

Between becoming and belonging: On the representation of queerly abject white male bodies

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“It’ll be about the people I met on the streets, hustlers, queens [...]”

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Abstract

Between becoming and belonging: On the representation of queerly abject white male bodies

In B. LaBruce's 2008 cult magnum opus and genre-blender, *Otto, or Up with dead people*, and its ballsy spiritual sequel, *LAZombie* (2010), the director seeks to reconceptualise traditional filmic ways of representing desire. The two films, filled with schlocky exclusionary politics, social marginalisation, and tropes of desiring zombies, posit belonging as the interplay between the social mechanics of exclusion and the lived experience of corporeal, desiring bodies, thus politicising sexual economy as G. Deleuze and F. Guattari notably do in *Anti-Oedipus* (1983). By portraying undead characters who desire intimacy and relationality, the film tasks the spectator with recognising relational desire in these abject cinematic bodies – in essence, to reconsider the *intimate* humanity of zombies – what amounts to, in many texts on the abject, arriving at a “new comprehension of humanness/humanity” (A. Nel, 2012b:547). To state it differently, the spectator is tasked with recognising the abject as immanent to desire, as immanent desire.

LaBruce explores themes of male belonging through becoming – that is, being that is not static, fixed or filial but always in the process of change and adaptation/adoption – in scenes that are explicitly sexual in nature and, as such, his work forms part of a category of post-millennial texts that reflect changing social norms and values regarding desire, sexual praxis, and love.

LaBruce's provocation lies in the simultaneous arousal and repulsion of the viewer – in essence, how they eschew palatability by amalgamating cinematic contours of desire and the abject in scenes that are at the same time both highly sexual and also impressionably abject. By having his characters intentionally co-move between zones of pleasure and of abjection, in order to

navigate (categories of) urban and national belonging, LaBruce not only shows repulsion and arousal both to be affective responses of desire, but also explores how each of these are dependent on categories of inclusion/exclusion and on the ways in which the body can be read as porous – crucially, whilst foregrounding the performativity of the abject.

The amalgamation of desirous/pleasurable and abject forms of the male body, manifesting in quite extreme forms in LaBruce's films, should not be seen as a cultural anomaly; a number of filmmakers, series showrunners, authors, activists, archivists, and artists have considered the effects and affects of the abject body's proximity to desire and pleasure, and have had to develop a (philosophical, conceptual, technical, and visual) lexicon with which to address both the foregrounding of this proximity and its effects on how we see ourselves in the greater (relational) whole.

In the 2013 novel *Wolf, Wolf*, Australian author E. Venter situates a white-dystopic narrative squarely in the abject actualities of a South African *now*. In its de-extraction of one of the foundational tenets of the plaasroman genre, the narrative's apparent focus on a drawn-out transfer of white symbolic and cultural power, and financial agency, between generations (or, in the parlance of the novel's reception: 'from dying father/patriarch to gay son') partially obscures Venter's larger, intense thematic consideration of a changing dispensation – a country whose whiteness is in *un-becoming* and to which the protagonist, a "lapsed South African" (H. Twidle, 2015), (seemingly) no longer belongs to/in. Venter's bleak outlook on citizenship has prompted C. Hope (2015) to call the novel a "stark study of arrested ethnicity", and "How should a man be?" has indeed become a refrain in reviews of Venter's novel (as it has, to a large extent, in his oeuvre). This points to an exploration of four interwoven facets of masculine identity in present-day South Africa (being a son, a lover, a citizen, a raced being) which abjectly manifest in *Wolf, Wolf* in the protagonist's relationship with the various male figures in his life, while abject ferality,

smell as identity, and dog symbolism act as textual indicators that the characters find themselves in abject (sexual) spaces – situated outside (hetero)normative, homosocial, and national categories of belonging, while simultaneously being immanent to them.

A clear line of argumentation arises here: How immanent abjection configures desire in belonging through queer experiences of the olfactory, whether related to decaying zombie bodies or dog-like anti-filial bodies or diseased fatherly bodies, so to speak. Furthermore, these decaying bodies – both abject and capable of desiring/inducing desire – speak to frames of inclusion and exclusion: personal, national, racial, sexual, and, I'd argue, textual (in the modulations actualised by LaBruce through a twinning of bodyhorror and porn, and in Venter's penetrative renegotiations of the plaasroman genre).

Even if, at first glance, the use of LaBruce as lens through which to view/read Venter is disconcerting, of note in his films is particularly the introduction of the abject into scenes of pleasure-belonging and how these surface notions of relational being, textuality, national frames of belonging, and performativity. Thus, LaBruce's films (in the methodological spirit of alloying) may act as a key to understanding how being, also in Venter, is continuously performed (so, too, textually, and in terms of 'genre') and how categories of belonging are constantly negotiated: Characters take on – and discard – abject performative 'identities' in order to navigate categories of belonging. Hence becoming (even toward unbelonging, or *un-becoming*) and movement, rather than identity and fixity, become primary. In LaBruce's films this happens primarily on the level of the individual; in *Wolf*, *Wolf's* white-queer engagement with the changing socio-cultural milieu of South Africa, (sexual, relational, national, raced, textual) being is shown, instead, to be performed on larger scales of relevance.

While the abject is often considered, current scholarship on queer-white fiction in Afrikaans scholarship, and, bar a few exceptions, in scholarship on Southern African fictions, tend to shy away from explicitly commenting on the way these texts' use of the abject ties problematically to abject-sexualised raced aspects. However, by taking LaBruce's films as a lens/key, again in the manner of Deleuzian 'alloying', I approach *Wolf, Wolf* in exactly this way: Through LaBruce, we begin to see the abject selves presented in the text not as static-raced, but instead as constituting a "threshold, a door, a becoming between multiplicities, an effect of a dance between power and desire" (M. Tamboukou, 2008:361). The thematic development from *Otto* to *LAZombie* (from individual becoming to pseudo-national urban unbelonging) echoes into the civil resonances/stark presupposition that after a loss of symbolic white power, Venter's characters seemingly have to become other (becoming-animal; become abject progeny; become feral) so to continue seeing themselves citizens of a (in their view) contested country.

In the movement between individual becoming and national belonging, these texts echo Deleuze and Guattari's view that society is not "defined by its contradictions [...but rather] by its lines of flight [...]. There is always something that flows or flees, that escapes the binary organisations, the resonance apparatus and the overcoding machine; things that are attributed to a 'change in values', the youth, women, the mad, etc." (1988:216). By paying close attention to these line(s) of flight – in the form of deterritorialisations, bifurcations or qualitative changes in the lattice of the olfactory organisation of the novel (pointedly, in olfactory intimacy, olfactory embodiment, and cubilication) – we come closer to articulating flows in the narrative nature of becoming-South African that move beyond filial strictures of collective narratives of nation-building (including that of the plaasroman) in place up to – and coalescing since – 1994/2000.

Central terms: abject desire; olfactory intimacy; queer citizenship; E. Venter; feralities

OPSOMMING

Between becoming and belonging: On the representation of queerly abject white male bodies

In B. LaBruce se 2008 kultus-kruisbestuifde-genre-opus, *Otto; or, Up with dead people*, en sig porno-reboot/opvolg *LAZombie* (2010), kom die konvensionele representasie van manlike filmiese begeerte onder loep. In albei films, deurtrek van sexy-slordige en banaal-begerende zombierige manne, word die nosie van 'behoort-tot' as 'n spel tussen sosiokulturele meganismes van uitsluiting en die beleefde ervaring van fragrante liggame vergestalt – met die gevolg dat seksuele ekonomieë op soortgelyke wyse as in G. Deleuze en F. Guattari se *Anti-Oedipus* (1983) ver-politiseer word.

Deur die representasie van 'undead' (in die taal van die filmwêreld) manlike karakters in hul soeke na hitsige relasionele intimiteit, word die kyker as 't ware gedwing om met die kinematiese liggame te identifiseer (en selfs te vereenselwig), en sodoende – in ooreenstemming met A. Nel se beskouing ten opsigte van 'n “new comprehension of humanness/humanity” (2012:547) – die *intieme* menslikheid van zombies te oorweeg. Dit word hoofsaaklik deur LaBruce se onlosmaaklike sáámbind van die abjekte en begeerte bewerkstellig.

In uiters seksueel-eksplisiete (én tegelyk afstootlike) tonele vol hygende zombies, word die nosie van wees/wese (nie identiteit nie) – binne 'n tematiese raamwerk van (manlike) 'behoort' en wording/in-wording ('belonging and becoming') – daargestel wat nie staties, vas ('fixed') of stal-geaffilieër ('filial') is nie, maar voortdurend onderworpe aan produktiewe verandering. As sodanig behoort LaBruce se werk tot 'n steeds groeiende post-2000 groep tekste waarin

veranderende sosiokulturele normatiewe (veral met betrekking tot norme en waardes rondom begeerte, seksuele praktyke, lus en liefde) manifesteer. Die kyker word uitgelok om tegelyk tot die teks aangetrokke te voel as daardeur afgestoot te word. Die ekstreme sameflansing van begeerte/genot en die abjekte in die LaBruce-films, geskied ook in ander kulturele produkte (soos televisiereekse, letterkunde, popmusiek, en dies meer), waar vervaardigers, skrywers, lirieskrywers, aktiviste, kunstenaars, en ander, die effek(te) en affekte (belewing) van abjekte begeerte aan die hand van die begerende, genotvolle, lustig-hitsige manlike liggaam deurdink/-kyk.

In hierdie proefskrif word LaBruce se films saamgelees met Australiaanse skrywer E. Venter se 2013-roman, *Wolf, Wolf*. In hierdie roman plaas Venter 'n wit-distopiese narratief pens-en-pootjies binne 'n bykans abjek-beskrewe Suid-Afrikaanse aktualiteit, waarin die uitgerekte oordrag van simboliese, materiële en kulturele magsbemiddelling van patriargale vader na queer seun 'n spieël word waarin dieselfde magservarings (dog binne witheidskader) verval. Die karakter se witheid ont-word (un-become) binne (en omrede) verweefde fasette van manlike identiteitsbelewing (om byvoorbeeld tegelyk seun, minnaar, burger én Afrikaner te wees), en hierdie belewings word uitgespeel binne die abjekte begeerte(s) van manlike wreedheid, reuk as identiteit, en jagtershondsimbolisme, asook as/binne tekstuele (a la die plaasroman). Sodoende word 'n duidelike aanknopingspunt met LaBruce se begerende zombies gesuggereer, wat tot die volgende vrae aanleiding gee: In watter mate kan abjekte begeerte gesien word as 'n wyse van behoort (veral binne die wordingsparadigma van Deleuze en Guattari), en in watter mate kan daar affektiewe, tekstuele, en generiese, verbande getrek word tussen verrottende zombieliggame en hond-agtige nieverbonde liggame en afvallige/afvallende sieklike liggame?

Sleuteltermes: abjekte begeerte; B. LaBruce; jagtershondtrope ('canid tropes'); verdenning ('cubilation'); burgerlike begeerte/begeerte-gebaseerde burgerskap; E. Venter; olfaktoriese beliggaming; olfaktoriese intimiteit; zombiepornografie

jy sit so ~~kruisbeen~~ wydsbeen oor my werksetiek

soos die dag uit my greep en

dag uit my venster skiet

kyk daar oor die berge

kom die honde aan

en hul sluier

dat alles moet sterf

maar ek't 'n gevoel in my dat ons vir altyd

in hierdie kamer kan bly

en as daai honde kom

kan ons twee

dalk net hier luier

- with apology to Spoegwolf (after the lyrics to *Nagmusket*)

Section 1

Barking mad/becoming-less (An introductory part, which situates the study within a specific time, place, and frame of mind)

1. Decaying zombie bodies, dog-like anti-filial bodies & diseased bodies

In B. LaBruce's 2008 cult magnum opus and genre-blender, *Otto, or Up with dead people*, and its spiritual sequel, *LAZombie* (2010), the director seeks to reconceptualise traditional ways of representing desire. The two films, filled with schlocky exclusionary politics, social marginalisation, and tropes of desiring zombies, speculate on the link between the social mechanics of exclusion and the lived experience of corporeal, desiring bodies, thus politicising sexual economy as G. Deleuze and F. Guattari notably do in *Anti-Oedipus* (1988). By portraying undead characters who desire intimacy and relationality, the film tasks the spectator with recognising relational desire in these abject cinematic bodies – in essence, to paraphrase Nel (2012b:547), to reconsider the intimate humanity of zombies, which amounts to, in many texts on the abject, arriving at a “new comprehension of humanness/humanity” (ibid.). To state it differently, the spectator is tasked with recognising the abject as immanent to desire, as immanent desire.

In *Otto*, the protagonist makes a conscious decision to take on an abject form – he pretends to be a zombie – as this provides a (temporary) ontological ‘safe space’ in which he can heal and attain closure after a traumatic experience of becoming-homeless, becoming state-less¹.

¹ Otto's becoming-homeless impacts on his being a lover, a son, and a citizen. His lover leaves him after finding out that Otto is HIV positive; his parents have him institutionalised; and he is then hounded by bands of thugs.

Similarly, in *LAZombie*, the boundaries of representation between ‘chosen’ zombiehood and the displaced, family-less/homeless/stateless self is blurred even further: so much so that the film consists solely of following a nameless, homeless protagonist in his random, non-connective amblings in and around the city². Notions of how an abject state affects our ability to relate to others are explicitly activated: In *Otto*, the abject may be seen as a performative process that can be adopted (and discarded) – a *becoming-zombie*, if you will³ – while *LAZombie* makes the zombie trope analogous to the ways in which the experience of precarity dehumanises citizens – a becoming-less or un-becoming-citizen. A central thematic consideration of (male) belonging (as a son, as a lover, as a citizen) and unbelonging is thus evident in both narratives, but questions around individual belonging in *Otto* is widened in *LAZombie* to reflect on collective/national concerns. Paradoxically, though, for the white queer bodies in LaBruce’s universe, it is exactly this becoming-abject that allows them to re-enter frameworks of belonging: Defaulting whiteness allowing the queer becoming-less; to be read subversively as a becoming-minor or line of flight – thus a *productive* ‘becoming-less’, following Deleuze and Guattari (1983; 1988).

LaBruce explores the theme of male belonging through becoming – that is, being that is not static, fixed or filial but always in the process of change and adaptation/adoption – in scenes that are explicitly sexual in nature and, as such, his work forms part of a range of post-millennial texts that reflect changing social norms and values regarding desire, sexual praxis, and love. LaBruce’s provocation thus lies in how he simultaneously arouses and repulses his viewer – in essence, how he eschews palatability by amalgamating cinematic contours of desire and the

² To the wealthy/healthy denizens of LA, the abject protagonist is, in a sense, invisible; the physical violence of *Otto* is thus replaced in *LA Zombie* with the violence of structural invisibility.

³ The term *becoming* is used by Deleuze and Guattari to refer to the process – rather than the state – of being. It thus denotes the continual movement in and between events, structures, assemblages, and is immediately immanent and emergent.

abject in scenes that are at the same time both highly sexual and also horrifically abject, and it is precisely this aspect of his work that necessitates closer scrutiny. By having his characters intentionally move between zones of pleasure and of abjection, in order to navigate (categories of) urban and national belonging, LaBruce not only shows repulsion and arousal both to be affective responses of desire, but also explores how each of these are dependent on categories of inclusion/exclusion and on the ways in which the body can be read as porous – crucially, whilst foregrounding the performativity of the abject.

2. (White) fear, but also hope

The amalgamation of desirous/pleasurable and abject forms of the male body, manifesting in quite extreme forms in LaBruce's films, should not be seen as a cultural anomaly; a number of filmmakers, series show-runners, authors, activists, and artists have considered the effects and affects of the abject body's proximity to desire and pleasure, and have had to develop a new (philosophical, conceptual, technical, and visual) lexicon with which to address both the foregrounding of this proximity and its effects on how we see ourselves in the greater (relational) whole – exemplified in this study by how gay men relate to national categories of filiation and belonging (i.e. citizenship)⁴. I am interested, specifically, in the ways whiteness modulates this textual intersection between the abject and desire – exemplified in this study by texts built

⁴ Within the Southern African actuality, this has added resonance in the play between queer and white: Take, for example, the deliciously postmodern tales of South African author Koos Prinsloo, which deals with the lived experienced of marginalised gay men during the State(s) of Emergency in late-1980s South Africa, and show a conflation between the various performative processes which a) create abject categories of male belonging and sexual subjecthood (or, rather, emphasise the becoming of subjects rather than the stable categories of identity); and b) constitutes the self-as-citizen, thereby positing pertinent questions – which have, thus far, not been answered – on the role of performative (abject) masculinity in becoming-citizen. One of Prinsloo's short stories, "PCP" (written between 1990 and 1992, and published in the collection *Slagplaas*, 1992), impacted to a large extent my view of the abject zombies of LaBruce's films as performative. The story simultaneously arouses and repulses: it presents a series of alternating narratives on the (quite explicit) sexual exploits of the protagonist/author persona; a (secular) wake held for the author by a number of his friends; and ruminations on violent historical atrocities committed in the name of national identity. Viewed through such a fractured set of (abject) lenses, a sense of fixed/stable (sexual, national, familial) identity is deferred, and the protagonist's life is instead made to resemble a series of performative 'rememberings'/becomings through roles 'played' for different people at different times (as lover, as friend, as citizen).

thematically (and structurally) around the ways white gay cis-gendered men relate to national categories of filiation and belonging (i.e. affective-dissonant citizenship⁵). Emblematic of this question and following along the same feral pathways as fellow white queer authors Koos Prinsloo and Johann de Lange, is the work of now-Australian author Eben Venter.

If the transition from Prinsloo to De Lange emblemises a queer take on the turn of the 20th century-almost-hopeful nature of South African actuality, Eben Venter's *Wolf, Wolf* (2013) – in fact, this author's whole oeuvre – reflects a different kind of peripheral-dissonant hopefulness: The Venter oeuvre deftly creates deceptively un-intricate-seeming landscapes of abject desire within a white relationality that, post-2000, quickly decided to take a dark turn towards the chthonian. (Even when taking into consideration the proto-chthonian undertones of the author's work in the 1980s, such as "Bang in Botswana", 1986.) This tendency is most notable in the novel *Ek stamel ek sterwe* (1996), a searing stream-of-consciousness narrative about a white male gay Afrikaner – in exodus, as so many of Venter's protagonists are – fatally decaying (corporeally, but also narratively) from the onslaught – meticulously documented – of a series of AIDS-related conditions, conflates the process of dying with the post-(im)migration of the protagonist. It furthermore sets up a metonymic relation between the national body and the physical body, in which both are shown to be porous and – as boundaries are shown to break down – prone to 'invasive' elements. Here are the first reverberations of concerns similarly

⁵ The (relative) lack of scholarly engagement with Prinsloo's work might be ascribed to the explicit manner in which he represents abject desire and pleasure – Scheepers (1998:341) states that his tales are "terrifying, and therefore fascinating" while Roos (1994) labels his work a terra incognita – but also to how he frottages against the contours of ethno- and national narratives. The sense of unknown-ness – a sense of the 'queerly other within our midst' – still haunts his work to this day; even though he has been canonised as one of the foremost Afrikaans authors of the late 1980s and early 90s, less than a handful short stories have been translated into English (though a Dutch translation of, for example, the collection *Slagplaas*, was published). Prinsloo passed away from AIDS-related illnesses on 06 March 1994, and there is some comforting symbolism to be found in a death that occurred one month before South Africa's first democratic elections. Prinsloo might not have been able to participate in the momentous – and traumatic – period of nation-building that followed the 1994 elections (a 'becoming-nation', if you will; a project that yielded one of the most inclusive and progressive constitutions in the world), but his fiction surely aided our understanding of what it means to be a South African, precisely by disrupting the 'clear-cut' notions of (white, hegemonic, heterosexual/heteronormative) citizenship frames prevalent during the 1980s.

manifesting in the work of LaBruce, with the fatal porousness of the textual body further exacerbated by truncating changes Venter and his translator, Luke Stubbs, made to the novel's 2007 English translation, published as *My Beautiful Death*.

Discourse around the translation of Venter's work – and indeed the affective difference between original and translation – reflects larger systemic questions not only on the dual inside-outside/national-ex-national position Venter occupies in the literary imagination (coupled to the field's steadily growing awareness that, after emigrating in the mid-1980s, Venter is now an *Australian* author, albeit one with an epi-intimacy to, and from, the Afrikaans literary-industrial system), but also show how these texts have been positioned both in terms of SA national and white ethno-national discourse post-2000, with aspects that appear pastoral-idiomatic in the original often attaining unreconstructed racial connotations in translation; this constituting a tenor shift that can't be explained by trite references to 'something lost in translation'. See, for example, G. Slovo's statements on the problematics of the racial apocalyptic tenor of Venter's retro-futuristic *Heart of Darkness* companion piece, *Trencherman*, and how such observations are absent in the near-universal acclaim of Afrikaans-language reviews of the source text, *Horrelpoot*.

While *Trencherman's* (but not, perhaps, *Horrelpoot's*) raciality is subsumed in the distancing nearness of the near-dystopic (even when an argument can be made that the novel is not dystopic per se, but merely the logical end of a slow-rolling, century-long ecocide), in *Wolf, Wolf* (2013) Venter situates another white-dystopic narrative squarely in the abject actualities of the South African *now*. In its de-extraction of one of the foundational tenets of the plaasroman genre, the narrative's apparent focus on a drawn-out transfer of white symbolic and cultural power, and financial agency, between generations (or, in the parlance of the novel's reception: 'from dying father/patriarch to gay son') partially obscures Venter's larger, intense thematic

consideration of a changing dispensation – a country whose whiteness is in *un-becoming* and to which the protagonist, a “lapsed South African” (H. Twidle, 2015), (seemingly) no longer belongs to/in⁶. Venter’s bleak outlook on citizenship has prompted C. Hope (2015) to call the novel a “stark study of arrested ethnicity” and “How should a man be?” has indeed become in reviews of Venter’s novel (as it has, to a large extent, in his oeuvre). This points to an exploration of four interwoven facets of masculine identity in present-day South Africa (being a son, a lover, a citizen, a raced being) which abjectly manifest in *Wolf, Wolf* in the protagonist’s relationship with the various male figures in his life, while abject ferality, smell as identity, and dog symbolism act as textual indicators that the characters find themselves in abject (sexual) spaces – situated outside (hetero)normative, homosocial, and national categories of belonging, while simultaneously being immanent to them. A clear line of argumentation arises here: How immanent abjection configures desire in belonging through queer experiences of the olfactory, whether related to decaying zombie bodies or dog-like anti-filial bodies or diseased bodies. Furthermore, these decaying bodies – abject *and* capable of desiring/inducing desire – speak to frames of inclusion and exclusion *intimately* experienced as personal, national, racial, sexual, and, I’d argue, textual (in the modulations actualised by LaBruce through a twinning of bodyhorror and porn, and in Venter’s penetrative renegotiations of the plaasroman genre).

3. On alloying

LaBruce himself states that his films are primarily concerned with “what it means to be human, to be a man, to desire” (2016). Such a view of discreet (identity) categories is, of course, challenged by queer theory’s destabilising of sexual and gender categorisation, by performativity’s conceptualisation of being/self, and by the Deleuze-Guattarian notion of

⁶ In this view, Venter’s decades-long consideration of what value, if any, the plaasroman as lived modality has, culminates in the loss of affiliation to the genre.

becoming. In the same way, conventional analytical approaches that focus exclusively on either desire or the abject appear inadequate for comprehending the productive capacities (i.e. in the Deleuzian sense of what the text does, instead of what it means) behind scenes of desiring, lusting and fornicating zombies for the reason that the abject subject is traditionally seen as not 'capable' of desire (within normative frameworks), nor is the abject scene capable of inducing desire. This study sets out to follow queer lines of enquiry to arrive at a model of desire that could offer scope for incorporating the abject – understanding the abject as immanent to desire – thereby allowing for a more holistic reading⁷ of these films.

The methodology I apply to a literary (fiction, long-prose) texts on South African identity (set in and around Cape Town, by an Australian author) through an abject-desire proximity lens first developed in another medium (film) and on two filmic texts from a different milieu (post-unification Berlin; contemporary Los Angeles) by a Canadian auteur-director, is typical of the 'alloying' tactic employed by Deleuze and Guattari. In their foreword to *Deleuze Reframed*, D. Sutton and D. Martin-Jones stipulate different epistemological 'tactics' employed by Deleuze in his quest to understand popular culture (especially film). One of these is "to ask a question that will give rise to new concepts in an alloying with the creative product" (2008: xiii).

Approaching *Wolf, Wolf* (and, conversely, the LaBruce queerzombie films) in this manner – and thereby prod and temporarily loosen at the literary-historical and receptional and readerly baggage that it has acquired over the years – might afford a productive take on Venter's text⁸,

⁷ The tenor of scholarly work on LaBruce's films has changed somewhat. When at first analyses that rely solely on his films as abject texts tended to negate the fundamental role that pleasure and desire (amongst the characters in the film, but also arousal generated on the part of the audience) plays, more recent work posit as inherent that the films intertwine arousal and repulsion – desire and the abject – in such a way that analyses based exclusively on either of these two are bound to fail to some extent.

⁸ On situating this study within the NWU research unit: Languages and literature in the South African context: Research on Afrikaans texts (especially those texts not translated into other languages) might be supplemented by an analysis which 'alloys' said texts with others (also, cross-media) from outside the Afrikaans literary system. In addition, this might address lacunae in current research on Venter; To my knowledge, no novel-film comparative analysis of a Venter text has been completed on postgraduate level, although A. Nel (2014) has published a

and might also allow the opportunity to a) avoid the either-or bind (either analysing aspects related to desire, or the abject aspects in their work) and b) focus anew on changing/shifting/becoming categories of belonging.

Even if, at first glance, the use of LaBruce as lens through which to view/read Venter is disconcerting, of note in his films is particularly the introduction of the abject into scenes of pleasure-belonging and how these surface notions of relational being, textuality, national frames of belonging, and performativity. Thus, LaBruce's films (in the methodological spirit of alloying) may act as a key to understanding how being – also in Venter – is continuously performed (so, too, as I'd argue, textually and in terms of 'genre') and how categories of belonging are constantly negotiated: Characters take on – and discard – abject performative 'identities' in order to navigate categories of belonging. Hence becoming (even toward unbelonging, or unbecoming) and movement, rather than identity and fixity, become primary. In LaBruce's films this happens primarily on the level of the individual; in *Wolf, Wolf*'s white-queer engagement with the changing socio-cultural milieu of South Africa, (sexual, relational, national, raced, textual) being is shown, instead, to be performed on larger scales of relevance.

In the intense olfactory orbit, we find resonances between LaBruce's films and *Wolf, Wolf*, that is, between the materiality of the abject/desirable-desiring zombies on film and the novel's urgent layering of a register of male smell, both nestled within frameworks of belonging. Instead of comparing these, I instead opt for seeking an alloying, which finds comfort in, and beyond,

comparative take on Venter and visual texts of D. Victor, in *Moments of transition: Diane Victor's Disasters of Peace etches and Eben Venter and S.J. Naudé's narrative texts*. Furthermore, my willful attempt to position Venter as unbelonging to mere nationalist(ic) frames may potentially lead to a larger exploration of the author's work.

merely “favour[ing] episodic interventions, unorthodox combinations of theory and problematic, varied points of focus and lines of approach” (Hook, 2014:9)⁹.

A guiding principle establishing flow¹⁰ in this alloying is a) the manner in which the abject and desire are twinned in the text, and b) how this situates it within frameworks of national belonging. Both these 'texts' manifest what F. Beckman, with regard to the role of pleasure and desire in creating a sense of self, in *Between Pleasure and Desire: A Deleuzian Theory of Sexuality* (2013) calls the exploration of “not so much the relevance of pleasure on an individual and personal level, but rather [its] political, cultural and conceptual significance” (2013:vi). Thus, in both LaBruce and Venter, desire is conceptualised as immanently political *and* social *and* irredeemably tied to the abject.

⁹ I've intentionally shied away from including Afrikaans (and South African) theoretical writing on desire and desire-pleasure, and this will be a limitation of the current study. However, as any work arises out of the environment that it reflects, that nurtures it, the limitations of this study speak to – but (as they are my own to own) is not excused by – related limitations in my socius. Put another way: Afrikaans and South African theory on desire often feels, to me, systemically, too self-referential – a closed loop almost – with circuitry, tonalities, textures outside my haptic grasp. Which is why I opted to approach *Wolf*, *Wolf* not as canonised Afrikaans text, but as translated text (both between Afrikaans and English, and made to be alloyed toward LaBruce) with an 'indringendheid' in its outward orientation – opening up aspects of the South African Afrikaner white socius toward the world outside. (Alas, I am not making grand claims here about the Afrikaans literary circuitry, or the South African literary system, or about New Queer Cinema, or about the dystopic, etc. – I am simply figuring out, textually, for myself, how abject-desire affects my own sense of being a South African academic.)

¹⁰ I base my use of the 'flow' code near-identical to how D. Smith (2011:37, worth quoting in full) outlines it: "In an interview, Deleuze and Guattari explain that the concept of the flow was 'a notion that we [initially] needed as an unqualified and undetermined notion [notion *quelconque*]' (Guattari 1995: 98), that is, as a purely nominal concept. Indeed, intuitively, one can conceive of extraordinarily varied types of flow, and the ways they need to be controlled or coded. Most obviously, there is the flow of water, and the building of dams and dikes to control and channel the water (in the Western USA today, the question of the rights to a limited water supply is becoming increasingly acute). There are economic flows such as money and capital, along with the control of markets. There are material flows of raw matter and utilities such as oil and electricity, along with the control of the grid, to keep the electricity flowing. There is the flow of commodities, along with their marketing and transport. There is the flow of traffic, along with the regulation of the highways and circulation (avoiding traffic jams), the mastery and control of speed. There are social flows such as flows of populations, the flow of immigrants and foreigners over borders, along with the ability to control and monitor those borders (issuing passports, customs, and so on). There are flows of sewage and refuse, and the question of what to do with them. There are somatic flows such as urine, blood, sperm, sweat, feces, milk, menstrual blood, and so on, with their various codings. (This is the example with which *Anti-Oedipus* opens: a breast emits a flow of milk, which is cut into by a baby's mouth, which becomes a flow of feces, cut off by the anus, and so on. Such is the lived experience of the infant, which has no sense of its organic body, but only of intensities such as hunger, or the need to defecate, and the flows and cutting of flows that satiate those needs.) One can even think of flows of thought, and the attempt to code and control the flow of thought via marketing, advertising, the media, and so on (such as the flow of scientific knowledge, as well as a flow of stupidity and opinion)."

In contradistinction to this guiding principle – at least at first glance – is the use of LaBruce as lens through which to read *Wolf, Wolf* (as opposed to the usual comparative methodology).

However, when LaBruce is viewed in light of methodology, this contradiction falls away:

Significant in LaBruce is particularly the introduction of the abject into scenes of (sexual) pleasure and desire and how these surface notions of relational being and performativity.

LaBruce's films (in the methodological spirit of alloying) act as a key to understanding how being is continuously performed and how categories of belonging are constantly negotiated: His characters take on – and discard – abject performative 'identities' in order to navigate categories of belonging. Hence, becoming and movement, rather than identity and fixity, become primary.

In LaBruce's films this happens primarily on the level of the individual. In Venter's white-queer engagement with the changing socio-cultural milieu of South Africa, (sexual, relational, national, raced, textual) being is shown to be performed on a larger scale of relevance. Published at pivotal moments in the history of the country, texts like *Ek stamel ek sterwe*, *Horrelpoot*, and *Wolf, Wolf* can thus be said to mirror the becoming-minor of white queer South Africa(ns), in the same way that LaBruce's zombies become-minor.¹¹

¹¹ There's thus also a North-South aspect to (my use of) alloying: This scholar is also a spectator, and I am an avid fan of LaBruce's no-rule-barred cinematic universing. Partly through this distinction, I see particular differences between abject-desire as a methodological frame, unilaterally projected onto the queerzombie texts, and abject-desire as employed to riff on/modulate/tease out affective stock through a more bilateral, equitable, and above all participatory, relation between spectatorial/identifying(/scholarly) viewer and text. Based on conclusions drawn from both frames of abject-desire above, the second parts of the study then moves on to *Wolf, Wolf* to see if abject desire (and, perhaps, not entirely, 'abject-desire') as a participatory textual engagement strategy can be applied to (this) fiction as well. [However, simply going from visual to written text feels inherently like imposing ontological framing, which is why I opted for an alloying instead.] Alloying allows for ways to get out of the decolonial dilemma, i.e. how to not-impose (ideological) frameworks of understanding from one context to another. Even when my intuitive positing of theoretical-structural bridging (between the North-South textualities gap) feels tenuous, with Northern-based theoretical-textual assumptions surfaced and their application on texts from the global South lapping at arbitrary categories. And stil... I am, after all, still watching and engaging with – and analysing these texts – as a South African, in a South African socius, within a Southern African framework of belonging.

4. Messy, corporeal, fragrant becoming, or: A series of questions arise

But, doggedly, through these LaBruce and Venter' texts' interplay between (sexual) connection and (social) exclusion, notions of the abject are coupled with desire and pleasure. This intentional abject-desire proximity problematises a reading of being as fixed and stable and suggests, rather, that (textual) selves are products of different becomings, thus necessitating an exploration of the role of the abject in desire. The proximity between pleasure and exclusion has implications for how the physical body (and its corporeal boundaries) is seen as constituting a singular 'self'. As Gail Weiss (1999:44) states, it is only through creating corporeal boundaries between 'me' and 'not-me' that an idiosyncratic entity is created, partly through recognising the "fragility of the self". The fragile boundaries of the corporeal manifest in notions of the desiring/sexualised body's distressing 'openness' to the world (Viljoen, 2014). As our bodies are loci of both our physical being and of our social identity (Hook, 2006), the abjectly desirous body's grotesque – and visual – difference and porous openness elicit repulsion in the reader/viewer, as it seems to remind us of the fragile and fleeting control we exert over our own bodies-in-desire.

However, a series of complications/questions arise here. First, if the self is seen as continuously in a state of becoming, how do we reconcile this fact with the (abject) fear of fragile boundaries? To answer this, I draw on selected elements of the philosophy of Deleuze and Guattari to show how the notion of becoming destabilises the primacy previously afforded to identity and representation. I then incorporate notions of the abject into models of desire/pleasure that facilitate a becoming-other/becoming-minor, showing that the abject is immanent to desire. Second, LaBruce's films foreground the fact that the abject-as-performance leads to a becoming-other and the same is implied in the *Wolf, Wolf*. But how does this foregrounding affect how the reader conceptualises the performative nature of being and of belonging to a

group? How does 'queer' and 'white' come into tension? Third, how has this tension (between queerness and whiteness) affected the critical incorporation and scholarly enfolding of the Venter text under discussion? Finally, if a performative understanding of being-as-becoming affects an audience's understanding (on thematic level, but also on the level of scholarly reception) of larger categories of belonging, to what extent can such a reception-based approach be situated within critical discourses on becoming and the construction of categories of belonging? (And, as a coda-of-sorts: what happens, sparks, arises and lingers in the space between becoming and belonging?)

Read *through* (not: alongside) LaBruce's films, *Wolf, Wolf* offers points of civil resonance that does not merely mirror changing South African actualities, but offers reflections on white fear and posits a correlate – though not oppositional – qualified kind of hopeful futurity¹², specifically as these affective vectors relate to performative modes of civil dispensation. They are further seen as problematic in the way they position the abjectly desiring body within frameworks of national identity: In other words, the white queerly abject male body's desiring/desirous/pleasurable behaviour is foregrounded in a defaulted manner in the texts in order to comment on ways of being, belonging, and citizenship while, significantly, also leading to a becoming-other. In this way, the cultural-temporal space between LaBruce and Venter charts a socio-cultural change in South Africa (as in LaBruce's filmic Berlin and Los Angeles) – a country itself in the process of becoming more equitable (specifically towards recognising constitutionally-enshrined rights of sexual and other minorities) whilst also experiencing severe economic and infrastructural decay – twin (and twinned) fears in the white psyche. I will explore how this becoming-other can be read as a becoming-minor, which here does not refer to minoritarian identity (which itself is still fixed or static), but to deterritorialisations or bifurcations

¹² For how hope can be seen as imminent to white fear (and thus not as oppositional), see section 2.10.

which occur and act as catalyst to disrupt normative conceptions and ways of national being, thus altering the landscape of white-queer possibility (i.e., the possibilities – and limitations – of white queerness in South Africa).

While the abject is often considered, current scholarship on queer white fiction in SA tend to shy away explicitly commenting on the way these texts' use of the abject ties problematically to abject-sexualised raced aspects. However, by taking LaBruce's films as a lens/key, in the manner of Deleuzian 'alloying', we can approach *Wolf, Wolf* in a different way: The abject-desire proximity in the texts challenges us to see the self not as a stable, fixed, power-based/power-subjected identity, but as in the process of messy, corporeal, fragrant becoming.

Through LaBruce, we begin to see the abject selves presented in *Wolf, Wolf* not as static, but instead as constituting a "threshold, a door, a becoming between multiplicities, an effect of a dance between power and desire" (Tamboukou, 2008:361). In this way, the thematic development from *Otto* to *LAZombie* (from individual becoming to national unbelonging) also echoes the civil resonances of the thematic development/use of the abject in *Wolf, Wolf* (and, by extension, in the Venter oeuvre – though unpacking and exploring precise ways in which the novel acts metonymically for the oeuvre lies outside the scope of this study).

On first read, Venter's oeuvre seems to be anchored to the starkly articulated acknowledgment (repeatedly, in each novel) that his characters have to become other (becoming-animal, become the abject progeny, fragrantly become-precarious) in order to continue being seen as citizens of a (to their mind) contested country: a stark (self-)assessment of whiteness in the post-1994/2000 social imaginary. But, a wider view is possible: In the movement between individual becoming and national belonging, *Wolf, Wolf* (as seen through the films of LaBruce) echoes Deleuze and Guattari's view that society is not "defined by its contradictions [...but rather] by its

lines of flight [...] There is always something that flows or flees, that escapes the binary organisations, the resonance apparatus and the overcoding machine; things that are attributed to a 'change in values', the youth, women, the mad, etc." (1987:216). By paying close attention to these line(s) of flight (in the form of deterritorialisations, bifurcations or qualitative changes in the olfactory lattice of the novel's smellscape, more sense of the whole as assemblage is possible; i.e. by analysing how civil resonances in the novel are conceptualised, framed and received through the lens of olfactory desire-object, we come closer to articulating flows in the narrative nature of becoming-South African that move beyond the filial strictures of official narratives of nation-building that have coalesced since 2000.

5. Sectionality

The second and third sections of this study, which takes the place of a traditional theoretical chapter, explores how the object can be said to be immanent to desire. In *Text-body-author as an assemblage of sexual reflexive selves, roped together, opened up to the public: A literature review*, I present what would typically be relevant parts of a literature review, and, in *How we become viewers of queer film: Notes on object-desire identification in Bruce LaBruce's zombie porn*, these parts are enfolded into a recursive analysis of the LaBruce films. Through a movement from one to the other, I posit that, in order to better understand the desiring undead of LaBruce's filmic worlds, notions of the object – which J. Dollimore, in their landmark study on sexual dissidence and differential perversion, claims to already "bear the imprint of desire" (1991:247) – need to be incorporated alongside pleasure into existing theoretical models of desire, specifically models that see desire as facilitating a becoming-other, becoming-minor, in order for sexual pleasure and sexual abjection to be regarded as sources for constructing a becoming-other/ becoming-minor in LaBruce's films. The notion of becoming already destabilises the primacy previously afforded to identity, and desire is seen as productive in the

Deleuzian framework rather than as a product of the unconscious. As such, desire is actualised through real practice, thus accounting for both pleasure and the abject. I propose a synthesis, abject-desire proximity, as a clear amalgamation of two distinct affective responses: abjection and desire (or, the ‘push-pull’ of affective response). Like Dollimore, I argue for the abject to be viewed as immanent to desire, in the same way that pleasure is, and this section serves as an exploration of the effects and affects this intertwined assemblage has on the characters, themes, and audience of the two films.

While these two sections co-develop abject-pleasure proximity, and its relation to national-affective assemblages, the subsequent section – *Anew/askew, assembled: An alloying* – takes a more creative/dysconventional form, as it deploys the notion of abject desire in an alloyed discussion of LaBruce and *Wolf, Wolf* that (even when it at one point – in its insistence on *showing* what an alloyed assemblage can be – explodes outward into a multitude of flowform, formative figures and texts from my own popcontextualised white-queer historiography) centres on an aspect clearly within a performative, queerer sense of interconnectedness: the olfactory.

Not only have categories of gender and sexuality been shown within a queer paradigm to be naturalized as opposed to natural, normative as opposed to normal, but so, too, have our conceptualisation of art, film, and fiction began to change to focus on its (textual) performativity and relational nature. M. Bal (2006:397) rightly states that “[a]s it happens, contemporary – postmodern – conceptions of art are also more invested in art’s relational potential, its performativity, than in its iconography” – echoing Deleuze and Guattari’s insistence on re-orienting towards what texts do, as opposed to what they mean. If we truly inhabit the world primarily through our embodied interactions (Johnson, 1999:81) with others, and can view categories of desire as essentially historically contingent (Weeks, 1986) and ‘bound up’ in

institutional and discursive practice (Foucault, 1975, 1976), then desire has to be seen as (at least in part) socially – *and textually* – constructed.

S. Jackson and S. Scott (2010) build on the work of G.H. Mead in making a case for the sociality of sexuality. Their model of social interconnectedness/interactionism states that the “self, and the reflexivity that makes selfhood possible, are anchored in sociality” (Ray, 2010:x-xi), with the self seen not as fixed, but as always in process of becoming; indeed, the self is created “by virtue of its constant reflexivity, in dialogue between self as subject and as object” (ibid.). Herein I see an openness to the public, when self becomes text, not in-being until ‘read’. Even more explicitly, this sense of interconnectedness is concerned with the sexual experience of a socially situated subject living in modern civilisation/late modernity, where the “disorder of social life [...] creates the chaos of inner life” (Simon, 1996:44, quoted in Jackson & Scott, 2010:16). It is precisely this angle, of the (sexual) disassociation of the subject due to the inconsistencies and incongruence of modern life (and, I contend, modern texts), which makes their model applicable here.

While the zombies of LaBruce’s films mindlessly desire after flesh and fornication, to attend to a lack that has become constitutive of their whole identity, Otto is stuck in an intrapsychic dialogue between self as subject and self as (abject) object. He is temporarily unable to locate himself in relation to others. Smell is the only way in which he ‘connects’ with others, but this – in the eyes/nostrils of the olfactory-typical – makes him *even more* abject and marginalised, making him seek out non-populated, urban-abject and feral places. Significantly, this movement-to compounds in him a feral status. Haunted by his past, he cannot escape the fixating spectre of (national and filial) belonging lost, of the abandonment of a lover and the rejection of his parents. I’m struck, again, on writing this, how much this alloys with my (yes, subjective) reading of *Wolf, Wolf*. As such, in the first section on the novel – *On queerly reading canid tropes in*

Eben Venter's Wolf, Wolf – I consider how various and varied categories of belonging (filial, intimate, national) are impacted through loss (particularly of white symbolic power, but also of spatiality) and interwoven through facets of masculinist 'identity' (being a son, a lover, a citizen) – reflected in the protagonist's (who is, in an echo of LaBruce's performativity, respectively Matt, Mattie, Mattheüs, Matthew¹³) orientation towards the various male figures in his life: Matt's father, dying of cancer and slowly losing his ability to interact with the outside world; Jack, his intermittent lover, who loses his home and employment – and who acquiesces to Matt's requests to stay unshowered before coitus; and his employee, Emile, a Congolese refugee trying to make a living during particularly xenophobic times. Matt tries to navigate this messy, lived corporeality while finding himself drawn into a steadily worsening cyber escapism. To boot, the experience of multiple loss(es) of ability, power, relationality, employment and citizenship around him leads Matt to consider alternative ways of navigating these 'in-between' spaces of belonging. Matt's affective response to canid-related symbolism – an erotised wolfhound mask worn by Jack (who then transforms into an anomalous but playful persona, nicknamed 'Wolfie'¹⁴), and a rather fierce homeless dog called Diamond that act as canine companion to or avatar for Emile – are read as indicators that the protagonist finds himself situated aside (and between) heteronormative and national categories, culminating in an episode of experimental ferality.

¹³ Cf. the splintered naming endemic to many Afrikaner families. See, for example, D. Botha in "Dis nou ek, Daniel Stephanus Botha (Danie, Daan, Danny, Daantjie, Dana, weermagterm: Liefeling)." I, myself, have been WJ, Wemar, Weems, Weempie, Wimpy, Wessel, Wesley, Mr Wes, Manie, gay Wemar, and, hereafter, PhDaddy. But there's more to mine, in mine: I'm Wessel Johannes (with 'Wemar' an anim-amalgamation of paternal grandparents Wessel and Marie). But my dad is also Wessel Johannes (Buks). And so is my grandfather (Oupa Wessel), as well as my dad's brother and his son. It is, indeed, a bonding ritual amongst temporary/returned expat-Afrikaners of a certain generation to bristle-remind at how we had to keep on explaining – for the entire first year, at least – to new Scottish/Rwandese/Thai flat mates why our given names did not appear in our passports, while they could only smile, bemused, at our embattled reluctance to accept and solidify a *single* name. Of my sisters, Le-Nika (as is, in passport) had it easier than Zané (Maria Elizabeth) or Zhandi (Adriana Josina Maria). I chuckle. She wrote on this for *Stilet* (Van Zyl, 2019). My uncle, blessed with the elongated-masculine 'JG' became, in an echo of Heleen's husband in *Horrelpoot*, simply Jay. I'm not sure what Zeilinga became, during his time in France.

¹⁴ There's a doubled anomalous here, as there's also a Wolfie at play in the structural intimacy of this study. I'm indebted to J. Cohn, whose *Who's Afraid of the Big Bad Wolves?: Coming to Terms with Deleuze* (2019), helped craft an ease in such scholarly wolfing.

Section 5 details Venter's intentional blurring of boundaries, especially within homoerotic and homosocial bonds between dog/wolf and man, between citizen and immigrant, between messy, carnal (corpo)reality and immaterial but still olfactorily-inflected memoryscape, queers the relationships presented in the narrative, with the characters continuously finding themselves in-between spaces/states of belonging. I utilise Deleuze's "The Body, the Meat and the Spirit: Becoming-Animal" (1981) to read-for indeterminate zones – or the in-between spaces created by experiences of loss or flux in general. Deleuze sees such shadows of excess echo in the intense affective states represented in Bacon's work: shame as a dog; desire as a wolf-like creature, baring its fangs. However, Deleuze warns against seeing a "formal correspondence" (ibid.) in this relation, and instead emphasises how "a zone of the indiscernible, of the undecidable between man and animal" is created (ibid.). Queer spectres of psychic excess, notably desire and shame, become external manifestations of inner states that are given shape not in the canid figures themselves, but rather in the zones of interaction which is enabled through a becoming-animal that can be traced throughout Venter's novel.

These zones of the indiscernible, I argue, can be used to comment on how categories of belonging are blurred – or, perhaps more accurately, traversed (but, *crucially, without conceptualising these as 'boundary' or 'border crossings'*) – in the novel: Such traversing happens through an inverse usage of canid figures (both the trope of the dog and the wolf), while scent is shown to be both identity marker (or rather: compositional element of being) and that which blurs identities, emphasising how Venter's use of olfactory intimacy sets up a (white, queer) olfactory imaginaire as onto-aesthetic Body-without-organs. By surfacing the zone(s) (multiple, possibly, but of which only a handful fall within the scope of this study) of the undecidable between human and non-human animal – and its civil resonance within olfactory interconnectedness – we get closer to Deleuze's shadows of indiscernibility; shadows of (repressed) shame, or even shameful desire, that escapes from the body; psychic excess

manifesting in a set of behaviours (a specific configuration of praxis) towards others (here, metonymically represented by Benjamin, Jack and Emile – the father, the lover, the raced-national other).

I attempt to read-for the way in which these shadows/zones manifest¹⁵ in the text, and thereafter lead into two sections in which I explore further zones of the indiscernible, specifically for how the abject and desire/pleasure is intertwined (and so tied intimately to the national) through the olfactory: In *The stench of the homosocial: The decaying body of the father as sign in Wolf, Wolf*, I look at how the dying body of the white patriarch, in fragrant and disorientating un-becoming, comes to stand for the traumatic ‘cutbacks’ of white symbolic power in a changing dispensation and, in *Wilting proteas & Jack's sweat: White belonging and olfactory embodiment in Eben Venter's Wolf, Wolf*, how the smells of the lover points towards possible new way of being-in-the-world (especially in a productively civic being-South African).

By placing these two read-fors alongside each other, and alongside scholarship on *Wolf, Wolf* (Buxbaum, 2017; Van Schalkwyk, 2017, on *Wolf, Wolf*, but also 2009, 2013 and 2011 on Venter; Nel, 2015), which positions Venter as a migrant-author charting the limits of belonging, I'd like to, here, explore how he can also be read as an author of un-belonging. But, crucially, unbelonging as a *process*, continuous and contested – not unbelonging as an arrestation, or static end-state of being.

¹⁵ In, for example, passages such as: “from behind the back of his chair, looms something misshapen with shoulders and arms attached to the shoulders, a massive thing: it's the incarnation of his vacillation in the presence of Benjamin Duiker” [page 13-14], or “en van agter, van agter die rug van sy stoel, verrys iets wanskapigs met skouers en arms aan die skouers, 'n massale ding: dis die vergestaltung van sy mentaliteit van huiwering in die teenwoordigheid van Benjamin Duiker” (bl.14).

6. Toward an olfactory male intimacy

Previously, I wrote that the protagonist's being is not only “reflected, refracted, in the body of his father, the body of his lover, the body of the other” (Strydom, 2018:108-109), but that the “process of being South African [is] a process where being (what I am) and self (who I am) are performed in relation to larger, national assemblages of belonging, themselves in constant flux” (ibid.). I am, now, progressively starting to see the popular and critical reception of Venter's oeuvre (of which I take *Wolf, Wolf* to be both culmination and punctum) as a compulsively repeating tracing-over of a moment of arrestation in this flux. (Quite where the moment is located – pre-94; post-2000; post-2006 – I'm not yet sure.) In this way, I see distance between my own read-for Venter, and the two other PhD-level studies (Joubert, 2017; Le Roux, 2019) completed thus far on Venter, who conceptualise him as migrant on a quest to belong(ing). This (still fractal, for now) view of the oeuvre colours how I read *Wolf, Wolf*, and how the protagonist's relation to citizenship – national-masculine belonging, specifically – is so impacted by related sets of schema of the past, that it is disallowed to actualise by the arrestation in the decaying body/stench of the father-in-the-now (instead of through the more belonging-centred olfactory memories of the mother, or even in the more erotic father-of-the-past schema). I will consider this arrestation in the first piece that follows, which looks at how the olfactory can be read as sign that indicates belonging (but not unbelonging, yet). The aim of the first section here is to think about Venter's use of the olfactory in *Wolf, Wolf* – specifically through the decaying body of the father – and to think about it as a material-affective sign in order to conceptualise belonging (only thereafter, non-belonging). In particular, I aim to link belongings (the plural hereafter indicates the assemblaged schema belonging-unbelonging- nonbelonging; belonging itself is never one thing, never static, always in need of renegotiation) to the protagonist's olfactory schema of his father (and, to a much lesser extent – in this specific novel – of the mother).

For a more granular-material read of Venter this is important, especially when seen through the lens of a becoming-wolf: In *Anti-Oedipus*, Deleuze and Guattari show how mechanisms of state (capitalism) and *socius*¹⁶ (psychoanalysis and the signifier) arrest desire and pleasure. [In other words, their argument is that the multiplicity of desire that exists in the world is homogenised to become a single (not singular) desire – capitalist desire. In thinking about wolves and propagation, the idea is to find 'minor' modes of desire that proliferate multiplicity again.] But, also, to look for correlate signs that un-proliferate: every vector of belonging also proliferates un-belonging and non-belonging¹⁷ – and therefore it becomes unproductive to think of belonging as singular.

In my 2018 read of *Wolf, Wolf*, desire [also the desire of the nascent academic] is arrested primarily by the progenitory propulsion (which is so often a driver of Venter's narratives), now seen in compounded fashion as acting *alongside* the olfactory desire-repulsion of the decaying body of the father figure. In a similar way, then, the figure of the wolf/Wolfie can be read to act as embodied desire-repulsion sign. In the second piece on olfactory intimacy, I therefore consider how the figure of the wolf(ie) allows desire (to a minor extent) to escape the constraints of capitalist arrestation – primarily, I argue, through smell (and not visibility, as is often foregrounded in scholarship on Venter). The relation with the lover, Jack – as intimate, temporary belonging – is further disallowed to proliferate into desire by the mirroring-arrestation with the embodied sign of the immigrant worker, Emil. (I consider the olfactory – specifically the protagonist's two differing reactions to Jack's and Emil's sweat – being the code to read-for

¹⁶ I use 'socius' throughout this study in its Deleuzian mode, i.e. not referring to society but, instead to an enplaced, "particular social instance" in which the temporal-social fabric around a node of being "presents itself as a socius or full body upon which all kinds of flows flow and are interrupted, and the social investment of desire is this basic operation of the break-flow" (Deleuze, 1983:42).

¹⁷ In short sections on homonormativity, the homosocial, hetero(happiness), and the homonational, I explore how these vectors of belonging proliferate and unproliferate within national frames – crucially, as *textualities*.

here.) In the second section on the olfactory I consider how this can be *read* differently, i.e. how the olfactory is a sign for potentially belonging-beyond the Afrikaner-white-past-ethno schema of the father.

These two sections differ structurally from the queer canids section (and from each other), in that the first focuses quite narrowly on one facet (the decaying body) of one figure (the father), in order to explore how the olfactory can be seen as a marker of belonging, while the second is less narrowly focused, more associative, and include a number of personal interjections. This is intentional, not only in how it traces the narrative structure of the novel itself but also how it points to the surface of the textual, where research(er) and novel snuffel at each other – an ethico-intentional uitsnuffel with an ethical imperative front and centre.

6.1. Or towards a plural ‘belonging’

Indeed, the second section ends by noting an ethical imperative in reading-for signs of olfactory belongings. I base my understanding of such an imperative on how A.P. Colombat, in *Deleuze and Signs* (2000) speak to the coimbrication of scholarly enplacement and methodology (in a set of quotes I return to, mantra-like, often and frequently): “The task of any researcher is not merely to find answers but to invent and define his or her problem and his or her problematic. Regarding signs, this implies that we are or become sensitive to certain linguistic or non-linguistic signs depending on our receptivity, on the arrangements and haecceities we become part of. One way we define an individual is through the characterisation of the signs [here: smells - WS] to which this individual re-sponds.” (2000:19)

In this way, my own being-in-the-world resonates with the scents and smells of the Venter oeuvre: *father, lover, deodorant, immigrant, past, homosocial, wood polish and wax, Ingrams camphor cream, sweat, trainers, Brut, wilting proteas, seep, fynbos gin, Jik, Omo, rooibostee, bloekombos, plaaspad-afdraai na Rietkuil en Groendraai en Erfdeel, sheepshearing season, the smell of optimistic friskiness on a cold morning, Ricoffy, dried cum on a verekombers, rosyntjies in water vomited up after a pushed-myself-too-hard jog, Buffelsfontein brannas en coke, Oros, Protex and Venter and I combine in molecular multiplicity.*

The assemblaged readerly engagement facilitates a consideration of being-South-African beyond the merely-Afrikaner, akin to how E. Holland, in *Nomad citizenship*, sees an Onward-faced “human life-form [...] launch[es] forth on the thread of a tune to self-organise in a multitude of different ways” (2013:94). As readers, we riff on the affective engagements – or, rather, our bodies’ affective response(s) – to the text, both as document of the arrest in the filial and as text that opens up readerly potentiality toward civil alliance: *I first read Venter when I was 19 – a coming of age occurring not even a half-decade after our country’s emergence out of a near-stifling, suffocating form of coloniality; a stench which lingers, insidiously but ever-here, into the Now.*

In a previous article (Strydom, 2018), I ask whether the doubled state of being suggested by the novel’s title offers two sides of being: subversive against normative. However, I’d like to qualify that: This should not be seen as an oppositional duality, or a binarism – in the same way that belonging should not ever be singular, or even merely ‘doubled’ – but instead as a continuum engaging with larger groupings¹⁸. We are indeed subversive *to*, and normative *from*, and to de-emphasise the oppositional (in order to bring belonging into the plural) is not to negate that

¹⁸ Especially because, within the renewed contexts in which white-queer moves, subversive is not necessarily an act of power-to.

these subject positionings are ways to position ourselves in relation to others. Rather, moving through the notion of doubled being toward an understanding of belonging as plural, moves us to find new ways of articulating our orientation to power. We look North, South. (Even when we irk at how these terms have come to signify.)

In my view of ferality¹⁹, I posit that forever positioning ourselves as marginal groupings to power negates the fact that power is multifold, and that belonging itself is not static; and we therefore need to more urgently differentiate between (though not to simplify into binary) power-to and power-over. This is where part of the value of this study lies: in considering one such way of positioning ourselves in relation to others that attempts to traverse categorical oppositionality: the olfactory.

6.2. Or, at the *very least*, a queering of a textuality

In order to show how we can read texts of queerness-in-service-of-whiteness in a more productive way, reading instead *for* its oppositionality, it would be productive to explore the olfactory as a sign (a material-affective sign, in the Deleuzian sense) that grounds the characters (and by extension, the reader) in the material, while also moving beyond it *via the affective* to the pack (in order to pack/plug into the oeuvre; to pack/plug into reader-Venter-novel). To turn back to Colombat, on what the critic/scholar/reader – faced with such a stench – *does*: “One task of the critic will be to unfold linguistic signs to reach this intensive level of non-linguistic signs, of ‘traits of expression’, of the expression and of the expressed” (Colombat,

¹⁹ In this study ferality operates on both thematic and methodological plane: as to the former, I follow N. Garside’s work in *Celebrating the invasive: The hidden pleasures and political promise of the unwanted* (2016); for the latter I look toward the wild scavenger queerness of J. Halberstam (primarily in *Female Masculinity*, 1998, but also elsewhere), as well as to E. Oinas’ *Wayward academia – Wild, Connected, and Solitary Diffractions in Everyday Praxis* (2021).

2000:25); i.e., to trace how olfactory signs fold into contours of affect²⁰ to make the novel, and, perhaps, one day, even the oeuvre thrum to the intensities with which at least one reader – this reader – enfolds with it.

This is important to *do* – near-essential in the lived actuality of the Now – and in terms of how it adds to the ways *Wolf, Wolf* (and Venter) can be read-for citizenship, belongings, civic relationality. In the study's final two parts, *A longer concluding part, with footnotes and personal interjections, that cubilicates into further/future research*, and *Addenda*, I emulate, *textually*, how the preceding sections progressively consider how Venter's novel fits into the tradition of the textual imaginaire by surfacing (and coding, and position in relation-to) signs and codes (in this study: olfactory intimacy between men).

At the end of any study, there must be a proliferation of questions, or at the very least more questions than answers.²¹ In the first part of the conclusion, I build on parts 2.2, 2.3, and 2.7 from the literature review, to ask questions around the queering of one's *own* discourses of the erotic, as well as how access to these discourses can be seen as a resource that activates frames of belonging (in part as the result of – but not directly referencing – how the section on wilting proteas and Jack's smell opened up indiscernible zones of possible molecular multiplicity, into which flowed my own onto-smell-memories). The second part of the conclusion, along with the parts of the addenda, sees the indiscernible zones of the study itself bubble up textually in a proliferation of footnotes, and I ponder where this (into 'queering' the plaasroman;

²⁰ After M.L. Johnson (primarily in *Embodied Reason*, 1999, but also elsewhere) and D.N. Stern's *Vitality contours* (1985), within an understanding of textual immersion as a plugging into of bodies-as-connections-of-affects (in Beckman's view of desiring machines, 2013:139), I see contours of affect as the ways in which affective investment in a text modulates, shivers and contracts over time.

²¹ During the finalisation of this manuscript, I marvel at the clairvoyant naivety of this sentence, written somewhere/sometime in 2019. I also wonder how much the title of Section 1 gives away, and, of course, how often (or, rather, how much) we use language, cleverly, to paper over trauma. And, also, how humour – mostly off-hand, but barbed at times – is used/useful.

in cubilication; in feral citizenship) may possibly lead Onward from the Now; as well as, of course, what the possible limitations to such onwarding would be/were.

Why won't the academic textuality be able to mimic how olfactory relation in the novel (through the alloying lens of LaBruce's contrarian zombies) signal new ways of desire-citizenry – *through the text* – to tie in with new and more inclusive and relational conceptualisations of citizenship that moves askew to queer-whiteness? Why won't the interplay between Venter's interrogating of 'Afrikaner-ness' and how critical reception of his work re-narrows identity lead the budding scholar to consider their own olfactory entering-into-relation with the ethno-national (through the novel's olfactory ambit of body, desire, the abject, spatiality, filial structures, pleasure praxis, addiction)? Why won't films about a plague, and a novel about anosmia, chafe in an era (I write these words in 2021, during my country's third Covid-19 peak) where a loss of smell indicates the entry into the body of a pathogen, a virality, a *difference*? Why won't the text itself (*this* one, the one in your hand or on your screen) become feral, become-different, so as to actualise or construct something akin to the interplay between belonging and becoming? Why not a *meaningful* wolfie, for a change?

7. Reading notes, around textuality

1.7.1 On scholarly translation (titles; terms) for granularity

In this study's sections on *Wolf, Wolf*, I quote from the English version of the novel [indicated in square brackets; p.], and include relevant passages from the Afrikaans version (indicated in round brackets; bl.) where productive (with a brief gloss where needed). This means that I refrain from offering my own translations (at times presented in scholarship on Venter, as, seemingly, a necessary encumbrance) of a text *readily available in translation*. (Afrikaans and

English versions of the novel were published simultaneously – which is also why I refrain from using the phrase ‘the Afrikaans original’.) However, this comes with the caveat that two different texts – or, rather, a bifurcated text with three sets (Afrikaans, English, and bilingual) of readerships²² – is at play here, with the attendant activation of bilingual scholarly set bias²³. While I follow conventional practice of translating Afrikaans titles (of scholarly work) for functional, pragmatic reasons (to potentially open up code flow between the granularity of these titles and non-Afrikaans speaking readers), I conversely don't translate my own (Afrikaans or Dutch or Thai) affective interjections into the text, or those Afrikaner-Afrikaans affective terms that don't *quite* translate into English. Neither do I mark these through italisation or within quotation marks (but do attempt to offer productive, contextual, intra- or sentence-adjacent pointers as to their ~~meaning~~ what they *do* in the text.) I don't see a contradiction in such a doubled approach, and instead see productive ways in which these openings and closings of flow interact. At the same time I am open to feedback if, instead of creating a fragrantly scholarly-subjective idiolect, the use of hyper-specific Afrikanerism (such as versions of the words ‘uitsnuffel’, ‘jakkals’, ‘vos’), Afrikaans-modeled linguistic and syntactic structuring or codependent codeswitched phrases instead over-centre whiteness/Afrikanerskap and thereby create a readerly distance too far²⁴.

It feels important, too, in a study written in English but on an Afrikaans-language application text, to surface such suturing lines on text-language-civic frame, especially as the two versions

²² Cf. Viljoen – in a review (2006) of *Body Bereft* – on how reading two versions of a text, in two languages, affectively situates the (bilingual) reader in a contested civic frame.

²³ Because of the unevenness of the translation, some quotes that sear in Afrikaans do not in English.

²⁴ This serves as an example of how flow between the granularity of the text and a reader's civic frames can be surfaced: For a generation of scholars who came of literary age in the ‘Model C’ national curriculum of the 90s – itself a set of textual modulations on ‘togetherness’, interculturality, and institutional belonging – there's still a subversive tenor that trails off the page in such gratuitous code-switching; but, it may also be that it doesn't translate – or won't date – well, or is too idiosyncratic in its civic framing.

of *Wolf, Wolf* occupy an almost-fulcrum point²⁵ in reception of the Venter oeuvre. Unlocking certain (language-based) code sets and framings of belonging in the novel is thus crucial in en- placing the oeuvre within an international frame of reception, especially as *Wolf, Wolf* is one of only four Venter long-prose works translated into English (to date), and thereby constitutes a disproportionate part of the author's current international stature. A stature which, because Venter's newest text (to be published in the months after this study was completed) was written in English (Venter, 2021) – and therefore will be the first of his novels of which the Afrikaans version is the translation – seems progressively more outwardly attuned.

1.7.2 On readerly lupification, or: Reading like wolves (Towards a conclusion)

As much as the protagonist of Venter's novel cannot escape the fixating spectres of national and filial belonging, so too is Venter oftentimes made to be read-for filiality; I track some of these filial lines (through biography, nationality, genre, and – almost – meat-eating) and their implications for my own reading of *Wolf, Wolf*, in part 2.10.

In an attempt to circumvent this, I posit aspects of my reading of the novel as a type of readerly lupification, a literary 'denning' around a Deleuze-Guattarian *wolfing*. Deleuze and Guattari's work is replete with references to wolves (in similar – and different – ways to which the Venter oeuvre is packed with canids) and, by their own admission, is underlain by an intense curiosity as to its very "modes of expansion, propagation, occupation, contagion, peopling. [...] The wolf is not fundamentally a characteristic or a certain number of characteristics; it is a wolfing" (1980:239). 'To wolf' becomes a verb, an action, a process, and their later exploration of packs

²⁵ Seeing *Wolf, Wolf* as punctum in an oeuvre which offers multiple potential points of immersion (Strydom, 2019), enables us to project more nuanced framings (backward) onto at-times problematic essentialism and unproductive caricatures in *Santa Gamka* (2009, untranslated) and *Brouhaha* (2010, untranslated); as well as addressing (forward) critique that frames *Groen soos die hemel daarbo* (2017; published in English as *Green as the sky is blue* in 2018) as unreconstructed neo-colonialist fantasia.

and multiplicity builds on the understanding of what the wolf comes to do, not (only) what it means (Holland, 2013:25). It also invites consideration of the extent to which humans resemble packs, like wolves, or herds, like cattle (ibid.).

Throughout the current study, I use the terms ‘dogs’ and ‘wolves’ as metonyms – or, perhaps more associatively, as sign cyphers²⁶ – for readerly-scholarly ways of plugging into the text, into the epitextual lattice around the text/oeuvre/author, or into the oeuvre. For me, there is a clear difference (even though slippage is, at times, productively addressed) between reading like a wolf (for the olfactory; in cubilication; ferally-into-pack) and reading like a dog (along the visual, filial, as a companion to the text); the same bifurcation informs my use of adjectives such as ‘dogged’ and ‘lupine’. And, in order to un-resemble the textual dogs that so often signal affective suture in Venter’s narratives from my view of dogs-as-markers-of-filial orientation, I refer to the former as ‘canids’²⁷. Related to this bifurcation, I surface (but do not conceptualise into cypher) a third way of relating to the assemblages in this study: a jackalling, which I base on a ‘losse groepering’ of Wolfie (the configuration of white-queerness in Venter’s novel that acts as entrant into the patriarchal intimate domicile), the affective hurl of *Ek stamel ek sterwe*’s “tweegatjakkals” (Venter, 1996), and a handful of other vosse and jakkalse in Venter’s oeuvre. Granted, while a grouping of such conceptual looseness evades being pinned down, it is still productive – perhaps, as a jackalling signals a prodding loose of fixed categories, even more so for its ephemerality.

²⁶ For a discussion of the larger question of how materiality is signified into meaning, and the role of icons and indexes (with specific *social* functions and effects), see N. Wallis (2013).

²⁷ As so much of this study cannot shake itself loose from the movement (continuous) or the effect (sweaty, like the middle third of a 10km Parkrun) between two quite ideologically muscular language sets (Afrikaner-Afrikaans and South African English), I find it productive that ‘canids’ translates, juicily, as *Lycaon pictus*/wildehonde/jagtershonde/jagterswolfhonde.

As I write in later sections, Venter's use of canid tropes opens up a Deleuzian zone of indeterminacy that allows different types of reading as ethical practice, allowing for the affective material through which to reconfigure a readerly being-in-the-world "associate[d] with kindness of heart" (in W. Schleidt and M.D. Shalter's phrasing (2003:59) of the wolf, canid, jackal). Such an assemblaged kindness comes close to counteracting the brutal intimacy (Venter, 2013:23) that filial readings of the novel (my own, Strydom, 2018, included) may surface.

Parts of this study traces²⁸ what such assemblaging does in/to the scholarly reading: For example, I see Wolfie not as a narrative figure, but as a modality Jack temporarily becomes, so to constitute a line of flight or bifurcation from the father (and the Afrikaner-patriarchal in general) and progenitorial duty. As "[b]ecoming produces nothing by filiation; all filiation is imaginary", write Deleuze and Guattari (1987:238), instead they emphasise alliance: "Finally, becoming is not an evolution, at least not an evolution by descent and filiation [...] Becoming is always of a different order than filiation. It concerns alliance." (1987: 238). Accordingly, through the Wolfie entrant (read alongside how *vosse* and *jakkalse* deploy and signal elsewhere in the Venter oeuvre) assemblage, duty is shown to be imaginary, even when its codification is so normalised in Afrikaner culture²⁹. On the other hand, alliance – such as temporarily between Matt and Jack – allow for some forms of becoming, particularly through Jack's becoming-wolf-Wolfie entrant. But this holds true for the reader too. And for reading strategies. And for how we

²⁸ I base my conceptualisation of 'tracing' (at times, I also refer to this as *snuffel/uitsnuffel*) on the methodology, presented by A. Mitchell in *Tracing Wolves. Materiality, Effect, and Difference* (2018), to construct a civic-State animal-human lens that becomes an ethicality.

²⁹ Or, rather: when its codification is so normalised in the type of Afrikaans culture *presented in the novel*; a specific variant of affluent, patriarchal-capitalist Afrikaans/Afrikaner culture, very specifically geo-located, which is often left unprodded in reception of Venter's work.

interact with the stickiness that is genre³⁰ or with the/our field-system³¹. And for how we look at the surface of the (academic) text. The novel's passages on cubilication and experimental ferality allows for a moving away from an anthropocentric view, to consider other ways of conceptualising more integrated ways of belonging. I take the 'form' of lupification (first encountered in Schleidt and Shalter's work) into the notion of a readerly strategy that reads-for oppositionality; as an erotic wolfing, that carries such potential to recode our conceptualisations of intimacy with the text, as it reroutes affect into more productive (as opposed to merely reproductive) ways of being-in-the-world: "In order to escape the psychoanalytical, familial delimitation of desire, Deleuze and Guattari also theorise a *different conceptualisation of bodies that rests less on organisation by species or genus and more on the connection of affects* – the plugging together of desiring machines. While there is a direct link between social production and sexuality, the very point of rethinking what desire and bodies can do is to reroute desire away from the reproduction of sexuality in its existing familial structures towards its more productive connections." (Beckman, 2013:139, my emphasis)

³⁰ In *The Materiality of Remembering: Freud's Wolf Man and the Biological Dimensions of Memory* (2010), T. Kwon speaks to how the textuality and temporal subject-place-ness of fiction and academic style overlaps, and how both "call to attention how science and literature are dynamically synthesised, and the manner in which the mode of remembering functions in the study's dialectic" (2010:213).

This correlates with two notions surfaced later in the current study: Firstly, P. van Schalkwyk's drawing of attention to how Afrikaans scholarly writing on literature resembles the literary stylistics – though, one would assume, then also (or not?) its fictive potentiality; secondly, how memory, academic affect, and textuality combine in the nostalgia of writing on the genre of the plaasroman. (As memory, and especially the biological flows of memory, memory-making, recalling, and remembering, are centralised in several Venter texts, there would be value in a fuller study on the materiality of remembering.)

³¹ In addition, I was influenced by J. Koch and P. Zajas' "tracing of reflections" (2011) in *Uit de donkere dagen van voor linguistic turn oftewel wat J. M. Coetzee in de bekentenis van Willem Termeeer zag en wat hij daarmee deed*, as well as how they (in the same article) see traces of duality (verlies and verwerving; schade and inbezitname) that offered much-needed nuance in the theorization of the plaasroman, circa 2011:

de Zuid-Afrikaanse beheptheid met het land – men denke alleen aan het in de plaatselijke literaire traditie bijna endemische gebruik van het woord *land / country* in de romans van vele Zuid-Afrikaanse auteurs. Met de hantering van dit woord – al dan niet kwalificatief, maar altijd afgaand op gevoelens – refereert ook Coetzee naar de betrokkenheid van de Zuid-Afrikaners bij hun land, opgevat in de letterlijke betekenis van grond als ook als een groter en abstracter geheel. De beste vertolking daarvan is de *plaasroman*, respectievelijk *farm novel* – het subgenre van de roman waar de problematiek van verlies en verwerving, schade en inbezitname centraal staat, de boerderij en het land idyllische proporties aannamen en het Afrikaans/Afrikaner pastoraal ideaal zijn neerslag vond (2011:93).

Lupine readings for oppositionality thus attempts to read-for shadows of indiscernibility, but the process is changed in a way by coming into contact with queerness: now we read-for to excavate queer traces under the normative-queer (or white-queer) intensities of Venter's oeuvre. We do not seek to procreate with the text, but to fuck with (into) it.

Interlude: “Concerning the disease of lycanthropy”

Chapter 23: Concerning the disease of lycanthropy, in which men believe themselves to be turned into wolves

They therefore go out of their houses, especially by night, imitating wolves or dogs in their every action. They are pale, and their eyes are sunken and dry. They see but dimly and have a dry tongue and a great thirst, while their mouths lack saliva, Their legs are so covered in sores that they cannot be healed – because of frequent injuries and dog bites. [...]

From: Johann Wier, *De praestigiis daemonum* (1563)

Section 2

Text-body-author as an assemblage of sexual reflexive selves, roped together, opened up to the public: A literature review

What is the truth of desire? Can it be defined, specified, theorized? (Catherine Belsey, 1994:42)

"disgust always bears the imprint of desire" (Stallybrass & White, 1986:191)

2.1 Introduction

Further back, perhaps, clues are offered to what is needed: Laura Mulvey's gentle-fierce reminder to find "a new language of desire" (1975:8) through which to address structural inequalities, specifically in popular narrative cinema. Forty-five years after Mulvey's essay, filmic scholarship on the body repeatedly looks anew (and, in this era of peak queer, askew) at the (social, cultural, onto-) matrices of power inherent to the act of engaging with visual texts. While popular culture has stratified as much as it has diversified – after all, "not everyone occupies the same Now" (Bloch, 1991:97, quoted in Dean, 2008:75) – some have been finding new ways of looking at, and new languages through which to articulate, emerging forms of desire, intimacy and pleasure. For example, Suzanne Ashworth's re-reading of Edgar Allan Poe as in search of the "cadaverous intimacies" (2016:565) denied to him in the social sphere he occupied, the movement to re-conceptualise the sexploitation films of the 1970s as body-affirmative (Jackson, 2017) or, even, patriotic (Olson, 2017), or Tim Dean's multi-text project (2008, 2009, 2010, 2011) to find meaning in and through barebacking (also filmic) communities. This approach of finding new ways of articulating the discourse(s) of the abjectly erotic to show how they

modulate frames of belonging to various groupings, including citizenship, is, however, coming into its own.

Desire and the erotic, as distinct from, though related to, pleasure, sex and sexuality, have occupied a space in public discourse – and *in* public – from the time of Aristotle to current discussions on Pokémon Go³². Certain subsets of contemporary cinema, specifically New Queer Cinema, and its subsequent queer-themed non-studio, pseudo-amateur-aligned filmmaking offshoots – as well as, to a lesser degree, both bespoke television series *and* bespoke sites such as thisvid.com – are progressively taking the lead on driving public discourse on desire by prodding at the Overton window of sexual economy and public discourse on desire-pleasure.

The contemporary popvisual landscape is subsequently filling up with what is seemingly progressive takes on desire articulation that are particularly tied to the renegotiation of (af)iliation, intimacy and belonging. Interestingly, such cultural-visual representations of new categories of belonging usually go hand-in-hand with the foregrounding of an abject version of the body as central to the narrative.

Net-based platforms such as MeWe, Swrl, and such, as the porno-equivalent of (atomistic) viewing platforms such as Netflix, Showmax, Hulu – as well as the rising popularity of porn studio subscriptions (such as Cockyboys, the studio Canadian filmmaker and director Bruce LaBruce is currently working with to offer a funded platform to expand his queerzombie universe) – act as echo-chambers of taste and identity and so narrows the already significantly subjective spectatorial viewing position. Instead of experiencing the filmic text as a member of

³² See, for example, the discussions on PokéDates and on the (humorous) similarities between Grindr and Pokémon Go in Henry (2016), or the smattering of titles modeled around Pokemon porn.

an audience, the viewer now more often than not constitutes an audience-of-one, with greater selective control over the text (he *paid* for) and consequently a lessened exposure to texts that (might possibly) offend or go against his highly subjectivised schema of belonging-desire. The popularity of these atomistic viewing platforms allows for niched zones of private erotic exploration that has taken the place of traditional porn, compounded by the banning of (vaguely defined) 'pornographic content' on two of the globe's largest and most democratic platforms – first Tumblr and now onlyfans.com (in 2021). In effect, creating a larger and more diffused – but paradoxically more precarious – assemblage of erotic citizenship³³.

I see LaBruce's queerzombie films, though their idiosyncratic foregrounding of not-porn as prefiguring the advent of atomistic viewing, as early harbingers of such viewing praxis. As one of the last generation of filmmakers to work on celluloid, LaBruce stands for a steadily passing time when film was/is still tactile, material, impermanent, and there's elements of a poetic elegiac to be mined in how the turn to digital (away from celluloid) came to signify a move from abstracted desire to concrete, messy pleasure. Instead of having to satisfy a common, homogenised audience, atomistic viewing platforms are able to fund, market and sustain idiosyncratic niche expressions of erotic praxis (FraternityX, Treasure Island Media, Planta Rosa Features, justcapturedguys.com, and the tweaker-porn³⁴ of Slamrush Studios.). A very large number of these 'mini-genres' are constructed around a (usually singular) abject act: college rape scenarios, non-consensual group breeding, highly scripted (so to appear realistic) pozzing/stealthng eroticisation, etc. – many, if not most, finding erotic gold in the coalpits of social dehumanisation and tribal-urban conflict playing out on in violently-sexual ways on one

³³ An alternative view would be that erotic exploration (through curated visual media) has always been to an extent niche and curated, and even as availability, volume, and consumption has increased manifold, the contours of curation has not.

³⁴ In which homeless methamphetamine-zombified young men are lured into getting fucked and bred by everyone in the neighbourhood, then thrown back on the street.

male body. As such, situating these forms of abject actualisation(s) of pleasure – like LaBruce's lustful zombies – within existing frameworks of desire necessitates a nuanced re-reading of major models of desire.

The zombie has, moreover, been read as a barometer of capitalist anxiety (Dendel, 2007) and the concomitant dehumanising scenes may in fact be read as an acting out of socio-economic arrangements. (ibid.). In the following piece, I consider how queerzombies (as a cypher for larger trends towards focusing on abject themes in porn *and* society at large) speak to or challenge existing models of desire and pleasure, specifically with regard to three aspects: identity formation, corporeality, and the socius, which does not refer to society but, rather, to “a particular social instance” in which society “presents itself as a socius or full body upon which all kinds of flows flow and are interrupted, and the social investment of desire is this basic operation of the break-flow” (Deleuze 1971). Primarily, I show how our engagement with these zombies mirror a change in society itself which often goes together with a change in theory, from notions of desire based in a modality of lack (Aristotle, Freud, Lacan, Paglia) to concrete³⁵, socially situated understanding(s) of pleasure (Grosz, Beckman, and others following Deleuze), and then consider how we might begin to speak of the desire/pleasure of the self-marginalised abject-subject. To do so, I take into consideration that the models of desire dealing with immersive experiences (here: cinema, porn) are frequently (and as frequently *not*, for specific audiences) situated within an abjectifying mode, and, perhaps more importantly, within frameworks of immersion that rests on the push-pull of attraction-repulsion.

³⁵ In this specific phrasing I do not wish to imply that the writings of Aristotle, Freud, Lacan, Paglia, and others I quote in this section, as a *category* can be reduced to 'desire as abstract', but do wish to emphasise that, coalescing around Lacan, desire is made to be based in lack, which then in Freud is reduced to an all-consuming Oedipality.

As stated, LaBruce's idiosyncratic use of the bodyhorror/porn body genre(s) necessitates a conscious recoding of the abject alongside frameworks of desire/pleasure (in order to *do*: for more affirmative understandings of the abject; for underscoring the immanence of the abject to desire) and to that end, I explore here one such recoding, abject desire. By surfacing the inherent similarities between the desire and repulsion (as induced by the abject) of pleasurable bodies-in-marginalisation, I explore how desire/pleasure and the abject can *be made to correlate* within the three aspects highlighted above, thus showing the abject as immanent to desire. This, though true within the world of LaBruce's queerzombie universe (and perhaps true for the abject porn of FraternityX, Treasure Island Media, and the like) will also, crucially, be shown in subsequent components of this study to have applicability potential for re-seeing erotic citizenship in a wider selection of texts and experiences that echo LaBruce's surfacing of questions of abject sexual inclusion/exclusion(s) and feral-erotic citizenship, and which specifically speak to prevailing discourse on belonging within national frameworks.

In the second facet of this study, I move away from the diegetic hermeneutics of LaBruce's filmic world, to investigate such an abject desire model's impact on categories of belonging in my own life, via an exploration of a South African (written) text (*Wolf, Wolf*), by an Australian author (Eben Venter), that I have personal resonance with and that correlates with the way new languages of intimacy is articulated in LaBruce's films. This, in turn, allows for possibilities of re-reading Venter's text more broadly in terms of olfactory intimacy and feral citizenship, and thereby specifically tracking the changes implied by the movement out of loss of white symbolic power to temporary intimacy. The interludes and addenda make up the third facet of this study, where I apply a queer scavenged alloying method to place texts that relate to the theory (through which I, in roundabout way, apply abject desire as a lens through which to better understand my own experiential reading of LaBruce and *Wolf, Wolf*).

The different facets of this study, though on the surface disparate, gradually (component by component) move the abject-desire model out of an exclusive body genre (filmic) application to a model for personally engaging with aspects of inclusion/exclusion in the molecular multiplicity of me-Venter-novel-oeuvre. By recoding the ways in which we understand ways of belonging, activated by the participatory identification with the marginalised body's experience of relationality through (abject) pleasure, all texts in the three facets speak to a shift from the filial to alliance.

2.2 Bodies and pleasure: From desire as lack to messy, bodily pleasure to queer ecological embodiment

2.2.1 Bodies before: Desire as lack

Numerous, though not all, Western conceptualisations of desire [for millennia] was based on loss-of-part of the self, ultimately, figuring desire as simultaneously a visceral overtaking and an active measure of reaching beyond the self to make up for a lack of some sort. Aristotle has been read (by, for example, Nussbaum, 2006; Pearson, 2012) as proposing such an intricate structural understanding of desire (as a philosophical concept, but also as a way of *being/living* in relation to others): Desire, for Aristotle, is an act – or an active process – that is not (merely) passively experienced, but which places the emphasis on erotic agency, of reaching out and making the desired part of the subject's world/body (Pearson, 2012)³⁶ – part of their *lived*

³⁶ For Aristotle, desire is delineated into three 'species' of desire, *epithumia* (pleasure-based desire), *thumos* (retaliatory desire), and *boulêsis* (good-based desire) (Pearson, 2012). His description of desire foregrounds the "element of reaching out for something in the world, grasping after some object in order to take it to oneself. Both humans and other animals, in their rational and non-rational actions, have in common that they stretch forward, so to speak, towards pieces of the world which they then attain or appropriate" (Nussbaum, 2001:275-276, as quoted in Pearson, 2012:20).

corporeality, in the context of my analysis of LaBruce's films³⁷ and in the olfactory granularity of *Wolf, Wolf*.) Fitting with the Aristotelian model, desire (in LaBruce's universe and in the cubilication passages of Venter's novel) is seen as overpowering – capable of taking over the body and reducing it to a state of temporary involuntary-ness: desires “as being too strong for our nature; we pardon them as things capable of overpowering nature” (Aristotle, in Pearson, 2012:208). Within this framework, erotic agency, as a (violent) searching/reaching for the desire(d), thus leads to overpowering desires that incapacitate the body. Thus, the soul reduces personhood (as Aristotle and the early Western philosophers saw it) to its base form. The incapacitating power of desire is somewhat reconceptualised after Freud, to be seen as “essentially mobile” (Bennet & Royle, 2004:178), with the need to fix(ate) on different objects at different times, and continuously resists being satisfied (ibid.). This “mobility of desire” (ibid.:179), is an essential concept appropriated by/assimilated into queer theories, as it facilitates an understanding of how sexual categories (and, by extension, categories of desire) are fluid, are in constant states of flux. This view, too, is founded on the notion that there is something inherent to the “nature of desire that is incompatible with satisfaction” (Bennett & Royle, 2004:181), paradoxically leading to the identification of potentially subversive, but still reductively base, potential in desire:

For Freud, this endlessly deferred complete satisfaction is seen simply as an unavoidable, if rather poignant aspect of what it is to be human. [...] For Lacan, on the other hand, the nature of desire is at once more alien and more subversive. [...] Instead, people have become alienated before they even become people (or ‘subjects’ in

³⁷ However, violence (specifically sexual and gendered violence) seems to be part and parcel of such an understanding of erotic agency, where the object is taken to (for?) oneself. In the films, the undead first (violently and graphically) maim and dismember others, before fornicating with the corpse of their victims. They have the decency to wait until the corpses have reanimated, though, as that implies returned/reciprocal agency and the possibility of returned desire – even from a corpse!

psychoanalytic terms). The human subject is always already 'split' – divided within itself by the *scandalous* nature of desire. (ibid., emphasis added)

The 'scandalous' and 'fragmentary' potential of desire's mobility, its refusal to be pinned down and made static, in either sex or 'the erotic', is affect-neutral in as far as it can be as both positive and negative— in the words of Camille Paglia (1990:3), both "cursed and enchanted". Paglia brings into play the body and, echoing Freud/Lacan, in a more poetic/problematic manner, reminds us that while "sex is the point of contact between man and nature, where morality and good intentions fall to primitive urges [at the] uncanny crossroads of Hecate, where all things return in the night", the erotic is instead "a realm stalked by ghosts. It is the place beyond the pale, *both* cursed and enchanted" (ibid., emphasis added). LaBruce's zombies seem to exist in these in between spaces between the uncanny crossroads of sex and the realm beyond the pale, stalked by (spectral memories of) desire. They stand in the cadre of lack³⁸, aimlessly wandering the city *en route* toward the (temporarily) desired object, aiming to violently appropriate it.

Hence, desire, seen through the (Western) prism of Aristotle/Freud/Lacan/Paglia, is always postponed and immaterial ('a realm stalked by ghosts'), characterised by mobility, acts in a fragmentary manner on the ego of the subject, overcomes the corporeal in incapacitating ways, and invokes the dual signage of attraction *and* repulsion. But such traditional concepts of desire, as making up for a *lack*, only partly illuminate the desiring zombies ambling around LaBruce's world. More recent theoretical work on desire, however, move away from seeing desire "figured

³⁸ In her reading of Freud and Lacan on desire, Belsey observes that they see lack/loss as the primal base of desire: "Every object of adult desire stands in for an original object which is forever lost, and which it represents. Since each substitute, each representation, is always only that and no more, it can never fully be the object of unconscious desire. Loss returns as the impossibility of perfect satisfaction" (1994:51). This view of desire as lack, as negative, will be challenged by E. Grosz and Deleuze and Guattari as detailed in later sections.

as a consequence of lack [...] irreducible to need, in that it cannot be easily satisfied” (Jackson & Scott, 2010:150)³⁹. Instead, they state that the change in theory on desire effected by the Deleuze-Guattarian paradigm has recoded desire as “positive and associated with transformative production and experimentation” (Potts, 2004:18, quoted in Jackson & Scott 2010:150). This transformative and positive view of desire comes to the fore in the work of scholars such as Elizabeth Grosz, who recognises:

Erotic desire [as] a mode of surface contact with things and substances, with a world, that engenders and induces transformations, intensifications, *a becoming other*. Not simply a rise and fall, a waxing and waning, but movement, processes, transformation. This is what constitutes the appeal and power of desire, its capacity to shake up, rearrange, reorganize the body’s forms and substances, to make subject and body into something else, something other than what they are habitually [...] desire need not, indeed commonly does not, culminate in sexual intercourse but in production [...] the production of sensations never felt, alignments never thought, energies never tapped, regions never known. (1995:249-295, emphasis added)

Jackson and Scott (2010:150) see in Grosz’s statement above, which they explicitly characterise as a (re)conceptualisation of contemporary, existing modes of thought on desire, a challenge to “the conventional sexual order and therefore championing forms of desire that push at the boundaries of normativity” and, in fact, put into question normativity itself. The undead in LaBruce’s films are unable to “make subject and body into something else” (Grosz, 1995:295), as their desire is based on lack and can therefore not be satisfied: Their sexual behaviour is predatory/cannibalistic, trying to (re)make others in their own image, and furthermore aligned

³⁹ This last characteristic of desire, that it operates under both attraction and repulsion, the erotic and the abject, informs my analysis of abject desire as textual engagement strategy.

with socially outdated political modes of affiliation⁴⁰ and clichéd sloganism, thus making them doubly impotent. At the end of the film, the ‘revolution’ ends in an orgy, a spectacle that remains just that – a temporary (visual) spectacle without any lasting bearing on the world⁴¹.

This raises questions as to what exactly our identity-politics-based sloganeerism effect if it is divorced from actualised social change. If desire is simply, in the Aristotlean/Freudian/Paglian sense, a lack of, and pleasure is but a temporary stay of that lack, and intimacy is simply a temporary negation of lack, then how does desire and pleasure and intimacy change things?

2.2.2 Introducing the body to desire/pleasure: Clusters of biological processes & pleasure as embodied

Human beings are creatures of the flesh. (Johnson, 1999:81)

The physicality/corporeal workings of the erotic, of the body in states of desire or arousal, is somewhat negated in more traditional literary theory: Psychoanalysis, for example, can only get you as far as reasoning why “sexual desire does not conform to a biological instinct that drives human beings towards perpetuating the species” (Bristow, 1997:7)⁴², but is more reticent about

⁴⁰ This film is set in a time of “purple peril”, when a “wave of gay zombies have made everyone even more paranoid than usual about homosexuals”. It stars Fritz as a zombie insurgent leader (a “gay Che Guevara of the undead”, leader of “a macabre muhajireen”) who, after his zombie husband is slain by conformist brutes, plans an uprising against the living. This is done by “[l]uring homosexuals into dark alleys and fucking them into immortality” until he in time creates a “small army of gay zombies who recruit members by fucking, killing and partially devouring vigorous young men. Not necessarily in that order”. [All quotes from screenplay.]

⁴¹ But is the spectacle not the point here? If everything is decaying, including these zombie bodies, is the decadence not a kind of double sign? First, to the decadence of life, of capitalist societies, etc. But also in defiance thereof, and therefore a double’d anomolous. *A Zombie, Zombie*, in mirroring of Venter’s text’s title.

⁴² I offer the full quote here, as it includes a (perhaps useful, for the sections on Venter’s progeny) reference to a separation between the erotic and the biological drive(s) to reproduce: “In many respects, Lacan’s work completes one of the main tasks begun by Freud: to dissociate eroticism from biological mechanisms. Psychoanalysis was the first body of theory to produce a detailed account of why sexuality must be understood separately from reproduction. In one of the clearest guides to psychoanalytic thought, Jean Laplanche and Jean-Bertrand Pontalis examine why sexual desire does not conform to a biological instinct that drives human beings towards perpetuating the species” (Bristow, 1997:7).

our understanding of how sexual desire, amongst other desires, plays out in/on the (corporeal/physical) body. Belsey, again, clarifies this point succinctly:

Desire is the effect of the lost needs: loss returns and presents itself as desire. Desire is not *the same* as need: analytical experience certainly demonstrates ‘the paradoxical, deviant, erratic, eccentric, even scandalous character’ which distinguishes desire from anything that could possibly be *necessary*. The erotic capabilities of the human animal are way in excess of nature’s reproductive imperative. In any case, the needs in question were a matter of survival, not sex. What returns as desire is quite other than the repressed needs that are its cause. (1994:57-58)

Such a view is almost exclusively characterised by – and expressed in – the negative, loss, lack, a loss of self. More recent theory, however, sees desire as a bridging space/zone between thought and action, between the psychological and the physical, between Cartesian body and mind, specifically as

...a state that sits between cognitive states, such as perception and thought, on the one hand, and action, on the other. This seems to make desire significant not only with respect to our understanding of how cognitive states can be translated into action, but also with respect to the mind-body relation itself, since desire, apparently a mental state, appears capable of issuing in physical output, i.e. action. (Pearson, 2012:2)

Besides, new materialist accounts show that movements are never from one to the other, without being other to the one. There are always a number of flows, desires and processes within an assemblage for a given period of time, and these are always in flux.

Bristow (1997:135), in unpacking Elizabeth Grosz's seminal work (1990; 1994) on the body, shows how literary theory comes close to admitting that the body is but a (rather abject sounding) cluster of biological processes⁴³. It then steps back from the brink and re-emphasise the socio-culturality of the body by not simply taking it "for granted as the locus of a conscious subject" but instead "reconceptualising the relation between bodies and desires". This affords us the "opportunity to imagine corporeality anew" (ibid.)⁴⁴.

However, we also have to re-see the relation between the body of viewer and the body of text: A renewed understanding of granular-materiality as series of koppelvlakke/interstices between bodies (viewer-screen/viewer-film) reminds us that even the materiality of the *material* of film – celluloid – "is not a timeless absolute but a cluster of historically contingent materials that happens to be, for the time being at least, the best means for creating cinema" (Walley, 2003:26). In the phrasing of 'material means' I see echoes of a materiality that is not always perfect, sometimes ruffled, sometimes cheap-looking; and in 'cluster of biological processes' I hear flashes of materials and processes and chemical reactions constituting the material nature – celluloid – of the film.

But bodies are not simply passive receivers of social meaning and sensual stimuli. Our bodies themselves affect how we perceive reality and others within that reality, which goes beyond merely being the filter through which reality is received. The material contexts within which we

⁴³ What Camille Paglia would term a "flesh-envelope"; as when she describes consciousness as a "pitiful hostage of its flesh-envelope, whose surges, circuits, and secret murmurings it cannot stay or speed" (1990:7).

⁴⁴ To illustrate, he quotes Grosz in full: "Deleuze and Guattari's notion of the body as a discontinuous, nontotalized series of processes, organs, flows, energies, corporeal substances and incorporeal events, intensities, and durations may be of great relevance to those feminists attempting to reconceive bodies, especially women's bodies, outside of the binary polarizations imposed on the body by the mind/body, nature/culture, subject/object, and interior/exterior oppositions." (Grosz, 1994:193-4, quoted in Bristow, 1997:135) This conceptualisation of the body, as a "discontinuous, nontotalized series of processes, organs, flows, energies, corporeal substances and incorporeal events, intensities, and durations" (Grosz, 1994:193) will be further discussed in terms of the contours of affect that influence it.

find ourselves also affect our bodies and desires. Johnson (1999:81, emphasis added) unambiguously writes that it is “*through our embodied interaction* that we inhabit a world, and it is *through our bodies* that we are able to understand and act within this world”, and consequently he links (corporeal) embodiment not only to interaction and inhabitation, but also to modes of being and ‘understanding’ (and acting upon this understanding) of the reality. Paglia (1990:19) concurs when she writes that “[o]ur lives as physical beings give rise to basic metaphors of apprehension”. Johnson (1999:81) draws on this sentiment, but goes further in arguing that even

...our conceptualization and reasoning are grounded in our embodiment, that is, in our bodily orientations, manipulations, and movements as we act in our world. No matter how sophisticated our abstractions become, if they are to be meaningful to us, they must retain their intimate ties to our embodied modes of conceptualization and reasoning. In other words, we can only experience what our embodiment allows us to experience.

Johnson thereby emphasizes that our conceptual systems are not merely ‘from’ our bodies or linked to our bodies (in some abstract sense), but rather that all schemas of understanding and perception are not only “by means of our embodied, imaginative rationality” (Johnson, 1999:81) but more importantly, are also “grounded in patterns of bodily activity” (ibid.:85). Activity that intersects with flows of bacteria and microbes, with electrical currents and light from film, with the musty ink smell of cheaply printed books.

If this holds true, if both perception and reaction is “grounded in patterns of bodily activity” (ibid.), then this must apply to schematic acts/reactions of desire⁴⁵ (and repulsion) as well.

⁴⁵ Cf. the important role contours of affect play in the erotic-object continuum, specifically the “speed at which desire raises and lowers its intensities” (Bristow, 1997:139).

Johnson goes on to delineate the specific categories of being that impact on how our perception-reaction schemas and reason develop, arguing that “[w]e conceptualize and reason the ways we do *because of the kinds of bodies we have, the kinds of environments we inhabit, and the symbolic systems we inherit*”⁴⁶, which are themselves grounded in our embodiment” (ibid.:99-100, emphasis added).⁴⁷ In short: Our bodies are affected by both what is inside and outside – which necessitates a move away from mere embodiment to the new materialisms. (As is clear in *Otto*; or, *Up with dead people* and *LAZombie*.)

2.2.3 **Object desire on macro level: How the social body corresponds to genre (bodyhorror and porn; body genres)**

We can think back to Stern/Johnson’s model of contoured affect, discussed in the previous section. The model implies that we “conceptualize and reason the ways we do because of the kinds of bodies we have, the kinds of environments we inhabit, and the symbolic systems we inherit, which are themselves grounded in our embodiment (Johnson, 1999:99). Symbolic systems find their outflow in literature, art, film – all creative texts – and so shape our (perception of) reality: Our embodied patterns of understanding “determine the ways we can make sense of and reason about things” (ibid.). Through the use of metaphor and metonymy,

⁴⁶ Art, literature and film can be included in these inherited symbolic systems, and (with an eye on later implications for the textuality - and genre - in which Venter writes) we must be aware of the manner in which, for example, literary form has been shaped to uphold societal inequality. Bennet and Royle, 2004:180, highlight that “critics such as Joseph Allan Boone, for example, have shown how the very *form* of conventional nineteenth-century narrative is bound up with the Victorian social dynamics of courtship and marriage (Boone 1987). According to Boone, the traditional marriage plot “owes much of its idealizing appeal to its manipulation of form to evoke an illusion of order and resolution”: this ‘illusory’ sense of order, he suggests, itself ‘glosses over the contradictions, the inequalities, concealed in the institution of marriage.” (Boone, 1987:9) Though I will not return to this in a later analysis of genre and audience reception, it is instructive how genre and normative filial kinship structures overlap.

⁴⁷ The quote, in full: “is an ongoing, developing activity by which we understand things, and this activity emerges for organisms of the sort we are, organisms with certain constraints on perception, movement, and cognitive processing. We conceptualize and reason the ways we do *because of the kinds of bodies we have, the kinds of environments we inhabit, and the symbolic systems we inherit, which are themselves grounded in our embodiment*. There are all sorts of constraints on this constructive process – constraints set by our sensorimotor system, our cognitive processing capabilities, *our interests*, and aspects of our environments” (ibid.:99-100, emphasis added). A rather queer question arises here: If we see the world based on lived/learned schemas arising out of our specific corporality, do gay people perceive reality differently?

“we extend image schemas with their spatial logic to structure abstract concepts and inference. Our rationality is embodied in the sense that it is built on and grows out of these affect-rich image schemas” (ibid.). We thus bring affect-rich schemata – lived through the body – to our viewing of these films, and blend this with our expectations of the generic conventions (*i.e. the frame of reference built on how our bodies responded to this type of text in the past*) of the film. This impacts on the way we construe meaning in a film, illuminated by our continued, collective thinking on macro (extra-textual) aspects, such as the implication of genre, the role of the auteur in changing/effecting the spectator’s expectations, and the nature of the effect of pornography. But what exactly is it about the nature of queer film as subset of genre that allows such (re)codings of pleasure, desire, intimacy? What characteristic of the *filmic* (as opposed to the literary or cultural, or even audiovisual or cinematic) representations of the desiring/object body allows such bodies to be seen as a “means of challenging the explanatory limitations of social constructionist/discursive accounts of experience” (Hook, 2006:15) through the becoming-object of the filmic queer body? (And to what extent does genre or oeuvre play a role in this?)

Steven Shaviro starts his 2006 analytical opus on the cinematic body with a seemingly-throwaway reminder: “Film is a *vivid* medium, and it is important to talk about how it arouses corporeal reactions of desire and fear, pleasure and disgust, fascination and shame” (2006:viii). He names three pairs of affective-contoured responses (desire-fear, pleasure-disgust, fascination-shame; to which I will add desire-object) – all three pairs have the same dynamic at heart: an affective *pull and push*. It is our response to affective contours, as much as our expectation of generic conventions, that come to define the *texture* of a genre. Awareness of genre can be defined as that moment “when a noticeable unit of literary texts adhering to a similar literary convention becomes established” (Smit-Marais, 2012:11). Swanepoel, however, warns that “what constitutes this [...] is not standardised” (2016:42). Genre thus becomes that categorical coding which we as viewers *expect* of a text, according to a blend of established

conventions, contours of affect, and our own expectational schemata – as lived through the body.

LaBruce's films seem to resist an easy categorical placement in terms of genre. It is not (necessarily) pornographic, but it is definitely a film that sets out to arouse (physically). In the same vein, it is not (necessarily) a horror film, but it is definitely a film that aims to repulse. Not surprisingly, both these affective responses focus on the body. Because of the focus on a visceral response, we could typify LaBruce's films as films *within the body genre*, which then implies two things: Firstly, Christiansen (2011:312) states that in the body genre, "the film jerks at the spectator's emotions and intends to overpower the spectator, which is in essence the opposite of classical film identification's powerful spectator in control of the images". This potentially intensifies the fragmentary identification detailed previously. Secondly, it is exactly through *affect* that "the boundaries between spectator/reality and representation are collapsed moving [sic] beyond the division which representation itself implies" (ibid.:314). Representation implies that there exists a boundary between the viewer and the text, but this boundary is problematized in the body genre, because of the intense affective responses – in the case of LaBruce's queerzombie films, of attraction and repulsion – working in on the viewer's body.

2.3 Object (violent) viewing: Horrific porn/pornographic bodyhorror and object/otherness made visual

Ernst Van Alphen's axiom that "[d]eath, then, is not an event which comes after life; it is a situation which lurks within the experience of the body" (1992:96) comes to mind when encountering LaBruce's queerzombie universe. Through its foregrounding – and eroticisation – of undead zombies, its emphasis on the physical limits of the decaying (human) body, and prominence given to the socio-political mechanics of exclusion under capitalism, the film visually

manifests several facets of abjection – defined by G. Weiss (1999) as the process, whereby “[e]xpelling (parts of) myself to establish myself as a member of the Symbolic order, *I create corporeal boundaries* between myself and what is not myself, and, in doing so, actively constitute myself as an idiosyncratic entity” (1999:44). Corporeal boundaries are necessary, not only of/between the living and (un)dead on the screen, but also between the text and the viewer (and, by extension, between viewer and non-diegetic world/others).

But LaBruce’s visualisation of the porousness of boundaries – corporeal, genre-based (as example: one sentence on the Judasfuck), and this disturbance of boundaries – even between the Symbolic and the corporeal, the materiality of the film stock imagines new ways of articulating pleasure, partly by consciously playing with the idea of creating (and discarding/transgressing) corporeal boundaries. By casting a loving glance at the highly stylised/visualised abject, decaying men on screen, he seems to challenge the post-millennial, queer viewer to reconsider the humanity in these abject cinematic bodies. As such, his film echoes Nel’s assertion on the power of abject representation in recent film, where a “rupture of the boundary between the inside and the outside of the clean and orderly body evokes critical questions about real and symbolic identity, which implies a new comprehension of humanness/humanity” (2012:547).

In this section I analyse this ‘new comprehension of humanness/humanity’, along abject lines, by briefly touching on theoretical assumptions (notably Weiss [1999], Hook [2004], and Kristeva [1982]) which posits abjection as a process regulating identity on interlinked levels: identity formation, corporeality, social abjection – all here revolving around the visualisation of the abject body.

2.3.1 The abject/abjection as ambiguity

On the literal level, abjection is seen as “a process of expulsion, whereby that which has been designated as abject (this can include other people, food, vermin, body fluids, rodents and an infinite number of phenomena) is rejected” (Weiss, 1999:57). On a deeper level, Butler describes abjection as a psychological process through which that which is different, foreign and of threat to the integrity of the body is “cast off, away, or out and, hence, presupposes and produces a domain of agency from [that which] is differentiated” (1993:243). By expelling the foreign element, abjection thus assures, temporarily, that the integrity and cohesion of the body is safeguarded.

Since our bodily experience provides a blueprint for abstract understanding and social reasoning (Johnson, 1999) – body here understood, as Steven Bruhm makes clear in “Still Here: Choreography, Temporality, AIDS” in both the material sense as “corpse, corpus, corporeal” (2008:321) and in movement (here: film) as “moment, movement, motive” (ibid.:317) – but also, at the same time, as socially-situated (see D. Hook, 2004, 2006, for the abject body as social entity) – through the use of (literary and conceptual) tropes, abjection can be seen on the symbolic-material level (and socially-situated level) as referring to the attempt to preserve corporeal boundaries (of the physical body, of the ‘pure’ social state, of citizenship, of the canon, oeuvre, genre). It becomes clearer, then, that abjection is immanent *to different levels of* the process(es) of identity formation. Hook (2004) offers a nuanced and multi-level, intersectional view on how abjection impacts on socio-identity formation by defining abjection as “a forceful physical, psychical and symbolic response, an expulsive response on all of these levels, a violent attempt at restitution of an apparent affront to wholeness be it of the body, of identity, or of socio-symbolic structure” (2004:687). In Hook’s view, abjection is a visceral response, an involuntary ‘pushing back’ against discord, a violent attempt to move (back)

towards both physical wholeness and symbolic unity. Within this paradigm, which locates the process of abjection within a corporeal, violent (re)action (of, first and foremost, the body), a clear differentiation between abject and abjection is made, where

...abjection, then, as a verb, should be understood as an operation: the powerful *visceral* reaction to a given stimulus that is then denigrated, rejected, expelled. The abject, on the other hand, as a noun, should be understood as the apparent source of such reactions and affects, that abhorrent, uncontained and indefinable 'thing' which elicits avoidance, repulsion, sickness, disgust. (Hook, 2006:16, emphasis added)

We read-for, in granular-material manner, for that 'thing': Our feelings or visceral experience of avoidance, repulsion, and disgust at the abject other does not arise solely due to our understanding of the abject as 'not-me', but rather because of the challenge(s) that the 'not-me' poses to our conceptualisation of our identity as our own, as discreet and within our control. Indeed, according to Kristeva (1982), "[i]t is thus not lack of cleanliness or health that causes abjection but what disturbs identity, system, order. What does not respect borders, positions, rules" (1982:3). Kristeva's characterisation of the abject as dangerous and 'disturbing' (in the sense that it disturbs social norms and structuring) led her to emphasise the ambiguous nature of our relation to the abject:

We may call it a border; abjection is above all ambiguity. Because, while releasing a hold, it does not radically cut off the subject from what threatens it – on the contrary, abjection acknowledges it to be in perpetual danger. But also because abjection itself is a composite of judgement and affect, of condemnation and yearning, of signs and Drives. (Kristeva, 1982: 9-10)

To summarise, there are three ways in which relationality with the abject other affects the subject. First, the abject is that which elicits avoidance and disgust; second, it is that which does not respect borders (and thereby is perceived to be of threat to borders); and third, it is an ambiguity. In LaBruce's film, *LAZombie*, zombies (the abject state *per excellence*; both alive and dead at the same time, "undead" in the parlance of the film) hold all three of the above-stated characteristics. They elicit disgust in the viewer and in the conformist living (but, crucially, not to other zombie/undead characters in the narrative) because their bodies are shown to progressively disintegrate (i.e., not be 'whole'), and also from the perverse pleasure they still take in eroticising their own – and others' – decaying bodies. Whereas normally the abject is disavowed (by looking away, or by relegating the abject to designated places unseen), in the film its (visual) disavowal is made impossible by LaBruce's insistence on *showing* and (highly) eroticising these abject bodies, as well as forcing the viewer's participation/complicity in this act. In short, then, the abject is shown to be immanent to desire, part of the infrastructure of desire itself. There is no desire without its other – the abject, the border between *this* and *that*.

2.3.2 Visual repudiation of abject bodies

Camille Paglia (1990) explicitly links looking to power, and as such follows a line of thought from Foucault-Mulvey-Bergson onward. On the link between seeing and knowing, she (1990:5) writes that the "westerner [*sic*] knows by seeing. Perceptual relations are at the heart of our culture, and they have produced our titanic contributions to art. Walking in nature, we see, identify, name, *recognize*. This recognition is our apotropaion, that is, our warding off of fear". However, what we repress through our constant need to name, organise, know, is the chthonian, that which is

...of the earth – but earth's bowels, not its surface [...] the blind grinding of subterranean force, the long slow suck, the murk and ooze. It is the dehumanizing brutality of biology and geology, the Darwinian waste and bloodshed, the squalor and rot we must block from consciousness to retain our Apollonian integrity as persons. Western science and aesthetics are attempts to revise this horror into imaginatively palatable form. (ibid.:5-6)

Although Paglia does not explicitly use the term 'abject', it is clear from the above that she recognises an organising principle in human culture that powerfully strives to cover (in abjection terms, to 'repudiate') over that which threatens 'our' integrity (integrity of the body, but also of the social order and of the nation state). (Although I won't categorise the Afrikaner as 'westerner', I see particular correlates here with the emphasis on visuality (for identity) in Afrikaner-Afrikaans (pop) culture, and in the centering of visual paradigms in Afrikaans literary research. Both science and the arts (including film) are seen here as *attempts* to stay with the chaotic and the unknown (ensuring that it stays unknown) and these attempts are conventionally ordered through the visual mode. These visual imprints can be perceived as violent themselves, but the violence fractures the narrative, emphasising the role of the camera itself – its materiality – as well as the materiality of the film stock and, by extension, the process of making a film (filmmaking, we could say, was one of Paglia's attempts to keep contemporary culture simultaneously saved from and enveloped in the chthonian). By bringing abject relationality into (conventionally seen, visual) being, by making it be seen and asking the viewer to participate in determining the intimate relationality of the (un)dead characters, the film itself attempts to counter the chthonian unknown, the abject anonymity of the dead.

2.4 Making the materiality of the (abject) body visible, socially

In the previous section I explored how the abject/abjection works on a personal level and how the viscosity and materiality of violence comes to be constitutive of the relation-sphere of the text. But how do we account for different affective participation contours between viewers? In other words, how do spectators affectively respond to the pornographic aspects of the films and link it to their day-to-day social contexts? And how do we enfold desire within the structural (and visual) imprinting of violence?

Elizabeth Grosz writes extensively on the ways in which social demarcations, norms and rules are projected onto the body. In her view, the

...body becomes a text, a system of signs to be deciphered, read, and read into . . .

Bodies speak, without necessarily talking, because they become coded with and as signs. They speak social codes. They become intertextuated, narrativized; simultaneously, social codes, laws, norms, and ideals become incarnated.” (Grosz, 1995:34–35).

These incarnations are (partly) prescribed through the visual mode; we ‘see’ distinctions and characteristics ‘onto’ the bodies of others. Extensions of materiality discourse will mean that we ‘see’ abjection *onto* the film’s dehumanised folk, in the same way we sense (haptic; olfactory) relational belonging in the novel.

In an earlier work, Grosz writes on the abject and connects the visual-power mode to the body’s own growing awareness of social projections:

Abjection is the body's acknowledgement that the boundaries and limits imposed on it are really social projections – *effects of desire*, not nature. It testifies to the precarious grasp of the subject on its own identity, an assertion that the subject may slide into the impure chaos out of which it was formed. (1990:90, emphasis added)

In thinking about these films, we see how the internal reflection of the movement-image is refracted through LaBruce's use of violence, pornography and the abject so that the seemingly linear-chronologic (though nested) narrative (film) is disrupted by the intrusion of the – a contagion of – abject in time-images; on structural level, by the breaking (or rather the stretching?) of the skin the film. In turn, the viewer's contours of affect become engaged when watching, leading to a choice to either embrace the abject relationality at the core of the queerzombie universe, or reject it.

But whether or not there is acceptance or rejection, I argue that the abject is *immanent to* desire, always already a part of it. Furthermore, LaBruce forces the viewer to look, to partake in this abject desire – to themselves *become* abject desire. Filming techniques which hold the viewer/demands a look – unlike the choppy editing and quick point-of-view changes traditionally associated with the texture of films in the zombie genre (specifically post-*28 Days Later*).

2.5 Desire/pleasure and social abjection

Various scholars have shown how processes of social abjection are rooted in a displaced sense of desire. Jonathan Dollimore, for example, in his landmark 1991 study on sexual dissidence and differential perversion, [will add title] discusses (at length) Stallybrass and White's historical view on the role of displaced desire in (social) abjection, specifically commenting on the role of the (often white, mostly middle-class) bourgeois in social abjection:

the bourgeois subject continuously defined and re-defined itself through the exclusion of what it marked out as 'low' – as dirty, repulsive, noisy, contaminating. Yet that very act of exclusion was constitutive of its identity. The low was internalized under the sign of negation and disgust. [But...] *disgust always bears the imprint of desire*. These low domains, apparently expelled as "Other", return as the object of nostalgia, longing and fascination. (Stallybrass & White, 1986:191, quoted in Dollimore, 1991:247, original emphasis)

He elaborates:

Conversely, desire bears the imprint of disgust: even as the low other becomes an object of longing, it is simultaneously that on to which is displaced a self-disgust that inheres at the centre of bourgeois desire, and for that matter other forms of desire. The difference of the other becomes a displaced and intensified facet of the same, the object of desire and disgust. [...] what I am pointing to here is an additional structural interdependence of desire and disgust. (Dollimore, 1991:247)

In terms of a discussion of LaBruce's films, the idea of the bourgeois is replaced by the dissociative effects of late modernism and urban-inflected capitalism. Difference itself is now fetishised. Because difference itself has become an "object of desire and disgust", Dollimore identifies a structural interdependence wherein desire and repulsion (in his words, desire and "disgust") are mutually constitutive. Thus, as I am slowly building an argument for, the abject is immanent to desire in the same way that desire is immanent to the abject. In a social context, this takes many forms. For example, the eroticized other can also be that which is considered abject. Let me turn to an example that brings together the social exclusionary thematics of

LaBruce's universe, the queer sentiments underlying this study, and the personal (almost ethnographic) South African situated frame, to show how desire and repulsion are structurally/mutually dependent, as well as visually-socially marked/coded on the bodies of those excluded: The way in which the different HIV/AIDS crises were framed as oppositional to heteronormative bourgeois culture, and as such, partly came to constitute its very identity. (Only *certain* people get infected; only *certain* acts lead to infection.)

Erica Singer writes on the current post-AIDS-crisis⁴⁸ era as an era of marked (visual) difference: "Within the framework of a logic of sexual epidemic, images of erotic access and mobility shift registers from those associated with freedom, surplus, choice, recreation to those of anxiety, unregulated contact, and uncontrolled spread" (Singer, 1993:28). The HIV/AIDS epidemic can be seen as bodyhorror *per excellence*, but on a massive, global scale. (Pre-covid 19, gay men were already intimately aware of the affective realities of a global pandemic, stigma attached to serostatus, non-adherence (to medication; to 'safe' sex discourse) as cypher for anti-establishment oppositionality; the bodily navigation of mask/condom; not being able to physically hug those you love.) It is the body turning on itself, and it was originally framed as a direct result of desire. (*Perhaps the equivalent of bodyhorror porn?*) Representations (film, for example) of erotic access (*and* of erotic excess) have thus been irredeemably hued by our experience of sickness on a global scale, of bodyhorror writ large. (Which makes the surging popularity of bug chasing, stealthing, coerced pozzing narratives culturally remarkable.) This shift be made to correlate with Stallybrass and White's description of bourgeois identity formation through social abjection: HIV/AIDS had, during the 1990s, become the abject – but

⁴⁸ The affective periodisation implied in the term 'post-AIDS-crisis/crises' has been contested and nuanced by scholars since, most recently in Kagan's (2019) critical unpacking of the term 'post-crisis' and the extent to which it adequately addresses the period after the 'pharmaceutical threshold' (Pearl, 2013). (Though scholars from the global South have critiqued, in turn, the ethical applicability of universalising periodisation terminology in countries where, for example, access to PreP remains hampered by capital flows.) I see productive relays opening up between this debate and the question of how to adequately and ethically compartmentalise the development of Afrikaans literature.

constitutive – Other to heteronormative bourgeois South African society, a society still basking in the glow of a post-1994 national honeymoon. (*Perhaps all that abject energy had to be channeled somewhere, and race-based prejudicial exclusion was – for a while – not as socially acceptable as homophobic discourse.*) This process of abjection centered around *the visualisation of the bodies of people* caught up in the crisis. (Remember, dear reader, the visual codings of countless mid-90s *Huisgenoot* articles, showing half-dead, emaciated men; the fetishising of morally decayed, the almost-dead, *Philadelphia's* disease as a visual – and highly visible mark on the forehead of the main character.)

Grosz (1990:90, emphasis added) reminds us that the “limits imposed on [the body] are really social projections – *effects of desire* [or, we can posit, effects of variously assemblaged desires - WS], not nature. It testifies to the precarious grasp of the subject on its own identity, an assertion that the subject may slide into the impure chaos out of which it was formed”. This dynamic also works on a cultural/structural scale, and the era of successive HIV/AIDS crises carries specific implication for heteronormative cultural identity. Hook (2004:676, original emphasis) conceptualises exclusionary affect, like racism (and I to which I would add homophobia and fear of the sick and of being infected – fear of the zombie, so to speak), as “a cluster of phenomena that is as *psychical* as it is political in nature, *affective* as it is discursive, *subjective* as it is ideological”. Physical (i.e., of the corporeal body and material world) as much as it is political (i.e., of the social-situatedness of the body), the exclusion happens *through bodies to bodies*. Hook (ibid.:20) thus follows a line of thought from Butler on the socially-determined nature of the abject and asks us to recognise that, considering that the realm of the abject “circumscribe the domain of those who *do* qualify as full subjects, [...] [t]his poses considerable complications for the ego: the abject ‘thing’ cannot simply be subsumed into the dialectics of self-other, ego-object strategies of identification”. Instead of simply accepting the abject subject’s place in the (my) world, it has to be (vehemently) disavowed.

One concept that weaves through the thematics of social exclusion into the South African nation-building context, is Kristeva's (1982:03) notion of the (un)dead as a constant – and visual – reminder of the abject: "Corpses *show me* what I permanently thrust aside in order to live. These bodily fluids, this defilement [...] are what life withstands, hardly and with difficulty, on the part of death." The abject process needs to be disavowed, but the continual visual and physical presence of zombies does not allow for this disavowal to occur. By not allowing the viewer (*this* viewer, here) to negate or disavow the desiring (loving, lustful, lusty) existence of the decaying and copulating undead on the screen, LaBruce foregrounds the structural interdependence of the abject and desire and activates memories of the visualisation of HIV (or, more accurately, of AIDS) in South Africa during the 1990s. HIV is invisible; AIDS is jarringly made visible on the body. AIDS as visual material synecdoche of sickness breaks the identificationary relation between viewer and viewed; to break apart this coding-set – so deeply entrenched in Afrikaner culture that my mother refuses that her sons ever appear gaunt – we have to re-see, recode. Abjection can thus be understood in terms of the (conventionally seen, visual) economy/politics of exclusion and inclusion. As stated, although abjection is first and foremost a visceral reaction, it also relates to social discourse(s) of inclusion/exclusion – visually encoded (*Huisgenoot*, films, *vet en dus gesonde wange*) on the bodies of those deemed abject other. The consolidation of social boundaries through abjection is especially visible in the immediately post-2000 work of Hook (2004; 2006), in which he links motifs of what he terms 'traumatised corporeality', with abjection as a "mode of reactivity that has been routed through the dreads, aversions and nausea of the body" (2006:3). Social exclusion, then, becomes a way of defending against the *corporeal* boundary threat – and racialised in the smells of 'them', made to be concrete by the body's shudder at recalling the inbraak into the domicile, by the bodily discourse in 'the taking out of our mouths our lewensbrood'.

Though, within the act of exclusion lies the subversive potential to recognise our similarities, not only our differences – to ally, to alloy, to unnaturally affiliate, as I show in the section on alloying. Herbst (1999:115-116) states that, although abjection works by excluding that which is different, “[y]ou can exclude it, but you cannot erase it [...] prohibited things, abject things, have a certain revolutionary power, whether real or imagined, and as such they challenge the ordering formation”. In the context of this study, this is especially true – or, as we’ll see in the next section, perhaps depressingly untrue – of the undead figures of LaBruce’s films. The (cinematic) undead are representations of the spectatorial viewer’s own mortality – an end that connects all humans in a relational whole; C. Townsend aptly writes that “[w]e need to understand death as a fundamental condition of being, *and of culture*, by which we may have some relationship to others, no matter how alien. (2008:3, original emphasis)

2.6 Abject desire as a new type of spectator complicity: Look(ing) anew

It is not, however, only death that binds viewers into a relational whole, but also desire – and specifically (here) desire actualised in pleasure. Previous sections hinted at how a model of abject desire is not only applicable to the queerzombie films of LaBruce’s world, but also contains larger social applicability. Intentionally embracing abject status – ignoring for a moment the social privilege and symbolic power at play in the word ‘intentional’ (as opposed to what a word such as ‘voluntary’ would do in that sentence) – through (sexual) pleasure-practice/praxis allows for a more equitable identification with other(s), even with the (memory of the) suffering of the past, and leads to, perhaps, a more equitable sense of being-in-the-world.

Fully embracing the abject nature of one’s sexual being (which I define as ‘how one is interpellated, on civic level, in a specific historical era, because of the kinds of intensity-sets in our sexual/desire-pleasure praxis) allows the subject to take a position of relational inter-

connectedness with the abject other, which leads to a sense of becoming (a) more equitable being-in-the-world. This notion will be expounded in the latter part of this study, where I look at how abject desire/pleasure affects our navigation of categories of belonging, with specific reference to Eben Venter's novel, *Wolf, Wolf*. Suffice it to say that abject desire offers a new mode of engagement between spectator/reader/scholar and screen/novel/genre/oeuvre. Thus, by using abject desire as textual engagement – as LaBruce does in *LA Zombies* – he manages to do away with the supposed binary between identification and distance (desire and the abject; attraction and repulsion) to “heighten both of these responses simultaneously” (Shaviro, 2006:162) and, in so doing, dissolves the dualistic nature of abject vs. desired through the film's push-pull mechanisms.

Such an engagement, that partakes of “both involvement and alienation as particular subject positions or modes of implication” (Shaviro, 2006:162-163), stands in stark contrast to previous immersive theories and acts instead as a “new mode of complicity” (ibid.:163). The word 'complicity' resonates with me and with the thematics of the study, because of how it lies next to multiplicity, for the implication that readerly strategies (reads-for) have differing implications, and for what it actualises in its affective cross-over into white complicity. (If 'the nation' – in the sense I use it in this study, i.e., as ethno-Afrikanerskap projected onto a national frame – isn't a text of scavenged parts, or a feral magnum opus, then what is it?)

By not negating the alienating effect of the repulsive undead bodies on screen, LaBruce constitutes abject desire as a new way of positing a narrative *towards* an audience. He still works within the confines of genre, interweaving conventions of both porn and bodyhorror (and, like Venter, in large part this confining into genre is to affectively counter-balance the narrow thematic borders assigned – by its critical reception – to hedge around his oeuvre) but in order

to comment on *lived* corporeal reality, he turns his focus onto the body and what the visually abject body is able to convey within the constraints of these two body genres.

As stated, embodiment inside the filmic narrative (bodies on the screen) impacts on the aroused/repulsed body of the viewer (bodies in front of the screen), but this time through contours of affect. As viewer, I am still

compulsively, convulsively [brought] face to face with Otherness that I can neither incorporate nor expel. It stimulates and affects my own body, even as it abolishes the distances between my own and other bodies. Boundaries and outlines dissolve; representation gives way to a violently affective, more-than-immediate, and non-conceptualizable contact. (ibid.:259)

Note the concepts used to describe the effect of textual engagement on the viewer:

convulsively, abolishes, dissolve, violently affective, forces me, assimilate. These concepts all point toward a renegotiation of identity, but on an affective level. Thus, this violent affective response arises from the affective capacity within us, which the auteur/director/author/scholar manipulates through an understanding of our expectation of genre and how this correlates with our schematic experience of contours of affect. Yet there remains an element that is more than the sum of its parts – that which is in excess and ruptures our expectations and boundaries. For this, we need to be responsive to our complicity with the text and allow for a suspension of disbelief/disavowal of the overarching sense of mere representation.

2.7 Alloying, but queerly, playfully forced, scattered, body-reflexive, and, above all, tongue-in-cheeks

At the start of *Otto; or, Up with dead people* the viewer is confronted with a minutes-long, static, black-and-white, blocked shot. Unable to look away, is forcibly made to enter into an (at least temporary) affinity with the diegetic, regardless of how mundane it appears at first.

The scene: a scene takes place in a graveyard, where Otto arises out of the earth. The mise-en-scène is overly stylized, perhaps even grotesquely Baroque. Medea's overly dramatic direction is played for laughs even as it clearly harks back to the signature pseudo-revolutionary dialogue of LaBruce's earlier films:

Now raise your hand out of the earth. Raise it as a protest against all the injustices purported against your kind. Raise it in solidarity with the lonely and the weak and the dispossessed of the earth. For the misfits and the sissies and the plague-ridden faggots who have been buried and forgotten by the merciless, heartless, hetero-fascist majority. Rise. Rise!

With this, her direction to Otto in a scene where he a-rises out of the earth, it becomes clear what metaphors Medea (the stand-in caricature of the auteur, and thus, by extension, of LaBruce) are dealing in; this might be the first of LaBruce's works where the dialogue is pushed to such an extreme stylization, that it (almost) appears as a mocking of the director's own oeuvre. Adding a layer of pop-cult-reference, snippets of Hitler's speeches are strewn over the soundtrack. The viewer is dared to rise, out of mundanity, up! up!, to contour a-risible, to riff on the rising, rising ridiculousness of the scene.

I discuss this scene in terms of a broader consideration of how LaBruce's sexual economy is based on the *textualisation* of exclusion and inclusion, in particular how these are activated within the performatively abject (but also in abject-desire). But there's a larger point, too, about how the viewer is made very much aware of their own complicity in allowing LaBruce to get a rise out of them: As with much contemporary mass media, consumers are aware of their forced affinity with the textual. And while Halberstam's scavenger method is clearly the queer methodology at play in this study, there's also a way in which I utilise the Deleuzian notion of alloying in manners that playfully-forces affinities. This may include, for example, the forced affinity between viewer and LaBruce's films, between LaBruce and Venter, between the screened wolves in Venter and the a-packing wolves in Deleuze and Guattari. It shimmers in the connection, the "really?", the double take, in the long-lost or oft-forgotten links – via that issue of *Werkwinkel/Werkswinkel* – between O. Kirch, Venter, Van Schalkwyk, Koch and Zajas – and how I met Koch and Sajaz at the same ALV conference that I met M. Beukes, of whom I'll write a life's tracing off/of, a decade later, for *Stilet* (Strydom, 2019b); or in the dobbering between Venter's doubled buoys. On how one pops up in a text on the other, two decades later/before. These are like teasers, trailers for movies (dubbed out of immediacy) to come, affective trails lifting off the page in the two seconds that I pause, while finalising the list of works cited.

In Section 1.3, on alloying, I write "In the intense olfactory orbit, we find resonances between LaBruce's films and *Wolf, Wolf*, that is, between the materiality of the abject/desirable-desiring zombies on film and the novel's urgent layering of a register of male smell, both nestled within frameworks of belonging." But these resonances aren't *necessarily* pleasurable, nor can we expect the abjectifying mechanisms of non-a-typical readers/viewers not to kick in when confronted by black zombie jizz, or the ripple of knowing chitter running through the movie auditorium when Otto holds up a tub of Vaseline in almost religious veneration and gratitude; or, if you haven't, halfway into *Brokeback Mountain* (somewhere in Edinburgh Playhouse) turned to

the complete stranger sitting next to you, and – utterly confounded at what else to do to stem the torrent of emotions gushing out of him – hugged him tightly, the joints of the cinema seat's armrest awkwardly and painfully but not entirely unpleasantly pushing into your side, the hands of those in the row behind you on your shoulders, the shame shared, flowing out of him; if you've experienced how the cinematic can temporarily be *that* connective joint between queers that allows for a short second's worth of dissolvment of past trauma, and thus *know*, deeply, how queers think about the contours of our corporeal, lived bodies within social structures, then how can we ignore the self's past textualisations when Connel heeds a “politics of social justice [that] needs to change body-reflexive practice, not by losing agency but by extending it, working through the agency of the body [...]. Rather than disembodiment involved in role reform, this requires re-embodiment for men, a search for different ways of using, feeling and showing male bodies.” (1995:233). How, dear reader, can this be anything but urgent, needed, *now*?

This – these experiences – informs the scholarly task, and asks for a better, more inclusive way of approaching the act of scholarship, one that stays critical but moves beyond comparison. Instead of comparison, I opt here for seeking alloying, but queerly, playfully forcefully, body-reflexively, and above all, tongue-in-cheek.

2.8 Not as migrant author nor homosexual writer nor genre-dipper: A brief review of the body of work on *Wolf, Wolf*

In the introduction to their recently awarded PhD, *Les rites des passage en liminaliteit van 'n migranteskrywer: Simboliese neerslag in Eben Venter se eerste drie romans*⁴⁹, [transl.: *Les rites*

⁴⁹ Titles of PhD and MA-level studies are italicized throughout (following NWU convention), while chapter and published article titles are too (against convention, but for ease of reading, and to avoid the creation of an epitextual hierarchy). All titles in Afrikaans are followed by my own translation into English.

des passage and the liminality of a migrant writer: Symbolic manifestation in the first three novels of Eben Venter], G.W. le Roux (2019:xi) offers a startlingly flattened take on the thematics of the Venter oeuvre:

Soos Venter self is die hoofkarakters meestal liminale individue – gemarginaliseerdes, outsiders [sic], buitelanders of randfigure. Die liminaal-gelaaide grensoorskrydings wat uitgeskryf word in hierdie romans toon ook duidelike ooreenkomste met die perigrinasies van Venter self. Verkap- outobiografies gesien verteenwoordig dit as't ware Venter se eie *rites de passage* van agrariese Suid-Afrikaanse boerseun tot homoseksuele skrywer in Australië. Verskeie grensoorskrydings in tyd en ruimte word deur die hoofkarakters meegemaak wat telkens 'n verandering by die individue teweegbring in die romans, met die daarmee gepaardgaande afskeid, verlies, verwarring, trauma, heraanpassing, individuasiëproses, ensomeer. Soortgelyk het Venter 'n aantal grense oorgesteek tydens sy eie individuasiëproses wat hom ook onherroeplik verander het.

In aansluiting by Venter en sy karakters se liminale status, is ook die literêre skryf- en leesprosesse op sigself liminale handelinge. In sy skrywerskap bevind Venter homself dus in 'n liminale ruimte – 'n ruimte wat hy deel met sy lesers – en binne hierdie ruimte leef hy hom uit as trieksterskrywer. Deur die lees van sy eerste drie romans kry die leser tot 'n mate insae in Venter se eie *rites de passage* – die ontheemding van *Foxtrot van die vleisetters*, die verwarring en disoriëntasie van *Ek stamel ek sterwe* en die vervreemding van *My sympatie*, *Cerise*.⁵⁰

⁵⁰ My translation: "Like Venter himself, the main characters are mostly liminal individuals – the marginalised, outsiders, outsiders [sic] or randfigure. The liminally loaded border crossings written out in these novels shows clear [precise] similarities with the peregrinations of Venter himself. Seen verkap-autobiografies, this represents Venter's own *rites de passage* from agrarian [pastoral] South African farmer boy to homosexual author in Australia. Several border crossings in time and space are made by the main characters which every time leads to a change in the

At this point, the reader not familiar with the oeuvre may need reminding that Venter is the queer author (or perhaps 'gay author', but not quite “homosexual writer”) of a textual baker's dozen, an eclectic oeuvre that reaches in tenor from bawdy to elegiac, from dirty-dirty to high tragedy. Reducing the body of work (even through the triptych précis Le Roux deems fit for metonymic analysis) to a sad sack of loss, confusion, trauma, and disorientation activated by a seemingly perpetual act of border-crossing – outsidership *ad nauseum* – seems disingenuous at best.

Even taking out of consideration why, specifically, *ontheemding*, *verwarring*, and *vervreemding* are chosen as main typifier for each of the three novels under discussion, one is impressed by the optimism of making the first three prose-length novels of an oeuvre (automatically necessitating that the stylistic and thematic development of the short/shorter prose work published in-between fall to the wayside) correlate neatly with three stages in an opaque version of a 1950s Western-European theoretical model on liminality. And while such instrumentalization is an obvious outcome of Le Roux's textual application methodology here – and the flattened assumption that all borders are liminal zones may be excusable – what is less obvious (especially to the reader less familiar with the nuances of Venter's oeuvre) is the extent to which biography has been made to replace identity (or authorial intent, or reader expectation), most egregiously in the apparent willful conflation of Venter and “his characters”; the definite conflation of Venter-as-person, Venter-as-author, and Venter-as-persona; the projection of Venter's perceived liminality onto his reader (“ruimte wat hy deel met sy lesers”),

individuals in the novels, with associated afskeid, verlies, verwarring, trauma, heraanpassing, individuasieproses, and more. In a similar way, Venter crosses a number of borders in his own individualisation process that changes him onherroeplik. [new paragraph] Tying in with Venter and his characters' liminal state, is the literary writing and reading processes as themselves liminal acts. In his writership, Venter thus finds himself in a liminal space – a space he share with his readers – and in this space he lives his life as trickster-writer. In reading his first three novels, the reader gets some kind of insight into Venter's own rites de passage – the *ontheemding* of *Foxtrot van die vleiseters*, the *verwarring* and *disoriëntasie* of *Ek stamel ek sterwe* and the *vervreemding* of *My sympatie, Cerise*.” This, and all subsequent translations in this section is my own. Where an official translation (into English) already exists, I attempt to indicate this as far as possible, followed by my own translation.

the assumption that Venter is *per se* 'a liminal figure'; or the assumption that literary writing and reading are inherently liminal processes.

This approach, though it culminates at its most egregious in work such as Le Roux's, is emblematic of much Afrikaans scholarship's *modus operandi* on Venter, fitting with a sometimes-inability to prod itself loose from fixed notions of statehood, citizenship, and from the fetish of nationality; an inability that also seem to inform the reluctance to see Venter as a queer – instead of a 'homosexual' – author. (Not to belabour the point, but there's an intellectual parochiality⁵¹ at play in assuming that, just because an author – even an author-persona with as flexible and oft-changing a biography as Venter – has chosen to live in more than one country, or keeps a home in two different countries, or likes living in a country that isn't the country-of-birth indicated on their passport/s, they are to be seen as migrant-author.) In addition, default-defining Venter as migrant-author (with the delimitation of that term left fuzzy) works on a superficial level only as neither the white, middle class, able-bodied, voluntary expat nor his writing resonate with the characteristics most often associated with that label: de-privileged, displacement, precarity.

When having to engage with the entire body of published work on Venter in one go, I am confronted with an eerie and not-quite-putting-my-finger-on-it sense of disconnect. No, this isn't quite the disconnect between oft-sedentary scholarship and the migrant's lived experience; rather, it is a more pronounced, institutional ennui that is the logical outflow of a minoritarian language such as Afrikaans being treated (at least by Afrikaans literary scholars ourselves) as still majoritarian. When supra-amounts of subsidy need to flow somewhere, but the know-how

⁵¹ Cf. Amid's (facetious, perhaps) comment, after attending one of the book launches of *Wolf, Wolf*: "I'm quite fascinated by Venter's admission that living abroad for much of the year allows him to see things quite differently (both from an Australian vantage point and from the guise of the "localised outsider" or "externalised local")."

and literary street smarts and human resources aren't quite up to scratch, studies such as the one above happens.

There are larger, systemic issues, too: (Even cursory) referencing of preceding work on the same Venter text is often absent, most notably in the two published PhD studies⁵² on Venter, but also in a number of published articles⁵³; similarly, references to work conducted on Venter in English is frequently absent from Afrikaans-language studies (and article's) source lists⁵⁴. This has the effect of activating non-continuous affect, allowing for willy-nilly entry points⁵⁵. For these reasons, I am not much surprised by the paucity of references to Afrikaans-language scholarly work on Venter in international (or in South African English) studies and articles on the author.

In this way, the body of work on Venter does not feel cohesive, nor (with the possible exception of the work of Van Schalkwyk on Venter's stylistic development, and of Visagie on the dystopic) does it have the sense of building towards something bigger, towards an academic-affective support system which will aid the author's international standing in the same way that the field has coalesced around Krog or Breytenbach⁵⁶. Such slim pickings are not entirely complemented

⁵² Surprisingly, even though the two studies share a similar thematic focus on Venter, there are no references to (or mention of) Joubert (2017) in Le Roux (2019).

⁵³ There are, however, specific, subtle ways in which Van Schalkwyk and Visagie build on each other that aren't always apparent in the reading of a single article. To unpack this would necessitate a close(r) reading of a range of articles (including work not on Venter), plus a thorough analysis of the ways each has implicitly nuanced statements in the other's scholar's PhD study – this, regrettably, falls outside the scope of the current study.

⁵⁴ I could, as but one example, find not a single reference to R. Barnard's 2011 *Post-Apartheid Modernism and Consumer Culture*, which explores *Horrelpoot* – and Venter more generally – in any Afrikaans article or postgraduate studies. Even when Barnard regularly returns the favour; see, for example, her (2011) referencing of Visagie.

⁵⁵ Especially when literary criticism builds in layers and nodal connections over time, and "there is more truth in the later efficacy of a text, *in the series of its subsequent readings*, than in its supposedly "original" meaning" (Žižek, quoted in Peters, 2007, with my emphasis).

⁵⁶ I wonder to what extent the non-connective academic lattice around Venter's work rubs off on those in close, but tangential, proximity to our field. (For a rather interesting example, see D. Attridge's piece (2018) on M. van Niekerk's *Agaat*, in which he touches on recent Afrikaans publications (and recent translations of previously published work). In a review replete with the hyperbolic – in the four paragraphs dedicated to Van Niekerk's peers, he uses the following adjectives and descriptive phrases: highly original, ambitious, outstanding, respected, complex, extraordinary, "one of the most singular and intriguing", important, substantial, meticulous, "major fictional work", "remarkable work" – *Wolf*, *Wolf* is dismissed as "[p]erhaps more of an acquired taste".

by a somewhat outdated (as it traces thematic developments in the Venter oeuvre only up to, and including, *Wolf, Wolf*) "Perspektief & Profiel" profile⁵⁷ (Human, 2016, only available in Afrikaans), E. Terblanche's 'skrywersalbum' entry (updated to April 2019, only available in Afrikaans), non-correlating wikis (in English, Dutch, German, and Afrikaans), a DBNL entry, and other miscellanea⁵⁸.

A cursory glance at postgraduate-level studies on Venter shows how, in their insistence to utilise one or more Venter texts to fit neatly onto a (usually European, usually mid-20th century) theoretical model, they also feel disconnected from how literature is read in the 21st century. MA degree studies on Venter can be grouped into two (perhaps three) categories: The first makes a fetish of biography-as-identity, and include the following: R. Schoeman's (2001) *Skryf as terapie by twee vertellers uit 'n postkoloniale bestel: 'n Vergelykende studie van Een vlek op de rug deur J. van de Walle en Eben Venter se Foxtrot van die vleiseters*⁵⁹, which posits (based on a single novel under analysis) Venter's writing modus as therapeutic writing-out/writing-away of the individual's past guilt, a thesis that bluntly ignores Venter's own (repeated) insistence that this is not the case (Amid, 2013, and others); F. Coertzen's (2014) *'n Ondersoek na toleransie en abjeksie in Santa Gamka (Eben Venter) en Een schitterend gebrek (Arthur Japin)*⁶⁰, which poses valid questions around abjection, even as it ties abjection to boundary-experience in order to moralise about 'tolerance' (but seems to have missed the mark on text choice: asking this about *Santa Gamka* seems esoteric, when *Ek stamel ek sterwe* and *Horrelpoot* fit better).

⁵⁷ Venter did not warrant a profile in the first iterations of *Perspektief & Profiel* and was only taken up in the second version in 2015-2016. Such belated entry into the 'canon' may say as much about Venter positioning/postionality as it does about the socio-political and socio-literary street smarts of the Afrikaans field.

⁵⁸ The need for a systematised, ethically updated, accessible, database-linked research portal (not: site; not in Afrikaans) on Venter is dire.

⁵⁹ Transl.: Writing as therapy in two narrators from a postcolonial dispensation: A comparative study of *Een vlek op de rug* by J. van de Walle and Eben Venter's *Foxtrot van die vleiseters*.

⁶⁰ Transl.: An analysis of tolerance and abjection in *Santa Gamka* (Eben Venter) and *Een schitterend gebrek* (Arthur Japin).

The framing of identity is markedly queer in the study of Venter, but then near-always situated in an interwoven mesh between gay identity (in the cypher of gay sex, specifically anal penetrative pleasure) and seemingly unavoidable diseased and death-ridden thematics: see, for example, Sections 4 and 5 in J. van der Merwe's (2012) *Destablisering van heteronormatieweit ten opsigte van homoseksualiteit, Vigs en dood in queer narratiewe*⁶¹ or M. Haupt (2014) *Gender-ambivalensie: Aspekte van beliggaming, performatiwiteit en ondermyning in Ek stamel ek sterwe van Eben Venter*⁶² – both centered around *Ek stamel ek sterwe*) even when querying/queering the incoherence of heteronormative coupling seem unavoidable in the high theory of Sedgwick, Halberstein, Butler *et al.* (Van der Merwe, 2012, and Haupt, however, approach this incoherence in different ways; Whereas Haupt see queer subversive (narrative) potential in affects such as melancholy and shame, as (affect-heavy) spaces of 'weerstand en angs' (2014:32;53;87), Van der Merwe, 2012, reads for the novel's 'queer strategies': "It is shown that the novels supply queer representations of aids and aids patients, which resist heteronormative assumptions about biological sex and sexual identity. The novels accentuate the role of language and the performative function and nature of language and bring to light the process of heteronormative signification. The novels also expose the inherent instability, incoherency and artificiality of a heteronormative discourse by applying queer strategies like creative appropriation and resignification, teatralisation, revelation and demystification to the components of the discourse" (Van der Merwe, 2012:ii). It is this intentionality, of an active read-for queer traces, strategies and fault lines in the text, that inform my own attempt to read-for (in the later sections on masculinities and loss in *Wolf, Wolf*).

⁶¹ Transl.: Destabilisation of heteronormativity with regard to homosexuality, AIDS, and death, in queer narratives.

⁶² Transl.: Gender ambivalence: Aspects of embodiment, performativity and subversion in *Ek stamel ek sterwe* by Eben Venter.

Where Venter explicitly states that his work enters into masculinities crises, few studies acknowledge this; alongside Haupt and Van der Merwe, S. van Zyl's (2014) *Die representasie van veelfasettige manlikheidsbeelde in Eben Venter se romanoëuvre*, which explores masculine schematic frames in *Foxtrot van die vleiseters*, *Ek stamel ek sterwe*, and *Santa Gamka*, is the exception here; even as it posits the notion – flying in the face of much of contemporary theorisation around identity – that masculinity exists in discrete, separate schema ‘units’ that a character can ‘pick and choose’ to their liking. Still, of interest is how Van Zyl develops distinctive farm and/vs. urban frames (in addition to seeing these as onto-spatialities), which takes the well-trodden distinction between these two spaces in the plaasroman genre into more productive territory.

The second grouping pertains to making a fetish of genre, either of the plaasroman or of the Conradian intertext. J.F. Röth (2011), exclusively reading for genre in *Horrelpoot (2006) van Eben Venter as apokaliptiese roman: 'n intertekstuele studie*⁶³, and situates *Horrelpoot* not so much as a text in and of itself, but as a palimpsestic, transposed echo of Conrad. By doubling down on genre (here: the apocalyptic novel) and intertextuality, Röth asks whether Venter's text could stand on its own, without its reliance on *Heart of Darkness*.

Genre-based studies that does not figure the dystopic include J. Jacobs (2018), who, in *Perspektiewe op die aanwending van retoriese strategieë in die littérature engagée van die 1970's en die vroeë 21ste eeu – 'n vergelykende studie*⁶⁴, track engaged Afrikaans prose in times of national 'crisis' between the 1970s and the 21st century, and sees in the engaged

⁶³ Transl.: *Horrelpoot* (2006) by Eben Venter as apocalyptic novel: An intertextual study.

⁶⁴ Transl.: Perspectives on the application of rhetorical strategies in 1970s and early 21st century littérature engagée – a comparative study.

modus a 'dialectic relationship between reader and author (2018:51-52) with regard to national frames.

Most of the above focus on *Horrelpoot*, seemingly the sole Venter text that lends itself to multiple reading-for-genre exercises (although G.A. Pillay's 1996 typifying of *Foxtrot van die vleiseters* as an apocalyptic novel is delightfully offbeat). Additionally, in *Meat and its Meanings: Representations of Meat-Eating in Selected Works of South African Literature* T. Coetzer (2015) looks at the symbolics of meat-eating in *Trencherman*. Even when spending most of its time situating *Trencherman* in the plaasroman genre, this study seems to be the closest precedent to the current study's forays into literary animal studies, but in making much of J.M. Coetzee's 'sympathetic imagination' (regarding the lived experience of animals) ironically shies away from materiality. While the study's final emphasis – that 'meat is infused with a range of meanings in South African literature' – can be glossed as obvious, there is granular value in its continual reminder that this comes at the cost of animal death and animal suffering on a near-unimaginable scale.

In *This land is us: Aspects of the plaasroman and hospitality in five post-Apartheid Karoo novels* (2012), S. Thomas situates two Venter texts, *My Beautiful Death* and *Trencherman*, alongside texts by Damon Galgut, Anne Landsman, and Zoë Wicomb, as prime examples of the plaasroman. The primary focus, however, on the Karoo setting – and on "fluid interactions between the consciousnesses [in the novels - WS] and the landscapes they portray" – lifts Thomas' analysis (of, particularly, *My Beautiful Death*) above merely typifying and delineating it as plaasroman. (The success of this makes me wonder if a focus on *regional* liminality, or reading Venter as *regional* migratory griot, say, may not be more productive than generic transnational migrant-author approaches.) Reading two Venter texts comparatively in one study,

even when both texts can superficially be labelled 'plaasroman', allows for a surfacing of the un-flattened texture of Venter's oeuvre: Both *Trencherman* and *My Beautiful Death* are

different in their spatial and temporal settings, their narrative styles and, indeed, in the manner in which they represent landscape, as well as the interactions of their characters within landscape. Ultimately, however, what the diversity inherent in these texts allows for is an illustration of how heterogeneous their responses to the highlighted conventions of the plaasroman are. Moreover, the diversity of settings, both temporal and spatial, as well as the diversity of narrative technique and characterisation, mean that the common features of relationships which I show to be based in conditional or unconditional hospitality are highlighted more vividly than they might otherwise have been. (Thomas (2012:07)

The two approaches (biography-as-identity or genre) do also overlap, for example in the biography-genre hybrid take *Elemente van die groteske realisme en karnavaleske in Foxtrot van die vleiseters van Eben Venter* (M. Heyns, 2006).

To date, only two major studies (one PhD and one D.Lit & Phil-level study) focus exclusively on Venter, and it may be productive to pause here briefly, as both studies carry trickled-down strains of simplification and point, metonymically, to how Venter is conceptualised in the field. G.W. le Roux's 2019 PhD dissertation, which – without referencing it in any form – seems to tread much of the same ground as C.J. Joubert's 2017 D.Lit & Phil dissertation, *Die verhouding tussen ruimte en identiteit in Eben Venter se prosakuns: Ballingskapliteratuur en die postkoloniale diskoers*⁶⁵. Beyond a very similar focus, both studies reflect a broader tendency in

⁶⁵ Transl.: The relation between space/place and identity in Eben Venter's prose: Exile literature and postcolonial discourse.

Afrikaans literary studies to define the relation between space and identity in the broadest possible manner: for Joubert, the 'space-identity dialectic' encompasses no less a list than

...space, place, exile, diaspora, spatial displacement, sexual migration, intra-national migration, international migration, empirical and cultural landscapes and identity as a social-cultural construction [...] mass migration, global uncertainty, transnational capitalism and radical decolonization in the form of violent crime, violent protests at universities, hate speech, farm murders, land reform, labour unrest, xenophobia and the dismantling of minority rights...

as well as

...the aftermath of apartheid, the Afrikaner-diaspora, landownership, the ideological appropriation of land, racism, homophobia, *queer*-migration, the viability of an inclusive African-identity and the altered role, place and identity of Afrikaners since 1994. (Joubert (2017:05)

By making Venter (Joubert looks at the eclectic set of *Ek stamel ek sterwe*; *Twaalf*; *Horreelpoot*; and *Brouhaha* – but not *Wolf*, *Wolf*) answer to all of these, it is no wonder that the study ultimately settles for ascribing to the author Said's (2000:177) nebulous label of "exile as a discontinuous state of being".

Apart from the obvious problem with assigning the status of 'exile writer/writer-in-exile' to the biography of an author such as Venter, Joubert's (and Le Roux's) work does delve into interesting (and productive) intersections between queer diaspora, lived experience, and seems finely attuned to the biographical journey of Venter (although I'd argue that an over-close

attunement with the biographical conflates this 'journey' with the biography of the highly mediated author-persona).

Quite why either of such doubled takes on Venter (either basing an analysis of fictional characters in a fictional text on piecemeal understanding of an author's highly mediated extra-textual swatting away of questions about his 'biography' or the inverse analysis of actively looking for inter-SA/Australian traces in three just-as-well-randomised novels and presenting these lists as a postgraduate study) is necessary, is unclear. Even if the above can – à la Venter – be swatted away as the idiosyncratic grasp(ing)s of a minor literature made desperate for subsidy, the take on migration in general (and queer diaspora, in particular) presented here is problematic (not the least with regard to the absence of engagement of foundational queer diaspora texts in Munoz, or even Warner). Seeing migration, movement, diaspora as admirable, unmessy, abstracted is the privilege of white academia, with whiteness defaulted in such ways that a claim to reposition Venter as 'exile writer' stands largely uncontested.

Where Joubert's study is useful, is in its positing of the 'rural closet' as spur to migration, a way to see the national and the sexual (and the 'plaaslike') in close proximity. This notion of the rural closet (to which we may, also, add a plural suffix) resonates with how D. Bell and G. Valentine (1995) conceptualise the affective spatiality of/surrounding queer rurality. However, for Joubert (as, can perhaps be argued, for Venter) whiteness in its modulation of (privilege-based) white mobility allows for a way to escape the rural closet. However, for such an analysis, we would have to not only interrogate gay identity, but gay identity in intersectional relation to other oppressions, like systemic racism and socio-economic status. (Or across time; the 14 years between 1996 and 2010 – between the publication of application texts *Ek stamel ek sterwe* and *Brouhaha* – had impacted white and Afrikaner identity significantly.)

Because Venter's oeuvre is sometimes perceived to be thematically flattened, and scholarship on him often in search of a single, specific aspect (as Conradian intertext; as neo-plaasroman; as writer of an early Afrikaans text on AIDS), he is often a 'useful example' to unpack (Steenberg, 1997; M.L. Crous, 2005; Van Schalkwyk, 2004; A.G. Visagie, 2004), or even a reference without explication (H. du Plooy, 1995; John, 2008; Fourie, 2020; Linde, 2018, Uys, 2012; Van Schalkwyk, 2004; Carvalho, 2009; Spies, 2013).

And while a plethora of *Vrouekeur*-level interviews and ephemera exist, I shy away from incorporating these, primarily for their passing importance, but also because Venter oftentimes contradicts himself (intentionally) in interviews and puff pieces⁶⁶ ; swatting away questions (mostly about his 'biography'), his answers often betray an irksome exasperation at why 'better', more outwardly attuned questions don't get asked⁶⁷. For their perfunctory hagiography, I tend not to read too much into initial (mostly Afrikaans-language) popular reviews of *Wolf, Wolf*, though I do find meaning in how starkly Afrikaans-language critical reviews (Cochrane, 2013; Crous, 2013; De Vries, 2013; Myburgh, 2013; and, in English, Amid, 2013; 2014) differ from reviews by scholars outside the Afrikaans literary field (Amid, 2013; Grant-Marshall, 2014; Hope, 2015; McManus, 2015; Ritchie, 2015a and 2015b; Van der Vlies, 2015). As R. Fourie (2020) has decidedly shown, there exists very specific differences in the lattice-like 'epitextual archives' that arise around 'literary' Afrikaans authors when they are translated, and that these "reciprocal influences, overlaps and imbrications – i.e. entanglements" (2020:ii) come to signify so much more than the comparative binarism of the Afrikaans and South African English literary

⁶⁶ Compare Nieuwoudt (1999) with Nieuwoudt (2003), or see the assertion that *Groen soos die hemel daarbo* was written "from the start in English" (Turnbull, 2015), or that *Santa Gamka* was translated (ibid.).

⁶⁷ Barnard alludes to the effect such insular (and uncritical) reception has on Venter's international standing: "But while in such casual venues Venter might risk a word like 'bastardisation', resonant of ethnocentric purism, *Horrelpoot*'s use of language reveals something more complicated and more in keeping with the post-apartheid moment. With its inclusion of the untranslated epigraphs from Conrad and the direct speech in English of a character who refuses, for political reasons, to speak Afrikaans, *Horrelpoot* is obviously addressed to a readership not only devoid of Anglophobia, but fluent in the English language and the English literary canon" (2011:234).

fields; a binarism made concrete when, for example, J. Amid points to how “the difference in reception of *Wolf, Wolf* by Afrikaans and English reviewers has piqued Venter: the two English reviews by Leon de Kock and Ken Barris have produced striking review-commentary, while Afrikaans reviewers have struggled to grapple with the complexities on offer” (2013)⁶⁸.

Therefore, in a manner similar to B. Burger’s (2016) methodology, I draw inferences on *Wolf, Wolf*’s conceptual insularity from the English-language reception of *Horrelpoot* and *Trencherman*, specifically from Flanery, 2016; Beilharz, 2016; Hartley, 2016; Lowry, 2016; Slovo, 2016; Suskind, 2016; and, in Afrikaans, De Villiers, 2008.

Sifting through work on Venter is always meaningful, not always in how it attempts to apply theory to text, but in what theoretical fashion it attempts to shoehorn onto his work, and in how it tracks the introduction – and sometimes flattened understanding – of new literary-critical concepts into the scholarly ecosystem: Venter seems to be viewed as a low-stakes, ‘easier’ terrain for MA students⁶⁹.

P. John’s *Vanaf die enigmatiese na die ongerieflike: die “gevaarlike kennis” van Eben Venter se Twaalf* (2002)⁷⁰ deals both directly (in discussing a Venter text) and indirectly (in discussing how a text such as *Twaalf* is discussed) with this problematic. John laments the negative impact of

⁶⁸ While one is tempted to read notions of queer shame into this comment, at the back of my mind a bell goes off, and I half-remember how, in an analysis of the complex of attitudes and views Coetzee’s (whom Venter holds in high esteem) writing exhibits towards the Afrikaans literary field, Barnard (2009) unlocks an affective-attitudinal stancing between the Afrikaans system and its epi-figures (such as Coetzee, and, I’d argue, progressively also Venter) that moves beyond shame: embarrassment.

⁶⁹ See, for example, how many of MA-level studies above come across as expanded, listicle’d, or duly footnoted versions of a single article published in the immediate years prior by either a supervisor or co-supervisor. (As example: the relation between F. Coertzen’s *’n Ondersoek na toleransie en abjeksie in Santa Gamka (Eben Venter) en Een schitterend gebrek (Arthur Japin)*, completed in 2014, and Coertzen’s co-supervisor’s 2009 *Against extremity: Eben Venter’s Horrelpoot (2006) and the quest for tolerance*.) It may be instructive (but superfluous) to note that few articles have made the vice-versa journey out of MA or PhD studies on Venter.

⁷⁰ From the enigmatic to the uncomfortable: The ‘dangerous knowledge’ of Eben Venter’s *Twaalf* (2002).

'theory' on the landscape of literary analysis in South Africa (or in the Afrikaans literary field). Building on Bernard Harrison's *Inconvenient fictions. Literature and the limits of theory* (1991), John argues that the 'identity projects' of high theory are to be seen as philosophically realistic. This argument has been threaded and rethreaded and would have – up to 2021's screeching artificial mania around identity politics and critical race theory – felt quaintly outdated. While I do not wish to engage here, I do find it interesting that John chooses, specifically, *Twaalf*, as application text, as opposed to, one could argue, more applicable Venter texts (published at that point) such as *Foxtrot van die vleisetters* or *Ek stamel ek sterwe*. (In the case of the latter, the assumption may have been that an AIDS narrative does not lend itself well to being called out as obsessively-ideological or 'too caught up in identity'. Gayness may yet be useful to the literary overcoding machine after all, it seems.)

How does this 'approach' to literary analysis (which is more a way of plugging into a literary field than an analytic approach) change how we see the fetishes of biography and genre that, compulsively, surface in Venter scholarship?

The 'high theory' approaches of identity and genre continue to trend in published articles on Venter, as in *Food as a Marker of Identity in My Beautiful Death* by Eben Venter, A. van der Spuy's (2018) work on food as marker of identity, and how the relation to food marks the protagonist of *My beautiful death*'s 'changing identity'. In this, it ties directly to another meat-identity-change work: Crous (2012) on meat as 'the conscience of the Afrikaner'. Given how divisive *Horrelpoot/Trencherman*'s reception was (compare English-language reviews with Afrikaans-language ones), it is perhaps unsurprising that this novel has received more critical attention than any other Venter text. A number of articles list why *Horrelpoot* can be seen as dystopian text, and/or as palimpsest for Conrad. Only a few manage to move beyond the obvious, for example C. van den Berg (2016), in *Mimesis soos beredeneer deur Philippe*

Lacoue-Labarthe: *Horrelopoot* (2006) deur Eben Venter as herskrywing van Joseph Conrad se *Heart of darkness*⁷¹, who reads beyond mere mimetic relation between the two texts, and into a constellation of *muthos* and *techne* (i.e. Lacoue-Labarthe's manners in which Western enlightenment and perceived superiority is instrumentalised in and through myth). What sets Van den Berg (2016) apart from other work on the relation between Venter and Conrad, is in how they explicitly ask what the text *means as a rewrite of Heart of Darkness*. Similar, Ina Grabe (2007) reads a specific eco-pop-cultural shift in the Venter-Conrad-palimpsest: "where it is the wilderness itself that appears life-threatening in Conrad's depiction of an impenetrable, hence 'dark' forestation in colonial Africa, it is the large-scale destruction of habitation in post-apartheid South Africa that results in the uninhabitable, thus life-threatening, situation depicted in Venter's futuristic vision" (Grabe, 2007:abstract).

Even when a scholar disputes the literary value of Venter's work, they are still able to ascertain some value in the presence of a Venter text in the social collective. For example, even as R. West-Pavlov (2015) sees *Trencherman* as a "shrill, hyperbolic [...] fantasy" (2015:43) that is "so excessive in its representation of white fears of collapse that [...] it verges on parody" (2015:43), they are still able to see in it an emerging template of a "non-teleological 'minor narrative' of liberation" (2015:42) in the post-postcolonial era.

West-Pavlov's tying of a read of Venter to the post-postcolonial brings into sharper relief how often scholarship on Venter feels somewhat colonial in the specific theoretical net it casts out (Non-Western European or non-US-based theoretical work is not often applied Venter) and in its reluctance to explore literary development aspects outside of very minor-narrow foci (on the dystopic; on intertextuality, but then with Conrad only). (For an example of how Venter speaks

⁷¹ Transl.: Mimesis as conceptualised by Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe: *Horrelopoot* (2006) by Eben Venter as adaptation of Joseph Conrad's *Heart of darkness*

to larger literary concerns, such as, for example, a troubling intersection between modernist literary studies and the postcolonial, we need to look outside the Afrikaans system, in this case to R. Barnard, 2011.) This, placed alongside a worrying tendency to substitute 'universal' human condition for traits that are obviously Afrikaner-specific, necessitates further analysis. It is, however, instructing to notice that West-Pavlov's ballsy assertion that the 'trauma' in Venter is actually such a shrill, hyperbolic version of white fear and insecurity as to 'border on parody' (2015:43) – and how this "vitriol remains largely an exercise in critique" (2015:52) as opposed to a 'counter-entropic model' – has not widely been addressed in scholarship that appeared thereafter.

Examples of scholars wanting to actualise something beyond the dystopic in *Horrelpoot*, are Visagie's work on linking the plaasroman, the post-colonial, and global capitalism (2011) and their typification of *Trencherman* as pseudo-dystopia (2009); and H. Sewlall's (2016) consideration of the text's 'dialogical engagement with the Conradian master text' that clefs to the dystopian (but omits whiteness from its analysis).

Where *Horrelpoot* is divorced from a close cleft to genre, and whiteness is brought into the fold, as in 'Memory, history and oblivion in *Horrelpoot* by Eben Venter (M. Postma & M.N. Slabbert, 2008), or the 'future histories' of Re/membering the future? Speculative fiction by Eben Venter and Lauren Beukes (K. Barris, 2017), or M. Titlestad's 'Contesting teleology as literary interpretation' (2017), the results are astounding: the text itself is held as example of how collective memory (and history) has shattered, while temporal stagnation, reactionary communities, and the "dull reiteration of historical fears" (Titlestad, 2017:87) takes its place as

neo-markers of (a particularly Afrikaner) dystopic. (Which informs my own view of the novel as charting a white-dystopic sense of being in the Now⁷².)

The latter article, alongside L. Buxbaum's (2017) work on xenophobia in *Wolf, Wolf* (see below) and Van Schalkwyk's 2013 article on the rhetoric of AIDS in *Ek stamel ek sterwe* (also below), clearly shows what is possible when South African scholarship rises to a level that meets the standard of the work under discussion. (It is not unremarkable that all three are published in English; in general, Venter scholarship in English vastly outshines work on him published in Afrikaans. *Why* this is the case falls outside the scope – or interest – of this current study.)

The most strikingly dis-conventional recent read of Venter (and of *Wolf, Wolf*) is provided by J.M. Jackson, who works outside the South African academic-literary sphere. In *Reading for the region in new African novels: Flight, form, and the metonymic ideal* (2018), Jackson compares *Wolf, Wolf* and Jamala Safari's *The great agony and pure laughter of the gods* (2012), both set in Cape Town and ostensibly dealing with intra-African, continental-southward migration. Working from the assumption that the "region is a formally and epistemologically distinct scale through which to theorise the African novel" (2018:42), Jackson questions the novels' representation of migratory identity and politics, especially migration-as-spacing in *Wolf, Wolf*.

⁷² Keeping in mind that Venter has been an Australian citizen, and thus part of the Australian *socius* since 1986, there's value in considering to what extent *Horrelpoot* is a consideration of *Australian* nationalist/ecological values (and less so of the equivalent South African intensities set). Whereas there are cohesive similarities at play within the term 'global South', clearly exogenesis differences exist between how colonial brutality, ecological imperial collateral damage, etc. advanced. My thinking – still embryonic – around this was prompted by T. Collits' attempt, in *Postcolonial Conrad: Paradoxes of Empire*, to find ways of repositioning Conrad as a postcolonial *per se*, as well as my (own) realisation that we don't quite read Conrad (now) as a critique of *Polish* imperial impulses.

Similarly, thinking about (and determining through textual analysis) how much three decades of Australian citizenship (and citizenry) has impacted Venter's use of the dystopic (crucially, as Visagie, 2011, shows, as counter to a *specific socius*). May *Horrelpoot* be more productively read (and be less amenable to racialised popular discourse) as a 'corrective' on white regrouping and fear *circa* 1986, instead of a) such regrouping post-2000, or even b) a more abstracted a-temporal white hysteria? (And, then, to what extent will the same effort – to locate the specific temporal *socius* against which the novel is a dystopic counter – be true of, or relevant to, the 'contemporary' white-dystopics of *Wolf, Wolf*?)

Through their insistence that it is only when regional consciousness becomes imbued with the concrete realities of migration that a kind of regional poetics can arise, Jackson posits novels, like that of Venter, which shies away hard from such a regional poetics, to serve as texts showing the “chismatic conception of African modernity” (2018:61)⁷³.

Though it is easy to gripe about how often (in postgraduate work) Venter is read in comparison with another (usually Dutch, Belgian, or Flemish – for subsidy reasons) text, Jackson shows the value of doing a comparative read with a second South African (though not necessarily Afrikaans) text. Similarly, A. Nel’s *Moments of transition: Diane Victor’s Disasters of Peace etches and Eben Venter and S.J. Naudé’s narrative texts* (2014) shows how a reading of Venter can be enriched by tracing its fault lines against work (across media) of a similar ilk (and thereby utilising the comparative method to, in R. Barnard’s word, surface “ways that may not be instantly legible” (2011:225) prior). Here, specifically, Nel frames *Horrelpoot* as a cathartic-courageous text whose author seeks to – even within the complex aftermath of Apartheid – “contemplate (if not to understand fully), the nature of horror, fear, or the textures of loss” (2014:217). Nel (2015) also employs this triple’d text technique in *Spel en die spelende mens in Die sneeuslaper (Marlene van Niekerk), Klimtol (Etienne van Heerder) en Wolf, Wolf (Eben Venter)*⁷⁴. Here, in the section on *Wolf, Wolf*, they do not simply outline how homo ludens manifest in the text (and in the narrative), but asks, pointedly, how this ‘playfulness’ effects the text-reader relationship (2015:180). In positing that it *compels* a readerly engagement (“dwing

⁷³ An expanded consideration of how this differs from, for example, Van Schalkwyk’s typification of *Horrelpoot* as a peripheral, discordant-subversive text, would be productive, but also falls outside the scope here.

Aside: If there was ever an Afrikaner-Afrikaans text that spoke to schismatic continental conceptions, it would surely be *Horrelpoot* – a text one assumes that Jackson would not soon write about. Specifically, it is interesting to speculate how their typifying of the manner in which hyper-connection in *Wolf, Wolf* becomes a detemporalising force (2018:60) could productively be applied to *Horrelpoot*, where failed hyper-connection and mass intra-state-migration is painted by Venter as not only detemporalising but also becoming-de-ontological.

⁷⁴ Play, and the playful human, in *Die sneeuslaper* (Marlene van Niekerk), *Klimtol* (Etienne van Heerder) en *Wolf, Wolf* (Eben Venter).

leserbetrokkenheid af"; 2015:201), Nel explicates what few other scholars working on Venter do: asking – critically – what the text *does*, as opposed to what it means. (In addition, Nel's 2014 inaugural lecture, on 'homo ludens', touches on aspects of *Wolf, Wolf* that are usefully incorporated in my thinking on cubilication).

Two related articles, that approach *Wolf, Wolf* from a sort-of-animal studies perspective, are Buxbaum (2017) and W. Strydom (2018). Buxbaum considers how South African letters responds to xenophobia, and specifically how the 'everyday intimacy' (2017:79) of violence against one's neighbours is in major ways built on social animalisation discourse – traceable in how animals, animal metaphors, and 'animalised humans' (2017:78) are employed in literary narratives (to wit: three novels – by Beukes, Vandermerwe, and Venter – published midway between the two peaks of xenophobic violence that gripped South Africa in 2008 and 2015). Strydom, similarly, looks at how literary animal cyphers and troped canid symbolism are utilised by the reader to make sense of "the brutality of male intimacy" (2018:112) underpinning Venter's narrative. Even though both delve into the ways tropes, cyphers and metaphors actualise in the South African socius, each argue explicitly for a *more* material framing of Venter's thematics: Buxbaum situates both animalisation discourse and xenophobia within the self-other schema of an embodied body; stating unambiguously that these centre "bodies as the place from which relations with others are conducted" (2017:78), while Strydom opts for a process of reading-for animalisation discourse fault lines in a text where the canid presence and the (male) body are never separate for long, asking what happens (not 'what it means') when we are asked to re-see, for example, farm dogs as machinic extensions of white farmer masculinity. For both these, again, reading is in effect a 'read-for' what the text does/actualises, instead of simply what it means, so to produces a take on *Wolf, Wolf* that feels absent in much of the work on *Horrelpoort* et al. and relates to how P. Van Schalkwyk (2017) attempts to re-position *Wolf, Wolf* within the Venter oeuvre.

Van Schalkwyk's repositioning, however, refers as much to Venter as to the scholar's own engagement with Venter: In a queer quartet of published work (2009-2011-2013-2017), Van Schalkwyk show himself to be the Afrikaans scholar most continuously engaged with Venter's *stylistic* development. Starting in 2009, with 'Against extremity: Eben Venter's *Horrelpoot* (2006) and the quest for tolerance' (notably, apart from the *Ek stamel ek sterwe* chapter, Van Schalkwyk's only journal article on Venter published *in English* but still using the Afrikaans novel as application text) charts the novel's "mapping of the interplay between fear, (in)tolerance, and extremity/extremism" (2009:84). These three concepts quickly amass a multitude of others: Lotman's semiosphere, peripheral texts, Adorno and dissonance, authenticity, dialectic openness, Socratic dialogue, pluralism, self-acceptance, and reciprocity all come under definitional loop. Lost in the cacophony is Van Schalkwyk's rather startlingly honest hypothesis that 'progressive' works of art *must* be 'dissonant-subversive'. (A notion which has a rich and long history in Afrikaans letters, but has lost steam since 1994, and has fallen into some disregard post-2000.)

Van Schalkwyk makes explicit the hopeful attempt to position *Horrelpoot* as oppositional to established/normative national discourse (and again doubling down on this positioning in a later article: cf. 2011:204). While it is indeed a unique way of reading (reading-for?) *Horrelpoot*, this particular set of affective vectors (on which Van Schalkwyk builds his intensities set as oppositional, and therefore hopeful) comes across as hard to swallow when we intentionally read the novel for this/with this in mind. (It then becomes coloured with the inkling that, perhaps, such a reading is rather a way of writing literary relevance into the reception of a text that might not be worth its salt). This vein of optimistic optimism (and reference back to *Horrelpoot*) also runs through the article on *Santa Gamka*, 'Homo sacer: Uitsondering en relasie in Eben Venter se *Santa Gamka* (2009)' (2011), in which Van Schalkwyk positions relationality within the seemingly discordant un-relationality of (his take on) contemporary South African actuality,

exemplified (for Van Schalkwyk) by Agamben's notion of *homo sacer*. Zipping through Johan Snyman, Rachel Falconer, Slavoj Žižek, Kaja Silverman, the usually laser-focused Van Schalkwyk unthreads with the material-granularity of the character-focus of his analysis: a strapping young man trapped in a potter's kiln, slowly suffocating.

Still, there's much, much to find in how Van Schalkwyk layers relational belonging and unbelonging around the protagonist of Santa Gamka; from how they cleverly 'misreads' Agamben's notion of *homo sacer* (where *homo sacer* can be read to denote extreme – and fatal – interpellation, Van Schalkwyk here enfold this precarity into its doubled half; to seeing the protagonist as exemplum, that is “precisely because of his marginality and the complex notions of relationality which he embodies” (2011:203) through which he – and the novel – become-code for “a celebration of one human life amongst many, and thereby of human life as such” (2011:203).

In ‘n Herevaluering van Eben Venter se *Wolf*, *wolf* binne die konteks van sy oeuvre’ (2017), Van Schalkwyk furthers the argument that Venter can be seen as primarily *in rhetoris*, and gracefully brings Kristeva to bear on Venter; by merging dis-explication of the symbolic and the semiotic in Venter's style-rhetoric, they show how *Wolf*, *Wolf* could possibly be read as a (literal) narrative of the transcendental ego in crisis/crises. The article jumps through the usual hoops necessary when bringing Kristeva to bear on Afrikaner-white hegemonic texts, but avoids, for example, some of the traps H. Sewlall's falls for in a separate application of Kristeva to *Horrelpoot*. The perceived methodology here – to re-consider the linguistic form-as-thematic as *theme* – reminds of a similar approach in Barris (2017) where corporeal and linguistic forms of the grotesque in *Trencherman* is held to signify the toxicity of Apartheid morality itself and is largely convincing. However, this does mean that Van Schalkwyk falls back onto the genre-bind

(the main argument for seeing *Horrelpoot* as an example of the symbolic is its strong mimetic relation to Conrad).

As alluded to earlier, though, the article carries a nominal sleight of hand in its title: in which what is purportedly a re-evaluation of *Wolf, Wolf* within the context of Venter's oeuvre only draws in a handful of other Venter texts (*Horrelpoot*, *Ek stamel ek sterwe*, *Santa Gamka*, and – briefly – *Foxtrot van die vleiseters*). Based on such a small sampling of texts alone (and ignoring those texts which came in-between), I take the author's thesis to mean that either a re-evaluation in terms of Kristevian rhetoric/stylistics, or a re-evaluation *in general terms* of Venter is needed. The 2017 article cannot possibly be *the* re-evaluation, as it would benefit from a larger application set (as well as consideration of how easily a novel such as *Groen soos die hemel daarbo*, published a few months after the article, seems to contradict the simplistic typification movement from/between rhetorician to/and stylist). Regardless of these quibbles (and a weird anti-pornography seam running through the article), Van Schalkwyk succeeds in answering his own clarion call (explicated at the start of the article) that Venter's oeuvre "is, however, in need of reappraisal" (2017:413), and one would have expected a number of rejoinders or rebuttals to have appeared in the years since. This was not the case.

This may make it especially grating that my own previous published work on *Wolf, Wolf* (Strydom, 2018), perhaps hampered by an unwillingness to engage with anything but the granularity of the text under discussion, and erroneously attempting to avoid overly abstract theorising, doesn't reference Van Schalkwyk either. In more ways than that, my own previous work on *Wolf, Wolf* occupies a queer spot here: Published as a midway-output (or, as an output, mid-way) of this (current) study, it argues for different materiality-granular reads of how masculinity and canid tropes are to be co-read in the novel, and in its positing of "acts of experimental ferality" (2018:118) it presages much of the texture of the final version of this

study. But even though it explicitly asks for different ways of reading Venter, it lacks an engagement with the ways in which Venter *had already* been read, especially by Van Schalkwyk and Visagie. The current study (especially the parts on cubilication) attempts to redress that.

A possible future avenue of analysis (outside the scope of this study) would be to see if a more material-granular approach to other texts in the Venter oeuvre is possible, or feasible. As a matter of fact, Venter's stature might very well be strengthened if more work is published, and a wider theoretical net is cast (also incorporating theory from our own continent). Imagine the potentiality actualised by readings of Venter that scavenges around in the oeuvre, queerly throws *Horrelpoot* to the neo-modernists, or runs *Wolf, Wolf* by animal ethicality anarchist groupings. A critique of *Begeerte* as New Black Archive? Imagine – I know you are already, aren't you – the delicious anarchy of an [specific kind of] spatio-anarchist read of the pathway-vectors of the bischon fris  in *My Simpatie, Cerise*. (Or an eye-tracking-adjacent analysis of said dog's eye movements with regard to classed characters.) Or. Or. Or. Any takers? Stoney and vegan masculinity and the limits of the decolonial at the end of the anthropocene, anyone?

Little work has been done that focuses exclusively on Venter's translations. However, there is something still present-absent in terms of relationality – what I term 'off-queer': those queer traces beneath whiteness in Venter's translated works. Approaching translation from a queerly activist standpoint necessitates a problematisation of the situation-ing of source and target texts in their geo-cultural specificity, so to better conceptualize of its functional potentiality (what and when and who the text speaks to; why it draws blood). Translation scholarship within South Africa has only in the last few decades begun to highlight the manner in which translations from Afrikaans to English can be problematized, surfacing how 'translating into whiteness' robs source texts of culturally-variegated nuance. This issue, what D. Attridge (2014) calls the

'Englishing' of Afrikaans texts through translation, is compounded both by the intertwining of English and whiteness in South Africa and the fact that published scholarship on Afrikaans-to-English translation almost exclusively focusses on texts from a rather heteronormative canonical centre. This raises questions related to the 'translation' of belonging.

To address how this unfolds in Venter would require a tracing of the interplay between queerness and whiteness (and its civil resonance) in the four (to date) translations, especially in the coupling of sexual and abject in strikingly queer fashion (for example, AIDS and nostalgia in *Ek stamel ek sterwe*; bodily racism and the return to the ancestral home in *Horrelpoot*; the tourist as racial fetish in *Groen soos die hemel daarbo*). How affect modulates in/through translations of his work, however, have been commented upon: See how Amid (2013) compares the "corruscating" Afrikaans version of *Wolf, Wolf* with a "slick, powerful" English companion version.

Similarly, translations of his work have been mired in controversy: For example, in Luke Stubbs' 2007 translation of *Ek stamel ek sterwe*, female and ambiguous pronouns were translated to exclusively male pronouns, a translation strategy hailed by reviewers as a necessary step toward redressing the heterosexist (and possibly intra-homophobic) nature of the source text. However, a closer read of the translation shows a number of zero-sum fault lines between ethnicity, race and sexual orientation introduced into the target text by the pronoun change, notably a loss of sexualized slang resulting in a pronounced de-sexualization of the original's lexico-erotic layer. Significantly, too, in key passages of the novel this serves to reinforce the source text's normalization of white positionality, seemingly at odds with the ostensibly greater identitarian inclusivity introduced by the change in pronoun – to a large extent unsurfaced by reviews of the translation.

Such disjunctive changes are common to the other Venter translations and taken as a whole appear as a psuedo-sterilisation of queer experience by subsuming it into larger socio-cultural narratives centred on whiteness. I posit seeing this as a queer analogue to Attridge's 'Englishing', with the author's queer thematic couplings rendered through translation not exactly un-queer (or less-queer) but rather off-queer. In using the term 'off-queer', I am riffing on Svetlana Boym's (2017) conceptualization of 'off-modern' – the dissonance of being recognisably neither modern nor postmodern – to show how Venter's sterilised-through-translation works are neither recognisably 'queer' nor immediately placeable within heteronormative mainstream modulations of the Afrikaans canon, while the neutered translations are not afforded place in the World Republic of Letters. This speaks to larger literary-social trends in South Africa. Whereas translation often opens up spaces for productive capabilities for societal change, here the queer literary figure's transgressive potentiality is haltered. Whiteness ebbs and flows undisturbed. Translated texts hide and reveal. As Boym sees in 'off-modern' the "phantoms of the familiar [...] and facades" (2017:26), so too does the queer-reader-as-activist recognize queer traces beneath whiteness in these off-queer translations.

It isn't immediately clear why scholarship on an author of Venter's stature and genre-breadth often fall into one of three groups: the dystopic (primarily racial, as opposed to ecological; but often without recognising how it would be productive to think of the text in terms of a 'white-dystopic'), structural intertextuality (and some thematic intertextuality, but near-exclusively focused on Venter-*Heart of Darkness*; not even Venter-Marlow-cycle, nor Venter-Conrad; very seldom Venter-Schoeman; almost never Venter-intra-oeuvre), or migratory marginalisation (especially a vaguely defined 'masculine' and inter-nation version of it) overly closely hewed to Venter's biography. If the scholarship – on which Venter's critical (and, to date, un-Hertzogged) tenure rests – has to keep apace, then what is needed is a more robust engagement with the

granularity of the literary texts themselves but also with the granularity of the scholarship that coalesce around these text, in effect how both bodies of work (fictional and scholarly) penetrate, skew and prod and turn askance; how they off-set and are off-kilter; how both can become neutered in translation. In essence, to re-see what these texts and scholars *do*, not only what they mean.

The current study, by focussing on ways in which unbelonging actualise through canid figures and in the olfactory ambit of *Wolf Wolf* (and how the olfactory, and the presence of canid symbolism, are cleft in the novel to considerations of belonging), attempts a more granular, unrut read of Venter – not as migrant author or homosexual writer or genre-dipper, but as an author who, granularly, *doesn't belong* to any such categorisations. Specifically, I explore the ways in which the granularity of the olfactory, and of canid figures, can be read as intimating different ways of plugging into (and out of) frameworks of belonging, ways that do not (necessarily) rely on Venter's nationality, his queerness, or his adherence to the strictly conventional textualisation of a genre such as the plaasroman.

These ways and intimations manifest, firstly, in reading-for how Deleuzian shadows of shame, desire, hope, fear, and exclusion, are activated, which manifest in a set of behaviours, sensings, and orientations towards others. I chart the novel's flux, play, and interplay between sexual connection, masculine inclusion, ferality, and social exclusion, and take these states of flux, of in-between-ness, to be given shape not merely in the presence of the olfactory ambit or the canid figures themselves, but rather in the zones of interaction activated by their presence, specifically in how they can be read as posing larger questions on the assemblaging of categories of belonging. For, if we accept that the self is not static, then categories of (national, sexual, familial) belonging can be read as assemblages of processes, sensations, affects and ideas. Secondly, I consider how plugging into (and out of) frameworks of belonging actualises

through olfactory intimacy in the novel, meaning. This allows for seeing the olfactory as also a primary marker of identity in Venter, as the visual is held to be. Thirdly, by seeing the novel's notion of cubilication (as opposed to domestication) as a way of plugging into a system-field (the urban; the literary; the masculine) with nodes of engagement in previous published work.

These two concepts, in their off-centred-ness (and de-human-centred glint), respond to what H. Viljoen (2008), sees as the potential value an analysis of, specifically, Venter can actualise for a continuation of the humanistic. Nearly all of Venter's work (and work on Venter) allows for a flow into Viljoen's brave optimism (of which I am an adherent, fully); that is, except for one aspect (the dystopic) of work on one novel (*Horrelpoet*). And, in order for my own notions of olfactory intimacy, readerly lupification, and cubilication to stand as potentially complementary to how Venter is often read as 'migrant-author, homosexual writer, or genre-dipper', I'd need to, briefly and in the following notes, consider how Venter is doubled read in service of the white-dystopic.

2.9 Concluding note on a queer theoretical disposition

In this section I've brought into play several scavenged relevances, that can be latticed into the alloying of Sections 3 and 4. In essence, as the theorists, activists, and scholars entered into engagement with in this section show, if we need to look anew/askew at ourselves as performatives, then we also need to look anew/askew at how desire and pleasure are limitations of that (especially within the national frames they are often enfolded in through regulatory discourse – or, even, narrative-textual-genre).

This approach is accordingly reframing the queer paradigm from its halting creative early-90s nascency into a full-throated, re-embodied, academic-accepted spotlight on flows and flux – ways of looking at desire by reconsidering traditional (theoretical) views of the erotic – and a

range of social manifestations/regulations of desire, specifically male-male desire – as embedded in larger frameworks of belonging (such as, for example, the national). By following ‘desire lines’ through theory, corporeal models, interactionism, and queer reconceptualisation of socialised desire, queer theories eventually arrive at the subversive power of an anti-heteronormative socio-political understanding of desire, as already immanent to the early 1990s writings of Giddens (1992), Tucker (1991), Singer (1993), and others. Significant, all three called for an erotic manifesto of citizenship (i.e. a way of actualising positive and productive citizenship through positioning ourselves vis a viz sexual groupings and the nation – riffing on how our exclusion can actually be taken to be constitutive of the identity of the nation state, as it were), which means the work of Puar and other – in situation the erotic-non-norm in/aside to/as/to/through the nation – comes full circle. For, as Jasbir Puar shows, often what we hold dear as non-normative, is appropriated into the overcoding machines (also into the literary overcoder intensities that is the local literary field – which is why my seeming critical tone and tenor in section 2.10 must instead be read as productive prodding from within). Queer is creeping slowly closer to being recruited – yes, that term with all its attendant baggage – into ethno-national, masculinist, military, nuclear family, disciplinary filiality ideals, as Puar makes clear. So, use the disruptive and stilted textuality (of, for example, white-queer). Agitate the expected structure of the PhD. While a scavenging or queer alloying still holds productive power, it should be *utilised*.

The temptation (in reseeing erotic re-embodiment in national terms) is to de-emphasise the racial: In *The Right to Maim* (2017), Jasbir Puar builds on Amit Rai’s (2010) recoding of sexuality as one of an “ecologies of sensation” that allows us to see it not in identitarian frames, but instead as a product of affective belonging: “transcend[ing] the designations of straight and gay and can further help to disaggregate these binary positions from their racialized histories” (2017:4). Not only are categories of gender and sexuality shown within a poststructuralist queer

paradigm to be naturalized as opposed to natural, normative as opposed to normal, but so, too, have our conceptualization of art (including film) changed to focus on its (textual) performativity and relational nature: Mieke Bal (2006:397) rightly states that “[a]s it happens, contemporary – postmodern – conceptions of art are also more invested in art’s relational potential, its performativity, than in its iconography” – echoing the Deleuze-Guattarian insistence on re-orientating towards our affective positioning toward a text (i.e. what texts do, as opposed to what they mean). In *Otto*; or, *Up with dead people*, the viewer is confronted with representations of desire that do not fit with current, widely-held assumptions and models of desire, intimacy, or love. Looking at other lenses through queer theories’ disposition provide a framework for looking anew/askew at performatives and at frames of belonging as affective-relational representations, and answers Connel’s call for a politically engaged and anti-essentialist approach that enables re-embodiment, a “search for different ways of using, feeling and showing male bodies” (1995:233).

Because of this reading through and with/but beyond queer theoretical dispositions, in the next section I attempt an alloying of (not 'between') LaBruce and Venter, moving between them not in a comparative manner, but to mine for resonances that illuminate both readings. As such, I'm not much interested in an analysis of either body of work on its own as how they work together, what they do. And, ultimately, as my own research focus is on Venter, on whether a more productive reading of Venter (specifically, in *Wolf, Wolf*) can actualise to ultimately, curiously and creatively complement (not disregard, nor discredit) existing research on the oeuvre. The (perhaps not entirely uncheeky) pairing of Puar and Bal's temporal, geographic, and perceived epistemologic differences points to what I see as a joyous, blissful allowance (or, even, imperative) in both my methodology (scavenged, queer alloying) and in my own assemblaging onto/into/with/alongside/askance to Afrikaans scholarly work on Venter: the

productive bringing into relation of seemingly disparate theoretical voices in a pleasurable-forced affinity, to see how they strums and riff and buzz and resonate.

Interlude: “You’d have to be an insipid, wretched creature not to enjoy the buzz...”

From “Meisie” (page 16), in *Twaalf* (2000):

Die mans praat met mekaar, dit kan oorlegpleging wees. Dis ’n gladde tongval, heelwat r’e. Die man gryp haar arms en hys haar op in ’n sitposisie. My God, dink sy, ek is in Soweto. Ek gaan in Soweto sterf.

Dit het donker geword. Daar loop trosse mense in die pad. Langs die pad. Oral. Sy sien kleintjies wat ’n hondjie dra. ’n Bondel seuns wat ’n hond verjaag. Vure in agterplasies. Karre, busse, taxi’s. Dis nou te laat om te skreeu, dis hoekom hulle haar maar laat sit. Soweto Teacher’s Training College, lees sy. Verhemelte, verhemelte, sy kan in haar vrees verstik.

Section 3

How we become viewers of queer film: Notes on abject-desire identification in Bruce LaBruce's zombie porn

*Cinema draws on and involves many desires, many forms of desire. And desire itself is
mobile, fluid, constantly transgressing identities, positions, and roles. (Neale, 1983:09)*

*...the best sex films are always about something else... (anonymous film reviewer, quoted in
Brinkema, 2006:102)*

3.1 An introductory note

do i think someone created AIDS?
maybe. i don't doubt that
anything is possible in a place
where you can burn a body
with less outrage than a flag

Danez Smit, from 'every day is a funeral & a miracle'

Canadian-Berlin-based queer-provocateur Bruce LaBruce is firmly preoccupied with finding ways to articulate new intimacies and erotic citizenships, and speaks loudly and obtrusively to the advent of the New Online Sexual-deviant Precariat. (See the introduction to the previous section, on new creativities and new precariousness in the democratisation of porn-as-pleasure.) His 'popnography' triptych (consisting of *Otto; or, Up With Dead People* and both versions of *LAZombie* – an 'arthouse' cut and the full-length pornographic version) are quasi-

porno art films (or quasi-art film porno) films about abjectly-coded gay zombies that challenge and enrage, bore and arouse in (un)equal measure – and perhaps has more to say about *how* viewers – even in the not-same Now – desire, especially when desire is oriented toward the abject, than *what* viewers desire. Through its portrayal of decomposing, lustful zombies on quests for intimacy and relational connection, the films *task* the viewing spectator with recognising relational desire in these abject cinematic bodies, in much the same way that Adele Nel sees *District 9*'s denizens' abject state necessitating re-seeing (the South African's) own relation(ality) to them. In essence, to recognise the abject as immanent to desire, as immanent desire.

LaBruce's queerzombie films are proudly messy pleasures, unsustainable idiosyncratic niche expressions of erotic praxis, abject erotic gold in the coalpits and abattoirs and waste factories and meat processing plants, sees the world's cities as interlocking, dehumanising, violently sexual landscapes of desire.

As such, situating these forms of abject actualisation(s) of pleasure within existing frameworks of desire necessitates a nuanced re-reading of models of desire-pleasure and of the abject. However, while much online pop-punditry on LaBruce is available, particularly during queerness' heyday in the 2010s, scholarship on the work is surprisingly scant.

In the previous piece, I consider how queer zombies (as a cypher for trends toward abject themes in porn-as-pleasure) engage with models of desire and pleasure, spectatorial identification, and the abject, specifically with regard to three aspects: identity formation, corporeality, and socius. Primarily, I considered how an engagement with these zombies mirror a gear-shift theory itself, towards concrete, socially situated, messy understandings, wherethrough we might begin to speak of the desire/desire-pleasure of the self-marginalised

abject-subject. In this piece, I take into consideration how the immersive experiences into cinema's genre enfants terrible (bodyhorror and porn) frequently interact with abjectifying modes, and, perhaps more importantly, within frameworks of immersion that rests on the push-pull of attraction-repulsion. To surface the abject as immanent to desire, I structure my thinking around a recursive set of short notes.

I use scenes from the LaBruce films (reuniting with a lost lover; sacrificing the self; patriotic identification, etc.) not as texts to analyse, but as points around which to prompt questions on the role of such films in conceptualising of (sexual) self as relational citizen: How do we identify with the lusty decay of the films? How does watching these films open spaces for a discussion of citizenship, and for potentially seeing ourselves as filmic desire-citizens? By eschewing an analysis of the scenes – not focusing on their *meaning* – but instead thinking, recursively, about what they do to the viewer, I attempt to surface something about the viewer's own agential capacities and complicities within assemblages of abject-desire.

In surfacing the inherent similarities between the desire and repulsion (as induced by the abject) of pleasurable bodies-in-marginalisation, I aim to explore how desire/pleasure and the abject can *be made to correlate* within spectatorial abject-desire aspects highlighted above, thus positing the abject as immanent to desire. This, though true within the world of LaBruce's queerzombie universe may also carry applicability potential for seeing erotic citizenship in a wider selection of texts and experiences that echo LaBruce's surfacing of questions of abject sexual inclusion/exclusion(s) and feral-erotic citizenship, and which specifically speak to prevailing discourse on belonging within national frameworks. For what, ultimately, makes a people abject? Or: What makes an abject people? How can queer theory, and a queer approach to text, help us understand the way we've been regulated into citizenry? These films show us how (sexual) self is constituted as relational citizen, it opens spaces for a re-

awareness, and then a potentiality for a re-negotiation, of citizenship – a space for potentially seeing ourselves as filmic desire-citizens.

3.2 On seeing LaBruce's films as texts of belonging

The scene: Francois Sagat's ambling protagonist find discarded attire, emblazoned with the US flag

Aspects of both the abject and desire figure heavily in the narratives of all three films, and are tied to affective configurations of inclusion and exclusion. *Otto; or, Up with Dead People* [textual note: not to be conflated with its protagonist, Otto) opens on a scene of a young man who, in the frame narrative, wakes up in a field outside Berlin with no memory of his life. He believes himself to be a zombie (no context is given as to why) and heads to the city, where he is hounded by groups of thugs, initially because of his visually different state. While hiding from these thugs, he answers a casting call for a zombie porno – a porno about the “purple plague proletariat” [from screenplay], rising up to overthrow the heterosexual bourgeoisie (“heterofascism”, in the parlance of the film). This porno is then presented as nested narrative: a film within a film. (See still sequence A) Gradually throughout the frame narrative, Otto recovers memories of his old life, and the viewer learns that his dissociative state developed in response to a traumatic experience of becoming-homeless which manifests on three levels: his being a lover, a son, and a citizen. (The viewer comes to learn that his lover, Rudolph, rejected him after Otto became HIV positive, whereupon his homophobic parents had him institutionalised, and then, after escaping and returning to Berlin, he is hounded by bands of thugs codified in heteronormative ways.) He makes a conscious decision to take on an abject form, as the zombie identity offers him a temporary, but safe, liminal space in which to grieve, heal, attain closure, and re-assimilate back into society. This opens up larger questions about identity as an

aspect of citizenship, performative, constructed and pointing to the fact that the abject – as a performative role usually *assigned* by society during marginalisation processes – can also *be willingly taken on*, temporarily.

Otto; or, Up with dead people's 'U.S. remake', *LAZombie*, also directed by LaBruce, was released simultaneously as a set of two films, marketed as two versions of the same narrative; an arthouse version and a pornographic version – labels which perhaps denote moralistic rather than film-structural description (especially as the arthouse cut is simply the porno *sans* penetration or erect penis shots). In *LAZombie*, LaBruce shuns a number of genre (and film-structural) expectations completely: he does away with *Otto; or, Up with dead people's* frame narrative and also with dialogue, while the nested narrative's pornographic elements are foregrounded, and he builds on the former's necrophilic undertones by including scenes of sex between the living and the dead. These amorous scenes, though grisly in concept, are shot in the mode of traditional pornography's pacing and setting; the rhythm of the narrative echoing mid-90s Anglo-US porno. In intentionally low-budget schlocky aesthetics: a succession of scened set pieces in a car crash scene, a homeless shelter made of boxes, a meth lab, with interjected scenes where the groggy protagonist ambles aimlessly through the city.

LaBruce cast popular pornographic actor, Francois Sagat, in the lead role and as such plays with the audience's preconceived receptional schemata, especially that of desire and the abject's affective responses to film. The boundaries of representation between 'chosen' zombiehood and the displaced, family-less/homeless/stateless self is further blurred. The protagonist (of whom the viewer never learns whether he is really a zombie or just a severely schizophrenic man) ambles through LA coded as what traditionally would be termed a 'homeless person' (in terms of filmic troping; at one point even pushing a trolley containing all his earthly belongings). Relationality is compromised: The only way he can connect or

communicate with others is by fornicating with them, usually with the dead. As the film's poster states, he came to "fuck the dead back to life".

There is more than mere shock/schlock tactics at play here: The deceased are all typified as from categories of collateral damage of capitalism: Automobile accident victims, homeless people who had starved or frozen to death, junkies killed by their dealers. The settings, which in traditional porn is usually highly coded (the frat house, the gym locker room, the public restroom) here instead resemble the abject spatial offcuts of capitalism: drainage pipes, sewers, sites of car crashes, slop houses – echoing more elegiac scenes from *Otto; or, Up with dead people* set in abandoned theme parks, waste management plants and abattoirs. The remake thus offers a narrowing focus from ecological, planetary concerns to abject metonymic-urbanised personae and settings, but, in this way, prefigures – and relativises – atomistic (and abject-leaning) pornography circa 2021.

In tandem with this, notions of belonging socially are activated: To the wealthy/healthy denizens of Los Angeles, the abject protagonist is, in a sense, invisible; the physical violence of *Otto; or, Up with dead people* thus replaced in *LAZombie* with the violence of structural invisibility (even when Sagat's nationality problematizes white/passing), whilst notions of how such an abject state might affect the ability to relate to others are explicitly activated. The remake – coded explicitly in promotional material as 'the U.S. remake' – more clearly hones in on national belonging: Although he spends the majority of the narrative in various stages of undress, at one point Sagat's character steals clothes emblazoned with the American flag, which offers tongue-in-cheek commentary on national identity as performance. A kind of (abject) citizenship as performance, but through commoditised clothing, stolen clothing. (These clothes are also extremely low cut and figure hugging, sexualising him even further. [See still sequence B]) Through the films' interplay between (sexual) connection and (social) exclusion, notions of the

abject – and abject citizenship – are irrevocably coupled with desire and pleasure, and shown to be intimately connected to larger modulations of (national) belonging.

In a similar way, through different layers – from the intimate to the national – LaBruce first sets up and then disrupts expected oppositionality between the erotic and the abject (especially in the bodily mechanics of, for example, anal-penetrative sex – where he relocates the penetrative entry point to a bullet wound, an oozing headshot, a gaping wound in a man's flank), thereby necessitating an exploration of the different ways of seeing, unseeing and re-seeing the abject and desire – not as binary opposites, but as affective responses situated on an abject-erotic continuum, the one always already contained within the other – immanent to it. The abject is *in essentia* defined as that which I must turn away from so as to create corporeal boundaries between ‘me’ and ‘not-me’ (other, one might say) and so create myself as an “idiosyncratic entity” (Weiss, 1999:44) in the process. Desire, on the other hand, is seen as “a mode of surface contact with things and substances, with a world, that engenders and induces transformations, intensifications, a becoming other” (Grosz, 1995:249, emphasis added).

Of specific focus is the effect this intertwined nature has on the spectatorial viewers of LaBruce's films, and on how this activates rethinkings of the different ways in which citizens belong and relate to larger groupings. Jacques Rancière writes in *The Emancipated Spectator* (Rancière, 2009) on distinctions between political/politicised spectators and the spectator who simply takes part in the spectacle. This distinction between active and passive positionalities vis-à-vis spectatorial engagement is of fundamental importance in how it relates what we come to expect from the text. In LaBruce's films, thematic dualism between the abject and desire manifests on structural level in various ways: in a spectatorial pushing and pulling of the viewer's bodily reactions, manifest in alternating identification/alienation with the bodies on screen, as a textual straddling of two genres (bodyhorror and porn), and as a split between two

narratives, each with its own alter-protagonist (Otto in the frame narrative and Fritz [A short contextualisation for the characters will have to come earlier in the study] in the nested narrative – two characters perhaps amalgamating in the unnamed protagonist of *LAZombie*).

LaBruce's use of the textual double and split narrative fragments – splits – how the viewer 'reads' the films. The various (sometimes disparate) modes of narrativization, which stretch the skin of the film close to breaking point, alienating-intriguing the viewer to the extent that our emotional and affective investment in the film is at risk of being compromised. These pairings of identification/alienation affects, the push-pull of arousal and repulsion, have a specific effect on the viewer, as it mirrors social process of inclusion and exclusion, and BLAB necessitate looking anew/askew at the relation between abject desire, genre/film-structural considerations, and the inclusion-exclusion *pas de deux* of citizenship. Based on a shift in textual engagement, from asking what the films mean, to asking what really happens to the viewer of LaBruce's films [a second, nested, provocation: what happens when that rather generic-vague 'viewer' is give the adjective "Afrikaner"?] and how it activates a re-seeing of the unsettling, politicising, bodily engagement of queer film.

3.3 On fear of the [extra-national] other

The scene: Otto is picked up by a couple, who immediately regrets it

When speaking of viewing bodies and pleasure, we must not lose sight of the (politized) body in front of the screen, or its entering into assemblage with the (queerly engaging) bodies on screen. For LaBruce, a new lexicon of intimacy is also a new articulation of national belonging. Here, the trope of the zombie comes in handy; examples from across the globe on the use of the zombie trope in discourse of nation-through-exclusion abound, and point, most often, toward

attempts to make bodily filial sense of something that is inherently about visceral, socius-based alliance.

Stern/Johnson's model of contoured affect posits that we "conceptualize and reason the ways we do because of the kinds of bodies we have, the kinds of environments we inhabit, and the symbolic systems we inherit, which are themselves grounded in our embodiment (Johnson, 1999:99). Symbolic systems find their outflow in literature, art, film – all creative texts – and so shape our (perception of) reality: Our embodied patterns of understanding "determine the ways we can make sense of and reason about things" (ibid.). Through the use of metaphor and metonymy, "we extend image schemas with their spatial logic to structure abstract concepts and inference. Our rationality is embodied in the sense that it is built on and grows out of these affect-rich image schemas" (ibid.). We thus bring affect-rich schemata – lived through the body – to our viewing of these films, and blend this with our expectations of the generic conventions (*i.e., the frame of reference built on how our bodies responded to this type of text in the past*) of the film. This impacts on the way we construe meaning in a film, illuminated by our continued, collective thinking on macro (extra-textual) aspects, such as the implication of genre, the role of the auteur in changing/affecting the spectator's expectations, and the nature of the effect of pornography.

But what exactly is it about the nature of queer film as "genre" that allows such (re)codings of pleasure, desire, intimacy? What characteristic of *filmic* (as opposed to literary or cultural, or even audiovisual or cinematic) representations of the desiring/abject body allows such bodies to be seen as a "means of challenging the explanatory limitations of social constructionist/discursive accounts of experience" (Hook, 2006:15) through the becoming-abject of the filmic queer body? (And to what extent does genre or oeuvre play a role in this?)

Steven Shaviro starts his 2006 analytical opus on the cinematic body with a seemingly-throwaway reminder: “Film is a *vivid* medium, and it is important to talk about how it arouses corporeal reactions of desire and fear, pleasure and disgust, fascination and shame” (2006:viii). He names three pairs of affective-contoured response (desire-fear, pleasure-disgust, fascination-shame) – all three pairs have the same dynamic at heart: an affective *pull and push*. It is our response to affective contours, as much as our expectation of generic conventions, that come to define the *texture* of a genre. Awareness of genre can be defined as that moment “when a noticeable unit of literary texts adhering to a similar literary convention becomes established” (Smit-Marais, 2012:11). Swanepoel, however, warns that “what constitutes this [...] is not standardised” (2016: 42). Genre thus becomes that categorical coding which we as viewers *expect* of a text, according to a blend of established conventions, contours of affect, and our own expectational schemata – as lived through the body.

LaBruce’s films seem to resist an easy categorical placement in terms of genre. It is not (necessarily) pornographic, but it is definitely a film that sets out to arouse (physically). In the same vein, it is not (necessarily) a horror film, but it is definitely a film that aims to repulse. Not surprisingly, both these affective responses focus on the body. Because of the focus on a visceral response, we could typify LaBruce’s films as films within the body genre, which then implies two things: Firstly, Christiansen (2011:312) states that in the body genre, “the film jerks at the spectator’s emotions and intends to overpower the spectator, which is in essence the opposite of classical film identification’s powerful spectator in control of the images”. This potentially intensifies the fragmentary identification detailed previously. Secondly, it is exactly through *affect* that “the boundaries between spectator/reality and representation are collapsed moving [sic] beyond the division which representation itself implies” (ibid.:314). Representation implies that there exists a boundary between the viewer and the text, but this boundary is

problematized in the body genre, because of the intense affective responses – in the case of LaBruce's queerzombie films, of attraction and repulsion – working in on the viewer's body. Within the logic of LaBruce's filmic universe, zombies can't be citizens because they refuse to accept the invisibility associated with death (even, as I'd argue, here bodily death is a metaphor for social death) and continue to engage in sex after they are (socially) dead (i.e. after they've contracted the 'purple plague').

This connects the (sexually-politized) body in front of the screen with the (queerly engaging) bodies on screen; In this way, LaBruce's lexicon of intimacy is also an articulation of national belonging through abjectivity. Over the years, the zombie has come to be a rather useful (and, perhaps, overused) trope, and LaBruce positions his fornicating undead figures specifically in terms of the zombie's long cultural-historical and socio-political baggage. The zombie trope carries material fear of insecurities about empire building, social marginalisation, the fear of the other, and citizenship. Entering the (Western) cultural register during the early years of the previous century, with the American invasion and occupation of Haiti, the zombie was both highly sexualised and vilified through inverse fear and collective guilt projection over the US military's monstrous behaviour towards the people of Haiti. Leading to Bishop labelling the zombie the "first thoroughly post-colonial creature" (Bishop, 2008:142). In its material history, then, the zombie trope carries the virus of xenophobic and exclusionary thinking, especially of the sexual other.

Fear of the (extra-national) other has proven to be a rather popular pastime, especially it is mixed with salaciousness (as a less threatening coupling of abject plus pleasure): McGee points to the immense popularity of such diverse media as zombie radio drama and zombie Broadway shows in the 1920s and 1930s when "Haiti [was still], for many white Americans, the paradigmatic exotic Other" (McGee). Further colonial and racist traces are seen in, for example,

how Wade Davis writes in *Passage of Darkness: The ethnobiology of the Haitian zombie*, that (quote) “For Americans, in particular, Haiti was like having a little bit of Africa next door, something dark and foreboding, sensual and terribly naughty.”

In our current era, zombie culture is experiencing a renaissance in response to renewed, this time *global*, fears and insecurities. Zombies had become almost blank texts onto which we project social anxiety about globalisation (and terrorism). New era, new anxieties, new (material) projections. In more recent zombie films from the US, “the infected are no longer considered Americans, but have become unwelcome immigrants, former citizens who have been ‘thirdworldized’” according to Wald (2008:61). This is not only the case in American film though: Ancuta’s (2016) analysis of the zombie trope in Thai horror films indicates how these narratives are built on “foreignness and the tensions between what is local (Thai) and what is not” (2016:35) relying heavily on newer tropes of inter-nation-al racial stereotyping. It is clear that the zombie sub-genre, which has since its inception been predicated on notions of (social) inclusion and exclusion, has now explicitly begun to engage with the idea of citizenship, specifically with the idea of the zombie as cypher of non-citizenship.

3.4 On viewing a white auteur’s orgy

The scene: Able-bodied men pretend to care fuck

The auteur-personae, and how porn was (originally seen as) subversive act as modulators of how we interact with the materiality of the trope – the time-image and movement-image aren’t only relatable to the film stock’s materiality, but also to the larger assemblage that the film makes up a part of; new clips from LaBruce’s Syrian refugee porn pops up in my FB feed when I’m having lunch. In this way, the affective materiality of the film/genre/auteur-personae/trope

extends outside the film itself, and onto onto-issues immediately surround the text, and to how we perceive it, such as the overbearing and invasive social – mediated figure of BLaB-as-auteur (he pops up in my FB feed *on a daily basis*)

When the auteur (perhaps out of necessity) becomes ringleader for their own work, even micromanaging how the materiality of the film/stock (his interviews on working in older film formats as opposed to working in digital; his multiple opinion pieces on how we should relate to older, forgotten queer film) to affect the viewer and spur them to the new. “Share the shame”, LaBruce often reminds us in interviews. This materiality-plus-auteur provocation is perhaps parodic of porn but does create distance between the viewer and the trope, especially when: LaBruce's filmic staging itself explores different themes of belonging in scenes that are so gratuitously explicit-sexual (as opposed to erotic or desirous) that the viewer can't not think they were intended as parodic of established pornographic conventions.

As such, it forms part of a larger range of post-millennial films that reflect changing social norms and values regarding desire, sexual praxis, and love. At a time when clear-cut distinctions between ‘queer’ and ‘mainstream’ films are starting to fade – see, for example, quite a large number of ostensibly queer films which ‘repackage’ queer desire and queer practice into more palatable reterritorialised forms – the films of LaBruce are still unapologetically provocative. His provocation, however, lies in how he simultaneously arouses and repulses his viewer – in essence, how he eschews palatability by amalgamating cinematic contours of desire and the abject in scenes that are at the same time both highly sexual *and* horrifically abject. For example, black ooze ejaculate spraying over a hapless bottom's face (and other OTT – pushes the signification ability of porn conventions to ridiculous heights.) By having his characters intentionally move between zones of pleasure and of abjection in order to navigate (categories of) belonging, LaBruce not only shows repulsion and arousal both to be affective responses to

porn's heightened materiality (*we have to hide porn viewing, we watch it in the dark, we are overly aware of the sounds it makes, we have to delete our search history, lest it leaves traces on our computers*) but also how it is reliant on seeing the body as heightened open to stimuli, porous.

Deterritorializing filial categories of belonging, such as national belonging: (to orgy, to end of film). As in his other films (notable 2004's terrorist-porno, *The Raspberry Reich*), LaBruce posits an ambitious form of abject citizenship, as a community of zombies go on a recruiting rampage, aiming to cause anarchy and overthrow the conformist status quo, but the final scenes of the nested narrative is still, a *white* auteur's orgy.

The thematics of the narrative and the nested-frame structural composition of the film (*Otto; or, Up with dead people*) speak in concert (and in a sense subverts its own project) about this ambitious form of abject citizenship (however arrested in the filial). After arriving in Berlin, Otto attends an audition for a zombie porno with nationalist and anti-fascist undertones. Intersecting the primary narrative (presented in colour), the viewer is then confronted with a secondary, nested narrative stream in black and white, showing scenes from the zombie porno. (A film-within-a-film, thus.) This nested porno is set in a time of "purple peril", when a "wave of gay zombies has made everyone even more paranoid than usual about homosexuals". Its protagonist is a zombie insurgent leader called Fritz (a "gay Che Guevara of the undead", leader of "a macabre muhajireen") who, after his zombie husband is slain by conformist straights, plans an uprising against the heterosexual living. This is done by "[l]uring homosexuals into dark alleys and fucking them into immortality" until he in time creates a "small army of gay zombies" who want to establish their own republic as they feel that the government is not able, or willing, to protect them from the living heterosexuals. They spend the remainder of the film "recruit[ing]

members by fucking, killing and partially devouring vigorous young men. Not necessarily in that order,” and the film culminates in a manifesto-shattering orgy of ‘Stalinist proportions’.

This explicitly positions the abjectly desiring and decomposing bodies within frameworks of national identity, but crucially they are posited as oppositional subject positions, offering commentary on the futility of contested (and, after Charlottesville, and Senekal, very topical) ways of being, belonging, and citizenship. Or, perhaps not so futile. While the orgy is presented as politically (and symbolically) vacant and vacuous, it is part of a series of events that lead Otto to recognise the futility of oppositional spectacle and sloganeering. He then decides to, in the primary narrative, shed his zombie identity “to move onward, to find some others like me”. This could be read as a line of flight, as a type of political-erotic consciousness awakened by the body’s experiences of the vacuity of the orgy (which is filial homonormativity per excellence: all white male, all pretty, all well-built, all able-bodied, all grunting and groaning with an emphasis on physical assertive intimacy).

This plugs into the film’s larger consideration on the movement between individual becoming and national belonging, with the texts echoing the Deleuze-Guattarian view that society is not “defined by its contradictions [...but rather] by its lines of flight [...] There is always something that flows or flees, that escapes the binary organisations, the resonance apparatus and the overcoding machine; things that are attributed to a ‘change in values’, the youth, women, the mad, etc.” (1987: 216). By paying close attention to such qualitative changes in the lattice of organisation, in the slippage and leakage of the film, we might be able to make more sense of the whole as assemblage. That is, by analysing how citizens, based on their race, gender, sexual orientation and sexuo-political inclination, conceptualise their sense of belonging through their bodies, we may be able to improve our understanding of the ever-changing social, cultural and sexual landscapes which inform social and sexual being. Assemblages are, after all, *also*

performances. As M. Tamboukou reminds us, they are “nomadic modes of existence [...] What is critical in the experience of freedom is our movement in between, when we follow lines of flight or escape, the intermezzo, the process of becoming other” (Tamboukou 2008:361).

But if the white auteur can be linked more explicitly to capitalist, colonialist heteropatriarchy, then how these tropes correspond with material reality (the refugee; the hot Charlottesville protestors, Danie on top of an upturned police van. What are sexual zombies, what are political zombies? Why this focus on abject sexuality? What does this correlate with in reality? How are these time-images manipulated (though montage or cut-ups have an impact on the spectator – to draw the spectator into the assemblage beyond the spectacle and thus politicise the entire assemblage?

3.5 On watching films as outsiders (or, *Up with Dead People*)

The scene: The lovers reunite

Parts of the mechanism of 'film-viewing' is abjectifying: In one view, cinema consists of dead images that are animated by desire (Baudry, 1986). This should be taken into consideration when conceptualising the ways in which repulsion and attraction (primarily, within the texture of these notes, in the narrowly actualised forms of death and sex) is represented through the mode of cinema – specifically how the filmic use of the zombies and related affective states challenge the integrity (i.e., its border making) of the subject viewing position. Traditional modes of storytelling in 'Hollywood cinema'⁷⁵ was developed to assist the viewer in keeping their ontological integrity intact, to differentiate between the 'me' who is identifying with the narrative

⁷⁵ My occasional usage of western-centric phrases such as “Hollywood cinema” does not negate film theory and praxis developed in different geolocations, nor is it indicative of a mode of Western hagiography.

on screen, and the 'me' as self, between engaged viewer and autonomous self. Deleuze refers to this as the movement-image as it implies a powerful thrust of linearity in/through the narrative, shoving fixed identities along from one static set of narrative nodes to the next; it is "the linear thrust which subtends the moments of dawning consciousness" (1986:38) of the spectatorial participant. However, as bodies are always situated in a specific place and time, a certain amount of identification dissonance leaks into the spaces around the body and has an effect on how the socially situated body (of the viewer) is conceptualised within its socio-cultural and historical placement as not-film. Roos, after his reading of Derrida, describes this process as follows: "given its insistent temporality, it [the film in this instance] inevitably moves toward the future. On the other hand, this is always a future that is foreseen, that the viewer knows will come to an end within the space of a screening; its finality imposes a kind of past upon it." (Roos, 1997:114-115, after his reading of Derrida, 1987:289) This very much has to do with the materiality of the film itself: "the viewer knows or is told that this or that building no longer exists; in a fictional motion picture, the viewer knows that these clothes are out of date, this actress is now dead, this actor is now old. Within the present space and present time of the motion picture, in other words, one is incessantly reminded of the past, and the past is a spectre, the past is dead" (ibid.).

In the LaBruce films, the zombies offer the living an "irksome reminder of their own mortality" (LaBruce, 2008). This is vividly illustrated in the textuality – the grain, sound, light, feel – of the film itself. At times, the narrative slips into the (then, in 2008, still becoming engorged as trope, and by now overly clichéd) audio-visual recreation of the 'point of view of the zombie', looking at 'us' (both us-as-not-zombies and us-as-viewer). Otto's droll remark that "the living all seem like the same person, and I don't like that person very much" (LaBruce, 2008) is textualised in/through jarring structural elements (discordant, jarring sound design, strobed lighting,

distorted music and decontextualised, distorted snippets of hysterical-historical political speeches) every time LaBruce moves into zombiePOV.

All of human history relegated to mediated remnant(s) through the materiality of the film. Apart from being a jarring dis-engaging factor, these elements spill over onto the viewer's engagement with the plot itself. During the emotional climax of the film, when Rudolph and Otto reunite, these elements break out of the zombie POV and partly obscures the (possibly romantic) dialogue, dialogue which the viewer construes as containing crucial information about the *reasons* why Otto decided to take on the abject zombie identity. As identifying viewers, bent on knowing – itself a filial way of mastery and control over narrative – we want to know how this conflict started and how it will resolve (especially, perhaps, since it carries troped conventions of a 'love story' in an otherwise all-over-the-genres text). LaBruce (or, rather: the film structural composition) denies the viewer this: Engagement – in knowing – is arrested.

Such an avoidance of closure, and an embrace of unintelligibility, stands in stark contrast to dominant-conventional forms of cinematic storytelling. The conventional 'reuniting scene', usually so crucial to the resolution of loose libidinal energy of the various troped strands of the 'romantic comedy' narrative, moves even further away from the familiar defamiliarisation of the zomromcom (for example, the – compared to LaBruce – fairly typical of films such as *Warm Bodies*) into structural-nihilistic territory: Toward the end of the scene, Otto is faced with the dawning realization that he has lost Rudolph. LaBruce intentionally surfaces and then subverts the traditional conventions of the romantic comedy by overlaying loud radio static on the soundtrack, obscuring some of the dialogue and keeping the viewer from knowing. This is conceivably meant to signify thematically that Otto has become so immune to the everyday, to love, to intimacy that he cannot connect with others anymore, but the very materiality of the film stops the viewer from connecting too. This echoes the dawning realisation throughout the film

that perhaps the 'reason' is less important than the effects it had/has on Otto: embracing what Stark calls the affirmative potential of unintelligibility. We are to know only partially; we become the partially impotent viewer; By being subject to such a process of relegation, the traditional spectatorial role is placed in abject positioning. We (very temporarily) become screenmigrant, celluloidal outsider.

The textual finality of the film and the viewer's knowledge that it will come to an end, along with the knowledge that the narrative presented on screen is not 'here' or 'now' (intimated to by Roos, above), places the fixed integrity of the social body, situated in a specific place and time, at risk. Such a sense of (affective) disruption can be seen as abjectly uncanny in the way it activates an estranging sense of (un)familiarity in the viewer. The ways in which these kinds of estranging disruptions are produced in film is what Deleuze refers to as the time-image. Unlike movement-images, time-images disrupt or trouble linear narratives and stable identities by making use of cutups and "piecemeal montage" (Deleuze 139), leading to, what I would argue, abjectifying experiences. Whereas the movement-images of normative narrative film could lead to a 'freezing' of the viewer in a place of fixed, stable identification, stagnation or fixation, Deleuze argues that the time-image allows

...the power of thought [to give] way, then, to an unthought in thought, to an irrational proper to thought, a point of outside beyond the outside world, but capable of restoring our belief in the world. The question is no longer: does cinema give us the illusion of the world? But: how does cinema restore our belief in the world?" (Deleuze, 1989:181-182)

Paradoxically, by negating the spectatorial role so easily assumed by the viewer (especially the white male viewer), fissures of re-identification are opened: Rudolf leaves, but not before handing back a book Otto once lent him, Nikolai Gogol's *Dead Souls*. The book, an 1842 novel

detailing one man's fight to survive the complacency and middle-class values of the society he lives in, is hugged close by Otto, and this marks the moment the zombie façade slowly starts breaking. The book is also a metonymic cypher for the film: apart from the self-deprecating nod to the thematics of the film itself, manifesting in Rudolph's admission that he never managed to read as it was "too depressing" (01:16:12), the intertextual relation between book and film opens up zones of interaction on questions of citizenship (and – given that these are ruminations of a gay zombie – perhaps of queer/queering citizenship), with the spectator posited as analogous filmic desire-citizen.

This allows for thinking about how notions of citizenship can be prodded, troubled, and creates a framework for affective pluggings/plugin. Like the viewer, Otto has a choice to either continue as he is, a fading and disassociated undead being, or reintegrate back into society with a new understanding of his own humanity and of the humanity of those around him. Ultimately, it is the abject being's relationship to "critical questions about real and symbolic identity, which implies a new comprehension of humanness/humanity" (Nel, 2012:547) that leads to this choice.

The viewer seemingly has an analogous choice to either be immersed in the viewing process that makes us into celluloidal abject, or to re-see ourselves as insider-outsider to the text. While traditionally "a mainstay of the impression of reality works to mask the extent of the image's relation to mort. This relation arises from the play of mort within desire [...]" (Roos, 1997:114-115, after Derrida) In other words, cinema is willingly experienced as 'the impression of reality' and try to mask to what extent the image is already in mort. This correlates with a central notion in theories on the abject: abjection as always inherently negating the very process of abjection itself. But this notion ignores the role time-images that make cinema political (again) – pushes the spectator into the mort of desire. In other words, the very concepts of the abject and desire

“become distinct” and “take on an autonomous political, historical, or archaeological range” (Deleuze 1989:118) that allows for an understanding of ourselves not as outsiders to the text, but as filmic desire-citizens.

Filmic desire-citizens are not passively made to be abject. Abjection is visual-political and the body is text (as the body is society). Pleasure at our fluid engagement with the text is an understanding of the necessary disavowal of the effect of mort: If cinema can be thought of as dead images, moving, then what makes this alive? Desire (“libidinal apparatus”) through the time-image – the time-image animates, while the movement-images arrests – not only in terms of viewer identification, but also in terms of spurring us to action.

Viewing LaBruce’s films is itself a process of making abject, but at the same time a navigation of that process – the viewer vacillates between participation and non-participation, we navigate the almost-decipherable thematics of inclusion and exclusion in these films, and the always already-*mort* of cinema. The next note will explore how we go about, through a navigated immersion, identifying with characters on screen, regardless of the knowledge of the already-*mort* of cinema, in order to traverse into/out of/from this abject positioning.

3.6 On immersion: How we navigate the ebb and flow of belonging

The scene: Otto, outside a nightclub called Flesh (hosting a zombie-themed night)

When we, as filmic desire-citizens, visually engage with the lustful decaying and copulating bodies on screen, desire and the abject is twinned in very specific ways. Barbara Creed (1993:10) distinguishes between two different types of desiring identification: “Viewing the horror film signifies a desire not only for perverse pleasure (confronting sickening, horrific images,

being filled with terror/desire for the undifferentiated) but also a desire, having taken pleasure in perversity, to throw up, throw out, eject the abject (from the safety of the spectator's seat)."

There seems to be a tension between a spectator's desire for seeing (as opposed to experiencing) the undifferentiated – what she calls "taking pleasure in perversity" (ibid.) – and of the pleasure in knowing that the undifferentiated, the abject, is ultimately kept at bay. The last part of this quote – "from the safety of the spectator's seat" (ibid.) – hints at a fundamentally different way of approaching the dual desire-abject in spectator's studies: As opposed to a theoretical/corporeal/ psychological understanding of the socialised interworking of desire and the abject, manifest in our identifications with people around us, our identification with filmic bodies on screen adds specific nuance and therefore necessitates nuanced models of spectator identification. By allowing ourselves as spectators to be vulnerable, we identify with the fissures opened up in the text and thereby navigate between agency and immersion.

Roberts (2003) writes on the different ways in which a viewer can forge a connection, psychosomatically, with the characters on screen. Sometimes we "feel an ebb and flow of emotion that follows the narrative. Sometimes the emotion is sympathetic: We feel what some character is feeling. Sometimes it is straightforwardly that of spectator: We feel an anxiety or compassion for the heroine that she herself does not feel, or an outrage at the injustice or a joy at the spectacle" (2003:343). Roberts differentiates here between two modes of emotional connection; as viewers, we either align (along with identitarian identification) with a character on the screen, and/or the narrative events unfolding on the screen engender in us a feeling or psychosomatic response. In both these modes, the emotional response is nearly never arbitrary; Roberts outlines both the role of the viewer in bringing a certain responsiveness to the text and the role of the author/director, who capitalises on the viewer's 'stock' of emotional responses:

Largely we bring our sensibilities, our emotional responsiveness, to the work. It is a soundboard of our character in which the themes of the soul – or at least our apparent soul – become audible to us. [...] The author (sic) may change our responsiveness by trading on concerns and sensibilities already present in us to draw us into angers and compassions, shocks and amusements, joys and admirations that are actually beyond us. (ibid.)

Through reference to this type of responsive synesthesia (the ‘soul’ becoming audible), Roberts turns to affective pairings (anger and compassion; shock and amusement) – what I am terming push-pull affect pairs. That which is already in us, draws us into the affective push-pull, bringing us into contact with that which is beyond the scope of the day-to-day. We have to know how to navigate this. (Queer) film and literature allows us to affectively be different, to yield to a category of escapism based on emotional linkages between affective responses (potentially) inside us and that which might be experienced. But affect is more than emotion. The queer text cajoles (us); it pushes and pulls at our affective stock.

Some texts also solicit desire (through the time-image; for the tantalising effect of being part of, being allowed to participate in, whether it is as an audience, a circuit, a nation). Texts make us desire, partly because they necessitate an audience: Through our very engagement with them, we become part of a bigger grouping, we belong (even if it means we belong abjectly). Even more so, film, which visually engages us directly as visual beings. In *Otto; or, Up with dead people*, for example, we see the film stock, the celluloid, become flesh, a sexy skin covering over abject innards. If the representational aspect is the skin of the film, then the abject sex is the meat, the flesh. Like Otto, we are attracted to the city – to the “smell of human density; the smell of flesh” [from screenplay] – and to (the) film since both are imbued with the smell of relational potentiality. The smell of decay; the smell of spunk; the associative memory of the

chemical smell of celluloid and of sex in darkened adult movie theatres. In the zombie films: a rotting penis and a disused theme park; a burning monk and sweat and spunk We can also desire (through) the abject, and the abject is desirous.

Manalansan (2006:50) states that “olfaction is a political and cultural process that should be seen in terms of the visceral or the emotional which includes shame, fear, disgust and shock.” Even though it feels like a visceral reaction, it is actually a conditioned response, it is metaphor given materiality. But smell is also the “liminal sense per excellence” (Howes, quoted in Manalansan, 2006:42), moving between the corporeal and non-corporeal; smells’ “very intangibility allows them to maintain the essential force of continuity, to reconstitute lost or forgotten contexts, to re-present unconscious memories and hidden, unrecognised truths” (Shulman, 2006:425). This applies to Otto, when he speaks of his slowly emerging memories of Rudolph (he can only remember he smelled like. Chlorine). Chlorine as sterility, a searing acid that eats away at dirt, but is also a cypher for affluent recreation. Redolent affect introduced by the film’s skin. But reference to smell here is not only about identity demarcation, but also serves to re-engage the viewer’s sense of the materiality of the text. Smell is off/from the body, and whilst placing you in socius, echoes the abjectification process. Smell also marks group identity: the smell of the immigrant, the smell of home. As viewers, we can’t smell how bad Otto smells – or what Rudolph’s chlorine smell was like. We have to rely on the reaction shots of others: Redolent engagement by proxy. We do what those passers-by won’t do: Theirs is a negation of the relation potential in olfactory intimacy, arresting perception of smell on the level of identity marker – a sign of otherness. We have to engage, interact, participate to make meaning. The screen doesn’t smell, but it activates memories of smell.

Smell is one way in which LaBruce’s queer films cajole us. Returning to Roberts’ notion of affective immersion, it is important to not think of texts as simply autonomous machines of

desire, but rather as objects that thrive on teasing out desirous or repulsive affective stock – or, sometimes, negated/abjected affects¹ deeply hidden – that were already implicitly present in the spectatorial viewer. Roberts can be read as saying that affect-response interactional alignment with the film happens along two vectors: our response echoes (or bears some relation to) the 'how and why' of desire in the narrative, and our response is created out of the affective reserve we bring to the film. The paired sets of affective immersion do not necessarily imply duality that needs to be broken. Rather, in queer fashion, duality shows itself intertwined and navigable. Affect is more than emotion. What drives us sometimes is being shocked by what we feel or discover that we can feel. The queer film's leakage (through identification fissure) onto the body. Maybe we find we desire while being repulsed and are then repulsed by the fact that we desire what we repulse. This may be a new experience and this is what is important, as it contours reaction to the film. Affect is not only about the emotions we experience, but the ways in which desiring-machines (or assemblages) ebb and flow in their connection with objects, groupings of people, flows of money, film stock, electrical currents, colour, smell, mother tongue and fatherland – and have the capacity to affect and be affected by all of this. Contours of affect is that which allows us to deepen our conceptualisations of belonging and by plugging in to (larger than the self) contours, also our becoming-citizen.

3.7 On re-seeing the 'normal' of an immolation

The scene: Otto sacrifices himself the performatively abject

In this note's intro, state how we get from LaBruce to the olfactory to desire to abject to citizenship. How does LaBruce do it, and what are the visual cues. There are specific ways in which a viewer can forge such a connection with the characters on the screen, exemplified by Roberts' (2003) distinction between identification connections between a character and a

viewer, and narrative-driven/genre-induced responsiveness. Whether the viewer's connectivity oscillates between character-identification and narrative immersion, or one of these two affective 'pulls' overpower the other, of note is that Roberts foregrounds the fact that this connection is not linear or constant, but rather that we, as viewers, "feel an ebb and flow of emotion that follows the narrative" (2003:343). Seeing emotional connection in terms of a non-constant and non-linear 'ebb and flow' is fundamentally different from how scholarship traditionally characterize film affect. Film affect, traditionally, is seen as a gradual build-up of emotional connectivity (the rise and fall of Freytag's conflict) through the myriad ways in which the director, as proxy for a whole team of creative technicians and artist-activists, 'leads' a viewer to catharsis; this being a clear example of the linear narrative of the movement-image correlating with filial ways of socially relating to others: less like a general leading an army, and more like a DJ curating a rave.

However, in films of the body genre, spectator identification is not so straightforward. Roberts' ebb and flow of affective contouring correlates with Shaviro's notion of affective response-inducing immersion, as the viewer is drawn into the emotional sphere/world of the diegesis and connects in ways that are (in terms of affect) "actually beyond us" (ibid.). Both speak to the power of the time-image to make us aware of inclusion and exclusion (not necessarily on thematic level, but more on structural/material level). In how it traverses the porn/not-porn genre divide, the materiality of these two films also explicitly activates a sense of becoming-other. Contours of affect, the way in which affective investment in a text modulates, shivers and contracts over time (Johnson, Stern) are, crucially, bodily ways of connecting with the narrative. Porn activates various types of viewer in us: the prude, the sadist, the insatiable, the unsatable. We roleplay our way through this immersion.

The intentional abject-desire proximity problematizes a reading of being as fixed and stable and suggests, rather, that ‘selves’ are products of different becomings. At various points in LaBruce’s films, the idea of fixed identity is indeed challenged: Actors play dual roles, nested films-with-in-a-film are haphazardly introduced and discarded, the casting of Sagat blurs the line between the repulsive diegetic and explicit non-diegetic arousal (see comparative still set D), and we, as the audience, experience severe uncertainty about both the protagonists’ ontological state.

Such personal layering of contours of affect constructs national contours of affect. Various intertextual references to nationalism and nationalistic inclusion/exclusion (examples) aim to tear at the skin of the film, rhizomatic insertions (What does it mean? What does it do?) opening up literary and politically infused fissures that leak/bleed affective potentiality. The film’s epigraph, a quote from W. Somerset Maugham’s 1944 novel, “The Razor’s Edge”, already activates the exclusion trope. It reads as follows: “The dead look so terribly dead when they are dead.” The novel, one of a number of novels featured (visually, prominently, throughout the film) about a traumatized WW1 pilot struggling to combat a sense of meaninglessness within bourgeois conventionality after a traumatic experience during the war, resonates on a number of levels with the events of LaBruce’s film. It also offers an important intertextual key to understanding the dissociative character of Otto, echoed in the film’s opening credit sequence, which superimposes images of the protagonist over stock news footage of dropping and exploding bombs, mushroom clouds, and, in the final, haunting image of the credit sequence, the infamous photograph of the 1963 self-immolation of Thích Quảng Đức, the Vietnamese Mahayana Buddhist monk who set his own body on fire in dissent. This scene – re-created in the secondary narrative, where Otto graphically sets himself on fire – challenges the viewer to completely let go of their identification/affective investment in the main character. To unplug out of the protagonist.

The credits sequence explicitly foregrounds the political nature of being, and of violent politics of exclusion – in addition, by using stock footage, LaBruce comments on the trite commercialisation of (political) violence. While these mediated violences are now recognised as part of a rhizomatic engagement with global power flows, even a decade ago LaBruce's film pointed to the tautness of a (textual) skin in becoming: Images and textual forms through which the skin of the film is cut open, scarred over, grafted on: Christopher Chemin's charcoal drawings; 4th-wall-breaking, straight to camera talking heads a decade before mass media punditry had become a cypher for contemporary disconnect (through global hyperconnection); faded and scratched old film footage; intertitles; actual media footage; animated cartoons; snippets of previous art-school films; the nested and frame narratives; and different POV scenes, characterised by jarring visuals and incongruent sound design. These different elements, as "memories of consciousness" (LaBruce, 2008), creates an affective assemblage that echo the many-headed media hydra of contemporary life; multiple potential points of entry for the viewer, many possible ways to plug into the provocative fucking machine that is LaBruce's work. Newspaper clippings, charcoal sketches, different film stock, the punk and gothic aesthetic – all offer differential entry points for the viewer to become immersed, so too do jump cuts, jarring intercuts, ludicrous dialogue, sharp staccato sounds all bring us back to the materiality of the film. Breaking the skin of the film – in itself also a becoming –characters move in and between representational layers of the text: They move between textual boundaries and physically enter the past's old black and white footage; Otto becomes Thích Quảng Đức and then again un-becomes him in the penultimate scene of the film.

3.8 On the urban(ity of the) abject

The scene: Francois Sagat's ambling protagonist cruises the city

Such more traditional models of immersion based on lack still do not allow for a full-enough comprehension of how LaBruce twins arousal and disgust. This note will pay particular attention to this intertwinement, as well as to how it moves us to re-see the normal, specifically that which surrounds in the national socius. When we align with characters on the screen, we are drawn into the emotional schema of the film and filled with emotions (arousal and repulsion, in this case) that might actually be 'beyond us'. The queer filmic text, as a machine of desire, itself solicits desire, feeding on the desire of viewers. On the other hand, the spectators too are desiring-machines, plugging into the film, the desire it elicits, the repression it brings to the fore, the disgust it engenders, the physical discomfort it produces.

But we also 'see' political violence from a national 'here' and 'now': When I first saw the self-immolation scene at the end of the nested narrative, it activated similar visuals from the South African actuality.

Identification, though, is not straightforward and without risk. As the viewer is drawn in, a sense of self is put at risk. Regardless of what conservative pundits may argue, shrilly, about identity politics, we tend not to actively place our abjected group identities (according to race, gender, sexual orientation and the like) at the foreground of our engagement with texts, but rather it simmers in the affective stock activated by that engagement. Ellis reminds us that identification is "multiple and fractured, [due to] a sense of seeing the constituent parts of the spectator's own psyche paraded before her or him" (1982:43). We see ourselves-as-group reflected on the screen. When as we identify through an immersive-affective responsiveness with the (fictional) bodies that/of desire on screen, q [sense of self becomes not only fragmented, but also fictionalized]. Roberts explicitly states that even though there exists a "discrepancy between [we] feel in response to the narrative and what [we are] really like in person [...] [we], if responsive, may be fictionalized by the work" (2003:343).

Responding to queer film is thus not simply a response, but has more far-reaching implications for a sense of self as it pertains to personhood and social situatedness; having an effect on how we plug into larger contours of affect of, for example, the nation, than we may realise/allow ourselves to 'see'. (This, in turn, impacts on how we see ourselves as a nationally situated subject, as citizens). It also gives us some insights into the *nature* of desire itself, as we shall see. After Fritz looks at himself in the shop window, and grimacing at his emaciated face, he sees a woman in a bourka walking past; afterwards Fritz and his husband meet, the copulating couple is mirrored in pristine, shiny, sterile kitchen appliances – in parody of a much-sought after (in 2008) homonormative domestic; the unknown protagonist of *LAZombie* and his ambulant, silent observation of the outcasts of capitalist society. Every time, 'self' is placed in tension with group identity, and with larger narratives of the normative. The viewer (or, rather, the viewer's body) is more responsive to certain filmic texts – bodyhorror and pornographic genres spring to mind. In these, there exists a higher risk of a viewer being 'fictionalised' through a closer identification with the bodies on the screen. However, even in the most responsive cases (a bullied kid watching a horror film with a subtext on bullying, for example), there still exists an ontological difference between the bodies-in-affect on the screen/diegetic bodies, and how 'we' perceive (i.e., experience through our own bodies or the corporeal more generally) the cinematic bodies in an unfolding narrative. As spectators, we are acutely aware of this ontological difference: The body on the screen (them) is not the body in front of the screen (me). Political engagement as parody, pop-literature engageé as parody, and the move away from cinematic realism leads to hyper-stylised and stilted dialogue, troped kinesthetic movements, the constant wink-wink-nudge-nudge meta-awareness as an almost-automatic response to the perceived vacuity of 'mainstream' (i.e., non-LaBruce) cinema. Having moved on from the anti-war, anti-American imperialism stance – as esthetic – of the first part of his oeuvre (the structural and thematic raging, albeit deliciously self-aware, against dominant power

structurings is still present, but now enlarged to include a crusade against dominant forms of representation in mainstream (i.e., so-called Hollywood) structuring).

Porn's textuality is surfaced: On the level of the textual, *LAZombie* is simultaneously less affected and more ridiculous than the nested porno in *Otto; or, Up with dead people*. The viewer is incredulous: LaBruce spends a whole movie (*Otto; or, Up with dead people*) showing us how ridiculously political-impotent porn (especially 'porn with a message') is and then, less than two years later, release *LAZombie*, in which the very ridiculousness of porn-with-a-message is pushed to the extreme: the posing static vacuity of it serves to comment on social issues (situating it squarely within the functionalist approach to porn studies), but the ridiculousness of it breaks the surface, the engagement falters. We cannot navigate the immersion productively in the face of such overt posturing. But porn *does* simply, even when its meaning is complex: It gets us to pay attention, gonzo porn being a stark example of this.

A number of years after *LAZombie*, LaBruce released "Refugees Welcome", an XConfessions short that ostensibly provides social commentary on the Syrian refugee crisis. LaBruce is currently in the employ of CockyBoys studio (see posters H and I), for whom he has made four thematically related (dealing with social exclusion) porn shorts. To some extent explaining his poetical assumptions about the socialising role of porn, LaBruce writes (regarding "Refugees Welcome"): "Porn is everywhere, almost like a collective unconscious"⁷⁶. Regardless of your ethical or academic stance on porn, you'd have to agree: Porn fictionalises us, tasking us to see differently.

⁷⁶ See: <https://filmmakermagazine.com/101770-porn-is-everywhere-almost-like-a-collective-unconscious-bruce-labruce-on-his-xconfessions-short-refugees-welcome/#.YX0Gkp5Bw2w>.

This fictionalisation and fragmentary effects/affects are seen not only when we positively identify with/relate to bodies on the screen, but also when we are repulsed. When repulsed by abject bodies on the screen, we react with disgust, but also with some sense of pleasure. Adèle Nel, in an analysis of the socialised/institutionalised role of abjection in South African film (specifically films that make the abject other out to be cypher for racial other, such as *District 9* – a film which arguably shows a number of correlates with LaBruce’s queerzombie films but never escapes the clutches of national-filial representation), argues that the “spectator’s confrontation with the abject body in cinema is also a border experience: a confrontation with disgust but also with a pleasure in perversity” (2013:147). This observation brings into question (at least on the structural surface of the relation between spectator, theme, actuality) the duality of pleasure and disgust in watching certain types of film in certain places/countries, and at the same time emphasise the role of the viewing body as placed in a certain diegetic socius. It is especially the grand societal narratives – political affiliation, aesthetics, textual function (even auteurship?) – that are brought into question through fictionalisation and the fragmentary assemblages they form part of. This, in turn, emerges a fragmented spectator – one who has to reconcile desire and disgust:

Film [...] brings me compulsively, convulsively face to face with otherness that I can neither incorporate nor expel. It stimulates and affects my own body, even as it abolishes the distances between my own and other bodies. Boundaries and outlines dissolve; representation gives way to a violently affective, more-than-immediate, and non-conceptualisable contact. Cinema allows me and forces me to see what I cannot assimilate or grasp. (Shaviro, 2006:259)

What does it feel like to face the otherness of the zombie? Does the body recoil, or are we so deadened to the trope of abjected other (in newspapers, radio shows, daily discussions) that our

bodies cease to respond? Why, then, would seeing two zombies fucking, using wounds as orifices, upset; why does the body recoil? Why the goose bumps, the elevated heart rate, the looking away, the rubber-necking? Here the 'normal' is made to be other. (FN I am not equating the abjectly poor and disenfranchised other with LaBruces' zombies; I am, from a white subject position, asking questions about selective affect.)

While Shaviro's stated lack of agency on the part of the spectator can be contested in an atomistic age where we turn off, turn down, unlike and unfollow too easily, there is value to be found in the notion of the viewer being 'forced to see' that which he cannot (yet?) grasp, compulsively and convulsively being made to look, made to see the zombies' intimate humanity. However, since a sense of participatory intent and awareness is still missing, we may see but not (yet) understand our own role in the abjection process.

The more obviously abject central spatial trope in the film is graveyards, both as cemeteries and as disused social areas (like empty amusement parks) of past pleasure. These types of spaces, which Nicol (2008:10) calls "uncanny site[s] within the human fabric", stripped of all prior function and use, and devoid of the living, become the spatial mirror of the undead roaming; even though they appear abject, these spaces are shown as needed for society to function: Sites like slaughterhouses and waste management complexes – symbolising two vital functions of the human body, sustenance and excretion, which also tie in to the abject concept of an unruly and grotesquely 'open' body – feature prominently in the nested film-within-a-film.

Various conceptual levels of abjection can be differentiated when abject space is filmed/represented on film. As film is already a subjective othering, and intentional arrestation of the subject (viewing) position, then the filmic representation of abject spaces implies a doubled abjection. In LaBruce's films, abject spaces are filmed in soundless, static shots overly

drawn out over minutes – their emptiness not able to sustain the filming techniques which hold the viewer/demands a look – unlike the choppy editing and quick cuts traditionally associated with films in the zombie genre. The porn camera’s stillness here is used to disconcerting effect. The viewer cannot look away, oscillates between boredom and anticipation, and becomes fixated on the skin of the film itself. Our thoughts wander, arrested but freed to contemplate social inclusion and exclusion (presented by the film’s thematic surface) beyond the frame of the screen itself. We see into the static emptiness of the disused locales; imagine ourselves inside its abject stillness.

This – long takes; mid-frame; not moving away, not letting up – is the same technique LaBruce uses to film the sex scenes, so zones of similarity (in corresponding patches of filmic skin) are created between sex and abject space. Compounding this is the fact that the penetrative sex in scenes is often placed in abjectly coded *mise-en-scène* (and self-referential abject *mise en abyme*) thus further amplifying the conceptual relation/the films’ residual amalgamation of sex and the abject. When diegetic music is used, it is jarring, and connects directly to the abject-desire thematics.

The viewer views sex scenes in abject space, we listen to cheerfully morbid songs about sex and death, and through our contoured immersion navigate the continuum that has desire on one end and abject on the other. Our perceptual porousness directs our surroundings into the text, to fill in the gaps, the stillness. Our notions of how we relate to others, how we become-citizen, how we desire, are activated: empty space must be populated with people, relations, orientations. Spaces of/for exclusion are presented as almost-empty cyphers, defamiliarised so that we need to recode them.

Spaces of refuse, abandoned pleasure spaces are troped abject and emphasises how we encounter/approach place to make it space. This is activated when LaBruce represents familiar, domestic functional spaces (the kitchen, the toilet) as en-strange-ing (in, for example, the perhaps intentionally-funny faux-domestic scenes between the nested narrative's zombie versions of Max and Fritz – the one man, bloodied and with staccato movements, drinks tea while the other, mauled and gashed, calmly reads the newspaper. Re-seeing domestic spaces (which are almost exclusively coded as heteronormative in mainstream cinema) act as *Verfremdungstechnik*. Even when in zombie state, Max and Fritz enjoy the petit pleasures of coupledness and domesticity – which in a sense humanises the undead characters, and imbues these scenes, traditionally associated with petit-bourgeois life, with a potentially subversive quality.

Making strange of that which is taken for granted, that which is, through its negation, held to be normal/natural. When is the last time a toilet was shown in mainstream cinema, apart from when the body's plumbing's workings are played for laughs. Re-seeing the mechanics of (daily) abjection, through Otto's eyes, guides the viewer to rethink the general workings of the abject. (In a similar way to earlier scenes guiding the viewer to re-see pleasurable acts.) The abject workings of desire/pleasure/praxis is linked when Otto re-sees sexual paraphernalia, and toilet plumbing – the viewer re-sees these along with him. We recode visually and so negate simplified ideas on representation (for example, Mulvey's binarism) thus finally give way to an affective response-inducing contact between spectator and film. On the skin of this contact – like a sweaty veneer – lies the affective push-pull of attraction and repulsion. Even though I realize that the other (body) on the screen is not-me/not-like-me, and acutely stay aware of the ontological difference implied, I still feel a 'violent affect', an "ebb and flow" (Roberts, 2003:343) of fragmentary identification; it shows me (forces me to see) that which I previously thought I 'cannot grasp', to experience the dual affective response of disgust and pleasure at that which

was, up to that point, perhaps 'beyond me', so to plug into new systems of representation and circuits of (abject) pleasure. It forces me to become-spectator, to oscillate between the turning away from, and toward, the materiality of the film. The viewing body is caught in the vectors, riffing with our contours of affect.

3.9 On the 'lewd perfume' of celluloid

The scene: Otto is crowned king of trash heap & abattoir

I see in Shaviro's notion of a violently affective response-inducing contact a clear correlate with something akin to abject desire, and this opens the possibility of reading LaBruce's film as a text (a machine of desire) that foregrounds the structural interdependence of the abject and desire on thematic and textual/structural level. LaBruce's films transgress and challenge, affects/effects the body in contradictory-simultaneous ways, which qualifies it as, amongst other things, a text of bliss. Barthes' texts of bliss – where 'bliss' is read as a transgressive and bodily ecstasy – are more than simply machines of desire that leaves blissful spectators in its wake, for there is a certain pleasure/joy/jouissance to be found in this feeling of being taken over by, or giving over control to, a textual 'machine of desire'.

However, this is never a merely passive process. Bodily ecstasy, seemingly divorced from power-based structurings, is implicated in an active orientation towards the text. Cixous, in particular, speaks of actively taking up a different jouissance by "[d]ephalloctrize the body, relieve man of his phallus, return him to an erogenous field and a libido that isn't stupidly organized around that monument, but appears shifting, diffused, taking on all the others of oneself" (Cixous, 1986:51, quoted in Singer, 1993:161). The text becomes the new focus of our libidinal direction. Taking on 'all the others of myself' by freely giving up control of the self (albeit

temporarily), as the “constituent parts of the spectator’s own psyche paraded before her or him” (Ellis, 1982:43) on the screen, appears to be a radical, subversive and active decision to identify with the possible (abject) identities on the screen, embracing the very relational nature of it all, and thus potentially leading to jouissance. (Or, conversely, giving in to textual bliss – even momentarily – relieves the self of having to act in control, in-power.) But, again: desiring-machines are never passive. This is inherently not possible, even when we think we are, because desire is in the pre-personal flows, in the movement from desire to pleasure (jouissance). Through the immersive positionality of the push-pull response, we go from virtual desire to extensive or actualised pleasure. But that itself is a socially abjectifying process: untying the different strands of affective vectoring that make up 'a viewer', the responses and goosebumps and blushing that make 'a spectator'.

The relationship between experiencing a text for the bliss of it, and subverting power-based modes are clearly articulated by Barthes, and, if we situate it within the movement from desire to pleasure, we see how some texts open flow into ever-bigger alliances, others channel flow into the filial, while still others attempt to arrest flow. For Barthes, however there are two main distinctive ways of finding various degrees of (subversive) pleasure in interactions with texts: He offers a “sort of critical anatomy of pleasure in reading and he distinguishes between two sorts of pleasure: pleasure of the ‘comfortable’ sort and pleasure of a more disturbing and subversive kind” (Bennet & Royle, 2004:264). Barthes differentiates between texts of pleasure and texts of bliss (*jouissance*):

Text of pleasure: the text that contents, fills, grants euphoria; the text that comes from culture and does not break with it, is linked to a comfortable practice of reading. Text of bliss: the text that imposes a state of loss, the text that discomforts [...], unsettles the reader’s historical, cultural, psychological assumptions, the consistency of his tastes,

values, memories, brings to a crisis his relation with language. (Barthes, 1973:14, quoted in Bennet & Royle, 2004:264)

Two different types of texts, then: one that confronts and one that conforms. This dichotomy clearly has a socially situated and relational aspect, specifically within the South African actuality. Watching the queerzombie films asks us to re-see our filial relation to film, to visuality itself, leading to a sense of a decolonial intimacy (between viewer and text): Texts of pleasure do not “break with culture but rather reinforces traditional or comfortable notions of meaning, society, ideology” (Bennet & Royle, 2004:265), while blissful texts are texts which impose a loss of self, and unsettle ontological categories. This echoes both Neale’s fragmentation of identity and Kristeva’s notion of the abject: but within a colonial spectatorship which defines itself on fixed, static, hierarchical notions of textual engagement, possibly (if even only temporarily) identifying with the abject other would, surely, feel disruptive, unsettling, like a potentiality?

LaBruce delights in confronting the viewer with the post-coital time-image. The over-the-top (even by LaBruce’s standards) stylisation satirising horror trope and sly dig at homophobic ideas which correlate gay sex and death. Blood is virility, lineage, filial, patriotism, blood van die/my vaders, Bloedrivier, but also: viral, virality, life, contaminating alliance. Blood on the walls of the hook-up’s apartment echo the graffiti written on the skin of the city: graffiti (‘Up with dead people’ – see stills sequence K) as revolutionary sloganism – comment on vapid and vacuous political sloganeerism prevalent in contemporary politics (especially in identity politics that act oppositionally, in filial categories of resistance to, in opposition to).

Otto is reminded time after time that “[t]he world is meat; we are meat. [...] The lewd perfume” (57:30). The abject notes of “[t]he sewage symphony”. The spectator is not merely a seeing-feeling subject any longer: An unusual olfactory experience lies under the surface, breaks

through the surface. The filmic city of Berlin is cut open by abject planning and plumbing and smells of waste, its wounds are garbage dumps and sewers and landfills and slaughterhouses. We see Otto in longshot, dwarfed by the sheer volume of rubbish, dwarfed by the sheer volume of the nested narrative's trite tirade against oppression. The sound-diegetic is filled with new narratives of our abjectifying relationship with the earth, with endangered species, with the dirtying oceans, with refugees, with immigrants, with one another. Refracted back to us, is Otto's question: What is our part in all this abjectifying? So much libidinal energy directed at the screen. So little of that same energy – that potentiality for change – is directed at suffering and violation and shaming.

Instead, the viewer wishes to penetrate deeper into the flesh, but for the most part the film arrests our engagement on the superficial level of the skin (the how, not the what), leaving us wanting more. Sudden, violent intercuts (00:44:30, 00:58:30, 01:02:59, 01:03:30; 01:14:07; 01:21:00, 01:21:16, 01:21:27, 01:21:47) of shots of butchered meat (in the sanitised sense of the butchery, perhaps – not that of butchered – which is still a violent affect) confront us with – are jarring reminders of – not only of our own fleshy mortality, but also of the flesh of the film (*Look, LaBruce says, how easy it is to perforate the film reel!*) and the flesh(iness) of others. Surfacing these assemblages of desire (in the sense of bringing to the surface, but also of bringing onto the surface of the film) shows us the complexity of us as desiring-machine-spectator – navigating the continuum of desire and disgust, in our engagement with LaBruce's abject-desirous world.

When we bring desire and disgust to the film's surface, we activate past experience. Cutting the city's skin; affect breaks the skin of the film; the body breaks under the pressure of such affective weight, of a past filled with such (social) injustice, such (ecological) wrongdoing. The city – Berlin, Johannesburg, Cape Town, Soweto, Potchefstroom – is a congregation of flesh, a

smelly mosh of human fleshiness and desire and pleasure and hate. And queer people. We watch as citizens who have smelled violence on our skin, in the pinpricks of fear and exhilaration and anger of raised hairs at the nape of our backs. Our skin ripples at the memory, hot flushes in electric waves bristle up and down our exposed flanks, blood rushing to my dick carries the memories of past bashings, of corrective rape (such a cowardly phrase); my cheeks burn in unrighteous anger, inflamed skin, corrective fucking, short-circuiting fleshy layers. Lovers can feel the heat of indignation on my burning cheeks, the hairs in the small of my back bristle with aroused anger – my citizenry bursts forth in zealous shouts: What makes a people abject? Or: What makes an abject people? How can queer theory, and a queer approach to text, help us understand the way we've been regulated into citizenry? These films show us how (sexual) self is constituted as relational citizen, it opens open spaces for a re-awareness, and then a potentiality for a re-negotiation, of citizenship. Space for potentially seeing ourselves as filmic desire-citizens.

3.10 A concluding note

In the intro I asked: What makes a people abject? Or: What makes an abject people? How can queer theory, and a queer approach to text, help us understand the way we've been regulated into citizenry? If these films show us how sexual selves are opened up in assemblages, to be constituted as relational citizen, the films can also open holes, or zones, of the indiscernable, of an immersive re-awareness. These could lead to a potentiality for a re-negotiation of citizenship, as filmic desire-citizens.

Writing twenty years before the queer project's genesis, Barthes foreshadows the queer modus operandi when he describes texts of bliss as that which

is (should be) that uninhibited person who shows his behind to the Political Father.

Above all, bliss has to do with the subversion of identity itself. As with the uncontrollable force of laughter or the moment of orgasm, the extreme pleasure of bliss involves a collapse of self, a (momentary) dissolution of identity. The subject is thus 'never anything but a "living contradiction": a split subject, who simultaneously enjoys, through the text, the consistency of his selfhood and its collapse, its fall. (Barthes, 1973:21).

Through an identification with the bodies on screen, the opened viewer accepts their fragmentation and finds in it bliss (in the intertwinement of repulsion and arousal) - are maybe even politicized toward, or the body galvanised into, (some kind of) action. They embody Barthes' split subject, oscillating between being fictionalised and scandalised by (our identification with) the text, repulsed by an attraction, attracted by a repulsion. Abject desire approximates a new type of spectator complicity wherein looking anew/askew, in a blissful manner – being affected and affecting in turn – offers queer potential for decolonialising intimacy, by actualising us out of the viewing position's complacency, and spurring us to action in the extra-diegetic world outside the textual.

New ways of seeing, new dispositional orientations towards texts are surfacing. If we critically return to Barthes's "delineation of the paradoxes of pleasure" (Bennet & Royle, 2004:264) into texts of pleasure and texts of bliss, we see that he states that "[n]o doubt all literary and other cultural texts are susceptible to being read in both of these ways" (ibid.). In *Otto; or, Up with dead people*, the two types of text coexist (as the two approaches do in Deleuze and Guattari). Where nested (filial, arborous, conforming) and frame (opening up zones of potential alliance, rhizomatic, confronting) narratives mesh, bleed into one another, against even the logic of the script. This is overly simplified, but *Otto; or, Up with dead people* is (can be) a text of pleasure, *LAZombie* is (can be) a text of bliss, because of the sense of loss it trades on. Even though

time-image and movement-image are present in – and at work in – both, the difference is, crucially, how we navigate our immersion, how we open ourselves to affective potentiation.

The participatory viewing of queer film offers the potential to, in a revoltingly revolutionary manner, plug the viewer into larger contours of affect, which destabilise, discomforts, and ultimately offers the potentiality of “a split subject, who simultaneously enjoys, through the text, the consistency of his selfhood and its collapse” (Barthes, 1973:21). Such a (queer) disposition is not ever negative, rather it is productive, and shows how, as we are reminded by Deleuze and Guattari, desire is productive: Here it produces in us a sense of desire-citizenry, of relating to/through the text to others, to ourselves. It is a particularly queer way of seeing our relation to the text. Weiner and Young (2011) write that queer theory’s main focus has, perhaps all along, been on queer bonds, not queer agents. So the potentiality towards destabilising lies in the *engagement* with the text, in the realisation that the abject and desire are intimate bedfellows, not in the viewer/spectator/text itself. A destabilising effect that needs to lead, through affective plugging into larger contours of affect, and by seeing affective/identificationary/participatory relationality’s potential to create a more equitable being-in-the-world – of queer film.

Such revolutionary potential to recode/potentiate relationality is already inherent in exclusionary abjection, immanent to it: The credit sequence posits a world that has been overcome by fear and horror at the “purple peril”, a kind of fear based on difference and exclusion. In Hook’s parlance, it is also an incoherent fear based on traumatised corporeality and a relegation of ‘others’ to the margins of society. He (2004:687) rightly states that the abject is “a force-field of identity, one in which two particularly potent sets of affect – hate and fear – exist in combination”. These negative affects – hate and fear – are visible in both nested and frame narratives. In the first, Otto finds temporary solace with the film crew, his “band of outsiders”. In the secondary narrative, exclusion and fearmongering are so prevalent that only an uprising –

through desire/pleasure/fucking – is left possible. It is into this already-abject environment that Fritz and his band of necromantic zombies start their uprising. It is no surprise that cast members are doubly credited as “Orgy Zombie/Revolutionary Zombie”: In LaBruce’s universe, you cannot be a desiring zombie without being revolutionary at the same time.

Within the threat of being excluded lies the subversive potential to recognise our similarities, not only our differences. Herbst (1999:115-116) states that, although abjection works on excluding that which is different, “[y]ou can exclude it, but you cannot erase it [...] This means that prohibited things, abject things, have a certain revolutionary power, whether real or imagined, and as such they challenge the ordering formation”. Abject queer bonds can be activated, and when a text is approached in read-for queer bonds that lie outside of patriarchal structurings, we are also busy surfacing decolonial intimacy. This is not only in/through visuality, but other modalities of the bodily is activated, such as the olfactory. Perhaps we should thus start emphasising how the body engages with the text in a blissful manner instead of simply saying ‘texts of bliss’. This type of intentional interaction – a reworking of the ways we think about our *working* relationships with texts – with a text is inherently political in nature. For Barthes, “[b]liss has to do with a deconstruction of the political” (ibid.:265) in as far as it is “de-politicizing what is apparently political, and in politicizing what apparently is not” (ibid.). On an even more subjective and personal level, such a blissful approach has to do with a renegotiation of the idea of self, of a “subversion of identity itself. As with the uncontrollable force of laughter or the moment of orgasm, the extreme pleasure of bliss involves a collapse of self, a (momentary) dissolution of identity. The subject is thus [...] a split subject, who simultaneously enjoys, through the text, the consistency of his selfhood and its collapse, its fall” (ibid.).

In the end, we are busy re-seeing the unsettling, politicising, bodily engagement of queer film. The bodily responses LaBruce’s films elicit in us – the erection, the goose bumps, the burst of

laughter, the redolent proxy – all point to a collapse of viewer-self as discrete unit, allowing us to (temporarily) lose ourselves in identification and so inhabit a fragment of “that uninhibited person who shows his behind to the Political Father” (Barthes, 1973:21) and then taking the father from behind (to borrow a phrase from Deleuze and Guattari) in a convulsing and compulsing conjugal recoding. The very nature of cinema (in queer film, particularly) itself allows for this enjoyment of the consistency – and potential collapse – of the self’s reliance on territorialised patterns of behaviour in/and codified praxis. Keep in mind Neale’s (1983:9) axiom that “[c]inema draws on and involves many desires, many forms of desire. And desire itself is mobile, fluid, constantly transgressing identities, positions, and roles”; by embracing such an articulation of desire and pleasure in/for film by intentionally seeing, unseeing and re-seeing the abject, we seem to be halfway closer to answering Mulvey’s clarion call.

Jy flikker uit die niet
Aan die kringe om my oë
As jy aan my koek
Om die donker se oor
Het [...] ons gehoor?
Jy kom ~~van~~ [in] my sy
Uit die vonk van die pyn
As die heelal wil skiet
Is ons al gebind [...]

Interlude: “met slegs 'n flikkering van 'n pols iewers binnekant” [201]

Hoe veel ek jou voel in my
Hoog, dalk nog hoër
As Botswana se bome toe jy
My onder die gras nog kon kry
Sit jou bene in die lug
Kyk hoe diep hang die nag
Jy gaan dieper in my ~~hart~~
Die car guard gisteraand
Het 'n aanval gekry
As ek als wat ek het
Vir sy kinders kon gee
Sou ek nog in jou kamer kon bly?
Is daar plek op jou kussing vir my?
Hoe veel ek jou voel in my
Hoog, dalk nog hoër
As die mense wat bo hom net kyk
As die dood soos 'n hond aan hom ruik
Sit jou bene in die lug
[...]

- with apology to Spoegwolf (after the lyrics to *Flikker*)

Section 4

Anew/askew, assemblaged: An alloying

4.1 Looking anew/askew at the construction of belonging/re-embodiment

...every literary text is in some way about desire (Bennet & Royle, 2004:179)

Scholarly work on how subjects – and their bodies – relate to one another abound. Within the field of relationality, all aspects of lived – corporeal – existence are shown to be constituted within dimensions of relation to other human and nonhuman subjects. Of these aspects, sexuality and sex receive disproportionate attention, while desire, and affective correlates such as intimacy and love, are often overlooked or glossed over in critical analyses. Likewise, where desire is discussed, especially within immersive models of (filmic) spectator theory, the focus most often falls on the desirability of bodies on the screen, and how this might have changed throughout cinema's development. After Laura Mulvey's (1975) watershed proposition of the (male) gaze, desire was inextricably linked with (male) power, within the central dyad of male viewers and female characters/bodies on screen. The last few decades have, however, seen progressive focus on the male body on screen, and recognition of both male and female (and, ever so slowly, non-binary, a-gender) spectatorship; or, in an interesting correlate, seen in Tim Dean's movement from barebacking communitas to genre porosity.

Theoretical work on male-male desire and gay (and queer) spectatorship is more brash and vocal, especially with the advent of queer theories' pseudo-acceptance in academia. Gibson (2004:177), for example, is concerned with the re-embodiment of spectator theory, and analyses "shifts in the idea of what constitutes a 'desirable' male body". His work forms part of a

larger movement that focuses on corporeal/lived bodies within social structures, an approach that Connel describes as a

...politics of social justice [that] needs to change body-reflexive practice, not by losing agency but by extending it, working through the agency of the body [...]. Rather than disembodiment involved in role reform, this requires re-embodiment for men, a search for different ways of using, feeling and showing male bodies. (Connel, 1995:233)

This move toward understanding the (cinematic, corporeal) body in terms of its social lived-ness/relationality (and specifically the male body as constructed, relational and mediated concept) is seen as an inherently political and engaged act, echoing queer theories' destabilisation of identity categories. In their reading of Connel's clarion call, Powrie, Babington and Davies (2004:14) write:

The patient chronicling of images of men on screen for what they can tell us about social and historical shifts – whether based in class, ethnicity or gender, or a mixture of all of these – can only help destabilize patriarchal hegemony by showing us that masculinities are various, shifting and comprised of 'flows', in the Deleuzian sense.

I quote this here, not only to illuminate the politically subversive, destabilising potentiality such work contains, but also to point towards one of the anti-essentialist, foundational tenets of this approach, encapsulated in the plural noun, masculinities. No longer seen as monolithic, feminist and queer theories over the last three decades have shown 'the masculine' to be a shattered/fragmented, and above all, performative category composed of men's (and male-presenting folk's) navigation of flows of desire.

In essence, as the theorists cited above show, if we need to look anew/askew at gender and sexuality as performance, then we also need to look anew/askew at desire and pleasure. This approach is accordingly reframing the queer paradigm from its halting creative early-90s nascency into a full-throated, re-embodied, academic-accepted spotlight on flows and flux – ways of looking at desire by reconsidering traditional (theoretical) views of the erotic – and a range of social manifestations/regulations of desire, specifically male-male desire – as embedded in larger frameworks of belonging (such as, for example, the national). By following ‘desire lines’ through theory, corporeal models, interactionism, and queer reconceptualisation of socialised desire, queer theories eventually arrive at the subversive power of an anti-heteronormative socio-political understanding of desire, as already immanent to early writings of Giddens (1992), Tucker (1991) and Singer (1993). Significant, all three called for an erotic manifesto of citizenship (i.e. a way of actualising positive and productive citizenship through positioning ourselves vis a viz sexual groupings and the nation – riffing on how our exclusion can actually be taken to be constitutive of the identity of the nation state, as it were), which means the work of Puar and other – in situation the erotic-non-norm in/aside to/aske to/through the nation – comes full circle.

However, the temptation (in reseeing erotic re-embodiment in national terms) is to de-emphasise the racial: In *The Right to Maim* (2017), Jasbir Puar builds on Amit Rai’s recoding of sexuality as one of an “ecologies of sensation” that allows us to see it not in identitarian frames, but instead as a product of affective belonging: “transcend[ing] the designations of straight and gay and can further help to disaggregate these binary positions from their racialized histories” (2017:4). Not only are categories of gender and sexuality shown within a poststructuralist queer paradigm to be naturalized as opposed to natural, normative as opposed to normal, but so, too, have our conceptualization of art (including film) changed to focus on its (textual) performativity and relational nature: Mieke Bal (2006:397) rightly states that “[a]s it happens, contemporary –

postmodern – conceptions of art are also more invested in art's relational potential, its performativity, than in its iconography” – echoing the Deleuze-Guattarian insistence on re-orientating towards our affective positioning toward a text (i.e. what texts do, as opposed to what they mean). In *Otto; or, Up with dead people*, the viewer is confronted with representations of desire that do not fit with current, widely-held assumptions and models of desire, intimacy, or love. Queer theories provide a framework for looking anew/askew at film (and fiction; and the experiential) as affective-relational representations, and answers Connel's call for a politically engaged and anti-essentialist approach that enables re-embodiment, a “search for different ways of using, feeling and showing male bodies” (1995:233).

In this article, I attempt an alloying of (not 'between') LaBruce and Venter, moving between them not in a comparative manner, but to mine for resonances that illuminate both readings. As such, I'm not much interested in an analysis of either body of work on its own as how they work together, what they *do*. And, ultimately, as my own research focus is on Venter, on whether a more productive reading of Venter (specifically, in *Wolf, Wolf*) can actualise.

From the two queer zombie films look at the construction of discourses on the erotic as regulatory of our way of engaging with a text, as a precursor to an analysis of *Wolf, Wolf* that focuses on rereading/reapproaching it as both an erotic text and a text *about* erotic texts. I posit a reading like wolves, a readerly lupification, so to surface how the flows of male intimacy so obviously fragrant and in your face in LaBruce are in actual fact also as obviously (close to the textual surface) in Venter's novel, but that our engagement with it is arrested because of the opaque layer of nation-ethno-father and raciality over the erotic flow and flux of the novel. Rai's 'ecology of sensation' can also be read as positioning us within (not only toward) a grander mesh of ecological belonging. Furthermore, it might allow the subject, ironically, to tap into a greater and less mundane whole, a feeling of relationality with the totality of the cosmos:

Queer director D. Jarman wrote poetically about the sense of connectedness he felt during that most banal activity known to gay men, cruising in Hampstead Heath: “The deep silence, the cool night air, the pools of moonlight and stars, the great oaks and beeches [...] as always, once you are over the invisible border your heart beats faster and the world seems a better place” (Jarman, 1992:83).

4.2 Text and body and author as a series of sexual reflexive personas, opened up to the public

Sexuality is self-evidently embodied: ‘having sex’ obviously entails socially located bodies in interaction (Jackson & Scott, 2010:139)

If we truly inhabit the world primarily through our embodied interactions (Johnson, 1999:81) with others and embrace our affective capacities (rather than subduing them by subordinating them to capitalist apparatus), plus view categories of desire as essentially historically contingent (Weeks, 1986) and ‘bound up’ in institutional and discursive practice (Foucault, 1975, 1976) – in discourses of/about the erotic – then desire has to be seen as (at least in part) socially constructed. Stevi Jackson and Sue Scott (2010) make such a case for the sociality of sexuality, in a model of social interconnectedness that sees the ‘I’ as a series of reflexive selves developed through, in part, sexual⁷⁷ episodes. Such a self is not seen as fixed, but as always in process of *becoming*; indeed, the self is created “by virtue of its constant reflexivity, in dialogue between self as subject and as object” (Ray, 2010:x-xi).

⁷⁷ Even more explicitly, their model is concerned with the sexual experience of a socially situated subject living in modern civilisation/late modernity, where the “disorder of social life [...] creates the chaos of inner life” (Simon, 1996:44). It is precisely this angle, of the (sexual) disassociation of the subject due to the inconsistencies and incongruence of modern life, which makes their theory useful in an analysis of queerly abject male subject positionality. Jackson and Scott allow for “agency and change in the constitution of the sexual self” (2010:14), which puts them at odds with the predeterminism of psychoanalysis (where the past experiences impact decisively on the subject’s present and future sexual identity). Jackson and Scott’s approach is not unique, but I include them here as a cogent example of bringing together scripted socialised self and larger discourses of the erotic.

If the white male subject is unused to seeing himself as object – or, more to the point, objectified, even orientalised – how would such a constructionist dialogue work? In LaBruce, the protagonists are detached from their history, are forced to see themselves as (sexual) objects, not only subjects – which allows for some sort of realisation of selfhood. In *Wolf, Wolf* though, we are presented with a protagonist seemingly stuck in filial understandings of the past – Bloedrivier, the father's study, Uncle Diek. While the zombies mindlessly desire after flesh and fornication, to attend to a lack that *has become constitutive of their whole identity*, Venter's novel can be read as a slowly-dawning 'realisation' of lack as constitutive of the protagonist's identity, without the correlate realisation that all experience is but a series of sexual reflexivities.

Scholarly work and, more problematically, reviews (which would have a larger readership) on *Wolf, Wolf* focus on the novel being about the protagonist losing 'everything', can thus be seen as written from a point of departure that white male subjects are 'due' all of these; a view of the world that is difficult to defend in light of the lived realities of the South African actuality.

LaBruce's films, however, show that loss – especially the white male subject's experience of loss – can be made to be productive when it is surfaced as such. Self as subject and self as (abject) object is filial binarism, so we should keep reminding ourselves to re-code/re-see these as two nodes on a continuum.

Moving from filial readings to readings based on alliance – modes of belonging that are 'new': posthuman, ecological, olfactory – allows for a more productive reading of *Wolf, Wolf* as not about loss but about recoding relational belonging (what loss does, not what it means). Like the protagonists of LaBruce's films, Matt Duiker is progressively unable to locate himself in relation to others. Smell is one of the last ways in which these white male protagonists (Otto, the unnamed protagonist of *LAZombie*, Matt) 'connects' with others, making him even more abject and marginalised. Haunted by their pasts, they cannot escape the fixating spectre of love lost, of

the abandonment of a beloved or the rejection of their parents (singular parent – the father – in the case of *Wolf, Wolf*'s Matt, as the mother is largely absent). Gagnon and Simon (1974:13) writes that “the present significantly reshapes the past as we reconstruct our biographies to bring them into greater congruence with our current identities, roles, situations and available vocabularies”. Otto is in the process of actively reshaping his biography, creating congruence between how he feels (lost, alone, rejected, and abandoned) and how he is perceived (abject, marginalised). Unable to escape the sign of Loss, he ‘becomes’ undead, i.e., choosing to inhabit a figure symbolic of the physical loss of life. This attests to the great degree of agency necessary in fashioning a (sexual) self after a metaphoric figure or troped identity. Part of my aim here is to see if characters from *Wolf, Wolf* can be read (against the filial, fatalistic grain of the novel) to inhabit canid tropes.

The sexual self depends on these biographies to make meaning of its place within the larger flows of social structure (the academy, changing readerships, a publishing industry driven by profit, the persona of the author). Desire, intimacy, and sex – like writing, publishing, reviewing, reading – are not only acts, but are also seen as “making and modifying meaning” (Jackson & Scott, 2010:14). Even while advocating for agency in living a self as a series of sexual ‘selvings’, Jackson and Scott stand critical towards the idea that simply presenting ourselves as moving away from (sexual) repression “would also free us from domination” (2010:18). Can we revolt against patriarchy and injustice through sexual praxis? LaBruce’s films suggest that we can attempt to, but that it would be an empty gesture if such praxis always stands under the sign of the filial. Note how the end of *Otto; or, Up with dead people*’s nested narrative is an orgiastic spectacle, but nothing – narratively-speaking – follows it: Sex-as-spectacle, or even sex for its own sake, seems to end simply in the “relentless imperatives of unsatisfied desire” (Belsey, 1994:88). For the viewer, and for Otto, the orgy-for-its-own-sake carries no liberatory value. In

the same way, simply writing about sex, but being arrested within the filial, carries little redemptive (or other) appeal either.

4.3 The language of socially regulated mechanics of male-male-plus

How we know the world and how it knows us are underlain by shadow patterns of sexual biography and sexual geography (Paglia, 1990:17)

My aim here is to show that how we talk *about* male intimacy is of course itself already a way of regulating ourselves, in *how* we talk about – and thereby situate ourselves within – *our own* discourses of the erotic. (Not in the sense of description that becomes prescription, but rather in how we articulate the potentiality of our belonging to these discourses.)

The intentional queer position, therefore, aims to defy these power structures: In discussing Judith Butler's contribution to queer theories, Bristow (1997:218) reflects that "[i]f we become more reflective in our handling of the terms we use to imagine sex, gender, and desire, then the greater becomes the possibility of resignifying our desires in ways that loosen the naturalizing power of the heterosexual matrix."

If eroticism is the "aura of emotion and imagination around sex" (Paglia, 1990:13), then desire-pleasure, as the more grounded, lived and corporeal reaching out of one body to (an)other, could situate such bodies within a social framework mediated by interpretive practices. Indeed, we are socialised into desiring "by copying others' desires, and our desire is produced, fundamentally, in response to the desire of another" (Bennet & Royle, 2004:184). To what extent do we copy that which we read, or position ourselves in opposition to (outdated) models of sexual intimacy? Formulated a different way, bodies are always situated within a (social)

context. In her reading of Young (2005), Viljoen (2014:101, original emphasis) comments on the 'body-in-situation' thusly: "[...] *situation* implies that human beings are always confronted with the facticity of their bodies and with the relation of these bodies to particular contexts. They do, however, also have freedom to construct themselves in relation to this facticity". This social situationing of the body, in relation to another/others takes various forms within the framework of desire outlined in the previous section on Aristotle/Freud/Lacan/Paglia. If we hold as true Johnson's statement (see section on desire) that meaning is generated out of the interplay between our bodies, our environment, and the symbolic systems we utilise – he specifically uses the phrase "the symbolic systems we inherit" (1999:100)⁷⁸, which raises questions of agency, cultural lineage, progeny – it becomes necessary to investigate the systems of power that influence a subject's ability to desire. In what follows, I briefly highlight four aspects of the matrix of socially situated desire: the homosocial, heteronormativity, (hetero)happiness, and homonationalism, as ways in which we can start to articulate the manner in which we are regulated to relate. All are part of a new articulation of connection (literally, a new language was coined in the 1990s and early 2000s) to address this. They are all reactive (not productive) and steeped in oppositional thinking on identity. As such, their easy applicability to Venter's novel (and his oeuvre) implies something about the filial arrestation of a generation of authors.

4.3.1 The homosocial

Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick (primarily 1985, 1991, 1994) proposes a framework of social connection between men within patriarchal societies, and terms it homosocial desire (not equated to homosexual desire), seen in "Western discourse, in stories, novels, films [...] [but

⁷⁸ Invariably, I think of Van Schalkwyk's claiming of *Horrelpoot* as peripheral text that seeks to reverse the way in which (white) fear – Van Schalkwyk reads it, additionally, as *inherited* white fear – is negated in new narratives of nation-building, post-2000.

not] explicitly expressed as desire, and it is not necessarily physical. In fact, homosocial desire is often concerned rigorously to exclude the possibility of homosexual relations. The traditional male preserves of locker-room, boardroom and clubroom are sites of homosocial bonding which, at the same time, may be virulently homophobic. But in male-dominated society, such relations are fundamental.” (Bennett & Royle, 2004:184) Sedgwick explicitly links these homosocial bonds and *spaces* to power in general, and more specifically to patriarchal power, which seeks to reduce women to “tokens of exchange [...and] excludes women even from relations of desire” (ibid.:185). Such homosocial fragility correlates to what Brenna Munro calls the anxieties of fraternity (2012:03): “the bond between two men that is camouflaged, mediated, and transferred through rivalry over a woman” (Munro, 2012:31) “the triangulation, while persistent, is fragile” (Munro, 2012:31).

Homosocial bonds and spaces need to be understood as ways of mediating power between men, to the exclusion of women (and thus extending entrenched gender inequality), but not (necessarily) through the prism of desire. Bristow (1997:171) shows how such an understanding of power refutes (to an extent) the central tenet in psychoanalysis that sexuality “is a surging hydraulic force that Western culture struggles to repress”. Instead, he claims that Foucault “exposed [...] the ways power is distributed, mediated, and produced within modern culture. That is why Foucault wishes to situate sexuality as a concept that serves as a ‘dense transfer point for relations of power’. Foucault, therefore, demonstrates how and why eroticism is bound into structures of *inequality*” (ibid.:172, emphasis added)⁷⁹.

⁷⁹ *Otto; or, Up with dead people's* nested film's exclusively male cast, and the nearly male-only cast of the frame narrative, constitutes the film *itself* as a homosocial space. By focusing on a predominantly male experience of the world, LaBruce highlights differences in equality *between* males, an (in)equality that is tinged with class and racial differences in *Wolf, Wolf*.

4.3.2 Heteronormativity

Sexual identity, and categories of desire, is institutionally and discursively constituted (Jackson & Scott, 2010:80), forming patterns which “give rise to and are sustained by forms of understanding whereby they appear natural and inevitable, and it is here that the normalising effects of institutionalised heterosexuality are evident” (ibid.:90). Within queer theories, the institutionalised ‘understanding’ of heterosexuality as natural and (hierarchically) preferable has come to be known as heteronormativity. This term, popularized in the work of Michael Warner (1993), foregrounds the inequality⁸⁰ of

heterosexual culture’s exclusive ability to interpret itself as society. Het culture [sic] thinks of itself as the elemental form of human association, as the very model of intergender relations, as the indivisible basis of all community, and as the means of reproduction without which society wouldn’t exist. [...] It has sneaked into dialectical thought (or thought of differences) as its main category. (Warner, 2007:xxi)

Heteronormativity contains a number of facets (with most of these surfaced and challenged by/in LaBruce’s film, but accepted as normative in *Wolf, Wolf*): First, as a heterosexual matrix, it creates a “grid of cultural intelligibility through which bodies, genders and desires are naturalized” (Butler, 1990:151). Second, its insistence on ‘compulsory heterosexuality’ (Rubin, 1993) rests on the assumption that sexual identity and categories of desire is stable and unchanging, assuming further that “for bodies to cohere and make sense there must be a stable sex expressed as a stable gender” (Butler, 1990:151). Third, it feeds into, and is sustained by,

⁸⁰ Let me be clear: Heterosexuality *per se* is not being defined as oppressive. (Although institutions like marriage have for millennia been the conduit through which gendered violence and the suppression of women were sanctioned and normalised.) Rather, in a queer theories paradigm, the positing of heterosexual identity and culture as normative, natural and a given, is challenged.

what Ingraham (1996) has labelled the 'heterosexual imaginary', seen as an "ideological device that masks the way in which gender has consistently been defined from a heteronormative perspective" (Ingraham, quoted in Jackson & Scott, 2010:81). She stresses differentiating 'between' sexes, rather than seeing sexes as 'opposites'. (The idea of 'opposite' sexes who 'complement' each other feeds into patriarchal oppressive structuring which suppresses women and the LGBTQI community.) These oppositional 'differences' are then held as the basis of the social union, a union "mediated through such concepts as dependence and reproduction" (Warner, 2007:xxi). Fourth, heteronormativity leads to a hierarchical categorisation of sex acts (i.e., morally differentiating between 'good' and 'bad' sexual conduct). This continuum posits as morally most ideal the conduct of monogamous sex within a religiously sanctioned marriage, between one man and one woman, for the purposes of reproduction (Rubin, 1993). Inherent in this preference is the idealisation of married (heterosexual) couples. A fifth, and rather disturbing, effect/affect of heteronormativity is the way in which it seeks to normalise mainstream gay identity. Jackson and Scott (2010:90) comment on this widespread phenomenon, acknowledging that the greater visibility of gay characters in popular media necessitate characterisation that is "gender conventional, committed to romantic-compassionate and family values, uncritically patriotic and detached from a subculture" (Seidman, 2002:160, quoted in J & S) which leads to the incorporation of gay visual elements "without overly unsettling heteronormative ideals" Jackson and Scott (2010:90), as society still differentiates "'good homosexual' or 'normal gay' from the 'dangerous queer' or the bad citizen" (Jackson and Scott, 2010:90).

These are ways that 'good citizenship' is being actualised on our behalf. Corporeality and affect kicks in: This normalisation drive furthermore results in a corollary of heteronormative thinking, namely homonormativity – which is, by extension, another way in which the boundaries of the normative are redrawn in favour of heterosexual ideals. Homonormativity primarily consists of a

“politics that does not contest dominant heteronormative assumptions and institutions, but upholds and sustains them, while promising the possibility of a demobilized gay constituency and a privatized, depoliticized gay culture anchored in domesticity and consumption” (Duggan, 2003), in essence seeing homonormativity as privatised and atomistic consumption (Evans, 1993). While most straight people “accept their heterosexuality as given and natural” (Jackson & Scott, 2010:98), gay and queer subjects have to reconfigure/re-evaluate a number of societal and structural ‘givens’.

4.3.3 (Hetero)happiness

Structural givens also extend to affect, and emotion. As but one example of an army of emerging voices on re-coding affective analyses away from the filial toward alliance, I Lozano-Verduzco’s 2015 study amongst gay men in Mexico City shows how fears around social/filial happiness and (family) inclusion act as an insidious underbelly to heteronormativity. He states that it is clear that “socializing their homoerotic desire is an obstacle most men feel they need to overcome. They feel that they are posing a conflict upon their families, and society in general, for not complying with heterosexual and gender norms” (2015:455) – showing how heteronormativity and negative citizenship value are linked.

Lozano-Verduzco then draws an inverse correlation between the *desire* many of these men exhibit, and the (socialised affective state we usually call) *happiness* they feel they can structurally-affectively experience in a heteronormative society. He sees happiness here through the lived affective model phenomenologist Sarah Ahmed proposed, as a “prescribed route in heteronormativity” (Ahmed, quoted in Lozano-Verduzco, 2015:455) and writes that “[t]he men interviewed feared being rejected and ostracized from their families, and thus of letting down the social project of heterosexuality [...] This fear is built on the fact that there is no

symbolic space for homoeroticism; gayness is only represented as negative and immoral for society". Social scripting is explicitly addressed, as their affect closely follows contoured "hegemonic discourses that affect their daily life and identity construction. Men's sexuality only made sense in reference to the triads male-masculine-heteroerotic or female-feminine-heteroerotic. They understand they are breaking a coherence that is strongly enforced by socialization within a culture focused on the nuclear family, marriage, and reproduction because of their homoeroticism. Other people who cite them as abject and subordinated also interpret this incoherence." (ibid.)⁸¹ In societies that lack a clearly defined symbolic space for the homoerotic, socialising male-male desire (i.e. not suppressing or hiding this desire) can be seen as tantamount to (attempting to) breaking down heteronormative coherence. The word 'coherence' is important here (even as it falls short of Deleuze and Guattari's preferred term 'assemblage') as it signifies that the society's integrity/borders are at risk, which is also a central principle in theories of abjection. These men are 'cited as abject', by people who, simultaneously, "also interpret this incoherence" (ibid.): They (both abject-er and abject-ee) are deeply aware of the fundamental role abject subjects play in keeping societies coherent and whole.

4.3.4 Homonationalism

All three terms (briefly) described above allude to contours of inclusion and exclusion experienced daily by LGBT people, which makes the rise of homonationalism doubly ironic.

⁸¹ There is perhaps scope for critiquing Lozano-Verduzco's contention that there exists "no symbolic space for homoeroticism" (2015:455). In addition, just because both qualify under the nomenclature of 'global South', it does not mean that South Africa and Mexico share similar power structurings. However, I include the notion of (hetero)happiness here as it shows a) how affect is tied with sexual exclusionary groupings in ways that move beyond even the orientation towards happiness in Sarah Ahmed's work on queer phenomenology, and b) how this relation manifests in language (we find new ways to write/label/terms these concepts). Crucially, it illustrates how c) futile it is to move from one normed trope (the suicidal gay character as staple of 80s and 90s film and TV) to another (the happy, chirpy, supportive and desexualised gay BFF of the early 2000s). Greater visibility and ostensible affective reversal (from sad to happy) does not liberate – instead, it keeps it arrested in the filial trap of opposition.

Coined by Jasbir K. Puar in 2007, in the seminal *Terrorist assemblages: Homonationalism in queer times*, it has had a rather explosive effect on what was previously labelled 'gay and lesbian studies', especially as it questions the very legitimacy (Dard-Dascot, 2012:02) of this field. Dard-Dascot sums up the exasperation felt in more activist, anti-assimilationist queer groupings when they write that "[t]he discontent one could feel in the LGBT world of theory and activism now had a name: homonationalism" (2012:01). Homonationalism is systematic coded praxis: it "appears when exclusionary practices are legitimated by the recognition of LGBT rights, i.e., when tolerance towards sexual minorities becomes the new threshold to gaining citizenship" (2012:04).

Homonationalism echoes the process of inclusion through exclusion that underlies abjection and ties the abject more explicitly to citizenship: Puar shows how the concomitant inclusion of sexual minorities carries with it the seed of exclusion of other groupings, 'new others'. Intimately coupling LGBT rights activism and theory⁸² to vilification of non-Western others: "The construction of a sexually more tolerant West comes with an imperialist agenda and is used to legitimate intervention abroad" (2012:02). This echoes both how the nation State relies on continuous exclusionary praxis (Fassin, 2006) as well as how bodies (in the wider definition of that term) rely on abjection. We have to question whether it is indeed so that "exclusionary politics are constitutive of LGBT politics or whether it is the State institutions that use LGBT rights to legitimate their nationalistic agenda and imperialistic politics" (2012:03). LaBruce's films can be read in such a way that find relational value in/for the (zombie as troped) extra-national sexual other, but Venter's text should not. A filial analysis frame which pits

⁸² Queer theory is (al)ready to be activist. The question is often asked whether an academic from any subject position can work with queer theory. The answer is two-fold: firstly, a resounding yes. Queer theory is about a positionality, not a position, a doing instead of being. Secondly, and leading from the first, queer theory opens up avenues of exploration on academic activism that cannot be ignored, it becomes part of the grain and texture of your work.

happiness versus pleasure, belonging versus becoming, males versus each other seems outdated, and smacks of a specific strain of US-advocated white picket fence homonormative domesticity; part desexualised blandness, part *Queer Eye-The Truman Show* mashup. (Regardless, a number of MA studies exist where Venter is read in exactly this way.) Happiness without affective depth. It is acutely aware of relations, but unable to share the volatility of affect. An impotent happiness, thus.

Consequently, we need a new paradigm of desire, one that does not uphold heteronormative and homosocial power structurings and does not prescribe to the inverse relationship between gay desire and (hetero)happiness. To this end, we must “consistently treat sex as part of the social: our desires and pleasures as well as the constraints upon them, the risks, dangers and pleasures associated with the sexual as part of the wider social context and shaping of sexual life rather than intrinsic to sex itself” (Jackson & Scott, 2010:47). Can we read *Wolf, Wolf* in a contra-happiness, contra-lack way, so to answer LaBruce’s call for new ways of seeing belonging/intimacy between queerly abject/abjectly queer men? Both *Otto; or, Up with dead people* and *LAZombie* (of which a fuller discussion falls, perhaps, outside the scope of the piece) offers insufficient answers/strategies to counter heteronormativity, the homosocial, (hetero)happiness, homonationalism. As a matter of fact, it dwells in – and celebrates – these retrograde mechanics of male-male relationality. Can we re-read *Wolf, Wolf* in other ways – by reading erotic lupification, cubilication/feral citizenship, olfactory intimacy and the like *onto the text* – to show more productive ways in which men, often fragile white men, connect and belong and become? In what follows, I explore two ways of approaching Venter’s text: first, I situate the novel within filial readings (reviews, academic work) as a text of masculinity in crisis, and argue that this is not only unproductive (i.e., it does not produces meaningful interaction between reader and text) but also an insufficient way to unlock meaningful meaning from the text.

Thereafter, I consider a queerer reading of *Wolf, Wolf* (via LaBruce) that surfaces the potentiality toward alliance, toward the new.

4.4 White fragile masculinity as/and unproductive reading

My reading of Venter's text (as well as my meta-reading of that reading) is underlain by a theoretical conceptualisation of a circular, and often fragile, masculinity (the white gay male author; the white gay male reviewer; the white gay male academic) rather hysterically perceived today to be 'in crisis'⁸³: in the parlance of the novel, relations between men are characterised by a 'brutal intimacy' (p.205) and, more often than not, end in "severed connection[s]" (p.221). I argue that Venter's work cannot adequately be read without a consideration of how they are produced by the author's perceived loss of masculine power-over⁸⁴ crucially, not *either* as citizen *or* as intimate being, but as *both* always intertwined. Venter's work is often read relative to his specific position(ing) in the Afrikaans literary system. How many pieces on *Horrelpoot/Trencherman* pick up on the intense erotic (dis)engagement, or that bodily disintegration in *Ek stamel ek sterwe*, or that the ending of *Wolf, Wolf* relativises the racial hysterics of the preceding chapters?

⁸³ A supposed crisis in masculinity has been bandied around academia since the 1970s, in various guises. Different answers, from a variety of disciplines/fields/lenses, across decades, are offered as to why we speak of such a crisis: male criminality (Campbell *et al.*, 1993), educational difference between genders (Lightfoot, 2000), unattainable media imagos (Wolf, 1991), loss of economic power, perceived threat of the rising equality of gay men, and the emotion-testosterone link, i.e., male anger, rage and violence (Clare, 2000). Discussions on masculinity oftentimes accompany discussions on whiteness, such as white fragility.

⁸⁴ Edwards (2006:8) groups issues related to the crisis in masculinity into different sets, or levels, of anxieties: a 'crisis from without' is based on the "perception that men have lost, or are losing, power or privilege relative to their prior status" (ibid.), whilst a 'crisis from within' centres on a "perceived shift in men's *experiences* of their position as men, their maleness, and what it means" (ibid., original emphasis). In the context of the effects of recoding power-over into pleasure (see study introduction), the question begs to be asked: Why should a loss of power necessarily be seen as negative? Why can't a loss of power-over, if it is accompanied by a realisation of power-to, instead be seen as potentiality?

What is at risk with such identitarian echo-chamber (the literary system as pat on the back, as circle jerk), reception is the potential loss of a relational ‘genuine encounter’ that can rupture what we think we know. Along with such a focus on the ability/capacity to be moved to act/to be affected/to feel, comes a rupturing of identity. (What gay, white masculine academia *does*, not simply what it *means*.) Indeed, Connel states that masculinity is not situated outside the gender system, but rather a “configuration of practice within a system of gender relations. We cannot logically speak of a crisis of configuration; rather we might speak of its disruptions or its transformation” (1995:84). Lines of flight are needed, then, away from binary-infused configurations of praxis and on to new, more equitable, practices of maleness, behaviour and connection. Seen in this light, the actual crisis is then that “men have come to believe that the distinction between reason and desire, the intellect and the body, the masculine and the feminine, is not only real, but necessary as well” (Brittan, 1989:204). A line of flight will not only transcend the configurations of lived (gendered) praxis but will also show these distinctions to be arbitrary and artificial – and (thus) transcendable.

There exists a real need for change in how men (and, of course, the term ‘men’ signify a vast array of signifiers, a broad and vague conglomerate of meanings) see themselves. Anthony Clare writes that “[t]he origin for so much male anger, rage and violence lies within the very way in which we conceptualise ourselves as men and women and the very way we negotiate the difficulties and obstacles of human love and hate” (Clare, 2000:37). Instead of a ‘need’, there exists an ethical imperative to rupture our conceptualisation of praxis and being within a system of gendered practices. The crisis in masculinity is not necessarily due to a loss of power (or perhaps due to perceived loss of power – a dissonance not yet adequately addressed in masculinity studies), but more fundamentally due to an inability to fit into new configurations of praxis, because of a) a loss of signifying relation with the overarching imagos of the past, and b) an inability/unwillingness to respond/recode into the imagos of the now. (And, of course, the

ways in which signifying frames are bound in larger structures of normative organisation, including academia.)

I posit that we see Venter as an off-queer, gay literary figure whose work is received as semi-queer⁸⁵ (in the same manner as he is an extra-national author whose work is semi-Afrikaans – in both ways writing from afar). There is a specific way in which semi-gay authors and poets have been incorporated into the Afrikaans literary system – the sufficiently desexualised Hennie Aucamp, for example – that speaks to the masculinist loss of power-over, as it relates to gay men: “Concerns relating to the family and men’s position [...] relate strongly to underlying anxieties surrounding men’s sexuality” (Edwards, 2006:13).

Loss figures in myriad ways in *Wolf, Wolf* [even when my argument is that we read loss in Venter in a flattened way]. At one point the protagonist, Matt, is denied an inheritance (apart from a white Merc), ostensibly because his lover, Jack, came to live with him in the ancestral home, against the express wishes of his homophobic and religiously conservative father; a father who was, at the time, dying of cancer in the very same home. In the eyes of the patriarch, his son’s desires for another man, and that which happens between the “debauched sheets” (p.173) of his son’s bed, comes to constitute, for him, his son’s being; for him, the function of male-ness (which in the novel is two-fold: to operate sexually in producing an heir, and to produce in the more general capitalist sense of the word) comes to outweigh the essence of the person’s being. Being is here construed on what we *have* to do, as opposed to what we *want* to do – affective potentiality versus dutiful filial adherence – and the inverse of Venter’s rumination of male progeny’s role. The restrictive nature issued from the father’s insistence on the son

⁸⁵ Venter’s sexuality is still not readily introduced in para-textual texts around his novels, pursuant to how his oeuvre has for the most part struggled to include positive gay (let alone queer) thematic elements. (Examples include: Ambivalent sexuality in the first published work; the manner in which the pronoun change in *My Beautiful Death* was handled publicly; Stoney as overly macho red herring alter ego.)

'carrying on the line' crystallises in a sense of dutiful progeny (often a primary driver of Venter's protagonists) and considerations of such a "duty" permeate the first parts of the novel: Matt is the "only, the first-born, the son [...] he's the one who'll be able to take it further" (p.106). This sense of duty literally manifests in the room between Matt and his father as a spectral apparition (add quote) and clearly constitutes a conflated tension between son-as-dutiful-carer, and son-as-needing-to-carry-the-line.

However, in making proclamations such as "What would happen to the world if everybody was like you and your friend? Where would our children come from? [...] There will be no more progeny. The bloodline runs dry" (p.178), the father is shown to conflate species continuation with the continuation of himself (as the reader gets a hint at the white male privilege in the subtext), allowing a reading in which the fear of his son as sexual other is shown to be partly a projection of his own fears about dying, about his own corporeal non-continuity, assuaged only by the (possible) continuation of his line/surname. The notion of a gay son being tasked with continuing the progeny, carrying the fatherly seed, but refusing, go some way toward queering this specific role. Venter, however, does not frame this non-acceptance in positive, productive terms: shows how it is experienced by the protagonist as a failing of some sort, as a *less than* form of masculinity.

Unsurprisingly, not only does the son go against the father's wishes; he goes one further by allowing Jack entry into his father's house, which results in a different kind of non-continuation: non-inheritance. (The son refusing the transfer of line; the father in return denying transfer of inheritance.) Fuelled by indignation at the non-inheritance, and at the forced selling of the family home, Matt goes to live in a car on Rondebosch Meent/Commons with Jack and starts terrorising the new owners of his old family home, the Mkhonzas, menacing them at night while wearing a wolfhound mask, the same mask, ironically, that Jack wears the fateful night he is

invited into the patriarch's house. The hooliganism echoes white-on-black violence, dogs/canids as machinic extensions of white power-over during Apartheid – an echo the author seems unwilling or unable to face.

The decidedly anti-social behaviour seems puzzling to the first-time reader (and is not nearly as 'playful' as reviews make it out to be), as it appears to constitute a further negation of self – or even a (further) self-marginalisation through an acceptance of undomestication – which is compounded by the fact that Matt then loses his livelihood (he bungles his takeaway business due to incompetence, sulks and mopes and scares off customers [to add quote on sullen proprietor] and, in the last pages of the novel, Jack is killed, presumably by the new owners of the house, driven to desperation by the campaign of terror. The end of the novel thus ostensibly constituting a complete stripping away not of power, place and positionality, but rather of white male centrality (financial, cultural, symbolic). This decentring is experienced by the reader without textual awareness that we are experiencing it by proxy (through the white male affluent protagonist), echoed in reviews which posit it as dystopic, which it patently is not (and cannot be, except if the white South African subject's experience is centralised as universal).

In addition to the inability to adjust to new(er) imagos through which to enter into configurations of praxis, a related aspect of the masculinity 'crisis' is insecurities generated around a perceived loss of economic power, insecurities which are then projected onto violence toward 'easy targets', such as, for example, women, gay men, and immigrants⁸⁶. Capitalism seeks to make (white) power and (male) desire universal because it is structurally arranged on the vestiges of colonialism and the continuing stronghold of patriarchy. On this point, when considering a loss

⁸⁶ Venter's use of Tannie Sannie as one-dimensional antagonist, as well as the Mkhonzas (who are only mentioned but not described, making them empty signifiers to be filled with white fear mongering about land appropriation and property transference), are examples of easy targets.

of male power, Heartfield (2002) reminds us that we are best suited in reconceptualising the crisis not so much as a “loss of [male] power in relation to women [but] rather in relation to capital that men and women alike have lost authority” (Heartfield, 2002). Except for some reviews of *Wolf, Wolf* which focus on the masculine crisis presented in the novel, while considerations of socio-economic nature are relegated or overlooked. This is exacerbated in the academic discourse constructed around Venter’s novel (and his oeuvre).

4.5 Moving up (South), or: An ethical imperative for moving toward a model for productively reading Venter

Love is a much trickier thing to theorise than sex or sexuality. (Bell, 1995:313)

For us to avoid the homonationalist, filial trap, we need to read differently. We’ve seen how power is seemingly impossible to divorce from frameworks of desire/sexuality/intimacy, especially in power structurings that govern male-male desire, such as the homosocial, the heteronormative, and ideas around (hetero)happiness, and how white male loss is construed as universal. What has been missing from this discussion so far: Productive queer bonds that engender positive fecund (though not reproductive) affect – conventionally called ‘love’. How do men (and also white men) navigate systems of oppressive patriarchy in order to create meaningful queer bonds? How does our awareness of relationality affect how power is upheld? If even homosocial bonds serve to uphold “structures for maintaining and transmitting patriarchal power” (Sedgwick, 1985:25), then how do we get out of the bind where homosocial relations between men (and even desire between men) is seen as constitutive of this patriarchy?

Following queer theories, we see the way to get out of this bind is by subverting the discourse from within. Queer and feminist scholars have aimed to posit a new way of speaking about (*our*) desire(s); a new language that functions within the confines of a patriarchal symbolic but seeks to subvert essentialist categories of sexuality (and, to some extent, of gender). I would like to briefly highlight three re-articulations as emblematic of this turn towards a more democratic, decolonialised (linguistic) conceptualisation of queer bonding: Giddens' 'episodic sexuality' (as alternative to 'promiscuity'), 'confluent love' (as a more inclusive term for non-monogamous modalities), and 'erotic welfare'. I propose these concepts, along with Lorde's view of the erotic as a potentially powerful mode of perception that *changes* (in Deleuze-Guattarian terms, *recodes*) how we perceive and understand our reality, as part of a movement away from filial bonds and towards bonds of alliance, and a methodological template that answers Giddens' (1992) call for a democratic intimacy. I aim to show how such a template can be divorced from traditional, patriarchal and unequal conceptualisations of desire, and that it thereby actively constitutes new ways of talking about, and representing, desire. If queer bonds' focus is on bond-like relationality, not agents, then there we see Giddens's re-assignment of meaning to desire as both an emphasising of the actions of actors (the relation-ing, positioning, orientation toward) and a moving away from filial hierarchy between actors/constituting parts.

Bell (1995) situates the work of Tucker (1991) and Giddens (1992) next to one another, and this 'conceptual conversation' queers normative discussions on promiscuity and monogamy, by offering more inclusive and more emphatic alternatives: the aforementioned episodic sexuality and confluent love. Episodic sexuality can be seen as a "model for a liberatory form of sexual intimacy freed from many of the power relationships which he sees as bogging down heterosexual love and sex" (Bell, 1995:313). Episodic love is a way of referring specifically to casual sexual encounters which "had and still have a bad reputation among the majority of people. It is the kind of sex that violates notions of romantic love, steady relationships or long-

term commitment [...] That this kind of sex is pursued and enjoyed as an end in itself seems shocking to them" (Lieshout, 1992:3-4). Looking at episodic sex in this manner categorises it within an emerging assemblage that views sexual conduct (especially sexual praxis seen as beyond the norm) as positive, constructive and emancipatory. The everydayness of the construction of the sexual self is accentuated. Giddens himself writes of episodic sexuality as a "positive form of everyday experiment [...] that] expresses an equality which is absent from most heterosexual involvements, including transient ones. By its very nature, it permits power only in the form of sexual practice itself: sexual taste is the sole determinant. That is surely part of the pleasure and fulfilment that episodic sexuality can provide" (Giddens, 1992:147). In a similar way, Jackson and Scott (after their reading of Gagnon and Simon (1974)), contest the idea of sexuality as "an overwhelming force, instead insisting on locating it in the mundane actualities of everyday life" (2010:13). Such an awareness of the sexual self in (everyday) relation to others short-circuits patriarchal systems of power structuring, which finds its power in/through grander, more universalising and generalising narratives. Recognizing the sexual in the everyday, in the mundane, allows the subject to "experienc[e] pleasure which is not [...] encoded in any way" (Keogh, 1992:10). We might disagree with Keogh's hyperbolic expression here, but the point holds that the sexual is banal, and therefore (potentially) revolutionary.

Confluent love is a conceptual understanding of (male-male-plus¹) 'togetherness' which is "not necessarily monogamous, unlike romantic love (Giddens, 1992:63, quoted in Bell, 1995:314), or in terms of sexual exclusiveness that gains sufficient benefit from the relationship to make its continuation worthwhile (ibid.). LaBruce's film lacks a central narrative arc on 'love', but rather deals with the coming to acceptance of a love that is no more. As the film is situated in specific generic popular discourse, however, the viewer needs affirmation that love is a possibility for the protagonist: Belsey (1994:xi) writes that "[d]esire in Western culture is inextricably linked with narrative, just as the tradition of Western fiction is threaded through with desire". Belsey's

comment shows how the audience's 'need' for desire orders the narrative on a textual level. We (the audience) feel compelled to find instances of love in the text, in the process becoming like the ambling zombies of/in the text, compelled to look for physical gratification and necro-intimacy. Conversely, the protagonists of *LAZombie* and *Wolf, Wolf* both seem unaware of their own progressive states of loss (complicated to some extent by *LAZombie*'s reliance on the pornographic convention of presenting a series of 'scenes' without much in terms of narrative cohesion, and therefore without a pressing need from the viewer for the protagonist to undergo change, as well as *Wolf, Wolf*'s 'journey' being partly focalised through its narrator's experiential immediacy).

Otto's encounter outside the nightclub can be interpreted as an example of episodic love, whereas his encounter with Fritz signifies a distillation of confluent love. While the viewer wants Otto and Fritz to 'live happily ever after' together (in 'reality', as unreasonable an expectation as that trite linguistic structure makes it sound, it is what we have been conditioned to expect at the end of a conventional narrative arc), this will not be the case in LaBruce's film. When Fritz wakes up the next morning, Otto has left only a card (with the words OTTO and RIP in shaky handwriting) behind. While the viewer might be tempted to interpret this as a negative ending, another reading is possible: perhaps this is a way in which Otto acknowledges that his time as a zombie is coming to an end. The zombie construct called 'Otto' is dead, so that the real Otto can start his process of self-creation and healing. (Would we be able to say the same of Wolfie? Or is the novel's filial too entrenched in colonial oppositional thinking? The troped persona Wolfie is, after all, killed by the 'interloper' family, the Mkhonzas.)

Apart from offering terms with which to express love, intimacy, desire and togetherness that does not fit the prevailing heteronormative discourse, using phrases such as episodic sexuality and confluent love actively agitate against power structures that are built on heteronormative anti-promiscuity and pro-monogamy values. In addition, it foregrounds the body, and what we

ultimately *do* with our body and the body of the other(s), finding a way to radically subvert/transform our ideas/experience of intimacy. Equipped with this new language/understanding of intimacy, we turn our attention to how desire itself needs to be rethought. Singer's (1993) conceptualisation of erotic welfare comes in handy. She posits it as a framework of articulating precisely *how*, in concrete ways, desire is good for us (on personal, social, economic, and global levels). Doing this

entails a rethinking of the socio-psycho material constitution of the realm we have collected under the term 'desire'. It will entail a consideration of how we come to know, feel, represent, produce, reproduce, exchange, and authorize what we want, what gives or is pleasure, what constitutes the threshold of necessity, capacity, and surplus. The use of the term 'welfare' is intended to allude both to the sphere of value, ethics, specifically an ethic of benevolence, and to the sphere of political economy and social utility. It is a way of reopening the questions of whether what we want (or say or feel or think we want) can also, in some sense, be good for us. (1993:28)

Singer subverts the language of capitalism, uses it against itself. (Re)articulating the ways in which desire-without-power shapes us, our communities, our nations and our world, and rethinking the ways in which it can be used as a force of social change (towards the *good*), leads to a linguistic way to decolonialise, destabilise patriarchal and power-infused structures. Even if a linguistic change does not necessarily lead to a material change, it is important to see how Deleuzoguattarian-infused identity is reified through linguistic structures. (It is not that linguistic change is not linked to the material, changing cognitive structures *is* a material practice.) Thinking in this way about becoming rids us of the yoke of a Cartesian mind/body duality and instead changes it into a mind-body continuum. But: Change is still difficult, traumatic even. And the status quo is entrenched, power structurings etc. For Otto to decide

that he is undead/inhuman because of abandonment by his parents (power and society) and his lover (desire and love), poses questions on how deeply these two concepts, power and desire, construe our sense of self. Being a zombie is not *good* for him, and our understanding of erotic welfare shows that his self will deteriorate further.

Because of the emphasis on embodiment, queer structural changes brought about by an awareness of the erotic welfare of the self/group/community/nation/world lead to a largening of the interstice between (private) intimacy and (socially situated) bodies. Being part of the nested frame's zombie porno, and its 'band of misfits', makes Otto aware (again) of the need to belong, to desire, to be seen. His awareness of interactedness (with society) and relationality (with the larger world) is reactivated. When his character (in the nested film) kills himself through self-immolation (death through fire is symbolically laden with associations to rebirth, purification, and cleansing of the soul/spirit), the real Otto (the one in the frame narrative) turns his back on the prevailing heteronormative discourses that instructs him he is only a 'person' if he is a son and a lover (in a monogamous, (hetero)happy relationship). His access to sexual scripts of the self is ruptured, but he has not yet realised the power of the erotic within himself. He has, though, found a group of subjects who are like him, a band of misfits, a queer community. This correlates to the temporary sense of elation felt by Jack during the Meent episode.

In *Wolf, Wolf*, love is coded as filial. Venter creates a binary opposition when he pits the lovers' (Matt and Jack) experience of desire (and its correlate, physical manifestation, pleasure) against progenial duty and the novel charts this interplay between (sexual) connection and (social) exclusion, echoing what Frida Beckman calls, with regard to the role of pleasure and desire in creating a sense of self, the exploration of "not so much the relevance of pleasure on an individual and personal level, but rather [its] political, cultural and conceptual significance" (2013:vi). For Beckman, desire is conceptualised as imminently political and social, allowing us

to traverse state restrictions and regulations, and circumvent familial duty regarding progeny and posterity, offering instead an understanding of desire as fundamentally integrated with our being-in-the-world but, simultaneously, as I contend, open to continual experimentation, to the new, through lines of flight.

4.6 Concluding part

Lest we forget, “masculinity does not exist as the property, character trait or aspect of identity of individuals” (MacInnes, 1998:2). In this sense, Matt’s being is reflected, refracted, in the body of his father, the body of his lover, the body of the other. (What causes this refraction of being, is Matt’s experience of desire, and its correlate, physical manifestation, pleasure, and the novel charts this interplay between (sexual) connection and (social) exclusion.) He is confronted with two options: Either end up like Uncle Hannes, stuck in the past, who lives the remainder of his days on a “man-forsaken farm” (p.200) with his family of dogs. (The interspecies bond – that arose due to his social/belonging exclusion – is clearer in the Afrikaans text: “met sy kroos honde”, p.131. This influences how we see the dog = machinic extension of male violence and subjugation of the novel?)

Matt, however, fixates on the contents of the will, after it is revealed that his inheritance will, instead, go to his sister, (add quote about her slowly dawning realisation that the non-inheritance is because of the debauched sheets). He has been cut off, out of the filial-symbolic line of succession. (This smarts, all the more for having been his father’s caretaker in his last days, there developed an intimacy between them, an intimacy that unnerves others (p.144) around him, especially his sister). “He can’t get past it: that the will is a refutation of everything he’d believed existed between him and his father. He’ll be grappling with this for the rest of his life. He doesn’t have it in him to get over the severed connections, printed here in black and

white” (p.221). Only when Matt realizes, in the truncated end of the novel, that a balance between love and desire is needed (which asks the reader to solidify, alongside the protagonist, and sanction the novel as a document of the filial), and thus negate the potential of recoded positionings offered at points in the novel.

The novel’s ending arrests him in the filial (perhaps indefinitely). It is a shame that Venter ends the novel on a note that draws his protagonist into a corner, within a systematic loss: He doesn’t produce an heir, his business fails and is taken away from him. I wonder if it would not be more productive, truer to the spirit the novel wished to present itself in [to add quote] if Matt realises that the only real production is that which arises through desire/pleasure. The non-inheritance could have been that which sets him free: a line of flight from the overcoded system itself. The next section (3.2) is an attempt to read against this filial dictate, to surface fault lines in Venter’s filial imaginary, and posit a reading more in tune with alliance, a reading perpendicular to both love and desire, that focuses on what pleasure does in the novel. I posit that such a reading offers a view of more sustainable praxis within patriarchal space and might even offer some commentary on potential male intimacies in contemporary SA that fall within a decolonial cadre. Pleasure is, after all, an actualisation of potentiality.

On becoming and belonging, Elizabeth Grosz writes, in reference to Deleuze, of desire as “a mode of surface contact with things and substances, with a world, that engenders and induces transformations, intensifications, a becoming other” (1995: 249-295, emphasis added). As such, a positive and productive view of desire (as opposed to desire based on repression via Freud or lack via Lacan) is inherently subversive; that is, it offers a queer challenge to conventional sexual and gendered order and “champion[s] forms of desire that push at the boundaries of normativity” (Jackson & Scott, 2010: 150). Instead of homonationalist, homonormative, (hetero)happiness, we can willfully read other ways on male connection, intimacy and pleasure

onto Venter's text, in a sense bending the text over, making it submit to our own notion of intimacy.

[Interlude]

From *Groen soos die hemel daarbo* (2017), page 200:

Daar is altyd mense aan beide kante van die pad, party met die groot pien-en-blou plastiekreissakke, of kinders met swart skoolskoene wat vra vir lekkergoed wanneer [...] spoed verminder tot 30 km/h ten einde op die spoor te bly. Gate en klippers wat skurf uitsteek, oral. Dis nie veel van 'n pad nie. En wat die mense by hulle het, lyk dikwels na die somtotaal van hulle besittings: halfvol plastieksakke en opgerolde komberse, 'n sakkie lemoene, 'n kartonboks vasgemaak met oranje tou, 'n hondjie in die arms van 'n skoolmeisie.

Section 5

On queerly reading canid tropes in Eben Venter's *Wolf, Wolf*

*The shadow of the man assumes an autonomous and unspecified animal existence. — Gilles Deleuze (lectures)*⁸⁷

5.1 Introduction

Loss figures in myriad ways in Eben Venter's *Wolf, Wolf* (2013), and its effect on various categories of belonging (filial, intimate, national) is seen in how protagonist Matt Duiker's notions of being a son, a lover, and a citizen is refracted in his orientation towards the various male figures in his life: Matt's father, dying of cancer and slowly losing his ability to interact with the outside world; Jack, his on-and-off lover, who loses his home and then becomes unemployed; and his employee, Emile, a Congolese refugee trying to make a living during particularly xenophobic times. Multiple losses of ability, power, relationality, employment, and citizenship leads the protagonist to consider the possibility of alternative ways of navigating 'in-between' spaces of belonging. Interestingly, the presence of canid tropes (jackals, dogs, wolves) and canid symbolism (rumination on the hunt, a wolf-like mask worn by Jack, a dog accompanying Emile everywhere) appear alongside his considerations of belonging. In this article, I attempt a reading of the canid tropes and canid symbolism to surface zones of indiscernibility between human and non-human animals. I am interested in how Matt's orientation toward the father, Jack, and Emile—the archetypal patriarch, the lover, the other—can be read metonymically to represent shame, desire and exclusion, as well as how the canid figures of wolf and jackal and dog can be read as external realisations of these inner states.

⁸⁷ Available: <http://deleuzelectures.blogspot.com/2007/02/body-meat-and-spirit-becoming-animal.html>.

In the eyes of the patriarch, his son's desires for another man, and that which happens between the "debauched sheets" (173) of his son's bed, comes to constitute, for him, his son's being; for the father, the function of male-ness (which in the novel is two-fold: to operate sexually in producing an heir, and to produce in the more general capitalist sense of the word) comes to outweigh the essence of a person's being. The restrictive nature issued from the father's insistence on the son 'carrying on the line' crystallises in a sense of dutiful progeny (often a primary driver of Venter's protagonists) and considerations of such a duty permeate the first parts of the novel: Matt is the "only, the first-born, the son [...] he's the one who'll be able to take it further" (106). When the son goes against the father's wishes and allows Jack entry into his father's house, it results in a different kind of non-continuation: non-inheritance. (The son refusing the transfer of line; the father in return denying transfer of inheritance.)

Significantly, Jack is allowed entry into the patriarchal space only whilst wearing a wolf-hound mask, creating a queerly human-animal persona he playfully calls 'Wolfie'. The introduction of Wolfie shows how the notion of a gay son being tasked with continuing the progeny, carrying the fatherly seed, queers this specific (male) role. By its very refusal, it replaces or recodes progenitory duty with an emphasis on different ways of connecting and belonging. Venter's intentional positing of the wolf persona as sexualised affront to the patriarchal culminate in Matt and Jack's decision to go live on Rondebosch Common. This decision is fueled by their indignation at the non-inheritance, and at the subsequent forced selling of the family home (an un-domestication of sorts).

On the Common, they themselves start to resemble the dogs around them (239). At the same time, they start terrorising the new owners of the father's house, the Mkhonza family, while wearing the same wolfhound mask Jack wore the fateful night he was invited into the patriarch's house. The hooliganism and decidedly anti-social behaviour seem puzzling to the first-time

reader (and is not nearly as 'playful' as initial reviews of the novel make it out to be), as it appears to constitute a self-marginalisation through an acceptance of dog-like un-domestication. Their precarious situation is compounded by the fact that Matt then loses his livelihood (he bungles away his takeaway business due to sullen incompetence, and the business is later appropriated by Emile). In the last pages of the novel, Jack is killed, presumably by the new owners of the house, driven to desperation by the campaign of terror. His death is foreshadowed by a jackal hunt described earlier in the novel. The end of the novel thus constitutes a decentering of white male power, place, and positionality, and continues the thread of fragile masculinity and the effect of brutal intimacy (23) exhibited by the men in Venter's novel.

As can be seen from the short narrative overview, male loss and the canid presence lie close together. The canid figures impact queerly on Matt's sense of belonging by destabilising certainties around normative sexual praxis and citizenship. Canid tropes usually stand in the frame of public relationality, i.e., our ability to form interactional identifications with(in) larger groups of people. Thus, the figure of the dog, in its traditional role of human companion and as a symbol for relational belonging, is modulated in Venter's text. Conversely, the figure of the wolf, in its specific guise in folklore, is also problematised: rather than the big, bad wolf of fairy tales, the sexualised persona of Wolfie can be read as a semiotic agitator, a queer persona that prods at the confines of heteronormative homosociality.

5.2 Canid tropes and/as external manifestations of internal states

Frida Beckman explicates differences between animals as ciphers and indices. On the one hand, there's the long-held use of nonhuman animals as functional, cipher-like "place fillers". On the other hand, as opposed to such "casual anthropomorphism" (132), animals can be used as

indices, as when a particular animal is employed in the narrative “in a representational function [with] the specificities of indices important to the philosophical argument in which they appear” (133). Another use of the animal, beyond its status of mere ‘place-filling’ cipher or functional index, is as trope. Tropes are accompanied by literary baggage – the affective resonance we as readers bring to the text – which can be activated and/or subverted. For example, Venter, in a sense, reverse-engineers the wolf trope; Wolfie, far from resembling the dangerously beguiling lupine creatures of folkloric myth, is the only character who questions the ethical behaviour of those around him (Venter 239): When Jack is allowed to enter the ancestral home in a wolfhound mask, the persona of Wolfie becomes not only a manifestation of the lover’s illicit entry into the paternal and patriarchal space, but also of a queer challenge to the father’s—and Afrikaans culture’s—heteronormative demand for progeny.

What happens when canid tropes are used in such a specific manner, and when the reader considers these tropes’ literary baggage alongside their function in the text? Venter’s use of canid tropes—obedient dog and sexualised wolf and hunted jackal, with all the literary baggage these entail—can be explored in light of Deleuze’s zones of indeterminacy and, specifically, as manifestations of shame, desire, and exclusion. In “The Body, the Meat and the Spirit: Becoming-Animal” (1981), Deleuze discusses indeterminate zones—the in-between spaces created by experiences of loss—in the works of Francis Bacon. Describing Bacon’s process of replacing human heads and faces with animal heads and faces, he writes:

What happens is that the man’s head is replaced by an animal; but this is not the animal as form, it is the animal as outline [...]. What happens is that an animal, a real dog for example, is outlined as the shadow of its master; or conversely the shadow of the man assumes an autonomous and unspecified animal existence. The shadow escapes from the body like an animal to which we give shelter. (44)

Deleuze sees such shadows of excess echo in the intense affective states represented in Bacon's work: we see shame as a scuttling dog; desire as a wolflike creature, baring its fangs. However, he warns against seeing a "formal correspondence" in this relation, and instead emphasises how "a zone of the indiscernible, of the undecidable between man and animal" is created (44). In the novel, instances of canid-related symbolism—such as the erotised wolfhound mask—are textual indicators that the protagonist finds himself situated outside and between human- centred, heteronormative, and national categories. Indeed, intentional blurring of boundaries (especially within homoerotic and homosocial bonds) between dog/ wolf and man, between citizen and immigrant, between messy, carnal corporality and immaterial sterile cyberspace, is traceable throughout Venter's text.

When Deleuze writes of the "animal not as form, but as outline" and as "shadow escap[ing] from the body like an animal to which it gives shelter", he is approximating how zones of the indiscernible and undecidable 'discrete' units such as human and animal are created (44). External manifestations of inner states are the 'animal' to which the body 'gives shelter'. These are given shape not in the canid figures themselves, but rather in the zones of interaction, of refraction opened up by the presence of these figures—if we actively read *for* these zones.

5.3 The shadows of men: Dogs and masculine inclusion

Dogs figure in a number of passages on filial relations between men, especially passages that bring masculinity in relation to violence and subjugation, such as a lengthy description of a visit to the family farm where a jackal hunt is planned. Dogs act here as machinic extensions of the (white) men on the farm and are imbued with the men's contextually situated power, non-agential figures to exercise control over and with which to violently subdue the other – cyphers of exclusion, thus. The farm space is one of an extreme marriage of the heteronormative and

the homosocial; an all-male zone coded in violence and naturalised as instinctual. The hunt leads Matt to ponder the exclusionary and performative nature of such masculinity, and of his own role in a system of gendered praxis: "It's the exclusivity of the experience that he'd never be able to share in [...] the smell of gun oil, of dust and veld and a bit of blood, conspicuously macho: he doesn't cut it, he's not one of them" (Venter 135). In his focalisation, the heterosexual-homosocial is elevated to 'instinctual': "men come in, full of themselves – not with conceit, just full of the experience they share with each other as well as the [...] dogs, all of them waiting there down-wind in the veld with a cigarette and a swig from the hip flask, speech reduced to a single word, to breathing. [...] Now they're back with the experience" (134). This unspecified and nebulous instinctual sphere's impact is also seen on other characters on the farm, such as Uncle Hannes, whose relation to his dogs is coded as filial (he refers to his dogs as "my kroos").

The instinctual patriarchal and heteronormative homosocial space of the farm is mirrored in the father's house in the city. Specifically, the father's study is seen as a non-connective space where, quite early in the narrative, the reader is made privy to the brutality of male intimacy (146) in the zonal interplay between hyper- masculine father, homosocial space, and gay son. Matt recalls how, as a young boy, he was kept waiting to be allowed into his father's study, where his father and Uncle Diek (sic)

were regaling each other with lecherous tidbits, their ties loosened, sleeves rolled up over hairy forearms. [...] Pa [...] cut short what he was saying and looked at his son. He could have said anything to him then. [...] But the words weren't spoken, he'll never know what it was. Only: he was not admitted to the circle. [...] His father wanted to admit him, wanted him to experience his palpable charm, his passion and perseverance and principles, everything that made up his manly ego, but, *as with an animal, instinct*

warned him off: you're dealing with a different kind of creature here. It was all on his tongue, in his glance: his son, his own, his flesh and blood. How, dear Lord, had this come about? (10–1, emphasis added)

In Venter's novel, heteronormativity and heterosexism are not presented as natural, but rather as instinctual, and are specifically tied to the experience of certain spaces. This instinctual spacing is surfaced and challenged by the Wolfie persona's entrance. Suggestively, his entrance is coded in an erotic register that counters the way heteronormativity is posited as instinctual: "Jack goes down on all fours and trots on the spot. The cocked head looks at him with vibrating whiskers, and deep inside is the glint of real eyes. He announces that he's moving in as a dog, his name is Wolfie. Uncle Bennie won't mind, of course. Doesn't he have a soft spot for dogs?" (155). When the father enquires as to who is at the door, Matt's response is telling; instead of acknowledging the 'wolf' at the door, he simply states: "Scavenging dogs or something, Pa. I think somebody further up in the street let their dogs out on their own to go and do their business" (158). The more erotic under- tones of his answer shimmers through in the Afrikaans original's "losloperhonde" as well as the blurb's more erotic description: "The intimate space where Matt is waiting for his father to die is fatefully invaded by a wolf-like creature." Wolfie – it can only ever be a diminutive form, within such brutal masculine frames – comes to constitute a possible break with instinctual patriarchy, as it shows duty to be imaginary, even when progenitory codes are so normalised in Afrikaans culture: "What would happen to the world if everybody was like you and your friend? Where would our children come from? [...] There will be no more progeny. The bloodline runs dry" (178). The father is shown to conflate species continuation with the continuation of self, allowing a reading in which the fear of his son as sexual other is shown to be partly a projection of his own fears about dying, about his own corporeal non-continuity, assuaged only by the (possible) continuation of his line, the survival of the instinctual.

5.4 The shadows of (other) men: Dogs and migrant exclusion

Matt sees himself as standing 'outside' both the study and the hunt. This exclusionary worldview—with dogs as cyphers for a violent domestication of desire— manifests in Matt's heightened perception of Diamond, a 'fierce' (through Matt's focalisation) homeless dog who acts as avatar to the docile, stateless Emile. Matt's sense of shame at being less-than-a-man (within the homosocial confines of the narrative) drives his patronising and condescending behaviour towards the Congolese refugee—the only male occupying a lower social position than him in the narrative. Simultaneously, a creeping self-awareness of this behaviour manifests in how he becomes obsessively hyper-aware of the out-of-place-ness of Diamond: He "goes out by the door, double-locks it, closes the steel door too, and pretends not to know that Emile is standing right there with the dog that is by now tugging hard at its chain" (149). The instinctual is imbued with a physicality, a 'sense of prickliness': "The short-arse won't leave. Behind his shoulder, on the pavement, the dog is huffing and puffing, slobber drooling from his gums. There's a slight prickliness between them, and Mattheüs inevitably reacts with caution. He wishes he would leave now" (149).

Matt's filial view of dogs means that he does not allow for the close attachment between Diamond and Emile, so he circumvents this by transposing the one for the other. Throughout, his focalisation sets up a metonymical relationship between the dog and Emile, as when Matt's focalisation blurs the object being addressed: "[t]he small guy's still there, squatting next to the rump of his dog, eyes fixed on him, unblinking" (150). As readers, we don't know whose eyes are referred to (Emile's or his dog's). As Matt's condescension grows, the zone between dog and immigrant becomes imbued with ontological slippage – with much more than mere metonymy – and is blurred through the indiscernible in-between-ness of discourse relating migrants to dogs. This spills over the boundaries of the metonymic:

Emile is already taking the last mouthfuls of the food that he's just given him, sticks his tongue into the container, chucks container and spoon aside, the dog straining on its chain toward it all [...] the dog chomping at the plastic container, its head reaching almost to Emile's chest. Three, four times he looks around and grins toothily at Mattheüs, and he really does hope that it's nothing more than ordinary friendliness. (151)

The slippage comes uncomfortably close to raciality in the Afrikaans original, where Emile (or the dog—the reader themselves have to decide) “*grinnik deur sy tande*” (156). Of course, we read from personal assemblages to national categories of belonging. References to Diamond being tied up or being reprimanded often-times follow Matt's ruminations on national identity. The displacement of Matt's feelings of shame and inadequacy onto Emile manifests in the way his perception slips between Emile and Diamond, between immigrant other and non-human (animal) other.

It ultimately becomes apparent that Emile is not only more suited to dealing with the day-to-day challenges of living (a precarious life) in contemporary South Africa, but also much better equipped at running the takeaway business (having managed his own restaurant in Boma prior to fleeing to South Africa) than Matt himself—thus doubly challenging the sense of white male centrality Matt exhibits. Matt eventually asserts the only power left to him: firing Emile, and thereby dooming the Congolese's family to destitution. Emile's simple response of “*Je te comprends*” (149) (not ‘I understand’, but rather ‘I understand *you*’) is telling⁸⁸. Whilst spoken in a language Matt doesn't speak (does not have mastery over), he nonetheless understands the

⁸⁸ The English translation's response is a modulation of the Afrikaans original's “*Je vous comprends*”—a change which implies not only a formality shift, but also a potential shift from plural (or even collective) you/vous to singular you/te. (In the published version of this article, this appeared as an endnote, not a footnote. I've changed its type, but this does not change the importance of this change in the affect connoting around the me-we distinction in/through language, nor does it change my levels of un-comfort because of the lattices appearing in many aspects surrounding the translations of Venter.)

implication: “Mattheüs, in turn, understands exactly what he means. Emile implies that he understands everything, more than the takeaway he sees in front of him, whereas in fact there is nothing more to understand. And that’s what Mattheüs *instinctively* doesn’t like” (149, emphasis added).

The reappearance of the instinctual is problematic here, as it activates correlate discourse on raciality and affective views on migrancy. In the protagonist’s mind, dogs are ciphers to hunt with, to make obey, to violently subdue – domesticate – the other with. This worldview explains partly why Matt focalises Emile’s dog, Diamond, in such a vicious manner. Whereas dogs are traditionally construed as faithful companions or guides, here Emile’s dog come to encompass the apparent impenetrability and unknowing-ness of the Other, especially the immigrant other, through the externalised shame of the subject (of course within the specific actualities of a post-1994 South African reality). Venter’s use of the ‘faithful dog’ literary trope goes beyond simply constituting an ontological relation between Emile and Diamond. Zones of indiscernibility are activated so that Matt’s sense of shame at the loss of (male) power is echoed in the presence of Diamond. After Matt fires Emile, he watches him walk away with his “back hunched like a dog cowering after a hiding” (247), thus tethering his description to larger discourses of referring to immigrants as dogs. (See, for example, Greta Olson on the ease with which we read animal-like characteristics onto/into migrant characters.)

5.5 Reading tropes: Kitchens and canids

Reading Matt’s displacement of masculinist inadequacy is a way of rediscovering “our everyday interactions with [animals] and the new spaces of possibility such interactions can create” (Kohn 4). Kohn’s conceptualisation of an “ecology of selves” is useful here. Understanding that all beings participate in the world as “beings that have a point of view”, allows for a reading of

Diamond that “explode[s] [the] closed self-inferential circuit” (5) where the subject under discussion (dogs, for example) are made to be isomorphic with the discourse in which it is discussed (5). For example, if we read the trope so as to de-isomorph Diamond, we see that, from the dog’s ‘point of view’, Matt is the antagonist. Reading in a de-isomorphic manner, we see that not all canid tropes in the novel have the same function or are activated on the same plane of signification: Diamond and Wolfie are different from both the farm dogs (as machinic extensions of Afrikaner violence and subjugation) and from the hunted jackal. While there are differences in the affective residue of each trope, both Wolfie and Diamond are orientated in relation to the father and to what the father represents. This positioning is clearly emblemised in two very similar scenes, both involving a canid figure in a kitchen, that bookend Matt’s successive losses. The first details the presence of Wolfie in the domestic space of the father’s house (Venter 176); the second shows how Diamond protects the counter of the takeaway shop when Emile, after he is fired by Matt, forcefully asserts ownership of the business (263). The similarities between the two scenes (with both, for example, particularising that only the ears of the canid figure are visible over a kitchen counter, perhaps signifying Matt’s inability to comprehend completely) is more than just an interesting parallel; both are instances of the new (violently) invading the domestic ‘space’ of the status quo.

However, if the reader accepts Wolfie’s/Jack’s ‘invasion’, then must we not at the very least reconsider the validity of Emile’s takeover of Matt’s business? Both are instances of a ‘rupture’ or affront to (white) patriarchy, but only one—Jack’s invasion of the patriarchal—is coded and focalised as positive, while the other—a (non-white) immigrant’s takeover of a failing business—is presented as part of the breakdown of (white) socius. While there are salient differences between the two, both speak to manifestations of inner states, the coming to light of shame and desire, the externalisation (though not concretisation) of relations to others that make up our being-in-the-world. Even though Diamond is set up as the (troped) conceptual opposite of

Wolfie, I argue that they are equal in their relation or orientation toward the father, and that which the father represents. Thus, these two tropes have to be seen not in-and-of-themselves, but through their relation to Matt's being. For example, while Diamond is literally on a leash, metaphorically he can be read as standing for Matt's inability to let go of a past identity situated in power-over. Compared to this, the wolf motif in the novel is, though pervasive, at the same time a furtive presence. The wolf is an in-between entity to whom it becomes tricky to assign meaning, showing semiotic uncertainty in how the canid tropes are used (and are useful) within the semiotic sphere of the novel. While positing the entry of Wolfie as a challenge to such social expectations, to circumvent the direct imperative of the patriarch specifically in terms of the sexual life of the (only) son, the reader is affectively discouraged to read Diamond in the same manner. However, is Diamond not equally well-placed to challenge normative social expectations and circumvent the direct imperative of the patriarch? Why does only one type of subversion count? The novel, after all, charts positively the life of the son, incisively exploring the (re)configurations of desire and pleasure that can potentially disrupt historical and culturally situated schemas of masculinities in South Africa (specifically in Afrikaner/Afrikaans culture). Could Diamond then not also be read more positively as a type of catalyst for an exploration of loss that sees the national and the intimate closely intertwined?

This discrepancy between how we read Wolfie positively, but Diamond negatively, speaks to the novel's overall attempt to universalise displacement in terms of (loss of) white male power. The novel's explicit mirroring of these two canid/ kitchen counter passages further speaks to the difference between power-to and power-over, as well as to how our perception (our reading) is grounded in our socio-cultural background. Reading these troped scenes together can be seen as a possible break with the reader's own filial, intimate, and national sense of belonging, senses which guide the process of finding resonance in alliance with particular characters within the narrative, at the cost of, perhaps, ignoring the potential-ity of others. Questions arise: How

do men (and also white men) navigate systems of oppressive patriarchy in order to create meaningful queer bonds? How does the reader's awareness of relationality affect how power is upheld? If even homosocial bonds serve to uphold "structures for maintaining and transmitting patriarchal power" (Sedgwick 25), then how do we get out of the bind where homosocial relations between men (and even desire between men) is seen as constitutive of this patriarchy?

5.6 Reading tropes: Resembling dogs

The disruptive presence of a canid figure in a domestic space is inversely echoed in passages describing Matt and Jack's attempt to create a domestic-like living arrangement on the Common. This act of un-domestication is prompted after the ancestral home is sold to new owners. Matt and Jack squat illegally on Rondebosch Common, all their belongings crammed into a car. For some time, their life on the Common, and the car in which they live, resemble a "companionable chaos" (Venter 238). The novel sets up this episode as a concrete, messy, lived repudiation of the incorporeal spheres they previously moved in (Matt's porn addiction and Jack's over-reliance on social media). The (concrete and very visible) wolfhound mask is "propped up against the windshield as a talisman" (238) and dog and wolf figures amalgamate: slowly, Matt and Jack's actions start resembling those of the dogs who are walked at the Common. For example, "[d]uring the night Matt goes out- side with a roll of toilet paper to use the Common as the Common dogs do" (239) and Jack's students start complaining about his body odour (256).

I read the Rondebosch Common episode as a logical outcome of Wolfie's entrance into the patriarchal space, which surfaced the potential for new ways of being. The Wolfie persona introduces notes of erotic ferality into the (at that point) heavily heteronormatively coded

domestic, thereby recoding possibilities of belonging. On the Common, this (temporarily) becomes an affirming way of connective intimacy, a companionable chaos that allows the lovers to traverse traditional and restrictive categories of sexual and national identity. On this, Jack Halberstam, who has been attempting to remodel the concept of 'wildness' as moral-aesthetic rupture, states that because queer "no longer signifies the wild array of embodiment and utopian projects it once did" (Gervasio), we should embrace "all that is chaotic, reckless, and intense to the point of violence" (Gervasio), leading to the taking up of a position that is against the self-interest of a rational citizen. For a while, the episode on the Common can be seen as an act of *jouissance*, a temporary revolution against the filial: Jack characterises the Common as a place of safety, a totalising space where differences—between possession and precarity, between human and animal—are upended temporarily: "Jack looks north, west, south, east. 'Nothing. You can't see anything of the city from here. Only the grass and the mountain there, to the west. This is our hiding place in the middle of the city. Isn't that something'" (Venter 241). There is more to Jack's experience of the Common than simply seeing it as a space of security: Jack, who "knows the Common well" (237, in an apparent but veiled reference to cruising), describes it as a space where dogs run around freely, a space of "[p]ure joy. Up and down the paths among the grasses and flowers that have been trampled by people and by dogs' paws. He knows it sounds a bit silly, but he associates the Common with a zest for life" (237). Specifically, a scene (described through his focalisation) of two men (he is unsure if they are brothers or lovers) who often walk their two chocolate-coloured Labradors, come to signify the exuberance of a life lived 'outside of' repressive power structures. The Common is simultaneously a 'hiding place' (241) and an onto-aesthetic experiment.

Matt and Jack's decision to resemble-dog can be read as an act of experimental ferality. And, since it is constructed on male intimacy, and in opposition to heteronormative capitalist structurings, then perhaps also as an act of feral masculinity. It is an intentional decision to un-

domesticate, to disrupt expectations so as to create a space-ing of reflective being. Seeing Matt and Jack's choice as a temporal and ephemeral act of feral masculinity counters to a large extent the repressive and stratified filial relationality presented elsewhere in the novel. Through this, we may also read ferality in a slightly different manner: with an understanding that it connotes connection, instinctive cooperation, and erotic kinship; a way of being definitely and defiantly at odds not only with the isolating individualism of the erotic and sexual self in late capitalism but also with heteronormative progenitory duty. In addition, it can be read as an attempt to connect beyond the human-centred, to arrive at a sense of shared transspecies (Kohn 7) being-in-the-world, allowing us to see that for "what it means to be human in all of its contingent complexity [...] we need to look to a context beyond the uniquely human" (6). We read Jack's desire for what is signified by the two men (significantly, he doesn't know if they are brothers or lovers – to some extent negating the need to know) *and* their dogs (Venter 238). It is in the transspecies square (2 men x 2 dogs) that the relation whole of the Common surfaces, its immeasurable ability to be-all, to contain all affective being-in-the-world. This, to Jack, is something to be relished, the onto-aesthetic ferality of 'pure joy'.

Unfortunately, the Common episode coincides with Matt and Jack's progressively worsening terrorism against the Mkhonzas. Matt and Jack, however, see their hooliganism against the Mkhonzas not as a campaign of terror, but as a game; a game known to (Afrikaans) children as "*Wolf, Wolf, hoe laat is dit?*" (Wolf, wolf, what's the time?), with the temporal-symbolic echoes of the wording pointing towards a time of (perhaps, violent) reckoning, a time of endings. In the final chapters of the novel, Jack is killed after nearing the Mkhonzas' house whilst in the 'Wolfie' guise. This sense of a nearing end – activated by the echoing refrain of the game – points to larger questions of how we belong to national groupings and constantly-shifting cultural identifications; Matt and Jack's chosen homeless-ness, their willful precarity, and their anti-social behaviour is understood as a rebellion against a perceived loss of power here seen in

relation to the self's (in)ability to recode and adopt to new configurations of praxis. Their resemble-dog on the Common ultimately fails, and the novel's pervasive sense of loss comes full circle.

5.7 Conclusion

The Common episode temporarily disrupts negative connotations with animals and makes resemble-dog productive, affirmative. Their renunciation of their dependency on power structures and renewed sense of (feral) connectivity brings about a new sense of relationality found in the 'companionable chaos'. Venter's novel surfaces this, and other, zones of the undecidable between human and non-human animal. In this chapter, I read the presence of canid figures for how they activate Deleuzian shadows of shame, desire, and exclusion, which manifest in a set of behaviours and orientations towards others. In the novel, these states are metonymically represented by the father, Jack, and Emile, but significantly activated by *how* we read the canid tropes of wolf, jackal, dog. Lest we forget, "masculinity does not exist as the property, character trait or aspect of identity of individuals" (MacInnes 2). In this sense, Matt's being is reflected, refracted, in the body of his father, the body of his lover, the body of the other. The novel charts this interplay between (sexual) connection and (social) exclusion, and we read this interplay onto/into the canid tropes.

These states of flux, of in-between-ness, are given shape in Venter's novel not merely in the presence of canid figures themselves, but rather in the zones of interaction activated by their presence, specifically in how they are read as figures of masculine inclusion and migrant exclusion, and the unbridled though temporary joy of the Common. Read together, these tropes pose larger questions on the effects of loss on categories of belonging. If we accept that the self is not static, then categories of (national, sexual, familial) belonging can be read as

assemblages of processes, sensations, affects and ideas. Read in this way, the novel comments on the process of being South African—a process where being (what I am) and self (who I am) are performed in relation to larger, national assemblages of belonging, themselves in constant flux. Venter probes what it means to be, to act, not only as son and lover and migrant, but also as South African. The doubled “wolf” of the novel’s title signifies two sides of being: doubled notions of natural and unnatural, of normative against subversive ways of *being*. Not so much ‘wolf, wolf’ as ‘foreign dog, tame(d) wolf’.

Interlude: Danie, daarna, en dan, dan

Danie, daarna

[en dan die pa/seun se 'losloperhonde' quote uit *Wolf, Wolf*]

Dan woon ons in 'n [...]huis, alleen
En as dit reën sal ek op die dak gaan staan
[...]

Ons moet deur hierdie kom
Selfs met 'n hartseer glimlag
Dan nooi ons al ons vriende om te trou
Ek dink ek het een of twee
Maar die vloer is lendelam
En hierdie mense maak my eintlik net bang
Hey staan stil vir een sekonde
Mamma kyk na my [honde]
Dis nie [honde] nie my kind

[...]

Jy weet ek kan dalk arm bly
Ek sit vas in verlede tyd
Maar jy bly my by
Jy sleep my langsaan tot jou slaap
Met my hart tot op jou oor
Ek weet hys dood maar hy praat met my
En as krake op die vensters van my oë. Is dit jy wat daar skuil?
In die koelte van my syn

- with apology to Spoegwolf (after the lyrics to *Syn*)

Section 6

The stench of the homosocial: The decaying body of the father as sign in Eben

Venter's *Wolf, Wolf*

6.1 Introduction

The Venter oeuvre – ten prose works, one hybrid (word sketches-short prose-recipe collection) text, and a meta-visual collection titled “Translate Yourself”, to date (plus the as-yet-unpublished diaries) – strums steadily along to the ache of a densely articulated, and decades-long but persistently very-much-of-the-now, wanting to belong. The advancement of this articulation surfaces in *Wolf, Wolf* (2013) primarily through consideration of what happens when long-held certainties (indelibly Afrikaner-specific, even when articulated in the novel as universal-masculine and universal-patriarchal) around normative sexual praxis and citizenship are destabilised. In previous work on the novel (Strydom, 2018b), I consider the interpretative value actualized by readings of the novel that dwell on zones of the indiscernible (after Deleuze, 1981) – specifically in how reading for these zones allow the reader to bring forth moves from filial (in the context of the novel, arrested relations with the past; submission to power-over structurings of state-filiation; and cultural-progenitory filiation with the perceived cultural ancestry) to alliance.

But these filial arrestations not only occur in the text itself, but also in the relation between reader and text. I contend that canid-related symbolism in the novel, in particular the canid figuration of wolf, jackal, and dog, can be read as external realisations of inner states of desire and shame read-for to impact queerly on the how shifting senses of belonging (itself never not-plural; always in flux) is established in the novel's diegesis. Indeed, the ace up Venter's sleeve is how the novel compromises Afrikaans fiction's tired troping of canid figures such as the wolf,

jackal, and dog; literary tropes all too often overused as modulations of interactional identifications within larger groups of people and as symbol for filial-relational belonging rooted in Afrikaner ideas/ideals of subservience, mastery-over/power-over, and power-based companionship. However, the materiality of relation in the South African/global South text holds at least as much weight as a symbolic (or trope-focused) reading for belonging/relationality does; equally, a queer (theoretical) intensity – especially one rooted in Southern African soil (Strydom, 2018a) – necessitates that the lived materiality be (put) front-and-centre in analysing texts (especially texts, such as Venter's, held to be torchbearers of a gay, or queer – whatever this may mean at any given historical moment – sensibility). This makes it productive to look at how attempts at re-seeing the novel's positing of ways of belonging (including my own previous attempt) ring less than true when not taking the granular materiality of these tropes into account. [Similarly, the protagonist of *Wolf, Wolf*, Matt Duiker, cannot escape the fixating spectres of national and filial belonging – the novel has been called a “stark study of arrested ethnicity” (Hope, 2015).

It is perhaps not ethnicity, but rather various and varied categories of belonging (filial, intimate, national) that are explored through loss (particularly of Afrikaner financial-symbolic, somatic and biopower) and interwoven through facets of masculinist identity (being a son, a lover, an employer, an urbanite, a citizen). This is reflected in the protagonist's constant re-orientations in relation to male figures around him: his father, once-proud Afrikaner patriarch, now bedridden, anosmic, and succumbing to cancer; Emile, a Congolese refugee on to which Venter projects varied colonial tropes of uncleanness; and one of Matt's lovers, Jack, who becomes homeless and unemployed. Matt tries to navigate this messy, lived corporeality (even while finding himself drawn into a steadily progressing – and very un-corporeal – porn dependency). To boot, the experience of multiple loss(es) of ability, power, relationality, employment, and citizenship leads him to consider alternative ways of navigating belonging (in precarity).

In a more granular-material read-for of the novel, these indiscernible zones become smells – stench, odour, 'instinct' – manifesting in sets of affective-material vectors: the toxicity of the father's urine, the sourness left over on a cake of soap used by the migrant other, the powdery spunked cubilication with the fragrant body of the lover. Towards these smells – of father/Jack/Emile – the protagonist orientates himself. But it is specifically the relation with the father figure – often an axis around which Venter's narratives are built – that stands out here. In essence, the (stench of the body of the) father comes to figure here as the present-past, and as the national frame of belonging in/of the past – to such an extent that the father, the homosocial, the national, and the past, are all near-impossible to read-apart. But other traces of belonging potential do linger. Here I continue arguing for reading-for zones of the indiscernible, but extending these to smell and scent, specifically relating to the father figure (and, to a lesser extent, the motherly). Why? Because the blurring of categories of belonging is *advanced* by a materiality-reading, specifically by how Venter sets up an olfactory imaginaire (to appropriate Looby's (2006) term): the queer use of smell pervading the novel can be read to not only counteract the scentless incorporeality of abstracted notions of belonging but posits a different possible way of belonging in/to the past (and as bulwark against the odious odour of the homosocial).

6.2 Reading for scent signs: The movement of sign, from signifier through Deleuze to 'something else'

He "smells their house, a blend of floor wax and wilting proteas and kelim dust and the Duikers, their characteristic smell" (p.217)

“Deleuze’s entire work rebukes the notion of sign as it was defined by theologians (St Augustine) and by linguists (Saussure)”, writes André Pierre Colombat, and, by extension, the “tradition [that] led to the supremacy of the Signifier in contemporary thought” (2000:14). However, for Deleuze, the rebuke itself incorporates “the question of signs into much larger problems of expression and of expressivity” (ibid.) as well as on power flows through structure: “Contrary to the power of expressions, the power of signs is based on an illusion, on the pious belief in a distinct order of the Signifier – the transcendental law, the Word of God, the Phallus [...]” from which all of the material world “emanates” (ibid.). However, Deleuze, after Spinoza, and in conjunction with Guattari, rejects such reducing-of; instead, they propose a movement through signification towards expression: “Their criticism of semiology promotes a new kind of semiotics based on a new pragmatics. It cannot be disconnected from a new clinical gaze put upon the unfolding of expression of life itself” (2000:15).

But, for this to be productive, distinctions have to be made “between a sign and something else,” (2000:16): “On one side we find the signs of the prophet, the theologian, the priest, the psychoanalyst, the linguist: the signs of representation, negation, judgement and revelation. The expression is inseparable from the powers of the heterogeneous world, or arrangement, that it expresses. It ‘unfolds’ and ‘involves’ but has nothing to ‘unveil’. On the other side the philosopher must unfold the affirmative ‘expression’ of the Spinozist, or better said, the ‘expression’ of the ‘expressed’ that constitutes adequate knowledge (Deleuze 1990:151-2). A sign is the impure image of a pure meaning, of a pure abstraction, that has to be extracted or unveiled in order to ground language and its order-words” (2000:16).

Frankly, we cannot divorce the difference between sign and expression from power: “A sign always attaches to a propium; it always signifies a commandment, and it grounds our obedience.” (1990:56, 181-2) as quoted in Colombat, 200:16) So the sign isn’t obedience – in

the leash or the collar – but rather that which ‘grounds our obedience’ – the relation of domesticity, the memory-scent of control. Also, a sign does not exist in ordered-causal couplings of discrete units, or unit-pairs (dog-leash). Instead, it is part of an ecosystem of affect (owner/companion-leash-dog-park-observer-arbitrary municipal rule): “Where Freud, and even Lacan, saw signs, signifier and signified – a language and a syntax – Deleuze and Guattari describe connections, transformations, arrangements and productions [...]” (Colombat, 2000:18).

We’ve become so used to saying ‘what does it do, instead of mean’ that the phrase – the notion itself – is (like ‘to queer’) normativised. Therefore, it (the phrase ‘what does X do, not mean?’) needs further qualification, in order to keep it being productive. One such qualification is to move, in Colombat’s phrasing, from ‘What does it signify’ to “To which concrete social, political, or erotic arrangements is it connected?” (2000:18) Ultimately, yes, this allows us a move wherein “the problem of the expression replaces that of the designation and of the signification” (2000:18) and leads to a “special kind of empiricism” that, at least according to Colombat, underlies all of Deleuze’s work.

I’d like to extend that move to smell, here. (And perhaps inject the qualifier ‘queer’ somewhere in the phrase ‘special kind of empiricism’ of Deleuze and Guattari. Especially, in Venter’s register of smells.) The novel becomes a smellscape, but not of smells-as-signs, instead of smells-as-asignifying-smells: “We are now clearly dealing with a new kind of sign, with signs considered as expressions, with ‘asignifying signs’ connected with Deleuze’s transcendental empiricism and Guattari’s machinistic unconscious.” (18) There are smells that overcode the smellscape – the father immediately comes to mind – that appear so strong as to rupture the diegetic, that even risk overcoding how readers make sense of the olfactory ways in which other characters like Jack make their way through the novel-world with. And until the register is

parsed (what is, in turn, father, fatherly, father's body, young-father, genre-father) the olfactory enfolds opaquely, a-signifies, enfolds-out-of meaning.

For it is, after all, a *register* of smells, i.e., not only a neutral, a-historial, a-social 'opskryf' van ('registreer deur die sintuie'), but also a making-into-relation (registreer binne verband met ander reuke), and the register has to be parsed so to avoid the overcoding into becoming-hierarchy: "These signs are not to be characterised by their infinite and circular connection to other signs, not by their connection to the abstract theatre of the Spirit. They are to be considered as intensive and immanent signals expressing, marking, and unfolding the powers of a given milieu or heterogeneous arrangement." This is the smell-relation in Venter's register within, crucially, *the oeuvre*, although there is not space/scope in this article (except maybe in one or two superficial examples) to link the smells in *Wolf, Wolf* with the Venter-smells spread across his oeuvre, in order to find immersive moments/points of meaning-making: the fading, toxic body of the Father/father and Bill's sour-Jik-roggelende body; the sour 'unsoaped' (within the protagonist's perspective) smell of the migrant that pops up in *Twaalf*, in *Horreelpoot*, in *Groen*; the lover's mossy armpits that is (and isn't) Madelein in *Begeerte*, the marked absence of smell of the motherly.

These are all in the cadre of relationality, yes, but because the sign moves *beyond* the material to the affective-spatial, also smells-in-spatiality: The forbidding study of the Father/father, filled with smells [wax, polish, books, etc.], the alimentary topography of the kitchen and Duiker's Takeaway, the mouldy, musky cubilication of the lovers' room that explicitly activates the national [wilting proteas quote]. And there's a third layer, too: one that activates masculinist belonging within a national frame, in wilting proteas, Ingrahams, Vicks, Deepheat, Axe, lamb chops vs. lamsbredie. This specifically links to how "[s]igns involve heterogeneity in at least three ways: first, in the object which bears or emits them, and it is necessarily on a different

level, as though there were two orders of size or disparate realities between which the sign flashes; secondly, in themselves, since a sign envelops another 'object' within the limits of the object which bears it, and incarnates a natural or spiritual power (an Idea); finally, in the response they elicit, since the movement of the response does not 'resemble' that of the sign." (Deleuze & Guattari, 1983:30). To reiterate, smell is also, *always*, material, and in the manner that signs enfold each other – but not in hierarchy – for making into-relation, above all, the decaying body of the father – its heterogeneity touching each of the male-male relations Matt attempts.

6.3 The decaying (body of the) father as smell cycle

The olfactory, in this novel, can be read as sign, but sign that moves beyond the material to the affective. In *Wolf, Wolf*, the olfactory sign of the father moves between the present, past and future: In the present as a stench, associated with the decaying body. In the past, it presents memory-of-SA – the dutiful dog, Jas; the chrome and leather of a new car; the deodorant of a young, virile father. It also represents the future: where the stench and hurt (and homosocial) is gone.

But this temporal smellscape is obscured by how the sign (in the Deleuzian sense) enfolds. Several parts of the enfolding: a) the object emits on two layers: the body (as cypher for sickness) and the decay of smell (smell as cypher for decay); b) the Idea incarnates when the smell (of decay/of sickness) has near-fully enveloped the object [with the only exception: memory – confusingly also coded in smell – of the younger, desirous father]; c) the son recoils from the father's body in response, attempts to re-spatialize, becomes fixated on the internal wound.

It is further obscured – more significantly – because we often obscure (or negate) the cycle of smells (Cohen, 2006), especially of abject things such as corpses. In the first part of the novel, it becomes difficult to negate the fact that it is a *body* dying – the corporeal machine ceasing to function. A common, conditioned response to the body's dying odour is to perceive it as a warning, but it can also be seen in a more productive light. The temporality of the stench changes the way his son perceives spatiality: Initially, the study (a heterosexist space in the novel) stands in for the father, for the materiality of the fatherly body (as Venter makes it metonymic stand-in for the the previous dispensation), and so crystallises the homosocial connection between past-father-nationalism. But the study changes – or, rather, the son's perceptual and schematic relation to the study and what the study stands for changes. The father's being dissolves, and this affects Matt's relation/orientation to the study, coded in the olfactory: "The study with its pleasant blend of smells is a thing of the past. He's sorry about that, sorry for Pa who'll never again smell things like he used to." (p.32) and with the loss of the memory-identity of spaces (physical, but also coded olfactorily) associated with his father. (A 'thing' of the past – the dual meaning activates a sense of subject into object, a person into a 'thing'.) As the father's body will cease to be, so too should the materiality of the lived experience in the study cease to affect his son: That which has come before becomes totalised into the smell of sickness: "Mattheus permits himself one last thought in this study that is now infected with the strange smell that the sickness has brought into it. Everything, he's going to change everything." (p.104) However, this does not happen; instead, Matt contemplates the study – and the house – and what will become-after:

Teen dagbreek, toe die son vanaf die oostekant as vaal lig om die huis by die hoë, gordynlose vensters ingooi, neem Mattheüs 'n vreeslike besluit: dat hy nie die huis so gaan loslaat nie. Dis al onnosele manier, weet hy dit nie, om sy pa se verraad tot iets anders to maak, wat weet hy nog nie. Vreeslik is sy besluit, dit besef hy maar te goed,

omdat hy hom gaan veroorloof om met nog 'n ding op obsessiewe wyse om te gaan,
hom daarmee gaan bind tot die laaste toe, wat dit ook al mag beteken. (236)

But, in many ways, the olfactory transcends meaning, *is* materiality. (Whilst also staying indiscernible, the difficult to place, the out of place, memory. As such, it is material, but it also goes beyond it. *It is both meaning and materiality at the same time.*) The sick, dying body's smell becomes a presence, leading Matt to "turns away from the smell, caustic, the skin of a body cooling down permanently, just giving off a metallic dampness, appalling to have such a chemical smell on a human being, you can't imagine it." (p.33) But Venter does attempt to imagine it, and the reader along with him; An olfactory imaginaire is created, with the materiality of the text breaking into the imagination of the reader. Like the father, the reader becomes aware of his own body: "His urine stinks, he thinks." (p.38) The father's "own toxic urine." (p.177) is that abject part of the body as last remaining compositional marker.

However, beneath the surface of the sick, abject dying body is the memory (coded in smell) of the younger father, the handsome, virile, white man blossoming into (nostalgic) Apartheid SA's memory-citizen-being. Now-memory becomes smell of then-being: "[...] he succeeds in recalling his father's smell within that dusty sunlight, not as he later smelled on his sickbed, but before, with his expensive, sophisticated aftershave complementing the smell of his body." (p.208) Then-smell is textual memory *and* exclusionary *and* capitalist ("expensive" and "sophisticated"). Is this the genesis of Matt's double-split sweat fixation/fetish, we wonder, or is the sweat on Jack an olfactory reminder of a happier childhood (still, it has to be kept in mind, under Apartheid)? The reader is lost in the erotic overpowerment of the younger father-as-smell: "That, and then later, his father *as a man as he saw himself*, and as Mattheüs *saw him as a man*, his father coming from work in his elegant tailored suit and always smelling of money and strange women and the leather seats of those dream-mobiles [...] and if he then went to greet his father

and walked past him, his father remaining in exactly that position, his appeal wasn't lost on his son, he could smell his father, his own private smell after a whole day's working and negotiating that took place without his taking off that jacket, at most a slightly loosened tie." (p.196, emphasis added) He views – sees, saw, saw – a private smell in the integrity of a white male body, of masculinist existence ignorant of the injustices or intricacies of the lived actuality of the Now. The smell of a man is (to Matt) a combination of maleness, dominance, capitalism (money and women and dream-mobiles and the other to subdue.) But it is also a private smell – carried in public view – that is itself an autonomy over part of the embodied self. It is also a highly sexualised scent. A dog in heat.

In this, notably, scent charts male power. The father, for example, ruminates on how he was "the best smeller of their family, he used to be able to tell when the potatoes started sprouting in the darkness of the storeroom, he could smell their mother's monthlies" (p.125). The dying patriarch's imagined sense of smell is here used to demarcate him in a kind of hysterical self-representational caricaturing of heterosexuality – as commander of the harvest and commander of women – a quote which brings to mind Judith Butler's contention that heterosexuality is always in crisis because of its inability to fully actualise itself. Against this (now past) male virility, his sickness leads to gradual but extensive anosmia – that is, the inability to smell – inversely echoing his son's gradual over-sensitisation to smell (and so charting a renegotiation of power.) Being a son, of course, means something very specific in Venter's *oeuvre*: lineage, patrilineal guilt, end-of-the-line progenitory duty, taking on the function(s) of the father (here, literally, as the son has to assist his father's bodily ablutions. This sickly-smelling-anosmia tension sets up the spatiality into which the lover enters and against which the reader, supposedly, has to contrast more egalitarian, nuanced ways of belonging. The son, however, is also cognisant of how scent links to the perceived un-porous nature of being a man (tied to the integrity of the male body): "he's tussling with a suspicion about his porn-goggling: that his

insides, steeped in all the lascivious images, are sweating onto, infecting, someone as exposed as his father [...]" (p.74). This idea of scent contagion – of his inner desires emanating out into the open, breaking past the visual marker and into the sharp smell of urine – seems to relate to the Kantian notion that "scents enter into the very being of anyone who perceives them" (Gray, 2006:239), and may even be read as a concretisation of transposed guilt or shame (at, inter alia, his erotic arrestation in the cyber relationality of visual porn imagos) dependency on porn. Maybe he thinks the lack of male power-over leaves a scent trace? Regardless, "odors [...] naturalizes cultural disapproval and, conversely, being odorous is tantamount to being odious [...] Commensurate with these claims of foulness are inflamed anxieties over 'contamination'" (Drobnick, 2006b:14), as well as the awareness that odour is a "crucial component in the definition of, and orientation to, an environment and is instrumental in generating appropriate activity. [...] cues to particular modes of involvement with the setting" (Largey & Watson, 2006:35). The 'wound' contaminates, oozes into the homosocial, potentially outsmells the domicile. It is the bedsheet that becomes debauched, the dog that becomes deviant, the plague of wolves.

The house's alimentary topography is as ordered as Apartheid-era-colonialism's discrete and fixed categories of oppression: each room has a function and a set of rules – and a smell. These 'cues' (signs) for appropriate engagement with a setting/system are olfactory in nature in the novel, and help the reader navigate the exclusion/inclusion of the patriarchal spaces of Venter's design, which does not leave much space for revolt (partly because it is sometimes coded in – and through – its absence): "the old-worldliness of his father, a value system he was handfed with, and which he later, on becoming fully human, began to despise so passionately. And yet it's the constancy of that world that in an odd, almost repulsive way provided him with security, which he now misses so much, [...] *Mattheüs no longer qualifies for it*, [...] He weeps for it, not openly with visible tears, but deep inside, an oozing internal wound." (p.233-234,

original emphasis) Here, Venter seems to equate heteronormativity with (material) security – something that often happens in his work – but also activates the body (horror) of sickness as moralistic manifestation of presumed masculinist lack.

The stench of the homosocial thus emanates from both the wounded, dying body of the patriarch and the ‘oozing, internal’ wound-ing of the gay son – two sets of contagion intensities circling around the sign object of the father's decaying body. The idea of a wound twists in on itself, it makes us ponder the distinction between the inside and outside of the male body, places into doubt the integrity of that body (as well as the seemingly ordered body of society). As the textual body is also cypher for the text itself, these doubts are extended to the boundaried body of the text itself: How do we as readers become aligned with the (body of the) text, and how do we respond to such oozing textual materiality of an olfactory system that (en)codes homosocial behaviour? How does the page stain us with an odour we aren't able to shake even after we put the novel down?

In the pro-normative stratifications of homosocial-heteronormative statements such as “‘I like the smell of beer on you.’ Matt’s father tells him.” (p.33), we see that smell is also coded interaction, scent is connection, that which binds men to each other and to the past. But then-smell is also the troped idea of connection, the very material interchange of air molecules between people, that which moves between us, flows imperceptibly, always on the edge of sensual (in all senses of that word) perception. Homosociality is a scent, desire is smell, and life is breath. Even the patriarch’s death scene is coded in breath: “Where is his father now, he wonders after a while. He tests for warmth over the nostrils. The unconscious is still operating, where is the old man wandering, with which person or thing is he still lingering?” (p.195) The doubled meaning of lingering (smell, talm) echoes on: Matt “cherishes that intimacy of [his] father’s voice, warm as his own breath” (p.195). Silverman’s flesh of my flesh reimagined as breath of my breath: “He

takes the hand from his and carefully places it by his father's side on the bedspread. He tests it again over the nostril. It is so." (p.106) The death of the patriarch – the air leaving the room at the removal of the smell object even when the responses remain hanging in the air – could easily signal an opening up of ways of sexual being, deterritorialising the text. But, in Venter's oppositional matrix, it does not – we are arrested in (oppositional) revolt. The wolf stays dog.

6.4 Reading for the olfactory, not for visibility, as marker of father-son belonging (and un-belonging)

Visibility is traditionally held as primary marker of belonging in Venter. But when we read for the olfactory as sign, a different paradigm is unlocked:

Literature selects, develops and confronts signs in different worlds, along different aspects of time according to differing processes of continuous variation or transversals that Deleuze calls a writer's 'style'. In that respect, like Sade and Masoch, a writer is a very special kind of clinician who selects and organises signs into symptoms, images as on diagrams, to create his or her own symptomatology (1989a: 15-16). But the perception and organisation of these signs into symptoms are directly dependent on a specific regimen of visibility and enunciability, on a regimen of Light, that will define the clinical at a specific time. (Colombat 30)

A lupine reading strategy, then – reading like a wolf, not like a dog – is needed: Asking 'What is missed/lost when the materiality of/in Venter's work is not front and centre?' is the wrong question. The more productive entering-into is: What is *gained* when reading the olfactory-material as primary marker of belonging and unbelonging in *Wolf, Wolf*?

As Colombat reminds us, “[a] Deleuzian ‘sign’ always appears in the context of an encounter or an invention, in a space in-between, not as a discovery. It has become a truism to say that one ‘discovers’ only what was already in a position to be discovered [...]” (Colombat 2000:19). So, needed is not necessarily a physical spatiality; but, in Venter, often the memory of a place *while still residing in that very same place* that is also a memory-marker for oeuvre or genre-echo. To this end, scent is many things, and it is also an indexal marker of/to the past, specifically a past that is no longer “present”, in much the same way as ‘the oeuvre’ often becomes a shorthand of experiences-as-past. *Wolf, Wolf* charts not only the “uniquely direct neuroanatomical link between olfaction and the parts of the brain related to emotion and learning-memory” (Herz, 2006:191) in much the same way as *Horrelpoot* considered the role of the amygdala in fear-as-collective-identity and *Ek stamel ek sterwe* the granular way the senses gradually dislocate from the self, but also points to how the olfactory is especially equipped to represent the past – or, rather, to represent something about that which is no longer present. As A. Gell points out, “To manifest itself as a smell is the nearest an objective reality can go towards becoming a concept without leaving the realm of the sensible altogether” (Gell, 2006:403).

Therefore, it might be improper to write about Venter without acknowledging how such writing forces the self into an orientation towards the past. And with our remembrance of the past, collective as well as personal – is there really a difference anymore? – of that which has gone before, leading to a “disquiet and uneasy longing. [...] makes the past present again, but at the same time, as with any memory, it establishes a gap, a distance, a sense of loss” (Shulman, 2006:412).

I’ve charted my own engagement with Venter – smell-tracing the oeuvre; parts of it presented here in interludes and addenda, and – in terms of books, lost and returned – in the coda section of the piece on wilting proteas and Jack’s smell. Sometimes, I follow Venter like a puppy, a loyal

dog sensing that his master's out-of-place; other times, as in the piece on queer canids, I'm doggedly unloyal, tugging at a-not-entirely-unimagined leash.

6.5 Not the decaying father: The motherly past, alimentary topography

Instead of power-based configurations of the past, or Venter's filial positionality toward the/a future, what is surfaced in such a lupine fixation on the materiality of smell and scent in the text (in the room; in the reader's hand) is the sensation of being at one with that which has come before, at the very moment of loss, especially clear when the olfactory is read here as sign, but sign that moves beyond the material to the affective. Along with the overpowering presences of the father's past-sign, traces of other olfactory signs (to the motherly; the domestic space) linger. If the novel's alimentary topography of the present – and to some extent the future – are capitalist and masculine-male, then the absent olfactory past is motherly.

Though the novel is very clearly coded in homosocial sensuousness, there does exist exceptions. Beyond the smell of the past, both Jack's mother and Matt's mother are represented through an association with a specific smell (associated with a set of culinary dishes). These memories are vague and add less (when compared to the correlate fatherly, for Matt) to our understanding of who these two women were or what their influence on Jack and Matt constituted. Whereas the olfactory sign of the father moves between the present, past and future, these two mother-figures are subsumed into larger smell-scent paradigms: They disappear into memory-smellscapes (associated, as nearly always in Venter, with the alimentary-ritualistic preparation of food). As such, they resemble those smells that are "integrated into the mental representation of an experience; it has no identifiable [sic; there's a word missing in the text from which I got this quote] of its own but exists as part of a unitary, holistic perceptual event" (Engen, 1991:7, in Looby, 2006:290). It isn't entirely a case of erasing

the mother(s) at the expense of a homosocial novel, as motherly replacements/proxies do exist (Tannie Sannie for Matt, and Charnie for Jack), but instead to emphasise a tenuous ephemerality through its non-use.

To reiterate, if the father stands for a present reminder of the past, the motherly stands for an absence of the past felt/experienced *in the present* (and the potential to let go of the filial strictures of the homosocial past). More so, the olfactory sign of the father moves between the present, past, and future – between erotic young man in Apartheid-era South Africa to decaying (and dying) older man clearly situated within a new dispensation. What does Venter want to do here? Except referencing his own oeuvre – the Venter-tropes of father, cars, dogs, mother and food – it is about ‘cutbacks’, progressively erasing the father’s ability to smell-situate, as the mother-memory/mother’s smell-memory has been shown to have already self-erased; for this reason Venter allows himself, in the words of the protagonist, to say, at the end of the novel when he [Matt - WS] has let go of the father’s smell, that he will also ‘put aside’ some of the ethno-national affect that sat lodged in the (handling of the) father’s body, released slowly like vapour, or musk, that coils away from the corporeal towards the now-living: During the first ‘gamely’ terror, Jack pleads with Matt to leave the new owners in peace. Matt refuses, and codes in smell the falling to the wayside of all things.

While the malodorous body of the dying Father/father’s reads at first as clunky metonymy for the slow, dogged passing of a stubborn Afrikaner dispensation, through Venter’s use of the already-absent mother memorial smell the entirety of the olfactory-past ambit (including object-relation-sign of the father’s decaying body) becomes more subtle⁸⁹, more immediate: Venter is clear that

⁸⁹ Two very distinct epitextual groupings arose in the two years after publication of the two versions of *Wolf, Wolf*. It is this type of reading – where Venter at first read appears sophomoric – that was lauded in the first grouping, while more subtle ways of reading surfaced in the second, arising around mostly English-language reviews (De Kock, for

both need to be erased ['afgelê' is the more apt-descriptive, bodily-contoured Afrikaans term] for re-belonging in the Now to occur.

During his last night in the family home before it is sold off, Matt spends the night in solitary remembrance – no furniture, no decorations, simply the essence of the house and the memories (olfactory, too) that have built up over decades. Into these layered secretions of affect, the protagonist receives a 'visitation':

During the night – he must have dropped off – he smells boiled cauliflower with cheese sauce from the kitchen. He blows his nose and swallows and even flares his nostrils, but the smell remains unmistakably there. He considers getting up and going to find the source of the smell in the kitchen, but as soon as he sits up, the smell vanishes and he immediately lies flat again. The creamy, pale-yellow blanket of sauce over the soft-boiled billows of cauliflower, arranged in a Pyrex dish, and on top of the cauliflower, it goes without saying, the sprinkling of freshly-ground nutmeg. [...] the *image* consoles him and he sees it as a gift sent to him. (p.229, my emphasis)

The alimentary topography, though gothic, constitutes an olfactory memorial presence of the mother – of comfort food – as example of, what Schulman calls the “subtle stuff of remembering, an intangible, evocative, ambiguous, yet highly specific presence latent in the mind” (Schulman, 2006:417). Coding it in food codes is significant, it points to “handfed” (p.233) as a correlate mode of relating to (or belonging in) – but more kind than brutal – to the 'instinctual' codes of the fatherly. Strikingly, Venter decodes it as an image (in the Afrikaans,

example). Ascertaining *why* this is the case, beyond pointing to sections in Burger (2016), or in Fourie (2020), or in Kleyn (2013), or in Cochrane (2016), or to Venter's own, direct observation on the difference between these two groups lies beyond the interest horizon of this study.

thereby bridging the father's remembrance paradigm and the motherly; to make an image of a smell is to attempt to contain it, master it. Jack's mother is also recalled through olfactory ways, and in the presence of food activity that could be called Afrikaner-typical: During an al fresco braai with his students at Misverstanddam:

[w]hen the chops have been arranged head-and-tail, tail-and-head on the grid and the first meat fumes are billowing up, he remembers a time long ago when he was small enough to run around naked in a place like this. They were camping. There were gum trees, he can't remember where. He's banished most of this stuff from his life. And yet, tonight. Later in that place, when the wind came up over the water, there was also a dam or maybe a river, his mother called him and dressed him. He remembers how he likes her mother-hands on his damp skin and how nice the braai smoke was all around him. And his mother asked him: Can you smell the pine trees, the pine resin? Such a small thing to remember, nothing out of the ordinary. (p.63)

Here, not only past memory, but also present is coded in smell ("the meat fumes are billowing up"), and links to a second, more negative smell association he has to the parental domestic:

Look, if you were to ask him what kind of person he is, Jack would always say his senses come first. He hears and sees how a situation looks, he licks and spits, he acts on his senses. But now, this chop. It's as if he can't even bring himself to taste it. The chop represents the house that he's entered. By force. It may in future become his chop, but at the moment. Let's face it, in all his life he's never taken a chop from his own or his mother's fridge, as the chance of there being a chop in one of those fridges was zero. Sauerkraut, don't even ask why his mother developed a taste for that. That's all he can remember from their fridge in Worcester. The stinking bottle of old cabbage; hours after

his mother had opened the thing and helped herself, the smell still hung in the air in that kitchen. (162)

The trace-memory of this specific smell leaves him uneasy, as it comes at a specific time in the narrative, he feels distraught (and at risk of becoming homeless) – an example of where smell memory brings with it “disquiet and uneasy longing. [...] makes the past present again, but at the same time, as with any memory, it establishes a gap, a distance, a sense of loss” (Shulman, 2006:412).

The arrangement to the parental past here (as opposed to, but also related – in its spatiality – to the arrangement of the father-past-national) is rooted in affect: “[...] Deleuze replaces the problem of signs, designation, signification and representation with that of the expressed and the expression. What am I affected by? What do I affect? What creates in me great joy or great sadness? What forces me to think? What kind of political, social, sentimental arrangements am I connected to, associated with? What are my, your, our desiring machines?” (Colombat 2000:19). The ethno-national veneer – hunting trips, sweat, shoe polish, freshly starched and pressed uniforms, braai – of many of these smell codes offer ways of orienting towards the past; soliciting affect, even when it code-signals its own loss, its own unbecoming.

6.6 (Reading-for) signs for olfactory-belonging

Smell is seen as the “liminal sense per excellence” (Howes, quoted in Manalansan, 2006:42), moving between the corporeal and non-corporeal; smells’ “very intangibility allows them to maintain the essential force of continuity, to reconstitute lost or forgotten contexts, to re-present unconscious memories and hidden, unrecognised truths” (Shulman, 2006:425). Smell as continuity (coded as instinctual, in parts) is also not (merely) biological, nor is it (merely) one of

the ways in which the body interacts on phenomenological level with the non-body external, rather, smell is contextually and culturally inflected (if not entirely situated). Drobnick (2006b:1) reminds that “[t]here is a tendency to regard smells purely on the level of phenomenological immediacy, yet the manners and reasons people engage with the sense of smell are influenced by numerous cultural factors relating to the constructs a society creates” so much so that “no act of perception is a pure and unmediated event; each society inflects and cultivates sensory practise [...]” (Drobnick, 2006b:1).

We don’t talk of universals regarding the sense of smell, but only of very context-specific meanings (not least because not all groupings uphold the Cartesian split between the corporeal and the non-corporeal) – as a matter of fact, smell research suggests that olfactory meaning is only ever assigned in context (will add citation). This, then, makes it imperative to approach the text-world in a closed-text fashion – though not in hermeneutic way – surfacing what these smells do (in addition to signify), what they inflect within the Afrikaner parameters of the world of *Wolf, Wolf*.

But it is a spatially (and temporally) situated material *body* (the nose, the clavicle, the armpit, the butt) that renders smell possible: “What renders language possible is that which separates sounds from bodies and organizes them into propositions, freeing them for the expressive function. It is always a mouth which speaks; but the sound is no longer the noise of a body which eats – a pure orality – in order to become the manifestation of a subject expressing itself” (Deleuze & Guattari, 1990:181). (We can easily rephrase ‘language’ with ‘olfactory’ in the above quote – which, itself, is an example of the scholar reading-for the olfactory.) In thinking through sign with Deleuze, a material closed-text approach, then, would presupposes four things: That a) the sign is detachable from Signification; b) not reading for materiality leads to incomplete analyses (i.e. unproductive engagement with the literary machine); c) movement toward the

olfactory (and away from, say the visual – which is held as the primary marker of relational belonging in most analysis of Venter’s work) can also be productive (i.e. an engagement with the literary machine that opens up text, author and reader – the term I use later on is reader-Venter-novel (or even reader-Venter-novel-oeuvre – to the potential of affective enfoldment); and d) there is – ethical, even – value in such reading-for oppositionality, especially in a time when the politicization of reading-with-identity and reading-for-identity is not only capitalized, *productive*⁹⁰.

By obscuring the way in which the sign enfolds, and by obfuscating between present-past and genre-trope, *Wolf, Wolf* both allows for, and makes opaque, this type of reading. There is something system-productive and entirely within the closed-loop codings of Venter’s oeuvre about reading for the olfactory, especially reading in such a material hermeneutic manner. I employ Deleuze and Guattari here also for their emphasis on multiple relations over binary oppositions and their understandings of imperceptibility which I read as queer for its resistance to hierarchies and openness to affective forces – such as a material hermeneutic of smell would offer. Moreover, if body is also ‘body of work’, then in essence: “We know nothing about a body until we know what it can do, in other words, what its affects are, how they can or cannot enter into composition with other affects, with the affects of another body, either to destroy that body or to be destroyed by it, either to exchange actions and passions with it or to join with it in composing a more powerful body” (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987:25). It then starts making sense to talk of an olfactory semiology, instead of an ontology, because we read-for affective signs that take the place of words (signifiers). This is important, when we take into consideration the signification baggage smell comes with, especially how smell was weaponised during Apartheid.

⁹⁰ In the first draft of this article, I used the term ‘weaponised’ here. However, that implies that a read-for ‘oppositionality’ is a reactive reading, which it is/must not be.

There is an ethical imperative to this: “To render imperceptible, not ourselves, but what makes us act, feel, and think. Also because it's nice to talk like everybody else, to say the sun rises, when everybody knows it's only a manner of speaking. To reach, not the point where one no longer says I, but the point where it is no longer of any importance whether one says I. We are no longer ourselves. Each will know his own. We have been aided, inspired, multiplied.” *This* – a reading-for oppositionality; reading the oeuvre like wolves – will cause a “signifying break” (p.24) through which the potential for something new could enter into the pack.

The ethical here is to read-for new *meanings of belonging* (not only for new ways of belonging). An olfactory sign reading, in surfacing the varied ways in which the decaying body of the father becomes object, Idea, response – all in the sign of decaying body of – allows for a reading that pluralises belonging [from belonging to belongings], disentangles the fatherly from the lover, the past father from Afrikaner late capitalism, that prods at the filial reading tendencies exhibited in much of scholarship on Venter (my own 2018 attempt included).

6.7 Concluding part: What is made possible

One of two books Venter acknowledges to have informed his take on the sensorial-dystopic that is *Wolf, Wolf*, is N. Doidge's *The brain that changes itself* (2000) (the other being *The Complete Works of Kafavy*). Within the Deleuze-Guattarian paradigm of rerouting, recoding, sparking connections, Doidge's text feels at home. But it may also function as key to unlock further meaning from the textual.

As I explore elsewhere (Strydom, 2018b), Venter's intentional blurring of boundaries allows for queer readings, for indiscernible zones, but then these queer readings have to be read-for. The zone of the indiscernible can be used to comment on how categories of belonging are blurred,

or, more accurately, traversed in the novel: In the novel, traversing categories happens through an inverse usage of canid figures (both the trope of the dog and the wolf), while scent is shown to be both identity marker (or compositional element) of being and that which blurs identities.

However, as Colombat makes clear:

Deleuze's transcendental empiricism is not interested in language [read: smell] as such but rather in what makes it possible, what confrontations, what relations of forces, what viewpoints, what events are folded in, enveloped in signs. It is therefore not surprising that Deleuze never discusses literary texts from the perspective of a linguist. What interests him in a text are the processes, the resisting strategies writers invent in order to demystify language itself, to experiment with it, to 'complicate' signs, to confront the Outside or Life itself, to survive this confrontation and to create their own work their own events, milestones or shelters for a new 'life in the folds'. (Colombat 2000:29)

Reading-for pluralist belonging through olfactory intimacy (and for the olfactory as a significant marker of relational belonging) becomes one of a number of readings for oppositionality in Venter, along others such as reading for cubilication, reading for off-queer traces in translation, reading for illness-as-citizenship.

In a way such readings for oppositionality are inspired by Deleuze and Guattari's ordering of their own intensities into something akin to a methodology of reading-for. When, for example in their essay on Kafka, they (according to Colombat, 2000:26) "characterises how Kafka's writing, mostly through its use of sounds, ousts representation" and uses

writing as a process to multiply series, contiguous blocks of images, to trace transversal lines between them. Thus it creates many 'arrangements' that will release entire

'asignifying' series of becomings (or 'lines of flight') and enable them to proliferate and access the intensive, pre-philosophical and pre-linguistic world of expression itself. In this respect, writers have to create processes to turn forms of representation into elements of experimentation (1986:49), to replace the transcendence of the law with the immanence of desire (1986:49, 50-1). This dynamic process is precisely what differentiates a minor from a major literature. (Colombat, 2000:26)

Whereas one could argue whether Venter's writing is minor (or minoritarian), in and of itself; there are enough published reviews out there – and some scholarly work, too – that reads in him a mirror of their own orientation toward non-belonging. Does Afrikaner-minor occur, rather, not in the text itself but in the situationing of the text (or, of the author, or even the oeuvre) in a specific orientation to the literary field? (Gray & Strydom, 2019; Strydom, 2019a), I take heart, however, in the knowledge that it isn't until we plug into the machine that we know what flow codes it allows for; for "[w]hat else is an oeuvre if not a porous and malleable sequence of affective potentiality; a series of moments of potentiality?" (Strydom, 2019b).

[Interlude]

“The same applies to the book and the world: contrary to a deeply rooted belief, the book is not an image of the world. It forms a rhizome with the world, there is an aparallel evolution of the book and the world; the book assures the deterritorialization of the world, but the world effects a reterritorialization of the book, which in turn deterritorializes itself in the world (if it is capable, if it can).”

(Deleuze & Guattari 1987: 11)

Section 7

Wilting proteas & Jack's sweat: White belonging and olfactory embodiment in Eben Venter's *Wolf, Wolf*

7.1 An uncomfortable introduction

"I shrink and prickle. Against. Against my blood and the heritage thereof. Will I forever be them – recognizing them as I do daily with my nostrils? Yes. And what we have done will never be undone. It does not matter what we do. What De Klerk does. Until the third and the fourth generation." (Antjie Krog, *Country of My Skull*)

The oeuvre of Eben Venter deftly creates deceptively un-intricate-seeming landscapes of abject desire within a white relationality that, post-2000, quickly decided to take a dark turn towards the chthonian. (Even when taking into consideration the proto-chthonian undertones of the author's work in the 1980s, such as "Bang in Botswana", 1986.) This tendency is most notable in the novel *Ek stamel ek sterwe* (1996), a searing stream-of-consciousness narrative about a white male gay Afrikaner – in exodus, as nearly all Venter protagonists are – fatally decaying (corporeally, but also narratively) from the onslaught – meticulously documented – of a series of AIDS-related conditions, conflates the process of dying with the post-(im)migration of the protagonist. It furthermore sets up a metonymic relation between the national body and the physical body – from which Venter scholarship (my own included) seems unable to escape – in which both are shown to be porous – and boundaries are shown to break down – with both bodies prone to 'invasive elements'.

While *Ek stamel ek sterwe*'s raciality is subsumed in the distancing pragmatics of migration-to, in *Wolf, Wolf* (2013) he situates a white-dystopic narrative squarely in the abject actualities of the South African now. In this novel, the narrative's apparent focus on a drawn-out transfer of (symbolic/cultural/financial) agency from dying father to gay son partially obscures Venter's intense thematic consideration of a changing dispensation – a country in which whiteness is in *un-becoming* – in which the protagonist, a “lapsed South African” (Twidle, 2015), (seemingly) no longer belongs to/in. Venter's bleak outlook on (white) citizenship has prompted C. Hope (2015) to call the novel a “stark study of arrested ethnicity”.

“How should a man be?” has indeed become a refrain in reviews of Venter's novel (and oeuvre), and points to an exploration of four interwoven facets of masculine identity in present-day South Africa (being a son, a lover, a citizen, a raced being) which abjectly manifest in *Wolf, Wolf* in the protagonist's relationship with the various male figures in his life, while abject animality, smell as identity, porn addiction and dog symbolism act as textual indicators that the characters find themselves in abject (sexual) spaces, situated simultaneously outside (hetero)normative and national categories of belonging, while being immanent to them. But, doggedly, through the text's interplay between (sexual) connection and (social) exclusion, notions of the abject are coupled with desire and pleasure. This intentional abject-desire proximity problematises a reading of being as fixed and stable and suggests, rather, that (textual) selves are products of different becomings, thus necessitating an exploration of the role of the abject in desire. The proximity between pleasure and exclusion has implications for how the physical body (and its corporeal boundaries) is seen as constituting a singular ‘self’. As G. Weiss (1999:44) states, it is only through creating corporeal boundaries between ‘me’ and ‘not-me’ that an idiosyncratic entity is created, partly through recognising the “fragility of the self”. The fragile boundaries of the corporeal manifest in notions of the desiring/sexualised body's distressing ‘openness’ to the world (Viljoen, 2014). As our bodies are loci of both our physical being and of our social identity

(Hook, 2006), the abjectly desirous body's grotesque – and visual – difference and porous openness elicit repulsion in the reader/viewer, as it seems to remind us of the fragile and fleeting control we exert over our own bodies-in-desire. Read in this way, *Wolf, Wolf* offers points of civil resonance that does not merely mirror changing South African actualities but offer reflections on (white) fear but also hope as these relate to performative modes of civil dispensation. They are seen as problematic in the way they position the abjectly desiring body within frameworks of national identity: In other words, the white queerly abject male body's desiring/desirous/pleasurable behaviour is foregrounded in the texts in order to comment on ways of being, belonging, and citizenship while, significantly, also leading to a becoming-other. In this way, the cultural-temporal space between *Ek stamel ek sterwe* and *Wolf, Wolf* charts a socio-cultural change in South Africa – a country itself in the process of becoming more equitable (specifically towards recognising constitutionally-enshrined rights of sexual and other minorities) whilst also experiencing severe economic and infrastructural decay – twin (and twinned) fears in the white psyche.

Frustratingly, Venter's oeuvre seems to be anchored to the starkly articulated acknowledgment (repeatedly, in each novel) that his characters have to become other (becoming-animal, become the abject progeny, fragrantly become-precarious) in order to continue being seen as citizens of a (to their mind) contested country: a stark (self-)assessment of whiteness in the post-2000 social imaginary. Although it is indeed possible to explore how this becoming-other can be read as a becoming-minor, which does not refer to minoritarian identity (which itself is still fixed or static), but to deterritorialisations or bifurcations which occur and act as catalyst to disrupt normative conceptions and ways of national being, thus altering the landscape of white-queer possibility (i.e., the possibilities – and limitations – of white queerness in South Africa). While the abject is often considered, current scholarship on queer white fiction in South Africa tends to shy away from explicitly commenting on the way the abject ties problematically to

abject-sexualised racial aspects. However, it is possible to read-for *Wolf, Wolf* in such a way: The abject-desire proximity in the text challenges us to see the self not as a stable, fixed, power-based/power-subjected identity, but as in the process of becoming – but a messy, corporeal, fragrant becoming, with decaying and desirous bodies constituting a “threshold, a door, a becoming between multiplicities, an effect of a dance between power and desire” (Tamboukou, 2008:361).

In this article I read-for the olfactory. In the olfactory movement between individual becoming and national belonging, *Wolf, Wolf* echoes Deleuze and Guattari’s view that society is not “defined by its contradictions [...but rather] by its lines of flight [...] There is always something that flows or flees, that escapes the binary organisations, the resonance apparatus and the overcoding machine; things that are attributed to a ‘change in values’, the youth, women, the mad, etc.” (1987:216). By paying close attention to these line(s) of flight (in the form of deterritorialisations, bifurcations or qualitative changes in the olfactory lattice of the novel’s smellscape, more sense of the whole as assemblage is possible; i.e. by analysing how civil resonances in the novel are conceptualised, framed and received through the lens of olfactory desire-abject, we come closer to articulating flows in the narrative nature of becoming-South African that move beyond the filial strictures of official narratives of nation-building that have coalesced since 2000.

7.2 The novel as a register of male smell

“Behind them are the boys with iPods and bottles of Coke and water. Some of them have put on Axe deodorant. There’s the rubber smell of their designer runners, some of them have pulled their hoodies over to sleep – he knows the register of their smell.” (Venter, p.61)

While many of the texts in the Venter oeuvre deal with aspects of belonging and unbelonging, scholarly work on Venter usually arrests in close belonging-correlates, such as migration (Joubert, 2017), traversing liminal zones, play as a type of temporary haven (Nel), or the inverse (the perceived limitation in the oeuvre of racial harmony, for example, in Van Schalkwyk). This may be due to how South African belonging isn't explicitly addressed in the body of work itself, except in very, very specific filialities, specific exigencies in dealing with notions of belonging and/of white males: the body-intimate (most obviously in the diseased male body, frequently in reference to HIV/AIDS), the family relation (almost exclusively seen in the father-son progeny bond, and in the perennial mother's visit in later work), and in terms of doubled-national identity (Venter, born in South Africa, emigrated to Australia in 1986; even here it is more often "author in the process of migration" and liminality; not migration as a constant in contemporary life).

Belonging as multivalenced, as fractured-because-it-is-already-multiplicit, or always-assemblaged, however, isn't articulated. (For example, to my knowledge no Venter scholarship argues that Venter's perceived 'in-between' or rather doubled statehood 'identity' could be read as emblematic of a) how many people today live their lives like this, and b) how identification with state-filiality (and the notion of states themselves) are progressively falling into ontological disfavour.) For this reason, it is important to excavate the limits of white belonging in his work, so to complement work on belonging and kinship done on in the Southern African literary landscape done by scholars such as Gibson Ncube.

Reading-for white (male) belonging can thus be imbued with relevance, as an active reading-for *better* ways of being South African. In this, Lawy and Biesta (2006) focuses on citizenship-as-practice, as a more inclusive form of belonging based on active relationality and sets this in opposition with the more filial citizenship-as-achievement which emblemise much of the theorisation of citizenship during the 1950s to 1980s. In terms of my argument here, this

opposition correlates with the difference between what being *does*, as opposed to what it *means*. It also takes into consideration that many “lives comprise a complex mix of democratic and non-democratic practices that are never ideal” (2006:45). What is key, though, is how these two elements are navigated. Queer (insert here) is always toward the new: Riffing on Foucault’s famous ‘as yet unforeseen kinds of relationships’, Bell and Binnie adroitly call on us to imagine ways of belonging grounded in “as yet unforeseen kinds of citizenship” (2000:14).

In the Venter oeuvre these “as yet unforeseen kinds of citizenship” (2000:14) are kinds of belonging (personal, familial, national⁹¹, based in cuisine, in illness) that, crucially, traverse categorisation. In this way, Venter often alludes to the olfactory (or to scent or ‘instinct’) to indicate belonging or the need for belonging (or even, rejection, where desire-object sets are always entwined). Reading-for these is an important move in exploring the oeuvre because it allows a readerly lupification – i.e., allows the reader to scavenge-create a new lexicon of embodiment related to queer kinship.

To read-for these kinds of ‘as yet unforeseen’ ways of olfactory plugging into civic belonging in *Wolf, Wolf* is to read-for how the olfactory orbit of Jack and the father and Emil overlap: The olfactory comes to stand for a set of relations, a configuration of practices that correlates and intensifies the affective materiality of our being-in-the-world. (And, as such, it opens up and closes down belonging.) In Venter’s novel, a “register of their smell” (page 61) is brought into being. (I would add the adjective ‘male’, as in a ‘register of male smell’, since the novel primarily deals with male smell/scent⁹².) The novel is replete with olfactory imagery, and the word “smell”

⁹¹ ‘The nation’ for the Afrikaner carries different connotative and affective potentiality: something more akin to ‘ethno-centrism that *used* to be played out on a national scale’. In this way, for the Afrikaner, nearly *all* that pertains to the ‘nation’ stands within the cadre of loss. I therefore use the terms ‘the nation’ and ‘the national’ in ways that show their coimbrication with Afrikaner ‘ethnicity’.

⁹² There are a number of exceptions – such as the “Something of the extra-sweet that she sprays on penetrates the air, making him light-headed and adding to his nausea.” [p.186] that very deftly and brutally characterises Tannie Sannie. (As it does, near-verbatim, Grace Niemand in *Begeerte*.) My point is, however, that the novel does not dwell on these smells, does not invest such libidinal energy in it as it does in the male register of smell.

is repeated umpteenth times in the novel – more if you count related terms such as ‘after-smell’, ‘sniff’, ‘stink’, ‘fumes’, and ‘scent’ (and, in the Afrikaans original, related terms such as ‘klank’, ‘klankie’, ‘naklank’, ‘damp’.) The exposition offers an explicit key to the olfactory directedness of the novel: In the words of the father, “It’s not about seeing, Mattie. You of all people, who are so focused on the unseen.” (p.20) (Afrikaans original: “Jy van alle mense wat so op die onsienlike ingestel is.” p.20) Once we adhere to the exposition’s key to focus on the ‘unseen’ (the English translation lacks the crucial distinction between “onsienlike” and “onsigbare”), we start recognising various ways in which the novel situates smell as an in-between a sign (in the Deleuze-Guattarian sense – see previous article) for example in positing abject smell as charting the breakdown and terminal dissolvent of the decaying body of the father, reacting to the perceived-imagined smell of the immigrant, and even in re-considering the home’s alimentary topography, i.e. the ways in which traditional notions of consumption and its associated meaning(s), power dynamics, etc., has changed.

But we must also consider that the sensual connection of the olfactory becomes entrenched in the spatial: the father's study and the stench of the homosocial (Strydom, 2018); the sensuality of a past-lost in the kitchen and cauliflower passage, and now, here, in the room in which two grown men have to hide, like up-to-no-good schoolboys:

In all fairness, he's not going to blame Jack for the mildew, the grey-green growth, some of it already powdery. It's since he's moved in, no, this evening, that the room's felt so stuffy. There's the open wardrobe where Mattheus emptied three drawers for him and hat he hasn't used yet, the drawers still pulled open as he left them. In front of the wardrobe his running shoes sit gaping, with their worn inner rubber and a year's foot sweat. And there's the damp aftertaste, everywhere in the room, of the Ingram's

Camphor Cream that he uses and that Mattheus always rather liked on his mother's fingers rubbing it hard all around his chapped heels, but now it bothers him. (191)

While the previous passages denote an Afrikaner-indelible olfactory state, the lovers' olfactory cubilication is a way of becoming-their-own space, precisely because it is 'not allowed' in the patriarchal house; it wouldn't come to mean this much if it were allowed. The olfactory presence of the lover, infuses with cyphers of the national – Ingraham's cream, wilting proteas – in a "composition of speeds and affects involving entirely different individuals, a symbiosis [...] but Being expresses them both in a single meaning in a language that is no longer that of words, in a matter that is no longer that of forms, in an affectability that is no longer that of subjects" (Deleuze & Guattari 1987: 258). The canid trope surfaces here, as does the overpowering olfactory-presence-as-identity-marker of the (pseudo-)national: Jack is only allowed entry in the patriarchal domicile when he wears the wolfhound mask, in a "matter that is no longer that of forms" (ibid.). You see, Jack is not Afrikaner.

When we focus on ways in which smell and scent come to signify homosocial space-ing, male desire, and arousal-repulsion, by focusing on two registers of smell manifesting in the novel – both managing to overcome the stench of the homosocial (Strydom, 2018): the odour of the (extra-national) other and the intimate smell of the lover. [I'll ignore the visual-based narrative stream of pornography, even as it may have some relevance here, as it falls outside the scope here – but it is worth looking at elsewhere.] we come to posit a reading, to build on lupification and cubilication, to facilitate a move away from seeing Venter's text as a document of the filial, and instead surface in it that which is of alliance, which re-frames the intimacy of un-belonging as becoming-different *with others*, especially with the non-Afrikaner other, as in the olfactory intimacy actualised by their cubilication-in-their-own room/space:

on and on until both of them have emptied themselves completely of all thought and all activity that could possibly occur in the rational sphere, *both of them now surrounded by a new smell* that sweat carries and that both recognise precisely because they don't know it, because you don't smell it anywhere else, and then, at that moment: *the overwhelming, all-inclusive sensation of pure animality*. (Venter, p.193; emphasis added)

In essence, taking it beyond the Afrikaner-national-assemblage; In this I see the olfactory as not-necessarily-human sensual connection, a non-human orgasm – a *to wolf-ing*, to take a cue from the wolfhound mask's prominence in the narrative, in the paratextual (on the cover, for example, and placed so that it separates each chapter), and in promotional material for the novel –based on the totality of sensual relations, on “the tactility of impressions, and the acuteness of sensations that undo the codes that inscribe the body with identity and the human consciousness that orders it” (Beckman, 2013:141). Building on the 2018 article, 'to wolf' here is become-subversive thought expressed not in language but in an arousal-repulsion affect – *I laughed, I cried*, Matt says when Wolfie enters the patriarchal domicile.

Such opening up and closing down of belonging through the olfactory is advanced by the materiality of our engagement with the novel, by how Venter's symptomatology sets up an olfactory imaginaire – to appropriate Looby's (2006) term – as semio-aesthetic text: the queer use of smell pervading the novel not only counteracts the scentless incorporeality of the visual-based (and, on meta-analysis level, how the character's fixation on pornography mirrors Venter scholarship's focus on the visual as marker of 'identity'), but posits a new, queer-karmic scent as bulwark against the odour of the lived, erotic homosocial. Drawing on this, I consider how Venter's novel fits into the tradition of the textual semio-imaginaire by surfacing (and coding) olfactory intimacy between men. I read this as a form of potentiality beyond a colonial male intimacy: In the way it speaks to larger problems with migrant frames, for example, olfactory

relation can signal new ways of citizenry, to tie in with new and more inclusive and relational conceptualisations of citizenship that moves askew to queer-whiteness, crucially through a granular-material (instead of typical hermeneutic) read-for of the text. In short, seeing the olfactory intimacy with the lover, Jack, not as opposed to the homosocial-heteronormative affects in the olfactory orbit of Afrikanerskap (in the cypher-set of father-past-spatiality-'instinct'), but instead seeing the potentiality of the lover (and of the olfactory imaginaire created by reading-for) as belonging-beyond the 'nation'.

To do this, I employ a queer or 'scavenger methodology' (Halberstam, 1998: 149) in order to discuss belonging in Venter; bringing together bits and bobs and ends and off-cuts of kinship theory, queer theory, literature, Deleuze and Guattari, and Elizabeth Freeman, plus some of the self's fiction(s) – so as to mirror the multiplicit epistemology of contemporary living. This way of bringing textualities in connection, of queer scavenging-into-meaning

bring together methods and approaches that are often framed as being at odds with each other, such as empirical data and auto-ethnography. The methodological approach refuses disciplinary coherence (Halberstam, 1998). This approach to research proves valuable when considering the collection and curatorial space because it allows for fringe stories and encounters to be read alongside those of the dominant institutional practices. (Lymn & Leah, 2016)

7.3 (Reading-for) embodiment, the olfactory and queer kinship

By focusing on the olfactory, we can approach social embodiment (and, in correlate, kinship) somewhat differently; one way to do this is by scavenging for embodiment. Tom Ziemke offers a topology of different notions of embodiment that goes beyond mere physical or social

embodiment; in this view of embodied agency, there's also space for thinking of – and with – embodiment as premised on the “structural coupling between agent and environment”, and/or as a historical embodiment that arises “as the result of a history of structural coupling” (2003). In such a view, embodiment is seen as “organismic embodiment of autopoietic, living systems”, where “the notion of organismic embodiment holds that cognition is not only limited to physical, organism-like bodies, but in fact to organisms, i.e. living bodies” (Ziemke 2003).

Building on thought lines around embodiment that stretch from Von Uexküll's idea of the *umwelt* (1928) to Maturana and Varela (1987), Ziemke extrapolates that, thus, the behavior of an organism-as-living bodies “depends on an historically created basis of reaction, i.e., a context-dependent behavioral disposition” (2003). It is this sense of embodiment – which I see as a progressive, connected series of points/nodes of immersive being-situated – that allows for a more nuanced understanding of the role of sensorial (especially, here, smell) situatedness in becoming, specifically in the mode in which sensorial sociologists, such as Kelvin Low, sees a turn “towards individual, lived experiences where smell may be utilized as a social medium in the (re)construction of social realities” (Low, 398). In order to facilitate this turn, however, Low posits that multiple approaches are needed at once: by building on a “probe into propositions concerning the supposed low status of smell in relation to the other senses. [...we can] locate olfactory enquiries beyond physiological and biopsychological concerns, to further understand the role of smell in our day-to-day realities (Low, 398).

Speaking of the biopsychological concern indicated by the 'supposed low status' of smell in general, and of certain smells in particular, ties it explicitly to marginalisation. This is significant for how we approach a text (and an oeuvre) whose sexual economy is so deeply invested in how smell can be utilized in terms of belonging and unbelonging. It also has a readerly impact. In *How Stories Make Us Feel: Toward an Embodied Narratology*, Vittorio Gallese and Hannah

Wojciehowski (2011) traces the ascendancy of the sensorial in literary analysis, by placing it within the mode of embodied simulation: “There is a further aspect characterizing embodied simulation when driven by our immersion into the fictional worlds of art in general, and of narrative in particular, with respect to when this functional mechanism is activated by daily-life situations. In fact, artistic fiction is often more powerful than real life in evoking our emotional engagement and empathic involvement. Why? Perhaps because in aesthetic experience we can temporarily suspend our grip on the world of our daily occupations. We liberate new energies and put them into the service of a new dimension that, paradoxically, can be more vivid than prosaic reality. This relates to Venter's Brouhaha, and the Stoney recipes – where the reader is supposed to recreate the dish around which the accompanying short story is built. Whether this is successful or not is beside the point, as the affect – and, perhaps, the smell – drifts outside the boundaries of the text(ual).

In this way, our engagement with the text (and the Venter oeuvre) harkens back to an evolutionary time – predating books – [when we ourselves were embodied differently: “Another important element of liberated simulation consists in the fact that when we read a novel [...] we do it almost completely still. It is a sort of regression to, or, better, a neotenic retention of developmental time when our interactions with the world were almost exclusively mediated by a simulative perception of the events, actions, and emotions populating our social landscape. [...] Our pleasure in novel reading is thus likely also driven by this sense of safe intimacy with a world we not only imagine, but also literally embody.” Instead of a ‘safe intimacy’, I'd argue that our neotenic retention – I call this readerly lupification – actualises an unsafe intimacy where the queer porousness between text/reading/reader exposes the futility of seeing each of these as a discrete unit, and which is triggered by the ways in which Venter employs olfactory embodiment.

The unsafe intimacy of such a readerly lupification intentionally reads-for queer kinship sets (not only between text/reading/reader, but also in how kinship and relation *itself* is represented in the novel). In one of the seminal texts on queer kinship, Elizabeth Freeman shows how such kinship in queer ways of pleasurable relation-in-the-world differ from a heterosexual kinship that “[i]n state- centered societies” primarily “consists of the social policies that recognize some forms of lived relationality – those extending from the heterosexual couple and the parent–child unit – with financial and other benefits; these policies in turn demand certain responsibilities between recognized relatives.” (295) Freeman, of course, assigns queer kinship potentiality not only (or, one could argue, automatically) to queer folk, but to “people of all sexual orientations whose emotional, financial, domestic, and other ties do not follow the lines of dyadic sexual union and genealogical descent” (295)⁹³.

Such a queer kinship must, of course, be embodied (a la Ziemke). But a *different* kind of embodiment, within a queer framework. Keep in mind that:

Especially as queer theory has been shaped by the work of Michel Foucault, it does not understand sexual behavior as simply an expression or violation of a given culture’s [Afrikaner – WS] marriage and descent rules, the way that much of classic kinship theory does. Nor does it understand fantasy, desire, or erotic practice as mere parts of the whole of such a system, or as offshoots of a gendered division of labor. Instead, queer theory recognizes that sexuality is an effect of discourses and institutions that generally do not figure prominently in foundational anthropological accounts of kinship: the politics of state formation itself, racial taxonomies, and such seemingly extra- familial spheres as medicine. (295)

⁹³ Such obsession with genealogical descent rubs up against Venter’s progenitory drive.

This asks for a read-for that is orientated toward new forms of embodied belonging and new forms of embodiment – one which sees frames of belonging such as the sexual and then national as inextricably overlapping, even when kinship is inherently about embodiment:

For as a practice, kinship is resolutely corporeal. Its meanings and functions draw from a repertoire of understandings about the body, from a set of strategies oriented around the body's limitations and possibilities. Kinship 'matters' in the way that bodies 'matter': it may be produced or constructed, but is no less urgent or tangible for that. And if kinship is anything at all – if it marks a terrain that cannot be fully subsumed by other institutions such as religion, politics, or economics – this terrain lies in its status as a set of representational and practical strategies for accommodating all the possible ways one human being's body can be vulnerable and hence dependent upon that of another, and for mobilizing all the possible resource one body has for taking care of another. Even the term "belong," so central to kinship's basic function of determining who is connected to whom, suggests such literal proximity between bodies, for it comes from the Old English *gelang*, translated in the Oxford English Dictionary as 'alongside of' or 'at hand'.

(Freeman 298)

Such 'literal proximity between bodies' is painted in Venter's layers of sweat, mildew, stuffy air, dampness, camphor cream, and chapped heels:

"In all fairness, he's not going to blame Jack for the mildew, the grey-green growth, some of it already powdery. It's since he's moved in, no, this evening, that the room's felt so stuffy. There's the open wardrobe where Mattheus emptied three drawers for him and hat he hasn't used yet, the drawers still pulled open as he left them. In front of the wardrobe his running

shoes sit gaping, with their *worn* inner rubber and a year's foot sweat. And there's the damp aftertaste, everywhere in the room, of the Ingram's Camphor Cream that he uses and that Mattheus *always rather liked* on his mother's fingers rubbing it hard all around his chapped heels, *but now it bothers him*." (p.191, my emphases).

But it is more than just the corporeal/embodied self, it is *also* how that embodied self relates within the socius (the affective vectors of a self's social milieux):

In sum, kinship marks out a certain terrain of corporeal dependency: think of the cliché that home is where if you have to go there, they have to take you in. Kinship delineates the caretaking activities that have not been socialized as services for purchase or as state entitlements – or, more accurately, the kinds of nurture to which, despite their having been socialized so that they are available outside the household, people have unequal access. Kinship is private, unevenly distributed social security. A culture's official kinship system turns these forms of not yet or unequally institutionalized nurture into linguistic terms marking roles that feel like, and are culturally and legally recognized as, private, personal, and natural identities: the mother, father, husband, wife who is supposed to take you in. (Freeman, 298)

Venter situates several of Afrikaner culture's 'official kinship systems' in mouldy and mildewy proximity. The un-ordered ('just as they were left there') manner in stark contrast to the hyper-order of the father's study. The tying together (through the olfactory) of cleaning a room (but not a body), a socius-facing attachment, and temporality *is* itself the definition of kinship. This echoes in how Jack takes over cooking duties in the patriarchal kitchen [will add quote] which now, tellingly, becomes a suburban panopticon – till they have to close the curtains (curtailing the visual, and emphasising the olfactory) to their neighbour – tan Sannie's (Aunt Sannie)–

preying/praying neighbourly eyes. Such kinship invites frames of privilege and abjection to start overlapping:

Especially, it needs to continually identify practices of renewal that exceed the state's major form of "recognition" and collateral entitlements. Recognition is based upon identity: it asks the needy to abstract their needs into a name that grants them legal personhood and the privileges attending it. It is cognitive and spatial, insofar as it interpellates the needy into an abstract structure of privilege and abjection, legibility and illegibility. Renewal, by contrast, is based upon practice: in responding to needs, it makes no claims about their bearer. It is bodily and temporal, insofar as it simply makes people more possible; renewal grants a future, but one with an uninevitable form. (299)

7.4 Afrikaner olfactory embodiment, in relation to Black bodies: The scent of *us* and the odour of *them*

Manalasan writes of "emotions [forming] part of the embodied [...] reaction in the lives and sensory experiences of immigrants who create paradoxical and incomplete negotiations, refusals, resistances and capitulations between competing ideas and experiences of modernity and tradition, the public and the private, self and the other and between the odourless and the malodoros." (2006:51). In the novel, the heteronormative activates exclusionary coding: How his father treats him influences how we make sense of how he treats Emile. In Matt's perception of the other, smell becomes scent becomes (mal)odour: "Odours are the means by which the boundary between self and other is demarcated, as well as the supposed basis of prejudicial extensions of such demarcation; in other words, olfaction is the means to *corporealize dislike* and a prominent excuse for expressions of racism, sexism, classism and xenophobia"

(Drobnick, 2006b:14, emphasis added) 'Corporealized dislike' here means to make concrete a bias, or rather to actualize into materiality configurations of unjust praxis.

The perception of perceived – not necessarily real – smells (as compositional marker of another person's being) is based on a predisposition (dislike/fear, in this case). D. Hook's (2004; 2006) sense of corporeal abject comes into play here: In essence, if racial animus on a national scale was inherently viscerally learnt, it naturalises disapproval (Drobnick, 2006b:14). In addition, immigrant bodies – especially immigrant bodies perceived as racially other – are "culturally constructed to be the natural carrier and source of undesirable sensory experience and is popularly perceived to be the site of polluting and negative olfactory signs" (Manalansan, 2006:41). Here we see two factors at play: the actual (olfactory) experience *and* the (usually negative) signs (in the Deleuze-Guattarian sense) associated with the immigrant other.

For humans, the act of smelling, and scenting, is, in addition to being culturally inflected and able to facilitate a transcending of Cartesian dualism, also (physiognomy-ally) *learnt*. Even though there is some research on "genetically based individual differences in sensitivities that may predispose different people to like or dislike specific smells" (Herz, 2006:196-197) it is still a learnt reaction/perception, and therefore, like all learnt behaviour, open to experimentation, reinterpretation and lines of flight.

This will also be true in a cultural sense, not just in a biological one, i.e., to respond/be responsive to something. Manalansan (2006:44) writes that the "sense of smell is the basis for recognition and misrecognition and that it provides an opportunity to affiliate, to belong as well as to disidentify and to ostracise". (It thus works both ways – in terms of inclusion and exclusion; as both an opening and a closing of belonging.)

As discussed previously in the Literature Review, the inclusion and exclusion are defining affective responses underlying both abjection and desire. It is your relational seeking *being* that responds, via your olfactory system of reception. Thus, rather: the olfactory can be seen as an ontological, political, social response-function. The olfactory forms a sign (in the Deleuzian sense) that is interpreted in specific ways because it is related to specific codings. But, as Deleuze and Guattari remind us, signs always retain something that is beyond signification and that is where its potential lies. Thus: a semiological, political, social response-function: Manalansan (2006:50) states that “olfaction is a political and cultural process that should be seen in terms of the visceral or the emotional which includes shame, fear, disgust and shock”.

What feels like a visceral reaction is actually conditioned response. If we accept that it is conditioned, then three sub-tenets arise: Firstly, response to smell is not universal, as “we have no physical predisposition to respond to odors [...] this must be learned [...]” (Herz, 2006:194). Secondly, and related to the first tenet, the way we assign meaning is conditioned, and can thus be recoded. Thirdly, smell is queer, it is, as quoted before, the “liminal sense per excellence” (Howes, quoted in Manalansan, 2006:42), moving between the corporeal and non-corporeal; smells’ “very intangibility allows them to maintain the essential force of continuity, to reconstitute lost or forgotten contexts, to re-present unconscious memories and hidden, unrecognised truths” (Shulman, 2006:425).

These re-presentings of corporeal hidden biases flow in codes, so that “alleged malodour is a crucial component in the white racist’s conception” (Largey & Watson, 2006:33) of the non-white other. In effect, we are here in the realm of configuration of praxis where actual smell perception matters less than – or is even made redundant by – perceptual/sensual imagos of the (racial) other. Bodily hygiene constituted a potent warning to white Afrikaner population to keep the racial boundaries intact, infused with hysterical fears.

A textual incoherence arises: Venter (who often states that his mostly white, middle-class Afrikaans-speaking readership conflates his voice with the point of view of his characters) is here at his most Afrikaner-channeling racial-moralistic (perhaps at the expense of empathetic characterisation): “He gives Emile a cake of soap and a towel to wash himself in the back toilet that they share with the laundry. Under the arms, he indicates. A sour odour he refuses to tolerate on top of everything else, here in his takeaway. Personal hygiene – he doesn’t balk at talking to him on the subject. This is where his Duiker nature comes into its own.” (p.185) But he loves the smell of sweat, eroticises it, on Jack. How then to account for this disjunct? A weird discordant voice of the father/Afrikaner culture/discourse on immigrants and others and black people as ‘dirty/smelly’ creeps into the reading. Even if we read a continuum of arousal-repulsion onto the text, how are we to point blank accept that this is continuity in terms of characterisation? The same person who gets turned on by Jack’s sweat is disgusted by it on Emile? How does the abject deny desire, and vice versa?

Largey and Watson remind us that the intimate ways in which we belong, the way we “group [align] are at least partially established or recognised through olfactory stimuli” (2006:34). This “show[s] how powerful suggestion and context are in odor perception” (Herz, 2006:195). The novel’s uncritical treatment of Matt’s relational response to these two types of sweat shows how *deep* racial praxis has been embedded into the South African body. The reader engages with this material-affective sign: I can cringingly imagine the shame felt by Emile, a fully grown man, told by Matt how to wash his hands. (By necessity, this is a shame that *has* to be imagined, as Venter allows Emile minimal voice.) Manalansan, again, reminds us of “emotions [forming] part of the embodied [...] reaction in the lives and sensory experiences of immigrants who create paradoxical and incomplete negotiations, refusals, resistances and capitulations between competing ideas and experiences of modernity and tradition, the public and the private, self and the other and between the odourless and the malodorous” (2006:51). The use of soap, seen as a

rite of cleansing but construable as metonymic of patronising colonial discourse, here problematically echoes other postcolonial work on soap as 'induction' into civilisation within racist, colonial discourse.

But, within a material hermeneutic, this shame can once again be recoded, be queerly seen as producing meaning *about* the text itself, by surfacing a filial arrested relation with the past (both the past of the characters, and the text's past as part of Venter's oeuvre). Scent is, after all, also change: it is the movement of molecules from thing to perception. Scenting the past (and future). In the novel, Matt scents the future: "in the wink of an eye the takeaway on the corner of Main and Alberteyn becomes a reality. [...] he even smells his food, lamb chops and lemon and thyme" (95). The sense of change is most evident in descriptions of the smell of (his) people. He "smells their house, a blend of floor wax and wilting proteas and kelim dust and the Duikers, their characteristic smell" (217). (The wilting protea is almost too obvious a cypher for an outdated (and unchanging) nationalist orientation.) The olfactory is used here to engage with the passing of things: [not smelled since the mother's passing-quote] "Everything, all their games, their winters and summers, come to him like tastes in his mouth; all the memories still belong to him, even though he'll never live here again. Soon these will also fade, his mother's scent already much vaguer than his father's; and what do they actually mean after all, all the memories, what's the use of remembering that Pa's dog always chose the pebble path to the lemon tree to do his business?" (250) However, read against the grain, scent and odour, which traverses the spaces between people, between me and other, can be seen in the manner David Howes describes as the "liminal sense per excellence" (Howes, quoted in Manalansan, 2006:42), and this characteristic might (partly) explain its ubiquitous usage in the novel. If we construe *Wolf, Wolf* as an extra-national attempt at documenting a changing dispensation from afar, not only the changing circumstances of one man (the protagonist), then "[o]dors, [which] are very often present in rites of passage [...] where smells are employed to symbolize

transitions and shifts in status [...]”(Graham, 2006:315-316), make “visible” (or, bring into perceived being the) “materialisation and dematerialisation, the coming into being and passing away of things, situations, circumstances” (Gell, 2006:403).

In terms of the larger oeuvre, Venter’s malodorous treatment of extra-national other can be read as an adapted echo to Konstant Wasserman’s – protagonist in Venter’s *My beautiful death* (original 1996, translation in 2006) – obsessional hygiene. Why the intense consideration of smell, and the extra-textual olfactory relation between two texts – perhaps three, if *Trencherman*’s racialised bodies are brought into the equation – two decades apart? “Odors are very often present in rites of passage [...] where smells are employed to symbolize transitions and shifts in status [...]” (Graham, 2006:315-316) We recognise the changing of a national dispensation in Venter’s olfactoring of the immigrant, we smell the fear of a minority populace either unwilling to change or unable to recode toward the positive futurity of the new.

7.5 A queer(able) shame at smelling another?

@ Clarence House, Jack facebookes a quickie to Matt. I = stink. Shower first?

Matt: Come as you are. (From Wolf, Wolf)

Low’s (and others’) work are premised on the early-90s olfactory work of Synnott et al., an era that coincides with the crystallisation of queer theory/theories and before the advent of identity-narrowing relationality: “Odour is many things: a boundary-marker, a status symbol, a distance-maintainer, an impression management technique, a schoolboy’s joke or protest, and a danger-signal – but it is above all a *statement of who one is*. Odours define the individual and the group, as do sight, sound and the other senses; and smell, like them, mediates social interaction.” (Synnott, 1991:438) But, in the years since, queerness has moved through self-as-distinct,

concrete units of socius-facing (and sexualised) 'I', self, and therefore Deleuze and Guattari may come in handy here.

Indeed, as P. MacCormack (2011: 200) argue, one of the greatest contributions of Deleuze and Guattari to our understanding of subjectivity, “is premised on the shift from sexuality to desire, incorporating the inflections which catalyze subjectivity to connective intensifications, opposition to relation, [and] individuation to becoming part of a pack.” Moreover, elsewhere she argues that perversion can be seen as a tactic for thinking sexuality and subjectivity otherwise (MacCormack, 2004).

@ Clarence House, Jack facebookes a quickie to Matt. I = stink. Shower first?

Matt: Come as you are.

Jack: Okay, if you say so.

To see how Jack's smell, in a correlate way, allows for a belonging-through-and-beyond the nation, we could argue for an olfactory intimacy as a) this kind of perversion and b) showing towards a readerly lupification – that is, a method for *creating* queer kinship or belonging.

The materiality of the text here reminds of the materiality of the (male) body. Remember that intimate belonging, and “alignment are at least partially established or recognised through olfactory stimuli” (Largey & Watson, 2006:34). The materiality of the one comes to stand for the materiality of the other. This type of reading – a queer, active positionality towards the text – is a form of resistance against the filial; whereas the visual is power-over, smell, after all, is intimately connected to an “aesthetics of resistance [...] [b]ecause it is passive, it is always only reflecting existing power structures, denouncing them” (Rindisbacher, 2006:141).

However, the pleasures associated with smell surfaces tension between active and passive ways of going about this: “the pleasures of the sense of smell tend to be anticipatory, or retrospective, rather than being climactic. The sense of smell comes into play most when the other senses are in suspense, at moments, once could say, of materialisation and dematerialisation, the coming into being and passing away of things, situations, circumstances” (Gell, 2006:403).

@ Clarence House, Jack facebook a quickie to Matt. I = stink. Shower first?

Matt: Come as you are.

Jack: Okay, if you say so.

So Jack doesn't change into fresh clothes.

Furthermore: “A nonhuman orgasm [organism?] would be on the lookout: instead of centring its attention to genitality and the consciousness of sexed economy, it is invested by nonclassified forces of body parts (and here, ‘body’ is meant in its widest sense), by the tactility of impressions, and the acuteness of sensations that undo the codes that inscribe the body with identity and the human consciousness that orders it” (Beckman, 2013:141). Once again it is necessary to remind ourselves that it is the *material* body (the nose, the clavicle, the armpit, the butt) that renders smell possible. The lover, Jack’s, olfactory identity represents a bulwark of real-ness, of corporeal lived-ness. Matt is, perhaps not completely consciously aware of this; he likes smelling Jack: “He pulls Jack over to him and pushes his hands between his jacket and shirt along his sides and strips him of his jacket, he can smell Jack on the lining of the jacket, on the dark blue under each arm of the blue shirt.” (p.91) This explicitly refers back to one of Matt’s smell-memories, of his father in a jacket standing in the frame of a door looking smoking hot.

(Regarding the stilted nature of the English translation with its two proper names close together in one sentence: Is it wishful thinking to see that this points to a fault line in the text that posits the existence – for Matt, at least – of two different Jacks?) Corporeal olfactory is emphasised: “And he hugs Jack from behind and kisses him in his neck with a body that smells of food” (148).

@ Clarence House, Jack facebooks a quickie to Matt. I = stink. Shower first?

Matt: Come as you are.

Jack: Okay, if you say so.

So Jack doesn't change into fresh clothes. He likes fresh. Sounds exactly what it is. [...] Matt likes him like this, just as he's been teaching all day. Not that he lets Matt call the tune, but he knows when he has to please. Tonight he's got an issue, something he deliberately forgot to tell

Matt. Let's face it, Matt is a weirdo. Not because he likes sweat. That too.

The traces of homosocial-heteronormative failing (and masculinist outsider-ship) are clearer in the Afrikaans original's “Matt is ‘n anderse soort out.” (p.22, for “Matt is a weirdo”). Weirdo simply equals weird, but 'anderse soort' not only activates difference (anderse – also in colloquial form), but also *type* (soort – which, in addition, references seminal Afrikaans queer work *Soort soek soort*, in which Venter's short story appears). Reminding us that the difference here is not just weird, but *different-to* (something).

There is a definite game of power-to at play here. “Aromas create distance between craving and fulfilment” (Drobnick, 2006a:343), i.e., between what is here, and what is not, and, according to Drobnick, “to sniff, but not partake, breaks the anticipatory rhythm of desire and gratification. Detaching smells [...] can therefore involve an exercise of power in which arbitrary, moralistic and sadistic impulses thrive” (2006:343). Jack is fully aware of the power his body's smell holds

over Matt: he uses it and is introduced to the reader as having 'a nose' for rich men. So we have come full circle: The contours of affect we experience by proxy of Matt and Jack's dance of attachment and intimacy within a forever-conferring world, and the anticipatory desire rhythms of the men in Venter's oeuvre, unable to connect with others except periodically through smell and scent. Perhaps smell, which here accommodates both these positionalities, is truly the "queerest of the senses" (Graham, 2006:316).

The two reactions of Matt – repulsion at the smell of Emile's sweat; pleasurable arousal at the smell of Jack's sweat – are two positionalities, material modulations of power-over and power-to (specifically with regard to 'the nation'). Both signifying a different power, as both stand outside the father's system – and thus equal in their *relation to* Matt – and the way they spur him to accede to filial relation-making (power-to and power-over)⁹⁴ whilst both originating in the relation to the smell of the young-father (who sold cars and peddled in sexual object-making and 'werkswreedheid'): "Rubber and dust and the exhaust that had left behind a whiff of gas. I can still smell it in my mind." (p.42).

But the olfactory intimacy with Jack is temporary, and an example of a not-future-directed positionality (what Dana Luciano calls a certain generation of gay authors' misplaced "nostalgia for an age yet to come"⁹⁵) seems at odds with the end of the novel, where the protagonist realises that such a future is disallowed: "The waves are booming and crashing, their foam lips clearly visible in the evening light. It'll be like this with him and Jack, he decides. He'll work hard and transform his brain, and as far as Jack goes, he'll position himself somewhere between

⁹⁴ The shame of the material body figures heavily here, as always with Venter's protagonists, and disallows a flow from filial to alliance: "The craving overpowers him like a repressed impatience that he can hardly contain any longer, something delicious on the other side of the immediate horizon of whatever he's doing [...] The difference is Jack. Jack has come as a bulwark and a barrier. He touches himself. He doesn't want Jack to see him touching himself." (p.176) Even when this is seemingly future directed: "He feels good about Jack, and hesitant about this slow, half-unwilling retreat from his porn cocoon: there's a life to be lived out there, with Jack" (p.255).

⁹⁵ Which would put it into certain temporal tension with the nostalgia of a past *that is* (in the *plaasroman*) textually.

desire and love. If it's just desire, he won't be able to be with Jack alone, that's too much to ask of a man and far too much self-control to ask of him. And if it's love only, what becomes of his God-given desire? He'll drift along at some point between the two poles." (266) The protagonist (and Venter's over-reliance on performative morality lexicon, in 'God-given', for example) jars with the almost-alliance texture of the ending. He is stuck in the ways of the past, his is a masculinity of the colonial era, a male intimacy that will not break free from the bondage of the filial and the submission to structurings of power-over. His is a character forever unmoored, because Venter's novel presents these as two opposing and opposite modes of actualisation, which is – must be, surely – a false dichotomy.

7.6 An almost-queer olfactory imaginaire: Jack's smell as belonging-beyond the Afrikaner

"The scent of these arm-pits is aroma finer than prayer." Walt Whitman, in the first edition of Leaves of Grass (1982:51)

The numerous references to scent and smell, plus how time-after-time the olfactory is associated with male intimacy (not necessarily male pleasure), sets up a veritable queer 'olfactory imaginaire', comprising of, as Looby describes it, a "realm of actual and fantasmatic smell sensations, immediate and vicarious responses to odours, and significations and associations attached to those sensory phenomena" (Looby, 2006:289). Looby shows how the olfactory imaginaire, quite popular in the mid-nineteenth century amongst authors writing on male desire, could be construed to be "crucially related to issues of male sexual conduct and passionate freedom. The literary practices of Walt Whitman, Francis Parkman, Herman Melville and Thomas Wentworth Higginson provide a context for understanding [...] charged engagement with the odour of male solitude" (Looby, 2006:294).

While Looby's Euro-centrist overlap with queer textuality is to an extent understandable, we don't have to look far afield for more examples: We all smell (verb *and* adjective use of the term), so the imaginaire can be a temporary textual sense of belonging for all. But so much more for gay men, whose sexual praxis – and entire set of intensities – is so often reduced to the single act of anal insertion. This reduction is predicated on heteronormative (bodily) orientation, tropes of front/back, and tropes of dirt (internalised in digital-gay culture itself: see, for example, the use of the word 'clean' to mean 'drug and disease free' on hookup apps).

In the novel, olfactory relation-sets signals to the limitations and possibilities of belonging, asking to what extent it is OK to consider – even in post-1994/post-2000 South Africa – the limits of white belonging. (And, perhaps, which better code-set through which to consider the limits of belonging than queer theory?) We (queer people) see queerness as an opening up of vistas of belonging, but it also limits belonging (not only by insisting that the borders between identity categories are burned down, but by subjecting the practitioner of queerness (and the scholar who makes queer theory instrumental) to marginalisation).

Important, I feel, to add, when we read the 'new smell' again: "Sexual becoming thus always takes place 'in-between' (au milieu) in a process of double-becoming that de-personalises each of the partners at the same time that it gives each of them access to their potential molecular multiplicity in and through the other (as simultaneously subject and medium of becoming)" (Holland, 2013:109).

Pragmatics is inherently political: Entering into molecular multiplicity with the novel, or with reader-Venter-novel, is political, i.e., it neutralises white-queer to an extent, if only temporarily. Reading for scent signs (as a type of reading for proportionality) potentially actualises a rupture

in signification, akin to what Sabrina Achilles, in *Literature, Ethics, and Aesthetics. Applied Deleuze and Guattari*, calls an immanent re-appraisal of the literary machine: “what is it that the literary machine does to these other machines and why it is that these terms need to be thought outside other assemblages, including pragmatics that involve the postmodern cultural-critical turn and Austinian theories of performativity. While establishing the performativity and pragmatics of the literary machine, these terms are used to critique the use of these same machines by other critical and analytical regimes of signs” (2012). Reading for scent signs is reading for “transformations, variations, and innovations they bring into effect in relation, particularly, to the abstract machines of subjectivity and community. In adopting a Deleuze-Guattarian-style pragmatics with respect to the literary function, a political dimension is brought to the study of literary aesthetics. Such pragmatics are always political, since, as mentioned, where pragmatics are concerned there is no universal system (111). Rather, regimes of signs must be analyzed immanently.” (ibid.) Achilles’ point to Parnet: “[I]t is not the regime which presupposes signs, it is the sign which presupposes a certain regime” (Parnet, 105, quoted in Achilles) to state that,

[f]or Deleuze, regimes of signs create the lines that go to make up our lives, and the lives of groups (25). When we engage in pragmatics we engage in making lines, and this for Deleuze is what makes pragmatics political. Writes Deleuze, “[p]olitics is active experimentation, since we do not know in advance which way a line is going to turn. Draw the line, says the account: but one can in fact draw it anywhere” (137). In seeking a pragmatics for the literary machine, the aim is not to turn the literary back toward the book, but to enable the book to be turned to the outside, that is, such that it might be transformed into a line upon which we might find ourselves—one that is made available to us. In this way, the destination of the literary text is toward an ethics, in the broad sense of a way of being. (Achilles, 2012:4-5)

By reading the olfactory, in this novel, as sign, but sign that moves beyond the material to the affective: As such, it is signifying rupture that the olfactory allows for and what possibilities are opened up by that rupture (the opening into an assemblage that extends Jack's smell through-and-beyond Afrikaner belonging, for example).

To return, briefly, to the cypher for the animality in the patriarch domicile: The wolfhound mask Jack wears when he enters the patriarch's domesticity, and which they use for play, is more than just a cypher for 'wolf', it is a sign (in the Deleuze-Guattarian sense) of surrendering into belonging-beyond the Afrikaner-patriarchal: "To become-wolf is to surrender the unity of the supreme self to the multiplicities that make the subject but one intensity in a larger pack. Held together and fueled by desire, such packs are fluent and irreducible to the One. This is also how we must understand making love. To love somebody is to find that person's own 'pack'. These packs are the multiplicities enclosed within that person. Love is joining these multiplicities together, 'to make them penetrate mine, and for me to penetrate the other person's' (Deleuze & Guattari, 2004:39). Such 'heavenly nuptials', created by moving through so many bodies in each other, is making love through a body without organs (Deleuze & Guattari, 2004 40).

Part of the value in choosing to focus on the olfactory, not on the visual, as mode to signify belonging, is that Jack's smell comes to *mean* something different (to me, at least): It shows that, "[d]esires that are olfactory, [...] may be less easy to compartmentalise and less amenable to rigid heteronormative and homonormative categorisation of gender and sexuality than a distant disembodied participation through the visual." (Graham, 2006:318) One quote, in particular, clearly demonstrates the olfactory intimacy, and its attendant links to the bodily: "How grassy Jack's skin is at times, almost a kind of cud, and if he keeps his nose against it long enough, say for instance against the part from his underarm to his hip where there'd be sweat trails after running, he eventually also smells something like meat, aged at room temperature."

(p.256) This reminds beautifully of Whitman's "scented herbage of my breast" (1982:268-270) where the lover is addressed, metonymically, as an olfactory representation/distillation of all of creation; male intimacy as semio-aesthetic positionality, temporarily outside power structurings. Within such an olfactory imaginaire, non-normative/abject smell is (also) connective, not only dislocatory.

Even though, I admit, Venter might here be here busy with creating a literary representation of pleasure that does not escape the net of power-over, his specific take on this, viewed through the prism of an olfactory intimacy, attains a body-political or even socio-political edge, *if we are positioned in such a way as to be receptive to it* (i.e. if we choose to read-for it). Such a reading situates this "new smell" of "overwhelming, all-inclusive [...] pure animality" (p.193) as a signifying rupture, as both the scent of rebellion against the father's wishes for progeny, as well as a reawakening to the power of the pack algorithm, the instinctual and instinctive connection between all men. And comes close to even comprising a BwO: "It is a question of composing a body with the animal, a body without organs defined by zones of intensity or proximity."

(Deleuze & Guattari, 1987:274) which is the place where becoming actualises: "The BwO is where or when becomings take place, becomings that draw lines-of-flight away from rigid segmentarity in the direction of the plane of consistency of desire" (Holland, 2013:104).

This view allows us to stand outside the "codes of phallogocentric functions of identity" (Braidotti, 2002:124) – of intimacy as dirty, diseased, shaming – and see the text *though our intentional positionality towards it* as "not so much a body deprived of organs as an assemblage of organs freed from the supposedly 'natural' or 'instinctual' organisation that makes it an organism. Whether by naturally occurring instinct or socially-inculcated rules or habits, organs are all too often assigned particular objects and aims, when the beauty of being human (or the beauty of human-within-non-human-world being: its onto-aesthetics) is that it defies any and all pre-given forms of organisation" (Holland, 2013:94).

7.7 Concluding Part

A queer scavenger method allows us to bring together olfactory embodiment, kinship theory and literature with Deleuze and Guattari and this, in turn, allows for developing a new lexicon of embodiment related to queer kinship – putting on the wolfhound mask, in a readerly lupification.

How do dogs smell, we wonder?

And the other – we too easily ask (also in our literature; Afrikaans writing has no qualms about assigning smell to the other. There's a whiff of the hypocritical in the canon.)

And of the queer dog?

But surely both dogs and wolves smell at each other?

Such a readerly lupification is important, as helps theorize belonging in a different way: Smell is contagion, but then also sexual contagion – another rupture of troped signification of disease and 'gay recruitment' – and pack-making. Olfactory intimacy – which is transient – is a bulwark against proiginal duty and filiation made concrete in heteronormative praxis. Olfactory connection – whether as alliance or contagion – pervades Venter's novel. The ways the novel deals with the olfactory is also about becoming(s): "And if becomings-animal exert a fascination over us, it is because pack-multiplicities always operate via contagion rather than filiation. Whereas families, species, and State always, to the greatest extent of which they are capable, internalise the linear or lineal process of their own perpetuation, becomings, by contrast, operate laterally, and must always start over anew" (Holland, 2013:106).

Venter's novel not only seeks to represent the odours, smells and scents of male intimacy, but does it through/by emphasising the connective potential of animality (without animality in the text being situated in racial binarism), the all-inclusiveness of being part of the pack while dis-

centering human(ity) as protagonist: “on and on until both of them have emptied themselves completely of all thought and all activity that could possibly occur in the rational sphere, *both of them now surrounded by a new smell* that sweat carries and that both recognise precisely because they don’t know it, because you don’t smell it anywhere else, and then, at that moment: *the overwhelming, all-inclusive sensation of pure animality.*” (Venter, p.193) It allows for a flow toward the new: “We know nothing about a body until we know what it can do, in other words, what its affects are, how they can or cannot enter into composition with other affects, with the affects of another body, either to destroy that body or to be destroyed by it, either to exchange actions and passions with it or to join with it in composing a more powerful body.” (Deleuze & Guattari, ATP:257) A sexual becoming coded in the transience of the olfactory: “Sexual becoming thus always takes place ‘in-between’ (au milieu) in a process of double-becoming that de-personalises each of the partners at the same time that it gives each of them access to their potential molecular multiplicity in and through the other (as simultaneously subject and medium of becoming)” (Holland, 2013:109).

In summary, Venter’s use of olfactory intimacy (as one modulation of a register of smells in the novel; and one that moves between performative abject and desire-machine) sets up a (white, queer) semio-olfactory imaginaire. Crucially, this takes a step further than the 2018 queer canids one, by positing that there is olfactory intimacy to be found not only in the relation to the dying body of the Father/father, and in the relation with Jack, but also in the relation with Emile. These are still Deleuzian shadows of indiscernibility; shadows of repressed shame-desire, or even shameful desire, that escapes from the body in smell, scent, odour; and psychic excess manifesting in a set of behaviours (a specific configuration of praxis) towards the smell of father/Jack/Emile; the abject and desire/pleasure is intertwined, and thereby tied intimately to the national/national belonging.

[Interlude]

"[...] the story of "Little Red Riding Hood" has not been perceived to be a particularly queer tale. Rather, since at least the publication of Charles Perrault's canonical version, it has been interpreted as the definitive cautionary tale to never stray from the path. Queer reading, however, is all about straying from the path, particularly one built on binary oppositions between masculine and feminine, and heterosexual and homosexual. Just as the multiple versions of the oral folktale and the literary fairy tale make finding a universal meaning or purpose for any tale difficult and problematic, queer theory resists stable or easily repeatable reading practice."

From *A Wolf's Queer Invitation*, by J. Orme (2015:87)

Section 8

“All about straying from the path”: A longer concluding part, with personal interjections, that cubilicates into further/future research

8.1 Queering one's own discourse of the erotic in order to...

Bennet and Royle unequivocally states that “every literary text is in some way about desire” (2004:179). Perhaps, it seems, every (budding) literary theorist has something to say about pleasure, too. And perhaps even a text-based genre typification as filial as the *plaastroman* is, in its foundation, about desire (but perhaps not – yet – about pleasure). In the preceding sections, we explored facets of desire, not only looking at both traditional and new conceptualisation(s) of affective experience, but also at how these models and theories have been impacted by an anti-essentialist and power-destabilising sense of viscerally performed affect. In the encouragement of an active dislocation of current, power-based, and patriarchal categories of gender and sexuality, queer theories, which shakes its fist in the face of “identitarian assumptions that have underpinned so much thinking about sexuality from the 1860s to the present day” (Bristow, 1997:221), have completely changed how we comprehend vital affective experiences fundamental to the human condition, such as desire, intimacy, and love. Some of these assumptions were discussed, most notable Freud and Lacan’s grim view of desire as lack, as loss, where even “[d]esire is predicated on lack, and even its apparent fulfilment is also a moment of loss” (Belsey, 1994:38-39). Against this negative and loss-centred understanding based on psychoanalysis, scholars like Grosz and Jackson and Scott offer a socially-situated, embodied subject who desire within – and against – societal regulations. Abject desire sees the abject as immanent to desire, but not in terms of lack. Recode: Lack is productive, entering into

the trope of lack to produce something to the new. In our embrace of the abject us, we move toward the new.

By looking anew/askew at embodied desire and taking into consideration newer writings by Giddens (1992), Tucker (1991), Singer (1993), and Lorde (1984), new understandings of intimacy arise. The reflexive project of the self seems to not only be a by-product of democratic community-building, but rather posited as a requirement of participating in such communal living. This would include the self as author, the self as reviewer, the self as academic. These sexual selves are social beings, produced and mediated through the social interaction and relational nature of existence.

But desire (and pleasure) also deconstructs the binaries we hold dear: between hetero and homo, between Cartesian mind and body, between self and other. By embracing the queerness of a socially situated sexual self that desires in abject ways, the erotic power this engenders actively positions the subject in opposition to power structurings that rely on hierarchies of being. Reading *Wolf, Wolf* through the zombies of LaBruce's films affirm the somewhat "necessarily and desirably queer nature of the world" (Warner, 2007:xxi) of the queer academic. This affirmation is not simply a token, flippant way to reflect back on an analysis; it has significant consequences for every-day, lived experience in the South African actuality, with perhaps revolutionary potential to boot. Belsey justly reminds us that it is important to "write in a way that keeps desire in view for the reader, not just as an object of knowledge (though it is that) but as a lived condition, so that it is possible to see not only what but also how much is at stake" (1994:19) in the (fictional, popular, academic) narratives we construct around pleasure. Much is, indeed, at stake.

8.1.1 Access to the erotic (and erotic discourse) as pathfinding resource

When I wrote the first draft of this chapter, I included the whole quote:

Belsey justly reminds us that it is important to “write in a way that keeps desire in view for the reader, not just as an object of knowledge (though it is that) but as a lived condition, so that it is possible to see not only what but also how much is at stake in the stories Western culture tells about desire (1994:19).

The omission of the qualifying phrase “in the stories Western culture tells about desire” is central to the construction of not only decolonial intimacy, but also of the MA/PhD-subjectivity. The act of omission shows how we are constantly recreating discourse, instrumentalising it *on a syntactic-granular level* – activating and curating nearly invisible changes in flow – to thrum with how we [here: the scholar] see the bombast of the Grand Theories swirling in the air around us. In so many ways, *we don’t stray from the path, we provoke theory to coalesce into bridges, highways, and detours around us.*

In this regard, Audre Lorde’s influential essay, “Uses of the Erotic: The Erotic as Power” (1984), sees the ways we conceptualise of the erotic as a resource of potential power within each person: “the erotic offers a well of replenishing and *provocative* force [to the person] who does not fear its revelation” (1984:54, emphasis added), linking this practice explicitly to Singer’s erotic welfare: as citizens, we navigate national narratives of becoming as it intersects with our own (sexual) narratives of belonging.

Lorde situates the power of the (sexual) socially situated self between the subject’s awareness of being and its affective experience of the world. When we come to realise how our affective

experience of the world impact on our creation of a self, we stand to harness the power of the erotic. This is done by submersing ourselves fully, affectively, into our daily actions, “[f]or the erotic is not a question only of what we do; it is a question of how acutely and fully we can feel in the doing” (ibid.). The erotic experience of life is potentiality, and, as such, Lorde is unambiguous about how, and why, oppressive structures seeks to diminish that power: “In order to perpetuate itself, every oppression must corrupt or distort those various sources of power within the culture of the oppressed that can provide energy for *change* [...] [leading to] a suppression of the erotic as a considered source of power and information within our lives” (ibid.:53, emphasis added). Lorde’s use of the power of erotic sociality is also directly positioned against normative behaviour:

This is one reason why the erotic is so feared, and so often relegated to the bedroom alone, when it is recognized at all. For once we begin to feel deeply all the aspects of our lives, we begin to demand from ourselves and from our life-pursuits that they feel in accordance with that joy which we know ourselves to be capable of. Our erotic knowledge empowers us, becomes a lens through which we scrutinize all aspects of our existence, forcing us to evaluate those aspects honestly in terms of their relative meaning within our lives. And this is a grave responsibility, projected from within each of us, not to settle for the convenient, the shoddy, the conventionally expected, not the merely safe. (ibid.:57)

What has struck me most about reading Venter is the lack of erotic joy in much of the reception of his work, which directly contradicts my own experience of sexual pleasure. This also extends outwards: when I discuss his work with my students or colleagues, there is a po-faced-ness about our discussion; a disjunct emanating from how his work seems to arrest itself in the filial, even when it opens up hopeful (fault)lines of flight into alliance. Our erotic experience of the

(socially situated) sexual self-empowers us to dissect all the different parts of our lived existence, it affects our relationality, the way we interact and connect with others (through our bodies). Lorde sees this power as a bridge between the political (the realm of the social being) and the spiritual (the essence of being/self). This

bridge which connects them is formed by the erotic – the sensual – those physical, emotional, and psychic expressions of what is deepest and strongest and richest within each of us, being shared [...] whether physical, emotional, psychic, or intellectual, forms a bridge between the sharers which can be the basis for understanding much of what is not shared between them, and lessens the threat of their difference. (1984:56)

Embracing this sense of erotic sociality/solidarity changes us, much like Grosz' (1995) view of the transformative power of desire with the "capacity to shake up, rearrange, reorganise the body's forms and substances, to make subject and body into something else" (1995:295). We come to see ourselves as differently situated, with the yokes of patriarchy becoming clearer to see. Acceptance of the erotic self comes to serve as a countermeasure against the grand narratives of (western) daily life in the 20th and 21st centuries, and leads to a feeling of satisfaction, of completeness, that "does not have to be called *marriage*, nor *god*, nor *an afterlife*" (Lorde, 1984:57, original emphasis). Having to decide between desire and love, between acceptance of an erotic self or subsumed into a regulated procreative progeny – between, essentially, twee dobberende buoys – it is most definitely not.

8.1.2 Towards a *meaningful* wolfing

In this thesis, I showed how a different approach to *Wolf, Wolf* – reading for alliance, not for the filial – is one possible strategy of approaching Venter's work so as to make *meaningful* meaning

from our engagement with the text. By focussing on how the queerly abject male body can be read to connect to larger ways of belonging, I addressed how notions such as erotic lupification, cubilication, and olfactory intimacy can not only be (sexual) lines of flight out of the overcoded heteronormative system, but also recode how we see Venter (and, related, his place in the canon). Such an approach goes some ways toward queering the discourse of the erotic, reminding us that it is about navigating belonging. Decolonial intimacy is coded in changing tropes that echo social change and call for a more equitable sense of being in the world.

Interesting vistas of exploration are opened by thinking of/with the consequences of the 'lupification' of man (Schleidt & Shalter, 2003:58) as an erotic, or sexual, line of flight, especially in its erotic implications: I saw echoes of this notion in Jack's reliance on the wolfhound mask to allow him entry into the patriarchal and privileged space, to allow him a (temporary) sense of belonging, and to protect him from the prying eyes of others. He does, also, later on start thinking of the mask as a talisman. We need not (necessarily) have to read this as wildness entering the domicile, the big bad (sexually deviant) wolf penetrating the patriarchal homestead. Instead, we can allow ourselves to be swayed by a reconsideration of the main cultural narrative(s) about domestication (Schleidt & Shalter, 2003:66) to think of the wearing of wolf mask as representing a possible, though symbolic, return to a pre-modern, pre-capitalist understanding of connective relationality/feral connectivity.

The figure of a boy in a wolf mask, desperately asking to be accepted into a domestic space of belonging, into a pack algorithm, to be taken into the fold, (add quote of Jack in/after church service) also speaks to bigger, (though filial) national categories of belonging: To briefly return to Schleidt and Shalter (2003): they show how Hobbes' phrase, HOMO HOMINI LUPUS crystallises the "pessimistic view that human nature is essentially brutish, antisocial and selfish" (Schleidt & Shalter, 2003:69) which "necessitates an all-powerful central government to impose

order, ensure justice, and prevent men from destroying themselves in bestial fashion (Hobbes 1985, quoted in Schleidt & Shalter, 2003:69). We should approach the word 'bestial' here advisedly, as it speaks to Hobbes' worldview, a worldview that differentiated (and hierarchized) between man and animal. Regardless of their (and Hobbes') human-centric phrasing, new approaches to the text does empower us to re-see national belonging as connective, desiring-machines connecting to produce a 'coherent' narrative about 'us' (a relationship, but on a national scale). If all filiation is imaginary, as Deleuze and Guattari argue, then national belonging and citizenship are imaginary performances. The national is a text (and a roadmap), too.

Wolfie – it can only ever be a diminutive form, in Venter's worldview – comes to constitute a possible line of flight, as it shows duty to be imaginary, even when its codes are so normalised in Afrikaans culture. Heteronormativity and capitalism intertwine and the novel's emphasis on reproduction is echoed in a patriarchal need for progeny: "Freud's enforced reduction of many wolves to the one representing the father is taken as emblematic of his reduction of desire to the male and the female." (Beckman, 2013:125) Wolfie is one wolf, a stratification. Allows for re-seeing the Afrikaans literary system as pack: "The origin of packs is entirely different from that of families and States; they continually work them from within and trouble them from without, with other forms of content, other forms of expression." (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987:242) But there exist many wolves, the tradition of literary wolves which Wolfie alludes to, activates a smoothing, a wolfig that transcends the system itself.

Deleuze and Guattari shows that filial, Oedipal worldmaking – anti-wolfig – does "not lie at the core of the unconscious but represents an epiphenomenon peculiar to capitalism" (Holland, 2013:93). Against this explicit link between progeny and capitalism, the use of the erotic can be seen as a resource: Wolfie's entrance opens up a zone of not reproduction but becoming

(where Groszean desire is productive): “This is a far cry from filiative production or hereditary reproduction, in which the only differences retained are a simple duality between sexes within the same species, and small modifications across generations. For us, on the other hand, there are as many sexes as there are terms in symbiosis, as many differences as elements contributing to a process of contagion. We know that many beings pass between a man and a woman; they come from different worlds, are borne on the wind, form rhizomes around roots; they cannot be understood in terms of production, only in terms of becoming” (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987:242).

8.1.3 Affiliation-through-(queer)-desire, or: Love in the time of patriarchy (and pandemics)

Queering the discourses of the erotic. i.e., why was/is it important to surface things like olfactory intimacy, cubilication and erotic lupification? Because it is exactly on the enlarged interstice between private intimacy and social bodies, brought about by a queer structural emphasis on embodiment, that a sustainable recognition of changing belonging(s) could occur. Larger and larger categories of affiliation, ultimately leading to citizenship, and then to a more equitable (ecological) notion of being-in-the-world. Bell (1995:314) terms Giddens’ (1992) calls for such a *democratic* intimacy as a “manifesto for a civilised erotic life” in which

the democratisation implied in the transformation of intimacy includes, but also transcends, ‘radical pluralism’. No limits are set upon sexual activity, save for those entailed by the generalising of the principle of autonomy and by the negotiated norms of the pure relationship. Sexual emancipation consists of integrating plastic sexuality with the reflexive project of self. Thus, for example, no prohibition is necessarily placed on

episodic sexuality so long as the principle of autonomy, and other associated democratic norms, are sustained on all sides. (Giddens, 1992:194, emphasis added)

Integrating new understanding(s) of intimacy with the 'reflexive project' of subject-creation/self seems to not only be a by-product of democratic community-building, but rather posited as a direct requirement of participating in such community building. This, of course, goes against ideas of the state as built on patriarchal, nuclear family-based values and structures. Therefore, a (queer) awareness of – and challenge to – essentialist power structuring is inherent to democratic intimacy. The awareness of power structuring is clear in both Tucker and Giddens. Nonetheless, if we take into consideration Foucault's dictum that power is everywhere, we realise that power doesn't only work in on the subject-who-desires, but also extends outwards from that subject (weirdly echoing Aristotle's theory of desire agency):

Important for both Tucker and Giddens is thinking about power, which can all too often contaminate the pure relationship. But then there are certain sexed subjects who have always been aware of how power can be made performative or theatrical, and how reducing it to a game, to a set of roles, to a mask, can permit people to come together for the joy of sex which, by working on this performative power, can neutralise (and even eroticise) it. (Bell, 1995:315, emphasis added)

This awareness not only of power, but also of the performative nature of sexuality (and desire?) leads to a queering of power/performance, which, finally, threatened to implode overly-familiar concepts such as "masculinity" (singular), heteronormativity, and patriarchy: "When I take a cock in my ass, I am actively taking power and pleasure, not simply reproducing a passive 'femininity;' and when I choose to give my partner the chief balance of power in sex, so that he

strokes my cock with his asshole while I lie bound to a bed, then something is going on which is not reducible to the one word 'patriarchy'" (Tucker, 1991:16, as quoted in Bell, 1995:315).

There is something about the texture of Tucker's quote (above) that feels inherently subversive: the very granular-material-surface of it – utilising words that are oftentimes coded abject, such as 'asshole'; his reduction of patriarchy to 'one word' – activates textual insubordination. Language itself (or, rather, our relation to language) *needs* to change. Throughout the previous sections' discussion of the different modalities of socialised self and the sexual self in both LaBruce's films and in Venter's novel, we have seen that sexuality and desire cannot be analysed without being aware of the political and social power structuring surrounding and mediating it (and the language in which it is formulated and regulated). Foucault dictates that "sexuality is not, in relation to power, an exterior domain to which power is applied [...] on the contrary it is a result and an instrument of power's designs" (1976:152). Of Foucault's many notions underpinning my thinking here, most notable is his famous axiom (which is, after all, a linguistic formulation) on the production of the category of homosexual: "The sodomite had been a temporary aberration; the homosexual was now a species" (1967:43). To which I would, gladly, add: *The gay subject had been a political identity; the queer was now a contagious potentiality.*

A queer rethinking of desire, intimacy and love, then, as posited in the lived, corporeal experience of social bodies, thrumming to the tenor of one's *own* discourse of the erotic, can lead to a revolution. But this revolution needs imagination – a queer imagination, perhaps. A revolutionary imagination, even, with queer theories-plus-plus as its Manifesto. But a "manifesto for a civilised erotic life", in Bell's [1995] parlance, of wolves and worldings, of zombies and revolutionary erections. Love in the time of patriarchy (and pandemics)? Perhaps.

8.2 Frameworks of belonging, frameworks of research

8.2.1 (Reading-for) human-canid morality and connective ferality

The loss of power experienced by the protagonist leading to the Meent episode necessitates a moving away from an anthropocentric view, to consider other ways of conceptualising more integrated ways of belonging. The notion of lupification (which I first encountered in the work of Schleidt and Shalter, 2003) brings relationality into relation with canid morality. An erotic wolfing carries such potential to recode our conceptualisations of intimacy, as it reroutes affect into more productive (as opposed to merely reproductive) ways of being-in-the-world:

In order to escape the psychoanalytical, familial delimitation of desire [i.e., the domestication of desire], Deleuze and Guattari also theorise a different conceptualisation of bodies that rests less on organisation by species or genus and more on the connection of affects – the plugging together of desiring machines. While there is a direct link between social production and sexuality, the very point of rethinking what desire and bodies can do is to reroute desire away from the reproduction of sexuality in its existing familial structures towards its more productive connections. (Beckman 139)

A more 'productive connection' connoted by the Wolfie persona is activated by bringing it into relation with – i.e., by reading it onto Venter's text – the notion of inter-species morality.

Referring specifically to recent research on the co-evolution of human and canid morality by evolutionary biologists Schleidt and Shalter, who contend that human schemas of morality, connectedness, and empathy originating in our co-evolution with these fellow animals. In the seminal work, *Co-Evolution of Humans and Canids: An Alternative View of Dog Domestication* (2003), they argue that while primates allow us to speculate on our development of social

structures, the “closest approximation to human morality we can find in nature is that of the grey wolf, *Canis lupis*” (page). They show that not only do “[w]olves’ ability to cooperate in a variety of situations [...] is rivalled only by that of human societies” (58) and research suggests strongly that wolves’ social structuring and collaborative practice “predate[s] human sociality and cooperation by millions of years” (ibid.).

Schleidt and Shalter advocate for a changing understanding, one that “opens a new vista as to the origins of dogs. Instead of perpetuating our traditional attitude that our ‘domesticated animals’ are “intentional creations of human ingenuity”, evidence now regard mutual contact as the basis of a co-evolution and, significantly, that “[t]he impact of wolves’ ethics on our own may well equal or even exceed that of our effect on wolves’ changes in their becoming dogs” (58, my emphasis). It is this that prompts them to issue the command “Man is to man – or at least should be – a kind wolf” (ibid.). (And the qualified imperative of relationality in ‘or at least should be’ is, of course, of note). The notion of lupification implies a nod to the connective ferality present at the inception phase of our sense of ethics (not our morality) – prompting us to imagine/remember who we were when we roamed the early savannahs of prehistory with our canid companions, whose packs were characterised by co-dependent denning, the collaborative raising of pups, and practices of “essentially monogamous” (Schleidt & Shalter 61) couplings and, even though the “core of the pack [was] usually one extended family, pack members [...] also accept[ed] strangers” (Schleidt & Shalter, 2003:60). Such a view goes some way toward conceptualising a type of queer(ed) ethical orientation – not seeing ethical behaviour as a series of rational acts, but rather as an empathetic/emphatic kindness of heart, across and between categories of belonging.

On a larger level of praxis, the work of posthuman biologists (of which I take Schleidt and Shalter as emblematic) can be read as constituting a posthuman framework of research (or, an

approach to research) that Frida Beckman calls for, research that “has begun to question what has previously been seen as the constitutive differences between the human and the animal such as language, the use of tools and inherited social behaviours” (Beckman, 2013:126), as well as speak to the notion of accepting symbiosis (between all things, but especially between human and non-human animals) “as the very origin of multicellular life” (Masumi, 2014:1, quoted in Gray, 2018:4). This implies a return to the connective ferality of the earliest phases of the development of our (human and canids’ common) sense of (ethical) group behaviour. Such a view is echoed in *A Thousand Plateaus*: “[i]t is now even possible to establish a classification system for packs while avoiding the pitfalls of an evolutionism that sees them only as an inferior collective stage” (1987:245). The work of Schleidt and Shalter (2003) on human-canid co-evolution thus illuminates the Deleuze-Guattarian notion of multiplicities: “At the limit, packs form multiplicities that resist totalisation, unification, and reduction to a homogenous mass, and thereby prefigure nomadism” (Holland, 2013:95) as human social configuration – one that remains open (i.e., not a closed Freudian loop). That is, wolfing as a verb infiltrates all spheres of praxis, including academia.

8.2.2 Wolfcubs, rerouting ‘instinct’, new families

The idea of wolfcub ethics (as opposed to monkey morality) appeals to me. The wolf becomes a verb, an action, a process – *to wolf*. But not (never) in social isolation. To understand becoming-animal, we have to understand the concept of multiplicity: “A becoming-animal always involves a pack, a band, a population, a peopling, in short, a multiplicity.” (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987:239) As a matter of fact, “[w]e do not become animal without a fascination for the pack, for multiplicity. [...] Or is the multiplicity that fascinates us already related to a multiplicity dwelling within us?” (ibid.:239-240). It is important to note, though, that we are here speaking of a “multiplicity without the unity of an ancestor?” (ibid.:241). The centrality of the ‘ancestor’ is, in a

sense, replaced by a suffocatingly *dutiful* sense of progeny in Venter's novel/oeuvre: It is easier to deny your ancestors their cultural-filial continuity than it is to deny your progeny their existence. This leads to his protagonist's angst/*wroeging*, and to the temporary salve of the intimacy with Jack as bulwark against the filial-Afrikaner-progenitory drive; it is, simply, extension versus intension, national belonging versus (always temporary, in Venter) intimate belonging: "a multiplicity is defined not by the elements that compose it in extension, not by the characteristics that compose it in comprehension but by the lines and dimensions that it encompasses in 'intension'" (ibid.:245).

For Deleuze and Guattari, we have to "recognise that a multiplicity is itself always a combination of tendencies toward both stasis and change. Those multiplicities in which the tendency toward stasis dominates they call 'masses,' and those multiplicities in which the tendency toward change dominates they call 'packs'" (Adkins, 2015:39). Why is both stasis and change important in modulating our sense of belonging, either as packs or as herds? Because assemblages need some measure of consistency in order to function. But on the other hand, if they become too rigid, there is no movement or openness to change. 'Lupification' is thus a jump between nodes on the contoured continuum between inclusion and exclusion, nodes at which masses turn into packs. Deleuze and Guattari ask: "To what extent do humans organise socially in packs, the way wolves do?" (Holland, 2013:25) as opposed to cattle, in herds. "Are we a herd animal or a pack animal?" (Holland, 2013:25). The wolf pack trope reminds us of our past connective ferality, and this recodes our behaviour/how we see ourselves, i.e., a (further) readerly lupification: "A pack of forever variable intensities, wolves express the way bodies are continually composed and recomposed through desire" (Beckman, 2013:125). Recoding through desire, recoding power-over into queer pleasure, will by necessity be resisted by the capitalist overcoder machine; lupification is a way we can counter, though never reverse, capitalism+colonialism+patriarchy's triple-threat overcoding.

As I have shown in a number of sections in this study, the 'instinctual' patriarchal and heteronormative homosocial space of the novel – in terms of both physical space and space(s) of memory – is surfaced and challenged by Wolfie's entrance. The study, a non-connective space where, "as with an animal, instinct warned" (10), the father not to include the son in the homosocial, and recoded, almost irreversibly, Matt's view of himself as outsider, as unable to connect with other men, as standing 'outside' belonging. Against this, Wolfie/Jack's entrance, encoded in erotic language, represents a fulcrum point at which the narrative eroticises and at which the patriarchal solidifies against Matt:

Jack goes down on all fours and trots on the spot. The cocked head looks at him with vibrating whiskers, and deep inside is the glint of real eyes. He announces that he's moving in as a dog, his name is Wolfie. Uncle Bennie won't mind, of course. Doesn't he have a soft spot for dogs? (155)

When the father enquires as to who was at the door, Matt's response is telling; instead of acknowledging the 'wolf' at the door, he simply states: "Scavenging dogs or something, Pa. I think somebody further up in the street let their dogs out on their own to go and do their business" (158). (I've considered the Afrikaans versions' "losloperhonde" and its dislocatory eroticism as well as how this is an example of translation loss. The more erotic undertones of his answer shimmers through in the Afrikaans original's "losloperhonde": throughout Venter's oeuvre, 'losloperhonde', as term (los/loper connotes with loose sexual morals, and los/loop with roving without set home) and as actual narrative element, points to desire, but also to the fallout from acting on that desire – see, for example, how losloperhond becomes harbinger of death after sex in *Begeerte*, or how a losloperhond is the first crack in *Foxtrot van die vleiseters*' nuclear family's realisation of the nearing end of Apartheid). I've also considered how this resonates in the blurb's more erotic description: "*The intimate space* where Matt is waiting for

his father to die is fatefully invaded by a wolf-like creature” (my emphasis, but lacking the Afrikaans original's gothic-erotic loading: 'Vermom soos 'n wolf dring Jack die intieme ruimte binne [...] Blinkoog oor die vooruitsigte sluip die twee jong mans verby die studeerkamer, waar die blinde ou man, deurdrenk van droewe verknogthede en donker vermoedens, lê [...]).

What I haven't yet considered – and this will be another further/future avenue of exploration, is how the entrant's viral-change in the 'intimate space' allows for a potential overcome of stasis in the overcoding machine. To reiterate, reading the wolf pack trope onto the text allows us to reconceptualise morality/ethics into more affective configurations of praxis – a morality/ethics/being-in-the-world more “poetically associate[d] with kindness of heart” (Schleidt & Shalter, 2003:59). A kindness of heart is indeed needed to counteract the ‘brutal intimacy’ between the men in Venter's novel. (And, perhaps, in his oeuvre.)

In this way, brutal intimacy is also still intimacy. A brutality that, at this point in the narrative, had not yet reached (or, as per the ending of the novel, killed) the Wolfie/wolf cub. Jack is a teacher, and his profession activates a range of connotations around socialisation, learning, and play. Similarly, wolf cubs learn certain roles and social skills and roles within the pack by playing them out. There is an embrace of fluidity here, of experimentation. As wolves play, so philosophers experiment: “We philosophize as wolves (not as cattle)” (Holland, 2013:26).

On different levels, wolves and wolfcubs and wolfing and becoming help us understand that roles are acquired through pack interaction. Pack algorithm/rhythm connect to the affect contours surrounding our configurations of praxis: “For the affect is not a personal feeling, nor is it a characteristic; it is the effectuation of a power of the pack that throws the self into upheaval and makes it reel.” (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987:240) Indeed, “affects, the forces a body harbors to act and to be affected by other bodies and actions” (Holland, 2013:107). Wolfing is to tip into

contours of affect shaping our interaction/connectivity with others; making play of contagion and contagion of play. Wolfie's entrance is also the introduction of subversion-through-contagion. (Cf. How Venter codes the entrant's arrival in sex, sweat and a toxic fume.) Here, in the configuration of human/canid ferality, it 'spills over' (and over the contours of the text itself): "If the concepts of 'the animal' and 'sexuality' have been useful in tracing the contours of modern human subjectivity, Deleuze and Guattari's concepts of becoming-animal and desire are crucial to a posthuman ethics in that they spill over the edges of any such contours. The rhythm of animals and the connectivity of desire do not respect the boundaries chartered on humanist maps" (Beckman, 2013:144).

Lupification recodes, rerouting filial (the father, the ownership of a car, the mortgage payment, the inheritance, the bank loan) affect into more productive (not reproductive) ways of being-in-the-world: "In order to escape the psychoanalytical, familial delimitation of desire, Deleuze and Guattari also theorise a different conceptualisation of bodies that rests less on organisation by species or genus and more on the connection of affects – the plugging together of desiring machines. While there is a direct link between social production and sexuality, the very point of rethinking what desire and bodies can do is to reroute desire away from the reproduction of sexuality in its existing familial structures towards its more productive connections" (Beckman, 2013:139). Rerouting is recoding is re-smelling. What is more productive than reproduction? The 'new smell' of Matt's (male) sweat and musky, dew-filled room (and the continuation of such olfactory proximity and togetherness in their cubilication) is in a sense more than proglinal duty can ever be: "We know nothing about a body until we know what it can do, in other words, what its affects are, how they can or cannot enter into composition with other affects, with the affects of another body, either to destroy that body or to be destroyed by it, either to exchange actions and passions with it or to join with it in composing a more powerful body" (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987:257).

There does arise, however, tension between affects and agency (especially in Venter's – white, middle class – performative precarity): they still have to buy coffee, still have to use make ablution, Jack's students start to complain about his unwashed smell. The performative component here threatens to re-encode the attempted de-centering of anthropocentric views. Venter's men on the Meent come so close to being a reading constitutive of ontological equiponderance between human and animal subjectivities (Gray, 2017), almost showing that “the human-animal relation can also be established through a rhythm that undoes the very dichotomy that the dash between them signifies” (Beckman, 2013:144).

8.3 Re-seeing the variegated productive potentiality that the loss of white symbolic power actualises

8.3.1 Cubilication as a renunciation of power

I posit that Matt and Jack's temporary habitation on the Commons be read as an act of cubilication.⁹⁶ An act of un-domestication, and a positionality against the Afrikaner-citizen's capitalist, filial 'self-interest' – which is exactly what Matt and Jack do after the ancestral home is sold to new owners: they squat illegally on Rondebosch Commons, all their belongings crammed into a car. For some time, their life on the Commons and the car in which they live, resemble a “companionable chaos” (238). The novel sets up the episode at the Commons as a concrete, messy, lived repudiation of the incorporeal spheres they previously moved in: Matt's 'porn addiction' and Jack's overreliance on social media which, in the insular logic of the novel's narrative, prevent him from connecting to those around him. The wolfhound mask is “propped

⁹⁶ The term cubilication is delineated by Schleidt and Shalter (2003:65) when they note that we can't talk of the 'domestication' of canids, since it is “absurd to talk about the 'domestication' of dogs by humans who had not yet any permanent domiciles” (Schleidt & Shalter, 2003:65) especially since wolves'/canid's “use of dens dates back further” (Schleidt & Shalter, 2003:66). They then regard the use of the word cubilication (*cubile*, from the Latin for 'den') instead of domestication.

up against the windshield as a talisman" (238) and dog and wolf figures amalgamate in Rondebosch Commons. Slowly, Matt and Jack's actions (their orientations toward the world) start resembling⁹⁷ those of the dogs who are walked at the Commons. For example, "[d]uring the night Matt goes outside with a roll of toilet paper to use the Common as the Common dogs do" (239) and Jack's students start complaining about his body odour (256). Smell/scent a compositional marker – that which attracted Matt – now alienates his students. His filial relation to others is at risk.

For a while, the episode on the Commons can be seen as an act of *jouissance*, a temporary revolution against the filial: Jack characterises the Commons as a place of safety, a totalising space where differences – between possession and precarity, between human and animal – are upended temporarily: "Jack looks north, west, south, east. 'Nothing. You can't see anything of the city from here. Only the grass and the mountain there, to the west. This is our hiding place in the middle of the city. Isn't that something.'" (p.241) (The sense of freedom is arrested, though, by Venter's inclusion of white-centring exclamations such as: "We're white tramps, bergies. With a Mercl!" (p.241). There is more to Jack's experience of the Commons than simply seeing it as a space of security: Jack, who "knows the Common well" (p.237, in an apparent but veiled reference to cruising), describes it as a space where dogs run around freely, a space of "[p]ure joy. Up and down the paths among the grasses and flowers that have been trampled by people and by dogs' paws. He knows it sounds a bit silly, but he associates the Common with a zest for life." (p.237). On this, Jack Halberstam, queer doyenne, who's been attempting to remodel the concept of 'wildness' as moral-aesthetic rupture, writes that because queer "no longer signifies

⁹⁷ It is important to keep in mind that, for Deleuze and Guattari, imitation does not constitute a becoming, neither is it resemblance nor identification (ATP:237). They specifically caution that "[w]e fall into a false alternative if we say that you either imitate or you are" (ATP:238). Neither should Jack and Matt's (temporary) resemblance to the fornicating and defecating dogs on the Commons be seen as indices: "A becoming-animal of sexuality does not, of course, have anything to do with worn comparisons between carnal lust and the animal side of human beings. This would immediately rob both human and non-human animals of all animal-becomings through its anthropocentric interpretations of animal behaviour" (Beckman, 2013:137).

the wild array of embodiment and utopian projects it once did” (Gervasio 2015) we should embrace “all that is chaotic, reckless, and intense to the point of violence” (Gervasio 2015), leading to the taking up of a position that is against the self-interest of a rational citizen. Specifically, a scene (described through his focalisation) stands out of two men (he is unsure if they are brothers or lovers – page 237) who often walk their two chocolate-coloured labradors.

Their cubilication at the Commons can be read on two levels of signification. First, as a renunciation of their dependency on power structures through a renewed sense of (feral) connectivity – in other words, a type of spatial *wolfing* – which leads to a ‘companionable chaos’. Second, as an attempt to reconnect viscerally/bodily with the sense of belonging not (necessarily) found in cyber porn cycles or social media networking. When these two virtual (and non-corporeal) spheres fall away (due to lack of data – capitalist implications?), Jack and Matt turn to each other, to the cubilication potential of their retreat to the Commons. The notion of a close-knit and connective pack of wolves reminds us of our past connective ferality and this recodes our behaviour, how we see ourselves – lupification as a line of flight. In the Deleuze-Guattarian paradigm, “[a] pack of forever variable intensities, wolves express the way bodies are continually composed and recomposed through desire” (Beckman 125). Recoding through desire. If the entrance of Wolfie surfaces the non-connectivity of homosocial heteronormativity (as it is presented in the novel), then lupification – a becoming-animal – and cubilication – revelling in the musky security of male intimacy – acts as one possible way in which we can counter oppressive power structurings (capitalism, colonialism, patriarchy, capitalist addictions). Lupification echoes the affective contours surrounding our configurations of praxis and is actualised in cubilication – which opens up possibilities for lines of flight. As Deleuze and Guattari remind us: “For the affect is not a personal feeling, nor is it a characteristic; it is the effectuation of a power of the pack that throws the self into upheaval and makes it reel” (1987, 240). Lines of flight are made possible because the “rhythm of animals and the connectivity of

desire do not respect the boundaries chartered on humanist maps” (Beckman 144). Venter’s novel delves into the consequences of lupification as an erotic, or sexual, line of flight, especially in terms of its implications for pleasure. We need not (necessarily) have to read this as wildness entering the domicile, the big bad (sexually deviant) wolf penetrating the patriarchal homestead. Instead, we can allow ourselves to be swayed by a reconsideration of the main cultural narrative(s) about domestication (Schleidt & Shalter 66), to think of the wearing of the wolf mask as representing a possible return to a pre-modern, pre-capitalist understanding of connective relationality and feral connectivity.

Thus, cubilication is also olfactory, as much of Venter’s male intimacy is (Strydom, prev.): “on and on until both of them have emptied themselves completely of all thought and all activity that could possibly occur in the rational sphere, *both of them now surrounded by a new smell* that sweat carries and that *both* recognise precisely because they don’t know it, because you don’t smell it anywhere else, and then, at that moment: *the overwhelming, all-inclusive sensation of pure animality.*” (p.193, my emphasis) {doubled ‘both’ signify sex here between two men more egalitarian than than “i know her”-pussy quote} copulatory connection without/alongside patriarchal system.

8.3.2 Even for white men

It is difficult not to see, in 2021, *Wolf, Wolf* as yet another example of what Kylie Cheung (2021) calls “the unsolicited white male rehabilitation storyline”. Becoming-precarious (especially a voluntary version of this, practiced by white middle class South Africans) activates certain questions, most pressingly when it is brought to bear on communal urban spaces. Referring back to D. Hook, although abjection is first and foremost a visceral reaction, through its metaphoric dimension it also comments on social discourse(s) of inclusion/exclusion; holding up

a disturbing, sometimes-menacing mirror to society⁹⁸. Social exclusion becomes a way of defending against the corporeal boundary threat. Hook (2006:14) sees in the theory of abjection an “account of embodiment and affect that entails a strong social and political dimension, and that is able to explain something about pre-symbolic (or visceral) reactivity” that is based on “a constitutive kind of fear, on a form of horror that is at the same time a kind of incoherence and dissolution, the notion of abjection enables us to think a theory of racism that is based on boundary threats, on threats to the physical, psychological and symbolic integrity of the racist subject” (ibid.:15). A question that arises: Can revolutionary potential/potential to recode be brought into tension with exclusionary spacing? Within the threat of being excluded lies the subversive potential to recognise our similarities, not only our differences. Herbst (1999:115-116) states that, although abjection works on excluding that which is different, “[y]ou can exclude it, but you cannot erase it [...] This means that prohibited things, abject things, have a certain revolutionary power, whether real or imagined, and as such they challenge the ordering formation”. What are we to make of the novel’s white male subjects choosing to move to an abject public space, Rondebosch Commons?

Disregarding (for a moment) the tonedead ‘humour’ of Venter: the un-self-reflective affluence, the failed humour of a coffee roaster, I read the Commons episode as a way of connective intimacy, a companionable chaos of cubilication, outside of Afrikaner strictures. The novel charts these various characters’ negotiation of disenfranchisement and re-coding of (male) power into desire/pleasure, how – and to what extent – their doing so allows them to traverse traditional and restrictive categories of sexual and national (read: Afrikaner) identity. The

⁹⁸ A case can be made to connect the process of disavowal (inherent to abjection) with an essential practice in being a spectator: the suspension of disbelief. Bennet & Royle writes that, even though we are aware that we are engaging in a work of fiction, the notion of disavowal “highlights the contradictoriness of what is going on in the act of reading. The work of the text, *its task of seduction*, is to ensure this disavowal, to put the reader into this state of what is at once ‘truth’ and ‘fiction’” (2004:261-262, my emphasis). Disavowal thus seems to be an inherent characteristic of engaging, in the *seductive* mode of reading, with a (fictional) text.

Commons episode feels like a logical conclusion for the introduction of Wolfie's surfacing of potentiality – for new ways of being intimate and counteracting the imposition of ethno-Afrikaner state control, by introducing notes of erotic ferality into the heavily heteronormatively coded domestic, thereby recoding possibilities/potentiality of belonging for Matt – in essence, *re-seeing the variegate productive potentiality that the loss of white symbolic power actualises*. If we accept the notion of adopting the ethical closeness of the pack (Schleidt & Shalter 68), we may also read the notion of ferality in a slightly different manner: with an understanding that it connotes connection, instinctive cooperation and erotic kinship; a way of being definitely and defiantly at odds with the isolating individualism of the erotic/sexual self in post-Apartheid, late-capitalist-Afrikanership, so much so that “[t]he origin of packs is entirely different from that of families and States; they continually work them from within and trouble them from without, with other forms of content, other forms of expression” (Deleuze & Guattari, 1980 242). Even for white men.

Though, as Visagie (2000; 2002) intimates, there is much in the way of tropes that underlie the apparent pastoral yearning for (some) white men to return to spaces of “overrun nature [...] hunting fields and nature reserves where the illusion of a pristine world can be recovered” (2002:132). In Visagie's work I enfold such notes of a 'haunting' elegiac into its homophone, the hunt, and read-for differently in phrasings such as “Africa continues to haunt white writers” (2002:132).

8.3.3 Feral citizenship & feral masculinity

Contagious new views on belonging are in circulation. Ferality is usually (especially within the South African discourse) associated with the other. There is a sense of growing xenophobia in South Africa, an affective response many white South Africans see themselves as above. (A

response which we, through the lens of LaBruce, start seeing as performative.) These discourses are, in part, based on a conceptualization of national identity based on a) the exclusion of others/the Other – a game of zero-sum citizenship – and b) national identity recoded retrospectively on past (usually mythic) events, both problematized by the lived actualities of having to, now, live in an integrated pluralistic society. In other words, the static nature of (sexual, familial and national) identity categories is challenged, re/displaced by a sense of the self as becoming/nation as in un-becoming. The same can be said of national categories of belonging, i.e., citizenship, since these categories are ever-changing assemblages of affect, and affect underlies all configurations of praxis. Our view of national identity, nationalism, and closely linked derivatives, such as patriotism, is changing, specifically in how the relation between national, collective, in-group and personal assemblages/affects corresponds, weaves, obscures. (check). We are moving away from “the idea that the ties that bind a collectivity and connect it to a territory are experienced as ultimate, binding, and ineffable” (Izenberg, 2016:219). Such a myopic view, simply put, can no longer hold in a rapidly globalising world.

If nationalist being can be seen as performative, then all the more reason for emphasizing its in-flux nature. If “[c]ollective cultural identity, as something historical, subjective, and symbolic, could metamorphose over time” (Izenberg, 2016:222) into a nation, then by the same reasoning it can also, over time and with loss of power and signification, dissolve. I feel that this is what Venter attempts to chart, as he has charted the dissolvment of the body in *My Beautiful Death* (1996). (I’d situate *Wolf, Wolf* thus ‘between’ *Foxtrot* and *Trencherman*.) It is not, however, only through a loss of (white, Afrikaner) power that this dissolvment happens, but also through the critical distance implied by the characters own view on their/our collective history. Seeing this

history anew forms part of the act of “balance[ing] permanence and change in [our] understanding of [national] identity” (Izenberg, 2016:222)⁹⁹.

Nick Garside, in “Celebrating the invasive: The hidden pleasures and political promise of the unwanted” writes on how feral, stray and invasive animals are treated, and links this with how “jesters, fools and nomads” (2016:237) are seen as invading the “fictitious purity of the collective” (2016:237). Garside observes how, in an overwhelming number of ‘invasive animal’ narratives, the “overriding justification” for strict retribution relates to “an odd commitment to sustainability and conservations, not necessarily of anything in particular, but of everything in general” (2016:237). It is exactly the feral animal’s out-of-place-ness (2016:240) that activates the “context-free foundation of the conservationist gaze” (2016:237), not the other way around – “the presence of feral animals stimulates responses and disrupts perceived norms in the community visited” (2016:241). Based on this, Garside formulates the concept of feral citizenship. “if feral is to be claimed as a worthy approach to citizenship, it is due to its potential to cause problems and disrupt perceived norms and comforts of whatever community is entered. Once attached to political agency and introduced as part of a wandering political epistemology, the disruptive promise of being feral can become a radically democratic way of participating [...]” (2016:241-242). Garside does not explicitly mention Deleuze and Guattari, but I read his conceptualisation of ferality as a way of becoming: He states that ferality is not equated to ‘wild’¹⁰⁰, rather it is a “term that describes a creature that is neither wild nor domestic, and at times both wild and domestic – never conforming to either simplistic classification.” (Garside, 2016:242).

⁹⁹ ‘Modern nationalism’ means we can “entertain two identities [...] one was at once an individual defined by [one’s] universal humanity and the right with which it endowed the self, and a member of a particular community, bounded by its language, customs, and loyalties.” (Izenberg, 2016:223). Why is community here singular? Does a ‘postmodern nationalism’ exist, and does it traverse the doubled modes of being implied by the novel’s title?

¹⁰⁰ Not wild, as wild has “a kind of saviour character attached to it due to its constructed personality as human culture’s opposite. [...]for example] the attempts at re-wilding” desiccated forest lands” (Garside, 2016:242).

The cubilication episode on the Meent can be read as an act of ferality. And, since it is constructed on male intimacy, and in opposition to heteronormative capitalist structurings, it is also then an act of feral masculinity. It is an intentional decision to un-domesticate, to disrupt expectations so to create a space-ing of reflective citizenship:

what makes feral creatures persistently disruptive is their perpetual lack of home and their constant desire, if not need, to wander. [...] They disrupt it, change it, challenge its norms, and then move on. From a democratic perspective the idea is to encourage self-reflection- not to guide it, just to help create the conditions that will foster change. Acts of feral citizenship are not intended to entice followers; they are intended to help create political moments that can reinvigorate political debate and reinvigorate the political sphere as a space of antagonism, critique, opposition and plurality. (Garside, 2016:242).

Seeing Matt and Jack's cubilication as a temporal and ephemeral act of feral masculinity counters to a large extent the repressive and stratified Afrikaner-citizenship presented elsewhere in the novel.

Garside's model of feral citizenship is helpful for a variety of other reasons: Its focus is on the potentiality of the nomadic (and thus keeps it from resembling a fetishisation of self-/pseudomigrancy), and its particular delineation of 'feral' questions the dominant human-non-human dichotomy (Garside, 2016:245). Specifically, underlying the notion of feral citizenship is an appreciation of productive plurality: "feral citizens wander the democratic terrain with the intent and desire to explore, encourage, and understand the diversity, tension and often hidden solidarity or potential solidarity that litters democratic culture" (Garside, 2016:245). Most importantly, a sense of pleasure is activated by such a view: Such an "adventurous approach to

politics is another of the pleasurable parts [of celebrating the invasive]; [...] there are far more interesting side trails than there are main routes” (Garside, 2016:245).

8.4 Conclusion: When we play (and philosophise) as wolves, we...

8.4.1 Assume a queer(ed) ethical orientation, and so

What if we re-turn, re-orient ourselves back to the time when feral connectivity was more important than modernist-late capitalist Afrikaner individualism? The preceding was, in a sense, an exploration of what one manifestation of such an embrace would look like.

Rearticulating the ways in which desire shapes our sense of belonging foregrounds the performative nature of being/belonging. Instead of simply accepting (textual) performativity as a given, however, we need to keep in mind the ‘non-social’ bind that notions of performativity is in currently, That is, the various works of Judith Butler maintain, in seeming contradiction, that, “[o]n the one hand, the self is not given as a knowable substance but must be performed [...] On the other hand, such self-giving or performing is only possible through others and recognition” (Colebrooke, 2009:14). Instead of thinking about performativity as completely negating the socially situated nature of being, we should instead recognise that performativity is realised only through interaction with others. In this way, we can start conceptualising being (and belonging) not as fixed, static or non-relational, but as “a threshold, a becoming between multiplicities, the nomadic self par excellence” (Tamboukou, 2008: 372) – in effect, as an assemblage of different performances that are not located in being, but in becoming, in the intermezzo.

In essence, then, that categories of belonging, too, are (textualised) assemblages of identities that are a) performatively constructed, b) relationally understood, and c) always in the process of becoming. Taken together, these becomings pose larger questions on the very nature of (categories of) belonging.

8.4.2 ...become-less-barking-mad

What makes a study contribute? Or: What makes an abject people? How can queer theory, and a queer approach to text, help us understand the way we've been regulated into citizenry?

LaBruce's films show us how (sexual, textual) self is constituted in the textuality of relational citizenry, and *Wolf, Wolf* opens holey¹⁰¹ spaces for a re-awareness, and then a potentiality for a re-negotiation, of citizenship. "One needs to be deemed human", writes Garside, as he quotes from Steeves (2003), and follows this by stating that "the same can be said for citizens who are presently treated as 'taxpayers,' 'stakeholders,' constituents,' and 'property owners.' As citizens are addressed as these identities, these identities are being internalised and referred to for legitimacy and the right to speak within political discourse." (Garside, 2016:246)

For, dear reader, there's no such thing as a monolithic power against which to agitate. No such thing as 'hegemonic masculinity'. Diversity as inherent to contemporary societies: "Theorists searching for a pure politics or a pure political agent fail to realize the degree to which plurality and difference are constitutive of the democratic condition. They also, like those struggling to define what humanity is, fail to acknowledge that any definition of humanity is particular, often sexist, and almost always racist. [...] it is fairly simple to accept the obvious truth that whenever humanity is described it fails to include all humans. The presence of the feral re-introduces the failure of any definition and forces a reconsideration of how we define humanity" (Garside, 2016:247).

¹⁰¹ Part of the value of the study is not in bringing Deleuze and Guattari to bear on an Afrikaans text, as this has been done a number of times (sometimes productively – see, for example, Kotze's Samsa masjien MA study or Liezl Dick's review-essay on Loftus Marais) but instead to think *with* – and, in two instances, *through* – Deleuze and Guattari, into something else. Though, this may also be a limitation of the study, as it scavenges around for the useful in Deleuze and Guattari) as opposed to bringing an entirety of engagement to bear on the notion of abject-desire, or on reading for the olfactory. In this regard, my study is different from that of Carstens (2013), who combines accelerationism, schizoanalysis and Bodies without Organs to approach the narrativised notion of apocalypse, and interpret in it, amongst others, facets of the catastrophic or anastrophic (2013:iii). Being at least consequent in my queer scavenging, I nip these facets for my reading of Van Schalkwyk and Visagie's hopeful dystopics.

Echoing LaBruce's politically animated zombies, "While they may have no intention of enticing others to become feral, they do intend to create political moments in order to discuss public concerns and relations with those who are passively adapting to their domestic space."

(Garside, 2016:247) However, the crucial difference between those zombies and these cubilicators, is that the latter chooses this (self-imposed) ferality, while the former does not have such agency. Both aim to disrupt, though: "disruptive acts of feral citizenship are one kind of citizenship activity done by citizens intent on trespassing, visiting and disrupting communities." (Garside, 2016:250) It is on this notion of productive disruption that I'd like to end this convoluted conclusion, by asking how we [and at the end of the study this 'we' is left intentionally undefined, though not vague] go forward? In the months after this study has been submitted, the 'we' in my own practice will retrace (obsessively) agential lines of possible cubilication, seeking and seeing meta-ways of filling the gaps in the latticework of my argument. (For example, my wariness around Afrikaans' disciplinary settler symbolism, traceable in footnote after footnote, as if I never had the guts to enfold it into the text proper.)

What is productively disrupted? And to what end? What, we may ask about rock-solid disciplines and fields of enquiry, are even disruptable? In Garside's comment on how, even as "[t]heorists searching for a pure politics or a pure political agent fail to realize the degree to which plurality and difference are constitutive of the democratic condition" (2016:247) should not deter us from disrupting productively – even if it is ~~simply~~ the discourses of our own making.

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Addendum 1

The novel as a series of moments of potentiality

[Published in *Johannesburg Review of Books* as “The novel as a series of moments of potentiality – Wemar Strydom on ‘Translate Yourself’, Eben Venter’s first exhibition of visual work”, in March 2019]

Eben Venter presented the world debut of his first visual exhibition, ‘Translate Yourself’, at the February Lectures conference at the North-West University’s Potchefstroom campus at the end of February. The exhibition consists of forty-nine photographs, each with corresponding text from Venter’s latest work, *Green as the Sky is Blue* (Penguin Random House)—the first of Venter’s novels composed in English, and thereafter self-translated into Afrikaans. Various locations and settings from the novel are recognisable in the visuals—Bali, Istanbul, Tokyo, the Netherlands, and South Africa’s Wild Coast—in unambiguous contrast to the distinctly stark architecture of the exhibition venue, the Heimatsaal (once a male hostel, and now one of the oldest and most iconic buildings on campus).

It was a homecoming (of sorts) for Venter: during the nineteen-seventies he attended NWU (then still called the Potchefstroomse Universiteit vir Christelike Hoër Onderwys). As we walk around campus—a campus which today feels joyously different from when I completed my undergraduate work at NWU ten years ago—he remembers the ultra-repressive environment: ‘Even jeans were banned’, he remarks, chuckling. The remark seems offhand, but it activates something; there is a quiver in his voice, a furtive look that betrays a very clear affective memory from the past. The nineteen-seventies saw the height of white insecurity and disinformation, and it couldn’t have been easy for more liberal-minded students, such as Venter,

to navigate the masculinist constraints and Afrikaner-nationalist expectations of the campus. In a sense, it is exactly this aspect of his oeuvre that resonates most with me: the intense thematic consideration of how men navigate national frameworks of belonging.

In a similar way, the 'Translate Yourself' artist statement describes Venter's process as concerning itself intimately with navigating various ways and modes of translation (between English and Afrikaans; between language and visuality) as well as with a recognition of the impact of recursive movements to-and-fro between sexuality and the linguistic; a meditation on the potentiality of movements between body, word and image.

One aspect that stands out is how much of the 'meaning'—or even the enjoyment—a viewer constructs out of 'Translate Yourself' is not necessarily only in the way *Green as the Sky is Blue* is referenced, but in the myriad call-backs to the larger Venter literary oeuvre. I am intrigued by the potential of reading Venter's visual work superimposed onto his books, mapping it onto my affective—and, admittedly, highly subjective—orientation toward his body of literary work. (The phrase 'translate yourself' being read not only as imperative statement, but also as DIY instruction.)

Over and above aesthetic considerations, then, lies a baser question on how we would construct meaning from such a very self-referential reading of the visual work, a reading so intricately constructed around the ways it refers back to the thematics, characters, and affective texture of the totality of Venter's oeuvre. And, as the oeuvre is not explicitly referenced (barring *Green as the Sky is Blue*), the references we bring to the reading/viewing constitute lapses, referential spectres that work against traditional notions of word-visual translation fidelity (a fidelity that seeks to find, assign, correlate and master meaning).

Instead, in the proud tradition of queer theory's prodding of set identitarian assumptions (and, in keeping with the February Lectures focus on queer theory), the viewer plays with notions of fidelity, episodic moments, intimate confluence between visual and text. What do the gaps, the holes, the opacities between mediums signify? And what do they signify in terms of larger frameworks of belonging, in terms of national belonging, in terms of citizenship?

In this way, we get to read Venter's visual work not primarily with the aim of setting up a relation of correlative fidelity between the photographs and the 'corresponding' passage from his narrative work. The gaps in reference echo the specific geocultural location of the Heimatsaal (the word 'heimat' resounding inward towards—and against—notions of homecoming and belonging) as exhibition venue. Other contrasts stand out: on a table, adorned with a bunch of bright yellow sunflowers (a shock of colour against the drab grey and browns of the building's bureaucratic interior), lie four copies of Venter's latest novel; the pale yellow of the covers—a paleness that emphasises *that* line drawing by Jean Cocteau—echoed in photographs a few metres away. It's a spatial echo, and emblematic of how close the novel and visual works's thematic concerns lie, especially in themes such as the forms of desire, notion of home(s), spatial belonging, and abject desire.

But for me it's mostly male desire, in variegated forms, that runs through a large number of the forty-nine pieces, and that connects the parts of the whole. Themes of ferality and of fractured masculinities refract back; themes I read into and onto the series of photographs because that is how I've been reading Venter's body of literary work. The novels, physically absent here, impact my reading of the photographic work; the assemblage-of-forty-nine becoming more than just the sum of its parts, but simultaneously incomplete without considering the oeuvre.

There's a good dose of theory, too, to be found in the passages quoted below each photograph. A lot of Michel Foucault. In the artist statement, Venter echoes Foucault when he describes how

the protagonist of his novel 'creates a new way of being where he can invent and multiply and modulate himself, in order to translate his sexual experiences—and, most importantly, self-translate himself'. A number of the photographs echo this aim towards self-renewal, self-regeneration.

Still, I struggle to immerse myself fully in the visual work—to make sense of them affectively—without thinking of the novels. It's a queer relationship, this, between the quoted passages and the visual elements, between present visuals and absent oeuvre. Perhaps it's productive to read the exhibition as a series of visualisations, or translations into the visual: of the diasporic relationship to Afrikaans; of the visualisation of an autobiography; as a way of bringing *into the visual* a relation to the larger oeuvre. Whichever way we cut it, the approach itself is a queer move on the part of Venter, a visualised attempt to step out(side) of the recurrence of novel, novel, novel.

But it is also a move that breaks with the centrality of Afrikaans in the imagination of the Afrikaner diaspora. This occurs in both *Green as the Sky is Blue* and in 'Translate Yourself': instead of calling the Afrikaans version of the novel a 'translation', Venter sees it as a 'second original', while the artist statement acknowledges the 'lilting ghost of Afrikaans' in the quoted passages below each photograph. Some Afrikaans words stay untranslated in these passages—as when the text reads: 'My father was a man of action, he didn't say very much. Moody. There's a word in Afrikaans, *omgekrap*.' The use of Afrikaans and Afrikaans-isms is seen both as enabling *and* delimiting meaning, with the gaps between Afrikaans and English invested with meaning.

There's also the sense that we can read the exhibition as a visualisation of an (auto)biography, a travel-writing-esque life story that seems to riff on the travels of the protagonist of *Green as*

the Sky is Blue. But there are more gaps and lapses here: the photographs aren't clustered neatly into corresponding spaces and, while the aforementioned cityscapes are recognisable, reference to the novel's narrative devices that link the cities – and the corresponding making-into-a-sexual-self the protagonist undergoes in each cityscape – is lost. There are also 'scenes' depicted that don't immediately correlate with events in the novel. Venter as persona is inserted too, in ways that the real Venter has always shied away from. (An implied refrain in interviews with Venter is that the novels shouldn't necessarily be read as autobiographical.)

This insertion is another productive presence-as-gap: the author as persona identified by others close to him, in glimpses, for example of Venter's mother, or of Venter's partner Gerard Dunlop picking up a suit in Belfast. Also, some photographs are included that are simply too close to previous novels, thus disrupting clear-cut structural fidelity to *Green as the Sky is Blue*: the nude showering young man, for example, who could be *Santa Gamka*'s Lucky Marais – or not – activates in turn memories of the same novel's Eddy and Eamonn, who might be Eben and Gerard – or might not be. With each photo, the references to the oeuvre (that I, admittedly, read into the visual work) become progressively more pronounced, and at the same time more opaque.

The meaningful gaps and productive lapses between specific visuals paired with specific chosen passages thus speak to the continuation of a decades-long creation of the authorial persona; a visualisation of a relation to the larger oeuvre intersecting with elements of a curated (auto)biography.

Numerous themes and places resonate around this intersection, but especially those associated with male fragility and feral masculinity. I've often found myself reading a specifically resilient fragility onto the men in Venter's oeuvre. Oftentimes, his novels chart the particularly material how-to of male belonging, considered in all its earthy, musky molecularity, without shying away

from incorporating the abject. I think immediately of the pronounced olfactory intimacy of *Wolf*, *Wolf*, or the sweaty clay-and-dirt-on-the-skin of Lucky Marais, stuck in a potter's kiln.

One photo stands out for its contained masculine ferality, the way it revels in the eager beauty of the male form: James Kilohertz, photographed in Venter's back yard in Lismore, bends down on the grass to do a handstand, his *vastus medialis* taut and expression promising, eyes shyly upward and looking out toward the beyond of the frame, his pose and kinetic demeanour eager to please, eager to show off.

For me, perhaps inexplicably, there's a bit of *Santa Gamka's* Rooibaard in this photograph. And a bit of *Wolf*, *Wolf's* Jack, with his dewy, mossy armpits. The garden setting brings to mind (the not yet translated) *My Simpatie*, *Cerise*. There's even, perhaps, a bit of *My Beautiful Death's* Konstant Wasserman (an affective echo – not a logical connection or direct correlate – which I haven't yet properly processed myself). There's definitely more than a bit of the connective ferality of Jack and Matt on Rondebosch Common. I know the Wollondilly of *My Beautiful Death* and the Rondebosch Common of *Wolf*, *Wolf* are completely different spaces, but in this one photograph they are both activated, resonating together with equal affective urgency.

So there's productive meaning in the relation with the oeuvre, with affective meanings arising in the gaps, in the lilting ghosts, between the visual work on display here and the viewer's memory of the novels.

Seeing the potentiality in the relation between photograph and quoted passage opens up to the beyond of the text, allowing us queer effractions (to use John Champagne's term) into larger frameworks of belonging. To return to Venter's artist statement, this work seeks to visualise ways with which to 'invent and multiply and modulate himself, in order to translate his sexual experiences – and, most importantly, self-translate himself'. The forty-nine-and-one texts (the visuals and the literary oeuvre) here come to resemble a set of potential points of translatable

reference, ways of plugging into the oeuvre. What else is an oeuvre if not a porous and malleable sequence of affective potentiality; a series of moments of potentiality?

Addendum 2

Such words of gratitude, meant¹⁰²

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¹⁰² This study takes various paths, plugs into variant circuitry, crosses mediums and media, speaks in the voice of queer authors of the past, puts an ear to the chest for echoes across chapters and nationalities and provincial lines, looks in equal measure outward and inward to the contours of affect swirling around us to ultimately attempt the creation of an affective assemblage-as-response. This is not, ever, a one-man-job.

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