Marginalia

edge identities

and

virtual communities

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Set in Minion 12/24 with Papyrus heads.

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Fade in…

Before we begin…

This is about your secret fears:

the liminal, the transitional, uncertainty, infection.

Who are you, anyway?

Who are we?

We are fluid. I am vast and I contain multitudes.

I am host to thousands.*

> Living as we did — on the edge — we developed a particular way of seeing reality. We looked both from the outside in and from the inside out. We focused our attention on the center as well as on the margin.
>
> (hooks in Trinh, 1990: 341).

* with apologies to Walt Whitman

Abstract

This thesis is an examination of the discursive strategies 'edge identities' employ to negotiate multiple partial subjectivities in the interstices of multiple marginalised communities.

Sample texts, including the television show *The Secret Life of Us*, the film *Walking on Water*, cultural events such as Mardi Gras floats and the Internet-based community space *LiveJournal*, are analysed.

A number of the strategies, including passing, fragmented negotiated identity and identity-based micro-communities, are problematised. It is proposed to replace these with practice-based collectivities and the interconnected tactics of resistance in a context of capitalist post-modernity.

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A note on usage

This paper aims to reject binaries and embrace Deleuze and Guattari's rhizomatic thought. It also concerns marginal voices, voices not often heard. However, requirements of the project structure call for a linear presentation of thought demonstrating academic rigour. By including marginal texts — literally in the margins, and by marginal authors — I hope to allow those voices to seep into the spaces of analysis.

Marginal texts without attribution are my discursive contributions as an 'edge identity' author myself.

I have chosen to use lower case for all ethnicities and religions to avoid privileging ethnicity over sexuality. Quotes retain the usage of the author.

Contents

Scrawl: border protection

We live in a world obsessed with borders and national identity. At a time when the government of Australia continues to struggle with nation building while misapprehending community building, it is all the more vital to explore issues on the outskirts of these ideas, and indeed to question the discursive constructions 'nation' and 'community'. In discussions of immigrants, whether 'asylum seekers' or otherwise, political discourse assumes 'Australia' is an always already homogeneous community — despite lip service to multiculturalism — to which refugees are external, excluded and irreducibly 'different'. The notion of shared values as basis for community implicitly hides multiculturalism. For instance, Rosalyn Diprose (2003) addresses australian Prime Minister John Howard's comments concerning the 'children overboard incident'[1], arguing that "There is no acknowledgment here of the possibility that the meaning expressed by an individual or community is multifaceted, open and unfinished…"

I am the I that must be silent here. I am the thread that must be invisible but I cannot be silent here. I am expected to erase myself, remove myself, hide myself, unspoken author, modest witness, silent observer. I speak only through the cracks, I whisper through the fractured mirror, I crave, I scream, I act. Weave me into your nightmares. To reveal my frayed, multicoloured, multivalent self is to turn over the cloth, show the underside where the stitching is, reveal the lie of smooth striated space. I am not supposed to tell you I love women and men. I am not supposed to hint at my resonances with matryoska dolls. I am not supposed to remind you about piroski, latkes, bubble n squeak, tang and frozen raspberry ices in the Sydney heat. I am not supposed to mutter to you about tingling limbs, aching backs, memory lapses. I am especially not supposed to talk to you about rope, whips, blindfolds, intensity. Hide, hide. Quiet now.

In a similar way, we assume and confer upon strangers a homogeneity, a uniformity of attitude, belief and sexuality, that they do not possess. Nor is the individual an easily defined, simple being who can be assigned quickly to categories; despite the nervous and fearful requirements of the State or the moral majority, we are more elusive than that.

We are marginal, in so many of its meanings. The term "marginalia" stems from the Latin 'margin' meaning border or edge (OED, 2004). In common parlance, marginalia are the notes found in the margins of a text (Greetham, 1997). Marginalia are afterthoughts or commentary on the main body of the work; they are sidelined, incidental. They are already plural. A marginal note may indeed be revolutionary, insightful or profound; intriguing, obscure or opaque — but it will always be viewed in context (literally 'with the text'). The idea of marginalia assumes a centrality and an exterior, a hierarchy of values with a clear distinction between the two.

Post-structuralist approaches to subjectivity posit a fluid radical identity which exceeds this categorisation, yet real bodies live in a society that continues to organise itself along ethnic, religious and sexual lines.

1. On October 7, 2001, then immigration minister Phillip Ruddock informed the media that asylum seekers on the SIEV 4 boat had thrown their children overboard. These claims were later found to be incorrect. The full parliamentary report is available at http://www.aph.gov.au/Senate/committee/maritime_incident_ctte/report/contents.htm.

In between those categories are people who daily confront that fractured fluid identity 'on the margins' of societal normativity. In this sense, they are both 'marginalised' by the mainstream narrative of culture and choose to live on the edges of that society, dipping in and out of its rituals and behaviours in as much as this is required for survival. For this reason, I have dubbed the spaces taken up by these people, these border dwellers, 'edge identities'.

Identity/community/praxis

I want to start with a radical departure: I want to say that identity itself is dangerous; that there is a pattern of identity formation that relates to minority community formation and that this pattern is problematic. I posit that there are visible and invisible identifiers of marginality; that there is a common experience of coming out/conversion/identification with a marginal community; that there is a crisis or splitting of marginal communities when it becomes apparent that the process of identification is imperfect (that is, that no group is ever homogenous or perfectly identical, and individuals cannot perform perfect identity, at which point the process commences anew at a more fragmented level); that there is an underlying theme of purity, contamination and the need for 'border policing'; and that the problem of 'community continuity', now being negotiated urgently in a number of spaces (for example the jewish community, the gay community, indigenous communities and in ethnic skirmishes worldwide) is inherently flawed.

I argue that these ongoing debates stem from a fear of integration and the loss of 'difference' and that there are complex connections around ghettoes, identity maintenance and oppression. There are also questions about how to address real disadvantage without employing categories.

I intend to trace the narrative trajectory of these processes and investigate the resulting discursive strategies that 'edge identities' employ to negotiate multiple partial subjectivities in the interstices of multiple marginalised communities. I will engage with a number of televisual, electronic and cultural texts, elaborating the ways in which 'edge identities' are re/presented and fixed and the possibilities

Cornered
by identities I never wanted to claim,
I ran.
Fast
Hard

Deep
inside myself
where it was still.
Silent.
Safe:
Deception.
…
III
Pretended not to notice
the absence of black images
in this new gay life,
in bookstores
poster shops
film festivals,
my own fantasies.
…
In this great gay mecca,
I was an invisible man, still
I had no shadow, no substance.
No history, no place.
No reflection.
I was an alien, unseen and seen,
unwanted. »

for resistive readings of such representations. How successful are the strategies and tactics employed by 'edge identities' to negotiate their difference within these communities? I argue that it is preferable to establish social collectivities based on partial subjectivities in a way that does not fall back on fixed identity. I will attempt to construct a working theory of marginal subjectivity that could lead to a practical way to negotiate day-to-day life beyond categories.

Here, as in Hepzibah,
I was a nigga, still.
I quit the Castro
no longer my home, my mecca
(never was, in fact),
and went in search of something
better.
(Marlon Riggs, 1991)

The word "identity" here is loaded. The formation of an "identity" in Western culture is one of the key behaviours expected of an individual attempting to inhabit it. According to Lacan (1966), access to language and social interaction depends on a moment of recognition, "the mirror stage". The connection with identity is explicit: "We have only to understand the mirror stage *as an identification*" [original emphasis].

Fixed, essentialist notions of identity have been challenged from a number of directions. Theorists such as Geertz (1986), extending Max Weber, describe identity as "highly processual, mobile, fluid and contingent".

Bhabha (1994: 44) says that "to exist is to be called into being in relation to an otherness, its look or locus." Identity is always already a play between sameness and difference.

"Finally, the question of identification is never the affirmation
of a pre-given identity, never a *self*-fulfilling prophecy — it
is always the production of an image of identity and the
transformation of the subject in assuming that image. The
demand of identification — that is, to be *for* an Other —
entails the representation of the subject in the differentiating
order of otherness. Identification … is always the return of an
image of identity that bears the mark of splitting in the Other
place from which it comes. For Fanon, like Lacan, the primary
moments of such a repetition of the self lie in the desire of the
look and the limits of language."
(Bhabha, 1994: 45, original emphasis)

The key act in the formation of identity-based communities varies: in the case of ethnic groupings, the act is one of emigration and then heredity; with religious communities, it is one of birth and continual reinforcement though ritual; with communities based on sexual identity, there is a realisation and alignment at some point in time. These transitions are from a mainstream culture portrayed as stable into communities portrayed as equally stable and even positive in their constructions around notions of "support". The transitions are coded as rites of passage — emigration; conversion; coming out.

However, it is my contention that depicting these communities as dichotomous with their participants "identified" as "members" of such communities is overly simplistic. The internal cohesion of these communities and the act of transition between communities or between the mainstream culture and one of these communities can be viewed usefully through constructions such as "liminality" (van Gennep, 1960).

The liminal period is the margin between two fixed, stable states; it is usually seen to possess danger or to be less protected from danger. There are therefore quite frequently complex defensive rituals used in order to protect the subject of the transition who is viewed as "betwixt and between" (Turner, 1967). According to van Gennep, preliminal rites concern separation, liminal rites concern transition, while postliminal rites concern incorporation. For example, a citizenship ceremony would be a postliminal rite, marking the end of danger.

The notion that the transition between two stable cultures or between a dominant culture and a subaltern community is later diffused by the safety of a return to stability within a new "identity" in the new community is similar to Deleuze's notion of reterritorialisation by the State machine (1987).

The pattern of reterritorialisation and fracture is this: marginalised groups form new 'communities' based on essentialised identity[2], with similar rules and boundaries; then social structures become more and more atomised as the membership of each group shrinks and the criteria for membership become more and more specific. The ability to communicate across these borders becomes even more fraught with translation difficulties, until a string of translators is required to transmit a decipherable message. In its worst iterations, these games of identity politics are played out as ethnic conflicts with deadly weapons: it is no coincidence that the latter part of the twentieth century and the beginning of the twenty-first is an ongoing saga of 'national collapse' into new nations (Yugoslavia into Croatia, Slovenia, Bosnia/Herzegovina, Macedonia and finally Serbia and Montenegro; Czechoslovakia into the Czech and Slovak Republics; the USSR into numerous contentious spaces) and conversely of ethnic diasporas and stateless peoples disadvantaged within systems of privilege (the Kurds, the Palestinians, the Romani). The challenges faced by artists in these regions are some examples of the attempts to think through these issues (see for example, the chapbook produced to accompany artworks around the Yugoslavia Pavilion in the 2003 Venice Biennale, entitled *Serbia and Montenegro | Artist: Milica Tomič | Project: National Pavilion*, and in particular, Kendeel Geers' essay, "The Work of Art in the State of Exile".)

2. It is important to note that the existence of a particular intersection does not automatically make a community. Communities are always mobilised around constructed identity. Not all practices form identities and not all identities form communities (see Foucault, 1980). Mary McIntosh (1968) for example has studied why some societies form homosexual identities while others that have homosexual desire don't (quoted in Jackson and Sullivan, 1999).

However, it would be a mistake to consider only one axis of difference and address only one form of hybrid identity: the discourse of rights and ethnicity is merely the most advanced of the political trajectories of recent debates. To this mix, we add at least sexuality, belief and ability, and divide ethnicity into cultural, linguistic and visual attributes.

The aim is to provide a map[3] for the marginalised, a map of Deleuze and Guattari's DeTerritorialised Zone — the DTZ, if you will, to better invoke its resonances with Hakim Bey's Temporary Autonomous Zone (1991) — that hitherto uncharted zone of "madness", that space in between two or more communities that is occupied by those belonging to both/all and to neither/none. There are — and must be — alternative ways of addressing difference that do not rely on a choice between overt identification and the ghetto or subsumption into the faceless mainstream and the closet.

3. This metaphor of mapping is problematic. Maps, whether of bodies or lands, merely fix shifting borders temporarily, create a myth of stability, are out of date the moment they are drawn.

Preliminary investigations into the intersection between sexuality and ethnicity (Bersten et al, 2001) suggest that some people may simply subordinate one of their partial identities to the dictates of one or another of their communities rather than struggle with the challenges of constant renewal posed by radical subjectivity. A key test is to examine what occurs in identity-based community construction compared with interest-based interactions. In plain terms, what occurs when the focus shifts from what a person 'is' (gay, jewish) to what a person 'does' (sleep with men, keep kosher)? As I argue (via Foucault) that identity is discursively constructed, a change in the way we speak about identity — from an essentialised self to a praxis of self — would be significant.

Where self as identity results in communities of the Same, self as syncretic assemblage results in heterogeneous alliances we will loosely term collectivities. If marginalised subjectivity is multiple, partial and fluid and the consequent collectivities intersect and overlap, then 'edge identities' become a bridge between 'communities' rather than a catalyst for fracture. Even more importantly, though, heterogeneous alliances may provide commonality that escapes 'community' defined oppositionally and always of necessity dialectically engaged with its hegemonic instigator. If a subject is able to work doing-in-

> "The very possibility of cultural contestation, the ability to shift the ground of knowledges, or to engage in the 'war of position', marks the establishment of new forms of meaning, and strategies of identification. Designations of cultural difference interpellate forms of identity which, because of their continual implication in other symbolic systems, are always 'incomplete' or open to cultural translation."
>
> (Bhabha, 1994: 162)

common while immersed in diversity, then the fixed identity and being-in-common demanded by assimilation, always already set up to fail, will not suffer the catastrophic return of the repressed that almost invariably occurs.

Nascent examples of such collectivities can be found on the Internet. There are grand hopes for the development of 'virtual communities' which are based on interest rather than identity and which seem to accept multiplicity well. However, they too atomise frequently when they reach a certain mass, and their social ostracism of non-conformist members is well-known, as is their tendency to deliver critical messages emotionally and poorly (for a discussion of this 'flame mail', see Millard, 1997).

More recently, online communities such as LiveJournal have demonstrated precisely how partial identity can be negotiated through interconnected interest-based mini-communities.

In so many ways, this is not an idle inquiry. The 'global village' cannot deliver on its promises if its residents are hell-bent on witch-hunts, border skirmishes and ethnic cleansing. New ways of negotiating difference and transformation are imperative for harmonious societal survival.

"Locally produced content… challenge(s) hetero versions of the Australian nation by addressing lesbians, gay men, bisexuals, transgenderists and transsexuals of Aboriginal, non-Anglo and white backgrounds as Australians."

(Searle, 1997)

Who are you, anyway?

Marginal populations can be found in a growing variety of locations, as ethnic tensions lead to greater diasporic and refugee populations, as the increasingly global nature of corporate and diplomatic interaction lead to a new form of 'global nomad' (McCaig, 1996)[4], as indigenous rights movements and issues of self-determination arise in post-colonial environments, as questions of continuity arise in newly fundamentalist religious communities and as issues of 'tolerance' and/or integration are debated around sexuality and disability.

Within the rhetoric of the global 'melting pot' of multiculturalism lies the tension of cultural authenticity, the issues of cultural identity maintenance in diasporic and migrant cultures, and the resurgence of ethnic identities and border wars in a post-colonial world.

This tension is particularly relevant in Australia, where multiculturalism has been a political project of various federal governments starting with the Whitlam

4. Bhabha (2004b), quoting the most recent UNESCO report of the World Commission of Culture and Development, estimates that the last few decades have seen 40 million foreign workers, 20 million refugees and 20–25 million internally displaced peoples as a result of famines and civil wars.

administration and continuing in various guises to the present day (Department of Immigration and Multicultural and Indigenous Affairs, 2004), and where one of its cities, Sydney, is popularly touted as the second largest 'gay' city in the world after San Francisco.[5] This has commercial implications as well as cultural implications. Defining multiculturalism, ex-Labor Minister for Immigration Al Grassby said that "each ethnic group desiring it, is permitted to create its own commercial life and preserve its own cultural heritage indefinitely while taking part in the general life of the nation," (Grassby, 1973 quoted by Zubrzycki, 1988: 130 quoted in Jackson & Sullivan, 1999: 10). The general acceptance of the queer community in Sydney is also usually defended on the grounds of the 'pink dollar' and the tourist income the Sydney Gay and Lesbian Mardi Gras parade and festival bring to the region (witness the numerous 'supporting' messages from politicians found in the annual Mardi Gras program guide). It could be argued that society tolerates marginal communities dependent upon their cooperation with capitalist imperatives. However, these communities within the wider 'nation' are neither homogenous nor exclusive, regardless of the projected and imagined cultural identities of the spaces.

5. According to Flynn (1989) and Fitzgerald and Witherspoon (1995) Australia's multiculturalism goes back a lot further than this. "The First Fleet's crew included men from the Netherlands, France, Germany, Portugal, Sweden and Jamaica. Among the First Fleet's convict cargo were a number of Jews, as well as several black men from Africa, North America, Jamaica and the West Indies. Early settlers included Americans, Maltese, Chinese and West Indies Creoles." (Schembri, 2000)

This discussion of marginal identity takes place within a number of theoretical disciplines, including philosophy of culture, culture studies, anthropology, post-colonial theory, globalisation theory, psychology, women's studies, queer theory and disability studies. It also draws on the overarching investigation of subjectivity itself, relying on theorists such as Foucault, Lacan, Haraway and Deleuze and Guattari to name a few.

One of the key tensions in the area relates to the notion of 'essential' selfhood versus culturally constructed selfhood. Butler (1990), for example, discusses self as performance and critiques the idea of an *a priori* gender identity. She examines the ways in which those who resist the expected performance are isolated and 'punished' through violent reprisal. As mentioned above, Foucault (1980) posits identity as discursively formed, a crucial distinction which relates to the choice of textual analysis for this current inquiry. The framework for this analysis is a form of post-structuralist cultural materialism (Milner, 2002).

> "Cultural materialists investigate the historical conditions in which textual representations are produced, circulated and received. They engage with questions about the relations between dominant and subordinate cultures … the scope for subaltern resistance and the modes through which the system tends to accomodate or repel diverse kinds of dissidence."
>
> (Sinfield, 1997)

Is 'identity' inherently problematic? In their seminal work, *A Thousand Plateaus* (1987), Deleuze and Guattari associate identity with the despotic State, representation, legislative systems and force. It is not simply that current identity constructions and community formations are in worldwide crisis, but that such crises are an inevitable result of identity as it is currently constructed. I would argue that 'ethnic tensions', queer bashing, race riots, religious intolerance, and more are the outcome of these constructions. However, to subvert a line from *Star Trek*, resistance is not futile. Opposed to identity and representation is 'nomad thought'[6] which "rides difference" (xii).

6. It is intriguing that the term 'nomad' is deployed here also, but its construction is very different from McCaig's.

According to Brian Massumi in his translator's foreword to *A Thousand Plateaus*, "Nomad thought replaces the closed equation, x = x = not y (I = I = not you) with an open equation: …+ y + z + a +… (…+ arm + brick + window +…)". This notion of 'resistance' within a locus of 'capitalist post-modernity' (Ang, 1994) also has an extensive theoretical heritage, including, for example, de Certeau (1984). Both address the difficulty of political action in a world after grand narratives.

At the level of marginal identity investigation, as opposed to subjectivity *per se*, key theorists have tended to focus on singular aspects, whether relating to ethnicity (Fanon, 1968, Said, 1978, 1994; Spivak, 1987, 1993; Trinh, 1989; Hall, 1990; Bhabha, 1994; Du Gay and Hall, 1996), sexuality and gender (Fuss, 1989; Sedgwick, 1990; Butler, 1990) or disability (Shakespeare, 1995).

Hybridity and hyperdifferentiation

Other is a fluid concept. It is always ready to expand, engulf, drown. Fixed identity is so specific; at least, the idealised version of it is. But no one ever exactly fits into the glass slipper. There's always a little bit of toe or heel to be sliced off before we resemble the princess.

Notions of 'hybridity' have emerged more recently. Some works essentialise identity or focus only on hybrids within one area (such as hybrid ethnicities), for example, Stuart Hall's "Rethinking Ethnicities: three blind mice, one black, one white, one hybrid" (1993).

Massumi's *Capitalism and Schizophrenia: A User's Guide* (1992) elucidates the concept of the grid system of identity categorisation, explains how 'hybrid' identities merely reify identity politics and develops a theory of 'hyperdifferentiation' as a strategy of resistance.

We are, at birth, marked with a number of signs, attributes which are multiple and interwoven, and whose discursive power moulds — at least in part — who we will come to see ourselves to be.

However, 'society' assigns binary oppositions: male/female; christian/not-christian; white/not-white; rich/poor. Massumi (1992: 76) calls this "a grid of abstract categories":

> The grid is a proliferating series of exclusive disjunctive syntheses adding up to a system of value judgement. You are either all one or all the other, and if you're the other, you're not as good.

These oppositions all concern power and who has access to it. Key to their assignment is the question of difference and normality. As Phelan (1995: 334) notes:

> This dynamic relies on the assumption that "everyone else" is in fact law-abiding and "normal". It is the hegemonic assumption, the assumption that exempts (white, middle-class) heterosexuals from problematization. This assumption assigns difference to the under-privileged side of what is actually a relation of difference. Instead of noting that both sides of an opposition are "different" from one another, the hegemony works to render the relation invisible and to describe difference as something inherent in one side.

It is one step to reject this overly simplistic dichotomy. The multitude of sub-groups within the category "non-white" already complicate the issue. It is another to escape the concept of same/different altogether.

The radical resistive possibilities of hybrid identities are also challenged within cultural studies. For example, in "Hybridity and Double Consciousness", Moreiras (1999), while still addressing only hybrid ethnicity, begins to explicitly critique post-colonial theories of hybrid subjectivity within a context of global capitalism. "Subalternity," he says, "is the site, not just *of* negated identity, but

also *for* a constant negotiation of identity positions: identities are always the product of the hegemonic relation: that is, always the result of an interpellation, and therefore not an autonomous site for politics. As with identity, with difference or hybridity," (original emphasis). His contention is that the radical possibilities of subalternity are "domesticated" as hybridity, or to use Deleuze and Guattari's term, reterritorialised. He specifically critiques Hall's notions of ethnic hybridity, saying that "the politics of ethnic hybridity seem to reach exhaustion in the potential universalising of a resistance which the system itself produces and can therefore always potentially reinstrumentalise".

Discussions of hybridity are complicated by the mobilisation of hybrid identities in a variety of contexts. On the whole 'african-american' and 'chinese-australian' refer to hybrid cultures rather than to hybrid ethnicities, with all the attendant interpellations of post-coloniality and migration discourse, while then raising issues around 'authenticity' and intercultural/interracial relationships. The resulting second- and third-generation children frequently deal with both hybrid cultural identities and hybrid ethnicities. When these relationships are with white (anglo) partners, the hybridity is sometimes erased: although it is becoming more common to talk about "aboriginal-irish" heritage (for example, reports around the resignation of Dawn Casey, director of the National Museum of Australia, AAP, 2003), the focus on the non-anglo 'component' of heritage is as problematic as ever. The inherent duality around the hyphen precludes discussion of the actual heritages in many australian families; for example, my mother is the product of hungarian and ukrainian/belorussian refugees via England and Lithuania/America respectively and my father is the child of a ukrainian immigrant and a dutch-australian of six generations. Others may be of chinese-aboriginal-european heritage, where the simplistic narratives of aboriginal-anglo interactions and attendant political issues may not be applicable.

> "Operating within the framework 'identity (negative difference) versus undifferentiation (confusion)' leaves a body three options. Becoming the person it is said to be: the slow death of stable equilibrium. Opting out of that path, into its opposite: neurosis and eventual breakdown. Or shopping-to-be: not exactly mental stability, but not quite breakdown either. The frenzy of the purchasable — potential experienced as infinite choice between havings rather than becomings. Stealing away from the shopping mall on an exorbital path tangent to identity and undifferentiation is called 'schizophrenia'. Schizophrenia is a breakaway into the unstable equilibrium of continuing self-invention."
>
> (Massumi, 1992: 92)

Similar issues of hybrid identity apply to bisexual and transgendered people who are presented as being 'between' gay/lesbian and straight or male and female. Bisexual and transgender practice results in a more fluid subjectivity engaged with body and desire which may shift in and out of same-gender

and opposite-gender desire insofar as the terms 'same' and 'opposite' may be understood in such a circumstance.

The difficulties around political engagements and language wars in recent years have resulted in a variety of terms to express the struggles these marginal communities have had. While hyphenating has been used in the past (most notably in the derogatory term "she-male"), the attempt to include all these communities under the umbrella term "queer" has competed with an agglomeration of identities ("GLBTI community" for gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender and intersex) to result in the even more ludicrous GLBTIQ. Part of the issue here is the political desire to associate with the wider political power of the subaltern without defining the group in oppositional terms.

The fears that occur in the gay and lesbian community, where people with bisexual practice who 'identify' as lesbian or gay are accused of falsely claiming an identity (and sometimes access to funding or services) they are not entitled to, are similar to fears of hybrid ethnicity in non-hybrid ethnic communities. It is not an accident that Sinfield (1996) lists 'bisexuality, transvestisism, transsexuality' as the "sexualities that the [gay and lesbian] movement has treated as marginal" nor that he then goes on to say "we" (gays) must be "ready to learn from the different kinds of 'gayness' that are occurring in other parts of the world, and among ethnic and racial minorities in Western societies."

> SHANE: I thought Jenny was straight.
> ALICE: Most girls are straight until they're not. Or they're gay until they're not. Sexuality is fluid, whether you're gay or straight or bisexual, you just go with the flow.
>
> (The L Word, 2004)

Bisexuality and transgendered identity persist in the spaces between and threaten the neatness of the category. The threat of these excessive, overcoded spaces (Deleuze & Guattari, 1983) is also apparent when Sinfield lumps "misogyny, bisexuality and sado-masochism" together as "confusions, conflicts and griefs" that the (presumptively homogenous and otherwise untroubled) gay and lesbian subculture must work through. Part of the reason bisexual and transgender practice confronts identity-based community is that the partners of people with bisexual practice are equally likely to be 'gay', 'straight' or 'bi' while the partners of people with transgender practice are equally likely to identify as 'male', 'female' or 'transgendered'. The borders of any 'community' founded

on bisexual or transgendered 'identity' are always already permeable and 'membership' becomes remarkably difficult to define.[7]

How hybridity concerns ability is slightly more complicated again. However, some similar issues face those with "invisible disabilities", such as severe chronic fatigue, learning difficulties and mental illness. Accusations of "passing" as either able or disabled can problematise community interactions, for example when a person with some mobility impairment uses a wheelchair on a part-time basis. In the wheelchair, they are read as disabled. Out of it, they are read as able. Standing up from it after a wheelchair basketball game, they may be read as betraying the "team".

While "new sexualities come onto the market" (Massumi, 1992: 134), along with new ethnicities and new abilities, they're still just categories in the grid. They're not instantly liberatory just because they're in-between (for more on this, see "Becomings", Deleuze & Guattari, 1987).

To address this, Moreiras usefully makes a distinction between "savage or nomadic hybridity" which constitutes the radically split subject and ungrounds it "*vis-à-vis* any conceivable operation of state or social regime constitution" and "cultural hybridity" which is "an ideological response to the socio-statal interpellation that produces it". I would argue that 'edge identities' are similarly subject to these dual articulations; in conjunction with Massumi's term 'hyperdifferentiation', we can now begin to describe the patchwork of intersections and fractal expressions of marginal subjectivity.

"Hybrid subjectivity, through its very undecideability *qua* hybrid, pre-empts the closure of any discursive position around either identity or difference. Hybrid subjectivity, at its limit, does not sometimes allow for identity and sometimes for difference but rather simultaneously undermines both identitarian and differential positions, which are driven into aporia … It is therefore not a place for subjective conciliation. On the contrary, it points to the conditions of possibility for the constitution of the socio-political subject as at the same time conditions of impossibility: because the subject, through its constitutive, hybrid undecideablility, is always already split."

(Moreiras, 1999)

On the edge

Edge identities are not simple hybrids along a single axis. They exist in the spaces between the categories, where sexuality and ethnicity overlap, where ethnicity and ability overlap, where ability and sexuality overlap.

Areas in which there is a body of cultural work on double identity are sexuality and ethnicity (for example, Pallotta-Chiarolli, 1992, 1995a; Takagi, 1994; Jackson and Sullivan, 1999; Levy, 1999), sexuality and disability (for example, Shakespeare et al, 1996; McCabe and Taleporos, 2003), ethnicity

7. Despite these difficulties, there have been a number of attempts to form queer communities that are inclusive of bisexual identity. In Sydney in early 1993, a group named Love Is Boundless set up a social group for "A Queer Community without Prejudice". However, shortly after the 1993 Mardi Gras this group was co-opted by reterritorialising forces and renamed the Sydney Bisexual Support Network. Since 2001, a dance party known as BiVersity has been held in Sydney and a bi culture based on sociality has developed and can be seen on sites such as http://www.bi.org.au. Some of the complexity of "bi community" can be seen in the "bi band code" at the site, explaining ways that bi singles and couples can indicate who they are looking for.

and religion (for example, Sivan, 1995), and ethnicity and disability (for example, Stuart, 1992). Much of the other work in edge identity communities stems from medical, psychological, social services, therapeutic and similar disciplines. Some of this work does approach questions of identity (for example, much of Pallotta-Chiarolli's work and Priestley, 1995) and there is movement towards a unified 'cultural identity theory' within some of these circles but research tends to focus on one aspect at a time. Pallotta-Chiarolli (1995a, 1995b) and Levy (1999) also explicitly addresses media representations of edge identities within an educational context.

"Hybridization is not a marginal phenomenon but the very terrain in which the contemporary political identities are constructed."

(Laclau, 1996)

In addition, some of these works posit identification as a positive political project, which I dispute. For example, Shakespeare et al: "Finding an identity and a community can be particularly difficult for people who are both disabled and also lesbian or gay. Giving space and receiving recognition for both aspects of one's self is often difficult or impossible." (1996: 170). Rutherford (1990) argues that "belonging neither in one place nor the other", an "indeterminate state of hybridity", is a "predicament" that must be resolved. How? By creating new identities.

There are fewer works discussing subjectivity (as opposed to identity) with specific reference to the experience of the doubly marked, those who occupy marginal spaces. Haraway (1989) has discussed the possibilities of radical subjectivities for women and post-colonial subjects. While theorists such as Shakespeare (1995) acknowledge similarities in the experiences of disabled, queer and ethnic minorities, and even begin to approach the question of crossover identities, it is not the core of their arguments.

Deleuze and Guattari (1987) also provide concepts such as assemblages, 'lines of flight' and deterritorialisation as ways of thinking through cultural binaries and resisting 'arborescent' thought through 'rhizomatic' constructions. The notion of 'multiplicity' is particularly useful with regards to thinking about edge identities, because it enables discussion of the complexity of intersecting partial subjectivities without collapsing difference into hybridity or mass.

'Intersection' implies a clear-cut binary relationship where none exists: assumptions creep in, that our 'edge identities' are not otherwise hybrid; they are. Or at least, they can be. Combine any one hybrid identity with another axis of marginality and it becomes even more complicated. The DTZ is a criss-crossing matrix of hyperdifferentiated bodies: black gay bodies and jewish lesbian bodies, certainly, but also asian-american deaf bodies and african-italian transgendered bodies and everything in between.

"Disabled people often find themselves on the margins, a common experience for bisexual people, and bisexual disabled people have argued that it is hard to achieve a sense of identity and community when there is no place that one belongs." (Shakespeare et al, 1996).

The fractious interactions within attempts to set up hybrid social spaces should indicate that edge identities should not look to this as a solution to the discomfort experienced when the attempt at diasporic return fails. "Most of us do not look, act, move, or communicate in what is considered to be a lesbian or gay way. We are outsiders in our own community, and no one hesitates to let us know that." (Hearn, 1991).

^ *Trembling Before G-D*

Nor is it merely a matter of time until a wider 'community' (with its associated media, cultural practices and politics as well as social spaces) develops. While culture intrinsic to edge-identity micro-communities is emergent, these cultural instances have not yet become cultural institutions: for example, the Jewish Gay film, *Trembling Before G-D* (Dubowski, US, 2001) has screened at gay and lesbian film festivals and jewish film festivals, but there are not yet gay and lesbian jewish film festivals. That's not to say such a festival is not on its way. In the US, there are already gay and lesbian synagogues and queer jewish schools (Schneer and Aviv, 2002).

This further reterritorialisation reiterates the myth of essentialism and leads to further fragmentation down the track as this group in turn realises the premise of 'identity' was misleading. (See section, "Coming Home", page 34).

Scope: isn't everyone multiple?

We all express ourselves as partial, fluid subjectivities. It is vital to acknowledge that 'white, straight, male' is equally a raced, gendered and sexually-oriented multiple subjectivity. Indeed, as Fung (1995), Grossberg (1996) and Chua (1999) note, focus on the "multiple identities" of a marginalised subject without acknowledging the power relations that constitute marginality "paradoxically reinstates his/her position as the more socially devalued half of the binaries white/colored, male/female, hetero/homo, abled/disabled, and so on" (Chua, 1999: 102).

However, the resulting scope of research would make any attempt at analysis prohibitive. In addition, I would argue that since real discrimination continues to exist, such relativist positions are problematic and crises in identity are more visible in subaltern edge identities. Caucasian, heterosexual men are less likely to have interrogated the construction of their subjectivity as they are not confronted with their 'shortcomings' as seen through the prism of idealised identity. Rather, they are held up as the ideal against which others are measured. They are therefore less likely to form support networks based on this multiple identity, making it harder to examine the ways in which this subjectivity is negotiated.

The next most simple move is to limit the work to Australia, which also limits the applicability of the conclusions. However, given the inter-cultural, transglobal nature of the subjectivities under investigation, the inherent characteristics of hybridity and its diasporic reach render problematic attempts to concentrate enquiries within national borders for the sake of expediency. Much of the creative material, especially in the black/gay conjunction, emerges from North America, and intellectual associations between theorists and activists across the globe is now commonplace.

I dream / I dream /
I dream
of a world
a beautiful
world
that exists
above the clouds
There is
love
there is hope
there is
peace/equality
and social justice

There is
no need
for signs
proclaiming
Land Rights

There is
no need
for anti-
discrimination
legislation
Let me
fly above
the clouds
Let me
breathe

(Bellear, 1996)

That said, the key texts examined in this thesis are locally-produced and all are available and viewable locally. The texts chosen for discussion are also significantly those aimed at a broad audience rather than a narrower community. Identity-based constructions of 'queer' audience reception (Searle, 1997) and ethnic viewing audiences (for example, the establishment of broadcasters such as the Special Broadcasting Service (SBS) in Australia) are counter-productive to the thesis of the current work.

Another issue is in the limitation of the key 'identifiers' as outlined above to ethnicity, sexuality, ability and religion. This excludes one highly contentious identifier (gender) but extensive work on gender construction has already been conducted (Butler, 1990; Irigaray, 1985; Fuss, 1990; Pettman, 1992 among many others) and is outside the scope of this thesis. A further, considerable, exclusion is the self-chosen sub-culture, such as punk, goth, skater and so on. While these identifiers would be extremely useful as comparisons, there is already solid work on their construction and constitution (Hebdige, 1979, Thornton and Gelder, 1997). Such sub-cultural formations will be touched upon as options available for edge identities in terms of tactical or strategic alliances but they are not the core concern of this work.

> "… the formalist, post-structuralist tendency to over-generalize the global currency of so-called nomadic, fragmented and deterritorialized subjectivity … only serves to decontextualize and flatten out 'difference', as if 'we' were all in fundamentally similar ways always-already travellers in the same postmodern universe, the only difference residing in the different itineraries we undertake … Against this tendency, I would like to stress the importance [of] the particular historical conditions and the specific trajectories through which actual social subjects become incommensurably different *and* similar."
>
> (Ang, 2001)

Diaspora, sweet diaspora

The locus of this intersection of ethnicity, sexuality and ability is in itself unfixed, positioned in populations uprooted in more ways than one. The term diaspora, with its inherent longing for homeland, mobilises the hybrid, the translocal, identity as performance.[8]

At risk is an atavistic appeal to a prior 'purity', an originary dream. However, just as 'we' were never authentically polish or chinese or greek or even aboriginal (and definitely not 'australian'), neither were 'we' authentically heterosexual or homosexual, able or disabled. The 'return' to the motherland or even to the gay heartlands of Oxford St or Chapel St or the Castro, will not bring closure. All that has occurred is the exposure of the process, the revelation of the lie of authenticity.

8. For an excellent discussion of the origins of the term diaspora and its recent rethinking, see Tölölyan, 1996.

However, the figure of diaspora is a useful one: a population spread across a global society, with commonalities yet with distinct adaptations to its host's culture, in constant negotiation with that culture, fluid, changing, uncertain. This is the seed of the diasporic imagination. "Instead of being unproblematic — given, merely "factual" — a diaspora is always an intellectual construction tied to a given narrative." (Dayan, 1998: 110)

Diasporas are one of the possible 'virtual communities' of the title, since they maintain an imagined connection as per Anderson's constructions of nationhood (1991).[9]

9. I argue that the global 'queer' community functions as a virtual community even though it is not diasporic in the sense of emanating from an 'original' locus. Rather, an imagined home is created in the form of gay heartlands.

Diasporic identity is always already in the process of becoming-other, always engaged in a shifting cultural discussion of the liminal. Contrary to the assumption that the inevitable outcome of removal from 'traditional' groups and structures is an isolated individual doomed to failure, the particularate identity reconstructed by diasporic populations provides a model for connections, tendrils, fibres, producing a rhizomatic tangle that cannot be easily unravelled.

It is this tangle that traditional identity politics fears as undifferentiated muck, that must be recast in the binary construction of Self-other if identity-based Self is to survive. Society's framework is "identity (negative difference) versus undifferentiation (confusion)" (Massumi, 1992: 92). Living in the spaces in-between threatens the grid of categorisation. The dual fears of ego dissolution and isolation/abandonment lead to a pursuit of triumphal molarity which is fragile and impermanent, requiring constant shoring up, renewal, reassurance. That which is different is denied, punished, or cast out to preserve the illusion of unity. It is this tangle that is railed against in the diasporic 'community's' appeals to continuity, to uphold 'tradition', to marry 'people like us'.

"This is our refugee camp — Australia.
We have always maintained that we never
ceded sovereignty. Instead of us proving
our ongoing connectedness to land,
where's their proof?"
(Susan Rankin [Aunty Sue], 2004)

Although indigenous populations and queer populations are not diasporic, there are nonetheless similarities in the way these populations interact with the wider socius and with others from resonant global populations that makes the mobilisation of diasporic theory useful when examining edge identities.

In particular, "like other ethnic groups, of which they may be a special and distinct case, diasporas patrol their communal boundaries, either of their own volition; or at the insistence of the ruling majorities of the host countries, who do not wish to assimilate them; or due to a combination of the two". (Tölölyan, 1996). Another similarity can be found in the trends towards maintaining communication and cultural contact, including pilgrimages and other travel, and cultural maintenance through diasporic media (Cunningham and Sinclair, 1999). Queer populations go so far as to establish what are even referred to as 'gay ghettoes'. It can be argued that indigenous populations are diasporic to the extent that they have been displaced from their homelands even though they continue to live in their 'nation' of origin according to colonialist border definitions.

Q: Do you find it difficult to form relationships with white men?

A: Really, I don't think that way. I'm more concerned about the communication barrier between deaf and hearing people, because it requires a lot of attention and work within the relationship. If I thought only of racial issues, guys would call me a racist and they wouldn't have a relationship with me. I'd have a more difficult time as a result.

("Pablo", 1993)

The deaf community also has similarities to diasporic populations although to a vastly reduced extent. "Since the 1980s, many members of the deaf community have been galvanized by the idea that deafness is not a medical disability, but a cultural identity. They call themselves Deaf, with a capital D, a community whose defining and unifying quality is American Sign Language (ASL), a fluent, sophisticated language that enables deaf people to communicate fully, essentially liberating them — when they are among signers — from one of the most disabling aspects of being deaf," (Mundy, 2002). This article, concerning Sharon Duchesneau and Candy McCullough's attempts to conceive a designer baby with a deaf donor, also mentions deaf cultural institutions such as the Gallaudet University. Deaf texts such as segments on Channel 4's *Out on Tuesday* (UK, 1996) operate as diasporic media for other sign-speaking audiences. The resonance with diasporic experience is remarked upon by the author:

> The words "bond" and "culture" say a lot; in effect, Sharon and Candy are a little like immigrant parents who, with a huge and dominant and somewhat alien culture just outside their door, want to ensure that their children will share their heritage, their culture,

˅ *From deafqueer.org*

> their life experience. If they are deaf and have a hearing child, that child will move in a world where the women cannot fully follow. (Mundy, 2002)

Simply evoking a parallel between queer/disabled and ethnic minority experience is inadequate, however, as it again implies exclusive boundaries. One problem with positing what Sinfield (1996) calls the "ethnicity and rights" model is the elision of the intersection between categories. When Sinfield writes that "lesbians and gay men have understood themselves on the model of ethnicity", there is an impression that lesbians and gay men can never be of ethnic minority origins themselves.

There is also a perception that it is not enough to claim a diasporic identity: the rituals and acts — both collective and individual — that make up a cultural practice are constitutive of the communal identity.[10]

10. For further examination of the effects of diasporas on identity and culture, see Said, 1994 and Barkan and Shelton, 1998.

It is here that edge identities run into the borders that circumscribe their lives: it is impossible for them to simultaneously perform all the acts required of them to remain a member of all of the communities to which they feel they belong.

Where am I? Recognition and identity formation

Cultural texts reflect societal norms at the same time as constructing acceptable axes of behaviour. A commonly reported experience of 'coming out' is thinking that you're 'the only one'. Seeing 'yourself' on television, in cinema, in the pages of a novel, provides a model of how-to-be[11]. It's too tempting to grasp at any representation of multiethnic sexuality or any moment of disability, no matter how token, as a validation of self, of acceptance, of belonging. Nonetheless, these moments of recognition can be powerful, even when coded so subtly that only an active reader will spot them. In the pilot episode of the recent queer drama *The L Word* (Troche, US, 2003), Jenny (Mia Kirschner), who is dealing with her desire for both a man and a woman, is seen to be wearing a necklace with the Hebrew word *chai* on it. A queer viewer with a jewish background has to look twice to be certain: is this a jewish queer?

11. Gross (1998) quotes a number of black and asian american theorists and actors discussing their 'hunger' for representations of black and asian faces on television. He points out: "I would venture to suggest, however, that neither B.D. Wong nor Margaret Cho would have been called into the living room to witness one of the even more rare appearances of a lesbian or gay character on television." (90)

The show seems to be the first to explicitly deal with questions of these intersections. In another storyline, two women in a long term relationship (Tina, blonde, white; Bette, brunette, black) want to conceive. Discussing a potential black donor, Tina says "on top of having two moms, that is a lot of otherness to put on one child." Later, discussing it with a therapist, she is told such a comment "comes across to Bette as a rejection of her identity." This is certainly different from the other key queer drama on australian television, *Queer as Folk* (Davies, USA, 2000), where all of the main male characters are Anglo (one of the two token lesbians is jewish) and black characters appear only fleetingly in non-speaking roles in sexual encounters.

Despite the 'refreshing' variety of representations in *The L Word*, there is nevertheless a feeling that edge identity viewers reach eagerly for each appearance as affirmation and validation of themselves as 'acceptable'.

One of the problems encountered in diasporic communities is a sense that diasporic cultural communications and media are performing a project of "reconstructing endangered identities" and connecting together disparate sections of the diaspora (Dayan, 1998: 104). According to Dayan, in 'fragile' communities, "the question of identity is no longer one of routine maintenance and such institutions [as universities, museums] are mostly absent. In such communities maintaining a group's identity requires complex strategies".

˅ *Bette (Jennifer Beals) and Tina (Laurel Holloman) in The L Word*

In these ways, the narrow range of 'ideal' community members is reiterated and reified. I would go so far as to argue that this reiteration of a niche message to a specific interpretive community is part of a wider stratification of modern reading positions that contributes to the masking of hegemonic discourse.

This is even more intriguing as a number of the texts considered here, although intended for diverse audiences, are produced by edge identity authors (Rose Troche, now living in America, queer with puerto-rican heritage; Tony Ayres, now

living in Australia with his partner Michael McMahon, born in China; Christos Tsiolkas, gay, now living in Australia, greek heritage).

Historically, the presence of the ethnically and sexually other in media texts has moved from absent to token in the 1970s and 1980s to foregrounded during the identity wars of the early-to-mid 1990s to more recent idealised post-identity tropes.

ˆ Ari (Alex Dimitriades) and Sean (Julian Garner) in Head On

That is not to say that the experiences of edge identities match these movements. There remains a fissure between autobiographical texts by edge-identity authors and the cultural production of their image. Where edge identity authors report fracture and struggle to perform 'correct' (anglo) queerness or 'correct' (heterosexual) ethnicity, filmic representations such as *Walking on Water* (Ayres, Australia, 2001) gloss over these moments of tension.

This move to enunciate cultural practices without explicitly addressing identity is a discursive evolution from mid-nineties texts such as *Head On* (Kokkinos, Australia, 1998), which was still caught in an agonistic engagement with identity. In *Loaded* (Tsiolkas, 1995), the book that *Head On* is based on, the protagonist, Ari, explicitly responds to issues of ethnicity, even while he acknowledges that harmonious homogeneous ethnic communities are fictitious.

> "The peasant Greeks who have made their money working the milk bars, delis, markets and fish shops of Melbourne look down on the long-haired loutish Greek boy and the bleached-blonde sluttish Greek girl with disdain and denial. The denial is total. You are not me. We are not you. You don't exist.
>
> Ethnicity is a scam, a bullshit, a piece of crock. The fortresses of the rich wogs on the hill are not to keep the *Australezo* out, but to refuse entry to the uneducated-

long-haired-bleached-blonde-no-money wog."

(Tsiolkas, 1995)

Ari is also attracted to men, but the idea of a queer community is less present in the text. His encounters with men in back alleys are filled with violence and loathing, not communitarian feeling-together.

By contrast, it is the ethnic community that hovers as an invisible ghost in the friendship between Charlie and Anna in *Walking on Water*. Cultural competency or lack thereof is hinted at only once during the film:

ANNA: Are the *debreceners* ready?

SIMON: (indicating sausages) If that's what these are,

then yes.

Anna has a cosmopolitan cultural awareness that extends beyond her own heritage — *debreceners* are a type of hungarian sausage — while Simon, white and from out of town, does not. And while the sexual practice in the film is explicitly placed outside of heteronormative constructs (even the heterosexual sex in the film is extra-marital), the only time 'identity' is used as a descriptor is in a moment of black humour, when Charlie and Carl, Gavin's ex-boyfriend, express their hope that Gavin won't come back as a sea gull or a dog. "Or a poof", adds Carl. Charlie nods firmly to this. Anna tells them to shut up. Despite the implied negativity of life as sexually other, there are no other judgements in the film that one sexual practice is more or less valuable than any other.

It's possible to read this new construction as both a positive political gesture — a utopian play of post-identity practice — and a reterritorialisation of difference as harmless, thus neutering its political potential.

Equally revealing is the official character bio of Chloe from *Secret Life of Us*. At no point is her ethnicity or sexuality stated although the images are of her kissing Miranda, and her ethnicity is visually asian, though not culturally present. She's just another one of the gang; it seems like her sexuality and ethnicity are incidental.

Chloe is a ground-breaking character — the first long-term queer character of non-anglo descent in an Australian television drama. What are the

"Chloe is able to compartmentalise her life much more than the other female characters on the show. She's just such a terrific girl to play, I am really enjoying exploring her character." — Nina Liu

Chloe has rejected a career path that beckoned at the end of her Commerce degree. Working part time, four days a week, as team leader at a call centre fulfills her needs exactly - something that's challenging in the moment, but once the clock hits 5:00 she can just go home and not think about it. Chloe's confident that whatever happens she'll be able to rely on herself, her skills and qualities.Chloe's fearless, and opinionated. She's trying to be her own person, choosing to define herself outside of what she feels society expects. She is very responsible, often accepting responsibility too quickly. You could say she's a serious young insect but at night Chloe is a bit of a party girl. She likes to have fun."

Biography for "Chloe", Secret Life of Us Web site

cultural markers that are being deployed and what does this tell us about the construction of 'community' and 'identity' in the australian cultural landscape? She is "a serious young insect" but also chooses "to define herself outside of what she feels society expects" (SLOU Web site, 2003). This is especially relevant in an area (St Kilda, Melbourne) where sexual diversity is relatively accepted while racism, particularly where the asian population is concerned, is still rife.

What is the effect of this invisibility? For the queer viewer, the invitation to construct Chloe's interest in Miranda as sexual or Frank's comforting of Charlie as other than merely friendly, long before these behaviours become explicit, creates a complicity of expectation: are they? will they? In the absence of markers the uncertainty is 'realistic'.[12]

12. One response to uncertainty is an explicit declaration of allegiance. This is especially seen where the marginality would otherwise be invisible. Examples include the chai or star of david worn by Jews; the pride flags, rainbow rings, pink triangles and so on worn by the queer community; and the aboriginal flags worn by indigenous people. The power of the symbol is diluted when those not 'entitled' to wear it do so. These markers assist in the identification of acceptable partners for sex and relationships and alleviate some of the difficulties in negotiating the uncertainty of day-to-day interaction. See section "I am infection" for more.

Isn't this then a productive engagement? If the goal is a praxis of self rather than an essential identity, then it is possible to read the presentation of Chloe as a person with potentially dynamic cultural and sexual practices as positive. However, while Chloe's ethnicity is presented as incidental, her sexuality — and that of Miranda — is problematised.

In the episode "Destiny" (*Secret Life of Us*, Episode 11, Series 3), Chloe and Miranda explicitly discuss identity. In this dialogue, identity is posited as something that has very little to do with practice. Both women have slept with men and women, yet one claims a lesbian identity while the other explicitly claims a heterosexual identity. Within the space of those identities, practice is wide and varied. The concept of bisexuality is never raised, although the spectre of "wanting it both ways" haunts the scene and is treated as an accusation. The discussion is closed when Miranda chooses — one or the other. Seemingly, Chloe doesn't mind her girlfriend keeping their relationship in the closet, or even saying she's heterosexual, provided she doesn't want it both ways. She has to fit into the societal range of acceptable identities, find her slot on the grid.

Once, the slot "lesbian" was marked as unacceptable, but that has been recoded. The dangerzone of fluidity itself — of refusing the category altogether — is the stuff of nightmares. This DTZ with its shifting, unstable boundaries demands moment-to-moment negotiation. It requires acknowledgement that

CHLOE: Do your parents know?
MIRANDA (smiles): That I'm with you?
CHLOE: That you're with a woman?
MIRANDA (in a 'no, dummy' tone): No.
CHLOE (smiling): Why'd you say it like that?
MIRANDA: Because I just wouldn't tell them.
CHLOE (still smiling, knowing): You want it both ways.
MIRANDA (incredulous): What?
CHLOE: Well, you wouldn't be ashamed to say you were heterosexual, would you?
MIRANDA (almost wistful?): No.
CHLOE: But you are ashamed to say you're a lesbian.
MIRANDA: Because I'm not one.
CHLOE: What makes a lesbian?
MIRANDA: Someone who's only ever been with women.
CHLOE: (mock outrage) Oh. (explanatory) Well then, I'm not a lesbian. I've been with men.
MIRANDA: I'm heterosexual. I just fell in love with a woman.
CHLOE (smiling): I'm glad it's me. [They kiss.]

(SLOU, 11:3)

there is nothing that can be depended on, that the freedom to manoeuvre is purchased with the loss of anchors to solid ground.

How the rest of their relationship would play out is uncertain: if these 'identities' are fixed then presumably, Miranda will never invite Chloe to participate in her family life as a partner, as she would a male partner. "I just wouldn't tell them" is never really challenged, apart from the common assertion that bisexuals take advantage of their 'dual' participation to benefit from the privilege of the heteropatriarchy while delving into the sensuality of the forbidden.

KEN (innuendo): Are those two…?

EVAN (very matter of fact): Yeah, yeah, they're a couple.

KEN (low, conspiratorial): Wouldn't mind getting a bit of that action.

EVAN (friendly but informative): I think the fact that they're lesbians means you're not going to get *any* of that action, Ken.

(SLOU, 11:3)

Intriguingly, it's the woman with the anglo-celtic background who is in the closet. Although many autobiographical accounts from edge identity authors indicate a lack of support within a number of ethnic communities for queer progeny, it is Chloe who says "They know I'm a lesbian but they don't rejoice in it or anything."

Chloe doesn't challenge Miranda's reticence despite her earlier statement that closeted relationships are less valid, in part because they don't enter fully into the discursive life of the group:

> MIRANDA: Have you ever been in love before?
>
> CHLOE: I went out with a girl at school but that was a secret so it didn't seem very real.

Interpreting permissable behaviours in a space where identity is fixed but practice is fluid is confusing. While both women allow for sex with men, the men of the group are expected to respect a different boundary. When visiting backpacker Ken encounters Chloe and Miranda, his reading of terms is swiftly corrected by the series' key narrator, novelist Evan: "I think the fact that they're lesbians means you're not going to get *any* of that action, Ken."

˅ *Chloe (Nina Liu) and Miranda (Abi Tucker) in Secret Life of Us (click to play movie)*

The glosses over the continuing societal tensions concerning these

issues present the group as 'utopian', a projection of a potential space where the tensions have been resolved. Only Ken, the outsider, doesn't understand.

This is even more apparent in *Walking on Water*, where identity is almost never mentioned and certainly not a topic of discussion. Is this what the world looks like post-categories? Or does this have the effect of presenting the question as always already resolved so that there is no need to address the current real-world problems? If the aim is the end of categories, or as Massumi puts it (describing Deleuze and Guattari's goal) the destruction of categorical gridding (1992: 88), does this also inevitably remove the possibility of discussing disadvantage?

As Massumi notes elsewhere in his *User's Guide* (1992) it's all very well for Westerners to engage in shopping-for-identity but it's a lot harder to do when the body you're trying to do it with is starving.

I am infection

The fear, the liminal panic, inspired by the edge identity is a fear of the borderless, infectious. There is no clarity; in fact this idea of a fixed edge is a lie, as much as the notion of fixed identity is a lie: we seep beyond, always. There is no hard end to queer, no careful line between black and white, no sharp division between able and crippled. This seepage terrifies, since white, heterosexual and able is marked as empowered. Being in-between instantly threatens privilege and power as a whole.

"If 'it' is any intense same-sex bonding or the occasional occurrence of any same-sex act, then research will find hardly anyone to be immune."

(Sinfield, 1996)

What's more, Appadurai's "global ethnoscape" (1991) is interwoven with a similar tapestry of sexualities and beliefs. Even within a seemingly protected space of one kind of privilege, other identities will well up, challenging the assumptions of possibility.

Community debates about continuity are frequently framed in terms of fragmentation and integration. Bringing someone into the community — whether through conversion, emigration or coming out — changes the community. Rituals of integration protect the community to some extent, insisting on certain guarantees of loyalty or behaviour, adherence to guidelines — what it means to be 'jewish' or 'muslim' or 'australian' or 'gay'. Those who

cannot adequately account for themselves are not allowed in: stopped at the door of the club in trivial cases and more seriously locked up in detention centres, indefinitely, in the worst examples.

Ironically, the same people accused of bringing the 'yellow peril' to Australia frame the 'white disease' of homosexuality in similar terms. "My parents' paradox — they hate queers, but they love me, even though I am gay — can be achieved by separating my gayness from my other identities … This is easily done, since, for most Asian parents, being Asian and being gay are mutually exclusive… There is not a need to talk about 'it' because it is only a problem for white people: 'it' is a white disease." (Wat, 1996).

Queers are accused of "recruiting" new victims. Homosexuality is presumed to be infectious in and of itself. The arrival of an actual infection made the mobilisation of this discourse even easier. It didn't take long in the mid-1990s identity wars for the discussion of the "gay plague" (AIDS) to look towards bisexual people as vectors of transmission to the straight community. One volunteer worker referred to it as "relentless vilification of bisexual men socially sanctioned by the State" (Anderson, personal communication, 2004). Red Cross blood donor questionnaires continue to include a specific question about sexual contact with bisexual men.

There's no way to win: setting up community as a bastion against external forces and 'contamination' perpetuates oppression, especially when visible as a ghetto; abandoning the community of ethnicity or sexuality results in accusations of betrayal, uncertainty and loss of a 'connection' with an ethnic or sexual heritage. The similarity in the cultural patterns of ethnic diasporas in Australia and the crises facing sexuality-based ghettoes in Sydney and San Francisco demonstrate the futility of identity-based community. Recurring patterns of deterritorialisation/reterritorialisation occur within the community as 'authentic' behaviours are mandated for core community members and border dwellers are ostracised as impure. Mercer (1994) notes that this discourse of racial authenticity in black communities is frequently used to exclude people of mixed heritage and non-white queers.

"Classic works by black nationalists Frantz Fanon and Eldridge Cleaver identified homosexuality in black men as a mental illness symptomatic of the totality of their subjugation by whites. President Robert Mugabe of Zimbabwe has blocked organization for gay and lesbian rights in that nation on the grounds that these efforts are the work of white agitators who present a neocolonial threat."

(Johnson, 2004)

The edge identity inhabits the nightmares of conservative Australia. In Pauline Hanson's feverish fantasy of the ultimate end of australian multiculturalism and immigration policy, a dystopian australian republic in 2050 with a population of 1.8 billion people, "Australasia's new President is Poona Li Hung. Ms Hung, a lesbian, is of multiracial descent, of Indian and Chinese background, and was felt by the world government to be the most suitable President. She is also part machine — the first cyborg president." (Hanson, 1996 quoted in Hansard, 1997.) All the notes are hit at once: the collapse of the nation-state as self-determining, the horror of the cyborg, the edge identity as out of control.

'Authenticity' and 'continuity' tend to go hand-in-hand (cf ATSIC Deputy Ray Robinson, quoted in Guilliat, 2002). This 'continuity' is effectively predicated on a fear of assimilation, the flipside of the minoritarian discourse. It is a fear of the minority being infected in its turn by the mass until there is nothing left to see, colonised in more ways than one.

It is this fear, I would argue, that leads to overt cultural signification — a continual and ongoing coming out, especially prevalent in the less visually recognisable communities. Visible difference (overt racial or ethnic markers, physical impairment markers) must be negotiated separately from invisible difference (some forms of disability, sexuality, most religions).

Where there is invisible difference and a person continues to practise the difference but without overtly identifying membership of the group whether by visible markers or verbal confession, they are said to be 'passing' or 'closeted'. Passing is frowned upon by minority communities, as the minority person is perceived to enjoy the privileges of the non-marked while actually being a member of a persecuted minority. Sedgewick (1990) elaborates how the notion of the closet could apply to gypsies and jews, however she considers sexuality-related passing to be a special case and she doesn't see how it relates to ethnicity or ability. Indeed these assumptions that ethnicity and ability are always visible and knowable contribute to the pressure not to 'come out' and similar responses ('Why did you feel the need to tell me that?') arise in response to such confessions. Most multiply marginal identities have an aspect of their practice that can be concealed in one or another of their communities. They will not always attempt to pass as part of the dominant group; it may not be possible. However, a fijian-aboriginal person might find it easier to allow the assumption they are aboriginal. A bisexual person might find it easier to allow the assumption that they are gay. Certainly much of transgender interaction is concerned with successfully passing as either male or female — though certainly not all, for example Sydney trannie celebrity Norrie May-Welby in a letter to the Sydney Star Observer, 11 December 1992: I am not a gay man ('man' is a culturally constructed concept that I don't include in my personal

"Community building in queer Asian America requires vigilance regarding the notions of home and experience, especially regarding the ways these concepts may close off further discussion about who's in and who's out of the community and why. (This is not to imply that there is a model leader or organization that can bypass the problem of authenticity to bring all of queer Asian America directly to a copacetic destination called 'justice')."

(Aguilar-San Juan, 1998)

"We can afford neither simple assimilation into mainstream politics nor total withdrawal in search of the authentic community — or we must demand the right to both."

(Phelan, 1995: 354)

identification), but I *am* gay, I am a queen (and of *transgender* identification) [original emphasis].

Where it's possible to be mistaken, to pass, the pressure from the majority community is to hide. In the film *Bend It Like Beckham* (Chadha, UK, 2002), Tony tells Jess he "really likes Beckham". At first she doesn't understand what he's implying. Then she says "But you're indian!" as if that makes his homosexuality an impossibility. Her third response is "God, what's your Mum going to say?". He acknowledges he has to keep his sexuality a secret. And although Jess goes on to defy her family and claim a space for herself as a footballer, even leaving the way open for her to have a relationship with a non-indian boy, being queer is just too other.

What is the alternative? A permanent coming out, a constant declaration, in the form of visible markers: buddhist monks shave their heads, queer men wear pink triangles, queer women wear labrys, jewish people wear stars of david or the word *chai* or in the case of orthodox jews, grow their hair and wear distinctive clothing. Even where difference might be visible, additional signs are deployed to indicate an alliance of political identification: the red, black and yellow of the aboriginal flag, the green, red and yellow of the ethiopian flag that stands in for all Africa.

> "What the Jewish community fears, of course, in these intermarriages and relationships, is assimilation. We define ourselves by our otherness, our separation and difference from the goyim, those who are non-Jews… We hold onto our Jewish difference so as not to disappear, even while we crave a kind of "invisibility" where our Jewishness is merely another aspect of our personalities."
>
> (Schimel, 1997: 166)

Passing "rehearses continually our moment of enforced but imperfect separation from the *straightgeist*," (Sinfield, 1996, original emphasis). Referring to queer badges and T-shirts, Sinfield describes the fear of "the doorstep Christian who catches you in your bathtowel, bereft of signifiers". Such a scenario can be imagined for a variety of edge identities.

There is also a dimension of choice and agency involved in this signification. Whereas skin or sexual preference or impairment may be experienced as inherent, allegiance with a group or community can be indicated with this form of cultural decoration, whether as a resistive strategy or as an approach to seduction.

This overt 'identification' with a group becomes even more interesting when the behaviour of the person displaying the symbol does not match with how some members of the community believe others should behave.

When multiple axes of marginality are involved, the play of signifiers either demands a hybrid mutation of the signifiers in question such as the rainbow star of david or the rainbow christian fish symbol, some form of hierarchy of identification, a shopping-for-identity (Massumi, 1992) in the choice of which identifiers will be used as 'primary' markers or a polyphonic excession that defies binary constructions. As Hall (1996) says, "its complexity exceeds this binary structure of representation". Another response is to abandon all signifiers altogether. For example, neither Charlie nor Chloe display symbols of their ethnic heritage or their sexuality.

Charlie and Chloe are then safe — with no ethnic behaviours to separate them from the crowd, they do not threaten the community with their difference. In *Secret Life of Us*, the issue of sexuality itself is still contentious. By bringing these attitudes of sexual acceptance back to their ethnic communities, these characters would challenge socially acceptable behaviours. Neither are they shown negotiating these complex spaces. If you choose to be queer, you must give up your ethnicity and cultural practices, it would seem. And if you choose your ethnicity, you must stay in the closet (see for example films such as *Head On*, *The Wedding Banquet*).

> "But it makes an immigrant laugh to hear the fears of the nationalist, scared of infection, penetration, miscegenation, when this is small fry, peanuts, compared to what the immigrant fears — dissolution, disappearance. Even the unflappable Alsana Iqbal would regularly wake up in a puddle of her own sweat after a night visited by visions of Millat (genetically BB; where B stands for Bengaliness) marrying someone called Sarah (aa, where a stands for Aryan), resulting in a child called Michael (Ba), who in turn marries somebody called Lucy (aa), leaving Alsana with a legacy of unrecognizable great-grandchildren (Aaaaaaa!), their Bengaliness thoroughly diluted, genotype hidden by phenotype. It is both the most irrational and natural feeling in the world."
>
> (Smith, 2000)

The tensions in *Walking on Water* revolve around developing a new morality for this community without anchorage: What will be important? Who will take precedence? What is loyalty? Is euthanasia acceptable? Is adultery? These are all questions which have clear answers within the 'traditional' ethnic and religious communities the characters have left. In this world, however, it is all up for grabs again and must be renegotiated.

Fractured selves: negotiated safety

Too often, reports by or about edge identities rely on the idea of 'choosing one identity over another' (for example, medicalised texts such as Ridge et al, 1999

and Sanitosio, 1999) with the unsurprising result of experiencing psychological isolation after rejecting one's ethnic identity (Sanitosio, 1999). With some religious groups' vocal condemnation of queer desire, it is also unsurprising that some subjects develop a notion of 'incompatible' identities.

Schimel (1997) describes his dilemma: what would make him sexy to the queer community is exactly what would make him an outcast in the Jewish community. "I have, in fact, never looked more gay … the only thing I'm missing to be a perfect '90s clone is a tattoo, something tribal perhaps, on my left or right arm. But I'm a Jew, and Jews don't do tattoos."

These demands to prioritise should not be mistaken as the sole domain of dominant medical or sociological discourses. Gilroy (1993) comments on the way in which earlier constructions of black community relied on asking black people to prioritise blackness over such "petty concerns" as class, skin colour, language and to some extent gender. This kind of demand is also made of communities based on class identity (the solidarity of the worker over colour, gender, language), feminist communities (the sisterhood over colour, class, language) and within gay rights discourse (sexual fraternity over colour, class, language and to a lesser extent gender).

Communities of choice may take priority in these circumstances over communities of chance. In Shakespeare (1996), there is explicit discussion of disability as a constructed identity (as opposed to impairment as a physical condition) and the possibility of being 'out' as disabled. "I would declare myself as an out gay man rather than a disabled man. My identity is firmly out gay. The fact that I am disabled is secondary." ('Jeremy', quoted in Shakespeare, 1996)

It is significant that Charlie (*Walking on Water*) and Chloe (*Secret Life of Us*) are presented as isolated from their families. Charlie and Chloe are never shown coming out or coming into the wider society. They are already home: in the friendship circle. Their heritage is never discussed. However, acceptance within the group is always at risk. It is no surprise that one of the theme songs of the Gay and Lesbian community is "We are family". This is the replacement for home, and in both texts, the circle of friendship and the 'community' in

Denton: How would you explain aboriginality?

Mailman: It's a spiritual thing. It's a sense of belonging and everyone has a different way of identifying that. Because I didn't grow up with any of those stories, I don't know language.

Sometimes there's a language that we slip into. It's a natural thing. I don't know whether it's my speech pattern that changes. You can say a million things just with a couple of [gestures]. There's a lot of things I don't know. I'm still really learning and it's only through meeting other blackfellas in my community that I get bits and pieces.

It took me ages to understand that there was a whole generation that was brought up to be shamed.

(Denton, 2004)

which the characters operate is presented as multicultural and multi-sexual. The community of friendship hails "the contradiction inhabiting the very concept of the *common* and the *community*" (Derrida, 1997).

That said, Chloe is the only asian we see in SLOU, as Kelly is the only koori. Charlie at least has Anna, explicitly greek-australian at least on one parent's side because of her surname. Is Charlie greek? Italian? We never find out.[13] Should we? This is perhaps Derrida's "incalculable equality of these friends of solitude, of the incommensurable subjects, of these subjects without subject and without intersubjectivity" (1997: 43).

While the friendship circles of SLOU and WOW are presented as harmonious, the communities edge identities leave behind are weakened by their departure. It is also significant that many of the multicultural queer characters in Western film and television are in relationships with people from Anglo backgrounds. Miranda (Chloe's girlfriend in SLOU) and Frank (Charlie's boyfriend in WoW) are both white. Ling-Yen Chua (1999) lists numerous films with interracial relationships as the key sexual relationship for the central queer character: *My Beautiful Laundrette* (Stephen Frears, UK, 1985), *She Must Be Seeing Things* (Shiela McLaughlin, USA, 1987), *Young Soul Rebels* (Isaac Julien, UK, 1991), *Salmonberries* (Percy Adlon, Germany/USA 1991), *The Crying Game* (Neil Jordan, UK, 1992), *Grief* (Richard Glatzer, USA, 1993), *Go Fish* (Rose Troche, USA, 1994), *Boys on the Side* (Ross Herbert, USA, 1995), *Bar Girls* (Marita Giovanni, USA, 1995), *When Night is Falling* (Patricia Rozema, Canada, 1994) and the film Chua is analysing, *The Wedding Banquet* (Ang Lee, Taiwan/USA, 1993). In all of these films, Chua argues, homosexuality is located implicitly within white culture, and I would argue, in some ways the character's homosexuality is positioned as an indication of the degree of their assimilation within white culture.

Chua also notes that these apparently progressive relationships are relatively unthreatening because they produce no children and therefore do not play against the taboo of miscegenation.

A rewritten Jewish practice is only possible, ironically, with an immersion and understanding of traditional Jewish practice, which excludes so many of us who feel unwanted or unnecessary as women and queers. Those of us who rejected the religion early now find ourselves tracing a culture, wanting to relearn Hebrew and other liturgies in an effort to subvert what we learn. I am jealous of those now who speak the language well enough to enact interventions in its spaces while I remain excluded, speechless.

By leaving the Jewish community, we failed to transform it. By leaving the Gay and Lesbian community, we failed to transform it. These resonances I now find moving within and between alternative queer, alternative Jewish and the various intersections of these allow for liens between these spaces, allow for these spaces to expand to be transformed until they are seamless. Not merged seamlessly, not to say at all that they are somehow now identical, but rather than it should be impossible to determine at which point one has begun and another ended.

13. His surname — Bell — appears fleetingly on the will in a two-second shot. In the original script, none of the characters had specific ethnicities. The actors were cast because of talent and so the characters acquired ethnicity. (Ayres, personal communication, 2004).

Nonetheless, Wei Tung, *The Wedding Banquet*'s key character, is still alone on the edge: none of the other queers are asian and none of the other asians are queer. Charlie and Chloe find themselves in the same situation. The result is one model for edge identities to employ: a fracturing of subjectivity, a shifting of behaviour depending on the circumstances and the surroundings.

^ *Wei Tung (Winston Chao) and Simon (Mitchell Lichtenstein) in The Wedding Banquet*

The resulting fractured subjectivity should not be confused with the partial subjectivities of the radical split subject. Rather, in this scenario, tactics are employed to pass using a variety of camouflage, a shifting chameleon negotiating safe space. Based on interviews with edge-identity subjects (Bersten et al, 2001), some of these strategies include non-disclosure, non-confrontation, modified language, grammar, dress and association with others, minimisation of contact with (or removal of themselves from) communities. The strategies varied according to the degree of belonging or acceptance that the interviewees experienced, or conversely to the degree of inner conflict experienced in that community.

This fracturing is not reserved for edge identities: even a single axis of difference produces expectations of behaviour according to the norms of a group that is not that of the (different/migrant/queer/other) community for some part of a person's day. The difference is that for edge identities, there is nowhere they can simply be all of themselves, in all their multiplicity and complexity, at once. The shadowplay is required at all times and in different ways, alternately repressing one characteristic and then another (refraining from talking about the boyfriend at home; eating hamburgers and drinking beer when out with friends).

Off screen, queers of asian and mediterranean ethnicity living in Australia encounter racism and ostracism (Jackson and Sullivan, 1999). How does

televisual representation of an integrated multicultural queer collectivity affect negotiations around sexuality and ethnicity? At the same time as re/presenting positive possibilities for edge-identity practice, their danger is depoliticised. Culturally, they're represented as white, harmless, non-threatening. Apart from visually appearing as ethnically other, neither Chloe nor Charlie *do* anything that's identifiably from a cultural practice other than anglo. Both wear clothes from within the inner-city urban culture. Both choose music that is either nostalgic for Australia in the early 90s ("Under the Milky Way" by The Church, for example, at Gavin's wake in *WoW*) or american. At one point, Charlie is seen wearing a United States Marine Corps T-shirt. They pass.

ˆ *Charlie (Vince Colosimo) and Frank (Nicholas Bishop) in Walking on Water.*

Tony Ayres, director of *Walking on Water*, would recognise Chloe's behaviour. Born to a chinese family and growing up in Perth, Western Australia, he recalls struggling with the clash between his external appearance and his practice. "I had an obvious blindspot (i.e: the mirror) but then I kept telling myself I wasn't Chinese. I shunned the other Asian kids at school. I grew tall on Australian food. I forgot how to speak Mandarin, my first language. I became a 'banana' . Yellow on the outside, white on the inside" (Ayres, 1999). Charlie, in Ayres' film, is similarly 'white' in his cultural practice. Ayres also describes the prejudices in the gay scene, the expectations of asian men as submissive, the feminisation of their representation in gay magazines, and the feelings of self-loathing that resulted. By contrast, Chloe seems confident, capable and diffident. Only one week after she has cried bitterly over Miranda's departure, she is shown partying (for the first time) with other women who are identified by flatmate Christian as lesbians and discussing body modification with the other women at the Fu Bar.[14]

There are other, more intricate, ways to read Charlie's Marine Corps T-shirt: rather than a sign of allegiance or hegemonic indoctrination, it could be seen as

14. This discussion, around the issue of plastic surgery to make labia "more attractive" almost requires a thesis in itself. The women share a pornographic magazine, looking at the bodies of the models and commenting on which of them 'could do with' surgery to make their genital appearance more acceptable. Chloe partakes in this discussion without hesitation and there is no dissenting voice presented which argues that women's bodies might just be beautiful the way they are. It is a profoundly disturbing scene.

an ironic *perruque* (de Certeau, 1984). Charlie can be seen as conducting a raid on the culture of the US Marines, very vocally opposed to gay bodies within its ranks with its "don't ask, don't tell" policies and its whitebread all-american boy image.

The varied representations of ethnically-other, sexually-other and ably-other people in these texts open readings and possibilities for edge identities, rather than restricting their options to a narrowly-defined minority space.

Coming home: micro-communities

Alone then, the edge identity has three options: abandon some part of their historical practice in favour of a constructed self that is more acceptable to a chosen interpretive community; learn to become a chameleon; or attempt to reterritorialise a community based on an ever smaller identity base (the black gay deaf muslim club). Many of the approaches to examining diasporic, exilic or 'global nomad' identities are atavistic appeals to a previously imagined 'home' (Barkan and Shelton, 1998) or reify identity and attempt to create a new micro-community of the dispossessed (McCaig, 1996).

Sinfield (1996) argues that where people of ethnic minorities inherit community, gay and lesbian people (his terms) "have to move away from [families] … and *into*, if we are lucky, the culture of a minority community." If we are lucky? In his discussion of being 'at home', of assembling, Sinfield is only peripherally aware that those of us on the edge, inhabitants of bisexual, transgendered, deaf and otherwise other bodies are not invited into this new home. For us, acceptance into this 'minority community' is not a question of luck and the feeling of arriving home doesn't last very long as we become aware that blonde blue-eyed hunks are the mediatised image of idealism and we are still the shameful secret in the 'family' closet.

> "When I came out I instantly made links about race, gender, sexuality, it's about discrimination … and then I got disheartened in the lesbian and gay movement, straight away, very early on, about the levels of misogyny … I thought we were a community, because that's what I had read about in these books, I couldn't understand that the reality was very different … I already knew the personal was political, not just for gay men, not just for lesbians, but also for women and black people, so everybody had a model that covered this, so it was easily transferable into my experience of impairment."
>
> (Daffyd, in Shakespeare, 1996: 177)

In *Secret Life of Us* ("The Innocents", Episode 12, Season 3), there are only two places you can be, the straight community or the gay community. "Which community are you in?" Simon asks Richard. In response, Richard laughs incredulously and simply says "Shut up…". Even the question raising the

possibility of an in-between must be silenced. These slippery bisexual types are dangerous. They raise all sorts of fears, of betrayal, contamination.

This question of 'community' is key. In the fragmented, uncertain world of capitalist post-modernity, the search for stability, for community, for that feeling of 'belonging' leads to reified national imaginings *à la* Anderson. The desire for community is similar to the desire for love — the ecstasis of dissolution, relief from the eternal solitude of individuality.

The constant demand for fractured negotiated subjectivity is what makes the reterritorialised micro-community appealing: surely the Young Gay Asian Men's group will let me be myself? For example, Kaushalya Bannerji writes: "I find a need to create social spaces in which aspects of my personality are not censored and silenced … This sense of not belonging in either culture seems to be a form of exile. Perhaps it is not the exile our parents experience but it is nonetheless a fundamental fear of not having a real sense of community or country." (1993). She goes on to talk about ways in which "holding onto my Indian lesbianism through a variety of methods" is a way of dealing with this feeling of exile. The only problem is that 'asian' and 'gay' and even 'men' are artificial constructs in themselves, masking numerous national origins and ethnicities and a variety of sexual practices and gender identities. Nor does the existence of the micro-community preclude interactions with the rest of the world: negotiated encounters with exteriority are still likely and despite separatist rhetoric, desirable.

Commonality, a having-in-common or even an acting-in-common is not the issue here. The critique of community is not a critique of intersubjective connectivity or the collectivities constituted through such connectivity. Rather, the critique explicitly concerns projected permanent connections called communities based on imagined fixed identities resulting from identical-but-aleatory characteristics. The problem is in some ways posed by Nancy (1991): if community is essentialised it loses its political power. It is reterritorialised. It loses the 'uncertain' — all its ambiguity, its intersubjectivity.

Aleph Melbourne cordially invites you and your partner/friend to attend our Pesach (Passover) Shabbat dinner, to be held on April 9 at the Leo Baeck Centre in Kew. This invitation is extended to all our friends from the Melbourne GLBTIQ multicultural groups and AGMC members.
Please bring along a plate of food for the meal. Food/drink suggestions include vegetarian antipasto, gefilte fish, tuna bake, quiche, vegetarian lasagna, salads (greek, garden, waldorf, potato etc), smoked salmon, compotes, fruit platter, desserts, cakes, juices and alcoholic beverages (beer, wine).
The kitchen and facilities at LBC are kosher and we have been requested not to bring meat. Fish, including salmon, tuna and other varieties that have both fins and scales are acceptable; flake, shellfish, prawns, calamari, oysters, eel etc are unacceptable. Email/call Michael if you have any concerns.
As this dinner occurs during the Passover festival, we are also requested not to bring food containing any bread or bread products. Of course, you are welcome to bring food prepared with Matzos (Jewish specially baked flat breads). You can obtain a wide variety of Matzos from most supermarkets and specialty food stores in the Prahran/Balaclava/Elsternwick/St Kilda areas. Looking forward to seeing everyone on the night!
(e-mail from Aleph Melbourne to Greek and Gay, 24/03/04; it should be noted that Pesach is a festival where Jews are encouraged to invite the outsider to sit at their table.)

The emergence of a micro-community simultaneously threatens and delimits the ethnic and sexual communities in question. Schembri (2000) provides a detailed history of micro-community formations in Sydney (and to a lesser extent, Melbourne) in the last 30 years. According to Schembri, social groups for queers of latin american, greek, maltese, jewish, arab, irish, indian and east asian backgrounds were set up between 1992 and 1994 but "most of these tended to be short-lived". Other Australian micro-community groups include: jewish queer groups Chutzpah (Sydney, 1970s), Jews and Gentiles Together (1990), Jews and Friends (1991, 1992), Sydney Aleph (1993–96), Aleph Melbourne (1997), Jewish Lesbian Group of Victoria (Melbourne, 1998), Dayenu (Melbourne, 1999–present); indigenous queer groups OutBlack (Melbourne, 1994–present) and Gar' ban'djee'lum (Brisbane, 2000–present); asian and south asian groups Silk Road (1992), Asians and Friends (1990–1995?), Gulaba Masala (Pink Mix, Sydney, 1996, few months only), Sydney Asian Lesbians (1990–present); european groups including Greek and Gay (1995–present). These groups claim room in both queer space (for example, the annual Sydney Gay and Lesbian Mardi Gras parade) and ethnic cultural spaces (for example, in 2000 a group of chinese "gay and lesbian activists" (Schembri, 2000) took part in the Lunar New Year Parade in downtown Sydney).

The following example of such a projected community is complicated by my own interpellation by the queer/Jewish intersection. In April 2000, David Gellman, President of the US-based Sha-ar Zahav congregation (he describes it as a GLBT Jewish congregation), wrote about his experience in Australia of the Stars of David Come Out float for the Sydney Mardi Gras (Gellman, 2000). He describes the float as an "issue of deep controversy in the Australian Jewish Community". He deploys the singular term 'community', despite only paragraphs earlier explaining to his presumably US-based audience that around eighty per cent of australian jews are orthodox, while the remainder are liberal or Reform. So, despite this division, together, the group is still the "Australian Jewish Community".

It's hard to describe my own conflicting emotions standing in front of the Stars of David float. I have no interest in being in this float, identifying myself with these people, even though I would fit their 'criteria'. My sister is part of this float. The disco version of Shalom Aleichem blares out from their truck. It stirs memories from childhood, memories only there because of community, common experiences that I share with these people and not with the non-Jewish people I am watching with. The appropriation of the star of david in pink, a merger of the signs: the star, usually, blue, indicating Judaism, the pink from the pink triangle appropriated by gay men, a sign taken from the concentration camps. This star, once yellow, used by the same guards in the same concentration camps, to mark these people as jews. What about gay jews? Would it be exactly this symbol, that now forms some strange triumphant self-labelling? Apparently, gay jews wore a yellow star with a super-imposed pink triangle but it could easily have been a symbol like this one. I fear their labels.

The marchers are also declaring their presence in another community: the queer or, as Gellman would have it, gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender community. As Dawn Cohen, one of the float's co-ordinators, told ABC radio (03/03/2000), "We've been involved in the Jewish community. We've been involved in the gay and lesbian community. But we've always received the message that we should keep our other half hidden and now we're saying no. We're saying we're going to celebrate our whole identity." This idea of a 'whole' identity — sometimes referred to in academic texts as an 'integrated identity' — is frequently invoked with regards to micro-communities.

Gellman says that "The memory that will stay with me the longest was of a man in his late sixties, standing alone, cheering us on and pointing to his chest, to tell us that he, too, was a Jew, and most likely one of us." It is this phrase, "one of us", that is telling. One of us, not one of them. Even while claiming a space previously unavailable due to prejudice, this new community creates borders, identities, guards. Who is one of us? In what way?

Annie Goldflam, an academic who describes herself as a "Jewish lesbian", addresses the difficulties inherent in setting up a jewish lesbian group in Perth (1999). The group encountered "a daunting array of eligibility issues". Who was in? Were bisexuals okay? Were they "lesbian" enough? Was a transgendered person a woman? What about dykes with jewish fathers but not jewish mothers? Were they "jewish" enough? What about non-jewish partners of lesbian jews? And although she doesn't mention it in her list, what about women like me, born to two jewish parents, but now effectively a practising pagan?

While Goldflam resents others' judgements of her as not being a 'dinkum' or 'genuine' jew (and, intriguingly, compares it to fair-skinned urban aboriginal people not being seen as "dinkum Aborigines"), she nonetheless attributes the failure of the group not to the inherent "potential for a plethora of splinter groups" but to "internalised anti-semitism and lesbophobia". She doesn't seem to see that the establishment of the group automatically sets up a standard for what it means to be a 'dinkum' jewish lesbian.

In those years
In those years, people will say, we lost
track
of the meaning of *we*, of *you*
we found ourselves
reduced to *I*
and the whole thing became
silly, ironic, terrible:
we were trying to live a personal life
and yes, that was the only life
we could bear witness to
But the great dark birds of history
screamed and plunged
into our personal weather
They were headed somewhere else but
their beaks and pinions drove
along the shore, through the rags of fog
where we stood, saying *I*

(Rich, 1991, original emphasis)

The question of what it 'means' to be a "dinkum Aborigine" is one that is being contested on an number of fronts. Queer or otherwise, aboriginal edge identities interrogate hybridity and 'authenticity'. Who determines the definition of 'aboriginality'? For the most part, current legal definitions effectively allow for self-identification: if you tick the box that says you claim aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander heritage, then you're in[15]. It's not that easy though: debates in Tasmania over who can and can't claim the 'identity' have resulted in people being taken to court for fraud (Guilliat, 2002). Courts pore over genealogical records to determine whether someone's remote ancestor was indigenous or not. We wouldn't want to return to some version of categorisation in which the proportion of aboriginality was measured: full-blood, half-caste, quarter-caste, quadroon; words to create nightmares. Who is white enough? Who is black enough? Why does it matter? And it's always assumed the other proportion is white. Why is it that someone with seven anglo great-grandparents and one black one identifies as aboriginal? Naturally, that is partly to do with a resistive reclamation of pride in a heritage disparaged and discriminated against by mainstream Australia. What about someone with six anglo great-grandparents, a black great-grandparent and an asian one? The complexity of actual heritage within the jewish-australian diaspora, already a hybrid of convict settlers and free settlers from the 19th century, refugee populations from the pogroms of Eastern Europe at the beginning of last century and refugee populations from Nazi genocide in the middle of it, has previously been mentioned. How far back do you go? The reality of our bodies is never as simple as the categories of identity.

15. 'Self-identification' was introduced in the 1970s as a response to the racist categorisation of half-caste, quarter-caste and quadroon. Three criteria were required: indigenous ancestry, self-identification, and community acceptance.

"The policy of the Commonwealth is to do everything possible to convert the half caste into a white citizen … unless the black population is speedily absorbed into the white, the process will soon be reversed, and in 50 years, or a little later, the white population of the Northern Territory will be absorbed into the black."
Cecil Cook, Chief Protector of Aborigines, NT, 1927 – 1939 (quoted in McGregor, 1997)

Given the destruction of indigenous cultures by white colonisers, it's hard to know what cultural attitudes to queer populations were prior to white invasion. While it's likely attitudes varied among groups, some may have had an understanding of queer practice similar to the indigenous american notion of "two-spirit" people while others may have had kinship models of relationships that overrode gender choice concerns (Adam, 1985). Today, the indigenous queer micro-community called OutBlack explains that it is for

"Indigenous Australians / Torres Strait Islander Gay & Transgender Sister Girls living in Victoria" but acknowledges that such a micro-community could be limiting when it notes that "partners and friends" are welcome to social functions. On its web site, the question "why have a group?" is prominent. The answer is to "improve the lifestyle" of its members, provide education for its members and raise awareness of "issues and concerns" within "the Koori and wider community". I would argue that such a group acts instead as a delimiter of both communities where it could be a bridge.

The authors of early gay/lesbian jewish anthology *Twice Blessed* (1989) now acknowledge it was firmly rooted in the identity politics of the time. Since then, however, they have noted its limitations:

> We understand that especially when you have a history of "otherness" and strong feelings of not belonging, it can be hard to venture back out once you have found a home that affirms all of who you are. Yet true liberation does not lie within a cocoon… (Balka & Rose, 2002)

Particular attractions

It is at this juncture that the crisis in the notion not simply of fixed identity but also of unitary identity becomes apparent. All of the categoric labels employed in explicating hybridity and even 'edge identities' are contingent, discursive constructions that must be swept away. The concept of partial, fluid and particularate subjectivities is necessary when dealing with multiple marginality. It is interesting here to look to Maffesoli (1998) and his discussion of neo-tribalism and the multitude of individual acts of self-definition that constitute new partial identities. I plan to use the term liminal subjects and 'liminars', following Naficy (1996).

> "I missed being part of a larger, more heterogenous Jewish Renewal Community. I didn't want to be forever locked into a queer Jewish ghetto. So, with a mixture of hope and despair, I stuck my toe out every so often. It became a dance; weaving in and out of communities that nurtured me in various ways… My world is multiple and paradoxical, but I no longer feel fragmented and torn. I feel like a kaleidoscope."
>
> (Nagle, 2002)

Even Sinfield (1996) in the end wants to talk about "'subculture', as opposed to 'identity' or 'community'" because he "envisage[s] it as retaining a strong sense of diversity, of provisionality, of constructedness". I find myself resisting this term, however, with its implication that punk is equivalent to queer or sub-

altern in some way. Some (for example, Thornton, 1997) argue that community rests between 'societies' or 'cultures' on the one hand and 'subcultures' on the other. They are a banding together of similarly marked subjects. According to Thornton, the difference between a community and a sub-culture is that a community "suggest[s] a more permanent population … of which the family is the key constituent part" (2). Each community may have a history — of emigration, political struggle — but the notion of the 'identity' at the core of the community is essentialised and it is mythologised as natural. In the past (Bersten, 1994) I have used the term constituency to highlight the way that participants constitute the alliances in question. There are some similarities here with Fish's concept of an "interpretive community" (1980). Maffesoli (1996) uses the term "network" while Hardt and Negri (2000) call it "the multitude", and Bakhtin (1968) calls it "the collectivity". This latter term has resonances with political collectives and action-in-common which align well with my understanding of the engagement of agency in such alliances.

"Undoubtedly, as I flitter back and forth [between the LGBT Reform congregation and the ultra-Orthodox shul], I reinforce my location as an inhabitant of fluctuating margins. It is much easier to live in this body as a construction that I've carved out, rather than as a set of identities that were pushed out."

(Michels, 2002)

These kinds of syncretic spaces can be seen in online groups such as LiveJournal Communities. Individuals can maintain their own journals or they can create or join "community journals". The ability for community moderators to censor any statements they disapprove of in a community journal and to ban members makes LiveJournal an intriguing realm. It is certainly not some democratic utopia. However the lack of any hierarchy or centrality, and the way in which autonomous communities and individual journals interact and intersect, with members able to belong to whatever communities will have them, communities able to "friend" other communities and individuals able to add friends and list interests that then become links to others whose interests intersect makes this a fascinating space to study identity, friendship and community. With its tendrils reaching out and crossing over, intertwined, it resembles nothing so much as Deleuze and Guattari's rhizome.

If television and film necessarily produce identities that are based on recognition, they will always involve some kind of fixity. The kinds of queer or ethnic audiences produced by television and film are necessarily domestic

and/or isolated. However, the audience produced by LiveJournal is always already linked and enmeshed in a network of friendships if not communities. Therefore the kinds of identities produced in this space are necessarily particular, partial and deferred as there is always a link to the next connection, the next tendril. The multitude is to networked media what the mass was to old media (cf Hardt & Negri, 2000).

The gamut of identifier expression can be found in online spaces and it is not surprising that some LiveJournal communities employ identity labels as shortcuts. Such community journals include *gayasian*, ones aimed at lesbians with disabilities or queer women of colour. Others started out as hybrid communities and have now become liminal spaces; for example, the Hapa Mafia community started as a hapa group (the term is hawaiian and generally used for asian-pacific islanders of mixed heritage) and has now become a hapa queer space. Some attempt to describe practice or cultural position such as 2nd Generation for children of migrants. Although there are a number of marginal communities in Australia — for example, groups for asians in Melbourne and queers in Melbourne which has some liminal members — I was unable to find groups aimed at edge identities in Australia.

Despite the prevalence of identifiers, not all of the individuals who post entries in these journals see themselves in identity terms. Many are attempting to navigate the spaces of their cultural practice through discussions in these community journals. "keldaryth", who isn't sure whether he's gay, but is "95% certain", is using the community *queeraustralia* to discuss this. "I'm almost sure I'm queer — and definitely non anglo if you go by race. Culture's more complex, as I'd rate mine international with a western edge." However, asked about edge identity communities, he responded "Being more culturally western, I'm not particularly well suited to a gay asian community with asian culture and values".

In the Hapa Mafia community, "angryasiangrrl" started a discussion about identity and heritage with "ehem, now that i have your attention, let's talk identity :) or at the very least, i'll talk about my identity issues." At the end of

> "I am these days haunted by what these words ('queer', 'community') do not say: the evasions; the absences; their histories. And I sometimes wonder also: in the great rush to delineate and document the radical difference in all its permutations, do we not sometimes lose sight of what it is that binds us to the world? The prevailing cultural and political climate cultivates fear, envy, and a suspicion of alterity. Its currencies are corporate bluster, pop psychology, and the fetishism of the individual experience as the font of all truths. In such a climate, it seems more important than ever that 'activism' — towards whatever end — affirms its belief in, and commitment to, a common world of human affairs, discourse and debate. We need to *think* what we do."
>
> (Machon, 2000, her italics).

her description, she poses the question to others: "what are your issues/ experiences with identity formation?"

She had previously announced herself in the community as a "hapa lesbian" and explained that "i'm japanese from my mom's side and swedish/german/ french from my dad's", so the absence of these terms from the following description is not significant. Her experience of *identity formation* to use her own term, however, is of being defined by others' external perceptions. She doesn't explicitly engage with practice in this initial approach:

> i spent a lot of time trying to figure out where i fit in. it was oh so confusing going from being the only black haired kid in preschool in a sea of blondes in stockholm, to catholic elementary school in los angeles where all of my classmates were mexican americans. i went from being one type of "other" to a whole other type of other. once i hit that school i became a "white girl" because i was one of the few non-mexican kids. i guess growing up i always felt defined by how other people identified me. in college i spent a lot of time trying to get in touch with my asianness. took asian american studies classes and stuff of that nature. and by the time i wrapped my brain around my ethnic identity, then sexual identity came into question. and that's a whole other story i suppose.

A recent poster for a St Patrick's Day Guiness promotion suggested that consumption was all that was required to partake in cultural identity. "There's a little Irish in all of us" ran the slogan. (Guinness poster, Clifton Hill Hotel, March 17, 2004).

"nfgdragon" is another exemplar of the shifts and challenges around identity and practice. In his private journal's "user info", he says:

> Yeah, I'm 19, I go to SFSU. Some people think I'm cool, are you one of them? Umm, I kiss boys, yah, I'm a fag.

Note that the practice ("I kiss boys") comes before the grudging identifier ("yah, I'm a fag"). It's also significant that while a number of variations of "gay" and "punk" appear in his interests and bio, no mention of his ethnicity appears in either. A photo of him appears on the site; perhaps his ethnicity is supposed to be read from this. In his day-to-day journal, his ethnicity and sexuality are

> "The only notable difference which characterises the electronic nebula is of course the very temporality of these tribes. Indeed, as opposed to what is usually meant by this notion, the tribalism we are exploring here can be completely ephemeral, organised as the occasion arises."
>
> (Maffesoli, 1996: 139)

virtually never declared. Over a photo of his band, the words "halfway between" appear on his home page. Ethnicity and sexuality may appear in practice, in the gender of a person he is attracted to or in the cultural practice of dinners he takes with his family, but his identity is declared in a different way in the public space of a community. For example, in the community *the_anti_azn*, (nfgdragon, 2004b), he uses an identity statement immediately followed by a clarifier: I'm Japanese (well 5/8ths Japanese).

Of course, LiveJournal is just one of a multitude of online spaces in which people interact, form connections for a certain period of time and disperse. The flux and shift of these spaces and the play of surface involved evokes a Situationist response to cultural space. Maffesoli (1996) begins to understand these issues, circling as he does around questions of anarchic collective organisation and interest-based electronic groups. However, he sees them as possessing a tragic dimension (1996: 140) and he longs for belonging, welcomes the rites of acceptance and rejection played out in super-compressed speed in the digital realm. For Maffesoli, diversity always occasions discomfort. Although he uses the analogy of being a 'regular' at a bar, he fails to observe that these are behaviours and not identities; that as the bar's patrons shift, so the behaviours of regulars shift, the dress codes, the in-jokes. It is the same online: there may be rituals of acceptance, but they are fluid. There may be discursive tricks to catch the outsider (for example, 'trolling', discussed in Tepper, 1997) but the outsider becomes the insider swiftly and plays the same tricks in turn.

There is an inherent paradox in attempting to celebrate the post-category melange of a community-in-difference: it requires categoric labels to describe the positive import of its success. Hence the struggle to address the nature of the characters in *Walking on Water*.

Aguilar-San Juan (1998) argues that "precisely at the moment in which we wish to speak, the problem of authenticity prevents us from doing so. We resist labelling; yet without a label, how can our views and perspectives be given a meaningful context? Ironically, we need to fix ourselves as a stable (read: knowable, nameable, solid) community in order to point a finger at

Israeli world music outfit Sheva struggles with labels. Asked to discuss his role in the group, Ahmed Taher, Sheva's percussionist, said "I don't want to say, 'this is muslim, this is jewish'. In my town (Acco), there has been a mix of jews and arabs since long before there was a land called Israel." (2004). The challenge, however, is that the reason Sheva is relevant is that Taher can be described as a muslim arab-israeli while the rest of the band can be described as jews in a world where there is conflict between these categories. This of course conflates an enormous variety of backgrounds under the moniker 'jewish': the rest of the band are variously from brazilian-israeli heritage, iraqi/russian/yemenite heritage, egyptian/lithuanian heritage and more. Their ability to celebrate difference and sing about peace is however to some extent a function of their willingness to play down difference: since they interchangeably wear head coverings or don't and interchangeably speak Hebrew or Arabic, exclaim "inshallah" or "baruch atah adonai", determining who is 'jewish' or 'muslim' is moot. The leaders of those religious communities would disavow all seven of them. Their musical influences and spiritual affinities stem from african, indian and tibetan customs as much as middle eastern ones. The group indulges in ecstatic becoming-liminal, celebrating difference while refusing to name it.

the practices and ideas that deny us that stability from the start." While it's understandable to desire this return to stability as necessary, its lie cannot be constructive.

Is it then unavoidable that a hyperdifferentiated collectivity has interchangeable signifiers? It is this that challenges the sensibilities of the fundamentalists who see it as blasphemy. Paradoxically, post-category, post-identity, post-oppression, some individuals could be left longing for discrimination and wondering what the next move is. "At least culturally speaking, oppression may have been the best thing that could have happened to gay culture. Without it, we're nothing." (Daniel Mendelsohn, quoted in Klein, 2000). While that might be a bit strong, Schembri (2000) acknowledges that while most non-asian queer social groups disappeared in Sydney by 1996, "anti-Asian racism provided an ongoing stimulus to Asian organising". It's also problematic to declare that the destruction of categories means the end of oppression, especially when acts can be policed as much as identities. Currently, certain acts are proscribed with the intention of discriminating against certain categories even when the acts are not exclusive to the people targeted (for example, sodomy laws to target male-male sex and loitering laws to target indigenous peoples). However, resisting such laws should not solely be the responsibility of those targeted.

> "The Internet is precisely the kind of interstitial space I've tried to describe. It is neither a fully public sphere nor is it a private sphere, it allows for a certain kind of artifice of identity so that it doesn't ask you authentically to be yourself. It never asks you that question. It assumes that you can present yourself as you want. It does not have a notion that if you participate in the Communist party then you are, you know, every molecule, every germ in your body is somehow that. It allows for a much more fluid and transitional form of identification. The Internet is really not like a nation, and there has been a way in which productive resistance, even on the Left, has always been identified with groups who will constitute themselves like a nation. What's happening on the Internet is that people are forming minority groups or collectivities not because they want to be majorities, not because they even see that is the way to be. Minoritisation is now not to be set up against the majority, it's a different way of identifying with political change and effecting political change."
>
> (Bhabha, 2004a)

The absence of oppositionally-defined community does raise challenges for finding friendship in a multivalent world. It is likely that friends would be found within a similar interpretive community. The sorts of issues faced by a diffuse populace keen to meet others with similar practical experiences while not falling into categoric identity labelling is seen in this invitation to join the LiveJournal community *transpoc* (transgendered people of colour) posted in the LiveJournal community *any_bodied_men* (for female-to-male transgendered people wanting relationships with biological men):

> We are a community for People of Color who are transgendered, transsexual, genderqueer, two-spirited, bigendered, multigendered, genderneutral, third-

> gendered, intersexed, partners of people who are TG/Q/IS, people struggling with their own gender identity/expressions, people undergoing surgery/hormone therapy, TG/Q/IS/POC activists, supportive allies, family members, friends, and educators. Trans_Poc is here for you as a discussion forum, a community, an information exchange center, an advice network, a support system, a family, and friends. We are a small and often dispersed community in "real life", let's have a solid internet community.

The word "queer", which in the early 90s was intended to replace the variety of identity-based names with an 'umbrella term' has now become one in a long list of labels interspersed with practices. Although "people struggling with their own gender identity/expressions" and "people undergoing surgery/hormone therapy" would sufficiently describe the people concerned, nonetheless, the other labels are used as well. However, "people of color" is apparently a label that needs no further exploration. The permeable boundaries of the "community" are made clear: friends, family, partners and activists who are neither people of colour nor dealing with gender issues are welcome.

> "Let misfortune befall us … it is we who must follow the most deterritorialized line, the line of the scapegoat, but we will change its sign, we will turn it into the positive line of our subjectivity, our Passion, our proceeding, our grievance."
>
> (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987:122)

This is in contrast to other groups, such as *any_bodied_men*, which explicitly requests that its members be "male-identified". Here we have exactly the challenge of identity versus practice and where the issues become fraught with conflict. Subjectively, a person 'feels' that they are other than their physical body might indicate. This goes as much for the ethnically Indian woman who 'identifies' as white as it does for the biologically female person who 'identifies' as male. In the end, it is unsurprising that edge identities might want to act in the world without being hailed constantly *as* their ethnicity, gender or sexuality.

How do i practice being me?

Moves to discuss practice rather than identity were most visible in Australia as part of early campaigns to address, ironically, a real-world infection, HIV.

Identity-based campaigns aimed at "gay men" were not perceived as addressing men who participated in high-risk practices such as unprotected sex with other men but who perceived themselves as bisexual or even straight. Some of these men were married and had high personal investment in resisting the label "gay" as an identity that applied to them. In response, HIV/AIDS organisations began to use the construction "men who sleep with men" in policy documents and created public materials describing practices rather than identities (ACON, 2004).

While it is relatively easy to talk about practising a religion or a sexuality, it is less clear how one goes about practising an ethnicity or a disability. Does using the chinese horoscope, believing that red is a lucky colour and celebrating the chinese New Year make someone chinese?

Is it more important that the people 'reclaiming' their aboriginal heritage are seeking out practices and rituals from aboriginal traditions? The notion of 'uninterrupted' culture, passed from one person to another, suggests that practices, rather than just genetics, are important to notions of aboriginality. Does such a practice 'make' someone aboriginal? Conceptual limitations to the constructions of a praxis of self mean that this thesis can only sketch out potential directions for change.

It may well be, as Irigaray has argued (1985), that without creating an entirely new symbolic from which to speak we cannot ever enunciate the issues we need to address.

Shared cultural practices are evident in borderless spaces such as the Sydney Gay and Lesbian Mardi Gras, where 'straight' friends are invited to participate in floats and experience queer, where 'straight' women flirt with notions of same-sex love through televisual embraces and party experimentation, where 'straight' men become 'metrosexuals' through accessorising and shopping for the right furniture (*Queer Eye for the Straight Guy*, US, 2003). They are also apparent in spiritual spaces which increasingly borrow tibetan prayer flags and yoga practices. To what extent are these simply appropriations and reterritorialisations? As noted by Sydney artist, Shabnam Hameed, the costumes

Four: History
Should I simplify my life for you?
Don't ask me how I began to love men.
Don't ask me how I began to love women.
Remember the forties songs, the slowdance numbers
the small sex-filled gas-rationed Chevrolet?
Remember walking in the snow and who was gay?
Cigarette smoke of the movies, silver-and-gray
profiles, dreaming of he-and-she
breathing the dissolution of the wisping silver plume?
Dreaming that dream we leaned applying lipstick
by the gravestone's mirror when we found ourselves
playing in the cemetery. In Current Events she said
the war in Europe is over, the Allies
and she wore no lipstick have won the war
and we raced screaming out of Sixth Period.
Dreaming that dream
we had to maze our ways through a wood
where lips were knives breasts razors and I hid
in the cage of my mind scribbling
this map stops where it all begins
into a red-and-black notebook.
Remember after the war when peace came down
as plenty for some and they said we were saved
in an eternal present and we knew the world could end?
— remember after the war when peace rained down
on the winds of Hiroshima Nagasaki Utah Nevada? »

and decorations of african or indian ('exotic') culture are presented as available to the white body as playspace but the Indian body is circumscribed by western clothes or 'traditional' dress (Hameed, 1999. Hameed produced a series of sewn and embroidered golliwogs dressed variously in flamenco, african wear, hawaiian grass skirt, cheong sam and other 'traditional' costumes).

At the Good Vibrations festival in Sydney, January 2004, legendary reggae performer Lee 'Scratch' Perry declared to the crowd "You are all black here. There are no white people here." This conferral of blackness due to participation in 'black' musical practices instantiates the supplementarity of deferred identity (cf Derrida), as we are only black so long as we continue to practice blackness, or at least, we are left only with memories of blackness and our tangential relationship with its trajectory through cultural production. What this means conversely for participation in cultural whiteness is less clear.

and the socialist queer Christian teacher jumps from the hotel
window?
and L.G. saying *I want to sleep with you but not for sex*
and the red-and-black enamelled coffee-pot dripped slow
through the dark grounds
— appetite terror power tenderness
the long kiss in the stairwell the switch thrown
on two Jewish Communists married to each other
the definitive crunch of glass at the end of the wedding?
(When shall we learn, what should be clear as day,
We cannot choose what we are free to love?)

(Rich, 1993–1994)

Interestingly, discussion of cultural practices in some LiveJournal communities, for example *the_anti_azn*, a group that specifically aims to deconstruct notions of homogenous "asian community", can open space for wide-ranging negotiation around understandings of behaviour without rancour. For example, when "the_puffin" posted commentary around behaviour by "asian men" when eating, responders immediately began talking about cultural influences on behaviour and "the_puffin" tempered further responses, acknowledging such behaviour occurred in other populations and exploring why s/he was mostly bothered by the same behaviour by asian men. Unlike some LiveJournal users, "the_puffin" has not entered any gender, sexuality or ethnicity labels into his/her biography, but a short survey of his/her journal reveals political interests, anti-racism activism, and queer-friendly comments. Is the calm and analytical response to what could be read as an inflammatory and racist description of 'asian' behaviour due to this absence of markers? It's also possibly due to the nature of that particular community space (*the_anti_azn*'s community info page says it is for "the educated who live outside their race lines and have a sense of humour" and that "Although this community is Asian-oriented, non-Asians are of course welcome to join.").

Beyond categories

What is significant here is the resonance between the lived experiences of the intersection of multiple marginality: the intersection of black and gay experience, of jewish and lesbian experience, the experience of deafness and transgender in the same body or living in a blind asian-aboriginal body. These intersections, this doubling and in some cases tripling or quadrupling of partial subjectivity, are articulated through similar aspects and cultural forms. The threads of theory surrounding liminal subjectivity woven together reveal common patterns that may lead to practical suggestions for alternatives to identity wars. In effect, since liminal subjects employ similar strategies to negotiate within and between cultural interpretive communities and since these strategies fail in the same ways and for the same reasons, it is preferable to develop a working theory of subjectivity where the categories can be exceeded without reprisal while still addressing disadvantage and oppression.

Increasingly niche community formations based on difference isolate individuals. Furthermore, they effectively rely on a continuation of discrimination for their existence. As Diprose (2003) notes, "what drives community in the first place is a relation to difference that would be effaced if unity and mutual recognition were ever fully realised."

Conversely, transcultural and transcommunal collectivities exceed this reactive determination. Strategic alliances between liminal collectivities may be a creative move that does not

˅ *The Holocaust Memorial in Green Park, Sydney, between the Sydney Jewish Museum and St Vincent's Hospital.*

The text on the bottom triangle reads:

We remember you who have suffered and died at the hands of others: men who loved men; women who loved women; and all who refused the gender roles others wished us to play. Nothing shall purge your deaths from our memories. (Bersten, 1996)

result in essentialist reterritorialisation. As Bhabha has recently said (2000, 2004), minoritisation is no longer a question of assimilation or integration but one of proximity.

If ethnicity and sexuality are not central to a person's constructed subjectivity, there may be a clash between external assumptions about and projections of labels onto their bodies. For example, a person of indian ethnicity and queer practice may nevertheless define themselves as a dog walker and organise their politics around class struggle rather than ethnicity or sexuality (Hameed, personal communication, 1999). A person's acceptance in and identification with an interest-based sub-culture such as goth, punk or raver, may also be significant here.

Examining the intersections of marginal subjectivities also highlights the crises in identity construction in general. This is vital in the current global environment of capitalist post-modernity in which post-colonial tensions and the renegotiation of the role of the nation-state are leading to widespread calls for ethnic self-determination and a 'return' to fundamentalism, and where resistant alliances are gathering worldwide to respond to the way governments and corporations propose to remove borders for capital while increasing 'border protection' against people.

It is not suggested that a shift from speaking of what we 'are' to what we 'do', from an essentialised self to a praxis of self, is sufficient to resolve international tensions. However, given the expanding 'multiple' nature of the world's population, such an investigation into the constructions of multiple and liminal subjectivities may indicate ways forward in an increasingly complex global society. Also, since identity is coded and overcoded at the discursive level (Deleuze and Guattari, 1983), the discursive intervention to recode subjectivity is one of the few tools of resistance available to marginalised individuals on their own.

Capitalism's response to demands for representation during the identity politics era was merely to co-opt our bodies into marketing campaigns (Klein,

> "Freed from old and new constraints they [transnational filmmakers] are 'deterritorialized'. Yet they continue to be in the grips of both the old and the new, the before and the after. Located in such a zone, they become interstitial creatures, liminars suffused with hybrid excess. On the one hand, like Derridean 'undecideables' they can be 'both and neither' … on the other hand, they could aptly be called, in Rushdie's words, 'at once plural and partial' … they are also capable of transcending and transforming their own individual, cultural and other affiliations in order to produce hybrid, syncretic and virtual identities."
>
> (Naficy, 1996)

> "As my screen name says, I'm a punk … What do you know about punk? Do you think we just listen to loud, thrashy music, and say 'fuck off' to everybody? Or do you see a united front of youth working together for social justice? Joe Strummer, frontman for The Clash, a seminal Punk band once said: 'The Essence of being a punk is being in a state of humanity, because punk, as with any decent movement is a protest movement.' This is more or less what I believe. I believe that the prosperity of the human race is more important than the color of my skin, or your skin, or anyone's skin."
>
> ("nfgdragon", 2004a)

2000)[16]. Hybrid identities are not immune: see McDonalds' effort to 'celebrate' asian pacific islander americans at http://www.i-am-asian.com. As Moreiras (1999: 387) puts it, "identity is always open to commodification by the cultural ideological apparatus of global capitalism."

Representations of liminal subjects concerned with issues other than their ethnicity or sexuality, such as *Walking on Water*, widen the range of 'acceptable' behaviours and open possibilities for fluid engagements in social collectivities such as LiveJournal. The end of gay has already been declared (see Reynolds, 2002). In this post-identity culture, politics have shifted to strategic alliances against globalised capitalism and the corporatisation of our bodies and lives. It is this engagement on the political level — the daily tactical, critical and hegemonic interventions performed by edge identities — that undermines global capital's ability to sell us back to ourselves as recognisable niche markets and categoric identities.

Some marginal bodies have already begun this process of linking issues: the nascent fluid collectivities on the Internet, the advent of a 'queer bloc' in anti-corporate protests, groups such as Queers for Reconciliation and Black, White and Pink which do not define the identities of participants so much as highlight the political aims in common.

The politics and power of the collectivity can also be seen in the subversive acts of the 'flash mob' (Rheingold, 2002) and the autonomous zones, festival culture and other fleeting collectivity formations that are examples of resistant politics in the face of capitalist post-modernity. Even the media developed in these zones is rhizomatic, decentralised and organised by "spokescouncils" (see http://www.indymedia.org. For further discussion of media in the age of collectivities, see Meikle, 2002). These temporary connections in the DTZ are the flowerchildren of Debord's detournements.

"But thinking through hybridity is also to think with cultural anxiety; for anxiety is the affect, the structure of feeling that is inherent in the act of transition — but it is also the affect of freedom."

(Bhabha, 2004b)

It's possible to argue, as Slavoj Zizek does, that even 'resistant' communities — the "new 'organic' populism-communitarianism (standing for the force corroding the state from below)" — rely on global capitalism for their existence. "Each pole of the antagonism is inherent to its opposite, so that we stumble

16. The latest in a long line of campaigns appropriating ethnicity while insulting minorities comes from Freedom Furniture. In its recent TV spot, three women acknowledge "I'm as Asian as microwaved spring rolls", "the closest I get to tribal is the odd spot of hunting [men]" and "I thought rendezvous was a Parisian drag queen". The tag line: "But then I discovered the new Winter collections at Freedom. Now I don't have rooms, I have … destinations."

upon it at the very moment when we endeavour to grasp the opposite pole for itself." (Zizek, 1994: 3). As Moreiras (1999) concludes, "locality … does not form the privileged site for an alternative to global dominance: it is in fact one of its faces". Even the protesters note that their "resistance is as global as capital". Moreiras' response is to call for a 'politics of transfiguration' (Gilroy, 1993) and the possibility of a "savage outside" that would overturn the reterritorialisation of cultural hybridity.

It's not easy to live day to day in a fluid, post-category space. The anxiety and uncertainty of modern identity crises does tend to accompany the attempt at first, and it is disorienting. But so long as we think that the only people who need to work on identity are those who are already in-between, we're in trouble.

> "…becoming-Jewish necessarily affects the non-Jew as much as the Jew. Becoming-woman necessarily affects men as much as women. In a way, the subject in a becoming is always "man" but only when he enters a becoming-minoritarian that rends him from his major identity." (Deleuze and Guattari, 1987: 292)

The struggle inside the micro-community and the minority community is between the radicals who want to engage in a becoming-minoritarian in order to escape and the others who see this as a dissolution of self, a collapse into the abyss of undifferentiation. One problem here is a dialectic between a political project which has at its roots a subaltern desire for a resistant response to global capital that it saw potentially arising from hybrid consciousness in and of itself and an individualist approach that sought comfort and solace for the marginalised within a sociological framework. For those whose goals are assimilation, acceptance and an assured place in the hallowed institutions of the military and marriage, the oppositional strategies of the border subject are counter-productive. The clashes within gay culture over these issues are indicative of the dismay. The policing of the border of community is a (re)enactment of the policing of the border of self.

"Savage hybridity can be understood as the radicalization of the reticent version of cultural hybridity on the basis of its constitutive negativity: it turns a reticent understanding of cultural change into a principle of counter-hegemonic praxis, and it places it at the service of the subaltern position in the constitution of the hegemonic system."

(Moreiras, 1999)

However, what must be understood is that becoming-minoritarian "is a political affair and necessitates a labor of power (puissance), an active micropolitics." (Deleuze and Guattari, 1987: 292). In a movement away from identity thinking, some individuals pursue a kind of "semiotic break" (Guha, 1983) which ruptures hegemonic discourse and allows for political engagement with resistant consciousness and strategic alliances.

"It's the longing to be inside which makes you an outsider" (Ayres, 1997). The radicals are no longer interested in assimilation or even integration into the majority. They want to overthrow it, putting in its place a rhizomatic network of autonomous collectivities. As seen at the recent autonomous conference State of Emergency, held in a squatted factory in Melbourne, they are no longer satisfied with (only) turning the lens of analysis back onto the contraptions of domination, although that project isn't finished. Alongside sessions analysing whiteness, global networks of power and a group calling itself Q.U.E.E.R. (Queers United to Eradicate Economic Rationalism) were constructive sessions on seed-saving, reclaim the streets parties and stencilling. They also have a sophisticated approach to subjectivity. As one of its organisers, Nik Beuret, put it in his blog (2004), "The trick is to navigate the relations in a way that sets up identities that are open to mutation, and collectivities/communities that are stable yet promote change and possibility and departure". Liminal subjects may move through a variety of strategies to negotiate comfort spaces while oppressive systems continue to demand conformity, but the strategic alliances of Internet spaces and radical networks of resistance open up potential escape routes that may eventually render these unnecessary, moving beyond the limits and into a kaleidoscope of hyperdifferentiation.

> "The ultimate goal for Deleuze and Guattari … is to destroy categorical gridding altogether, to push the apparatus of identity beyond the threshold of sameness … to lift the body from the constraints of reciprocal difference in a system of approximate closure (variation within external limits set by an overcoding differential grid imposing a segregative binary logic) and catapult it into the absolute difference of dissipation (a bodily state so differentiated that it differs even from itself, holding its past together with its many futures in each of its undecideable presents; the body itself as non-binary, material differential in an irreversibly open system enjoying infinite degrees of freedom; life in the vortex; intensity)."
>
> (Massumi, 1992: 88–89)

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