Dangerous spaces, dangerous memories, dangerous emotions: informal education and heteronormativity.

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Introduction

The question of why particular spaces may be perceived as dangerous to the currently hegemonic constructions of ‘citizenship’ and the issue of what might make for a ‘good’ or ‘better’ polis or city from the point of view of those whose lives are lived on the edges of it has been a preoccupation of much feminist writing in the last twenty years. This paper draws its inspiration from that work and in particular from the invitation which Donna Haraway issued many years ago now to work in ways which take ‘pleasure in the confusion of boundaries and responsibility in their construction.’ (Haraway, 1991). It starts from the assumption that the boundaries which currently exist and which sometimes are only visible when crossed sustain currently hegemonic social relationships and that therefore, from a critical perspective, such boundaries are always to be questioned. This paper engages with these issues of boundary-construction and citizenship through a case-study of informal education which addresses same sex relationships. It argues that whilst informal educators in schools are able to work within emerging hegemonic constructions of space to counter homophobic cultures, these same emerging constructions of urban space are challenged by informal education when it happens in more marginalised and stigmatised spaces. It therefore opens up for discussion questions of the nature of educational spaces in the city, from a non-heterosexual perspective. This leads in turn to discussion of emerging themes in urban studies, including the discussion of what might constitute citizenship in ‘cosmopolis’ and what forms of education might support this.

The paper draws on a series of interviews with participants in the ‘Exceeding Expectations’ project in Manchester and from a period of participant observation of The Blue Room which began as a formative evaluation in January 2009. (Batsleer and Davies, 2008) The value of an extended period of ethnographic study, and ‘immersion’ in the practice of this emerging project is very much as outlined by Jo Frankham in her accompanying paper in the symposium. The issue of which stories emerge as needing to be told, and which questions emerge as needing to be asked, as distinct from the technicist confidence with which evaluations of ‘impact’ are sought, is an important part of the story which is not foregrounded here. Nevertheless, the issues of the ethics of research, the processes of defamiliarising and the long period of refusal of obvious ‘aims’ which Jo has outlined are very pertinent to the partial and not at all innocent account presented here.

Exceeding Expectations is a Manchester project which is focussed on the invisibility of lesbian and gay (and also bisexual and trans) experience within schools and within the Sex and Relationships Education curriculum. Lesbian and Gay Youth Manchester is a Manchester Youth Service group involved in a partnership with Exceeding Expectations. Workshops enable young people to meet ‘out’ gay adults and explore issues on non-heterosexual identification and homophobia with them.
The Blue Room is a project which uses creativity to engage with young men who may be involved in selling sex in Manchester and other cities.

Exceeding Expectations started as a project based in Theatre in Education. The Hope Theatre Company based in Salford offered a play which tells the story of a young person coming out in school and the workshops which accompany the play focus on the use of the word ‘gay’ as an insult and young people’s attitudes to same sex relationships. The initial scheme was then developed through the involvement of Lesbian and Gay Youth Manchester to include ‘witness statements’ by young lesbian, gay, bisexual and trans young people who talk about their experience of ‘coming out’ and who join in with small group discussions with pupils. The initiative is now run by the Healthy Schools Team in Manchester.

The Blue Room is an arts-based initiative linked to Theatre in Prisons Programme (TIPP) bridging the worlds of creativity, applied arts and social care. It was created by Graeme Urlwin and Kate McCoy arts practitioners with an applied theatre training, in 2007. The project uses drama, photography, storytelling, animation and music and, it is increasingly recognised, youth work. As the project has evolved roles for staff have been demarcated: Visiting artists; visiting social care project workers; Blue Room workers. Blue Room workers undertake outreach work and group work and run a drop-in session. The aims are to engage young men who may be ‘renting’ or selling sex in a range of creative activities, including public performance and presentation of work. Graeme Urlwin set up The Blue Room as part of a long engagement with issues facing vulnerable young men, which he had first been made aware of through his work with The Albert Kennedy Trust, a then Manchester-based agency named after a young man who died falling from the roof in Chorlton Street Car Park in what has now become ‘Manchester’s Gay Village.’ Albert Kennedy had run away from a care home and some people believe he had become involved in ‘renting’ or selling sex before his death. The period during which Graeme has been working in Manchester has seen the transformation of the space occupied by the gay community in the life of the city and the development of a number of ‘civil society’ organisations which are now well established and contribute to development of the cultural life of the city, particularly through Pride, as well as to the inclusion of lesbian, gay, bisexual and trans perspectives in the development of public services. Positive initiatives in health care, policing and education in Manchester are all to be credited to the confident development of gay or ‘lgbt’ community organisations during this period and the City Council’s openness to dialogue with them.

Boundaries, Urban Space, Cosmopolis and Heteronormativity

The regulation and construction of sexuality is clearly a site of both boundary-making and boundary-crossing (Bell, D. and Valentine, G. (eds.) (1995). There have been significant studies of the ways in which schools act to reproduce social norms of heterosexuality and the processes involved in the social construction of sexuality and of racialised masculinities and femininities. (Macanguill 1994; Epstein, D. And Johnson, R. 1998 ). There have also been significant studies of the construction of ‘gay space’ within urban space and these studies form the critical framework for this paper. It is often assumed that informal community based education exists in a relationship of permanent critique to schooling but this is far from straightforwardly evident. As in much research and teaching, the desire for a process of limiting practice by prescribing outcomes at the start is omnipresent and the development of ‘targets’ and ‘outcomes’ in youth work has threatened to
reshape the spaces of practice in community settings as it has in other educational contexts. (Davies, B. And Merton, B. 2009). Constructing the boundaries of safe space is critical to the practice of groupwork in community settings and this boundary-construction operates to enable some aspects of experience to be spoken about and, concomitantly, others to be silenced. The role of community-based informal educator is therefore significant in relation to change processes which ambivalently both open up and close down new subject positions and forms of urban life and citizenship, in this case the possibilities of sexual citizenship for individuals involved with lesbian, gay, bisexual and trans lifeworlds.

Mac an Ghaill’s (1994) discussion of the ways in which schools construct a range of hegemonic masculinities drew clear attention to the interplay between the masculinities of teacher roles and those of their pupils. Richardson (1996) further argued that the currently hegemonic construction of sexuality assigns ‘sociality’ to the heterosexual (so that heterosexual life is understood, across the culture, as involved in the complexity of relationships, law, commerce and so on) whereas homosexuality is constructed as merely and entirely sexual and therefore private and not to be spoken about in the public domain. This hegemonic construction of heterosexual and homosexual/social lifeworlds have been engaged with and to some extent contested by the informal education practices described in this paper. There are powerful emergent constructions of sexual citizenship with which educators can engage. Arguably, schools lag behind the prevailing culture and reinforce earlier dominant constructions of heterosexuality and homosexuality as delineated by Richardson, even as these cultural forms are being transformed in the new forms of global capitalist constructions of ‘difference’ which other commentators point towards.

**Challenging Heteronormativity in Schools: The Invisible Queers and the Coming Out Process.**

Debbie Epstein and Richard Johnson have shown over many studies how schooling has become a site for the construction of identities. Embodied practices of sexual identifications and demarcation of ‘otherness’ are, in this model, not understood biologically but as the means through which young people engage in the construction of their sexual identities. Epstein and Johnson argue that young people construct themselves through their own sexual cultures but that these are always in interaction with the practices of schools, commercial culture and the family and household practices they inhabit. Young people make their identities but not in conditions of their own choosing. Understanding processes of sexual identification therefore involves recognising that ‘practitioners are involved in the identity formation of their young clients, students or patients in the same moment as they are involved in the construction of their own identities. ‘ (Epstein and Johnson, 2008: 34).

The construction of a culture of silence and invisibility in secondary schools about the presence of lesbian and gay bisexual and transgender students and teachers potentially undermines the sense produced by a brief glance at Manchester’s corporate construction of the urban village as a gay-friendly space, in which the gay festival ‘Pride’ is indeed a source of pride to the city, winning Pink Paper Top Council awards on its behalf. The question of why schools have ‘lagged behind’ other parts of urban society in accepting the visible presence of lesbian and gay teachers is complex and rooted in a hegemonic homophobia which has sexualised lesbian and gay identities while producing ‘heterosexuality’ as normal. Homophobic discourses propose a ‘transmission’ of homosexuality (like
a disease) from teachers to pupils, possibly, a sexual transmission, since gay identity is, as Richardson has argued, sexualised. This raises fears of allegations and accusations of sexual offences with ‘under age’ young people. Lesbian, gay, bisexual and trans teachers have chosen to remain closeted as a result of fear of attacks, other teachers also remain silent and an openly homophobic and heteronormative culture thus remains dominant as young people who may ‘suspect’ their teachers are gay and unable to be open about it are unlikely to be open about it themselves.

The distancing of ‘subject teachers’ from messy personal bodily matters is marked in the organisation of the curriculum of secondary schooling. Most school teachers do not include sex and relationships education in their understanding of their role as teachers. In one sense this frees young people (in Johnson and Epstein’s words) ‘to make their own identities in their own sexual cultures’ but at the same time it leads to an emphasis on the ‘otherness’ of sex and intensifies the invisibility and silence attributed to lesbian, gay, bisexual and otherwise queer sexual experience. So ‘sex’ is dealt with by school nurses, by PHSE Departments or by youth workers, and ‘relationships’ are probably not dealt with at all.

In contrast to the situation in schools, youth work has, in cities at least, been a profession which has offered a relatively open space to lesbians and also, though to a lesser extent, gay men. Indeed many who are drawn to youth work are so drawn because of their experience of difficulties in mainstream schooling. An early reaction (following decriminalisation and then the AIDS Crisis and Section 28) to the silence in mainstream schools about homophobia was the establishment of lesbian and gay youth groups. LGYM Manchester was one of the first such groups to be established.

Its meetings were held from the beginning in the Gay Centre near the University, just up the road from the places in which the more ‘secretive’ early groups established themselves. In order to exist, it needed adult gay community space and to distance itself from schooling and also other ‘mainstream’ youth provision. Such informal community based spaces offer alternative stories and practices to young people who are then often empowered to return to school settings and to engage with initiatives such as ‘Exceeding Expectations.’ Educators need to be aware of how their practices construct possibilities and spaces for identity projects. It is partially to promote such awareness that the initiatives documented and analysed here work.

Staff at Lesbian and Gay Youth Manchester believe that their involvement has pushed the project to a more participatory approach involving young people in the programme of work and also ‘pushing the boundaries’ to include bisexual and trans as well as lesbian and gay young people. Youth work is currently dominated by a discourse of ‘participation’ and user voice and this will be explored later in this paper. Schools participate voluntarily in the work. Only one faith school has participated thus re-inforcing the current constructions of faith discourses as actively hostile to same-sex relationships. Recognising the long-standing reluctance of schools to become involved with this agenda has led staff at LGYM to become involved in a regional and national campaign to address schools and teacher culture. Through the North West Consortium of Lesbian and Gay Youth Groups, they have become involved with the promotion of Quality Standards for work with lesbian and gay young people in order to make same-sex relationships a safe space for teachers and others in the children’s workforce to explore. The invitation to participate in this work led to one letter from a headteacher querying the invitation and asking whether they would be invited to a conference to
discuss sex with animals. Thus the dangerousness of the space and its boundaries are marked, through the designation of disgust.

The ‘coming out’ narrative is central to both Exceeding Expectations and to the Quality Standards initiative and this telling of non-heterosexual identity projects is potentially affirming for all participants, both the young people who take part as members of LGYM and for the young people in the participant schools. At the same time the participation of bisexual and trans young people opens up discussions of fluid and complex identifications and of the possibilities of change in identities over time. The work connects with anti-bullying agendas in schools and aims to challenge institutionalised forms of homophobia which lead for example to PE becoming a deeply troubled space: there are stories of boys and girls who have come out being asked to use the disabled toilet for getting changed and of girls being asked to use the boys changing room ‘because you don’t fancy them do you.’ (Hence it is interesting to note in passing the importance of the Lesbian and Gay Youth Games as a LGYM initiative). Again, the ways in which bodily, visceral and emotional responses are being used to construct space and the ways in which spaces themselves (the toilets in schools; always the toilets in schools) become signs of a wider abjection and marginalisation are notable.

The troubling of schooling by the presence of sex among teenagers is here caught in a dangerous loop with the sexualising of LGBT identifications. When peer educators go into schools and engage with young people about the meanings of the word ‘gay’ and then talk frankly about their own experience in schools, which may include examples of awful bullying and harassment, they offer through the rehearsal of those dangerous memories a present and surviving connection with a successful adult identity as lesbian or gay. This also strengthens the peer educator’s identity potentially repairing some of the earlier damage experienced in school. It is means too that the plurality and complexity of identities can be made visible. Peer educators are male, female, trans, Catholic, Jewish, of Jamaican heritage, from the North, from the South and speak about these complexities during the workshop.

Following the example of the national Schools Out project, (Sanders, 2008) the Quality Standards initiative encourages feedback to teachers with the aim of creating LGBT affirmitive space, using postcards to former teachers: ‘It would have helped if..... or ‘Thankyou for...’ (www.schools-out.org.uk). The lines drawn around spaces shift by the telling and re-telling of stories and the modification of scripts. Storylines and boundary-lines are deeply implicated with one another.

The NWConsortium of LGBT Youth Groups has recognised the importance of developing a safe space in schools and has developed the Quality Standards Exercise to make same-sex relationships a safe topic for teachers to explore. Liverpool Hope University has taken it on as an offer in their teacher training courses. Making a safe space for teachers appears to mean, to these young activists, making the work boring, bureaucratic, depersonalised with achievable targets. To quote one of the women who designed the package: ‘It makes it safe and boring and so addresses teachers cultures and is a vehicle for change.’ This emphasis on checklists and paper-work effectively desexualises the subject of lesbian, gay, bisexual and trans identifications. The Consortium also offer a training package for teachers and others in the children’s workforce; action planning with a variety of groups: support to whole school approaches; support to specialist projects and dedicated LGBT work;
offering ways of challenging heteronormativity. In so doing they are themselves caught in a technocratic approach, following an established road of ‘raise awareness, train, deliver outcomes’ which of course is, as Frankham articulates, at the least, questionable.

There is evidence that fear of Section 28 is still being used in schools to control speaking about homosexuality, some years since its removal from the statute books. The new 2009 requirement for all schools to teach sex and relationship education does nothing to suggest that faith (or other) schools will be required to speak positively on the matter of same sex relationships. The role of the informal educator – here the peer educator – is to be ‘the other’ to the hegemonic norms of schooling, speaking what is usually not spoken, as a guest or stranger invited by the ‘host’ in school. The work of Exceeding Expectations challenges the establishment of ‘gay (and straight) enclaves.’ It affirms identity claims and enables peer educators to experience positive identifications as non-straight in a space which has hitherto been experienced as unsupportive at best and hostile at worst, thus potentially transforming that space. This challenges the boundaries of silence set by schools. Yet in so doing lesbian and gay peer educators fulfil many of the roles expected of the emergent gay citizen. This ‘virtually normal’ citizen, Andrew Sullivan suggested, brings to the good city the civic virtues of style, irony, childlessness and so an enormous capacity for volunteering, community commitment and contribution to cultural and entrepreneurial regeneration, all leavened with just a streak of rebelliousness. (Sullivan, 1996).

The model of ‘coming out’ which the project works with is certainly amenable to this discourse of ‘good citizen gay’ who will take part and participate in the formation of an inclusive civic culture, above all by participation in the market place. The ‘autonomous’ self who ‘comes out’ is also of course the self-governing, chastening psyche of capitalist democracies. This assimilationist figure of the ‘good gay’ (it has been argued, influentially, by among others David Bell and Jon Binnie) is a creation of the most recent period of capitalist urban development in which ‘difference’ has become marketable, a feature of consumption. How rapidly it is noted, the ‘gay areas’ have become available for marketing and promotion as an essential feature of cosmopolitan space. The ‘danger within’ of the Thatcher years has become a marketing opportunity, and the emerging gay citizen is above all a consumer. ‘Multicultures can be made corporate through essentialising of difference’ as Binnie and Skeggs argued in a highly influential paper about Manchester’s gay village. It is no surprise then that one of the boys who had come out at school and contacted LGYM and complained of being under pressure: ‘Every-one wants me to go shopping with them.’

This making of lifeworlds into ‘experiences’ for shoppers and therefore corporate and marketable through the construction of new ‘essential differences’ marks the new urban spaces such as ‘the gay village’ by class and by the ability to consume. (Binnie and Skeggs, 2006). It is through money and through the appearance and practice of prosocial responsibility that sexual citizenship is conferred thus creating another boundary. This then positions the ‘good gays’ against the ‘bad queers’ on ‘the other side of the street’ and it is ‘on the other side of the street’ that the second project presented here happens.

The Blue Room and informal educators responses to stigmatised identities

Whereas the work of Exceeding Expectations and the Quality Standards Initiative positions the informal educator as one who, as an invited guest in schools, challenges the invisibility of same-sex
relations, and thereby extends the space of citizenship, promoting the recognition of sexual citizenship and the identity of lesbian and gay citizens, the role of the youth workers in The Blue Room is one in which the inherent ambivalence of care and control is more evidently at work. As the new social construction of the ‘out and proud’ gay citizen in turn produces a new boundary, it constructs the boys who participate in The Blue Room as the ‘outsiders’ whose presence may appear, because of their engagement in vice and anti-social behaviour and unhealthy practices, to undermine the contribution of Manchester’s gay village to the civic culture. Whilst ‘Pride’ received a ‘tourism’ award, boys using the Blue Room feel themselves to be regarded as ‘scum’ and ‘shit.’

In general it can be said that policy on the sex industry, focussed as it is on the prevention of crime, speaks a language of control and regulation which, even as it seeks to reduce exploitation, seeks first to address the presence and visibility of the street prostitutes whose presence is so problematic for the safety and quality of life of those (non-prostitute) communities with whose lifeworlds they intersect. Paradoxically policy initiatives to tackle prostitution end up preferring to make it ‘unseen and unheard.’ This is a major aspect of policy with which The Blue Room is in tension. A second way of seeing sex work and prostitution is through the veil of sexual shame and of stigma. The development of the language of ‘sex workers’ (as distinct from ‘prostitute’ or ‘rent boy’) was a 1970’s West Coast American coinage in the context of the liberation movements of that period. It sought to destigmatise involvement in the sex industry and at the same time to emphasise that as ‘workers’ those involved in the sex industry also had rights: they were not, by virtue of their involvement in the most despised and ‘low’ activities, thereby available for rape or other forms of abuse; they were not to have their health and well-being disregarded and they were not to be regarded as incapable of speaking for themselves or of having their own perspective on the work. The Blue Room and its partner agency MSWOP (The Male Sex Worker Outreach Project) have chosen at times to use the designation ‘sex worker’ to emphasise this ‘rights-based’ ethic. However, the ‘whore stigma’ remains and is (for reasons that there is no space to explore here) unlikely to disappear in the lifetime of The Blue Room. Alongside the controlling directions implicit in public policy, this is the second major silencer with which The Blue Room must grapple.

The border pedagogy (Coburn, 2009, forthcoming) of youth work of necessity works very differently here than it does or can in schools.

1) Although there is in each case a commitment to ‘safe space’, what is required in each case of that safe space is very different. In the case of the Blue Room, rather than challenging an enclave approach, as the work in schools does, there is a need for the creation of a specific space: for young men; for young men ‘in the city centre’ ...for ‘young men who are vulnerable to sexual exploitation.’ And sometimes – but only sometimes- ‘for young men who sell sex.’ The forms of address to and about the client group indicate the reasons why safe space is needed. They construct the subject positions for participation in an enabling pedagogy whose boundaries must be secure if the young men are to be enabled to explore issues that matter. So, it is by definition an exclusive rather than an inclusive space. Of women, of punters, of tourists...of boys who are not ‘on the game.’ This attention to forms of address links to the importance of practices of welcome and recognition which are
fundamental aspects of informal educator's groupwork practice, in constructing democratic spaces for collaborative enquiry.

2) The Blue Room sidelines rather than affirms identity claims. Staff and members at LGYM argue that the inclusion of bisexual identification and of trans identification as part of their work with Exceeding Expectations makes it harder for the work to be recuperated into the essentialising and commodifying of identities which accompanies emerging gay sexual citizenship. However, the practice of evading identity claims in the Blue Room is marked. Young men who regularly sell sex to men quite often wish to assert heterosexuality or else to avoid 'labels'. In any case, most of the labels available for the boys to wear are derogatory and not about to be fashionably reclaimed and even the term 'sex worker' (viewed, in an earlier moment, as a liberatory term) is now questioned as it potentially turns a practice into an identity and so makes the practice harder to contest. Beyond the issue of forms of address, informal educators must grapple with the capacity of identity-claims to solidify what was liquid and open to change, and learn to explore the moments when claims to identity, however noble, immediately reinforce the conditions of abject otherness which stigmatised groups experience.

3) Enabling of witnessing and testimony. A haunting phrases used by a member of The Blue Room about their life used at the end of a film made by the project is. 'You have to keep your head down and learn to live like a ghost.' Through the various creative projects and events Blue Room members have been able to testify to their experience and arts-based practice of informal education enables this to be done in ways which are provisional, complex, shared and anonymised. A photography exhibition does not bear the names of the artists. A play is a play about Barney, or Charlie and Ronnie. The creation of a character can be either owned or disavowed depending on the audience and context. This practice has enabled forms of compassionate witnessing and dialogue between the young men and professionals. 'Developing self-esteem (or 'learning to hold your head up') is at the very least an ambivalent project for those who need to learn to keep their heads down to survive. Such arts events have created a challenge to current forms of 'service user involvement' being promoted currently in public services as they are driven by the young people's agendas rather than by the need for consultation on aspects of service delivery. They challenge the professional agenda with questions such as 'Why don't you try to change things more?' and even 'Why are you wasting my time?'

4) Whereas practitioners who are involved with Exceeding Expectations are characteristically delighted and proud to be able to declare their identities and tell their stories, owning their own narratives and being centred in them, the operation of shame and stigma in relation to sex work means that the fear of exposure among the boys who are members of The Blue Room is great and informal educators need to be attentive to this at every point. This includes exposure within the 'community' of homeless and vulnerable people within the city centre. After the 'Down not Out' event,(an event facilitated by the Blue Room, using performance and discussion to create dialogue with professionals who work with street homeless people and people with drug and alcohol issues and severe mental health problems) whilst most of the young men felt proud, one of the young men who had been
involved in a theatre production said that he felt more vulnerable because ‘250 more people now know what I do. Well, they won’t know, but they’ll assume.’ The boundaries of the safe space for collaborative enquiry are potentially marked by shame and stigma and by a prurient curiosity by all those who participate in them.

This suggests that the nature of safe or dangerous spaces of sexual citizenship and the role of educators cannot be specified ahead before an analysis has been made of how hegemonic boundaries are currently operating.

Opening up new forms of citizenship and education. Who is ‘the outsider’?

At this point, this paper seeks to locate the argument in an ongoing discussion (taking place in sociology and social geography) of new forms of citizenship developing in this period of capitalism which are related less to national boundaries than to ‘cosmopolis.’ Thinking about ‘cosmopolis’ has been developed by academics involved in urban planning globally, notably by Leonie Sandercock, whose book ‘Cosmopolis II: Mongrel Cities of the Twenty First Century’ has been the source of much debate. In it Sandercock develops an argument for cosmopolis as a model of a ‘good city’ based on new civic virtues of hospitality, responsiveness and welcome to ‘others’, openness to integration, which may be enabling us to imagine new transnational forms of civic virtue. Sandercock’s ideas are presented in a summary form in ‘Cosmopolitan Urbanism A Lovesong to our mongrel cities’ and debated in the collection ‘Cosmopolitan Urbanism’ (edited by John Binnie and others) by a variety of authors. Here I focus on Kurt Iveson’s chapter ‘Strangers in Cosmopolis’ because Iveson raises explicitly issues of the role of informal educators as youth workers or community development workers. He highlights the problems of class which seem to haunt the vision of ‘cosmopolis’ in which historically working–class communities (with their failures to integrate and celebrate difference) are seen as the ‘other’ of cosmopolis. Such difficulties also extend to other marginalised groups in the new social order, such as the young men who use The Blue Room.

‘If city life is essence ‘lived among strangers’ then attempts to order urban life which embody ‘enclave consciousness’ – fear of touching, fear of the other, the desire for community’ are deemed inherently problematic,’ says Iveson. Every time a community is constructed, an ‘other’ or an outsider is constructed, and this challenges the emerging cosmopolitan virtue of openness. The regulation of prostitution in city centres however is an excellent example of how even such emerging ‘cosmopolitan zones’ require such regulatory processes, in order to support certain kinds of touching and desiring and to regulate others. The closure around ‘us’ and ‘them’ (which is accompanied by regular use of CCTV, surveillance and police helicopters) is not in this case brought about by the despised white working-class with their desire for homogeneous communities, but by ‘cosmopolis’ as the space of tourism and many other forms of commodity exchange, which explicitly excludes prostitution. If new forms of education and schooling are emerging which are more permeable and cosmopolitan, in response to these new conditions within global capitalism, there is a need to be attentive to those forms of closure.

Iveson asks of Leonie Sandercock, (who sees hospitality to strangers as an essential civic virtue): ‘Who is a stranger?’ and responds to his own question by arguing that cities need to recognise
that every-one who lives in them and moves through them is a stranger. The only basis for the development of civic virtues and forms of democracy then is the recognition that the relationships of urban life are lived on common ground in the community of strangers. In order for this community to have life, there need to be spaces where strangers meet and negotiate in ‘reasonable’ ways. For Iveson, this reasonableness does not take the form of a debating chamber, but rather suggests spaces which are open to surprise, change and indeterminacy. For he is alert to the ways in which attempts to regulate urban space through dialogue become modes of regulation when they completely fail to acknowledge the relative power of participants in dialogue.

‘If graffiti writers refuse to put their identities at risk by engaging in a wider dialogue about urban aesthetics with ‘outsiders’ to their subculture are they being unreasonable? Should they be lured or forced into such a dialogue because living together in the city demands it? If the homeless and the addicted fail to participate in a debate about the norms which govern street contacts and begging, are they being unreasonable? Should they be educated or empowered to participate in such a debate because living together in a city demands it?’

If not the police who intervene and remove and punish those unreasonable people then it is the youth worker, the local government official, or the educator who might step in to impart the capacities to live in the good city. ‘

In so naming the educator and the youth worker, the boundary drawing aspect of the role of educator in relation to reasonable debate is made all too clear. The educator has the power to define the limits of reasonable exchange. This power can in my view only be exercised differentially in relation to the educator’s assessment of the strengths and weaknesses of the groups being worked with. The discussion of Exceeding Expectations and The Blue Room bears this out, showing that any demand for openness has a different meaning for weak groups than for those who live in the enclaves of privilege. It is one thing to require a greater openness to same sex relationships in schools and to affirm ‘coming out’ and self-advocacy. It is quite another to expect similar patterns of openness from the young men who use The Blue Room, who may depend on professionals, or on artistic representations, to advocate for them rather than risk their own safety through self-advocacy.

Iveson argues that strangeness is a condition shared by every-one. Notions of a purified ‘homeground’ for any individual are ultimately untenable as we all move through different ‘life spaces’ so there is nowhere you can go and only be with people like you. A view of citizenship as ‘strangers sharing common ground’ gives us freedom to glimpse our own hybridity, our own contingency and encourages us to recognise, in all civility, that there are no values beyond contestation. The assumptions of ‘family values’, the assumptions of ‘queer’ are open to question and challenge.

What would an education system look like in which difference, otherness, multiplicity, heterogeneity, diversity and plurality prevail? In order to discover this and to continue to open up spaces for acceptance and understanding of same-sex relationships, informal educators who work in the space of ‘otherness’, and of border pedagogy, at the periphery have a vital role. The challenge
in that role is in recognising its ambivalence and its tendencies to regulate, contain and control even as it opens up to new imaginations.

Working as an informal educator (and indeed as a researcher) with such ambivalence demands careful attention to the emotions which mark the boundaries of urban life. Throughout this paper emotions and affects have been noted: pride and abjection, shame, disgust and fear, amazement, joy and the question of the place of erotic life, of desire. Tentatively, I would suggest that a form of postemotionalism and flatness of affect characterises the ‘marketing of difference’ which global capitalism has embraced. Excitement and amazement, as well as fear and disgust, may mark places where this flatness is challenged. Haraway’s suggestion that the boundaries which these emotions mark need careful attention: pleasure in the confusion of boundaries (the sex worker is now an artist; the professional non-sexual teacher is gay) and responsibility in the construction of them (which means that CCTV is not enough; and silence is not enough) remains for me a provocative and challenging starting point for the practice of informal education. (Batsleer, 2008)

References


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