

Dear Reader,

There are 2 articles here:

Are You Gay/Sir? is meant to be read first and is forthcoming in 'Melbourne Studies in Education'

Are you gay/sir?: I'm not going to tell you: Towards a pedagogy of provocation.

This is the paper that I presented at the AARE conference in 1999.

This paper follows AYG/S?

The articles are an attempt to explore tension. The first offers an example of an attempt to reduce tension and the second works with the idea that provoking tension is a good strategy to use in order to move towards cultures that are of difference.

The second article is not finished. It needs to be substantially edited. The footnotes especially need a lot of work.

I hope that the articles are of some use. You can contact me to comment at:

The Youth Research Centre,

University of Melbourne,

Parkville,

Melbourne, 3052.

[m.crowhurst@pgrad.unimelb.edu.au](mailto:m.crowhurst@pgrad.unimelb.edu.au)

## Are You Gay/Sir?

### **Michael Crowhurst**

Feminist, Poststructural and Queer theorists suggest that the use of narrative can be strategic and illuminating. They suggest a tendency within narrative for moments of connection, for moments of clarity, for moments where discursive structures become visible. Theorists suggest the tendency within narrative for moments of connection from moments of difference.

This text is an attempt to write using many different voices. The various fonts used are an attempt to visually fragment the text, and to echo the fragmented nature of the poststructural subject. The fonts are random.

The text is also an attempt to explore tension. The tension associated with the perception of occupying two contradictory places at once. This text is the first part of a two part project exploring the idea that strategically occupying undecidable spaces, with appropriate structural support, is a necessary part of the work of improving educative experiences for gay, lesbian, bisexual, same sex attracted and transgendered young people.

This narrative was initially written for and used within a community group and it considers one instance of my experience as a gay teacher. The text was initially written to be read aloud.

The school where the narrative takes place was very supportive of diversity and a great place to work.

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The fragment of text that follows, was originally written for a discussion group. I'd just read Bronwyn Davies' '*Shards of Glass*' and thought that it would be interesting to explore narrative work with the group. Davies suggests that stories and memory work:

'...are not...idiosyncratic ...but ...evidence  
of the cultural detail through which we are each  
spoken and written into existence'.

As a poststructural feminist, Davies is, in part, engaged in a project that attempts to unhinge biology and destiny and is a part of another that attempts to explore the linkages between biology and discourse. Davies does not ignore the materiality of the body, nor does she argue that the material body is entirely a product of discourse. The body bleeds, breathes, grows and dies; it functions in ways that exceed and/or precede discourse. Davies writes within a framework that acknowledges that the body exists as a fact, and, as an idea, and

that therefore the body as a site is partially open to possibility. Davies writes within a project that suggests that the fluidly hybrid deep surfaces of the body are, to a degree, taken up and formed in social practices that the body enacts and constructs, as it moves through culture.

Davies, following Butler and Foucault, suggests a body that is not only fluid at the level of meaning but that it is also to some extent fluid, as a material product. The sound of the human voice is a good illustration of this idea. The sound of the human voice is an aspect of embodiment that is inscribed with culture and that is an effect of the subject engaging in processes of taking up culture. Accents, as a part of the sound of the voice, offer an example of cultural inscription and also an example of what it means to engage in processes of taking up culture. An accent is clearly a cultural construct that is taken up by subjects in a way that demonstrates a moment where the division between the body and culture is blurred. Accent demonstrates a moment where culture has become part of the fabric of the material body, where culture has become an 'inseparable' part of what the body does.

Davies is part of a broad project that argues that the embodied subject, is in relationship with webs of discourse, and as such, following the example of the accent, that the embodied subject is open, to some degree, to the possibilities that such webs afford. She suggests that we make and position ourselves from within patterns of discourse, but that discourse itself is embedded in broader patterns and power relations. Davies proposes that there is a need to change, open or rupture discourse in order to change, open or rupture the possibilities of the material body.

Subjects, in culture, are embedded in and participate in practices that reproduce discourses that are gendered and that carry meanings implicated in and constitutive of sexuality. If the cultures that embodied subjects inhabit are patriarchal or heterocentric there is a likelihood that the values and relations that circle patriarchy and heterocentrism will be taken up in very deep ways by them. Subjects in culture can perpetuate relations that some people experience as oppressive and limiting and conversely that other people experience as enabling and freeing. Subjects in culture can perpetuate practices that are embedded in values and relations, that leave some people feeling constrained, tense and disadvantaged.

Davies, argues that inequality is facilitated or constructed through discourse, and that therefore discourse that creates inequalities (where that can be recognised) needs to be challenged. The old ways need to be deconstructed, they need to be changed. If we want to work towards diversity, if we want to occupy new spaces in the world, we need to engage in the work of rupturing the inequitable patterns that are evident in the discourses that we move through and are embedded in. And that is why this text looks a little different to others that I have tried to write.

It is important to begin to write in different ways. To write as praxis (whether you do so as a Marxist or as a Post-Structuralist). It is important to try to write from the margins. To try to write in difference. To try to avoid the 'entrapment' of writing using a patriarchal form. To try to avoid being appropriated or consumed by the dominant, ascendant or hegemonic culture. This is why it is sometimes important to construct new texts and to deconstruct old ones, and in the process to perhaps make and unmake the self.

An example of this type of text is Du Plessis' *Pink Guitar*. It is written in fragments and in many different voices, and it is truly an attempt to write from the margins, to write in difference, to avoid closure. '*The Pink Guitar*' has certainly influenced parts of the narrative that follows. Similarly, Beth Randell's PhD thesis exploring women's humour, which is written as a play script and employs the device of using two voices throughout the text has also influenced this narrative.

### Finding Common Ground In Difference - Narratives and Politics

...It may be useful to be reminded that power is not some static or unique possession and that power 'circulates', but there is more than enough evidence to suggest that it is also 'located' to the structural advantage of key players...

Dwyer's comments are relevant because they highlight the fact that there is more to becoming different than a 'simple' writing of the texts of new bodies. This is so because there are, in addition to discursive practices understood as linguistic, other material practices at work that seek to limit certain bodies. Dwyer reminds us of the importance of remembering that while power can function, in the poststructural sense, in concert or through new modes of discourse as an expansive, productive, generative force that it can also function in a manner that a structuralist might describe as repressive. Dwyer reminds us that while poststructural insights into the workings of power are illuminating and valid, that we nevertheless need to be conscious of the ways in which power can be wielded and how power can function in a structural fashion.

Because power seems to function in structural and in poststructural ways, there is a need to respond to perceived inequalities using structural and poststructural methods. This text acknowledges that structural interventions, such as changing policy and the like, are a necessary component of constructing cultures that are of difference but such interventions will not be the focus of this text. The focus here, following a more poststructurally influenced approach, is to consider the narrative of one teacher and to reflect on what that narrative might indicate as far as improving gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgendered (GLBT) school experiences are concerned.

#### Narrative Work

How might narrative work begin to rupture patternings that seek to enshrine inequality? How might narrative work contribute to the political work of moving towards diversity?

To move towards a free-er, a better, a more diverse space, it is important to explore that which is common or close, in the experiences of those who position themselves or are positioned by broader culture as different. What is often common to those who live in difference is an awareness of the limiting effect that discourse can exert and the tension that such encounters can provoke. What is also common perhaps is an awareness of the mechanisms that facilitate constraint. People begin to see, and to articulate, that what has happened to them has also happened to others. People begin to see the work of discourse. People begin to experience, and remember the tense pleasures of the experience, of moving in new ways, of moving beyond or through limiting structures, of becoming different. People begin to see that such movement is and simultaneously is not about an individual struggle.

Feminist poststructural narrative work is to do with new ways of writing, reading, of engaging with text. Feminist poststructural narrative work is about the attempted achievement of different discursive patternings in the hope that these will facilitate new ways of moving as embodied subjects through the world. Narrative work changes the way that people think about their experiences, and in my experience it has in some cases been a catalyst that has moved people to resist discourse, and that has provoked people to engage in the difficult

work of moving in new ways, where they feel that it is safe and strategic to do so. Narrative work can also nurture the collective focus that is often necessary to challenge taken for granted practices. Narratives can support people to resist discursive patterns and practices where the location and organisation of power that circles such patterns and practices is experienced as limiting. Narrative work is a form of praxis that is especially relevant in educative settings. The narrative that follows is an attempt to reflect on the experience of what it means and feels like to begin the work of moving in new ways.

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### The Poststructural Subject meets Poststructural Structure

The moment where the poststructural subject and the poststructural structure meet is one that I am interested in. I am interested in it as a moment of tension, as a moment of possibility of the new, as a moment of recognition of constraint, and as a moment where the unity of the subject is called into question. This is something that emerged in part from the narrative that follows...that has already started...The point of tension in the narrative is the point where the teacher (me) is asked the question: Are you gay sir? I think that this is a moment of tension because it makes visible an awareness of the split nature of the subject and it does so in such a way that this splitting is not able to be easily resolved. It's a moment of tension because it is a moment that is experienced by the subject as a moment of contradiction. This tension, is a tension that is embodied, that is grounded, that manifests in heart beats, blushing, raised temperature, hunched shoulders, a cracking voice and the like.

This tension is also to do with the realisation that the embodied subject is required to consider the possibility of doing his gayness, is presented with the possibility of taking up space in the world as a gay man in a new way. This tension is to do with the recognition of the possibility of resisting a dominant discourse that requires that gay teachers keep quiet about the fact that they are gay, that requires that they do their gayness in a particular way. This tension is about the experience of standing at the crossroads of refusal or compliance. It is also about changing or staying the same. (The fragmentation and multiplicity of the embodied subject, which is a major preoccupation of poststructural theory, is explored throughout the narrative).

The encounter with limiting discourse requires a variety of strategies and a variety of responses. Narratives aren't the only way to go but they are certainly one way.

Does this make any sense at all? It's the literary, contextual, poststructural equivalent of suggesting that you are what you eat...Or that you are the result, of the work of making choices to engage or not to engage in multiple sometimes contradictory practices to do with the consumption or the avoidance of foods that you are aware of...You can choose (if you've got the money) to eat a cheese sandwich or a potato cake and chips on your lounge room floor or to drink a good red wine with anti pasta at an expensive restaurant ...You like potato cakes but you know they're not good for you...You like red wine as well and you know that too much of that isn't good for you either...

Tuesday I stopped in at the fish and chip shop around the corner, and purchased two potato cakes **and** when I got home I had a glass of medium priced red wine...About a \$12 bottle...Certainly not a very healthy dinner...That's because I'm not a unity...I am not consistent...I'm plural, fragmentary and structured in the possibility of contradiction...I'm of difference...I'm like a perfume ad...I lick the top off ice cream cones in pool halls and giggle...I like fried food at the same time that I like a glass or two of red wine...Red wine

reminds me of an art gallery /fish and chips reminds me of 'Home and Away'...And that is the other message that poststructural (feminist) theorists offer, the message of contradiction and the message of the split and multiple subject...So you are what you eat, sometimes you eat health food sometimes you eat junk...I'm hard to pin down...I'm hard to bring to closure...I am a contradictory and multiple subject ...There are many different subject positions that I can choose to occupy and often I occupy more than one position at the same time...there are also many different subject positions within subject positions...I do my gayness as a white man...I do my gayness differently on paper than I do in a coffee shop or a classroom...I do a number of gaynesses...My gayness is more than one gayness...When I become aware of this or are made to become aware of this it causes tension...It doesn't make me giggle and it doesn't usually make other people giggle when they become aware of contradictions in me or in themselves either...When they are required to read something that they thought they were familiar with in a new way...when the relationships that they enjoyed with that familiar object or person, and the power relations that characterised that series of relationships are altered...When those relations are altered they too are altered...Are you Gay/Sir?...

Back to the main game...Meanwhile/A couple of years ago...In a fabulous State School light years away from the privilege enjoyed by Private School students...

'Fag'...As I rounded the corner I could hear the giggles. I thought I knew who was responsible or at least where the sound appeared to be coming from but no proof. They were invisible...Safe in the staff room, I focused on the pile of correction that I swore I would finish two days previously...guilt guilt guilt...I'd made time for a coffee but not for..."I've left my text back in room 35'...

Back through **the corridor** and back into room 35. Someone had scratched an 'R' and a 'Q' on the door at lunchtime. Thank God/god they were interrupted before the 'Q' and 'R' read queer.

Sounds like I'm blowing this out of all proportion (no it doesn't) but it certainly didn't feel like that on Thursday as 'poof' (or was that 'fag' on a Wednesday? - We construct the past - ) echoed around the school corridor and around my head.

Five years on I think that it's interesting that there is a focus on the corridor...The area outside the classroom...The area where teachers aren't really in any sense in command of what's happening...A space that teachers walk through to get to where they are really going...To what's really important about school...To the classroom...Conversely the corridor is the space that young people fill...That they take up with their presences...That they take up with their BODIES...Where they go from being outside to being inside the classroom...An inbetween unresolved place, neither here nor there, a borderline, a passageway...Where they go from the places they control or have more control over to the places that are seemingly (I knew they liked me) structured in favour of the teacher...(or teachers)...In favour of the person who is enacting the role of the teacher for the people who are simultaneously engaged in enacting the role of the student...The corridor is different to the staffroom and the classroom...It's sort of like being backstage without the red velvet curtains.

Wednesday, Period 1, I discovered a small group of students writing stories that were homophobic, sexist and violent (these 3 things go together somehow I think). I had set them a task that I thought was interesting, within a subject that I had very little interest in, that I thought was mechanical and closed.

I thought that I'd move Information Technology, (I.T.) , to a more creative place...I proposed that we could spend part of the term exploring the keyboard by writing creative stories...Some (not all) Year 8 boys are prone to fall into...are prone to choose to

write...stories that are sexist and violent and homophobic (...and that has nothing to do with testosterone)...Ever seen a fight in a gay bar?...All of those boys all of that alcohol...No...You can always get a taxi outside of a gay bar...Taxi drivers know)...The trick is to deal with the stories without appearing to censor...To appeal to their rational selves...To discuss...

Ray Misson once gave a lunch time seminar that I attended where he in part spoke of the limits of opposing prejudice using rational means...Heterosexism isn't rational...It's based on fear and ignorance and tension and it is exceedingly subtle and layered...It's also something that is to do with power and the benefits that accrue to individuals that are co-opted by and allow themselves to co-opt speech and stances that are heterosexist...Heterosexism takes up an embodied place of residence in people...Heterosexism is taken up by people in very deep ways...it is learnt in very complex subtle and deep ways...Heterosexism lives in peoples heads and beyond their heads in their feelings in their gut reactions...Heterosexism is learnt and taken up by straight people and by queer people...Heterosexism is a construct, in a similar way that the sound of a person's voice is a construct, the deep surface that is the sound of the voice, a hybrid construct negotiating and occupying an inbetween ambiguous space where the body and culture blend, or pass into or through each other...The sound of an accent, the sound of class...the sound of an excessively spacious gorgeous campness...To change heterosexism...to change an accent...Heterosexism is a better word to use than homophobia.

When I presented this paper, this one that you are reading, a person who was listening to me read it at her said: 'If you can't use rational means to combat it what can you use?'...Misson suggests humour...So does Beth Randell in a related way in her PhD thesis focusing on humour as feminist strategy...I think that you also need to work with tension...

Anyway...I quietly requested that these stories, the sexist, racist and homophobic ones, be erased and said that I thought that they were inappropriate. A barrage of questions followed regarding my sexuality and whether I knew or approved of gay/lesbian lifestyles...

### ...Are you married?

Are you gay?

Rather than sweep things under the carpet I thought I'd address some of the issues that had surfaced...Rather than say: 'Get on with your work...My private life is none of your business...See me immediately after class'...Rather than bring the issue to **closure** I decided to **prize it open** a little...But I **felt** uneasy...I was also aware that there would be gay students in the class and I was keen that they see that I wasn't ashamed of being gay and I hoped that if I bumped into them in a bar in 10 years time that they'd understand why I couldn't just say 'Yes I'm gay'...I was also thinking that they'd possibly be feeling self conscious and may even blush...That they'd be given away by their bodies against their will...

You might be wondering why I'm using all of these pesky fonts and things...Well it's to further fragment the text by visually fragmenting it as well and to suggest in the process (following poststructural theory) that subjectivity is similarly fragmented...It's also fun...I don't write like this all the time (not that I have a great body of published work or anything) because sometimes it's far more useful to be linear...But this is very freeing...And that is what I'm writing about and I want it to be evident in the text not just something that I write a text

about...I've also recently read Dean Kiley's 'and that's final' and he uses a lot of fonts...He probably has a plan that all means something that I can't understand but believe me there is no plan here as far as the fonts go...

The thesis that I had recently written ...Memories of the thesis that I had recently written...The text that I had produced suggesting teachers might be visible rushed to consciousness...At the same time I quickly glanced at the clock...30 minutes till recess...Long enough to have a good chat/long enough to descend into chaos...Still we backed onto recess...(You've had your fun 8f, now I'll have mine)...I stepped to the edge of the spring board and decided that I could bounce a little even if I didn't dive right in and get wet...I knew this class I had some brownie points...They knew I was soon going to be writing their reports and that what I had to say about their keyboarding skills they would carry to their graves...I was aware that I had a degree of power here...I was aware that the power that I had was not absolute...I was aware that the students had power too...I was aware that the power that circled the 'IT' room was not easy to pin down...Certainly not predictable...

The question: 'Are you gay Sir?'...

...Gay/Sir...

**Gay:** private (well in school anyway, in the part of the school that is the classroom, the part where the students are), within this school positioned as lacking power (don't know about that one: it's not always a position that would be lacking power), not usually an aspect of subjectivity openly supported by the school at this point in time, a role that I enact.

**Sir:** public, authoritative: invested with the idea of power, (I know I definitely have authority problems), supported in all sorts of ways, a role that I enact...

I always had difficulty (tension) with students calling me Sir...I have always asked them not to do so...I always had tension with the thought that they might call me gay too...I used to think that my classroom was democratic...or reasonably democratic...That's why I used to think that I had problems with being called Sir...But now I think maybe it had something to do with the perception of a contradiction between gayness and sirness...I'm sure others don't experience that tension...

I felt uneasy...My body felt tense...

Are you gay/sir?...The text that I had produced suggesting teachers might be visible rushed to consciousness...suggesting teachers might be visible...teachers...text...Are you gay/sir?...I'd always thought that I was invisible I mean I never said anything but perhaps I wasn't...They'd been reading me...walks and talks...bodies and space...they'd been reading the body I'd been moving through the school with as gay...they'd been watching me...under surveillance...questioning me to let me know that they were reading the text that is my body...the text that is the teacher's body...the word spectacle is a homograph, bodies are too...discipline that excessive body...you bind a thesis...rein it in...don't let it do that...don't let it walk like that don't let it sound like that...make it sound and walk like this...make a different body...make it invisible...but not too invisible...keep it separate so we know we're different from it...but rein it in at the same time...Is that a gay body?...answer us...set us straight...something in the way she moves...are you gay/sir?...

I'm not going to tell you...

'Are you gay sir?'...I opted (with less than 2 seconds thought), for a grey, dithering, corridor of a response, something along the lines of 'I don't want to discuss my private life'...(still there is a lot to be said for the grey response)...Thinking all the time about wedding rings and the easy conversations that I had heard other staff have with students about their children and the fact that they were married...heterocentrism heterocentrism heterocentrism...

Thinking about the vast array of information that is conveyed about heterosexuality to students every day of the school week...I don't care what they do in private as long as they don't shove it down my throat...Cliche...or...Touche...This anglo word processor doesn't have an accent key...

Students told me that other teachers had told them whether they were married or not or whether they had a girlfriend or boyfriend. Public space, public speak, (fixing) the meaning of their expansively...mmmmmm...maybe not so expansively...certainly not excessively...constructed heterosexual bodies...On the radio the other day on 'Arts Today' on Radio National, 621 on the AM Dial, I heard someone say that the site of any spectacle is a contested one...

They smelled a rat.

I decided that it would be unwise to make a personal statement (because I was only at the school for a term and I had two weeks to go and this was far more complex than two weeks would allow) and opted instead to speak of my

support for gay and lesbian people and my acquaintance with 'them'

and **steadfastly refused to confirm that I was straight.**

The class became very focused...

Possibly the most focused they had been all term...

The class became **tense and restless...**

**Possibly as tense and as restless as I'd seen them.**

### Next Day

The next day was far from pleasant

How is it that a group of 13 year olds feel that they have the right to harass an adult based on the assumption that he is gay? How is this possible within a culture that positions 13 year olds as children and powerless and adults as powerful? What has mobilised this group to be so intolerant of difference and so eager to join together to attempt to push the person that is positioned as different into a position of subordination? What tells this group of young people that it is safe to rebel against the authority invested in the adult teacher?

Notice how when issues of power surface...When it's not a comfortable memory for the writer...That the pesky fonts disappear...That it doesn't write fun...I just did

On Wednesday I was a teacher that managed somehow without resorting to violence to get a group of 13 years olds to spend 40 minutes at antiquated keyboards doing an exercise that they weren't all that thrilled about...Thursday I was someone that those same students felt they had the power to ridicule...If I knew anything I knew that this was about a shift...Something had changed and my feeling was that this might have something to do with the boundaries that police the public and the private...Something that was meant to occupy private space, was moving beyond that space, attempting to take up space elsewhere, attempting to expand/to colonise/to carve out a space within that elsewhere and in the process to make it a new space...Mardi Gras hasn't been appropriated or commodified by Chanel 10, Chanel 10 has been queered by it...The weather person knows that the place where the highs meet the lows is a place of turbulence...We were traversing a borderline but we weren't in the corridor...

So I decided to respond in a public fashion...Because I was 'out' to staff members I enlisted the support of year level co-ordinators...All the time aware that I was playing the hierarchy, power game that had got me where I was in the first place...

But not quite...I think I was using hierarchy against itself...I imagined that the students would imagine that I wouldn't do this...I spoke to the class and said that I was unhappy with their behaviour and attitudes and I tried to twist the guilt knife by saying that I'd liked them as a class and I couldn't really understand why they had suddenly changed...

I

knew

they

liked

me

...At the end of my chat with them I let them know however that the school as a structure wouldn't allow homophobic behaviour to go unchallenged...I let them know that I would use one structure against another...That I'd employ one hierarchy of values to deconstruct another...That there would be all sorts of trouble for them if they didn't decide to be nice to me...I'd use hierarchy...I'd use my trump card...I prioritized the position of the teacher, a position that I had access to, that I had colonised, because it offered me more power...Good Cop/Bad Cop...I knew they liked me/step out of line and I'll kill you...Are you gay/sir?...

So why didn't I just 'come out' in the first place...I spoke to the Deputy Principal about 'IT'...She was very supportive...I wrote a rather lengthy submission to the Equal Opportunity Committee who were in the process of re-writing the school policy...The policy is now inclusive of sexual preference/the policy is now more diverse...chip chip chip...The Deputy Principal said that she wouldn't 'come out'...but she didn't tell me not to or that she wouldn't support me if I did so in the future...I think I could have, but I'm not going to give myself a hard time about it...I think the issue is bigger than me...still I think I could have surfed the tension and emerged at a place where 'IT' was no longer an issue...I'd been 'out' in other schools...I'd never lost a job but I do know a couple of people who have left jobs because of issues relating to sexuality...I know that this is complex...I know that I'm rambling...and I know that there is also a lot to be said for occupying an ambiguous space...a lot to be said in support of the strategy of queering the text that is the body of the teacher...a lot to be said in favour of never coming out...'come out' as what?...and why should I anyway?...

Friday: Jason...(who had been away on Wednesday or was that Thursday?)...said in class...That he'd heard that I'd had a bit of a hard time on Wednesday/Monday?...Yes Jason...Keep going with your work...I'm very busy thinking about what I'm going to write about you in your report!...click click click...(times 30)...Have a good term break 8f...I feel like I'm crawling to them but they have been nice to me today...

Good...So they should be...

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This narrative has been an attempt to explore the tension of moving through the culture that is the school as a gay teacher. It has been an attempt to explore what can happen when the subject experiences the tension of occupying space in a manner that provokes a feeling of contradiction for one reason or another. It has also been an attempt to explore the tension and various resistances ('internal' and 'external'), that accompany the possibility of moving through the world in a different way, that accompany the possibility of change. What might this narrative offer in relation to thinking through processes of constructing classroom spaces that are of difference?

This narrative points to the tendency for people to struggle to make meaning of the bodies that they are in relationship with. This is so because in making sense of others we engage in the work of constructing and making sense of ourselves. When the work of making sense of another, or of the self, is made difficult because of perceived contradictions, tension can be the result. Tension is sometimes the product of a refusal to accept the complexity and contradictions of those that we are in relationship with and sometimes the product of a refusal to accept the complexity and contradictions of ourselves. The tension that accompanies complexity can also provoke the subject to work towards a moment of clarity that may enable a decision to change.

There is a need in schools, to continue to work to open up the possible meanings of bodies, to continue to work to open up the possible meanings of teacher's bodies, in an effort to convey to students some of the diverse possibilities that are available to them as embodied subjects, and particularly in an effort to improve the school experiences of gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgendered young people. There is a need to work with young people in schools to explore complexity, contradiction, and the possibilities of difference.

The narrative suggests a need for all teachers to actively work to provoke students to read them as complex, to read them as contradictory, to read them as different. The narrative also suggests that there is a need to acknowledge that the tension that can accompany such

provocation is structural in nature and that individuals engaging in the work of making structural change therefore need to be structurally supported.

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#### Author Notes

Michael is a part-time secondary school teacher, a part-time community worker and a part-time PhD student at the Youth Research Centre, University of Melbourne. His area of interest is gay and lesbian school experience.

**This paper is in progress.**

Author

Michael Crowhurst,

Part-time PhD candidate,

Youth Research Centre,



University of Melbourne.

[m.crowhurst@pgrad.unimelb.edu.au](mailto:m.crowhurst@pgrad.unimelb.edu.au)

## **Are You Gay/Sir? #2**

**I'm not going to tell you:**

**Towards a Pedagogy of Provocation**

### **Abstract**

The following section accompanies Are You Gay/Sir #1. Are You Gay/Sir? #1 was an attempt to explore the tension that such a question can provoke. Part 1 suggests following feminist poststructural theory that this tension is the result of the subject becoming aware of occupying a number of contradictory positions simultaneously.

(See also Bronwyn Davies - Post structural theory and Classroom practice.....and make sure that this goes into the first section as it is very relevant and I forgot to do so in part 1)

Part 2 will link this experience of contradiction with Garber's notion of 'undecideability' in order suggest that occupying such places, can be strategic as far as improving school settings for gay and lesbian school students.

I will argue that the text that is the teacher's body is one site that can be used, with structural support, to render the meaning of bodies fluid. I will argue that willingly occupying a place of multiple meanings and communicating that willingness to students in an attempt to provoke questions regarding the meanings of bodies is part of the work of constructing school cultures that are open to difference.

This is not to say that there is never a place for clarity, or that the work of consciously seeking to open the text that is the body of the teacher is possible (to the same degree) in all situations, it is rather to suggest that often, to get to a place of clarity requires working through tension. This tension is located with the self and indicates that making simple statements, albeit important ones, is really the end of a slower more gradual process. This section, is an attempt via a lesson plan to ground what such slow gradual tense work might look like.

This text is an attempt, in keeping with the title, to provoke discussion and to raise questions.

## **Are You Gay/Sir? #2**

**I'm not going to tell you:**

### **Towards a Pedagogy of Provocation**

He rolled over onto his stomach and said:

' I'm not going to let you touch it '.

#### **Introduction**

This article is written with a classroom situation in mind. Heterocentrism is a structural phenomenon and as such it is complex. The effects of heterocentrism can be overt, brash and deliberate and on the other hand can be exceedingly subtle and layered. It is the layers and the learnt attitudes and feelings that inhabit those layers, that I want to consider here. This section of the text will consider how a classroom teacher might begin the work of undoing the effects of heterocentrism. I want to consider tension. I want to consider the tension that undoing the effects of heterocentrism might provoke, and simultaneously how the provocation of tension is an essential aspect of the work of undoing heterocentric classroom cultures.

The section that precedes this chapter (*Are you gay/sir?*), attempted, via a narrative, to explore the tension that might be felt by a teacher who is asked the question; *Are you gay sir?* I have argued following poststructural theory that such a question has the potential to present the subject with a moment where the fragmented nature of subjectivity is made evident, and that it also has the potential to present the subject with a moment such such fragmentation is experienced as contradictory. The section that preceded this one, argued following poststructural theory that contradictory moments can provoke tension.

*Are You Gay/Sir?* also considers the effect that the perception of such a contradiction might have on students (assuming that a gay teacher can sometimes be encountered by students as contradictory). Drawing on structural notions, I suggest, that students are able to use '*the gay teacher*' as a vehicle with which to attempt to secure power. I think that there is a degree of truth in this analysis.

Here I would like to reverse this somewhat, I would like to shift the focus. I would like to consider a teacher (manipulating) a situation, where students are lead to an experience of fragmentation, where they are made aware of the possibility of choice and the possibility of change, and where the tension that such an encounter can provoke is embraced, acknowledged and teased open rather than avoided and swept under the carpet. I am interested in this as an example of one strategy that might be used in concert with others, to work towards the construction of classroom cultures that are of difference.

This section of the text will work with the notion that it is in encountering tension, that the subject can emerge at a place of a provisional clarity, that is a result of, and that allows for an expansion of, relations of difference.

This section of the text is written, in keeping with the title, with the intention of provoking discussion.

### Inclusion v Diversity

Section xx (the section of the text dealing with curriculum), suggested that approaches to the creation of school cultures that are open to sexual diversity that are over reliant on inclusions ('add ons') (See Eyre) are flawed. Including gay and lesbian perspectives in classroom discussions, subject content and the like, while a very important part of the work of opening up school cultures to sexual diversity, is only one aspect of the work that needs to be done.

Section xx considers an unintended effect that the well meaning inclusion of gay and lesbian perspectives can have on a gay or lesbian student in the classroom. John, one of the students who is referred to in that section, complains of an absence of lesbian or gay content in the courses that he encountered at school and he is very angry about this. Later in the interview, he says however, that on the few occasions when there was such content that he felt uneasy, that he blushed, that he was squirming in his seat. It is worth repeating what he had to say here because I think that John's blushing points to the complexities of the task of attempting to work around issues of sexual diversity:

I always felt that I was different and always felt that it should have been catered for.....except anytime it was broached in conversation in English or somewhere like that, then you felt they were talking about you or you started to get really embarrassed.....Like I used to feel that I was going so red.....and you just felt like: "Oh God I know they're talking about me I must be the only one in class".....And when you think about it you've got 25 students to a class and on average there must be two or three students.....and so I suppose looking back it was just me being paranoid most of the time

(see Crowhurst, 1993, 1999)

John squirms where a culturally sanctioned private, silent or absent gayness meets a culturally transgressive present, spoken or public gayness. John squirms when he realises a contradiction. He squirms when he realises that his gayness requires him to make choices, that his gayness is, to a degree, about a series of choices, and that the decisions that he makes may have contradictory or ambiguous outcomes. He squirms when he realises that his gayness, and that gayness generally, is not a unity. John squirms when he experiences the tension of an inconsistency born of fragmented subjectivity.

John's blushing illustrates the ways that heterocentrism (and other ideologies or discourses) are taken up and how they become a deep part of the fabric who people are. John has been embedded within a culture that is heterocentric, and he has taken up that heterocentrism, and in that taking up he has consciously and unconsciously inscribed his body with the power relations that circle heterocentrism.

John squirms here, or feels tense, because he is in a contradictory space. A space where he is both a young gay man angrily demanding representation, demanding the right to be expansively gay, and simultaneously a young gay man who has grown used to and uncomfortably comfortable in the private constraining place that he knows, that he has learnt that he is meant to occupy within heterocentric spaces. John squirms here because he is at a place where his desire to be expansively gay is in opposition to his desire not to be expansively gay.

John's blushing is an effect of what has subtly and not so subtly been communicated to him regarding his place or position as a young gay man. John's blushing is a moment of discomfort or tension that reminds him that he has a choice. John can bask in the oppressive 'comfort' of invisibility, he can choose to occupy the culturally designated unseen centric oppressive place that is teen gayness, or he can choose to do, and in the process construct, aspects of his teen gayness differently. John's squirming and blushing also illustrates just how difficult it is to begin to work against something that is as subtle, unconscious and ingrained as heterosexism.

John's squirming also illustrates that heterocentrism is not simply a rational phenomenon, that it isn't simply a series of ideas that can be unlearnt, cast off and replaced with new ones. Rather John's squirming indicates that heterocentrism as taken up by subjects, is embodied, and as a consequence that the work of undoing it needs to take on board that rupturing heterocentrism is about rupturing not only ideas about how bodies should take up space in the world but very much about offering opportunities for bodies to take up space differently and to recognize that this work, the work of taking up space differently, can be tense and can produce sensations that feel uncomfortable. John's squirming suggests that an approach to making school cultures better for gay and lesbian students that focuses on policy and inclusions (as important as that work is), but that ignores attitudes and tensions of embodied subjects will only enjoy limited success.

Working against heterocentrism involves much more than the easy mentioning of gay and lesbian characters or of inserting the words gay and lesbian in policy documents, (as important as I've already written a thousand times as these inclusions are). Working against heterocentrism is of necessity layered, complex and tense work. Working against heterosexism requires an acknowledgment that tension is sometimes an effect of what we have learnt, and that such learning is embodied (see also Are You Gay/Sir?). Working against heterosexism requires that we work sideways, that we work in subtle ways, but mostly that we work with tension, that we work with the tension that difference can provoke in the bodies of embodied subjects, in the interests of constructing spaces that are truly diverse.

### Tension, Change, Provocation, Avoidance ???

Are you gay/sir?.....The text that I had produced suggesting teachers might be **visible** rushed to consciousness.....suggesting teachers might be**visible**.....teachers.....text.....Are you gay/sir?.....I'd always thought that I was invisible I mean I never said anything but perhaps I wasn't.....They'd been reading me.....**walks and talks**.....**bodies and space**.....*they'd been reading the body I'd been moving through the school with as gay*.....they'd been watching me.....under **surveillance** (see, Foucault, 1991).....questioning me to let me know that they were reading the text that is my body.....the text that is the teacher's body.....the word spectacle is a homograph, some bodies are too (see Edelman, L. , 1994).....discipline that excessive body.....you bind a thesis.....rein it in.....don't

let it do that.....don't let it walk like that don't let it sound like that.....make it sound and walk like this.....make a different body.....make it invisible.....but not too invisible.....keep it separate so we know we're different from it.....but rein it in at the same time.....Is that a gay body?.....answer us.....set us straight.....something in the way she moves.....

Are you gay/sir?.....

**I'm not going to tell you.....**

The section of text above (taken from the previous section), read through John's earlier comments about discomfort and blushing, is the foundation of the discussion that follows. The previous section explored the notion that where the subject becomes aware of occupying contradictory positions, that the result can be experienced as tension, that is, the effect of an inability to achieve a unity of meaning. This tension is the effect of an awareness of complexity and an awareness of the contradictions that an awareness of complexity can sometimes provoke.

The discussion that follows will suggest that the tension that is provoked 'in' the subject by the awareness of complexity, as was the case in the previous section of the text, can also be experienced in encounters with 'other' subjects who do not offer a simple, closed or certain reading. The discussion that follows will work with the idea that people struggle to construct unified meanings of those that they are in relationship with and that where this is made difficult or complicated because of the perception of a contradiction, that tension can result. The discussion that follows is framed with the idea that the anxiety that circles the desire to bring the meaning of the bodies of others to closure, to render them less complex, is about an attempt to avoid change.

Change, is needed in order to improve the school experiences of gay and lesbian young people. There is a need for school cultures, and for the people who inhabit them, to become different if gay and lesbian school experiences are to become better. There is a need for school cultures, and for the individuals who inhabit them not only to be open to the idea of difference but rather to accept the challenge of consciously seeking to construct school cultures where difference happens and where that happening is supported and protected. If this is to occur there is a need not only to accept the inevitability of tension but to seek to actively provoke it, and this acceptance needs to be enshrined in policy.

#### Policy and the provocation/management of tension

I would briefly like to elaborate on what I mean by the last sentence here with a brief consideration of policy. Much that is done in schools that is concerned with issues of difference is designed to minimise the tension that difference can provoke and to protect the rights of individuals to be different. At the level of policy and practice, for example, there is often a focus on familiarising individuals who occupy the central place with various expressions of 'difference' with a view to reducing the tension that encounters with 'difference' can provoke.

'Foods of the World' days, as enjoyable as they are, where 'ethnic' cuisine is usually positioned as non Anglo-Celtic, and then fetishized as a smorgasbord available for the consumption of the centric group, are an example of an attempt to reduce tension in the centric group by familiarising that group with non threatening aspects of ethnic difference. 'Foods of the World' days, are also an example of an approach to 'difference' that can subtly have the effect of cementing position of the centric group.

Nevertheless, the effect, is an expansion of difference. New foods are experienced or refused, and the choices that people can make regarding what to eat are widened. The point that I want to focus on here however, is that this expansion, is framed within an approach to difference that attempts to reduce tension. Tension is reduced by making new knowledges (in this case knowledges of cuisine) available to people. People are presented with choices, that they can become familiar with and that they become less threatened by.

A similar approach to gay and lesbian issues might be framed with an understanding of gay and lesbian people are being different and the idea that this difference can provoke tension. An approach to issues of sexual diversity that was attempting to reduce tension experienced by the centric group might move in ways similar to 'Foods of the World' days. There might be a use of guest speakers, and information might be made available. Again, the approach would be fuelled by a desire to reduce tension and the mechanism that would facilitate this reduction would be access to information or individuals who might provide new knowledges. Approaches that seek limit the tension associated with expressions of difference, as valuable and necessary as they are however remain limited.

Similarly, policy that stresses that harassment on the basis of difference is not acceptable and that spells out the consequences of such harassment while absolutely necessary, can only achieve limited results. Again, such policy seeks to manage the effects of the tension that difference can provoke, and seeks to curb the power that centric groups or individuals can sometimes wield and to minimise the effects that such uses of power can have on other groups or individuals.

Equal opportunity policies, such as those that exist Federally and at State levels in Australia, are examples of policies that are designed to manage the effects of tensions or suspicions of difference that manifest as harassment or discriminatory practices. They are an attempt to put edges on things and in the process to reduce the tension that can result when different people live in communities with each other.

Policies that attempt to manage the tensions of difference are absolutely necessary and there is no attempt here to suggest otherwise. What I am going to suggest however, is that as well as policy that seeks to minimise tension, and in the process that seeks to minimise the effects of such tension, there is also a need for policy and approaches that have the effect of provoking tension.

The issues that are raised by the section above are complex and I have only touched on them here (and in the footnotes). I have done so in order to argue that policies that seek to address difference, via various strategies that attempt to manage the tension that difference can provoke, while very necessary are only part of what is needed. It is important that policies that seek to minimise tension, operate in concert with others that seek to nurture and support expressions of difference and that do not shy away from the tension that difference can provoke.

I am not arguing tension for tensions sake here, very few people actually enjoy being tense for extended periods of time. I mean to suggest that part of the process of moving differently will of necessity involve moving through tension and that a policy approach that only aims to avoid tension can inadvertently have the effect of diluting rather than promoting difference.

There is a need for a mix of policy in moving towards cultures that are of difference. There is definitely a need for policy that protects the rights of those who are positioned within centric cultures as 'different' to access the same benefits that are available to centric groups (see footnote no). There is a need to manage the tension of difference, via policy, in the interests of achieving equity, and in the interests of avoiding abuses of power. There is a need for

policy that allows for the centre to be ruptured and colonised, that offers access where access is sought and that limits the ability of those who enjoy the unconscious illusion of occupying the centre from using power in a fashion designed to limit the expansive difference of others. There is a need for policy that seeks to put brakes on the tendency of centric groups to consciously and unconsciously seek the endless expansion or repetition of the similarity that they are comfortable with, particularly where that attempt at repetition involves an exercise of power that seeks to limit another's right to move through the world differently.

However there is also a need within this policy mix to push the envelope and to acknowledge that the work of difference is not only the work of those who are positioned by centric cultures as 'different'. There is a need to acknowledge that the work of difference, that the work of becoming different is work that the centric group needs to take on board too. There is a need to acknowledge at the level of policy that such work will invoke tension. There is a need to acknowledge that tension is the proof that such work is happening and that policy can never contain the tension of a space of real difference.

The work of policy in this area is therefore inherently ambiguous, in the sense that policy must simultaneously seek to manage and limit the effects of tension provoked by expressions of difference, while it must also, seek to encourage and support expressions of difference that provoke tension. The structural work of achieving such a poststructural mix of policies is however unambiguously essential if the school experiences of gay and lesbian young people are to improve.

The text that follows will attempt to explore what the work of provoking tension, might look like in a classroom situation. It will focus on how, with structural support, working through tension provoked by queering the meaning of the teacher's body, might make a contribution towards improving classroom and other school spaces for gay and lesbian secondary school students.

#### Post structural Provocation with Structural Support

It is 5 years since I started to write 'Are You Gay/Sir?'. 'Stan', was 8 when I started work on that piece, he is now 13. 'Stan' is a student at an inner-city community school where I currently work on a part-time basis. Founded in the 70's, the school was influenced by neo-Marxist and feminist political philosophy and continues in that tradition. It is self consciously

a school that seeks to be 'alternative' and that seeks to offer an educative experience that is different to students who feel different.

Stan, is a 'challenging' student (as are many of the other students at the school), and has been described by another teacher as: 'a student who works the room'. He has been there and done that and doesn't hesitate to let you know it. You can imagine my surprise then, when I had Stan literally hopping all over me, in a moment reminiscent of a 5 year old waiting for Santa, on the way to look at a stormwater drain that runs the length of the Tullamarine Tollway. How had I managed this? How had I constructed this activity so that Stan didn't offer his usual: 'This is shit', assessment of the excursion?

I had managed this by 'camping' the excursion up. I had managed this by refusing to tell the class anything about where we were going or why we were going there. The only information

that the students were given was that we were going somewhere, that they weren't to swear at anyone on the way, and that it would be something that they would always remember as one of the highlights of their years at school. The students were left in the dark, the destination was unknown, and this was a state of affairs that I had manipulated.

The unknown destination provoked a deluge of questions from all of the students in the class. A deluge of questions from students who, like Stan, were very difficult to impress or engage. The deluge of questions was an effect of students not knowing where we were going, an effect of students being unable to clearly anticipate a destination, perhaps an effect of students feeling a little 'lost'. The students were frustrated with my refusal to bring clarity to the situation but they were also surprisingly excited and tense. The notion that the unknown or that difference provokes tension is, as I have stated elsewhere, central to this text.

The next section will work with the notion of 'being lost' via an exploration of Aichorn's work in Britzman.

#### Aichorn through Britzman - On Being Lost

*What might we take from Aichorn's work:*

*'it has to do with considering the logic of the student and allowing this logic to guide the work of making education. Teachers might then see a great deal of their work as a problem of redirecting the address of anxiety (beginning with their own), as opposed to viewing the circulation of anxiety as an interruption of education. But in doing so, the teacher must become interested in embodying, purposefully, an ambivalent position, entertaining some promises, foreclosing others'.*

*(Britzman, D., 46)*

Deborah Britzman, writing from a psychoanalytic perspective, considers the work of Aichorn (45-7). Aichorn worked with young offenders and utilised psychoanalytic theories in an effort to reduce their tendencies to engage in behaviours such as fighting or stealing. Britzman reports that Aichorn framed his work with young people from the perspective that they had lost their way.

Aichorn interpreted the actions of the young people that he came into contact with as symptomatic of an experience of being lost (45). Aichorn's theory suggests that when young people feel that they are lost that this provokes anxiety and in order to reduce anxiety the young person engages in behaviour that provides a sense of control, and the illusion of direction. Psychoanalytic frameworks do not assume that the subject is necessarily aware that he or she is lost. This awareness is arrived at with the assistance of the therapist.

Britzman reports that rather than work to reduce anxiety, by acting as an authority figure and devising strategies to assist the young person to stop engaging in anti-social behaviour, that Aichorn, worked instead, to incite anxiety through the 'symptom', 'until the symptom (could) no longer serve its purpose of achieving satisfaction' (46) by masking the subject's sense of being lost.

So, if a young person was seeing Aichorn because of a problem with stealing, Aichorn wouldn't berate the young person for this but rather would encourage them to engage in the behaviour, so that the behaviour in question might no longer be able to serve the function of masking a young persons feeling of being lost.

Aichorn refused to play the part of the authority figure in his dealings with young people, and instead insisted that the anxiety that was provoked by encouraging the young person to engage in certain behaviours be 'addressed' (46) back to the self, be addressed back to the young person.

When Aichorn states that anxiety be addressed back to the self, he is suggesting that the subject look to the origin of the problem that presents and not to the problem itself. If a young person is stealing because they have 'lost their way' and because they feel anxious about this , then the role of the therapist or counsellor is not to attempt to restrict certain behaviours but rather to support the client to deal with the anxiety that is causing the behaviour in the first place.

Aichorn suggests for the young person that he works with that they embrace and acknowledge anxiety and then make some decisions in the face of it rather than avoid it by engaging in behaviour that is known, that is controllable and that offers the reward of reducing anxiety. Aichorn suggests that they find their way that they cease to be lost. he suggests that they find new ways of reducing the anxiety of being lost that are not anti-social. Aichorn also suggests by implication that the tension and discomfort that accompanies the feeling of being lost is the motivating force that drives one to attempt to cease being lost.

This requires that the 'subject' do the work, rather than the authority figure that is the therapist, and that they take a new direction. This approach acknowledges that anxiety and tension is an essential part of such a process. This approach requires of the subject that they cease to be lost. This requires of the subject that they cease to be lost by making a decision and by then moving.

Aichorn's ideas, as canvassed by Britzman, pose a few ethical dilemmas for the writer. I doubt whether I would want to follow his approach to the letter in an instance where engaging in the behaviour under question or encouraging the subject to engage in the behaviour under question might result in the subject or another being harmed in some way. Nevertheless, the idea that the subject find his or her own way out of the tense place that is the space of being lost is persuasive and will partially inform the remainder of this text.

The aspects of Aichorn's approach that are of interest are:

His willingness to engage the subject in a process that involves acknowledging and embracing tension,

His refusal to signpost a direction that the client should take,

And his willingness to provoke a situation that builds and uncovers tension which requires that the subject make decisions in order to deal with this tension.

Aichorn's ideas are very relevant to the task of attempting to think through approaches to the achievement of school cultures that are open to expressions of sexual diversity. Aichorn's approach suggests that if difference provokes tension that there is a need to visit rather than run from those tense places. and a need to examine and rework the cultural discourses and practices that have supported the subject in the work of constructing such tension in the first place.

People who are suspected of being lesbian or gay can provoke tension in others. This tension, as will be explored later, is in part to do with the way that queer bodies rupture a heterocentric framing of bodies that seeks to render all bodies heterosexual, that seeks to ensure a clear distinction between gendered bodies, and in the process that seeks to unconsciously render the meaning and possibilities of bodies known.

There is a need to protect lesbian and gay people, with clear policy statements and procedures, from the tendency for some to ease their tension via attempted erasures of difference or via the demand that the meaning of a body be brought to clarity. Via the demand that subjects be made to occupy the terrain of an existing set of relationships organised around an existing series of labels and the power relations that circle those labels. However, there is also a need to surf the dangerous and uncomfortable place of the tension that is provoked in some by queer bodies if schools are to get better for people who choose to live and express their sexual diversity in an expansive fashion. If schools are going to improve for lesbian and gay students then part of what is required is the provocation of tension and the address of that tension back to its origin, back to the subject who is tense and not the person who is read as different.

The rest of this piece will consider what such provocation might look like in a classroom.

#### People who are lesbian or gay can provoke tension in others

In the previous section I suggested that people who are lesbian or gay can provoke tension in others. I would like to consider here why this might be so and to work with this idea for a while. I would like to begin doing this via an exploration of the reactions of a group of students to a teacher who was Indian, and then to sedge way via Jay, Endelman, Grosz, Garber and Butler to consider related terrain.

#### Ambiguity provokes Tension 1:

##### The text that is the body of the teacher

Here I'd like to work through a few scenarios to suggest following poststructural theory that ambiguity provokes tension. To return to the students on their excursion referred to earlier, I'd propose that the students were tense and anxious because they were uncertain about where they were going and consequently they couldn't position themselves in relation to that unknown destination. This example suggests the tendency for subjects to avoid ambiguity in an effort to avoid change, in an effort to cement an idea of the relational self and in doing so to attempt to stabilise the power relations that characterise the centrisms that constitute the subjects experience of the relationships that characterise the present.

This section of the text will apply similar ideas to the body of the teacher in order to explore the notion that provoking students to ask questions of that text, and then refusing to offer fixed answers about it, is one strategy that might be used in a classroom situation with a view to provoking tension in an effort to work against heterocentrism.

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#### Modelling difference - Rather than modelling a role:

##### Why focus on the body of the teacher?

teachers.....text.....Are you gay/sir?.....

I'd always thought that I was invisible

I mean I never said anything but perhaps I wasn't.....

They'd been reading me.....

**walks and talks.....bodies and space.....**

*they'd been reading the body I'd been moving through the school with as gay*

Until the age of 16, it is compulsory that students attend school. Australia is an affluent culture, and successive governments have recognized the private and social capital that education affords. The idea that education is of benefit and that this benefit is bestowed upon or taken up by people in educational institutions is generally accepted by the populace. There may be debate regarding the directions followed, the effectiveness of the system, or to do with pedagogy, but in spite of this education is generally positioned by the State and by the populace as a social good.

Teachers, as the agents that facilitate the achievement of this social good, are embedded within discourses that mark them as authoritative, as moral as professional; as powerful (see Miles). The teacher's body, is inscribed with the idea of power, and this inscription is received and engaged with by students in resistant and accommodating ways.

It is interesting to focus on situations where the cultural authority of the teacher is called into question or resisted. It is interesting, given the focus of this text, to think about how the cultural authority of the body of the teacher is sometimes challenged when that body is simultaneously read as gay. It is interesting and relevant to focus on the body of the teacher, on the body of the gay or lesbian teacher, because it offers an interesting perspective on the subtle ways that power moves, is used, is contested and the subtle (but not absolute) ways that it accrues to certain bodies and not to others.

The extract at the beginning of this section works with the idea that students are not only engaged in listening to what the teacher has to say (or resisting listening to what the teacher has to say), but are also engaged in processes whereby the body of the teacher is read as and constructed as a text. This is certainly not the only process of decipherment that students are involved in within the classroom but it is an important one, because of the discourse of 'the professional' a heightened one, and for the purposes of this text a very relevant one.

The spectacle that is teacher's body however, is also a contested and multiple site, in the sense that it is also inscribed and embedded, and seeks to inscribe and embed itself, within discourses of gender, ethnicity, class and sexuality. As such a teacher can occupy and can sometimes be read as occupying contradictory subject positions. Here I would like to suggest that it is on occasions where the body of the teacher is read as ambiguous that a degree of tension can set in (these themes were taken up in part 1). I would like to work through what I mean by this via some memories of a teacher who was from the Indian sub-continent that I was taught by as a secondary school student.

The Indian Teacher:

### The perception of an ambiguously embodied teacher

In the 1970's I attended a Christian Brother's College. During that time I was very fortunate to be taught English by a woman, who was from India. Initially this teacher was constantly harassed by students in the classes that she taught. Her situation illustrates a number of ideas that are relevant to this text.

While her body was inscribed within discourses of 'the teacher' as being powerful, it was also simultaneously inscribed within competing discourses of gender and ethnicity as occupying the less privileged culturally constructed terrains, of being black and of being a woman. This teacher's body was a body that provoked tension, which manifested in the form of misbehaviour, from the students in the classes that came into contact with her.

This black, female, teacher's body, in occupying a place culturally designated as powerful had trespassed on a subtle cultural understanding to do with power. This black, female, teacher had trespassed on the powerful terrain of the subtly transmitted idea that places of power, within this culture, are not female and are certainly not black, but are rather white and male. This black woman in occupying the place of the teacher was subverting, resisting, colonising, appropriating and deconstructing a subtle but yet all pervasive central place that conflates power with discourses of whiteness or maleness.

This teacher's body provoked tension because it was read using discourses that simultaneously positioned it as powerful and not powerful. Her body provoked tension because on reading it, it became apparent that it occupied ambiguous cultural spaces, it became apparent that it was of difference. The teacher's body, within the cultural context that it inhabited, was contradictory, ambiguous and 'undecideable', and provoked tension because of its refusal to offer unity.

In similar ways I would like to argue that if discourse renders the idea of the body of the teacher as powerful and if within a heterocentric culture straightness is subtly positioned as powerful, that there is a trope that renders the idea of the teacher's body as straight.

I want to suggest here that the idea of the teacher, that the idea of the body of the teacher, as read within a heterocentric culture is unconsciously understood as and expected to be a body that is straight. I would like to argue that where a body is occupying the subject position of the teacher but is simultaneously being read as gay or lesbian that such a body provokes tension in similar ways to that which the body of a black female teacher provoked tension in the 1970's.

There is a difference however, between gay and lesbian teachers and black female ones in that while people can be relatively sure of the colour of a person's skin they cannot be sure of a person's sexuality. I would argue that the gay or lesbian teacher's body provokes tension for a large number of reasons. One series of reasons, are similar to the reason that the black female teacher provoked tension.

Teachers with bodies that are read as queer however, can also provoke tension in students for reasons to do with queer bodies, and the challenge that 'bodies read as queer' can pose to centrisms that circle gender and that in turn that circle sexualities. Bodies that are read as queer challenge the centrism that seeks to inscribe and embed bodies within a series of discourses that attempt to render knowable the limits of desire, and that are in turn dependant, within heterocentric cultures, on there being a reasonably clear difference between the bodies of men and women. Bodies that are read as queer, render all bodies unknowable, render all bodies 'undecideable' render all bodies ambiguous. Bodies that are

read as queer can provoke tension for this reason. Bodies that are read as queer leave some people feeling tense because they leave them feeling lost.

Bodies that are read as queer complicate the readings, meanings and possibilities of bodies and can shift the heterosexual subject from a privileged, unmarked, unconscious, unaware space within heterocentric cultures to a less comfortable place of awareness. I will now turn to briefly enlarge on this notion.

### Queer bodies provoke tension

As the section above indicates, the perception of a queer teacher can provoke tension in students for many reasons. Some of those reasons are to do with the tension that queering centrisms of power can provoke and some are to do with the tension that queer bodies pose within heterocentric cultures generally. This section will consider why queer bodies provoke tension. It will not however, following poststructural theory pretend or attempt to completely answer this question.

I would like to move through this next section via a few practical examples and then onto a brief consideration of some relevant literature. I will argue that bodies that are read as gay or lesbian rupture the spectator subjects ability to bring to closure the meaning of all bodies. I will argue through Martin, Edelman, Grosz, Garber and Butler that this effectively means that the spectre of the identifiably queer body renders all bodies queer or queers all bodies. I will then suggest following this logic, and appropriating and adapting Aichorn's notions of being lost, and his suggestion that the anxiety that circles the state of being lost should be addressed back to the subject, what this might mean for teachers who are trying to work in the interests of gay and lesbian students in classrooms in secondary schools.

### Teaching and Terracotta Pipes:

#### Ambiguous Visions

When I was 6 years old a piece of terracotta pipe lodged in my eye and scratched the surface of the pupil. I can remember wearing an eye patch for 6 weeks. When I was 12, I went to an ophthalmologist to have my eyes tested. I had difficulty reading the chart. He found scar tissue on the surface of the eye and prescribed glasses. I can remember being driven down Box Forrest Road in Hadfield and seeing leaves on a tree at a distance for the first time. I can remember thinking that everyone else must have been able to see leaves at a distance all of the time that I hadn't been able to.

I remember thinking that I had been seeing things differently from everyone else and that there had been no way of knowing this. When I got my glasses even though I attributed my new ability to distinguish leaves on trees at a distance to them, I continued to universalise the experience. I unconsciously assumed that the way that I was experiencing the world through sight with my new glasses was the way that everyone viewed the world.

Years later I found myself teaching in a school in the East End of London. I was under allotted on my time table and enjoying having one more free class than I would normally have been entitled to. Unfortunately the Art teacher was stabbed one weekend and because I was teaching in the same department and had a free lesson up my sleeve I landed the Art class. Friday period 2, for what I was told would be 12 weeks but which ended up becoming 20 or so, I became an Art teacher.

I had absolutely no idea what I was doing and so I consulted with the Head of the Department. He suggested that a good use of the time would be to set up a display in the

middle of the room and spend the one lesson a week that I had with the class sketching. This proved to be very successful for a number of reasons.

I taught at a Boy's school and the vast majority of the students who attended came from Bangladesh. Many, were recent arrivals and had never attended school in Bangladesh and many spoke very little English at all and apart from the odd piece of swearing that I'd picked up from the students at the school I didn't speak Bengali. An Art class where students might draw with minimal input or instruction from me was a good idea. The students were engrossed in their work and seemed to be enjoying it.

One week I had arranged a display in the centre of the room, part of which involved a pot plant on a table. Four of the students in that class had been in England for 3 months or less. As I wandered around the class and made positive noises about the drawings that the students were doing I asked one of the students who had recently arrived in England, via another member of the class, to explain which part of the display he'd drawn. He pointed to the pot plant on the table.

He had spun the perspective around and so the image that I saw made me think of a plant on a 1950's television. Three legs, a rectangle and a plant on top. The rectangle represented the top of the table as it would have been seen if you viewed it from the roof ie. vertically rather than horizontally as it would be viewed in the display. As I went around the class I noticed that the most recent arrivals to the class had all represented the pot plant in this manner. They had all spun the perspective of the top of the table from horizontal to vertical. The way that they were interpreting and representing what they say was very different from other members of the class who had been born or lived in England for an extended period of time.

### Theorists and Vision

Martin Jay sweeping through the millennia from Plato to Foucault argues that Western culture is ocularcentric. He suggests that sight occupies a privileged place within Western culture and that we are unaware of the effects of this and that we are also unaware of the assumptions that support this. Jay suggests for example that the privileging of sight allows for the idea of the objective detached spectator that in turn allows for the scientist, that the idea of the scientist is dependent on ocularcentrism.

Jay is not on a quest to attack science (and nor am I), on my reading, he seeks via drawing attention to the limits of the 'truth' of any spectacle to engage in a discussion that highlights not only the incompleteness and limits of scientific projects but that seeks to highlight the incompleteness, limits and subjective elements that are implicated in all acts of seeing and therefore in all endeavours where sight is the sense that functions to verify the truth.

To suggest that something is incomplete is not to suggest that it is without value. Rather the idea of incompleteness suggests the need to incorporate difference and different approaches into any attempt to move towards the 'truth' of an object or experience, and also recognises that the 'truth' of an object or experience as understood via a cultural framework will always be incomplete, not only because cultural frameworks are of themselves incomplete but also because the truth of an object is always in the process of being constructed via those same incomplete cultural frameworks.

Jay proposes that within ocularcentric cultures that there is an unconscious belief that what we see, is seen in similar ways by all. Jay proposes that there is an 'unconscious' belief in the universality and veracity of sight. Jay proposes that we blindly accept that what we see has a meaning and a truth that coincides with the meaning and truth that others accord a

particular object. Jay suggests that challenging the hegemony of vision within Western thought and culture is part of the project of twentieth-century French poststructuralism. One implication of Jay's work is the notion that calling attention to the subjective and contextual nature of acts of observation becomes a necessary part of moving Western culture elsewhere.

I would like to work with the idea that we accord the status of a universal truth to the things that we see, in the sense that we unconsciously assume that others see things the same way that we do. This unconscious assumption is one, like all centrisms, that allows the subject to bask in the comfortable space that is being unaware. I will argue following Edelman and Jay that queer bodies pose a threat to the centrism that we can verify what we see. I will argue following Edelman, and taking Jay's point about the centrality of the sense of sight, that bodies that threaten the ability of the subject to verify the meaning of all bodies are a site of considerable tension, because they move subjects from a place of unconsciousness to a place of being tensely aware.

\* Return to underlined section to make sure that this is in fact what I have argued

### Edelman

Lee Edelman suggests that often tensions circle queer bodies. He argues that this tension, or these tensions are born of a series of contradictions or ambiguities. One is to do with a contradiction that is the effect of the desire to simultaneously see and not see bodies that are read as queer. The other is to do with the challenge that queer bodies pose to the gendered meanings of all bodies within heterocentrism. Edelman deploys the idea of the homograph, to work towards explaining what he means by this. His ideas are central to this section of the text.

The title of his book employs the term 'Homographesis' and this term, in turn, refers to and in the process queers the word homograph. A homograph is a word that can have a series of meanings. The word spectacle is an example of a homograph, as in: I must wear spectacles in order to watch spectacles.

If the word 'spectacle' is encountered in isolation it can take on various meanings, it has no fixed or closed meaning of its own, it offers a multiplicity of meanings that are arrived at contextually. The meanings of the word spectacle are constructed, are worked out, according to the position that it occupies in relation to other words.

The word 'spectacle' is multiple in the sense that it offers a variety of possibilities or meanings, but this variety also renders the sight of the word 'spectacle' as multiple. As a sign, the word 'spectacle', seen in isolation is emptied of certainty. As a sign, the word 'spectacle', seen in isolation, is 'undecidable'. Edelman uses the idea of the homograph to explore the ways that the texts of bodies thought to be queer are encountered, and the effects that such encounters might provoke.

Within heterocentric cultures, sexuality and gender is constructed by embodied subjects from within systems of binary logic. Gendered bodies, for example, within heterocentric cultures, which are dependent on systems of binary logic take on meanings from within relationships where the gendered bodies of women are constructed as the opposite of the gendered bodies of men.

Male bodies, as a sign that communicates a message about sexuality, within heterocentric cultures dependent on systems of binary logic, have a relatively stable meaning. Within heterocentric cultures, male bodies desire female bodies.

Gay bodies however, complicate matters, as they render the sign that is the category 'male body', 'undecideable'. Gay bodies rupture the binary that supports or is made possible by heterocentrism.

But on the other hand gay bodies support that binary, in the sense that within an economy of desire predicated on binary logic, the idea of the gay body is absolutely required, in order that there be the idea of the straight body.

Discourses of sexuality, within heterocentric cultures, are framed from within a system of binary logic that are in turn situated beside and in relationship with other systems of binary logic that frame discourses of gender.

Heterocentric discourses function from within a system of binary logic that positions heterosexuality to be the opposite of homosexuality and homosexuality to be the opposite of heterosexuality. Within such a system heterosexuality is constructed within an oppositional relationship to homosexuality, and homosexuality is constructed within an oppositional relationship to heterosexuality.

Sexuality is designated within heterocentric discourses as straight or gay or lesbian according to the gendered body that a subject is sexually and emotionally attracted to. Heterosexuality requires that a subject be attracted to some of the gendered bodies of the opposite sex and homosexuality requires that the subject be attracted to the gendered bodies of some of the same sex.

The divisions that demarcate categories of sexuality however are, like categories of gender, socially constructed and are therefore unstable or subject to processes of deconstruction. There is a tension that circles categories of sexuality. There is a tension that is an effect of the embodied subjects knowledge, on some level, that sexuality is formed in relationship in social contexts, and that consequently sexuality is fluid.

This tense knowledge points to the paradox that is at the heart of the fear and curiosity that circles sexualities that are positioned as different. The paradox being that while sexualities are socially constructed and dependent on oppositional relationships they are simultaneously challenged and threatened by those same relationships. There is a tension that circles queer bodies that is to do with the threat that such bodies, as read through filters of gender, can pose to heterosexuality. But there is also within an economy of sexualities where heterosexuality is constructed in relation to its opposite a need to see or recognize a body that is queer.

Heterosexual subjects are also subtly challenged by homosexual subjects because homosexual subjects challenge the centrism that assumes that all subjects are heterosexual. Heterosexual subjects are challenged by homosexual subjects because homosexual subjects make conscious the notion that there are non heterosexual modes of desire.

Bodies that are read as queer complicate the meaning of gendered bodies within heterocentric cultures, in the sense that they challenge the unconscious assumption that desire functions across genders. And in the process they complicate the easy, unconscious reading of gendered bodies, in the process all bodies are queered.

Bodies that are read as queer, are often bodies that are excessive. Excessive in the sense that they challenge centrisms that circle gender that are in turn in relationship with centrisms that circle sexuality. They can provoke tension in the spectator that is straight because of the challenge that such bodies pose to heterosexuality and so there is a desire not to see them,

not to be confronted by them. But this desire not to see them sits in relationship with it's opposite.

Garber explores similar terrain in an article focusing on transexuality, where she uses the word 'undecideable' to describe the transexual body. She suggests that the body of the transexual is an undecideable body in the sense that it is a body that does not lend itself to a clear reading. The transexual body, like the body read as queer, as it is encountered by others in culture, is a sign that is unstable or ambiguous. The transexual body deconstructs heterocentric notions that circle gender relations organised in accordance with a system of binary logic.

The transexual body can be encountered as neither male or female, as a body that is undecideable, and therefore as a body that doesn't quite make sense in the manner that we are used to making sense of bodies as they are read through discourses of gender.

The transexual body requires that we devise new ways of making sense of it, that we devise new ways of entering into relationship with it, and in the process that we devise new ways of making sense of ourselves and that we devise news ways of making sense of some of the relationships that we are party to. Undecideable bodies, as read through cultural filters, provoke tension because we are not quite sure about them and because we are not quite sure about where we sit in relation to them.

The remedy for this tension, is sometimes expressed as a desire that those who move differently through the world cease to do so, that those who move differently through the world, rein it in, that they discipline their excessive bodies. I would like to argue here however, following the earlier section of this text that considered policy that the task at hand is not to avoid tension but rather to embrace it. (Ambiguity is a form of difference.)

Bodies that transgress centrisms that regulate how gendered bodies move through culture can as I have been suggesting provoke tension. Elizabeth Grosz, suggests that such tension fuels discrimination levelled at gay and lesbian people. Grosz argues, and there are points of connection in her arguments with Edelman and Garber, that gay and lesbian people encounter discrimination when their sexuality is labelled suspicious or rendered ambiguous on account of the way that they move through culture as gendered subjects. Grosz suggests that discrimination directed at lesbian and gay people comes into effect where lesbian and gay bodies begin to move differently through culture, where a different body is read as one that does not conform to centric notions which are in turn informed by heterocentric notions of what is appropriate gendered behaviour.

Grosz also extends the argument to consider that the disciplining of bodies, that the desire to rein in excessive bodies is about a fear of the excessive possibilities of pleasure and desire that bodies are capable of but not currently engaging in. She suggests, following Deleuze, that the desire to limit the possibilities of bodies, is about a constraining desire to engage in practices and to construct and reproduce discourses that attempt a repetition of similarity rather than an expansion of difference.

Reading Grosz through Edelman and Garber (and keeping Jay in mind), an interesting series of tensions that circle bodies read as queer becomes evident. For Grosz, tensions set in at the point where queer bodies are recognized and challenge the status quo with their promise of new, different and expansive ways of being an embodied subject in the world. For Edelman, this same tension exists, but he also points to the threat that queerly gay and lesbian bodies pose when they remain hidden. Like Grosz, he suggests the need within heterocentric cultures to limit excessive bodies in order to police the borders of heterosexuality, but he also suggests the need to recognise queer bodies in order that there

be an oppositional limit that defines heterosexuality. For Edelman there is a tension that circles the need to see and not to see queer bodies. There is a tension within a tension.

Edelman suggests the tense need on the part of centric subjects that queer bodies make themselves known, that they show themselves, that they render themselves intelligible. For Grosz, Edelman and Garber there is a tension, that is brought into focus via the provocation of bodies that are read as or suspected of being queer, and this tension comes to circle the intelligibility of all bodies, and in the process renders all bodies queer, renders all bodies undecidable.

For Grosz, Edelman and Garber, bodies read as queer provoke a tension that is a product of the transgression of a gender order that is in turn the product of heterocentric discourse. Queer bodies complicate the centric subjects ability to unconsciously render bodies straight, and in doing so they complicate the power dynamics that circle the relationships that embodied subjects engage in within heterocentric cultures.

Butler, suggests related ideas concerning drag. She argues in 'Gender Trouble' that drag, as a performance of gender, calls attention to the performative nature of all gender. Butler suggests that when the subject watches a drag performance that there is a double moment happening whereby the spectacle is both consciously understood as performative but where the viewer enters into the spirit of the performance such that it takes on the characteristics of the 'real'. When a subject watches a drag performance there is the possibility that he or she may come to view the character on stage as a 'real' woman or 'real' man. The gender that the character is performing seems 'natural' or the character becomes gendered.

This moment, is one that Butler is interested in, for she suggests that it is here, in the moment where the imitation of culturally constructed gender that is drag, is experienced by the spectator as authentic that on some level a question forms as to the authenticity or essence of gender full stop. Butler argues that drag performances suggest the performative nature of all gender.

Butler, in concert with other feminist writers such as Grosz, Davies, Pallotta-Chiarolli, Irigaray, Gatens, Du Plessis, Harris, also suggests that it is the cultural discourses that embodied subjects inhabit that determine the performances and processes that embodied subjects enact. She goes on to suggest that it is during the embodied work that is the enactment of discourse that, to a degree, the embodied subject is formed. Butler argues a process of becoming through performance. Butler argues that being is an effect of doing.

There is a link, not an absolute one, but a link nonetheless, between discourse, between centrisms and between the way that we move and understand ourselves as we move through the world as embodied subjects. Centrisms inhabit discourse in exceedingly subtle ways and have a disciplinary effect. They discipline those who are positioned within them as outsiders and who are therefore aware of them. And they discipline those who are positioned by them as insiders and are therefore not aware of them.

Centrisms govern the way that we read the world around us and the way that we read the embodied subjects that we come into contact with in the world. Centrisms govern in subtle ways the possibilities of who we can be and who we are. When a centrism is challenged there is the possibility that the world that we inhabit is also challenged and there is the possibility that we are challenged or move into change in the process. I would argue that a moment of tension can be a moment where a centrism is under threat.

Gay and lesbian bodies, as has been briefly explored via Jay, Edelman, Grosz, Garber and Butler, challenge, but also paradoxically confirm a system of binary logic that reproduces

centrisms that can have negative impacts on gay and lesbian people. The threat of gay and lesbian bodies is that they (we) render the meaning of all bodies undecidable, in that a heterocentric reading of bodies, that subtly and unconsciously renders all bodies desiring of the opposite gender, and that anchors the proof of this desire via a subtle and not so subtle codification of the ways that the gendered bodies of embodied subjects move through the world, is ruptured.

Gay and lesbian bodies as they move queerly through culture, offer new ways of moving or desiring as an embodied subject in culture. And therefore following Butler, queer bodies offer the possibility of new ways of being. This can be threatening because it entails the possibility of change. But gay and lesbian subjects are 'known' in the sense that there are discourses that circle the labels gay and lesbian within heterocentric cultures and these discourses are in turn embedded within certain arrangements of power.

Gay and lesbian bodies are threatening but they are not as threatening as a body that refuses to occupy a position within a binary set of relations. Gay and lesbian bodies are not as threatening as the ambiguous, undecidable body that refuses to signpost future possibilities and that refuses to allow the parties to a relationship to overlay that relationship with labels that limit the possibilities of that relationship, that seek to organize the power that circles it, that seek to constrain and effect a repetition of similarity, a repetition of the power arrangements that circle labels that are known, rather than support and surf the tension that accompanies an expansion of difference.

I am not arguing here against claiming the labels gay or lesbian I am following queer theory however, suggesting that what might appear to be a moment that has the potential to produce expansive effects might in fact, on some level, serve to support an oppressive status quo. I am not arguing against labels, I am however arguing their limits and that they be queered.

In order to be expansively gay or lesbian, in order to be queerly gay or lesbian, there is a need, to an extent, to move beyond binaries and into difference. In order for this to happen there is a need for the centric group to support this movement, and for centric groups to be supported to offer support, this is so because centric groups via numbers and following structuralist theory can actually attempt to stop such movement. In order for this expansive moment to happen there is a need for centric subjects to have an encounter with a subject that steps outside of a heterocentric demand that sexualities be constructed oppositionally. There is a need for the centric subject to experience the tense but expansive pleasure of an encounter with ambiguity. There is a need for this tension to be embraced and nurtured. There is a need for the tense centric subject to explore the possibility or come to the realisation that the remedy to the tension that an encounter with ambiguity might provoke is perhaps to be accomplished via work. And that this work needs to be done by the centric subject. The centric subject needs to realize that the tension that ambiguity can provoke can dissipate as a result of engaging in the difficult work of attempting to construct clarity. Not a clarity that is focused on another but a clarity that is focused on the self.

In a similar and related fashion I want to return to the body of the teacher. Earlier I argued that the text that is the body of the teacher is circled by heterocentric discourses that subtly mark and render it as a culturally powerful body as straight. Where a teacher offers a reading, or provokes a reading that queers the text that is the body of the teacher by calling into question its straightness a centrism is ruptured and tension can be the result. I want to suggest here that this tension is positive.

It is good that students encounter teachers that offer them experiences with difference. I want to suggest here that this encounter might actually be more acute if the experience of

difference is not initially labelled or named. I want to suggest here that an encounter with difference, such as an encounter with a body that offers from within certain centrisms an ambiguous reading, is an encounter that may provoke tension. Following earlier arguments I also want to suggest that centric subjects will seek to ease this tension by overlaying the relationship with the teacher read as ambiguous with familiar labels that are in turn circled by familiar power relations, that are in turn reproduced from within systems of binary logic within heterocentric cultures.

I want to suggest therefore, to finally cut to the chase, that when a student asks the question: Are you gay/sir? that this question might be motivated by a perception on the part of the student of an ambiguity that has provoked a degree of tension in the student. I want to suggest that the student might then seek to ease this tension by removing the ambiguity of the teacher by requiring that the teacher confirm the meaning of his or her body.

I want to suggest a danger in too quick a confirmation. A danger that an opportunity at fostering an environment that is of difference might actually be missed is the teacher answers 'yes' too quickly. I say this because by saying yes there is a danger that the relationship between the teacher and the students might come to occupy an already inscribed place. I want to suggest that by initially refusing answer this question: Are you gay/sir? and then subsequently provoking students to ask similar questions that there is an opportunity to participate in the construction of an environment that perhaps supports an expansion of difference.

I want to suggest that by not answering the question that the work of arriving at clarity, which is provoked by an expansion of the feeling of being tense, becomes the work of the student. I want to suggest that the result of this work will be multiple clarities. I want to suggest that the clarity that the students arrive at will be different for each one of them.

I want to suggest that gay and lesbian bodies, for a host of reasons, are bodies, to follow Aichorn's ideas, that some subjects can become lost in. I want to suggest that the tension that accompanies the feeling of being lost that can be provoked by queer bodies be addressed to the subject who is experiencing the tension.

So what might this look like in a classroom?

### **Issue Sheet**

#### **Situation**

The other week I was in the shower at the gym and I was very tired. I had done a workout and was hot and sweaty. My friends Mic and Chris were there too. They were also hot and sweaty.

Anyway.....While I was in the shower, just enjoying the water and feeling a little pleased with myself because I'd done such a fabulous workout a group of 15 year old guys invaded the change rooms.....And invaded is certainly the right word.....You should have heard the noise that that group were making.....I've got a bit of a thing about people taking up all of the sound space in a place.....I've got a bit of a thing about people assuming that they're the only ones that matter as far as noise is concerned.....Anyway they were very loud.....

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I couldn't hear myself think and I couldn't hear what Chris was saying and I was annoyed because Chris is pretty funny at the best of times (although he does have his serious moments), and from the look on Mic's face it looked as though he had said something funny.....

Anyway I called out to the young guys:

Put a sock in it.....

**You're** giving me a headache

Chris and Mic said that I was getting old.....The young guys quietened down (good) but I'm not sure that I handled the situation as well as I might have.....

What do you think?

And what has noise in the showers got to do with an environmental issue anyway?

Questions:

- \* Describe a time when you had an issue with someone
- \* How did you resolve the issue?
- \* How did you work through the issue?
- \* What do you think working through an issue entails?
- \* Can you always work through an issue?
- \* Describe a time when you had an issue that you were not able to resolve
- \* Describe a time when you had an issue that you didn't think that you'd be able to resolve but that you were able to resolve in the end
- \* How did you feel when you were in the process of working through the issue?
- \* Did you feel tense or nervous?

Task

Role play 'an issue'

What elements of this lesson are intended to provoke students to queer the text that is the teacher's body?

- \* 3 men in a shower
- \* nakedness
- \* 'fabulous' workout
- \* 'hot and sweaty'
- \* whispered joke - indicating a degree of intimacy
- \* autobiographical account

The four examples above are intended to provoke students to read the text that is my body as gay.

There are also other elements that I am working with here to do with contradiction.

- \* Gym - macho / Gay Men - not macho?
- \* Chris as funny/Chris has a serious side
- \* Teacher as sure (voices)/teacher as unsure (did I handle this well?)
- \* Teacher as teacher in classroom/teacher as private - gym

### Extending the Idea

The text that is the body of the teacher is an important site to consider here for the reasons stated above. But consciously working to open up that text also suggests the importance of working in similar ways in order to open up the many other texts that students come into contact with in the classroom or within school cultures.

It is also important to note that the proposition that we consciously open the text that is the body of the teacher is not to suggest that the teacher's body is not already open, is not already subject to deconstructive processes. The proposition is rather to suggest that the radical, relational, fluidity, that characterises the text that is the teachers body (that characterises all texts), be acknowledged, and that the tension that such fluidity and possibility sometimes provokes be accepted and explored rather than denied, ignored or swept under the carpet.

The suggestion that we accept the radical fluidity of the text that is the teachers body requires us to avoid the illusion that we can freeze the meaning of a person that we are in relationship with. Accepting fluidity means not to attempt to freeze the possibilities of relationship, means not to attempt to freeze the possibilities of embodied subjects engaged in processes of relationally constructing selves, means not to avoid encountering and accepting difference and the possibility of change in others and in ourselves.

Accepting the fluidity, ambiguity and difference of the cultural texts that we are in relationship with means that we cannot fix ourselves in relation to them and that consequently we risk change. Accepting this fluidity and difference means that we risk becoming different ourselves as we struggle impossibly to embrace and recognize our own fluidity. Accepting the fluidity and difference of the texts that we are in relationship with also requires that we embrace and acknowledge tension and change and in the process that we encounter loss, and this is not an easy thing to do.

### Link to conclusion

The tension that circles gay and lesbian bodies is an example of the tension that circles ambiguity full stop. It is the tension of ambiguity that we need to think about, work through and embrace if we are to hope to construct classroom and school cultures that are of difference.

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### Ambiguity Conclusion - USE THIS ONE - WITH EDITS

The embrace of ambiguity, is the act of engaging in the refusal of the safety of closure, and is simultaneously about the ceding of a wish, the wish to control another. To accept the ambiguity or complexity of another is to accept the ambiguity or complexity of the self.

The acceptance of the ambiguity of the self is also the acceptance of the requirement to make choices and the consequences of the choices and the directions that one moves in. In moving away from the desire to fix the meaning of another, in moving away from the desire to frame another within some illusion of clarity, in moving away from this space there is the creation or colonisation of another. There is a movement into a space that accepts others in all of their complexity and that recognises that this acceptance requires the subject to make choices. Choices that are necessitated by the tension that ambiguity can provoke.

Choices that are predicated not on wanting another to become clear, not on wanting another to cease to be ambiguous or complex, but rather that are predicated on a desire to become clear about where the subject wants to be. These are choices that will involve the costs and loss of change but they also offer the possibilities and benefits of change. These are choices that involve the decision to move into new relational spaces rather than choices that seek to position the actors that are party to a relationship within some pre-existing frame, or series of understandings.

The encounter with undecideability, the encounter with ambiguity, the encounter with difference, can be the catalyst that demands that the tense subject do the work of trying to achieve something approaching clarity. The encounter with the ambiguity of another suggests that often the 'truth' of the subject is not to be found in the power relations and understandings that circle spaces that have already been encountered and colonised, in the spaces that are already inscribed and embedded in various centrisms, but rather that the

subjects 'truth' is to be found in new spaces. And these new spaces will be the responsibility of, and the result of, the choices that the subject has made and they will not be the result of an exercise of power that seeks to make another conform to what the tense subject might hope that he or she might be. These new spaces will not seek to erase the complexity, ambiguity, contradiction, or difference of another.

Often the solution to the problematic that is the subjects experience of a tension provoked by an encounter with the ambiguity of another does not rest with that other becoming clear, does not rest with that other becoming different, the solution rests with the subject becoming clear, with the subject choosing to become different. The encounter with the tension that ambiguity can provoke is also sometimes paradoxically the encounter that can facilitate the achievement of a provisional clarity, an encounter that echoes the paradox that it is only by embracing the tension of ignorance, that it is only in spaces that are tense, in spaces that are confusing, in spaces that are unknown that the desire to work towards the clarity of new albeit partial understandings can take place.

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Gerber's focus on the ambiguity of transexual bodies makes yet another connection, with Grosz and Endelman. She suggests that a tension flows where there is an inability on the part of the spectator to clearly decide on the meaning of a body. This tension is to do with not knowing the meaning of and the power relations that circle the relationship that one has with an undecideable body, and following Butler is also to do with the potential that the undecideable body has to render all bodies undecideable. The body that is read as undecideable provokes the realization that all bodies undecideable.

The spectre of the gay or lesbian body, the confirmation of the gay or lesbian body, puts the meaning of all bodies up for grabs, and creates a tension that seeks its dissipation via clearly label suspect bodies gay or lesbian. To mark out and map the terrain of the different so that it can be seen so that it can be known. To overlay the relations that exist between different bodies with labels that carry meanings that are in turn circled with understandings that seek to organize the dynamic that is the power that circles the realtionship. There is a tension that circles undecideable bodies within heterocentric cultures that seeks to render the meaning of those bodies known in order that they conform to an existing set of power relations.

Gay and lesbian bodies call into question the ability of any subject to knowingly read the body of another subject and hence they call into question the power relations that might circle subjects in relationship. I will try top ground these ideas by considering an example from an earlier project that I was involved in.

Jonathan is .....

There is a desire to put those excessive bodies under the spot light so that they are known so that they are intelligible. This desire functions in an effort ot cordon difference off and to enable heterocentrism to continue. It is at the point

and it ceases to be viewed as performative. The character ceases to be viewed as an impersonator and convincingly takes on via perfomance the gender of the opposite sex.

In the process the authenticity of the original that is being copied is called into question. If a man can imitate a woman so convincingly that a spectator fully aware of the performance ceases to

The experience of viewing the spectacle that is the drag performance is similar to the experience of watching a movie in the sense that there is the possibility while watching a movie that the subject through the process known as 'suspension of disbelief' gets lost or engages with the spectacle that is the movie to such a degree that it can provoke an emotional response. Horror movies make us jump, tragedies make us cry, but both of these genres make us forget where we are momentarily.

We become lost in the moment. We become lost in the moment where we

The experience of watching a drag performance is similar to

I would like to explain what I mean here by working through - Johnathan and Butler.....

Johnathan - undecideable body

Butler queer bodies render all queer

Don't run from tension - embrace it - Don't manage it by seeking to render another clear.....don't attempt to solve another's tension.....

bodies that one gets lost in

Aichorn -

What lies at the heart of the question are you gay/sir? and what can it offer strategies to - 1st part considered the tension that that q can provoke for teachers.....using tension as a guide and seeking to embrace tension the second part aims to provoke that question....aims to go to that place.....Why do young people ask that question?

why should you go there?

because decide

Expansion of difference

In another project I interviewed a young gay man who remembered  
Endelman considers such ideas.....

divides and categorizes desire along

Endelman and Bodies read as Queer

UP TO HERE.....NOV 17

extend his ideas re spectacle to bodies

bodies are read

through filters of gender and sexuality - heterocentrism

which assumes all bodies are heterosexual

this heterosexuality is read through gender

walks and talks.....

\*

Heterosexuality is constructed within a binary set of relationships

A binary that positions it as opposite to homosexuality

Homosexuality requires an economy of desire whereby same desires same

Heterosexuality needs to be able to recognize and in a sense to encourage same sexers to construct itself in opposition to that

but

Heterosexuality is also constructed in a manner that requires a clear distinction between the desires of men and women.

Heterosexuality is threatened when this dichotomy looks as if it might break down.

## How is heterosexuality threatened?????

It is threatened when the easy heterocentric assumptions that circle the meaning and possibilities of bodies is called into question by queer bodies.

**SO there is a desire to see and not to see queer bodies**

There is also a tension that circles queer bodies re the meaning of bodies ..... within hetism there is an unconscious positioning of bodies as straight.....this is taken for granted.....the cosy heterocentrism that assumes straightness is called into question by the sight of a body read as queer.....but there is a desire to clarify or recognize that body too.....there is a need to see it and not to see it.....

\*

NOTES FOR THIS PART - READ THIS SECTION BEFORE FINISHING THE SECTION ON  
THE LESSON PLAN

**Johnathan**

**- QUEER BODIES APART FROM CREATING A TENSION AS FAR AS THE NOTION OF  
THE TEACHER IS CONCERNED - PROVOKE TENSION FULL STOP - THIS TENSION  
HAS A LOT TO DO WITH VISION AND THE MEANING OF BODIES -**

**I WILL NOW TURN TO AN EXPLORATION OF WHAT I MEAN BY THIS.....VIA**

**JAY - OCULARCENTRISM - Maybe mention Disc and Punish in the footnotes  
here.....**

**EDELMAN - TENSION RE SIGHT - NEED TO SEE NEED TO DISCIPLINE**

**GROSZ - CENTRIC BODIES AND DISCRIMINATION**

**GARBER - UNDECIDEABILITY**

**'UNDECIDEABILITY'**

**THE ORDER OF THINGS - PREFACE**

**JOHNATHAN - KNITTING /FOOTBALL**

**BUTLER - QUEERING THE TEXT OF ALL BODIES**

Queer teachers also provoke tension for all of the reasons that queers provoke tension in the broader culture as well.....Endelman.....Johnathan and the football field.....

So where a person is read as gay or lesbian there is a need for confirmation of that identity. To bring unity to the dominant subject position that the person is enacting in the school (ie the subject position of the teacher) with the subtle assumption of straightness that circles that subject position. This unity is important as students are to be able to fix themselves in relation to the teacher.

QUEER BODIES ARE BODIES THAT OTHER BODIES GET LOST IN -BECAUSE THEY  
ARE UNDECIDEABLE.....BECAUSE THEY RENDER ALL BODIES  
UNDECIDEABLE.....BECAUSE THEY RUPTURE A COSY HETEROCENTRISM THAT  
ASSUMES A CLEAR DISTINCTION BETWEEN GENDERED BODIES.....AND THAT  
SIMULTANEOUSLY REQUIRES THE TRANSGRESSION OF THE CLEAR DISTINCTION

IN ORDER TO MAINTAIN A HETEROSEXUALITY OPPONENTIALLY CONSTRUCTED IN RELATIONSHIP WITH GAY AND LESBIAN QUEERNESS.....

QUEER BODIES ARE THE SAME BUT DIFFERENT THEY ARE AMBIGUOUS.....SOMETIMES THEY MOVE DIFFERENTLY THAT WE ARE CULTURALLY TOLD THAT AS GENDERED BODIES THEY SHOULD.....THEY HAVE CAMP VOICES AND LIMPP WRISTS IF THEY ARE MALE BODIES AND NARROW HIPS A SWAGGER AND SHORT HAIR IF THEY ARE FEMALE BODIES.....

QUEER BODIES RENDER ALL BODIES UNINTELLIGIBLE AND LESS CERTAIN.....QUEER BODIES QUEER THE PITCH OF ALL BODIES.....THE EXCESSIVENESS OF QUEER BODIES READ AS SUCH IS THE FRONTIER OR BOUNDARY AGAINST WHICH ALL OTHER BODIES ARE CONSTRUCTED.....IN SOEM SENSES IT IS NOT EXPANSIVELY CAMP OR BUTCH QUEER BODIES THAT ARE OPPRESSED BY HETEROCENTRISM IT IS THE STRAIGHT BODIES THAT HAVE BEEN BOUND AND DISCIPLINED AND MADE NARROW EVEN THOUGH THEY SEEM TO BE EVERYWHERE AND TAKE UP MOST OF THE SPAEC OFTEN THEY TAKE UP SPACE IN NARROW WAYS.....QUEER BODIES ARE EXCESSIVE.....AND STRAIGHT BODIES ADN THE OWNERS OF WUEER BODIES SOMETIMES TRY TO DISCIPLINE THEM BECAUSE OF THIS.....

QUEER BODIES ARE AMBIGUOUS.....THEY ARE UNDECIDEABLE.....THE ARE BODIES THAT 'OTHERS' GET LOST IN.....IT IS UP TO THOSE OTHERS TO FIND THEIR WAY.....IT IS NOT UP TO QUEERS TO DO THE WORK FOR THEM.....

#### **THESIS ENDING TO SECTION -**

#### **LEAVE - FOR THESIS AS A WHOLE RATHER THAN THIS AS A SEPARATE PIECE OF WRITING**

THERE IS A NEED FOR TEACHERS TO DO THE WORK THAT ELIZABETH GROEZ'S FRAMEWORK SUGGESTS THAT IS REFERRD TO IN SECTION 1 OF THE THESIS.....

IF AS GROSZ SUGGESTS DISCRIMINATION AGAINST QUEER BODIES KICKS IN NOT AT THE LEVEL OF THE IDEA OF THE QUEER BODY BUT RATHER AT THE POINT WHERE QUEER BODIES DO THINGS DIFFERENTLY, AT THE POINT WHERE QUEER BODIES MOVE THROUGH THE WORLD DIFFERENTLY THEN THERE IS A NECESSITY IN THE INTERESTS OF IMPROVING SCHOOL SETTINSG FOR GLBT YOUNG PEOPLE FOR TEACHERS TO MODEL DIFFERENT WAYS OF MOVING THROUGH THE WORLD AS AN EMBODIED SUBJECT. THIS IS VERY DIFFERNT FROM THE MODELING OF A PARTICULAR IDEA OF A PARTICULAR IDENTITY TEACHERS MUST BECOME MODELS OF AN EMBODIED SOMETIMES AMBIGUOUS DIFFERENCE THAT PROVOKES ENOUGH TENSION IN STUDENTS THAT THEY CAN RECOGNIZE THIS TENSION AND THAT PROVOKES ENOUGH TENSION IN STUDENTS THAT THEY DO THE WORK OF ARRIVING AT THEIR OWN PROVISIONAL CLARITIES.

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