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Becoming ecologies of a social scene: Lesbian subject formation via parrhesiastic ‘coming out’

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> The individual is not to be conceived as a sort of elementary nucleus, a primitive atom, a multiple and inert material on which power comes to fasten or against which it happens to strike, and in so doing subdues or crushes individuals. In fact, it is already one of the prime effects of power that certain bodies, certain gestures, certain discourses, certain desires, come to be identified and constituted as individuals. The individual, that is, is not the *vis-à-vis* of power; it is, I believe, one of its prime effects (Foucault, 1980, p. 98).

> The capacities of a body to act can come into being only in relation to the vibrations of its nonhuman environment (Roberts, 2012, p. 2517).

This paper shakes loose 'coming out' from its largely confessional figuration, performed by an autonomous *I*, by offering a theoretical reading of a social scene in which a research partner's[1] – Kaye's[2] – 'coming out' bespoke a discourse of truth-telling known as *parrhesia* (Foucault, 2011, Foucault, 2005, Foucault, 2001). Delving into the *kairos* – the conditions – of the *parrhesiastic* act through which Kaye became constituted as a lesbian subject, I mine the poststructural vein of Butler (2017, 2016, 2012) and Foucault, the language philosophy of (Austin, 1962), and cross-fertilise their palpably discursive and linguistic foci with insights from critical and queer geographies, theories of affect, and new materialism/posthumanism. I suggest the affectivity and materiality of the spatial, including the bodies of staff and customers, cannot be shorn from – indeed, are the *foundation of* – the parrhesiastic act, and hence, Kaye's

[1] I use research partner to distance myself from the scientised onto-epistemology of participant(s) haunting qualitative research.
[2] Kaye expressed a desire to use her own name as a political practice of (re)claiming authenticity of her lesbian identity.

‘coming out’. Highlighted in this paper is the dependency on multiple others – human and non-human alike – in the iterative process of subject formation vis-à-vis ‘coming out’.

Key words: Parrhesia, affect, subjectivisation, lesbian identity, coming out, non-human agency

Surveying the scene

On Thursdays, Kaye serves at the counter of a capacious second-hand goods store in a gay-friendly suburb in Victoria. She recalls an occasion when a Caucasian, ‘older Australian male’, his Filipina wife, and stepson – roughly in his thirties – had come into the store. The woman and son had disappeared into the labyrinth of goods while the man stood at the counter, prattling about his stepson. ‘Oh … he’s my wife’s boy. I only met him when he was nine or something like that. He’s gay, he’s gone to shop for handbags.’

Kaye exchanged sidelong glances with the second lady serving at the counter.

The man headed towards the corridor leading to another labyrinthine section of the store but turned on his heel.

‘Oh, do you know what my wife calls him? She calls him … half-man, half-woman.’

This is the point at which Kaye clapped back. ‘I just went red. And I don’t normally react. I said, ‘Well, I’m gay and I find your comments offensive.’

Nonplussed, the man muttered, ‘Oh…’, then scuttled off.

Not of the confessional

‘Coming out’ frequently takes the form of a confession (see Wood, 2005, Lepp, 2022, Bannink and Wentink, 2015, Chirrey, 2003). Foucault (1976) identifies that since the Middle Ages the West has drawn upon the ritual practice of confession as the means by which the truth of the subject is wrought. The confession, as a social contract, requires the actual or virtual other to bear witness to one’s confession: ‘the authority who requires the confession, prescribes and appreciates it, and intervenes in order to judge, punish, forgive, console, and reconcile’ (Foucault, 1976, pp. 61-62). Confessional discourse has become operationalised in legal, medical, educational, and familial domains, inexorably bound up with axes of power, privilege, and status:

> One confesses one's crimes, one's sins, one's thoughts and desires, one's illnesses and troubles; one goes about telling, with the greatest precision, whatever is most difficult to tell. One confesses in public and in private, to one's parents, one's educators, one's doctor, to those one loves; one admits to oneself, in pleasure and in pain, things it would be impossible to tell anyone else … One confesses—or is forced to confess (Foucault, 1976, p. 59).

In the social scene Kaye describes, however, 'coming out' did not belong to the realm of the confessional but exudes a speaking back to power characteristic of a modality of speech called *parrhesia*.

Foucault is largely credited for excavating the concept of parrhesia from Greek antiquity. Translated as *free speech* (Foucault, 2001), *frankness*, *telling all* (Foucault, 2005), and *free-spokenness* (Foucault, 2011), parrhesia is truth 'in all its naked force, without adornment' (Foucault, 2005, p. 382). The *parrhesiastes* – 'the one who uses parrhesia, i.e., the one who speaks the truth' (Foucault, 2001, p. 11) – is produced *by*, and is the subject *of*, the utterance. For one to invoke the position of parrhesiastes requires particular conditions. Fundamentally, there must be a power differential between interlocutors: a person cannot marshal parrhesia if they wield greater privilege than the other party. 'The *parrhesiastes* is always less powerful than the one with whom he [*sic*] speaks' (Foucault, 2001, p. 18). The heteronormative infrastructures that encode queer subjects' 'coming out' as obligatory, while at the same time designating 'coming out' for heterosexual subjects redundant, satisfy this condition for Kaye to speak truth to heteronormative power. To invoke parrhesia is to exhibit courage by speaking dangerously and risking violence (Foucault, 2001). Certainly, Kaye – like many queers who 'come out' – could not anticipate what manner the man's response might take to this '*explicit self-declaration*' (Butler, 1997, p. 22). Nevertheless, her steely statement, *'I'm gay and I find your comments offensive'*, distilled the truth of her sexual subjectivity 'without concealment, reserve, empty manner of speech, or rhetorical ornament' (Foucault, 2011, p. 10). Kaye did not offer an obliging laugh to the gauche remark, a form of phatic speech – '*What are you looking for today?'* – or even respond with *'I'm offended by your comments'*. She deliberately enacted her lesbian identity as rejoinder. A crucial point is that Kaye performs parrhesia as a woman, marking the intersection of sexuality, gender, and age in the parrhesiastic

act: a 71 year-old *gay woman*[1] ripostes heteropatriarchal power *vis* the middle-aged *straight man's* pejorative.

Also required in the parrhesiastic act is the other 'who is present, and necessarily present in the practice of telling the truth about oneself' (Foucault, 2011, p. 5). This alterity is not, however, in the form of the witness figured in confessional discourse, who brandishes power to criticise, condemn, or console. Rather, according to parrhesia's ancient cultural tradition, this party 'could be anybody' (Foucault, 2011, p. 5), provided their social privilege and position is greater than that of the parrhesiastes, and on the condition *this* individual must receive *this* truth.

The *kairos* of parrhesia

Foucault (2005) outlines the contextual parameters of parrhesia:

> It is a specific, particular practice of true discourse defined by rules of prudence, skill, and *the conditions that require one to say the truth at this moment, in this form, under these conditions, and to this individual* inasmuch, and only inasmuch as he [*sic*] is capable of receiving it, and receiving it best, at this moment in time. That is to say, what essentially defines the rules of *parrhēsia* is the *kairos*, the occasion, this being precisely the situation of individuals with regard to each other and to the moment chosen for saying this truth (p. 384; emphasis added).

Every moment is a dense confluence of absences, presences, registerings, possibilities, amplifications, tensions, dispersions, exchanges, anticipations, attunings, flurries, disintegrations, and intensities. A moment might be what Stewart (2007) calls the 'something[s] [that get] throw[n] … together … as an event' (p. 1), while Barad (2007) has suggested how 'each moment is alive with different possibilities for the world's becoming and different reconfigurings of what may yet be possible' (p. 182).

It is apposite to unspool the constituents composing the *kairos* (the unscheduled moment) of parrhesia, in order to theorise the roll call of conditions – discursive, spatial, bodily, relational, political, affective – that converged in the situated and specific spacetime of Kaye's parrhesiastic act. According to McCormack (2015), 'the question of how to think with/in the

world—*this* time, on *this* occasion, under *these* circumstances—is never settled in advance' (p. 89), but in line with non-representational theories and approaches, this is contextually exclusive. Foucault (2011) states that the circumstances of subjectivisation vis-à-vis parrhesia warrant exploration: 'the conditions and forms of the type of act by which the subject *manifests* himself [*sic*] when speaking the truth' (p. 2). Deleuze and Guattari (1987) have remarked that one's voice is animated by other voices, and is never the product of a ready-made, autonomous *self*: 'the collective assemblage is always like the murmur from which I take my proper name, the constellation of voices, concordant or not, from which I draw my voice' (p. 84). If Kaye did not speak from/as the sovereign *I*, what other 'dynamic and shifting engagement of relations' (Barad, 2007, p. 35) are mapped into the parrhesiastic act? For Zierhofer (2002), it is facile to regard speech acts as the monopoly of human speakers; they involve ever-present non-human actants and specific figurations. This begs the question: what array of conditions might have produced Kaye's act of parrhesia that Thursday?

Foucault's (1986, 1995, 1973, 1975, 2007) genealogies and archaeologies consider the nexus of space, power, and (disciplinary) practices in producing subjects. Here, I amalgamate new materialist and posthuman onto-epistemology, affect theory, and critical and queer geographies to supplement the discursive production of subjects vis-à-vis parrhesia. Soja (1985) argues that space is 'socially-produced', just as we are 'shaped by a constantly evolving spatiality which constitutes and concretises social action and relationship' (p. 90; also see Thrift, 1996). Relatedly, Ahmed (2006) has described the capability of spaces to house and hold bodies, or not, and the corollary (in)capacities of these bodies to act within that location. Furthermore, Roberts (2012) writes that 'a body cannot help but contribute to the material becomings of its milieu, by virtue of its own vibrating materiality' (p. 2517). We are aware from Kaye's narration that the scene transpired within a second-hand shop, managed by a man Kaye describes as 'as camp as a row of tents', operated by gay and lesbian shop assistants, that has as its clientele queer shoppers, located in a gay-friendly suburb. But what *makes* the suburb, and correlate store, gay-friendly?

A response to these questions arises in taking seriously the mutual impress of bodies on spaces and spaces on bodies. McCormack (2013) remarks upon the porousness of bodies and spaces such that 'it becomes extremely difficult to differentiate the affective qualities of [both]' (p. 3). Queer bodies are, it seems, assimilated with relative ease into this particular geography while their presence simultaneously reinvigorates the affectivity that rendered them *in place* in the first instance. This highlights 'a spatio-temporal structuration of social life which gives

form … to … the recursive practices of day-to-day activity' (Soja, 1985, p. 94). Said differently, the prosaic daily movements of queer residents (and allies and nonchalant locals), the circulation of media and people disseminating *this* place's queer conviviality, the practices of meaning-making tied to *this* locale, (re)produce the queer-friendliness of the suburb and, by extension, the shop where it is located. Ahmed (2019), too, calls attention to the evidence left when something is used: what is used leaving signs of frequentation in the form of well-wornness, ease, familiarity, and comfort. At the same time, spaces are not fixed or static. Spatialisation is a dynamic process of transformation (Barad, 2007, Ewalt, 2016, Thrift, 2008), highlighting the 'multiply fluid, ambiguous and contingent sexualised spatialities that are constants in human experience' (Knopp, 2007, p. 22). The man's comments – *'He's gay, he's gone to shop for handbags', 'my wife … calls him … half-man, half-woman'* – evidence this spatial mercuriality. In an instant there is a discernible shift in the emotional and affectual tempo of the space, reciprocally tripped by and tripping the affective thermostat of Kaye's body.

When Kaye recalls how she 'just went red', that she would not 'normally react', she references a disturbance and disequilibrium in her bodily disposition or *hexis* (Bourdieu, 1977). To use the terms of Goffman's (1959) dramaturgical framework, Kaye's *front stage*, marked by one's adherence to norms and social mores, was superseded by her countenance of frustration and a verbalised retort characteristic of the *back stage* – what is supressed and withheld from public display. The internal disordering that provoked Kaye to the 'free-spokeness' (Foucault, 2011, p. 11) of parrhesia underlines 'affect [as] the emergent and energetic expression of the force of practice in place' (Duff, 2010, p. 891). Affect is unpremeditated, as Deleuze (1988) tells us, because '[we] do not know beforehand what a body or a mind can do, in a given encounter, a given arrangement, a given combination' (p. 125). Accordingly, Kaye could not have presaged how the composite relations of the encounter would bloom into parrhesia.

The definition of affect par excellence, is the capacity to affect and be affected. Seigworth and Gregg (2010) have written that affect 'can serve to drive us toward movement, toward thought and extension' (p. 1). Might the forces, energies, and charges synonymous with affect, which move bodies and provoke action, also (dis)activate utterance? What bearing does the affectual have on instigating the somatic dimensions of speech – the will or desire to speak *at all*? 'How does a body, marked in its duration by … various encounters with mixed forces, come to shift its affections (its being-affected) into action (capacity to affect)?' (Seigworth and Gregg, 2010, p. 2). Indeed, Butler (2012) has suggested that to be overloaded by relations is a precondition for action:

> Must we, in fact, be overwhelmed to some degree in order to have motive for action? We only act when we are moved to act, and we are moved by something that affects us from the outside, from elsewhere, from the lives of others, imposing a surfeit that we act from and upon (p. 136).

While Kaye states that she '[doesn't] normally react', on *this* occasion she did. The forces at play at this spacetime suggest, for Kaye, a localised susceptibility 'to registers and modalities … that exceed conscious rational thought, or that exist at the edges of consciousness' (Blackman, 2019, p. ix). Might Kaye, in advance – and as a necessary condition – of becoming the parrhesiastes, be tapping into what Probyn (2003) refers to as the 'denseness, historicity and structural complexity' (p. 294) of the spatiality of the store and its affectual intensities? If the store has been made – is continually (re)made – familiarly queer, as 'an effect of inhabitance' (Ahmed, 2006, p. 7), when Kaye says, *'I'm gay and I find your comments offensive'*, the subject pronoun *I* could be substituted for *we*. *We* (queer bodies past and present) *find your comments offensive*. If credence is (rightly) given to the spatiality of the store and its various ecologies of practice, consumerism, movement, and affect in enabling and empowering Kaye's retort, what is inferable is a mutual performative enactment of agency. That is to say, the second-hand shop and its multiplicitous materialities work *through* Kaye and her utterance, and Kaye locates agency *from* these very spatial compositions (Coole, 2005).

The prerequisites of the parrhesiastic act were introduced previously as the asymmetrical power dynamics between persons and the necessary presence of another to witness the parrhesiastic act. To this list, within this setting, I submit as crucial the man's phobicly coded comments, without which, Kaye's very impetus to 'come out' would be moot. Butler (2016) explains that not only is avowal 'a scene of address' but '*a response to an interpellation, a way of responding to having been addressed*' (p. 84; emphasis added). But as Kaye was not the one addressed as gay, the interpellation, strictly speaking, did not belong to her; it was intended for the man's 'gay' 'half-man, half-woman' 'stepson'. Nevertheless, the interpellative address triggered *something*, precipitating a gathering of relations that congealed, momentarily, as Kaye's parrhesiastic act.

Queer geographies and geographies of sexuality have explored queer-identified and identifying spaces and the attendance of heterosexual occupants within these spaces (see Casey,

2004, Bettani, 2015, Matejskova, 2007, Hartless, 2019). Brown (2000) recounts an incident on a bus in Seattle when a man boarding – performing his queerness with socially intelligible markers of non-normative sexuality – takes his seat. A young straight couple tut and scoff – this is overheard by the man. Demanding who had made audible their judgement, the woman announces that she had spoken. The queer man replies, "'Well if you don't like it, girlfriend, *what the hell you doin'* up on Capitol Hill in the first place!'" (Brown, 2000, p. 27). In the scene, the queer man's retort insinuates that it is the straight couple who are personae non gratae in the gay-friendly area of Seattle. It is a misrepresentation, however, to name Capitol Hill and the second-hand shop as *queer-exclusive*. As remarked by Chauncey (2014): 'there is no queer space; there are only spaces used by queers or put to queer use' (p. 202). It is clear in both examples that each location is visited by cisgender and heterosexual people, that both are 'transcultural contact zones' (Hacker, 2007, p. 70). The point here is that in both instances, it is the phobic remarks, *not* heterosexuality, that is *out of place*.

Couched within the *kairos* is a particular ensemble of conditions. Hence, if the social dynamics of the scene (the second-hand store) were altered, if the sexual and gender identity become a gay/queer woman, for example, parrhesia could not have taken place, given both interlocutors (Kaye and now the woman) are equally marginal to heterosexual and androcentric discourses. Additionally, a different environ (not in the gay-friendly town/not in the second-hand store) would foreclose, for Kaye, the possibility of drawing from relations of power and the queer affectual registers of the space. The work of Kraftl and Adey (2008) contends that within buildings, 'certain kinds of affects are specifically and locally stabilized in an effort to engender more particular forms of inhabitation' (p. 228). This would suggest that a location where homophobia is cultivated and performed with abandon might preclude Kaye from speaking out, that the relational and affective conditions of this hypothetical milieu would authorise and energise the man's comments. This points to the notion that differences between subjectivities are materialised, and one's (un)belonging is underscored, in space (Probyn, 2003).

Language *as* material: Doing things with words/words doing things

Austin's (1962) *How To Do Things With Words* demonstrated, as the title implies, how interlocutors use language as a semiotic system. Austin did not reference explicitly the materiality of language, but scholars have observed shimmers of a materialist philosophy of

language in his performative speech act theory (Beetz, 2016). While Austin described the conditions that render the performative utterance (in)felicitous – the speaker's (in)sincerity, the speaker having (not) been heard by the addressee, the speaker having (not) been apprehended by the addressee – let us pivot into a new materialist and posthuman direction and consider the materiality of language. Specifically, the materiality of Kaye's parrhesia.

In Western episteme, language and materiality have a history of being separable, distinct, and unrelated. New materialist and posthuman scholarship, however, construes language *as* material (see Shankar and Cavanaugh, 2017, Daya, 2019, de Freitas and Curinga, 2015, Shankar and Cavanaugh, 2012, Pennycook, 2024, MacLure, 2013, Beetz, 2016, Jackson and Mazzei, 2023). Barad (2003) has noted that 'materiality itself is always already figured within a linguistic domain as its condition of possibility' (p. 801). Knopp (2007) declares that from a queer imaginary 'the material is always discursive and the discursive is always material' (p .27). And Beetz (2016) asserts that 'language and discourse are fundamentally material and the subject is constituted and decentered in relation to this materiality' (p. 73). Observing language *as* material is not only an epistemological shift but undoubtedly 'an ontological move' (Shankar and Cavanaugh, 2017, p. 1).

While this scholarship collectively accentuates language's materiality, what is meant by materiality is opaque and sticking. Beetz (2016) has written, for example, that:

> language is a material phenomenon. It is material, because it consists of sounds—agitated air that sets matter in motion. In its textual form, language possesses a materiality that derives from markings—inscriptions—on pieces of paper, stone tablets, wooden planks, screens, a body, or any other surface. Gestures are material in their reliance on physical presence and bodily motion' (p. 82).

But does this interpretation of physicality underplay the extent of language's material dimension? What if we do the critical work of expanding the indexical function of *material* and *materiality*, make a U-turn on language's allegedly exclusive 'phonic, graphic, and gestural' (Beetz, 2016, p. 83) forms, and view language's materiality in, and as, matters of worlding (Barad, 2007)? A communicatory medium, (re)producing identities, structuring concepts and ideas, advancing and stultifying movements and actions, bringing relations into being, and (dis)organising social worlds and realities, language 'consist[s] of its *own*

materiality' (Shankar and Cavanaugh, 2017, p. 2; emphasis added). Language does not stop at being semiotic and symbolic, significatory and representative; rather, these functions are already material processes, acting on/in the world. Indeed, Barad's (2003) posthuman performativity thesis proposes language as already part of the world and therefore an inseparable element entangled in its *intra-active* (re)production and (re)making. 'Matter and meaning are not separate elements' (Barad, 2007, p. 3). A synergy emerges between Barad's interpretation of ethics as the 'responsibility and accountability for the lively relationalities of becoming of which "we" are a part' (Barad, 2008, p. 333) and parrhesia, as a profoundly ethical act, rooted in responsibility (*response-ability*): dismantling structures of power, disrupting hegemony, and potentially transforming self and other.

Within the framework of language *as* material, what is the relationship between parrhesia and 'coming out'? In brief, both are material, generative praxes of subjectivisation and worlding. Worlding is a 'transformative politics' (Papadopoulos, 2012, p. 1), an intervention, not only human-directed but co-performed with non-human and more-than-human others that produces 'an opening to material processes and practices and a possibility for crafting—literally—common, alternative forms of life' (Papadopoulos, 2012, p. 2). 'Coming out', too, as a 'politics of naming' (Allen, 2011, p. 80), is a discourse shot through with relations of power, privilege, access, and capacity, making it a not necessarily viable or even desired option for some LGBTQIA+ people (Rasmussen, 2004). In this scene, 'coming out' is a political act of resistance (see Halperin, 1995), unlike performances of 'coming out' connected to discourses of recognition and acceptance of self and by others (see Denes and Afifi, 2014, Rossi, 2010, Whitman and Nadal, 2015). *'I'm gay and I find your comments offensive'* is double-pronged in its avowal and disavowal. Kaye avows herself as a sexual subject (see Butler, 2016) while disavowing heteropatriarchal power being (re)articulated in situ: in *this* space, at *this* time, to *this* addressee, *those* cis-hetero-centric comments are impermissible. This embodied act of opposition is powerful in view of the history of lesbian identities being restricted and regulated in public space (Browne, 2021, Valentine, 1993a, Valentine, 1993b, Valentine, 1996).

The purpose *of parrhesia* is *paradosis*, '[the] transfer of true discourse from the person who already possesses it to the person who must receive it, must be impregnated by it, and who must be able to use it and subjectivize it' (Foucault, 2005, p. 382). We are not privy to the after-effects of the social scene – Kaye mentions that the man scuttles off down the vestibule and is not seen again. But it merits consideration: what bearing, if any, did Kaye's address have

on the man? Did paradosis occur? Stewart (2011) contends that 'what affects us—the sentience of a situation—is also a dwelling, a worlding born from an atmospheric attunement' (p. 449). Was a new world *worlded* for the man through the reattuning e/affects of paradosis? Was the man changed as a consequence of Kaye's parrhesia? Did her words burrow, lodge, and stick in the viscera of his being? Will a newly formed filial duty mean calling out his wife if or when she refers to her son as 'half-man, half-woman'? These postulations and their answers are virtual but not imponderable. As Deleuze and Guattari (1987) have espoused, the virtual is not the anthesis of the *real*, but precisely an elusive potentiality not yet actualised.

Material matters and lesbian subject formation: Constitution and subordination

'Coming out' is considered by and large a linguistic act. Within this linguistic economy, the queer subject precedes the *queer*, so to speak. In the poststructural modus, Butler (2001) informs us that the *I* through which one narrates an event is speaking belatedly: it is always constructed retrospective to the experience. Giving an account of the experience in which one became subjectivised – formed as a subject – is paradoxical, in that the *I* who recounts the experience is not pre-constituted but is instead its discursive *effect*. This does not mean, however, that we disregard and dispose of the narrating *I*. Indeed, for Butler (1990, 2001), this time lag is one of the necessary but ambivalent conditions we must assent to, in order to be able to speak autobiographically at all.

Foucault (2011) states that through *parrhesia* 'the individual can … tell the truth about himself [*sic*] and constitute himself [*sic*] as subject [*sic*] telling the truth about himself [*sic*]' (p. 7). Thus, parrhesia is *both* a discursive and material (material-discursive) act of subjectivisation *and* speaking out from that subjectivity. As argued by Martine and Cooren (2016), '*materiality should ... be conceived of as an irreducible aspect of everything that is, including speech and any communication act in general*' (p. 151). I have attempted to aetiologically account for the myriad of relations that might be said to have permeated, pervaded, and penetrated the *kairos*. In line with Foucault (1980), I am interested in the conditions orbiting and channelled into the *kairos* which enabled parrhesia and, therefore, enabled Kaye to become subjectivised as a lesbian subject:

> Rather than ask ourselves how the sovereign appears to us in his [*sic*] lofty isolation, we should try to discover how it is that subjects are gradually, progressively, really and

> materially constituted through a multiplicity of organisms, forces, energies, materials, desires, thoughts etc (Foucault, 1980, p. 97).

One element I have drawn particular attention to is the spatial organisation of the suburb and store. Probyn (2003) has emphasised the spatial dimension in subject formation: 'it is … undeniable that the sites and spaces of its [subjectivity's] production are central' (p. 294). Drawing from Barad's *agential realist* account qua matter, space, and time being interwoven (*spacetimemattering*), Juelskjær (2013) has written how gendered subjectivity is produced with/in this triad as a 'socio-material-discursive-affective process[]' (p. 766). To borrow this nomenclature of Barad (2014, 2020), the *kairos* might be analogous with spacetimemattering, where 'space, time, and matter are mutually constituted through the dynamics of iterative intra-activity' (Barad, 2007, p. 181).

The presence of multiplicitous agents, to which Foucault (1980) refers above, makes clear that it would be premature to suggest Kaye's parrhesiastic 'coming out' is reducible to, and successful as, a performative performed by an a priori *I*. Indeed, 'discourse precedes and makes possible the subject who speaks' (Butler, 2010, p. 148), and 'speech "acts" not because the subject's intention is so effective, but because the act of speech relies upon certain social conventions that give efficacy to the act' (Butler, 2017, p. 173). In other words, Kaye's utterance, *'I'm gay'*, is intelligible and carries the force it does because of the historicity of gay/queer identity discourses (including 'coming out'), a common understanding of what the signifier *gay* might refer to, and the particularities of the social context (Butler, 2010, Butler, 1993, Butler, 1991). When Kaye avows her identity, *'I'm gay'*, she contemporaneously avows 'gay' as an identity which others have and avow themselves. This highlights the fundamentally relational dimension of what we take as the *self*. When one 'comes out' as a non-normative gender or sexual subject, one becomes 'bound to others who are doing the same act under a similar constraint' (Butler, 2016, p. 85). The fact that others take on the 'coming out' discourse to name themselves as a non-heterosexual/cisgender identity means that the dissymmetry of discourse becomes further (re)produced and consolidated as a dominant social script: repeatable and repeating, reified and reifying heterosexual/cisgender hegemony. There is always a dependence on the exterior in naming what we take to be, and to belong to, the interior.

The scene always changes

As Allen et al.'s (2022) new materialist-informed work tells us, spaces are made (un)safe for queers as a result of the 'intra-relational nature of space and human activity by which it *becomes*' (p. 769). Made apparent in this quotation is the relational, processual dimension of spaces and bodies, in whose mutual openness and impress each comes to affect and be affected. In this paper I have offered what Soja (1985) might consider a 'materialist interpretation of spatiality and spatial praxis' (p. 90), exploring the cluster of relations that conditioned the *kairos* – the occasion – of Kaye's parrhesiastic act.

As a fundamentally political modality of speech in which truth, in all its possible danger and discomfort, is told sans censor, parrhesia was the method of veridiction through which Kaye became formed as a lesbian subject and, concurrently, challenged the man's phobicly veiled comments about his gay stepson. Kaye's parrhesia not only spoke truth to power in the specific context of the encounter, but was an indictment of the cis-hetero-normative powers that begot those remarks. In this way, Kaye might be making and exercising what Pennell (2016) calls *queer transgressive cultural capital*, unsettling the presuppositions of deficiency and powerlessness often ascribed to queer subjects by, and within, spheres of hegemonic sexuality and gender. Furthermore, the function of parrhesia is to effect paradosis, handing down truth to another such that they might inherent and be changed by this truth (Foucault, 2005). We remain unsure, however, if Kaye's parrhesia parlayed into paradosis for the man.

On-brand with new materialist and posthuman understandings, in this paperI have suggested agency was mutually constituted and distributed (Coole and Frost, 2010, Coole, 2005, Latour, 2005). The materiality of the locale, the space's emotional and affective energies, the resonances and orbits of other bodies and objects, I suggested, catalysed Kaye's parrhesiastic act, while her parrhesia reciprocally transformed those very relations. When heed is given to the materiality of language, or language *as* material, parrhesia translates as a material praxis of subjectivisation and worlding. Within this ontology, a parrhesiastic 'coming out' breaks from 'coming out's' largely confessional/linguistic framing (Foucault, 1976, Austin, 1962), and instead becomes concerned with 'the material aspects' (Shankar and Cavanaugh, 2017, p. 4) of the performance and the materialisations it enables.

[1] In a footnote in *Fearless Speech*, editor Joseph Pearson notes that 'Foucault indicated that the oppressed role of women in Greek society generally deprived them of the use of the use of *parrhesia*' (p. 12). I acknowledge Foucault's historical analysis while, at the same time, I seek to unshackle, in this paper, parrhesia's historical constraints by de-gendering and transposing the concept within contemporary 'coming out' discourse.

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