum* (2007) in regard to the relation of the aesthetic to sexuality education. Thus, although the Ministry of Education states that sexuality education is not confined to the learning area of Health and Physical Education within *The New Zealand Curriculum* (2007), but occurs "across the wider school" (Ministry of Education, 2015, p. 8), there is no explicit recognition of a connection between the aesthetic dimension/modality and sex and sexuality. In its advancement of "a holistic approach to sexuality education," especially through the promotion of the concept of hauora, the Ministry clearly acknowledges that "sexuality has social, mental, and emotional, and spiritual dimensions" that are closely "interrelated" (Ministry of Education, 2015, p. 14). However, the aesthetic is conspicuously absent from its conceptualizing and its models. By neglecting to consider sex in relation to the aesthetic, including sex as a modality of the aesthetic, *The New Zealand Curriculum* (2007) appears to limit the role of literature and the arts in sexuality education to supporting and reinforcing *messages* related to hauora, health promotion, and socio-ecological perspectives, as well as to various attitudes and values conducive to the

²⁸ Two 'classic' YA novels by New Zealand authors that fit this pattern are William Taylor's *The Blue Lawn* (1994) and Paula Boock's *Dare Truth or Promise* (1997). At a time when most schools were still reluctant to encourage LGBTQ+ visibility, these books were recognized for their sympathetic treatment of the coming-out of their respective gay or lesbian protagonist(s). *The Blue Lawn* won the 1995 Senior Fiction Award, while *Dare Truth or Promise* was the winner of the 1998 New Zealand Post Children's Book of the Year. Both novels were picked up by international publishers and later nominated for the Lambda Literary Award for Children's and Young Adult Literature. However, in the nineteen-nineties, although some New Zealand schools were willing to risk controversy by teaching *The Blue Lawn* and/or *Dare Truth or Promise*, others refused to have them in classrooms or in the library.

advancement of personal and interpersonal wellbeing, ethics, and social justice. Sex and sexuality education are not themselves approached from an aesthetic perspective.

Of course, it is not surprising to discover that the type of counter-intuitive insights into sex and sexuality that readings of Spivak, Bersani and Wright are capable of producing are at odds with the direction of sexuality education in New Zealand's state and state-integrated schools as mandated by the Ministry of Education's *Health and Physical Education in The New Zealand Curriculum* (2007) and 'unpacked' in subsequent documents including *Sexuality Education: A guide for principals, boards of trustees, and teachers* (2015) and its 2020 revision. There, as we have seen, sexuality education programmes are required to present sexual development as both 'positive' and 'natural'—"sexuality education in New Zealand takes a positive view of sexual development as a natural part of growing up" (Ministry of Education, 2015, p. 4.), we are told. Yet, the documents repeatedly under-cut themselves, telling us, that New Zealand school-based sexuality education programmes are required at the various levels to address issues of "risk and safety" (Ministry of Education, 2015, p. 12)²⁹. Why, we may ask ourselves, if sexual development is natural and positive, do we need to be reminded so often of the need to mitigate against sex's attendant dangers?

Further anxiety comes with the Ministry of Education's warning that in New Zealand schools sexuality education should neither "be framed by notions of risk and safety" (Ministry of Education, 2015, p. 23) nor by those of "risk and violence" (Ministry of Education, 2020a, p. 27, 2020b, p. 31). For, this approach easily leads to programmes "driven by fear and blame" (Ministry of Education, 2015, p. 23, 2020a, p. 27, 2020b, p. 31). In advising schools that lessons concerned with matters such as sexual violence and abuse be kept at arm's length from the rest of the sexuality education programme, the Ministry not only seeks to deal with a Spivakian-type double bind by refusing to face it, but also in the process reveals a "desire for transparency and accessibility of

²⁹ For example, the Ministry of Education (2015) focuses on such measures as "safety management" (p. 13); "identifying risks and planning safety strategies" (pp. 15, 16); "investigating safety procedures and strategies for sexual health, including access to health care, contraception, issues of consent" (p. 18); "understanding the influence of attitudes and values on the safety of self and others" (p. 18); "identifying risks and developing skills for safer sexual practices, including preventing pregnancy and sexually transmissible infections" (p. 19); "understanding safer sexual practices" (p. 20); and "critically analys[ing] issues of safety and risk" (p. 23).

meaning in sex education” (Gilbert, 2004, pp. 233–234) that encourages a side-stepping of the ambiguities and complexities raised by Spivak, Bersani, and Wright. Rather than express a willingness to direct teachers to engage with the “delightful and disturbing action of eros” (Carson, 1998, p. 97), avoidance is often held to be the wiser option. A consideration of Gilbert’s question—“shouldn’t sex education address exhilaration, passion and devastation?” (Gilbert, 2004, p. 233)—is apt here, too, especially in the light of Bersani’s claim and Wright’s testimony that sexuality is always inherently risky and unsafe.

Gilbert, in emphasizing that we must not “erode the possibility for new, more expansive understandings of sexuality and learning” (Gilbert, 2014, p. xiii)—whether in an effort to be ‘right’ or ‘safe’—indicates a line of thought well worth pursuing in any re-envisioning of sexuality education. If education, frequently undone by an unpredictable and uncontainable sexuality moving through cultures and persons, often fails to take account of “the strange and contradictory movements of desire” (Gilbert, 2014, p. xi), then this is to its detriment. Much is to be gained by attending to the complexities and complications of sexuality that the work of Spivak, Bersani and Wright makes visible—for example, Bersani’s notion of sex as both self-shattering and aesthetic; Spivak’s argument that reproductive heteronormativity “offers us a complicated semiotic system of organizing sexual/gendered differential” (Spivak, 2012, p. 124); and Wright’s choreographic negotiation as a twelve-year old of the consent/abuse double bind.

However, *The New Zealand Curriculum* (2007) is more interested in deploying sexuality education to “develop competencies for mental wellness, reproductive health and positive sexuality, and safety management” (Ministry of Education, 2007, p. 23) than in grappling with the unsettling notion—and the complexities which flow from it—that “both in relation to gender and sexual identities the individual subject is never captured by a unitary model of who and what they are” (Weeks, 2011, p. 212). For example, the Education Review Office, in recommending that teachers draw on student voice when dealing with the issue of pornography in an effort to help students “separate fantasy from reality, and distinguish between healthy and unhealthy relationships” (Education Review Office, 2018, p. 26) imply that it is possible to make hard and fast distinctions between the one and the other. In the pursuit of clarity about pornography—which international research suggests “is becoming an increasingly accepted and prevalent aspect of young people’s sexuality experiences” (Education

Review Office, 2018, p.18)—decisiveness tends to be favoured over more complex and nuanced thought.

Although the Education Review Office acknowledges that “when students have opportunities to engage critically with sexuality education they are capable of thinking through these issues with a high degree of sophistication” (Education Review Office, 2018, p. 41)—a statement, the importance of which, I highlight by placing it at the head of this chapter—sexuality educators do not necessarily have the confidence or capability to promote and make the most of such engagements. Because teachers, principals, and board of trustees of New Zealand schools are encouraged to hold themselves responsible for what is framed as the “delivery” (Ministry of Education, 2015, pp. 26, 28, 31, 32, 33, 37; Education Review Office, 2018, pp. 6, 10, 11, 20, 29, 42) of health and sexuality education programmes, ways of conceptualizing sexuality education that do not sit easily with notions of education as something easily packaged and dispatched tend to be rejected. No wonder, as Allen observes, sexuality education has concentrated “on delivering information about safer sex and pedagogies enabling students to practice condom use” (Allen, 2018b, p. 133). For, that which is easily deliverable—information—is what tends to be delivered. Sophisticated thinking does not arrive in the same way!

It seems, then, that it would be unwise and counter-productive to take account of the ideas of Spivak, Bersani and Wright in pre-service or in-service professional development programmes for teachers of sexuality education in New Zealand schools. The ‘unsafe’ perspectives on desire, sexuality and impersonal intimacy which Bersani and Wright espouse, and Spivak’s ‘destabilizing’ notions of aporia, double binds and relations without relationship would be unlikely to get much traction in the current educational environment. Nevertheless, the “counter-intuitive but crucial shift in thinking away from projects of redemption, reconstruction, restoration, and reclamation” (Halberstam, 2013, p. 177) that Bersani, Wright, and Spivak perform in regard to sex and sexuality serves to productively complicate such important notions as the LGBTQ+ subject, LGBTQ+ rights, and homonormativity and the process of homonormalization. Indeed, ideas of redemption, reconstruction, restoration, and reclamation, which Bersani, Wright, and Spivak disrupt, still underpin school-based sexuality education in Aotearoa New Zealand.

Among other structures central to sexuality education that Spivak, Bersani, and Wright, in their different ways, attend to and interrogate are the binaries of adult/child, heterosexual/homosexual, cis gender/gender diverse, knowledge/innocence, and pleasure/danger. While Bersani's approach has been described as "emphasizing the negative potential of the queer, and thus rethinking the meaning of the political through queerness" (Halberstam, 2013, p. 178), Spivak's contribution to this complication lies in her rethinking of gender as "an instrument of abstraction" and "a position without identity" (Spivak, 2012, p. 31). For, by applying the tools of deconstruction to sexual difference and reproductive heteronormativity (RHN), Spivak sets out to show, not only that the supposedly irreducible is reducible, but also that "originary queerness contains and is contained by reproductive heteronormativity (RHN)" (Spivak, 2012, p. 190). Wright's *ghost dance*, as I have argued, is a rich text for literary reading, especially on account of its choreographic treatment of sex in the modality of the aesthetic.

Given that discussions about sexuality in schools in many parts of the world, including Aotearoa New Zealand, "are often framed by the crises of teenage pregnancy, AIDS and STIs, gay suicide, and sexual assault and harassment," which "set the agenda for a sex education constituted through discourses of moral panic and a narrow conception of health and illness" (Gilbert, 2014, p. 65), there is an urgency, as Gilbert argues, to think beyond a sexuality education that insists on compliance—whether it be in the service of abstinence, or is promoted to improve mastery of various methods of contraception, infection control, or of one's body and psyche. In this context, the ability of Spivak, Bersani and Wright to complicate and challenge habitual ways of thinking provides a welcome opportunity for those seeking a re-envisioning of sexuality education in Aotearoa New Zealand to investigate how sexuality moves unpredictably in our schools—that is, in queer ways which defy the simplification of sexual development as 'natural' and 'positive'.

Some Concluding Remarks

If, in its stated aim of taking account of "broader understandings about sexuality and sexuality education" (Ministry of Education, 2015, p. 3), the Ministry of Education's *Sexuality Education: A guide for principals, boards of trustees, and teachers* (2015) leaves the door at least partly open to the complications that might arise in sexuality education if teachers are willing to be hospitable to the insights and approaches of Spivak, Bersani and Wright, it also allows for the sorts of possibilities that may emerge

from a sexuality education that is confident enough to take advantage of the literary and aesthetic modalities that are accessed through the humanities. Hence, I argue against a sexuality education that is directed exclusively by the empirically focussed sciences and social sciences. While these clearly have an important role to play in sexuality education, this should not be at the expense of the humanities and the approaches they nurture and promote, including literary reading. For as Bersani, Wright and Spivak show us, a notion such as desire, which is at the heart of sexuality education, is able to be explored broadly, deeply, and choreographically through the reading of literature.

If, in this chapter, I have focussed on the ability of literary reading to mobilize desire—thereby, keeping meaning on the move to the benefit of sexuality education—in the chapter that follows, I argue the advantages for sexuality education of theorizing desire in multiple ways.

Chapter Thirteen

Sexuality Education, Pedagogies of Desire, and Literary Reading

There is osmosis between sexuality and existence, that is, if existence diffuses throughout sexuality, sexuality reciprocally diffuses throughout existence, such that it is impossible to identify the contribution of sexual motivation and the contribution of other motivations for a given decision or action, and it is impossible to characterize a decision or an action as ‘sexual’ or as ‘nonsexual.’ (Merleau-Ponty, 1945/2014, p. 172)

If the world is approached as a reality constructed of interactions, relationships, constellations and proportionalities, then choreography is seen as the aesthetic practice of setting those relations or setting the conditions for those relations to emerge. (Klien & Valk, 2008, p. 20)

Overview

Given that the human body and sex are inevitably and inextricably entangled with desire—but also with discourses of knowledge, power and pleasure, as Foucault has argued—it seems to me both necessary and advantageous that efforts to conceptualize sexuality education in ways that are both more utopic and queer would concern themselves with desire, not only as it relates to sex and figures in these discourses, but also as a pedagogy that activates the imagination, opening the way for a “relational encounter among individuals through which unpredictable possibilities of communication and action are created” (Zembylas, 2007a, p. xiii). Yet, for a variety of reasons, including the Ministry of Education’s long-standing pre-occupation with sexual health and an emphasis on risk-management, desire remains for the most part invisible, unaddressed, and certainly under-theorised, in the context of sexuality education in Aotearoa New Zealand.

In this chapter, as I propose the enactment of pedagogies of desire, especially in the field of sexuality education and in the context of Spivak’s aesthetic education, I argue the benefits of theorizing desire in multiple ways—psychoanalytical and Deleuzo-Guattarian among them—paying attention through its mapping to the ways in which desire underlines movement. Whether the movement of desire is conceptualized as occurring between subjects, as it is in the psychoanalytical tradition, or in Deleuzo-Guattarian terms, “as part of an immanent process of connectivity between bodies” (Beckman, 2013, pp. 34–35), it is always fruitful to take note of what desire does and

makes possible, including its ability to keep meaning on the move. If different ways of conceptualizing desire permit desire to do different things and, therefore, to produce different results, then theorizing the movement of desire in relation to the choreographic is especially worthwhile when considering the dynamics of sex, or the re-envisioning and queering of sexuality education through Spivak's aesthetic education

Desire and the Choreographic

As we have seen, Bersani's understanding of the choreographic emphasizes how, over time and in various spaces, we move ourselves and are moved by others—an aesthetic of handling—yet, choreography can be thought more broadly still as extending beyond the human to include any dynamic assemblage. For, as the choreographer and artist Michael Klien suggests, “choreography has become a metaphor for dynamic constellations of any kind, consciously choreographed or not, self-organizing or artificially constructed” (Klien & Valk, 2008, p. 20). Viewed as an aesthetic practice, choreography, as stated at the head of this chapter, is concerned not only with establishing relations in the world, but also with “setting the conditions for those relations to emerge” (Klien & Valk, 2008, p. 20). In other words, choreography is concerned with opening up possibilities, not with repeating the same.

In the context of sexuality education and when aligned to pedagogies of desire, a choreographic approach to movement and thought, such as that described by Klien, has the ability to draw attention to what in Deleuzo-Guattarian³⁰ terms amount to “territorialized forms of the body”—that is, to those forces that close rather than open the body “to what it is capable of” (Beckman, 2013, p. 6). This is so because a choreographic theorization of sexuality education undermines “the dominant insistence upon the stability of bodies, the body as fact, transmitting obvious information” (Britzman, 1998b, p. 63), an insistence which neoliberal education echoes and amplifies to its advantage. If, for Deleuze and Guattari, deterritorialization challenges those stratified forms of desire which result from the organizing principles and structures

³⁰ Given that four of Gilles Deleuze's most important works were co-authored in a collaborative process with Félix Guattari, it is often impossible to separate the thought of one author from the other, even in the many texts that they produced individually. Thus, for the purposes of this chapter, I treat Deleuze's own individual works and those he wrote together with Guattari as constituting Deleuze's *oeuvre*, frequently describing them as Deleuzo-Guattarian.

inherent in the notion of ‘territory,’ then a sexuality education that is choreographic in its emphasis, and which sets out to enact what Klien calls an ‘Aesthetics of Change,’ “engages everyone’s perception and knowledge of ‘how things move,’ inquiring if and how individuals can imaginatively order and re-order aspects of their personal, social, cultural and political lives” (Klien & Valk, 2008, p. 21). Imagined, thus, as a form of deterritorialization—a “coming undone” (Deleuze and Guattari, 1983, p. 322) through movement—a choreographic approach to sexuality education does not require the implementation of a grand plan, and might involve “no more than the reshuffling of context,” that is, “enough ‘re-framing’ for an idea-body to get unstuck, rough and tumble, from its habitual pattern of circumstance and repetition” (Klien, Valk, & Gormly, 2008, p. 18). Such an approach, therefore, has much in common with Spivak’s aesthetic education, which through the uncoercive rearrangement of desires sets out to teach the imagination “to discover (theoretically or practically) the premises of the habit that obliges us to transcendentalize” (Spivak, 2012, p. 10)—that is, to absolutize or totalize—such values as ‘nation,’ ‘tribe,’ ‘religion,’ ‘family,’ ‘gender,’ ‘subject,’ ‘sexuality,’ and ‘education’.

In advocating for the enactment of pedagogies of desire in sexuality education, I do so by promoting literary reading—for literature “is not merely instructive *about* desire; in a sense, desire *is* a phenomenon of the literary imagination” (Bersani, 1978, p. 10). In other words, desire and the imagination converge and become entangled in the spaces opened up by fiction, spaces where seduction of the reader by the story and its characters becomes more than possible. However, familiarity with literature and the discourses circulating around it not only brings into focus “how little attention literary criticism has paid to the desire which features so commonly in the texts it analyses,” but also calls into question “the widespread notion that desire, however differently conceptualized” (Belsey, 1994, p. 8) requires no analysis.

Just as psychoanalytical approaches to desire tend to work to reinforce the idea that subjectivities are or should be fixed—and invariably linked to objects—Deleuzo-Guattarian and Bersanian theorizations support the hope that “*the* desiring self might even disappear as we learn to multiply our discontinuous and partial desiring selves” (Bersani, 1978, p. 7). On the one hand, human agency is less important in Deleuze and Guattari’s sexual imaginary than “the ability to open up to new connections, or to be disrupted so radically that a new thought can be born” (O’Donnell, 2011, p. 218). On

the other, *intensive* movement is just as worthy of attention as “great movements of extension” in the production of those “conjunctions nomadic and polyvocal” (Deleuze & Guattari, 1983, p. 319) which work to make established sexual categories—those classifications which create discrete sexual orientations and separate the human from the nonhuman, for example—irrelevant or even nonsensical. As Deleuze and Guattari queerly and utopically state:

. . . homosexuality and heterosexuality cannot be distinguished any longer: the word of transverse communications, where the finally conquered nonhuman sex mingles with the flowers, a new earth where desire functions according to its molecular elements and flows. (Deleuze & Guattari, 1983, p. 319)

Thus, while we do well to take account of the surfaces upon which desire, as it moves, extends itself, we must also pay particular attention to those intensities, those “moments in which something new may be created, another way of relating to the world and to oneself where one cannot maintain the person one felt one was” (O’Donnell, 2011, pp. 221–222). For, it is at such moments that “the operation of desire undoes presuppositions and depersonalises, making us see that we are less the one who *has* desires, than that desires have *us*” (O’Donnell, 2011, p. 222). In Spivakian terms, we are not rearranging desires, desires are rearranging us. It is by allowing our desires to be uncoercively rearranged and by relinquishing our tight grip on agency that we come to recognize that we are “constituted and moved by many forces” (O’Donnell, 2011, p. 222), and that our sexuality is not something that belongs to us as subjects, something which we can hold together by effort or dint of will. At the same time, being “already something other than itself” (Merleau-Ponty, 1945/2014, p. 174), sexuality is unable to be transcended. As Merleau-Ponty’s epigraph to this chapter suggests, sexuality and existence are best thought of as mutually osmotic and diffusive. Therefore, by figuring sexuality as co-extensive with life, we, like Merleau-Ponty, may come to appreciate that sexuality is “continuously present in human life as an atmosphere” (Merleau-Ponty, 1945/2014, p. 171).

For Deleuze and Guattari sexuality is similarly continuously present—“not just becoming as one, or even two, but becoming as a hundred thousand” (Deleuze & Guattari, 1983, p. 296):

The truth is that sexuality is everywhere: the way a bureaucrat fondles his records, a judge administers justice, a businessman causes money to circulate; the way the bourgeoisie fucks the proletariat; and so on. (Deleuze & Guattari, 1983, p. 293)

As Deleuze and Guattari state, sexuality is found in all cultural, social, political, governmental, and economic institutions. Yet, despite its ubiquity, sexuality is “captured and allowed only to mean certain things” (Beckman, 2013, p. 9). Insofar as it “represents a seizure of the body” (Halperin, 1992, p. 261), sexuality is directed to produce only approved forms of subjectivity.

Nonetheless, when sexuality educators as everyday choreographers begin to ‘think’ more freely with desire in its various and multiple conceptualizations—as the likes of Spivak, Bersani, Merleau-Ponty and Deleuze and Guattari prompt us to—then sexuality education, even under a neoliberal agenda, becomes better at thinking more queerly, utopically, and aesthetically. Re-conceptualized as a site where movement is implicated in the imagining and reimagining of sexuality, and in the making, unmaking and remaking of sexual subjects, sexuality education no longer operates as a curriculum area designed primarily to support the formation and maintenance of stable sexual subjects within a humanist framework.

The more mobility is recognized as working against structures that rigidify—and the more the choreographic becomes a way of attending to how, over time and in various spaces, we move ourselves and are moved by others—the easier it becomes not only to problematize “the drive to identity, recognition, and self-affirmation” that pervades much of the current thinking around sexuality education, but also to interrogate those theories which tie the human subject to “relations of desire” (Grosz, 2005, pp. 186, 189), theorizations which sexuality education in Aotearoa New Zealand mostly takes for granted. Moreover, if desire is refigured as an impersonal force, as Deleuze and Guattari suggest it should be, it cannot be tied down or reduced to any specific relation to the human subject. A choreographic approach to sexuality education—one that attends to ways in which “inhuman forces, forces that are both living and non-living, macroscopic and microscopic, above and below the level of the human” (Grosz, 2005, pp. 189–190) move in relation to the contours and components of bodies, human and otherwise—both side-lines efforts to distinguish between such favoured concepts as

consciousness and the unconscious, and works to open up a field closed by psychoanalysis.

Given that desire, as Deleuze writes it, is “not a natural given,” but an ‘event’ on “a field of immanence . . . defined by zones of intensity, thresholds, degrees and fluxes” (Deleuze, 2007, p. 130), it follows that sexuality itself is “highly plastic and . . . no longer reliant on the terms of any binary opposition such as those of male/female, active/passive or human/animal” (Shildrick, 2009, pp. 123–124). Sexuality, thus conceived, and resistant to the gravitational pull of the Daddy-Mummy-Me triad of psychoanalysis, may be experienced as both *heimliche* and *unheimliche*, familiar and unfamiliar. This is so, not only because, as Sedgwick explains, anyone’s sexuality or gender can’t be made to signify monolithically, but also on account of the “powerful effects of overlap, resonance and substitution between the ‘queer’ and the ‘uncanny’” (Royle, 2003, p. 43).

In response to Claire Colebrook’s question: “Is queer theory a reflection on what it means to be queer, or does the concept of queerness change the ways in which we theorise?” (Colebrook, 2009, p. 11), it is fair to say that Deleuzo-Guattarian theorizations—and their off-shoots, including the work of Elizabeth Grosz and new materialist thinking—certainly queer our understandings of and approaches to sex and sexuality education. And they creatively do so, in that the work of Deleuze and Guattari indicates “a rupture in the established ways of thinking, suggesting an intrinsic queerness in thinking and theorising that breaks away from a representational thought” (Nigianni, 2009, p. 2). For, in Deleuzo-Guattarian terms, queer-becoming implies not only a resistance to normalization, but also a willingness to sabotage the repetition of sameness in order to produce difference. When conceptualized in relation to the choreographic, Deleuzo-Guattarian ways of approaching sexuality suggest a “capacity to produce deviant lines along established thinking and disciplines (Nigianni, 2009, p. 1), a transversal movement “where openness is introduced through variations in relationships that disrupt, rework but also productively inhabit hierarchies” (Ringrose, 2015, p. 399). They also through their openness to the random movements of desire clear the way for fresh approaches to sexuality education that are “playful, experimental, hopeful (yet hopeless), and thus decidedly *queer*” (Allen, 2018b, p. 6).

With Allen's statement in mind, I affirm that my intention in arguing for the choreographic treatment of desire in relation to the re-envisioning of sexuality education is neither to restrict movement, nor to make it fit a particular model—Spivakian or Deleuzo-Guattarian—but, rather, “to provide a cradle for movement to find its own patterns . . . over and over again . . . to prevent a body . . . whether bound by skin or habits . . . from stagnation, and enable that lightness, primal energy and elemental possibility only to be found once relations start dancing” (Klien & Valk, 2008, p. 22). Spivak's aesthetic education and literary reading have an important role to play in this process.

Sexuality Education and Desire

Michalinos Zembylas, by calling for the enactment of a pedagogy of desire that “*produces and seduces* imaginations” (Zembylas, 2007b, p. 332), as opposed to one that coerces or represses them, aligns himself, unwittingly, perhaps, with Spivak's aesthetic education, which, as we have seen, seeks “an uncoercive rearrangement of desires, through teaching reading” (Spivak, 2012, p. 373). In doing so, Zembylas, like Spivak, recognizes that without desire the imagination cannot operate.

Although sex, the subject and focus of sexuality education, is unavoidably entangled with human desire and the human body, sexuality education, as we have seen, has for the most part ignored the erotic tradition which attends to “the body primarily conceived, and primarily become significant, as the agent and object of desire” (Brooks, 1993, p. 5). Yet, given “a Cartesian legacy” (Allen, 2014, p. 89)—a dualism—which historically has determined that educational institutions prioritise the development of the mind over that of the body, it is, perhaps, inevitable that “student bodies and the messiness of their sexuality” (Allen, 2018b, p. 1) have been regarded within education as marginal and somewhat embarrassing. Nevertheless, young bodies and messy sexualities are concerns which must be addressed, albeit reluctantly, in order to facilitate students' smooth progress through a curriculum that affords a very high status to ‘academic’ subjects such as science and maths. The fact that sexuality education in New Zealand schools sits under the umbrella of Hauora Wāhanga Ako or the Health and Physical Education learning area within *The New Zealand Curriculum* (2007)—and that prospective teachers of sexuality education are usually trained from a Health and Physical Education perspective—helps explain why desire and its theorization have up to now been neglected in a curriculum that is more at home with

managing bodies ‘at risk’ than with positioning sexuality education as “a problem of and for thinking” (Gilbert, 2014, p. 67).

Promoting wellbeing through sexuality education (2018), the most recent Education Review Office report to evaluate the effectiveness of sexuality education in New Zealand schools, does so on the basis of the direction set by *The New Zealand Curriculum* (2007) and *Sexuality Education: A guide for principals, boards of trustees, and teachers* (2015), both of which determine a focus “on the wellbeing of the students themselves, other people, and society through learning in health-related and movement contexts” (Education Review Office, 2018, p. 5). In reporting the findings of its investigation into how well schools support and promote wellbeing for their students through sexuality education, ERO paints an uninspiring picture, one which suggests that many of the 116 schools that it visited between May and August 2017 are failing to meet the needs of their students in various aspects of this curriculum area.³¹

In a quantitative summary of how well sexuality education was taught in the 116 schools that it visited, ERO reported the following: in 27.6% of schools it was taught not at all well; in 19.0% somewhat well; in 33.6% well; and in 19.8% very well (see Education Review Office, 2018, p. 6). If it is not worrying enough that most schools barely manage to comply with Ministry requirements for the teaching of sexuality education, it is also seriously concerning that many schools evidence significant lapses and deficiencies in matters of stewardship, leadership, connection with community, curriculum design and delivery, and teacher capability and confidence. For sure, if “‘intellectual’ subjects like maths and science” (Allen, 2018b, p. 1) were to receive—as sexuality education has—an Education Review Office report which identifies “absent, or inadequate, community consultation”; “lack of assessment and evaluation”; “lack of teacher comfort and confidence”; “low prioritisation . . . among competing priorities”; and “school policies not widely understood and implemented” (Education Review

³¹ The Education Review Office reports: “In the 2017 evaluation, ERO found that, overall, curriculum coverage remains inconsistent. Some schools are not meeting minimum standards of compliance with current requirements. Most schools are meeting minimum standards, but many have significant gaps in curriculum coverage. Although biological aspects of sexuality and puberty are well covered, more in-depth coverage is needed for aspects like consent, digital technologies and relationships. Sexual violence and pornography were covered in fewer than half of the secondary schools ERO visited.” (Education Review Office, 2018, p. 5)

Office, 2018, p. 7) as barriers to their successful delivery or implementation, there would be consternation and alarm in the community!

In ERO's estimation sexuality education in New Zealand schools is not up to scratch. Yet, viewed through a queer lens, sexuality education's shortcomings may be the very straw that Rumpelstiltskin spins to produce gold. If, as Allen argues, "sexuality education has always been a *queer* proposition for schools" (Allen, 2018b, p. 1)—given its potential to disrupt much that is normal and normative about school life—perhaps, it is its very *queerness*, its relative insignificance in the educational hierarchy, and its awkward fit with the more 'academic' subjects that make sexuality education "ripe for the emergence of new modes of thought" (Allen, 2018b, p. 3). Thus, in its very ambivalence and strangeness, sexuality education might come to exemplify Halberstam's "queer art of failure" (Halberstam, 2011)—a failure theorized in the mode of the aesthetic—which not only "allows us to escape the punishing norms that discipline behavior and manage human development" (Halberstam, 2011, p. 3), but also at the same time to move beyond "a series of stalemates" (Allen, 2018b, p. 3) involving sexuality education's most pressing issues.

Many of the Education Review Office's recommendations for the improved provision of sexuality education in schools are difficult to fault—for example, that schools "implement a comprehensive sexuality education programme, making sure sufficient time is provided for delivery and that students at all levels have opportunities to engage with sexuality education," or that they "make sure teachers have sufficient professional capability to effectively teach sexuality education, and access professional learning and development as needed" (Education Review Office, 2018, p. 20). However, what is not addressed in the Education Review Office's report are the limitations and exclusions inherent to the theoretical framework upon which sexuality education in Aotearoa New Zealand is currently based.

Because concerns about health and wellbeing—physical, social, cultural and spiritual—drive sexuality education in its present form, risk-management and addressing issues of disadvantage are over-riding preoccupations. This is evident in the current report's sometimes infelicitously articulated anxiety in relation to groups already identified as disadvantaged—including Māori, Pacific, and international students, students with strong cultural and religious beliefs, queer students, and those with particular learning

needs—who “remain less well catered for, despite being at higher risk of negative wellbeing outcomes” (Education Review Office, 2018, p. 5). While the report’s concern for student wellbeing is to be lauded, the Education Review Office, in neglecting to contextualize wellbeing in relation to eros, also ignores desire—“a term that lies at the heart of sexuality” (Weeks, 2011, p. 39)—thus, missing a golden pedagogical opportunity to link sexual desire with the desire for knowledge.

Unlike Peter Brooks, for example, who argues that there is much to be gained from theorizing “about bodies emblazoned with meaning within the field of desire, desire that is originally and always, with whatever sublimations, sexual, but also by extension the desire to know: the body as an ‘epistemophilic’ project” (Brooks, 1993, p. 5), sexuality education in Aotearoa New Zealand and elsewhere, does not, for the most part, take advantage of the insight that the desire to know—curiosity—is inseparable from sexual desire, but also from movement. Nor does sexuality education address the issues that the Education Review Office identifies as requiring deeper coverage—consent, digital technologies, sexual violence and pornography—in relation to desire and curiosity. Thus, notwithstanding ERO’s finding that “without the knowledge and skills to navigate this context, young people are at risk of developing unhealthy attitudes toward sexuality, increasing risks to mental and physical wellbeing for themselves and others” (Education Review Office, 2018, p. 18), it must be asked whether a better future for sexuality education will be determined not so much by increased knowledge, more developed skills—and everyone working harder—than through “an ontological reorientation of the nature of sexuality education itself” (Allen, 2018b, p. 144). As Allen suggests, it is time for “a queer experiment in defamiliarizing our current understandings of sexuality education” (Allen, 2018b, p. 144).

While Allen proposes that a queering of sexuality education might come about by focussing on those features “which have been constituted as peripheral foci in conventional sexuality education” (Allen, 2018b, p. 7), my proposal for queering sexuality education involves both a return and a veering: a return to desire—“an iconic conception in the Western metaphysical tradition” (Azari, 2008, p. 9), one that is central to Spivak’s aesthetic education—and a veering in a different direction. Thus, in calling for the mapping of desire’s strange choreographic, I draw attention to the swerving, turning, swinging, curving, slanting, sheering, deviating, deflecting movements that occur not only when desire moves us in relation to other bodies

(human and otherwise), but also in relation to thought. If, as Ahmed suggests, queering offers “a different ‘slant’ to the concept of orientation itself,” it also positions us “at an oblique angle to what coheres” (Ahmed, 2006, pp. 4, 172) as given, whether in action or in thought. In other words, because “desire is, after all, what moves us closer to bodies” (Ahmed, 2006, p. 103), and to ideas, a queer perspective on sexuality education—one that takes account of the unpredictability and strangeness of desire’s movement—will accept that desire does not travel in straight or direct lines. Just as it is productive when conceptualizing desire spatially to imagine it moving transversally, that is, travelling “the path in between, the diagonal across the grids of horizontal and vertical coordinates, the zigzag of a line of continuous variation,” so, too, is it helpful to think of desire in temporal terms, as “always underway among things” (Bogue, 2007. p. 5), always *in media res*. Asserting this is to concur that desire—successfully evading as it does all attempts to contain or restrain it—“can go anywhere” (Belsey, 1994, p. 6), anytime. It is also to affirm that “desire eludes final definition” (Belsey, 1994, p. 3).

Although it is many years now since Michelle Fine first wrote of “the missing discourse of desire” (Fine, 1988)—thereby drawing attention to the ways in which schools in combination with other institutions have denied female sexuality through the silencing of discourse about desire and pleasure—desire, like pleasure, remains largely absent from Aotearoa New Zealand’s mandated sexuality education programmes.³² Maybe it is because desire is so slippery and difficult to grasp, so intangible, that sexuality educators have tended to shy away from addressing it—in much the same way that they have avoided attending to pleasure. Yet, in the context of sexuality education, desire and pleasure—if mentioned at all, or even in their conspicuous absence—have been linked more often than not. For example, *The Politics of Pleasure in Sexuality Education: Pleasure Bound* (2014), a recent volume of edited essays that seeks “to provoke a reconfiguration of thought regarding sexuality education’s approach to pleasure and desire” (Allen et al., 2014, p. 4) consistently binds the two together. But

³² With the release of the new guidelines for relationships and sexuality education (Ministry of Education, 2020a, 2020b), the long-held official silence about desire and pleasure appears to have been broken. For example, at level 8 of the curriculum students will be “able to explore desire, pleasure, consent, and attraction as interpersonal, social, and ethical concepts” (Ministry of Education, 2020b, p. 39). Whether such exploration will extend to the sorts of queer, aesthetic and choreographic approaches to sex and sexuality that my thesis advances—including through literary reading—remains to be seen.

there is much to be gained, I believe, by loosening this bond. If “we untie pleasure from desire, the latter can be allowed to exist as a constructive positivity in its own right” (Beckman, 2011, p. 12)—but only when it has been released from the psychoanalytic apparatus and freed from a relation with ‘lack.’

If sexuality educators avoid addressing pleasure because it doesn’t behave itself—after all, “when a discourse of pleasure is put into circulation it is (re)configured and recuperated in unpredictable ways” (Allen et al., 2014, p. 9)—they steer clear of desire because it seems too abstract, too intangible, too complex to theorize. As Gorton says of desire: “It is a difficult and perhaps an impossible concept to pin down, explain or ‘solve’” (Gorton, 2008b, p. 1). Given the many and seemingly contradictory conceptualizations of desire that are on offer—psychoanalytical, Marxist, feminist, Foucauldian or Deleuzo-Guattarian among them—the hesitancy of sexuality educators to grapple with it is not surprising, especially as desire has been variously classified as an affect, as a drive, as an emotion, and, by Spinoza, “as the essence of human subjectivity” (Gorton, 2008b, p. 8).

Because of the great and abiding influence exerted by psychoanalysis on contemporary thought, current theorizations of desire and desire’s relation to sexuality have found it impossible to ignore Freud and his followers. All, to a greater or lesser extent, have been influenced by psychoanalysis, which, especially in its Lacanian form, distinguishes between the satisfaction of a biological need and “the demand that remains tenaciously persistent” (Azari, 2008, p. 10) once that need has been met—this while at the same time insisting that “there is no insistent sexual desire which pre-exists the entry into the structures of language and culture” (Weeks, 2011, p. 40). Wishing to break the stranglehold of psychoanalysis, Deleuze and Guattari reject a sexuality that has been territorialized by Freud’s Oedipal and castration complexes, a sexuality which is predicated on lack and the belief that desire can never be satisfied. Rather, by envisioning “a sexuality that is not limited by organic or structural functions but that moulds its material in ever changing constellations and connections” (Beckman, 2011, pp. 9–10), Deleuze and Guattari depart from psychoanalytical—in particular Lacanian—approaches to sexuality. The latter maintain that desire comes into play only with the subject’s entry into the symbolic order, that is, the social world of linguistic communication and inter-subjective relations that presupposes a distinction and separation between the signifier and the signified. By conceptualizing desire in relation

to material flows and connectivity—an approach which positions desire as a pre-subjective, pre-conscious and immanent force: “first and foremost the psychical and corporeal production of what we want” (Holland, 2010, p. 68)—Deleuze and Guattari open the way for the elaboration of “a new sexuality beyond Oedipus and what it could be and do” (Beckman, 2011, p. 11).

However, while Deleuze and Guattari’s work has been welcomed by many queer theorists as an explication of “the materiality of desire under capitalism”—especially, insofar as desire in the depersonalized form of energy flows is the genesis of all social life—their “intensified emphasis on desire as the motor of history and an elevation of the desiring subject as history’s agent” (Hennessy, 2000, pp. 70, 71) has been criticised for resulting in the removal of desire, and by extension sexuality, from the material events of history. Thus, although always *driving* history, Deleuzo-Guattarian desire is forever *outside* history and—like the desiring subject itself—can play no part in accounting for or explaining the actual changes that take place from one historical period to another, or from one stage of capitalism to the next. Spivak, in observing that for Deleuze and Guattari desire is “not tied to an individual subject, not to a subject at all,” but stands, rather, as “a kind of misnomer for something that ran everything” (Spivak, 2008, p. 253), identifies the risks involved in employing a term like desire, which being applied so broadly ceases to signify anything much. Yet, Spivak may have missed the point! For, ““the menstrual flow that carries away the seed unfecund””; “amniotic fluid spilling out of the sac and kidney stones; flowing hair; a flow of spittle, a flow of sperm, shit, or urine” (Deleuze & Guattari, 1983, p. 5)—and other vivid images encountered in Deleuze and Guattari’s philosophical work—are not so much representational metaphors as compelling figurations of the movement of desire and the productive flux that constitutes the intensities of sexuality. It is through such images, as much as by way of reasoned argument, that Deleuze and Guattari suggest “the infinite variety of potential interconnections and relationships” (Weeks, 2011, p. 40) available to a subject that is transient, in the middle of things, without fixed or stable identity.

If, for Deleuze and Guattari, it is capitalism—produced by the Oedipalization of society—that represses desiring production and sexuality while forcing disjunctions of gender and identity, it is the same capitalism that also manufactures homosexuals. In observing that “desire is no more homosexual than heterosexual,” Guy Hocquenghem, the pioneering gay theorist and activist, emphasizes that “just like heterosexual desire,

homosexual desire is an arbitrarily frozen frame in an unbroken and polyvocal flux” (Hocquenghem, 1972/1993, pp. 49–50, 50).

Yet, despite the many and seemingly contradictory ways of theorizing desire, what persists through them all is the intimation that desire is non-totalizable, and, therefore, always exceeds the best efforts to contain or explain it. Nevertheless, in the context of sexuality education, desire must continue to be interrogated because no matter how it is conceptualized, whether by psychoanalysis, Marxism, feminism or sexology, within or outside fiction, it “remains a fundamental and constitutive category of human experience, indifferent to the signifier, and the common assumption that this condition, because it is simply given, needs no analysis” (Belsey, 1994, p. 8). While the theorisation of desire is never straightforward—entangled as desire is with other concepts pertinent to sexuality, including knowledge, power, and pleasure—what is common to all theories of desire is the urge to account for its mobility. For example, if according to psychoanalysis, “desire is a movement, but one with a focal point,” then, for Deleuze and Guattari desire is “more fluid and open-ended” (Gorton, 2008b, 26). However, given that movement plays a significant role in all theorizations of desire, rather than positioning the different theoretical models of desire in opposition to one another, may it not be more productive to “examine the ways in which this movement functions and how it can be connected more specifically to recent work on affect” (Gorton, 2008b, p. 26)?

Pedagogies of Desire and Literary Reading

Insofar as desire is understood to be an affect, a drive, or a flux, it is helpful to think of it—as Ahmed thinks of emotions—as “not simply located in the individual,” but as moving “between bodies” (Ahmed, 2014, p. 10). By attending to the movement of desire—that is, to desire’s choreographic propensity “to arrange bodies in time and space” (Lawrence, 2008, p. 54) rather than to desire’s origin—the emphasis is shifted from what desire *is* to what desire can *do*. In this way, as Gorton suggests, desire, however it is theorized, can be thought “as something that supports connections and relations and that produces an expression that is impossible to contain or categorize” (Gorton, 2008a, p. 19). Such a perspective is valuable, not only because it highlights desire’s relation to the choreographic, but also because it suggests a means of avoiding the deadlock that is created when, for example “Lacanian and Deleuzian models of desire are constantly set in opposition to each other” (Gorton, 2008a, p. 16). Thus, in

proposing that sexuality education would benefit greatly from the enactment of “a *pedagogy of desire*” that “can be theorised in ways that mobilise creative, transgressive and pleasurable forces within teaching and learning environments” (Zembylas, 2007b, p. 331), I argue that theorizations of desire capable of leading to productive pedagogical encounters among students and teachers need not be restricted to those provided by Deleuzo-Guattarian perspectives and approaches.

However, whereas Zembylas proposes “a *pedagogy of desire*” (Zembylas, 2007b, p. 331), I prefer the plural, especially given that there are many and various ways of theorizing desire, each of which permits desire to do different things. In my own exploration of desire’s ability to do things, in particular, in pedagogical contexts and through literary reading, I attend to desire’s ability to keep meaning on the move. Like Gorton, I hold that desire is a force that underscores movement, “whether of a narrative, a gaze or analysis and that it resists interpretation and any final closure” (Gorton, 2008b, p. 1).

In emphasizing desire’s inseparability from movement, it is helpful, especially in the context of sexuality education, to approach desire “through different theoretical registers” (Gorton, 2008a, p. 30), for instance, the psychoanalytical and the Deleuzo-Guattarian, two theorizations usually positioned antithetically. This brings with it the benefit of being able, firstly, to distinguish between a choreographic that attends to movement between self and other, and one that highlights movement for movement’s own sake; and, secondly, to track the ambivalence that accompanies desire’s movement.

Because, since Freud and the advent of psychoanalysis, the human body has been “defined radically by its sexuality” (Brooks, 1993, p. xiii), it is at our present point in time difficult to imagine pedagogical explorations of what a body can do that neglect to take account of psychoanalytical approaches to sex and sexuality. These, as Lacan argues, posit desire as “the drive for wholeness and completeness” (Zembylas, 2007b, p. 335). However, while psychoanalytical understandings of desire are often dismissed for their negative emphasis on lack or absence, they do, nonetheless, provide a useful way of figuring movement in relation to the other. Spivak’s aesthetic education with its advocacy of *teleiopoiesis*—reaching out to the distant other (whether person, place, thing, or idea) through the imagination—being a case in point. If, as we have seen,

desire perceived through the lens of psychoanalysis is movement with a focus—albeit movement that sets the subject in the direction of an unattainable other or which incessantly shuttles between poles of a double bind—Deleuze and Guattari’s conceptualization of desire as a fluid process, one without beginning or end, attends to desire’s productive potential and its role in ‘becoming’.

In relation to ‘becoming’—and figured in choreographic terms—the potential of desire thought and imagined as movement lies in “its ability to dynamically extend the many from the one” (Manning, 2009, p. 21). That is to say, desire enables pedagogical encounters among individuals “through which many possibilities for growth are created” (Zembylas, 2007b, p. 332). Such an emphasis is useful in that it serves as an antidote to a sexuality education that over-plays notions of being and identity. In other words, desire imagined beyond the dynamics of self-other/subject-object binary relationships is desire “not attached to a form already-taken,” but a force that in its movement gives rise to “openings, intervals, fluxes of potential relation” (Manning, 2013, pp. 21, 52)—all of which come at the expense of predetermined outcomes.

Zembylas, in support of the claims of a Deleuzo-Guattarian approach to a pedagogy of desire—a pedagogy that sets out to make possible the sorts of dynamic extensions that Manning identifies—argues that the release of “powerful flows of desire” promised by such a pedagogy would enable teachers and students to challenge normalized significations and representations, thereby, gaining access to “a radical self” (Zembylas, 2007b, p. 332). Yet, if, as Zembylas proposes, the success of such a pedagogy depends on teachers understanding “the multiple aspects of desire and how they pervade pedagogical relations among students and themselves” (Zembylas, 2007b, p. 332), then it is imperative, I believe, that teachers of sexuality education expose themselves to ways of conceptualizing desire—including theorizations developed within psychoanalysis—which think the movement of desire differently from Deleuze and Guattari. What is important is not so much the differences between the various theorizations of desire, but what they produce, connect, align, or disjoin. As Gorton explains, we need to “consider desire as a way of thinking and as a kind of intelligence; as something that supports connections and relations” (Gorton, 2008b, p. 29).

Earlier, I addressed the inevitable entanglement of desire and pedagogy. Here, in advancing the case for the activation of pedagogies of desire within sexuality education,

I work from the premise that “the classroom becomes a space in which desire and knowledge converge” (Zembylas, 2007b, p. 333). The unpredictability and intensity of this confluence are particularly marked when it comes to sexuality education, for although all reflections on sex and sexuality demand that we recognize that “our bodies are with us” (Brooks, 1993, p. 1), we inevitably have great difficulty thinking how this is the case. For example, we variously speak of *having* a body, of living *in* a body, of being *at one with* a body, or of experiencing *alienation from* a body. Because we shift our subject-object relations so readily in relation to the body and the experiences of pleasure, pain and desire that we associate with it, the body is “always the subject of curiosity, of an ever-renewed project of knowing” (Brooks, 1993, p. 1).

If, as Beckman argues, “exploring what constitutes a body at any particular time, and what this body is capable of, is more interesting than trying to ascertain its relation to a central mind or the permanence of its identity” (Beckman, 2013, p. 47), this is especially so in regard to sex and sexuality education. In this context, our centuries-old preoccupation with wanting to understand the body’s contours and components—arising, perhaps, from an awareness of the body’s instability and volatility: that is, our sense of the body as ‘other’—is readily evidenced in “specific pleasurable configurations of bodies in literature and culture” (Beckman, 2013, p. 45). Thus, literature is a valuable but much under-utilized resource for sexuality educators wanting to explore cultural and social, as well as personal understandings, not only of pleasure, but also of desire.

Belsey, for example, in claiming that “the tradition of Western fiction is threaded through with desire”—on the basis that people like telling and reading about it—recognizes that our culture’s understanding of desire is to a very significant extent inscribed in its fiction, which has become “the location of norms, proprieties and taxonomies” (Belsey, 1994, pp. ix, 4), including those related to sex and sexuality, that continue to shape and constrain us. Given Foucault’s contention that sexuality is “an especially dense transfer point for relations of power” (Foucault, 1976/1998, p. 103), it is not surprising that since the Enlightenment, and as the discourse of sex has proliferated, sexuality has increasingly been seen as a force to be controlled and administered rather than as a state to be judged and disciplined. With the rapid growth in literacy over the same period, fiction’s complicity in what amounts to a process of sexual policing has not gone unchallenged. However, just as fiction has played a

significant role in the development and spread of a *scientia sexualis* less concerned with sexual pleasure than with personalized control, so has the novel, especially in the West, also contributed to the deconstruction of reductive and restrictive conceptualizations of sexuality. As the editors of a recent study of sexuality and contemporary literature observe, “a common thread running through the critical scholarship on sexuality in the humanities and social sciences over the last five decades has been the attempt to dismantle essentialist notions of sexuality” (Gwynne & Poon, 2012, p. xi).

This convergence of desire and knowledge is especially apparent in the literary reading of texts, including that which takes place in pedagogical contexts—a process described by Louise Rosenblatt (1986, 1994, 1995, 2005) as ‘transactional’ in an effort to shift attention away from any message readers might receive from a given text and place the emphasis on what occurs when we read a literary work. As Rosenblatt explains: “Sharp demarcation between objective and subjective becomes irrelevant, since they are, rather, aspects of the same transaction—the reader looks to the text, and the text is activated by the reader” (Rosenblatt, 1994, p. 18).

Georges Poulet, in describing the ways in which a book claims a reader, identifies dynamics and processes characteristic of pedagogies of desire, but also suggestive of seduction and sexual merging: “take a book, and you will find it offering, opening itself” (Poulet, 1972, p. 57). As Poulet sees it, successful transactional reading necessitates a falling away of barriers between reader and text—“you are inside it; it is inside you; there is no longer either outside or inside” (Poulet, 1972, p. 57)—not unlike that which occurs whenever the classroom becomes “a space in which the teacher and the student ‘seduce’ each other and capture each other’s desire” (Zembylas, 2007b, p. 333). If, in a pedagogical setting, as at other sites of seduction, someone is successfully ‘won over,’ this happens not by force, but through allurements. In Spivakian terms, desires are uncoercively rearranged. Because, for Spivak, “all texts . . . are transactional, and they teach you how to read, not just the text but also the world” (Spivak, 2014, p. 51), transactional reading itself “is a theory of reading in the strongest possible sense,” especially insofar as it gestures towards the possibility of action through “active transaction between past and future” (Spivak, 1998, p. 272). In other words, literary reading facilitates a *teleiopoiesis* that stretches the reader’s imagination beyond the frame of the here and now.

While Spivak does not explicitly concern herself with sexuality education as such, she is well aware, as I have mentioned earlier, that the first difference is sexual difference. Sexual difference becomes the impetus for our invention and articulation of a whole series of consequent binaries related to sex and sexuality which form the taken-for-granted fabric of many sexuality education programmes. In promoting transactional reading, Spivak urges a deconstructive approach to texts which “would put these oppositions into question” (Spivak, 1998, p. 272) through an examination of “how we inscribe ourselves in sexual difference” (Spivak, 2012, p. 392). Such an approach is invaluable in that it is able to bring to light and challenge the unexamined assumptions which all too often underpin the design and teaching of mandated sexuality education programmes. For these generally tend to reflect and serve dominant educational ideologies and, as a consequence, neglect or marginalize queer and other minority perspectives on matters of gender, sex and sexuality.

By arguing for her particular brand of transactional reading, Spivak seems to encourage readers to allow themselves to be seduced by the text, but also to resist it—the one in order to counter or reverse the other. In doing so, Spivak points to the entanglement of desire and sexuality that inevitably occurs whenever readers actively engage with a text: “To be sure, to learn to read well is to say ‘yes, yes’ to the text, if only in order to say ‘no,’ in other words to perform it, if only against the grain” (Spivak, 2012, p. 47). If, as Spivak explains, this affirmation and negation on the reader’s part provides “a toe-hold” that enables the reader not only to enter the text, but also to participate in its desire, if not in the desire’s fulfilment, it is because learning to read in this counter-intuitive way offers the kind of training that “makes the muscles of the ethical reflex stronger” (Spivak, 2014, pp. 56, 57). As Spivak sees it, in saying ‘yes’ to a text, the reader submits to the pleasure of being directed, moved and formed by the words on the page. Yet, by simultaneously resisting the pull of the text, the reader refuses to be “consolidated and sedimented” as subject by it—but only in order that she “can go on saying ‘yes,’ indefinitely” (Spivak, 2012, p. 39).

This dynamic—the incessant making and unmaking of meaning—which Spivak argues develops the ethical response, is especially pronounced in the reading of fiction where, “even in the most simple reading, according to rudimentary or sophisticated hypotheses about persons, places, and times” (Spivak, 2012, p. 37), the reader is required to imagine herself as the one for whom the text was written. In other words, every reader

must allow herself to be positioned by the text so that her mind comes to resemble “the mind of the so-called implied reader” (Spivak, 2012, p. 37). The same holds true, I suggest, when it comes to the ‘reading’ of sex. For the shuttling dynamics of ‘yes’ and ‘no,’ which operate in the context of literary reading, helping to strengthen the ethical reflex, are also at work in pedagogical spaces, including those of sexuality education. However, without a leap of the imagination anything written, spoken, or otherwise performed within the spaces of sexuality education or literary reading will have little impact. The experiencing/reading subject must be willing and able to grasp that what is received is destined for her.

Deleuze, like Spivak, understands reading to be an activity laden with ethical implications. Although coming at the matter from a different angle to Spivak, Deleuze—who theorizes ethics in terms of how we “assess what we do, what we say, in relation to the ways of existing involved” (Deleuze, 1995, p. 100), rather than as blueprint for acting derived from transcendent values of good and evil—similarly rejects the notion that characters in literature are there to be judged or imitated. Literature, like ethics, must concern itself with becoming—in other words, with the maximizing of those forces and connections that expand and extend life’s possibilities. If writing, to the extent that it is always becoming, is “always incomplete, always in the midst of being formed, and goes beyond the matter of any livable or lived experience” (Deleuze, 1997, p. 1), then the same can also be said of reading.

In contrast to most readers who see a book or other text “as a box with something inside and start looking for what it signifies”—that is, they are fascinated by the signifiers and go in search of a meaning to attach to them—Deleuze envisages a way of reading that both acknowledges and departs from the strictly transactional, one where the book is viewed “as a little non-signifying machine” (Deleuze, 1995, pp. 7, 8). Deleuze’s approach side-lines questions of hermeneutics, spot-lighting instead the text’s operability: “‘Does it work, and how does it work?’ How does it work for you?” (Deleuze, 1995, p. 8). In rejecting the taken-for-granted notion that a book is “an image of the world” (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987, p. 11), Deleuze affirms that reader and text “overwrite and iterate one another until the two become inseparable, indiscrete entities” (Cole, 2009, p. 34). This position is not too far removed from Rosenblatt’s claim that in the act of reading each becomes the other’s environment, or from Spivak’s assertion that “the effort of reading is to taste the impossible status of being figured as object in

the web of the other” (Spivak, 2012, p. 317). For Deleuze, the reading of a literary text requires a sensitivity towards intensities and flows of desire that extend beyond the book itself: “Writing is one flow among others, with no special place in relation to the others, that comes into relations of current, countercurrent, and eddy with other flows—flows of shit, sperm, words, action, eroticism, money, politics, and so on” (Deleuze, 1995, p. 8).

If, as Deleuze suggests, “reading with love” requires that the reader read intensively, this is with the intention of facilitating an engagement with those aspects of a text that resist signification—“flows, revolutionary active lines of flight, lines of absolute decoding rather than any intellectual culture” (Deleuze, 1995, pp. 9, 22). Deleuze urges the reader to embrace this responsibility, not because of his own affinity with vitalist thinkers, including Bergson, William James and Nietzsche, whose philosophies “focus on emergent processes that develop in unpredictable ways and sustain themselves by means of their own internal logic” (Moses, 2014, p. 3), but because literary reading, like literary writing, has the ability to invent “ways of living, of surviving, resisting, and freeing life” (Marks, 1998, p. 125). This happens by de-emphasizing the consciousness of the reader as “a mind reacting to itself—to its own thoughts, ideas, or memories” (Moses, 2014, p. 203). Deleuze, in calling for ways of reading that decentre the subject and subjectivity, and open up “a world in which individuations are impersonal, and singularities are pre-individual,” seeks to promote what he terms “a Cogito for a dissolved self” (Deleuze, 2014, p. xvii). To embrace this Cogito, is to commit oneself to an ethics that is focussed on maximizing, not limiting, life’s possibilities.

As Deleuze and Guattari see it, if reading has any role to play in the dissolution of the self and of finding new ways of living in the world, it is in the context of the emergence of a minor literature—writing which to the extent that it is characterized by “a high coefficient of deterritorialization” (Deleuze & Guattari, 1986, p. 16) facilitates a physical, mental or spiritual undoing of all that is habitual. It is in this context that literary reading, insofar as it mobilizes and releases desire, enabling readers to view the world from a minoritarian perspective, becomes a powerful pedagogical tool. In Deleuzo-Guattarian terms, when “teachers and students make available to themselves the forces of pleasure and the powerful flows of desire”—for example, through the act of reading—they may discover themselves in “a *landscape of becoming*” (Zembylas,

2007b, p. 332) where representations, significations, regularities and certainties are overtaken by flows and intensities that break established codes. As language's signifiers become conduits of force, intensity and desire, and, thus, "regain the other of signification" (Genosko, 2016, p. 8), readers will find themselves increasingly 'at sea,' no longer able to rely on their own previous experience (of reading or of the world) in their efforts to find and uphold a stable meaning in the text. From a Deleuzo-Guattarian perspective, this disorientation or defamiliarization, though unsettling for readers, is potentially very productive because it stimulates "a sobering process by which the knowing subject disengages itself from the dominant normative vision of the self he or she had become accustomed to" (Braidotti, 2013, p. 167). Reading minor literature—or any literary text viewed through a minoritarian lens—in this way prepares a subject to become "relational in a complex manner that connects it to multiple others" (Braidotti, 2013, p. 167).

Deleuze and Guattari, in proposing that readers approach a book as "an assemblage" (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987, p. 4)—which in its multiplicity is "shaped by and acts on a wide range of flows" (Livesey, 2010, p. 18)—attest to the impossibility of attributing to a text a stable definition. Rather, a text's meaning is always in flux. This is because of "the particular way in which a particular reader connects to it" (Hamilton, 2018, p. 13) on a particular occasion. If in Deleuze and Guattari's view, a book has no secrets to reveal, what it does imply are "strata and territories" (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987, p. 3), intimations of the familiar or the same—certain repetitions of words, phrases, language structures, or of the images they create—from which readers attempt to construct interpretations of the text. As they do so, readers will also sense a text's "seemingly inherent resistance to organization" (Hamilton, 2018, p. 12), that is, its apparent inability to provide a unified, unambiguous meaning. This is the case with "lines of flight" (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987, p. 3), those multiple inclinations within the reader-text assemblage "that could evolve in creative mutations" (Lorraine, 2010, p. 147) and which work to move the assemblage beyond its present form. In other words, when a reader encounters a text there is always desiring-production, a potential for the production of the new. Key to the actualization of the new in the reader-text encounter is the reader's willingness to risk defamiliarization, a readiness to see texts as "passageways that have the potential to transform our way of thinking about (any aspect of) the world" (Hamilton, 2018, p. 13). Like Spivak, who insists that readers

must incessantly juggle with the multiplicity of possible meanings that a text suggests— thus, indefinitely deferring the attribution of any final meaning to it— Deleuzo-Guattarian approaches to reading view encounters between readers and texts, including those that take place in explicitly pedagogical contexts, as opportunities to keep meaning on the move, thus, providing “some possible escape routes from enclosure” (Cole & Masny, 2014, p. 1). With meaning always taken to be multiple, processes of defamiliarization are stimulated and “dominating paradigms that are intent on control and exploitation” (Cole & Masny, 2014, p. 1) undermined.

If new thought is “born along the line of flight of the literary encounter” (Hamilton, 2018, p. 13), lines of flight within the reader-text assemblage also imply both “a sort of delirium”—a *délirer* or going off the rails, as Deleuze describes it—and a betrayal of “the fixed powers which try to hold us back, the established powers of the earth” (Deleuze & Parnet, 2006, p. 30). This is so because lines of flight work against the tendency to absolutize and essentialize such constructions as ego or subject. Notions such as the dissolved self or deterritorialization are articulated on the basis that “individuals find a real name for themselves . . . only through the harshest exercise in depersonalization, by opening themselves up to the multiplicities everywhere within them, to the intensities running through them” (Deleuze, 1995, p. 6). Clearly, given that a Deleuzo-Guattarian pedagogy of desire is premised on a willingness to embrace ambiguity and challenge established boundaries, it “does not escape the tensions between risks and pleasures in teacher-student encounters” (Zembylas, 2007b, p. 332), whether or not these encounters are mediated by the reading of a literary text. Lines of flight not only serve to account for “an erotic frisson that propels and sabotages the practices of education” (Gilbert, 2014, p. x), but also for literary reading’s particular ability to stir the pot of sexuality, especially, perhaps, when sexual elements are veiled by a text rather than directly presented, as is often the case with YA literature.

Reading for More Spacious Worlds

In the context of school-based sexuality education, then, where risks and pleasures are both corporeal and explicit, the literary reading of texts dealing with so-called ‘non-normative’ expressions of sexuality—or the presence of queer-themed fiction in the school library—can be expected to provoke educational conflicts. While these may reflect “large-scale cultural battles about sexuality,” they also indicate “how the most

intimate of our experiences can come to shape how we see and act in the world” (Gilbert, 2014, p. xiii).

In such circumstances, an approach to literary reading sympathetic to Poulet’s supposition that a book is not just one thing among many, but an object waiting to be transported away from its materiality and immobility—a gift asking to be read—will set off alarm bells for some sexuality educators. This is to be expected given that such an approach seems to invite vulnerable young readers to let down their guard and open themselves up to the potentially dangerous “quantity of significations” (Poulet, 1972, p. 57) issuing from the pages in front of them. For, as Poulet puts it, a book, in welcoming me, “lets me look deep inside itself, and even allows me, with unheard-of license, to think what it thinks and feel what it feels” (Poulet, 1972, p. 57). Although they would take issue with aspects of Poulet’s approach to books and reading—his notions of immateriality and interiority, for example—Spivak and Deleuze, in their different ways, also argue that a book is of value to the extent that it allows its readers to think other and to resist the habitual.

Implicit in the act of reading, as Poulet presents it, but also in the very notion of queerness, is a sense of both the singularity and the otherness of the self. If singularity “is something that happens over and over, each time differently, in the life of the literary work” (Attridge, 2015, p. 138)—as it is read in various but particular contexts—then, concomitant with this singularity is the recognition by the reader, not only of “the alterity of one’s self” (Sorensen, 2010, p. 34), but also of the self’s ungeneralizability. This recognition acknowledges the awareness of the divisions within the self, as well as its inconsistency and instability. Furthermore, it is through “the introduction into the known of that which it excludes in constituting itself as the known” (Attridge, 2015, p. 219) that literary reading is able to challenge established epistemological, ontological and ethical paradigms. This happens as it disturbs mental and emotional structures, and shifts habitual ways of thinking and feeling. Insofar as the act of literary reading “unveils otherness to the reader” (Sorensen, 2010, p. 35), it becomes an *event*—“an unpredictable occurrence . . . that brings about a change” (Attridge, 2015, p. 40)—which, as Spivak explains, implies “an indeterminate ‘sharing’ between writer and reader” (Spivak, 2012, p. 317). Whether this occurrence is explained in relation to Spivakian *teleiopoiesis*, or from a Deleuzo-Guattarian perspective as “engagement with the otherness of our immanent and fluid relations to

our selves, each other and the world” (Sholtz & Carr, 2018, p. 461), what marks it is a willingness on the part of the reader to resist the temptation to appropriate or master the situation by thinking unicity rather than admitting multiplicity. In that reading involves a kind of suspension of the sense of self, it also develops in readers an ability to be at home with paradox and the queer.

If reading is always an uncertain and potentially risky activity that challenges habitual ways of thinking and seeing the world, its goal, as Spivak and Deleuze and Guattari see it, is never the destruction of the reading subject. Spivak’s aesthetic education, for example, in seeking to train the imagination by directing readers to inhabit unacknowledged double binds through *teleiopoiesis*, aims to bring about an exposure which “would destroy that habitation” (Spivak, 2012, p. xiii)—but, not the reader. In other words, Spivak, by opening the reader to “a logic of destabilization always already on the move in ‘things themselves’” (Royle, 2000, p. 11), equips her to denaturalize and deconstruct those dichotomies that found and support taken-for-granted hierarchies through the manipulation of difference. Likewise, Deleuze and Guattari, who, while appearing at times to place the practice of literary reading in the service of self-dissolution and the obliteration of any distinction between self and other, caution against throwing out the baby with the bath water. In warning of the unmitigated risks involved in any effort to dismantle the subject, they point to the need “to keep small rations of subjectivity in sufficient quantity to enable you to respond to the dominant reality” (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987, p. 160).

As Deleuze and Guattari see it, what is called for—in reading as in ‘life’—is not so much the dissolution of the subject as a “depersonalization through love,” a process whereby “one becomes a set of liberated singularities, words, names, fingernails, things, animals, little events” (Deleuze, 1995, p. 7). When one loves—and opens up “to more spacious worlds, to masses and large aggregates” (Deleuze & Guattari, 1983, p. 294)—one enters a disjunctive synthesis, a relation-without-relation, through which “one can be this or this or this, *and this and this and this*” (Colebrook, 2010, p. 81). In other words, when disjunction is acknowledged as a mode of desiring-production, the constraints of either/or ways of thinking are left behind. By ignoring the logic of binaries—the logic of the excluded middle—series of what Deleuze calls “larval subjects” (Deleuze, 2014, pp. 103, 104, 151) are produced: “not persons but points of relative stability resulting from connection” (Colebrook, 2010, p. 80).

When disjunction as a mode of desiring-production is recognized as operating transversally or queerly, crossing and connecting different potentials and investing territories in an effort to multiply relations, the movement of desire may then be understood as the movement of eros—not eros “bound between a subject and its other” (Sholtz & Carr, 2018, p. 461), but eros as the proliferation of desire and the initiation of becomings. If Spivak’s aesthetic education promises to train us in one way of releasing desire from the binaries that bind it, including those foundational to customary understandings of sex and sexuality, Deleuze and Guattari direct us to take another path in the pursuit of what has been termed “infinite eros” (Sholtz & Carr, 2018, pp. 455–465), a trajectory which Elizabeth Grosz has assiduously advanced in her own exploration of ways in which functioning bodies transform understandings of space, time, knowledge and desire.

In emphasizing that sexuality and desire are “energies, excitations, impulses, actions, movements, practices, moments, pulses of feeling” (Grosz, 1995, p. 182), rather than aspirations, fantasies, hopes or wishes, Grosz directs us to see how at a micro level and in a corporeal sense sex and sexuality are less the products of human agency than the result of the movement of eros in/across/through/around/over series of body parts—vagina, penis, anus, nipples, mouth and tongue among them, but also toes, nose, fingers, hands, elbows—and of the on-going territorialization, deterritorialization and reterritorialization of various colours, sounds, smells, textures that result. This movement is not contained within “a predesignated erotogenic zone, a site always ready and able to function as erotic” (Grosz, 1995, p. 182), as psychoanalysis proposes, but extends beyond the human body to those sites of machinic connection and interruption where one thing or surface engages or disengages with another. It is at those points and moments where surfaces meet—for example, where a nose sniffs a lemonwood, a finger brushes against the bark of a kauri, toes sink into mud, or a piece of toilet paper wipes an arse—that eros makes itself felt in “rhythms, intensities, pulsations, movements” (Grosz, 1995, p. 182). These, in their provisionality, temporality, and singularity, always resist generalization and universalization.

While Grosz’s work challenges us “to abandon our habitual understanding of entities as the integrated totality, and instead focus on the elements, the parts, outside of their integration or organization,” it also advances the argument for a choreographic approach to sexuality education in that it figures desire as a force, which as it

ceaselessly moves, creates “encounters, interfaces between one part and another of bodies or body-things” (Grosz, 1995, p. 182). Thus, if, as has been claimed, an “*infinite eros* speaks to philosophy as a dance of differences” (Sholtz & Carr, 2018, p. 460), then it also makes sense, I believe, for sexuality education to take advantage of those theorizations of desire that not only attend to desiring-production, but which also imagine the mobility of desire in choreographic terms, that is, as movement that disrupts “habitual ways of connecting, recording and consuming” (Hughes, 2015, p. 69)—and, hence, of thinking. For, rather than prioritizing the subjective ‘I’ caught up in movement, an exploration of the possibilities of choreographic thought attends to the thinking of movement as event, as well as to how the potential for thinking movement might be realised.

Received understandings of choreography, at least in the West, have tended to afford prestige to the role of the individual choreographer—the human agent, traditionally male, who determines, maps and directs the moves within a particular work or art form, sometimes in an autocratic fashion. However, if choreographic ways of thinking are to benefit sexuality education, it is necessary to distinguish between such retrograde views, which find support in the notion that “the uniquely personal vision of an ‘auteur’” (Copeland, 2011, p. 50) is an indispensable factor in the production of quality art, and other more expansive approaches to choreography that take advantage of “wider perspectives of bodily being-in-the-world” (Monni, 2008, p. 37). The latter work to broaden the definition of choreography by stressing its utility as “a tool of understanding and change, in reinventing relations to destabilise sedimentary stagnation” (Terlingo, 2008, p. 17). As Klien explains:

The term ‘choreography’ was transposed to the field of human relations, as a way of seeing the world, an art of interaction and interference with . . . an art of traversing . . . the everyday governance of relations and dynamics, expressed in physical movement or ideas. (Klien & Valk, 2008, pp. 21–22)

Embracing as it does both Klien’s concept of “‘Choreography as an Aesthetics of Change’” (Klien & Valk, 2008, p. 21) and Bersani’s commitment to choreography as a means of furthering new relational modes, it is this wider perspective that informs and enables the sort of choreographic approach to the pedagogy of sexuality education which I advance. It is a perspective which also supports a choreographic

conceptualization of literary reading in that it accounts for “the ways in which texts extend, interrupt or displace” (Hughes, 2015, p. 69) the familiar and the habitual through the movement of desire. To use a Deleuzo-Guattarian metaphor, literature activates our desiring-machines, giving rise, as we read, to affects and becomings. Or, as Spivak puts it, “reading literature closely” exercises “the imagination to play the double bind” (Spivak, 2012, p. 12), an activity which brings about its own uncoercive rearrangement of desires.

While the psychoanalytical tradition has consistently relied upon and worked with the concept of depth, drawing our attention to that which lies ‘buried’ in the psyche—the unconscious mental processes and motives that determine much of human behaviour—“the important thing for Deleuze is not discovering new depths but rather *producing new surfaces*” (Lapoujade, 2017, p. 50). By adopting the notion of the ‘plane’—a term used to denote “the autonomous existence of a surface” (Lapoujade, 2017, p. 51) upon which all movement takes place and all determination is made—Deleuze not only emphasizes the superficial, but in the process discredits the requirement, dear to psychoanalysis, that all being, all movement, must be explained in terms of ‘ground’ or ‘grounding’. Grosz, like Deleuze and Guattari before her, also stresses that movement occurs on surfaces. What we term libidinal desire—or “desire as corporeal intensification”—involves “being thrown into an interchange with an other whose surface intersects one’s own” (Grosz, 1995, p. 200). Thus, desire’s inscription of erotogenic surfaces is best imagined in transversal terms, as extending and cutting across planes, rather than penetrating inward to form and enclose interiors. One benefit of re-conceptualizing the movement of desire in this way is that it collapses the distinction between “the surface of pure thought” and “the noisy depths of the body” (Lapoujade, 2017, p. 154)—the binary of surface and depth—and so challenges certain abyssal forms of thinking to which sexuality education is prone.

Attention to surface at the expense of depth, in addition to supporting the anti-psychoanalytical argument that “the unconscious has no pre-given form or essential structure and that there is no state to which it might return in support of health or perfection” (Hughes, 2015, p. 63), also undermines the very notion of interiority, which since the time of Freud has shaped dominant approaches not only to the human personality but also to literary characterization. Up until very recently writers and readers of fiction have generally been able to presume ‘interiority’—the idea that a

fictional character not only ‘exists’ in “a kind of enfolded space that is an island of separateness in the world that surrounds it” (Bourassa, 2009, p. 7), but also that important aspects of that character always remain hidden from the world. Nor are these ‘secret’ elements, including desires and emotions, able to be accessed by the character’s own consciousness, even though they contribute significantly to the character’s formation and development.

In directing us to forsake depth for surface, the likes of Elizabeth Grosz and Deleuze and Guattari throw into question E. M. Forster’s famous dictum that it is “the function of the novelist to reveal the hidden life at its source” (Forster, 1927, p. 66). Yet, with the refiguring of desire as a force that moves across surfaces rather than as an emotion that operates within and between characters, we are better equipped to read literature, especially fiction, in new and exciting ways. ‘Human’ attributes or qualities—of emotion, inwardness, individuality, experience (the latter being the elements in the plot that determine and illustrate a character’s ‘development’), potentiality, and meaning, for instance—which writers have readily attached to their fictional creations in an effort to make them seem ‘life-like,’ lose their fascination when readers abandon notions of depth and refocus their attention on the movement or flow that takes place on the various surfaces or planes that are made present through the reading of a novel. A shift in emphasis in literary reading from “the humanness of the human” (Bourassa, 2009, p. 18) facilitates the reader’s affirmative recognition of the presence of the nonhuman in encounters with the fictional text, that is, with language and its other. For, “force is the other of language without which language would not be what it is” (Derrida, 1978, p. 27).

In literary reading, as Bourassa argues, the nonhuman—or more-than-human—comes in various modalities which Deleuze, for example, conceptualizes as affect, the event, force, singularity, the outside, and the virtual. These modalities “exist in relations of resonance with each other, of differential repetition, of imperfect overlap, of mutual intensification, and, at times of mutual capture” (Bourassa, 2009, p. 24). If lines of flight, that is, movements of deterritorialization or destratification, are “the conceptual tools which best allow us to map Deleuze’s ethics of reading” (Smith, 2007, p. 50)—including the presence and dynamics of the nonhuman or more-than-human—they also serve us well when considering the relationship between reading and writing. While writing “expresses the lines of flight charting bodies (both personal and collective),” in

reading “one either resonates with lines of flight or one doesn’t” (Smith, 2007, pp. 50, 51).

If lines of flight, becomings, and deterritorializations are concepts often employed interchangeably by Deleuze—as a way of addressing at the level of language the territorialization implicit in such a notion as ‘images of thought’—this is, in part, because of “the Deleuzian drive toward conceptual production” (Smith, 2007, p. 37), a dynamic which, I believe, needs to be taken account of in any rethinking of sexuality education. For, by positioning desire as “the force of positive production, the action that creates things, makes alliances, and forges interactions,” it becomes possible to re-imagine sexuality education as unrestricted by “blueprints, models, ideals, or goals” (Grosz, 1995, pp. 179, 180), as experimental, inventive, open-ended—and, thus, better able to take advantage of curiosity and cope with uncertainty.

Some Common Ground

At first glance, Spivak’s aesthetic education, preoccupied as it is with shifting ideas through the uncoercive rearrangement of desires—that is, with “epistemological reterritorialization” (Spivak, 2012, p. 544, endnote 2)—seems at a distance from the work of Deleuze and Guattari which is more obviously concerned with ontological matters, the material world, and the movement of bodies. Yet, in respect of any potential contribution that the respective approaches of Spivak and of Deleuze and Guattari might make to the re-envisioning of sexuality education in Aotearoa New Zealand—and to its queering—it is important to acknowledge that they occupy considerable common ground.

A closer examination of Spivak’s aesthetic education reveals that her unwillingness to place desire in the service of any telos or predetermined end positions her much nearer to Deleuze and Guattari than to the psychoanalytical tradition where desire always circulates within the orbit of the Daddy-Mummy-Me triad. On the one hand, there is a clear resonance between Spivak’s insistence that “the world needs an epistemological change that will rearrange desires” (Spivak, 2012, p. 2) and Deleuze and Guattari’s theorization of desire as a “positive and productive” (Ross, 2010, p. 65) force. On the other, Spivak’s warning against any “tendency towards totalization” (Spivak, 2000, p. 23) that would attempt to make the undecidable decidable clearly aligns with Deleuze and Guattari’s refusal to personalize desire. If Deleuze and Guattari “de-sexualise and

de-individualise desire” (Ross, 2010, p. 66), so, too, in her own way does Spivak who is primarily concerned with desire’s role in the activation of the imagination, the structure which she posits as necessary for “thinking absent things” (Spivak, 2012, p. 16). Thus, Spivak, by refusing to outline any theory of her own about the origins of desire, signals that she, like Deleuze and Guattari, is much more interested in desire’s operation—what desire can do and how it moves—than in speculating about its genealogy. As she says, in regard to such speculation, “the ‘perhaps’ decides” (Spivak, 2000, p. 23).

As I have argued, both Spivakian and Deleuzo-Guattarian theorizations of desire have much to offer sexuality education in that they inform the practice of literary reading in ways that provoke queer or “aberrant movements” (Lapoujade, 2017). As Rajchman explains, “a movement may be said to be ‘ab-errant’ just when it breaks away from a given rational logic, physical, social or mental, and veers off on new paths, in an uncharted zone, without inside or outside, up nor down, start or finish” (Rajchman, 2017, p. 9). If, as Zembylas puts it, “desire in pedagogical relations is always movement” (Zembylas, 2007b, p. 340), then the pedagogical practice of literary reading in the context of sexuality education is especially prone to producing unexpected or aberrant outcomes because it draws one into the risky business of thinking one’s own thoughts “moored to love, hate, loss, and disappointment—the emotional geography of our sexual lives” (Gilbert, 2014, p. 65). Given Brian Massumi’s claim that thought never arrives unaccompanied by physical sensation, and that “in the experience of reading, conscious thought, sensation, and all the modalities of perception fold into and out of each other” (Massumi, 2002, p. 139), it seems fair to conclude that readers will encounter the aberrant and the queer affectively as well as cognitively. This, perhaps, is especially the case when so-called hot-to-handle topics are addressed in sexuality education, for the classroom is no less likely a space for the emergence of intensities than the private places to which most people prefer sexuality to be confined. As Grosz puts it, “the bedroom is no more the privileged site of sexuality than any other space; sexuality and desire are part of the intensity and passion of life itself” (Grosz, 1995, p. 181), including life at school.

Yet when sexuality—that which “is most foreign in each of us” because we are not in control of its meanings—is invited into the classroom, it “pushes against the laws of hospitality, is a disruptive guest, breaks rules, and is rarely a good role model” (Gilbert, 2014, p. 92). The fact that literary reading, as I have presented it, is “an encounter

composed through a text that is not entirely under its own control and is not reducible to a single affective referent” (Bradway, 2017, p. vii)—this because the transactional nature of the reader-text relationship determines that reader and text *together* are opening a space of potentiality—adds to the unpredictability of an already potentially volatile situation. This is, perhaps, especially so when the encounter takes place in the context of sexuality education.

Some Concluding Remarks

In the light of my claim that literary reading has a positive contribution to make to the re-envisioning of sexuality education—and in the context of Spivak’s advocacy of an aesthetic education that will uncoercively rearrange desires through reading—it should have come as no surprise, then, that in this chapter I have argued the benefits of adopting a Deleuzo-Guattarian theorization of desire, pointing out its affinities with the queer as well as with Spivak’s own work. For such an understanding enables readers to engage in the literary reading of texts so that “intensities and surfaces rather than latencies and depth” (Grosz, 1995, p. 183) are privileged. The latter, of course, are a preoccupation of those psychoanalytical approaches to literature which equate quality fiction with those literary works where characters are most life-like, that is, psychologically convincing.

However, if, as Bersani states, “questions of character are precisely a kind of petrification of the ability to move” (Royle, 2016, p. 266), then the sorts of reading made possible by Spivakian, Deleuzo-Guattarian, and queer approaches to texts—readings that not only counter the tendency to freeze character or fix meaning in relation to other textual features—are to be welcomed for their ability to keep desire moving along aberrant trajectories. This focus on movement, as a process of making and unmaking, is potentially very productive, especially given that calls for “a new politics of attention might also involve paying attention to the process of sexuality education rather than pre-existing ends or aims” (Allen, 2018b, p. 134).

If, as MacLure has argued in respect to methodologies used in qualitative research, more attention needs to be paid to those moments of the process that “confound the industrious search for meaning, and instead exert a kind of fascination” (MacLure, 2017, p. 52), then greater emphasis should also be given, I believe, to the practice of literary reading in the context of sexuality education. For literary reading, insofar as it

draws attention to intensities—to those movements and moments in the encounter with the text that “‘glow’” (MacLure, 2017, p. 52)—shifts attention from fixed meanings and ends to the mobility of desire, including its tendency to veer and queer. And there are plenty of opportunities for sexuality educators and their students to experience this ‘glow,’ these aberrant movements, through encounters with texts drawn from the ever-expanding world of YA literature with LGBTQ+ content.

In the final chapter of my thesis which follows, I turn to one such text—William Taylor’s *Pebble in a Pool*—in order to explore not only the ‘glow’ of shame, but also the reparative possibilities that can be found in ‘difficult knowledge.’

Chapter Fourteen

Drawing to an End . . .

. . . to a reparatively positioned reader, it can seem realistic and necessary to experience surprise. Because there can be terrible surprises, however, there can also be good ones. Hope, often a fracturing, even a traumatic thing to experience, is among the energies by which the reparatively positioned reader tries to organize the fragments and part-objects she encounters or creates. Because the reader has room to realize that the future may be different from the present, it is also possible for her to entertain such profoundly painful, profoundly relieving, ethically crucial possibilities as that the past, in turn, could have happened differently from the way it actually did. (Sedgwick, 2003, p. 146)

Overview

One of the significant challenges that sexuality educators face is how to deal adequately in the classroom with those affects which are experienced or perceived either by themselves or their students as ‘negative’. In this brief chapter, I suggest how the sorts of Spivakian, Bersanian, Deleuzo-Guattarian, and queer theorizations around desire and its movement—including its relation to literary reading—which I have concerned myself with in this thesis might helpfully inform the treatment of shame, among the most intense of affects or negative feelings requiring “depathologization” (Cvetkovich, 2012, p. 5). This I will do with reference to the opening sentences of William Taylor’s YA novel, *Pebble in a Pool* (2003).

. . . Reparatively, Not Shamefully

Silvan Tomkins, in claiming that “the pulsations of cathexis around shame, of all things, are what either enable or disenable so basic a function as the ability to be interested in the world” (Sedgwick & Frank, 1995, p. 500), suggests that shame is “the primary affect of intersubjective life” (O’Donnell, 2017, p. 1). If discourses on shame are commonly marked by such recurring motifs as personal inadequacy, low self-esteem, inability to meet a moral standard or ideal determined by others or oneself, social ostracism, and objectification and marginalization by others, this is because “shame attaches to and sharpens the sense of what one is” (Sedgwick, 2003, p. 37). In that it “works on and through bodies . . . shame also involves the de-forming and reforming of bodily and social spaces” (Ahmed, 2014, p. 103), causing the subject to turn away from self and from others. Insofar as shame interrupts positive self-

identification, it reconstructs an identity characterized by inhibition and isolation at the expense of enthusiasm and joy.

As Ahmed observes, given that “shame can also be experienced as *the affective cost of not following the scripts of normative existence*” (Ahmed, 2014, p. 107), it is hardly surprising that those whose sexual desires, pleasures, objects of love, or claimed identities are deemed by themselves or others to be queer—that is, they deviate or veer from dominant social, cultural and familial ideals—are particularly susceptible to extreme levels of shame and melancholy. This is often apparent in the sexuality education classroom, not only when queer students and teachers “experience shame and vulnerability with regard to sexual feelings that they perceive as out of their control or not within prescribed norms” (Lamb, 2014, p. 143), but also in relation to non-conforming gender identities. While the presence of shame is more markedly obvious in the case of “impoverished or inaccurate sexuality education” (Fischel, 2016, p. 147)—for example, in those abstinence-based programmes where it is explicitly manipulated as a means of scaring young people off same-sex relationships, premarital sex, getting pregnant, or catching an STI or STD—shame is also inadequately addressed in other less paranoid contexts, including those programmes dealing with sexual abuse and the emotional trauma arising from it. Yet, in its efforts “to support the positive and holistic development and health of all students in New Zealand primary, intermediate, and secondary schools” (Ministry of Education, 2015, p. 3), shame is ignored both by the Ministry of Education’s *Sexuality education: A guide for principals, boards of trustees, and teachers* (2015) and its recent “refreshed guidelines” (Ministry of Education, 2020a, 2020b, p. 7). Nor does it merit a mention in the Education Review Office’s *Promoting wellbeing through sexuality education* (2018).

On the other hand, Eve Sedgwick’s process for depathologizing shame, depression, failure, melancholy and negative feelings through the practice of reparative reading—an approach which emphasizes “multiplicity, surprise, rich divergence, consolation, creativity, and love” (Love, 2010, p. 237) as a means of countering damaging paranoia and hopelessness—provides sexuality educators with a strong pedagogical tool. As Sedgwick makes clear in the epigraph to this chapter, the reparatively positioned reader works from a position of hope, entertaining the notion that the future may be different from the present and that the past may have happened differently. So, too, do Pitt and Britzman, who in their “speculations on qualities of difficult knowledge in teaching and

learning” (Pitt & Britzman, 2003, p. 755) explore and problematize those pedagogical approaches that attempt to deal with trauma, including shameful thoughts and experiences, by way of its representation and narration. By linking anxious thought to those encounters with knowledge that gives rise to feelings of shame, Pitt and Britzman draw attention to the “ordinary yet ubiquitous trauma of having to learn” (Pitt & Britzman, 2003, p. 770). If “lovely knowledge” is the comforting knowledge that we are required to give up when we open ourselves up “to accept the losses that compose the force of learning” (Pitt & Britzman, 2003, p. 766), then ‘difficult knowledge’ is that new knowledge which we construct from the wreckage of old meanings. In asking “what it means to represent and narrate ‘difficult knowledge’” (Pitt & Britzman, 2003, p. 756)—this includes, I suggest, the varieties of knowledge that often come to light in the spaces opened up by sexuality education—Pitt and Britzman invite reflection on the complexities of such an exercise in the broader context of teaching and learning:

Where does one situate the event that is experience? In the past that is narrated or in the presence of its interpretation? (Pitt & Britzman, 2003, p. 759)

Yet, Pitt and Britzman, by insisting that the figure of trauma—so often employed to describe those disjunctive experiences which we perceive as obstacles confounding our best efforts to construct linear and coherent self-narratives—also stands as metaphor “for the pushes and pulls between knowing and being known, between phantasy and reality, between one’s early history of learning and one’s haunted present of learning, and between experience and its narration” (Pitt & Britzman, 2003, p. 769), gesture in the direction of moving beyond stuck identities towards new sorts of relations.

In turning now to the opening sentences of William Taylor’s YA novel, *Pebble in a Pool* (2003), I do so in an attempt to provide a platform for a ‘thought experiment’ stimulated both by Sedgwick’s notion of reparative reading and Pitt and Britzman’s questions around difficult knowledge and its narration—not only “what it means to represent and narrate ‘difficult knowledge’” (Pitt & Britzman, 2003, p. 756), but also, perhaps, the ethical obligations in doing so.

The Pebble in a Pool

Toss a pebble into a pool of still water. Watch the ripples. Calculate the effect.

Nothing much, I hear you say, just a few tiny waves and then all is still again.

Well, think a bit harder. What if you were an amoeba living your single-cell life

in that puddle, busy in the middle of your process of dividing? What if you were some higher form of life, a water bug, whatever, and those ripples caught you in a frenzy of water bug mating? Not quite so inconsequential now, I think. The effect of that pebble tossed into the middle of that small, still pool—your home—might indeed be cataclysmic, catastrophic. At the very least, life-changing.

The problem in relating all this to my life of late is that I am not sure at all whether I am the pebble, the pool, or some denizen of that water. But I can't think of any better way to open the story of my life as it has been lived over the course of last year. (Taylor, 2003, p. 1)

Here, Paul Carter, the seventeen-year-old narrator and gay central character of *Pebble in a Pool*, begins the story of his final year at Everton High by intimating that his is 'difficult knowledge'—the type of knowledge, which because it “cannot be put in its proper place, . . . can return as a threat that divides” (Pitt & Britzman, 2003, p. 765). Indeed, rejection by his classmates and a hostile reaction from the Principal after speaking out against the gay-bashing and subsequent death of another queer student, ejection from the family home following an extremely violent beating at the hands of an abusive and fundamentalist father, and a precipitous entry into his first sexual relationship with Steve, “a very good-looking older dude” (Taylor, 2003, p. 20) would appear to suggest that Paul is not only 'at risk,' but the shamed victim of very difficult life circumstances. Yet, this is not the conclusion to which *Pebble in a Pool* directs us. By faithfully following the protocol of the text, it becomes possible to read what happens to Paul not as a tale about trauma and shame overwhelming a victimized human subject, nor as the story of a human agent battling and overcoming forces that conspire to bring him down, but as an exercise in how through “moments of disruption and recognition, a space opens up, inviting, without guarantee of success, resistance and creativity” (O'Donnell, 2017, p. 2).

If becoming-other, in a Deleuzo-Guattarian sense, “entails a passage between categories, modes of existence and discrete entities such that stable elements are set in metamorphic disequilibrium” (Bogue, 2010, p. 9), then it is possible—from a minoritarian perspective and without making excessive claims for it—to take the beginning of *Pebble in a Pool* as a little lesson on the conditions for becoming-other.

The novel's opening, in that it attends to Paul's inability to locate himself as subject in what might be termed "but a unique instant of production in a continual flow of changes evident in the cosmos" (Stagoll, 2010, p. 26), underlines for readers that movement is the pre-existing "process of differentiation" (Grosz, 2011, p. 1), the dynamic that makes and unmakes things, bringing about what we call change. Therefore, as Elizabeth Grosz reminds us, to speak of human agency makes sense only in the wider context of "a series of imperceptible movements, modes of becoming, forms of change, and evolutionary transformations that make up natural, cultural, and political life" (Grosz, 2011, p. 1). On the one hand, if Paul, as character, doesn't know where to position himself in relation to what he perceives as life-changing events—"I am not too sure at all whether I am the pebble, the pool, or some denizen of that water" (Taylor, 2003, p. 1)—on the other, as narrator, what he does have is an incipient awareness of "the conditions under which material and living things overcome themselves and become something other than what they were" (Grosz, 2011, p. 1). By directly addressing readers as 'you,' Paul not only invites us to participate in his own disorientation, initially by asking us to imagine ourselves as various features of the scene he lays out before us (pebble, pool, water, amoeba, water bug), but then by urging us to "think a bit harder" (Taylor, 2003, p. 1) about the possible range of impacts that a seemingly inconsequential action such as throwing a small stone into the pool might have on its inhabitants and beyond.

The images that William Taylor has Paul present us with in this apparently simple scenario—of movement in and through water: ripples, tiny waves, stillness, frenzy; and of life forms dividing, mating, struggling for existence—suggest not only the fragility of pool life and its vulnerability as an assemblage to forces external to itself, but also its intricate and inextricable links with the cosmos. They also indicate the complexities and multiplicities of any assemblage conceptualized in relation to material flows and connectivity. Of course, in describing the pool and its inhabitants, Paul is setting the scene for the narrative which is about to unfold, his detailed account of the life-changing events that he has experienced over the past year. But from a Deleuzian perspective, where "to talk, even about yourself, is always to take the place of someone else in whose place you're claiming to speak and who's been denied the right to speak" (Deleuze, 1995, p. 41), Paul's words also mark a move towards the impersonal, a step in the direction of becoming-amoeba, becoming-water-bug, becoming-pebble,

becoming-pool, becoming-other, becoming-queer—as he inserts himself into the scene he describes.

All readers attempt a similar process of insertion and suspension whenever they engage with fictional texts. For insofar as literary reading is understood as an attempt “to find creative ways to de-personalise the self as a way to intensify life in order to sense more and perceive more” (O’Donnell, 2017, p. 7)—that is, to become-other—it also suggests possibilities for resisting habitual ways of thinking and feeling that reinforce the damaging isolation and exclusion of shame. If, as we have seen, Spivak’s aesthetic education sets out to change habits of mind, it is a process that presumes a reader’s willingness to insert himself/herself “inside the text of the other, not as her/himself,” but in an effort to take on the voice of the other, that is, to “ventriloquize” (Spivak, 2014, p. 31) the other. Spivak’s assertion that “the effort of reading is to taste the impossible status of being figured as object in the web of the other” (Spivak, 2012, p. 317) suggests something both of the complexity and of the paradoxical nature of this task. Here, her stance is consistent with Deleuze’s claim that literary reading demands a sensitivity towards intensities and flows of desire that extend through and beyond the book itself. Both approaches to literary reading—Spivak’s and Deleuze’s—ultimately require an act of faith: faith, certainly, in the suspended relation to meaning and reference that operates within and through language, but faith, too, in choreographic ways of thinking as well as doing, which as we have seen are able to re-contextualize and re-frame ideas and bodies, unmooring them from stultifying habit and fruitless repetition.

Some Concluding Remarks

The ability to re-contextualize and re-frame as a means of countering the stale and the unproductive is especially helpful when addressing shame and its sisters. Given that Spivak’s aesthetic education is premised on the uncoercive rearrangement of desires and Deleuze theorizes desire as the force that supports the very conception of life and the production of the new, my contention is that both have a part to play in shaping “new ways of short-circuiting the seemingly near-inescapable habits of thought” (Sedgwick & Frank, 1995, p. 500) which establish and reinforce shame and other unproductive states.

Thus, mindful of the benefits claimed both for Pitt and Britzman’s problematizing of “issues of encountering the self through the otherness of knowledge” (Pitt & Britzman, 2003, p. 755)—especially through narratives of trauma, including those with a sexual dimension—and for Sedgwick’s practice of reparative reading as a means of addressing shame ethically, epistemologically and affectively, I close this final chapter of my thesis by inviting sexuality educators to explore those theorizations of desire that not only emphasize desiring-production, but which also encourage a re-imagining of sexuality in choreographic terms.

If the boldness of this invitation is provoked by “an optimism for opening new possibilities for ways of thinking and being” (Allen, 2018b, p. 29) in the field of sexuality education, it is inspired, as I indicated in my Preface, by Kathleen Quinlivan’s insistence on “the potentiality for a different, and better, kind of future” (Quinlivan, 2014, p. 276)—that is, a queerer future where Spivak’s aesthetic education and Bersani’s choreographic treatment of sex in the modality of the aesthetic might play their part in keeping the door to the house of sexuality education open in the expectation that something wondrous might enter and disturb its inhabitants. Given, as Quinlivan observes, that young people involved in school-based queer straight alliances often willingly risk disappointment for the sake of something better, then sexuality educators must be prepared to do the same if sexuality education in Aotearoa New Zealand is to keep Muñoz’s “educated hope” (Chambers-Letson et al., 2019, p. ix)—as distinct from an uncritical optimism—alive.

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