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Queer Genders: Problematising Gender through Contemporary Photography

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Abstract

This thesis explores ways in which non-normative representations of gender in contemporary photography (with a focus on amateur work displayed on the photo-sharing website Flickr) raise the issue of what gender is and whether an original exists. Using Judith Butler's seminal ideas in *Gender Trouble* of gender as performatively constituted as a theoretical background, each chapter goes on to deal with a particular strategy and style of image that work towards subverting binary gender norms.

I begin with a discussion of new media technologies, in particular photo-sharing websites. I apply Donna Haraway's cyborg metaphor to the interlinked nature of humans and these technologies with regards to their possible impact on the dissemination of images and thus on binary gender norms. Chapters two-five begin with providing an extended theoretical basis for understanding the images that are analysed in that chapter. The focus of chapter two is the gender attribution process, the 'sex signs' and aspects of gender roles that are involved and how their visual manipulation can challenge gender norms. Chapter three introduces Genderqueer as a concept of non-binary gender and looks at the portrayal of ambiguous gender in the images analysed, while chapter five uses discussions of 'other spaces' to conceptualise a queer time and space. Chapters two, three and five look at amateur photographic images that are displayed on the photo-sharing website Flickr. Chapter four, however, uses gender variant visual artist Del LaGrace Volcano's images in the photo-book *Femmes of Power* to conceptualise femme as a subversive parody that queers and denaturalises femininity as essential to femaleness.

Its focus on amateur photography that is displayed on Flickr, the discussion of the potential of these new media technologies and the variety of theoretical strategies and image styles that are addressed give my thesis a unique approach to the visual portrayal of queer genders.

Queer Genders: Problematising Gender through Contemporary Photography

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Degree of Master of Arts by Research

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Introduction

In what ways can contemporary photography work towards subverting binary gender norms? This is the central question that I consider throughout this work as I look at how non-normative representations of gender in contemporary photography (with a focus on amateur work displayed on the photo-sharing website Flickr) raise the issue of what gender is and whether an original exists.

Butler's *Gender Trouble*

One of my key theoretical standpoints, that creates a basis of understanding for this work, is that of Judith Butler, particularly what is often considered to be one of the founding works of queer theory *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of identity.* Fundamental to Butler's argumentation is to query the seemingly natural state of the categories of identity such as sex, gender and sexuality by demonstrating how they have been culturally constructed to the point of being able to present themselves as real, natural and universal. She does this by attacking central aspects of the forms of feminism that suppose that 'woman' is an identity and a subject which should be represented in society. For Butler the category of woman is too problematic as it hides considerable racial, economic, gender and cultural differences within it and one is also assuming a commonality of identity which cannot truly exist. She also criticises feminism for basing itself on binary 'sexual difference' between men and women and thereby perpetuating the myth of binary sex as natural and pre-discursive. Not only does it maintain the binary structures of man/ woman, male/female etc. but also in taking an essentialist approach to the definition of 'woman' it removes the possibility for gender variation and reinforces the narrow binary gender roles and stereotypes that are so commonly visible in today's society.

Also crucial to her attack on these forms of categorisation is her deconstruction of what has come to be seen as a traditional distinction between sex and gender both in feminism and some other areas of academia. This distinction has been drawn in the form of defining sex as natural, innate, not subject to cultural influence and thus unavoidable, whereas gender is seen as culturally constructed onto sex and therefore mutable. Butler deconstructs this stance on the relationship between

sex and gender via more than one route. In doing so she not only undermines this sex/gender distinction and thus the natural appearance of sex but also calls into question the logic of binary gender. Firstly she asks, why, even if one considers sex to be natural and stable, if gender is just the meanings that culture puts onto the sexed body, can't the possibilities of gender not fluid and multiple? If gender is constructed onto sex, theoretically, it need not necessarily be constructed as binary; a female body need not become woman and a male body need not become man. Surely the possibilities of construction could be endless. If, however the construction of gender is seen as completely separate from sex, gender consequentially becomes a 'free-floating artifice' (Butler 2006: 10) whose conformity to binary sex would not be expected or perhaps even possible. In reality, neither scenario becomes reality. We have a binary gender system where gender appears to result from and be continuous with binary sex. However, sexed bodies cannot signify without gender, and the apparent pre-discursive nature and immunity to cultural imposition of sex is merely an effect of the functioning of gender. Sex is produced by gender therefore sex is a gendered category. 'If the immutable character of sex is contested perhaps this construct called 'sex' is as culturally constructed as gender; indeed, perhaps it was always already gender, with the consequence that the distinction between sex and gender turns out to be no distinction at all' (Butler 2006: 10-11).

She creates the notion of gender performativity in which gender is performatively produced. 'There is no gender identity behind the expressions of gender, gender is performatively produced by the very effects that are said to be its results' (Butler 2006: p33). When Judith Butler describes gender as performative, this should not be confused with saying gender is just a performance in the traditional sense, it is not about choice! It is not about choosing to put on a gender as if it were a performance in the obvious way. What is meant by the performativity of gender is that gender is constituted by performative acts which, because they are constantly repeated, come to form a 'coherent' gender identity. These performative acts refer not to a 'performance' but to 'official' social acts which are actually seen to constitute a gender not merely reference a gender. For example, putting on a police uniform does not make one a police person, one is merely referencing the attire associated with being a police person, however when one acts in a certain gendered way, specifically

in line with the gender norms one not only references a gender role one appears to become that gender.

Butler uses the performative to suggest that this coherency is false and that because of acts that disrupt the strict reads of gender, acts that occur subconsciously and unacknowledged, gender comes to be seen/viewed as that which is only as stable as this performative function. That is, gender as 'stable' is undermined by Butler by reading it through the performative because it can never be "performed" in exactly the same way. Therefore, it is not that people can choose to perform a certain enumeration of gender, rather it is that no-one actually precisely fulfils these gender identities that we have.

She also argues that by looking at gender as constituted by these performative acts it becomes evident, that 'real', 'original' genders don't exist rather binary genders of man and woman, which have come to appear as natural are no more real than the example she gives of *drag*. *Drag* is not a parodic copy of an original rather a copy of a copy because no original exists.

Furthermore, if the appearance of 'being' a gender is thus an effect of culturally influenced acts, then there exists no solid, universal gender: constituted through the practice of performative acts, the gender 'woman' (like the gender 'man') remains contingent and open to interpretation and 'resignification'. Butler suggests that certain cultural configurations of gender have seized a hegemonic hold, but, she suggests, it does not have to be that way. Rather than proposing some utopian vision, with no idea of how we might get to such a state, Butler calls for subversive action in the present: 'gender trouble' the mobilisation, subversive confusion, and proliferation of genders and therefore identity. My use and understanding of the concept queer builds upon David Halperin's explanation of the term as anything that is 'positionality' rather than a 'positivity' that is 'at odds with the normal' (Halperin 1995: 62) and Nikki Sullivan's assertion that queer can be seen as a set of 'practices and (political) strategies and positions that has the potential to challenge normative knowledges and identities' (Sullivan 2003: 43-44). I discuss the various possible meanings of queer in significantly further depth in chapter four where it becomes necessary to explicate the concept in more detail in order to further the understanding of femme as queer femininity in that chapter.

Why photography?

While photography has traditionally been viewed as a medium that merely reflects the real, recent work has stressed the medium's performative dimensions (see Antke Engel's 2009 article entitled *How to Queer Things with Images: On the Lack of Fantasy in Performativity and the Imaginativeness of Desire)*. Furthermore, photography can be seen not only to represent reality but to mediate and shape the ways in which that reality is perceived. In *On Photography* (1977), Susan Sontag noted that the omnipresence of images, in particular photographic images, affects how we view the world, and that we have come to rely on images to provide us with a sense of reality. In the introduction to their 2009 bilingual German and English edited volume with the English title *Queer Added (Value): Visual Culture, Art, and Gender Politics* Barbara Paul and Johanna Schaffer state that art and visual culture can be seen as potential 'forms of knowledge production and communication' that can be 'gender critical' (Paul, Schaffer 2009: 20-21). These aesthetic practices can also be political practices that can 'work to dismantle normalising regimes and hierarchialising effects'. In the above mentioned article in the same volume, German visual culture and queer theorist Antke Engel also talks about the 'power of images' which she views as an overused phrase that she re-terms the 'social productivity of images' which refers to 'their power as productive, creative power' that 'unfolds' in the 'social sphere' (Engel 2009: 119). She goes on to explain that 'representation does not depict it constructs meanings and reality' (Engel 2009: 120). With this in mind, these photographs could therefore also be seen to have the potential to open the way for a wider variety of possibilities for the performance and perception of gender through such representations.

Methodology

Methodologically, I use what has been conceived by Halberstam as a 'queer methodology'; that which 'remains supple enough to take into account the variety of locations of information' (Halberstam 1998: 10). A queer methodology is 'a scavenger methodology' (Halberstam 1998: 10) which allows for an interdisciplinary application of a combination of methodologies and standpoints from a variety of

relevant schools of thought. My work is situated not only within and beyond feminist and queer theories and current radical gender studies, which propose the deconstruction of the dominant gender binary system, but it is also influenced in the final chapter by what has recently been termed 'postmodern geography'. André Jansson's and Amanda Lagerkvist's 2009 edited volume *Strange Spaces* and Edward Soja's 1996 monograph *Thirdspace* are explorations into 'other' temporality and spatiality, which deal with real spaces in which discrepancies of space and time converge in reference to Foucault's article on 'heterotopias' (1967) as well as ideas of imagined 'utopia'. Foucault's lecture notes *Of Other Spaces*, that were written back in 1967 and published in the year of his death in 1984 in the original French, followed by the English in 1986, already started to theorise aspects of time and space as strange and disruptive, upon which the current debates within postmodern geography have developed. Despite the recency and thus the rarity of material on the topic, my work is also influenced by recent material on new media technologies, in particular the photo-sharing website Flickr and the social networking website Facebook. Additionally, with reference to Donna Haraway's cyborg theory I reflect on these new media technologies with regards to their possible impact on the dissemination of the types of images that I consider throughout the course of this work. Staying in the spirit of a 'queer methodology' which is clear from the theoretical base that influences my work, though image analysis remains in the forefront, I also deviate slightly from this in chapter four where it is necessary to discuss the texts that accompany the photographs that are being analysed in order to fully comprehend their contextual significance. The images that are analysed through the course of this work are, with regards to my thoughts of new technologies of dissemination, primarily photographs taken by amateur photographers who display their work on the photo-sharing website Flickr. The exception to this tendency remains in the discussion of queer femininity (femme) in chapter four, where I felt that the significance of gender variant artist Del La Grace Volcano's images of *Femmes of Power* and the accompanying text by femme theorist Ulrika Dahl could not be overlooked.

Related works

Regarding other works that look into non-normative representations of gender in photography, Del La Grace Volcano and Ulrika Dahl's book *Femmes of Power: Exploding Queer Femininities,* as mentioned above is an important contribution. It aims to visually queer femininity by detaching femininity from heterosexuality and normativity and combats the over-valorisation of all forms of masculinity in LGBTQ and even feminist circles by focussing on the frequently ignored topic of queer femininity (Dahl, Volcano 2008: 11). It consists of an extensive collection of photographs of variety of femme people, taken by Volcano and accompanied by texts written by Dahl. The majority of texts, including the introduction are written in the form of letters to the people in the photograph that it's referring to; some are written from their point of view and others are left in question and answer interview form. The texts in this book are crucial for Volcano and Dahl, as they play an important role in bringing about Volcano's aim to allow the people in the photographs to 'feel empowered by both the process and the final product' (Dahl, Volcano 2008: 14). They introduce the people as individuals with life stories and histories. As a result, the reader/viewer gets an insight into how they got to this point in life, what femme means for them and how they live as femme which provides an important context in the contemplation of the images. Despite the importance and uniqueness of these images, which led me to include some in my work, the book lacks any form of image analysis and theoretical background and context which would lend weight to the potential impact of the images. Even in Dahl's introduction, where she does briefly mention a few academic works on femme, there is a notable lack of any form of referencing and the tone of this piece, which is also formulated as a letter to the femmes who were photographed, remains popular, informal and personal. One could argue that this allows for a wider accessibility of the work and therefore increased impact, however despite the potential impact of the images, the lack of any form of interpretation or theoretical basis means it unfortunately can not really be considered as a contribution to academic discourse on gender and contemporary photography.

Another collaboration of Del La Grace Volcano with an academic is the *The Drag King Book,* which was published in 1999. Judith Halberstam, for whom a drag king is 'a performer who makes masculinity into his or her act' (Halberstam, Volcano 1999: 36), provides the text for this publication. Despite a similar lack of referencing

of other sources this book includes a significant amount of in-depth analysis of some of the images and a lengthy discussion of drag kings and their history, significance in relation to discourses on gender and its relationship to these images. Halberstam also utilises the many interviews with the drag kings and usefully discusses and analyses their viewpoints and experiences. In this case masculinity is detached from men and as Halberstam states in her last sentence, 'with the arrival of the Drag King, the normal will never again be the same' (Halberstam, Volcano 1999: 152).

Another photographic book that deals with non-normative images of gender is that of the female to male transsexual (FTM) author and photographer Dean Kotula entitled *The Phallus Palace* and published in 2002. In contrast to Volcano's collaborative work with Dahl and Halberstam that looks to challenge heteronormative binary ideas of gender Kotula clearly expresses a very essentialist and biological view of binary gender. In his introduction to the book he states that there is a biological cause for transsexuality (Kotula 2002: XVII) and recounts his own experience of gender and body dysphoria as *the* standard experience for female to male transsexuals (Kotula 2002: XVIII-XIX). The book also includes contributions from sexologists and therapists who deal with the 'diagnosis' of transsexuality as a mental illness which is treated with sex reassignment. These contributions also explicitly perpetuate stereotypes of FTMs as men in women's bodies and make various claims as to the biological and essential gender of FTMs. Kotula also claims to speak for 'the vast majority of transsexuals' who he believes all reject the term transgendered as FTMs were always men and are simply aligning their sex with the inner core and innate gender identity. He also feels that the term devalues a FTM's commitment to hormones and surgery. According to Kotula they also all have 'an aversion toward or awkwardness with one's genitals' (Kotula 2002: XX). The photographs of the FTMs that Kotula documents are also accompanied by brief life stories of these people, which all conform to the typical transsexual narrative of a dysphoric and miserable teenagehood that went away with surgery and the effects of hormones. The photographs are also taken of the subjects in typically masculine positions and/or engaging in traditionally masculine activities. Also included for each person is the 'before' picture in order to emphasise the new and 'true' masculinity of the more recent photograph. A whole section of the book is also dedicated to photographically documenting, in finest detail, the various stages of the main possible surgery types

that are available for FTMs in most cases with a glorifying 'end result' photograph with a caption of how well functioning and/or aesthetically pleasing the new or reconstructed body part is. The caption that accompanies the 'end result' photographs of a phalloplasty operation (to construct a penis) is a particularly demonstrative example.

> Radial forearm phalloplasty results after healing: photographs demonstrate patient's ability to receive an erection with the aid of an implanted pump and the ability to urinate through his penis (Kotula 2002: 200).

Not only does this caption seek to emphasise the success of this surgery which Kotula himself admits currently entails many risks and flaws (Kotula 2002:176), it also reinforces functions of the penis that are closely associated with masculinity i.e. being able to have an erection with the implied aim of being able to perform penetrative heterosexual intercourse and urinating through the penis while standing up. Kotula does not include analyses of the images themselves but does include a theoretical background upon which to base an understanding of the images. In stark contrast to the queer potential of Volcano's work however, this theoretical basis along with the life stories of the FTM individuals, ends up serving to maintain rather than challenge normative ideas of biologically determined binary gender.

The final publication that I want to mention that concentrates on non-normative gender in photography is a 1997 book publication of the catalogue of a Guggenheim Museum exhibition, which was organised and curated by Jennifer Bless. Entitled *Rrose is a Rrose is a Rrose: Gender Performance in Photography,* this publication includes essays by Judith Halberstam, Nancy Spector, Carole-Ann Tyler and Sarah Wilson. Among the many photographers represented are mainly famous names such as Claude Cahun, Hannah Höch, Man Ray, Nan Goldin, Robert Mapplethorpe, Cindy Sherman and Andy Warhol. The theoretical thoroughness of this work and the in-depth image analysis make it a fine contribution to discourse on non-normative gender and photography. However, its broad range of artists from as far back as the 1920s means one could not really consider it to be a book that deals primarily with the potential of contemporary photographic work.

Other contributions to this area that combine a theoretical background with photographic practice and analysis include Sara Davidmann's 2003 publication *Crossing the Line* which documents and examines male to female transgender and

cross-dressing practices and Jay Prosser's *Second Skins: The Body Narratives of Transsexuality* (1998) that also looks at transsexual narratives and portrays them through the visual.

There are also works that take a primarily theoretical approach to image analysis. Chapter five of Judith Halberstam's *In a Queer Time and Place* looks at representations of the transgender body in art as opposed to just photography. The above mentioned bilingual German-English 2009 edited volume with the English title *Queer Added (Value): Visual Culture, Art, and Gender Politics* examines the critical potential of queer art (photography, drawings, paintings and cartoon posters), while Doris Leibetseder also includes image analysis of CD covers in her search for queer subversive strategies in Rock and Pop Music (*Queere Tracks: Subversive Strategien in der Rock- und Popmusik* 2010).

A look forward at this work

Although Leibetseder considers some forms of new technologies such as cyborg, transsexuality and the dildo as subversive strategies in themselves, none of these works really looks at the potential of new media technologies as modes of dissemination. My first chapter, therefore, takes on the form of a discussion of these new media technologies using Donna Haraway's cyborg metaphor and applying it as a metaphor for the interlinked nature between humans and these technologies of dissemination. The other chapters (two-five) all begin with providing an extended theoretical basis for understanding the images that are analysed in that particular chapter. Chapter two looks at the gender attribution process and the cues or signs that are involved; chapter three introduces Genderqueer as a concept of non-binary gender while chapter four looks at femme as a form of queer femininity. The final chapter uses discussions of 'other spaces' in postmodern geography and Judith Halberstam's *In a Queer Time and Place* to conceptualise a queer time and space. In each chapter, the theoretical basis is then demonstrated visually through in depth image analysis.

My thesis brings several new aspects to the discussions of photography and non-normative gender that are not covered by the previously mentioned works in this area. While several of these books focus on one specific form of non-normative gender such as femme, drag kings or FTM transsexuals, my work looks at a variety of different representations of non-normative gender in photography. It also includes a

detailed theoretical background to the images that are analysed in depth, aspects of which the majority of the mentioned photo-books are missing at least one. Furthermore, an approach that is unique to my work is the analysis of amateur photography as opposed to the work of more well known profession names. This is an important approach as the artists whose work that I consider make use of new media technologies to disseminate their work which creates a completely different (and higher) level of accessibility and target audience which has implications for their potential impact. These considerations are also discussed in my opening chapter. As well as building upon the ideas of Kate Bornstein and Judith Halberstam, amongst others, regarding the gender attribution process and the use of postmodern geography in conceptualising queer time and space, my thesis also provides a new insight by theoretically conceptualising Genderqueer, which up until now has been primarily in use as a term for self-identification of non binary gender within queer communities, and looking at its visual representation. My work therefore provides a unique perspective on aspects of queer genders, their visual portrayal in amateur photography that is displayed via new media technologies and their potential impact on the heteronormative binary gender system.

Chapter one: Cyborgian photo-sharing

Before dealing with any of the visual representations of queer genders in further chapters, this chapter looks at the new media technologies of dissemination, which constitute the source of most of the photographs that form the corpus of visual work to be analysed in this thesis. The effect that these new technologies have on the dissemination and subsequent impact of these photographs is of central importance to this study.

Haraway's Cyborg

In the seminal work *A Cyborg Manifesto: Science, Technology, and Socialist Feminism in the Late Twentieth Century* Donna Haraway deals with the potential of new technologies to break down existing dichotomies. That she continually makes use of the concept of cyborg as a representation of the connection between humans and technology serves to further her many ideas and lines of argumentation, several of which are relevant to my consideration of the impact of new media technologies in the dissemination of images of queer gender.

Haraway's definition and explanation of the concept of cyborg that she is deploying are important to apply to my line of thought on this matter. She says, crucially 'A cyborg is a cybernetic organism, a hybrid of machine and organism, a creature of social reality as well as a creature of fiction.' (Haraway 1991: 149) This statement needs to be taken apart if we are to fully understand it. As a field of study, Cybernetics looks at control and communication (Wiener 1948), consequently a cybernetic organism is one which operates as, or as part of, a communication and control network. Here, Haraway could be seen to be relating her cyborg metaphor more distinctly to new technologies in general. Although written in the context of the 1980s and early 1990s, it remains relevant in the context of today and is particularly relevant to the internet and the new media technologies which have evolved from it, as communication is central to their function and in many cases they form a communication network. The cyborg for Haraway is both a metaphor for a lived reality of new technology and also the postmodernist and political play of identity. It is important to understand the importance of Haraway's definitions, not as separate entities but rather as co-determinate. Haraway makes clear that the boundary between

the two is not unambiguous because one is constantly in the process of being redefined by the other, 'Social Reality is lived social relations, our most important political construction, a world-changing fiction' (Haraway 1991: 149). The cyborg is also a mixture of the organic and technological, both in a real and a figurative sense. This is probably the most significant aspect to the cyborg metaphor as it stands, not only for the literal combination of humans and machines, which she mentions are already very much present in modern medicine, but it also evokes the impact that civilisation and with it technology has on humans. She goes so far as to say that, 'we are all chimeras, theorized and fabricated hybrids of machine and organism; in short, we are cyborgs,' (Haraway 1991: 150) that is, we are so affected by and dependant on technology that we are fused with it.

The metaphor of cyborg is employed to facilitate a critique of essentialism in second wave feminism, particularly radical feminism which had become a theoretical element of second wave feminism, and the concentration on essentialist notions of gender and identity. Her postmodern approach to feminism leads her to use the metaphor of cyborg to argue against this essentialism and the naturalist ideas of 'female' or 'woman' as an incontrovertible category 'there is nothing about being female that naturally binds women together into a unified category. There is not even such a state as 'being' female, itself a highly complex category constructed in contested sexual scientific discourses and other social practices' (Haraway 1991:155).

The hybridity of the cyborg, which by definition blurs the boundary between the organic and inorganic, challenges the nature – culture binary which has been so ingrained in society. Essentialist feminism has made use of this duality to hold onto an idea of and 'organic' self as a basis for affinity and identity. It created the concept of 'a women's experience,' used as a category to enable exclusion of those that did not fit the narrow criteria of 'woman' as so controlled and defined. Haraway argues that the cyborg 'changes what counts as women's experience,' (Haraway 1991: 149) which, she adds is a 'fiction and fact of the most crucial, political kind.' As previously mentioned the blurred boundaries of the cyborg demonstrate that these two seemingly opposite categories are by no means discrete. Feminism needs to face the possibility that it cannot cling to such categories because there isn't such a thing as a 'natural' self.

Breakdown of Boundaries

Haraway considers there to be three boundary breakdowns, in particular, brought about by the concept of cyborg. She sees the crossing of the borders between humans and animals, humans and machines and between the physical and non-physical (or 'virtual' as we now would refer to it) as rendering the essentialist feminist call for 'natural' categories impossible. The first, brought about by the production of transgenic organisms, calls into question the concept of a unique being and unwavering categories of identity. In her discussion of the second she argues that machines make 'ambiguous the difference between the natural and artificial,' (Haraway 1991: 153) that is, between ourselves and the machines. Without stating as much, she alludes to the power of technologies saying, 'our machines are disturbingly lively, and we ourselves are frighteningly inert' (Haraway 1991: 153) which one can interpret as a comment on the increasing role of technology in our daily lives and subsequent dependence on it. The third is also relevant here and connected to the second in so much as it looks again at the border between technology and the virtual. She refers here more specifically to computer technology, illustrating the omnipresence of 'microelectronic devices,' (Haraway 1991: 153) noting that 'they are everywhere and they are invisible'. Ironically, in her statement on the 'ubiquity and invisibility' (Haraway 1991: 153) of computer technology, Haraway would not have been aware of what has recently been termed 'ubiqitous computing', explained as the 'third wave in computing' by Mark Weiser (1996), in which information processing has been so thoroughly combined with ordinary objects and activities that it 'recedes into the background of our lives' (Weiser: 1996). In making use of these everyday devices and performing these activities, someone 'using' 'ubiquitous computing' engages with many computational instruments and systems simultaneously but it is very possible that they may not be aware of the system in which they are operating. It points towards the truth in Haraway's argument for the blurring of the boundary between the 'physical and the non-physical' (Haraway 1991: 153) due to the increased reliance on but also increased imperceptibility of computer technology in everyday life.

Haraway states the 'cyborg myth is about transgressed boundaries, potent fusions' (Haraway 1991: 154). In demonstrating the constructed nature of the category of 'woman' it also makes apparent the constructed nature of categories of

gender as a whole, that is, particularly the rigid binary gender system, where 'male' and 'female' or 'man' and 'woman' are the only possible options. She argues for 'pleasure in the confusion of boundaries and for responsibility in their construction' (Haraway 1991: 150) and writes of a 'utopian […] world without gender' which are all possible through the concept of cyborg; that is through our relationship with new technologies. 'The cyborg is a creature in a post-gender world; it has no truck with bisexuality' (Haraway 1991: 150). For Haraway the cyborg is outside gender as it doesn't look towards a heterosexual mate and could be seen as a medium for subverting societal heteronormativity which focuses on the nuclear family as it 'does not dream of community on the model of the organic family' (Haraway 1991: 151) nor does it follow normative 'organic' life patterns of birth and death 'it is not made of mud and cannot dream of returning to dust'. As such, the concept of cyborg, this cybernetic mixture of the organic and technological, a myth and yet a reality, not only serves to blur boundaries in a more general sense, it can also serve to blur the boundaries of gender and begin to deconstruct mainstream society's rigid binary gender system and challenge normative social and gender roles. Haraway also suggests that whilst the 'cyborg myth is about transgressed boundaries, potent fusions' (Haraway 1991: 154) it is also about 'dangerous possibilities which progressive people might explore as one part of needed political work' (Haraway 1991: 154). That is to say, she feels that new technologies also have the potential to be used as a medium for radical political action.

So, how does this all relate to representations of queer genders in contemporary amateur photography which are displayed on photo – sharing sites such as Flickr and social networking sites such as Facebook?

New Technologies

Haraway argues that new technologies can be a powerful means of breaking down dichotomies, and blurring boundaries of categorisation. She also argues more generally that they can and already do have a powerful influence on us as individuals and on our society as a whole 'Communications technologies […] are the crucial tools recrafting our bodies' (Haraway 1991: 164). Also in her statement that 'we are cyborgs' (Haraway 1991: 150) she is inferring that we are already extremely well integrated with and reliant on technology.

In view of Haraway's assertions on the crucial nature of new technologies in society and Haraway's assertion of their power to blur boundaries I wish to consider the new media technology photo-sharing websites, taking Flickr as my example, with regards to the possibility of their playing a role in altering perceptions of gender and working towards the deconstruction the rigid boundaries of the gender binary. I will also briefly consider the potential of social network sites which have the function to create photo albums, using Facebook as my example. One major factor in their possible capacity for evoking a change in perceptions and/ or opinions and ideas on gender is their role in the dissemination of these non-normative representations of gender to a considerably larger audience, than more traditional modes of circulation of images would allow. On first glance this may appear to be a shift in the grounds of debate from the cyborgian merging of technology with humans to questions of dissemination and accessibility; however one can also argue that they are also highly interlinked. The merging of human and technology both in terms of the creation of an online self in the form of a profile and through the user-technology relationship formed in the simple accessing and viewing of the images available online can be viewed as a cyborgian. Thus this cyborgian user-technology merging process becomes synonymous with the increased dissemination and accessibility. The layout and structure of Flickr, the wide variety of activities that Flickr supports in addition to the simple uploading of photographs is one of the reasons Flickr has become so popular in a relatively short space of time. According to the article entitled *Flickr of idea on a gaming project led to photo website*, published in the *USA Today* newspaper in February 2006 and taking its statistics from the internet measurement firm Nielsen/NetRatings, 'in the nearly 12 months after Yahoo purchased it in March 2005, the site went from 250,000 registered users to more than 2 million' (Haralson, Darryl and Lewis, Adrienne 2006: 1). As of October 2009, it hosts more than four billion images according to the accompanying Flickr blog. 'Flickr allows owners to title, tag, and describe images, and organize them into sets' (Van House 2007: 2719). Users can also add contacts and 'friends', be members of common interest groups, contact each other via the private messaging function, comment on photos, tag photos and create a selection of their favourite photos'.

Undoubtedly, the simple fact that Flickr, being an online resource as opposed to the previous methods of archiving, such as the pre-digital physical photo albums

followed by the storage of digital images on computer hard disks, compact discs and memory sticks, and exhibiting or sharing photographs, such as the sharing of print images in person or by post and of digital images by email, and gallery exhibitions, makes it accessible to a much larger number of people than would have previously seen photographs. Furthermore, in contrast to some other online photo-sharing and archiving facilities, though one can alter the privacy settings for photographs, the default setting and the most commonly used one is 'public' so the photograph is searchable and available for general viewing and open to comments.

However, a primary tool which makes Flickr, in particular, so valuable in the wider dissemination of such queer images of gender is the 'tagging system'. The tagging system allows users to associate key words with their photos which describe content, the event, location, subjects or to relate concepts and ideas, allowing them to be more easily searched online. These key words or 'tags' are not limited to a controlled vocabulary so are freely applied by the owner of the photograph (or their network of contacts) so can vary widely for the same photograph. Tags form a 'core element to the sharing, retrieval, navigation, and discovery of […] images. […] Tags are an important part of this environment, where tags act as a primary navigational tool for finding similar resources' (Boyd, Danah, Davis, Marc, Marlow, Cameron, Naaman Mor 2006: 36). The authors of this article, during the course of their research, identified several reasons which motivated users to tag their photographs. These included some social reasons; 'contribution and sharing,' to 'attract attention', 'self presentation,' and 'opinion expression' (Boyd, Danah, Davis, Marc, Marlow, Cameron, Naaman Mor 2006: 36). Despite being in some ways distinct from each other, the common aim appears to be the reaching of a wider audience. These photographers therefore tend to use many varying tags to describe the content, concepts and ideas surrounding their work. This is at the crux of my argument. Photographers displaying images representing non-normative genders will often add a variety of tags to these photographs both relating to and not relating to gender. Both artists creating images to deliberately express an opinion or spread a message as widely as possible about queer gender and those who display it in their work by taking simple portraits or self portraits will also tag other aspects of their photographs such as lighting, location or other features. For example, a photograph of a person representing gender in a non-normative way that is taken in an outdoor environment

might or might not be tagged for the concepts of non-normative gender related to it such as 'genderqueer' or 'transgender' and may also be tagged 'tree,' 'park,' or 'river'. Those not aware of queer gender issues may quite easily come across these images of queer gender and thus be exposed to the related commentary by the artist on gender and subsequent discussions. The structure then makes it likely that other photographs by the same artist will be made visible, or those of that artist's contacts. Photographs with the same or related tags such as those that deal with aspects of gender may also be made available and person involved would subsequently be further exposed to new concepts and possibilities for gender and its expression. Photographs displayed on Flickr can also be assigned to groups and may belong to multiple groups, again increasing the potential for images of queer gender to be viewed by people who did not originally search for related concepts but may have been simply browsing photos assigned to an unrelated group.

Social network sites which allow users to upload photos, such as Facebook, could also be said to increase the potential amount of viewers that are exposed to images of queer gender. Social network sites can be defined as
 'web – based services that allow individuals to (1) construct a public or semi – public profile within a bounded system, (2) articulate a list of other users with whom they share a connection, and (3) view and traverse their list of connections and those made by others within the system' (Boyd, Danah, & Ellison, Nicole 2007: 1). Facebook is the most popular social network site, having overtaken its main rival Myspace in April 2008. In common with other such websites users create a profile with information about themselves and create their contact networks by 'adding friends'. Unlike some other sites, it allows users to upload an unlimited amount of photos, whilst Flickr actually limits users' uploading capacity. It is, however, far from being a dedicated photo-sharing site like Flickr, with the emphasis remaining maintaining social contacts (Boyd, Danah, & Ellison, Nicole 2007: 10). There is a form of tagging system, although not to the extent that Flickr has. Facebook permits users to tag their 'friends' in their photos who will then receive a notification that they have been tagged so they can then view the relevant photo. Other people and objects can be tagged but do no create any form of searchable link. As Facebook users are often 'friends' on the site with people they only have the slightest offline link to (Boyd, Danah, & Ellison, Nicole 2007: 10), many have several hundred or even a thousand

contacts in their 'friends list' who will have access to the specific user's photos. Some users also allow their photos to be viewed by 'friends of friends' or even by any registered user. My point therefore, with regards to increased exposure to images of queer gender, is that users browsing the photos of an acquaintance with whom they are 'friends' on Facebook may come across such images unexpectedly. This may be amongst their acquaintance's photos or even the photos of a friend of that acquaintance. The potential impact of Facebook in this respect is certainly less than on Flickr due to Flickr's extensive tagging system and the fact it is used primarily as a photo-sharing site although it does have social network functions. Flickr is also used by amateur photographers who use photography to send out a social and political message about non-normative gender to as many people as possible and who make use of the tagging system for this purpose whereas the Facebook photo-storage facility tends to be used by people to store and share their personal photos with existing contacts.

To return to Haraway's cyborg metaphor, a fusion of human and machine that is already occurring in everyday life, has a considerable impact on society and holds the power to break down dichotomies. One can certainly look at the close relationship between cybernetic technology, the human user and the representation of the human body in the images as cyborgian. Though their efficacy varies due to the difference in the intended function of these sites, the intentions of the users and the facilities available to users such as the extensive tagging system, it is pertinent to apply this metaphor to such new media technologies and their relationship with the users/viewers, as portrayed in the demonstration of the ways in which Flickr and Facebook do increase dissemination of images of non-normative gender and thus raising the level of exposure to non-normative concepts of gender.

Chapter two: Attributing Gender

Increasingly, queerly gendered people from all walks of life are attempting to challenge the rigid notions of binary gender that are still pervasive in contemporary western society through the medium of visual culture. As discussed in my first chapter, new media technologies such as photo-sharing sites, for example Flickr, and social-networking sites with a photo-sharing facility, such as Facebook, are enabling these amateur artists to disseminate their work and thereby their messages[1] on queer genders to a much wider audience than traditional methods of sharing physical photographs or even sharing digital photographs by email ever allowed.

During the course of my research, whilst looking for photographs to form the corpus of images that I will subsequently be analysing as part of this work, particularly the research centred around the example of the photo-sharing site Flickr which I discussed in my first chapter, I discovered two main ways in which such artists use visual representation to deconstruct traditional notions of gender.

Some of the images, as I demonstrate and discuss in this chapter, are intentionally and, often humorously constructed images, often making use of computer programmes that permit the manipulation of photographs, in order to combine several, separately taken photographs to form one image or to alter the photograph or constructed image in other ways. The construction of the image also often involves various props and costumes in order to convey, through the particular scene created in the image, the message about gender, which the artist is intending to put across.

The second category into which these contemporary amateur representations of non-normative gender can be divided is that containing those images that could be seen to be making use of simple portrait photography, in many cases often self-portraits. This category is characterised by a lack of the playfulness and technological

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[1] I use the word message here, not in the traditional sense where a message has a specific, intentional meaning that is being communicated, rather in the context of communication theory dealt with in Roman Jakobson's book *Language in Literature* where a message is a function of language. It can be thought of almost as a tangible object, the act of communication between "addresser" and "addressee" (Jakobson 1990: 66) which requires common "context", "code" and "contact" for communication to function. I do not mean to imply that the photographers are sending only one specific meaning to the viewer with their photographs as possible readings are multiple and not all will have necessarily been consciously intended.

manipulation that characterises the first category. These photographs may be taken wearing various different styles of clothing and in various different locations and settings or with plain backgrounds. What they all have in common is that the subject's gender expression is in some way ambiguous or unusual. For many photographers, as becomes apparent in their comments and notes on their work, these images are their own way of expressing their own queer gender identity and in so doing challenging viewers to think about issues of gender. For other photographers, it is a simple process of taking portrait or self-portrait photographs without the intention to say something about gender. Simply by the power of what they represent, however, these photographs also very much have the potential to impact upon their viewers' perceptions of gender. This second category of images and their potential will be further demonstrated and explicated in the following chapter, whilst this chapter looks to deal with images that have been deliberately constructed to convey a message about gender to the viewer of the image. This chapter will also consider what these representations of ambiguous bodies and gender presentations say about the relationship between the sexed body and gender identity. It also looks at the category of sex and at the gender attribution process.

Sex Signs

As discussed in my introduction, Judith Butler attacks the category of 'sex' and thereby the sex-as-biology and gender-as-cultural distinction in her book *Gender Trouble*. Her logical line of argumentation leads her to uncover sex, so often portrayed as natural and immutable, to be no less cultural than gender. She demonstrates that gender, in fact, creates the apparent naturalness of sex (Butler 2006: 10-11). As Riki Wilchins puts it in her discussion of Butler's key ideas in *Gender Trouble* 'Gender will not only be the meaning culture attaches to the sexed body, but the reason that Sex itself is produced. Sex will be shown to have been Gender all along' (Wilchins 2004: 136). Staying with the metaphor of sex as 'raw' and gender as 'cooked' that Wilchins uses to illustrate how the sex/gender distinction is traditionally seen, where gender is culturally produced from sex, she goes on to conclude: 'The designation supposed to have been in the raw proves to have already been cooked, and the central distinction of the sex/gender narrative collapses'

(Wilchins 2004: 136). That is, as Butler demonstrated, sex is already as much a culturally constructed category as gender.

In the final section of *Gender Trouble* entitled 'Subversive Bodily Acts' Butler pursues the discussion of the category of sex further. I refer in particular to her treatment of Dr. David Page's research and article which claimed to have found the absolute genetic determinant of sex. His research was carried out on people who would now be seen as being intersex but are referred to in his article as males with XX chromosomes and females with XY chromosomes. As Butler points out, he makes no mention of why these individuals were assigned to the sex that does not usually correspond to their chromosomal status but we are left to assume that it has to do with outward, physical indicators that lead to them being medically assigned as such, despite their chromosomal make-up (Butler 2006: 145). This evinces the hugely defining role that these physical indicators play in assigning someone's body to one or the other binary sex categories. Their crucial nature in the initial sex assignment serves to further demonstrate the role they also play in what Kate Bornstein terms in her book *Gender Outlaw: On Men, Women and the Rest of Us* as 'Gender Attribution' (Bornstein 1994: 26-31). As for many people gender is seen as synonymous with sex in that a stable binary gender is said to be built upon fixed biological sex (Gauntlett 2002: 137), sex indicators become 'cues' for attributing gender. According to Bornstein, gender attribution is the process whereby one looks at someone and, most of the time quite automatically, decides what gender they are. This is based on what Bornstein refers to as 'cues' given by the person whose gender is being considered and also depends on how these cues are interpreted by the person doing the considering (Bornstein 1994: 26). The perception and interpretation of theses cues will vary depending on the culture. Some of the most influential of these cues are primary and secondary sex characteristics which are assumed to, though may or may not actually exist and are attributed to someone presumed to be of a particular gender as certain characteristic are said to indicate a particular sex.

In Judith Butler's more recent book *Undoing Gender* (2004), her chapter 'Undiagnosing gender' deals with the contentious debate surrounding the issues regarding the continued use of the medical diagnosis of transsexuality or officially 'Gender Identity Disorder (GID)'. She discusses the example of a butch lesbian who had breast cancer in one breast, which she had removed, and as she had no emotional

attachment to having breasts she wanted to get the other one removed as a precaution, but was told her insurance wouldn't cover it. Her lack of attachment to her breasts called into question her desire to be a woman, so strong is the association between having breasts and being a woman (Butler 2004: 85-87). The force of this association between breasts and being a woman demonstrates the influence these characteristics have on peoples' view of what indicates sex and therefore gender. Society does not question the acceptability of women enlarging or reducing breast size or men enlarging penis size and people are not subject to psychiatric assessment in order to be allowed to undergo such procedures whereas rigorous psychiatric procedures are in place for anyone who expresses a desire for any procedure which does not stay within what is considered to be the norm (Butler 2004: 87), i.e. that men have a penis and no breasts whilst women have breasts and no penis.

Bornstein points out that both initial sex assignment and gender attribution are phallocentric and that the question whether someone has a vagina is hardly a factor in deciding whether a baby is male or female. In the case of gender attribution, 'one is assumed to be male until proven otherwise' (Bornstein 1994: 26). A study by Suzanne J. Kessler and Wendy McKenna revealed that it takes on average four female cues to outweigh one male cue for the gender to be attributed as female. These cues do not, therefore, constitute gender themselves rather are very much open to cultural interpretation. Referring first of all to the accepted forms of surgical alteration on sex characteristics, Butler notes:

> These practices are part of the daily habits of cultivating secondary sex characteristics, if that category is taken to mean all the various bodily indicators of sex. If the bodily traits "indicate" sex, then sex is not quite the same as the means by which it is indicated. Sex is made understandable through the signs that indicate how it should be read or understood. These bodily indicators are the cultural means by which the sexed body is read. They are themselves bodily and they operate as signs, so there s no easy way to distinguish between what is "materially" true, and what is "culturally" true about the sexed body. I don't mean to suggest that purely cultural signs produce a material body, but only that the body does not become sexually readable without those signs, and that those signs are irreducibly cultural and material at once. (Butler 2004: 87)

In other words, it is through these signs that sex and therefore gender become recognisable. It is in playing with these signs that one can impact on the perception of gender and make one realise the significance we place upon these signs.

Kessler and McKenna also address the cultural nature of bodily symbols of sex in the section of their article entitled 'Cultural Genitals' (Kessler; McKenna 2006: 173). A cultural genital, it is explained, is 'one which is assumed to exist and which, it is believed, should be there. […] Cultural genitals are the attributed genitals' (Kessler; McKenna 2006: 173). It is also noted that 'the relationship between cultural genitals and gender attribution is reflexive. The reality of a gender is "proved" by the genital which is attributed, and, at the same time, the attributed genital only has meaning though the socially shared construction of the gender attribution process' (Kessler; McKenna 2006: 174).

That is to say 'cultural genitals' are very much part of the process of gender attribution. The various aspects of expected binary gender roles, that is, appearances, body language and communication, as well as possible knowledge of activities undertaken by the person in question lead to an attribution of gender which is combined with the assumption of a particular genital to confirm the original gender attribution. Actual knowledge of the existence of said genital is unnecessary; the gender attribution also confirms the assumption of a particular genital.

Visually manipulating sex signs: Image one

The photograph I have chosen does play with the signs mentioned by Butler in *Undoing Gender.* The background of this image is a plain off-white colour, with the slight impression of light shadows behind the three figures spread at roughly equal intervals across the image. All three are dressed in the same plain black vest top and royal blue underwear with a lace trim around the waist. The underwear is closely fitted and can be described as the type of underwear usually associated with stereotypical female clothing. The outer two figures are positioned upside down; the middle figure is in an upright position. The bodies of the two outside figures are turned outwards and they look away from the camera so that they do not meet the viewer's gaze, implying a certain passivity (Clarke 1997:104). They are standing straight up with their legs together and hands behind their back at the level of the buttocks. The fact that these figures are positioned upside down, their neutral facial expressions, their passive body language and lack of eye contact draw attention to contemplation of the middle figure, which is positioned the 'correct way round'. This figure has a rather more challenging facial expression; the eyes stare directly into the camera, deliberately meeting and challenging the gaze of the viewer and establishing a sense of dominance, power and strength (Clarke 1997:104).

The photo directly addresses the issue of signs of sex in gender attribution by displaying the appearance of these signs in the three figures. It is clear from the facial features and body structure that the three figures are images of the same body combined to form one image, but representing different sex characteristics. The outer figures represent the binary norms. The left-hand figure appears to have a typically male flat chest – in female to male (FTM) transgender terminology the flattening of the breasts to give the appearance of a male chest is known as *binding*. There is also a bulge in the underwear, giving the appearance of a penis – in FTM terminology the insertion of something into the underwear to create a bulge to give the appearance of a penis is called *packing*. The flat chest and appearance of the penis create what one would expect of a male person, portraying one side of the binary sexual norms. The figure on the right hand side has the appearance of breasts and no bulge in the underwear, which would be culturally interpreted as the absence of a penis and therefore by default the presence of a vagina, thus representing what society would expect of a typical female-bodied person and demonstrating the other side of the binary norms. In male to female (MTF) transgender terminology the pushing back

and compression of the penis and testes to hide the bulge that would indicate the appearance of a penis is known as *tucking*. That the figures portraying the norms are the passive figures points to the commonplace and ordinary nature of those norms thus again drawing attention to the middle figure as out of the ordinary and worthy of particular note. They serve as a reference point with which to compare and also draw the viewer's attention to the middle figure. It is this that holds the focus of the viewer due to its representing a mixture of sex characteristics which do not fit within society's binary norms for bodily sex signs. The middle figure has the appearance of breasts but also the appearance of a bulge in the underwear which would indicate the presence of a penis. The effect of this mixture combined with the aggressive emphasis of the breast by the position of the hand on the breast with splayed fingers and of the bulge representing a penis through the forward-thrust hips, actively challenges the viewer to think further about the meaning of the confused gender symbols. The mixture of these signs show that the appearance of both genitals and breasts (or perceived lack thereof) can be purely created and therefore it is possible, in society, to assume the presence of what isn't physically there as a result of other aspects of the gender attribution process (aspects of gender roles which are dealt with in more detail later in this chapter). This mixing of sex symbols not only creates a disturbing effect for the viewer which leads to a questioning of the role of these symbols in gender attribution but also emphasises that, as Butler and Kessler and McKenna noted, sex signs can be cultural and do not in themselves constitute sex and therefore gender (Butler 2004: 87).

Gender Roles and Stereotypes

'Gender roles are collections of factors which answer the question, 'How do I need to function so that society perceives me as belonging to a specific gender?'' (Bornstein 1994: 26). Which factors are included is open to interpretation and differences in culture, as some such factors can be culturally specific, whilst others are very much cross-cultural. These cross-cultural factors vary from culture to culture as to the degree of rigidity or flexibility which is allowed for a certain factor. Bornstein feels these factors are more specifically 'positions and actions' (Bornstein 1994: 26) in daily life which are assigned as male or female positions and activities by that culture. These would include an individual's level of economic activity and

subsequent economic role, activities such as certain necessary tasks within a household and also hobbies and other daily activities, which are also often designated as tasks, which should only be performed by someone of a specific gender.

In one of the studies detailed in the article by Kessler and McKenna *Toward a theory of gender* participants had to ask certain questions to which the answer could only be yes or no in order to determine the gender of a fictional person. As well as anatomical questions, many questions were orientated towards economic status and interests. Women were deemed less likely to hold a permanent, full-time job, whilst men were considered more likely to be the breadwinner of a household. Playing with certain toys as a child was also seen as a gendered attribute; dolls, for example were thought of as a female toy. However, questions also orientated towards appearance, in particular hair length, behavioural cues such as mannerisms and communication came into consideration as did the wearing of certain articles of clothing such as skirts which was considered a particularly female trait. Bornstein views such factors as not belonging to those which make up gender roles (Bornstein 1994: 26) and treats these aspects under the heading 'Gender Attribution' which she discusses as separate from gender roles (Bornstein 1994: 26-31).

However, Bornstein's attempt to separate them masks the inherently interlinked nature of these aspects which need to be discussed together. The way in which someone is expected to look and behave to fit with society's view of how someone of a particular gender should be, is as much, if not more to do with playing a particular role, as activities, which make up the way-of life are. As Bornstein says herself, physical cues, behavioural cues and social interactions play a very important part in gender attribution (Bornstein 1994: 26-31). They are also integral parts of expected gender roles of people deemed to be of a certain gender and, as mentioned above, Kessler and McKenna's study indicates that these aspects of gender roles do play a significant role in gender attribution (Kessler; McKenna 2006: 165-167).

In her discussions of such issues Riki Wilchins refers to gender stereotypes and in contrast to Bornstein's approach, does focus on the rigidity of what she calls normative 'gender expression' that is 'clothing, behaviour, grooming etc.' which is allowed and expected within society's binary gender system (Wilchins 2004: 8). Indeed, she makes the point that it is necessary to conform to one or other of the two options for gender in order to attain recognition in society as a 'real social actor'.

(Wilchins 2004: 153) Without such recognition, one is not considered to be a whole person, a legitimate individual. Non-conformity is tantamount to omission altogether. Judith Butler writes on the subject of recognition in *Undoing Gender* that it is 'not the simple presentation of a subject for another' (Butler 2004: 131) but 'rather, a process that is engaged when subject and Other understand themselves to be reflected in one another' (Butler 2004: 131) She notes that the process of recognition is 'a normative ideal' (Butler 2004: 132) wherein a common context is required in order for the Other, seen as separate, but 'structured […] in ways that are shared' to be recognisable. In other words, in order for one to be acknowledged as a legitimate individual in society, which requires one's gender to be recognisable, it is not just a case of presenting a gender to society and being recognised, rather that gender needs to reference what has gone before. It needs to fit in with the binary gender norms that society will understand. To do otherwise, to present a gender other than male or female, something new and unfamiliar, will not allow for the necessary shared context required for understanding and recognition.

Gender stereotypes are also dealt with by Wilchins in the context of the feminist, gay and trans struggles for equality and why gender norms should form the main target of such fights if they are to succeed. She also points out that they not only affect such minority groups but also have a profound effect on the freedoms of everyone to live their lives. In her discussion of feminism in chapter one she points out that gender lies behind sexism and misogyny (Wilchins 2004: 11). In chapter two, dealing with homophobia, she points out that many lesbian and gay people transcend gender norms and it is the fear of and animosity towards anyone who breaks those norms that lies very much behind homophobia. Thus, much gay rights activism stopped concentrating on the right to freedom of expression and began trying to make the lesbian and gay community look more 'palatable and gender normative' and emphasise the normality of homosexuality (Wilchins 2004: 17). Few homophobic attacks are carried out because of what someone is actually doing in the bedroom; indeed, individual gay men and lesbians are not recognisable beyond doubt, they are not being demonstrably sexual on their own in public, rather their gender presentation is often perceived as transcending norms, which is seen as an indicator of their sexuality. People who carry out such attacks target those that don't fit those norms because such gender ambiguity, which challenges a system that is seen as

unquestionable, as just existing naturally, creates a 'terror and hatred' of the unknown and of the destruction of the status quo (Bornstein 1994: 72-75).

It is not only the people who are perceived as transgressing gender norms who do not benefit from the rigid binary gender system but also those who are conforming to the expected roles for their assigned gender (cisgendered people) who are confined to these roles, often without realising it. As previously mentioned, women in particular are victims of the binary gender system. Contrary to what one might imagine from the word binary the binary gender system does not work in two equal halves. As Wilchins puts it 'Woman is always 'Other'. […] The second term of the binary exists only to support the first term. Thus woman functions not as and equal half but as a support and prop, derivative from and dependent on Man' (Nestle, Howell, Wilchins 2002: 44). This is, of course, not a new insight, and may indeed be a function of all binaries which tend to be established on a relational basis; however Wilchins very lucidly explains this effect within the binary gender system. Bornstein theorises gender as a class system of oppression alike to the caste system in India or the apartheid in South Africa because they have also been said to be natural by those who wish to uphold those systems. She explains that binary gender is a hierarchical system of power without which the power dynamic 'male privilege' (Bornstein 1994: 108-111) would cease to exist. However, what both authors fail to point out is that it is not only women, as well as those who obviously transgress gender norms, upon whom the gender binary system impacts negatively, rather men are also confined to their traditional role of masculinity. In a binary gender system where men have the upper hand in the power dynamic and typical female characteristics are seen as inferior, men cannot adopt any aspect of the female gender role without provoking ridicule, or worse. Therefore theoretically, the end of the binary gender system would signify an end to the oppression of those that transcend its norms and stereotypical female roles would no longer be seen as inferior if the unequal power dynamic no longer existed. Subsequently, men would also benefit from an enhanced freedom of gender presentation.

Mixing Gender Roles: Image Two

The photograph that I have chosen can be seen as an attempt to visually illustrate and challenge a variety of aspects of these rigid binary roles including stereotypical gendered activities, appearance and communicational or behavioural characteristics by deliberately creating a melange of references to traditionally gendered characteristics to form particularly unusual figures. These figures combined with other aspects make for a rather atypical image. First of all the background is somewhat unexpected, a grey concrete breeze block wall covered with a significant amount of illegible red and black graffiti. The upper part of the majority of the background consists of a dirty window, again graffiti-covered. The graffiti this time is in white paint, also the colour of the paint which is peeling off the narrow, wooden window frames. To the left of the picture, still in the background is a thin metal post, partly grey, partly painted black and brown or possibly rusted. In the window of this building it is possible to distinguish a wooden shelving unit, stretching high up and well out of the frame of the photograph and above the heads of the figures. The shelves of this wooden shelving unit are filled with what appear to be cardboard boxes and a variety of other containers. This unusual background can be said to have a jarring effect, that is, it creates a sudden, harshly perturbing and unpleasant feeling in one's thoughts and/or feelings as a result of its strange appearance. The production of this uncomfortable feeling and impression of strangeness and otherness in the

viewers mind and emotions can serve to further the confusion caused by the mixing of gender symbols and references to gender roles by setting a disturbed mental backdrop on which to consider the questions of gender arising from the figures. The connotations of the concrete, somewhat unkempt building are not only urban, but also point towards a certain sense of abandonment and strangeness; the ground's relation to the figures, which in themselves convey a sense of 'Other,' enhances the overall Otherness and subversive nature of the image. The background, in that it consists of concrete and graffiti, not only allows us to place the image in an urban setting but also in a contemporary time setting.

Both figures are clearly the same body performing different roles and superimposed next to one another to form a compound image. The manipulated nature of the image is however not immediately obvious except for the fact the figures are the same person (evident from the face) in different attire and in different positions. The figures are only visible from the waist upwards. The figure on the left is wearing a royal blue dress with a slight pattern visible on the material, which has the reflective appearance of satin and a trim of embroidered flowers around the collar. The dress has short sleeves which reach mid-upper arm, the shape of breasts is clearly visible under the dress and it is taken in at the waist which emphasises a typical female shape. The figure is also wearing long, dangling earrings to match the dress. The attire of the figure references a stereotypical female role which is expected of women within the binary gender system. As the Kessler and McKenna study indicated skirts and dresses (Kessler; McKenna 2006: 166) are seen as female articles of clothing and are part of an expected female role, as are such long dangling earrings. The figure's body language and position in relation to the other figure also reference stereotypical female body language and behavioural roles. The figure is located behind the other figure and has a soft, passive, facial expression and is slightly turned away from the camera to the right, so as not to meet the gaze of the viewer. Being turned away from the camera, staying behind and not meeting the gaze of the camera are all considered to be female characteristics that indicate the passivity associated with the female gender role (Clarke 1997:105). Furthermore in transgender culture female to male (FTM) transsexual people are told to make eye contact with people in the street in order to pass (be perceived as the gender they are presenting as)

as male. Lack of eye contact is perceived as a female characteristic and is linked to the expectation of female passivity.

This is where this figure's references to female gender roles ends, however as the figure has what appears to be a short but full beard and is, in contrast to the other figure, wearing no make up. The deliberate wearing of a beard, indeed any facial hair, is seen as part of a male role and would not be expected of a female. The lack of make-up, though not in itself a wholly male characteristic, can be seen in this context, in contrast to the other figure who is wearing make up, to reference a male role. The references to female roles in the form of stereotypical female clothing, body language and the appearance of breasts juxtaposed with the references to male roles in the form of a beard and lack of make-up create a jarring, 'othering' effect. Again, as explained with the effect of the background, this combination of gendered characteristics in both figures is seen as strange and unusual. It creates an uncomfortable feeling of not knowing and confused thoughts in the viewer which may lead the viewer to attempt to work through those thoughts and feelings, thus leading to more detailed contemplation of the questions of gender raised by the image. One is not able to make a coherent binary gender attribution, notions of binary gender roles are challenged and questions are raised of the process of binary gender attribution.

The other figure, on the right hand side of the photograph is dressed in a white pinstriped typical men's shirt with a dark navy blue tie and pinstriped waistcoat. These clothes would be considered stereotypically men's clothes and reference a male gender role. Specifically, formal attire such as the shirt, tie and waistcoat also connotes power, possibly in business, banking or high society, roles more commonly open to men and demonstrating visually the subtleties of the 'male privilege' (Bornstein 1994: 108-111) of the gender binary system. This figure also has the same short but full beard as the figure on the left and the appearance of a fat chest. The beard and the almost unaltered hairstyle are in fact the only similarities in the gender presentations of the two figures. This figure's body language and communication can also be said to be that which is typically expected of men. The figure stands square on to the camera with a dominant facial expression and meets the gaze of the viewer of the photograph. Being located in front of the other figure is also a sign of this typical male dominant body language and behaviour. This figure's attire, behaviour and beard are clearly referencing expected male roles within the binary gender system.

The long sleeves of the white, pin-striped shirt are rolled up to just above the elbow, revealing slim, apparently hairless, typically female forearms. Most striking is the obvious make-up; the figure is wearing bright red lipstick and dark black eye-liner and mascara, something that is deemed to be quintessentially female. Finally, this figure holds upright in front of them a kitchen utensil (spatula). It is not a usual position for use of the utensil; the position is meant to emphasise the presence of this object. This utensil can be read both as referencing a typical female role, that of heterosexual housewife and homemaker. A cooking utensil can be seen as something that would be used by a woman as cooking is certainly as considered part of this role of homemaker. On the other hand, the position of the utensil leads one to read it also as a phallic symbol, referencing again a male role of dominance over the other figure and the whole situation in the context of the image. This also demonstrates the phallocentric nature of symbols of meaning, that purely and upright somewhat long and thin object can be read as such. Most importantly, the phallus is displaced onto an object that is in itself coded as feminine, thereby introducing gender trouble into the spatula itself.

As with the figure on the left, the appearance and body language of this figure juxtapose references to both expected binary male and binary female roles. The effect is again jarring and disturbing; one's sense of automatic gender attribution is further distorted by the mélange of gendered symbols.

Bringing them together

Although discussed somewhat separately in this chapter, separating aspects of gender or the gender attribution process can be problematic, as I point out regarding Bornstein's separation of Gender Roles and Gender Attribution (Bornstein 1994: 26). Such separation of aspects which contribute to the way in which gender is subconsciously and consciously defined and attributed can mask the complicated processes and interplay of these aspects and in some cases the reflexive nature of particular aspects of gender and the process itself. This is demonstrated in Kessler and McKenna's theorisation of 'Cultural Genitals'. A particular genital is assumed because of the gender attribution which has already been made and the gender attribution is subsequently confirmed by the assumed existence of a particular genital

(Kessler, McKenna 2006: 174). This can also be applied to the other bodily signs referred to by Butler (Butler 2004:87).

This chapter brings together the components which together contribute to the gender attribution process within the binary gender system and therefore what is recognisable as gender in this society. It provides amateur photographic examples from the photo-sharing website Flickr of how these components can be visually subverted in order to highlight their role in and demonstrate the culturally constructed nature of the whole process of gender attribution within the binary gender system. The mixing of the appearance of bodily signs from what are considered to be opposite sexes in the middle figure of the first photograph could be seen as a challenge to the natural status often given to the appearance of such signs. It showed them also as cultural constructs that are assumed to exist only in certain combinations on people of a certain attributed gender. Presenting the figure with both the appearance of breasts, which are considered to be a female characteristic, and a penis, which is seen as the male genital, as well as being unusual, if not shocking, shows that one can create the appearance of both these signs without them actually existing on the body but that their appearance still has meaning in gender attribution. This demonstrates that the appearance of a particular genital, or lack thereof, can also be assumed even when no deliberate attempt to create or hide the appearance of either has been made. This assumption, as explained by Kessler and McKenna in reference to genitals (Kessler; McKenna 2006: 174) is an integral part of the process of gender attribution within the gender binary system as such signs are considered by many to constitute binary sex which they see as inseparable from gender.

Whilst the first photograph demonstrates the culturally constructed nature of the role of these bodily signs in the gender attribution process, the second photograph plays visually with expected gender roles and stereotypes. As discussed in the second section of this chapter the stereotypical binary gender roles are a 'collection of factors' (Bornstein 1994: 26) which are also key to the gender attribution process and as already mentioned, are interlinked with the way in which certain bodily signs are assumed to exist in this process. These cues vary widely in nature and can include clothing and other aspects of grooming, knowledge of daily activities and lifestyle and both verbal and nonverbal communication. In the second photograph the mixing of references to binary gender roles further challenges the rigid nature of these binary

roles by showing them to be culturally constructed and therefore malleable rather than natural and fixed.

The two sections of this chapter, which separately consider the function of bodily signs and the aspects gender roles, come together to demonstrate how the binary gender system is maintained through the attribution process. It also shows how photography, displayed on the photo-sharing website Flickr is being used to confuse and subvert aspects of the gender attribution process in order that the social construction of two genders begins to be called into question.

Chapter three: Genderqueer: Beyond the Gender Binary

This chapter deals with the second category of photographs as defined in chapter two; photographs which are unintentionally images of queer gender presentation. This second category into which these contemporary amateur representations of non-normative gender can be divided, is made up of those images that could be seen to be making use of simple portrait photography, in many cases often self-portrait. This is not to say that the artists are not deliberately presenting their gender ambiguously; indeed there are many techniques that they may adopt, both of photographic composition and in their own styling in order to accentuate or hide certain characteristics. However, for the artists, there is a sense of these images being merely photographs of themselves in the gender presentation that they wish to take on rather than, as in the previous chapter, being constructed to portray a certain message on gender.

These photographs may be taken wearing various different styles of clothing and in various different locations and settings or with plain backgrounds. What they all have in common is that the subject's gender presentation is in some way ambiguous or unusual. Whilst some photographers are simply making portrait and/or self-portrait photographs, for many, the creation of these images is itself their way of expressing their own queer gender identity through non-normative gender presentation and in so doing increasing the visibility and awareness of such gender presentation and mounting a visual challenge to the binary gender system. The artists' awareness of the possible effects of their work becomes apparent in their comments and notes accompanying the images.

Even the photographs of those photographers for whom it is a simple process of taking portrait or self-portrait photographs without the explicit intention to say something about gender, very much have the potential to impact upon their viewers' perceptions of gender by virtue of the sheer power of what they represent. Whilst the previous chapter deals with the first type of images, namely those that have been deliberately constructed to convey a message about gender to the viewer of the image, this second category of images and their potential will be further demonstrated and explicated in this chapter. This chapter will also consider the complicated and

problematic relationship between viewing gender as constructed and performative and the concept of non-binary gender identities which some of the artists are expressing through their work.

Genderqueer

I primarily consider the concept of *Genderqueer*. Genderqueer is a relatively new term that is rapidly becoming more widely recognised, accepted and commonly used amongst LGBTQI (Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual Transgender, Queer, Intersex) communities as mode or term for self-identification of gender identity. It treats the grey area between binary genders and beyond the binary system, contributing something radically new to the deconstruction of a biologically determined gender-binary. Genderqueer is somewhat at a crossroads between traditional academic discourse on gender and 'real-life' identifications.

People who identify as Genderqueer or with its concepts may think of themselves as being both male and female (often referred to as bi-gendered within LGBTQI communities), somewhere between male and female as someone whose gender falls completely outside the gender binary or as not having a gender at all (referred to as agendered in the aforementioned communities). The concept of genderqueer challenges binary constructions of gender where male and female are the only two possible genders and can even be seen to challenge the concept of two-poled, traditional images of transsexual people.

Genderqueer people's idea of how gender can be conceptualised impacts on what their gender identity means for them. How gender is viewed by genderqueer people as a whole and its relationship to themselves can vary widely. Some view gender as a continuum between man and woman, with the two traditional genders at the two poles and their own genderqueer place as somewhere within the continuum. Others believe there are as many genders as there are people and consider their own genderqueer identity to be one unique gender identity of many. Still others believe that binary gender is a social construct and feel they do not fit into that construct; their own genderqueer place being completely outside of any describable structure. This place is somewhat difficult to define conceptually, as a place outside of the binary gender system is still with reference to the system it is outside. Some genderqueer people experience their gender as fluid, varying from day to day or year

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to year and may use the term *gender fluid* to describe themselves. Some genderqueer people reject any gender system as a valid method of classifying individuals.

In terms of presentation, some genderqueer people do fit into the stereotypical gender roles expected of their legal birth assigned sex, others present more in line with what is expected of the 'opposite' gender role to that of their legal birth-assigned sex, but still identify outside of that and reject a two-pole gendered system. Many genderqueer people, however, choose to present themselves in a non-normative, gender-variant way.

Some genderqueers prefer to go by the conventional binary pronouns 'he/him/his' or 'she/her/hers,' while others prefer gender-neutral pronouns such as 'ze/hir/hirs' or singular 'they/their/theirs' instead of the traditional gendered ones. Some genderqueer people prefer to have people alternate between male and female pronouns (and sometimes including gender neutral pronouns in this alternation) in reference to themselves, and some prefer to use only their name and not use pronouns at all.

Genderqueers use a wide variety of terms to describe themselves, including bi-gendered, multi-gendered, androgyne, gender outlaw, gender bender, gender-fluid and gender-fuck. Sometimes they refuse to attach a label to their gender identities at all, feeling that no one word or phrase can adequately capture the complexities of how they experience gender.

Whilst the recognition of the validity *genderqueer* is increasing within the LGBTQI communities where it is in use, there has been almost no academic work looking at any detail into this problematic concept and how it could possibly be reconciled with or add to current discourse on gender. This can be attributed to the relatively recent nature of the term and concept within the communities where it is in use, but also the due to the difficulty in pinning down the term to any fixed meaning, which results from the various possible connotations surrounding the differing views on gender and individual use of the term as a descriptor for diverse ideas and feelings.

The problem lies therein; identity is seen to be very much an essentialist concept, indeed Butler key point in *Gender Trouble* was on the performative nature of identity and not just gender, and therefore the idea of genderqueer as an identity, albeit a non-binary one, doesn't sit with ideas of gender as constructed as opposed to an innate core sense of self. Though some genderqueer people still view their

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genderqueer identification as such, it is becoming much more a political identity by choice, a conscious rejection of the constructed binary gender system, and statement that there should be and can be multiple options for gender. The word identity is still used, not in the sense that it has been traditionally used in the past where an essential core identity is implied, but rather it is being subverted to take on the meaning of a political standpoint on gender that is incorporated into the individual's sense of self, whilst remaining aware of the constructed nature of gender and identity as a whole. Many are also choosing, not only to describe their identity as outside of the traditional binary gender system but are using gender presentation that is outside of expected stereotypes for male or female to make a political statement about the proliferation of genders.

Genderqueer people are living Butler's call to *gender trouble*. They are taking charge of the performative acts that make up their gender 'identity', for want of a better word. One reaches the problem of trying to use inherently normatively and binary gendered and essentialist language within a gendered society to discuss something that transgresses that entirely. Living the call to *gender trouble* not only refers to those who choose to present their gender in a non-normative, ambiguous way but also those whose presentation appears to conform to one or other of the binary stereotypes, whether that be for their birth assigned sex or the 'opposite' one. Performative acts as covered during my discussion of Butler's ideas in my introduction are not the same as a performance, but in the case of gender, are those that appear to create 'real' gender. These are not only physical and visual but can also be speech acts, the act of describing one's gender as *genderqueer* is in itself one of these acts that is contributing, in conjunction with other practices, to the creation their genderqueer place.

The only published work that looks at all at Genderqueer are Riki Wilchins' introductory essays to the anthology of personal stories *GenderQueer: Voices from Beyond the Sexual Binary* of which she is co-editor. In these essays, she lucidly combines these concepts of gender identification, used by 'real-life' queer people to describe their gender identity, with Butler's model of performative construction. She sees the gender binary as the regulation of the performative acts to give the appearance of two coherent genders and explains that as these performative acts must be repeated, they are therefore unstable. They can sometimes become unreadable

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within the gender binary and therefore these genders 'fail' as they cannot be read as one or the other binary options for gendered acts. She then asks, if gender can fail unintentionally, can one not also consciously choose to disrupt it?

As in Butler's 'copy of a copy' Wilchins argues that 'successful' genders reference already existing copies, there is no room for recognizing a new variation. These would be seen to 'fail'. For Wilchins, 'Genderqueers are people for whom some link in the feeling/expression/being perceived fails.' (Nestle, Howard, Wilchins 2002: 28) She goes on to note, however that the problem with trying to define who fits into this identity is that, as with any identity based politics, it risk excluding people who would choose to be represented. She also criticizes the commonly held view of a 'gender spectrum' where, although a plurality of gender is implied, these are seen to lie in between the two binary extremes of man and woman. It still does not allow for an exit from this binary albeit an extended one with space in the middle. She argues that this is still somewhat in keeping with the heterosexual norms and only 'slightly less oppressive' (Nestle, Howard, Wilchins 2002: 30) and 'not less binary than its predecessors' (Nestle, Howard, Wilchins 2002: 30-31).

Butch/FTM Border wars and the Transgender Butch
In chapter five of her 1998 publication *Female Masculinity*, which is entitled 'Transgender Butch: Butch/FTM border wars and the Masculine Continuum' Halberstam deals with what she terms the Butch/FTM border war which has to do with suspicion and mistrust which can sometimes exist between butch lesbian communities and Female to Male transsexuals. Some butch lesbians feel threatened and/or betrayed when people they know as butch lesbians decide to transition to live their lives as men. Maintaining a butch identity is often difficult, given the invisibility in popular culture of lesbian lives and communities, but particularly of non-gender normative lesbians. Many butch lesbians may often feel that as more butches disappear, the butch lesbian community will become even more invisible. Butch lesbians, who still live their lives legally as women, may also resent the privilege that FTMs acquire once they are able to pass unequivocally as 'non-transsexual' men and some butches will also see FTMs as 'traitors to a "woman's" movement who have crossed over and become the enemy' (Halberstam 1998: 144). On the other side, many FTMs are eager to establish themselves as male and don't want to be seen as a

butch lesbians and thus take some efforts to distinguish themselves. Many FTMs get annoyed when they perceive that some butch lesbians, in particular, refuse to accept them as men and view butch lesbians and too afraid to transition from male to female whilst butches view FTMs as conflating the body with gender. Both sides accuse each other of gender essentialism (Halberstam 1998: 143-144).

Halberstam notes that some standpoints on their own transsexuality represent gender essentialism (Halberstam 1998: 146) and also deals with a media article which appears to favourably contrast FTMs to butch lesbians. For the article, the reporter interviews several transsexual men and is supposedly pleasantly surprised to not find mentally unstable butch lesbian women who hate their bodies so much they turned to self-mutilation, but rather ordinary, charming, masculine men. Halberstam points out that the reporter would be unlikely to comment so favourably on the masculinity of butch lesbians but notes that in mainstream attitudes to find normative masculinity in, albeit transsexual men, 'shores up the essential differences between men and women' (Halberstam 1998: 157-158).

This type of gender normative discourse, currently embedded in medical ideas and practice, where the transsexual person is purely bringing their body into line with their essential gender identity as they were born in the 'wrong body' by which they are disgusted and distressed means that ' transsexual men become associated with real and desperate desires for reembodiment, so butch women become associated with a playful desire for masculinity and a casual form of gender deviance' (Halberstam 1998:143).

By dealing with these 'border wars' which she also terms the 'fault lines between masculine women and transsexual men,' (Halberstam 1998: 143) Halberstam attempts to create a new conceptual space within or along these 'fault lines' (Halberstam 1998: 143) or 'borders' and coins the new term 'transgender butch', as the chapter is entitled, to describe this in-between conceptual space; 'a form of gender transitivity that could be crucial to many butches' sense of embodiment, sexual subjectivity, and even gender legitimacy' (Halberstam 1998: 144). By creating the transgender butch Halberstam wants to 'carve out a subject position […] to signify the transition that the identity requires from female identity to masculine embodiment.' She goes on to create transgender butch as a loose category of cross-gender identification which is not aided by surgery or hormones and involves

the movement of cross-gender identification similar to the implied transition from F to M in the commonly used acronym FTM, rather than taking an oppositional stance to the transitional nature of FTM and appearing to be a stable subject position as might be inferred for the term butch. Transgender butch, however conveys the 'instability and transitivity' of cross-gender identification which still exists in the space that is the transgender butch (Halberstam 1998: 146). Halberstam emphasises though that she is not advocating that gender fluidity is the ultimate in subversive gender presentations which should be strived for, noting rather that 'gender and sexuality tend to be remarkably rigid' (Halberstam 1998: 147). She does however assert that many sexual and gender identities do involve a degree of movement; 'we do not necessarily shuttle back and for the between sexual roles and practices at will but we do tend to adjust, accommodate, change, reverse, slide and move in general between moods and modes of desire' (Halberstam 1998: 147).

Interestingly, at the beginning of her theorisation of transgender butch she also briefly refers to the space between lesbian/gay and transsexual which doesn't fit on either side as 'transgender or gender-queer' (Halberstam 1998: 145). Although at the time of publishing the more developed use of the term genderqueer as a concept of non-binary gender was yet to exist on the scale which it does now within LGBTQ communities and Halbertstam separates the two words 'gender' and 'queer' with a hyphen suggesting that she is using queer more as descriptive of gender, thus referring more generally to non-gender normativity, rather than in the context of genderqueer as a term and descriptor in itself. What is also interesting is that she also states that this 'gender-queer' position is also called 'queer theory or postmodernism' (Halberstam 1998: 145) thus linking, what I would consider one small part of the predecessors of the current understanding of the concept of genderqueer to theories which strongly advance non-essentialist conceptions of gender and identity. This can be seen as going some way towards contesting the possible criticisms of the current use and understanding of genderqueer as going back to ideas of an essential core identity, which, as I have explicated in the above section, are being challenged by people who use genderqueer to describe their identity as a consciously chosen political mode of identification.

The photographs that I have chosen for this chapter are photos that I believe visually illustrate the concepts outlined detailed above. The ambiguity of the gender

presentations of the photographed subjects challenges the concepts of binary gender by visually representing that which is neither/nor.

Making use of camera and body angles: Image one

The first image consists solely of the photograph of a person with a white background. The colouration is not completely monochrome, as the colour of the figure's t-shirt is visible, however the rest of the photograph, that is skin, hair and other colours are not. This effect appears to allow for angles and variations of the lighting to become more apparent and so features which the lighting emphasises are highlighted more than they otherwise would be. It is a close-up photograph, which captures the figure from just above the hips, so that a belt buckle is visible at the very bottom of the image and the top few centimetres of the head are cut off. The person's upper body is dressed in a dark purple t-shirt which is fitted around the shoulders and chest but slightly looser around the abdominal area. On their right wrist they appear to be wearing a leather studded armband or bracelet and on their face an indistinct, frameless pair of glasses. The hairstyle is short but is long enough to be brushed forward over to one side so that it partially covers one ear and most of the forehead.

The body is angled partially to one side so that the person's right upper arm, shoulder and elbow are very much in the foreground with the body turned slightly away from the camera. The left are which is furthest away from the camera is held beside the body with only part of the forearm being visible just in front of the left hip but the hand is cut off from view at the bottom of the image. The right arm, the upper part of which is in the foreground, is bent at the elbow and the hand is in contact with the left side of the chin with the thumb touching the centre of the chin as if in an

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expression of thought. The face is turned to face the camera and the eyes stare directly into the camera and boldly meet the gaze of the viewer.

The figure combines in one person a mixture of gendered cues (as discussed in the previous chapter), which contribute to gender attribution. This is enhanced by the composition of the image, which makes use of the angles of positioning of the body and lighting and camera angles to accentuate certain body parts or characteristics. The angle of the body placing the shoulder and upper arm in the foreground of the image means that these appear to be bigger and more muscular than they might otherwise appear, for example if the person was facing square on to the camera. Bending the arm in such a way also means that the muscles of the upper arm are contracted so that they appear bigger and the contours of the muscle are accentuated. The slight upward angle of the camera also accentuates the size of the upper body in general and gives the impression of a very square jaw as it creates a shadow underneath the side of the chin and jawbone. The muscular appearance of the arm and shoulder combined with the short hairstyle and flat chest as well as directly meeting someone's gaze would be considered gendered cues that are associated with the male gender role. A leather studded armband or bracelet would also be considered a more masculine accessory. However there are certain cues that would be read as cues, which reference the female gender role such as the lack of any facial hair or stubble, the fact that the visible arm, though muscular is also more or les hairless and more curved an rounded structure to the backside and hip. The overall perception of these cues may lead, after longer consideration, to the attribution of the male gender role as the masculine cues appear to outweigh the feminine ones; however it is the presence of both that leads to this questioning of what is usually taken to be automatic in heteronormative society that prescribes certain binary gender norms. A mixture of these norms breaks the assumption of this process being automatic and begins to create space for other possibilities.

Gendered cues neutralised: Image two

A common feature of the second image that I have chosen to analyse and the image analysed in the previous section, is that both images consist simply of the figure on a plain white background which draws the full attention of the viewer to the contemplation of the figure as there are no distractions in the background. This photograph is also in monochrome, which in contrast the other images creates a more classical photography style and also lends a 'fine art' aspect to the portrait. The figure is wearing dark, stonewashed appearance jeans that are relatively fitted, though not entirely figure hugging and a fitted, wide strap, black vest top. The fact that the photograph is taken in monochrome, does not allow the viewer to distinguish how the hair is styled except that it is a short and simple style, although the viewer can distinguish the wide shape of the cut, indicating it is not so short that it is shaved, rather there is a certain amount of length on the head. The body is facing square on to the camera, however the figure does not meet the gaze of the viewer, rather the figures gaze is cast downwards and the heard is bent forwards with the chin on or nearly touching the chest. The bent forward position of the head, so that the top of the head is made more prominent and the wider haircut give the impression of a large head, which would typically be thought of as a male characteristic; however if the slightly wider styled haircut is considered on its own, it could also be considered as a more female gendered cue that renders the head ambiguous as a gendered cue. It may contribute either way to the gender attribution process and/or simply cause uncertainty in the viewer.

Other characteristics are also very much ambivalent in terms of how they would affect the attribution of gender by a viewer trying to attribute one of the binary gender options. The arms one of these features in that the shoulders seem to be broad

and muscular. This impression is enhanced by the angle of the body being straight on to the camera and the fact that the photograph is taken from close up makes the shoulders appear even wider. However the lower arms and in particular the wrists are seem to be slim and delicate and the arms more or less hairless, which would be attributed as female characteristics and contrast with the masculine appearance of the broad and muscular shoulders and upper arms.

This ambiguity also extends to the body shape and body language of the figure in the photograph. The seemingly male, broad upper body and flat chest taper to a slim waist and one can then distinguish the outline of the hips, which curves outwards from the waist, which give the contrasting impression of a slightly curved body shape that would usually be attributed a female shape. The clothing could also not be attributed with any certainty to wither gender role and both the jeans and the vest top are relatively fitted, as opposed to loose but not overly figure hugging and there are no obvious symbols which would help in the attribution process. In terms of the body language, the head being bent forwards and the gaze cast downwards portrays a sense of passivity, which would be traditionally seen as a female attribute, whereas the position of the hands that are rested in a casual manner in the area of the jeans pocket is very much a masculine stance of casual and confident dominance.

Again, as in image one, the figure brings together in one person a mixture of gendered cues; however, in contrast to the previous image there are several cues that could not be unambiguously attributed to either of the heteronormative binary gender roles. There also more cues present in this image than in the previous image that would be attributed to the female gender role. Thus, the overall gender attribution process is made all the more difficult and confusing for the viewer of the photograph. So many differing aspects and contradictory cues are brought together in the figure who has been photographed that the viewer may change back ad forth between their gender attribution or even abandon the process altogether, leaving an open conclusion and calling the process of binary gender attribution and thus the binary gender system into question.

Merging figure and ground: Image Three

The third image differs dramatically from the first two as it is in full and vibrant colours as opposed to monochrome or near monochrome and has a varied and intricate background to the figure as opposed to a plain white background. Further, with the previous two images, there was a certain amount of deliberate posing and positioning of the figure that had the effect of accentuating or hiding certain features that took place. Although there is always a certain amount of intention with self-portraits such as these and the background, in particular, seems to have been selected, deliberate consideration of body angles in relation to certain body parts does not appear to have been used for the composition of this image.

The photograph is set in a sparsely wooded area that has a small road running through it that is distinguishable in the distance. There is one more prominent tree standing on top of a slight hill behind the figure and hiding other trees behind it. It is just slightly to the left of the figure and its branches extend upwards and sideways, almost completely blocking out a mixed blue and slightly cloudy sky. Other, smaller trees are visible towards the right side of the image and further into the distance, next to the small road. A lawn, scattered with small, white, wild flowers occupies roughly the bottom third of the image, upon which the figure is standing, just slightly to the

left of centre. This image has a relatively extended depth of field meaning that some details such as branches of trees, blades of grass and the road in the background are still acceptably sharp. Only furthest into the distance are leaves and branches and no longer sharply in focus. Despite the extended depth of field, the figure is still very much prominent in the foreground, an effect of the upwards camera angle and that the photograph was taken from relatively close up. Both make the figure appear larger and more prominent. That the figure is still prominent in the foreground but many aspects of the background are also clearly visible creates a strange figure ground relationship where the attention of the viewer is competed for by both aspects of the image. Both are considered separately and alternating but also merge into one. This merging effect is enhanced by the positioning of the figure in relationship to the nearest and most prominent tree in the background whose branches seem to grow out of the figure's head, shoulders and arms.

The figure, who is situated slightly to the left of centre, is wearing beige, knee length shorts and short-sleeved dark green and white checked open-necked shirt, with an under-layer slightly visible where the collar of the shirt is open, and a black leather or leather-effect studded belt. The picture is cut off at the knee of the figure so the lower legs and footwear aren't visible and the figure is facing slightly to their left (to the right side of the image) rather than square on to the camera. With wider, rounded hips and abdominal area, and narrow waist and shoulders this person has would what traditionally be perceived as a female body shape. Slim and hairless lower arms and wrists and a rounded facial structure as opposed to the typically male squarer jaw also contribute to this impression. The figure's avoidance of the viewer's gaze, as the head is turned to their right and the gaze is directed in the same direction into the distance, could also be considered as part of the female gender role. The chest appears slightly more rounded than flat although the shape of breasts is not obvious under the shirt and the hairstyle could also not be unambiguously attributed as a typical haircut of either binary gender role. The hair is dyed a bright electric blue. On the right side of their head it is chin length and swept round the side of the face and covers the right three quarters of the forehead. The hair on the left side of the head is shaved very short and there is a large, matching blue, somewhat alternative style earring hanging from their pierced left earlobe. The earring, although earrings would usually be attributed to the female gender role, this assumption becomes less certain because of

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it's rather more alternative, somewhat punk-like style. The clothing is also ambiguous as it is neither fitted enough to be typically clothing that is associated with the female gender role, nor is it loosely cut enough to be seen as traditionally 'male clothing'. The left arm is rested beside the body but the left arm is bent; the left hand is holding a large drinks can, usually associated with alcohol, at around chest level. Drinking alcohol from a large can would certainly be associated with the male gender role as it is not something that would be expected and would possibly even be considered inappropriate, of someone in a normative female gender role.

Despite the presence of a few ambiguous cues and the drinks can as a male cue, the majority of and stronger cues are those associated with a female body shape meaning the viewer is likely to eventually attribute the figure as female. The contrasting outer cues however such as clothing, hairstyle and the drinks can emphasise to the view however that people may choose to present themselves and behave in ways that do not conform to traditional gender roles. Though perhaps less effective at confusing the viewer and making them call binary gender into question through the disruption of the binary gender attribution process, the ambiguous outer presentation does present a deviation from gender norms that may cause the viewer to question the norms of gender roles and their associated outer presentations. Furthermore, the unusual figure-ground relationship mentioned above, where there is a merging effect of the two contributes to this ambiguity as the figure is considered less closely than they would be in the previous two photographs and therefore attributing their gender becomes less important.

Beyond the binary?

In this chapter I have attempted to theorise and put into words the term Genderqueer as a possibility for gender outside of the normative binary gender system where male and female are the only two possibilities. It is a term that is already being used and a concept that is already being lived in LGBTQI communities. Whilst acknowledging that many such people do maintain that they have an innate, core genderqueer identity, I have sought to bring to light the different way that a genderqueer identity can be viewed; that is, as a conscious political resistance to the heteronormative gender binary system. Many genderqueer people are no longer viewing gender as an

innate, core sense of self; rather they are recognising the constructed nature of identity as using it to their advantage against the binary system.

I have also taken the influence of Halberstam's related concept of the transgender butch as a concept located along the borders between or lying somewhere in the middle of an imaginary spectrum from butch woman to transgender man. Transgender butch can serve as a useful predecessor and tool in the conceptualisation of Genderqueer but also has its drawbacks, which genderqueer seems to manage to avoid in part. First of all, transgender butch would appear to only take into account female-bodied people who would be seen as being somewhere along a spectrum of transmasculinity. It does not allow other forms of non-normative gender and also implies a scale or spectrum between female and male, albeit between butch femaleness and trans maleness. Genderqueer as a possibility or perspective on gender allows for wide variation of bodies, presentations and perspectives that challenge the gender binary. The self-portraits by amateur genderqueer artists that are featured in this chapter bring this challenge to the gender binary visually to life. By disrupting the gender attribution process through mixed and ambiguous gender cues and other aspects of composition, such as the unusual figure-ground relationship in the third image, the viewer is forced to reconsider the usually automatic process of attributing one or other of the binary options for gender. They are forced to acknowledge that gender is not quite as simple as they had once thought and the existence, at least visually of other options. A non-binary genderqueer place begins to take on greater meaning.

Chapter four: Femme: Queering femininity

What is femme? How does it differ from normative femininity? Why does a chapter on femme belong in a work about problematising gender? Can femme be called queer? How and why is femme queer? These are some of the questions I seek to address in this chapter, as well as looking at how the photographs I have chosen, that represent femme, could be said to subvert or 'queer' the norms of femininity.

In order to determine if, why and how femme is queer, it is first necessary to establish what I mean by the use of the term queer. In will try to avoid trying to define 'queer' to one particular attitude, identity or political position or strategy, which, as Nikki Sullivan notes, 'would be a decidedly un-queer thing to do' (Sullivan 2003: 43). I will instead consider a few different ways of looking at the concept of 'queer' before clarifying how I am using the term for the purposes of this work. Despite Sullivan's assertion, it is possible to look at trends in the way ideas of 'queer' and queer theories have been commented on and attempts at explanation made. I also consider parody as a queer subversive strategy and look to apply it to femme to demonstrate how femme can be seen to queer femininity.

Queer

In her well-known book on the topic, Annamarie Jagose offers us a view of what 'queer' is *not*. 'Queer itself can have neither a fundamental logic, nor a consistent set of characteristics' (Jagose 1996: 96). In other words, queer is not just one idea or way of thinking, nor does it have a check list of exactly what is queer and what is not. It is a far more diverse, complex concept which resists being pinned down with a unified definition. Meanwhile, Cherry Smith, as cited by Nikki Sullivan, offers a suggestion of what queer can be. For Smith, queer 'defines a strategy, an attitude… [Q]ueer articulates a radical questioning of social and cultural norms, notions of gender, reproductive sexuality and the family' (cited in Sullivan 2003: 43). This gives us a slightly clearer view of the types of ideas surrounding the possible meanings and usages of this particularly multi-faceted term. What is important to note is that queer is conceptualised here as active and in motion. By motion, I do not mean the fluidity of identity often connected with queer theory, but simply *activity*. It is not a category

of essential *being*, rather a *doing*, which describes practices of resistance to the aforementioned social norms. This strategy, or perhaps more accurately these *strategies,* in the plural, refers to the ways in which people are carrying through this resistance. The attitude (as referred to by Smith) is *in relation to* these norms, it is not solely abstract; it is part of the resistance but also the motivating force behind such resistance or 'radical questioning' (cited in Sullivan 2003: 43) in the words of Cherry Smith. Furthermore, Lisa Duggan has argued that queer also offers 'the promise of new meanings, new ways of thinking and acting politically' (Duggan 1992: 11). Therefore, queer is not only about activity and movement in the physical sense, but also in an intellectual and psychological sense, in that queer can include these new ideas as part of its strategy and also as part of its result. As Sullivan lucidly summarises, 'Queer (Theory) is constructed as a sort of vague and indefinable set of practices and (political) strategies and positions that has the potential to challenge normative knowledges and identities' (Sullivan 2003: 43-44).

However, despite Duggan's claim that queer is not a just a new term which has been developed to describe old ideas (Duggan 1992: 11) in some cases queer is conceptualised as a sort of umbrella term to describe the various different types of members of a community with one word. Sullivan gives us a very clear example of this in which the former editor of a Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans community magazine clearly states that for him, queer functions as a catch-all term in order to avoid having to list all the individual categories of people who can be seen to be part of the LGBT community (Sullivan 2003: 44).

Austrian queer theorist and philosopher Gudrun Perko also presents an interesting but somewhat problematic explanation of the possible meanings of the term queer in her book *Queer-Theorien* (Queer Theories), published in 2005. She offers three alternative versions of queer, regarding which categories of people can be seen to be covered by the term. She calls the first form *(feminist)-lesbian-gay-queer,* where queer functions as a synonym for lesbian and gay. The second variation is the *lesbian-gay-bi-transgender* version which is somewhat extended by the addition of the two further categories of bisexual and transgender. Her third, and preferred form is the *plural-queer variation*,

in which the widest possible variety of human beings and forms of living (transgender man, transgender woman, intersexed people, drag kings and drag queens, camp, cyborg, tommboyfemme, lesbian, gay etc.) is included under the politically strategic umbrella term Queer (translated from German Perko 2005: 8).[2]

She makes it clear that she wishes her use of the term queer to be understood as the third *plural-queer* version and goes on to explain her view of the *plural-queer* in more detail and how she considers that the *plural-queer* version would work .

> Its main points – such as the live and let live of plural and plurisexual forms of living, the possibility of self-definition, the opening of diverse spaces, the recognition of ambiguity and plurality, etc. – go against thinking in dichotomous binaries and so aim towards a changed way of thinking. Boundaries are broken down, hierarchical categorisations, definitive models of identity and identity politics, polarities as well as dichotomous figures of thought are ultimately deconstructed with the intention to open democratic space on all levels of societal life to plurality. In this sense, this book sets itself against heteronomy and categorisations and against the conceptualisation of clear-cut identities and identity models, which exclude certain people, marginalise and discriminate against certain people, and for a democratic society that is in favour of mutual recognition and plurality (translated from German Perko 2005: 8).[3]

Although Perko goes into further depth and makes a strong case for her preferred *plural-queer* variation she misses the point which the previously mentioned authors have made and the opportunity to see queer as an active resistance to norms; to use it in the sense that when something is described as queer, it is not in itself actually queer. What is in fact meant by this is that it is *queering.* It is *doing,* it is having an effect on social norms.

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[2] My own translation from the original German 'in der die gröβtmögliche Vielfalt von menschlichen Seinsweisen und Lebensformen (transgender Mann, transgender Frau, Intersexe, Drag Kings und Drag Queens Camp, Cyborg, Tommboyfemme, lesbisch, schwul u.v.m.) unter dem politisch-strategisch verwendeten Oberbegriff gefasst wird' (Perko 2005: 8).

[3] My own translation from the original German 'Ihre Kernaussagen – wie das Sein-Lassen pluraler und plurisexueller Lebensweisen, die Möglichkeit der Selbstdefinition, die Eröffnung vielfältiger Räume, die Anerkennung von Ambiguität un Pluralität etc. – richten sich gegen ein Denken in dichotomen Binaritäten und zielen so auf eine veränderte Denkweise ab: Grenzen werden durchgebrochen, hierarchisierende Kategorisierungen, eindeutige Identitätsmodelle und Identitätspolitiken, Polarisierungen sowie dichotome Denkfiguren werden letztlich mit Intention dekonstruiert, der konfliktualen Pluralität auf allen Ebenen des gesellschaftlichen Lebens demokratischen Raum zu eröffnen. In diesem Sinne setzt sich das vorliegende gegen Fremdbestimmungen und Identitäten und Identitätspolitiken, die bestimmte Menschen ausgrenzen marginalisieren und diskriminieren, und für demokratischen Gesellschaftsentwurf ein, der sich für die gegenseitige Anerkennung und für Pluralität ausspricht' (Perko 2005: 8).

It would appear that Perko's description of queer as an umbrella term for a certain group of people, even though her preferred version includes a very wide range of people, can be seen to contradict her subsequent explanation of what she considers to be the possible effects of her *plural-queer* version, as quoted above. She seems aware of some of the possible outcomes of queer but not of how a static descriptive term could achieve those outcomes. However, her view of queer in general does appear to be that of a descriptive word for, in her own words 'a state of existence against the norm' (translated from German Perko 2005: 16)[4]. If the term is to be used merely as a descriptive umbrella term for a very varied group of people, surely the possibilities to impact on social norms are fairly limited? Perko's conceptualisation of queer as a 'politically strategic umbrella term' (translated from German Perko 2005: 8)[5] seems to be somewhat oxymoronic, as reducing queer to an adjective, albeit a political one, masks the *activity and motion* of queer as a concept for change and takes away a certain amount of the possible impact.

Despite missing some of the points made by some of the previously mentioned authors about the *activity* of queer, it is, however important to acknowledge that Perko does recognise some of the *potential* of queer, 'which radically calls the seemingly natural order of things into question,' (translated from German Perko 2005: 27)[6] although without really considering how queer as a descriptive term could conceivably be working strategically and politically whilst static. A further recognition on her part, despite writing about 'being queer' (translated from German Perko 2005: 29)[7] is that queer does not refer to one simple, clear-cut identity rather, it refers to the mobility of gender and desire. She also notes that queer can facilitate and strengthen the strategy of ambiguity although does not acknowledge queer as a strategy in itself (Perko 2005: 30). Crucially, her manifesto for the plural queer, very clearly emphasises queer as more that just a synonym for lesbian and gay, but as a far wider, diverse and more complex concept. Perko's attempt at putting the concepts of queer and queer theory into words, though deficient in some areas, is an important basis for other theorists to work from and build upon.

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[4] My own translation from the original German 'Gegen-die-Norm-Sein' (Perko 2005: 16).
[5] My own translation from the original German 'politisch-strategisch verwendeten Oberbegriff' (Perko 2005: 8).
[6] My own translation from the original German 'das die angeblich natürliche Ordnung der Dinge radikal in Frage stellt (Perko 2005: 27).
[7] My own translation from the original German 'Queer-Sein[…]' (Perko 2005: 29).

David Halperin gave a clear and widely acknowledged explanation of queer back in 1995:

> Queer is by definition *whatever* is at odds with the normal, the legitimate, the dominant. *There is nothing to which it necessarily refers.* […] "Queer," then demarcates not a positivity but a positionality vis-à-vis the normative… [Queer] describes a horizon of possibility whose precise extent and heterogeneous scope cannot in principle be delimited in advance' (Halperin 1995: 62).

Though perhaps not apparent from the outset, this explanation of queer may also be interpreted more as an active than passive concept. To be 'at odds with' does not solely mean 'different from,' as often taken on first impression, rather, according to the 2010 version of the Oxford English Dictionary, it also means to be' 'in conflict or at variance with'. Therefore queer does not merely stay outside of, or different from the norms, it is actively in conflict with them and moving to remain so. It is not an actuality or existing objective fact ('positivity') rather it is constantly *positioning* itself (or being positioned) in relation to the norms, with which it remains in active conflict. Halperin recognises that the possible effects of queer are extremely broad and unpredictable and comments further on this 'conflict' and possible outcomes.

> Resistance to normativity is not purely negative or reactive or destructive, in other words; it is also positive and dynamic and creative. It is by resisting the institutional practices, which in their scattered and diffuse functioning, contribute to the operation of heteronormativity that queer identities can open a social space for the construction of different identities, for the elaboration of various types of relationships, for the development of new cultural forms. (Halperin 1995: 67)

Though the expression 'queer identities' can be viewed as implying an essential identity it is clear that this is not what Halperin intended, as he goes on to talk about constructing different identities. If we take this, therefore, to mean the active living of queer practices one recognises that Halperin, in fact, did articulate the active nature of queer in relation to societal norms.

Antke Engel, German Philosopher and Director of the Institute of Queer Theory, which is a cooperation between the Universities of Hamburg and Berlin, comes closest to putting into words how I feel the concepts of queer and the key ideas of queer theory can best be explained and how I wish my use of these terms to be

understood. In her 2009 book *Bilder von Sexualität und Ökonomie. Queere kulturelle Politiken im Neoliberalismus* (in English, *Images of sexuality and Economy. Queer cultural politics in neoliberalism)* she first of all very simply states what she considers queer theory to be about.

> Queer theory deals with the question as to how we can think about – and live – the body, gender and sexuality so that they do not always remain bound to a rigid two-gender system and to the norm of heterosexuality (translated from German Engel 2009: 19). [8]

Most importantly, on the following page, she goes on to state that she views queer theory as a critique of any form of identity construction and that she views the term queer, 'not as a description for individuals or social groups […] rather in terms of *queering* – to describe practices as well as interventions that instigate change in the regime of normality' (translated from German Engel 2009: 20) (my emphasis).[9]

My understanding of queer theory and subsequently of the concept of queer is formed from a mixture of the many possibilities discussed thus far. It is to some extent in line with that which Antke Engel has concisely noted in her book, as quoted above. Queer theory, then, can be viewed as the way of thinking about and analysing the broader strategy of (*queer)ing,* which deals with ways (that is, the lived practices) in which the dominant ideas of binary gender and heterosexuality and gender norms are called into question, challenged and broken down. Queer, as per my interpretation of Halperin, remains in constant conflict with the norms, looking towards the possibilities described by Perko in her support of her plural-queer version, which however, as Halperin recognises, are very unpredictable.

Parody

Doris Leibetseder conceptualises parody theoretically as one of her queer subversive strategies in her 2010 publication *Queere Tracks: Subversive Strategien in der Rock- und Popmusik* (in English*, Queer Tracks: Subversive strategies in rock and pop*

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[8] My own translation from the original German 'Queer Theory befasst sich mit der Frage, wie wir Körper, Geschlecht und Sexualität so denken – und leben – können, dass sie nicht immer wieder an eine rigide Zwei-Geschlechter-Ordnung und die Norm der Heterosexualität rückgebunden werden' (Engel 2009: 19).

[9] My own translation from the original German ' nicht zur Bezeichnung von Individuen oder sozialen Gruppen geeignet, sondern [...] im Sinne von queering – zu Bezeichnung von Praxen sowie verändernden Eingriffen in Normalitätsregime' (Engel 2009: 20).

music – forthcoming (2012) Ashgate). She explains that in ancient Greece, parody was an 'after song' or a 'counter song'. In the ancient Greek, there was the term 'parados', which describes an imitating singer' or an 'imitating singing' in contrast to the concept of the original singer. The word "ridiculous" was used to describe the basic meaning of parody as the 'singing of a song' where the words were altered (Leibetseder 2010: 55).

According to Linda Hutcheon, parody is a repetition with a critical difference. Herein lies its subversive potential. A subversive parody would have a political 'cutting edge', which undermines the hegemonic system with the aid of this critical difference (Hutcheon 1985: 37). Parody, therefore is not simple imitation, rather a distortion of the original; it 'de-realises' norms that the original tries to realise' by uncovering the falseness of that which appears to be the original.

In her chapter dealing with the subversive strategy of irony, Leibetseder also briefly discusses the similarities and differences between irony and parody. She notes that 'irony is based on a word or a sign that can adopt two different meanings. Parody, on the other hand, is comprised of a repetition or imitation that, in act of repetition, takes on a second meaning' (translated from German Leibetseder 2010: 33).[10] She explains further that 'parody uses irony as a structural function in that irony occurs through the maintaining of the original outer form (style, structure, performance) and gives the content another meaning' (translated from German Leibetseder 2010: 33). [11] She also notes that, although they are based on different factors they function in similar ways, that is, as they both criticise and ridicule (Leibetseder 2010: 33).

Parody, then, with its similar functions and its interlinked nature with irony must possess similar characteristics to a subversive irony in order to meet its subversive potential. Leibetseder underlines that a subversive irony must contain a 'political sharpness,' that is, Hutcheon's 'cutting edge,' that is recognizable beyond

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[10] My own translation from the original German 'Die Ironie fußt auf einem Wort oder einem Zeichen, das zwei verschiedene Bedeutungen annehmen kann. Die Parodie wiederum besteht aus einer Wiederholung aus einer Wiederholung oder Nachahmung, die im wiederholenden Akt eine zweite Bedeutung annimmt' (Leibetseder 2010: 33)..

[11] My own translation from the original German 'die Parodie benüzt die Ironie als eine strukturelle Funktion, indem die Ironie durch die Beibehaltung der äußeren ursprunglichen Form (Stil, Struktur, Performanz) vorkommt und dem Inhalt eine andere Bedeutung gibt' (Leibetseder 2010: 33).

ambivalence. By this, she explains, that although on a semantic level, irony can have two meanings; the meaning with the political message must be unambiguous.

Butler's Gender parody

As Judith Butler demonstrates in her theorisation of gender parody, gender identity is constructed through disciplinary production. Certain actions, gestures and desires create the illusion of an inner core or an inner substance, an identity that is a factual reality. These actions, gestures and desires, which construct gender identity, are seen to be an expression of the identity that they have created, which serves the reproductive, heterosexual system (Butler 2006: 184-185). Butler uses the example of 'drag' as a form of gender parody that does not simply imitate an original; rather it exposes the original gender identity, or gender presentation via this exaggerated copy or repetition, as an imitation of a non-existent original. For Butler, this can be applied to all gender identities, in that all gender identities are simply imitations of false originals. One could argue, however that they do not fit the characteristics of a subversive parody, as they are lacking in any 'political sharpness' which could be in any way subversive. She emphasises that parody is not necessarily of itself subversive, rather it is in the constant repetition that can work to challenge the cultural hegemonic system (Butler 2006: 189). In her later work she states that, 'at best it seems, drag is a site of a certain ambivalence, one which reflects the more general situation of being implicated in the regimes of power by which one is constituted and hence, of being implicated in the very regimes of power that one opposes,' (Butler 1993: 125). She is thus recognizing the possible ambiguous nature of some types of drag. She summarises the possibilities of a subversive drag (or parody): 'drag is subversive to the extent that it reflects on the imitative structure by which hegemonic gender is itself produced and disputes heterosexuality's claim on naturalness and originality' (Butler 1993: 125). One could add that it is only subversive to the extent not just that it reflects thereon, but that it incites its spectators to reflect thereon.

Femme

So, what is femme?! Academic work on the topic is quite rare and also in most part relatively recent. One of the main works on the topic is the 2009 German language

edited volume by Sabine Fuchs entitled *Femme! Radikal – Queer – Feminin.* Fuchs describes femme as a 'declaration of war against traditional ideas of femininity as weak, helpless and meaningless' (translated from German Fuchs 2009: 12).[12] She also suggests that to try and find a vocabulary to attempt to describe the complexity and diversity of femme would produce a situation of social in- and exclusion as do any such categorisations. She explains that there is much disagreement as to how femme should be defined, whether it should be defined at all and declares it to be a positive thing if the future of the term is left open with regards to whom and in which ways people can choose to take on the term femme as a descriptor for themselves (Fuchs 2009: 10). Femme is not reactionary; femmes combine femininity with a radical gender- and sexual politics and transform it into femme-ininity. Femme is not rooted in supposed 'natural' femininity of a female body, rather it is a transformational performance; it accomplishes a major feat: by living as femme, they deal with gender and sexuality in a radical way. Living as femme is not a strategy of assimilation; femmes are not simply feminine, in the traditional, heternormative sense (Fuchs 2009: 12), rather as part of a deliberate queer strategy. However, she does mention that in some lesbian circles, particularly since the late 1980s, femininity was seen as synonymous with conforming to the binary gendered, heterosexual lifestyle and thereby as politically incorrect and non-lesbian (Fuchs 2009: 14-15). It was considered to be an uncritical and unquestioning taking on of clichéd gender roles and therefore as non-queer and non-subversive. Fuchs emphasizes that this mistrust of femmes stems from the low value that is given to femaleness and thereby femininity in the heterosexist, patriarchal mainstream society and that this low opinion has been transferred over to queer-feminist communities (Fuchs 2009: 15).

Normative heterosexual femininity has been so rigidly policed by society that only certain people are considered to be 'truly feminine.' People who are not female or who do not fit exactly the norms for what is expected and required both in looks and behaviour have been largely ineligible for the traditional label of femininity.

Femme involves the making and breaking of rules, rather than abiding by previously established ones. It involves resistance to definitions. Traditionally

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[12] My own translation from the original German 'eine Kampfansage an die traditionelle Vorstellung von
Femininität als schwach, hilflos und unbedeutend' (Fuchs 2009: 12).

feminine women have very strict rules defined by the times in which they live. Should they fail to conform they may compromise their access to the label "feminine" (and the associated privileges) if they do not live by the rules. 'Those who cannot or do not want to fulfil the societal beauty norms are confronted with discrimination and exclusion' (translated from German Fuchs 2009: 23).[13]

The femme's audience is defined by her, rather than by the mainstream culture. A heterosexual, normatively feminine woman may find that her audience is all men without her consent (since non-queer femininity usually caters to the pleasure and comfort of men). However, a femme can reject men's ideals for her femininity altogether, and choose to perform her gender for herself and for her other queer companions. There is a wealth of audience options for actors of the femme role. Femme is intentional rather than by being the default mode of operation for female-bodied people. Indeed, Crocker and Harris note that femme is 'a chosen rather than an assigned femininity' (Crocker, Harris 1997: 5). Fuchs writes further that femme is not just about celebrating femininity, although that is a part of it, but about putting it into a critical societal and political context (Fuchs 2009: 13).

As Lisa Duggan and Kathleen McHugh in their contribution to this volume *Ein fem(me)inistisches Manifest* write, 'Femme is not an identity […]. The body of a femme is anti-identity, a queer body in feminine drag' (translated from German Duggan, McHugh 2009: 47).[14] Further on they state that 'Femme is *la je ne sas quoi*' (original emphasis) (translated from German Duggan, McHugh 2009: 47).[15] In other words, femme is that particular something, which is unique and indescribable; it is certainly not normative or traditional. Harris and Crocker write in the introduction to their edited volume *Femme: Feminists, Lesbians and Bad Girls* that femme is not solely about how one looks but also, 'a set of behaviours used as codes of desire' (Crocker, Harris 1997: 3).

Similar to Crocker and Harris in this respect Dagmar Fink writes in her essay on the topic that 'to represent oneself as femme is not simply a question of outer appearance; it is an attitude, a habitus, a set of behaviours, desires as well as the

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[13] My own translation from the original German 'Wer gesellschaftliche Schönheitsnormen nicht erfüllen kann oder will, wird mit Diskriminierung und Ausgrenzung konfrontiert' Fuchs 2009: 23).
[14] My own translation from German 'Femme ist keine Identität […]. Der Körper der Femme ist anti-identitär, ein queerer Körper in fem(me)ininem Drag' (Duggan, McHugh 2009: 47).
[15] My own translation from German 'Femme ist *la je ne sas quoi*' (Duggan, McHugh 2009: 47).

encoding of gender' (translated from the original German Fink 2008: 174).[16] Fink also argues that femmes play with appearing similar and different at the same time. This game is at the same time serious and ironic. This simultaneous appearance of 'seeming to be like' and 'not seeming to be like' (translated from the original German Fink 2008: 174)[17] works as a resistance to heteronormative femininity and opens up space for difference.
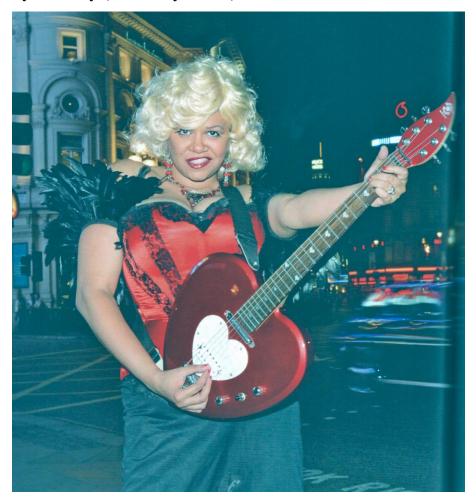
These perspectives on femme correspond very much with Leibetseder and Hutcheon's conceptualisation of parody as a repetition with a 'political sharpness' or 'cutting edge'. I propose that femme can be conceptualised as a subversive parody, which is actively queering normative femininity. It takes said femininity and distorts it, thus introducing the unambiguous subversive critical difference. Indeed, Fink recognizes femme to be an ironic imitation, which marks the difference to the norm (Fink 2008: 183).

The photos that I have chosen to visualize these thoughts on femme femininity are taken from the photo-book *Femmes of POWER: Exploding Queer Femininities.* This is a collaboration between gender variant visual artist Del LaGrace Volcano and femme academic Dr Ulrika Dahl. With the stated aim of 'exploding queer femininities', (Dahl, Volcano 2008: 25) they visually demonstrate how femme can be a subversive parody of normative femininity.

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[16] My own translation from the original German 'Sich als Femme zu repräsentieren ist nicht einfach eine Frage der äußeren Erscheinung, es ist eine Haltung, ein Habitus, ein Set an Verhaltensweisen, die Begehren wie auch Geschlecht codieren' (Fink 2008: 174).
[17] My own translation from the original German 'erscheinen wie' and 'nicht erscheinen wie' (Fink 2008: 174).

Dyke Marilyn, Piccadilly Circus, London 2006

The first image is of Maria Rosa Mojo, a mixed race, queer femme performer living in London who calls herself Dyke Marilyn, which is to be found on page 46 and 47 of the book. It spans one and a half pages of this book which is somewhere in between A4 and A5 format. Her femme is a 'brazen femininity that remains in your face!' (Dahl, Volcano 2008: 49) which is very much apparent in the photograph.

Her hair is a light blonde and styled in a typical, recognisable, Marilyn Monroe style, although it is not clear whether she is wearing a wig or whether her hair is died blonde and styled. She explains that she 'wanted to shatter the white idol of femininity' (Dahl, Volcano 2008: 48), 'expose her black roots' (Dahl, Volcano 2008: 48) and 'delight in [her] brown flesh of black and white descent' (Dahl, Volcano 2008: 49). She is of medium-large build and dressed in a bright scarlet red corset. The material of the corset has a satin- or silk-like appearance and it is trimmed with black lace. Its shape at the top of the corset and its form pushes up the bust and

emphasises the cleavage. Around her upper arms, she is wearing armbands made of large black feathers and around her neck a large silver necklace with red beads, which ends in a triangle form which points downwards and also emphasises the cleavage. She is also wearing matching, long earrings, also silver with the red beads. Her skirt is black, fitted and also of silk- or satin-like appearance and although the photograph is taken from relatively close up, so that her legs are cut off at the bottom of the photo roughly at mid-thigh, one can perceive a hint of lace in the middle of the skirt. Her finger nails are painted red, she wears bright red lipstick, dark mascara has been heavily applied to her eyelashes to give a long and curved appearance and her eyebrows seem to have been drawn on with eyebrow pencil.

Her body position is somewhat asymmetrical; she is leaning on her right hip so her upper body is leaning in this direction and her left hip is emphasised. She is holding, in playing position for a right hander, an electric guitar whose body is red and hear shaped with a white heart in the middle. There are little white hearts on the fingerboard, which is otherwise a mid-brown wood effect colour and the headstock is also red. With her left hand she is holding the neck with her fingers on the finger board so the backs of her fingers are facing outwards so a large silver ring on her left ring finger is noticeable. Her facial expression is also worthy of note as her mouth expression could be described as an aggressive, but also sexually provocative grimace and the eyes stare boldly and directly at the camera; her face and whole body are also facing square on to the camera. In the left side of her nose is a small silver nose stud.

As a first impression, much of her appearance may seem to stem from normative femininity; however it is the combination of, timing and context of her presentation which makes it unusual and radically different. Her exaggerated, extremely sexualised attire, in particular a lace trimmed red corset and black skirt with lace accompanied with black feathers would appear to be more typical dress of a prostitute (i.e. another kind of performer of exaggerated femininity) or more suited to the bedroom than normal daywear of a normatively feminine woman. Her stance with the guitar, on first glance purely a playing position, on the second, an ironic phallic symbol gripped in ownership and power by her left hand. Her facial expression is aggressive and sexual, her clothes, make-up and hair are hyperbolic, excessive and overstated in comparison with what is accepted as normatively feminine appearance and behaviour.

The picture is taken at night so the background is dark with only artificial lights, some of which create a blurred effect through movement. One can distinguish tall, grandiose buildings on both sides of the picture, traffic lights, road markings and a tall tower with indistinguishable words in lights on top and a car which, due to the blurred effects of the reflections of light, seems to be driving past. As we know from the information given in the book the background scene is, in fact, Piccadilly Circus in London. The figure ground relationship is such that the figure is close up, prominent and in sharp focus whilst the ground is less so. Though the depth of field is not particularly shallow, as objects in the background are sufficiently sharp, the dark lighting of the background and full lighting of the figure mean that the figure is emphasised and draws the viewers focus.

Dyke Marilyn is dominant, forward, sexually provocative, phallic and takes command of the camera. The lighting and figure ground relationship emphasise her presence. She is a woman on her own, dressed provocatively standing in the street in central London at night and carrying an electric guitar. Despite wearing some articles of jewellery and make-up would be appropriate to normative femininity, this is precisely everything that stereotypically feminine heterosexual woman should not be and do. Being normatively feminine is associated with passivity not the assertive, emphatic presence in this photograph. Dyke Marilyn embodies a queer subversive parody. She is imitating aspects of normative femininity and putting them into a completely different, non-normative context; through her domineering persona and exaggerated clothing, she adds the critical difference.

Itziar Ziga, Barcelona 2007

Itziar describes herself as an 'extreme radical femme' with a 'degree in journalism' and a 'writer by passion' (Dahl, Volcano 2008:73). She lives in Barcelona, a city, she says, 'where I am possible' (Dahl, Volcano 2008:74). In this image, found on page 75, she is wearing a floor length vibrantly coloured patterned skirt; large bright green squares sit in between smaller shocking pink ones and rectangles in blue or black and white patterns. The bottom part of the skirt also has some red patterned material

mixed with the green, which also has multi-coloured patterns across the material. Her top is made of the same deep red patterned material; it is sleeveless and has a low plunging neckline. Her finger nails are also painted a deep red, on her left index finger she wears a ring and on her right wrist a shocking pink plastic bracelet and string bracelet. In her right hand she is holding the side of ruffle of her skirt to her right hip, which is pushed over slightly so as to emphasise the right hip as opposed to the left. The left hand is on her left hip and she looks boldly and deliberately sideways, over her right shoulder. Bright green eye-shadow makes up her eyes; from her ears hang fluorescent green plastic fish earrings and she wears a black studded dog collar around her neck, with a padlock as a pendant. Her hair is died a blue-black colour and cut starkly away from her forehead and temples, creating a strangely exact line for her fringe and adding to the eclectically unusual appearance.

This picture is taken in front of apartment blocks with washing hanging from the small balconies; chairs and plant pots are also visible and give a 'lived in' feel while the discoloration of the buildings and close shops with graffiti covered shutters implies urban decay and a poor area. In contrast to Dyke Marilyn's picture, although the figure is very much in the foreground the depth of field is much deeper so that all these details, including letters and numbers on the shops and individual stones of the houses are clearly discernible. Here, the background also has an important meaning; it references Itziar's working class background, which is very much part of her heritage (Dahl, Volcano 2008:73).

The style of the clothes gives a very Latin impression, indeed Itziar mentions her 'flamenco imagery' (Dahl, Volcano 2008:77) and refers regularly to her Latin origins and culture. This flamenco style is also apparent in her bodily stance, with hands on hips, one hip accentuated and the skirt ruffles held to the hip on one side, which not only moves away from passive norms of femininity, as flamenco requires strength and boldness, but also in the mixture of bright colours that highlights this eccentricity. The various unconventional accessories, particularly the dog collar with padlock, add a leather or punk-rock style which is also far from conventionally feminine and in contrast to other aspects of her presentation. The flamenco style is and stance can also be read as sexually provocative as could the strong sideways look. There are certainly aspects to be taken from normative femininity, in general a floor length skirt and fitted, sleeveless top, necklace with a pendant, bracelet and

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earrings could fit this category. However, in the case of Itziar in this photograph everything has an unusual twist which takes it away from normativity. She says herself on the topic of femmes that 'exuberant femininity distinguishes us from the heterosexual Latin female who apparently delights in the roles of woman/wife/mother' (Dahl, Volcano 2008:73). Certainly, her femininity is a very different one from that which is expected, whilst the combination with this particular background makes it clear that her working-class background, which maybe would be an obstacle to conforming to normative femininity, is not object when it comes to living as femme. In her own word from the point of view of a femme 'we parody that which we never wanted to become' (Dahl, Volcano 2008:73).

Femme = Femininity queered?

Particularly worthy of note is that the photographs of Dyke Marilyn and Itziar Ziga demonstrate that femme can cross boundaries of race, class, build and body image. Dyke Marilyn is proudly and openly of mixed racial heritage and wears clothing that emphasises her heavier build and rounder curves, whilst Itziar Ziga is photographed in an urban, working class area and stands proudly by her working class heritage. They show that femmes create their own style and behaviour rules. They are both assertive and sexually provocative; in Dyke Marilyn's case to the point of aggression, and have developed their own femme way of presenting themselves.

For Volcano it was important, for this project in particular, to give the people being photographed a voice (Dahl, Volcano 2008:14). With this in mind each photo is accompanied by a short piece of prose made up of the ideas expressed in interview with the photographed person themselves about their life, the photograph, their experience of the shooting and their thoughts and views on femme and how they relate to it. These texts are important to the context of the images and they cannot be separated from each other without losing the context that they give each other. Thus, I refer repeatedly to the texts accompanying my chosen images, which lend context to and enrich my analyses of these images.

In some of the other writings, femme was also described in similar ways to those mentioned by the academics Fuchs, Fink etc. In the piece of writing accompanying the photograph of Stav B, for example, 'femme does not originate in femaleness' (Dahl, Volcano 2008: 54) whilst Meliza and Celestina argue that femme

can involve a 'brazen 'kiss my ass' attitude' (Dahl, Volcano 2008: 59). For transfemme Andy Candy 'femme is a kind of femininity that is dissonant, clearly distinguishable from the straight kind' (Dahl, Volcano 2008: 88).

This lends weight to the academic line of argumentation that femme is a radical, chosen femininity that differs significantly, deliberately and recognisably from normative femininity as the people themselves who are living as femme also recognise it as such. Femme is femininity with a twist. This 'twist' lends it its subversive potential and power; it gives it the necessary political sharpness. Taking on a femme persona and living as femme does not relegate that person to a subordinate status; rather, it allows for the queering of femininity itself.

It is necessary to concede, that, in the same way that not all forms of irony or parody contain the recognisable difference that gives it a political cutting edge, not all representations of femme will be recognisable enough in their difference to be subversive. However, the two images that I have chosen demonstrate that femme and representations of femme can be subversive parodies of normative femininity, which possess the necessary cutting edge. Femmes are living and performing this non-normative femme femininity for themselves but also for all the world to experience. Femme is queer because it is queer*ing*; it is part of the active strategy. It is subverting normative femininity and denaturalising it as the only possibility for female-bodied people.

Chapter five: Queertopia: Other time and space

'Queer is by definition *whatever* is at odds with the normal, the legitimate, the dominant. *There is nothing to which it necessarily refers.* It is an identity without an essence' (Halperin 1995: 62).

As discussed in the previous chapter, queer can refer to strategies which call social and cultural norms regarding gender and sexuality into question. In this chapter I propose a radical extension of Halperin's definition of 'queer' as anything 'at odds with the normal' to encompass conceptions of non-normativity that go beyond genders and sexualities to conceptions of the fundamental categories of time and space. In particular, I explore ways in which ideas of non-normative time and space can be conceptualised, before going on to examine the subversion of these categories in topographical photography. I also consider the potential for photography to mediate experiences of profound spatio-temporal dislocation in the neglected spaces of postmodernity.

Foucault's Other Spaces

The work on which some of the varied conceptions of non-normative time and space which are now referred to as postmodern geography are based is Foucault's *Of Other Spaces.* As Edward W. Soja explains, this seminal text came from lecture notes prepared by Foucault in 1967 that he never considered for publication. They formed part of a set of lecture notes which were then released to the public shortly before his death in 1984 for an exhibition in Berlin. They were first published under the title *Des Espaces autres* in the architecture journal *Architecture - Mouvement -* in the same year and subsequently in English translation in the *Diacritics* journal in 1986 (Soja 1996:154).

Foucault starts by stating that the obsession of the nineteenth century was history and speculating that that of the present epoch might turn out to be space. He goes on to set out a very brief history of time and space in which he sets the two concepts against each other. He looks at space in the Middle Ages which he deems to be hierarchical and consisting of several different types of space, each serving a specific purpose. He terms this 'medieval space' 'the space of emplacement'

(Foucault 1986: 22). According to Foucault Galileo's work brought the end to medieval ideas. They were 'dissolved' and made way for an 'infinitely open space'. He then changes tack slightly; writing about today's space he starts to use the word 'site'. Contemporary space, then, 'takes for us the form of relations among sites'. The word 'site' is described as 'defined by relations of proximity between points or elements' (Foucault 1986: 23). He comments further that 'the anxiety of our era has to do fundamentally with space, no doubt a great deal more than with time' (Foucault 1986: 23). Further, for Foucault

> our life is still governed by a certain number of oppositions that remain inviolable, that our institutions and practices have not yet dared to break down. These are oppositions that we regard as simple givens: for example between private space and public space, between family space and social space, between cultural space and useful space, between the space of leisure and that of work' (Foucault 1986: 23).

Certain spaces have not yet been 'desanctified' (Foucault 1986: 23), that is, there are still many fixities in the current uses and ideas of space. Significantly, he theorises space as 'a set of relations' (Foucault 1986: 23). The important substance of this article, which relates to how others have subsequently and how I intend to conceptualise non-normative space, is his dealing with the 'other' spaces mentioned in the title. Such spaces were termed 'heterotopias' and according to Foucault are linked to and also contradict all other sites (Foucault 1986: 24).

First of all utopias are mentioned as 'sites with no real place' (Foucault 1986: 24) that either reflect the current society in a perfected form or in a completely altered, opposite form, which is presented as an ideal. He stresses that utopias are 'fundamentally unreal spaces' and are generally not compatible with the real space of society (Foucault 1986: 24). He then goes on to state that there are also places that exist cross-culturally which function as counter-sites in which other sites are 'represented, contested and inverted' (Foucault 1986: 24). These sites, although it is possible to locate them in real space, Foucault argues that these sites are 'outside of all places' because 'they are absolutely different from all the sites that they reflect and speak about' which is why he has termed them 'heterotopias' in contrast to utopias (Foucault 1986: 24). He also terms the study of heterotopias as 'heterotopology' which he describes as 'a sort of simultaneously mythic and real

contestation of the space in which we live' (Foucault 1986: 24). He goes on to outline what he considers to be the six principles of heterotopias, using examples to aid the illustrations of each principle.

The first principle, he argues, is that heterotopias are a cross-culturally occurring phenomenon but that they take on very varied forms according to the culture in which they are occurring. They can, however, be divided into two main categories. The first category is called heterotopias of crisis, which occur mostly in what Foucault refers to as 'primitive societies'. These are places especially for people who are in a state of crisis in relation to the society in which they are living such as adolescents, menstruating and pregnant women and the elderly. Such heterotopias are disappearing in our society, states Foucault, but a few remaining examples include boarding schools and military service camps for young men (Foucault 1986: 24). These heterotopias of crisis are being replaced, in our modern society by heterotopias of deviation; these are places which are outside of the acceptable norms for society or which accommodate such non-normative behaviour. Foucault gives the example of retirement homes, psychiatric hospitals and prisons. He does admit that the heterotopia of a retirement home occupies a middle ground between the two categories (Foucault 1986: 25). However, there seems to me to be little difference between the categories as a whole as the majority of these 'states of crisis' can also be considered as deviations from the norm. The variation occurs because the states which are considered to be crises or deviations vary from culture to culture and change over time. Most important to take from Foucault's thoughts surrounding his first principle is that heterotopias are spaces in which deviations from the societal norms occur in one form or another. Some of his ideas as to what constitutes such deviations are not always obvious spaces that one would think of straight away as unusual.

However one space that is somewhat clearer as an unusual space is the heterotopia of the cemetery, which is the example used to illustrate the second principle, as they demonstrate how within a particular society the function of certain heterotopias can change over time. Foucault notes that cemeteries in Western cultures, up until the end of the eighteenth century, were generally situated in the centre of a village, town or city next to the church and the assignment of tombs was very hierarchical. However from the beginning of the nineteenth century cemeteries

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were placed on the outside of communities as the dead were thought to bring illness to the living so were kept away from the houses. The cemetery was no longer at the heart of the community but became an 'other' place (Foucault 1986: 25). Thirdly, heterotopias are capable of juxtaposing sites that otherwise would appear incompatible, within a single space. Here, he mentions the theatre as an example, which represents many places in one space which don't fit or belong together. He also cites the cinema as one such site of juxtaposition as it is an unusual rectangular room where three dimensional space is projected on to a two dimensional screen (Foucault 1986: 25).

The relationship between heterotopias and time is dealt with by the fourth principle of heterotopology. Foucault argues that heterotopias can be linked to heterochronies, which are breaks in traditional or normative time. The cemetery is again an example for this as it is associated with the end of life and also an eternity (Foucault 1986: 26). He also separated the heterotopias which are associated with these heterochronies, or aspects of non-normative time, into two categories. Firstly, there are the heterotopias of 'indefinitely accumulating time' such as the archives of libraries and museums and there are also the heterotopias that are linked to 'fleeting, transient, precarious aspects' of time. The fairground is Foucaults example of this kind of temporally linked heterotopia as it exists only infrequently on an otherwise empty or non-existent site (Foucault 1986: 26). The fifth principle has to do with the accessibility of heterotopias, which, Foucault argues, either require some form of permission to enter or entry is compulsory as opposed to their being publicly accessible spaces. They are generally in some way excluded from public view (Foucault 1986: 26). The final aspect of Foucault's heterotopology is that heterotopias also take on a role in relation to the space around them; either as a space of illusion or as a space of compensation, that is 'other' but in a 'perfected' and 'meticulous' form, in comparison to the surroundings. One of the examples put forward here is that of colonies, in particular the puritan communities of the English colonists in the United States of America which functioned as a regulated version of previous unordered society structures (Foucault 1986: 26).

I do not wish to suggest that Foucault's conceptualisation of non-normative space and time as heterotopias and some that are related to heterochronies; is a faultless and overriding view of how one can view unusual aspects of time and space.

Heterotopias are quite a specific form of non-normative time and space and cannot be universally applied in this context. Foucault's ideas do, however provide a framework, which I and other theorists can use to build upon and form other concepts of non-normative time and space.

Strange Spaces

Andre Jansson and Amanda Lagerkvist are some of these theorists that have furthered Foucault's idea of heterotopias in their 2009 edited volume *Strange Spaces.* In the introductory chapter of this book they conceptualise 'strange spaces' as 'those bewildering and sometimes unspeakably bizarre spaces where disruption or disarray leave social subjects *estranged* and out of place' (Jansson, Lagerkvist 2009: 2). These *strange spaces* are 'geographies of uncertainty and in-betweenness; of cognitive displacement, loss, fear or exhilaration' (Jansson, Lagerkvist 2009: 2). What is meant by this feeling of *estrangement* is explained further starting with the definition of the verb *to* from the *Oxford Dictionary of the English Language* which has nine entries;

> to remove something from its familiar place; to make someone a stranger to a condition of place; to withhold from a person's perception or knowledge; to render alien; to alienate in feeling or affection; to make unlike oneself; to render strange or unfamiliar in appearance; to be astonished (quoted in Jansson, Lagerkvist 2009: 2).

These definitions have in common a sense of otherness, alienation and/or something new and unknown. The types of otherness or othering can include 'exile', the 'obscene', the 'deviant' and 'queer' is even mentioned briefly as a form of otherness that can be linked to this feeling of *estrangement* brought about by *strange spaces.* Some of the spaces that can cause this othering or *estrangement* can range from unplanned spaces and spaces that only exist infrequently, spaces in states of ruin or decay that may be disappearing, decadent and disorderly space or spaces that invoke a sense of awe or wonder. Jansson and Lagerkvist also state that, for them, strangeness, in terms of *strange spaces,* is not meant solely in terms of the 'unfamiliar' or 'other' but also has to do with 'a psycho-cultural spectrum of spatial opacity'. Strangeness is not only marked by 'interpretive conflict or surprise,' but

also by a sense of the paradoxical, disorientation and unease (Jansson, Lagerkvist 2009: 2).

The first example they use is that of an old ferry boat, which used to commute between two small Swedish Islands during the 1970s and 1980s. This boat is now used to take travellers across the Malaccan strait between Malaysian Penang and Indonesian Sumatra. They describe the boat as 'worn-out' and write that it has been fitted with old aeroplane seats and is 'reeking of cigarette smoke'. It is also travelling in an area known for being under risk of pirate attacks and where accidents are common. These circumstances combine to evoke a 'thrill or fear' about this space which contribute to a sense of 'emotional estrangement'. Jansson and Lagerkvist also refer to Foucault who actually uses the boat as his final example of heterotopias as boats in general are 'heterotopias par excellence' because they are spaces where an unusual combined spatial and temporal situation occurs and where seemingly incompatible sites are juxtaposed (Jansson, Lagerkvist 2009: 2). Foucault writes that 'The boat is a floating piece of space, a place without a place, that exists by itself, that is closed in on itself and at the same time is given over to the infinity of the sea' (Foucault 1986: 26). In other words it is a non-place; it is nowhere, but it is also a real place; it is somewhere because it is a place in itself. It also has no time, but also has its own time frame. It is a space that, once on water is inaccessible but also in a never-ending space and time.

Further on, Jansson and Lagerkvist begin to elaborate on the topic of strange spaces;

> what is strange about strange spaces, however, lies beyond imaginative travels and subject formation by means of *reading experiences* and arises out of a shift in perception and a change of the state of affairs, involving the whole body, the senses and the emotions (Jansson, Lagerkvist 2009: 3) (original emphasis).

They infer that it is not merely the space itself that is strange but also has to do with the experience of interpretation of the person who is perceiving the space. They also go on to refer to the 'significant mediatisation' of society which occurred during the twentieth century as a factor which has contributed to the production of strange spaces through mediated obscurity as a form of spatial obscurity. Interestingly, they

maintain that some of the incongruities that occur to produce strange spaces are formed due 'to the overburdening of space by means of representation' (Jansson, Lagerkvist 2009: 3). Referring again to Foucault, and aiming to 'expand on Foucault's enigmatic notion of the *heterotopia'* (Jansson, Lagerkvist 2009: 3), strange spaces are presented as possessing several of the heterotopian characteristics, in that they juxtapose elements within them that are otherwise incompatible and that they occur when there is a break in the normative temporal routine. Furthermore, strange spaces and heterotopias are also interlinked in that they either create an illusion which reveals society to be illusory and/or they are or create *other spaces.* However, in contrast to heterotopias, strange spaces are not necessarily real physical spaces, rather they can appear or are produced in many different, unexpected ways and can be within and beyond dreams and imagination (Jansson, Lagerkvist 2009: 4). As such, strange spaces could also refer directly to mediated spaces and to representations of space.

What constitutes and contributes to *strangeness* is also dealt with over the course of this introductory chapter. Spatial obscurities, they note, can arise from outlawing certain practices as well as outright discrimination and also out of the unexpected happenings, changes and complexities of everyday life. 'Silence and prohibition, deviance and marginality' can also be aspects of *strangeness* (Jansson, Lagerkvist 2009: 6).The perception of *strangeness* is also important in that it is not the actually the space itself that is strange, it is the effect that it has on us and our perception of it. They argue that in perceiving a certain space as strange one must have a sense of being in the present but also somewhere else and/or in another time simultaneously. One becomes lost between the normal reality and what appears to be happening, not just in terms of space but in relation to normality in general. 'Strangeness as so conceived thus implies a distortion of the interpretive schemes and embodied understandings we apply for making sense of everyday life.' This sense of *estrangement* is like 'daydreaming in reverse' (Jansson, Lagerkvist 2009: 6).

A further useful example of strange spaces that Jansson and Lagerkvist mention later on are what they refer to as 'urban black holes' which are 'empty, left over, or left behind places' which seem to occur in most cities, even in the most well-planned, modern ones. Such spaces are often the 'decaying zones' around industry areas. Though they may appear dull and lifeless, these spaces also open to the

imagination and creativity (Jansson, Lagerkvist 2009: 6). Their position of marginality and sense of decay and nothingness invokes a sense of estrangement.

Whilst Jansson and Lagerkvist emphasise that strangeness 'cannot be reduced into one formula or form of explanation' (Jansson, Lagerkvist 2009: 6) they usefully summarise their idea of *strangeness* with regard to *strange spaces* thus;

> strangeness is brought about through a breakdown of the codes and conventions normally governing morally and/or aesthetically legitimate social appearances. Such transformations or transcendences tend to balance between the unspeakable attraction of the illegitimate and the aversion towards the obscure, perverse, grotesque or bizarre (Jansson, Lagerkvist 2009: 6).

Thirdspace

Edward W. Soja introduces his concept of *thirdspace* as 'a purposely tentative and flexible term that attempts to capture what is actually a constantly shifting and changing milieu of ideas, events, appearances and meanings' that brings about 'new ways of thinking about space and social spatiality' (Soja 1996: 2). A few years earlier in 1990, Homi Bhabha formed a similar idea that stemmed from his thoughts on hybridity. He says 'for me the importance of hybridity is not to be able to trace two original moments from which the third emerges, rather hybridity to me is the 'third space'[18] which enables other positions to emerge' (Rutherford 1990: 211). Most relevant and significant for this chapter are Soja's ideas in his second chapter entitled *The Trialectics of Spaciality*. In this chapter he uses a short story called *The Aleph* in which someone finds 'the Aleph' in their cellar, a point in space which contains all other points, to illustrate the 'radical openness' of spatiality that he is trying to convey as *thirdspace;*

> The space where all places are capable of being seen from any angle, each standing clear; but also a secret and conjectured object, filled with illusions and allusions, a space that is common to all of us yet never able to be completely seen and understood, an 'unimaginable universe' […]. *Everything* comes together in Thirdspace: subjectivity and objectivity, the abstract and the concrete, the real and the imagined, the knowable and the unimaginable, the repetitive and the differential, structure and agency, mind and body,

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[18] Bhaba also later expands upon his thoughts on 'third space' in his 1994 publication *The Location of Culture*

consciousness and unconsciousness, the disciplines and the transdisciplinary, everyday life and unending history (Soja 1996: 56-57).

What it seems Soja is trying to convey by this somewhat poetic but rather abstract attempt to explain his concept, is that *thirdspace* is not confined by and is set in resistance to binary oppositions. Far from being confined by them, *thirdspace* combines these incompatibilities within itself, as do heterotopias, so as to work towards the breaking down of these sets of categories as binary oppositions.

He moves on to write about 'thirding as othering' in a section of this chapter entitled as such. He argues that it is possible to open up binarised categories by introducing 'an Other term, a third possibility or moment'. This third possibility should not just be a combination of the two binary categories, nor should it be an in-between stage in an imaginary continuum. This critical 'thirding as Othering' is an important step in opening up categorical binary oppositions and introduces a critical 'Other' possibility that is not just an addition to the binary categories, rather a 'disordering, deconstruction, and tentative reconstitution of their presumed totalisation producing an open alternative that is both similar and strikingly different' (Soja 1996: 60-61). Thirdspace therefore is 'a space which is distinguishable from other spaces (physical and mental, or First and Second)[19] and a transcending composite of all other spaces' (Soja 1996: 62).

This follows on to his treatment of bell hooks' ideas on spatiality in *Yearning; Race, Gender and Cultural Politics.* Soja uses hooks' ideas of multiple *other* spaces that move beyond binary oppositions of race, gender and class that create new sites for resistance. She actively chooses 'the Margin as a Space of Radical Openness'. Soja proposes that this active choice for marginality is crucial as a counter-hegemonic power which works for communities of resistance. He argues that hooks opens up a Thirdspace through the real and imagined spaces that she suggests (Soja 1996: 96-97). Soja's conceptualization of Thirdspace is thus not all that dissimilar from Jansson and Lagerkvist's *strange spaces.* They are both real and imagined spaces situated outside of and in resistance to spatial and temporal norms and routines.

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[19] As Soja mentions previously as having been theorised by Henri Lefebre in *La production de l'espace* (1974); English translation (1991)

Queer time and space

In her pioneering book *In a Queer Time and Place: Transgender Bodies, Subcultural Lives,* which was published in 2005, Judith Halberstam seeks to 'detach queerness from sexual identity' arguing for the existence of 'queer time' and 'queer space' (Halberstam 2005:1) as 'an outcome of strange temporalities, imaginative life schedules and eccentric economic practices' (Halberstam 2005:1) which develop in resistance to heteronormativity. Crucially, she argues that

> queer uses of time and space develop, at least in part, in opposition to institutions of family, heterosexuality, and reproduction. They also develop according to other logics of location, movement, and identification (Halberstam 2005:1).

In contrast to the other previously mentioned theorists, who have concentrated mainly on non-normative spatiality and looked at non-normative temporality more in relation to spatiality that in itself, Halberstam begins with her considerations of *queer time.* She notes that a form of queer time became particularly noticeable during the AIDS crisis in the latter part of the twentieth century and argues that the loss of the prospect of a long-term future for a significant proportion of the queer communities led to 'a new emphasis on the here, the present, the now' being created within these communities. This 'urgency […] expands the potential of the moment and […] squeezes new possibilities out of the time at hand' and leads to a 'rethinking of the conventional emphasis of longevity and futurity' (Halberstam 2005:2). Notably, she conceptualises queer time as outside of the expected heteronormative life schedule. It 'lies outside of those paradigmatic markers of life experience – namely, birth, marriage, reproduction, and death' and is very much about 'the potentiality of life unscripted by the conventions of family, inheritance, and child-rearing' (Halberstam 2005:2). She describes in detail the heteronormative temporality which she sets queer time in opposition to. This normative life schedule is governed by the human 'biological clocks' in particular that of women and by the rigid rules of what is considered the correct, and respectable schedule for marriage and child rearing which is believed by many to be the natural reproductive schedule. Such heteronormative temporality also involves the expected scheduling of daily life, which Halberstam describes as 'early to bed, early to rise' that is considered to be part of children's

needs for a healthy life and environment. She argues that it also involves the 'time of inheritance […] within which values, wealth, goods and morals are passed through family ties from one generation to the next' and the hypothetical temporality which includes health and other insurance policies and the making of a will. She uses the concept of queer time to make visible the norms of respectability that are maintained by this logic of reproductive temporality (Halberstam 2005:4). Queer time also allows for those other non-normative time frames, which contrast with the normative idealisation of longevity as the expected and desirable concept of futurity, the extension of life at any cost and the pathologising concepts of temporality and modes of living that do no prioritise longevity and stability. The example that Halberstam gives of such forms of temporality where people 'live in rapid bursts' is that of the 'ludic temporality' of drug addicts. This instability and the fact that they are not striving for longevity, is often deemed to be 'immature and even dangerous' (Halberstam 2005: 4-5).

Thinking about time in terms of *queer time*, Halberstam argues, 'produces new conceptions of space' (Halberstam 2005:6). By forming a concept of *queer time* she presents a new way of understanding queer practices as queer activity which also requires or creates *queer space,* which she describes as referring to 'the place-making practices within postmodernism in which queer people engage' (Halberstam 2005:6). It also refers to the new understandings of space which result from these queer practices.
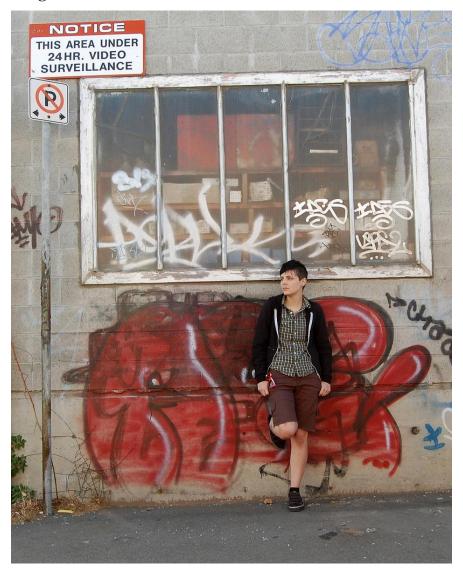
Though her main contribution in this chapter are her thoughts on queer time, she does go on to mount a critique of David Harvey's *The Condition of Postmodernity*, which leads her to expand slightly beyond her description of what she means when referring to queer space. Her criticism of Harvey's work amounts to the fact that he actively excludes sexuality as a category for the analysis of space (Halberstam 2005:) and neglects to discuss normativity using this precise term as theorised within queer studies, though some of the same ideas are addressed. What she does take from his work, however, is that the normative time cycles, for example that of reproduction and the schedule of family life 'that we have naturalised and internalised […] are also spatial practices' (Halberstam 2005: 7-8). Thus if normative temporalities are the space creating practices that produce heteronormative space,

queer temporalities can also create queer spaces that are outside of the spatial practices of heteronormativity, reproduction and family scheduling.

Before I move on to look at an example from contemporary photography which could be seen to represent non-normative spatiality and temporality, I want to briefly mention Sara Ahmed's description of what she calls the feeling of 'disorientation' in the concluding chapter of her 2006 publication *Queer phenomenology: orientations, objects, others.* She describes disorientation as 'bodily experiences that throw the world up, or throw the body from its ground' which 'can be unsettling and it can shatter one's sense of confidence in the ground' (Ahmed 2006:157). She briefly describes the example of the sensation of having one's deep concentration on one particular object or task suddenly broken where there is a 'switch' of 'dimensions' (in this case focuses of concentration) that cause a momentary loss of perspective (Ahmed 2006:157-158) or can also be a 'feeling of losing one's place' (Ahmed 2006:160). She also suggests such disorientation has the potential to be politically radical as it can 'offer the hope of new directions' (Ahmed 2006:158).

I would suggest that this feeling, which Ahmed describes as *disorientation* is not dissimilar from the feeling that Jansson and Lagerkvisst refer to as *estrangement* in *Strange Spaces.* With the possibility of encounters with non-normative space inducing such a feeling as described by Ahmed, Jansson and Lagerkvist the image that I have chosen is one that appears as though it may have this power.

Image: Urban black hole

This image could be described as what Jansson and Lagerkvist refer to as an 'urban black hole', which are the 'decaying zones' in urban areas whose strangeness and otherness provoke a sense of estrangement or disorientation (Jansson, Lagerkvist 2009: 6). The background of photograph consists of the concrete breeze block wall of what appears to be a dilapidated, perhaps abandoned warehouse or factory building and large window in the upper half of the wall, both of which are covered in graffiti. At the bottom of the image and in the foreground is a tarmac surface in which there are a few small potholes. What appear to be small stones are strewn across the surface and a few minor pieces of litter and dried leaves are visible. Through the graffiti covered window various boxes of different sizes that are stacked on shelves are

vaguely visible in the dark space inside the building. The white paint is peeling off the window frame and to the left-hand side of the window is a grey metal pole which is partially covered in what appears to be either rust or brown paint. A variety of dead and alive weeds is growing around the bottom of the pole. On top of this post a small, white, square sign is mounted with a red circle with a line through it which goes through and over a large black letter 'P'. In the bottom corners of the square sign are arrows pointing away from each other. This sign could be interpreted as a no-parking sign for the space in front of the wall where the photograph has been taken as the letter P is often used to represent parking in English speaking countries and the red circle with the line through it usually represents a ban in some form or something that is forbidden. Above the sign and mounted on the wall just above the top right hand corner of the window is another sign. A relatively narrow margin along the top of the sign is filled with the colour red; on this red margin, in large, white, capital letters is the word 'notice'. Underneath this word, written in black capital letters on a white background are the words 'this area is under 24.hr video surveillance'.

Slightly to the right of centre of the image is a person who is standing leaning against the wall with the sole of their right foot (but the furthest left in the image due to the mirror effect of the camera) against the wall and their left foot on the ground. Their attire includes black plimsoll shoes and black ankle socks on the feet, dark brown, knee length shorts that have an unfinished hem and give the impression of perhaps being cut off trousers. On top they are wearing a brown and white open necked checked shirt with a dark navy blue or black hooded sweatshirt with a full length zip which is open at the front so the shirt is visible. A pair of red-framed sunglasses is visible on the outside of their right shorts pocket; they appear to be secured in the pocket by tucking the arm of the sunglasses into the pocket. Their body faces square on to the camera but their face is turned to their right. The facial expression could be read as serious, thoughtful and slightly vacant. The casual, perhaps somewhat bored body posture, which consists of the leaning against the wall, positions of the feet, slightly hunched shoulders and thumbs in the pockets of the shorts, combined with the facial expression could be interpreted as an expression of waiting for something, something to happen or for someone. The graffiti on the wall is not the often elaborate graffiti art that also appears sometimes on buildings and can almost give the impression of a planned mural and is usually a visually pleasing

image and/or legible and artistically written words; rather the graffiti in this image consists of unintelligible scribbles. These appear both on the wall, where the main, central feature is what appears to be large red, white and black letters that were maybe intended to spell a word but are too roughly drawn to be legible, and also on the window. The graffiti on the window is mainly white scribbles, some of which seems to be on the inside of the window and there are other bits of scribbled graffiti on the wall in various other colours.

The overall impression of this image is very much one of urban decay. The stones, leaves and litter on the ground, the weeds growing around the base of the signpost and in particular the messy graffiti which has been left on the wall and window of the building, not only on the outside but also on the inside give the impression that the building really is abandoned or at least very much neglected, especially if someone is able to gain access and have the time to spray graffiti on the inside of the window. The signpost is also partially covered in graffiti paint or rust and the peeling paint of the window accentuates the decaying look of this place. The stark grey concrete breeze block wall and dark tarmac ground surface that lack in colour except for the graffiti also contribute to the hostile effect of the environment. Further, certain things suggest a sense of not being welcome as the no parking sign implies that one is not allowed to drive to the place as a destination as one is not permitted to park and get out. This is emphasised by the surveillance notice which is placed in a prominent position so as to ensure potential trespassers know that they are being watched. This sense of being constantly observed by an 'invisible eye' (as Foucault describes in his analysis of the panopticon structured prison in *Discipline and Punish* as a metaphor for modern 'disciplinary' societies where the people are under constant surveillance) also contributes to the unnerving feeling of *strangeness,* that this is a place where one should no be. Time is also no longer normative as the moments in time that happen here are also caught on camera and can be repeated whilst at the same time in this place of decay, neglect and nothingness one could say that time stands still in this space, where nothing is occurring.

The figure in this image also contributes to the *strangeness* of this space through their queer temporal and spatial practices. Thinking in terms of the heteronormative binary gender system and the cues that contribute to gender attribution, this figure gives mixed gendered cues that confuse the viewer as they

cannot immediately make a positive gender attribution which can cause a sense of *estrangement* and feeling of bewilderment and confusion. The clothing would generally be considered to be men's clothing, the shoes could be seen either as men's shoes or as for 'either' gender. The hair cut is also somewhat ambiguous as it is shaved short on one side but is long on top and the other side. The laid-back, casual or bored body posture would usually be considered a characteristic attributed to the male role while certain bodily features such as the narrow shoulders, the shape of the legs and hips and lack of visible facial hair would be seen as attributes of the female role. These are however also contradicted by the 'male' appearing flat chest. As previously stated, this ambiguous presentation can be seen as a queer practice which challenges the normative practices of binary gendered presentation, which are just as naturalised as and also linked to the heteronormative reproductive and familial practices. This image combines many aspects of non-normative space and time; the appearance of and meanings of the space itself, the person themselves and the relationship between them, which results in a visual experience that is profoundly estranging.

Queertopia

This image portrays what I want to term as *queertopia*. It expands Halperin's definition of queer and begins to 'detach queerness from sexual identity' (Halberstam 2005:1) and 'attach' it to practices that can be seen to queer normative ideas of temporality and spatiality as described by Halberstam. I use the term queer*topia,* specifically the suffix *topia,* for several reasons; it originates from the Greek meaning relating to place or position etc.[20] and I want to relate queerness to practices that are both spatial and temporal. It also has similarities to Foucault's heterotopias in that this image represents a space that exists in real life but is also a kind of 'non-space' that is abandoned and neglected, where time is standing still for the ambiguously gendered (which can be viewed as a queer practice) person who is waiting, perhaps thoughtfully, in these strange surroundings. It is a *strange space, thirdspace, other, or marginal* space that can induce the feeling of *estrangement;* of being 'out of place', a

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[20] Taken from the website wordinfo.info, which provides 'cross-references' for 'words derived primarily from Latin and Greek word families' and the Oxford English Dictionary's entry for topography which also relates to place and locality.

feeling of 'displacement, loss, fear or exhilaration' (Jansson, Lagerkvist 2009: 2) or as termed by Ahmed of *disorientation*. As Ahmed notes this sense of disorientation can (perhaps particularly when it is invoked by a queertopia or representation of one as in this image) be politically radical as it can 'offer the hope of new directions' (Ahmed 2006:158). Thus, the *topia* of queertopia also references utopia which present society in an altered, ideal form. The feelings of *estrangement* and *disorientation* induced by the *strangeness* of this 'urban black hole' (Jansson, Lagerkvist 2009: 6) or *queertopia* can lead to the contemplation and questioning of norms of reproductive and familial temporal and spatial practice. The queer temporal and spatial practices present in the images and concept of queertopia denaturalise these heteronormative practices that have been so rigidly enforced to allow for the possibility of other, queer practices in time and space.

Conclusion

The central focus of my thesis has been some of the possible ways in which contemporary photography can work towards subverting binary gender norms. Before I review the ways that this question has been addressed I first want to look at an example of just how ingrained the norms of the binary gender system really are. This example comes in the form of intersexuality and the types of treatment applied to it that continue to be used in our western cultures. Intersex activist Cheryl Chase writes in her article *Hermaphrodites with attitude: Mapping the Emergence of Intersex Political Activism* that despite the complete lack of awareness of society in general as to the existence, or at least the extent of the existence of intersexed people, the medical literature that Chase cites states that about one in two thousand babies is born with some sort of intersex condition (Chase 2006: 300). However,

> because medicine intervenes so quickly in Intersex births to change the infant's body, the phenomenon of intersexuality is today largely unknown outside specialised medical practices. General public awareness of Intersex bodies slowly vanished in modern Western European societies as medicine gradually appropriated to itself the authority to interpret – and eventually manage – the category which had previously been widely known as hermaphroditism (Chase 2006: 301).

As Chase explains, the birth of an intersexed child is deemed, in the words or 'John Hopkins model'[21] for the treatment of intersexed infants, 'a psycho-social emergency' but instead of a team of psychologists and bioethicists and intersex support organisations, surgeons and endocrinologists are instead deemed necessary in order to determine the child's 'true sex' and medically intervene by means of surgery and hormone replacement therapy (Chase 2006: 300). The binary gender norms are so rigid, that even when bodily sex proves to be non-binary those bodies must be brought into line with the binary norms for sex rather than this sexual diversity being recognised. Parents are told to lie to their child and if, as in some cases, the sex is reassigned when the child is already a toddler or young child, all traces of the

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[21] The John Hopkins Model refers to a series of techniques and protocols for physically transforming intersexed bodies that were developed under the guidance of urologist Hugh Hampton Young at the John Hopkins University in Baltimore during the 1920s which are still used as guidelines for the treatment of intersexed infants today (Chase 2006: 301-302).

previous sex assignment such as photographs, gender-specific toys and clothes are to be removed from the home, a new name is given and families are often forced to move area. Sexual ambiguity is so highly stigmatised that the possibility of social rejection in the future is used as the sole justification for surgical and hormonal intervention. Roughly ninety per cent of intersex infants are assigned as female purely due to the technical limitations of surgery. Children assigned as female often have their larger than 'average' clitoris (or what would have been a small penis had the child been assigned as male) removed and if not already present a vagina is constructed. In the majority of cases this surgery is not medically necessary and the removal of the clitoris often results in a complete lack of sexual sensation as an adult. The only thing which is considered, however, is that the constructed vagina can be penetrated by a penis. This is considered by surgeons as 'normal sexual function'. The remaining ten per cent are subjected to a series of operations to straighten and enlarge the small penis and redirect the urethra to allow the person to stand whilst urinating (Chase 2006: 302-303).

Chase goes on to argue that 'we as a culture have relinquished to medicine the authority to police the boundaries of male and female' (Chase 2006: 303) and concludes that this kind of forced genital normalising surgery on intersex infants provides evidence for Judith Butler's assertions, which were discussed in my introduction, that '*sex*, the concept that accomplishes the materialisation and naturalisation of power-laden, culturally constructed differences, *has really been gender all along*' (my emphasis) (Chase 2006: 312). This normalising surgery on intersex infants exposes the rigidity of the binary gender system that cannot even allow for diversity of the material body. This is the gender binary that the photographs, which have been analysed in this work, are calling into question through their queer representations of gender as transcending heteronormative male or female gender.

Let us return to the aims of my work to explore ways in which contemporary photography, with a focus on amateur work that is displayed on the photo-sharing website Flickr, can challenge and call this rigid gender binary system into question by representing non-normative images of gender. I began in the first chapter by considering the role that new technologies of dissemination, more specifically of photo-sharing websites and social networking websites, could play in this visual

challenge to the gender binary. Taking Donna Haraway's metaphor of the cyborg as a fusion or 'a cybernetic organism, a hybrid of machine and organism' (Haraway 1991: 149) that can work to break down existing dichotomies (Haraway 1991: 153), I applied it to the close relationship (or one could even argue that this is a 'merged' relationship where boundaries are no longer clear) between the photographers who use these technologies to display and disseminate their work and the technologies themselves. This close relationship is demonstrated by the creation of an online self in the form of a profile. Perhaps more importantly, the cyborg metaphor is also applied to this 'merged' relationship between these technologies and the users who view photographs online. These 'viewers' are not only viewers, they interact with the technology and thus with the photographs and with the cyborgian artist profile. Users may also manipulate the image in several ways such as tagging, viewing the image in enlarged form and posting a comment about the image. These technologies do not only enhance the engagement of the viewer with the image. The tagging system also increases the possibility of photographs, where queer images of gender are portrayed, being made available and viewed by users who would not have specifically searched for such images. This increased dissemination of and interaction with the images, which results from these technologies' cyborgian relationship with users, can therefore play an important role in increasing their potential deconstructive impact on the gender binary system.

My second chapter considers the role that 'sex signs' or 'sex indicators' play in the binary gender attribution process. It also looks at the different aspects of gender stereotypes and gender roles and their role in upholding the binary gender system and the gender attribution process. Butler argued and demonstrated both in *Gender Trouble* and *Undoing Gender* that, as gender is seen to stem from sex, which is considered to be natural and fixed, bodily signs of sex are taken to be the ultimate indicators of gender or as Kate Bornstein calls them 'cues' that are used in the gender attribution process. Suzanne J. Kessler and Wendy McKenna's study demonstrated the cultural nature of these cues. It revealed that it takes on average four female cues to outweigh one male cue for the gender to be attributed as female. These cues do not, therefore, constitute gender themselves rather are very much open to cultural interpretation. Culture can even appear to 'create' these cues, as Kessler and McKenna revealed in the section of their article which addresses 'cultural genitals'.

Cultural genitals are the attributed genitals that people assume exist based on their initial gender attribution and that, in turn, 'prove' that initial attribution. The photographic example from an amateur photographer who uses the photo-sharing Flickr as their means of display shows the effectiveness of the mixing of gendered cues to create a strange mixed figure. The mixture of these signs shows that the appearance of both genitals and breasts (or perceived lack thereof) can be purely created and therefore it is possible, in society, to assume the presence of what isn't physically there. This leads to a questioning of the role of these symbols in gender attribution but also emphasises the cultural aspect of these sex signs as gendered cues and exposes the binary thinking in the gender attribution process. In the second part of the chapter that dealt with gender roles and stereotypes aspects of stereotypical gender expression were addressed and also different activities of daily life that are also considered to be either male or female activities. Again, Kessler and McKenna's study demonstrated the power that these aspects of expected gender roles can have in the gender attribution process and confirms the rigidity of the binary gender roles that one is expected to conform to in order to be recognised in society. I also highlight that a rigid gender binary, where 'female' is the 'lesser' category, as well as oppressing those who transgress its norms, also limits men in their freedom of gender expression, as to take on any aspects of the female role would be to lower themselves and subject themselves to ridicule. The amateur photographic example taken from Flickr, as with the mixing of the sex signs, mixes aspects of the male and female gender roles in both figures to the point where one is not able to make a definitive gender attribution of either figure. Both photographs mount a visual challenge to the binary thinking surrounding sex and gender roles by mixing and confusing the viewer's otherwise automatic process of gender attribution and cause the viewer to start to reconsider these issues.

The concept of Genderqueer as non-binary gender is introduced in the third chapter. People who identify as Genderqueer or with its concepts may think of themselves as being both male and female (often referred to as bi-gendered within LGBTQI communities), somewhere between male and female as someone whose gender falls completely outside the gender binary or as not having a gender at all (referred to as agendered in the aforementioned communities). The concept of genderqueer challenges binary constructions of gender where male and female are the

only two possible genders and can even be seen to challenge the concept of two-poled, traditional images of transsexual people. Identity as performative is reconciled with the concept of a non-binary gender identity as many people who are identifying as genderqueer are choosing this 'identity' as a political statement that is incorporated into their sense of self that challenges the dominant binary gender system. Judith Halberstam's conceptualisation of the 'transgender butch' is also dealt with as a related non-binary gender position that she sees as occurring between butch lesbians who fully identify as female and female to male transsexuals. This is a useful concept upon which genderqueer can be built, however it has the disadvantage of appearing to refer primarily to masculinity and stages of male identification in female-bodied people whereas a genderqueer 'identity' can be adopted by anyone, although many genderqueer people do have an ambiguous gender presentation. This ambiguous gender presentation is portrayed in the amateur photographic examples, which are taken from the Flickr photo-sharing website. The artists use various techniques of camera angles and lighting to accentuate certain parts of the body or attire and to draw attention away from other areas. These photographic techniques, body positioning, clothing and the use of other accessories such as an alcohol can in the final picture that is analysed in this chapter serve to present such a level of ambiguity as to render the viewer completely unable to make a positive gender attribution. This ambiguity forces the viewer to reconsider binary ideas of normative gender.

Queer as a concept is expanded upon in chapter four where I discuss a variety of explanations and definitions that have been put forward by different theorists. I argue for queer as an active concept, a strategy that includes practices in which, the dominant ideas of binary gender norms and heterosexuality are challenged and called into question rather than purely a description or mode of identification. I use this conceptualisation of queer to look at parody as a possible queer subversive strategy that involves a repetition with a critical difference and apply this to femme, as radical queer femininity or 'femininity with a twist' that is consciously chosen rather than normative femininity that is imposed upon women. In this chapter I use photographs taken by Del La Grace Volcano in the photo-book *Femmes of Power*. These images of non-normative femininity, particularly when combined with the texts that accompany each image which are written by queer femme academic, Ulrika Dahl,

detach femininity from normative heterosexual femininity and place femininity in a queer context.

The final chapter takes a more abstract direction and seeks to move beyond conceptualisation of queer as referring solely to non-normative genders and sexualities, and with the help of Judith Halberstam's *In a Queer Time and Place* create a concept of queer time and space. In order to do this I explore theorisations of non-normative time and space, starting with Foucault's heterotopias as real 'other' spaces in which anomalies of space and time converge. Foucault's *Of Other Spaces* formed the basis the more recent works in 'postmodern geography' of Andre Jansson and Amanda Lagerkvist in *Strange Spaces* and Edward W. Soja's *Thirdspace* who explain these to be spaces that create a strange feeling, termed *estrangement* by Jansson and Lagerkvist and *disorientation* by Sarah Ahmed in *Queer phenomenology: orientations, objects, others.* In her work Halberstam noted that queer temporalities and spatialities develop in resistance to heteronormative ones. Building upon this assertion I conceptualise these converging queer temporalities and spatialities as *queertopia*. The image that I analyse in this chapter, in combining many aspects of non-normative time and space with the somewhat ambiguous gender presentation of the figure and an unusual figure ground relationship gives the viewer an overall uncomfortable and thought-provoking experience where normative ideas of time and space are visually challenged.

One difficulty that I encountered was in finding images that portrayed queer femme femininity on Flickr. As well as the significance and power of Del La Grace Volcano's work in *Femmes of Power,* the fact that it proved difficult to find examples of amateur work from artists that made use of Flickr to display their photographs, that could be seen to portray femme as a subversive parody of normative heterosexual femininity, influenced my decision to use Volcano's work in chapter four. This difficulty could be due to the lack of visibility of queer femininity, even within queer communities. A wider search which encompasses other photo-sharing sites and social networking sites could perhaps form the basis for further research in this area as well as looking at other ways in which contemporary amateur photographers challenge gender norms with portrayals of non-normative gender in their work. The strategies that I have focussed on, whether they be the deliberate manipulation of sex signs and aspects of gender roles to form 'mixed' figures, ambiguous gender presentation in

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self-portraits, queer radical femininity or images of queer temporality and spatiality, all disturb viewers' automatic assumptions of gender as binary, where the only options are male and female which correspond to masculinity and femininity respectively and also normative ideas of time and space. I began this conclusion by demonstrating just how rigid the gender binary really is, that it does not even allow for the bodily diversity of intersex infants. I therefore do not expect the type of images that I have analysed here to miraculously destroy the binary gender system; rather, that the more images that challenge and transgress societal norms are made visible and accessible, the more people will start to question those norms and allow for a greater diversity of gender.

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