

*Towards a New Sissiography: The Sissy in Body, Abuse
and Space in Performance Practice*

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Declaration of Originality

I, Luiz Fernando Fernandes Messias, declare that the submission presented here is my own work. Information derived from published or unpublished work of others has been acknowledged in the text and a list of references is given in the bibliography.

Luiz Fernando Fernandes Messias.

London, 10th of June 2011.

Abstract

Along with the live performance of *Sissy!*, the present document constitutes research centred on the figure of the 'sissy,' defined in relation to the effeminate homosexual. The practice-based study proposes 'sissiography' as an original concept, conceived of as a negotiation between the three elements of body, abuse and space. Bodily traits are investigated under the coin 'negotiable markers' to include mannerisms, behaviours and sartorial choices commonly regarded as characteristic of the sissy. Abuse is studied in reference to Butler's notion of 'words that wound' as well as to incidents of hate crime in London. Thirdly, sissy space is analysed in relation to safe and hostile urban zones. The study concludes that the unifying principle at the heart of sissiography is the concept of failure.

In examining the writing of sissiness, the thesis considers existing scholarship on sissies and positions itself against the diagnostic concept of so-called Gender Identity Disorder. The argument developed here is underpinned by autobiographical elements. Historical discourses of male effeminacy are presented to challenge the notion of fixity in perceptions of the sissy.

While offering a written investigation of the concept of sissiography, the study also develops an analysis through the researcher's body in a series of studio experimentations and live performances. Practice is the central instrument of the enquiry, facilitating the writing of new sissy discourses. A cyclical mode of research leads from practice to theory and back to practice. The sissiography is thereby shown to be a form of inscription on the body, a form of writing space, of writing movement, of reinscribing history, of describing possible sissy futures.

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Dedication

To my mother, Iara, whose high-heeled shoes, make-up and perfume served as fabulous props for my childhood rehearsal of a life of sissy performance. Thank you for being so special and unique in allowing me space to be a sissy.

To Lawrence, the love of my life, without whom I would never have finished this. Thank you for your companionship, love and patience.

To Bruce, without whom I would never have started this. Thank you for providing unconditional support to the development of this project. Thank you for believing in me.

To all sissies around the world: past, present and future. Thank you.

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My incredible supervisor, Stephen Farrier, for being one of the most sensitive and intelligent teachers I have ever met; Experience Bryon, my second supervisor, for all the advice and creative incentive; my dance partner and artistic soul mate, Biño Sautzvy, for all the input, inspiration and endless hours of rehearsal; my fellow PhD student, Jessica Hartley, for not allowing me to give this journey up, for all the chats and the support; my good friends, Bebel Domingues, Hari Marini and Helen Noir; Martin Welton at QMUL; my lighting designer, friend and collaborator, Marc Antonio Cifre; Darrell Berry, for the amazing photos; my fellow queer performers, Scottee (and the whole of the Eat Your Heart Out collective) and Theo Adams (and all Theo Adams Company members); Anna Terry, Tony Fisher, Andy Lavender and Simon Shepherd at the Central School of Speech and Drama. Thank you.

How to read the present thesis

The document you are reading follows the submission of the performance *Sissy!* on 11th October 2010. The show was the fourth in a series of performances that constitute much of the research. At every stage in the process, reading, reflection, studio experimentation, live presentation and writing alternated, each informing the other.

The documentation of the performances is to be found in the appendices, and you might prefer to view them all after reading the thesis as a whole. Meanwhile I will refer to specific passages of the performances, which can be accessed as distinct clips of the relevant DVDs (appendix E) or as still photographs (appendix D).

There will also be reference to performance undertaken outside the academic setting. Once more, images can be accessed in the appendices as well as in the DVDs.

Introduction

In the summer of 2005, I was attacked by a gang of about eight young men. The attack took place at the top end of the street where I live in East London. It started out as verbal harassment. I especially remember the remark ‘make way for the gay’¹ being hurled at me at the same time as my way was being blocked so as to stop me from escaping. This quickly progressed into physical violence: punches, kicks, and a shove to the ground followed by spitting.² I was bruised badly, my knee was injured and I was so overwhelmed by fear that it took me weeks to be able to go out again.³ I have never fully regained the confidence to occupy the streets of London without fear.

Although a very personal account, the above incident has a specific role in the present introduction. Firstly, it can be singled out as a shifting point for me. It has fomented my desire to do something about the violence that has often been directed to my genderqueer body throughout my life. This violence had, at this particular stage, literally stopped me from going outdoors. To a certain extent, the research is of personal cathartic value in that sense.⁴ Its function is not, however, limited to that specific purpose. It is also empowering in that it gives me a certain agency. By engaging with the research, I feel I am taking action in trying to change the brutal reality of daily violence. At the same time, the research is also careful in negotiating critical distance by situating such instances of personal narrative always in relation to current discussions on the fields of the gendered body (Hennen 2008, Tucker 2009), genderphobic violence (Butler 1997, 2004, Kosofsky Sedgwick 1994) and gendered segregation (Halberstam 1998, Houlbrook 2005).

¹ ‘Make way for the gay’ is an expression that bears relevance to my research in the sense that it offers some interesting readings in terms of opening new space for discussion, for new knowledge and for my later articulation of a sissy space (chapter four). I will go back to it later in the thesis.

² Being punched, kicked and shoved to the ground have all been incorporated in my choreographic design in *Sissy!*

³ Here I speak in terms of confinement. I will go back to this in my later discussion of the practice in chapter five.

⁴ In *Cruising Utopia* (2009), José Esteban Muñoz has also laid claim to the personal as a valuable source of data in an academic enquiry. “My writing,” he has suggested, “brings in my own personal experience as another way to ground historical queer sites with lived queer experience” (Muñoz 2009: 03).

Moreover, the above-mentioned incident is emblematic in the way it neatly contains the core elements of the present study. The way in which this attack unfolded appears to follow an identifiable pattern; a pattern I have come to understand as—and have subsequently named—a ‘causational chain of injury.’ In more simple words, (a) the body is recognised as existing outside normative rules of gender (in my case, as a sissy body); (b) this body is subjected to oppressive violence (more commonly verbal but often physical); and (c) through the action of violence, it is pushed to the social and geographical margins of conviviality. This body is socially marginalised since stigma is seen to be attached to it and it is geographically marginalised by being pushed out of particular zones (the top end of my street, for example).

In sharing this instance of violence, my intention has not been to provoke a sense of pathos but rather to expose and situate the origins, the trajectory and the purpose of the present research. Consonant with Peter Hennen’s strategy, I too have used my “own position in the field as a source of data” (2008: 24). The ‘personal is political’ approach—one of the foundational tenets of the feminist movement; a movement that has also concerned itself with gender inequality and oppression—is also a precedent I find within the academic tradition (Muñoz 2009, Butler 1990b: 273, Halberstam 1998: xiii). It is with the redemptive hope of this principle that I have embarked on the present investigation; an investigation that stems from—but is not limited to—my daily battle of being a sissy in the world.

I want to use this notion of the personal as a political tool and as a potential instigator of critical thinking (and indeed change) in order to further consider the function of autobiography in the present research. In doing so, I want to place it in relation to (a) existing research in the field and (b) the act of creating performance. The slogan ‘the personal is political’ is not only useful in academia; for Deirdre Heddon (2008) it is also intimately related to the genesis of autobiographical performance. The micropolitical (or the personal) and the macropolitical (the social), she has suggested, are always related and closely connected (2008: 01). The role of autobiography in the present study therefore has been to propose an engagement with what Lionnet has identified as the productive movement of autobiographical performance; that is, “a project that self-consciously moves from the general to the particular to the general” (in Muñoz 1999: 81).

Autobiographical performances are for Heddon “‘performance[s] of possibility’ where the possible suggests ‘a movement culminating in creation and change’” (2008: 02). In critically engaging with autobiography, the present research takes the position that change is, in the words of Heddon, “necessary, desirable and within reach” (2008: 02). Not only does my study accept that change is necessary but it seeks to potentially initiate that process precisely through ‘creation’ in the act of performance.

This brings me to my second consideration in regards to autobiographical performance: that is, the place the present research occupies in relation to existing research on the field. Whilst it might be true to say that the practice submitted as part of this study (*Sissy!*) has drawn from events that have happened in the ‘real world’ (to use Heddon’s terms), it is also true that the performance practice is not, thereby, attempting to re-stage or re-present the real world. Rather, as Heddon herself has argued, “we should not forget that performance, where it is read as such, unavoidably foregrounds its status *as performance*” (2008: 28, original emphasis). “Performance,” she continues, “is *not* the real world (though it might very well prompt us to consider whether and how the ‘real world’ is performance, or at least performative” (Heddon 2008: 28, original emphasis). I will return to this relationship between performance and the performative and its productive possibilities in the conclusion to this thesis. For now, however, suffice it say that *Sissy!* has offered a critical engagement with the notion of sissy performativity through the means of performance.

In further situating the role of autobiography herein, I must add that its application in my methodology should be understood as akin to the traditions established by the late German choreographer Pina Bausch (Fernandes 2001, Hoghe 1989). In other words, specific details of my daily (sissy) life (and here I am thinking about the damaging effects of violence, for instance) have served as the driving force to create choreographed movement. It differs, therefore, from most of the autobiographical performance work investigated by Heddon (Carl Lavery, Phil Smith, Mike Pearson and Bobby Baker, to cite a few) in the sense that the methods and the products of my developed process are presented in a more strictly codified and rigidly choreographed fashion (more on this in the section ‘notes on practice’ below). On the other hand, the role of autobiography in my work might be seen as parallel to the aforementioned

practitioners in that details of my life are used in order to illuminate and explore something more universal (such as violence) with the goal of possibly initiating a process of change.

Besides the methodological communion with Bausch's legacy, the research's approach to autobiographical performance also proposes a citation of the queer methods of engaging with the autobiographical genre. Here I am making specific reference to the concept of 'disidentification,' as outlined by Muñoz (1999). In more simple words, my strategy has been to "reappropriate an ambivalent yet highly charged set of images" (Muñoz 1999: 90-91)—those representing the queer sissy body, abuse and space—in order to "remake them in a fashion that explores and outlines the critical ambivalences that make this image a vexing site of identification ... with antiracist [and here I place antisissiphobic] political positions" (Muñoz 1999: 91)(more on this in the conclusion).

Although I have thankfully not encountered physical violence since 2005, I have nevertheless continued to suffer verbal abuse and threats on a regular basis: at a bus stop, on the streets, when leaving the house, when coming back home. It was in 2009, however, with the rise of homophobic violence being reported in the mainstream British newspapers, that it became clear to me that fear in the public sphere was not exclusively a part of my life. Violence appeared to have become increasingly part of the lives of more queer subjects in London, many of whom I encountered at a meeting organised by the Metropolitan Police at a community centre in East London that year. This meeting was attended by a group of queer men and women who had also been affected by the recent attacks and who demanded the police take some form of action in order to try to put an end to the violence. The rise was clearly not only a story printed in newspapers and magazines.⁵ Proof of that were the testimonies of those present, people who, like me, also felt overwhelmed by fear when leaving their homes. With this meeting—and with the space for discussion it provided—the

⁵ A recent article has been published in the July 2010 issue of *Attitude* magazine (see Edge 2010). For examples of news articles, see Dangerfield (2009) for *BBC News*; Jones (2009) for *The Guardian*; and Johnson (2009) for *The Independent*. In chapter three I will cite specific police figures relating to homophobic crime.

relevance of my research to others became a distinct possibility. In other words, this was no longer ‘my problem’ since it clearly affected others around me.

The two instances of abuse I have described above—one physical and the other a series of verbal attacks—should not be seen as isolated events. They have been singled out, however, as representing important turning points in my critical thinking around (a) hate crime, (b) the strategic targeting of minority groups and (c) the urban occupation of space. If the personal urgency of the 2005 incident instigated a desire to take action, the events of 2009 afforded me a realisation of the extent to which violence affected other people. This sense of communality in a shared vulnerability (physical and emotional) to hate crime—what Butler might call an “alliance focused on opposition to violence” (2009: 32)—has served therefore as impetus to complete the present research. My attempt has been to transform these instances of violence into productive tools of reflection and analysis in the context of my present exploration. The potentially productive effect of violence is a theme I constantly go back to throughout the thesis—always with a firm focus on defiance, redemption and alliance.

Body/Abuse/Space

The string of events I have identified as a common pattern in gender-motivated attacks follows the cycle body/abuse/space, a cycle I have initially outlined in the section above when introducing the notion of a ‘causational chain of injury.’ This tripartite relationship between body, abuse and space is one of the original features of my research. The dynamic relation between these three elements can be further examined through an investigation of the gendered-body/sissiphobic-violence/marginalisation effect; an investigation I undertake in the chapters that follow. This order of events has also influenced the sequence in which the chapters of the present thesis have been organised: sissy body, sissiphobia and sissy space.

It is my belief, however, that in order to better determine what constitutes each of these elements separately, I would need to start by offering an investigation of the discourses that have been traditionally produced around them. Therefore, preceding my discussion on the sissy body in chapter two, sissiphobia in chapter three and sissy space in chapter four, I will present what I have called a ‘sissy canon.’ I am all too

aware of the possible methodological inconsistencies of proposing a historical account of male effeminacy in support of an argument that claims the sissy as a fluid identity position, an issue I will articulate in chapter two. This approach, however, is not unique to my research. Judith Halberstam (1998: 41), for instance, has argued that her “project of historicising female masculinity” should be seen as consistent with her ‘queer methodology.’ A queer methodology, she has claimed, is “a scavenger methodology that uses different methods to collect and produce information on subjects who have been deliberately or accidentally excluded from traditional studies of human behaviour” (Halberstam 1998: 13). “The queer methodology,” she continues, “attempts to combine methods that are often cast as being at odds with each other, and it refuses the academic compulsion toward disciplinary coherence” (Halberstam 1998: 13). Hennen, also using a historiographical approach, has claimed he “spends time establishing the historical context to foreground the politics of gender” (2008: 22).⁶

In chapter one (sissy canon), I will look back in history with the goal of investigating the evolution of discourse within Western representations of male effeminacy. The common thread between the different effeminate types I propose to examine in this chapter is their shared positionality as deviant individuals—a deviance I have determined strictly from the angle of their effeminate visibility. I will look at the *kinaidos* in ancient Greece and the *cinaedus* in Rome as outcasts according to a sociological framework (Gleason 1990, Murray 2000, Halperin 2002). I will also examine the figure of the ‘homosexual’ within clinical-pathological discourses (Halperin 1990, Sinfield 1994, Hennen 2008) and within legal parlance (Lucas 1994, Sinfield 1994, Houlbrook 2005) and will extend this investigation to the disenfranchised radical fem within post-Stonewall same-sex discourses. In this chapter, I will also trace further parallels between earlier types of effeminate men and the contemporary sissy when it comes to their occupation of space and relationship to violence. Whilst I have constructed a historical chain of bodily citations by highlighting the similarities between past and present, I have also attempted to draw

⁶ For other examples of researchers who have adopted a historiographical method within the field of queer theory, see Muñoz (2009), Naphy (2006), Turner (2003) and Sinfield (1994). For more on my methodological approach, see ‘notes on methodology’ on page 16.

on some of the discrepancies in traditional discourses, challenging thus the modern notion of effeminacy as a trope of homosexuality.

My hope with the proposed chain is therefore to analyse and challenge perceptions of effeminacy, rather than to study the essence of the behaviour. The purpose of chapter one is, hence, not to serve as an authoritative historical document on sexualities. Rather, its goal is to demonstrate how gender has played a major part in what we now might call the history of sexuality—from ancient history to contemporary debates of mental illness. Gender, I suggest, in its many complicated couplings and uncouplings with sexuality appears to be what seems to remain most prominent.

In chapter two, I will investigate what elements might be used to distinguish the sissy body from other manifestations of gendered bodies. Here, I will establish the boundaries of the sissy body within my study by describing it in gestures, mannerisms and sartorial choices. I will refer to these elements as ‘negotiable bodily markers of effeminacy.’ By ‘negotiable,’ I mean to say that these markers offer, to a certain extent, the possibility of being played up or played down, camped up or disguised. In other words, integral to their constitution appears to be their potential malleability. Among such markers, I include the limp wrist, the mincing gait and the hand on the hip, to cite but three.

By ‘markers,’ I mean identifiable and repeatable traits of effeminate behaviour—a definition I have drawn with reference to Judith Butler’s assertion that “for a mark to be a mark, it must be repeatable, and have that repeatability as a necessary and constitutive feature of itself” (1997: 149). My concept of negotiable markers is therefore closely related to her notion of ‘gender performativity.’ The gestures I call negotiable markers are, in more simple words, passed on through a process of repetition and when repeated (or ‘performed’), they produce a specific type of effect. I will suggest in this chapter—with reference to Crisp (2007 [1968])—that one essential part of the sissy’s political strategy of overt visibility is his self-knowledge as a ‘gender-disturber.’ Underpinning that self-awareness of gender manipulability, I will claim, there exists a possibility of rebellion and potential power in the sissy’s gender performance.

I use ‘overt visibility’ (Tucker 2009) hence as a conceptual tool to speak of the political strategy of actively choosing to embody effeminacy. I will investigate this in terms of ‘confrontational tactics’ by looking at Quentin Crisp’s use of make up as a statement against imposed political invisibility and the quean’s powdered and perfumed persona (Houlbrook 2005) as a self-stigmatised position. In my exploration of overt visibility, I will define my own concept of ‘sissiography’ as a process that involves the voluntary writing of the negotiable markers of sissiness on the body.⁷ Sissiography, I will show, is intrinsically connected to the sissy’s constant negotiation of violence, which has a knock-on effect on his use of space. Writing sissy on the body (or ‘sissying it up,’ to coin a phrase) might occur, in other words, when in a safe environment where danger might be perceived as non-imminent. Erasing—or, better, attempting to erase—the negotiable markers, on the other hand, might occur when the perceived safety of a space comes under threat.⁸ In sum, I will use sissiography in this chapter to investigate what can be made visible in different spaces and how the sissy might create new uses for traditional spaces in order to enhance his possibilities of visibility and safety. Sissiography is therefore a process that alternates between visibility and invisibility, hiding and revealing, writing and erasing, depending on the space and on the varying degrees of risk involved.

When trying to reconcile myself with the anxiety of defining *a* sissy body—rather than sissy *bodies*—I will adopt Gayatri Spivak’s concept of ‘strategic essentialism’ (in Butler 1990: 280) as a necessary rhetorical approach. As I will show, the sissy body—and here I take my own as a constant point of reference—shares certain specific elements of its constitution with sissies in past and present. In that sense, one might speak of the sissy body as being attached to a ‘historical chain of citations’ (to use Butler’s term). As such, the elements that characterise this body might be seen as somewhat stable. Having accepted that there might not exist an exclusive way of embodying sissiness, I will nevertheless demonstrate how some physical elements of this body (such as the limp wrist and the mincing gait) have been viewed as somewhat transhistorical and transcultural. In other words, these markers repeat and it is through this repetition that they become recognised as markers. This repetition and

⁷ See more on the concept of ‘writing’ in the section ‘Notes on terms’ below.

⁸ The spatial implications of sissiography will be examined in further detail in chapter four.

reproduction of ideals (or, at times, even stereotypes) is, for Butler, what defines the very process of gender learning.⁹

My investigations of past writings of and about gender deviant effeminates has as its main purpose the belief that their effeminate mannerisms—like mine—rather than being essential features of their ontological formation, are, on the contrary, passed down the ‘citational chain.’ Although I understand that there might be a whole host of possibilities for sissy embodiments, I have deployed the term sissy in my study as a unitary and overarching ‘signifier of resistance’ (to borrow Lee Edelman’s term (1994: xvi)) in a way that gives back to the effeminate man “the possibility of knowing subversion” (Tucker 2009: 16), thereby allowing thus power to coalesce in new and liberating forms.

Furthermore, it is part of my methodological approach that I should embrace the stereotype rather than avoid it.¹⁰ I am aware of the dangers (and the thrills) of working with stereotypes. If I decide to tackle them, it is with the specific goal of challenging their validity. For Shannon Jackson (2004), stereotypes can be used with political potential as creative tools of theatrical performance. Queer performer Muñoz, she has claimed, offers a good example of how this may be achieved. Muñoz, says Jackson, “cite[s] conventions of race, gender and sex with parodic difference” (2004: 191). “Such ironic performances,” she continues, “repeat normalised stereotypes not to reify them but in order to expose them ... situating that use within a citational legacy” (Jackson 2004: 91). I have consciously chosen the limp wrist, the mincing gait and other (often perceived as) clichés of effeminacy as tools that will allow me to playfully question rigid structures of gender. In chapter five, I will explain how I have approached corporeal stereotypes in my body through practice.

⁹ It is important to remember here that this process through which we learn to perform gender, through its mechanic repetition might also be conducive of transformation through mechanisms of *failure*. “To the extent that gender norms are *reproduced*,” Butler explains, “they are invoked and cited by bodily practices that also have the capacity to alter the norms in the course of their citation” (2004: 52, original emphasis). It is also worth mentioning that ‘failure’ is a fundamental element of my discourse here. I will extend on the subject in the following chapters.

¹⁰ See ‘notes on methodology’ below for a further explanation of how I might do this.

My argument in chapter two will inevitably pass through a discussion of the current psycho-pathological conception of Gender Identity Disorder (GID) as a mental disease (Kosofsky Sedgwick 1994, McInnes and Davies 2008, Zucker 2008). Among the many political ramifications of such a diagnosis, I include my personal stand against this view. Having been treated for GID myself as a child, I will offer my personal narrative not in isolation but in relation to a set of existing discourses on the subject. In regard to the opposition to the diagnosis as a mental illness, I will make reference to ideas postulated in *Sissies and Tomboys* (1999, ed. Rottnek), a collection of essays that combines theory and personal narratives as part of its methodology, focusing on gender atypicality in childhood (Minter 1999, Corbet 1999, et al.). The main goal of the book appears to be its attempt to expose the absurdity of pathologising gender nonconformity rather than understanding it as an expression of diversity.¹¹

In chapter three (sissyphobia), I will investigate the different ways in which the sissy body has been subjected to violence.¹² Of specific relevance to my argument in this chapter is the recent rise of homophobic abuse in urban areas. This phenomenon, I will suggest, might be connected to the strategy of easy targeting of genderqueer subjects. I will investigate this specific claim in relation to the sissy's alleged heightened visibility over the past few years and the dynamic relationship between power and violence (Arendt 1970, Žižek 2008). More than being directly affected by the daily threat of violence, I will suggest in this chapter that the sissy body is, in effect, constituted by it.

In my discussion, I will divide violence into verbal and physical abuse. In exploring the damaging effects of verbal abuse, I will use Butler's (1997) concept of 'words that

¹¹ For a study that has addressed the effects of treatment in children, see Green (1987).

¹² 'Sissyphobia' has been coined as a term by Tim Bergling in *Sissyphobia—Gay Men and Effeminate Behaviour* (2001). Mark Simpson, who has written the introduction to this study, has defined 'sissyphobia' by suggesting that "a hatred or even dislike of sissies is at least irrational and probably pathological—a sign of weakness, of *unmanliness*, a subjection to fear. Rather, in the same way that a hatred or even mild dislike of homosexuals has been successfully pathologized by the word 'homophobia'—so that 'homophobes,' in liberal circles at least, become as undesirable, sick, and pathetic as homosexuals used to be" (in Bergling 2001: xii). In her essay 'How to Bring Your Kids Up Gay: The War on Effeminate Boys,' Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick (1994: 157) has used the expression 'effemiphobia' in a similar vein, whereas Muñoz has used 'femmephobia' (2009: 77). In my writing, I spell 'sissyphobia' differently from Bergling's coin in order to distinguish my specific use from his.

wound.’ Violence, I will claim, has a material impact on the body as well as shaping the sissy’s use of space. I will also investigate the potentially productive effects of abuse and will conclude with the proposition that the sissy body can become itself an instrument of violence. In doing this, I will draw on Georges Bataille’s notions of taboo, transgression and contagion (2006 [1962]) by presenting the sissy as a representation of the pleasure principle. In that sense, the sissy will be looked at as deriving pleasure from his inevitable failure to do masculinity right.¹³ Pursuing the notion of agency in failure, I will examine David McInnes and Cristyn Davies’ (2008) proposal that the sissy boy in school is active in the project of ‘disordering gender.’

When looking at the idea of sissy space in chapter four, I will explore it in terms of safe and hostile zones. Here, I will discuss how the sissiological process might unfold and some of the strategies sissies might use to create protective niches within the urban fabric of London, at times reinventing the conventional use of public spaces (Betsky 1997). In this chapter I will also try to challenge the validity of the concept of safe zones of conviviality, which I believe might sustain, to a certain extent, the function of the so-called ‘gay neighbourhoods’ in the twentieth-first century. My desire to challenge the validity of ‘safe’ zones of conviviality has stemmed from an observation that queer spaces, just like queer bodies, can be seen as targets of violence. The nail-bomb attacks of 1999 in London might serve here as a clear example of spatially targeted attacks.¹⁴ What I claim in chapter four, therefore, is that the idea of a ‘safe’ sissy space might be a utopian one.¹⁵

¹³ This particular turn of phrase (‘do masculinity right’) relates directly to one of my most recent performances on the subject of sissiness. The piece in question has formed part of *Eat Your Heart Out*, a night of performances organised by a collective of queer artists headed by Scottee. In *Shoot the Sissy!* (2010, see figure 01), I make direct reference to a scene in Pina Bausch’s *Palermo, Palermo* (1989) where a female dancer (Julie Shanahan) demands two male dancers pelt her with tomatoes. This scene is set to *Why don’t you do right?* (1936, written by Kansas Joe McCoy). In my reading, I take part of this song’s lyrics as background text for my performance. “Why don’t you do right, like some other men do” becomes, in my interpretation, “why don’t you do masculinity right, like some other men do?”

¹⁴ The London nail-bomb incidents took place in three different locations on three different dates in 1999. The first attack occurred on the 17th of April in Brixton, leaving 39 men, women and children injured. The second attack happened on the 24th of April on Brick Lane, leaving 6 men and women injured. The last one happened on the 30th of April at a pub (The Admiral Duncan) in Soho’s Old Compton Street, leaving 65 men and women injured and 3 killed. The attacks were evidently intended to affect specific minority groups: namely, the black community, the Asian community and the gay community, respectively.

¹⁵ The main argument in Muñoz’s study centres on the notion of utopia, which for him is definitional of queerness. “Queerness,” he has claimed, “is essentially about the rejection of a

When revisiting the systemic bullying of sissy boys in school in this chapter, I will look at the potential legitimacy of hiding as a spatial strategy of protection. My argument here consists of presenting sissy space as experientially constricted by violence (or by the fear thereof). Most important, however, is my claim that such a constriction of space might not be exclusively limited to damaging or negative effects. This constriction might, I will claim, also be seen as creative in the new propositions of inhabiting space it might afford—in hiding or in crouching, for instance. Further on in my investigation of a sissy space, I will propose an analysis of the public toilet (Halberstam 1998, Gershenson and Penner 2009, Muñoz 2009) as a place of tense exchange between safe and hostile energies.

The bathroom will also be analysed from the standpoint of regulatory mechanisms. In terms of state-sponsored regulations of space, I will look at Andrew Tucker (2009) and Matt Houlbrook (2005). In Tucker's (2009) study of queer experiences in South Africa, gender visibility seems to be further complicated by "the extraordinary way in which communities have historically been spatially regulated by the state" (2009: 02). In chapter four, I will show that whereas this segregation might be more obviously outlined in South Africa with its apartheid history, the institutionalised regulation of space can also be seen at work in Britain (and more specifically in London) to this very day. Stephen O. Murray (2000), for example, has suggested that gay districts are as equally constructed on a spatial and cultural segregatory basis as apartheid might have been. I will substantiate this claim by looking at Houlbrook's (2005) investigation of the interwar quean and his occupation of urban space. The visible quean, according to Houlbrook, was often restricted within the spatial limits of the West End, becoming therefore known by the moniker 'West End Poof.' Although the boundaries between queer and non-queer spaces might no longer be so clearly regulated by the state, I will claim in this chapter that they remain policed by the constant fear of violence. Fear, in other words, still has the power to compartmentalise, block and restrict access to certain areas, manipulating thus the mobility of certain groups.

here and now and an insistence on potentiality or concrete possibility for another world" (2009: 01).

My discussion of space in this chapter also extends into a consideration of *how* space might be navigated by the queer subject; a consideration I will explore with reference to Sara Ahmed (2006). I will look at what strategies the sissy might devise in order to ‘safely’ navigate space outside supposedly queer-friendly zones. I will address the question of how to possibly traverse the heteronormativity of particular urban spaces unscathed and will discuss what might happen to those of us who are unable to accomplish that task. In constructing the notion of a ‘sissy space,’ I will draw from Larry Knopp’s (2007) concept of ‘topographical imaginings’ and Halbertam’s (2005) ‘place-making strategies’ by claiming that sissy space is only ever temporarily constructed and always in constant tension with traditional understandings of normative space. Whereas my proposed sissy space might extend on some of the ideas proposed in Aaron Betsky’s *Queer Space* (1997), it might also pose some specific challenges to it. In this chapter I will address, in other words, where sissy space might be situated in relation to queer space.

In chapter five, Sissy!, I address a critical reflection of the dialogue between theory and practice—a dialogue that has fuelled the present study throughout its many stages of development. It is here that I will look at instances of both studio and performance practice; always with a firm focus on how practice has been central in instrumentalising an empirical investigation of traditional discourses of effeminacy (chapter one), of visibility (chapter two), of violence (chapter three) and of marginalisation (chapter four). This final chapter therefore returns the discussion to issues previously addressed in earlier chapters and proposes some formal conclusions.

Since practice is the principal tool of investigation of the research, I have discussed it most in the last chapter of the thesis in order to signal the importance of the conclusions it draws. As the culmination of the discourse, it purports to utter the last word by pointing towards a new sissiography. Chapter five is also active in opening conceptual space (or in ‘making way’) for me to ‘talk back’ to the theory, reasserting thus my authority as a practitioner and firmly establishing my study within the terrain of practice-based research.¹⁶

¹⁶ In a lecture given at the Central School of Speech and Drama, artist-academic Patricia Lyons has argued that “practice is intelligence. It allows you to find out how you think. It

Chapter five examines practice after the chapters on theory which in turn were presented after the live performance of *Sissy!*—the first point of contact with the research. The present thesis hence mimics the overarching movement of the study. By starting and ending with practice, the study reinscribes the cyclical mode of enquiry developed between practice, reflection, writing and back to practice; taking the reader through an identical process of reflection to that developed by the researcher. *Sissy!* (the performance) and *Sissy!* (the concluding chapter) both propose different forms of *writing* at the same time as their content remains fundamentally the same. The performance must be seen as, to use the words of Gavin Butt, “the unique spatio-temporal event” (2005: 10) and, as such, proposing an ephemeral, embodied type of writing. The final chapter, on the other hand, as “the writing in the *absence* of the art object” (Butt 2005: 10, original emphasis) must be regarded merely as a different form of writing.

In the process of cementing this notion of ‘different forms of writing’—the first, a writing pursued through the body in performance and the second, a writing pursued through more conventional methods of language, discourse and argument¹⁷—I have brushed against the idea of new types of methodologies, which will hopefully bring forth new types of knowledge. Thus, chapter five attempts to offer a thorough discussion of practice. It does so at the same time as it negotiates the structural difficulties inherent in analysing something so ephemeral and so ‘given to disappear’ (Butt 2005: 10) as theatrical performance essentially is. In articulating a conclusion, chapter five accounts for, traces and captures the evolving knowledge that is located *in* the body, carried and disseminated *through* the body and best understood when explained *with* the body; a knowledge that is transmitted in the act of performance but must, at least on this occasion, be articulated in words. What chapter five, as a last word, attempts to capture, in sum, is an effete, albeit fragmented, new type knowledge: a sissy knowledge.¹⁸

can radically open up how you think ... Practice is important because it gives you [the artist] the authority back” (Lyons: 22.06.09).

¹⁷ It is important to remember here, however, that even the more conventional methods of approaching language, such as writing, always necessarily involve the body.

¹⁸ A potential parallel could be drawn here between these different types of knowledge—one inscribed in the written thesis and the other in the body in performance—and J. L. Austin’s

Notes on practice

The practice has therefore a central role in the process of development of the present research. Firstly, in presenting practice as an integral part of the final submission of the thesis, the study attempts to reach for other, non-traditional, modes of evidencing. The research claims, in other words, that the performing body represents a legitimate way of accessing and disseminating knowledge about the body and its formal processes of codification and construction.

When reflecting on the importance of practice in the research, I am taken back to the beginning of the process. I ask myself, in other words, why I have undertaken this project. In answering that question, I realise that the initial impulse of the research has been my desire to investigate the sissy body and the violence to which it has been traditionally subjected and, perhaps more importantly, my desire to *do something* about such concerns. This desire has originated from my personal investment in understanding the mechanisms of violence in accordance with Butler's assertion that once I have been exposed to such mechanisms, I have a moral and ethical responsibility to do something about them. The research represents this *doing something about it*. Through my practice, I have acknowledged the responsibility, which I believe I have, of investigating the processes that perpetuate violence and their damaging effects. Through the practice (and through the research as a whole), I have proposed the beginning of a process of change.

Performance is not only my passion, it is also a tool that allows me, with the skills and the training I have, the language necessary to speak out, to talk back at systems of oppression. Performance is my preferred form of expression and the urgency of producing performance has been imperative in my desire to undertake research on the sissy. One of the most important tasks of performance is, to my mind, to rethink the subject and to question his/her condition(s) in terms of the body. The present research has done precisely that. It has opened space for an embodied reflection on the body,

speech act theory. Chapter five articulates the theatrical moment and, as such, might be seen to take on a symbolic 'non-serious' camouflage cloak once we consider that the theatrical has been explained in Austinian scholarship (1973 [1962]: 22) as parasitic, hollow or void. For more on the potential relationship between Austin and queerness, see Muñoz (2009), Butt (2007) and Edelman (1994).

on abuse and on space. The practice disseminates knowledge through the act of doing (or performing) the body, the violence and the space of sissy subjectivity in front of an audience. The practice, as embodied knowledge, opens up the space, to use the words of Mock, for “processes of exchange between performers and spectators” (2009b: 14). This exchange between performer and audience has been one of the crucial aims of the practice.

My methodology has followed a system of conversations between theory (researching, reading, writing) and practice (studio sessions and performances). This process of development has proved more productive when both elements that constitute the research (i.e. theory and practice) have developed simultaneously. In other words, when reading and writing coincided with periods when studio sessions were also in development. The studio investigations have allowed me to confirm some of the assumptions I thought I had about sissiness. On the other hand, the practice has also served the purpose of challenging some of these assumptions. It was through the *doing* of the practice that I was able to understand, for example, that the sissy might be (a) not *that* transgressive after all but somewhat integral part of the hegemonic system of gender; (b) participating in the violent construction of gender binaries as a threat to every man; (c) violent in his abandonment to pleasure and, finally (d) not a victim of gender but a subject who might find potential pleasure in his non-normative position. The practice therefore has been invested not only in answering question but also in asking them.

Practice has permeated the whole process of research, from beginning to end, systematically marking important milestones in the study. To that end, the final performance piece (*Sissy!*) is attached here in appendix in a DVD, as are other instances of development (*In My Shoes* and *Crumbs!*). In the process of using the practice as a tool of critical thinking, I have developed two main ways of exploring the material. In the first one, I have used some of the actions (to punch, to kick, to spit *or* to be punched, kicked, spat at), some of the images (pillorying or the painted and perfumed body) and some of the gestures (the limp wrist, the mincing gait) found in my readings as literal inspiration for creating movement. This approach has allowed the body to enter the space of language through its own means and to produce its own vocabulary and understanding. My second method can be seen as following

the tradition established by Bausch with her long-term collaborators (see Fernandes 2001, Hoghe 1989). Here, I would bring a specific concern (about suffering abuse, about hiding or about the pleasure in using makeup, for example) into the studio and would develop a movement sequence inspired by it, with my body, without using words.¹⁹ I will give specific examples of each of these instances in chapter five.

The scenic elements I have used have also allowed me to establish a specific conceptual framework and a specific dramaturgy for the practice, always in relation to the research as a whole. I have used high heels, a wig and makeup as references to the notion of queer gesture as choreography (Muñoz 2009). These items of costume (or props) have also allowed me to speak of self-agency in the act of reaching for the elements that have so often been denied me. The process of developing choreography, therefore, has been part of a long process of reflection and cross-fertilisation. The studio explorations have also dictated what direction the reading and the writing should take. To use a meaningful metaphor, the studio sessions have forced me to take some productive deviations just as the readings have had a similar effect on the practice.

One of the strongest features of my research is the relationship it fleshes out between the performing body and the performative body, which I will discuss in the conclusion to this study. The practice has been instrumental in allowing me to reach such an insight.

Contribution to knowledge

Besides the proposed relationship between performance and sissy performativity, the research makes a distinct contribution to knowledge in the fields of queer theory and performance studies. The research proposes the sissy as the central figure of study.

¹⁹ In her work, Bausch has proposed movement as language and has used each of her dancer's personal experience as a resource for creating scenic material. Her method was to ask her dancers a series of questions, to which they would respond in movement. For *Nelken* (1982), for instance, these are some of the questions she asked: "something about your first love; how did you, as a child, imagine love?; when someone forces you to love, how do you react?" (in Fernandes 2001: 25). It is alongside this specific branch of autobiography in performance (i.e. dance-theatre) that I have placed my practice. Some of the questions I have asked myself along the process have included: "when you feel you might be in danger of violence, how do you react?; what do you do when you want to avoid abuse?; what makes your body visible?; can you hide the queer gesture effectively?"

The sissy is understood here as a genderqueer position, related (but not limited) to the figure of the effeminate man (see chapter one). Whereas the sissy has previously appeared in academic discourses (Green 1987, Kosofsky Sedgwick 1994, Rottnek 1999, Oluchi Lee 2005, McInnes and Davies 2008), he has generally been presented in relation to the idea of mental illness, under the nomenclature Gender Identity Disorder (or ‘sissy boy syndrome,’ to use Green’s [1987] terms). By positioning itself against the idea of effeminacy as a form of pathology, the present research extends on that knowledge by proposing a more thorough investigation of other discourses that might also serve to constitute the sissy. Moreover, the study proposes a motion towards a ‘new sissiology,’ where new discourses around the sissy might potentially emerge. This new sissiology explores the elements that might make space for pleasure in sissy subjectivity.

Furthermore, my investigation of sissiness somewhat mirrors the research previously developed by Halberstam in *Female Masculinity* (1998). It does so by producing a study of male femininity (or effeminacy). The research, however, moves beyond merely mirroring Halberstam by presenting practice as a form of accessing and disseminating what it sees as the complex and potentially fluid meanings of male effeminacy. My study analyses the body, the abuse and the space of sissiness by *doing* those things in front of an audience. The study also connects with and extends current developments on the concept of failure, specifically in the field of queer theory and performance studies (Johnson 2009, Muñoz 2009, Le Feuvre 2010, Bailes 2011).

As a conceptual framework, my proposed new sissiology potentially offers academics in the field of queer theory and of performance studies a critical tool with which to investigate queer positions in (and out of) performance; specifically, the sissy (as the effeminate man) but on a broader scope, any other types of sissy. As a conceptual framework, sissiology also offers practitioners (of queer theatre, of dance-theatre, of autobiographical performance, among other genres) a tool with which to create new work or analyse existing ones.

Notes on methodology

The present study adopts a historiographical approach to queer theory. In proposing a sissy canon (chapter one), I undertake an investigation of the discourses and instruments that have worked to constitute effeminacy as ‘abnormal.’ Rather than fixing sissy identity, my study attempts to analyse (and thereby challenge) traditional perceptions of male effeminacy. As far as fixing identity goes, chapter one risks presenting the effeminate as the outcast, the unmasculine, the one who might exist outside discourses of the normal. In this respect, the effeminate man has admittedly remained stable. As discourses of normativity evolve, however, so does the positionality of the outsider. The effeminate, I will show, remains fixed only insofar as he retains his place as the other, the odd one out, the queer. This stance will constantly shift; varying from social to legal discourses, from the medical diagnosis of effeminacy as a mental illness to the politics of gender liberation; at times these might overlap. My concept of ‘graphy’ is instrumental in facilitating this strategy of initially ‘writing’ (or ‘inscribing’) a history of effeminacy to later be able to ‘describe’ it (Edelman 1994).²⁰

In positioning the sissy within what Houlbrook might call “a canonical queer history” (2005: 245), my goal has not been to state that I occupy the same space as the *cinaedus* or the quean might have occupied. In other words, I am not claiming that effeminacy should be seen as an immutable type of subjectivity. On the contrary, looking at the past has been taken on as an attempt to investigate what possibilities of change might be available. Any change, I suggest, can only be achieved through an understanding of the mechanisms that have kept sissies trapped within a cycle of injury. The paradox of moving back in order to look forward does not escape me. Nonetheless, as Heather Love has suggested, “the dreams for the future are founded on the history of suffering, stigma and violence” (2007: 01). The promises of a new sissigraphy might, according to that, lie in a sissy canon.

Sissy visibility

When speaking about forms of embodying effeminacy—in gestures, behaviours and sartorial elements—I will do so with specific reference to Tucker’s (2009) notion of

²⁰ See more on ‘writing,’ ‘inscribing’ and ‘describing’ under the section ‘Graphy’ below.

‘queer visibility.’ Queer visibility, he has defined, is “a concept that examines how queer groups are able to overcome the heteronormativity of particular urban spaces; the options that are available for them to do so; the perception of the decision to undertake certain visibilities” (2009: 03). Visibility, in Tucker’s schema, appears to be connected to a sense of agency in that it is presented as a conscious decision. Moreover, queer visibility as an analytical concept, says Tucker, can be used as “an exploration of queer public performances” (2009: 03). Whereas Tucker’s argument involves an investigation of different types of visibility in South Africa, I propose a ‘sissy visibility’ specifically bound to London 2010. Whereas Tucker investigates “the ability or inability to stay visible” (2009: 04), I propose ‘sissy visibility’ as more closely associated with the impossibility of achieving invisibility. As such, it can be seen as a more overt type of visibility; a visibility that, due to its explicit nature, has a clear effect on the urban occupation of sissy bodies.

Notes on terms

‘Homosexual,’ ‘gay,’ ‘queer’

Following Tucker’s proposed guidelines, I will use ‘homosexual’ as an anachronistic term when discussing, for example, “state, legal or nationalist sanctioned discrimination against a ‘medicalised’ condition” (2009: 33). ‘Homosexual’ is understood as a late-nineteenth century word in the medical thinking of the time as traced by Michel Foucault (1998 [1976]).²¹ It is also according to Foucauldian scholarship that the study understands the creation of identity labels in modern discourse as a means of social control. As such, however, these unitary categorising systems, in the act of oppression, appear to paradoxically offer a common foundation for resistance.

²¹ See also Halperin (1990), Murray (2000), Naphy (2006). According to this conceptual shift in sexological discourses, a whole host of sexual acts began to be articulated as a static notion of identity according to a ‘preference’ of sexual-object choice. Many forms of sexual behaviours began to be classified under one of two mutually exclusive categories according to the anatomical sex of the participants involved in the act. The binary produced—same-sex (homosexual) versus different-sex (heterosexual) practices—tended to reproduce the already existing male/female binary following dominant values of hegemonic power. This shift resulted from an intense period of medical research and social change, but, as Halberstam rightly points out, should not be seen as an achievement constrained to this period. Rather, it should be understood as part of a longer process of the emergence of sexual identity (Halberstam 1998: 75).

‘Gay’ is used in the thesis “in a developmentalist framework as a ‘progression’ from ‘homosexual’” (Tucker 2009: 33). By ‘developmentalist framework’ (to use Tucker’s term), I mean a process of evolution of sexual and gendered identities. In that sense, ‘homosexual,’ ‘gay’ and ‘queer’—the latter “less an identity than a *critique* of identity” (Jagose 1996: 131, original emphasis)—are all understood as denoting non-heterosexual identities with each being associated to specific socio-political advancements.²² ‘Gay,’ as a post-Stonewall identity marker, is hence understood as much as a reaction against ‘homosexual’ as it is a progression from it. Moreover, “‘gay’ will be used when discussing such self-labelled entities as ‘gay villages,’ ‘gay movement,’ ‘gay rights’ or ‘gay pride’” (Tucker 2009: 33).

I will use ‘queer’ to refer to “those who eschew any ‘regimes of the normal’” (Tucker 2009: 17-18), with the “intention to wilfully deviate from what is good, proper and reasonable” (Munt 2007: 23). Seen in its historical context and as a progression from ‘gay,’ ‘queer’ is understood as a political term emerging in the late 1980s and early 1990s in counter-reaction to the ‘gay is good(s)’ ideology (Lucas 1994: 30, Simpson 1996: xiv). Ian Lucas (1994) has suggested that queer came about as a result of a media backlash against AIDS. Queer activist organisations in the United States, such as Queer Nation and ACT UP, were created in an attempt to counter what Chris Woods (1995) has called the “rampant homophobia of the Republican and Christian right, and the savage impact of AIDS” (1995: 25). “In the late 1980s,” he goes on, “US gay and lesbian activists began using the term ‘queer’ to designate a hardcore politics, militant anger vented both externally (at the Republican Bush administration, the rise of Christian fundamentalism, the AIDS crisis) and internally at an apathetic gay establishment seen to be failing in the light of these factors” (Woods 1995: 29).

²² Likewise, for Kosofsky Sedgwick, earlier models of sexuality are not simply replaced by later ones. Rather, she has suggested, the earlier ones are contained within the later ones, making these more complex (in Halperin 2002: 10-11). Sexological models, she has claimed, appear to develop through a progressive pattern rather than a substitution model. ‘Queer,’ it follows, does not necessarily replace ‘gay.’ ‘Gay,’ in turn, does not necessarily replace ‘homosexual.’ The latter models are understood as evolutions of earlier ones, containing these within. Similarly, Michael Warner (1993: xxviii) has claimed that “queer politics has not just replaced older modes of lesbian and gay identity; it has come to exist alongside those older modes opening up new possibilities.”

Queer groups in Britain, claims Woods (1995: 25), also had government homophobia to fight against but here they wanted to tackle other issues such as cottaging arrests and the killing of gay men. Catalysts in the formation of OutRage! in 1990 were the murder of the actor Michael Boothe (Woods 1995: 25), and Section 28 of the Local Government Act of 1988, under Margaret Thatcher, which tried to ban the ‘promotion of homosexuality’ by schools and local authorities (Woods 1995: 09). Central to the formation of queer groups like OutRage! in Britain was, according to Woods, the struggle “against a system they see as corrupt” (1995: 26).

‘Sissy’ and ‘effeminate man’

In my research, I am staking claim to the word ‘sissy.’ I define sissy as closely related—but not limited to—the figure of the effeminate man. The term sissy is a deliberate choice, a direct reference to the ambiguous sense of pride in the condition of shame. I use it to refer to contemporary notions of the effeminate body, in which I include myself. Ideologically speaking, ‘sissy’ must be seen as positioned alongside ‘queer’ politics in the sense that it stands against or outside heteronormative values. Admittedly, once defined as ‘against or outside,’ sissy retains a standing *in relation* to the normal. In chapter one, I will show how this relationship might be regarded as mutual by demonstrating how the masculine man (as the ‘norm’) might also be defined in relation to the effeminate man (the ‘non-normal’). When analysing past types of feminine men—which I do in chapter one, especially—I shall refer to them as ‘effeminate men’ rather than sissies. When discussing the performance practice presented as part of my final submission, a performance entitled *Sissy!*, I write it in italics, with a capital initial letter and a final exclamation mark to differentiate it from the identity marker ‘sissy.’

As a gender identity category, sissy has appeared in the work of Richard Green (1987), Barrie Thorne (1993), Ken Corbett (1999), Oluchi Lee (2005), among others. In Green’s *The Sissy Boy Syndrome and the Development of Homosexuality* (1987), ‘sissy-boy syndrome’ is put forward as an alternative nomenclature to Gender Identity Disorder. In such context, sissy becomes a clinical, medicalised term; a label directly associated with a psychiatric condition. My thesis endeavours to trouble discourses of sissiness as pathological by suggesting, in chapter two, that intervention should be

directed towards ‘effeminophobia’—a Kosofsky Sedgwick term (1993: 157)—rather than towards effeminate boys.

Thorne’s (1993) study of school children appears to take a similar stand by suggesting the diagnosis of effeminate boys as a psycho-pathology can only have damaging effects (in chapter four, I discuss what such effects might be). ‘Sissy’ as a term of abuse in the playground, Thorne has shown, “alludes to gender deviance, but with relentlessly negative connotations” (1993: 116). “Put it simply,” he continues, “a sissy is a person whose character, interests, and behaviour partake too much of qualities, such as timidity, passivity, and dependence, that are stereotyped as childish, and as female” (Thorne 1993: 116).²³ I shall return to Thorne in my investigation of ‘contagion’ in chapter three and in my exploration of ‘division of space’ in chapter four.

My attempt to reclaim an abusive term might be seen, in that aspect, as somewhat parallel to Corbett’s (1999) study. His self-proclaimed use of ‘girlyboy’ is, he has declared, “guided by ... the spirit of parodically reclaiming oppressive signifiers” (1999: 109). It is in alliance with this spirit that I have adopted the term ‘sissy.’ He continues, however, by suggesting that “perhaps it would make more sense to rebelliously appropriate ‘sissy,’ and repeatedly and defiantly invoke its linkage with pathology, indictment, and scorn” (Corbett 1999: 109). This promising project outlined by Corbett is undermined by a final consideration. “‘Sissy,’” he concludes, “carries the implication of weakness, unbecoming delicacy, and enervation, devoid of the possibilities of resistance, agency, and action” (Corbett 1999: 109). This latter statement clearly creates some tension when placed in relation to my study, which endeavours to embrace the unique qualities of the sissy by claiming that these

²³ Thorne’s definition of ‘sissy’ is especially interesting in his comparative analysis to the term ‘tomboy.’ “The ‘tomboy’ and the ‘sissy’ stand at and help define the symbolic margins of dichotomous and asymmetric gender difference,” he has argued (Thorne 1993: 111). “The label ‘sissy,’” he continues, “suggests that a boy has ventured too far into the contaminating ‘feminine,’ while ‘tomboys’ are girls who claim some of the positive qualities associated with the ‘masculine’” (Thorne 1993: 111). In chapter three, I will examine the implications of the term ‘contaminating’ in Thorne’s study. In one of her songs, Madonna—whom Alexander Doty evokes as “queer culture’s post-Stonewall Judy Garland” (1993: 10)—speaks of this asymmetrical value attributed to gender positions by saying that “girls can wear jeans but for a boy to look like a girl it is degrading” (in the intro to *What It Feels Like For a Girl* (2001, written and produced by Madonna and Guy Sigsworth)).

qualities are precisely the ones that offer him the productive potential for resistance, agency and action.

Despite Corbett's above dismissal of sissy as an inappropriate site for resistance, I will demonstrate in the chapters that follow that the sissy's agency is located precisely in what has been commonly dismissed as his 'weakness, unbecoming delicacy and enervation.' The sissy, I will show, is by no means devoid of redemptive possibilities. Contrary to common assumptions and to Corbett's premise, I suggest that the qualities that set the sissy apart from others are those very same qualities that afford him potential for resistance, agency and action against claims of 'pathology, indictment and scorn.' What I wish to show, in other words, is that the sissy should not be written off, disregarded or left behind because of his apparent weakness, delicacy or enervation. Rather, it is from those misconstrued virtues that his unique strength might originate.

In investigating the etymology of the term 'sissy,' I have reached for *The Oxford English Dictionary* (1989), which defines it as follows:

Sissy ('SISI). *Colloq.* [f. SIS *sb.* + -Y] **1.** A sister. **2.** An effeminate person, a coward. **1887** *Lantern* (New Orleans) 27 Aug. 3/2 Look and walk too much like sissies to do much fightin'; **1899** T. HALL *Tales* 131 'Well, you are a sissy,' said Blinks contemptuously. **1926** *British Weekly* 9 Sept. 473/3 A religious 'sissy' was anathema to me. **1932** S. GIBBONS *Cold Comfort Farm* xvii. 237 I want red blood. I don't want no sissies, see? **1938** L. MACNEICE *ZOO* iv. 74 The Sealyham, say the older breeders, is becoming a sissy. **1969** C. HIMES *Blind Man with Pistol* ii 25 The sissies .. were colored and mostly young. They all had straightened hair ..; long false eyelashes. **1977** *Time* 21 Feb. 40/2 Smokers proved to be sissies when deprived of cigarettes. **3.** *attrib.* or as *adj.* Effeminate; cowardly. (...) **1893** *Sunday Mercury* (N.Y.) 14 May 15/5 (*heading*) Sissy men in Society—Powdered, Painted and Laced. They swarm at Afternoon Teas. **1899** T. HALL *Tales* 121 Scotty was, in the newspaper vernacular, a 'sissy boy,' or in other words, a bit effeminate.

I have chosen to quote this section at length for two main reasons. First, because in defining the etymology of the term, the passage already establishes a citational chain of injury connected to its usage. This chain, I claim, is somewhat stable. The sissy, in other words, has been perceived invariably as effeminate or cowardly. The sissy, it seems, has therefore remained traditionally trapped in a derogatory framework of

discourse. The term has been generally used, it appears, ‘contemptuously.’ In chapter one, I will develop a more thorough exploration of the discourses that have surrounded sissiness by challenging this notion of fixity, offering a more nuanced view and arguing for the reappropriation of the word.

The *OED* definition has proved apposite to my argument in a further aspect. In illustrating the origins and the history of the term, the language there seems to already provide a citational relation to my research. Examples of usage provided above speak of sissies who ‘look’ and ‘walk’ too much like sissies; sissies who were ‘colored,’ had ‘straightened hair,’ wore ‘false eyelashes;’ sissies who were ‘powdered, painted and laced.’ In chapter two, I will use some of these exact terms when looking at the ‘somatic’ and ‘cosmetic’ body of the sissy. The sissy, I will claim, is determined through a reading of his body, through what I have called a ‘sissy performativity.’

Moreover, the sissy, according to the passage above, is a man who avoids ‘fighting;’ who seems to avoid ‘red blood.’ In my investigation of abuse in chapter three, I will analyse the representation of violence in *Sissy!* by exploring the appearance of red blood on stage. Whereas it might be true that the sissy might choose to avoid fighting—he is, after all, a sissy—I will claim in chapter four that this choice might be seen as sissy agency, which, in turn, might be productive, among other things, of new ways of performing space. The history of usage outlined by the *OED* is also pertinent in providing an example of a type of sissy other than the effeminate man. By speaking of a ‘religious’ sissy, the source supposedly points at the possibility of other sissies in the world with whom the effeminate man might make communion. The research might hence offer some form of knowledge that might be accessible to all sissies (of gender, of religion, of race, of colour, among others).²⁴

‘Graphy’ in sissio-, historio- and choreo-

I use ‘graphy’ with reference to Edelman’s (1994) notion of ‘graphesis.’ ‘Graphy,’ as a written notation, is used in my study when investigating (a) historiography; (b) sissigraphy and (c) choreography, which forms part of my performance practice in *Sissy!* (2010) (2009), *Crumbs!* (2007) and *In My Shoes* (2006) (see chapter five).

²⁴ It is also interesting how the *OED* refers to sissies and cigarettes, echoing thus the use of the latter as props in *Sissy!*

Edelman has used ‘homographesis’ as a neologism that allows him to examine the formation of a category of individuals—namely, homosexuals. This formation, he has claimed, has been facilitated through the use of discourse and language. In Edelman’s words the “homosexual person whose very condition of possibility is his relation to writing or textuality, his articulation, in particular of a ‘sexual’ difference ... generates the necessity of reading certain bodies as *visibly* homosexual” (1994: 09, original emphasis). The corporeal visibility to which Edelman refers has a central function in my study; a function I have briefly discussed above (see ‘sissy visibility’) and will return to for a more lengthy discussion in chapters one and two. ‘Graphesis,’ hence, seen as “the entry into writing” (Edelman 1994: 09), denotes a tradition of Western discourses on ‘homosexual identity;’ an identity “differentially conceptualized by a heterosexual culture as something legibly written on the body” (Edelman 1994: 09). Sissigraphy, I will claim, is similarly ‘legibly written on the body’ in gestures as well as in dress. At times, it will be literally *written on* the body through the use of make-up. The make-up therefore becomes both instrumental and figurative of the notion of writing in the practice.

As a queer project, however, Edelman’s *Homographesis* uses ‘writing’ as a destabilising force. “Like writing,” he explains, “homographesis would name a double operation: one serving the ideological purposes of conservative social order intent on codifying identities in its labor of disciplinary inscription, and the other resistant to that categorization, intent on *de*-scribing the identities that order has so oppressively *inscribed*” (Edelman 1994: 10). In other words, ‘writing’ appears to negotiate a paradoxical pull in Edelman’s theory; it first serves the purpose of codifying, stabilising (or ‘*inscribing*’) identities to later offer some form of internal resistance, which ‘*de*-scribes’ the same codes it has helped inscribe. This concept is thus germane to my proposed historiography of effeminacy in chapter one where I write a history of effeminacy in order to later resist traditional writings of clinical, legal and social discourses.

In sum, ‘writing’ (or ‘graphy’) is brought in relation to the question of an effeminate body as text, “a body that always demands to be read, a body on which ... ‘sexuality’ is always already inscribed” (Edelman 1994: 10). Finally, I will also speak of ‘the

writing of space' in the sense of institutionalised regulation of borders (Houlbrook 2005), in my use of a choreo-graphy on stage and in the 're-writing' urban spaces with reference to Larry Knopp (2007) and Halberstam (2005) in chapter four. Chapter three will touch on writing by describing how violence can leave 'marks' (or writings) on the body. My conclusion will propose a re-inscription of sissiness by pointing towards a new sissigraphy.

Sissy Canon

What visibly sticks out ... what is salient to observers, especially alien ones, is gender nonconformity (Murray 2000: 293).

Effeminacy is a historically varying concept deployed primarily as a means of stabilizing a given society's concept of masculinity and controlling the conduct of its men (Hennen 2008: 48).

This chapter investigates the history (or the evolution) of male effeminacy in Western civilisation. Its main goal is to argue that social perceptions of male effeminacy are, contrary to commonly held mainstream assumptions, largely unstable, varied and nuanced. As I will show, social perceptions of effeminacy have undergone important changes throughout history. What the ancient Greeks might have associated with effeminacy, for instance, might not resonate with what current Western society does today; although, at times, it will. More important perhaps—and what this chapter endeavours to challenge—is the belief that effeminacy is a monolithic concept even for those living and sharing a similar set of conventions in a fixed historical period. In other words, the concept of male effeminacy may change not only from one historical period to the next but it may also vary within a common society. Therefore, effeminacy must not necessarily be exclusively trapped within the conventional associations with same-sex desire, practices and cultures that it normally has been.

In order to contest such associations, I will look back at some Western traditions of male effeminacy. As I delineate the history of feminine behaviour in men and its respective and evolving social perceptions, my intention will be to show that I, as a sissy today, am to a certain extent a cultural heir to the *kinaidos*, the molly and the quean yet I am not on a par with them in every single respect. My position as a gender nonconformist, effeminate man in today's society is different to theirs in their times. Inevitably, there will be some important parallels; and I will draw on them. By establishing this 'historical chain' (to use Butler's expression) of gender identity between me, the *kinaidos*, the molly and the quean, I am not by any means trying to determine that my position as an effeminate man today is an essential one, that it is a given. Instead, I see my effeminacy as more closely associated with Hennen's idea of "surface play" ... rather than as essentialist behaviour" (Hennen 2008: 40). In this I am setting myself in opposition to Rictor Norton's (1997) proposition.

“Most queens,” says Norton, “are as recognizable for their characteristic speech, mannerisms and bearings as are Jamaicans, Italians, Pakistanis or any other ethnic group” (1997: 19). Whilst there might be some truth to the above statement—and, indeed, my main argument in fact relies on some of those characteristic mannerisms, bearings and speech of queens—my stance is that these mannerisms and bearings that Norton isolates must be seen as strictly culturally bound and not, as he appears to claim, essential traits of any given group—ethnic or gendered.²⁵

Looking at past models of effeminacy will allow me a better understanding of my own positionality as a feminine-gendered, male-bodied individual today, which in turn will hopefully shed some light into the future (and the social inadequacies) of sissies like myself. According to Love (2007), looking back in history can be an effective way of “attending to the specific histories of homophobic exclusion and violence—as well as their effects—[and] can help us see the structure of inequality in the present” (2007: 30).²⁶ Therefore, my strategy of looking back in history attempts to contribute to the project of alleviating the tough realities and struggling social issues of sissies in present and future alike.

²⁵ One can draw a parallel here between Norton’s hypothesis and the mannerisms and bearings of, for instance, ballet dancers. Having been trained in ballet, I am able to spot other ballet dancers on the streets by the way they walk—the erect spine, the stiff chest, the solid and immobile trunk, the turned-out feet and hips, the weightless steps, among other things. I am able to recognise some female ballet dancers by the way they do their hair and their make-up and by the kind of jewellery or clothing they might be wearing. I have been spotted myself by strangers on the street (supposedly dancers themselves) who have asked me point-blank if I was a dancer. Their speculative thoughts supposedly originated from their reading of my body just like my recognition of other dancers on the streets has come out of such readings as well. These recognisable mannerisms and bearings are, in the case of ballet dancers, clearly not essential or genetic. In other words, a ballet dancer is not born walking in such a way. On the contrary, we become acculturated into such bodies through rigorous training. We even learn to share a common language and a vocabulary. The same might apply to ‘queens’ who are, admittedly, potentially recognisable for their bearings and speech. Nevertheless, that is not to say that they constitute an ethnic group on that basis as Norton appears to be suggesting. In chapter five, I will return to this association between gender and dance as corporeal styles to explain how I have explored this relation in performance practice.

²⁶ In *Backward Glances* (2003), Mark Turner adopts a similar strategic approach: he looks back in history as a way to gain a deeper understanding of the present and thus be prepared to propose a new future. Muñoz has similarly claimed that *Cruising Utopia* “offers a theory of queer futurity that is attentive to the past for the purposes of critiquing a present” (2009: 18).

Whilst conventional contemporary associations with male effeminacy might be largely related to same-sex desire, behaviour and practices (associations that, as I will show, can be partially traced back to classical thought), the history of Western representation and discourse (Gleason 1990, Murray 2000, Halperin 2002, Naphy 2006) allows us a multi-dimensional understanding of feminine behaviour in men, far broader than mainstream discourse has often been ready to convey.

David Halperin (2002), for instance, has shown that effeminacy in ancient civilisations might have been connected to a different set of ideas and values than we today—after the culmination of what Foucault has called the paradigmatic shift in sexual discourse (more on this below)—might associate it with. “Effeminacy,” claims Halperin, “has traditionally functioned as a sign of heterosexual excess in men” (2002: 112). “Men who pursued a life of pleasures,” he continues, “who made love instead of war ... incarnated the classical stereotype of effeminacy” (Halperin 2002: 112). The fact that effeminate men might have been regarded as ‘womanisers’ in antiquity might in itself challenge some of our present-day assumptions regarding gender conventions. Halperin argues that effeminates were regarded as “womanizers because they deviated from the masculine option of war” (2002: 111) and demonstrated “a skilful use of cosmetics, so as to be attractive to women” (2002: 112).²⁷ An effeminate man, according to classical thought, might therefore be a man who actively rejects conventional ideals of masculinity; a man who deviates from the ideal of war; a man who—more like a woman—indulges in pleasure to the detriment of self-moderation. An effeminate man, according to classical thought, was, in other words, not necessarily or instantly associated with what we later come to understand as a ‘homosexual.’

Murray (2000) appears to concur with Halperin. For him, the ancient concept of effeminacy as a sign of heterosexual excess has even found echoes in the English language. “The old meaning of *effeminate* in English,” claims Murray, “is ‘preferring the company of females to that of males.’ Contempt for unmasculinity did not preclude suspicions that effeminate males sought to have sex with females, that they

²⁷ I will later in this chapter extend on the idea of using make-up as (a) a form of sexual availability or advertisement pursued by some effeminate men pre-Stonewall and (b) an integral part of the sissy’s sense of being. In chapter five, I will extend on the importance of make-up as a recurring element in the practice developed as part of (and alongside) the present research.

were not just gossiping and comparing coutures and coiffures” (Murray 2000: 354, original emphasis). For Murray, the connection between classical discourse and pre-modern English conventions can be identified in the literary works of Marlowe and Shakespeare (Murray 2000: 154, cf. Sinfield 1994).²⁸ Even if the notion of effeminacy as heterosexual excess in men might come across as somewhat outdated nowadays—and, for some, maybe even contentious—it might still be fair to say that suspicions that “some men simulate femininity as a cover for seducing women” (Murray 2000: 354) still remain somewhat current in modern representations (or are at least present in the popular imagination) of effeminate men today.²⁹ The further implication of this idea of pretense is, of course, that when accepting that some men might ‘put on’ effeminacy as a cover to gain easier access to feminine environments and, consequently, to women as sexual objects, one must also accept the notion that gender rules might not be fixed after all but, rather, should be regarded as malleable, bendable and possible to manipulate. Gender is, to a certain extent, something one can ‘play with.’ In chapter two, I will extend on this concept of gender as malleable by referring to Butler’s idea of citationality.

The Wilde effect

Furthermore, Sinfield’s research (1994) on contemporary notions of effeminacy around the time of Oscar Wilde’s trials appears to corroborate the idea of effeminacy as a trait of heterosexual excess in men as part of the English tradition. Effeminacy before the trials, says Sinfield, meant “being emotional and spending too much time with women. Often it involved cross-sexual attachment” (Sinfield 1994: 27). For Sinfield, the 1895 Wilde trials demarcate a conceptual shifting point in early modern European history. “Until the trials,” he comments, “effeminacy and homosexuality did not correlate in the way they have done subsequently” (Sinfield 1994: 04). Wilde’s effeminacy was perceived, according to Sinfield, as a sign of ‘aristocratic

²⁸ In the introduction to his book, Alan Sinfield (1994) situates this sentiment of heterosexual excess in effeminacy in the work of Shakespeare and Marlowe. In their work, he claims, being effeminate meant giving too much attention to women, not being interested in ‘manly’ things, namely, ‘war.’ An effeminate man was seen as a womaniser, a man who gave too much attention to pleasure and who sought pleasure too avidly.

²⁹ In the film *Shampoo* (1975, dir. Hal Ashby), for example, Warren Beatty plays a hairdresser who pretends to be homosexual in order to have more access to sex with women.

refinement' rather than as a sign of 'queerness.'³⁰ Wilde's dandy affectations were indeed a sign of a long established English tradition of upper-class behaviour and mannerisms. As such, they did not necessarily involve any suspicions of same-sex attachments. For Sinfield, Wilde remains the culmination of a representation dating back to the eighteenth-century.

The aristocratic fop and the molly subculture in 1700s England

The aristocratic figure represented by Wilde before his trials might, to a certain extent, be conceived of as one of the most notorious cultural heirs of the eighteenth-century character type known as the fop. Although in the eighteenth-century aristocracy, as Sinfield has suggested, effeminacy "embodied aspirations towards refinement, sensibility and taste" (1994: 52), this period was also the time of the mollies. It is therefore a particularly interesting historical moment for my current examination of social perceptions of effeminacy since it allows me to better illustrate an important point: namely, that social perceptions of effeminacy might vary not only from one historical period to the next but also within the same socio-historical context. Nowhere can this be better demonstrated perhaps than in the period of the 1700s in England. Here, as Sinfield's comparison reveals, "the aristocrat with his admiration for opera, girlish education, foppish clothes, continental manners, tea-drinking was also [like the molly] considered effeminate but had little to do with mollies" (Sinfield 1994: 40).³¹

"The eighteenth-century effeminacy," continues Sinfield, "came to function as a general signal of aristocracy" (1994: 40). "But," contributes Rey, "if the same mode of attire was sported by a member of a lower class, it became an indication of the wearer's real effeminacy" (in Sinfield 1994: 41).³² We can see here how there

³⁰ 'Queer' in the time of Wilde was an expression used to mean what later came to be referred to as 'homosexual.' Later, in the late 1980s and early 1990s, 'queer' was reclaimed as part of a political gesture of 'reverse discourse' (Foucault 1998 [1976]: 101) by a group of activists and theorists intent on resignifying the term's oppressive meaning.

³¹ Rey has explained that the aristocrat was *expected* to be effeminate "so same-sex passion was not foregrounded by his manner" (in Sinfield 1994: 41). "With lower-class young men," he continues, "it was otherwise" (in Sinfield 1994: 41).

³² Sinfield supports this idea of a class divide in modes of representing effeminacy by claiming that mollies seem to have been generally from the lower-to-middle-class strata (servants and tradesmen) (Sinfield 1994: 39). In his investigation of modern queer South African culture, Tucker (2009) has observed that a similar pattern remains prevalent in that

existed at least two cultural modes of effeminacy at this time: (a) the ‘real effeminacy’ of the mollies—which seems to denote a sort of a character and moral flaw and, with it, appears to bring considerable stigma—and (b) the refined, cultured effeminacy of the aristocrats—which is largely idealised in this period and, hence, seems to stand as a non-stigmatised position. This dualistic notion of effeminacy within one common society appears to support Sinfield’s earlier statement that the Wilde trials of 1895 have indeed marked a conceptual shift in thinking. After the trials, effeminacy appears to have become more readily associated with same-sex desire. There is evidently a relation between class and effeminacy which the Wilde trials have helped flesh out. I shall return to it with reference to Hennen (2008) in chapter two.

Before the trials, however, the 1700 molly-house subculture in England has also been identified as a crucial point in the evolving discourse and social perceptions of effeminacy and same-sex behaviour. For Sinfield, this is the period when the pattern begins to change radically; a change that, for him, appears to have climaxed with the trials. It is with the development of the 1700s molly subculture that the social convention that a man might sexually approach another man or a woman in equal measure begins to become obsolete. “The sodomite,” argues Sinfield, “became an individual interested in his own gender and inveterately effeminate and passive; and the manly libertine had to restrict himself to women as sexual partners” (1994: 37).³³ “So,” he concludes, “in the public mind effeminacy in dress began to be associated with sodomy between males” (Sinfield 1994: 37).

country. The ‘moffies,’ which he has identified as individuals belonging to “a coloured community based on effeminate gendered performances” (2009: 74) have been commonly looked down upon “by the wider middle class” (Tucker 2009: 90). “Class,” he concludes, “remains an important contributing factor in these queer men’s views of drag [seen as a practice adopted by visibly effeminate men]” (Tucker 2009: 90).

³³ The term ‘sodomite’ originated in law to define the individual who practices ‘sodomy,’ described as the act of ‘unnatural’ sex. The term derived from the association with the biblical story of Sodom and Gomorrah (Book of Genesis) as places of grave sin and has entered common speech as a synonym for homosexual. Elisabeth Badinter has defined sodomy, with reference to Jeffrey Weeks, by saying it “is a ‘catchall term’ that includes sexual contacts—not necessarily anal—between men, men and animals, men and women, that go against the idea of reproduction” (1992: 98).

The relocation of effeminacy

At this point, Sinfield claims, homosexuality as we know it came into being and the key move appears to have been the relocation of effeminacy (Sinfield 1994: 38). In other words, the notion of effeminacy—as performed by the mollies—seems to have become associated with the later idea of a psychological failing inherent in the notion of homosexuality. It appears to have become a sort of an internal, almost essential, character defect whereas hitherto it appeared to have been largely perceived as a form of a social deviance; as a quality that any man who rejected masculine values could have potentially embodied. Effeminacy becomes central to the later construction of the discourse of homosexuality and the creation of types such as ‘the invert’ (Krafft-Ebbing), ‘the woman’s soul trapped in a man’s body’ (Ulrichs) and all other categories that focused on gender deviance to explain homosexuality (more on this later in this chapter). Lucas appears to concur with this ‘relocation of effeminacy’ paradigm by suggesting that the rise of the molly had a direct effect on the association of cross-dressing (a perceived form of effeminacy) with homosexual identity (1994: 51).

The molly houses, suggests Lucas, of which “there were many ... in London during the eighteenth-century ... played an important role in radical gender inversions in Renaissance England” (Lucas 1994: 51).³⁴ They were, he continues, “the secret meeting places of effeminate homosexuals” (Lucas 1994: 52), a place where they could safely act an “excessive effeminate role” (Lucas 1994: 52). Although I will defer my investigation of safe and hostile spaces in regards to the sissy until chapter three, it is nevertheless important to highlight at this point that both Lucas and Sinfield have established that the free and ‘excessive’ expression of visible effeminate behaviour was, in the 1700s, already reserved to the confines of ‘safe’ locations; a statement that seems to clearly imply that not all places were safe for the effeminate man at this time. Indeed, as William Naphy has demonstrated, any identifiable adult effeminate sodomite was punishable by law, being placed in the pillory and having, among other things, rotten produce being hurled at him (2006: 237).³⁵ Visibly effeminate men were,

³⁴ For more on the molly houses, see Norton (1992). For a theatrical representation of the molly-houses, see Mark Ravenhill (2001).

³⁵ The public punishment of effeminate sodomites offers a link with what I later discuss (in chapter two) in terms of the systemic bullying of the sissy boy in school as well as the daily violence encountered by sissies. My encounter with Naphy’s description of the pillorying of sodomites in Victorian England, which I transcribe below, is a clear example of where the

moreover, “subjected to assault, and to arrest for the offences of sodomy and attempted sodomy” (Sinfield 1994: 38).

Effeminacy appears therefore to have been central to the construction of a molly subculture in England. As an isolatable concept, visible effeminacy helped forge the discursive construction of an emerging category of individuals. As Bray has shown, “effeminacy and transvestism with specifically homosexual connotations were a crucial part of what gave the molly houses their identity” (in Lucas 1994: 53). Effeminate behaviour starts to become exclusively associated with same-sex desire and culture at this stage, although it is not until the end of the following century, with the invention of homosexuality, that this association is formally addressed.

The conceptual shift epitomised by the advancements of the nineteenth-century sexologists was, as we can see, a long process that can be traced back, at least in England, to the mollies. Although the emerging associations of effeminacy as an exclusive and telling trait of homosexuality—or of sodomy, at the time of the mollies—might be identified as a form of minoritising and later pathologising a group of individuals, it might also be identified as a potentially productive construct if we think in terms of the molly house subculture as one of the initial steps towards historicising community.³⁶

Western traditions of masculinity

So far, we have seen that contrary to modern speculations of effeminacy as a defining trait (or as *the* fundamental symptom) of homosexuality, in classical thought and in pre-modern England this gendered behavioural trait might have been associated with a sense of refinement or with a sense of heterosexual excess in some men or, still, with the desire to spend too much time in the company of women rather than in the company of

reading has had a material impact on the practice in the process of my research. As Naphy puts it, sodomites in that period “were placed in the pillory and the mob hurled faeces, urine, rotten produce (fruit, vegetable and eggs) and even decaying cats at their heads and faces. The acid and bacteria could blind and, if enough of the refuse actually coated the face, suffocation was a distinct possibility” (Naphy 2006: 237). This passage has inspired my performance *Shoot the Sissy!* (2010) with the hurling of tomatoes, see fn. 13 and fn. 181.

³⁶ As Randolph Trumbach has suggested, “it is from the early eighteenth-century that we should date ‘the model of the gay minority,’ with its subcultures and its roles” (in Sinfield 1994: 37).

men. “In classical discourse,” Murray extends, “loving another male does not effeminize a man” (2000: 154). “If anything,” he continues, “it was loving females too much and desiring to spend time in female company that made men effeminate” (Murray 2000: 154).³⁷ We might still find residues of this latter notion of masculinity in our current ideology. To be a thoroughly masculine man, to be a ‘laddish lad’ today, appears to involve spending more time in male (and equally masculine) company at male-dominated environments like the pub, the football terraces, the football pitch and so on. Spending too much time with girls, by contrast, appears to be for sissies.³⁸

Being effeminate in antiquity might have been associated with giving into a sense of pleasure—a mostly feminine quality—a sense “of being oversexed with both sexes” (Murray 2000: 265). Being masculine, on the other hand, meant forsaking pleasure for the purpose of achieving the more honourable, noble and austere sense of masculinity (cf. Hennen 2008).³⁹ In defining effeminacy, therefore, it might be pertinent to also look at what it is meant by masculinity. As Maud Gleason has claimed, “we infer the

³⁷ Badinter (1992) has written on this subject by claiming that “among ancient peoples it was often understood that men who loved other men were more masculine than their heterosexual counterparts” (1992: 77). “The logical argument behind this,” she continues, “was that men who loved men would try to equal them and be like them, whereas men who loved women would become like them, that is, ‘effeminate’” (Badinter 1992: 77). Edward Carpenter returns, in his writings, to this ancient notion of homosexuality as quintessentially masculine. Although Carpenter’s initial intentions might have been to dissociate homosexuality from the idea of an internal and inborn sense of effeminacy, his writings might have inadvertently given rise to the later cult of masculinity within gay circles and, as a result, to a hatred and contempt for effeminate homosexuals, a minority within a minority.

³⁸ Thorne’s (1993) study addresses this notion of spatial segregation as a process of consolidating gender. He has established that infants as young as two develop the awareness that they share a category with others labelled either ‘boy’ or ‘girl’ (Thorne 1993: 60). “This awareness,” he has shown, “leads girls to want to be with girls, and boys with boys” (Thorne 1993: 60). “When boys associate with boys, and girls with girls,” Thorne has claimed, “they have found a powerful way of ‘doing gender’” (1993: 60). In terms of the effeminate man/boy, Thorne’s findings appear to show that in spending more time with girls, the effeminate appears to *spatially* perform his effeminacy. This tension might work in two separate ways. First, a man might be deemed to be effeminate *because of* his preference for female company (as we have seen above with reference to Murray (2000)). What determines him as an ‘effeminate’ in this case seems to be his use of space, which he occupies ‘in the company of girls.’ Alternatively, his mannerisms or attitude might signify effeminacy first, which appears to be the case of sissy boys in school. Sissy boys are then ‘pushed out’ of male-dominated environments by being verbally or physically abused and are, as a consequence, ‘pushed into’ what Thorne has curiously termed “the contaminating space of girls” (1993: 74). I will return to the sissy boy’s occupation of space in school in chapter four.

³⁹ Hennen suggests that ‘moderation’ was seen as an inherently masculine trait and that any man who indulged in sexual practice (either with other men or with women) was seen as effeminate (2008: 43).

existence of a cultural norm of masculinity from accounts of deviations from it” (1990: 392). In accepting Gleason’s assertion, it must therefore follow that gender deviants, such as the effeminate *kinaidos* in Greece and the *cinaedus* in Rome, have historically served a particular social purpose when it comes to learning and understanding the social rules of gender.

The *kinaidos*, the *cinaedus* (and later the molly), in their visible displays of effeminate behaviour, appear to have been instrumental in the acculturative process of (others) learning what it means to be masculine.⁴⁰ These effeminate types appear to have a function that initially presents itself as seemingly transgressive but that is, when closely inspected, already built into the repressive system of gender learning.⁴¹ In this sense, effeminate men might already “have a place in ... the gallery of types that society erects to show its members which roles should be avoided and which should be emulated” (Sinfield 1994: 187). In chapter three, I will discuss the role of violence and the sissy boy in school as a potentially negative exemplar of masculinity today.

As Gleason has shown, “masculinity in the ancient world was an achieved state, radically undetermined by anatomical sex” (1990: 391, cf. Badinter 1992). “Masculinity,” she continues, “constituted a system of signs. It was a language that anatomical males were taught to speak with their bodies. The process began at birth” (Gleason 1990: 402).⁴² We can identify in Gleason’s study of ancient civilisations some initial considerations of what Butler later developed into her concept of ‘gender performativity’ (more on this in chapter two). In other words, for the ancients (as for Butler (1990) and, before her, for Simone de Beauvoir (1997 [1949])) one is not born

⁴⁰ On a curious historical note regarding the role of the molly as embodying the ideal of a ‘effeminate man,’ Sinfield (1994: 45-46) discusses the case of James Cook, a “big strong fellow” arrested in 1810 where exceptional violence was used on the way to the pillory. The extraordinary violence, speculates Sinfield, was in response to Cook’s refusal to appear effeminate. His attitude as the masculine molly appeared to have been perceived as distinctly provoking since it deviated from the formula ‘feminine molly’ and drew attention to the prevailing ideological confusion. “Such a contradiction in terms,” says Sinfield, “was intolerable” (1994: 45-46).

⁴¹ For Foucault, “dissidence may seem always fatally implicated with that which it aspires to oppose. Even attempts to challenge the system help maintain it. Where there is power,” he has suggested, “there is resistance, and yet, or rather consequently, this resistance is never in a position of exteriority in relation to power” (Foucault (1998 [1976]): 95-96).

⁴² In chapter five, I will extend on this notion of gender as a form of ‘language’ that needs to be ‘learnt’ by making a comparative association between gender and ballet with reference to Butler (1990) and Adrian Heathfield (2006).

masculine or feminine by dint of being born male or female. One is, rather, taught through a series of long-established conventions, how to properly behave ‘like a man’ or ‘like a woman;’ a process that due to its repetitive mode, claims Butler, often gives the impression of an essential trait (see Norton above). Masculinity, it follows, must be regarded as an ideology rather than as an essence. What we need to consider, therefore, in regards to my current argument, is what happens to those who fail to achieve such ideals; ideals, which are, for Butler, always already unattainable to begin with (Butler 1990: 176).⁴³

Gleason’s above assertion is interesting here for the insight it gives us into the gender politics of ancient societies. If masculinity for the ancients was, according to her, not an essential trait, if “it remained fluid and incomplete until firmly anchored by the discipline of an acculturative process” (Gleason 1990: 412), then what happened to those men who were unable to conquer it? Murray (2000), in a later consideration of ancient culture, has similarly argued that “to become an honourable man is a difficult achievement, not at all an automatic consequence of being born male. Those who won’t or can’t make it,” he suggests, “are cast down to female society” (Murray 2000: 256). A man who cannot successfully become a masculine man appears thus to be commonly regarded as ‘effeminate,’ ‘feminine,’ ‘fey,’ among many other seemingly derogatory denominations that, with them, appear to attach considerable stigma to its bearer. An unmasculine man becomes, in sum, a ‘failed man’ (Badinter (1992), Thorne (1993)); he is, in the words of Murray, ‘cast down to female society.’⁴⁴

Effeminacy and passivity

Up to this point, I have shown how effeminacy might have served as a marker of heterosexual excess for the ancients and of refinement in Renaissance England. I will now move to a discussion of effeminacy as more closely related to the idea of ‘passivity’ as stigma in same-sex sexual relations, which I suggest as more closely related to modern conceptions of the gender construct I have been examining. For

⁴³ “‘The normal,’ ‘the original,’” claims Butler, “is ... an ideal that no one *can* embody” (1990: 176, original emphasis).

⁴⁴ What Murray’s expression—‘cast down to female society’—seems to illustrate here is the contempt, in ancient society, for the ‘feminine.’ In other words, anyone who displayed this quality, be they a man or a woman, was looked down upon. There is also an interesting suggestion here of a ‘downwards’ movements associated with femininity. I will explore this further in chapter five in relation to ‘the fall.’

Halperin, the defining elements of the ancient *kinaidos*’ (and of the *cinaedus*’) identity was that (a) he specifically derived pleasure in the act of having sex (with other men and with women), *not* the fact that he engaged in same-sex sexual practices and (b) his gender nonconformist behaviour displayed in dress and comportment.⁴⁵ Engaging in sex with other men in antiquity, was, as Gleason has pointed out, “nothing out of the ordinary” (1990: 412).⁴⁶ It was the pleasure element, which I have discussed earlier, that appears to have set the effeminate man apart from the rest of society in general. “The *kinaidos* could be conceived by the ancients,” argues Halperin, “as a potential threat to the masculine identity of every male ... a class of deviant individuals” (2002: 33).

It is both interesting and intriguing how Halperin defines the effeminate type as a general threat to the potential undoing of masculinity, a threat to *every* male. According to Halperin, the *kinaidos* represents what every man could be like if he were to sacrifice his dignity and masculine gender status for the sake of pleasure-at-any-price (more on the pleasure principle and Bataille in chapter three) since men were seen as those who conquered the masculine ability to withstand the seductive appeal of pleasure (Halperin 2002: 33).⁴⁷ The *kinaidos* was, moreover, “a peculiar, repugnant, and perplexing freak, driven to abandon his sexual and gender identity in pursuit of a pleasure that no one but a woman could possibly enjoy” (Halperin 2002: 34). Halperin demonstrates here how the social status of the *kinaidos* was that of a freak, seen as peculiar, repugnant and

⁴⁵ The *cinaedus*, for instance, has been described by Latin physiognomists as having “a tilted head, a mincing gait, an enervated voice, a lack of stability in the shoulders, and a feminine way of walking” (in Halperin 2002: 35). The body of the *cinaedus*, in the above description, sounds remarkably fitting of a contemporary notion of an effeminate body.

⁴⁶ Despite the fact that, as Gleason has suggested, sex among males was nothing out of the ordinary in ancient Greece, it is important to point out that such practice followed a strict set of moral and social codes. As Naphy has claimed, although “same sex acts and relationships remained an important and accepted feature of Greek society” (2006: 56), pederasty in classical Greece “was fairly institutionalised” (Naphy 2006: 52), it usually involved a young, primarily passive adolescent male having sex with an older, primarily active, adult male (Naphy 2006: 52, see also Betsky 1997: 32).

⁴⁷ Halperin offers an analogy that might help us better understand the social standing of the *kinaidos* in ancient society. He claims that the ancients might have believed that while anyone can feel the pleasures of being penetrated—it is, he proposes, a universal pleasure—only those who had something fundamentally wrong with them succumbed. The modern equivalent to that reasoning might be, Halperin suggests, that whilst *anyone* can become addicted to drugs, only those who have something fundamentally wrong with them do (Halperin 2002: 34).

perplexing for what was regarded as his reprehensible resemblance to a woman in his pleasure-seeking antics and in his gender nonconformist behaviour.

The *kinaidos*'—as his Roman counterpart, the *cinaedus*'—downfall appeared to be the fact that he, as an adult male, often acted as the inserted, passive partner in sexual intercourse with other men. This practice—itself a breach of commonly accepted moral codes—was not the only cause of the *kinaidos*' stigma. The fact that he was perceived to be deriving pleasure from occupying such a position was perhaps a more grave matter. As Williams (2002) has pointed out, “a *cinaedus* was ... a man who failed to be fully masculine, whose effeminacy showed itself in such symptoms as feminine clothing and mannerism” (in Halperin 2002: 36).⁴⁸ The *cinaedus*' effeminacy, continues Williams, showed itself in “his predilection for playing the receptive role in penetrative acts” (in Halperin 2002: 37). This classification of the ‘passive’ or ‘receptive’ partner as inferior has later appeared in the work of European sexologist Richard von Krafft-Ebing. As Halperin has shown (2002: 114), for Krafft-Ebing, a man who practices ‘active’ sex with other men and with women but looks normal, by penetrating another man was seen as having a ‘perversion.’ In other words, there was nothing constitutionally wrong with him. He was not ‘sick’ but might be seen as ‘immoral.’ His ‘active’ position with another man was regarded as a manifestation of his normal sexual appetite, albeit somewhat reprehensible and abominable.

Whereas the ‘active’ partner was seen as being ‘perverted,’ ‘immoral’ and having a ‘vice;’ the ‘passive’ partner was, conversely, regarded as being ‘perverted,’ ‘pathological’ and having a ‘disease.’⁴⁹ Williams’ earlier statement clearly suggests that being the passive partner in same-sex sexual encounters played a significant role in the *cinaedus*' stigmatisation and marginalisation from society in general. His (sexual) passivity, continues Williams, was also “a sign of a more fundamental transgression of *gender* categories” (in Halperin 2002: 37).

⁴⁸ See chapter two for a further investigation of clothing and mannerisms as markers of effeminacy.

⁴⁹ Naphy dates the repudiation for ‘passives’ further back by claiming that “in ancient civilisations (e.g. Assyrian and Hittite), same-sex sexual relationships might have been ubiquitous even if the one taking the ‘passive’ role was generally repudiated” (2006: 22).

This investigation of ‘passivity’ as a stigmatised position will later link with my analysis of the sissy as a ‘ruined identity’ (Love 2007: 30). There still remains today, I would suggest, certain contempt for the passive partner in homosexual practices and cultures. I will later claim, in chapters two and three, that this element of passivity might be one of the defining elements of the perceived repudiation of the sissy today. Williams describes in his above statement how gender comes to play a fundamental role in the stigmatisation of the *cinaedus*. I now begin to enter a more focused analysis of the politics of gender transgression in history.

Gender deviance

With the nineteenth-century invention of homosexuality, engaging in sex with other men becomes the definitional element of a new category of individuals. Before that, argues Gleason, “the ancient *cinaedus* was defined not in terms of the gender of his sex partners”—an element that after the institution of homosexuality becomes fundamentally characteristic of the homosexual. Rather, the *cinaedus* was defined, she continues, “by his own gender deviance, his departure from the norms of ‘correct’ masculine deportment ... what made him different from normal folk,” she concludes, “was not simply the fact that his sexual partners included people of the same sex as himself (that, after all, was nothing out of the ordinary) ... but rather an inversion or reversal of his gender identity: his abandonment of a ‘masculine’ role in favour of a ‘feminine’ one” (Gleason 1990: 411-412).

What Gleason’s reasoning appears to confirm here is my suspicion that gender deviance has been the core issue all along. Gender nonconformity seems to be what transhistorically and transculturally necessitates correction for it is, in the end, what is immediately and most visibly displayed at any given moment. Gender behaviour seems to become of paramount significance in Gleason’s analysis of the categorisation of this character type. The effeminate *cinaedus* seems to be looked down upon, first and foremost, for giving up his masculinity; a masculinity that is defined through conventional behavioural codes and specific sexual practices. One appears to be primarily assessed according to how much one accepts or how much one rejects gender codes, rather than sexual codes. Nevertheless, this equation is not as simple as it might initially appear. Sexual politics in antiquity seemed to have been strictly codified (as

explained in fn. 44) so deviating from such codes was enough to deem an individual a ‘freak’ (Halperin 2002: 34) in society’s eyes.

Furthermore, associations between sex and gender remain somewhat incoherent during and after the developments brought about by the scientific advancements of the late nineteenth century by European sexologists. A man who engages in sex with other men might have come to be classified as a homosexual since then. However, the methods applied for identifying a homosexual—or, in other words, the so-called ‘symptoms’ of homosexuality—appear to remain irrevocably similar to those symptoms used to identify gender nonconformists. In chapter two I will investigate some of the more contemporary implications of the same issue in relation to the exclusion of homosexuality from the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual’s list of mental illnesses. This exclusion, according to some queer theorists such as Kosofsky Sedgwick (1994), should be regarded not as an exclusion *per se* of homosexuality but, rather, as a manoeuvre to re-articulate discourses surrounding ‘homosexuality as a pathology’ into discourses of ‘gender nonconformity as a pathology.’

The personage of the nineteenth-century homosexual and his gendered symptoms

I have thus far examined how social perceptions of effeminacy have undergone significant change in history, from heterosexual excess, to refinement, to passivity. I will now explore the inversion paradigm and its future implications for the effeminate man in social, medical and legal discourses. My analysis has a specific focus here: to demonstrate how the creation of the new character type of the homosexual man has been largely tainted by the common repudiation—which still remains—of visible displays of gender deviance.

As Foucault famously claimed in *The History of Sexuality: Volume 1* (1998 [1976]), developments in scientific research at the end of the nineteenth and beginning of the twentieth century in Europe can be singled out as the moment when a major conceptual discursive shift in sexuality began to take place. A whole host of sexual acts began to be articulated as a static notion of identity according to a ‘preference’ of sexual-object

choice.⁵⁰ These many forms of sexual behaviours began to be classified under one of two mutually exclusive categories according to the anatomical sex of the participants involved in the act. The binary produced—same-sex (homosexual) versus different-sex (heterosexual) practices—tended to reproduce the already existing male/female binary following dominant values of hegemonic power.⁵¹ This shift came as the result of an intensive period of medical research and social change, but, as Halberstam rightly points out (1998: 75), should not be seen as an achievement constrained to this period. Rather, it should be understood as part of a longer process of emergence of sexual identity, part of which I have delineated above.

Historians of sexuality (Foucault 1998 [1976], Halperin 1990, Naphy 2006 et al) have shown that the term ‘homosexual’ was coined at the end of the nineteenth century. Foucault marks “Westphal’s famous article of 1870 on ‘contrary sexual sensations’ ... as its date of birth” (Foucault 1998 [1976]: 43). Halperin (1990: 15) suggests that ‘homosexual’ was first used in English by Charles Gilbert Chaddock in the year 1892 in a translation of the *Psychopathia sexualis* written by Krafft-Ebing twenty years earlier. In a more recent study, Naphy (2006: 248) credits the psychologist Karoly Maria Benkert for coining the term as early as 1848 and suggests it was popularised in the works of Magnus Hirschfeld and Havelock Ellis. Ellis, a British sexologist and contemporary of Freud (Naphy 2006: 249), advocated tolerance in his writing (*Sexual Inversion* (1897), among others) arguing that homosexuality was congenital and hence not a choice. Ellis’ claim for tolerance—a claim he shared with other sexologists of the time such as Hirschfeld and Karl Heinrich Ulrichs—might be seen here as a political stance and, as such, the origins of what later evolved into the homophile movement.⁵²

⁵⁰ Halperin suggests that before the invention of homosexuality, there were separate denominations for each of the partners in the same-sex sexual act. The ‘active’ partner was generally referred to as the ‘sodomite’ whilst the ‘passive’ partner was the ‘catamite.’ “The hallmark of ‘homosexuality,’” argues Halperin, “is the refusal to distinguish between same-sex sexual partners” (2002: 132). “One name for governing individuals en masse,” he concludes, “is normalization” (Halperin 2002: 136).

⁵¹ As Sinfield has suggested, “homosexuality and heterosexuality are mutually defining concepts; the one is stigmatised because it is not the other” (1994: 203).

⁵² ‘Homophile movement’ is the expression generally used before the Stonewall riots of June 1969 to refer to groups organised by homosexuals, brought together by the common focus of fighting for what they perceived were their rights to integrate into society.

The main point I want to raise in what regards the emergence of homosexuality in Western discourse is its subsequent connection with gender deviance; a connection I find disturbing in its insistent and lingering presence in contemporary ideas of effeminacy, in the fossilisation it later occasioned of the cult of the masculine man and—as a result of this ideological mechanism—the hatred and contempt for the feminine man.⁵³ As we have previously seen with reference to Sinfield (1994: 38), the invention of homosexuality as a category might have been somewhat facilitated by the relocation of effeminacy. This relocation in the context of the medical sciences might be seen as a key move in the construction of the discourses of homosexuality. Effeminate males, according to that schema, became representative of a pathological model of sexuality; a model which relied mainly on gender deviance traits in order to characterise a certain character type.

Sexological types such as ‘the invert,’ originally created by Krafft-Ebing and further developed by Ellis (Halberstam 1998: 76) and ‘the woman’s soul trapped in a man’s body’—or *anima muliebris virili corpore inclusa*—a category originally identified as his own by Ulrichs (Halperin 1990: 16) were formally described as primarily gender nonconformists and psychologically flawed.⁵⁴ What I object to is what Hennen has

⁵³ The cult of the masculine and the subsequent contempt for the effeminate man is an issue that has influenced not only the present research and the practice associated with it but, by and large, my performance practice in general. In that sense, there seems to be a potential ideological parallel that could be made with the work of queer performance artist David Hoyle. Although the language and the aesthetic of his performances might be seen as different from mine, he has repeatedly expressed, on stage, his anger at the cult of the masculine body within gay male environments. I have the performance *Dave’s Drop-In Centre*, which I saw at the Royal Vauxhall Tavern in 2009, especially in mind when drawing this parallel.

⁵⁴ The primacy of gender behaviour over sexual practice as a defining characteristic of the invert—one of the first characters in the typology of homosexuality—has been highlighted by Sinfield. “In the case of the invert in the discourse of the 19th century sexologist,” he has shown, “social behaviour [i.e. ‘effeminacy’] was defining, and sexual practice was secondary” (Sinfield 1994: 46). Furthermore, on the discursive construction of identities, Norton (in Sinfield 1994: 110) reminds us that “as far as we can tell, gay men did not think of themselves as women trapped in men’s bodies until the sexologists began popularising this term in the 1860s.” In what regards my performance practice, the physicality implicit in terms such as ‘inversion’ and ‘trapped’ have inspired reflection and have helped develop the bodily discourse of the research. In *In My Shoes* (2006), I explored the idea of being trapped by using a trunk, from which I emerged in the beginning of the piece and to which I returned at the end (see figure 02, clips ‘Hernando’s Hideaway’ and ‘I Take This Shoe’ in *In My Shoes*, DVD 2). My use of the trunk has also fomented some further considerations in terms of (inside and outside) space and confinement, on which more in chapter four. In *Crumbs!*, I experimented with the idea of the inverted position by delivering voiced text while in a

described as “the inversion paradigm [as] an essentialist concept that ascribes effeminacy to some kind of psychological ‘mistake’” (Hennen 2008: 36). In chapter two, I will show how this idea of ascribing effeminate behaviour to a psychological failing might still be resonant today in the Gender Identity Disorder diagnosis and treatment, for instance, and the damages it might cause. Ulrichs, it must be pointed out, was, similarly to his contemporary Ellis, also an outspoken advocate of sexual minority rights (Halperin 1990: 16, Naphy 2006: 249). The main goal of both their studies therefore appears to have been to advocate tolerance even if, unknowingly, they might have ended up somewhat aiding the institutionalisation of certain gender stereotypes and setting the terms (see fn. 52).

The view of homosexuality as a congenital and pathological condition within psychoanalytical discourses such as the one developed by Sigmund Freud at the beginning of the twentieth century offered itself to the idea that a ‘cure’ might be available.⁵⁵ On the other hand, the view of homosexuality as an inborn condition was, one could argue, what prompted a political reaction from homosexuals themselves who demanded to be treated equally and did not wish to be discriminated against for a condition that they supposedly had no ‘choice’ over. Foucault has explained this counter-reactive discourse under the coin ‘reversibility of power.’ For him, discourse produces power but might also serve to undermine power. “Foucault’s paradigmatic example of such a turn,” shows Love, “is the invention of homosexuality in its modern form out of sexological, medical, and criminal discourses of the late nineteenth century” (2007: 02). “Describing the transition from the legal and religious human sciences that classified homosexuality (or, more properly, inversion) as an illness,” she continues,

headstand (see figure 03, clip ‘Headstand’ in *Crumbs!*, DVD 2). The difficulty of maintaining this position was felt in my body and voice, which later opened space for a further reflection on the impact of effeminacy (or inversion) and the body (chapters two and three).

⁵⁵ Naphy has suggested that this view of homosexuality “combined in the 1930s with emerging ideas about racial purity and eugenics [had] disastrous consequences” (2006: 249), resulting in “what most research suggests ... over 20,000 homosexual men ... murdered in concentration camps by the Nazis” (Naphy 2006: 252). The play *Bent* (1979, Martin Sherman) proposes a theatrical representation of such events. *Bent* has been adapted for screen by Sherman. The film has been directed by Sean Mathias (1997) and stars Clive Owen, Ian McKellen and Mick Jagger. Some of the treatments and cures available for homosexuality at the beginning of the twentieth century have included, Naphy has shown, castration, hormone injections, hypnosis and, up until 1979 in West Germany, lobotomy (2006: 249-252).

“Foucault argues that the creation of this new social category enabled the emergence of the first homophile movement” (Love 2007: 02).⁵⁶

The categorisation of homosexuality as a congenital ‘disease’ might have had, as we can see, its potentially productive effects. For Warner, “the Gay Movement came into being only when the assumption that ‘homosexuality’ was pathological was suddenly resisted” (1999: 137). Important figures in the genesis of a counter-reactive political discourse, what later came to be known as the homophile movement might include Ulrichs, seen as an advocate for the rights of sexual minorities before 1862 (Halperin 1990: 16); Ellis, who advocated tolerance in *Sexual Inversion* (Naphy 2006: 248); Carpenter, regarded as an early advocate of equal rights for homosexuals (Goldstein 2002: 24); Hirschfeld, a member of German socialist groups at the time of the Weimar Republic and one of the founders of the Philatelic Society, an organisation that, according to Richard Goldstein, might be regarded as “the first party to organise homosexuals” (2002: 24).

Effeminate behaviour and the homophile movement

The relocation of effeminacy, which Sinfield (1994: 38) proposes as the instrumental paradigm for the original conceptualisation of the homosexual male later becomes a major point of tension within the growing discourses of equal rights groups organised by homosexuals. It is in this period that effeminacy starts to acquire the one-dimensional meaning I have been arguing against, the idea that visibly effeminate homosexuals—a category Crisp has declared a minority within a minority (in Mitchell 1970); a category he claims to belong to—are shameful and representative of the main taboos from which other ‘respectable’ and manly homosexuals are trying to dissociate themselves.

This polarisation of flamers and queens at one extreme and masculine-looking and masculine-acting homosexuals at the other, which somewhat characterised the homophile movement of the beginning of the twentieth century, has given rise to many of the discourses of tolerance that have followed it since, both within and without the

⁵⁶ In Foucault’s own words, “homosexuality began to speak on its own behalf, to demand that its legitimacy and ‘naturalness’ be acknowledged, often in the same vocabulary, using the same categories by which it was medically disqualified” (Foucault 1998 [1976]: 101).

ranks of the gay community.⁵⁷ Whereas the homophile movement—and later the homo-cons⁵⁸ of the 1990s—were united by the principles of acceptance and assimilation into mainstream society, principles that mimicked heteronormative values to a certain extent; the homo-cons mainly advocated the idea of remaining invisible, looking normal and rescuing homosexuality from what they appear to see as its degrading associations with gender deviance. Whereas homo-cons seemed to demonstrate a certain repudiation of feminine men and masculine women, the more liberationist groups appeared to be, on the other hand, united by what they perceived as their freedom and right to be otherly.

In the later part of the twentieth century, in the period post-Stonewall, this ideological schism between rejecting effeminacy and embracing it might have culminated in a subcultural divide epitomised by the emergence of the Clone culture in the late 1960s and early 1970s.⁵⁹ But, as Gough points out, there is a certain self-aware playfulness in the deliberate manipulation of gender codes presented by the Clones. “Gay masculinity [e.g. as represented by the Clones],” he has argued, “is not, in any simple way, ‘real’ masculinity, any more than Camp is ‘real’ femininity. It is more self-conscious than the real thing, more theatrical, and often more ‘ironic’” (in Sinfield 1994: 194).⁶⁰ The mentality represented and promulgated by the Clones, however, is often disputed in its perceived oppression of the effeminate queens and for passing on to them the hegemonic control heteronormative society has often been keen to enforce towards the homosexual. “There is a tendency among ‘homophile’ groups,” claims Miller, “to deplore gays who play visible roles—the queens and nellies. As liberated gays, we must take a clear stand. 1) Gays who stand out have become our first martyrs. They came out and withstood disapproval before the rest of us did. 2) If they have suffered

⁵⁷ Sinfield has shown how this polarisation has appeared in the work of Carpenter, for example. Effeminates were, for Carpenter, ‘extreme specimens’ of homosexuals and not ‘the more normal and perfect types’ (in Sinfield 1994: 114).

⁵⁸ The expression ‘homo-cons’ or ‘homocons,’ short-hand for ‘homosexual conservatives,’ has been largely associated with the rise of the gay conservative movement in the United States in the 1990s, led mainly by writer Andrew Sullivan (1995). ‘Homo-cons’ advocated assimilationist politics and invisibility in mainstream society.

⁵⁹ I will offer an extended discussion of the idealisation and fetishisation of masculinity in chapter five by demonstrating how I have used the song *Macho Man* by the Village People as a tool that has allowed me to comment on the idea of gender relations in the body. For an account on how this might relate to contemporary queer practice, see fn. 51.

⁶⁰ For a more extended analysis of ‘Camp’ as theatrical, ironic and ‘fake,’ see Susan Sontag (1994).

from being open, it is straight society whom we must indict, not the queen” (in a 1969 Gay Manifesto in Hennen 2008: 12).

Homosexuality and the law

In what regards the legal discourse of homosexuality, it is crucial to highlight at this juncture the fact that homosexuality was illegal in Britain up until the twentieth century.⁶¹ This clearly has important implications in terms of social interactions between homosexuals and social perceptions of homosexuals by the ‘outside’ community. More specifically still, in what regards the scope of my research, effeminate behaviour in the period after the invention of homosexuality and before the Stonewall riots (more on this below), in the form of visible displays through the use of feminine clothes and gestures could serve a very particular function. For Crisp (2007 [1968]) and for the interwar ‘quean’ (Houlbrook 2005),⁶² this form of gender nonconformist behaviour might have been used as a form of sexual advertisement, as a form of ready signalling to other homosexuals, although it should not be understood as restricted to that.⁶³

⁶¹ Lucas (1994) and Sinfield (1994) have both shown that Britain has a history of prosecuting homosexuals. “By 1861, with the Offences Against the Person Act, the death penalty for sodomy was replaced with penal servitude, between ten years and life” (Lucas 1994: 34). In 1885, the Labouchere Amendment was passed, making all homosexual acts illegal (Lucas 1994: 35, cf. Sinfield 1994: 9); Wilde’s trials happened in 1895; “by 1898, the Vagrancy Act had also made homosexual ‘soliciting’ illegal” (Lucas 1994: 35). The Wolfenden report of 1957, which “did not reflect an acceptance of homosexuality [but] rather the method and extent of control was refined” (Lucas 1994: 41), led to the Sexual Offences Act being implemented in 1967, legalising some homosexual relations between consenting men over the age of twenty one, effectively ‘privatising’ homosexuality at the same time as differentiating the age of consent between homosexual and heterosexual relations. Lucas suggests that prosecution of gay men radically increased after this law was passed (1994: 42). Homosexuality seemed to be something the government appeared eager to protect its citizens against until fairly recently with the Section 28 of the Local Government Act of 1988. Although this history seems to point to a long-standing tradition of repression in legislation, it might be argued that Britain has made attempts to overcome such history over the past few years with, for example, the repeal of Section 28 in 2003, the Civil Partnership Act of 2004 and the Gender Recognition Act of 2004.

⁶² Houlbrook uses the spelling ‘quean’ instead of ‘queen.’ “While the spellings ‘queen’ and ‘quean’ were used interchangeably in the first half of the twentieth century,” he explains, “I have followed Eric Partridge’s *Dictionary of the Underworld*, in using ‘quean’ as the standard spelling” (2005: 277, fn. 16). In my thesis, I use the spelling ‘quean’ when referring to Houlbrook’s book, otherwise, I will revert to the contemporary, more common version ‘queen.’

⁶³ Hennen demonstrates that in 1920s and 1930s New York, effeminate behaviour went through a somewhat fashionable phase, which he calls the ‘pansy craze’ (2008: 47). After a subsequent crackdown on clubs and theatres in Times Square where effeminate men used to

This specific notion of effeminacy as used in the early part of the twentieth century might have been another residue of the molly subculture. The male prostitute, according to Sinfield, might have used effeminacy as a signal of sexual availability to a client (1994: 46). For the molly, he claims, “effeminacy is a form of self-advertisement in such contexts” (Sinfield 1994: 46). Although effeminate behaviour might have served this particular purpose at certain times in history, it would seem rather simplistic to reduce it exclusively to the idea of sexual availability or advertisement. The risk this raises here is, of course, that all effeminate behaviour becomes associated with and consequently reduced to a form of sexual, rather than gender, presentation.⁶⁴ Although it might be true that effeminacy might have represented a form of sexual visibility for the molly and for the quean, it must also be regarded as a form of making oneself visible other than sexually at a time when the concept of a communal meeting place—what we now have come to know as a ‘gay pub’—was not yet firmly established.⁶⁵ This strategy of visibility has clear implications to the way effeminate men have engaged with urban space (see chapter four). Moreover, and perhaps more importantly, visible effeminate behaviour in manner and clothes might also represent an important, playful and pleasurable part of these characters’ sense of self, a form of behaviour Hennen has identified as ‘surface play’ (2008: 40).

congregate, however, “many otherwise ‘conventionally gendered’ gay men continued to advertise themselves sexually to other men by adopting an aggressively effeminate persona in public” (Hennen 2008: 47).

⁶⁴ Norton offers a somewhat opinionated and seemingly intolerant version of this view by claiming that “fairies act in such a way as to attract men; they offer their sexual services to men in the manner that is most readily recognised by punters. The limp wrist, the swivel-hipped swish and the widespread use of rouge and powder are all markers to signal sexual availability rather than gender identity” (Norton 1997: 46). What Norton fails to consider in his statement is, of course, the fact that these days we have places where gay men can go in order to socialise with other gay men, places where gay men might go in order to look for (or maybe even have) sex with other gay (or bisexual, or curious) men and thus, the function of effeminacy as a sign of sexual availability has become largely obsolete in most urban areas. The markers Norton singles out above (i.e. the limp wrist, the swivel-hipped swish, the use of rouge and powder) all form part of the movement vocabulary of *Sissy!*. For an extended discussion of this, see chapter five.

⁶⁵ Although there might not have been places expressly marketed as ‘gay pubs’ prior to the Stonewall riots, there have been communal meeting places for queer people, which might have slipped under the radar. Places like public toilets, parks and drag balls. For an extended study of such queer meeting places, including detailed maps of queer London, see Houlbrook (2005).

Effeminacy and entertainment

It is also within the period before Stonewall and after the invention of homosexuality that the idea of effeminacy as a form of artistic sensibility, the idea of ‘homosexual professions’ began to be more widely recognised. Homosexuality, or rather effeminacy, becomes at this point more instantly associated with the idea of creativity in the “belief that an interest in the finer things of life—art, music, poetry, fashion, and so on—is a feminine characteristic, and from the corresponding belief that ‘homosexuals’ are more feminine than ‘heterosexuals’” (Sinfield 1994: 84). Houlbrook further develops this notion by calling it a “commonplace equation between effeminacy and entertainment” (2005: 160). The idea of the ‘aesthetic as effeminate’ might be still somewhat pervading today, seeing that professions such as those in theatre, as ballet dancers, hairdressers, make-up artists, interior decorators, antique dealers—all very common stereotypes—remain more commonly associated with effeminate, flamboyant gay men.⁶⁶ Crisp, for example, using his characteristic sarcasm, has declared that “the first rumours about homosexuality ... brought only fear. They suggested that it was a much larger monster than had originally been suspected, devouring not only ballet dancers and a few actors but thrusting one claw in at the front door of ordinary citizens” (2007 [1968]: 81).⁶⁷

Keeping in mind that homosexuality was still illegal at this particular point in time and that gender nonconformity was seen as the telling sign of homosexuality *par excellence*, we must also consider the other facets and implications of effeminate behaviour in the period before Stonewall and the subsequent emergence of equal rights discourses.⁶⁸ For

⁶⁶ Lucas has claimed that “popular misconceptions of theatre see it as a business closely associated with, if not dominated by, homosexuals” (1994: 14).

⁶⁷ This idea of ‘entertainment and effeminacy’ might perhaps be derived from the earlier notion of effeminacy as a form of aristocratic refinement, reference to which can already be found in Ellis (1975 [1897]). In *Sexual Inversion*, he emphasised the notion of an innate talent for working in the entertainment sector, a correlation between ‘effeminacy and entertainment.’ Moreover, as Sinfield’s association demonstrates, Crisp’s attitudes and beliefs are “recognisably continuous with the molly-house subculture ... it converges with the Wildean image on the ground of dandified affectation and art” (Sinfield 1994: 139). “Genteel, refined qualities,” adds Hennen, have been commonly “associated with literary and artistic pursuits of the classical scholars” (2008: 40).

⁶⁸ The emergence of equal rights discourses in the 1960s were contemporaneous with the emergence of the second wave of the feminist movement, the US civil rights movement and the gay liberation movement, the predecessor of the gay rights movement. Strong structural bonds were forged between these many groups, which among themselves might have

one, visible effeminates were the sure and easy targets of homophobic abuse (Crisp 2007 [1968], Houlbrook 2005). Secondly, as Houlbrook's (2005) research has shown, it might be fair to say that overt effeminates were also the more common victims of police harassment and homosexual arrests.

Houlbrook's study (2005) relies heavily on uncovered police records of homosexual arrests in the period between the wars and so appears to support the above statement. What Houlbrook seems to successfully demonstrate is that effeminate queans were easy targets; that they were commonly approached by the police and that they were marginalised both figuratively and literally. First, they felt metaphorically marginalised by society in general who perceived them as somewhat inferior. Secondly, in the more literal sense, they felt marginalised in their actual use of space, being only allowed to really express themselves within the confines of the West End, the place of the 'West End Poof' (Houlbrook 2005: 139); the borders of which appeared to have been strictly guarded by the police (Houlbrook 2005: 153, Crisp 2007 [1968]: 81).

One of the police reports used by Houlbrook, for instance, describes two queans being followed by policemen on the bus and on the streets of the West End. "They were," he transcribes, "powdered and painted ... they smelt strongly of perfume and spoke effeminately" (Houlbrook 2005: 139). What makes these 'Nancy types' (to use Houlbrook's expression) stand out from the crowd is, according to him, located "in the male body's 'behaviour and appearance.' Sight, smell, and hearing focused upon a cluster of discernible characteristics coded as 'effeminate'—'powder and paint,' 'perfume,' and speech'" (Houlbrook 2005: 139). Houlbrook provides here clear examples of bodily markers of effeminacy as readable signs of illicit behaviour. It is important to note that it is *effeminacy*, which appears to distinguish the queans from other males distinctly perceived as 'normal.' It was homosexuality, however, a practice often also procured by the other more 'normal' homosexuals, that the effeminate queans were being arrested for.

The conflation of effeminacy with homosexuality is, in this example, clearly problematic. Effeminate men were arrested for dressing and behaving effeminately—a

recognised they were united in fighting against the oppressive powers of the same hegemonic system, epitomised perhaps by the image of the white middle-class heterosexual male.

behaviour that, at this time, might have been confused with homosexual ‘soliciting’ (see fn. 59), even though soliciting was not always necessarily the purpose of their chosen gender presentation. Powder, paint, perfume and speech mark the bodies of the effeminate queans as ‘criminals,’ as homosexuals. Furthermore, visibly effeminate men might have served yet another social purpose. With their flamboyant behaviour, they might have vicariously helped the relations between non-effeminate homosexuals to occur more freely since the focus was more often placed on visible queans and, consequently, out of those regarded as conventionally gendered homosexuals. Their overt visibility seems to somewhat enhance the possibilities of invisibility for others. Visibility might hence be seen as a double-edged concept. In a first instance, one *wants* to be seen by other homosexuals and thus employs readable signs that might identify them as such to others alike.⁶⁹ Secondly, for the ‘normal,’ ‘respectable’ homosexual, these same signs must be readable by other homosexuals yet must remain concealed from the rest of society in an attempt to reduce the chances of encountering stigma, violence, harassment and, at times, even imprisonment. The effeminate man then appears to become a character *sui generis* as far as visibility goes: he is the one who is seen by all at practically all times.

The Stonewall riots⁷⁰

This tension between repudiating and defending effeminate behaviour as a legitimate choice of expression within homosexual quarters later led to what has become known as the Stonewall riots of June 1969 in New York City, a historical moment that has been

⁶⁹ In *Impertinent Decorum* (1994), Lucas offers an extensive study of the evolution of such semiotic signs used by men throughout the development of queer identities and interactions between gay men. Lucas investigates the use of the green carnation by Wilde and his contemporaries as a statement (Lucas 1994: 91, see also Ellis 1975 [1897]); the use of pocket handkerchiefs as a strictly codified language by the Clones in the 1960s and 1970s (Lucas 1994: 92); the 1990s ‘gay is good(s)’ phenomenon in the cult of the gym, steroids and Calvin Klein briefs (cf. Simpson 1996, Manning 1996, Robinson 2005) and the use of Camp as a common language between those perceived as being flamboyant homosexuals (cf. Sinfield 1994, Sontag 1994).

⁷⁰ The Stonewall riots are a seminal moment in gay history. They are rather more complex and contested event than I present here, involving, among other factors, the rising discontent of a group of disenfranchised homosexuals, alleged mafia involvement and bent cops. For a detailed account of the Stonewall riots, see Martin Duberman’s (1993) memoirs of the event. The film *Stonewall* (1995, dir. Nigel Finch) has been inspired by Duberman’s book of the same title.

largely considered as the starting point of the modern gay liberation movement.⁷¹ If the earlier homophile movement struggled to represent more traditional values, claiming that gay men were no different than other men apart from what they did in the privacy of their own bedrooms, the post-Stonewall organisation New York Gay Liberation's agenda was, on the other hand, much more aggressive and focused primarily on the idea of gender radicalism, motivated by their conviction that gay men were the targets of homophobic abuse not because of the way they had sex but, rather, because of the way they presented gender.⁷²

This schism also holds true in what motivated the creation and history of Gay Liberation Front in Britain.⁷³ Lucas describes this tension by saying that the GLF of the early 1970s in Britain “saw an influx of drag queens, ‘rad-fems,’ who consciously chose to rebel against repressive gender dressing” (1994: 55). “It was the drag queens,” he has claimed, “traditionally frowned upon by assimilationist homosexual rights campaigners—who were taking the lead in the Gay Liberation Front and discovering a voice for themselves, one which had been often denied to them by a gay community more intent on proving itself as responsible, respectable and deserving of liberal tolerance and equality” (Lucas 1994: 56). “Essential to the GLF’s radical manifesto,”

⁷¹ For Lucas, it was “the traditionally dispossessed drag queens, closet queens and cruisers of the Stonewall Inn” (1994: 21) who were mostly responsible for starting the revolution in 1969. He continues by saying that they “acted out their anger and frustration with police intimidation in three days of rioting and violent carnival” (Lucas 1994: 21). It is worth noting here as well that the death and the funeral of Judy Garland, largely perceived as one of the most iconic and adored female performers in the history of queer performance (Garber 1992: 54), coincided with the Stonewall riots. “That the Stonewall Riots came in the wake of Garland’s funeral,” claims Laurence Senelick, “is often commented on as a cause-and-effect phenomenon” (2000: 387, cf. Duberman 1993). My use of Garland’s rendition of *The Man That Got Away*, from her now-legendary 1961 Carnegie Hall performance, is both an homage to the myth and a nod to her iconic status in queer history. Garland’s influence still has a strong repercussion in contemporary queer culture. In 2007, the Canadian musician Rufus Wainwright re-staged Garland’s aforementioned concert at the London Palladium. The work of London-based performance artist Dickie Beau has also been clearly influenced by Garland’s oeuvre and memory. Beau has been performing his moving *Judy Tapes* over the past few years at the Bistrottheque and Royal Vauxhall Tavern, among other alternative venues.

⁷² Goldstein points out that the Mattachine Society—for him, the first modern gay organisation, founded in 1948—“devoured itself in a struggle between radicals and conservatives” (2002: 11).

⁷³ The Gay Liberation Front was founded in London in 1970 by Aubrey Walter and Bob Mellors (Lucas 1994: 142). It found opposition in the more conservative Committee for Homosexual Equality, later to become the Campaign for Homosexual Equality (Lucas 1994: 142). For a detailed history of Gay Liberation Front in Britain, with testimonies of its activists and participants, see Walter (1980) and Power (1995).

he concludes, “was visibility” (Lucas 1994: 115). Although visibility appears to have been a crucial element of the GLF’s manifesto, some of its members appeared to have experienced a discrepancy between the group’s stated desire for visibility and the actual practice of visibility among them. Among the group’s most notorious members, Bette Bourne—founder of the legendary queer theatre company Bloodlips and an early member of the GLF in Britain—has claimed that even though its manifesto appears to be inviting of genderqueer people, in practice, its meetings were not necessarily welcoming of these subjects.⁷⁴

This post-Stonewall rift later translates in the 1990s debate in the media and academic circles between gay conservatives (or ‘homo-cons’) and gay liberationists (later ‘queers’). In America, the two sides of this debate have been mainly headed, respectively, by theorists Sullivan (1995) and Bruce Bawer (1994) on one side and by Warner (1999) on the other whilst in Britain either sides of the debate were mainly represented by the organisations Stonewall, formed in 1989 with a more assimilationist rhetoric and OutRage! formed by a group of queer activist, among them Peter Tatchell, in 1990 with a more radical, liberationist slant on their politics (Woods 1995: 25).⁷⁵ On the role of effeminacy in the realm of gender politics, Paul Robinson has suggested that the homo-cons of the 1990s appeared to “seek to rescue homosexuality from its association with gender deviance—with effeminate men and mannish women” (2005: 02). My position here is therefore consonant with the gay liberationists’ discourse that gay men’s choice to present a manly stance should remain open as long as that does not curtail effeminate men’s right to choose to present a feminine stance if they so desire.

⁷⁴ In *A Life in Three Acts* (Bourne and Ravenhill 2009), Bourne tells the story of queens being treated with contempt and disapproval and not being really welcomed into group meetings. In one instance she recounts the story of Piggy, a drag queen who came to a meeting wearing a skirt and make-up. “I don’t want to be put down by you lot because I’m wearing a skirt,” says Piggy. “I like my skirt,” she continues, “and it’s just part of me and if you don’t like it you can fuck off! ... I like it and I don’t see why I should have you lot putting me down ... for wearing a skirt because I’m a man” (in Bourne and Ravenhill 2009: 20).

⁷⁵ In America, the organisations Queer Nation and ACT UP might be regarded as sympathetic to the discourse produced by the British OutRage! (and vice-versa) in their similar queer tactics and politics (Woods 1995: 25). These queer groups were formed in the mid-to-late 1980s and early 1990s as a reaction against assimilationist politics, government-sponsored homophobia and the media backlash against the AIDS epidemic (Woods 1995: 25).

Conclusion

Although I have made a conscious effort to separate homosexuality from gender deviance in this chapter by claiming that not all effeminate men are necessarily homosexual and that, conversely, not all homosexual men are necessarily effeminate, in my research, I do look at the sissy as a position in the same-sex continuum. What I am aiming to foreground with this distinction however is the notion that the historical perception of homosexuality as a form of deviation and the stigma that ensues as a result of that have been most commonly attached to the effeminate body to the exclusion of conventionally gendered ones—even within same-sex communities.

Effeminacy, therefore, appears to have remained somewhat ensnared in its recurrent conceptualisation as a form of social deviation; and deviance, as Lucas has wisely pointed out, has “traditionally ... been signified negatively through all manner of processes, including madness, neurosis, guilt, effeminacy and suicidal tendencies” (1994: 90).⁷⁶ The main thrust of my thesis is to embrace effeminacy and to run *towards*, rather than *away from* the stereotype of the effeminate gay man. As Sinfield has suggested, “gay men are entitled to present a manly stance if they want” (1994: 196). “Yet,” he continues, “dumping effeminacy because it has been stigmatised hardly seems heroic” (Sinfield 1994: 196). Whilst I agree that effeminacy might not be the only way to be gay—just like masculinity might not be the only option of gay male embodiment—the central tenet of the study is to argue for effeminacy, allowing it space to remain a legitimate option of gender expression that can hopefully exist without the constant threat of social violence. To use the words of my aggressors, my research attempts to ‘make way for the gay.’

In the historical approach I have pursued in this chapter, I have shown how the concept of effeminacy has undergone considerable change. With this historical approach, I have tried not to determine that I am equal and the same as my fellow effeminate historical

⁷⁶ ‘Suicidal tendencies,’ which Lucas includes in his list of stigmatised behaviours, has been investigated as a potential result of the social pressures suffered by some visibly effeminate men. Kosofsky Sedgwick (1994: 154) has pointed to studies that establish the cause of high rates of suicides and suicide attempts in children and adolescents to be linked to “the hostile and condemning environment, verbal and physical abuse, and rejection and isolation from families and peers” faced by young gay men and lesbians. I will further examine the serious implications of suicide as a potential outcome of GID treatments and the pressure to conform in chapters two and four.

figures, although I have found positive support in these underground and often subordinate figures. Rather, the main goal of this survey has been to establish the effeminate body's discursive construction—"which is not me, but only what others have made of me" (Butler 1993: 122)—and establish that certain of its elements remain relatively constant through time, although there will be some notable variations. I look back therefore for the purpose of preserving the gains of past effeminates, "to keep faith with the struggles of earlier generations" (Sinfield 1994: 196-197). "One way of doing that," continues Sinfield, "is to reassert stigmatised gay traditions" (1994: 196-197), which is, I hope, precisely the role of the 'sissy' herein.

While I have traced the evolution of discourse and of social perceptions of effeminacy, more specifically, I have determined how this evolution has led to current notions of effeminacy. In other words, I am not aiming to establish an essential connection between modern and past effeminate types but am, rather, arguing that current perceptions of sissiness have a troubled history. In analysing this troubled history, I have carefully chosen to focus on specific time periods to the detriment of others. This approach has helped me to reinscribe the historical chain of injury to which effeminacy has been traditionally attached. The sissy canon developed in this chapter has highlighted key moments where important change in discourse might have occurred. I have investigated the continuities and the ruptures in history by looking at the social role of the ancient *kinaidos* and the *cinaedus*, the molly and the 'quean' in disrupting gender and sexual codes. I have considered the Wilde trials as essential to the progress of legal discourses of homosexuality in Britain and how they have helped promote the relocation of effeminacy in modern thought. I have looked at the definitional effeminacy of the invert in the nascent medical etiologies and, finally, I have considered the Clone and his hypermasculinity in relation to the effeminate man and his hyperfemininity; the latter two in their self-conscious, playful manipulation of gender codes and the impact they might have had on gender politics and on same-sex equal rights discourses.

While this chapter has touched on what the remaining chapters will extend on—i.e. effeminacy in clothes and manner in chapter two; violence in chapter three; and space in chapter four—it has also worked towards defining what the research is *not* about—i.e. effeminacy as a sign of heterosexual excess, effeminacy as a form of sexual availability

or effeminacy as the desire to be a woman (or to be *like* a woman).⁷⁷ Whereas this chapter has described some of the history of feminine behaviour in the West, the chapters that follow will extend on more contemporary notions of effeminacy. If hitherto I have investigated the figure of the ‘effeminate man,’ we will now enter the domain of the ‘sissy,’ who, to borrow the words of Roberta Mock from a different context, deliberately “emphasize[s] the visibility of gender to the exclusion of all other ‘vectors of power’” (2009: 61). The sissy’s effeminacy is, I suggest, connected to a sense of self-expression. The sissy believes and practices his “right to adopt an unpopular gender style [that is] essential to [his] sense of self” (Robinson 2005: 26). The sissy’s effeminacy should be more readily associated with a sense of being different, with standing against and outside normal expectations of gender behaviour, with defying (more often voluntarily than not) heteronormative rules and codes of gender behaviour and, in the process, deriving pleasure from it.

This chapter has fostered the time-honoured debate between essential and constructed natures of gender by claiming effeminacy as a historical construct with, in the words of Sally Munt, no “eternal ... essence outside the frame of cultural change and historical determination” (in Norton 1997: 20-21). Nonetheless, as Munt herself has concluded, I acknowledge that “this strictly intellectual definition wouldn’t stop me *feeling*, and sometimes behaving, as though the total opposite were true ... we need our dream of a lesbian [or, in my case, a sissy] nation, even as we recognise its fictionality” (in Norton 1997: 20-21). I want to use Munt’s aspiration as an allegory to conclude this chapter. She refers to the impossibility of realisation of the utopian dream of a lesbian nation.⁷⁸ This dream, it appears, survives despite her admission of its constitutional fictionality. There is an exciting and pertinent idea which I want to tease out of her paradox. This dream, pointing towards the future as it does, is predicated in the historical determination of the past. While the dream points towards the road ahead in the desire for a more promising future, it is also effective in recognising its structural bonds to the past. The movement proposed by Munt points back at the same time as it points forward. This, I suggest, has been the function of my proposed sissy canon.

⁷⁷ (Cf. Sinfield 1994: 39): “the mollies were trying to identify as mollies, not as women.”

⁷⁸ For a detailed study of utopia and queerness, see Muñoz (2009).

However, recognising the *fictionality* on which the dream of a sissy nation might be built does not stop me from pursuing it. The sissy canon I have constructed in this chapter offers therefore a certain political engagement with what Butler has defined as a ‘queer criticality.’ It is, in other words, “a point of departure for a set of historical reflections and futural imagining” (Butler 1993: 228). My discussion of sissy space in chapter four signals to the (im)possibilities of realising a sissy nation. *Fictionality* is a crucial concept here since it lays the foundational structure for gender play, which I have pursued in practice (see chapter five); it signals to the knowingness of gender as a cultural artefact; it indicates the pronounced artificiality of the body and the manipulation of gender codes in the space of the stage. *Fictionality*, more importantly, points to the medium of performance, chosen in my study as the locus for debates around the body in history, in manner, in relation to violence and to space.

Sissy Body

Bodies are shaped by histories, which they perform in their comportment, their posture, their gestures (Ahmed 2006: 56).

Human subjects actively fashion their own identity *in spite of* regulation, prohibition, and subjugation (Munt 2007: 222, original emphasis).

Whereas I might agree with Halperin's statement that it might be "useful to distinguish effeminacy from male passivity, inversion, and homosexuality" (2002: 110), I think it might also be useful—having established that distinction—to take a firm stand in relation to what Hennen has called the 'effeminacy effect' (2008: 180). 'The effeminacy effect,' he has explained, "does not simply equate to an attitude towards effeminacy, but rather how [we] negotiate the powerful historical coupling of effeminacy and homosexuality" (2008: 181). Taking a stand, for me, has meant not being compliant with hegemonic expectations of masculinity. I must also acknowledge, nevertheless, that attempting to forge a separation between effeminacy and homosexuality in my writing only to later reassert my position as an inveterate effeminate homosexual sissy might perhaps create one of the many meaningful paradoxes I have attempted to address in my writing.⁷⁹

In chapter one, I have fleshed out recurrent historical themes (or, rather, *perceptions*) associated with effeminate behaviour in the West—themes I have organised by engaging with Hennen's (2008) proposed taxonomy. According to Hennen, effeminacy can be largely classified transculturally and transhistorically according to the four following themes:

(a) 'Polarity:' in his words, "the degree to which the effeminate man is understood as the polar opposite of the authentic 'real' man" (Hennen 2008: 35). I have touched on this by addressing the effeminate as a 'failed' man and by discussing the gender politics within gay subculture in the Clone/effeminate schism;

⁷⁹ The paradox between my queer standing and the historiographical approach in the study might be another example of this (see the methodology section in the introduction for an explanation of how I have negotiated these tensions). It is also important to note that this separation is not a homophobic move, nor does it attempt to give that impression. Moreover, this separation is only intellectual insofar as I experience them as largely commingled.

(b) ‘Universalising versus minoritising tendencies:’ which Hennen has argued “applied to the way a particular society views effeminacy ... [in] a universalising view ... *any* man is understood as vulnerable to the temptations of effeminacy, which then figures as a generalised social threat [and in] a minoritising view ... a relatively small number of men are invested with the qualities of effeminacy and the concept of *the* effeminate figures prominently” (Hennen 2008: 35-36, original emphasis). I have addressed this aspect by examining the *kinaidos* as succumbing to what has been commonly viewed as a universalising tendency within his socio-historical framework and the ‘quean’ as representative of a type within a society that largely held minoritising views;

(c) ‘Association with homosexuality:’ “effeminacy is sometimes associated with same-sex interests, but it has also been interpreted as the result of a too-ardent interest in the opposite sex ... during much of the history of the West, effeminacy and homosexuality were understood as contemporaneous but unrelated vices” (Hennen 2008: 36). I have shown how the invert was seen as directly associated with homosexuality whereas the ancient *cinaedus* as not necessarily so;

(d) ‘Intersections with class and race:’ “in much of the West,” explains Hennen, “the masculinity of the working-class men has traditionally been understood as authentic and doubts of manliness sown generously as one moves up the class ladder” (Hennen 2008: 37, cf. Houlbrook 2005). “Similarly,” he continues, “in racialized societies entire races may be feminized in the popular imagination, such as the feminization of Asian men in many Western cultures” (Hennen 2008: 32).⁸⁰ I have examined this aspect by demonstrating how the aristocratic figure was commonly expected to behave effeminately as a sign of his refinement but if the same markers were attributed to a working-class individual, a betrayal of his compulsory masculinity was often read as a psychological or a moral failing.

In the present chapter I will develop a more focused investigation of the bodily markers that have set the effeminate body apart from others. I have come to understand these markers as strictly ‘negotiable’ (more on this later). The present

⁸⁰ Hennen’s work has been published in the United States where the racial identity marker ‘Asian’ usually refers to what in Britain we tend to associate with ‘Oriental.’

chapter will hence involve a narrower investigation of the historicity of and the traditions of writing (of, about, on) the effeminate body; a body to which the sissy might be considered, to a certain extent, a cultural heir with its characteristic mannerisms, deportment, behaviour and sartorial presentation. This chapter, in sum, tries to answer the question of ‘what’ constitutes this body, it endeavours to describe what it might look and behave like by establishing it in relation to the historical line of injury to which it is enthralled.⁸¹

Whilst isolating bodily traits that are repeated in the historical chain, in a process that will involve selecting markers I find resonate with my lived experience of effeminacy today, I will construct (or, better, attempt to *write*) only one possibility of a sissy body rather than *the* definite exemplar. This perhaps post-modern notion of a sissy body—a body that borrows from fossilised notions of gender deviance, picking and choosing at will which aspects to negate and which aspects to embrace—might produce as a result a rather fragmented sissy body. Whilst I am aware of the dangers of this rather queer method of writing, my hope is that by the end of the chapter I will have determined successfully that my experience and understanding of a sissy body is a playful one, albeit, at times, also a rather painful one as well. Sissies are, at least in one aspect, similar to Hennen’s ‘faeries’ in the sense that they both seem to “revel in effeminacy, exaggerate the claims of the effeminacy effect, and from their marginalised location toss the matter back to the cultural centre with parodic glee” (Hennen 2008: 181).⁸²

My investigation here will inevitably revisit the ancient effeminate body of the *kinaidos* and of the *cinaedus* (Halperin 2002, Gleason 1990); the pre- and post-homosexual body of flammers and Clones with their reinscription of gendered binaries and underlying sexual politics (Lucas 1994); the gay body in the ‘gay is good(s)’ phenomenon of the 1990s (Manning 1996, Simpson 1996) and in Hennen’s (2008) triptych categorisation of gay embodiment in the figures of leathermen (‘too

⁸¹ In chapter one I have addressed the question of ‘how’ this body might have been traditionally perceived.

⁸² Hennen’s spelling ‘faeries’ refers to the American social movement named ‘Radical Faeries,’ “a tribe of gentle gender warriors, queer folk, self-described ‘country faggots’ ... composed primarily (but not exclusively) of men with same-sex interests who explicitly reject traditional notions of masculinity” (Hennen 2008: 59).

masculine'), faeries ('too feminine') and bears (in the middle, 'just right'); and, finally, the pathological body in a more manneristic analysis of the homosexual and the alleged reinvention of homosexuality as Gender Identity Disorder (GID). The latter move follows what Kosofsky Sedgwick has defined as the "much-publicized 1973 decision to drop the pathologizing diagnosis of homosexuality from ... the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual (DSM-III)" (1994: 155).⁸³

It is also in this chapter that I will begin to draw from my lived experience of being a sissy, especially with regards to how I myself have encountered, as a child, the psychiatric treatment for Gender Identity Disorder.⁸⁴ I will also draw from my later experience, as a teenager and as an early adult, of 'coming out' in Brazil in the 1990s amid prevailing expectations to look muscular and masculine (Simpson 1996, Manning 1996) and utterly failing at that. I will extend on the damaging effects of living a life that includes stigma (Goffman 1963, Warner 1999), shame (Munt 2007) and ostracism (see 'ostracism' and space in chapter four) for not living up to the standards of masculinity that have been, from an early age, expected of me from my family and from other boys in school and, at a later age, from other gay men and from heteronormative society at large. These failed expectations still make themselves felt in my body today even if through my conscious and active rejection of them. This rejection, being an active movement as I claim it is, becomes, as a decision, permeated with new and productive possibilities of being. Failure, in turn, has formed part of my practical investigations in studio.⁸⁵

⁸³ For more on the GID debate, see McInnes and Davies (2008), Zucker (2008), Butler (2004), Rottnek (1999) and Green (1987).

⁸⁴ The experience of being treated for GID in childhood has had a large impact on much of the performance work I have produced to date. The trauma and pain of the imposed correctional gender treatment is a further point I feel I have in common with the work of David Hoyle (see fn. 51). After the screening of *Uncle David* (2009), his directorial debut as a film director, Hoyle participated in a post-show discussion with the audience of *Burn: Moving Images by Cabaret Artists* (2010, curated by Ben Walters) at East London's alternative performance venue, Bistrottheque. During this discussion, Hoyle openly revealed how he has been personally affected by the GID treatment and how this experience, which he compared to child abuse, has also been used as a source for developing his work as a performer (see also Gardner 2010). My attempt with this note is not to compare my work with Hoyle's but, rather, to situate my practice within existing queer performance.

⁸⁵ See chapter five for a critical discussion of the role and presence of failure in the practice.

A sissy body menagerie

Gleason (1990), Murray (2000) and Halperin (2002) all seem to agree on the idea that the *kinaidos* was conceived by the ancients as “a peculiar, repugnant, and perplexing freak” (Halperin 2002: 34) for presenting a gender that was seen as falling outside the normal expectations of masculinity.⁸⁶ As I have shown in chapter one, the *kinaidos* might have been considered a freak for abandoning his compulsory masculine identity in pursuit of pleasure. The stigma attached to his social deviant position, however, is visibly located in his body even if his practices might have involved, at times, a more ideological abandonment of masculinity. In more simple words, the *kinaidos*’ effeminacy is clearly sited in his body. As Wrinkler has shown, the *kinaidos* was “a man socially deviant in his entire being, principally observable in behavior that flagrantly violated or contravened the dominant social definition of masculinity” (in Murray 200: 255).⁸⁷

Similarly, when investigating the social positionality of the Roman *cinaedus* through a reading given by Latin physiognomists, Gleason has shown that this gender deviant type—like his predecessor, the Greek *kinaidos*— could be equally identified by the way he moved his body.⁸⁸ “He [the *cinaedus*] shifts his eyes around in sheep-like fashion when he speaks,” describes Gleason, “he touches his fingers to his nose ... he frequently stops to admire what he considers his own best feature; he smiles furtively when talking; he holds his arms turned outward; he laughs out loud; and he has an annoying habit of clasping other people by the hand” (1990: 396).⁸⁹ The

⁸⁶ More on the concept of ‘normativity’ later in this chapter.

⁸⁷ For more on the bodily behaviour and the social perceptions of the *kinaidos*, see Naphy (2006: 237).

⁸⁸ When expanding on the idea of the ancient notion of physiognomy as a science, Gleason has explained that “the fact that physiognomy was prepared to offer itself as a tool for decoding the signs of gender deviance makes it a fruitful source of information about the sex/gender system that permeated ancient society” (1990: 390). “In this system,” she continues, “gender is independent of anatomical sex” (Gleason 1990: 390, cf. Butler 1990). “You may obtain physiognomic indications of masculinity and femininity from your subject’s glance, movement, and voice,” she explains, “and then, from among these signs, compare one with another until you determine to your satisfaction which of the two sexes prevails. For in the masculine there is something feminine to be found, and in the feminine something masculine” (1990: 390).

⁸⁹ Among the many physiognomic descriptions uncovered by Gleason, there are some peculiar ones that seem to have no similarities to today’s notion of effeminacy. Among these is the idea that the *cinaedus* “compulsively obliterates all traces of spittle he may find—his own or anyone else’s—by rubbing it into the dust with his heel” (Gleason 1990: 396). Also regarding the discrepancies encountered in the historical line of bodily citations of

characteristic mannerisms of the *cinaedus* uncovered in Gleason's research show that what might have set him apart from other 'conventionally' gendered men was unequivocally located in his body; a body that appears to move and behave according to a narrowly codified system.⁹⁰

The *cinaedus*, with his "tilted head, a mincing gait, an enervated voice, a lack of stability in the shoulders, and a feminine way of moving the body" (Gleason 1990: 396), could—if we were to focus on the way his body was socially intelligible—be said to perform a gender that is 'substantially identical' (to use Gleason's expression) to the later homosexual, the quean and the contemporary sissy even if not all aspects of the earlier match the later ones.

According to Hennen's proposed 'typology of effeminacy' (2008: 49-51), the distinct bodily markers of the *cinaedus*, described here through the shifty eyes, the furtive smile, the loud laughter, the outward-turned arms, the tilted head, the mincing gait, the enervated voice and a feminine way of moving the body, might be classified under what he coins a 'somatic' effeminacy. "The somatic form," he explains, "reads the body itself as evidence of effeminacy ... wherein a man is judged by prevailing standards of either moving or using his voice 'like a woman'" (Hennen 2008: 51).⁹¹

effeminacy, Ellis (1897) has made reference to the *cinaedus* to prove a somewhat curious point. He suggests that "inverts exhibit a preference for green garments" (Ellis 1975 [1897]: 125-126). Ellis extends on the idea of a preference for green, a seemingly essential characteristic of the invert, by saying that "some years ago a band of paederasts at Paris wore green cravats as a badge" (1975 [1897]: 126, see also Betsky 1997: 87). Although a preference for the colour green might now sound like a rather peculiar unifying element of effeminacy, it appears to have been a plausible argument when Ellis produced and published his seminal study. Most famously, Oscar Wilde and his circle of friends wore green carnations as a statement (Lucas 1994: 91). Later in the 1920s, red ties take on a similar function as a code between 'queers' (Houlbrook 2005: 146). Apart from being known as "fond of green" (which sounds peculiarly like an euphemism for homosexual such as "confirmed bachelor"), Ellis also describes the invert as having a "taste for keeping the neck uncovered" (1975 [1897]: 125). "The cause," he continues, "does not appear to be precisely vanity so much as that physical consciousness which is so curiously marked in inverts, and induces the more feminine amongst them to cultivate feminine grace of form" (Ellis 1975 [1897]: 125). These differences are analysed here in support of the idea that effeminacy is after all a social construct that varies according to different social and historical contexts and is, therefore, unstable.

⁹⁰ In chapter five, I will return to a discussion of codified systems of classifying the body with reference to ballet training.

⁹¹ Other types of effeminacy, as categorised by Hennen, include 'Moral' Effeminacy, "as a form of moral or ethical weakness ... decidedly not associated with exclusive homosexuality

I will now move into a discussion of how the ‘somatic effeminacy’ of the ancient types might have been instrumental in the emerging definitions of a homosexual body in nineteenth century sexological discourses. Like the preceding ancient types, the homosexual has been constructed according to rigid social codes of gender behaviour. Unlike the earlier types, however, the homosexual becomes a representation of a fundamentally pathological body.

The nineteenth-century homosexual

For Foucault, the nineteenth-century homosexual’s identity was wholly determined by his sexuality. “It was everywhere present in him,” he has claimed, “at the root of all his actions because it was their insidious and indefinitely active principle; *written immodestly on his face and body* because it was a secret that always gave itself away” (in Gleason 1990: 411, my emphasis).

Gleason has remarked that Foucault’s description of the nineteenth-century homosexual “fits the *cinaedus* remarkably well” (1990: 411). Provided, of course, that we allow for an important caveat: “‘homosexuality’ as a category,” she ponders, “focuses on the gender of a person’s sexual object-choice, while the ancient *cinaedus* was defined not in terms of the gender of his sex partners, but by his own gender deviance, his departure from the norms of ‘correct’ masculine deportment” (Gleason 1990: 411).⁹² “So while Foucault is surely right to stress the change that took place in the nineteenth century,” Gleason concludes, “the notion that a person’s character,

... this version of effeminacy assumes that all men are equally vulnerable to temptation from women and men ... During the Renaissance, this type of effeminacy was more closely associated with debauchery and in other periods was articulated in terms of class (particularly with respect to the ‘debauchery’ of the aristocracy)” (Hennen 2008: 50); ‘Political’ Effeminacy, which “represents a lack of fitness for citizenship and the demands of involvement in state activities. This type predominates in ancient Greece” (Hennen 2008: 49) and ‘Cosmetic’ Effeminacy (which we will see later in this chapter in relation to Crisp and the London ‘quean’). Hennen’s four types are, he suggests, not mutually exclusive, there might, at times, be an overlap between them. We have already seen ‘moral’ and ‘political’ effeminacy in chapter one in the figures of, respectively, the aristocrat and the *kinaidos*.

⁹² The sissy, I propose, might be seen in that respect as analogous to the *cinaedus*. That is to say that the sissy is also primarily defined by his gender deviance and, later, by the gender of his sexual partners so that he might be understood as, in this particular order, an effeminate homosexual.

including his sexual temperament, is written all over his face and body is actually an ancient one” (1990: 411).

In practice, however, the discursive notion that a homosexual could be defined by the gender of his sexual partners rather than by his own gender deviance might have been strictly bound to language. As Houlbrook has shown, the first medical etiologies of same-sex practices tended to be underpinned by what he has called the ‘gendering of desire’ (2005: 142). In other words, “the desire for a woman was considered inherently masculine [whereas] the desire for a man was a priori womanlike” (Houlbrook 2005: 141). Moreover, studies such as Anomaly’s *The Invert and His Social Adjustment*, published in 1927, tended to “locate men’s ‘homosexual’ desires in their essentially feminine physiological constitution” (in Houlbrook 2005: 142).

The ‘deviance’ of the homosexual and the ‘normality’ of the heterosexual have been, according to this schema, further mapped onto the gendered opposition between the deviant, visible quean and the normal, invisible man; between the feminine and the masculine, where men were not necessarily labeled by their choice of sexual partners but, rather, by a broader deviation from normative masculinities of gender presentation. In this way, explains Houlbrook, “the basis for labeling someone a quean—or identifying as such—was thus not who a man had sex with but his gendered character” (2005: 143). “Rather than sexual practice,” continues Houlbrook, “terms like ‘pansy,’ ‘Nancy-boy,’ ‘cissy’ [*sic*] and ‘Poof’ denoted particular gendered patterns of appearance and behaviour” (Houlbrook 2005: 143).

Crisp has identified the presence of this gender dichotomy in same-sex relations and practices by suggesting that “the same exaggerated and over-simplified distinction that separated men from women ran like a wall straight and impassable between the ‘roughs’ and the ‘bitches’” (2007 [1968]: 62). If in Houlbrook’s study the abstract ideological concepts of ‘normality’ and ‘difference’ appeared to have been embodied, respectively, by ‘men’ and ‘queans,’ in Crisp’s universe they might have been

represented by ‘roughs’ and ‘bitches.’ I have touched on a similar dichotomy in chapter one when discussing the Clones and the fems in the context of the GLF.⁹³

Crisp and the London ‘quean’

If in the previous two sections I have focused on elements of what Hennen has coined ‘somatic effeminacy,’ I will now add to that analysis an investigation of ‘cosmetic effeminacy.’ Hennen has defined ‘cosmetic effeminacy’ as associated with “the use of women’s clothing, jewelry, and make up as signalling effeminacy” (Hennen 2008: 50). These visual markers are, in other words, markers that can be viewed as being attached to the body. In the first instance, I will look at ‘cosmetic effeminacy’ with reference to the experience of Crisp as described in *The Naked Civil Servant* (2007 [1968]) and also with reference to the figure of the London quean (Houlbrook 2005).

At different points in his memoirs, Crisp describes his own body as a quasi-dysfunctional one; a body that appears to be at times fetishised, at times repudiated, at times ridiculed and often violently attacked.⁹⁴ “If I was compelled to stand still in the street in order to wait for a bus or on the platform of an Underground railway station,”

⁹³ The two bodies in *Sissy!*, Biño Sautzvy’s and mine, offer representations of these opposing ideals of embodiment: his muscular and strong body offers a visual reading of the masculine man whereas my ‘skinny sissy’ body (to use Muñoz’s term (2009: 78)) offers a visual reference of the effeminate body (see figure 04).

⁹⁴ In a passage where he describes meeting a friend, Crisp goes so far as to imply his visibly effeminate body might have been perceived as deformed. “She had been crippled by polio and wore a metal splint on one leg,” he says of his friend (Crisp 2007 [1968]: 36). “Because of her handicap,” he continues, “she was sympathetic to all deformity and was especially drawn to anyone she felt to be worse off than she. I came into this category” (Crisp 2007 [1968]: 36-37). Associations between the queer body and the disabled body have been forged in academic discourse (see Thomson 1997, McRuer 2006, Davidson 2008, Siebers 2008) where the principal point of contact between the two disciplines appears to be the notion of ‘visibility’ (Davidson 2008: 19). Tobin Siebers (2008: 118) even suggests ‘*overvisibility*’ as “a term of disparagement aimed at minority groups who appear to be ‘too much’ [too ugly, too fat, too deformed, too effeminate] for society to bear.” ‘*Overvisibility*’ offers, for Siebers, a potential for political action in the sense that it can easily be transformed into a sort of invisibility, whereby the queer and the disabled bodies are deliberately blanked out by (‘normal’) others. The aversion of the gaze might result, Sieber explains, from the normal subject’s desire not to ‘stare.’ Interestingly, the notion of disability already appears connected to the effeminate body as far back as the first medical studies of homosexuality. In Ellis, Hirschfeld and Ulrichs, for example, the male invert is said to be unable to whistle (Sinfield 2005: 38-39). Butler (1993: 233) has claimed that in *Sexual Inversion*, Ellis had linked sexual inversion to blindness when in fact he has compared sexual inversion to colour-blindness in making a point that both conditions represent biological variations. “While an abnormal phenomena,” he says of colour-blindness in comparison to inversion, it “cannot be called a diseased condition” (Ellis 1975 [1897]: 135).

he explains, “people would turn without a word and slap my face, if I was wearing sandals passers-by took care to stamp on my toes” (Crisp 2007 [1968]: 50). In his own words, Crisp appears to place his perceived difference and the violent contempt, with which he was often met, unambiguously in his performance of an effeminate body. “I was from birth,” he claims earlier, “an object of mild ridicule because of my movements—especially the perpetual flutter of my hands—and my voice” (Crisp 2007 [1968]: 34). ‘The perpetual flutter of the hands’ and the ‘voice’ are isolated here by Crisp as bodily markers that separate him from other supposedly conventionally gendered men. It is bodily markers that appear to make him, in his words, ‘an object of mild ridicule.’

In an earlier section, Crisp suggests with characteristic humour that apart from his hands and his voice, his walk was also a conspicuously telling element of ‘the secret that always gave itself away’ at a time when homosexuality was still illegal. “A passer-by would have to be very innocent indeed,” he jokes, “not to catch the meaning of the mannequin walk and the stance in which the hip was only prevented from total dislocation by the hand placed upon it” (Crisp 2007 [1968]: 25-26).⁹⁵ I have shown earlier in this chapter how the *cinaedus* had also been identified and typified as effeminate due to his peculiar way of walking, described by Gleason as a ‘mincing gait.’ Crisp, however, seemed to have regarded these bodily markers as “natural outward and visible signs of inward and spiritual disgrace” (2007 [1968]: 34); a claim that due to my queer leanings I am reluctant to accept as either ‘natural’ or ‘disgraceful.’ Rather, I see these markers as strictly bound to a social process of

⁹⁵ Crisp’s description of the effeminate man’s characteristic walk as ‘the mannequin walk’ appears to be somewhat foretelling of the 1980s New York voguing underground movement. Vogue balls were largely premised on the desire to reproduce (and perform) the glamour commonly associated with the high-fashion world and the perceived hyperfemininity of the supermodels. In *Macho Man*, I make a passing reference to this practice by including a vogue walk in the choreography (see clip ‘Macho Man’ in *Sissy!*, DVD 1). In *Crumbs!* (see clip ‘Tajabone’ in *Crumbs!*, DVD 2), I experimented with the hand and arm gestures codified by the movement, which has been brought into mainstream culture by Madonna in her music video version of *Vogue* (1990, dir. David Fincher). For a critical analysis of the repercussions of the voguing subculture, see Peggy Phelan (1993) and Muñoz (2009). See also *Paris is Burning* (1990), a documentary film directed by Jenny Livingston that chronicles the drag ball culture of Harlem of the mid- to late-1980s. For a critical analysis of the latter, see Butler (1993). Vogue balls have recently experienced a revival in the drag circuit in London with versions by the Bistrottheque and Horse Meat Disco, to cite two.

learning and suggest they might offer elements of both individuation and pleasure precisely because they seem to constitute me as different from the normal.

Nevertheless, what I do want to acknowledge in Crisp's self-understanding of gender deviance—a deviance he appeared to have understood as the embodiment of a social taboo in the transgression of masculinity—is his conscious effort to highlight his deviance through his personal engagement with Hennen's 'cosmetic effeminacy' (2008: 50). Crisp has claimed that he did not wish to be seen as "trying without success to hide [his flamboyant mannerisms]" (2007 [1968]: 34). On the contrary, "I wanted it to be known," he declares, "that I was not ashamed and therefore had to display symptoms that could not be thought to be accidental. I began to wear make-up" (Crisp 2007 [1968]: 34). Crisp's pride in his effeminacy is also evident in a passage where he transcribes a dialogue with a potential employer. The latter asks, "why do you go about looking as you do?" to which Crisp responds, "because this is the way I am. I wouldn't like you or anyone else to think I was ashamed" (2007 [1968]: 58).

Crisp's remarkably politicised engagement with the use of cosmetics appears to stem from what I would suggest is his quasi-missionary approach to effeminacy. "The message I wished to propagate," he has declared, "was that effeminacy existed in people who were in all other respects just like home. I went about the routine of daily living looking undeniably like a homosexual person" (Crisp 2007 [1968]: 33). In his way, Crisp appears to imbue make-up with a special meaning, transforming it into an instrument that appears to communicate a message. 'Not only am I aware of my difference,' the message might read, 'but I am also proud of it and I want it to be seen; and I want to see that it is being seen.' Indeed, Crisp specifically refers to his make-up as 'war-paint' (2007 [1968]: 34). For the queans, Crisp's contemporaries, make-up appeared to have a similar function. As Houlbrook has shown, the queans used to speak of cosmetics not as 'make-up' but as 'ammunition' (2005: 144). Crisp's sense of agency in the engagement he procured with his body and its effects seems to suggest an almost crusader approach to effeminacy. He appeared to have taken on the task of educating people on the subject of homosexuality and effeminacy by making himself as visible as possible and, consequently, bravely enduring violence as part of that process.

However, Crisp's acerbic accounts of daily, urban struggles run the risk, at times, of over-romanticising the notion of effeminacy to the detriment, it seems, of what I suggest is a potentially transgressive engagement with codes and practices of gender already inherent in his performance. His blatant refusal to conform, or even to try to conform, and his apparently inexhaustible sense of defiance both appear to be glossed over behind glamour. "Blind with mascara and dumb with lipstick," Crisp declares, "I paraded the streets of Pimlico" (Crisp 2007 [1968]: 49). Although this narrative appears at first to read as a throwaway (albeit rather colourful) remark, it is nevertheless pointed; signalling as it does to a sense of self-acquired disability: the mascara 'blinds' while the lipstick 'dumbs.'⁹⁶ Crisp's experience of make-up might be better understood perhaps when analysed in tension with the concept of self-stigmatisation. He appears to indelibly mark his body in a way that slightly debilitates it and significantly hinders his ability to perform public space (more on space in chapter four).

Although we might need the glamour that Crisp so effectively presents us with (I know I do) in order to survive, I want to make sure I guard myself against the danger of forgetting how this same embodiment of proud effeminacy, in an inspiring and brave combination of 'somatic' and 'cosmetic' approaches, might often be encountered with violent resistance; a violence, which Crisp himself is ready to acknowledge in his accounts. As Houllbrook has declared, "Crisp's memoirs are a moving litany of the experience of exclusion and violence" (2005: 158). For Lucas, this close relationship between outrageous flamboyance and danger might be translated in his sentiment that Crisp's queer fabulousness might potentially slip into a sense of content apathy in his marginalised position. "When Quentin Crisp walked down the road during the 1930s and 1940s with make-up and outrageous clothes, he was aware of being 'queer,' of being watched, of being a 'spectacle,'" claims Lucas (1994: 60). "The danger here is," he concludes, "that this is the only view, that the

⁹⁶ I offer a physical engagement with this idea of a disabled, effeminate body in *Sissy!*. My use of the wig, which I put on back to front, restricts my view in the earlier part of the performance, somewhat 'blinding' me. The idea postulated here by Crisp that the lipstick 'dumbs' might be seen reflected in my use of the lipstick and the magnifying glass where my mouth moves but no sound comes out of it. This is also a reference to the practice of lipsynching. I will offer a more in-depth investigation of this scene in chapter five.

‘exotic’ becomes marginalised or ghettoised rather than radical and/or threatening” (Lucas 1994: 60).

I would argue, however, that contrary to Lucas’ above assumption, Crisp’s ‘spectacular’ body could not be understood—in the context of the 1930s and 1940s—outside the social, legal and medical framework that described it as ‘threatening.’ It is a body that appeared as contravening the law.⁹⁷ Crisp presents a body that, in ‘looking undeniably like a homosexual’ (to use his own words), might have often been perceived as pathological. His was a body that regularly met with violence and resentment. As such, this ‘spectacular’ body cannot be seen as ‘non-threatening.’ It effectively challenges and threatens regulations since it parades the streets and is displayed publicly; even if that public performance is often disturbed, slowed down, interfered with (more on which in chapter four). Gender deviance, I argue, could only be understood in Crisp’s time as a threat to the potential undoing of *every* man’s manhood (Houlbrook 2005: 158). To a certain extent, the overt effeminate body continues to be understood in relation to the remaining ruins of such a framework. I will now turn to an analysis of what function such visible displays of effeminacy might have had for the London quean. In doing that, I will focus specifically on some of the elements which have fostered similarly productive discussions in my practice.

The London quean

As I have discussed in chapter one with regards to Houlbrook’s study (2005), police reports from the period between the wars show how queans lived under the constant surveillance of the law. These queans were described in one of such reports as “powdered and painted ... they smelt strongly of perfume and spoke effeminately” (Houlbrook 2005: 139). The queans’ conscious engagement with practices coded as effeminate could be regarded, I suggest, as a new and inventive way of writing *on* the body what appeared to have already been marked *in* their bodies. The quean’s proposed tension between ‘cosmetic’ and ‘somatic’ approaches to effeminacy is

⁹⁷ In a passage of a documentary produced for television (1970, dir. Mitchell), Crisp has declared how he was often stopped by the police due to his sartorial choices. “A policeman once came up to me on the street,” he relates, “and said, ‘you can’t go about like that’ and I said ‘why not?’—I was dressed in trousers—and he said, ‘well, you look exactly like a woman’ and I said ‘I’m wearing trousers’ and he said, ‘well, women wear trousers’ and I said, ‘I can’t help it if other people are eccentric’” (Crisp in Mitchell 1970).

interesting insofar as it indicates a critical engagement with the process of self-stigmatisation in relation to Goffman's concept (1963: 11, Warner 1999: 27).

As Erving Goffman's seminal study has shown, the origin of the term 'stigma' can be traced back to an ancient social practice involving the body. "The Greeks, who were apparently strong on visual aids," says Goffman, "originated the term *stigma* to refer to bodily signs designed to expose something unusual or bad about the moral status of the signifier. The signs were cut or burnt into the body and advertised that the bearer was a slave, a criminal, or a traitor—a blemished person, ritually polluted, to be avoided, especially in public places" (1963: 11).

The use of make-up as a form of self-imposed stigma, as a bodily mark that set the quean apart from the rest, can be seen, in this context, as both exciting and dangerous. It is exciting in the sense that the queans seemed to have appropriated for themselves objects, gestures and practices more commonly associated with the feminine universe despite overbearing regulations not to do so. In the process of doing this, they appeared to have invented a new identity category (in body and practices) and a new subculture (in space and practices) for themselves. This was done, we must remember, at a time when the mainstream opinion was often critical and hostile of their free expression and perhaps even of their existence. The queans could be said to have existed, to a limited extent, as laughing in the face of power, even though their realities were normally tainted by repression and violence.

This self-marking of bodies with make-up appears to have been a practice taken on by the queans as an active attempt at visibility. It was a practice they appeared to have developed as a form of self-expression and in response to institutionalised repression. Similarly, as a shared practice, make-up appears to have given the queans their bodies (and their power) back from the stigmatised and marginalised positions they might have previously occupied. Through make-up, they appear to be active in the process of inventing new forms of corporeal presentation. This presentation—revelling in effeminacy as it seemed to have done—appeared to have been permeated with a strong sense of irony. The quean's ironic self-presentation served, one might say, as a form of social commentary.

Whereas the vehicle of such commentary was their own bodies, its content appeared to denounce the awareness the queans might have had of the destabilising nature of their gendered selves. The irony with which this commentary was conveyed might be best illustrated perhaps by examining a description of a specific London quean's body. In discussing the case of William L., Houlbrook has shown that "his dress, voice, and mannerisms were visibly 'effeminate.' He was 'highly-powdered'" (2005: 149). William L.'s body is presented here, as Houlbrook has shown, as *visibly* effeminate. This visibility has been placed, as the transcript confirms, in his dress, in his voice and in his mannerisms but also, and perhaps chiefly, in what has been described as a *highly-powdered* body. We have already seen, with reference to Butler, that gender can be explained as being inscribed in the body. The quean appears to have had an experiential knowledge of this rather intellectual notion. Testament of this knowledge is the quean's manipulation of certain aspects of his body—through make-up and dress, for example. This manipulation appeared to be always veered towards a 'visibly effeminate' rendering of the body.

The irony with which the quean might have approached this complex system of inscriptions, however, appears to be made clear in Houlbrook's further revelation. William L., he has shown, "had two tattoos—a beauty spot on his cheek and his camp name—Gertie—on his arm" (Houlbrook 2005: 149). William L.'s use of tattoos returns the discussion to Goffman in the way it effectively brings the structural bonds between *stigma* and *markings on the body* into tension. "Stigma," as Warner has defined it, "refers to a mark on the body, like a brand or a tattoo ... identifying the person with his or her disgrace" (1999: 27). William L., like Crisp, appeared to have been aware that the stigma of performing effeminacy was located in his body. Moreover, he appeared to have been aware of the inescapability of gender categories (I have spoken similarly about the *impossibility* of 'erasing' bodily markers of effeminacy). Like Crisp, William L. clearly did not want to be seen as being ashamed of his effeminacy. In the act of tattooing a beauty spot (a rather more permanent form of make-up) and his camp name on his body, William L. *reinscribed* the stigma that already marked his body. The tattoos, as *marks* on the body, appear to have been creative and rather queer responses to his lived reality of social stigma.

Both tattoo and make-up must therefore be seen as conscious attempts at strategies of counter-discourse. Through the *writing* of signs (a beauty spot) and of language (a camp name), they seem to offer an engagement with the same language that renders them abnormal. Like gender, tattoos and make-up are both written on the body. Tattoos and make-up might be seen as representative of, respectively, the permanent (impossible to erase) and non-permanent (possible to play up or down) elements of gender. Like gender, tattoos and make-up cause the quean's body to visually appear different. Knowing as he appeared to have been that his embodiment of effeminacy existed in relation to a system that imbued his body with a specific meaning (effeminate homosexual); knowing as he appeared to have been of the uselessness of trying to exist outside such frames of meaning, William L. creatively embraced—tongue firmly placed in cheek—his effeminacy by using, as Foucault (1998 [1976]: 101) might have said, “the same vocabulary [a camp name], the same categories [bodily signs]” that qualified him as a ‘quean.’⁹⁸ The self-knowledge of his positionality as an effeminate homosexual appears to have originated the demand for the creation of a new identity, which William L., other queans and Crisp appear to have done through their use of make-up, dress or tattoos. This new identity category appears to be firmly established in the pleasure these men seemed to have derived from their shared effeminacy. “Character and identity,” concludes Houlbrook, “were indelibly marked on and through the body” (2005: 149).

On the other hand, the quean's use of make-up might be seen as dangerous since it visually renders them *more* visible. Visible and extreme queans in this period in London were often persecuted and commonly became targets of abuse, arrest, and assault because of their public expression of effeminacy (Houlbrook 2005: 136). “At Bow Street Police Station,” relates Houlbrook, “Cyril was subject to the humiliating ritual of having his cheeks rubbed with blotting paper for evidence of make-up”

⁹⁸ The quean's creative engagement with discourses that oppress them might be explained through Foucault's concept of ‘reverse discourse.’ “There is no question,” he has claimed, “that the appearance in nineteenth-century psychiatry, jurisprudence, and literature of a whole series of discourses on the species and subspecies of homosexuality, inversion, pederasty, and ‘psychic hermaphroditism’ made possible a strong advance of social controls into this area of ‘perversity,’ but it also made possible the formation of a ‘reverse’ discourse: homosexuality began to speak in its own behalf, to demand that its legitimacy or ‘naturalness’ be acknowledged, often in the same vocabulary, using the same categories by which it was medically disqualified” (Foucault 1998 [1976]: 101).

(2005: 05). Although, having one's cheeks rubbed for evidence of make-up might not in itself constitute violence, we must remember that this is happening at a time when homosexuality was still illegal. Within that context, wearing make-up, women's clothes and perfume could be interpreted as external signs of sexual inversion. I have shown earlier how this has worked for Crisp when he was stopped by a policeman who perceived him to be dressed 'like a woman.' The traces of make-up left on the blotting paper could, and in the case of Cyril in fact were, used as evidence of illegal practice. As Houlbrook has shown, "he was imprisoned and then brought to trial at the central criminal court" (2005: 05).

Queans like Cyril were habitually humiliated and occasionally had their lives wrecked by the disaster of gaining criminal records, having their names and addresses published in national newspapers and becoming targets of public hostility as a result. Even though they suffered the damaging effects of shame, stigma and violence, these social types seemed to form communal ties with other effeminate homosexuals. "If denigrated as 'Nancies,'" says Houlbrook, "they themselves could celebrate their effeminacy ... [and] positioning themselves within a canonical queer history reinforced this process" (Houlbrook 2005: 245).⁹⁹ There appeared to be, nonetheless, a common thread in the quean's self-conscious sense of artificiality in gender presentation, a self-confessed 'construction' of "an 'effeminate' public persona" (Houlbrook 2005: 07); an exaggeration in form, even if this deliberate 'construction' stemmed from what they might have perceived as their "inner nature" (Houlbrook 2005: 07).

The queans seemed to have manipulated their physicality by borrowing elements from the feminine universe. They "plucked and pencilled their eyebrows; they wore lipstick, eye shadow, rouge, and powder; they painted their fingernails; they wore scent ... they grew and styled their hair in ways coded as feminine. Waving was most common but some also used colours" (Houlbrook 2005: 147-148). "Drawing upon the material culture of femininity," says Houlbrook, "they manipulated their bodies' physicality to create an arrestingly colourful persona, a striking and often undeniable

⁹⁹ The quean's positionality within a 'canonical queer history' for the purpose of 'reinforcing the process' of celebrating their effeminacy is inspirational for my research given that my historiographical method assumes a similar purpose.

urban presence” (2005: 147-148). Houlbrook’s insight is helpful here in its revelation that the queans’ engagement with effeminacy and their bodies might have been, to a certain extent, understood as artificial or even theatrical. They ‘manipulated’ their bodies despite, as I have shown earlier, perceiving their effeminacy as part of an ‘inner identity.’

The queans “carefully managed their bodies to enhance their visibility ... their make-up was thought to symbolize a dangerous excess of femininity” (Houlbrook 2005: 148). This artificial approach to their gendered bodies is, as Houlbrook shows here, also somewhat dangerous by dint of being excessive. Their presentation of gender is clearly theatrical, they “carefully mirrored those bodily practices conceptualized as womanlike ... their walk is ‘mincing;’ they have an ‘exaggerated gait’ and an ‘effeminate’ or ‘affected’ manner” (Houlbrook 2005: 148). Here again, Houlbrook demonstrates how the queans had a clear knowledge of the manipulability of gender: they managed their bodies ‘carefully;’ they ‘mirrored’ bodily practices in posture, walk and voice. “The quean’s sense of self *saturated* his body,” he later writes (Houlbrook 2005: 148, my emphasis). Effeminacy appeared to be taken to the limits. The extreme figure of the quean inscribed itself in stark contrast with the disparaging figure of the respectable, ‘normal’ masculine persona. Their bodily practices—both in somatic and cosmetic instances—were thus not restricted to their own underground culture, they also challenged and to a certain extent even dictated the concept of the masculine man. “The quean’s prominence in contemporary culture,” says Houlbrook, “shaped the behaviour of *all* men, constraining the clothes they wore, the hairstyles they adopted, and the way they moved” (2005: 149).¹⁰⁰

The quean’s effeminacy appears to have infected the larger ideal of masculinity. To be masculine, in other words, was to be *not* like the quean. Hennen has argued that the body of the effeminate homosexual has traditionally held a proscriptive position.

¹⁰⁰ Just as “respectable ‘homosexuality’ was predicated upon a disdainful repudiation of the quean’s visible difference” (Houlbrook 2005: 266) in the period between the wars, the Clone’s hypermasculine gender performance was also predicated upon a disdainful repudiation of flamboyant homosexuals in the 1960s and 1970s. For Houlbrook, “it was in the 1950s and 1960s [in post-Wolfenden report Britain] that ... tensions and ambiguities inherent to queer political interventions solidified into a rigid bifurcation between the respectable and the disreputable, the ‘homosexual’—beneficiary of the law reform, and the queer—continued subject of social opprobrium and regulatory intervention” (2005: 254).

“The effeminate homosexual,” he has claimed, “has acted as a powerful mechanism for policing hegemonic masculinity” (Hennen 2008: 58). In chapter three I will discuss this policing function with regards to the sissy boy in school. The assumption that the effeminate body has the power to constrain the limits of masculinity is interesting since, thus far, I have been speaking about how the effeminate body is the one who is passively suffering the effects of power.

On further analysis, this same body might be seen as actively participating in the construction of gender boundaries. For Houlbrook, this idea of effeminacy as a systemic instrument of controlling masculinity is made clear through an analysis of Crisp’s body: “as Crisp recognized, the image of the quean constituted a disparaged other against which a ‘normal’ masculine persona was articulated, inscribing the male body within a constant anxious surveillance” (Houlbrook 2005: 149)). For Badinter (1992), masculinity must be seen as always acquired through this process of negation. “A little boy,” she has argued, “defines himself primarily negatively” (1992: 32). “Males,” she has explained, “generally learn what they must not be in order to be masculine, before learning what they can be” (Badinter 1992: 32). “Many boys,” she concludes, “define masculinity simply as what is not feminine” (Badinter 1992: 32). This notion of effeminacy and masculinity as counter-distinctive concepts has been explored in my research through the relationship developed between the two bodies on stage. In *Sissy!*, my body, in its representation of effeminacy, offers a visual contrast to Sautzvy’s, in his representation of masculinity. The first might be seen to become more feminine because it is not the second and vice-versa.¹⁰¹

The choice of engaging in this practice of queering gender normative codes is, still today, often actively discouraged and admonished, especially in young boys. I will now describe how these tensions might play out when placed in contrast with prevailing clinical discourses of gender deviance. As I will show, seen through the lenses of certain medical discourses, gender deviance might be understood as a psychopathology classified under the nomenclature ‘Gender Identity Disorder.’ This

¹⁰¹ The counter-distinctive pull between effeminacy and masculinity is further explored in *Sissy!* in another layer of text. This appears in my use of the spoken word when articulating the following text: “Don’t masquerade ... in women’s clothes ... [don’t] use make-up ... don’t wear conspicuous rings, watches or cuff-links ... don’t stand with your hand on your hips [don’t] walk mincingly” (Anomaly in Houlbrook 2005: 204).

view clearly has specific implications to my study, I will now explain what these might be.

Gender Identity Disorder

Although significant progress has been made in terms of formal legislation, medical discourses and the acquisition of rights for homosexuals since the time of the London quean and of Crisp's autobiographical accounts, I would suggest, based partially on my personal experience, that visibly effeminate bodies continue to be regarded, to a large extent, as 'abject bodies' (Butler 1993).¹⁰² Whilst homosexual acts are no longer illegal in the West and homosexuality is no longer classified as a mental illness, there are still important issues that need fighting for. One might be the fact that homosexuality is still a crime punishable by law in seventy-five countries, with a further five where the death penalty is a distinct possibility. Another cause worth fighting for—which I do in chapter three—is countering the violence with which sissy bodies are often met, proving that the rights of protection enshrined by law are more effective on paper than they seem to be in practice.¹⁰³ A further issue that needs addressing is the fact that gender dysphoria remains listed as a mental disorder.

Not only would I suggest that the effeminate body remains socially regarded as an example of the abject body, but the same markers that used to set the quean and Crisp apart from others as social deviant types are the same markers that, according to a established psycho-clinical canon, might be regarded as symptoms of a mental

¹⁰² An example of the 'abject body' is, for Butler, a body that poses a potential challenge to mutually exclusive understandings of 'maleness' and 'femaleness.' In *Bodies That Matter* (1993), she proposes a reading of the body as 'constructed,' complicating the feminist tenet of 'gender' as a social construct versus 'sex' as a biological given. Thinking about the materiality of the body outside construction is, for Butler, a vain exercise since thinking outside cultural frameworks such as language and signification appears to be impossible. In her terms, "to claim that discourse is formative, is not to claim that it originates, causes, or exhaustively composes that which it concedes; rather, it is to claim that there is no reference to a pure body" (Butler 1997: 10).

¹⁰³ Evidence of the perceived increase in violent attacks aimed at visibly queer men has been recently reported in London's East End. As a result, a support group page has been set up in the social networking engine Facebook (see 'East End Homophobia' 2009). Participants are encouraged to record any incidents they might have been victims of or that they might have witnessed. The stated aims of the group are to: "(1) collect data on prevalence; (2) coordinate (and not duplicate) advocacy work with: [among others] residents, police, GLA, MPs, community leaders; (3) design and implement intelligent plan of action to combat the problem" ('East End Homophobia' 2009). The group provides a living catalogue of injury and attests to the urgency and currency of this matter in the queer community.

disorder entitled Gender Identity Disorder (GID). The negotiable markers I have been addressing thus far as markers of effeminacy take on a different dimension when scrutinised under the guise of this branch of science. Seen through medical lenses, in other words, these negotiable markers might become actions indicative (or even *performative*) of a mental illness.

The pathological body

Having myself received treatment for GID as a child, my study attempts to partially address the gap that Susan J. Langer and James I. Martin's article has identified as still open in the scholarship of gender. "Although there are some studies of the effects of treatment provided to children diagnosed with GIDC [Gender Identity Disorder in Childhood]," they state, "none of them examined the experience of this treatment by the children themselves" (2004: 17).¹⁰⁴

According to the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual (DSM, currently in its fourth edition), a man who presents recognisably feminine traits of behaviour could be regarded as suffering from the pathological condition 'Gender Identity Disorder.'¹⁰⁵ In an essay entitled 'How Dresses Can Make You Mentally Ill,' Langer and Martin (2004) openly criticise the validity of GID and the work of its supporters, led mainly by psychiatrist Kenneth Zucker. They claim—and I agree—that "gender atypicality is a social construction that varies over time according to culture and social class and therefore should not be pathologized" (Langer and Martin 2004: 05).

Zucker, on the other hand, proposes children should be treated for GID, claiming treatment will help "to reduce their experience of social ostracism and its psychopathological sequelae" (in Langer and Martin 2004: 14). Although the experience of social ostracism is indeed traumatising and the attempt to minimise it might constitute a worthy cause, there are nevertheless serious ethical implications

¹⁰⁴ Among the studies that have investigated the effects on children diagnosed with GID is Richard Green's *Sissy Boy Syndrome* (1987). Among the studies providing views from the treated subject's perspective, see Rottnek (1999).

¹⁰⁵ The DSM is published by the American Psychiatric Association (APA). Richard Green, in his 1987 book offered 'Sissy Boy Syndrome' as an alternative name for GID. GID is also a listed disorder in the International Statistical Classification of Diseases and Related Health Problems (ICD). Currently in use is ICD-10, which was published by the World Health Organisation (WHO) in 1992.

with Zucker's other stated motive for treating sissy boys. According to him, treatment will also help "to prevent their becoming either homosexual or transsexual adults" (in Langer and Martin 2004: 14).¹⁰⁶ Social distress is, however, a result of peer rejection and bullying and, as such, should be seen as a reflection of how homosexuality is perceived rather than a condition of homosexuality itself. It must follow, therefore, that intervention should be directed at bullies and not at homosexuals.

In their campaign for the removal of GID from the forthcoming edition of the DSM,¹⁰⁷ Langer and Martin point out that GID-related treatment "represents a conflation of conformity with health in which effeminate boyhood is considered not just different, but pathological" (2004: 14). For Butler, GID is a pathology that focuses on 'failure.' Treatment for GID, she has claimed, "assumes that certain gender norms have not been properly embodied, and that an error and a failure have taken place" (2004: 77). In their definition of failure, however, what both the diagnosis and the treatment seem to neglect is an assessment of how gender norms seem to constantly evolve. In chapter three I will return to the idea of 'failure' in relation to sissiness.

The inclusion of GID in the list of psychosexual disorders bears historical and political significance. The first time GID appeared in the DSM was in its third edition (DSM-III), published in 1980. Unsurprisingly, this was also the first time homosexuality was not included in the list of mental illnesses, which led queer theorists and activists such as Kosofsky Sedgwick (1994) to suggest that the depathologisation of sexuality (i.e. homosexuality) came at the price of a new pathologisation of gender (i.e. gender dysphoria). In 'How to Bring Your Kids Up Gay: The War on Effeminate Boys,' Kosofsky Sedgwick has claimed that according to this new diagnosis, "femininity, in a person with a penis, can represent nothing but deficit and disorder" (1994: 160). GID is therefore regarded, it has been claimed, by

¹⁰⁶ The attempt to prevent children from becoming homosexual or transsexual sounds rather like an attempt to eradicate these conditions, which, in turn, might be regarded as a rather close position to a politics of eugenics, see fn. 53.

¹⁰⁷ DSM number V is to be published in 2012, an early draft of which has been released to specialised medical practitioners for comments in 2009, among them Zucker, who is on the consulting panel.

a section of the medical establishment as a new way to pathologise homosexuality (Rottnek 1999, Minter 1999). Butler appears to concur with Kosofsky Sedgwick's view by suggesting that "GID became an indirect way of diagnosing homosexuality as a gender identity problem" (2004: 78). "The diagnosis of GID is in most cases," continues Butler, "a diagnosis of homosexuality, and the disorder attached to the diagnosis implies that homosexuality remains a disorder as well" (2004: 78).

Diagnostic tests for GID

Data published in the *Handbook of Sexual and Gender Identity Disorders* (Part II: Gender Identity Disorders edited by Zucker (2008)) determine that children can be diagnosed with GID during their pre-school years, between two and four years of age, if not earlier. Gender role is "measured in young children by affiliative preference for same-sex versus opposite-sex peers, roles in fantasy play, toy interests, dress-up play and interest in rough-and-tumble play" (Zucker 2008: 379). For Friedman, "the distinction between nonconformists and people with psychopathology is usually clear enough during childhood. Extremely and chronically effeminate boys," he concludes, "should be understood as falling into the latter category" (in Kosofsky Sedgwick 1994: 156). Friedman's distinction is pertinent here since, thus far, I have been investigating precisely those who present gender in an 'extreme' manner. Seen in closer detail, the DSM-IV specifies children must be diagnosed as suffering from GID according to criteria that includes, among other symptoms:¹⁰⁸

- (a) In boys, preference for cross-dressing or simulating female attire;
- (b) Strong and persistent preferences for cross-sex roles in make-believe play;
- (c) Intense desire to participate in the stereotypical games and pastimes of the other sex;
- (d) Sense of inappropriateness in the gender role of his or her sex ... manifested by any of the following: aversion toward rough-and-tumble play and rejection of male stereotypical toys, games, and activities (in Zucker 2008: 384)

Butler has openly criticised the diagnostic criteria by claiming that "the diagnosis seeks to establish criteria by which a cross-gendered person might be identified, but

¹⁰⁸ Here, I have selected symptoms that are relevant to this chapter, which investigates the sissy body. The symptoms I list here have also served as source material in my investigative practice carried out in studio. For the full criteria list, see appendix A.

the diagnosis, in articulating criteria, articulates a very rigid version of gender norms” (2004: 95). In ‘Drop the Barbie! If You Bend Gender Far Enough, Does It Break?’ (2001), Stephanie Wilkinson has described some of the diagnostic tests used to establish whether or not a particular child suffers from GID. One such test involves the child being asked to produce a drawing. “Girls who draw men in positions of power first and boys who draw princesses or mommies,” she has shown, “are suspect” (Wilkinson 2001). In her article, Wilkinson offers a critical discussion of other diagnostic criteria: “the Barlow Gender-Specific Motor Behaviour test examines such things as how far from the back of the chair a seated child’s buttocks are—farther is ‘masculine,’ closer is ‘feminine’” (Wilkinson 2001). “All the precision of science,” she concludes, “was applied in developing these tests to measure such things as the angle between the wrist and the hand ... and how far the hips swayed as the child walked across the room” (Wilkinson 2001).¹⁰⁹

Wilkinson shows here how the sissy boy can be diagnosed following strictly codified rules of body behaviour. In other words, sissiness is located specifically and undeniably in the body and its mannerisms—in the limp wrist, in the sitting posture and in the sway of the hips, for instance. The sissy body, according to this clinical assessment, must be treated, corrected, ‘straightened’ and normalised. The material body of the sissy boy is manipulated in the setting of medical treatments but instead of enhancing the elements that make it different—like the quean and Crisp appeared to have done—in the medical view, the sissy body must be made to adjust to culturally established, rigid notions of gender behaviour.

GID diagnosis appears to offer a rather unsophisticated reading of the otherwise complex relationship between the cultural body and the material body. Its premise seems to be that the cultural body—what Butler has defined as ‘bodily indicators’—and the material body—i.e. the biological body—should always (be made to) align. However, as Butler has claimed, this separation between cultural and material is not always possible to negotiate in practice. “These bodily indicators [i.e. mannerisms, deportment],” she has claimed, “are the cultural means by which the sexed body is read. They are themselves bodily, and they operate as signs, so there is no easy way

¹⁰⁹ The tests described here by Wilkinson have also proven to be a fruitful source for the practical investigation of the sissy body in my research.

to distinguish between what is ‘materially’ true, and what is ‘culturally’ true about a sexed body” (Butler 2004: 87). Mannerisms and deportment indicative of gender, according to her, appear to be always already attached to the material body. “I don’t mean to suggest” concludes Butler, “that purely cultural signs produce a material body, but only that the body does not become sexually readable without those signs, and that those signs are irreducibly cultural and material at once” (2004: 87).

These cultural signs that produce sexually readable bodies presumably exist within the same framework that produces those unreadable or abject bodies of the sissy boy. The sissy boy, following the clinical discourses I have been examining, must therefore undergo treatment in order to supposedly become readable within heteronormative structures. Types of treatment that reinforce gender conformity include (a) ‘behaviour therapy,’ where gender typical behaviour is rewarded whereas cross-gender behaviour is not; (b) psychotherapy and (c) the treatment of parents, who are taught how to establish boundaries.¹¹⁰ All of the suggested forms of treatment appear to be designed to encourage boys to conform to traditional gender and heterosexual roles, further stressing the conflation between health and conformity.

Although there has been no scientific evidence to support the idea that conversion can be successful (Langer and Martin 2004: 14), correctional treatment is still offered and carried out in some clinics to this day. Langer and Martin go so far as to say that “treatment for GIDC [Gender Identity Disorder in Children] bears striking resemblance to conversion therapy for homosexuality” (2004: 18) and that “children could be harmed by GIDC-related treatment in several ways” (2004: 18). “Gender-atypical children who are brought into treatment by parents who want them to be ‘normal,’” they have warned, “are not likely to have the opportunity [of identifying with a community of others who are similarly stigmatised]. Their experience of stigma is likely to be far lonelier and more damaging” (Langer and Martin 2004: 17).

To illustrate the potential damages GIDC-related treatment might cause, Langer and Martin have described the case of Kraig, an effeminate boy who started seeing a psychiatrist at the age of four and “began to exhibit aggressive, destructive behaviours

¹¹⁰ For a detailed description of types of therapeutic intervention, see Shannon Minter (1999).

after two years of treatment” (2004: 18). According to the researchers, Kraig’s destructive behaviour escalated and “when Kraig was interviewed at age seventeen, he was obsessed with appearing masculine” (Langer and Martin 2004: 18). The result of Kraig’s treatment, Langer and Martin have established, was tragic: “he attempted suicide at age eighteen” (2004: 18). Butler has also warned against the potential effects of GID treatment by arguing that “the pathologizing force of the diagnosis can be debilitating, if not murderous ... it murders the soul, and sometimes it becomes a contributing factor in suicide” (2004: 78).¹¹¹

Although difference is admittedly situated in the body—in mannerisms and behaviour—research such as Langer and Martin’s has shown that this body cannot be converted without severe damage; assuming, of course, it *can* be converted at all. Subjects who undergo treatment are liable to suffer intense psychiatric sequelae, as Kraig’s case might demonstrate. Treatment seems to be highly unethical even if the intention is to supposedly minimise social ostracism.¹¹² As Pleak has suggested, “attempting to change children’s gender identity for this purpose seems as ethically repellent as bleaching black children’s skin in order to improve their social life among white children” (in Langer and Martin 2004: 14). Instead of focusing on modifying the behaviour of effeminate boys, Pleak has suggested, “therapeutic intervention with such children should focus on supporting their development to become healthy gay adults” (in Langer and Martin 2004: 17).

The treatments currently available to gender atypical children and adults seem to offer one of two options, both of which appear to focus on either ‘containing’ or ‘correcting’ the sissy body. The first option is what we have seen above, that is, the psychiatric treatment of children with the goal of ‘masculinising’ their behaviour. GID treatment addresses what Butler has called the ‘cultural body’ by forcing boys to

¹¹¹ We have already seen the association between gender dysphoria and suicide as investigated by Kosofsky Sedgwick (1994), (see fn. 74). The imperative to conform and the realisation of the inability to do so resulting in suicide is also a factor investigated by Houlbrook (2005). “The risk of arrest could seem ever-present,” he has shown in regards to the social and legal context of the quean, “bracing many men’s everyday lives with a crippling perpetual anxiety” (2005: 36). This anxiety, he has suggested, led many men to commit suicide. “Rather than risk public exposure, imprisonment, ostracism by friends and family, and dismissal at work,” he says, many men “chose to take their lives” (Houlbrook 2005: 36).

¹¹² More on ‘ostracism’ in chapter four.

learn and embody proper codes of masculinity. The second option might be seen by some as a consequence of the unsuccessful result of the first. In other words, having failed in acquiring masculinity, the ‘material body’ is now the one that is offered some sort of ‘correction,’ which may include hormone therapy with the ultimate goal of sex-reassignment operations.¹¹³ Both alternatives of therapeutic intervention appear to reinforce the same ethos, namely, the imposition that sex and gender must align at any cost.

Either the feminine gender performance is tamed through therapy to align with the male biological body or the male biological body is surgically corrected in order to align with the feminine gender performance. Although I am not in any way against the option of transsexuality as a legitimate way of living, I am nevertheless against the idea that the two options above should be the only options available. In more simple words, what I am against is the idea that effeminate behaviour in men should be seen as always necessitating correction. What I object to is the idea that gender transgression should be seen as deserving of social punishments such as “the surgical correction ... the medical and psychiatric pathologization and criminalization in several countries ... of ‘gender dysphoric’ people, the harassment of gender-troubled persons ... employment discrimination, and violence” (Butler 2004: 55). The list, as Butler appears to suggest, does not seem to include space for the performance of gender misalignment without any form of social, medical or legal opprobrium (or a combination thereof).

Conclusion

In this chapter I have tried to draw a picture of the sissy body by placing it in a line of historical representation. I have established that the sissy’s effeminate body has traditionally stood outside and against discourses of normativity. Normativity—the

¹¹³ In an article published by *The Guardian*, Viv Groskop describes some of the advancements in the treatment of sissy boys. Rather than being coerced to conform to the masculinity that is expected of them, some sissy boys have been given a new drug to stop them developing secondary male characteristics (e.g. facial and body hair, Adam’s apple, deep voice, etc). Currently being tested in—among other countries—Australia, Belgium, Canada, Germany and the Netherlands, this drug “suppresses oestrogen in girls and testosterone in boys” (2008: 15). The article tends towards an essentialist explanation of gender discomfort. The main goal of the treatment with hormone-suppressing drugs seems to be sex reassignment surgery to correct these children’s “wrong body” or “make [their] genitals right” (2008: 15).

great anathema to queer theory—represents, for Warner (1999), among other things, the submission to a package. “If one is born with male genitalia,” he explains, “you will behave in masculine ways, desire women, desire feminine women, desire them exclusively, have sex in insertive ways and within officially sanctioned contexts, think of yourself as heterosexual, identify with other heterosexuals, trust in the superiority of heterosexuality no matter how tolerant you might wish to be” (1999: 37-38). The logic, he continues, imposes you should “never change any part of this package from childhood to senescence” (Warner 1999: 38). According to this heteronormative system, gender and sexuality *must* align and anyone who deviates from the conventional path will inevitably do so, as Warner puts it, at ‘their own cost’ (1999: 38).¹¹⁴

Having actively questioned the validity of normativity with his ‘overvisible’ (Siebers 2008) statements of hyperfemininity, the sissy body of the effeminate man has paid the price variously of shame, stigma, violence, marginalisation, criminalisation,

¹¹⁴ Warner traces our current obsession with the idea of ‘normal’ back to the birth of statistics, at the beginning of the nineteenth century. As a science, he has shown, statistics was originally used to determine clinical/biological conditions of human beings. By making a survey of body temperature or of blood pressure, for instance, scientists would come up with a normal range as control data. This was happening, it must be pointed out, parallel to the birth of medical discourses and classifications of sexual perversions by European sexologists. Indeed, suggests Warner, “it seemed only a small and logical step, later in the nineteenth century, to extend the same thinking to sexuality.” (Warner 1999: 57). ‘Normal,’ he claims, dictates that “what most people are...is what people should be” (Warner 1999: 57). Human sexuality, however, is not as stable and fixed as the laws that govern biology. Moreover, even the laws of biology have proven to be variable, unstable, and susceptible to the cultural inscription of meaning as Butler has shown. For example, Warner cites studies that show how blood sugar levels in Europeans and Africans differ, due to—as the theory goes—different standards of activity. “Given these conditions,” claims Warner, “who decides what level of glycemia will be classified as hypoglycemia—that is, pathological?” (1999: 57) If it is the European, concludes Warner, then his kind of life will pass as normative. The idea of biological norm then becomes an expression of social norms, which is why Butler’s project is not only to contest gender as a construct (a notion that has been largely accepted by now) but to debunk the idea of sex as a given. We learn to conform to heterosexual hegemonic laws of sexuality and gender behaviour simply because that is what the average of a vast population accords with. But why should the variation from the majority (i.e. the deviation) necessarily represent a sign of pathology when it could just as well be seen as an alternative to the norms or even as new norms? Being normal, furthermore, must be understood as a utopian ideal since “to be fully normal is, strictly speaking, impossible. Everyone deviates from the norm in some way.” (Warner 1999: 54). For an alternative conceptualisation of the origins of ‘normal,’ see Butler (2004: 49).

pathology and disenfranchisement.¹¹⁵ Despite all the regulations, I would suggest that the sissy deliberately adopts a style that makes his difference all the more legible. Through his use of make-up, tattoos and a peculiar way of walking, the sissy actively ‘fashions,’ to use Munt’s term (2007: 222), a sissy body despite regulations, despite prohibitions and despite subjugation.

Despite being traditionally dismissed as criminal, as mentally ill and as socially inadequate, the sissy is still able to find agency through the manipulation and reinvention of his body. Whereas I have argued that the sissy’s embodiment of effeminacy might grant him some form of agency (in reinvention, in glamour, in playfulness, in theatricality and, perhaps chiefly, in the pleasure intrinsic in living ‘outside’ normality), I also want to be careful in recognising that this agency might often come at the price of violence (chapter three) and systemic marginalisation (chapter four). Needless to say, it is the body itself that pays such prices of regulation.

There is indeed a price to be paid for visibility. There is a price to be paid for standing out from the crowd, for refusing to wear the public mask of normativity. The question this raises is then: is this price worth it? The question becomes rather immaterial if we bear in mind that visibility, for the sissy, might be unavoidable. As a sissy, I want to reclaim this often-repudiated effeminate body from its exclusively negative potential as my own by firmly positioning myself within this canonical queer history of effeminacy. My visibility as a sissy, I hope, can work towards challenging the notion that effeminate bodies can only be understood within the tropes of disease, disfunctionality, ridicule, taboo or violence. Whereas I want my study to work towards dissociating effeminacy from violence and other damaging effects, I want it to achieve that by not compromising the sissy’s positionality as different. In other words, I want to remain a sissy gender nonconformist but do not want to be punched in the face, spat at, laughed at, derided or threatened every time I turn a corner.

¹¹⁵ I use the term ‘hyperfemininity,’ rather than ‘femininity’ *tout court*, as a way of stressing the self-aware and playful use of an overt version of femininity by sissies. In Gough’s words, hyperfemininity could be defined as being “more self-conscious than the real thing, more theatrical, and often more ‘ironic’” (in Sinfield 1994: 194).

The common thread of this chapter has been this ever-present sense of, both voluntarily *and* involuntarily, performing a body that is forcefully and often violently repressed but that, as it turns out, cannot or refuses to be undone. More specifically, the focus here has been placed on what Peggy Phelan (1993: 07) might have called a ‘visibility politics.’ Visibility, she has claimed, is “a trap ... it summons surveillance and the law” (1993: 06). Sissy visibility, seen as clearly marked in the body, is, I have shown, an inescapable condition. As such, it inevitably summons both surveillance and the law. Nevertheless, rather than being understood exclusively within the structures of oppression, surveillance and the law (as potentially unavoidable companions of sissy living) might be seen as productive of new subjectivities. Surveillance and the law might be regarded as facilitating the creation of a spectacular body. In other words, if he cannot help but being looked at, the sissy might actively invite the gaze of others by performing an extreme version of his body. At other moments, however, the sissy might be seen as creative in devising ways to navigate space outside the framework of visibility and constant surveillance. I will show how this might happen in chapter four.

The invisible, on the other hand, “is unmarked and therefore escapes political surveillance” (Phelan 1993: 95). Invisibility, seen as the result of the proper embodiment of masculinity and normativity, might represent the undoing of the sissy body. For that reason, invisibility is understood as not only unachievable for the sissy but also as undesirable. Revelling in effeminacy, the sissy body creates new approaches towards codified ways of describing the body. The sissy piles on the make-up, accentuates his limp wrist, paints his nails, walks rather more effeminately in his high-heels and repeatedly flutters his hands when speaking. In doing so, the sissy highlights his marked difference and claims a space outside normativity, outside violence and outside tolerance; for “tolerance,” as Crisp has wisely pointed out, “is the result not of enlightenment, but of boredom” (in Tucker 2007: 04).

As Oluchi Lee puts it, “I could never really not look like a sissy girl faggot with my flopping wrist and hip-shaking walk, the escape is never effective—or satisfying. What works,” he ends, “is to accept that mistakability as not only a fact of life but a point of joy and liberation. It can be powerful to be what you look like. It can be wonderful to be mistaken for something that the rest of the world calls horrible, ugly,

embarrassing” (2005: 54). By asserting the importance of keeping the elements that make me a sissy intact; by asserting the desire to enhance, rather than erase, such elements; by claiming sissy as my own identity marker, I hope this chapter has been effective in answering Love’s plea. “I insist,” she reminds us, “on the importance of clinging on to ruined identities and to histories of injury. Resisting the call of gay normalization,” she concludes, “means refusing to write off the most vulnerable, the least presentable, and all the dead” (2007: 30). It is with Love’s appeal in mind that I will turn in the following chapter to a discussion of sissiphobic violence as constitutive of the sissy body and as an ever-present force in the lives of sissies.

Sissiphobia

Generally speaking, there is nothing that can conquer violence (Bataille 1987: 48).

The practice of violence, like all action, changes the world, but the most probable change is to a more violent world (Arendt 1970: 80).

In the present chapter, I will develop a discussion based on the causes and the effects of violence. Specific to the purposes of my argument is my investigation of the rising phenomenon of ‘sissiphobic abuse’ in London over the past few years.¹¹⁶ In order to define sissiphobic abuse, I will first investigate the definition of ‘homophobic crime’ and ‘homophobic offence’ as developed by the Metropolitan Police. Later in the chapter, I will engage in a discussion that involves definitions proposed by Butler (1997, 2004b, 2009) Kosofsky Sedgwick (1990, 1994) and McInnes and Davies (2008), among others.¹¹⁷ According to the Metropolitan Police’s official website, “a Homophobic Offence is any classified notifiable offence which is perceived to be homophobic by the victim or any other person (that is directed to impact upon those known or perceived to be lesbians, gay men, bisexual or transgender people)” (Metropolitan Police 2010). The use of the verb ‘perceived’ in this definition is significant. I would suggest this word proposes some important implications in relation to the sissy body—a body whose characteristics I have described in the previous chapter.

Whereas the victim of a homophobic offense might perceive the attack to have been motivated by his or her being a lesbian, a gay man, a bisexual or a transgender person, it is also true that the attacker, when directing abuse, might have, in the words of the Metropolitan Police, ‘directed [the abuse] to impact upon those known or perceived to be lesbians, gay men, bisexual or transgender people.’ There are hence two parts to the above definition: the victim’s perception of the abuse and the aggressor’s perception of his victim. Let us therefore consider, for a moment, the point of view of the aggressor who deliberately targets lesbians, gay men, bisexual or transgender

¹¹⁶ ‘Sissiphobic abuse’ is a term I have devised to discuss the physical and verbal abuse directed towards sissies.

¹¹⁷ Having established in the previous two chapters how the research has been situated in respect to homosexuality—i.e. I define ‘sissy’ as an ‘effeminate homosexual’—in this chapter I situate ‘sissiphobic abuse’ as a subcategory of ‘homophobic abuse.’

people (LGBT)—in other words, the one who ‘perceives’ them to be thus. The first question this raises for me is this: what might this ‘perception’ entail for queer-bashers? Tentatively, I will speculate that to perceive someone as being gay, bisexual, transgender, queer or non-heterosexual (LGBTQN-H), will often have something to do with the way they might look, the way they might walk, the way they might gesticulate or talk. It may well have something to do with how they might be dressed, or with the people they might be with. In other words, this perception may well be a perception of the external appearance of the victim (the subject of chapter two). This perception might, moreover, have something to do with the place the victims of hate crime might be hanging around or the venue from which they might be leaving. In other words, it could well have something to do with the space in which they find themselves when attacked (chapter four). Moreover, this perception might even have some relation to the victim’s body being perceived as a site of desire.¹¹⁸ Badinter has expressly suggested that “homophobia is tied to a secret fear of one’s own homosexual desires. To see an effeminate man arouses a dreadful anxiety in many men; it makes them aware of their own feminine characteristics, such as passivity and sensitivity, which they consider to be a sign of weakness” (1992: 116). I will investigate the latter claim further in the current chapter with special reference to Butler (1997) and Bataille (2006 [1962]).

Furthermore, the aggressor’s targeting methods might leave a considerable margin for error since ‘perception’ can only be biased and tinted by personal judgment; it can only be qualified by circumstance. “It is the perception of the offender,” according to criminologist Susan Paterson, “that dictates whether one becomes a victim of homophobic attack” (Paterson 2010). There is no real evidence in someone’s appearance or behaviour that could prove that this person is, in reality, homosexual, or bisexual, or even heterosexual, for that matter. A person’s appearance, therefore, might not serve as sufficient grounds to determine their sexual orientation—although

¹¹⁸ Some studies have shown that there might exist an association between homophobia and repressed homosexual tendencies. Glenn Wilson and Qazi Rahman (2005) have cited comparative research where “it was found that men who expressed hostile feelings towards homosexuals (homophobes) showed greater signs of erectile response [if compared to more tolerant heterosexual men] when viewing film clips depicting homosexual activity” (2005: 15). According to such theories, homophobic attacks might be understood as a violent suppression of desire. As such, they could also be explained as a ‘fear’ reaction (see more on this below).

at times, it might. What may well be more readily legible in someone's manner and dress, on the other hand, is the way they do gender. Their voice, mannerisms and overall outer appearance might be indicative of their conventional or unconventional gender performance. It may well be gender, in other words, that is being 'perceived' and attacked in homophobic offences; not sexuality.

Being judged or 'perceived' as LGBT, therefore, might amount to being judged and perceived by the body one possesses or, more specifically, by how that body displays gender or where it might choose to circulate. It might be argued hence, that in certain circumstances a *homophobic* attack could be better understood as a *sissiphobic* attack seeing that some homophobic attacks are a violent response to the social display of a sissy body.¹¹⁹

Regardless of what element of the sissy body denounces it as a gender nonconformist (I have been abused for wearing nail varnish, for instance), the simple, indelible and painful truth is that homophobic crime in London rose considerably in 2009.¹²⁰ What I would like to consider at this juncture is what might be at the core of this increase in violence. It could be due to an increase in sissies coming forward and reporting abuse when it happens. In other words, it might have something to do with a shift in reporting practices. This would imply, of course, that the recent rise comes as a reflection of a rise in reports rather than a rise in attacks. Alternatively, the rise could be directly associated with an increase in homophobic crime in the capital.

Tom Geoghegan, writing for the BBC, has reported that "the police say this rise, at least partly, is due to improved relations with the gay community. After decades of mistrust and a resistance to reporting homophobic crime, gays and lesbians are

¹¹⁹ It naturally goes without saying that this logic is only valid if we talk about effeminate men, which is the subject of my study. An attack directed towards a masculine-looking or masculine-acting woman, for instance, despite also being a product of genderphobia, would not be defined as a sissiphobic attack.

¹²⁰ Across the capital, numbers went up by a total of 27.6%, going from 1,029 cases reported in the period November 2007 to November 2008 to 1,313, the following year. In the borough of Tower Hamlets alone, where I currently live and work, the increasing rate of homophobic crime is even more distressing: it went up by 41.5%, reaching 75 cases reported in the period November 2008 to November 2009 compared to 53 in the previous year (Metropolitan Police 2010). The fact that the number of homophobic victims is higher in Tower Hamlets when compared to certain other London boroughs is of special significance to my research. I will discuss the implications of this in chapter four, where I investigate the politics of sissy space.

coming forward in greater numbers” (Geoghegan 2009).¹²¹ The improved relations mentioned here by Geoghegan might have come as a result of victories achieved over decades of fighting and campaigning for equal rights. Whereas until the fairly recent past homosexuals might have been somewhat mistrusting of the police and resistant to reporting homophobic abuse—given that the admission of homosexuality could have potentially landed them in jail—they now demand their right of protection as well as their right of legal unions in civil partnerships, the right to adopt, the right to be protected against gender discrimination and so on.

Contrary to the police suggestion as cited by Geoghegan, human rights activist Peter Tatchell has claimed that the rise in reports might correspond to a direct rise in attacks. For him, “as more people come out they become more visible and more easily identifiable. That makes them easier targets for people who want to target them” (in Geoghegan 2009). Tatchell’s analysis appears to go some way in supporting the argument I have been making thus far. The sissy’s overt visibility and legibility on the streets might in fact make him an easier target of abuse. Homophobic attacks, however, should not be regarded as a phenomenon confined to London 2010 even if the recent rise has brought them more to the general public’s attention. What I suggest instead is that these attacks have been a traditional part of the hegemonic system, commonly used as instruments of gender control. Kosofsky Sedgwick has called our attention to a phenomenon she identified, in 1990, as “the most common and most rapidly increasing ... crimes in the United States” (1990: 18).¹²²

I am not suggesting in my current analysis that homophobic crime should be seen as solely aimed at gender nonconformists. What I am suggesting, however, is that, to use the words of Paterson, the “one who is ‘fully out’ is more likely to suffer homophobic abuse in public spaces” (Paterson 2010). The sissy, as I have claimed in

¹²¹ The rise in homophobia, being such a recent topic, becomes somewhat difficult to capture in sources other than internet forums and newspapers. I have, however, taken part in a research workshop organised by University College London (UCL) and dedicated to this subject. The workshop took place on the 11th of February of 2010, with the title ‘Backlash? The ‘resurgence’ of homophobia in contemporary cities.’ Speakers included artist and blogger Paul Harfleet; artist Oreet Ashery; academics of geography, criminology and gender and a final lecture by Tatchell.

¹²² For some considerations on the hostility of homophobic attacks, see Badinter (1992: 117). For more on the rising number in homophobic crime in the early 1990s in America, see Badinter (1992: 220 fn. 89).

the previous two chapters, must be seen as exactly that: ‘fully out.’ ‘Out’ is, of course, understood here in relation to the conceptual framework of ‘the closet’ (Kosofsky Sedgwick’s (1990)). ‘The closet,’ Tucker has suggested, “has been viewed as the defining structure of gay oppression during the twentieth century” (2009: 08). As such, he goes on, “it allows for a discussion of how the concealment and denial of homosexuality as a discrete sexual identity in society works to reinforce the heterosexual/homosexual binary and hence ... the dominance of heterosexuality” (Tucker 2009: 08). I have written, in chapter two, about my experience of ‘coming out’ in Brazil in the 1990s. ‘Coming out’ has been written in inverted commas since, for the sissy (and hence, for me), it can only ever be addressed as a notional experience. The sissy, I claim, has never been able to afford the ‘luxury’ and the space of the closet since “being ‘out’ of ‘the closet,’” as Tucker has put it, “requires ... somehow being ‘in’ ‘the closet’ too” (2009: 08). The supposed ‘concealment’ and ‘denial’ of homosexuality to which Tucker refers above are, as I have shown, always implicitly denied for the sissy. That some sissy boys begin to be treated as early as two years old for GID (Thorne 1993: 60, Minter 1999: 09, Zucker 2008: 379) is surely clear evidence of that fact.

Queer-bashing in its many forms—from bullying in school to medical treatments, from legal injunctions to religious proscriptions and verbal and physical harassment—could be seen as an institutionalised form of trying to contain femininity. Sissiphobia is a desperate attempt to shove sissies back within the limits of masculinity. Those men who fail at masculinity are in constant risk of losing their lives or, at the very least, their safety of body and mind (Butler 2004, Love 2007). Sissies, in other words, live under the threat of their failed masculinity. The recent rise in attacks and the space they have occupied in the media might serve an important purpose here: to highlight the fact that attacks on gender minorities are more fundamental a problem than most of us are ready to admit—at least those whose daily lives are not necessarily touched by it.

The increase in incidents might hence be seen as an urgent reminder to sissies whose public lives are to a certain extent already centred around strategising how to avoid violence (what to wear to avoid harassment, where to get changed safely, when to put make-up on, how to navigate the city to avoid danger, and so on). Whereas some of

these actions might seem petty preoccupations, their repression represents the oppression of one's identity. This oppression builds up over a lifetime and can become a cumbersome compromise that even poses serious threats to one's mental, physical and emotional stability. The rise in violence could therefore be seized upon as an opportunity to consider the ubiquity of violence and, hopefully as a consequence of that initial consideration, to find and implement strategies that could help diminish the damaging effects of abuse in the lives of those it does touch on a regular basis. If genderphobic attacks are not, as I suggest, an exclusively contemporary phenomenon, then the recent rise might indicate (a) that more information has become available on how to report crime and how important it is to do so; (b) that we sissies have finally started to gain more confidence and courage to take action against hate and (c) that this courage necessary to take action and report is the same courage that can force us out of the vicious cycle of repression, subjugation and injury and into a more visible, uncensored and public expression of effeminacy. The question then becomes: what can be done to enhance the possibilities of the positive outcomes?

It is possible that one of the productive effects of violence is that this increased rate in queer-bashing has forced some gender nonconformists to do something about the frequency with which violence features in their lives.¹²³ Coming forward in greater numbers might demonstrate how sissies are feeling more assertive about their unavoidable visibility.¹²⁴ Perhaps sissies begin to find the courage to fight back more—albeit in their own sissy ways—when are attacked more. They begin to stand up for themselves after being repeatedly knocked down and stepped over.¹²⁵ If the promise that violence might be potentially transformed into a constructive force can truly bear fruit, then one of the results this recent increase in hate crime might lead to is perhaps a more critical discussion of the causes and consequences of sissy vulnerability and how to reverse this chain of injury. This is precisely the function of both my thesis and my practice. This discussion, I suggest, could lead to some

¹²³ I use 'productive' here in accordance with a Foucauldian conceptual framework, in reference to the concept of 'reverse discourse' (Foucault 1998 [1976]: 101).

¹²⁴ I say 'unavoidable' visibility here in reference to Butler's suggestion of the impossibility of escaping one's own gender performance (2009: 167).

¹²⁵ The language here affords some interpretation in choreographic terms. I will discuss in chapter five how 'the repetitious falls' might be a symbolic representation of 'being repeatedly knocked down.' One of the scenes in *Sissy!* translates, in body and movement, the expression 'being stepped over' (see end of clip 'Spiegel Im Spiegel' in *Sissy!*, DVD 1).

creative solutions at the same time as possibly helping forge firmer and more cohesive bonds between sissies.¹²⁶

For Butler, this transformative promise potentially inherent in violence and injury can be articulated thus: “to be injured,” she has suggested, “means that one has the chance to reflect upon injury, to find out the mechanisms of its distribution, to find out who else suffers ... unexpected violence, dispossession, and fear, and in what ways” (2004b: xii). For Butler, being subjected to violence not only gives one the *chance* to effect change but, most importantly, it presents one with a pressing *responsibility*. “In a certain way,” she has claimed, “our responsibility is heightened once we have been subjected to the violence of others” (2004b: 16). “Only once we have suffered that violence,” she concludes, “are we compelled ethically to ask how we will respond to violent injury ... will we be furthering or impeding violence by virtue of the response we make?” (Butler 2004b: 16). Following from Butler’s claims, I would suggest that my personal desire and ability to reflect on the mechanisms of sissiphobic abuse might stem precisely from the fact that I have suffered abuse on such a regular basis. This abuse, I suggest, has been enacted through the medical treatment I have undergone as a child, through the systemic bullying in school and through the frequent social opprobrium, occasional threats and violence I continue to suffer as an adult.

Just as I have claimed above that homophobic violence should not be confined exclusively to the context of London 2010, I would also note that violence in general is not confined exclusively to the reality of sissies. This consideration has a place here as an attempt to avoid falling into the trap of what Lucas (1994: 73) has referred to as ‘the Camille syndrome.’¹²⁷ In other words, I want to acknowledge—albeit momentarily—that violence is a force to which we as humans are *all* exposed and

¹²⁶ The sort of discussion I am inviting here is already taking place in on-line discussion groups, like *East London Homophobia* (2009), see fn. 101.

¹²⁷ Lucas talks about this ‘self-pity’-evoking discourse as a common strategy in gay men’s rhetoric. “The *Camille* syndrome,” he explains, refers to “the misunderstood who may die, but who dies beautifully and with a great deal of pathos and sentiment” (1994: 73). ‘Camille’ refers here to the main character in the film of the same title (*Camille*, 1936, dir. George Cukor). The film is an adaptation of the romantic classic, *The Lady of the Camellias*, by Alexandre Dumas, Fils. (published in 1848). The novel has also been adapted for theatre and has served as inspiration for the libretto of Giuseppe Verdi’s opera, *La Traviata*.

susceptible. As Butler has suggested “there are no invulnerable bodies” (2009: 34). “We all live with this particular vulnerability,” she maintains, “a vulnerability to the other that is part of bodily life” (2004b: 29). Violence, in other words, transcends and binds us all together in certain ways.

Whilst it is true that we as human beings are collectively open to the possibility of violence, it might also be true that as gender and sexual minorities, through our indelibly marked visibility, we might be exposed to this violence more often than others. “Women and minorities, including sexual minorities,” in Butler’s words, “are, as a community, subjected to violence, exposed to its possibility, if not its realization” (2004b: 20). Not only is violence more often present in the lives of minority groups but, I would suggest, it is in fact *constitutive* of their identities. As Butler herself has put it, “each of us is constituted politically in part by virtue of the social vulnerability of our bodies—as a site of desire and physical vulnerability” (2004b: 20).¹²⁸ The physical vulnerability of his body is, I will show, what helps constitute the sissy in social terms.

Violence and the sissy body¹²⁹

Violence is, for Butler, the process through which we all learn to do gender. “We are at least partially formed through violence,” she has suggested (2009: 167). It is through violence, she continues, that “we are given genders or social categories” (Butler 2009: 167). It is through violence, moreover, that we are conferred legibility by learning through an iterable process how to embody the proper codes of gender behaviour. These genders and social categories, which for Butler “confer intelligibility or recognizability” are given to us, she has claimed, “against our will” (2009: 167). That gender is given to us ‘against our will’ might in itself be seen as a violent element of the process.

For Badinter (1992), however, acquiring masculinity requires rather more exertion than acquiring femininity might do. “Being a man,” she has theorised, “implies a labor, an effort that does not seem to be demanded of a woman” (1992: 01).

¹²⁸ Note how Butler includes ‘desire’—as well as vulnerability—as an element constitutive of the bodies of minorities.

¹²⁹ See chapter five for an analysis of how I have investigated this relationship in practice.

“Manhood is not bestowed at the outset,” she goes on to say, “it must be constructed, or let us say ‘manufactured’” (Badinter 1992: 02). We have just seen how Butler has also established gender as a construct. For both these writers, masculinity seems to be harder to achieve when compared to femininity. However, whilst Butler has defined “masculinity [as] a fragile and fallible construct” (2004: 90), she has equally postulated that we, male *and* female, are *all* subjected to the violent process of gender learning. Badinter’s hypothesis, on the other hand, seems to hinge on the premise that femininity is a natural state—what she calls ‘the *protofemininity* of the human baby’ (1992: 45, original emphasis)—“whereas masculinity must be acquired, and at a high price” (1992: 02). Having argued that manhood must be ‘manufactured,’ she goes on to say that “a man is therefore a sort of *artefact*, and as such he always runs the risk of being found defective” (Badinter 1992: 02, original emphasis). “There may be a defect in the manufacture,” she concludes, “a breakdown in the machinery of virility, in short a failed man” (1992: 02). Badinter’s premise seems to focus on the artificiality of masculinity. The sissy, we have seen, can also be regarded as proposing a rather constructed and excessive (or ‘artificial’) version of gender. Effeminacy, like masculinity, could hence be understood as a sort of *artefact* as well. As such, it could be regarded as an alternative embodiment or ‘a version of masculinity (as well as femininity).’¹³⁰

The sissy, as we have seen, can be examined in constant relation to masculinity: either in his active denial of it or in his (un)conscious failure to embody it. Thorne (1993) has defined the sissy in these exact terms: “in short, a ‘sissy’ is a *failed male*” (1993: 116, my emphasis). We have already seen in chapter two how GID diagnostic criteria are based on the premise of failure to embody gender (Butler 2004: 77). As gender nonconformists, sissies fail at masculinity and hence appear to learn gender ‘differently.’ Sissies seem to embody the mistake, the failure which is always already inherent in the system. Whereas I would agree with Butler’s claim that the process of learning gender is violent for *everyone*, I would suggest that when it comes to the sissy, perceived as a ‘failed’ man, violence remains a constant reminder that he ‘hasn’t really learnt properly.’ Violence thus seems to remain present throughout the

¹³⁰ The sissy might be seen as presenting a bit of a challenge to Badinter in the sense that it constitutes a man, just a different kind of a man, rather than a woman, seeing that her theory talks about girls embracing femininity.

lives of sissies. For the sissy, violence seems to work as a force that appears to constantly try to push him back within the symbolic boundaries of gender. This tension is perhaps made clearer in Butler's observation that GID "is a diagnosis that has been given to people against their will" (2004: 77). The diagnosed sissy boy, according to that, having gone through the same violent process of learning gender that we all go through, 'against our wills,' and having failed, now undergoes a separate violent and involuntary process, where his gender is pathologised, once again, 'against his will.'

This violence against the sissy can take many guises at different stages. For children in school, it might be enacted through bullying and teasing. As Thorne has shown, "teasing and labeling can be seen as strategies for containing the subversive potential" of gender (1993: 133). For Butler, however, 'peer teasing and rejection' are more than mere instruments of social pressure. The language that has been used in the DSM to describe the symptoms of GID, she has shown, tends to euphemise "violence against transgendered youth ... as teasing and pressure" (2004: 99). It does that, she has suggested, by overlooking the actual effects of such strategies; namely, isolation, rejection, suicide attempts, risks of death and murder (Butler 2004: 99).¹³¹ At later stages, sissiphobic violence might no longer be enacted through teasing and bullying, as it had commonly been in school, but through more violent forms of physical and verbal abuse.

Social violence might hence be seen as an attempt to erase the realisation of failure, embodied in the sissy's performance of gender. As long as sissies exist, the illusion on which gender as a system is built might continue to be challenged. For Badinter, the primary function of homophobic violence is specifically to strengthen heterosexuality (1992: 118). But if heterosexuality is perceived as in need of strengthening, it follows that it might be understood as fundamentally weak. More than that, it might be fair to say that heterosexual embodiments of gender, as ideals, could be aware of their weakness. The proof of that awareness would lie in the fact that the mistake, in this case, the sissy, is constantly under attack; it must be hidden; it must not be seen to exist. Sissies are thereby forced into the margins, out of sight and

¹³¹ For more on the potential relationship between gender nonconformity and suicide, see Kosofsky Sedgwick (fn. 74), Houlbrook (fn. 109) and McInnes and Davies (fn. 154).

into the abject zones of conviviality. Being unintelligible or partially intelligible, sissies suffer violence as a response to their embodied mistakes. The mistake, I would suggest, works as a constant reminder of the fallacy inherent in the search of the ‘ideal.’ Sissy bodies represent, in a material way, the realised proof of the inefficacy of gender.

Besides forcefully shoving the mistakes out of sight, violence also works by pointing at those who have got it wrong. The violent act *highlights*, even if its intention might be to *erase*, the one it addresses. In that way, violence works as a mechanism that supports the gender system by alternately erasing and highlighting the ones it is responsible for producing. Hegemony, in other words, both requires *and* rejects the mistake in order to function.

Not only is violence physically enacted against gender nonconformist bodies but verbal abuse can also be experienced as an assault against the contraventions they might represent. I will now extend my discussion of violence and the sissy body to include an examination of verbal assaults as instruments of control. I will refer to Butler in order to explain how verbal practices can affect the body in a material way.

Injurious speech or words that wound

In *Excitable Speech* (1997), Butler’s main argument is based on Austin’s (1973) claim that words *do* things. A word, according to Austin’s theory of the performative, not only signifies a thing but it also enacts the thing it is supposed to signify. In Butler’s Austinian discussion, violence to the physical body—as well as to the soul and the psyche—can be enacted through speech as well as through deeds. To call someone a name, it follows, is effectively to abuse them verbally *and* physically at the same time. “To claim that language injures ... that words wound,” Butler has determined, “is to combine linguistic and physical vocabularies” (1997: 04). An injurious word therefore not only communicates violence, it *is* violence. Munt appears to concur with Butler’s claim by suggesting that “the body that is shamed ... is metaphorically slapped” (2007: 103).¹³²

¹³² Lawrence has similarly claimed that “‘verbal assault’ is like receiving a slap in the face. The injury is instantaneous” (in Butler 1997: 04).

Words of violence therefore enact *deeds* of violence. Even though the verbal abuse might not physically touch the body, it nevertheless acts directly upon it. “One need only consider the way in which the history of having been called an injurious name is embodied,” Butler has claimed, “how the words enter the limbs, craft the gesture, bend the spine” (1997: 159). “One need only consider how racial or gendered slurs live and thrive in and as the flesh of the addressee,” she continues, “and how these slurs accumulate over time, dissimulating their history” (Butler 1997: 159). I would suggest, following Butler, that more than inflicting physical and emotional pain, these words in fact constitute and form the sissy body. Words of violence—or ‘fighting words,’ to use Thorne’s expression (1993: 116)—call their subjects into discursive existence. “Being called a name,” explains Butler, “is one of the conditions by which a subject is constituted in language” (1997: 02).¹³³

Being called a name—an ‘interpellating performative,’ in Butler’s terms—calls one into being also in what regards gender. “The doctor who receives the child and pronounces—‘It’s a girl,’” she has shown, “begins that long string of interpellations by which the girl is transitively girl’d” (Butler 1997: 49). In much the same way, the sissy might be said to be ‘transitively sissied’ through a similarly long string of interpellations.¹³⁴ In chapter one, we have seen how a similar performative practice can be explained in the segregation of space (see fn. 36). The repetition through which gender is instituted, Butler has determined, is a form of repetition that “occasions both the risk of failure and the congealed effect of sedimentation” (1997: 49). The sissy might be regarded thus as the embodiment of failure, the exception that proves the rule.

Rather than being brought into discursive life through what Butler might call the ‘girling’ process—a process that starts, as we have seen, with the doctor’s ‘it’s a girl’ interpellation at birth and evolves into the choice of a feminine name, the use of the feminine pronoun ‘she,’ the dressing of the baby in pink clothes, the playing of

¹³³ Butler’s claim here is derived from Louis Althusser’s notion of interpellation (Butler 1997: 02).

¹³⁴ The title of my final piece of performance practice, *Sissy!*, makes direct reference to such interpellating performatives.

feminine games, the use of female toilet¹³⁵ and so forth—the sissy might be brought into discursive life through a series of catcalls that begin at an early age for the effeminate boy (Thorne 1993), grows into more violent gender slurs, insults and often involves the medical diagnosis and treatment (which constitute him, in word and in deed, as mentally ill, as ‘deranged’) and, in some places where homosexuality is still illegal, the sissy might be defined according to criminal discourse (which constitute him, in word and deed, as an outlaw).¹³⁶

The sissy is therefore brought into discursive life through violence and, as long as he does not successfully conform to social rules of masculinity, either by ‘growing out’ of his childhood effeminacy (perceived, to a certain extent, as somewhat ‘normal’) or by wilfully conforming to heteronormative expectations ‘no matter what,’ he might continue to perform a body that is persistently touched by violence. Although the violence of the process of gender formation, according to Butler, affects the boy, the girl and the sissy, it seems to remain more often a constant in the life of the latter. This is due, of course, to the sissy’s representation of a rupture in the failure to perform gender according to the ‘heterosexual matrix’ (to use Butler’s term). What happens to this failed subject as a result is violence and marginalisation. “Contempt and violence (sexual and other),” as Murray has suggested, “are the lot of effeminate men (cross dressed or not)” (2000: 256-257).

For Ahmed, “no matter how ‘out’ you may be, how (un)comfortably queer you may feel, those moments of interpellation get repeated over time, and can be experienced as bodily injury” (2006: 147). The word ‘sissy’ therefore—as an example of an injurious interpellation that might be directed towards effeminate men—might be said to *signify* sissiphobic violence at the same time as it *enacts* that abuse in the body of the person it addresses. To put it differently, the word sissy does not simply *represent*

¹³⁵ Apart from forming part of the ‘girling’ process, pink clothes, feminine games and toys and the use of female toilets, when observed in boys or in men, can also be seen as symptoms of GID (see chapter two). These elements have also been used as theatrical props in the narrative of *Sissy!* in, respectively, the pink tutu and the pink poodle at the end (see figure 05) and the urinating scene where I am seen crouching and Sautzvy is seen standing (see clip ‘Urinating, Rice Shower’ in *Sissy!*, DVD 1). I will provide a more lengthy discussion of these elements in chapter five.

¹³⁶ In chapter two, I discussed how homosexuality is still illegal in some countries. For a study of the marker ‘gender outlaw,’ see Kate Bornstein (1994).

violence, it often *is* violence. Following the Foucauldian schema of ‘reverse discourse,’ however, we must acknowledge that injurious names derogate and demean but, as Butler has pointed out, “by being called a name, one is also, paradoxically, given a certain possibility for social existence” (1997: 02). “If to be addressed is to be interpellated,” Butler ponders, “then the offensive call runs the risk of inaugurating a subject in speech who comes to use language to counter the offensive call” (1997: 02).¹³⁷

Reverse discourse: the reappropriation of the word

Love has claimed that the strategy of reverse discourse might be effective in “transforming the base materials of social abjection into the gold of political agency” (2007: 18). In actively choosing to position oneself in relation to a derogatory word, she suggests, one might be seen as “attempting to counter stigma by incorporating it” (Love 2007: 01). My use of the word ‘sissy’ comes as a direct and conscious attempt to engage with that strategy. It is also important to highlight that this word conceals a long history of abuse (both verbal and physical). The one who utters a gender slur, Butler has claimed, “is thus citing that slur, making linguistic community with a history of speakers” (1997: 52).¹³⁸ To cite the word ‘sissy,’ it follows, is to release a chain of other derogatory meanings that may be attached to it, such as ‘passive,’ ‘coward,’ ‘womanly.’¹³⁹

Rather than denying effeminacy because it has been traditionally frowned upon and stigmatised, I choose therefore to willingly occupy this position. My strategy of embracing sissy as a term that has constituted me through injury comes in response to the creative potential I have perceived to be intrinsic to it. This approach is similarly identified in Butler. “The injurious address [that] may appear to fix or paralyse the one it hails,” she reminds us, “may also produce an unexpected and enabling response” (1997: 02). It is interesting how Butler has expressed injury here as a force that ‘fixes’ or ‘paralyses.’ Injury, it seems, has a material effect on the addressee’s

¹³⁷ What Butler articulates here has also influenced my choice of title, see fn. 132.

¹³⁸ Butler’s assertion here offers a further conceptual layer to my strategy of writing a sissy canon (chapter one). I cite sissy bodies in order to make linguistic (and in my case, corporeal) community with a history of sissies.

¹³⁹ Munt, in discussing the multiplicity of meanings an injurious word might conceal, has claimed that “the racist epithet ‘Paki’ ... conceals other silent concepts within it such as outsider, dirty, immigrant and such” (2007: 12).

body as well as in his use of space. In fixing and paralysing its subjects, injury seems to impede movement and detain progress in space. In the following chapter, I will expand on the concept of injury and the potential impact it might have on the sissy's performance of space.

If change is what is being sought, then the question might become this: is it enough to simply occupy a stigmatised position given the limitations and risks implicit in its recirculation? Among the potential risks intrinsic to recirculation, Butler has suggested the following: (a) the desired resignifying effect is not a guaranteed result and (b) the attempt to resignify a term might effect no change at all (1997: 38). To put it differently, restitution from injury cannot be fully anticipated or secured in advance of any intended action. However, as Butler rightly points out, "keeping such terms unsaid and unsayable can also work to lock them in place, preserving their power to injure and arresting the possibility of a reworking that might shift their context and purpose" (1997: 38).

Moreover, the violence directed at the sissy, both in deeds and words, both in looks and threats, might be seen by some as a response to the violence with which the sissy body might be socially read. Crisp has notably claimed that "the great barrier between me and the outer world is my appearance. Sometimes it led to my being beaten up," he says, "but this, of course, I had to expect. My way of going on is a protest and the beating up is a counter-protest. It's people's way of saying they don't accept the way that I am" (in Mitchell 1970). Crisp's being 'beaten up,' which he clearly understood as a 'counter-protest,' appears to signal to the idea that the violence he suffered might have been a reaction to the violence his body might have inflicted. Furthermore, I would suggest that the sissy's visible transgression of gender might be seen as the materialisation of a social taboo. The sissy might be perceived as a violation of the taboo against the deliberate feminisation of masculinity; a masculinity he actively undermines. The implication of this initial violation, as we have seen in chapters one and two, is usually that of breaking the taboo on sexuality. The sissy represents the indulgence to pleasure that conventional men are supposedly not allowed. This indulgence can be identified, among other traits, in the sissy's passivity, in the sissy's perceived vanity and most of all in his apparent disregard for social conventions of gender behaviour. I will now turn to a discussion of how

transgression and taboo might be seen, especially in Bataille, as elements conducive of violence.

Taboo, transgression and violence in Bataille

For Bataille, transgression might be regarded as “a return to violence, to animal violence” (2006 [1962]: 65). Taboo seems to stand in diametrical opposition to transgression; it is a barrier against violence (Bataille 2006 [1962]: 67). “The taboo,” Bataille has suggested, “would forbid the transgression but the fascination compels it” (2006 [1962]: 68). Any transgression of taboos is therefore, according to Bataille, always inevitable and always violent. Transgression exists outside the world of reason and is thus ‘extravagant’ by nature.¹⁴⁰ Transgression revels in pleasure and represents the world of violence.

For Butler, the dynamic between taboo and transgression might be explained through a Freudian conceptual framework. “Anyone who has violated a taboo becomes taboo himself,” she has suggested, “because he possesses the dangerous quality of tempting others to follow his examples: why should *he* be allowed to do what is forbidden to others?” (1997: 115, original emphasis). “Thus,” she concludes, “he is truly contagious in that every example encourages imitation” (Butler 1997: 115).¹⁴¹ In Butler’s reading of Freud, the one who embodies the taboo—the sissy, for the sake of my argument—is seen as both ‘dangerous’ and ‘contagious.’ The sissy’s embodiment of effeminacy, of the passive, of the one who might indulge in pleasure to the exclusion of work and reason, might represent danger to the general stability of the ideal ‘masculine man.’¹⁴²

¹⁴⁰ In chapter two, I have discussed effeminacy as a form of ‘excess’ of femininity, as a ‘spectacular,’ glamorous and, thus, *extravagant* way of presenting gender.

¹⁴¹ Butler understands this type of taboo as being “invested with contagious power” (1997: 115). In chapter one, I have shown how femininity, in Thorne’s (1993) study, has been presented as somewhat ‘contagious.’ Sissy boys, he has shown, were often pushed into the ‘contaminating space of girls’ (see fn. 36). I shall return to the idea of contagion in the current chapter with reference to Thorne’s notion of ‘rituals of pollution.’

¹⁴² This pleasure might include the use of make-up, cross-dressing, the disregard for social rules of appropriate gender conduct. In chapter one, I showed how, in ancient thought, there appeared to have been a belief that although all men were susceptible to the compelling appeal of pleasure (sexual pleasure as one example, but not exclusively), only the ‘failed’ man succumbed.

The effeminate man's visible embodiment of effeminacy is, for Badinter, what supports the 'successful' embodiment of masculinity for others. Masculinity, according to her, seems to thrive on the antagonistic relationship it drives with effeminacy. "Traditionally," writes Badinter, "masculinity is defined more often by the avoidance of something than by a desire for something" (1992: 115). This avoidance, she has claimed, seems to be translated as a fear of contagion. "To be a man," she explains, "signifies *not* to be feminine, *not* to be homosexual; *not* to be effeminate in one's physical appearance or manners; *not* to have sexual or overly intimate relations with other men" (Badinter 1992: 115).¹⁴³ This avoidance—itsself a materialisation of the fear of contagion—appears to be already predicated on an inescapable bond that connects the effeminate to the masculine and, consequently, the masculine to the effeminate. To be defined as effeminate, in other words, is to be defined as being *not* masculine and hence, already in relation to the masculine.

As Bataille has claimed, however, the transgression of taboos is itself a transgression already circumscribed within the normative process.¹⁴⁴ Accordingly, any transgressions must be seen as following their own set of prescriptions and regulations. Transgression, Bataille has proposed, might be socially accepted as long as it takes place in accordance with the established prescriptions. Bringing this back to gender, effeminacy might be seen as a taboo that is already built in the normative system. As Kosofsky Sedgwick (1994) has shown, an adult gay male could be, to a large extent, socially tolerated as long as he acts and looks masculine, as long as he embodies the 'healthy' type of homosexual. Likewise, in what regards the sissy boy, his effeminacy might be similarly accepted, excused and tolerated as long as he eventually grows out of it or as long as he stays within the limits of what might be considered 'normal' for a boy. Once his effeminacy extends itself outside such limits, it becomes abnormal or, according to psycho-pathological discourses, 'chronic' and 'extreme' (Kosofsky Sedgwick 1994: 156). 'Extreme,' however, as we have previously seen, must not be regarded, in itself, as necessarily a negative trait in my project, especially when it comes to sissiness. On the contrary, 'extremeness' might be seen as a desirable and definitional element of the sissy's 'artificial' conduct.

¹⁴³ See fn. 99.

¹⁴⁴ We have seen a similar relation between the concepts of power and dissidence in reference to Foucault's theory (see fn. 39).

Nonetheless, the sissy, as a chronic, extreme and proud effeminate adult male, might be seen as existing outside the limits of such prescriptions. Even then, the adult effeminate male is still defined in relation to the norm. In other words, he exists outside and against it. According to this, the masculine man and the sissy exist in a complex relation to one another. The latter represents an exception to the rule, a body against which the former must be defined. The masculine man is thus in a way already 'infected' by the idea of the effeminate man and vice versa. To be defined as 'masculine,' therefore, is to be primarily defined as 'non-feminine' or 'non-effeminate;' a process Butler has called 'the *exclusionary* means of gender construction' (1993: 08, original emphasis). In the end, my failed embodiment of masculinity might not be as transgressive or as heroic as I might have expected it to be, provided, of course, it remains obedient to the prescriptions to which it must respond. My effeminacy whilst transgressive might also be seen as, in certain ways, in aid of the norm.

For Miller, this counter-distinctive process of gender construction can be explained thus: "straight men," he has suggested, "unabashedly *need* gay men, whom they forcibly recruit (as the object of their blows or, in better circles, just their jokes) to enter into a polarization that exorcises the 'woman' in man through assigning it to a class of man who may be considered no 'man' at all" (in Edelman 1994: 105). "Only between the woman and the homosexual together," he finishes, "may the normal male subject imagine himself covered front and back" (1994: 104). The masculine man seems to be infected by the sissy just as the sissy—who is 'no man at all'—is already defined in relation to 'man.' The structural difference between the two, however, appears to be the instrumentalisation of violence. As Miller has suggested, the normal man, in order to exist, *needs* the gay man. The effective construction of masculinity of the former is dependent on the symbolic (and, at times, material) destruction of whatever traces of masculinity might remain in the latter. This destruction is systematically implemented through what Miller has identified as 'blows' and 'jokes,' which could be read as, respectively, 'violence' and 'ridicule' or 'physical' and 'verbal' abuse. These are, in sum, the traditional instruments of oppression and subjugation.

As research has shown, the counter-distinctive process of gender might be seen to be in place from early in our lives. Thorne (1993) has shown that “the sheer knowledge that one is a girl or a boy, an awareness that consolidates around age two ... may set processes of gender separation into motion” (1993: 60). In chapter four, I will examine how this process of gender separation might translate specifically in spatial practices. In what concerns the present chapter, however, Thorne’s study is insightful in the critical analysis of the social practices it investigates. ‘Rituals of pollution,’ among such practices, is of special relevance here for the light it sheds into my current discussion of contagion in the process of learning gender.

Not only does Thorne demonstrate that gender is learnt through a process of identification—i.e. boys normally associate with boys while girls normally associate with girls (1993: 60)—but the consolidating process of gender also involves what he terms ‘rituals of pollution’ (Thorne 1993: 73). Such practices will certainly have been part of most people’s childhood. They mostly involve chasing “where specific individuals or groups are treated as contaminating or carrying ‘germs’” (Thorne 1993: 73). Such germs, Thorne continues, “are invisible, they make their initial appearance through announcements like ‘Rochelle has cooties!’” (1993: 73).¹⁴⁵ These children, he goes on, also have rituals for transferring germs. Such transference, Thorne has shown, is usually facilitated through, once again, a vocal announcement—or in Butler’s terms, an ‘interpellating performative’—just like the germ’s initial appearance had been. Whereas the description of this ‘pollution ritual’ might not be necessarily illuminating, it is Thorne’s critical analysis that makes it germane to my present argument.

“While girls and boys may transfer cooties to one another,” he has claimed, “and girls may give cooties to girls, boys do not generally give cooties to boys. Girls,” he concludes, “are central to the game” (1993: 74). This brings me to the point I want to draw out of ‘cooties.’ Might it possible that ‘cooties,’ in this context, represents the notion of ‘femininity’? “There is,” he concludes, “a notable gender asymmetry, evident in the skewed patterning of cooties; girls as a group are treated as an ultimate source of contamination” (1993: 74). Thorne’s insight returns the discussion to the

¹⁴⁵ Thorne’s study describes, in ‘cooties,’ a form of ‘tag’ or playing ‘it.’

counter-distinctive process of gender production I have been examining thus far. To be a proper boy seems to be translated here as being ‘untouched’ by all things girly. To be a boy is to escape and avoid girlyness; it involves identifying and isolating the ‘girl,’ as a general concept, outside. Girlyness, femininity, cooties or sissiness, could all be seen as contagious notions.

In McInnes and Davies’ (2008) study, a similar process is examined in their analysis of sissy boys in school. “Understanding Marco as and declaring him a sissy,” they have claimed, “does not mean he is outside discourses of gender but that his gendered performance confounds the normative ordering of gender” (2008: 108). “The supposed biological ‘fact’ of his body,” they continue, “is misaligned with a feminized performance. That he confounds the normative ordering of gender can be used (as is often the case) to suggest that he is disordered” (2008: 108). The interesting insight in McInnes and Davies’ analysis seems to lie in the reversal of roles they appear to suggest. “Marco, as a sissy boy,” they have claimed, “disorders gender, revealing through his very sissiness the impossible-to-maintain fiction of gender and normative ideals of masculinity” (2008: 108). The sissy boy appears to become an agent of gender. In other words, he *disorders* gender rather than being *disordered* by it. More importantly perhaps is the idea that the disordering that might be recruited by the sissy’s embodiment might be experienced, by others, as a rather violent practice. Therein, I suggest, resides the power of the sissy body.

The sissy therefore can be explained as contaminating the masculine so that the violence he often encounters might be seen as a response to the violence he appears to engender. Sissiphobia, I suggest, could be explained as a violent reaction to fear. The sissy body, in its visible representation of a taboo, generates fear of contagion. George Weinberg—who coined the term ‘homophobia’ in 1972 (Badinter 1992: 219 fn. 79)—has explained it according to this same relation between fear and contagion. Homophobia, he has suggested, is “a fear about homosexuals which seemed to be associated with a fear of contagion, a fear of reducing the things one fought for—home and family” (in Fox 2009: 161).¹⁴⁶ Weinberg’s schema could serve as a tool

¹⁴⁶ Fear is a key concept here. For Badinter, “the behavior that societies define as appropriately masculine is formed of defense mechanisms” (1992: 47). This can be explained, she continues, as “fear of women, fear of showing any sort of femininity, including

with which to analyse the recent rise of attacks in London. The increase in violence may be explained as having been prompted by the fear of losing home and family (in Weinberg's words); ideals which, as we know, are central to the construction of heterosexual supremacy. The violence enacted against gender minorities might be seen, thus, as a reaction against increased visibility; a visibility achieved as a result of increased victories in equal rights. Violence is here understood within the framework of power in the sense that the violence proposes a backlash against power.

Parallel to Weinberg's definition, Kosofsky Sedgwick (1990: 19) has used the judicial term 'homosexual panic' as a key analytic tool to discuss homophobic crime. Queer-bashers who resorted to this strategy, she has demonstrated, were given a reduced sentence if convicted of a hate crime. Judicially speaking, it means the aggressor's responsibility for the crime was diminished since the attack was seen as being provoked—by an unwanted sexual advance, for instance. Whereas this defence mechanism might be restricted to the context of a judicial setting in the United States, it is nonetheless rather telling since it effectively exposes what the pervading social assumptions of homosexuality in the West might be. The fact that an often-violent attack (a homophobic crime) might be a justifiable response to a sexual advance (invited or uninvited, perceived or real) or that all gay men go about making passes at strangers are rather revealing assumptions. What it shows, says Kosofsky Sedgwick, is "that hatred of homosexuals is even more public, more typical ... than hatred of other disadvantaged groups" (1990: 19).¹⁴⁷

For Hannah Arendt this tense dynamic might be described in her assertion that "power and violence are opposites" (1970: 56). "Violence," she has suggested, "appears where power is in jeopardy" (1970: 56). Although gender and sexual minorities might be gaining more power by being secured more rights, part of the response these minorities seem to get might be reflected in the recent increase in

tenderness, passivity, and caregiving to others, and of course," she concludes, "fear of being desired by a man" (1992: 47).

¹⁴⁷ In support of this assertion, Kosofsky Sedgwick has claimed that 'homosexual panic' is unique as a judicial strategy. There is, she has suggested, no equivalent 'race panic,' for instance. Her hypothetical insight on 'heterosexual panic' is also important. "If every heterosexual woman who had a sexual advance made to her by a male had the right to murder the man," she shows, "the streets ... would be littered with the bodies of heterosexual men" (Wertheimer in Kosofsky Sedgwick 1990: 19).

violence. In an analysis of the recent attacks, Tatchell appears to have signaled towards a similar relationship between power and violence. “There’s probably an element of people who are losing what they have until now taken for granted,” says Tatchell, “their right to be homophobic. They are angry and it’s a last desperate gasp from people who are used to doing what they like to gay people” (in Geoghegan 2009). Tatchell’s assertion appears to suggest that queer-bashers become more violent the more their power to injure and to go unpunished seems to be taken away from them. In other words, the *less* power the oppressors feel they have, the *more* violent they appear to become.¹⁴⁸

Contagion

So far we have seen that the feminine contaminates the masculine; that the definition of masculinity is structurally infected by femininity (and vice versa) and that violence may be explained as a fear of being touched and contaminated. I would like to continue by using Bataille’s words as a metaphor: “Death,” he has said, “is a danger for those left behind. If they have to bury the corpse it is less in order to keep it safe than to keep themselves safe from its contagion” (2006 [1962]: 46). The corpse, says Bataille, might be seen as “a symbol of violence and as a threat of the contagiousness of violence” (2006 [1962]: 45). The corpse is thus both violent and contagious at once. Gender nonconformists, I have suggested, might be seen as performing a body that is both violent and contagious. Their bodies might be seen as violent in their transgression of gender, in their excessive ‘artificiality’ and in their embodiment of a taboo. Perceived as a threat to the general stability of masculinity, sissies must be ‘buried’ in order to keep others safe from contagion. I use ‘buried’ here both metaphorically and literally. The systemic marginalisation to which sissies are often subjected might represent this symbolic burial. As contagious bodies, they can exist as long as they exist outside the limits of normal living, on the margins of society.

For some, nevertheless, death is not only symbolic but also a distinctly real possibility. As Love has suggested, “the history of Western representation is littered

¹⁴⁸ Tatchell makes an analogy with the past: “I remember there was a similar backlash in the US in the 60s, a big rise in racist attacks in the wake of the civil rights movement” (in Geoghegan 2009). Slavoj Žižek appears to concur with the power/violence dynamics. “Violence,” he has suggested, “is an implicit admission of impotence” (2008: 69).

with corpses of gender and sexual deviants” (2007: 01). The larger cause of calling for an end to violence as a serious threat to life seems to be the central feature of Love’s *Feeling Backwards* (2007). Like Love, Butler has also repeatedly investigated the seriousness and the frequency with which death is dealt as a response to unintelligible bodies. In *Bodies That Matter* (1993), she has investigated the cases of Brandon Teena and Venus Xtravaganza who, among many other transgender people, have paid the price of gender nonconformity with their own lives.¹⁴⁹ ‘Pay the price’ is an analogy I have repeatedly gone back to. In violence, as previously in the process of learning gender, it is the body that pays the price. Butler has famously argued that gender “comes at a cost” (2004: 42). Badinter has argued that masculinity must be acquired “but at what price!” (1992: 69). What I wish to shore up with the idea of the body paying the price of regulations is mainly the notion of a body in constant pain. I shall return to this in chapter five.

“Those who are directly identified with same-sex desire,” continues Love, “most often end up dead” (2007: 01). Whereas this might sound like a rather pessimistic assessment of the prospective outcomes of queer lives, Love’s above statement holds a certain poignancy. I have mentioned earlier how being marginalised might hold a symbolic value; a value perhaps comparable to death. There appears to exist some echoes of that notion in Love’s claims. “If they manage to survive,” she concludes in a rather pathetic note, “it is on such compromised terms that it makes death attractive” (Love 2007: 01). So if it is really true that the violence with which sissy bodies are met is a response to the violence they engender, then how are we to establish the difference between these two types of violence—the violence these bodies suffer and the violence they might inflict?

¹⁴⁹ Teena was a female-to-male transgender person and has been the main subject of the film *Boys Don’t Cry* (1999), directed by Kimberly Peirce, (for more on Teena, see Halberstam 1998). Xtravaganza was a male-to-female pre-op transsexual person and appears in the documentary *Paris is Burning* (1990), directed by Livingstone (for more on Xtravaganza, see Phelan (1993) and Butler (1993)). More recently, in the article ‘My Body is Wrong,’ published by *The Guardian*, Groskop describes the cases of many genderqueer children and adolescents who suffer the consequences of living outside the norm. Among those, she speaks of the case of “Lawrence King, 15 ... who described himself as ‘gender non-conforming’ and was a victim of school bullying [and] was shot in a science laboratory by another pupil” (2008: 14).

If violence, as Bataille has suggested, “is the result not of a cold calculation but of emotional states: anger, fear or desire” (2006 [1962]: 64), then the sissy body might be one that variably incites all three affects. Homophobia, I have claimed, might be seen specifically in relation to such a framework. If the sissy, as the one who breaks the taboo, becomes the taboo himself and if taboo is constitutively violent, then, it follows that the sissy body could be perceived as an instrument of violence. This body might be violent by dint of being excessive and it might be extravagant by dint of the pleasure it is seen to derive from its constitutive failure. “The pursuit of pleasure,” as Bataille puts it, “even if reckoned as useful is essentially extravagant” (2006 [1962]: 168). Being extravagant, the sissy body might thus be situated outside reason and its common values of production.

The sissy’s extravagant pursuit of pleasure could be further investigated with reference to Žižek’s notion of ‘the traumatic intruder’ (2008: 50). To put it differently, the sissy might be understood, in the words of Žižek, as “someone whose different way of life (or, rather, way of *jouissance* materialised in its social practices and rituals) disturbs us, throws the balance of our way of life off the rails” (2008: 50). “When it comes too close,” Žižek concludes, “this can also give rise to an aggressive reaction aimed at getting rid of this disturbing intruder” (2008: 50). Žižek’s postulation seems to reflect what we have already seen in Weinberg’s definition of homophobia. That is, the sissy body might be seen as contagious and for that reason it might be seen as worthy of fear. We have also seen how the sissy might ‘disturb’ the balance of gender. The sissy body might be seen, therefore, as that which must be kept at a distance for if it gets too close, it might contaminate others.

This notion of performing a body that is potentially violent might also be seen in Crisp. He appears to have had a certain awareness of the violence and disturbance his body might have, at times, occasioned. “I welcomed the animosity of the public,” he has claimed, “it seemed to demonstrate the necessity of my continuing to hammer away at them” (2007 [1968]: 88). Crisp’s statement seems to imply that the persecution he seemed to suffer from the society (or ‘the public’ as he so theatrically puts it) was, to a certain extent, a response to his own provocations, of his ‘hammering away at them.’ But can one say that queer-bashing, as a form of ‘response,’ is really proportionate to the perceived violent nature of the sissy body?

The violence directed at sissy bodies, I would claim, far exceeds the violence it might stand for. There is a fundamental difference in practice between (a) the violent excess and extravagance of the sissy body and (b) the violent response it often attracts. Whereas the sissy might present a body that is violent in a Bataillian sense, he is not—and must be set apart from those who are—violent in the active pursuit of causing physical and emotional harm to others.

Butler has suggested an important distinction between aggression and violence. This distinction allows me some insight in bringing this chapter to its conclusion. “Aggression,” she has suggested, “is part of life and hence part of politics as well” (2009: 48). “But aggression,” she continues, “can and must be separated from violence (violence being one form that aggression assumes)” (Butler 2009: 48). “There are ways of giving form to aggression that work in the service of democratic life, including,” she concludes, “‘antagonism’ and discursive conflict” (2009: 48). Butler’s proposed solution to the problem of violence seems to point towards more productive means of dealing with what Bataille has claimed is our natural instinct. Rather than violence, Butler suggests we think about ‘aggression’ and ‘antagonism.’ “Antagonism,” she deduces, “can be lived within and among subjects as a dynamic and productive political force” (2009: 141).

Conclusion

I want to believe that the violence that forms me as a ‘failed’ gendered individual might be redirected in a positive manner. I hope I have identified some of the ways this might happen, be it through the consolidation and mobilisation of communities, be it through the better understanding and, consequently, more preventative treatment of the mechanisms that occasion violence and oppression or be it through a living that allows for creative difference at the same time as it precludes physical violence. I am aware that I am not hereby putting a specific solution forward or drawing a concrete proposition on how this violence might be channelled productively. What I hope I have achieved, however, is to highlight that there is a problem in violence and to point out that it needs to be addressed before further lives are lost ungrieved (Butler 2009, Love 2007). As an effort of a more persistent demonstration against sissiphobia, I have attempted (and continue to pursue) a daily engagement with what Žižek has called ‘the politics of visibility’ (2008: 65, see also Phelan 1993: 07).

Žižek's conceptual development of the 'politics of visibility' has been offered as a reflection of his analysis of the riots in the suburbs of Paris in 2005. These incidents, he has suggested, "were simply a direct effort to gain *visibility*" (Žižek 2008: 65, original emphasis). "Their actions," he has claimed, "spoke for them: like it or not, we're here, no matter how much you pretend not to see us" (2008: 65). This same political strategy of increased visibility and of occupation of urban spaces, might be seen as central to the 1990s Queer Nation's direct actions and marches. Its members and activists, who declared to have had enough of the state-sponsored homophobia, took to the streets and, as a group, chanted "We're here! We're queer! Get used to it!" As in Paris, these queer men and women (both groups similarly disenfranchised), united and organised public demonstrations aiming at visibility as a form of protest. Violence, claims Žižek, was a necessary instrument in the case of the civil unrests in the *banlieues*; but "they were neither offering a solution nor constituting a movement for providing a solution" (2006: 66). "Their aim," he adds, "was to create a problem, to signal that they were a problem that could no longer be ignored. This is why violence was necessary" (2006: 66).

Likewise, I propose that the inevitable visibility of the sissy and the violence his body supposedly engenders could be put to good political use. The sissy disorders, intrudes, confounds and disturbs. The 'loudness' of our effeminate behaviour should no longer fall on deaf ears. Our defiant exhibitionism must be seen as a direct effort to gain visibility. This visibility, in turn, should point towards the endemic sissiphobia that has traditionally been aimed at us, with the ultimate goal of ameliorating this harsh reality. Our actions speak for us: like it or not, we are here, no matter how much society pretends not to see us. Although we might not be offering a solution nor constituting a movement for providing a solution, the increasing violence with which our bodies have been treated might be used as evidence that there is a problem in gender. This problem, I claim, should no longer be ignored.

Sissy Space

Queer is, after all, a spatial term (Ahmed 2006: 67).

Faeries are a pale and motley race that flowers in the minds of decent folk. Never will they be entitled to broad daylight, to real sun. But remote in these limbos, they cause curious disasters which are harbingers of new beauty (Genet in Hennen 2008: 59).

It is not only a question of how discourse injures bodies, but how certain injuries establish certain bodies *at the margins* of available ontologies (Butler 1993: 224, my emphasis).

In the previous chapters I have discussed how the sissy body can be seen as being constituted by its marked visibility and by the violence that is often directed at it. Visibility and violence are thus essential traits in the understanding of what I propose might be seen as a sissy ontology. In the current chapter, I will show how these two elements—visibility and violence—can be seen as central to the paradoxical tensions inherent in the idea of a sissy space. I say paradoxical in the sense that these energies might be seen as both a hindrance to the sissy's performance of space *and* as potentially productive of new futures. Ahmed (2006) has suggested in her study of a queer space that a queer landscape might be “shaped by the paths that we follow in deviating from the straight line” (2006: 20). “Risking departure from the straight,” she continues, “makes new futures possible, which might involve going astray, getting lost, or even becoming queer” (Ahmed 2006: 21).

A sissy space, I will suggest, might emerge precisely from these new paths that result from the potentially positive action of ‘going astray.’ Whereas going astray might be at times a question of choice (ideological or geographical) and hence, positive and productive, it might also result from the fear of violence or the desire to avoid violence. The latter option clearly represents an obstruction to the sissy's sense of mobility if we consider that, at times, the sissy might have no choice but to go astray; assuming, as I do, that violence and abuse are to be avoided. As such, the need to go astray might be seen as not entirely positive but as part of a response mechanism to perceived threat. In my personal experience, I will often take the longer route home in my attempt to walk around an area I might see as unsafe. While on this detour, however, I might find new possibilities in never travelled before routes while new

imaginings might spring forth from possible new encounters. Nevertheless, detours are more often than not anxious experiences since they are commonly pursued as a response to fear and the need to search for protection.

Furthermore, going astray involves an engagement with the notions of time and space. The queer subject, in other words, might take longer than other conventionally gendered individuals in reaching certain destinations. Time and space are thus somewhat distorted in queer experiences.¹⁵⁰ For Halberstam, “queer uses of times and space develop, at least in part, in opposition to ... heterosexuality [and] according to other logics of location, movement, and identification” (2005: 01). Her definition seems to imply that queer time and space might exist outside (or against) the common values of (re)production and reason. I will later investigate how Halberstam’s claim of alternative logics of location and movement can be seen at play in my proposed notion of a sissy space. Suffice it to say for now that a sissy space might be concerned with inventing new functions for conventional spaces and that this sense of creative reinvention might be born out of necessity.

In developing the concept of a sissy space in this chapter, I will draw on existing scholarship on queer space (Betsky 1997, Halberstam 2005, Houlbrook 2005, Ahmed 2006, Knopp 2007). Parallel to that, I will make reference to examples of personal journeys whenever these become relevant to the argument. In this sense, this chapter follows in the steps of Ahmed’s methodology in that it “moves between conceptual analysis and personal digression” (2006: 22).¹⁵¹ These moments of personal digression will allow me to draw important connections between the theoretical and practical elements of the research. In my analysis of space, I will use Knopp’s (2007) proposed definition of ‘queer geography’ as the guiding conceptual framework. In tandem with Knopp’s propositions, I will employ Halberstam’s (2005) theoretical development of ‘queer space’ as a tool to develop my own concept of a sissy space. Knopp and Halberstam will be instrumental in my examination of socio-geographical

¹⁵⁰ This relationship between ‘time’ and ‘space,’ which I am about to explore further, can be seen as somewhat reflecting the relationship between chapter one, in its discussion of ‘time’ (history) and the current chapter, which discusses ‘space’ (geography).

¹⁵¹ “Why call the personal a digression? Why is it that the personal so often enters writing as if we are being led astray from a proper course?” (Ahmed 2006: 22). My methodology of using the personal in support of (or, at times, in contrast with) the argument at hand might be seen as somewhat analogous to Ahmed’s strategy here.

concepts such as ‘marginalisation’ and ‘ostracism,’ which I will later propose might be seen as spatially performative practices.

Further on the subject of segregation, I will look at public toilets as sex-segregated and abject spaces (Halberstam 1998, Andersson and Campkin 2009). I will also investigate some of the strategies sissies might adopt when trying to avoid abuse in heteronormative spaces—sometimes unsuccessfully—and how these strategies might open up new spaces. Sissy space is therefore investigated not only from the point of view of *what* might constitute it but also from the perspective of *how* it might be navigated.

From queer space to sissy space

My proposed contribution of a sissy space must be seen here as primarily grounded on the foundations laid by the notion of a queer space, which I will now examine. What I propose in this section is that the idea of a sissy space must be regarded as always departing somehow from the path previously trodden by gay and lesbian spaces. Sissy space is hence situated within the field of ‘queer geography,’ which according to Knopp, must be understood as always dependent on “the application of postmodern ... perspectives to sexuality and space studies, generally, and lesbian and gay geographies, in particular” (2007: 22). This postmodern perspective to which Knopp alludes has also been identified by Halberstam as an operational force in the queer subject’s reconceptualisation of boundaries. “‘Postmodernism’ in this project,” she has explained, “takes on meaning in relation to new forms of production” (Halberstam 2005: 06). Sissy space, in this sense, engages with queer’s postmodern ethos by producing new forms of performing both straight and gay spaces.

As a first step towards constructing a sissy space, I would like to return the discussion to Ahmed’s idea of going astray. Her claim that a queer space might consist of “that which is ‘off course,’ that which is off the line we have taken” (Ahmed 2006: 19) suggests some exciting new possibilities. “Such moments,” as she has claimed, “can be a gift” (Ahmed 2006: 19). These deviations, which appear to be crucial to Ahmed’s definition of a queer space, are also intrinsic to my proposed notion of a sissy space. I will therefore follow her lead and will propose a double reading of deviation. Ahmed theorises deviation by initially explaining it in relation to (a)

‘sexual orientation,’ or a deviation from the ‘straight’ path; the latter represented by the imposition of a compulsory heterosexual matrix and (b) a more literal reading of ‘deviation,’ examined through spatially-projected and socially-reinforced practices. My reading of deviation departs from Ahmed’s in the sense that I propose the first meaning (i.e. ‘sexual’ deviation) as already implicit in my understanding of sissy (see chapters one and two). I shall therefore proceed to offer a double reading of deviation that is more narrowly focused on spatial practices in what regards (a) geographical deviations and (b) deviations from function.

The first idea I want to explore is that of a ‘geographical,’ material deviation. This, I suggest, is often a deviation that might be provoked by fear of violence. In my attempt to avoid a certain space or a situation I might perceive as dangerous, for example, I might feel compelled to change my route. The deviation is seen here as a path initiated by and later pursued in fear. This fear, in turn, appears to stem from the subject’s perceived need to search for shelter, protection or help. In acknowledging that fear might be a driving force in such deviations, Ahmed has suggested that whereas unplanned detours might “open up new worlds” (2006: 19), they might also, at times, be “the site of trauma, anxiety, or stress” (Ahmed 2006: 19).

These unplanned detours could be described as potentially ‘fabulous’ in the sense that they might provide one with an exclusive journey, through a path never trailed before with potential new encounters and new worlds opening up as the journey unfolds. The ‘modern queer,’ as Betsky has suggested, “creates fantastic places of the imagination” (1997: 57) in an attempt to situate his identity and place in the world. Besides opening new spaces for the imagination, these deviations could also be seen as potentially radical in their politics given their refusal to tread the straight, mainstream path. Whilst these queer deviations might be both exciting and radical, the reality is, however, often somewhat less ‘fantastical.’ More than representing exciting new possibilities or radical choices (which they might do, at times),¹⁵² these moments of enforced redirection become cumbersome due to their repetitive nature. The low-level pressure of having one’s path repeatedly restricted, in other words, congeals and accretes over time. The sissy therefore appears to be coerced to live

¹⁵² Like in the case of cruising, for example, where going off path is an activity undertaken to seek pleasure (see Turner 2003).

with the condition of having his mobility constantly constrained. The ability to freely move about in conventional spaces seems to be less available to the sissy. The sissy's relative lack of control in relation to spatial performance seems to reflect the control that appears to be already wielded over his body through coercion, fear and violence; elements which have informed the discussion developed in chapter three.

Visibility, hypervisibility and violence

The main source of these interruptions and forced deviations might be identified in the sissy's marked visibility. What I mean to suggest here is that there is a necessary correlation between visibility and violence that guides the sissy's performance of public space at all times. Deviating or not deviating from the 'normal' path is a necessity largely dependent on the balance achieved between the different levels of visibility and the different levels of perceived danger. To put it more simply, the more visible the sissy body becomes in space, the more easily identifiable as a target of violence it might become. "Visibility," as Halberstam has argued, "may be equated with jeopardy, danger, and exposure" (2005: 78). We have previously seen how there are clearly different degrees of visibility. The sissy body in its somatic presentation of effeminacy might be regarded as *visible* whereas the same body in its somatic *and* cosmetic presentations of effeminacy might become *more* visible or, better yet, *hypervisible*.

The sissy body might be seen as being visible in its performance of identifiable and codified markers of effeminacy such as the mincing gait. When playing up such markers and making use of lipstick and heels, for instance, the sissy might manipulate his body into becoming *hypervisible*.¹⁵³ For Ahmed, bodies "become hypervisible when they do not pass, which means," she continues, "they 'stand out'" (2006: 135).

¹⁵³ I deliberately choose 'make-up' and 'heels' here to illustrate the point that there is a peculiar balance between visibility and hypervisibility. There seems to be no apparent linear continuum between the two nor does there seem to be a dividing line, as it were, when visibility suddenly becomes hypervisibility. In other words, I do not necessarily become more visible the more I dress up. On the contrary, sometimes when in full drag, I can go unnoticed. I can 'pass,' as it were. I am rather more visible when using a few cosmetic and sartorial elements commonly perceived as feminine while maintaining some other masculine ones. Visibility/invisibility/hypervisibility might therefore be explained as dynamic energies that work in relation to the approximation or distancing effects of gender binaries. The closer the position in relation to the social categories 'man' or 'woman' I am perceived to occupy, the more 'invisible' I appear to become; the further from them, the more 'visible' I might become.

The language here already suggests a certain investment in space. In claiming that hypervisible bodies ‘do not pass,’ Ahmed appears to be suggesting that these bodies might have their passage denied. Indeed, she later confirms that claiming “such bodies are stopped” (Ahmed 2006: 139).¹⁵⁴

Thus far, we have seen that visibility has a material impact on the sissy’s ability to ‘pass’ (both symbolically and literally). In my experience, the workings of what Ahmed has termed a ‘stopping device’ can be seen at play almost as soon as I step outdoors. Bearing in mind that I have been physically abused by a gang on my doorstep, going in and out of my house and circulating on the street where I live—a daily and necessary activity—represents, for me, a common site of stress and anxiety (see Crisp 2007 [1968]). As I step outside, I will normally recur to strategies I have developed in my repeated attempts not to stand out. To a large extent, walking down this street without being stopped depends on my ability to go unnoticed. In trying to do this, I might focus on the way I walk, which I do by trying to filter out all elements of femininity from my gait. I might keep my hands in my pockets, for example, especially if my nails are painted. I might try to take more decisive steps while trying to control the swing of my hips. This disguising process can be highly stressful, not only because it makes me tense up in anticipation of some form of imminent abuse, but also because of the self-censoring on which the process appears to be premised. Furthermore, disguising my effeminacy is hardly ever a successful endeavour. So whereas this exercise in disguise might be seen as a legitimate exercise of safety enhancement, it must also be understood as somewhat hopeless if we take into account that it is an exercise always already *failing* at what it endeavours to accomplish.

Besides the manipulation of some of the mannerisms and behaviour that make me stand out, I will also frequently defer the further marking of my body. My use of make-up and high heels, in other words, are often postponed until I find myself in a space where I perceive I might be out of danger. At times, this change from visible to

¹⁵⁴ She continues by making reference to black activism and claiming that “some bodies more than others are ‘stopped’ by being the subject of the policeman’s address” (Ahmed 2006: 139). Crisp provides a clear example of this idea of being commonly stopped by the policeman’s address in his relation to gender, rather than race (see fn. 74).

hypervisible might occur inside a taxicab on my way to a queer club. The change might also occur on a street corner just before I reach the aforementioned club. Whereas my decision to wait to perform a hyper-version of sissiness until I find myself within the boundaries of a 'safe' environment might originate from a rational fear of violence, it might also be seen as guilty of extracting the sissy (in his more extreme version) from heteronormative spaces. This extraction might mean, from the point of view of straight spaces, that the sissy might only be seen in glimpses, resulting thereby in a somewhat fractured view of his body. This use of conventional spaces such as the cab and a street corner as make-shift changing rooms brings me to my second proposed reading of deviation, which I will now investigate in relation to proposed deviations in functionality.

A sissy space

We have seen thus far that the sissy might experience space through a series of negotiations devised in order to enhance his sense of protection and security. I have proposed these types of deviation, in space and in time, as more often than not occasioned by fear. For de Certeau, this strategy of deviation might be explained as a form of 'reading space.' That is, "to be able to see (far into the distance) is also to be able to predict, to run ahead of time by reading a space" (de Certeau 1984: 36). In reading the potential violence of a particular space, the sissy becomes active in creating deviations that might preclude his encounter with abuse.

Whereas these deviations, or 'goings-astray,' might in turn produce fear, anxiety and trauma, they might also be seen as conducive of new forms of experiencing space. Through his personal system of deviations, the sissy "increases the number of possibilities [of navigating space] (for example, by creating shortcuts or detours)" (de Certeau 1984: 98). More emphatically than that, I would suggest that these deviations could be seen as giving rise to 'new spaces,' to 'sissy spaces.' According to de Certeau, being able to read space provides the subject with precisely that, an individual space. Being able to read space, he argues, produces "a specific type of knowledge, one sustained and determined by the power to provide oneself with one's own place" (1984: 36). A sissy space, as I propose it, might be understood as being made up of the 'in-between' spaces. By 'in-between,' I mean spaces that might happen 'on the way' somewhere. By being situated in the 'in-between,' these spaces

might offer an alternative relation to the normative frameworks of time and space. This new relation, in turn, works according to the queer logic, which for Halberstam “has the potential to open up new life narratives and alternative relations to time and space” (2005: 02). These in-between spaces, moreover, might be considered as a result of what Knopp has called ‘topological imaginations’ (2007: 23).

Halberstam has explored this idea in her definition of a queer space. For her, a ‘queer space’ “refers to the place-making practices ... in which queer people engage” (2005: 06). The use of the back seat of the taxicab on my way to a queer club might be seen, according to Halberstam’s assertion, as a place-making practice. Or, according to Knopp’s conceptualisation of space, as a ‘topological imagination.’ Having the lived and embodied knowledge of my street as an unsafe place—a place I cannot circulate safely while in make-up and heels—I make creative use of the cab to change into my heels and to apply make-up. The cab becomes an improvised changing room, albeit momentarily. Rather than drawing attention to the elements I am using here (i.e. make-up or high heels), what I want to emphasise instead is what defines a sissy space. I have chosen the cab as an initial example for this specific purpose. The cab journey allows me to illustrate what I suggest is the passing, fleeting, moving and ephemeral nature of a sissy space.¹⁵⁵

This moving quality must be seen here as the definitional feature of a sissy space. For Knopp, this transient quality must be understood as a counter-reaction to the hostile experience of fixity inherent in traditional spaces. “Queers,” he has claimed, “are frequently suspicious, fearful and unable to relate easily to the fixity and certainty inhering in most dominant ontologies of ‘place’” (2007: 23). This suspicion and fear, he has shown, result from “the visibility that placement brings” (Knopp 2007: 23); a visibility, which as we have seen above, “can make us vulnerable to violence” (Knopp 2007: 23). “It is no surprise, then,” Knopp goes on to say, that “many queers find a certain solace, safety and pleasure in being in motion or nowhere at all” (2007: 23). I will later offer a more thorough investigation of the notion of ‘nowhere at all,’ to which Knopp makes reference here. Before that, I would like to tease out some

¹⁵⁵ Later in this chapter I will return to the idea of the cab (or the car) as representative of queer space in Betsky (1997) by establishing what potential tensions his theory might propose when placed in relation to my notion of a sissy space.

further ideas and explore the implications of the ephemeral qualities of sissy space, which I have begun to develop in the idea of the ‘in motion’ tactics of the cab journey.

A sissy space is ephemeral in the sense that it might take place when no one is looking. There is an interesting movement here in the idea of searching for spaces where ‘no one is looking,’ spaces that can be carved out of moments when invisibility might be (barely) possible, only to then reemerge into the normative space, which for the sissy will often mean a space of (hyper)visibility. Sissy spaces are therefore transitional, they are spaces where preparation might take place. Moreover, a sissy space can be said to be ephemeral in the sense that it happens ‘in the moment’ and once the space has been used, it might disappear.¹⁵⁶ This idea of an inherent ephemeral nature in sissy spatiality begs an inevitable comparison here. Sissy spaces might be said to be analogous in nature to the stage or to performance practice. Performance, as Butt has suggested, is “an art form that is ‘given to disappear’: one which happens, and when once it has happened, is gone” (2005: 10). This sense of fleetingness, which as we know is intrinsic to performance practice, is precisely what I propose constitutes the notion of a sissy space.

Sissy spaces are therefore theatrical in their artificiality, in their topological imaginations, in their place-making endeavours. Sissy spaces propose a deviation from the norm in function, producing new meanings for old spaces. In that sense, sissy spaces are also ‘queer’ spaces. What makes sissy spaces unique, however, is the fact that they create an environment where the ephemeral nature of theatre and the theatrical nature of gender might converge. The sissy’s need to create a separate space might serve many different purposes. A sissy space might be a place of hiding, it might be a place of protection or, alternatively, it might be—as the example of the cab illustrates—a place of transformation.¹⁵⁷ A sissy space, in sum, is a place that produces new uses for conventional spaces when no one is looking.

¹⁵⁶ Later in this chapter I will discuss how this ‘disappearing dynamic’ of sissy space might work in relation to Betsky (1997: 43).

¹⁵⁷ In chapter five, I will examine how these possibilities have been investigated through performance practice in my analysis of *In My Shoes*, *Crumbs!* and *Sissy!*.

Places of hiding, places of transformation: libraries, toilets and other sissy spaces

Having established sissy space as ephemeral, passing and a result of a complex circuit of negotiations between violence and visibility, I will now explain how sissy spaces might be seen as founded on deviations of functionality. In doing this, I will make reference to the concept of ‘geographies of resistance,’ which Halberstam has defined as the “use of space and time in ways that challenge conventional logics of development, maturity, adulthood, and responsibility” (2005: 13). Whilst the back seat of a cab might be used by anyone who wishes to change shoes or refresh their make-up on their way somewhere, it (and other spaces like it) might take on a more fundamental meaning for the sissy. This space becomes fundamental, I suggest, since its use is predicated on the knowledge that public spaces are not always safe for the sissy. The back seat of a cab—as just one example of the many temporary and improvised spaces sissies might create—provides the genderqueer subject with a certain amount of protection for a certain amount of time.

Houlbrook (2005) has observed a similar practice of spatial transformation in the context of the London quean. “Wearing drag in public,” he has shown, “was simply too dangerous” (Houlbrook 2005: 145). Queans were therefore engaged in the exercise of reinventing conventional spaces in ways that came to serve their purposes. In their attempt to get around the violence to which they were often subjected while at the same time *not* repressing their desire to wear drag, queans organised drag balls. These balls provided them with a communal place where they might have felt safe to express their gendered selves or, perhaps better, a more theatricalised version of their gendered selves. However, queans still had to resolve the problem of how to get to the ball in drag. The space between their homes and the venue, in other words, still represented the possibility or the realisation of violence. Crossing that space, therefore, was largely experienced as dangerous. “Most of those attending balls,” Houlbrook shows, resolved this problem in a simple yet inventive manner: they “changed at the venue” (2005: 145).

The queans’ spatial reimagining provides us here with another example of a queer engagement with the ‘geographies of resistance.’ Through necessity, the quean momentarily transforms the public bathroom into a dressing room. One might even imagine how, in this situation, the bathroom might have been experienced as a place

of pleasure and excitement. These affects, I suggest, might have resulted from the communal experience of self-transformation, from the experience of sharing with others this ritual of gradually stepping into a more extreme version of oneself without the fear of being chastised or reprimanded. In many ways, the bathroom might be understood as more integral to a genderqueer universe than the ball itself. The bathroom, when used as a dressing room, might be seen as somewhat *more* queer due to its temporary and subversive nature. In terms of spatial practices, the bathroom/dressing room gives queans the chance to engage with the place-making strategies, which as we have seen above, are definitional of ‘queer geographies.’ In this way, the bathroom/dressing room—or even the cab/dressing room—provides the genderqueer with a certain agency in his active construction of a ‘safe,’ albeit ephemeral, environment for his expression of gender.

Moreover, I would suggest that the bathroom might be more queer than the ball due to the anticipatory energy on which it appears to thrive. As a preparation activity, the act of dressing up (or dragging up) is, to a certain extent, more concerned with what is *about to happen* than with what *is happening*. In the dressing up, there appears to exist an underlying anticipation about what is in the near future, about what happens *after* the dressing up has finished. This anticipation might hold true regardless of where the sissy might find himself immediately after the dressing up has taken place. When dressing up in a club’s toilet, the sissy might be excited at the prospect of being in a space where his gender performance will be celebrated rather than admonished. By contrast, when dressing up at home, the sissy might be anticipating the negative attention and violence he might attract while navigating the streets. The latter scenario is precisely what (a) drives him to seek deviations on his way to the club, (b) causes him to be stopped if he happens to be spotted or (c) drives him to revert to produce new functions by queering conventional use of straight spaces. The dressing up that happens in the bathroom therefore appears to be based on the expectation of a future event. To use Muñoz’s (2009) concept, the space of the bathroom might be seen here as ‘utopian’ since it appears to be concerned with the ‘then and there of queer futurity’ rather than the ‘here and now.’ It is a space that allows us to imagine “an escape from this world that is an insistence on another time and place that is simultaneously not yet here but able to be glimpsed in our horizon” (Muñoz 2009:

183). In its act of deferral, the bathroom/dressing room might be said to “open up ... alternative relations to [both] time and space” (Halberstam 2005: 02).

Furthermore, I would suggest that there is also a notable theatricality inherent in these queer spaces. For one thing, in the sense that in the act of dressing up, sissies might be seen as consciously manipulating the negotiable markers of gender. In the act of dressing up, gender signifiers (or, more specifically, effeminacy) might be, up to a point, enhanced, played up and highlighted. It follows, therefore, that the bathroom must be seen as a place where gender presentation becomes an act of intentionality, of authorship, of creativity and of authenticity. As such, the bathroom might be seen as somewhat reminiscent of a performer’s dressing room. This analogy is especially relevant if we consider that the ball (to the quean)—and the club (to the sissy)—might be experienced as a “theater for staging his gender” (Halberstam 2005: 16).¹⁵⁸ This act of theatrical performances of gender takes on a further meaning once we consider that in gay jargon, the club or nightlife in general, becomes known as ‘the scene.’

Besides its temporariness, its improvised nature and its subversion of functionality, I would maintain that the bathroom as used by genderqueers—along with all other devised dressing rooms—remains more inherent to the concept of ‘queer geographies of resistance’ on a further account. The ball and the club allow the sissy to exist, to a certain extent, outside the frameworks of violence and subjugation. This is possible, one might argue, because in these spaces, communality is based on a visibility that seems to be shared among the occupants of such space. In the space of the club or the ball, the sissy might be seen to exist ‘among others like him’ and thereby no longer in isolation, no longer as ‘standing out.’ Whereas this communality might bring a sense of protection, I suggest it might also represent the potential demise of the sissy.

The mechanics of such demise might be identified precisely in that element of communality that affords protection. The visibility that is paramount to sissy

¹⁵⁸ Butler has famously investigated this idea of gender as ‘theatrical’ under what she has termed ‘gender performative’ (1990). She has explained this precisely by examining an act of performance, namely, the ‘drag act.’ According to Butler, in imitating gender, drag exposes the imitative structure upon which gender is constructed. The drag act appears to flesh out the fact that *no* gender performance can ever live up to femininity, not even a performance by a ‘woman,’ since even “‘the normal,’ ‘the original’ is ... an ideal that no one *can* embody” (Butler 1990: 176, original emphasis).

subjectivity—as I have characterised it—becomes, in queer communal spaces, somewhat unremarkable. To put it differently, the club provides a space where ‘sissiness’ and ‘visibility’ might cease to be recognised as such in order to become, instead, the norm. Whereas I think it is necessary that we find spaces like the club and the ball where communality is encouraged, I also think that they might occasion the sissy’s partial disappearance. Furthermore, the club might be seen in relation to what Knopp suggests is “the persistence of a closet-ghetto polarity to describe the world of lesbian and gay (and even, to some extent, queer, sexualities)” (2007: 25). “Queering our spatialised notions of homophobia and heterosexism,” he has claimed, means “getting beyond the closet-ghetto polarity” (Knopp 2007: 25).

Knopp’s above assertion seems to suggest that in both the ghetto (as in ‘the scene,’ the underground club) and in the closet (as in the conceptual construct that allows for an ideological and, at times, even behavioural concealment of homosexuality), queerness might be deemed as acceptable as long as it remains invisible, out of sight, at the margins or in ‘its place.’ Similarly, Betsky (1997: 45) has deemed ghettos as the first places of isolation. Nevertheless, as I have suggested, sissy visibility can only exist in contrast or in relation to the normal and hence not in isolation. In other words, not only in relation to others like him but also in spaces where the sissy might be read as different. Sissy subjectivity can only exist in tense relation to the frameworks of visibility. A sissy spatial ontology, it follows, must be seen to originate from the struggle inherent in navigating space while negotiating the subtle nuances between visibility, hypervisibility, (temporary) invisibility and the violence or protection, which might ensue as a result of these.

There is a central paradox here. Whereas I might have been arguing that sissy space is a space that allows for some respite from the duress under which the constant surveillance of our bodies exists—a space that, in its deviations and hidings, allows for *invisibility*—I also want to argue that the invisibility procured in these spaces might represent the end of sissy subjectivity. Sissy space looks for invisibility at the same time as it rejects invisibility. A sissy space might be seen as paradoxical, moreover, in relation to Butt’s conceptual framework, “in its mode of operation ... in the sense that it depend[s] for its definition on departing from commonly understood beliefs and values” (2005: 05). This departure from beliefs and values, as we have

seen, is what defines queer geographies through their engagement with place-making strategies and deviations.

Sissy space might be seen as constituted of the complex matrices that result from the negotiations between visibility and (temporary) invisibility, isolation and communality, queerness and normality, hiding and revealing. Sissy space might be seen as constituted of the entrances and exits from such structures. The transient and ephemeral qualities of sissy space, as I have been defining it, are what allow that paradox to occur. In their use of the cab and the bathroom as dressing rooms, sissies might be regarded as subverting or going against heteronormative uses for heteronormative spaces. The new spaces produced can be seen, therefore, as making space for what Butler has defined as “a fundamental human desire to assume a bodily form that expresses a fundamental sense of selfhood” (2004: 92). Although Butler uses this as a comment on sex reassignment operations, I suggest it might be applicable to a more temporary type of newly invented ‘bodily form.’ This more temporary version might find expression, for example, in the embodiment of a hypervisible version of effeminacy, materialised outwardly in the sissy’s gender performances. The bathroom therefore opens space for desire, self-expression, self-realisation, resistance and subversion to take place.

The bathroom problem

Thus far, I have been investigating the bathroom as providing space (albeit momentarily) for the sissy to perform outside the frameworks of visibility and violence. I will now address what might possibly happen once sissy visibility becomes a problem in the public bathroom. I will do so by making reference to Halberstam, who has argued that “the bathroom ... represents the crumbling edifice of gender” (1998: 24). Whereas my analysis here will privilege discussions of gender performances in public spaces, I must nonetheless acknowledge that the public bathroom, in the context of gay male studies, proposes a betrayal of the ideals and values of heteronormative culture in yet another way. This further subversion might be identified in the use of the public toilet as a site of sexual pleasure and sexual

encounters. In other words, the public bathroom as a ‘cottage.’¹⁵⁹ Halberstam has compared her experience of genderphobia in the women’s toilet with men’s experiences by arguing that “something very different happens ... in the men’s public toilet” (1998: 24). Here, she continues, “the space is more likely to become a sexual cruising zone than a site for gender repression” (Halberstam 1998: 24). Contrary to Halberstam’s assumption, my experience as a visibly marked sissy is that the men’s public toilet is more likely to become a site for gender repression than a site for sexual cruising.

The act of sexual cruising brings me to the point I want to make in relation to Betsky’s theory of queer space. Whereas his *Queer Space* (1997) proposes some exciting intersections with my notion of a sissy space—among which we might consider their improvised natures, their intrinsic sense of temporariness, their ephemeral qualities, their active procurement of invisibility and their subversion of normative functionality, or in Betsky’s terms, their “misuse or deformation of a place” (1997: 05)—there is one fundamental element that sets both these spaces apart and that is cruising. For Betsky, the nature of queer space “always remains sexual” (1997: 144). “It allows,” he concludes, “for cruising” (Betsky 1997: 144). Although Betsky’s queer space and my proposed sissy space both seem to rely on invisibility, on temporariness and on subversion of normative notions of space; although both spaces seem to be improvised and situated in the nooks and crannies of traditional space, their functions appear to be discrete.

The principal function of sissy space, as I propose it here, is to offer a temporary structure of protection for the expression of queer gender. The principal function of queer space, on the other hand, as conceptualised by Betsky, appears to be that of a temporary structure of protection for the expression of same-sex desire. This fundamental distinction appears to become clear once we analyse Betsky’s definition of the car, which (as we have seen earlier in the example of the taxi) is a potential sissy space/dressing room. “The car,” argues Betsky, “as both an instrument and a location, a lonely bubble and a protected shelter, a physical implement and a moving

¹⁵⁹ Within the context of queer (gay male) practices, the bathroom has been investigated as a regular site of pleasure and sexual encounters in the work of Andersson and Campkin (2009), Muñoz (2009), Houlbrook (2005), Turner (2003) and Edelman (1994).

vision, a mass-produced object and a personal space, might be,” he concludes, “the ultimate icon of cruising” (Betsky 1997: 148). Whereas it might be argued that the sissy might find ways to partake in the exciting possibilities of cruising—an activity that for Betsky is so inherently connected to the notion of queer space—the truth is that, as a practice, cruising is often unreceptive of the hypervisible sissy. The reason for this implicit rule is simple. The sissy, in his overt visibility, appears to make the otherwise inconspicuous nature of cruising revealed.

If, as Betsky has argued, queer space “never endured beyond the sexual act” (1997: 141), then it must be seen as a space that might preclude the presence of the sissy. Nonetheless, the fact that the sissy appears to have ‘no place’ in Betsky’s demarcation of queer space (apart from, perhaps, the private space of his ‘highly decorated,’ ‘theatrical’ home) might be seized upon as a rather productive opportunity. In not acknowledging the sissy, Betsky allows room for this figure to produce his own space, which is precisely the goal of the present chapter. Queer spaces of cruising, like the public bathroom, are therefore ambivalent. They represent a place for the potential enactment of same-sex desire for some queer subjects while simultaneously representing a potential site of danger for others.

As Knopp has remarked, besides cruising the bathroom can also be the place where “the violent regulation of ‘gender outlaws’” might take place (2007: 24). This violent regulation—which Knopp suggests might result from the “anxieties and hostilities that gender-ambiguous bodies provoke in ... sex-segregated bathrooms” (2007: 24)—has also attracted the attention of Halberstam. In *Female Masculinity* (1998), she has investigated this problem by making reference to personal examples of moments when she might have been harassed for her genderqueerness. “Having one’s gender challenged in the women’s rest room,” she has claimed, “is a frequent occurrence in the lives of many androgynous or masculine women” (1998: 20). As a sissy, my own experience of public bathrooms has often been similar to Halberstam’s. I have often been derided and ridiculed in the bathroom for the gender I present. I have often felt ‘out of place’ in the men’s toilet. Whereas the bathroom might offer some potential productive possibilities for sissies (some of which I have explored above), it might be viewed as more commonly representing a site of violence.

The sissy's difference, as I have shown, is always and unavoidably legible. Sissy spaces therefore might consist of precisely those niches that provide the sissy with some form of respite from this otherwise incessant visibility. The cab and the bathroom might at times represent such niches even if, at other times, they do not. I will now investigate the idea of 'hiding' as a strategy of protection. In doing this, I will establish it in relation to the practice used by sissy boys in schools that can produce both damaging and productive results.

Hiding

McInnes and Davies' (2008) study of sissy boys in school develops an interesting reading on the concept of 'hiding.'¹⁶⁰ This strategy, they have shown, might be produced as a coping mechanism by sissy boys who are systematically bullied in school. "Boys who experience such vilification," they have suggested, "tend to move into less stressful and 'risky' areas of school life and school space" (McInnes and Davies 2008: 115). Here we can see how the main aspects of what I have defined thus far as constitutive of a 'sissy space' are already active in the sissy's space-making strategies from early life. In the statement above, McInnes and Davies establish that sissy boys tend to avoid 'risky areas' where they might be vilified for their gender nonconformity. This 'moving away' from danger, as we have seen, is precisely what constitutes a sissy space as such; a space which evolves from a complex system of deviations, resulting from the threat or the realisation of sissiphobia.

Sissy boys, McInnes and Davies have shown, "withdraw from participation in areas of school activity in which their gender nonconformity calls forth shaming circuits of recognition" (2008: 115). The sissy boy's withdrawal from hostile space seems to reiterate what we have seen earlier in relation to Knopp's notion of 'queer geography.' I have discussed this idea at the beginning of the chapter by demonstrating how I regularly pursue deviations in my daily use of public space. In what regards the school environment, researchers have used the now ubiquitous example of the sports class (see Langer and Martin 2004, Wilkinson 2001, Corbett 1999, Thorne 1993, Green 1987) to investigate this system of deviations. Here the

¹⁶⁰ In chapter five, I will articulate how I have engaged with the idea of hiding in relation to sissiness in performance practice.

sissy boy's visible effeminacy seems to make him more vulnerable to the systemic teasing and bullying that happens in other areas of school life.¹⁶¹ Sports classes and other such 'masculine' spaces become hostile for the sissy boy who learns, in time, to avoid them for the sake of protection. I have found it important to look at playground bullying here for two main reasons. Firstly, because I believe it might allow for a clearer understanding of how visibly marked sissies might learn to develop their own system of deviations when navigating space. As an investigation, it is also important for the better knowledge of the mechanisms of exclusion it might afford. School bullying, furthermore, might be said to be something of a foretaste of what most sissies later come to experience as potentially life-threatening violence.

I want to focus the discussion here, however, on what the sissy boy does when avoiding such hostile spaces. We have seen that he tends to work according to an autonomous system of deviations; by moving into less stressful areas of school life and school space. McInnes and Davies have scrutinised the dynamics of this system under what they have called 'strategies of secrecy' (2008: 110); or more simply, 'hiding.' When avoiding male-dominated spaces, games and activities usually associated with 'boys,' the sissy boys observed in their research would often use the library as a hiding space (McInnes and Davies 2008: 115). Also part of sissy boys' hiding practices is what McInnes and Davies have identified as a more metaphorical engagement with the concept of 'hiding.' When not hiding in the library, sissy boys might "'tone down' their excessive behaviour to stay more comfortable within the normative bounds of masculinity" (McInnes and Davies 2008: 115). Here, sissy boys might be seen as trying to 'hide' their effeminacy. Pablo, one of the case studies, "hid in the library. He also 'hid' within himself" (McInnes and Davies 2008: 115). "His response to shame," McInnes and Davies have concluded, "was spatially organized" (2008: 115).¹⁶² Pablo's spatial organisation, one might say, originates new ways of

¹⁶¹ Sports classes have been identified by researchers as commonly hostile to sissy boys due to these boys' supposed symptomatic, according to GID diagnosis, "aversion toward rough-and-tumble play and rejection of male stereotypical ... games, and activities" (in Zucker 2008: 384). Green goes so far as to identify this avoidance of sports in school as "the usual reason for the epithet 'sissy'" (1987: 05).

¹⁶² McInnes and Davies correlation of shame and space appears to, in this specific aspect, echo Munt's (2007) research. In her study of the affect of shame, which she has defined as critical to queer subjectivity, Munt has similarly considered how shame might be spatially mapped. "Shame," she has suggested, is "a powerful spatial emotion, effecting displacement

engaging with space, even if it might initially result from an ‘avoidance’ of mainstream areas.¹⁶³

McInnes and Davies appear to have mainly argued against the strategy of hiding in their study. The counter-productive value of hiding lies, they have suggested, in that fact that it “removes the shamed from the spaces in which their disordered selves draw attention and shaming recognition” (2008: 115). In advocating that the sissy should remain visible and forgo the hiding, the researchers seem to be proposing that the sissy should thereby endure the violence and abuse they often attract in such normative spaces. This ‘hiding’ in school must be seen as similar in tactics to the adult sissy’s use of deviations and place-making strategies. Both hiding in school and the later system of deviations appear to be creative in finding solutions to fear, to anxiety and to social ostracism. I would therefore oppose McInnes and Davies’ proposed solution by arguing that the sissy’s engagement with space procured in the ‘hiding’ strategy might, to a certain extent, be seen as productive. Whilst it might not provide a definite solution to fear, violence or ostracism, ‘hiding’ can produce a sense of protection (even if a false and temporary one). Despite its limited temporality, these moments of hiding can be of significant value for the sissy, offering momentary reprieve from violence and from visibility.

However, as McInnes and Davies’ argument suggests, ‘hiding’ “also means that the ‘reality’ of gender alignments ... on which normative gender is built remains unscathed, unaltered, unpolluted by the performances of those that do not conform” (2008: 115). There is clearly an important point to their argument here; namely, that the sissy “disorders gender, revealing through his very sissiness the impossible-to-maintain fiction of gender and normative ideals of masculinity” (McInnes and Davies: 108). Whereas this might be true—and I suspect it is—I would still suggest that

and effacement in its subjects” (2007: 80). Munt’s definition of shame is interesting here insofar as it involves both notions of space and the queer subject. Her proposition appears to explicitly construe the latter in a position of ‘displacement’ to the former.

¹⁶³ This consideration of the avoidance of mainstream areas is interesting here in that it appears to return the discussion to a sissy space as always queering ‘normative’ uses and ‘normative’ spaces. We have seen this earlier in relation to heteronormative spaces such as the cab, the street and the bathroom but also in relation to homonormative spaces such as the club. Sissy space might be said to represent a queer manifestation of space in the sense that it betrays both hetero- and homo- normative ecologies.

expecting the sissy to bear the brunt of gender fictionality might come at a price. How many times does the sissy have to suffer verbal abuse, be the centre of ridicule or be beaten up until the ‘reality’ of gender alignment is finally scathed, altered and polluted by his gender nonconformist presence? Must the sissy really be the paradigmatic example of the tyranny masculinity exerts? I would find that almost impossible to sustain and certainly difficult to live with on a long-term basis. Hiding might sometimes be the best option and should not be considered illegitimate when used as a strategy of defence. Hiding must be legitimate at least until we find ways that enable the sissy to freely occupy social space without the fear of violence while, at the same time, maintaining his visibility. All this is assuming, of course, that the occupation of social space without fear is a desirable prospect for the sissy. The realisation of that ideal might, as I have been claiming, amount to the sissy’s potential invisibility and subsequent disappearance.

Hiding, in sum, must remain an open and legitimate—albeit temporary and non-exclusive—answer to the distress caused by visibility and violence. Indeed it is this very ‘temporariness’ on which hiding is premised that makes it so representative of sissy space. What might make sissy space so unique is perhaps the fact that it cannot be pinned down or unambiguously delineated; the fact that it is, much like queer space, so ephemeral. Sissy space is, in that sense, of a protean nature and the hiding largely reflects that elusive quality. Hiding, as a strategy, might produce creative new forms of self-expression (in clothing, in style and in presentation) when ‘no one is looking.’ Besides being a form of self-expression, style—as Halberstam has suggested—might also be regarded as an important form of (counter)discourse. Subcultural movements, she has claimed, produce certain challenges to hegemonic values through style “rather than simply through overt ideological articulations” (Halberstam 2008: 33).

Whilst hiding might be predicated on the principle of self-exclusion, it might also be seen as producing creative and exciting new relationships with space. Hiding in the library might be seen as a rehearsal for the later hiding on street corners, in bathrooms and in other temporary and improvised dressing rooms. Whereas these spaces of hiding allow for provisional bodily transformations—which, in turn allow for hypervisibility—I now want to examine what might be the driving force behind the

sissy's need to seek refuge in hiding. Although 'moving away' into less risky areas might become a voluntary action, we must also remember that this strategy might be seen as originating in socially excluding practices such as marginalisation and ostracism. In the following section, I will investigate the latter two forms of social practice with reference to Butler's notion of the performative.

Ostracism, marginalisation and other excluding performatives

As we have seen in chapter three in relation to Butler's notion of 'words that wound,' verbal abuse might be understood as physically *doing* something to the body. As I have shown, gender slurs have a material impact on the body they call into being. The injurious address, as Butler has claimed, may be seen to somewhat fix or paralyse its addressee. Words of violence, as we have seen earlier, enter the limbs, craft the gesture and bend the spine. What I mean to propose now is that social rejection, like verbal abuse, can have a similar effect on the body of those it 'touches.'

I have investigated thus far how fear of violence can restrict the genderqueer's use of normative space. We have seen earlier how Ahmed (2006) has proposed that the queer body might be investigated as navigating space through deviations. She has also claimed that the queer body might be a body that, in its occupation of space, is continually stopped. This 'being stopped' seems to affect mobility so that the queer subject often has his passage restricted, denied or delayed. Apart from affecting the queer person's performance of space and mobility, Ahmed has suggested that a further potential impact might arise from the act of being stopped. "Stopping," she has claimed, "is an action that creates its own impressions" (2006: 139). "Being stopped," she concludes, "is not only stressful, but also makes the 'body' itself the 'site' of social stress" (Ahmed 2006: 140). We can see in Ahmed's proposition how the body becomes both the object and the locus of stress. Stress is both *directed at* the body and *contained within* it so that the way the sissy subject experiences space—i.e. by 'being stopped'—does not only affect his spatial ontology but also has a material impact in his body.

In a psychological study of the subject, Kipling D. Williams (2007) has shown how ostracism works as a form of social regulation and exclusion. Williams has described the origins of the practice as "occurring long before it was named (*ostrakismos*)

around 500 B.C., when Athenians cast their votes on shards of clay, *ostraca*, to determine whether a member of the community ... should be banished” (2007: 428). This definition is relevant to my argument since it reveals how ostracism, as used today in the sense of social ostracism, has its genesis in a strictly spatial form of social regulation and exclusion.¹⁶⁴ Ostracism, in its original context, used to represent an actual expulsion of selected citizens from the limits of the polis. In its modern usage, Williams has shown, “ostracism is typically defined as being ignored and excluded” (2007: 429). Ostracism, therefore, seems to have become synonymous with a more ideological form of banishment, a form of political invisibility in the way that the ostracised might be ignored in certain social settings. “Individuals who deviate from others’ expectations,” shows Williams, “are often the targets of ostracism” (2001: 11).¹⁶⁵ “The primary function of ostracism,” he concludes, “is to bring the target back into the fold [through coercion into conformity] or to expel him or her altogether” (Williams 2001: 11).

As Williams’ research demonstrates, ostracism has retained some of its original power to segregate its targets and so might be seen as a practice with strictly spatial consequences. Ostracism, which Williams repeatedly explains as a manifestation of ‘rejection,’ might be therefore interpreted as a metaphorical invitation to leave the space. For Kosofsky Sedgwick, rejection might be better understood when examined as a “shame-humiliation response” (2003: 36). Rejection, in other words, can be experienced as “a *failure* or absence of the smile of contact, a reaction to the loss of feedback from others, indicating social isolation and signalling the need for relief from that condition” (Basch in Kosofsky Sedgwick 2003: 36, my emphasis). In being rejected and isolated from mainstream society and normative spaces, the sissy might (voluntary or involuntarily) retreat to zones outside the limits of conventional space, to the margins, the hiding places, the niches and the ghettos.¹⁶⁶ In being ostracised, the sissy might learn to occupy space in isolation.

¹⁶⁴ This definition is also relevant here in the sense that it demonstrates how expulsion, or banishment from a certain territory was determined through *writing* (graphy): the names of those proposed to be ostracised were written on shards of clay.

¹⁶⁵ It is interesting here how Williams has used the kinetic term ‘deviate’ to determine who is often target of social ostracism. ‘Deviation,’ as we have seen earlier, is also what characterises the queer subject’s experience of space.

¹⁶⁶ If, on the other hand, this sense of rejection is internalised, it might produce tragic consequences. For Pablo, for example, the sissy boy in McInnes and Davies’ study, “these

“Ostracism can cause such a strong desire to belong,” claims Williams, “that [the] individual’s ability to discriminate good from bad may be impaired to the point that they become attracted to any group that will have them” (2007: 428). “Even,” he continues, “cults or extremist groups” (Williams 2007: 428). Whereas Williams’ conclusion seems to reflect a rather normative view of the world in its implication that it takes poor judgement (or perhaps even despair) to join ‘cults’ or ‘extremists groups,’ the ‘joining’ strategy he alludes to might, in queer eyes, represent a rather queer manoeuvre. It might come as a result of what we have just seen above in Kosofsky Sedgwick, as ‘the need for relief from that condition’ of isolation. Leaving aside the religious and/or political merits of joining such groups—and leaving aside the spatial implications intrinsic in the term ‘extremist’—the act of ‘joining’ might be seen as potentially productive in that it foments a sense of relationality to others.

This sense of relationality, in turn, might preclude the isolation which is often intended with any acts of ostracism. The ostracised individual, in ‘joining,’ might find a place among other ostracised individuals, forming thus a community. The relationality procured between queer individual and queer groups might be seen, therefore, as positive in essence as it is predicated on a desire to create, in the words of Munt, ‘horizontal bonds.’ These horizontal bonds, Munt has claimed, are productive in that they “can be transmuted into collective desires to claim a political presence and a legitimate self, that new sense of identity can forge ahead and gain rights and protection” (2007: 04).

Williams has also established how ostracism might be commonly used as a tool that allows for the further consolidation of certain groups. “The group that ostracizes,” he has shown, “becomes more cohesive” (2007: 427). Williams’ insight is interesting in the sense that it relates back to my earlier discussion of violence in chapter three. There, I have shown how violence (or, more specifically, homophobia) can be seen as a tool that reinforces group cohesiveness. By making reference to Badinter (1992), I suggested then that homophobia might be seen as being operationally employed to

feelings [of self-rejection] are mapped spatially, and are unable to be contained by the body as they [in Pablo’s words] ‘swelled’ and ‘burst’” (2008: 110). This sentiment, the researchers have shown, ended up “leading Pablo to attempt suicide” (McInnes and Davies 2008: 110).

‘strengthen’ heterosexuality. The main point I want to make here, however, when it comes to my investigation of ostracism, is that social exclusion might have a material and tangible effect on the body. As the results of Williams’ study have shown, “regardless [whether] the ostracism was unintentional or intentional, it was associated with increased activation of ... a region of the brain that shows activation during exposure to physical pain” (2007: 433). In an earlier study, Williams has similarly established that “ostracism causes general ‘physiological regulation:’ it interferes with our immunological and hypothalamic reactions” (2001: 11-12). “Case studies,” he finishes, “report stomach ulcers, fear of public gatherings ... as a result of ostracism” (Williams 2001: 12).¹⁶⁷ What these findings might help me illustrate is that ostracism—along with all other forms of social rejection and exclusion—might be regarded as performative in the Butlerian sense. Ostracism and marginalisation, put simply, *do* something to those bodies they address.

A sissy sense of placelessness

As we have seen above with reference to Knopp’s (2007) queer perspectives, safety from fear and danger might be found only in the ‘in motion’ spaces. Sissy spaces, it follows, are spaces that deny the fixity of all normative spaces. This denial, I have shown, works also at the level of the rejection sissy spaces might propose towards any sense of rigid definitions. If sissy spaces are spaces constituted of ephemeral moments, of spaces ‘in motion’ and of deviating paths, then it might follow that the intangibility that characterises this space might define it as a ‘nowhere at all’ space. Having seemingly ‘no place,’ however, must not be seen as necessarily undesirable but rather as a condition of being queer (Munt 2007: 99, Ahmed 2006: 141, Betsky 1997: 57, Butler 1997: 04).

For de Certeau, the experience of performing urban space is in itself already characterised by a sense of ‘placelessness.’ “The moving about that the city multiplies and concentrates,” he has argued, “makes the city itself an immense social experience of lacking a place” (de Certeau 1984: 103). The lack of place seems to be

¹⁶⁷ Whereas the stomach ulcer might signal to a psychosomatic response to the symbolic ‘punch in the stomach’ of ostracism (cf. the ‘metaphorical slap’ of the verbal abuse (in Munt 2007: 103 and in Butler 1997: 04); the fear of public gatherings might be materialised in the subject’s actual limited mobility and restricted use of public space.

situated here in what de Certeau calls “tiny deportations (displacements and walks)” (1984: 103). In other words, placelessness appears to be the effect of the continually moving dynamic of the city. “To walk,” he has put it more emphatically, “is to lack a place” (de Certeau 1984: 103). Whereas this might be true, to a certain extent, for any passer-by, my suggestion in this chapter has been that sissy space is wholly determined by the sense of placelessness provoked by deviations rather than being merely enhanced by it. While having ‘no place’ in mainstream ecologies, sissies might find themselves responsible for creating their own sissy-safe spaces, their own ‘sissy nation.’¹⁶⁸ This creation, as I have suggested, evolves out of strategies such as hiding and deviations, which enable sissies to make efficient and intelligent use of environments that work to their advantage.

Moreover, as Munt has reminded us, “to be out of place, always exceeding its position, perpetually moving” amounts precisely to the definition of ‘*ekstasis*’ (2007: 222). According to that, a sissy space, in its perpetual movement, in its perpetual state of displacement, in its perpetual ‘placelessness’ (Knopp 2007), in its always ephemeral and deferring nature, could potentially be seen as rather ‘ecstatic.’ As an ecstatic space, sissy spaces might be therefore seen as places of elation, excitement and joy rather than always as desolate and abject places. “Ecstasy,” Muñoz has suggested, “is queerness’s way” (2009: 187).

Knopp has investigated this quintessential characteristic of queer subjectivity—this ‘no placeness’—by creating the concept of ‘placelessness.’ ‘Placelessness,’ for Knopp, also offers some political potential of reversibility. “Placelessness,” as he has put it, “might be productively reconceptualised as an embodied and material practice, one that offers certain pleasures and other benefits” (2007: 23). One of the benefits of placelessness, he has suggested, might include, among other things,

¹⁶⁸ The idea of the queer subject having ‘no place’ has also been investigated by Muñoz, who has claimed that “queerness is an ideality” (2009: 01). Later in his book, he articulates this relationship by claiming that “queerness is illegible and therefore lost in relation to the straight minds’ mapping of space. Queerness,” he continues, “is lost in space or lost in relation to the space of heteronormativity” (Muñoz 2009: 72). “To be lost,” he concludes, “is to veer away from heterosexuality’s path” (Muñoz 2009: 73, cf. Ahmed 2006). Muñoz’s study adds to Edelman’s (2004) postulation that queer subjects must embrace negation. For Muñoz, queerness must be understood as a utopian identity in the sense that it is constantly in search of a *there and then* to the detriment of the *here and now*.

security. The search for security is, as I have shown, what might lead the sissy to constantly change places, leading him to develop a relation with what Knopp has termed a sense of ‘placelessness.’ There are, as he has rightly pointed out, some apparent structural bonds between the idea of ‘having no place’ and the constant search for ‘security.’

Defining a sissy space therefore, the principal task of this chapter, might have been a ‘sissy fuss’ all along since a sissy space is a space that, in its queer ethos, defies definition. A sissy space, in sum, might be ‘no place at all.’ As Edelman has claimed, “queerness can never define an identity; it can only ever disturb one” (2004: 17). Likewise, I propose that sissiness can never define a space; it can only disturb spaces. The sissy might be seen as disturbing normative spaces through his deviations and proposed subversions of function and through his place-making practices. In the process of disturbing, though, sissy spaces are also engaged in being disturbed; a process they endure every time their hiding is found out. This fundamental sense of ‘disturbance’ is, as we have seen in the previous chapters, also inherent in the sissy’s physical and relational ontologies. The sissy, in short, is disturbing.

Sissy spaces, moreover, must be seen, in their precarious temporariness, more as ‘places’ than proper ‘spaces.’ In structuring this argument, I will recur to Knopp’s conceptual framework. “‘Places,’” he has suggested, might be understood “not as fixed ontologies but as passings that are elusive, ephemeral and always in the process of becoming *and* disintegrating” (2007: 23). I want to set Knopp’s description alongside the myth of Sisyphus; initially because the pun is too good to let it slip by. Nevertheless, despite the echoes in the Greek hero’s name, the analogy with his eternal penalty is irresistible. There is something rather sisyphian in Knopp’s conceptualisation of a queer space, in its supposed construction that appears to be founded on a constant becoming *and* disintegrating; a space that precisely because of this constant disintegration, never actually seems to materialise. A queer notion of place—on which my sissy notion of space has set up camp—seems to be formed on a construction that appears to be never-ending, ever-evolving.

A queer space, and consequently a sissy space, must hence be seen as a place that might never truly materialise. Queer space, as Betsky has put it, is “a space that appeared and disappeared continually” (1997: 05); it is ever elusive and seems to topple over as soon as its foundations begin to be laid. In that sense, a sissy space shares its structural bonds with queer since queer spaces, claims Betsky, “as soon as they were stated, they disappeared” (1997: 05). A queer sissy space is, in other words, constituted of passings. “These passings,” Knopp suggests, “are always becoming and disintregating ... always evolving and incomplete” (2007: 23). Sissy space is potentially invisible, being organised as it is in the spaces *across*, *in-between*, *at the edges*, *on the margins* of traditional spaces.

In the introduction to this chapter, I suggested that a sissy space should be seen as always already deviating somehow from the notion of a queer space while at the same time always returning to it. In closing the chapter, I will return to that initial consideration in constructing a tentative definition of a sissy space. In doing so, I will make reference to Halberstam’s examination of queer subjects and their experience of space. Queer subjects live, she has written, “in the spaces (physical, metaphysical, and economic) that others have abandoned” (2005: 10).¹⁶⁹ Similarly, I would argue that sissy subjects live in spaces others have abandoned; but to Halberstam’s physical, metaphysical and economic, I would add geographical, urban, gendered and symbolic. More than being abandoned, I suggest that sissy spaces are also those that others might not see or those that others might discard as ‘no place at all.’

Sissy spaces must be seen as more than glorified ‘dressing rooms,’ although, at times, they might be just that. As such, they must not be overlooked nor looked down on. On the contrary, they must be recognised as essential in providing space for the hypervisible sissy to exist and later occupy the streets in all his high-heeled and belipsticked glory. More than dressing rooms, however, I suggest that sissy spaces are spaces that are principally engaged in the ideals of topological imaginations, place-making practices, subversion of function and of meaning. They are spaces that

¹⁶⁹ These abandoned spaces Halberstam refers to might be understood in relation to what Betsky has called the “ruins and forgotten places” (1997: 06) on which queer subjects have made a conscious living.

emerge from their action of devising new systems of deviation. In uniting all these qualities, sissy spaces are both *queer* and *theatrical*.

Sissy spaces are formed of those places that allow for some momentary invisibility and respite from violence while at the same time allowing for a transformation that returns the sissy body back into its indelible (hyper)visibility. Sissy spaces are those that preclude the need to become either straight or to disappear (Ahmed 2006: 178). “This,” as Ahmed put it, “is the choice between two different kinds of death” (2006: 178). Finding a sissy space means, therefore, finding places that would allow the conditions for what Butler has called ‘a livable life’ (2004: 224) to flourish. Finding a sissy space, hence, entails finding ways to finally establish the conditions for a life outside the frameworks of subjugation, ridicule and violence. This space, however, must remain firmly located within the structures of visibility and difference. Finding this space might mean, in the words of Ahmed, finding “another way of dwelling in the world” (2006: 178). For the sissy, finding another way of dwelling in the world might mean dwelling in the ephemeral in-between spaces and never seeing broad daylight or real sun. Nevertheless, returning to Genet whom I quoted at the epigraph of this chapter, “remote in these limbos, faeries might cause curious disasters that can herald new beauty;” and sissy space, like queer space, “creates its own beauty” (Betsky 1997: 193).

Conclusion

In the chapter above I have developed an analysis of the mechanisms that constitute what I have called a sissy space. By way of moving towards chapter five, where I will discuss the sissy in the theatrical space, I want to expose some of the meaningful parallels I have identified between these two spaces—i.e. the sissy’s social space and the theatrical space. A sissy space, I have claimed earlier, is independently constructed, it follows its own particular rules, at the same time as being structurally bound up with existing notions of queer space. A sissy social space has been identified as potentially invisible, as hidden, as out of sight. When scrutinised from that perspective, the sissy’s social space is ultimately *unlike* the space of the theatre. The latter, as we know, is a place where all action must be seen, where all bodies must be visible at all times.

The sissy's production of space, I have shown, develops in relation to a complex negotiation with the notions of visibility, invisibility and hypervisibility. The sissy's production of space is, in other words, often born out of the strategies he develops in order (to try) to avoid social violence. These strategies (deviations, hiding, reinventions of use) afford the sissy a certain protection in invisibility; a state that, for him, can only ever be temporary. When in public, therefore, the sissy might either hide the effeminate gesture in an attempt to 'pass' unnoticed or he might hide his effeminate body when realising he will probably *not* pass unnoticed. Either way, the sissy's production and performance of social space is intimately connected to his often failed, albeit vital, attempts at invisibility.

The sissy's personal relationship with visibility is, moreover, in constant flux. If he stands out too much, he might become the target of violence. On the other hand, if he blends in too much, he risks disappearing altogether. Sissy space, consequently, is also in constant flux. It is a space built on the notion and acceptance of its own ephemeral nature. Herein lies one of the main resemblances between the theatrical space and the social space for the sissy: they are both spaces that can only exist temporarily. In sum, sissy space is ephemeral and invisible whereas the theatrical space is ephemeral and highly visible. This analysis of differences and similarities between social and theatrical spaces brings me to a second parallel I wish to consider in the present conclusion, namely the one between sissy performance and sissy performativity.

This parallel also implicates the concept of space, both social and theatrical. If sissy space, as I have claimed, is only viable when 'no one is looking' and if, similarly, the theatrical space is only viable when someone *is* looking, then the sissy's gendered behaviour might be interpreted differently in each of these spaces. In more simple words, the sissy's social space—the one that does not usually allow room for spectators, the one that potentially rejects them—might be regarded as the realm of sissy performativity. As we have previously seen with reference to Butler, it is indeed in the context of the *social* exchange that one learns to do (and later even read) gender. The mincing gait and the limp wrist, among other traits, have been identified

as distinctive markers of the effeminate body; markers that constitute what I have described as sissy performativity.

Whilst I have also claimed that sissy performances might take place in such public spaces as the street, the bathroom, the club, the ball and the cab, I want to firmly posit the stage as a more privileged site for such forms of expression.¹⁷⁰ In chapter five, I will discuss the function the formal stage (and its creative processes) has had in the present research.¹⁷¹ Before then, however, I want to reaffirm the importance of a more metaphorical stage, which I have referred to above when speaking of the bathroom or the cab as ‘dressing rooms,’ of the club and the ball as ‘the scene’ and of the street as a ‘catwalk.’ It is crucial to note, nevertheless, that while the streets might be the site of impromptu sissy performances (like those of Crisp or of the London quean, for instance), they have also been identified here as a potential site of abuse.

If sissy performances can take place within the theatrical boundaries of the stage as well as in the social sphere of the streets, then what might separate performativity unequivocally from performance is intentionality. Whereas sissy performativity might be given to the sissy ‘against his will’ (to paraphrase Butler), sissy performances might be said to be constructed out of the act of deliberately, consciously and even wilfully embracing such performativity. Sissy performances might be therefore characterised as a self-aware and often exaggerated engagement with the markers of effeminacy. Once the sissy’s gender becomes actively performed (on the stage or on the streets), then it must be seen as not only performative but also as a form of performance.

¹⁷⁰ Earlier in this chapter I spoke of the dynamic changes latent in the sissy’s use of the bathroom, for instance. I suggested that as a social environment, the bathroom might be viewed as a potential site of danger. Within that same social framework, the bathroom (as a dressing room) might be seen as a place where gender presentation becomes an act of intentionality. It is in the latter scenario that the function of the bathroom appears to temporarily shift. It appears to move away from its social function and momentarily provide the sissy with a rather more ‘theatrical’ environment—a dressing room—where there seems to exist a decidedly more self-conscious preparation for the ‘scene.’

¹⁷¹ In chapter five I will investigate the performance *Sissy!* as presented to an invited audience in a conventional black-box theatre following a structured process of investigation, creation and rehearsals. I use ‘formal stage’ in this passage, therefore, as a way to differentiate *Sissy!* from the more ‘accidental’ or ‘improvised’ representations of stage I have indicated above.

As an intentional expression of sissiness, sissy performances produce both a critical understanding and a pointed commitment to the otherwise potentially passive process of gender inscription. By deliberately and wilfully embracing the markers that make him different, the sissy gains agency: he *chooses* to deviate in body and in space. The performative therefore becomes understood, in the words of Laurence Senelick, as “the sociocultural ‘constitutive constraint’” whereas theatre might be seen as “the agency or subversion of that constraint” (2000: 06). The theatrical space, which I will investigate next, has traditionally functioned as a privileged site for deliberate constructions of gender. In chapter one I investigated how effeminacy has been associated with the notion of entertainment and with the theatre (Hennen 2008, Crisp 2007 [1968], Houlbrook 2005, Lucas 1994, Sinfield 1994, Ellis 1975 [1897]). Furthermore, as Senelick has suggested, “the performing arts provide the most direct, most graphic, often most compelling representations of gender” (2000: 06). This has been true in terms of both masculine and feminine representations by both male and female performers. Such staged representations of gender, moreover, have often operated “at odds with ... the common sanctions of society” (Senelick 2000: 06).

The stage, as Senelick’s (2000) study has shown, has consistently kept its doors firmly open to gender transgression, even if it has not always successfully precluded the violent antagonism common to the streets. As Senelick has put it “stage-gendered creatures are chimeras which elude the standard taxonomies and offer alternatives to the limited possibilities of lived reality” (2000: 11). “That these alternatives cannot exist outside the realm of the theatre,” he continues, “makes them all the more cogent to the imagination” (Senelick 2000: 11). Although not always the result of personal investments in the politics of gender, male actors have appeared in female garb as far back as Ancient Greek theatre (Senelick 2000: 49). As a continued convention, they can still be seen on stage playing female roles in Beijing Opera and in Kabuki performances, for instance. British theatre, as Senelick has also outlined, has had an especially rich history of cross-gender practice: from the boy players of the Elizabethan stage, to the pantomime dame, to the female impersonators of Victorian variety shows and Edwardian vaudeville, to the Artaudian theatre of Lindsay Kemp, to drag performers in working men’s clubs, to Danny La Rue, Eddie Izzard, Julian Clary and the late Leigh Bowery (Senelick 2000).

In concluding this chapter, I want to harness an understanding of gender play (in body and in dress) as a political gesture in the theatrical space. This gesture, I claim, remains current and retains its transgressive and transformative value. Although *Sissy!* borrows some of the elements that characterise cross-dressing and female impersonation on stage—establishing thus citational communion with such practices—it must not be seen as a study focused solely on that heritage. Rather, as chapter five will determine, it offers a reading of the complex relationships between the social sissy and the stage sissy. In exaggerating some of the markers of effeminacy, *Sissy!* uses the theatrical space in order to expose the often masked processes of gender performativity.

Sissy!

This body on stage must emerge despite and beside any normative and pedagogical discourses on gender ... history, and tradition. It must emerge against those discourses that refuse and refute the flesh (Lepecki 2002: 273).

The hair swung and fell, it followed the deathly gravitational pull on the performer's bodies, it came to rest veiling faces, entangled, dishevelled, a mark of embodied distress (Heathfield 2006: 196).

The troubled yet singular space of performance offers an ersatz paradise: prone to fantasy, pleasure and desire, it also, in the same gesture, invokes a presentiment of something catastrophic (Johnson 2009: 180).

In the previous chapters, I have defined the sissy body in relation to its queer historical tradition (chapter one). By engaging in this supposedly backward-looking exercise, I have established a connection with Muñoz's study, which has maintained that "queerness is primarily about futurity and hope" (2009: 11) while at the same time remaining "attentive to the past" (2009: 18). The looking back is hence proposed as an attempt to understand the present and visualise the productive possibilities inherent in the notion of a queer future. In chapter two, I have proposed an association between the historical sites of queer representation (scrutinised in chapter one) and inherited forms of sissy embodiment, especially in relation to Hennen's (2008) taxonomy of 'somatic' and 'cosmetic' effeminacy. Throughout my writing, I have continually placed my lived experience of effeminacy in service of the construction of a new account of sissiness, a new sissiology. My conceptual framework (i.e. the juxtaposition of past, present and personal in search of a new future) in that sense shares much in common with that on which Muñoz's book has been premised.

"My intention in this [autobiographical] aspect of the writing," as Muñoz put it, "is not simply to wax anecdotally but, instead, to reach for other modes of associative argumentation and evidencing" (2009: 03-04).¹⁷² As I approach the end of the present thesis and its project of producing a possibility of a new sissiology, I will demonstrate in this chapter how I have reached for other modes of associative argumentation and evidencing. Among such modes, I contend, is performance practice. My research has offered *Sissy!* (presented live) as a form of argumentation and evidencing, even though, as I have claimed earlier, the act of performance might

¹⁷² See also fn. 4.

be viewed as somewhat impossible to capture or document. As Muñoz has pointed out, “it has become somewhat axiomatic within the field of performance studies that the act exists only during its duration” (2009: 71).¹⁷³ In presenting practice as both argument and evidence, I have taken into account its constitutional transience. Indeed, the purpose of the live performance as a document has been to deliberately provoke a lived experience of the ephemeral. The ephemeral, as we have seen, is fundamental in the understanding of queerness. My articulation of a sissy space, in chapter four, for instance, has established it as structurally bound to the notion of the ephemeral. “The key to ... prove queerness and read queerness,” Muñoz has argued, can be located “by suturing it to the concept of ephemera ... as trace, the remains, the things that are left, hanging in the air” (2009: 65).

When writing about performance, therefore, I wonder whether Muñoz has a point in proposing that “this command to write is a command to save the ephemeral thing by committing it to memory, to word, to language” (2009: 71). The endeavour to document performance thereby ‘saving’ it appears to be predicated on an intrinsic command to fail. “We cannot,” Muñoz has suggested, “simply conserve ... a performance through documentation” (2009: 71). “We can perhaps begin to summon up,” he concludes, “through the auspices of memory, the acts and gestures that meant so much to us” (2009: 71-72). What I am interested in in the current chapter is therefore an investigation of the residues of memory. I also consider how memory has a specific role in the construction of performance material. In other words, one of the points this chapter will trace is the function of autobiography (another form of ‘graphy’) in the creative process.¹⁷⁴ More specifically, the present chapter exposes the process of construction of a sissigraphy in the representational space of the stage. In doing that, I will reveal the impact my experience of GID treatment in childhood (among other forms of violence) has had in the constitution of my body as a sissy body in the domain of performance.

¹⁷³ For more on the ephemeral nature of performance, see Phelan (1993) and Butt (2005).

¹⁷⁴ I have previously defended the use of the autobiographical in my writing by placing it in relation to the methodological approach of queer scholars such as Halberstam (1998) and Muñoz (2009). In the present chapter, I will locate the autobiographical in the field of performance practice by making reference to some of the practitioners who have had an impact on my research’s investigative process, among which will be Pina Bausch (see Fernandes 2001 and Hoghe and Weiss 1989).

In my analysis of choreography, where ‘choreography’ is understood as a particular form of writing,¹⁷⁵ I have continually placed it alongside existing written knowledge on queer practice but also alongside my personal understanding and lived experience of such knowledge. In situating the practice in the territory of dance, I act in the belief that, as Muñoz has claimed, “dance is an especially valuable site for ruminations on queerness and gesture” (2009: 65). In the following section, I will articulate how queerness (in the figure of the sissy) has been explored specifically through an investigation of gestural analysis. In chapters one and two, I have offered a careful investigation of such aesthetic signifiers, many of which I have taken into studio. The markers of effeminacy will now appear in a more focused and critical analysis of their role in the writing of movement.

Having previously written (or, to use the words of Edelman (2004), *inscribed*) a history of effeminacy in the West, I will now develop a *de*-description of certain of its elements through my proposed investigation of my own practice. The *inscription* produced in the previous chapters has yielded a foundation for the current *de*-description of the body. This fluid relationship between the writing and the body has developed throughout the period of the research, attesting to the interdependent nature of such elements. As Dominic Johnson has claimed, “in order to write about language, it is imperative to return to the body ... [in so far as] language relates to and occurs in the whole body” (2009: 179).

The sissy body in choreographic practice

In this section I will analyse the process of investigation of the sissy body in performance practice. When making reference to ‘elements of performance practice,’ I am aware of the broad scope of the term, which might include, among other things, lighting and sound design, props, dramaturgy, soundtrack and narrative. Although I might mention some of these in my current investigation—see appendix C, for instance, for a reading of the soundtrack as a form of textual layering—I will concentrate the argument mainly on the body (abuse and space) for the sake of focus.

¹⁷⁵ In *Exhausting Dance* (2006), dance scholar André Lepecki has developed an extensive investigation of the etymological roots of the word ‘choreography.’ “Compressed into one word, morphed into one another,” he has shown, “dance and writing produced qualitatively unsuspected and charged relationalities between the subject who moves and the subject who writes” (2006: 07).

I will refer to the movement (the ‘somatic’ body) and to the costumes and props (the ‘cosmetic’ body) used in my investigative process of a sissy ontology. I will preface my discussion with an analogy between ballet as a codified system of body training and Butler’s notion of the gender performative.

“Gender,” as Butler has claimed, “is the repeated stylization of the body, a set of repeated acts within a highly rigid regulatory frame that congeals over time to produce the appearance of substance, of a natural sort of being” (1990: 43-44). Butler’s notion of gender is remarkably clear in dance training, and, more specific to the purpose of my present argument, ballet technique.¹⁷⁶ In ballet, the body is similarly taught how to move and how to occupy space in ways that conform to Butler’s ‘highly rigid regulatory frame.’

The balletic body is trained to embody certain codes, thereby producing a pre-determined set of meanings. Consistent with Butler’s proposition of the ‘gender performative,’ balletic bodies also go through a process of repetition and stylisation over an extended period of learning.¹⁷⁷ Furthermore, the goal of ballet is also to produce the appearance of substance or naturalness. Needless to say, by contrast the mechanisms that regulate the process of gender learning outside the theatrical context seem to be somewhat covert when compared to the mechanisms that regulate the process of learning ballet. In ballet, the technique is consciously rehearsed, exercised and repeated to exhaustion. Learning ballet is almost always in front of a mirror since it is a process predicated on the notion of mimetic learning, on imitation.¹⁷⁸

In ‘After The Fall,’ Heathfield (2006) has drawn a similar analogy. “As most dancers will tell you,” he has claimed, “the body is a house of habituation: one holds oneself,

¹⁷⁶ The main source of the following observations will be my personal experience of ballet training over the past thirteen years. In ballet class, I have constantly tried to escape the masculinisation of my body by, for instance, joining a girl’s group in the development of an exercise (classes are usually gender segregated) or in my training in *pointe* shoes (traditionally a prerogative of female dancers) or in my active search to hone the female technique *in lieu* of the male one. For more on the male body and ballet, see Ramsay Burt (1995).

¹⁷⁷ Muñoz has proposed a similar parallel by speaking of “ballet’s performativity” (2009: 165).

¹⁷⁸ In his study of Vaslav Nijinsky’s queer legacy, Kevin Kopelson has specifically described “dance as mimetic” (1997: 04). I will return to the idea of imitation later in the chapter.

acts and moves, according to learned customs laden with often unknown and undisclosed values” (2006: 190). Heathfield seems to suggest that dancers, because of their often-rigid process of body training, might be more consciously aware of the intrinsic artificiality of the (gender and ballet) performative. The ‘appearance of naturalness’ on which Butler suggests gender performativity seems to rest might also apply to dance. Dance critics, dance connoisseurs and dancers alike might all agree that a certain dancer’s technique appears to be remarkable when it remains ‘invisible.’ A successful dancer might be, in that sense, referred to as a ‘natural’ when, in fact, technique has been acquired in a highly artificial, arduous and complex process.

When it comes to gender outside the theatre, this perceived naturalness and invisibility of the accomplished dancer’s body seems to manifest itself in those we might refer to as conventionally gendered individuals. They, as I have shown in chapter four, appear to be the ones who, unlike the sissy, ‘pass’ unnoticed. In accordance with this notion of invisibility, it must be noted that ballet, as a form, has been intentionally made invisible in *Sissy!* Choreographically speaking, that is, *Sissy!* has not been devised around the codes that govern the language of ballet; yet ballet, the foundation of my training as a dancer, cannot but have informed my choices as a choreographer and as a performer. The hidden value of ballet is something I also claim to share with Pina Bausch’s creative process. Most of Bausch’s dancers are ballet trained even though their technique does not often appear explicitly on stage (Fernandes 2001). When it does, it is often as a critique to the form, conventions and oppressive mechanisms on which ballet survives.

Gender and ballet both seem to produce specific types of bodies, which become readable through recognisable and codified markers. The function of ballet in the present argument becomes more evident once we consider that ballet produces a rigid division between mutually exclusive masculine and feminine forms of embodiment; a division that the present research attempts to confound. The masculine body is, for instance, taught to jump higher, to occupy more space, to stand and hold itself in a certain way. Moreover, the masculine body of the male dancer is the one which is taught and expected to carry the feminine body of the female dancer. In *Sissy!*, Sautzvy, who might be seen as taking the role of the masculine male dancer, is the

one who carries me in the series of lifts performed towards the end.¹⁷⁹ My primary goal with the lifts has been to offer a visual and corporeal representation of danger. The lifts, however, might also be viewed as a direct reference to the potential violence of ballet (in its strict division of gender roles, in the pain it often inflicts on the body, in its oppressive system of regulating the body).¹⁸⁰

Ballet, as we have seen in chapter two, has traditionally functioned as a placeholder for effeminacy. When I was a child, I used to sit by the door outside my sister's ballet class and watch her dance. Being a boy, I was not allowed to take classes precisely because that would potentially make me a sissy. Ballet was not only something for which I was not allowed to reach as a form of expression but it also represented a place materially demarcated out of bounds for me. In other words, I was not permitted to enter the space of the ballet class. Later in life, I started attending ballet classes. My decision to train in ballet might be seen as somewhat akin to my deliberate choice to wear make-up and high heels. When appropriating myself of elements that had been supposedly out of my reach, I felt empowered to speak for myself—much in the same way Crisp has done (see chapter two)—and perform my pride in being a sissy *in* and *through* my body.

What I mean to suggest with the comparison developed above is that the social codes of gender conduct might be seen, to a certain degree, as equally artificial and constructed (or as 'theatrical,' perhaps) as the codes that regulate some of the more highly codified systems of body training. What interests me in ballet is not the

¹⁷⁹ The main source of inspiration for some of the lifts performed in this section has been the ballet *Romeo and Juliet*, choreographed in 1965 by Kenneth MacMillan for the Royal Ballet to the music of Sergei Prokofiev.

¹⁸⁰ The rigid codes of ballet have served as source material in the work of Spanish performance artist, La Ribot. In one of her *Piezas Distinguidas* (*Missunderstanding*, 'Distinguished Piece' # 24 (1997, distinguished owner: North Wind, Barcelona)), the hand gestures commonly used by ballet dancers in class when 'marking' the exercise are used as reference for creating movement. In doing this, she transposes a gestural code that is largely 'hidden' to a performance setting, thereby exposing it. La Ribot's visibly trained body is also the subject of *Pieza Distinguida, 19 Equilibrios y Un Largo* ('Distinguished Piece' # 19 (1997, distinguished owner: Marga Guergé, New York)). The latter piece centres on a series of highly technical and virtuosic demonstration of balances on *demi-pointe*. I am interested here not in ballet *per se* but, rather, in how La Ribot might offer a different way of framing something as traditional as ballet by reifying its codes and contesting them at the same time. For more on La Ribot's *Distinguished Pieces*, see Heathfield (2006) and Lepecki (2006: 65-86).

technique itself but, rather, how it produces bodies that might escape or actively challenge the boundaries demarcated by its conventional system.¹⁸¹

In bringing this section to a close, I want to offer a final consideration on the potential influence of ballet on the queer performance canon. In his study of queer utopia, Muñoz has developed an analysis of ‘queer avant-garde’ choreographer and performer Fred Herko. Herko, whose work has been “affiliated with many countercultural performance groups” (Muñoz 2009: 147), was also noted for his “love of ballet” (Muñoz 2009: 150). More than his “faggy flamboyance ... [and] decidedly eccentric comportment” (Muñoz 2009: 150), I am interested here in his queer readings and subcultural legacy in relation to the critique he has proposed to the universe of ballet. Specific to my purposes is Herko’s “final performance, his suicide ... [which was] staged as a performance” (Muñoz 2009: 148).¹⁸² “His leap out of the window to his death,” Muñoz explains, has been “described as a perfect *jeté*” (2009: 148).¹⁸³ Two points stand out for me here. The first is related to what Muñoz has identified as “Herko’s own brand of failure” (2009: 154). For him, Herko’s performances (his life and his death) were repeatedly marked by a ‘history of failures’ (2009: 155). Herko’s “movement through the world and the performance space,” affirms Muñoz, “was always disruptive, always linked to the force of failure, the aesthetics of excess with minimalism, temporal disjointness, madness” (2009: 159).

Herko’s own brand of queer failure, linked as it has been to his ballet-trained body, raises some important questions in what regards my personal relationship with queerness, with ballet and with failure. I wonder whether failure, as a conceptual framework, might be competent in describing the role of ballet in *Sissy!*. The references to *Romeo and Juliet* (see fn. 172), to the gender division of ballet as a coded language, to my being denied it in childhood (itself a form of violence and

¹⁸¹ In regards to performance practice, I have articulated in fn. 173 how the work of La Ribot might offer an embodied form of subversion to the codes of ballet. In *Crumbs!*, I propose a more explicit engagement with such codes rather than keeping them invisible. See clip ‘Death and the Maiden’ in *Crumbs!*, DVD 2.

¹⁸² The discussion of suicide as a potential damaging result of the social pressures of living a life as a gender nonconformist has been addressed in chapter two.

¹⁸³ An expression belonging to ballet terminology, the *jeté* is, in many ways, one of the most virtuosic movements of ballet. Muñoz makes a link between queerness and virtuosity by suggesting that “the other side of the performance of failure is queer virtuosity” (2009: 177).

subjugation) and to my aspiration and later appropriation of it as a process of learning and of self-expression might have all remained invisible. On the other hand, the failure to recognise the reference might be investigated from a different perspective. It might be viewed as a failure of the audience. Moreover, *failing* might be perceived as a particular mark of queerness and therefore potentially desirable.

The notion of failure as a distinctive element of queer performance brings me to my second point. Herko's *jeté* to his death, as a final gesture, seems to firmly place his oeuvre back in the domain of ballet. Herko's fatal gesture makes me wonder whether Muñoz's 'failure' to propose a parallel between the 1960s New York choreographer's jump and Nijinsky's legendary *jeté* out of the window in *Le Spectre de la Rose*¹⁸⁴ has been intentional. As Kopelson has claimed, "Nijinsky's most famous leap is the exit through the open window in *Le Spectre de la Rose*" (1997: 107). Does the absence of Nijinsky in Muñoz represent a deliberate attempt at *inscribing* 'failure' into his study and if so, should it have remained invisible? Herko's apparent performative reference to Nijinsky, one of the most celebrated ballet dancers of the twentieth century is germane to the argument specifically in what regards the re-inscription of the fall, where the 're-inscription' is seen to be performed by Herko's recirculation of Nijinsky's leap.¹⁸⁵

I want to use Herko's ('real life') suicidal leap out of the window (and, subsequently, Nijinsky's legendary leap 'off-stage') as an analogy in my use of the falls in the choreographical inscription of sissiology. I am particularly interested in how Herko's fall 'performs failure' and how it might be seen as somewhat symbolic of the

¹⁸⁴ Choreographed by Michel Fokine in 1911 with libretto based on Théophile Gautier's poem of the same name and music composed by Carl Maria von Weber and Hector Berlioz.

¹⁸⁵ Although I have given special focus to the leap, Nijinsky's rejection of the masculine form is clearly relevant here. His interpretation of *Le Spectre de la Rose*, for instance, has been described as presenting "feminine arms, masculine legs" (Kopelson 1997: 107). Nijinsky "abolished the classical correctness of the *port de bras*, curling his arms round his face and holding them, when extended, with broken wrists" (Buckle in Kopelson 1997: 108). His rejection of the classical, masculine form was often read as "effeminate arm motion" (Kopelson 1997: 114). In *Crumbs!*, the coded language of the *port de bras* has been used as a source of gestural investigation. Here, I juxtapose the arms of *Raymonda*'s solo variation (1898, choreographed by Marius Petipa; music by Alexander Glazunov) with movements from the voguing subculture (see clip 'Tajabone' in *Crumbs!* in DVD 2).

self-destructive pull towards violence.¹⁸⁶ When developing this analysis, I will use Heathfield's (2006) investigation of the fall as the main conceptual tool. The fall in *Sissy!* represents an embodied attempt to perform failure.

The fall¹⁸⁷

The fall is physically threatening, it puts the body in danger. Indeed, in one of the live performances of the first version of *Sissy!* (2009), with an unchoreographed strike of my knee, I accidentally cut Sautzvy's forehead open. A rush of blood suddenly followed; and, "a rush of blood," to use Bataille's words, "upsets the balance" (2006 [1962]: 105). In its unscripted appearance, blood did indeed upset the balance of the performance.¹⁸⁸ Sautzvy's body had been literally (albeit momentarily) open at this occasion and, after the performance, his wound had to be stitched up. Although the shedding of blood was accidental, its appearance bears undeniable significance to the research. As Bataille has suggested, "blood in itself is a symbol of violence" (2006 [1962]: 54). It is rather appropriate that blood should appear materially just when I was trying to represent symbolic violence through the falls.

Furthermore, it is interesting, if not ironic, that the body which suffered actual injury in the aforementioned accident was the one which was supposed to represent 'the masculine.' It is perhaps more ironic still that this wound should have been inflicted by the sissy, who is commonly seen as 'the coward,' 'the victim,' 'the passive.' In chapter three, I have claimed that the sissy body is not only a victim of violence but

¹⁸⁶ Associations between queerness and the death drive have been explored by, among other queer scholars, Edelman (2004) and Johnson (2009). "Abandoned to jouissance," Johnson has suggested, "queer sexualities must embrace the death drive" (2009: 179).

¹⁸⁷ For an image of the falls in *Sissy!*, see figure 06. The falls have also appeared as a physical representation of failure in *Crumbs!* (see clip 'Falling' in *Crumbs!* in DVD 2).

¹⁸⁸ A connection might be made between this specific instance of my work, in the presence of blood, and the work of queer performance artists Franko B. and Ron Athey. Muñoz has established a link between the work of Herko and the later use of blood in performance art. "Herko's sacrifice ... for art," he has suggested, "anticipates the blood work of queer performers Ron Athey and Franko B." (2009: 160). In my investigation of effeminacy markers in performance, I have found inspiration in the work of Athey. My back-combing scene (figure 07), for instance, makes direct reference to one of Athey's blood performances, which I witnessed in 2009 (*Visions of Excess*, as part of SPILL Festival in London, an event that makes direct reference in its title to Bataille's (1985) book). The idea of citation in performance has also been approached in my reference to the falls from Bausch's *Café Müller* ((1978), see a detailed description of this scene in Heathfield (2006: 193)) and in the hurling of tomatoes in *Shoot the Sissy!* (see figure 01), a direct reference to Bausch's *Palermo, Palermo* (1989).

that it might also be seen as its embodiment. In the event of the accident, the audience witnessed the sissy body in the act of performing violence. The sissy body is also seen here in the act of stopping the other rather than ‘being stopped’ (Ahmed 2006), which we have seen partially constitutes the notion of a sissy space. In this instance, the sissy body literally stops the other from continuing with the scene and is therefore active in its production of space.¹⁸⁹

The accident that caused Sautzvy’s rush of blood has remained just that although interestingly to my research, the stitched up wound has left a ‘mark’ on his body. As for myself, having had contact with blood while on stage has afforded me another embodied understanding of violence. This understanding, I suggest, has been gained from my close proximity to blood (‘a symbol of violence’), in the responsibility of having opened the body of the other and in having forced the other to stop. This consideration may, of course, be only hypothetical since my ‘attack’ in *Sissy!* lacks the intentionality, which I have discussed in chapter three as constitutive of any sissiphobic abuse. Even though I have not targeted Sautzvy as an object of abuse, I can nonetheless still understand, in my body, the core meaning of inflicting violence. What the accident does inscribe effectively, however, is the notion of failure in performance. The spilt blood resulted from my failure to execute the fall ‘correctly,’ according to its physical and technical requirements and according to the prescriptions of ‘safety.’

Moreover, ‘the fall,’ which in Heathfield’s formulation represents “a dominant figuration in the choreography of dance-theatre” (2006: 189)¹⁹⁰ is of interest here for the engagement it proposes with the body. The stumble, the toppling of the body in *Sissy!* not only places the same in a direct relation to abuse in the context of

¹⁸⁹ A further physical engagement with the tension of ‘being stopped’ has been attempted at the collisions in the series of diagonals in *Sissy!* (see figure 08).

¹⁹⁰ The context of Heathfield’s argument is his investigation of the language of dance-theatre. In my construction of *Sissy!*, I have encountered aesthetic inspiration precisely in the fall, specifically as articulated in the work of two dance-theatre practitioners. First, in the work of Bausch (*Café Müller* (1978)) and, secondly, in the work of DV8 Physical Theatre (*Dead Dreams of Monochrome Man* (1988), choreographed by Lloyd Newson). Bausch’s fall has been reproduced in *Sissy!* as a direct citation to her work. From DV8’s fall, I have retained the growing intensity of a repetitious cycle of falls, which in *Sissy!* appears in the continuous throwing of my body into Sautzvy’s arms, who I trust will catch me. For both set of falls, see clip ‘Für Alina’ in *Sissy!*, DVD 1. See fn. 181 for a consideration on the notion of citation in performance.

performance but it also describes a specific trajectory in space. During the fall, the body is observed in a continuous state of motion; it is ecstatic and mobile, its place cannot be firmly determined since it is shifting and in movement. In chapter four, I have established sissy space as a mobile and constantly 'in motion' place. The falls therefore might offer a performative reading of this notion. "Trusting in relation, in the will and flesh of the others, dance-theatre's emblematic, sacrificial body," argues Heathfield, "fell again and again, subject to the violent disregard of the other" (2006: 189). Following Heathfield's proposition, the fall, in its incessant repetition, becomes important in the embodied discourse of *Sissy!* not only for its centrality in the process of healing and resistance against the social (and at times, physical) wounding of the body but also, and perhaps more importantly, because of the imperative it appears to entail.

"The fall," as Heathfield has explained, "contained an imperative like all sacrifices for the social body (the audience): the imperative to recognise, remember and repair" (2006: 189). Heathfield seems to propose that, from the audience's social perspective, the fall acquires a certain value in recognising, remembering and repairing the wound; the latter being central to his understanding of dance-theatre. I have determined in previous chapters how the sissy body might be defined by the wound it sustains during its constitutive process: through experiences with violence, through potential psychiatric treatment, through bullying, through a connection with a historical chain of 'injury.' I have also demonstrated how the wound has appeared in Sautzvy's body during one of the performances. As I have suggested, this wound, although inflicted in the body of the other, has had a vicarious scarring effect in mine. The fall hence recognises and remembers the wounding process and, through its re-enactment of such process appears to propose some form of repair.

For Heathfield, "dance-theatre and physical theatre articulated a certain wounding in the nature of sexual (and social) relation" (2006: 189). The wound, which he has identified as one of the leitmotifs of dance-theatre, might be the result of a dualistic "interdependence of presence and absence, masculinity and femininity, sex and death, attainment and loss" (2006: 189). The abstract binaries, which Heathfield posits as intrinsic to the movement vocabulary of dance-theatre, are, to a certain extent, also imbricated in the performance practice developed as part of the present research.

We have seen, for example, how masculinity and femininity, as opposing forces, can be seen as both present *and* absent in the sissy body. The sissy fails to perform masculinity while at the same time presenting a ‘different type’ of femininity, and so failing at femininity too. To that end, I have consistently referred to the sissy’s ‘effeminacy’ rather than ‘femininity.’ The tense relationship between sex and death might be understood with reference to the impact HIV/AIDS has had on the queer community, which, as Muñoz has shown through his conceptualisation of ‘utopia,’ has subsequently affected the notion of queer representation (2009: 79, see also Johnson (2009)). Blood on stage also draws particular questions regarding (HIV) contagion. I have touched on contagion in chapter three, whereas in chapter four, I have developed an analysis of space by making reference to Bataille’s notion of death; a subject I have returned to above in my exploration of Herko’s suicidal jump. Also in the study of binaries, which for Heathfield are a mark of dance-theatre, I have considered the dynamic relationship between concealment and revelation or visibility and invisibility in the sissy’s use of space.

Dance-theatre’s conceptual wound underlines, in Heathfield’s approach, the development of an aesthetic movement language. The wound finds its locus of expression in the body. As he has claimed, dance-theatre posits “the performing body as the vital means through which to access and articulate this wound” (2006: 189). Heathfield’s consideration is essential to my present discussion not only because of my drawn inspirations (methods and aesthetics) from dance-theatre, especially in the oeuvre of Bausch but, chiefly, for the proposed dialectical relationship he appears to flesh out between the following three elements: the wound, the body and the fall.

By yielding to gravity, the falls in *Sissy!* might be viewed as a yielding to the violence of every day life as a sissy. The falls might represent a failure to escape the damaging experiences of embodying the anti-normative. Following Heathfield’s formulation, the falls in *Sissy!* might be investigated as having a specific function. They allow the audience and the performers to recognise, remember and, to a certain extent, repair the wound caused by their encounters with violence. The falls foment that process precisely by re-enacting violence (scripted or *unscripted*, represented or real). In the same gesture, they might be seen as representative of what I would like to propose is a

form of resistance, resilience and rebellion against violence. The falls might connote for the sissy a sense of endurance against the potential threat of daily abuse. Moreover, I suggest that the act of standing up *after the fall* and voluntarily re-enacting the gesture might articulate a more emphatic representation of resistance, resilience and defiance. In the repetition of throwing myself off the table into Sautzvy's arms and being caught again and again I have attempted to articulate, through the body, the sissy's marked endurance.

I want to place this repetition of falls and catches in *Sissy!* in relation to what Heathfield has called 'choreographic cycles of capture and escape' (2006: 191). In their repetition, the cycle of falls inscribes, moreover, 'a history of failures' (Muñoz 2009: 155). Nonetheless, as Muñoz has pointed out, "despite [its] seeming negativity, a generative politics can be potentially distilled from the aesthetics of queer failure. Within failure," he continues, "we can locate a kernel of potentiality" (2009: 173). "An aesthetic of failure," he proposes later, "can be productively occupied by the queer artist" (2009: 173-174). This might be true, especially if we consider how failure is only negative when scrutinised according to normative values. In queer eyes, failure might be seen as a sign of bravura in the act of 'taking a risk.' In their failure to consistently obey the prescriptive regulations of 'safety,' in their repeated citations of danger (and of death), the falls might come to symbolise what Johnson has termed a "persistence of triumphant failure" (2009: 177). What I have tried to convey with the falls, in other words, was the idea that I will continue to stand up and show my face (painted or not) out on the streets no matter how many times I might have been punched, spat at or pushed to the ground.

In their corporeal performance of disruption of physical balance, the falls aim to expose a more allegorical disruption of balance between masculinity and femininity, pain and pleasure, life and death. More simply, in my failure to keep balance, I might be signalling to my failure to conform, my failure to fight like a man, my failure to be a man; a failure that, despite the *failing*, might signal to a constant investment in endurance, resilience and defiance. In representing failure, the falls work towards constructing a somewhat lucid reading of queerness in gesture and queer aesthetics. Other instances of *inscription* of failure in *Sissy!* have included my failure to light the match at the prescribed moment during the *Rock 'n' Roll Suicide* sequence, my failure

to protect Sautzvy from danger when hitting him with my knobbly knee, my failure to execute the first lift in the *Spiegel Im Spiegel* sequence due to the rice on the floor, which made it slippery (and dangerous). These have all been *unscripted* mistakes that have nevertheless allowed for the writing of a living (yet vanishing) catalogue of queer failure in performance.

Following on from Muñoz's notion of a queer aesthetics, I will now turn to a discussion of the use of gesture in *Sissy!*. I will focus mainly on the bodily markers of effeminacy, in particular the limp wrist and the mannequin walk, which will lead me to a later reinvestigation of the cosmetic elements of sissiology. Besides articulating the queer history of such gestures, I will also establish how they have been used in the construction of a dramaturgy of failure in *Sissy!*.

The use of gesture in *Sissy!*

According to Muñoz, gesture can be defined as “precise and specific physical acts ... such as the tilt of an ankle in very high heels [and] the swish of a hand that pats a face with imaginary makeup” (2009: 67).¹⁹¹ In using his definition for my investigation of gesture, I hereby align my practice with a certain queer practice canon.¹⁹² Muñoz's formulation is especially relevant to my discussion, situating gesture as it does, in relation to some of the elements I have used in my choreographic practice such as high heels and make-up. I will give special attention here to the inscription of movement developed to the song *Macho Man*, where my use of queer gesture has been the central focus. The main elements of its choreographical construction have been the limp wrist, the raised hip and the mannequin walk. I will take each gesture in turn by proposing an understanding of each as a “historically dense queer gesture” (Muñoz 2009: 67) and in line with the notion of “gesture as the choreography” (2009: 162).

¹⁹¹ The context of the definition above is Muñoz's study of New York city's clubworld performer Kevin Aviance and clearly relates to what the theorist has later in his book termed 'queer gesture.'

¹⁹² By queer practice canon, I mean performers who, like Aviance, have developed their work in anti-conventional spaces such as nightclubs. Besides the space of the conventional stage, I have also performed at many of London's cabaret spaces such as the Bistrottheque and The Royal Vauxhall Tavern and clubnight events such as Eat Your Heart Out. Aviance, for Muñoz, represented “the bridge between quotidian nightlife dance and theatrical performance” (2009: 77).

The main premise underlying the choreographic construction of *Macho Man* has been the attempt to hide and the subsequent *failure* to hide the effeminate gesture. The failure, as I have shown, is already intrinsic to the sissy's daily life. The effeminate gesture is a gesture I have claimed not to be able to escape. Despite my seeming awareness of the failure, however, the attempts to hide the gesture continue and the experience of failure situates stress in my body. I have shown, for example, how bullying in school might lead to a material hiding, which translates in space (e.g. hiding in the library). The bullying in school, I have established, might also lead to a more internalised engagement with the project of hiding such as in the attempt to 'hide' the queer gesture.¹⁹³

I have also demonstrated how some forms of psychiatric treatment might induce a process of masculinisation of the body, approached through a process of erasure of the visual markers of effeminacy. In the case of the sissy, these attempts to hide the gesture often constitute *failed* attempts. However, in my experience, the failed attempts continue to inform the bodily and spatial constitution of the sissy. Queer failure, in other words, remains despite the embodied knowledge of the possible futility of ever having tried to succeed. Queer failure, in other words, as Muñoz's theory has established, seems to be determined by its constitutional temporality. In that sense, the failed attempts of childhood are repeated continually throughout the sissy's life.¹⁹⁴ Although the attempt to hide the gesture often originates from the desire to exist outside the frameworks of shame, danger and violence, the "project of butching up," to use Muñoz's expression (2009: 68), still produces a rather painful experience for many.

¹⁹³ This double manifestation of 'hiding' has been investigated by Muñoz. He has explained, for instance, how the imperative to 'walk like a man,' placed on him by family and friends in his childhood, was overwhelmingly shame-producing. In Muñoz's anecdote, his inability to comply with the command to straighten the gesture, he has shown, used to force him into an engagement with the strategy of hiding. "I rush to my room to hide from this mockery," he tells us, "which I find amazingly painful" (2009: 68). Here we can see a clear explanation of how body, abuse and space might be inherently related. Muñoz's 'girly walk' (located in his body) is identified as queer. As a result of that, taunting (abuse) ensues, which leads him to 'rush to his room to hide' (space).

¹⁹⁴ I have spoken for instance, how I continue to try (and fail) to hide the effeminate gesture when walking on my street, a place where I have experienced violence. In my (always failed) attempts to hide, I might 'manipulate' the way I walk by trying to walk more 'like a man.' I might also try to hide my painted nails (another visual signifier of effeminacy) by putting my hands in my pockets. The attempts remain despite my experiential knowledge of their intrinsic failure.

The project of masculinising the body produces pain and suffering particularly on those who are unable to succeed in it. For them, “childhood is often a degraded zone of random violence and constant policing” (Muñoz 2009: 69). As I have suggested, this violent demand originates externally (from the social body) and is often enacted internally. In other words, the social expectations to conform to masculinity are sometimes internalised. The choreographic score of *Macho Man* tries to respond to the social pressure inherent in the command that, as the lyrics of the song go, “every man ought to be a macho macho man.”¹⁹⁵ To that end, the song adds a further textual layer to the demand inscribed in the body. In proposing a gestural analysis of this internal battle (the demand to conform and the inability to do so), I have resorted to a study of hyperfeminine gestures, where ‘hyperfeminine’ is taken to mean “gestures [that] are unapologetically femme” (Muñoz 2009: 77).

In an autobiographical account, Muñoz exposes how his ‘walking like a girl’ has been a source of stress and ridicule in his childhood (2009: 68). This story is something I can relate to. I remember my grandfather demanding I ‘straighten’ my walk when I was a little boy and how shaming his remark was. Various attempts followed to obey my grandfather’s command. The telltale of sissiness, however, has remained imprinted in my body. I wonder to what extent the experience of being shamed and taunted for walking like a girl in childhood, which both Muñoz and I have suffered, remains imprinted in the effeminate man’s body. The walk is certainly something I still have in me and now celebrate. It is something moreover that Crisp has also identified as his in the ‘mannequin walk.’ The mannequin walk in *Sissy!* (a brief passage in *Macho Man*) attempts to make a visual reference to this specific marker of sissiness.

Walking like a girl, as a gesture, might be seen as somewhat emblematic of effeminacy. This might be true especially if we consider how it has permeated aspects of subcultural movements, such as voguing. Vogue balls are organised specifically around the performative practice of ‘walking.’ One of the categories of

¹⁹⁵ *Macho Man* (1978, performed by The Village People, written by Jacques Morali, Henri Belolo, Victor Willis and Peter Whitehead). The role of lyrics and pop songs as potential forms of text in queer performance has also been investigated by Muñoz (see 2009: 185-189).

such balls is usually ‘femme real,’ where participants are judged on their capacity to mimic the (hyper)feminine walk of supermodels. “Vogueing,” for Muñoz, “is too often considered a simplistic celebration of black queer culture. It is seen as simple appropriation of high fashion or other aspects of commodity culture” (2009: 80). “The gesture,” he defends, “contains an articulate message for all to read, in this case a message of fabulousness and fantastical becoming” (Muñoz 2009: 80).¹⁹⁶ To me, voguing represents a form of embracing and exaggerating the ‘girly walk’ of childhood and transforming the shame into glory.

In revealing the attempt to ‘hide’ the hyperfeminine gesture, the choreographic score of *Macho Man* engages in a visual manipulation of the gesture where the hyperfeminine at times becomes the hypermasculine. The limp wrist, for example, becomes a fist. Besides the fist, I have collected a series of hypermasculine gestures. The grabbing of the crotch, spitting (figure 09) and the double bicep flex (which Jones has identified as “a classic body builder position” (2007: 14), figure 10) have been written in juxtaposition to the ones that might indicate a “very high level of faggy flamboyance” (Muñoz 2009: 150). The often violent and damaging effects of attempting to hide the effeminate gesture evolves into a choreographic fight. As a form of writing, the choreography here proposes a reinscription (in the space of the stage) of violence, self-inflicted or not: punches, kicks, slaps and a knock to the ground, all of which might be read as both metaphorical or literal. The solo fight in *Macho Man* has been one of the principal changes between the 2009 and the 2010 versions of *Sissy!*. This change has originated from my growing preoccupation of how to embody and represent sissiphobic violence in performance and through movement.¹⁹⁷

There is an element of self-mockery intended in the choreography, especially in my quest to embody the stereotype. As Johnson has shown, there is a potential pleasure that the stereotype urges upon us (2009: 173). The element of self-mockery is echoed by the choice of song. The laughing at oneself, however, as Johnson has argued,

¹⁹⁶ For a critical discussion of voguing as a subcultural practice, forged kinship relations and the potential effects of emulating heteronormative paradigms of gender, see Butler (1993) and Phelan (1993).

¹⁹⁷ To see an example of how the choreographic representation of violence has evolved, see the clip ‘Macho Man’ in both versions of *Sissy!* (2009) and (2010).

often suggests a “tendency towards hostility ... and the invitation to humiliation” (2009: 178). “It is a process that is at once more readily jovial and hopeful, but,” he concludes, “also dangerously proximate to hatred and abuse” (Johnson 2009: 178). In that sense, there is an attempt to use the gesture in a way that connects to what Muñoz has termed “gestures [that] connote the worlds of queer suffering” (2009: 79). The laughing at oneself and the abuse, both of which *Macho Man* attempts to represent, are thus inscribed in the choreography. “Often, one gesture will contain both positive and negative polarities simultaneously, because the pleasure and the pain of queerness are not a strict binary” (Muñoz 2009: 74).

More than hiding, therefore, *Macho Man* is about those who, like Crisp, are aware of their inability and/or unwillingness to be a ‘macho man’ and who are often left with no other choice but to face the possibility of violence. *Macho Man* is about accepting and embracing the queer gesture despite the looming possibility of abuse. In the above section, I have developed an investigation of the queer gestures of sissiness, especially in the limp wrist and the mannequin walk. I have also developed a discussion about how such gestures might be utilised as productive tools to critique normative gender paradigms and the fear of effeminacy. I will now move to an investigation of the role of cosmetic effeminacy in the practice. I will focus mainly on the wig, the make-up and the heels.

I will divide this discussion of the elements of queer aesthetics in the cosmetic body of the sissy into two main categories. The first will address how the elements of cosmetic effeminacy have served to highlight or exaggerate the sissy body on stage. The second category will explore the tools (or props) that have produced a site where a dialogue with the idea of hiding could develop in performance.

Make-up and heels: attempts to exaggerate the body

In his analysis of Aviance’s work, Muñoz posits the performer’s ‘queerness’ in his effeminate gestures but also in his ‘blackness.’ “One particular Aviance gesture worth noting,” Muñoz has pointed out, “is the way in which his ankles fold or crack as he walks, or rather stomps, the runway” (2009: 75). Whereas I have previously addressed the mannequin walk in this chapter, I want to go back to this “telltale of queer gesture”

(Muñoz 2009: 78) in order to propose an investigation of the potential effects the high-heeled shoe might have on the performer's body.

Muñoz has identified that in Aviance's case, the walk in high heels has produced an extreme representation of the body. "His buttocks and chest are both outstretched," he describes, "exaggerating the features of a racialized body" (2009: 75). I want to borrow that description in advancing what I propose is, in my case, an exaggerated version of gender rather than race. The high heels, in that sense, might be seen as exaggerating the features of my *effeminate* body. When walking in heels, my legs might seem more elongated. My steps, as a consequence of the heels, become by necessity shorter since balancing on top of these becomes rather more laborious. My buttocks and my chest, as in Aviance's example of body adjustment to the heels, also become somewhat outstretched. My hips move from side to side more than they would if I did not have the heels on. The walk in heels, furthermore, as Muñoz has shown, is a "gesture [that] connotes a tradition of queenly identification with the sadism of female beauty rituals" (Muñoz 2009: 75).

What Muñoz appears to suggest above is that, for most 'high-heeled walkers' (2009: 75), walking in heels is a gesture that requires some physical exertion, or, perhaps more to the point, pain. There is one specific moment in *Sissy!* in which I have attempted to inscribe this notion of pain inherent in the practice of walking in heels. At the beginning of *Sissy!*, when Sautzvy and I meet at the back wall, I lift my leg in a *passé* (another reference to the codes of ballet) and rest the end of my left shoe on my right thigh. The point of the heel digs into my muscle. It hurts and I grab my foot with my hand to remove it from the thigh (see clip 'The Man Got Away' in *Sissy!*, DVD 1). The association between pain and heels is not only physical but could also be seen as relating to the pain of being denied the possibility of feminine embodiment. The image might represent, in other words, the idea that, as a man, the heels are supposedly out of my reach, or the notion that when wearing them, again as a man, I should expect to be treated with violence for not corresponding to the normative ideals of gender.¹⁹⁸

¹⁹⁸ It may be no accident that 'stiletto' in Italian derives from the word for 'dagger.' One can also refer to particularly high shoes as 'killer heels.'

My intention with the heels has been more closely associated to the idea of hyperbolically expressing the effeminate body; an idea towards which the high heels appear to signal. There is a potential verbal pun I would like to consider here. The ‘heels’ might signal towards the idea of the ‘Achilles’ heel.’ This might be especially relevant if we consider that at one point in *Sissy!* (when Sauitzvy removes my shoes), my body starts to be manipulated around the space. One possible reading of the series of lifts is that without the heels, I cannot walk unaided. The representation of a fragile body comes back at the very end, just before Sauitzvy puts me down on the chair. My falling backwards might indicate that I have no strength without the heels. The following scene sees Sauitzvy putting the shoes back on my feet, which moves me to walk back towards the table, where I started the performance. One might say that when having my shoes back on, I might regain composure. The heels (as a signifier of femininity) and Achilles (as a myth of masculinity) seem to be at odds with one another, producing perhaps a queer reading of the shoes.¹⁹⁹

The use of make-up in *Sissy!* might also be scrutinised under the lens of the exaggerated sissy body. Here I have also engaged in an exercise of expressing “an amplified and extreme queer body” (Muñoz 2009: 74). The magnifying glass as a prop provides precisely that: an amplified vision of the painted mouth, of the lipstick, of the pink blusher in the act of marking the cheeks (see figure 11).

In chapter two, I have proposed a reading of the colour *pink* in relation to what Butler has called the ‘girling process.’ *Pink* must be understood within the dramaturgical and methodological choreographic study of *Sissy!* as having a particular role. This becomes apparent in the final image, that of a sissy body in its most extreme version. By now the body has undergone a sissigraphy process by means of (a) transformation of the body (painting the face, untying and brushing the hair, undressing, having the shoes removed); (b) encounters with abuse (in the performance of *Macho Man*, being stepped over by Sauitzvy, being stopped in the series of collisions in the diagonals, falling repeatedly off the table and off Sauitzvy’s arms) and (c) *inscription* of sissy space (in the transformation of the stage through the use of rice and water, in the

¹⁹⁹ DV8 Physical Theatre’s production *Enter Achilles* (1995) has developed a compelling investigation of masculinity in movement. See appendix B for a consideration of the role of the sissy therein.

strategy of hiding under the wig and under the hat, in the opening walk near the walls or ‘at the margins’ of the stage and in its subsequent repetition and transformation at the end, ‘away from the margins’ of the stage). Only after all that, with painted face, in wig and high-heels, resting on a chair, the sissy is now presented with a *pink* box, wrapped in a *pink* bow. Inside the box, the sissy finds a *pink* tutu. Putting it on, he walks back to the table and repeats the opening walk close to the wall. This final walk mimics the one in the beginning only now the sissy walks towards the *pink* toy poodle (see figure 05).

The action of using make-up to *mark* or *write* on the body, moreover, relates back to the notion of self-stigmatising, which I have developed in chapter two with reference to Crisp and the London quean. It can be understood as a form of ammunition or as a way to perform a proud and visible version of effeminacy in the deliberate act of marking the skin.²⁰⁰

Wig: disidentification and *failed* attempts to hide the body

Whilst the high heels and the make-up might have served as tools to enhance the notion of a hypervisible effeminate body, the wig might have worked towards a putative hiding of the same body. Initially proposed as a form of further effeminising the body, the wig, especially if placed in contrast to what Muñoz has conceptualised as the ‘disidentification process’ (2009: 75) might be seen as producing here a somewhat ambivalent reading of visibility.

Muñoz explains the disidentification process by suggesting that Aviance’s ‘unorthodox’ way of walking in heels “constitutes a disidentification with ... traditions of gay male performance of female embodiment” (2009: 75). “Aviance’s refusal to wear wigs,” he continues, “is a further example of this disidentificatory

²⁰⁰ In one of my performances for *Eat Your Heart Out*, I experimented with the idea of an even more exaggerated sissy body, which I then expressed by painting my whole body *pink* (see figures 12 and 13). The exercise of *marking* or *writing* on the skin has also been procured in *In My Shoes*, where I literally take a pen to my body and draw on it: a thinner waist, breasts, jewellery, the back-seam of imaginary stockings and, in contrast with all that, a moustache (see figure 14). In *Shoot the Sissy!*, I write an ‘X’ on my face and chest with lipstick, marking the place where the tomatoes should be hurled (see figure 01). In *Sissy, a Short Film* (2009, dir. Judy Jacob, screenplay by Jacob and Messias), I have also developed an investigation of *pink* in relation to visibility, invisibility and the public performance of (excessive) gender.

dynamic” (2009: 75). My appropriation of the wig in *Sissy!* might be seen as proposing a similar process. This might be noted in my wearing my wig back to front. I have put it on backwards in a queer attempt to disrupt normative expectations of aesthetics. In doing this, the wig has allowed me some ‘space’ under which to hide. The disidentification might also be noted in the fact that the wig serves the purpose of covering my face during the performance. At first, it covers my eyes (see figure 15). Later in the performance, it comes to conceal my whole face (see figure 16).²⁰¹ The wig, however, tends to enhance visibility rather than confer invisibility. It does so by making the body it intends to cover appear more, rather than less, conspicuous. The attempt to hide under the wig seems therefore to *fail*.

In adopting the frontward falling wig, my intention might be perceived as somewhat parallel to other queer artists who, like Aviance, might not be interested in “attempting to imitate a woman” (Muñoz 2009: 76). The body in *Sissy!* is “instead interested in approximating a notion of femininity” (Muñoz 2009: 76).²⁰² In that sense, it might be said that the use of the wig performs a double *inscripton* of failure in *Sissy!*. Having *failed* to hide the body, it now *fails* to comply with what Lepecki has identified as “the trope of cross-dressing” (2002: 272). If we agree with Heathfield’s proposition of “long hair as the primary signifier of femininity” (2006: 196), then the wig might be seen as *failing* to unambiguously signify ‘woman’ or ‘feminine’ and instead doing ‘something else.’ In what regards the wig, this ‘something else’ (which as we have seen in Muñoz constitutes part of the queer aesthetic) might be defined in its offer of the hiding place. This it does in detriment to emulating woman. Yet, at times, it also might be seen to fail in the strategy of hiding and to succeed in the project of signifying woman.²⁰³

²⁰¹ The wig served a similar purpose in *Crumbs!* where it was also used as an excuse to hide my face (see figure 17).

²⁰² Lepecki has similarly spoken of the notion of ‘theatricalization of gender’ (2002: 267). When offering a critique of the work of Portuguese dancer, Francisco Camacho, he has claimed that “the question of impersonation and of a mimetic appropriation of gender is never addressed or performed. Camacho,” he concludes, “does not represent or mimic ‘woman’ (Lepecki 2002: 267).

²⁰³ In *Cry Out* (2009/2010, Theo Adams Company), I have used the theatrical technique of body mimesis (see Martin 1995, Schechner 1995) precisely to engage with a ‘mimetic appropriation’ (see fn. above) of gesture (rather than gender). Here, I have attempted *not* to impersonate Egyptian-born singer Dalida but, rather, to propose a queer reading of gender and lipsynching. To my use of wig, makeup, dress and high-heels, I have contrasted my bare

Moreover, the artificiality of the long hair in *Sissy!* is never consciously concealed. It is clearly something that does not belong to me, a prop. As such, it stands in contrast to my male body “in a cohabitation of female and male traits” (Muñoz 2009: 76). This cohabitation becomes most explicit in the image constructed around the naked body (see figure 18). The intention here has been to visually state the main goal of the research, which is to propose an investigation of the effeminate body. By performing naked in heels, I have attempted to present, in one image, an embodied version of the sissy body, which I see as effeminate and male. The exposure of the male genital organ in this scene might reflect another aspect of Aviance’s disidentificatory dynamics; namely, the fact that the performer “does not tuck (conceal or hide the male genital bulge while in drag)” (Muñoz 2009: 76). In the opening section of *Macho Man*, I make reference, in movement, to the practice of tucking. Besides the association with Muñoz’s conceptual framework, the naked scene also engages with both the concepts of visibility and hiding. It makes, in other words, the maleness of my body visible while the scarf hides the face. The image of the naked body is hence about hiding *and* revealing simultaneously.

Conclusion

In bringing this chapter to a conclusion, I want to consider the ways in which the practice has been invested in *inscribing* failure. Ultimately, the difficulty (and subsequent failure) in trying to separate ‘in practice’ the issues relating to body, abuse and space might effectively symbolise the importance of failure in the research. The separation might only ever have been possible as a result of an intellectual exercise, or, in other words, ‘in writing.’ My lived experience of body, abuse and space has certainly been concomitant and it has been impossible to divorce one from another. What this chapter has shown is that, through practice and through a reflection on (or a *de*-description of) practice, I have gained an embodied understanding for which only practice could have allowed.

Although my proposed sissiological process might consist of body, abuse and space, on reflection it has become evident that the latter two will inevitably refer back to the

male chest. My refusal to wear fake breasts (a practice that most traditional drag might be associated with), might be seen in relation to Muñoz’s (2009) ‘disidentificatory dynamics.’

first. Abuse and space, in other words, will always pass through the body, be directed at the body or be experienced by the body. I have looked at violence from the standpoint of how the sissy body can be the site of both *failed* femininity and *failed* masculinity and how the dynamic between the two can cause both pain and pleasure. I have also investigated abuse in my choreographic inscription of the desire to hide the effeminate gesture, which I see as a rather violent manoeuvre. So too the presence of blood on stage has been scrutinised as a performance of violence.

In my search for a sissy space, I have proposed the wig as a place of hiding. The attempt to clearly define the meaning of such a space has, however, also failed. Sissy space has therefore remained ecstatic and mobile. Its construction has once again, in perfect queer tradition, slipped through my fingers. The failure to define it has allowed me nonetheless to firmly place sissy space in the territory of queer dance. “Queer dance,” as Muñoz has claimed, “is hard to catch, and it is meant to be hard to catch—it is supposed to slip through the fingers and comprehension of those who would use knowledge against us” (2009: 81). Likewise, sissy space is supposed to be hard to catch, lest they (those who use knowledge against us) find where we have been hiding.

Final notes towards a new sissiology

In this final section, I will offer some final considerations regarding the function of the thesis as a whole. I will articulate what the research has achieved and what it has potentially failed to achieve. In evaluating my own research I have posed myself a number of questions: (a) how well has my tripartite structure—body, abuse and space—functioned as a tool of theoretical and practical analysis?; (b) what has been the effect of the research being so personal?; (c) how well have theory and practice complemented each other?; (d) what is the meaning of my research as a process rather than just its end results?; and (e) what is the central principle that unifies my proposed sissiology?

I will begin with my proposition of a structural relationship between body, abuse and space, which has been central to the present study. The three elements of the research have each yielded distinct fruitful results, and hold together in the way I will now describe.

Overall the research reflects my consistent commitment to the body in both lived and intellectual endeavours. In my study, the body has served as both a point of departure and a destination. Indeed, this reflection is in itself already invested in a methodological approach that is committed to an investigation of space. In other words, ‘the point of departure’ and ‘the destination’ are the body; a trajectory that is developed in relation to abuse. The discourse, in sum, begins and ends with the body: abuse and space are either performed by it or in relation to it.

The sissy body has been presented as constituted by what I have called sissy performativity. In chapter one, I have established the history of effeminacy, in relation to which sissiness has been defined. I explored then the various ways that effeminacy has been understood: as a form of social deviancy, as a form of ideological negation of masculinity (in gender presentation and in sexual practice), as a form of refinement, as a form of transgression of social rules of ‘proper’ masculine behaviour. My intention with this historiographical approach has been to demonstrate how effeminacy might be seen as a fluid concept rather than simply as a trope of homosexuality. In chapter two, I delineated the physical characteristics of the sissy body by relating it to Hennen’s (2008) proposed taxonomy of somatic and cosmetic

effeminacies. Here I have established how the sissy gains agency by consciously choosing to magnify the very traits that make him a sissy. In doing this, the research has argued that agency might lie in the act of embracing the elements that have been traditionally viewed as demeaning. In welcoming these sissy elements, the research has actively appropriated itself of the term 'sissy' along with the body and the space it supposedly performs, offering thus new ways of owning the term.

Sissy space has been demarcated in relation to queer space. At times, this has meant a denial of some of the definitions of the latter. Betsky (1997), for instance, seems to propose queer space as a place primarily predicated on the possibilities of same-sex sexual pleasure. The sissy, in his enhanced performance of visibility, appears to disturb that specific spatial notion. On the other hand, sissy space shares its boundaries with queer space in that they are both territories defined as invisible, hidden and ephemeral. Queer space, as Betsky has argued, is "ambivalent, open, leaky, self-critical and ironic, and ephemeral" (1997: 18). This definition relates equally to sissy space. Sissy space therefore ambiguously extends the notion of queer space at the same time as it proposes some specific challenges to it. Whereas the spaces of sissy and queer expression might be the same, i.e. "the dark alleys, unlit corner, and hidden rooms ... in the city" (Betsky 1997: 141), what the subjects that artificially construct each of these spaces do once there—whether it be sexual cruising or dressing up—differs.

If the reading of a body largely determines how it might relate to other bodies and to the space it performs—and here I am also thinking of forms of writing on the body: with make-up, with tattoos, with the colour pink, with exaggerated gestures but also of forms of writing *with* the body: in the choreography of gesture and of movement in the space of the stage—the choices we make when performing social space might also be seen as suggesting their own form of reading, their own 'rhetoric of walking,' to use the words of de Certeau (1984: 100).

When hiding, the sissy might therefore produce a sissy rhetoric. The sissy rejects the places of potential violence and moves towards spaces that allow room for his difference to be celebrated and enhanced while remaining visible. "He thus makes a selection" (de Certeau 1984: 98) of where to go and where not to go based on his

experiential knowledge. It is through this very selective use of space that the sissy exercises his agency in relation to traditional spaces. If, to quote de Certeau (1984: 99), “he [in my case, the sissy] condemns certain places to inertia or disappearance,” he consequently creates new uses for otherwise abandoned spaces. The sissy, in sum, engages in “practices that invent spaces” (de Certeau 1984: 107).

Sissy performativity, I have claimed, is visibly marked in the body. In performing the limp wrist and the mincing gait, among other markers, the sissy deliberately performs sissiness. On the other hand, sissy performativity might be seen as also visibly marked in space through systems of deviation and hiding. Sissy body and sissy space therefore both produce a sissy rhetoric. A sissy body might be determined by a highlighted version of his somatic and cosmetic effeminacy. A sissy space, conversely, is constituted by the sissy’s own “trajectories (going this way and not that)” (de Certeau 1984: 97). The sissy’s active transgression of traditional and proper ways of presenting himself socially has been the central focus of the studio work. The boundaries between sissy performativity (the social body) and sissy performance (the performing body) have been investigated in practice. The empirical investigation to which the research has been committed has afforded me a number of insights; among which the conclusion that a self-conscious presentation of the social codes of gender represents a step into the realm of performance.

Reiteration and citation, in accordance with Butler’s theorisation of gender performativity, have been the instruments through which change has been sought. For Muñoz, reiteration and citation are “the most easily identifiable characteristics of this mode of performativity” (1999: 80). To that end, the repetition and citation of the sissy’s quotidian body on stage has elucidated an ethics of transformation. Following from Muñoz’s premise, the research has deployed “a practice of performativity that repeats and cites, *with a difference*, the generic fictions of” effeminate behaviour (Muñoz 1999: 80, original emphasis). This ‘disidentification’ strategy proposed by Muñoz (1999) has allowed me an engagement with sissy stereotypes that has worked towards challenging their validity rather than simply reifying them.

I have also shown how the inverse relationship between performativity and performance might offer some exciting associations. In other words, by investigating

ballet, as a code of performance that offers a rigid and specific training and reading of the body, I have shown how performance techniques might also impinge on the social body. The training, in other words, is seen as somewhat invading the space of the social body and affecting its exchanges just like the performative body of the sissy has provided material for an investigation of the body in performance. Sissy performativity, in sum, has been investigated through a critical analytical process of gender positions, expressed through a choreographic use of space, movement and violence.

I want to return here to the commitment to which the research has staked claim, namely to the body. Sustaining this commitment throughout has occasioned a process of development that is intimately connected to the space of theatre (the studio and the stage). As a platform for the body, the space of the theatre has been paramount in the development of critical thinking and in the dissemination of knowledge. In displaying my body on stage in front of an audience, I have not only indicated what a potentially new sissiology might look like, I have actually *done* it; I have *performed* the sissy body through its complex negotiations with abuse and space.

As a practitioner, I have used performance as a language with which to articulate the wound caused by daily violence and disenfranchisement. As a practitioner-researcher, I have considered the value inherent in a politics of performance. The task of performance, I have suggested, is precisely to rethink the subject in terms of the body (or perhaps according to the terms determined by the body). In engaging with the imperative to rethink the body, I have been able to accept and nurse the wound thereby proposing a version of a sissy body that is simultaneously wounded and glorious.

The sissy body has been proposed as spectacular in its public performances of excessive gender. Make-up, as a writing instrument, has coloured the body pink and red. Red has appeared in the lipstick but also in the blood drawn on stage, attesting to the potential multiplicity of meanings inherent in the notion of a sissy body: violent in its presentation of extravagant gender, violated because of that and colourful despite of it. The repairing process has been proposed through, among other things, the—to speak—‘heeling’ power of the shoes. The cosmetic elements of the sissy body—

and indeed some ways to describe it—might be seen therefore as both frivolous and essential to a new understanding of self.

The stage has therefore served as a fertile ground to develop my proposed sissy lore. A potential paradox arises here. Whereas I have proposed a sissy space that is constitutionally bound to the concept of invisibility, defined as a space where ‘no one is looking,’ I have chosen to express that idea on stage, where the exact opposite is true. On the other hand, the stage has afforded me a place to express effectively what I have determined as the ephemeral nature of sissy spatiality. In performance, as in the sissy’s experiential ontology, the notion of space is only temporarily constructed. Once that job of construction is done, space disappears leaving no traces behind but the memory thereof. Memory, as we have seen, is notoriously impossible to document and hard to capture. A sissy space is, in that sense, tantalising, it is the carrot at the end of the stick of queer knowledge rather like queer identity itself.

The notion of memory leads to my next point. I want to consider here the role of the personal in the research. As another form of *writing*, the element of autobiography has helped my argumentation strongly in the chapters above and in my performance on stage. In addition to my experience of violence, I have explored my interests in dress, makeup and mannerisms—things that might be commonly thought of as ‘frivolous.’ To that end, a sissy space has been largely determined in relation to the sissy’s desire to dress up. In that sense, I suggest that sissiness proposes a challenge to what I perceive is a masculinist worldview, in accordance with a particular strand of queer scholarship (Muñoz 2009, Butt 2007).

The research, however, does not speak *only* of my personal experiences of violence and sissiness. The research is not, to use the words of Mock, “all about me, me, me” (2009b: 07). It engages with current debates around such issues as the rise in homophobic attacks in East London, for instance. The research hence makes a contribution to the lives of those visibly effeminate men (but also to others) who continue to be touched by violence on a regular basis. My project, in both its written and performed outcomes, has instigated a discussion of the causes and consequences of sissy vulnerability. The ‘personal is political,’ which I have discussed earlier in the introduction to the thesis, has allowed me the space to provoke what Muñoz has

described as a “movement of personal histories into a public sphere” (1999: 81). The goal of such an exercise has been to “reclaim the past and put it in direct relationship with the present” (Muñoz 1999: 82) with the aim of finding the direction towards a new future.

A sissy past has been identified in the continuous history of violence, in the charges of mental illness and in the alleged illegal behaviour to which the sissy has been associated. A sissy present has been identified as somewhat continuous with this chain of injury. The role of autobiography in the present study therefore has been to propose an engagement with what I have claimed is the productive movement of autobiographical performance: the movement from personal to political to personal.

In reflecting back, I have made an effort to identify the research’s original impulse. The main thrust has been my own sissy body and the daily violence to which it has been subjected; a violence that, as I have claimed, accretes over time and accumulates in the body. Whereas the driving force of the study might have been the personal, I have strived for an understanding of sissy bodies other than my own and the potential common ground between past and present accounts of sissiphobia. The result has been the possibility of a sissy canon. To that end, the personal has lent me the focus necessary to scrutinise the effeminate homosexual and his queer legacy and aesthetics.

In turning to my question on the research as process, I am aware that the final form of the above chapters and the particular performance submitted have only been parts of my research. The process of development of the present research at one stage passed through a phase of exploration of physical balance. During that phase, I used balance as a tool of investigation of masculine and feminine energies in the sissy’s body. Although the idea of balance as a central metaphor for the research has been abandoned, it has continued to permeate the study. The lack of balance, now represented materially in the falls, speaks of processes of erasure (or *description*) and the residues of memory they leave behind. To that end, the other instances of performance presented here have served as (potentially failed) attempts to document the traces of memory left behind.

Finally I need to consider what is the unifying concept of my research. I am proposing failure as the central principle on which I have founded the possibility of forming a new sissiology. There is an inherent paradox here: striving to succeed in an endeavour at the heart of which lies failure. The sissy fails to comply with normative ideals that govern straight space. He does that by subverting function and by deviating from the path. The sissy therefore fails to perform space in accordance with conventional values of production: he sissifies bathrooms and avoids dangerous zones by taking alternative routes. In his failure to perform space, the sissy is dislocated or 'moved about' by the damaging effects of violence. He is also prevented from dislocation in space by 'being stopped.' This seeming failure, however, is also productive of new spatial ontologies such as hiding and should therefore be seen as potentially constructive.

The sissy fails to embody masculinity and fails to embody femininity; failing, as a result, to perform gender right. In his failure to represent gender, the sissy might be productively reconfigured not as a trope of failure but, rather, as an embodied sign that points at the failure of others in recognising the mistakability that is always already intrinsic to the mechanisms of gender production. In centring the discussion on the sissy body, thereby highlighting it in the performance and in the above chapters, I have considered not only the violence that might be responsible for its constitution but have also identified the problem of systemic sissiphobia. What the research maintains, in other words, is that the focus should be placed not on the sissy body's behavioural codes but on the reactions it often attracts.

In more simple words, the present research moves towards embracing the sissy body and claims that the solution to sissiphobic violence might lie in an investigation of current perceptions of effeminacy rather than in systems that reinforce the correction, straightening or subjugation of the potentially disturbing excessiveness of the sissy body. What I mean to say here is that intervention should be directed at bullies and not at sissies.

The sissy fails to avoid violence and fails to hide the gesture. Failure, however, in what concerns my study, must be understood only in relation to the process of sissiology. At times, as I have shown in chapter five, this will include failing to

perform a choreographed move on stage or failing to remain within the boundaries of a prescriptive notion of safety. On the other hand, I want to discern sissy failure from issues unrelated to sissy futurity. In more simple words, what I propose here is not merely that the sissy is a failed subject (although he might be viewed as a ‘failed man’), but rather that his failure offers a potential kernel of possibility for a new future; a future that might always remain elusive.

The question then arises of whether the research, in trying to take the sissy seriously, has once again failed. This is assuming, of course, the sissy does not wish to be taken seriously. The answer to this question clearly depends on what framework we use in defining ‘serious’ and whether or not such framework is left unquestioned. I hope that by ‘seriously’ embracing the frivolity of sissiness, I might have proposed a potential renegotiation of such values.

In summary, the research proposes not a new sissiography but *towards* a new sissiography. With failure at its heart, the project has a distinct impetus (fuelled by the personal in the research). It is failure that makes the sissy’s future elusive. If the thesis fails to delineate a sissy space, it asserts the dynamic possibilities intrinsic in occupying space as a flux. Sissitopia, it might be said, lies in the future and always will do.

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Appendix A:

DSM-IV Diagnostic Criteria for Gender Identity Disorder (Children)

A. A strong and persistent cross-gender identification (not merely a desire for any perceived cultural advantages of being the other sex). In children, the disturbance is manifested by at least four (or more) of the following:

1. Repeatedly stated desire to be, or insistence that he or she is, the other sex.
2. In boys, preference for cross-dressing or simulating female attire; in girls, insistence on wearing only stereotypical masculine clothing.
3. Strong and persistence preferences for cross-sex roles in make-believe play or persistent fantasies of being the other sex.
4. Intense desire to participate in the stereotypical games and pastimes of the other sex.
5. Strong preference for playmates of the other sex.

B. Persistent discomfort with his or her sex or sense of inappropriateness in the gender role of that sex. In children, the disturbance is manifested by any of the following:

1. In boys, the assertion that his penis or testes are disgusting or will disappear or the assertion that it would be better not to have a penis, or aversion toward rough-and-tumble play and rejection of male stereotypical toys, games, and activities.
2. In girls, rejection of urinating in a sitting position, assertion that she has or will grow a penis, or assertion that she does not want to grow breasts or menstruate, or marked aversion toward normative feminine clothing.

C. The disturbance is not concurrent with a physical intersex condition.

D. The disturbance causes clinically significant distress or impairment in social, occupational, or other important area of functioning.

(in K. Zucker (part ed.), 'Gender Identity Disorders,' Part Two in *Handbook of Sexual and Gender Identity Disorders*, D. L. Rowland and L. Incrocci (eds.) (2008), Hoboken, New Jersey, John Wiley and Sons, Inc.)

Appendix B:

Enter Achilles: the sissy and the heteronormative space in a dance-theatre piece

I will use DV8 Physical Theatre's film version of *Enter Achilles* as a critical tool of analysis in my present discussion. *Enter Achilles*, which was broadcast on UK television in 1996, in an adaptation from the original stage version, is set in a fictitious pub called The Plough.²⁰⁴ In this production, choreographer Lloyd Newson appears to use the pub as the quintessential representation of masculine space. In one of the scenes we see hypermasculine men hanging out, drinking pints of beer, playing darts and wolf-whistling to girls they supposedly see walking past outside the window. The piece offers a competent investigation of masculinity through movement. In analysing masculinity, *Enter Achilles* also appears to extend its choreographical inscription to sissy corporeality.

Masculinity seems to be presented throughout as a task or, at times, as a contest. It never appears to be firmly attained by the men portrayed here. In one scene, for instance, some of the dancers (this is an all-male cast) are seen doing push-ups with their tops off. Their masculinity appears to be put constantly through the test; it is a race in which there appears to be no final mark. Masculinity seems to be affirmed only by contrast, only through the constant negation and ridicule of the feminine; personified in the figure of the sissy. The sissy does not appear to belong in that space, although he does not appear to be allowed out of it either. The sissy here is the representation of the 'insider out' or the 'outsider in.' He is the personification of what Hennen might have called the 'spectre of starched chiffon' (2008: 183). The sissy remains present *and* absent, constantly elusive in his threat to undo masculinity, which Butler has defined as "a fragile and fallible construct" (2004: 90). The sissy's 'somatic' and 'cosmetic' effeminacies (Hennen 2008: 50-51) denounce him, corporeally, as otherly. This un-belonging might be seen, nevertheless, as somewhat deceptive. As McInnes and Davies have shown, the sissy might be "powerfully necessary for masculinity's authenticity" (2008: 120). Whereas the sissy might be

²⁰⁴ *Enter Achilles* was originally created for the stage in 1995 by Lloyd Newson and DV8 Physical Theatre. In its film version, it was produced by DV8 Films for the BBC in association with RM Arts in 1996. Adapted for screen by Lloyd Newson and Clara Van Gool, produced by David Stace and directed by Clara Van Gool.

constantly ostracised from within the overtly masculine environment of the pub, his presence in fact is as indispensable to the construction of masculinity therein.

The sissy in *Enter Achilles* represents the crucial ‘outsider inside;’ the effeminate man against which masculinity defines its limits. In what I find one of the most compelling scenes of the film, the sissy is surrounded and confronted by all the other butcher dancers. While he tries to escape, he is forced to perform his sissiness in movement. In fear of violence, he flutters his eyelashes and displays his floppy wrist in a deconstructed rendering of such markers. These gestures are then mockingly repeated by the other dancers (the bullies), who ridicule the sissy in their imitation of him. It is in the act of repeating the sissy gestures, however, that masculinity appears to reaffirm itself through a process of negation. In other words, the dancers try the markers that define the other as effeminate on their own bodies. In so doing, they laugh at the other’s difference at the same time as they appear to work towards obliterating effeminacy by demonstrating that it is clearly something that does not belong to them. The dancer’s violent rejection of the sissy seems to be connected to their violent rejection of effeminacy, which, in part, is always already constitutive of masculinity.

The sissy’s mannerisms therefore appear to demarcate the outer limits of masculinity. In other words, according to Badinter’s (1992) theory, to be a masculine man means to act *not* like the effeminate. Throughout the piece, the sissy is alternately persecuted, ganged up against, chased down, thrown out of the pub and derided. What seems to remain constant is the contact the bullies and the bullied establish between their bodies. The more masculine dancers are seen touching the sissy’s body frequently. In that sense, the sissy becomes a somewhat open, public body even if his effeminate behaviour appears, at times, to be undesirably contagious. Although the sissy is violently repelled, his presence seems to be nonetheless necessary for the other men’s ontological constitution as masculine. In its active-aggressive masculinist tactic, the pub—like the school in his earlier years—might be, for most sissies, the materialised version of a gender dystopic hell.

Appendix C:

The soundtrack as a form of textual layering in the search for a new sissiology

In this document, I will offer some initial considerations on how the songs used in the process of development of the present study might have come to add a further textual layer to the research. Although I will only provide comments where relevant, I will still list every song used in the process of performance practice. In analysing my choices, I will categorise the soundtrack according to the following taxonomy:

(a) in reference to a camp canon, according to the definition of ‘Camp’ by Susan Sontag (1994). In referencing the camp canon, I will borrow from the repertoire of Judy Garland, Maria Callas and Maysa Matarazzo;

(b) in reference to the lyrics—i.e. offering a physical engagement with the actual words of certain songs like *Macho Man* (see chapter five), *Smack My Bitch Up* and *Make Up* and

(c) in reference to the cultural significance of either the style or the interpreter of a given song. David Bowie and Lou Reed might be seen here as examples of ‘Glam Rockers’ or as representing the notion of the ‘feminine man.’

In My Shoes (2006):

1. *Hernando’s Hideaway* (1954), by Richard Adler and Jerry Ross.

A show tune, part of the musical *The Pajama Game*, originally produced in 1954 on Broadway. The lyrics describe a dark and secretive club. The genre of musical theatre might be regarded as a spectacle of both artifice and exaggeration.

2. *Smack My Bitch Up* (1997), by Liam Howlett.

Performed by The Prodigy, this song has been chosen for the potential connections it might offer in terms of representations of violence.

3. *Make Up* (1972), by Lou Reed.

Besides Reed’s androgynous style in the 1970s in his use of make-up and painted nails, this song is also significant in the research since it marks the origin of ‘make-up’ as part of the discourse developed in the research. Make-up, as I have shown, has remained a constant element of exploration throughout and, as such,

offers a line of continuation (in aesthetics and in discourse) between the four pieces of performance practice presented here.

4. *Ne Me Quitte Pas* (1959), by Jacques Brel.

I have use the recording of Brazilian torch song interpreter Maysa Matarazzo (1961). Matarazzo is regarded as one of the foremost gay icons in Brazil. The choice of a Brazilian singer signals to some of the potential elements of intersectionality in the research at the same time as it adds another layer to the autobiographical sources used herein. This version has been used in the soundtrack to Pedro Almodóvar's *Law of Desire* (1987).

5. *Gay Messiah* (2004), by Rufus Wainwright.

Crumbs! (2007)

1. *Illusions* (1948) by Friedrich Hollaender.

A song made famous by Marlene Dietrich in *A Foreign Affair* (dir. Billy Wilder, 1948). Dietrich is regarded by Sontag as a Camp figure (1994: 283).

2. *Tajabone* (1999), by Ismaël Lô.

Featured as part of the soundtrack of Pedro Almodóvar's *All About My Mother* (1999). This song is played when the main character, Manuela, arrives in Barcelona and goes to find her friend Agrado. The screenplay tackles issues such as HIV/AIDS, transvesticism and transexuality. Almodóvar dedicated the film "to all actresses who have played actresses. To all women who act. To men who act and become women. To all the people who want to be mothers. To my mother."

3. *Je m'appelle Jane* (2004), by Jane Birkin.

4. *Death and the Maiden* (1824), by Franz Schubert.

Sissy! (2009)

1. *The Man That Got Away* (1953), by Harold Arlen with lyrics by Ira Gershwin. This song was written for the movie *A Star is Born* (1954, dir. George Cukor), starring Judy Garland. Garland is perceived as one the most iconic divas within the gay culture canon.

2. *Tekno Love Song* (2005), by Coco Rosie.

3. 'Habanera' from the opera *Carmen* (1875), by George Bizet.

In Sontag's definition, "opera and ballet are experienced as ... rich treasures of Camp" (1994: 286). "Sometimes whole art forms become saturated with Camp," she suggests earlier, "Classical ballet, opera, movies, have seemed so for a long time" (Sontag 1994: 278). In chapter five I discussed the role of ballet in the research. I have chosen to use Maria Callas' rendition of the aria.

4. *Rock 'n' Roll Suicide* (1974), by David Bowie.

Like Reed, Bowie was also noted for his androgynous style and use of make-up. "The androgyne," for Sontag, "is certainly one of the great images of Camp sensibility" (1994: 279). "Camp taste ... consists in going against the grain of one's sex ... allied to the Camp taste for the androgynous is something that seems quite different but isn't: a relish for the exaggeration of sexual characteristics and personality mannerisms" (Sontag 1994: 279).

5. *Macho Man* (1978), by Jacques Morali, Henri Belolo, Victor Willis and Peter Whitehead. See chapter five, for a discussion of how this song has been used as part of the process of sissigraphy in performance.

6. *Spiegel im Spiegel* (1978), by Arvo Pärt.

7. *Für Alina* (1976), by Arvo Pärt.

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Figure 16— Wig hiding face. *Sissy!* (2009). Photo by João Braz.

Figure 17— Hiding under wig. *Crumbs!* (2007). Photo by Karoline Bjune.

Figure 18—The naked body. *Sissy!* (2009). Photo by Darrell Berry.



Figure 01



Figure 02



Figure 03



Figure 04



Figure 05



Figure 06



Figure 07



Figure 08



Figure 09



Figure 10



Figure 11



Figure 12



Figure 13



Figure 14



Figure 15



Figure 16



Figure 17



Figure 18

Appendix E:

List of clips and DVDs

DVD 1:

1. Sissy! (2010) Full Version

1a. Sissy! (2010) Clips

- Clip 01—The Man That Got Away
- Clip 02—Tekno Love Song
- Clip 03—Habanera
- Clip 04—Rock ‘n’ Roll Suicide
- Clip 05—Macho Man
- Clip 06—Urinating, Rice Shower
- Clip 07—Spiegel Im Spiegel
- Clip 08—Für Alina
- Clip 09—The Man That Got Away Revisited

2. Sissy! (2009) Full Version

2a. Sissy! (2009) Clips

- Clip 01—The Man That Got Away
- Clip 02—Tekno Love Song
- Clip 03—Habanera
- Clip 04—Rock ‘n’ Roll Suicide
- Clip 05—Macho Man
- Clip 06—Urinating, Rice Shower
- Clip 07—Spiegel Im Spiegel
- Clip 08—Für Alina
- Clip 09—The Man That Got Away Revisited

DVD 2:

1. Crumbs! (2007) Full Version

1a. Crumbs! (2007) Clips

- Clip 01—Illusions
- Clip 02—Tajabone
- Clip 03—Je M’Apelle Jane
- Clip 04—Bread and Table
- Clip 05—Chair
- Clip 06—Death and the Maiden
- Clip 07—Headstand
- Clip 08—Falling
- Clip 09—Feeding

2. In My Shoes (2006) Full Version

2a. In My Shoes (2006) Clips

Clip 01—Hernando's Hideaway

Clip 02—Another Fine Day

Clip 03—Smack My Bitch Up

Clip 04—Make Up

Clip 05—Ne Me Quitte Pas

Clip 06—Corset on Chair

Clip 07—The Corset is Very Tight Today

Clip 08—Gay Messiah

Clip 09—I Take This Shoe