

EPISTEMOLOGIES OF POSSIBILITY:

Social movements, knowledge production and political transformation

Sarah R. Lamble

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**Kent Law School, University of Kent
Canterbury, Kent, UK**

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Abstract

Urgent global problems—whether military conflicts, economic insecurities, immigration controls or mass incarceration—not only call for new modes of political action but also demand new forms of knowledge. For if knowledge frameworks both shape the horizons of social intelligibility and chart the realms of political possibility, then epistemological interventions constitute a crucial part of social change. Social movements play a key role in this work by engaging in dissident knowledge practices that open up space for political transformation. But what are the processes and conditions through which social movements generate new ways of knowing? What is politically at stake in the various knowledge strategies that activists use to generate social change?

Despite a growing literature on the role of epistemological dimensions of protest, social movement studies tend to neglect specific questions of epistemological change. Often treating knowledge as a resource or object rather than a power relation and a social practice, social movement scholars tend to focus on content rather than production, frames rather than practices, taxonomies rather than processes. Missing is a more dynamic account of the conditions, means and power relations through which transformative knowledge practices come to be constituted and deployed.

Seeking to better understand processes of epistemological transformation, this thesis explores the relationship between social movements, knowledge production and political change. Starting from an assumption that knowledge not only represents the world, but also works to constitute it, this thesis examines the role of social movement knowledge practices in shaping the conditions of political possibility. Drawing from the context of grassroots queer, transgender and feminist organizing around issues of prisons and border controls in North America, the project explores how activists generate new forms of knowledge and forge new spaces of political possibility.

Working through a series of concepts—transformation, resistance, experience, co-optation, solidarity and analogy—this thesis explores different ways of understanding processes of epistemological change within social movement contexts. It considers processes that facilitate or enable epistemological change and those that limit or prohibit such change. Bringing together a range of theoretical perspectives, including feminist, queer, critical race and post-structuralist analyses, and drawing on interviews with grassroots activists, the thesis explores what is politically at stake in the different ways we conceptualise, imagine and engage in processes of epistemological change.

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Chapter 1

KNOWING OTHERWISE:

The problem of knowledge, the challenge of change and the emergence of new political possibilities

Introduction

As we move through the world, there are moments in our lives that we might describe as ‘life-changing’—experiences that we deem to have dramatically altered our sense of self, disrupted our expected path or shifted our broader understanding of social phenomena around us. Whether these are traumatic events (an encounter with violence, a brush with death) or joyful ones (the birth of a child, a journey to a special place) or something more uncertain (a personal discovery, a change of self-identity), such experiences can mark a significant shift in the ways we understand ourselves and others. For the way we previously inhabited, interpreted and perceived the world is no longer quite the same as it was before. Ordinary things in our lives seem different and take on new meanings. Ideas or assumptions we previously took for granted no longer seem true in quite the same way. We question, we contemplate and we rethink our previously held conceptions. In short, we come to know the world otherwise.¹

Of course, life-changing experiences are not the only way we shift our practices of knowing. Such changes also occur in more subtle ways through the

¹ I recognise that some readers may feel excluded by, or wish to remain outside, the various significations of the term ‘we’ as I deploy it throughout this thesis. In some ways, using the term ‘we’ is inevitably problematic as it immediately generates the question of who is included and excluded in its configuration. Although my use of the term ‘we’ does presume a reader who is interested in questions of social and political justice (broadly defined), I do not intend the term to denote inclusion in any specific community. Rather the term is meant to invite readers into a more collective sense of analysis and reflection, which would include disagreement and dissent. It is meant as a connective and collaborative ‘we’ rather than a unifying or regulating one.

accumulative effects of daily social interactions, personal relationships and political encounters. Moreover, experiences and events are not life-changing in themselves but are ascribed such status through broader cultural practices of meaning-making. These processes not only attach particular values, associations and interpretations to what become known as events and experiences, but also work to constitute those events and experiences themselves.² In this sense, the way we think and know is never solely an individual process but a fundamentally social one (Mannheim 1936; Swidler and Arditì 1994; Berger and Luckman 1966/1971). We might understand a particular phenomenon in one way at one point in time and come to understand it in a completely different way at a another point, without necessarily being able to pinpoint how we moved from one approach to the other. But whether attributed to a singular event or traced to a broader set of social factors, these processes that affect our sense of being in the world simultaneously alter our practices of knowing. In doing so, these shifts can reconfigure the boundaries of what we previously deemed ‘thinkable’ and ‘knowable’, thereby opening space for new possibilities of thought and action.

But what are the precise conditions and processes through which *knowing otherwise* becomes possible? Why do we experience some events in ways that reconfirm what we already know, whereas others prompt us to radically question more conventional modes of thought and knowledge? What moves us beyond minor changes in thinking and instead instigates the kinds of paradigm shifts that are necessary for more transformative social change to occur? What role do intentional efforts at social change—such as those enacted by social movements—play in the transformation of knowledge?

In its broadest sense, this thesis explores the social conditions, political processes and epistemological terms of *knowing otherwise*.³ It is concerned with the

² See Chapter Three for a further discussion of the relationship between experience, meaning-making and knowledge production.

³ For a similar although slightly different use of the concept, see Alexis Shotwell’s wonderful book *Knowing Otherwise* (2011). Although Shotwell is also interested in processes of social, political and epistemological change, she uses the term specifically to refer to more embodied, experiential and

means through which it becomes possible to move from one way (or set of ways) of knowing to another, particularly when these epistemological shifts operate as catalysts for broader social and political change. This project is thus concerned with epistemological openings: processes that make space for new ways of knowing and being, particularly when the question of what might emerge from that space is not known in advance. The space I refer to is both conceptual (thinking space) and material (political, economic and social space). This project thus considers how knowing practices can move, shift and unsettle established norms in ways that make room for political possibilities that were previously not there. It is about the openings that emerge when we question established truths and become open to new modes of thought and action.

Drawing primarily from the context of social movement struggles, this project aims to explore how activists engage in strategic knowledge practices that enable new political possibilities to emerge.⁴ It considers individual and collective knowing processes that enable us to ‘think the unthinkable’ and ‘know the unknowable’ by creating space for the unfathomable to become both imaginable and intelligible. For if knowledge frameworks both map the horizons of social intelligibility and chart the realms of political possibility, then epistemological interventions constitute a crucial part of social change (Norval 1996; Smith 1998).

More specifically, this thesis is concerned with processes of *epistemological transformation*. While the question of what constitutes *epistemological transformation* will be considered in more detail in Chapter Two, I use the term to refer to processes whereby knowing practices shift or change in fundamental or

tacit ways of knowing that differ from the traditional kinds of ‘propositional’ knowledge claims that have dominated western philosophy. For Shotwell, ‘knowing otherwise’ partly refers to the ways in which we come to know the world differently, but also the ways in which we know the world through means that exceed propositional claims. For example, her work considers the role of tacit forms of embodied knowledge in enabling processes of personal and social transformation to occur.

⁴ There is much debate over what constitutes a ‘social movement’ particularly in relation to questions of ‘old’ and ‘new’ social movements. For my purposes, I broadly follow della Porta and Diani’s definition of social movements as characterised by collective action focussing on conflicts, informal interaction networks, shared beliefs, solidarity, and use of protest (della Porta and Diani 1999, 13-15). See also Sidney Tarrow’s definition of ‘collective challenges based on common purposes and social solidarities, in sustained interaction with elites, opponents and authorities’ (Tarrow 1998, 4).

substantial ways. *Epistemological transformation* describes processes of change that are radical enough to fundamentally alter, restructure or recreate the substance, meaning or form of a particular knowing practice.⁵ In addition to exploring how knowledge practices undergo processes of transformation, the project also considers how knowledge practices can trigger or generate transformative effects more broadly. In this latter sense, I use the term *transformative epistemologies*: these are knowledge practices that generate transformative effects beyond themselves; transformative epistemologies are knowledge practices that create space—or act as catalysts—for broader forms of social and political change to occur. While epistemological transformation and transformative epistemologies are linked processes, I use each the terms to emphasize different dimensions of radical forms of epistemological change.

Of course it is immensely difficult to trace precisely how knowledge practices generate particular kinds of change. As such, this project does not seek to undertake a ‘cause-effect’ analysis in the sense of attributing particular outcomes to specific causal factors. This project also differs from other studies of social movement knowledge in the sense that it is not an investigation of struggles between competing ideologies (e.g. Marxism versus liberalism) or between different kinds of knowledge (e.g. activist knowledge versus state knowledge, or ‘experiential’ knowledge versus ‘scientific’ knowledge). It is also not concerned with processes that deliberately seek to replace one set of predefined truths for another (e.g. in more dogmatic forms of political or theological conversion). Rather this project considers questions of how to think about, conceptualise and understand the conditions and processes that give rise to epistemological openings more broadly. Prioritizing questions about how to understand process, change and flow in the generation of ideas and ways of knowing, this project considers knowledge practices that have socially transformative

⁵ Here, I loosely draw from Drucilla Cornell’s definition of *transformation* as change which is ‘radical enough to so dramatically restructure any system—political, legal, or social—that the identity of the system is itself altered’ (Cornell 1993, 1). While Cornell is not specifically referring to knowledge practices, her emphasis—on how transformation is a kind of change that dramatically reconfigures the very substance, ethos or essence of the thing it alters—is useful here.

potential, that is, processes that have the capacity to generate new possibilities for knowing and being in the world.

This project's emphasis on *processes* of epistemological transformation marks a deliberate effort to grapple with challenge of conceptualising change itself. For despite considerable efforts to conceptualise the dynamism and movement of social life, processes of change are notoriously difficult to capture within language and thought. Most commonly, processes of change are understood through measures of difference: phenomenon A was like X, and now it is like Y. Paradoxically, however, such measures of difference require change to be reduced to a set of momentary snapshots in time. Time-lapse photography, for example, allows us to watch a 30-second clip of a flower emerging from early bud to full bloom, which in 'real time' would take several days. This tool enables us to 'see', 'think' and 'understand' change through a framework that gives us the impression that we are witnessing 'live' movement or change. Such a framework, however, is actually an optical illusion.⁶ We are not witnessing change itself so much as we are watching a series of momentary snapshots that are shown in rapid succession; our brains are measuring small differences between one moment in time and another. While these comparisons may be useful in exploring the complex phenomenon of difference, they do not necessarily tell us *how* movement from one moment to the other actually takes place.⁷ Indeed, when we understand change in this way—through 'freeze frame' moments—we are engaged in what Brian Massumi calls conceptual 'stop operations'; 'we are stopping the world in thought. We are thinking away its dynamic unity, the continuity of its movements' (Massumi 2002, 6).

The trouble is that movement is difficult to capture in language. This is in part, because of the paradox of language itself; as soon as we try to describe something in words, we assert a set of meanings and significations that 'pin down' a

⁶ To say that this is an illusion is not to suggest that what we see is not 'real'; rather what we perceive is a virtual representation of reality—one that is always a partial and incomplete but nonetheless part of the real. See Chapter Two for further discussion of the relationship between the 'virtual' and the 'real'.

⁷ See also Bergson (1911/1970, 246-253) and Massumi (2002, 6) in their discussions of the paradox of Zeno's arrow, discussed in Chapter Two.

phenomenon—even if just momentarily—in ways that inevitably betray its complexity. As such it is difficult to find adequate concepts for describing and naming processes of change, even when the words themselves denote movement. Consider, for example, the concept of ‘knowledge production.’ Despite an immensely rich, wide-ranging and cross-disciplinary literature on ‘knowledge production’, the concept itself appears to have lost some of its theoretical force. ‘Knowledge production’, much like ‘social construction’, is now commonly used to describe almost any kind of meaning-making practice such that the term has come to *stand in for*, rather than give rise to, explanations of knowledge generation processes. While it may be accurate to say that articulation, interpretation, identification, appropriation, circulation, and dissemination of knowledge all constitute forms of knowledge production, the naming of practices as such does not necessarily reveal much about *how* those processes occur. So while this thesis certainly does not purport to solve the problem of conceptualising change itself, it seeks to explore what is politically at stake in the different ways we understand processes of epistemological change.

Working through a series of concepts—transformation, resistance, experience, co-optation, solidarity and analogy—I consider what these concepts offer, and how they are limited, for understanding processes of epistemological change. Chapter Three, for example, considers the role of resistance in the generation of transformative knowledge practices. It asks: Do we need to actively resist one way of knowing in order to create space for another? Or can we shift from one way of knowing to another through another means, say a diversion in thinking or a change in the direction of our inquiry? What moves resistance beyond a simple counter force to become something that generates more transformative outcomes or effects? Similarly, Chapter Four asks: what role does *experience* play in processes of epistemological transformation? When does experience generate new forms of knowing and when do knowing practices generate new experiences? So while the thesis maintains an overall focus on questions of how transformative knowledge practices occur and the means through which we might understand these processes, each chapter considers these concerns from a different conceptual site or example.

In doing so, the thesis aims to provide a set of conceptual mappings for exploring the processes and conditions of transformative epistemologies and epistemological transformations more broadly.

Context: Another World is Possible

This thesis is motivated by a set of political dilemmas that have arisen from the context of grassroots social movement struggles in the Canadian, USA and British contexts. More specifically, the project emerged from my own involvement in queer, feminist and transgender organizing around issues of imprisonment, state border controls and neoliberal globalisation. Originally, these struggles were the primary focus of the thesis, as I sought to explore and document the ways that grassroots queer, feminist and transgender activists engage in transformative knowledge practices around these specific issues. Having been involved in such activist work for many years, I found myself constantly grappling with a set of recurring questions and dilemmas around political imagination, knowledge production and social possibility. Hence this project was initially designed to explore these dilemmas by documenting and analysing activist knowledge practices in these contexts. As the project unfolded, however, I found myself grappling with more theoretical and methodological challenges, namely around how to conceptualise the process and conditions of epistemological transformation itself. While conceptual questions have now become the primary focus of the thesis, each chapter nevertheless draws from empirical examples within social movement struggles to ground, illustrate and think through the analysis. As such, in order to better understand the empirical context of the thesis, this section provides some background about the social movement struggles that motivated this project and the political dilemmas they raise.⁸

⁸ This project is a response to set of recurring conceptual and strategic dilemmas that arose from within that organizing work, but which I did not always have the time or thinking space to fully grapple with. While I reject the assumption that theory and practice are discrete phenomenon and believe that many conceptual dilemmas can be worked through the process of political struggle, I also recognise that the regular tempo of activist work (and the sense of urgency from going from one

Three main social movements formed the initial focus of the project: the anti-globalization (or alter-globalization) movement, the movement against border and immigration controls (i.e. struggles for the free movement of people) and the prison abolition movement.⁹ Each of these movements can be characterised as having global dimensions (in the sense that they are linked through international networks and have international aims), but are locally based (in the sense that most organising work takes place through local, regional and national groups). As such, these movements encompass a wide range of participants, groups and projects, each of which organise somewhat autonomously around specific goals and localised aims. At the same time, these varied struggles are connected by the broader ethos and aims of the particular social movement umbrella under which they organise. So although the case studies explored in Chapters Six and Seven might not be defined as social movements in and of themselves, they organise within and are explicitly connected to, larger social movement networks. As such I consider them within the umbrella of social movement organising.

It is also important to note that the project was initially conceived to focus on social movement organising in the Canadian context. Recognising the importance of historical, political and geographic factors in shaping activists struggles, I sought to locate my research in the regional context in which my own organising work had been based, and where questions that motivated the thesis had first arisen.¹⁰ However, as the project focus shifted to more conceptual questions, the regional focus also expanded. Having moved to England to undertake the PhD, the location of

project or task to another) does not always leave sufficient time for the kind of reflection that is enabled within academic contexts. This project is partly an attempt to carve out some thinking space to grapple with specific dilemmas that continue to trouble such political work.

⁹ See Appendix A for the Research Call for Participants.

¹⁰ The decision to focus on a national (rather than subnational or international) scale was also pragmatic. Because key decisions around imprisonment, borders and economic policy are primarily determined at a national level (even when occurring through regional or transnational frameworks and agreements), most activist work on these issues remains targeted at the national or subnational level. Further because I was specifically interested in queer and transgender organizing around issues of prisons, borders and globalization, which is a relatively small strand within the broader movements, I needed a scale large enough to include a range of activists and groups, but small enough to retain sufficient contextual specificity.

my own activist work also shifted as I became involved in social movement politics in Britain. Many of the questions I was grappling with, however, continued to be relevant within this new setting and thus continued to shape my analysis and thinking. Moreover, because the particular groups I have focussed on (namely groups that take a queer, feminist and transgender approach to issues of prisons, borders and globalization) are relatively small and grassroots-based with limited resources, they frequently share resources, tools and strategies across national borders and regional contexts. As such their strategic knowledge practices also are influenced by cross border analysis (see Chapter Seven). So while the two case studies in Chapter Six and Seven are primarily focussed on organizing work taking place in the Canadian context, the analysis is supplemented by material drawn from my own experience of organising in the British context as well as from my links with activist work in the US context. Arguably this scalar shift has the benefit of bringing a broader perspective to the overall analysis, but also has the limit of underplaying the contextual specificities and differences between and within each location.

While the social movements that motivate this thesis encompass a wide-ranging of projects, struggles and participants, the project was designed to focus on a more specific strand of organising that shares several specific characteristics. First, the social movement struggles that prompted this project are explicitly orientated towards 'radical' rather than reformist political goals. By radical, I am referring to social movements whose ultimate goals can only be fulfilled through broad-based social, political and economic change, and therefore require a fundamental transformation of existing institutions and structures of power.¹¹ The project was motivated, for example, by social movements that explicitly seek to abolish prisons, end state border controls and develop alternatives to neoliberal globalisation. Because such goals fall outside dominant social, legal and political norms, activists face the acute challenge of articulating their demands in ways that are both politically intelligible and practically viable. Such movements thus require creativity and imagination to 'think outside the box.' Particularly in the contemporary political

¹¹ For a brief discussion and critique of the use of the term 'radical', see Chapter Two.

landscape where neoliberal market rationalities regularly co-opt, assimilate and appropriate even the most grassroots political projects, it is difficult to engage in political work that does not slip into the very form or logic of that which one seeks to challenge.¹² Within these contexts, activists are increasingly faced with the challenge of how to think outside conventional political repertoires and beyond the traps of traditional political strategies. In this sense, the question of how to generate transformative knowledge practices is not simply an empirical or conceptual concern but a fundamentally political and strategic one.

Second, this project is inspired by activist struggles that do not simply critique existing social structures and institutions, but are involved in developing concrete alternatives. Prison abolitionists, for example, often argue that the struggle to abolish prisons is not only about dismantling the institutions that incarcerate people, but about developing alternative responses to violence, harm and insecurity. As Critical Resistance (a prison abolition group in the US) argues in their (2004) pamphlet on 'What is Abolition?': 'every time we oppose or try to tear something down, we need to build something sustainable in its place'.¹³ Such struggles are about,

build[ing] models today that can represent how we want to live in the future. It means developing practical strategies for taking small steps that move us toward making our dreams real and that lead the average person to believe that things really could be different. It means living this vision in our daily lives. (Critical Resistance 2004)

Likewise, anti-globalisation activists are known for setting up alternative social spaces at sites of protest, where decisions are made non-hierarchically, where basic needs such as food, shelter and childcare are collectively provided for and where environmental sustainability is a key organizing principle (George 2004; Chang et al.

¹² See also Chapter Five. For a discussion of neoliberalism as economic policy and political rationality, see Harvey (2005), and Brown (2005c).

¹³ Likewise, as activist-scholar Andrea Smith describes: 'I think its important for prison abolitionists to focus on prison abolition as a positive rather than a negative project. That is, it's not simply about tearing down prison walls, but it's about building alternative formations that actually protect people from violence, that crowd out the criminalization regime' (quoted in Samuels and Stein 2008, 5). See also the classic *Instead of Prisons: A Handbook for Abolitionists* (Prison Research Education Action Project and Critical Resistance 2005) as well as *Abolition Now: Ten Year of Strategy and Struggle Against the Prison Industrial Complex* (Critical Resistance 2008c).

2001; McNally 2002). Embracing a do-it-yourself ethos that prioritises direct action and community self-organisation above top-down leadership or representational politics, such movements are committed to collectively enacting change in the present as a means of developing possibilities for the future. Such movements are broadly committed to an ethos that ‘another world is possible’ not only in theory but also in practice—not only for an imagined future, but for an immediate present.

At the same time, the commitment to ‘another world’ is not a claim to know exactly what that world should or could be. As long-time Critical Resistance organizers Kai Lumumba Barrow emphasises: ‘It’s important for us to communicate with folks that we don’t have answers; we are like everybody else, trying to figure out how to change the world. We have analysis, but not answers’ (quoted in Samuels and Stein 2008, 4). In this way, the struggles that motivate this thesis can be characterised by an ethos of openness and experimentation, an attempt to discover new ways of social organizing rather than being driven by a preconceived idea of what the future must be.¹⁴ Hence, such movements not only require new kinds of knowledge and new ways of thinking to develop alternatives, but a recognition that the process of creating alternatives can be epistemologically generative. In this sense, this thesis is not only about how ‘thinking and knowing differently’ opens up space for new ways of acting, but also how ‘acting differently’ opens up new possibilities of thinking and knowing.

Third, this project is motivated by social movements that address law-related concerns but seek change that goes beyond the formal legal system itself. Recognizing the limits of rights-based legal reform, such movements tend to be wary of traditional litigation strategies and instead opt for more grassroots tactics.¹⁵ Groups like ‘No One Is Illegal,’ for example, engage in legal advocacy strategies (e.g. undertaking individual casework and lobbying around particular laws and policies), but their overarching objective is to challenge the notion of human illegality itself

¹⁴ See, for example, Conway (2005, 1-2) and Wainwright (1994, 90-112) on the significance of openness and experimentation with respect to social movement knowledge politics.

¹⁵ For a range of critiques of law reform struggles, particularly around LGBT issues, see Herman (1994), Smart (1989), Cossman (2002) and Spade (2009).

(see Chapter Seven). Likewise prison abolition activists challenge practices of criminalisation by questioning the norms around what constitutes a crime and the assumption that the criminal justice system is the only option for addressing social harms. By engaging in alternative ways of knowing, naming and understanding socio-legal norms, such activists are arguably shifting the political targets of law; they are transforming the social and cultural meaning of law itself. As such these struggles provide important sites for understanding how grassroots activists are engaged in strategic forms of knowledge production as a tactical response to the limits of liberal legal reform.

Fourth, the activist work considered in this project operates largely at a grassroots level, with little or no funding and at an organisational distance from the state. By grassroots, I am referring to loose-knit and community-based groups of activists that do not have large organisational structures, tend to have no or few paid staff (and are thus driven by volunteer labour), and do not operate within formal political party structures. While operating largely on a local and autonomous level, however, these groups are nonetheless driven by and connected to larger social movement goals and are thus distinct from struggles that exclusively focus on local issues, service and advocacy work or single-issue campaigns.

Fifth, this project is motivated by activist struggles that specifically address issues of gender and sexuality, but do not organize under the banner of traditional identity politics (e.g. trans rights or lesbian and gay rights). Such struggles instead bring questions of gender and sexuality to more issue-focused concerns, such as prisons, borders and globalisation. Indeed, queer and transgender politics are playing an increasingly important role in social justice struggles that have not been traditionally addressed as lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender or queer (LGBTQ) issues. In doing so, such groups are redefining the terrain of LGBTQ politics and prompting a rethinking of the relevance of gender and sexuality to broader social justice issues. As discussed in Chapter Six, for example, queer, transgender and gender

nonconforming¹⁶ activists are making strategic interventions in prisoner justice struggles by drawing attention to the role that sex and gender norms play in maintaining the prison system and vice versa. Rather than asking ‘what rights should a gay person have in prison?’ such groups might ask ‘how is sexuality, as a relation of power, relevant to the maintenance of the prison system?’ While such questions do not abandon questions of identity altogether, they place power relations rather than group identity at the centre of analysis.

The presence of queer and ‘Pink Block’ groups in anti-globalization protests, and the work of queer and trans activists in struggles against immigration detention (see Chapter Seven) illustrate further efforts to take up gender and sexuality politics within broader social justice struggles.¹⁷ These initiatives recognise the importance of identity but seek to avoid the pitfalls of more essentialist modes of identity politics. Because these modes of activism draw together previously under-connected issues (e.g. gender and globalization, sexuality and borders), they require new vocabularies and analysis. As such, organizers involved in such struggles are actively engaged in critical processes of knowledge production.¹⁸

¹⁶ I recognise the inability of any single term to encapsulate both the fluidity and specificity of people’s gender and sexual identities. However, for the purposes of this thesis, when referring to gender and sexual *identity terms*, I broadly use terms in the following ways: By *queer*, I refer to people whose sexual desires, identities and practices do not conform to heterosexual norms (including, but also going beyond, lesbian, gay, bisexual, two-spirit, trans and queer-identified people). By *trans*, I refer to people who identify or express gender differently than what is traditionally associated with the sex they were assigned at birth (e.g. transgender, transsexual, two-spirit, male-to-female and female-to-male people). By *gender nonconforming*, I refer to people who do not identify as trans, but whose gender presentation or identity does not conform to gender norms or expectations (e.g. women who present in a masculine way, but nonetheless identify as women, non-trans identified androgynous, intersex, gender-fluid and gender ambiguous people). See below for further discussion of queer and trans as political ethos rather than identity.

¹⁷ Such movements have arisen partly in the wake of ‘post-identity politics’, which tend to recognise the continuing significance of identity-based oppression as a materially experienced effect of power, but nonetheless remain wary of appealing to (essentialist) identity claims as a primary basis for seeking remedies to injustice. Such struggles also tend to take seriously the politics of intersectionality, namely in recognizing that different elements of social oppression (such as racism, classism, ableism, sexism and homophobia) do not operate as discrete formations but are produced through interlocking relations of power.

¹⁸ Such ‘alternative’ queer and transgender movements are also relatively under-evaluated when compared with more ‘mainstream’ gay and lesbian organizing and therefore warrant further attention (Namaste 2000; Currah and Spade 2007; Markson 2008).

My focus on queer and trans organizing thus stems from an interest in work that queer and trans-identified activists are engaged in, but also from an interest in a particular kind of queer and trans political approach. Although ‘queer’ is now commonly used as an umbrella term for a multiplicity of sex/gender identities (i.e., lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, two-spirited, etc.), its roots emerged in part from a critique of identity itself. Rather than trying to ‘normalize’ homosexuality in relation to heterosexuality (which is the aim of many recognition and rights-seeking projects), ‘queer’ seeks to question the norm itself and contest binary logics altogether (Butler 1993; Sedgwick 1990; Jagose 1996; Turner 2000; Halperin 2003). As David Halperin describes,

Queer is by definition whatever is at odds with the normal, the legitimate, the dominant. *There is nothing in particular to which it necessarily refers.* It is an identity without an essence. ‘Queer’ then, demarcates not a positivity but a positionality vis-à-vis the normative. (1995, 62 italics in original)

In this invocation, ‘queer’ is not so much an identity as a practice or a methodology. While ‘queer’ as an identity category and as a political project continues to be both perpetually contested and (ironically) normalized (Halperin 2003; Jagose 1996), it is this spirit of questioning the logic of normalcy that I want to highlight here. Likewise, trans politics, while grounded in the specific experience of trans-identified people, increasingly refers to a politics that is attentive to broader processes of embodied transition, identity crossing and somatic transformation. So when I refer to ‘queer and trans’ social movements, I am both describing movements comprised primarily of LGBTQ-identified people and referring to movements that embody a ‘queer’ and/or ‘trans’ ethos—regardless of the specific identity of their participants.

This project also emerges from an acute sense of needing to move beyond—or get ‘unstuck’ from—certain ways of thinking that limit the possibilities for engaging in transformative modes of social change. Amidst declarations of the ‘end of history,’ the so-called triumph of global capitalism and the growing ascendancy of neoliberal political rationalities, it is difficult to make space for politics that do not capitulate to neoliberalism on the one hand or nostalgically lament for the return of a

more democratic and egalitarian (i.e. Keynesian or socialist) past that never fully existed on the other (Brown 2005c). In many ways this thesis is about finding ways of taking up political struggle that do not fall into the same traps—the same rationalities and logics—that created the very problems we seek to address. For as Audre Lorde said famously, ‘the master’s tools will never dismantle the master’s house. They may allow us to temporarily beat him at his own game, but they will never enable us to bring about genuine change’ (Lorde 1984, 112). Yet escaping the master’s house is not easy. If, as Foucault suggests, there is no outside of power, and if as Althusser suggests, there is no outside of ideology, then in some ways the master’s house is everywhere (Foucault 1980, 2000; Althusser 1971).¹⁹ So a politics of getting ‘unstuck’ is not about seeking a utopian place outside of power and ideology but about recognizing that there is always space for movement, opportunities for change, capacities for other possibilities. The challenge is to find, create and make use of those spaces. This project is thus driven by a desire to better understand the conditions and processes through which such possibilities emerge.

Key Concepts and Themes

a) Power, knowledge and meaning-making processes

This project begins with an assumption that making knowledge is a political act. In other words, social processes of meaning-making are not simply ways of describing a pre-existing world, but work to constitute the world in ways which open space for some political possibilities and foreclose others. As such, making change in the world is not simply a matter of acting differently; social and political change requires new ways of knowing, naming and understanding the world.

¹⁹ To say that there is no outside of power or ideology is not to suggest that there is no outside domination. As discussed in Chapter Three, while relations of power are often unequal, the exercise of power does not necessarily entail relations of domination. See also Cooper (1995, Chapter 2).

More specifically I start from an understanding of knowledge that is broadly characterised by four overlapping features. First, following Foucault, knowledge is coextensive with—and therefore inseparable from—power. As Foucault describes, ‘it is not possible for power to be exercised without knowledge, it is impossible for knowledge not to engender power’ (Foucault 1980, 52). Indeed, because knowledge is involved in the production of truth claims—truths that works to ‘normalise’ and produce particular social relations—it is always an exercise in power. Likewise, power is an epistemological relation in so far as it operates through discourses and practices of knowing; power is exercised through processes of naming, identifying, classifying and categorizing, which generate particular social relations, norms and hierarchies.

Second, as a relation of power, knowledge is a practice rather than an object. While power relations may generate knowledge *effects* that become entrenched over time and are treated with object-like status (i.e., facts, truth claims), the meanings of knowledge claims are never stable; knowledge claims must be constantly made and remade through ongoing practices of meaning-making. So in contrast with much of the social movement literature, which tends to treat knowledge as an object, resource or framing device (see Chapter Two), I approach knowledge as an active practice and ongoing process. For this reason, this thesis primarily uses the terminology of *knowledge practices* or *processes* rather than ‘knowledge’ per se.²⁰

Third, all knowledge practices are situated and partial, meaning they are conditioned by the time, place and particular location of the subject making those knowledge claims (Haraway 1991, Chapter 9). I therefore resist the possibility that any knowledge claim is absolute or objective. In other words, I reject the ‘god-trick’ of universal knowledge claims, which presume to see from everywhere and nowhere at the same time. Having said that, I also resist the lapse into relativism. The problem with both universalist truths and particularist relativisms is that both positions are socially and political unaccountable. By contrast, situated knowledges are explicitly

²⁰ This emphasis on knowledge *practices* is also meant to highlight the embodied, inhabited and experiential dimensions of knowledge work, and to move away from the conventional separation of thought and action that is common to the western philosophical tradition. See Chapter Four for further discussion of embodied and experience-based knowledge practices.

recognised as coming from a particular location (which is invariably limited and partial) and are embedded within specific relations of power (Haraway 1991, Chapter 9).

Fourth, as a social practice of meaning-making, knowledge production is a material phenomenon rather than a 'merely' representational one. In other words, knowledge practices do not simply describe or represent 'reality'; knowledge practices also shape reality (Berger and Luckman 1966/1971; Foucault 1978/1990, 1980). Knowledge is not simply a practice of 'pure' thought or rationality (in the Cartesian sense of a mind/body split), but one that is embedded in the world of embodied experiences and material practices (see Chapter Four). As such, knowledge practices are textured by their material contexts. At the same time, 'producing reality' through knowing practice is not a free-for-all exercise; knowing practices are contingent upon the repertoire of existing (albeit ever-changing) norms, values and meaning-making structures that shape a given social context, situation and epistemological community. So while the specific nature of the relationship between 'knowledge' and 'reality' is highly contested, it is clear that no simple line can be drawn between the two. The problem then, as Haraway describes, 'Is how to have *simultaneously* an account of radical historical contingency for all knowledge claims and knowing subjects, a critical practice for recognizing our own 'semiotic technologies' for making meanings, *and* a no-nonsense commitment to faithful accounts of a 'real' world'(1991, 187). This challenge—of navigating the relationship between the material and the conceptual—is one that I will explore further below. So while the specific nature of the relationship remains contested, I nonetheless work from a general assumption that knowledge practices both shape, and are shaped by, the material conditions of their making.

b) Moving meaning, shifting power: conceptualising epistemological change

Seeking to better understand the processes and conditions of *knowing otherwise*, this project grapples with the challenges of conceptualising epistemological change more broadly. For as noted above, the conceptual tools commonly used for understanding and imagining change are often limited in their capacity to capture the dynamism of transformative practices in process. As I argue in Chapter Two, much of the literature on social movements treats knowledge as a resource, object or tool to be used in support of political goals and thus focuses on questions of knowledge content rather than process. Such approaches tend to frame knowledge in largely static terms, making it difficult to explore precisely *how* processes of epistemological change occur within social movement contexts.

Attempting to develop a more dynamic and open-ended account of processes of epistemological change, I suggest that such practices can be understood as *processes of movement*. By movement, I refer to a sense of shifting, moving, and reconfiguring meaning-making practices. For if we accept that knowledge is never absolute and that meaning is not fixed but is perpetually made and remade, then all practice of meaning-making are practices in motion.²¹ Moreover, it is precisely the dynamic character of meaning-making processes—the fact that meaning is always ‘on the move’—which gives knowledge practices their generative power. If this is the case, then tracing such knowledge movements can potentially help understand processes of epistemological change.

²¹ This is the case whether one takes a structuralist or poststructuralist approach to language. For if Ferdinand de Saussure is correct in demonstrating that language functions diacritically, then the meaning of a sign is never present in itself but only in relation to all other signs, and the appearance of differences do not originate in essences but through relational effects (Saussure 1916/1974). Without positive essences, the meanings of signs are both temporally deferred (through the incessant reference to what a sign is not rather than what it is) and spatially differentiated (through distances which make proximate things discernible from each other). This simultaneous processes of deferring and differing, encapsulated in Derrida’s term *différance*, radically contests the presumption of a transcendental signifier—the ultimate word, presence, essence, truth or reality which offers a foundation for thought – as meaning is never present outside the system of differences (Derrida 1978, 1982).

By saying that ‘knowledge moves’, I am not referring to the conventional approach of treating knowledge as a resource-object that can be moved from one location to another (i.e. moving marginalised knowledges into more mainstream domains) (see Chapter Two). Rather, I am referring to processes of movement that are embedded within the practice of knowing itself. In other words, I want to trace the ways that meaning-making movements occur *within* and *across* knowledge practices and how those movements generate new ways of knowing. We might think, for example, of the popular children’s game of ‘grapevine’ or ‘broken telephone’.²² The game begins when one player whispers a short story or complicated sentence to the next player. The second player then whispers the story to the third player, the third to the fourth and so on. Inevitably the story changes along the way because players have misheard, misremembered, or reinterpreted the previous version, or have deliberately changed elements of the story. When the game concludes with the final player who tells the story aloud, the narrative has usually turned into something rather amusing and often bizarre—much to the delight of the players. The game nicely illustrates how knowledge is not merely transferred as a stable object from one to another, but undergoes changes in the process—changes that sometimes have a profound effect on meaning. Such changes can arise from a variety of factors, such as environment (e.g. whether the game is played in a quiet room or outside on windy day), communication modes (e.g. tone, volume or clarity of each speaker) and individual agency (e.g. whether players deliberately choose to alter the story or not). The game also depends on skill levels and power relations at work in the group. Very young children, for example, might have more trouble than older children in remembering the details of a complicated story. Similarly the story involves a particular cultural reference that some children are not familiar with, they may not understand its meaning in the same way. The game is also highly unpredictable; one cannot know in advance what the outcome of the story will be. While the game operates primarily through substitutions, omissions and

²² In Britain, the game is popularly—and problematically—known as ‘Chinese Whispers’, a title that stems from a legacy of orientalist imaginations in Europe (Ballaster 2005, 203-207).

distortions of *words* rather than of *ways of knowing*, the game nonetheless illustrates how meaning-making practices can move, change and transform through a combination of contextual factors, power relations and varied processes of articulation.

This thesis explores epistemological movements in several different but overlapping ways: as practices of transferring meaning from one context to another (Chapter Two and Chapter Seven); as shifts in knowledge-power relations (Chapter Two and Chapter Six); as processes of entanglement and disentanglement (Chapter 5); and as reconfigurations in relationships between knowers (Chapter Six). I also consider knowledge movements in terms of epistemological border crossings—as processes where concepts criss-cross knowledge boundaries or push the limits of knowledge ‘norms’ in ways that generate novel modes of knowing (Chapter Seven). Although such knowledge movements are fluid, contingent and unpredictable, they can be arguably traced or mapped in ways that reveal their pathways and trajectories.

Of course, epistemological movement is not always politically desirable. ‘Freezing’ or ‘stabilizing’ knowledge can also be a useful political strategy—particularly if one aims to prevent a particular knowledge practice from being co-opted or shifted in counter-productive ways (see Chapter Five). One might, for example, hold steadfastly to a particular understanding of ‘the university’ (and a set of pedagogical and institutional knowledge practices that go with that understanding) in order to resist efforts to privatise or commodify higher education. But such strategies arguably require an awareness of the processes and conditions of epistemological transformation in order to prevent undesired forms of change. So my analysis is not meant to necessarily valorise ‘movement’ over ‘stasis’ but to better understand the processes and conditions through which knowledge movements work to shift, alter or sustain particular ways of knowing.²³

²³ For a critique of feminist political investments in ‘movement’—and the implications for disability politics—see May and Ferri (2005).

This emphasis on knowledge movements nevertheless poses a dilemma for thinking about processes of epistemological transformation: if all knowledge practices are perpetually moving, what distinguishes the more minor and mundane kinds of movement from those which generate more 'radical' or 'transformative' effects? What differentiates the kinds of knowledge movements that are part of all practices of meaning-making and the kinds of movements that generate more transformative effects? Exploring this question in Chapter Two, I suggest that transformative knowledge practices can be understood as those that not only challenge or reconfigure more established ways of knowing but also significantly alter or disrupt dominant relations of power. So while all knowledge practices involve a constant ebb and flow of meaning-making, more transformative knowledge practices are those that challenge hegemonic relations of power.

Nevertheless, distinctions between knowledge practices cannot be made in an abstract or de-contextualised way. As such, another key argument recurring throughout the thesis is that all processes of epistemological change are temporally and spatially contingent, and the context in which those processes occur is crucial for understanding the conditions and possibilities for change. A knowledge practice that works to reinforce the status quo in one context might radically shift knowledge practices in another. For example, as discussed in Chapter Seven, when a concept is used in its original or 'home' context, it may replicate existing norms and ideas within that environment, but when it crosses a boundary and is deployed in a different context, it may generate more transgressive or transformative effects. Conversely, when a knowledge practice is removed from its original context, it sometimes loses its force and power. For example, when the concept of 'girl power' is divorced from its feminist empowerment values and is used instead to market brand-name commodities for young women, it arguably loses much of its transformative potential.

In other words, knowledge movements are not equal. The way that knowledges move and the *directions* they take are important. As navigational tools that effectively map out the world before us, knowledge practices arguably operate

as ‘orientation devices’; they direct our attention towards some things and not others; they bring some things to the fore while other things recede to the background (Ahmed 2006b, 2006a, 2010). As such, I argue that the direction, orientation and ‘navigational force’ of knowledge movements are crucial for understanding processes of epistemological change. For as we change our practices of knowing, we also change our sense of orientation to the world around us. Processes of epistemological transformation occur not only through these orientations, but through processes of *disorientation* or *reorientation* that reconfigure our social mappings (see Chapter Seven).

To describe knowledge practices as ‘orientation devices’ is not to suggest that shifts in knowing practices merely provide a different perspective or vantage point on a pre-given reality. Rather, as I argue throughout this thesis, when we re-navigate our understanding and movements in the world, the world itself becomes constituted differently. Our sense of being in the world—and the scope for possibility that we can imagine for that world—is shaped by the objects, ideas and social phenomenon that appear within our reach, the sensations and feelings that are generated by the focus of our attention, and the sense of perspective that comes from directing our knowing practices in particular ways (Ahmed 2006b). These orientations can thus shape the actions we take up in the world. As I argue in Chapter Seven, for example, the kinds of metaphors and analogies activists use can shift political attention and focus organizing energies in particular directions, which results in resources being channelled towards some things and not others. Seeking to better understand this relationship between how knowledge practices can reorient knowing subjects (both individually and collectively) and reconfigure social relations is thus a central theme explored in this thesis.

c) Navigating the interface of the material and the conceptual

Another dilemma that recurs throughout the thesis is how to understand the relationship between the material and the conceptual dimensions of knowledge

specifically in relation to processes of epistemological change. For if knowledge practices are materially bound, then epistemological change arguably requires a transformation in the material conditions of knowing. At the same time, changing material conditions arguably requires new modes of understanding. So how then should we understand the role of, and relationship between, the material and the conceptual in generating possibilities for *knowing otherwise*? In what ways do material conditions limit and facilitate the possibilities of knowing and how do particular ways of knowing limit and facilitate the possibilities for material change?

Underlying this dilemma is the longstanding debate between materialists and idealists: do ideas emerge from reality or does reality emerge from ideas? Or do ideas themselves constitute reality? My purpose in this project is not to resolve these dilemmas. Rather my focus is more specific and methodological: I am interested in questions of how to navigate the complex interface between the material and the conceptual when investigating processes of epistemological change. From a methodological perspective, the tension between the conceptual and the material is not necessarily a limit but potentially productive and generative. For it is not that we simply imagine concepts and then 'apply' them to material situations on the one hand, or that we undertake empirical analysis and then 'derive' concepts from those situations on the other. Rather, the conceptual and the material dimensions of knowledge are constantly informed and constituted by each other. As Mieke Bal describes: 'only practice can pronounce on theoretical validity, yet without theoretical validity no practice can be evaluated' (2002, 14). My analysis is thus marked by series of ongoing movements between the more materially grounded problems that motivate the project (e.g. the violence of imprisonment, the problem of border controls, the globalization of neoliberal economic policies) and the more-conceptually oriented thinking tools with which I seek to explore those problems (e.g. transformation, resistance, solidarity, power). Hence my thinking vacillates between using material situations to think through concepts and using concepts to think through material situations.

Yet the distinctions between the material and conceptual dimensions of knowledge are hardly straightforward. As suggested in Chapter Six, for example, the material and conceptual elements of solidarity-based knowledge practices are not easily separated; solidarity is both a conceptual ideal that activists deploy to mobilise a set of values, expectations and goals, and a material practice that refers to particular kinds of actions, behaviours and organizational strategies. Just as the ideal of solidarity works to shape and guide actions, the actions also work to shape and define the ideal. Moreover, what we understand as ‘material reality’ is always mediated through and conditioned by our conceptual practices. As discussed in Chapter Four, what we come to know as ‘experience’ is not simply the raw material of perception that we subsequently interpret and translate into formal knowledge claims; experience is itself brought into being through particular ways of knowing that name and constitute ‘reality’ in specific ways.

As such, my analysis in this project seeks to better understand how concepts move through, across and within the material—and vice versa. By this, I refer to the ways in which the conceptual and material dimensions of knowledge both intersect and interact. In Chapter Six, for example, I consider how knowledge practices literally move, shift and travel across material barriers like prison walls. For the physical walls that stand between prisoner and non-prisoner have a profound impact on what kind of ‘knowing relations’ are possible. The monitoring of prison letters means that some kinds of knowledge are literally prohibited from entering the prison. These prohibitions occur not only because letters are physically stopped by prison authorities, but also because surveillance can function as a pre-emptive force that restricts what people choose to write about in the first place. In this way, such prohibitions have the potential to block not only the *communication* of knowledge, but also its *creation*.²⁴ This issue is a particular concern for lesbian and gay prisoners

²⁴ Of course the boundary between communicating knowledge and creating knowledge is not straightforward. But if we consider writing, artwork and other forms of expression as not simply *communicating* knowledge, but also as vital form of expression, exploration and imagination, then factors that limit and restrict those expressions arguably impinge on space for knowledge generation. This may be particularly acute in prison, where opportunities for creative expression are limited.

who may not want their sexuality to be known in prison, which then makes it difficult to obtain support around those issues. At the same time, there are also 'non-material' factors that block the movement of knowledge across prison walls. Broader social attitudes, media stereotypes and popular assumptions about prisoners, for example, can function as a greater restrictive force in relationships of solidarity than the physical walls that isolate prisoners from society. Yet ultimately both reinforce each other: the walls are tolerated in part because of the social assumptions made about prisoners, and such assumptions are perpetuated in part because prisoners are kept behind those walls. Yet despite these barriers, the movement of knowledge across prison walls can occur with remarkable resilience. Knowledge sometimes travels in ways that people literally cannot. Different knowledge practices sometimes resonant or reverberate across barriers in surprising or unexpected ways. Simple words on a piece of paper can 'come to life' in significant ways.

So in negotiating the interface between the material and the conceptual, my approach is characterised by two broad premises: First, I treat conceptual practices as materially *contingent*, but not materially *determined*. So while knowledge practices are spatially and temporally located and therefore constituted by the material conditions of their making, this does not mean that knowledge practices are pre-determined by time and place. As I argue throughout this project, knowledge practices are fluid, flexible and always changing. Knowledge must be made and remade. Even the most deeply entrenched knowledge practices must be reasserted in order to command a sense of certainty, thus leaving them perpetually open to contestation. As such nothing can be fully or completely known; we are always in process of coming to know; knowing is always becoming (Grosz 1999c). For that reason, while material conditions may restrict the scope of epistemological practice in ways that make some things more possible than others, these conditions do not dictate in narrow terms how those possibilities might unfold.

Second, concepts do not simply provide thinking frameworks in an abstract sense; concepts 'do' material things in the world; they are thinking devices with material effects: they organize thought, mobilize meaning, provide bridges between

thinking and action. Concepts, like all knowledge practices, are performative; concepts bring the world into being and alter that being (Mol 2002; Mol and Law 2002; Law 2004). At the same time, to say that knowledge works to constitute the world is not to fall prey to crude forms of social constructionism, which claim that nothing exists in the world except what we name, articulate and understand through language. As I argue in Chapter Four, just because we cannot easily access 'experience' outside the realm of language does not mean that there is no 'material reality' or that everything in the world can be reduced to a 'text' (even if a text is understood in a broad rather than narrow sense).

In navigating the relationship between the conceptual and the material, this project contributes to broader debates about the relationship between epistemology (knowing) and ontology (being). In more conventional philosophical approaches, epistemology has been concerned with matters of truth: epistemology is a question of how accurately knowledge represents or reflects reality. From this perspective, knowing is a way of understanding or interpreting being. Yet in the wake of poststructuralist critiques of universal and transcendent truth claims, many thinkers have shifted attention away from questions of epistemology to focus on matters of ontology.²⁵ Resisting this move, I would argue that a rejection of universal truth claims does not require an abandonment of epistemology. Indeed, I would follow those who insist that ontology and epistemology cannot be separated, that knowing and being (or becoming) are always intertwined (Alcoff 1999; Grosz 1999a). Knowing is itself a practice of way-finding that both 'derives' from and 'intervenes' in the world. Exploring the ways in which such interventions are possible, however, requires greater attention to the processes through which knowing comes into being, and being emerges from knowing.

²⁵ Some also declare this move analytically but still remain concerned with questions of epistemology. For example, in the introduction to her wonderful book, *The Body Multiple: Ontology in medical practice* (2002), Annemarie Mol explicitly argues for a move away from epistemology in favour of ontology. Yet throughout the book she continually returns to questions of epistemology as deeply entangled with questions of ontology. So in my view, she does not move away from epistemology per se, but rather moves away from a particular *kind* of epistemology, namely one that measures knowledge claims according to their capacity to accurately represent a singular ontological truth.

d) Knowing relations: generating possibility through connection

If processes of epistemological transformation can be understood as forms of *knowledge movement*, they can be also understood as changes in *knowing relations*. By this I mean that processes of epistemological transformation both generate and emerge through shifts in relationships between and among knowers and knowing practices. In other words, knowledge practices do not simply change ‘in and of themselves’ but also shift through reconfigurations of their connections to, and relationships with, other knowers and other knowing practices. In Chapter Six, for example, I argue that prison solidarity practices not only facilitate movement of knowledge across prison walls, but also alter relationships between knowing subjects on either side of the boundary. Prisoners and non-prisoners (both individual and collective)²⁶ can come to know themselves differently as a result of the relationships they form with each other. Such relationships are important, I argue, because they provide opportunities to remake, reconfigure, and intervene in power relations. Exploring the points of connection, disconnection and reconnection that emerge from such relationships, this thesis asks how and why *knowing relations* matter for social and political change.

This emphasis on *knowing relations* is motivated by an ethos that I would describe as *a politics of connection*. Seeking to generate new ways of thinking, knowing, and acting by actively forming new epistemological and political links, a politics of connection explores the generative capacities that arise from points where knowledge practices meet and intersect. As discussed in Chapter Six, for example, when queer and trans prisoner solidarity groups make connections between issues of

²⁶ Many epistemologists who understand knowledge production is a social practice (i.e. an act that takes place within a community of knowers), nonetheless argue that knowing can only ever be an individual practice. From this perspective, while knowing might happen *within* a social context and be influenced by particular epistemic communities, ultimately only an individual can ‘know’. However, I would argue, following feminist, queer and other critiques of the individual rational subject, thinking can be a collective as well as individual practice and that ‘epistemic communities’ are a crucial part of knowing practices. See Matheisen (2007), Tollefseh (Tollefsen 2007) and Hakli (2007).

gender and sexuality and issues of imprisonment, they arguably generate new ways of understanding both gender/sexual regulation and carceral forms of control. Drawing attention to the ways that sexual and gender violence operates as a key mode of disciplinary power within prisons, for example, can reveal how sex and gender norms not only harm LGBTQ people in prison, but all prisoners (albeit in different ways and with different effects). In making these connections, queer and trans prisoner solidarity projects challenge LGBTQ organizations to better address prison issues and challenge prison groups to better address issues of gender and sexuality, thus reconfiguring the knowledge claims associated with both. These connections can thus serve to link struggles and build coalitional politics in transformative ways.²⁷

It is important to emphasise, however, that a politics of connection is not the same as a politics of unity or coherence. When non-imprisoned people make links with imprisoned people through letter-writing projects, for example, their connection does not necessarily depend on a sense of unity or similarity, but a willingness for understanding and commitment to relationship-building. Indeed, as I argue in Chapter Six, fostering connective relationships is not necessarily about prioritising sameness over difference (i.e. downplaying differences in the name of unity). A politics of connection neither fears nor valorises difference, but understands difference as a relational phenomenon and a site of potential linkage. For connection is the place where different things meet, rather than where they become one. Here I follow Donna Haraway's insistence that knowing subjects are never whole, but only partial. As Haraway argues:

The knowing self is partial in all its guises, never finished, whole, simply there and original; it is always constructed and stitched

²⁷ For another inspiring example, see the Statement on Gender Violence & The Prison Industrial Complex, jointly written by Critical Resistance and INCITE Women of Color Against Violence (available online: <http://www.incite-national.org/index.php?s=92>). See also Critical Resistance and INCITE! (2008)). This statement—which has become a key organizing tool in grassroots anti-violence struggles in Canada and the US—challenges the ways that feminist anti-violence movements and anti-prison movements often work in contradiction with each other. Seeking to find ways of better addressing all forms of gendered violence, the statement outlines a set of core values and organizing priorities that make links between interpersonal violence and state violence.

together imperfectly, and *therefore* able to join with another, to see together without claiming to be another. [original emphasis] (1991, 193)

In other words, connection does not need to be full and complete to bear political potential. It is precisely this partial character that leaves room for multiple connections and generative relationships to be established.

Attending to relationships of connection, however, also requires attentiveness to practices of disconnection. For processes of epistemological transformation do not only emerge from points of connection and resonance, but also from spaces of disconnection and dissonance. As discussed in Chapter Four and Six, when our ‘experience’ or ‘sense’ of the world conflicts with dominant knowledge claims we are told about that world, it can prompt a rethinking of social truths in important ways. Relationships that feel troubling, unsettling or disharmonious can prompt important opportunities for questioning and critical reflection.

Exploring relationships of connection and disconnection is also helpful for understanding broader changes in knowledge practices, or what we might describe as ‘paradigm shifts.’ As Thomas Kuhn argued in the case of scientific revolutions, paradigm shifts do not occur simply through the accumulation of knowledge, but through changes in knowing relationships (Kuhn 1962/1970, 1987, 1979). A ‘paradigm’ is itself a concept that designates connectedness; it is a set of links or relationships which, when given priority or importance over other relationships, forms an overall framework of coherence (Mol 2002, 73). As Kuhn’s work demonstrates, paradigm shifts occur when connecting relationships change: when anomalies that do not fit or ‘connect within’ an existing paradigm can no longer be dismissed as exceptional or trivial (i.e. when those anomalies gain greater importance or significance) new explanatory frameworks becomes necessary. Paradigm shifts thus occur when one set of connections gives way to another. It is precisely those changes in connection and disconnection that concern this thesis—how epistemological relations shift and change in ways that generate different kinds of knowing possibilities.

Methodologies

a) Interviews

Because this project began as a more empirically focussed study of how particular social movements generate new forms of knowledge, I initially undertook a set of interviews with activists involved in those struggles. My purpose was to gain insights into the kinds of strategies activists use to change knowing frameworks and to open up spaces for more radical political possibilities to emerge. I chose to focus on struggles that I myself had been involved in, both because I am interested in those issues and have background knowledge about them, but also because I thought it would make me more accountable as a researcher.

Interviewees were sought primarily through my own organizing networks in the Canadian context. I circulated a call out (see Appendix A) for interviewees on various email list serves and I also contacted individual activists that I knew from my own involvement in organizing.²⁸ The result was fifteen qualitative interviews with activists who broadly self-identified as queer or trans (or somewhere along the spectrum of gender and sexually dissident identities), who were also involved in anti-prison, anti-border or globalization struggles in the Canadian context. Two interviews took place in person (and were audio recorded), five interviews took place through telephone or online (Skype) conversations (also audio recorded), and eight conversations took place via typewritten online 'instant message' platforms (GoogleChat and Skype). While there were some differences in the quality of material I gained from audio conversations versus typewritten ones, for the purposes of the

²⁸ The interview process was pre-approved by the Kent Law School's Research Ethics Advisory Group and conducted in accordance with the UK Socio-Legal Studies Association's Statement of Principles of Ethical Research Practice as well as the Canadian Tri-Council Policy on Ethical Conduct for Research Involving Humans, 1998 (with 2000, 2002 and 2005 amendments). My approach was also guided by online discussions about research involving queer and trans-identified people, which took place on the transacademics.org group email list. See also Hale (1997), Martin and Meezan, (2003), Green and Dickey (2007).

project these differences were not significant.²⁹ Interviewees were invited to complete a brief demographics questionnaire (see Appendix C), which revealed that participants came from a range of (self-identified) class, racial, geographic and educational backgrounds. However, given that the interviewees were self-selected and invited, I make no claim that they are a representative sample.

Because I interviewed activists who were involved in political struggles that I myself have been involved in, but not necessarily in the same specific organizing groups, I undertook interviews as a partial 'insider' and partial 'outsider'.³⁰ Committed to the broader aims of these movements but also wanting to engage critical discussion and debate around these movements, I would describe my general approach to the interviews as one of 'friendly critique'.³¹

Many activist-academics have written of the political dilemmas of conducting politically motivated research in contexts where the researcher is also a participant (see for example, Reinharz 1992; Cancian 1993; Routledge 1996; Fuller 1999; Doyle 1999; Naples 2003; Frampton et al. 2006a; Hale 2006). These dilemmas include a range of issues: navigating power relations between 'researcher' and 'researched'; negotiating tensions between remaining accountable to the social movements that one is part of while also meeting the requirements of an academic project;

²⁹ Having completed only fifteen interviews, I cannot draw definitive conclusions about the differences in conversational form. However, in general, I found it was easier to develop a sense of friendly rapport with interviewees when the conversations were in person or by audio conversation. I also found the typed conversations seemed disjointed in some ways. At the same time, perhaps because interviewees could quickly edit their typed responses before sending them, I found that the typed conversations often produced much more focussed and precise comments. For discussion of the benefits and limits of various online interview techniques, see Volda et al. (2004) Stieger and Göritz (2006), Opdenakker (2006), Kazmer and Xie (Kazmer and Xie 2008).

³⁰ Of the fifteen people I interviewed, seven were people I had previously met through activist networks, and four of those seven were people I had worked closely with on activist projects.

³¹ As someone who is personally and politically invested in these projects, there is of course a risk that I will unduly romanticise them or fail to recognise things that an 'outsider' might be more attentive to. This is a risk I have tried to be conscious of throughout the research and writing process. At the same time, my political investment in these projects also sustains a commitment to critique; for if such projects are to 'succeed' they require (as I argue in Chapter Six) a self-reflexivity and attentiveness to limits and shortcomings. So rather than seeking to overcome either the insider or outsider aspects of my position as a researcher, I have tried instead to be self-conscious of—and explicit about—the impact of my location and perspective on my research.

maintaining a self-reflective approach to interpreting research material; negotiating one's political values in relations to one's research findings; avoiding assumptions based on one's organizing history; not exploiting one's position (as either an academic or as an activist) in ways that are harmful or disempowering for research participants. Wary of these issues (and having myself been interviewed several times as an activist), I deliberately set up my interviews in a way that I thought would be not only useful for my project, but also useful to other organizers.

Thinking of my own experiences of doing activist work—where I often move from one urgent issue to another with little time to stop and reflect—my questions were designed to give activists a chance to pause and reflect on the kinds of strategic knowledge practices they engage in. In some ways this proved to be a fruitful strategy, both in generating useful material but also in generating a positive response from the people I interviewed. At the same time, as I continued with the interviews, I realised that there were certain questions I wanted to explore, which would not necessarily be answered through the interviews. Because the questions I was asking were so broad, I found it challenging to pose questions in a way that were not too abstract on the one hand, or too leading on the other. Moreover, although several interviewees commented that they thought the process was interesting and helpful, I also became concerned that the process was perhaps not as useful to activists as I had originally hoped. So while the interviews I conducted were immensely rich and helpful, I felt wary of continuing to use up valuable activist time for something that would not necessarily be of much direct benefit to those particular activist struggles. Having enough material to work with at that point anyway, I stopped conducting interviews and turned to other sources of material to pursue the research questions that were troubling me. As such, the direct use of material from those interviews is limited almost exclusively to Chapter Six (and to a lesser degree Chapter Seven).

b) Concept-methodology

In addition to drawing from empirical research material, this thesis takes a methodological approach of ‘working through concepts’: it asks what work particular concepts do and what insights they offer in thinking through particular problems and dilemmas. In this sense, the project seeks to ‘activate’ concepts in different ways by rethinking the relationships that concepts have with particular ways of knowing. Working through concepts in this way may not solve a particular dilemma in an instrumentalist way, but it can help us to discover new methods for thought, analysis and action. As Mieke Bal describes, ‘While groping to define, provisionally and partly, what a particular concept may *mean*, we gain insight into what it can *do*. It is in the groping that the valuable work lies’(Bal 2002, 11). So in one sense, this project is driven by what Bal would describe as concept-methodology.

My emphasis on ‘knowing relations’ stems in part from this attentiveness to the analytical life of concepts. For as Brian Massumi argues, the importance of conceptual work lies in the kinds of relationships that are formed through their deployment, the connections and connectability that concepts can activate, the kinds of thinking processes those concepts can generate. In Massumi’s analysis:

A concept is defined less by its semantic content than by the regularities of connection that have been established between it and other concepts: its rhythm of arrival and departure in the flow of thought and language; when and how it tends to relay into another concept. When you uproot a concept from its network of systemic connections with other concepts, you still have its connectability. You have a systemic connectability without the system. In other words, the concept carries a certain residue of activity from its former role. (Massumi 2002, 20)

Massumi’s comments are particularly striking for this project, as they speak to the creative and generative force of relationships of connection, as well as the flexibility of conceptual work. For in many ways, this project experiments with conceptual border crossings. It borrows concepts from one terrain and thinks them through in another. It follows conceptual movements in order to understand how disrupting some connections and remaking others has generative possibilities. In this sense, the

thesis seeks to practice in method what it explores in substance: it explores how different knowing connections are made and remade and with what effect.

In using concepts to think through materials situations and vice versa, the thesis aims to document, critique and produce activist knowledge. Chapter Six, for example, rethinks conventional concepts of solidarity by contrasting those understandings with queer and transgender prisoner solidarity work as it occurs in practice. Drawing from the reflections and analysis of activists involved in that work and outlining the material challenges and difficulties that such work entails, Chapter Six partly offers an archive of activist knowledge practices: it documents the transformative epistemological aspects of prison solidarity as understood by the activists involved in that work. In contrast, Chapter Seven, which problematizes the role of analogy and metaphor in particular activist rhetorical strategies, draws on my own reading of activist texts. In that chapter, I offer alternative ways of thinking about and conceptualising political deployments of analogy and metaphor. In this sense, my role as a researcher who is both insider and outsider to the movements being studied, simultaneously functions as documenter and producer of knowledge; I am recording various examples of knowledge production within particular social movement contexts, but also seeking to develop new ways of thinking about knowledge practices that might also generate new ways of knowing.

Although this thesis is influenced by some thinkers more than others (it is grounded in feminist, Foucaudian, and queer theory for example), I have resisted the tendency to adhere to any single thinker or methodological paradigm. Instead, I have treated method as a kind of analytical scaffolding: a deliberately crafted yet provisional structure, designed for a particular intellectual task at hand (Foucault 1978/2000, 240). Scaffolding has a general consistency in structure, but is also custom designed; it must also be taken down and rebuilt for the specifications of the next task. Sometimes scaffolding lingers for years in an unfinished project, and other times is short-lived and ephemeral. Others might also describe this approach as one of 'bricolage': using the most readily available theoretical tools that seemed useful to the particular task at hand.

No doubt there are limits to this as a method, in terms of continuity and consistency. Readers may find this approach disorienting or unsatisfying in the sense that it does not adhere to a single overarching paradigm framework. However, each chapter is linked by the broader questions that motivate the project at large, namely: 1) How can we understand, conceptualise and make sense of processes of epistemological transformation, particularly within social movement contexts?; (2) What is politically at stake in the way we understand such processes?; and (3) What are the political effects of various methods that activists use to generate new forms of knowledge and new political possibilities? So while each chapter explores these questions from a different conceptual vantage point or site of analysis, each one is nonetheless motivated by the same set of overarching concerns.

Chapter Outline

In this first chapter, I have set out the key questions of the thesis, identified the empirical and conceptual context for these questions and identified some of the key themes that I explore in the project. The remaining chapters are set out below.

Chapter Two explores the relationship between social movements and transformative knowledge production. It asks, what are, and how should we conceptualise, transformative knowledge practices within social movements? Examining how knowledge production is commonly understood within social movement literatures, the first part of the chapter argues that the existing scholarship tends to treat knowledge as an object or a resource rather than a social practice and political relation. This framework is limited, I argue, because it treats knowledge largely as a pre-given phenomenon and therefore cannot adequately account for processes of epistemological change.

Turning then to the concept of 'epistemological transformation', the second part of the chapter considers how we might re-conceptualise epistemological agency within social movements in order to better understand processes of change. Arguing that all knowledge practices are comprised of ongoing and unstable processes of

meaning-making, Chapter Two sets out the problem of how to identify, understand and conceptualise knowledge practices that generate socially transformative effects. It considers how, and by what criteria, we might distinguish between minor forms of change that are inherent to all practices of meaning-making, versus knowledge practices that generate more fundamentally transformative effects.

The final section of Chapter Two considers the politics of 'epistemological potentiality', that is, a politics of transformation that remains open to new possibilities. There I consider what transformative epistemologies might mean for social movements which are intentional in their goals but open ended in their desired outcomes. Grappling with tensions between structure and agency, this section asks, what does it mean to actively or intentionally shape the future through alternative practices of knowing without falling prey to a narrow instrumentalist or determinist model of change? How do we understand the possibilities for shaping the future with particular goals and aims in mind, while remaining open to the spontaneity, unpredictability and uncontrollability of the future? In bringing together these three sections, the chapter seeks to map out a broad framework for understanding the possibilities of 'knowing otherwise' within social movement politics.

Chapter Three turns to the problem of power as it relates to processes of transformative knowledge production. This chapter asks: if knowledge is an effect of power, how do we understand knowledge-production within social movements, particularly among the relatively 'powerless' or marginalized? Does resistance itself produce knowledge, and if so how? Undertaking a close reading of Foucault's work on power/knowledge relations, this chapter revisits debates around agency and resistance within the power/knowledge nexus, focussing specifically on epistemological effects (an aspect that is often neglected in the existing scholarship). In working through the conceptual dilemmas that are posed by Foucault's work, the chapter outlines a set of analytic starting points for rethinking the relationship between power, knowledge and epistemological agency.

Chapter Four considers the relationship between experiential knowledge and processes of epistemological change. Posing the question of why some experiences

generate transformative knowledge effects and others do not, this chapter unpacks the epistemological politics of 'experience' both as conceptual category and a political orienting device. This chapter stems from ongoing dilemmas within social movement organizing around how to make strategic use of experiential knowledge claims. Many social movements, for example, prioritise the knowledge and experience of those who are most directly affected by a given injustice—particularly those whose experiences tend to be ignored, discounted or dismissed (e.g. prisoners' knowledge in the case of prison-related struggles or migrants' knowledge in immigration and border control struggles). This strategy, which is important for challenging the hierarchies of 'legitimate' knowledge and empowering those who experience injustice to set the terms of their struggle, nonetheless requires careful deployment in order to avoid falling prey to essentialist or tokenizing identity politics. As such, dilemmas around the political use of experiential and embodied knowledge claims arise on a regular basis within activist settings. Negotiating the tensions between activist deployments of experience as a catalyst for change and academic critiques of its use as a foundational category, this chapter explores the limits and possibilities of deploying experiential knowledge as tool for political change.

While the first four chapters consider processes that enable, facilitate or give rise to transformative knowledge practices, Chapter Five explores forces that limit, block or circumvent such processes. More specifically, this chapter considers the problem of epistemological co-optation within social movement struggles. The first part of the chapter considers ongoing dilemmas about co-optation within social movements, exploring these problems in a specifically epistemological register. I consider forces of co-optation that work to appropriate activist discourse, de-radicalise knowing subjects, narrow political imaginations and commodify dissent. The second part of the chapter turns to the concept of co-optation a more abstract sense, in order to consider some of the political problems embedded within the concept itself. I suggest that the concept of co-optation may be politically counter-productive as an analytic tool, as it often invokes a conservative desire for 'purist' forms of politics, which then restrict perceived possibilities for change. To illustrate

this point, I examine the relationship between co-optation and transformation. Arguing that transformation and co-optation are largely differentiated by their effects rather than their mode of operation, I suggest that processes of co-optation and transformation are strikingly similar. I conclude by offering another metaphor—hegemonic entanglements—as a possibility for re-conceptualising the problems that the language of co-optation seeks to address. I argue that by attending to the ways that all knowledge practices are ‘entangled’ in hegemonic norms in different ways (and therefore are never pure to begin with), activists can better recognise the limits and possibilities of particular knowledge strategies.

Chapter Six considers prison solidarity work as a case study for examining processes of epistemological transformation. Drawing from interviews with grassroots queer and trans prison activists in Canada, I argue that solidarity practices can work to shift ‘knowing relations’ between different subjects in ways that enable transformative knowledge practices to emerge. Offering a critique of the way that solidarity is conventionally understood as an ontological property (i.e. a unifying bond between two entities), this chapter suggests that prison solidarity work may be better understood as an epistemological practice. Here I suggest that the interplay between ‘resonant’ and ‘dissonant’ knowledge can generate important political reverberations that disrupt dominant power relations and open space for critical, reflexive and transformative knowledge practices to emerge.

Chapter Seven offers another case study, by considering activists’ strategic use of metaphor and analogy as a tool for knowledge production. This chapter poses questions about the ways in which metaphors and analogies generate new forms of knowledge, understanding and analysis, which open up space for alternative political possibilities. Drawing from queer and trans border activists’ analysis of the relationship between gender, sexuality and state border regulation, I consider the limits and possibilities of analogy and metaphor as potential sites of insurgent knowledge production.

Chapter Eight offers a brief conclusion by summarising the main developments of the thesis, revisiting the key themes explored, and identifying further questions for exploration.

Chapter 2

TRANSFORMATIVE EPISTEMOLOGIES:

Social movements, knowledge production and political change

Introduction

When we look back at supposedly civilized societies in the past, we are amazed at how complacently they accepted such obvious evils as slavery, child labor and torture. Surely, people in centuries hence will be similarly astonished at our own moral blind spots. But what might they be? After a little reflection, you may wish to hazard a guess. Here's mine: punishment by imprisonment. (Holt 2004, 246-253)

In most circles prison abolition is simply unthinkable and implausible. Prison abolitionists are dismissed as utopians and idealists whose ideas are at best unrealistic and impracticable, and, at worst, mystifying and foolish. This is a measure of how difficult it is to envision a social order that does not rely on the threat of sequestering people in dreadful places designed to separate them from their communities and families. This prison is considered so 'natural' that it is extremely hard to imagine life without it. (Davis 2003, 9-10)

In the introduction to her book, *Are Prisons Obsolete?* Angela Davis questions what makes a world without prisons seem so unfathomable. Noting that the modern prison is a relatively recent invention but also a rather 'peculiar institution' not unlike slavery, Davis invites readers to rethink commonly held assumptions about why the prison occupies such a naturalised and seemingly permanent place in contemporary societies. Similarly, Jim Holt questions the normalization of imprisonment by inviting us to think from the vantage point of a possible future that emerges from a reflection about the past.³² In posing questions that go beyond the more standard prison reform debates, both Holt and Davis stake out a possible future that might radically

³² Although I would question Holt's use of the term 'moral blind spots' in the sense that associates blindness with failed perception or flawed understanding and thus potentially perpetuates ableist norms, the overall point he makes is nonetheless helpful.

break from the present, but only through a fundamental rethinking of the political conditions that shape current forms of knowing.

In looking to such a future we may experience both an immense feeling of possibility and an overwhelming sense of 'unknowability'. It is hard to know, to even imagine, what a future without prisons might look like. But looking back in history, we experience somewhat reciprocal forms of inconceivability. Despite the common assumption that we can grasp more easily where we have come from than where we are going, there is an enduring unfathomability of the past. As Holt suggests, for example, many of us have trouble imagining a world in which the institution of slavery was seen as 'natural' and 'inevitable' as the prison seems today. Of course, the legacy of slavery persists, under new forms and terms (see for example, Alexander 2010; Wacquant 2001; Gilmore 2000; James 2005; Patterson 1982) but the legalised practice of chattel slavery now seems unthinkable to most. Such 'unthinkability' not only marks a moral prohibition against a particular injustice, but a literal difficulty in imagining a world where such practices were so pervasive and deeply engrained. This 'unthinkability' of the past marks, on the one hand, a kind of political amnesia—a forgetting of history—which is arguably bound up with notions of progress, enlightenment and liberal tolerance, whereby we disassociate ourselves from certain things in the past (even if they remain with us) in order to position ourselves along a teleology of modern advancement and 'civilization.' On the other hand, it marks a kind of epistemological other-worldliness, a paradigm shift where the conditions of knowing have altered to such an extent that certain ways of understanding the world are now largely inconceivable.

How then do these processes occur whereby the unfathomable (of the future) becomes possible and real, and the reality (of the past) becomes unfathomable? How do we move from one way of knowing to another and what conditions enable these processes to occur? How do our individual and collective frameworks of knowing

shift and change in ways that open up some political possibilities and foreclose upon others?³³

Although these questions are perhaps more readily taken up from a historical or genealogical perspective (what particular conditions and events made the present moment possible?) or from an ontological one (what enables new forms of being to emerge?), I want to explore these concerns within a specifically epistemological register. That is, I want to consider the role that knowledge practices play in shifting the conditions of political possibility. What are the conditions and processes through which new ways of understanding the world—ways that were previously unthinkable or unknowable—become possible? How do we come to know the world otherwise?

As noted in the introduction, underlying these concerns are broader questions about how to understand processes of epistemological change and how to conceptualise forces of epistemological agency. As such, this chapter sets out some preliminary terms, questions and starting points in which to frame the overarching concerns that underpin this thesis, namely to better understand the relationship between social movements, knowledge production, and political change. This chapter broadly considers three main questions: First, *how should we think about processes of epistemological change within social movements?* In other words, how should we conceptualise the processes through which social movement knowledge practices shift and move in ways that generate political change? Second, *how should we conceptualize epistemological agency, particularly with respect to social movements?* This question considers the scope for strategic action and capacity for political change that arise from collective practices of knowing and knowledge production. Third, *what does it mean to create epistemological space for alternative political possibilities?* This question considers the way that social movements actively or intentionally shape the conditions of possibility through strategic practices of knowing, but without falling prey to narrow and instrumentalist blueprints for change. It considers the tensions between seeking to enact change with particular

³³ These questions are not, of course, limited to the problem of imprisonment. One might also ask how to we begin to envision a world without poverty or war or borders.

goals and aims in mind while being open to the spontaneity, unpredictability and uncontrollability of how the future might unfold.

Subsequent chapters will explore more specific dimensions of these questions, but given the ambitiousness of the questions themselves, the purpose of this chapter is to provide some initial thinking points—or orientation devices—to begin approaching these issues. The chapter starts with a general review of the existing literature on knowledge production and meaning-making practices within social movements. Identifying some of the gaps and limits of that literature, I suggest that knowledge is commonly treated as an object or resource rather than a power relation and social practice. As a result, questions of epistemological change and epistemological agency are frequently neglected. Seeking to address those limits, the chapter explores how we might better conceptualise social movement knowledge practices that open up space for new political possibilities. Drawing on the concept of ‘transformation,’ I consider the processes through which social movements generate changes to epistemological content (what we know), process (how we know) and outcomes (effects of knowledge). In the final section, I explore what it means to engage in knowledge practices that generate spaces for new political possibility.

Social Movements and Knowledge Production

Social movement theorists and activists alike often take it for granted that knowledge is generated through social struggle. Not only do activists acquire skills and experience through the process of organizing, but movement claims help formulate new ways of approaching and understanding the world and its possibilities. Whether engaging in education campaigns, developing policy or launching grassroots research projects, activists both rely on and produce alternative forms of knowledge as catalysts for social change. In this sense, knowledge practices both derive from and generate processes of social struggle (Grundy and Smith 2007; Conway 2005; Cox and Fominaya 2009; Eyerman and Jamison 1991).

Although epistemological concerns are no doubt deeply embedded within social movement scholarship, knowledge production itself has not been an explicit focus within much of the Anglo-American and European literature (Eyerman and Jamison 1991, 162; McCormick 2006, 324).³⁴ Indeed, most scholarship on activist epistemologies has focused on relatively static, conceptual snapshots of knowledge that are momentarily frozen in time and space, such as content (e.g. how activist knowledge claims differ substantially from other kinds of knowledge claims),³⁵ sources (e.g. the use of activist experiences as resources for knowing),³⁶ validation criteria (e.g. how standards for legitimating truth claims differ and compete in various contexts),³⁷ standpoints (e.g., what difference one's social location makes for knowledge claims),³⁸ types (e.g. what differentiates various kinds of knowledge claims)³⁹ and frames (e.g. how activists present their arguments).⁴⁰ While these literatures have been vital for denaturalizing the logic and power of more hegemonic knowledge claims, such analyses do not fully account for the specific processes and conditions through which new ways of knowing are generated within social movement contexts.⁴¹

³⁴ Because most social movements explicitly seek to challenge certain norms or 'truths' as part of their efforts to generate social change, epistemological concerns are a key part of social movement politics. However, most of the key texts in the field do not explicitly discuss knowledge production per se and often treat questions of knowledge as secondary to debates about power, identity and organization. In the *Blackwell Companion to Social Movements*, for example, neither 'knowledge' nor 'epistemology' appear in the 38-page index of the 754-page volume (Snow, Soule, and Kriesi 2004). For notable exceptions which do explicitly consider questions of knowledge production, see Eyerman and Jamison (1991), Conway (2005), Kurzman (2008), and Cox and Fominaya (2009).

³⁵ See for example Jamison (2001), and McCormack (2006).

³⁶ See for example Collins (1991), Delgado (1989) and Delgado and Stefanic (2001).

³⁷ See for example Collins (1989, 1991), Epstein (1998) and Carolan (2006).

³⁸ See for example Smith (1974), Collins (1989), Harding (1991, 1993, 2004) and Hartsock (2004).

³⁹ See for example Conway (2005), Coy, Woehrle and Maney (2008) and Orsini and Smith (2010).

⁴⁰ See for example Snow et al. (1986), Gamson (1992), Benford and Snow (2000), Noakes and Johnston (2005) and (Smith 2007c).

⁴¹ My critique is not meant to suggest that these literatures treat knowledge in an entirely static way. Most scholars do recognise that knowledge claims are not stable and that contestation about knowledge practices constitute a key forms of struggle. Bedford and Snow, for example, describe social movement framing strategies as "an active, processual phenomenon that implies agency ... a dynamic, evolving process" (Benford and Snow 2000, 614). Rather my point, as I argue below, is that most of the literature does not focus specific attention on more process-oriented questions of epistemological change. Process-oriented questions tend to focus on responses to, or around,

In some ways, this lack of attention to processes of epistemological change is not surprising, as the study of social movements has historically focussed on questions of political action, collective organization and organized protest rather than on knowledge per se. But I would argue that the lack of discussion also stems from the limited way in which knowledge itself is commonly understood within the literature. While the existing social movement scholarship is both diverse and wide-ranging, some recurring trends can be nonetheless identified.

Problem 1: Social movement analysis often treats knowledge as an object or resource rather than a social relation of power. Perhaps owing to the enduring dominance of both resource mobilization theory and rational choice theory in Anglophone political scholarship, much of the contemporary social movement literature treats knowledge as an object or resource that is acquired and deployed by social movements to achieve goals. Resource mobilization theory, which studies how the availability and use of resources enables social movements to enact social change, treats knowledge as largely synonymous with information—data or expertise that is collected and used in the service of activism (McCarthy and Zald 1977; Tilly 1978; Jenkins 1983; Edwards and McCarthy 2004). For resource mobilization theorists, the relationship between knowledge and power is coterminous and circular, but not co-constitutive. The more knowledge resources a social movement has, the more power it has to make change. Likewise, the more power a movement has, the more it can access and deploy knowledge resources that enable it to mobilize successfully. In this paradigm, knowledge and power are both entities to be acquired and instrumentalised. Resource mobilization theory does not focus on knowledge production per se, because it is predominantly interested in the process of acquiring knowledge (in an accumulative, rather than productive sense) and using it for particular ends. Within the zero sum game of limited resources and rational choices, knowledge is a tool to be used for strategic political moves, rather than a

knowledge rather than on knowledge practice itself. As Eyerman and Jamison describe: 'The knowledge interests of a social movement are frozen into static, ready-formed packages, providing the issues or ideologies around which movements mobilize resources or socialize individuals' (Eyerman and Jamison 1991, 46).

practice that generates different ways of knowing and being in the world. Even among scholarship which explicitly approaches knowing practices as more deeply embedded in social relations, knowledge is often treated as something to be acquired, exchanged or disseminated, albeit through interactive, conflicting and politicized processes (McCormick 2006).

While some work has considered questions of knowledge production in less objectified terms, the process of epistemological transformation remains relatively under-theorized. For example, in a key study on environmental movements and 'green knowledge', Andrew Jamison describes political struggles for sustainable development as 'an ongoing series of cultural transformations whereby the visionary ideas and utopian practices of the environmental movement are working their way into the social lifeblood' (Jamison 2001, 45). Here epistemological change is imagined as a process where ideas that were once seen as marginal or radical become integrated within mainstream institutions and practices. While Jamison describes knowledge practices as dynamic and ongoing processes of struggle, the overall framework still treats activist knowledge practices as an alternative paradigm of competing truths to be embraced and implemented. In this sense, alternative knowledge practices are presumed to be already known; the political task is to ensure such knowledge moves from marginal to mainstream status. The emphasis remains on questions of knowledge transfer rather than transformation.

No doubt knowledge transfer—the application of knowledge from one context to another—can be transformative. Indeed, the bringing together of ideas across boundaries or contexts can generate unexpected and creative results (see Chapter Seven). However, in much of the existing social movement literature, questions of knowledge exchange and transfer are still treated in rather instrumentalist or commodified terms that remain at the level of competing frameworks or truth claims. As a result, such analysis reveals little about the processes through which new ways of knowing become possible and imaginable.

Problem 2: Questions of power focus on subjects/agents of knowledge, rather than on the power relations and social conditions of knowledge production itself. The

commodified view of knowledge reflects a second problem within the social movement literatures: questions of power tend to focus on social agents and social structures rather than on knowledge itself. For example, when understood as a precondition for empowerment and action, knowledge is treated as a means rather than an effect of power. Knowledge becomes a form of capacity building, which enables individual or group actors to act. As such, the individual or group's social location within power relations is privileged as the crucial factor in determining the capacity for change (Hall et al. 2006, 413; Nerbonne and Lentz 2003, 67). But in focussing on subjects of knowledge, questions of how knowledge is itself a relation of power (which works to produce subjectivities) are neglected. In other words, attention to power relations is invariably focussed on the 'agent/subject of knowledge' rather than understood as embedded within knowledge itself.

This focus on the subject/agent of knowledge is evident in much of the 'new social movement' literature, which takes collective identity as a key point of analysis (Laraña, Johnston, and Gusfield 1994; Polletta and Jasper 2001). The focus on subjects of knowledge rather than processes of knowledge production is also evident in the ways in which appeals to 'marginalized knowledge' are often linked with particular identities. Some literatures, for example, consider how governments rely on non-governmental organizations as knowledge-experts (e.g. women's organizations are treated as 'gender experts', or environmental groups are treated as 'green experts'), which supply the state with technical expertise or 'local knowledge' that can be used in policy making (Alvarez 1999; Grundy and Smith 2007) (see also Chapter Five). While the focus on localized knowledges is important in contesting dominant knowledge norms, the emphasis on identities, ideologies and subject positions can sometimes eclipse questions of knowledge production itself. There is a tendency to treat 'local' knowledges as already formed or established, rather than as in process, ongoing and dynamic.

Although important attention is often paid to the ways in which different identity-based communities draw on particular standards or criteria for legitimating knowledge—processes which no doubt emerge from particular constellations of

power relations—these questions of power ultimately return to the knowing subject's identity and social location. Knowledge is understood as 'belonging' to particular groups identities, whose marginalized or disadvantaged social position is seen as the fundamental problem to be addressed (and whose oppressed status is revealed by expressing that knowledge) (Collins 1991). Discussions around alternative knowledge practices are therefore treated primarily as problems of recognition, validation, circulation and translation of particular subjects' knowledges rather than as questions around the broader conditions and power relations embedded in the very process of knowledge production itself.

Problem 3: Studies of social movement knowledge tend to focus on questions of content rather than on production. When epistemological questions are taken up more directly within social movement literature, they are often conceptualized as problems of competing paradigms or perspectives. A growing literature, for example, examines struggles between local knowledge versus state knowledge, experiential knowledge versus scientific knowledge, or lay knowledge versus expert knowledge (Hall et al. 2006; McCormick 2006; Nerbonne and Lentz 2003; Robbins 2000, 2006). These literatures focus on the substance of knowledge claims in order to assess how different modes of understanding, struggles over meaning and questions of interpretation impact on a social movement's success. This paradigm is exemplified by frames analysis, which examines the ways that social movements strategically assign meaning to events and social conditions in order to garner support for their goals, prompt action and demobilize antagonists (Snow 2004, 384). As Johnston and Noakes describe, 'framing functions in much the same way as a frame around a picture: attention gets focused on what is relevant and important and away from extraneous items in the field of view' (Johnston and Noakes 2005, 2). Although such scholarship illuminates how particular forms of knowledge are constructed via interactive interpretive processes, frames theory is less able to consider the conditions by which different kinds of knowledges are produced, primarily because frames theory treats knowledge as largely perspectival, rather than constitutive. Indeed, the very metaphor of a frame suggests a pre-existing object or social

situation that is subsequently framed in various ways by different subjects or collective actors. Although frames analysis does pay attention to the processes and interactions that shape particular rhetorical and interpretative frameworks, it does not necessarily examine the process by which subject, object and frame are themselves constituted by social relations. As such, questions of knowledge production are largely treated as problems of representation and interpretation.

Of course interpretation is itself a form of knowledge production, and should be recognized as such. As many literary scholars have demonstrated, interpretation need not assume that social texts are static objects to be assessed for inherent properties, structure, style, or ideological meaning; rather, interpretation constitutes a practice, a form of engagement, and a 'methodological field' which actively produces both subject and text (see for example Barthes 1977/1998). As such, struggles over meaning-making are not 'merely cultural' practices, but are materially constitutive ones (Butler 1997b). Nevertheless, there is a difference between analytic frameworks which assume a plurality of perspectives on a single underlying reality, and frameworks which understand different perspectives as *enacting* different realities (Law and Urry 2004; Mol 2002). Frames analysis, in its descriptions of strategic, conscious and purpose-oriented framing (i.e., diagnostic, prognostic, motivational framing) and its emphasis on framing as a rhetorical and symbolic tool, tends to reflect the former rather than the latter (though arguably a case could be made for both).

Even among more nuanced understandings of social movement knowledge politics, processes of knowledge production remain relatively under-theorized. In her study of knowledge arising from coalitional social justice activism in Toronto, for example, Janet Conway describes three modes of social movement knowing: (1) practical knowing, which refers to tacit knowledges emerging from everyday practices in social movements, such as organizing meetings, planning events and conducting outreach; (2) reflexivity or praxis-based knowing, which arises when activists consciously and critically reflect on their political practice and its impact on self-understanding and knowledge of the world to be changed; and (3) pedagogical

knowing, which constitutes a purposeful intervention in the shaping of knowledge for political goals and broader social transformation (Conway 2005, 22). Conway notes that none of these knowledges are fixed or complete; they are constantly being revised and created. Yet Conway's description represents more of a taxonomy of knowledge types than an analysis of knowledge production works per se. She recognizes that knowledge is generated through experience and struggle (and different kinds of knowledge emerge from different ways of knowing), but does not fully interrogate how those processes occur. Importantly, Conway does argue that,

The problem of knowledge for social movements is not simply or primarily about appropriating or disseminating received knowledges, but also about producing the knowledges and identities that are constitutive of emancipatory agency. Social movements must build their collective capacity to enter into contemporary political struggle in which contestations over knowledge are central. (2005, 23)

Here Conway rejects a narrow instrumental view of knowledge and recognizes its constitutive power. At the same time, because Conway's overall view of power is somewhat inconsistent and unclear, she often reverts back to a view of power as a capacity to be possessed, rather than a constituent and relational force that is part of knowledge production itself. As such it is sometimes unclear precisely how processes of knowledge production occur within social movements, particularly with respect to questions of power.

Similarly, Coy, Woehrle and Maney (2008) offer a typology of 'oppositional knowledge' within social movements, which includes 'counter-informative', 'critical-interpretive', 'radical-envisioning' and 'transformative' knowledges.⁴² While each of these knowledge types operate through different means and generate different effects (e.g. exposing flawed information versus presenting an alternative policy

⁴² Coy, Woehrle and Maney use the term 'transformative knowledge' differently than I use it below. In their usage, transformative knowledge 'defines specific ways to achieve alternatives. It shows how to paint a picture that embodies this alternative knowledge . . . transformative knowledge lays out how to demand and achieve responsiveness from the power-holders' (2008, para 5.4) Hence for Coy, Woehrle and Maney, transformative knowledge is a kind of 'know-how' guide that shows how to achieve predefined political goals. In this sense it is much more instrumentalist than the way I use it below.

option), they are still largely understood as tools of political persuasion rather than modes of knowledge generation. In other words, the typology is helpful for understanding different epistemological tactics that activists use to contest one set of knowledges with another, but remains largely within the pre-established competing knowledges framework described above. As such, the framework does not necessarily help to explain how new ways of knowing are generated in the process of such oppositional practices.

In sum, because of a limited focus on epistemological questions on the one hand, and the dominance of more instrumentalist views of knowledge on the other, much of the existing Anglo- American and European social movement literature neglects processes of epistemological change. Despite posing important questions about the content, use, validation and recognition of knowledge within social movement struggles, this literature has not fully grappled with process-oriented questions of knowledge generation. In response, this project seeks to explore questions around how processes of epistemological change occur within social movements and what political stakes are involved in such processes. Focussing specifically on what I call 'transformative epistemologies' and 'epistemological transformations' I seek to better understand how social movement knowledge practices give rise to new political possibilities. So in the next section of the chapter, I turn to the concept of 'transformation' as a means to explore different ways of conceptualising epistemological agency and change within social movement contexts.

Conceptualising Transformative Knowledge Practices

All knowledge practices are, to some extent, transformative. The very process of coming to know something, particularly something that one did not know previously, arguably opens up new worlds, new possibilities, new ways of knowing and thinking. Indeed, thought itself, by its very nature, is fundamentally transformative. As Elizabeth Grosz describes, 'Thinking involves a wrenching of concepts away from their usual configurations, outside the systems in which they have a home, and outside the

structures of recognition that constrain thought to the already known' (Grosz 2001, 61). In this way, any epistemological practice can create space for 'knowing otherwise.' This is the radical potential of all thinking work: the capacity to explode concepts and understandings in ways that

scatter thoughts and images into different linkages or new alignments without necessarily destroying them...[to] produce unexpected intensities, peculiar sites of indifference, new connections with other objects, and thus generate affective and conceptual transformations that problematize, challenge, and move beyond existing intellectual and pragmatic frameworks. (Grosz 2001, 58)

In this sense, thinking is not necessarily the creation of something new, but the 'unhinging—perhaps a deranging—of expectation, order, organization, to replace them not with disorder or disorganization but with reordering' (Grosz 2001, 70).

Nevertheless, it is worth distinguishing between knowledge practices that broadly build upon, reaffirm or entrench existing epistemological norms and those which disrupt, challenge or reconfigure more conventional ways of knowing. While all knowledge practices involve some element of change, these changes do not occur through the same means or generate the same effects. Some knowledge practices may fundamentally challenge the status quo while others may reaffirm it. It might also be fruitful to distinguish between epistemological practices that primarily operate through the accumulation or retrieval of information (whereby knowledge functions largely as a resource or object to be collected and compiled) and those practices that activate the kind of 'thinking work' that Grosz describes above. Yet even in processes of recollection, retrieval or repetition of information, there are moments of slippage, reverberation and shifting where transformative potentialities lie. For if there is no 'pure' repetition or recollection of already-generated knowledge, change is always part of any meaning-making (or meaning-moving) activity.

It is also important to recognise that there is nothing *inherently* radical, transgressive or transformative about any knowledge practice. What constitutes 'radical' change in one context may be routine or commonplace in another. Acknowledging the fluidity and contingency of knowledge practices, however, does

not mean slipping into the quagmire of unqualified relativism; rather it simply means recognizing that knowledge claims must be assessed within the specific context of their articulation. This point is important for not only avoiding the pitfalls of essentialist knowledge claims (namely that the knowledge claims of particular groups are somehow more inherently radical than others—see Chapter Four) but to recognize—as previously discussed—that all knowledge practices are situated, and partial (Haraway 1988).

How then do we distinguish between the kinds of epistemological change that are embedded within all practices of knowledge and those that generate more radical and transformative effects? What differentiates more commonplace and routinized kinds of epistemological change from those that fundamentally alter the conditions of political possibility? While I want to leave these questions deliberately open-ended (as questions that will recur throughout the thesis), some provisional terminology is nonetheless necessary to begin such analysis.

For the purposes of this project, I use the term *epistemological transformation* to refer to forms of epistemological change that go beyond the ordinary, minor and routine kinds of change that are part of all knowing practices and instead generate more significant or fundamental epistemological shifts. *Epistemological transformation* thus refers to knowledge practices that not only challenge and reconfigure established ways of knowing, but also alter and disrupt dominant relations of power. The emphasis on power is crucial; for in order to dislodge entrenched ways of knowing, processes of transformation must significantly alter or disrupt the power relations that underpin those knowledge practices (see Chapter Three).

Transformation is a useful concept because it implies a thorough and dramatic change in substance or form, rather than a minor modification or alteration. It also suggests a durational process, rather than a spontaneous rupture or dramatic break. Accordingly, I use transformation to denote a sense of epistemological becoming—an ongoing process of coming to know the world differently. Such processes are grounded in epistemological openness; transformative processes are dynamic and

unpredictable rather than linear or calculated. As such, epistemological transformation should not be conflated with ideological conversion. Epistemological transformation is not about replacing one set of pre-established truths with another, but about practices that question norms in ways that open space for possibilities that are not yet determined. Processes of epistemological transformation are those that generate space for *thinking and knowing otherwise*.

I also make a distinction between *epistemological transformations* and *transformative epistemologies*. The former describes processes that fundamentally alter, restructure or recreate the substance, meaning or form of a particular knowing practice. That is, *epistemological transformation* describes processes that radically alter the ways we come to know and therefore what we know; these are changes to knowing practices themselves. The latter, *transformative epistemologies*, refers to knowledge practices that generate transformative effects beyond or outside themselves. These practices of knowing act as catalysts for broader social and political change. In some ways the distinction between *epistemological transformations* and *transformative epistemologies* relies on a differentiation between ‘internal’ and ‘external’ forms of epistemological change—changes that occur *within* knowledge practices versus those that are generated *by* knowledge practices. This distinction, however, is not meant to suggest that knowing practices can be isolated from their broader social and political effects. Rather, the distinction is meant to draw attention to different *dimensions* and *locations* of epistemological change, even if those processes are overlapping and interrelated.

I have chosen the concept of transformation deliberately, both as a term that is frequently used by social movements activists, but also as one that encapsulates practices that invoke generative or creative effects. While other terms gesture toward similar kinds of political-epistemological change—such as ‘radical’, ‘resistant’, ‘insurgent’, or ‘counter-hegemonic’—these terms tend to bear associations and meanings that are more oppositional than generative, and more designatory than process-oriented. For example, while ‘radical’ is popularly used among activists to identify political practices that seek more systemic rather than reformist kinds of

political change,⁴³ it also tends to be used to classify a particular political ethos (i.e. it assigns a counter-normative value or characteristic) rather than to denote processes of change.⁴⁴ Likewise, as I argue in Chapter Three, the concept of resistant or counter-hegemonic knowledge is often oriented around a politics of negation—marking a strike against, a refusal, rupture or challenge to dominant epistemologies, rather than a more creative or generative process. The concept of resistant knowledge also tends to invoke an overly simplistic dualism between hegemonic and non-hegemonic blocks of knowledge, which does not adequately account for the ways that knowledge practices are entangled in complex and contradictory relations of power (see Chapter Five). While a politics of negation—a refusal of what is—can be a crucial starting point for creating alternative ways of knowing, such practices are not necessarily sufficient to generate broader social and political change. By contrast, the concept of transformation invokes a greater sense of creative, productive and open-ended process.

In order to further explore how transformative knowledge practices operate, below I consider three different forms of epistemological change: those that occur at the level of content (what we know), process (how we know) and outcomes (the effects or potential effects of knowing practices).⁴⁵ These forms of epistemological transformation are not mutually exclusive; all are overlapping and to some extent inseparable. Identifying these different dimensions of change, however, can help to focus greater attention on the particular kinds of changes that occur through various knowledge practices.

⁴³ The term ‘radical’ comes from the Latin ‘radicalis,’ which means ‘arising from the root’ and is often understood in political terms as ‘getting to the root of the problem’.

⁴⁴ Even when used as a verb, (i.e., radicalizing), the term still generally denotes a particular direction of movement along a predefined spectrum of radical versus non-radical, rather than change that is more open-ended. An investment in ‘being radical’ also poses a strategic dilemma for social change; for the commitment to ‘radicalness’ may actually undermine possibilities for change by clinging too closely to an imagined space outside the norm. The question then arises: does radicalness inevitably require self-isolation/exclusion to maintain its status as radical? If a ‘radical idea’ gains legitimacy, does it not cease to be radical? In this sense, radicalness embodies a built-in conceptual limit, which turns against itself, always requiring it to remain at a distance from that which it seeks to change.

⁴⁵ I recognise that by making these distinctions I risk reproducing the taxonomies of knowledge categorizations that I critique above. However, I would emphasise that these types do not describe kinds of knowledge, but forms of epistemological change.

Transformative content (what we know): Epistemological change is perhaps most easily identified at the level of substantive content; we can recognise changes in the substance of claims about what we know. Owing in part to the commodification of knowledge and the seeming stability in which conventional notions of knowledge can be measured and concretized, knowledge practices are often understood as discrete objects that provide substantive parcels of information about a given phenomenon. In these terms, we can identify shifts or changes to meaning or content of particular knowledge claims. We might think, for example, about the way in which environmentalists have generated particular knowledge claims about climate change, which have shifted public awareness of environmental sustainability issues. Discovering something new, however, is not necessarily transformative in the broader political sense described above; learning something ‘new’ may simply tell us something more about something we already know. For my purposes here, transformative knowledges that occur at the level of content must create a rupture in previous forms of knowing (discovering something that prompts a questioning of something else) and in turn foster space for new knowledge practices to emerge. For example, we might consider cases where investigative journalists expose information about corruption within a particular government. In such cases, if the information significantly changes what we think about that government (i.e. it generates a crisis of legitimacy), we might describe it as transformative. But if such information is dismissed as trivial, exceptional or irrelevant, it may have little effect; our previous understanding may remain virtually the same. So the question of whether particular knowledge actually transforms *what we know* is of course dependent on the context in which it is exposed, the way it is interpreted (and by who), and the response it generates.⁴⁶

Transformative process (how we know): We can also consider transformative epistemologies as those that alter the very process, means or methods through which we come to understand or know. Changes in the content of what we know, for

⁴⁶ What constitutes a ‘rupture’ in conventional forms of knowing is also subject to debate. It may not be necessarily clear that such a rupture has occurred, particularly if such changes emerge from more accumulative effects over time.

example, sometimes arise not from discovering something new per se, but by *approaching* something in a different way. In contexts that still privilege ‘rationality’ and ‘logic’ over ‘emotion’ and ‘affect,’ for example, learning to pay attention to more embodied practices of knowing (such as feelings, sensations, and tacit knowledge) can create space for knowledge that is otherwise inaccessible through other methods (Shotwell 2011). Developing such alternative methods of knowing often occurs through processes of activist struggle. For as people collectively attempt to make sense of, and respond to, experiences of injustice, they may find that not only their perspective on a given phenomenon has changed but that the very means by which they come to know and understand that phenomenon has also shifted (Foley 1999, 1-2) (see also Chapter Four). Feminist social movements, for example, not only provide substantive information about gender issues in society, but also have developed a set of methodologies and approaches for understanding social relations more broadly. By putting questions of gender, sexuality, and power at the centre of analysis—and by developing research methodologies that contest more androcentric forms of knowledge production—feminist epistemologies provide different ways of knowing the world. In this sense it is not just *what* we know that matters, but *how* we know it.

Transformative outcomes (knowledge effects or potential): Transformative knowledge practices can also operate as catalysts for further change. We might engage in knowledge practices that do not materialise into transformative effects immediately, but carry with them a capacity to create an impact in the future. Illocutionary and perlocutionary speech acts—words which perform an action or generate an effect through their utterance, such as a demand for action or a statement which persuades others to take action—can also be understood as knowledge practices which generate transformative effects.⁴⁷ When activists use strategic knowledge claims to make a set of political demands, for example, those

⁴⁷ Speech acts are those linguistic statements that perform an action through their utterance. A classic example of a speech act, as outlined by John Austin is the declaration of ‘I do’ in a marriage ceremony. Saying ‘I do’ (a promise to legally wed someone) is not a descriptive statement, but a performative one; it *enacts* the marriage. Likewise, to declare the official name for something (e.g. “I name this ship the Queen Elizabeth’) or to bequeath something (‘I give and bequeath my watch to my brother’) are other kinds of speech-acts (Austin 1962, 5; see also Searle 1969; Butler 1997a).

demands may not generate change in and of themselves, but may prompt subsequent actions that in turn generate change. Calls to sign petitions, join picket lines or get involved in protest actions, particularly when coupled with knowledge claims that justify such actions, can generate such transformative effects. Likewise, activists often make public declarations of solidarity with other groups not because those statements are themselves transformative, but because they can generate 'snowball effects' which prompt others to also support the cause or take further action around that issue (see Chapter Six for a discussion of solidarity politics). We might also think of transformative outcomes in terms of knowledges that carry transformative potential, such as activist skills or 'know-how'. Learning how to facilitate a discussion by consensus-decision-making, for example, or learning a new language in order to communicate with others are important skills that can generate subsequent effects. We might think of such knowledge as containing within it seeds for change.

To consider in more concrete terms these three different dimensions of transformative knowledge, a brief personal example can illustrate. When I was a university student, I was arrested while participating in the non-violent occupation of a university building. Eight of us (all female students) had taken over a central administrative office in protest of university funding cutbacks and the proposed closure of our college. After occupying the building for three days, twenty-five (male) police officers arrived without warning in the middle of the night. Wearing full riot-gear and wielding batons, the police smashed windows and overturned furniture to access the rooms we had blockaded. We were physically restrained, handcuffed, dragged out by force and taken to the police station. We were strip-searched, subject to intense questioning, and held overnight on charges. Presented with extremely restrictive bail conditions (and advised by a lawyer to sign them), we collectively refused to sign the conditions and proceeded to a bail hearing. Through our own collective negotiations with the lawyer and court, we won release on far less restrictive terms than originally proposed and were given a date to return for trial.

The experience marked several kinds of epistemological shifts for me. While I was not physically harmed in the process, the experience left me profoundly shaken. No doubt owing to my privileged status as a white, middle-class, able-bodied university student, I had never before been directly subject to such aggressive police force. The experience made me fundamentally question the police, the state and the law in ways I had not fully done before.⁴⁸ At the same time, I was surprised by the success of our collective resistance. Even though it was a minor victory, winning release at the bail hearing felt like a significant achievement. The experience caused me to rethink both my perception of the legal system, but also my own capacity to engage in collective forms of resistance.

At the level of *content*, I learned new things about the criminal justice system that I did not know before. I developed a different perspective on procedures around arrest, detention, bail and court. At the same time, this experience went beyond simply acquiring new kinds of knowledge about the police and courts; I knew things *in a different way* than I did before. Facts and figures about arrests, rules about policy and procedure, and stories of other activists' arrests cannot capture the emotions, feelings and bodily sensations that I experienced that night. I came to 'know' the police in a different way than I had before and since then have not viewed the police in quite the same way again. The experience also provided me with epistemological tools for the future. As a result of that process, and through subsequent discussion and reflection with my co-accused and our supporters, I acquired a different sense of political strategy—a different set of questions, tactics and approaches for thinking about activism—that later assisted me with future protests and encounters with police. The experience also played a role in my subsequent decision to get involved in prison-related issues, work that has since become a key focus of my activism. Although that one night in jail was far less brutal than what many imprisoned people

⁴⁸ While we were certainly aware that our actions could prompt police action, we did not anticipate the kind of response that we got. There had been a long tradition of student occupations at our university, and to our knowledge, none had previously resulted in criminal charges or police involvement. Others in the university community were also shocked by heavy-handed response, and university faculty passed a motion of no confidence in the University President's decision to call the police.

experience on a daily basis, it was enough to prompt me to rethink my understanding of the state's power to criminalise. In this sense, the experience acted as a catalyst for other kinds of change.

On one level we might understand this example as typical of a 'consciousness-raising' experience. Indeed, the experience—along with subsequent discussion and reflection—shifted my sense of self and my analysis of the world around me. Yet the question remains: what made this experience so personally transformative, when it could be 'interpreted,' 'experienced' or 'known' in a myriad of other way? Why, for example, did this experience further galvanise my activism rather than render me more acquiescent? I have known other activists whose experiences with police have prompted a retreat from protest rather than a reinvigoration. So what made this situation different?

Here questions of time and process arise, for transformative knowledge practices arguably cannot be reduced to a singular moment. One does not simply have a singular epiphany-like experience in itself, but rather, such experiences trigger (and are triggered by) a larger complex set of processes that enable something new and different to emerge in the wake of the old. Indeed the above example may be limited in so far that it potentially overstates the importance of a singular event. No doubt my understanding of that event was shaped by previous events, knowledge and experience, as well as subsequent conversation, reflection and debate. Similarly, while individual 'paradigm shifts' are important, they are not sufficient in and of themselves to facilitate the more broad-based kinds of epistemological transformations that social movements seek. Such individual experiences are arguably only transformative when they are linked with, and part of, broader social epistemologies.

Another way of conceptualising processes of epistemological transformation is to imagine knowledge practices as forces which build, shift and (re)create the world as we know it. Here, we might imagine processes of epistemological transformation through the metaphor of sculpted clay. We can imagine that the clay represents both a space of knowing and a site of the known, and the practice of

sculpting marks multifaceted processes of knowing. For if practices of knowing not only work to perceive things in the world but also call those very things into being, then we can understand knowledge practices as literally shaping, contouring and constituting the world. As we feel our way through the world via our different knowing practices, we leave our imprints upon it, which in turn shape and constitute that world in different ways. At the same time, the clay leaves its imprints on us, so that we as knowers become embedded within what we know. The clay may become also attached to, or separate from, other elements in its field; particles of clay may stick to some surfaces and not others; clay residue may remain upon some external elements or might disappear when carried away by wind or water.

Just as individual and collective human hands work to shape the clay, so do other structural forces and environmental elements such as wind, sand, heat or water. As such, we are not simply free agents who can shape the clay at will; we feel our way through the world by making use of existing repertoires of way-finding and meaning making and by drawing on ways of knowing that we have previously learned. Just as malleability of a piece of clay can change depending on its context (e.g. clay that is baked in the sun may become hard and difficult to sculpt, whereas clay that is wet from the sea may become moist and pliable,) the contextual conditions of knowing likewise impacts on our agency as knowers. So in taking up this metaphor, we can imagine that processes of transformation involve ongoing tensions between more entrenched structures of meaning-making and more experimental and creative knowing practices. As such, it may be difficult to determine what forces, elements, agents and factors most influence the shape of the clay. These processes of shaping, forming and moulding the clay are ongoing and dynamic. But as we engage in practices of knowing, we can give the world new kinds of shape, form and meaning and the world gives shape to our different ways of knowing.

While all knowing practices arguably work to sculpt the clay (what is known), I would define *transformative* knowing practices as those that radically alter the clay's shape, form or substance. So while some practices polish, refine or extend an already established shape or form, transformative practices carve out new spaces and create

alternative formations. Transformative practices might add new elements to the mix, join together previously separated entities or create entirely new structures. Here we can imagine how these processes of reshaping the clay may involve certain breaches of boundaries or encroachments of space. By reshaping the clay to form a new appendage, for example, elements of clay move and shift from one spatial location to another; this may involve a kind of breach of territory, or the crossing of a boundary. It is thus important to bear in mind that all transformations are not necessarily 'productive' or positive. These processes of shaping, moulding, attachment, detachment and reconfiguration of knowing may involve particular forms of violence or may create undesirable results. The carving out of space to make room for one thing will invariably close space for another. As such processes of transformation should not be needlessly romanticized.

While the question of what constitutes epistemological transformation requires further exploration, I have tried here to sketch out some preliminary ways of thinking about what such processes might entail. Most importantly, I have defined transformative practices as those that work to shift or change dominant relations of power. I have also suggested that these changes can occur at the level of content, process or effect, in ways that are often overlapping. The clay metaphor, which I will return to below, offers a way of visualising how knowledge practices sculpt and shape the known world in both normative and radically transformative ways, but also how these practices always involve tensions between more structural forces and the agency of individual and collective knowers. The overall sketch I provide is not meant to be overly prescriptive but to provide some general starting points for examining the key questions in this thesis. Subsequent chapters will tease out different dimensions of epistemological transformation in more detail. But before doing so, I want to first turn to the question of possibility as it relates to questions of epistemological change.

Generating Political Possibilities

Having argued in the first section for a greater attentiveness to processes of epistemological change within social movements, and having explored in the second section how we might broadly conceptualise such processes, I want to consider in this final section what it means to generate new political possibilities. For the concept of transformation sketched out above has emphasised the kinds of epistemological change that more radical social movements seek, namely those that give rise to new spaces of thought and action. But what does it mean to engage in knowledge practices that generate spaces of political possibility? This question requires both an interrogation of the concept of possibility and an engagement of the tensions between the material and the conceptual.

For many activists, the relationship between knowledge production and political transformation is a strategic concern: activists identify a set of goals or aims and then seek to develop the knowledge, tools and skills necessary to enact those goals. In this way, political transformation often begins with a sense of knowing what is both desirable and possible, and then working to transform those political possibilities into 'reality'. Yet underlying the impetus to make 'real' a certain set of political possibilities is a presumption that we can know in advance (or have a broad idea) what is possible. There is a presumption that what is possible precedes what is real; the task is to discover and enact the processes through which we can transform the possible into the real. But what if our understanding of what is possible in the future is over-determined by the conditions of the present? Looking back at history, as Jim Holt urges in the quotation at the beginning of the chapter, we can recognize that things that *seemed* impossible in the past did in fact become possible in the subsequent present. But often we can only recognise those possibilities *after* they have become reality. This recognition ought to give us pause. For what if the scope of future reality exceeds our present understanding of what is possible? What if the terms upon which we come to know the possible-future is confined by the current conditions of the present-real?

Of course, few activists would claim to definitely ‘know’ in advance what is possible. Yet activists regularly question the relationship between the possible and the impossible, in order to make political assertions about how the world could be different. Arguments for the abolition of prisons, for example, pivot on the assumption that a world without prisons is indeed possible, despite the more pervasive belief that prisons are an inevitable feature of contemporary society. In making the argument that we can create a world without prisons, activists are therefore contesting the norms of the possible and impossible. Yet even for more modest goals, the insistence on alternative possibilities is also crucial, as any argument for social change rests on an assertion that the world could be different from its present ‘reality’. So in that sense, contesting the politics of possibility is a crucial part of all social movement struggles. As such, it is useful to critically reflect on the terms and processes through which we come to ‘know’ (or imagine we know) what is possible. This is both important for a politics that seeks to expand the very realm of the possible, but also for a politics that does not want to fall prey to totalitarian forms of utopianism.⁴⁹ Underlying these concerns are also questions about the relationship between the conceptual and the material (i.e. moving from ideas to reality or vice versa). So in order to pursue this line of questioning – and to help set out some initial thinking points to situate the analysis in subsequent chapters, I will briefly turn to Deleuze and Bergson’s work on questions of realising possibility.

In considering Henri Bergson’s analysis of the relationship between the possible and the real, Gilles Deleuze argues that the process of realization—the movement between possible and real—involves two key elements: resemblance and limitation. Because the ‘real’ is a manifestation—a bringing into existence—of the ‘possible’, the real must resemble the possible. Indeed, realization does not modify,

⁴⁹ Couton and López (2009) argue that a politics of ‘movement’ is a crucial element for utopian politics which does not slip into totalitarianism. This argument resonates with some of the arguments I make about ‘knowledge movements’ in subsequent chapters, although I also argue that movement itself should not be falsely valorised; the orientation or directionality of those movements is crucial (see Chapter Seven for further discussion).

add to, or alter the possible in its conceptual form; realization simply adds existence or reality to the possible. At the same time, this relationship of resemblance is accompanied by a limitation, since the realization of the possible marks a narrowing of which possibilities have become real. Because the range of possibilities invariably exceeds the scope of the real, the movement from possible to real necessarily involves a limitation of possibilities as some possibilities 'pass' into the real while others are thwarted or prevented from becoming real (Deleuze 1991, 97).

The problem with the common conception of realization, however, as both Deleuze and Bergson point out, is that it assumes that the possibility of things precedes their existence. If this were so, things would not only be capable of being represented before they exist, but they could be thought before being realised. But as Bergson argues, 'it is the reverse that is true . . . For the possible is only the real with the addition of an act of mind, which throws its image back into the past, once it has been enacted. But that is what our intellectual habits prevent us from seeing' (Bergson 1946/2002). In other words, it is not the real that arises from the possible, but the possible that arises from the real. It is only through the conditions of the real that we can come to know the possible. As Bergson explains:

As reality is created as something unforeseeable and new, its image is reflected behind it into the indefinite past; thus it finds that it has from all time been possible, but it is at this precise moment that it begins to have been always possible, and that is why ... its possibility, which does not precede its reality, will have preceded it once the reality appeared. The possible is therefore the mirage of the present in the past; and as we know the future will finally constitute a present and the mirage effect is continually being produced, we are convinced that the image of tomorrow is already contained in our actual present, which will be the past of tomorrow, although we did not manage to grasp it. That is precisely the illusion. (Bergson 1946/2002, 101-2)

Bergson draws an analogy to a person who sees their reflection in a mirror. The reflection—the virtual image, to use a phrase that Bergson and Deleuze both interrogate—cannot precede the 'real' person who stands before the mirror. Likewise, a person cannot see or touch their image in the mirror if they are standing behind the mirror. It is only once the body stands in flesh and blood before the

mirror, that we can see the virtual image reflected back. At that point, the 'virtual' image becomes possible, but only after the real has been made present. Just as it would be false to claim that the person in flesh and blood comes from the image in the mirror, or that one could see and touch the virtual image prior to standing before the mirror, Bergson argues that we cannot claim that the real comes from the virtual; it must be the reverse (Bergson 1946/2002, 101-2).⁵⁰ As Deleuze describes 'In fact it is not the real that resembles the possible, it is the possible that resembles the real, because it has been abstracted from the real once made, arbitrarily extracted from the real like a sterile double' (Deleuze 1991, 98).

One could argue, however, that the mirror analogy is a false one, for we do not need a mirror to imagine a range of virtual images of ourselves; we can imagine such images independently of seeing our reflections in a mirror.⁵¹ But even those imaginings do not come from nowhere; the scope for possible imagination is arguably grounded, or at least conditioned, in the materiality of the real. Our creative imaginary comes not from an infinite ideational realm, but from what can be imagined from the real (see discussion of 'situated imagination' in Chapter Four). In other words, we might be capable of imagining things that do not currently exist in the realm of the real (e.g. in science fiction or fantasy) but these imaginings are always tied in some way to the terrain of the real.⁵²

More importantly, if we presume that the real follows from the possible, then everything would be preformed, pre-existent and pre-given; the real would already

⁵⁰ As Bergson describes: 'It is as though one were to fancy, in seeing his reflection in the mirror in front of him, that he could have touched it had he stayed behind it . . . One might as well claim that the man in flesh and blood comes from the materialization of his image seen in the mirror, because in that real man is everything found in this virtual image with, in addition, the solidity which makes it possible to touch it. But the truth is that more is needed here to obtain the virtual than is necessary for the real, more for the image of the man than for the man himself, for the image of the man will not be portrayed if the man is not first produced, and in addition one has to have the mirror (1946/2002, 101-2).

⁵¹ One might also, following Lacan, question the relationship between the self and image that is recognized (or misrecognized) in the mirror itself. But this is partly to shift to questions of subjectivity and to fall back to the problem of representation, which we will return to below when we consider Deleuze's conception of the virtual as always already real rather than an image of the real.

⁵² Indeed, this is why the genre of science fiction is often treated not simply as a prediction or a projection of a possible future, but as a critical commentary on the conditions of the present.

exist in the image or 'pseudo-actuality of the possible' (Deleuze 1991, 98). All possibilities would be already pre-given, as though, to borrow Bergson's metaphor, they were pre-stored in a cupboard somewhere, for which we merely needed to find the right key to access and discover.⁵³ If, however, the possible is always already pre-given, there is little scope for creativity, spontaneity, agency or change. As Elizabeth Grosz notes: 'To reduce the possible to a preexistent phantom-like real is to curtail the possibility of thinking the new, of thinking an open future, a future not bound to the present, just as the present is itself a production of the past' (2005, 108). Indeed there is something oddly determinist in such a conception of real, which contradicts the openness that the 'possible' is presumed to denote.

Bergson suggests what is possible might be better understood as that which is *not impossible*. On the one hand, we must acknowledge that if 'the non-impossibility of a thing is the condition of its realization' then we can only know of its true possibility *after* it has been realized (Bergson 1946/2002, 102). On the other hand, we may know more readily what is *not impossible*, rather than what is actually possible. For the absence of a hindrance to existence is not the same thing as pre-existence. As Bergson explains, 'If you close the gate you know no one will cross the road; [but] it does not follow that you can predict who will cross when you open it' (Bergson 1946/2002, 102). In this sense, when the gate is open, is it not only *not impossible* for someone to cross, but there is actual potential that this might occur.

This questioning of the relationship between the real and the possible (and the potential and the 'not impossible') poses fundamental dilemmas for a politics aiming to generate social change. For it means that the work of generating new political possibilities requires more than just the realization of presently imagined

⁵³ One could argue that these possibilities are not in fact predetermined, by virtue of the fact that, as noted earlier, not all possibilities become realised. Therefore, depending on which possibilities are accessed and realized, there remains a capacity for agency. However, even if the selection of possibilities to be realized were not predetermined, the process of realization of those specifically 'chosen' possibilities would remain programmatic, as those particular realizations must nevertheless conform to their possible form.

ideals; it also requires changes to the material conditions of our present political imagination.⁵⁴

To return to the previous metaphor of clay: we can pre-imagine an almost infinite number of possible forms that the clay might take, but these possibilities must be imagined and then realized according to a particular pre-imagined form—a specific shape, size, etc. Realization requires that we make the clay in the image of that form, that we manifest the clay in resemblance of that form. But in this sense, we are limited to the possible forms that we can already imagine; we are limited in a sense to what we know already. At the same time, we cannot simply leave the clay's formation to 'chance'; to do so is to abandon our epistemological agency as knowers.

How then do we rethink, re-imagine and re-make the world of the possible so as to open up space for new ways of knowing and thinking? Is the task at hand a question of finding the hidden, marginalized or precluded possibilities and potentialities that already exist (but are unknown) in the present? If so, is this akin to what Foucault describes as the insurrection of subordinated knowledges (see Chapter Three)? Or does the emergence of such potentialities only occur through the very process of changing the current conditions of the real? Do we need to focus on removing certain hindrances or obstacles to possibility in the present in order to generate new potentialities for the future? How might we provoke, invite and incite new possibilities and potentialities into being?

Herein lie further tensions between seeking to shape the future while also remaining open to the possibilities and potentialities that we cannot know in advance. So rather than thinking about transformative knowledge practices as processes of *realising* possibilities, I want to approach it as question of *generating space* for new possibilities and potentialities to emerge. The space I'm referring to is

⁵⁴ It is worth noting that I am drawing quite selectively from Deleuze and Bergson's work, in that I am not pursuing the analysis of the virtual/actual that they each develop. Deleuze, for example, goes on to suggest the possible/real relation is a limited one and it is more productive to consider the relation of virtual/actual, and to focus on question of potentiality and becoming. For the purposes of this chapter, however, I am not convinced that the move from the possible/real to the virtual/actual assists significantly with the dilemmas at hand (although it may be useful in other ways), so I have not pursued it here.

both conceptual (thinking space) but also material (political, economic and social space).⁵⁵ This project thus considers how certain knowing practices can move, shift and unsettle established norms in ways that make room for political possibilities that were previously not there. It is about the fissures, cracks, openings and crevices that arise when we question certain established truths and become open to new modes of thought and action. In this sense, this project seeks to explore processes of opening rather than closure, of emergences rather than blockages, of potentialities rather than realizations.

The idea of opening space (even conceptual space) might be critiqued as a fundamentally imperialist venture; indeed European colonialism was born of an expansionist desire to literally open up a 'new world' for the purposes of extracting wealth, resources and power. As such, the risks involved with a politics of 'opening' must be considered carefully. For the practice of opening political possibilities is a process that poses ethical dilemmas, and therefore should not be unduly romanticised. At the same time, I would argue that opening up spaces of possibility is not synonymous with occupying or possessing space; opening space is not necessarily about taking over a pre-existing space, but about creating opportunities for something that was not possible before. In this sense, the politics of possibility is about contingent, yet open-ended orientations to the world—ways of seeing, knowing and perceiving that are attuned to the possibility that the world might unfold in ways that we have not yet have imagined.

⁵⁵ Although questions of opening space (imagining, thinking, knowing differently) cannot be thought outside questions of time, I do not pursue these questions in detail here. But it is worth noting, as Grosz and others make clear, that questions of the future (time) are also questions of space and vice versa. Just as the opening of (conceptual, political, knowing) space is predicated on the unfolding of time (what could be but is not now) so are future unfoldings predicated on spatial reconfigurations (what we make room for). So my questions about possibility and potentiality cannot escape dilemmas of time/space, these issues will remain as an underlying, rather than a explicit, questions.

Conclusion

While this chapter has perhaps posed more questions than it has answered, it has nonetheless identified some preliminary directions for future exploration—noting on the one hand traps that might be avoided, and on the other, suggesting lines of thinking that will provide direction and orientation for the chapters that follow. Arguing for a greater attentiveness to questions of process, change and flow in the generation of knowledge within social movements contexts, I have suggested that such a focus is necessary for understanding the role of knowledge practices in shifting conditions of possibility. Cautioning against analyses of knowledge production processes that are overly predefined on the one hand, or narrowly instrumentalist on the other, I have suggested that the transformative potential of knowledge practices lies partly in an openness to possibilities as yet to come. Drawing from the concepts of *transformative epistemologies* and *epistemological transformation*, I have also sketched out a preliminary framework for identifying knowledge practices that work to shift power relations and generate the kinds of political possibilities that are sought by more radical social movements.

Each of the remaining chapters starts from the overarching questions that this chapter began with—namely how to understand processes of knowledge production within social movement contexts and how to understand the relationship between epistemological change and political possibility—but focuses on a more specific problem or dimension. As noted above, part of the broader problem that underpins these questions is a lack of sufficient concepts—even adequate language—for conceptualising process and change itself, but especially with respect to practices of knowing. Indeed, concepts which adequately capture the dynamism of process are in relatively short supply, as more often than not such analysis tends to reduce processes of change to momentary fragments of time. But as the paradox of Zeno's arrow demonstrates, movement cannot be reduced to a series of static points through which time 'passes'; the fundamental character of movement is lost in this

rendering (Bergson 1911/1970, 246-253).⁵⁶ As such, 'movement is betrayed each time we think of it as a relation between actual, fixed terms, which are mapped on to discrete, temporal multiplicities, understood as a succession of presents and of static cuts' (Boundas 1996, 83). As such, we need to develop more rigorous modes of thought that enable us to better conceptualise the dynamic processes of knowing, knowledge production and epistemological becoming.

While there is a growing consensus among many social movements that 'another world' is both possible and necessary—particularly movements that organize broadly under anti-globalization, anti-colonial, anti-capitalist and anti-war banners—there is little agreement about what that alternative might look like or how it might be achieved. This lack of shared vision, however, is not necessarily a problem. Any politics that posits a narrow blueprint model of implementation should be treated with caution. Refusing to work within a predefined model of what the future should entail, however, does not mean shying away from politics that set broad goals and seek radical change. It means generating the conditions of possibility for the world to be otherwise, while remaining open to the range of possibilities that might unfold in the process.

⁵⁶ When an arrow move from point A to point B, we can imagine that it must pass through an infinite number of 'stopping' points on it's AB trajectory. Even if movement could actually be reduced to such stopping points, however, it becomes impossible to conceive of how the arrow gets from one point to another. No matter how fragmentary the increment between two 'stopping' points might be, the arrow cannot fly if it is understood as anything other than being in constant motion (Bergson 1911/1970, 246-253).

Chapter 3

TRANSFORMATION THROUGH RESISTANCE?:

Power, knowledge and agency in social movements

Introduction

In the previous chapter I argued that the existing literature on social movements has not fully grappled with questions of epistemological change particularly in relation to questions of power. Often treating knowledge as a commodity or resource that is circulated *by* power relations rather than *embedded within* and *enacted through* power relations, social movement scholars tend to approach power and knowledge as co-dependent variables rather than co-constitutive relations. As such, this literature does not provide an adequate account of the power relations at work in processes of epistemological change. Seeking to bring a more explicit analysis of power to the questions of *epistemological transformation*⁵⁷ discussed in the previous chapter, this chapter draws from Michel Foucault's work on power-knowledge to further explore the relationship between power, knowledge and agency within social movements.

Taking a Foucauldian approach to questions of knowledge production within social movements, however, poses a number of dilemmas about epistemological agency. First, if knowledge is an effect of power, as Foucault suggests, how do we understand knowledge-production among the relatively 'powerless' or marginalized? Are subaltern or resistant knowledges always constituted by and through dominant or hegemonic ones? Does resistance produce knowledge, and if so how? Second, if it is possible to generate knowledge through practices of resistance, how do such

⁵⁷ As explored in Chapter Two, I use the term epistemological transformation to refer to processes that fundamentally alter, restructure or recreate the substance, meaning or form of a particular knowing practice and in doing so open up space for alternative possibilities of knowing to emerge.

practices move beyond simply producing counter-knowledges and instead generate knowledge-effects with more transformative and creative capacities? How do resistant knowledge practices move from oppositional or counter politics (negating something) to more creative and productive knowledge practices (opening space for something new)?

These questions serve not only to interrogate whether resistance is a key site of knowledge production, but also to raise dilemmas about how to understand epistemological agency within social movements more broadly. Subsequent chapters will explore these questions through more concrete sites and empirical examples. The purpose of this chapter is to map these dilemmas in broad conceptual terms, in order to provide a clearer basis from which to understand the capacity of social movements to engage in transformative knowledge practices.

Using Michel Foucault's work on power-knowledge as a starting point is important for several reasons. First, much of the mainstream social movement literature has not fully engaged with Foucault's work on power/knowledge and arguably relies on a pre-Foucauldian view of power as either a centrally localised force (i.e. state power) or a capacity that can be owned and possessed, rather than a decentralised, immanent and generative relation that infuses all social practices. Although Foucault's work has made a significant impact in areas of political and social theory that are linked to social movements (such as feminist theory and queer theory), Foucauldian analysis is still largely absent from more empirical studies of knowledge practices within social movements.⁵⁸ Bringing a Foucauldian approach to processes of epistemological change within social movements potentially brings new insights and possibilities for analyses that go beyond the more conventional repertoires of ideology, resource mobilization and competing blocks of power. Second, because the existing social movement literature tends to treat power as a

⁵⁸ As Armstrong and Berstein (2008) argue, a more state centric and commodified view of power is especially prevalent within the North American literature when compared to the European literature. But even a cursory look at the bibliographies and indexes of the key texts in the social movement field reveals a notable absence of Foucault's work. Much of the work that does reference Foucault's work tends to do so in a rather cursory way. Notable exceptions include Gamson (1989) and Valverde (1999), although Valverde's analysis is theoretical rather than empirically-focussed.

kind of possession or commodity, there is little analysis of the *processes* through which knowledge-power relations shift and change. For if some people possess power and others do not (or if some possess more power and others less) how do we account for the means by which those with less power ever end up with more? What enables power relations to shift such that new forms of knowledge (or more relevant kinds of knowledge) emerge? Because Foucault asserts the inherent fluidity and indeterminacy of power relations (while also recognizing their fundamentally uneven and unequal character), and because he emphasizes the relational rather than possessive force of power, his work is helpful in moving beyond more static or determinist accounts of power. As such, Foucault's work provides key tools for thinking about the processes and conditions through which knowledge claims are made and remade, normalized and challenged, asserted and reconfigured.

Many scholars, especially feminists, have critiqued Foucault's analysis for failing to adequately theorize resistance. Critics charge that Foucault's work treats bodies as largely passive (McNay 1991, 31), takes totalizing view of power (Jameson 1984), relativizes power relations (Hartsock 1990; Fraser 1981) and provides a limited account of agency (McNay 2000, 9-10). Likewise, Foucault's rejection of humanism (manifest in the so-called death of the subject) allegedly further erodes the grounds upon which a theory of resistance might be based.⁵⁹ While such critiques have stimulated much important and productive debate, these discussions have tended to focus on the character of power itself, rather than the power-knowledge relationship. As such resistance remains under-theorized in general (see Harding 2010), but especially in relation to questions of knowledge production.⁶⁰ Accordingly, I want to revisit previous debates with a slightly different emphasis, by attending more carefully to the relationship between resistance and knowledge production within the power-knowledge nexus.

⁵⁹ For a compelling critique of the assumed 'death of the subject' in Foucault's work, see Allen (2000).

⁶⁰ For example, Picket (1996), Thompson (2003), McLaren (2004) and Kelly (2009) each focus on questions of resistance within Foucault's work, but do so primarily with respect to questions of power, rather than in specific relation to the power-knowledge nexus.

While the questions I pose are concerned with *human agency*, they are less focused on subjectivity, identity and embodiment (issues which have been a central concern in feminist readings of Foucault). Instead, I am more attentive to questions of *epistemological agency* (i.e. how subjects actively and deliberately shape the conditions and possibilities of knowing) and the processes through which new ways of knowing and new forms of knowledge become possible. Hence a third reason to engage with Foucault's work on power-knowledge is to consider the possibilities and limits of a Foucauldian analysis in understanding questions of agency within processes of epistemological transformation.⁶¹

In the first section, I revisit Foucault's work on power and knowledge, in order to map out a general understanding of power-knowledge relationships. Although this section covers well-worn territory, it is necessary to review this ground in order to examine how the dilemmas about resistance that arise from Foucault's work are specifically related to questions of knowledge production. In the second section, I work through these dilemmas by drawing on three concepts in Foucault's work—counter-discourses, subjugated knowledges and truth games—in order to explore different ways of understanding the relationship between power, resistance and transformative knowledge production. The final section sketches out a preliminary framework or set of conceptual orientations for approaching questions of transformative knowledge practices in process. My intention here is not to devise a 'theory' of knowledge production through resistance. Rather, I see this chapter as working through a set of conceptual problems, exploring a set of questions and considering a set of techniques that might be useful for understanding the processes and conditions in which transformative knowledges emerge in more concrete, historical and localized instances. If knowledge practices determine, in part, the

⁶¹ I would like to emphasize that my primary purpose in this chapter is not to write *about* Foucault's ideas per se, but to work *with* Foucault's ideas to explore some of the questions that motivate this thesis. Hence while I aim to provide a faithful reading of Foucault's texts, I am less concerned with positing definitive truth claims about Foucault's overall thought (a aim he would have likely resisted) and am more interested in exploring how particular concepts and methods within Foucault's work are useful for exploring questions of epistemological transformation. As such, my analysis is primarily limited to the texts that are focussed on the knowledge-power nexus rather than his entire oeuvre.

conditions for political possibility, then interrogating the conditions that make transformative knowledge practices possible must be a crucial task.

Power/Knowledge and the Problem of Resistance

In *The History of Sexuality Volume 1*, Foucault famously critiques the prevailing 'juridico-discursive' model of power as a force that functions through repression.⁶² Such power operates negatively; it regulates by saying no; it functions through censorship and prohibition. Emanating from above, as the king rules over his subjects, this power constitutes a force that is external to other relationships (e.g. economics, knowledge, sexuality) and can therefore be seized, shared, held by one and exercised over another. The model of juridical or rule-based power, which has dominated western thought since the Enlightenment, situates freedom outside of power; the liberated subject is the one who is free from, and not subjugated by, power's repressive force. Foucault challenges this understanding of power in part because it assumes that a sovereign subject exists prior to, and independently from power. For as Foucault asks, how does the subject come to be constituted, if not *subjectified* by the laws and rules which govern it? By assuming that individual subjects stand freely before the law, the (liberal humanist) juridical model of power denies the ways that subjects are dependent on the law for their constitution; the law denies how it produces the subjects it claims to represent (Foucault 1978/1990, 81-6; Butler 1999, 4).⁶³ Foucault also sees the juridical conception of power as

⁶² Foucault both critiques traditional *accounts* of power (i.e. explanations of power) but also seeks to explore how different *techniques* of power operate (i.e. modes of power). So as he clarified in subsequent writing, the critique in the *History of Sexuality* is not meant to suggest that juridico-discursive techniques of power do not exist (i.e. governance by a sovereign power through the imposition of laws and rules), but rather that such power needs to be understood differently and that there are other techniques or modes through which power operates. One of his key arguments in the *History of Sexuality and Discipline and Punish* (and further discussed in his lectures at the Collège de France) is that during the 19th Century, the techniques and deployment of power changed. Modern power, he suggests, is increasingly exercised less through sovereign power and more through what he describes as disciplinary, governmental and biopolitical tactics.

⁶³ As Foucault describes: 'The individual is not, in other words, power's opposite number; the individual is one of power's first effects. The individual is in fact a power-effect, and at the same time,

inadequate to explain power's productive capacity. For 'if power were never anything but repressive, if it never did anything but to say no, do you really think one would be brought to obey it? What makes it accepted, is simply the fact that it traverses and produces things, it induces pleasure, forms knowledge, produces discourse' (Foucault 1980, 119).

The productive capacity of power is perhaps most evident in Foucault's account of disciplinary power in *Discipline and Punish*. Here Foucault describes how modern penalty witnessed a shift from punishment that targets the physical body (i.e. public torture) to that which targets the soul (i.e. moral instruction). This shift is significant, argues Foucault, because it gave way to a new power to judge. No longer was the determination of crime and the allocation of punishment a satisfactory goal; modern penalty developed a need to assess, diagnose, and reform; to target the character, motives, passions, and inclinations of the criminal. Hence the executioner was replaced by the doctor, warden, chaplain, and psychiatrist, with a consequential fragmentation and proliferation of disciplinary techniques (Foucault 1978/1995, 11, 19).⁶⁴ The 'body of the condemned' gave way to the 'soul of the delinquent,' which emerged as the new subject of penalty. The aim of these disciplinary techniques was not simply to dominate or subdue the body, but to increase its utility, to render the body docile—meaning that it can 'be subjected, used, transformed, and improved' (Foucault 1984a, 180). In other words, the primary aim of disciplinary power was not to banish, humiliate or retaliate against deviant behaviour, but to subject delinquent individuals to techniques that would render them more docile, malleable and productive. As such, 'punitive measures are not simply "negative" mechanisms that make it possible to repress, to prevent, to exclude, to eliminate; but that they are linked to a whole series of positive and useful effects which is it their task to support'

and to the extent that he is a power-effect, the individual is a relay: power passes through the individual it has constituted' (1976/2003, 29-30).

⁶⁴ Note on referencing: Where two dates are given (e.g. Foucault 1978/1995), the first date indicates the text's original publication date, or, in the case of an interview or lecture, the date that the interview or lecture was given. The second date refers to the date of the particular published version or edition from which I was working. The purpose of providing both dates is for ease of identifying the specific edition being used, while also locating the text within the specific temporal frame in which it was written.

(Foucault 1984a, 171). Moreover, in the process of managing and disciplining delinquent behaviour, the very category, identity and subjectivity of the 'delinquent individual' emerges. In this way, power has a generative rather than a repressive function; 'power produces: it produces reality; it produces domains of objects and rituals of truth. The individual and the knowledge that may be gained of him belong to this production' (Foucault 1984a, 205).

Central then to Foucault's conception of power is its relationship to knowledge; the two are inextricably linked. For the power to judge, in the case of disciplinary power, requires power of knowing; in order to discipline the criminal, one must know who the criminal is. Hence the emergence of the modern penal subject coincided with the rise of new sciences, disciplines and institutions (e.g. psychiatry, psychology, criminology, etc.) that endeavoured to produce knowledge about the delinquent subject. These sciences sought not only to identify, name and diagnose delinquency itself, but govern delinquent subjects through powers and practices of normalization. Through such techniques, knowledge practices do not function primarily by repressing and punishing deviant behaviour, but by disciplining deviant subjects in order to teach them how to become normal.⁶⁵ Hence Foucault does not claim that 'knowledge is power' in the vernacular sense (i.e. to possess knowledge is to possess power); rather, power and knowledge are constituted through and by each other and produce particular effects. 'Power produces knowledge...power and knowledge directly imply one another...there is no power relation without the correlative constitution of a field of knowledge, nor any knowledge that does not presuppose and constitute at the same time power relations' (1984a, 175).⁶⁶ More

⁶⁵ As Foucault describes, 'Disciplines will define not a code of law, but a code of normalisation...and the jurisprudence of these disciplines will be that of a clinical knowledge' (1976/2003, 38).

⁶⁶ As several scholars point out, Foucault concedes in subsequent interviews that it may be possible for some knowledges to operate independently of power, particularly those in the non-human sciences (see for example Bell 1993, 45; Kelly 2009, 45-6). However, as many philosophers of science have demonstrated, even the most seemingly 'objective,' 'scientific' and seemingly 'non-political' discourses cannot be extracted from the social conditions (and hence power relations) of their production. Moreover, as this thesis is concerned with expressly politicized knowledge (i.e. knowledge deployed by social movements for political change), for the purposes of this thesis, I take the knowledge-power formation to be axiomatic.

simply, 'it is not possible for power to be exercised without knowledge, it is impossible for knowledge not to engender power' (1980, 52).⁶⁷

The inextricable relationship between knowledge and power is not only relevant to the specific form of disciplinary power that Foucault describes in *Discipline and Punish*, but also to other tactics of power that Foucault explores in his later work, namely 'bio-power' and 'powers of governmentality'. Like disciplinary tactics, these powers are exercised through the deployment of particular kinds of knowledges and rationalities that are used to induce certain kinds of behaviour and produce certain kinds of subjects (Foucault 1978/1991, 1976/2003; Rose 1999/2004; Dean 1999/2010). However, unlike disciplinary power which operates through techniques that are closely applied to individual bodies (whether through surveillance, training or other regiments), biopolitical power and governmental power more broadly tend to target behaviours at the level of populations, operating more 'through powers of freedom' and governing conduct more 'from a distance' (Rose, O'Malley, and Valverde 2006).⁶⁸

In each of these governing techniques, power is embedded within, and exercised through, particular economies or apparatuses of knowledge. These economies of knowledge generate discourses of truth—discourses that do not utter truth per se, but establish the rules, procedures and means for articulating and establishing truth. Discursive frameworks establish the boundaries of what can and cannot be said and what counts as legitimate knowledge (Foucault 1980/2000, 230) This is in part what Foucault means when he says that knowledge is an effect of power—for the kinds of knowledge that are deemed legitimate, and the criteria

⁶⁷ As such, power cannot be reduced to the exercise of violence on the one hand or the production of ideology on the other. As Foucault describes, 'power is not caught in this dilemma: either to be exercised by imposing itself by violence, or to hide itself, and to get itself accepted by holding the chatty discourse of ideology. In fact, every point of exercise of power is at the same time a site of formation: not of ideology, but of knowledge. And on the other hand, every established knowledge permits and assures the exercise of power' (quoted in Paras 2006, 113).

⁶⁸ Although there is debate among Foucauldian scholars about the extent to which Foucault's analysis of power changed in his later work or whether it was primarily his focus and emphasis that changed, there is little doubt that the interrelated nature of power and knowledge is a theme that runs throughout his work. For a discussion of these debates, see Kelly (2009).

through which legitimacy is established, are produced through and by relations of power. Hence, we must recognise that

multiple relations of power traverse, characterize, and constitute the social body; they are indissociable from a discourse of truth, and they can neither be established nor function unless a true discourse is produced, accumulated, put into circulation and set to work. Power cannot be exercised unless a certain economy of discourses of truth functions in, on the basis of, and thanks to, that power. (Foucault 1976/2003, 24)

In other words, 'mechanisms of power cannot function unless knowledge, or rather knowledge apparatuses, are formed, organized, and put into circulation' (Foucault 1976/2003, 33-4).

Foucault's emphasis here on the movement and 'circulation' of knowledge-power relations is crucial for understanding processes of epistemological change. Because power-knowledge practices are relations that are constantly in flux, the knowledge effects that are generated through these relations are also constantly changing. While certain knowledge apparatuses or 'truth effects' may become entrenched over time (giving a sense of stability), the knowledge-power relations that underpin them are nonetheless constantly being made and remade. It is precisely the dynamism of power relations that enables knowledge practices to shift and change over time.

Understanding how power operates through knowledge, however, requires a move away from conventional understandings of power as a commodity or capacity that can be owned or possessed, held by one and exercised over another. For Foucault, power is not an external source, but an omnipresent and generative force; it is embedded in every social relation from one point to another; it constitutes a multiplicity of force relations that are immanent, inter-linked, adaptable and transformative. As such, there is no binary opposition between ruler and ruled (Foucault 1978/1990, 92-5). As Foucault famously describes:

Power is not something that is divided between those who have it and hold it exclusively, and those who do not have it and are subject to it. Power must, I think be analyzed as something that circulates, or rather

as something that functions only when it is part of a chain. It is never localized here or there, it is never in the hands of some, and it is never appropriated in the way that wealth or a commodity can be appropriated. Power functions. (1976/2003, 29)

In this sense, 'Power is everywhere, not because it embraces everything, but because it comes from everywhere' (Foucault 1978/1990, 93). In short, there is no outside of power.

Although power is everywhere, this does not mean, as some critics have concluded, that power is totalising, deterministic or unchangeable. While power relations are never equal or symmetrical, power can only operate where there is some degree of freedom on both sides (Foucault 1984/1987, 123). In this sense, power is both predicated on, and operates through, freedom; power can operate only so far as it can persuade, influence, or impact the behaviour of those who have some discretion in their actions (Rose 1999/2004, 340; Foucault 1982/2000b). Power is not so much in operation when it *forces* someone to take a particular action, but when it convinces, impels or structures the field of possible actions in such a way that a subject *chooses* that particular decision. In this way, power operates by 'activat[ing] a subject's own sense of agency' (Cooper 1994a, 437).

Here Foucault makes an important distinction between relations of power and states of domination (1984/1987, 130). The former, which refers to situations where one person or group wishes to direct the behaviour of another, involves relations and capacities that are not symmetrical but are nevertheless changeable and reversible (Foucault 1984/1987, 122-3). These may be situations where such asymmetry exists in contradictory and layered ways that generate different outcomes even within the same relationship. As Foucault illustrates:

The fact, for example, that I am older and that at first you were intimidated can, in the course of the conversation, turn about and it is I who can become intimidated before someone, precisely because he is young. These relations of power are then changeable, reversible and unstable. (1984/1987, 123)

States of domination, by contrast, are power relations that, 'instead of being variable and allowing different partners a strategy which alters them, find themselves firmly set and congealed' (Foucault 1984/1987, 114). This occurs when 'an individual or a social group manages to block a field of relations of power, to render them impassive and invariable and to prevent all reversibility of movement.' In these situations 'liberty does not exist or exists only unilaterally or is extremely confined and limited' (Foucault 1984/1987, 114).

Presumably all power relations fluctuate and change such that sometimes they are closer or farther from states of domination. Where power relations are more entrenched, there will be less freedom on one side than the other, which may generate 'the effect of supremacy' among some positions or groups (Foucault 1980, 156). But even in situations where liberty on one side is extremely limited (e.g. in cases of slavery or imprisonment), there may be some possibility to alter those relations (e.g. even if only through the possibility of escape or suicide) (Foucault 1982/2000b, 347). So against critics which read Foucault's work on power as totalising on the one hand, or relativising on the other, I read Foucault's work as providing tools that make it possible to identify and analyse asymmetrical relations of power without denying the opportunities (even if limited) to challenge or shift these relations (see also Cooper 1995, 1994a).

These tensions between power and agency in Foucault's work do, however, raise key questions around how we understand resistance, particularly in relation to questions of knowledge production. For if knowledge is coterminous with power, what role does resistance play in the transformation of knowledge practices? Does resistance produce knowledge in and of itself, or does resistance only produce knowledge through power? Conversely, does knowledge produce resistance?

As noted above, many critics have pointed both to the sparse references to 'resistance' in Foucault's work and to the limits of his analysis in formulating either a coherent theory of resistance or clear account of agency. In one sense this is accurate: Foucault refused to articulate any programmatic theory of resistance, in part because he was wary of speaking about power in general terms (and was

cautious about the totalizing function of theory), but also because he rejected the logic which would valorise resistance against power (in the sense of power is bad and resistance is good) (1982/2000a, 172). For if there is no outside of power, then a struggle against power itself is futile. More importantly, Foucault understood power and resistance as coextensive (1977/1988, 122). It is this last point, which opens up space for a more rigorous consideration of the relationship between resistance and knowledge production.

Foucault makes it clear that power cannot be separated from resistance. 'Where there is power, there is resistance . . . and consequently, this resistance is never in a position of exteriority in relation to power' (Foucault 1978/1990, 95). Yet Foucault goes further: 'If there was no resistance, there would be no power relations. Because it would simply be a matter of obedience ... So resistance comes first, and resistance remains superior to the forces of the process; power relations are obliged to change with the resistance. So I think that *resistance* is the main word, *the key word*, in this dynamic' (1982/2000a, 167).

Accordingly, Foucault describes resistance and power in comparable terms: like power, resistances are 'distributed in irregular fashion: the points, knots, or focuses of resistance are spread over time and space at varying densities' (1978/1990, 96). Foucault refers to 'a multiplicity of points of resistance: they play the role of adversary, target, support, or handle in power relations . . . [they] are present everywhere in the power network' (1978/1990, 95). Characterizing resistance as 'the odd term in relations of power; they are inscribed in the latter as an irreducible opposite' Foucault renders ambiguous the power-resistance relation (1978/1990, 96). Both an 'opposite' and an 'odd term', resistance simultaneously constitutes a reversal of power *and* a deviation from pure refraction. Hence, resistance might be described as *reversal with a difference*. This possibility is reinforced in Foucault's suggestion that resistance is 'not only a reaction or rebound', but an active force that is immanent in all power relations (Foucault 1978/1990, 96).

As an 'active force', does resistance share the productive capacity of power? Foucault alludes to this possibility by suggesting that,

one is dealing with mobile and transitory points of resistance, *producing* cleavages in a society that shift about, *fracturing* unities and *effecting* regroupings, furrowing across individuals themselves, cutting them up and *remolding* them, *marking* of irreducible regions in them, in their bodies and minds [emphasis added]. (1978/1990, 96)

Though this productive capacity of resistance is exercised through destructive force (fracturing, furrowing, cutting) its effects (cleavages, fractured unities, severed subjectivities) are constructive in the sense that power relations are made anew. Likewise, resistance has an organizational capacity, 'at times mobilizing groups or individuals in a definitive way, inflaming certain points of the body, certain moments of life, certain types of behaviour' (Foucault 1978/1990, 96). A comparison between assemblages of resistance-points and converges of power further illustrates their shared productive capacity. It is 'the strategic codification of these points of resistance', notes Foucault, 'that make a revolution possible, somewhat similar to the way in which the state relies on the institutional integration of power relations' (Foucault 1978/1990, 96). The productive capacity of resistance seems necessary for Foucault's broader analytics of power; without this capacity, resistance operates solely through negation, thus mirroring (in reverse) the juridical model of power of which Foucault is sceptical.

Yet, if power both responds to and cannot operate without resistance, we must acknowledge that resistance does not only subvert power, but can also prop up or enable power. This tension raises questions about whether we need to distinguish between a 'co-opted' resistance and 'effective resistance'. As David Couzens Hoy describes,

Co-optation is the phenomenon where domination defuses resistance not by trying to suppress resistance, but on the contrary, by appearing to allow such resistance to express itself. . . . Insofar as power functions more effectively the less visible it is, the critical activity may be serving rather than subverting power if what looks like resistance is really just an appearance that hides the insidious spread of normalizing processes. (2004, 83)

So while resistance is necessarily present in all relations of power, ‘some resistance serves the ends of domination more than it inhibits them’ (Hoy 2004, 82). For example, we might consider cases where the state allows an organized political protest (such as an anti-war demo or a protest against government policy) to occur unimpeded as evidence that ‘democracy is working’—even while the demands of the protest remain completely unheeded. In such a case, the protest may work to prop up the very system it seeks to challenge by sustaining an illusion that the state is democratic when in actual fact it is not. While Hoy’s comments above refer specifically to ‘domination’ rather than ‘power’ (in the sense that Foucault distinguishes them), the dilemma applies equally, if not more, to relations of power than it does to states of domination (where lack of freedom means that resistance does not need to be subverted in the same way). Foucault does suggest that cases of ‘effective resistance’ can be distinguished from ‘co-opted resistance’ where strategies of co-optation are themselves co-opted (i.e. resistance actually subverts power rather than sustains it). ‘Critical resistance in these cases involves using the very mechanisms of power to destabilize and subvert domination’ (Hoy 2004, 83).⁶⁹

The complexity of this relationship between resistance and power prompts further questions about the process through which power relations generate knowledge. For if resistance functions in a similar manner to power can one be distinguished from the other in terms of understanding capacities for generating knowledge? If power cannot function without resistance and vice versa, then is knowledge an effect of the power-resistance relation together, or do some knowledges emerge more from the resistance side of power relations and others from power side? In this sense, are knowledge-power relations also forms of knowledge-resistance or is there something different between the former and latter?

One response to these dilemmas would be to say that power and resistance must be understood as inter-linked but discrete forces and only the dominant side in a given power relation (e.g. power) produces knowledge or generates ‘truth-effects’. From this perspective, resistance may give power a specific focus or purpose which

⁶⁹ For a further discussion of co-optation, see Chapter Five.

generates particular reactions or responses (and thus produces resistance-influenced knowledge-effects), but ultimately resistance itself does not create knowledge; it is only the dominant side within power relations which has the capacity to generate 'truth effects'. Therefore in order to actually produce new forms of knowledge one must (even if only temporarily in a given situation) be positioned on the 'winning' side of power. By this understanding, if social movement actors are to challenge dominant knowledge practices or assert transformative kinds of knowledge, they must aspire to not only resist, but exercise power. This is not to say that activists should aspire to 'take power' in the conventional sense of 'taking over' (e.g. vying for state power), nor should social movements seek to exercise 'power-over' others in the sense of domination. But if one accepts Foucault's assertion that power is not inherently repressive or harmful (but rather is a creative force which can generate effects both 'good' and 'bad'), then the key strategy of resistance is to activate points of reversal in a given power relation such that one can overtake the dominant strategy, and in turn become capable of exercising power and generating knowledge effects.

This position could be supported by parts of Foucault's analysis that describe power relations as a kind of game between adversaries where conflicting strategies are enlisted in the hopes of exercising power. For example, Foucault suggests that while power and resistance are mutually interdependent, they are not the same thing and one may struggle to overcome the other. As Foucault describes,

Every power relationship implies, at least in potentia, a strategy of struggle, in which the two forces are not superimposed, do not lose their specific nature, or do not finally become confused. Each constitutes for the other a kind of permanent limit, a point of possible reversal. A relationship of confrontation reaches its term, its final moment (and the victory of one of the two adversaries) when stable mechanism replace the free play of antagonistic reactions. Through such mechanisms one can direct, in a fairly constant manner and with reasonable certainty, the conduct of others. (1982/2000b, 347)

Here Foucault both asserts the importance of distinguishing between power and resistance (and not collapsing the two into a single force) but also notes that

processes of confrontation offer an opportunity for 'reversal' such that the resistant force comes to overtake the other. As Foucault further explains, a power struggle reaches its 'final form' when,

either in a type of action that reduces the other to total impotence (in which case victory over the adversary replaces the exercise of power) or by a confrontation with those whom one governs and their transformation into adversaries. Which is to say that every strategy of confrontation dreams of becoming a relationship of power and every relationship of power tends, both through its intrinsic course of development and when frontally encountering resistances, to become a winning strategy. (1982/2000b, 347)

Both passages above imply that in a moment of confrontation, a strategy of resistance can transform the situation such that it becomes a strategy of power and, vice versa, a strategy of power may lose its position and become one of resistance.

Yet, this analysis is also compatible with a view that power and resistance are ultimately the same phenomenon (forces or capacities which generate effects), only differing in their direction, purpose or level of force. In other words, if power relations are comprised of at least two conflicting forces or effect-generating capacities, resistance can be understood as the 'lesser power' in that relationship (Heller 1996, 99).⁷⁰ Being the lesser power does not mean an inability to generate effects, but rather that those effects are moderated by the stronger power. Indeed the primary effect of resistance might be to mediate or slow down power's force (Harding 2010). In this sense, it does not necessarily follow that only the dominant 'winning' adversary or force is capable of producing knowledge. Rather, each 'side' might assert and deploy different knowledge practices in order to contest and exert power, even though one side may ultimately 'win out' over another.

This leads to a contrasting position, which would recognise power and resistance are discrete forces in a given relationship, but nevertheless hold that knowledge is not exclusively an effect of power and can also be produced through resistance. From this perspective, we could say that resistance has the same

⁷⁰ See also Sharp et al. (2000) who draw from Foucault's work to distinguish between a 'dominating power' and a 'resisting power'.

capacities to generate effects as power, only perhaps on a different scale, direction or with different aims. This does not mean that knowledge is outside of power (for resistance is still bound by power, just as power is bound by resistance), but that knowledges can be generated through both sides of the power-resistance dynamic. Such a position would mean that by simply resisting power—or by challenging a particular set of dominant knowledge practices or truth effects—social movements can and do produce knowledge through practices of political resistance.

Both positions, however, potentially over-simplify the relationship between power and knowledge, and ultimately reassert a binary view of power and resistance. By seeking to separate power from resistance through a model of opposing adversaries, both perspectives not only return to a juridical/possessive view of power (whereby power is a kind of zero-sum game where one side holds more power than the other), but also reassert a separation between powerful and powerless (or dominant and dominated), which obscures the indeterminacy, complexity and persistently changing nature of power relations. Moreover, the inverse relation between power and resistance does not adequately take into consideration the way that knowledge practices are much more deeply embedded in the dynamic of power relations. In other words, it may be misleading to suggest that knowledge is merely a product or effect of one side or another, since knowledge effects are themselves strategic practices that are embedded within the interplay of power-resistance dynamics. So if we take power-knowledge relations seriously, we must recognize that knowledge practices are always already strategically deployed, asserted and enacted from *within* power-relations, and as such produce a range of overlapping and sometimes contradictory effects that cannot be necessarily attributed to one side or another.

So a third position would suggest that power and resistance cannot be easily separated (or at least are more intensely entangled than the above perspectives suggest) and that knowledge effects emerge from ongoing processes of struggle between various strategies or agentic forces. These struggles occur not simply among various agentic forces (such as social movements), but occur within the context of

social systems and structures that incorporate and produce conflict (e.g. social and political institutions, structures of meaning making, etc.). Because knowledge is both an effect of power (i.e., power relations generate certain norms and truths) *and* a means through which power operates (i.e. knowledge practices or truth claims enable power to be exercised), knowledge itself is deeply entrenched in the power-resistance nexus. Knowledge effects thus emerge in power relations as part of an ongoing process; we cannot easily distinguish between resistance and power, but only assess the specific effects of particular power-knowledge practices. Part of such an analysis requires less attention to the specific locale or instance where power and resistance are in operation, but to the moments of transgression, change and transformation. As Ben Golder and Peter Fitzpatrick describe, ‘for Foucault, power must constantly respond to a resistance which comes to occupy and re-form it, and... it is in the very moment of transgression composing and recomposing the limit that the world is ever “made and unmade”’ (2009, 77).⁷¹

Perhaps then, the impulse to conceptually separate power and resistance is misplaced, and it is more useful to consider the kinds of knowledge effects that emerge from a given situation or relationship. In other words, rather than seeking to attribute a particular knowledge effect to power or resistance, it may be more analytically fruitful to consider how particular knowledge effects work to entrench, contest or transform established ways of knowing. This requires us to turn our attention to the processes whereby particular knowledge effects become normalised or legitimated through power relations and examine what spaces or opportunities exist within those relationships to express, articulate and generate new or transformative knowledge practices.

Drawing from three conceptual tools—‘counter-knowledge’, ‘subordinated knowledges’ and ‘knowledge games’—the next section explores different ways of understanding the process by which power-knowledge strategies are challenged, contested or questioned, and considers how those processes can open space for new

⁷¹ Practices of transgression, however, are neither simple nor straightforward. See Foucault’s discussion in ‘A Preface to Transgression’ (1977).

knowledge practices to emerge. The section also poses more directly the question of how resistant knowledge practices can move beyond mere negation or opposition and instead develop as more creative and transformative epistemological practices.

Knowledge/Resistance Dilemmas

a) Counter knowledges / reversal strategies

If the relationships between power, knowledge and resistance cannot be teased out into discrete phenomenon, then perhaps it makes sense to turn our attention to the site where all three come together: discursive practice. For if discourse 'can be both an instrument and an effect of power, but also a hindrance, a stumbling-block, a point of resistance and a starting point for an opposing strategy' then discursive practice may be a key starting point for epistemological agency (Foucault 1978/1990, 101). In considering the role of power, resistance and transformation within discursive practice, however, we must be attentive to what Foucault means by discourse itself. 'Discourse' should not be confused with knowledge per se, but refers to sets of knowledge practices that establish the terms, limits and conceptual zones around a particular site or object of knowledge. As Foucault describes:

Discursive practices are characterized by the demarcation of a field of objects, by the definition of a legitimate perspective for a subject of knowledge, by the setting of norms for elaborating concepts and theories. Hence, each of them presupposed a play of prescriptions that govern exclusions and selections. (1971/2000, 11)

While discursive practice works to legitimate particular norms or ways of knowing, discourse should not be mistaken for 'ideology' in the conventional sense of paradigmatic ideas that mask or obscure 'truth'; discursive practices are those which work to determine the very conditions of 'truth' itself. As such discursive process cannot be reduced to a kind of 'ideological trimming' (Foucault 1980, 118). Discursive practices 'are not purely and simply modes of manufacture of discourse' but rather 'take shape in technical ensembles, in institutions, in behavioural schemes, in types

of transmission and dissemination, in pedagogical forms that both impose and maintain them' (Foucault 1971/2000, 12).

Because discursive practices are established through a complex field of social practices rather than from a singular idea or framework, changes in discourse cannot be attributed to 'individual discovery' nor should they be understood as a 'change of outlook' or shift in collective mentality. Rather,

The transformation of a discursive practice is tied to a whole, often quite complex set of modifications which may occur either outside it (in the forms of production, in the social relations, in the political institutions) or within it (in the techniques for determining objects, in the refinement and adjustment of concepts, in the accumulation of data), or alongside it (in other discursive practices). And it is linked to them in the form not simply of an outcome but of an effect that maintains its own autonomy and a set of precise functions relative to what determines the transformation. (Foucault 1971/2000, 12)

The complexity and embeddedness of discursive practice is partly what makes it difficult to challenge or transform, but also what make discourses vulnerable to contestation.

Here we might consider Foucault's remarks about 'reverse-' or 'counter-discourses'. These are power-knowledge practices that take up discourses in ways that challenge their normal use or reconfigure their normative effects. Foucault uses discourses of 'perversity' as an example. He notes how the whole set of psychological, medical, psychological and psychiatric discourses that produced the category of 'homosexual' as a perverse subject also enabled the homosexual subject 'to speak in its own behalf, to demand that its legitimacy or "naturalness" be acknowledged, often in the same vocabulary, using the same categories by which it was medically disqualified' (1978/1990, 101-2). What is helpful then about the idea of reverse or counter-discourse is that such strategies serve as grounding points for transformative epistemologies to emerge. For if one takes up a dominant discourse in a way that counters or reverses it, the process implicitly opens up space for new or alternative discursive possibilities.

At the same time, we must be cautious around the meaning and use of counter or reverse discourses, particularly if understood in a binary sense. As Foucault notes,

There is not, on one side, a discourse of power, and opposite it, another discourse that runs counter to it. Discourses are tactical elements or blocks operating in the field of force relations; there can exist different and even contradictory discourses within the same strategy; they can, on the contrary, circulate without changing their form from one strategy to another, opposing strategy. (1978/1990, 101-2)

To take up the concept of reverse discourses may therefore entail a risky strategy, for it potentially (even if unintentionally) re-invokes a simplistic dualism between power and resistance, which not only fails to encapsulate the complexity and fluidity of knowledge-power relations, but also potentially re-asserts the powerful/powerless divide. There may be a temptation to attach dominant and counter discourses to particular subject positions (e.g. powerful individuals or groups mobilize dominant discourses whereas relatively powerless individual or groups challenge them with counter-discourses) rather than understanding discursive practices as emerging from a more contested, multifaceted and contradictory 'field' of power relations.

The idea of a counter-discourse also suggests that such resistance works primarily by 'mirroring' or 'reversing' power rather than transforming it. While such mirroring may reflect or refract power in new or unpredictable ways (which seems to be the way in which Foucault deployed the concept), the language of 'reverse-discourse' may not fully account for the creative or transformative capacities of power relations more broadly. As Davina Cooper notes, an 'emphasis on resistance rather than transformation implies a kind of closure by power, that is, subordinated groups can only respond to the power relationships that exists rather than looking beyond them' (1994a, 443; see also Cooper 2009). While it may be true that resistant or subaltern knowledges are always constituted by hegemonic or dominant ones (Foucault 1982/2000a, 168), this is not a strictly determinant process; any resistant knowledge practice must go beyond simply reversal in order to bring about

epistemological change. If resistance were nothing other than reversal or reflection, we would be stuck in an endless trap, much like a never-ending reflection in a hall of mirrors.

So on a strategic level, social movements are faced with a question of how to make political-epistemological moves that go beyond the terms and conditions of the very logic that they wish to challenge. This of course is not a new problem. As Carol Smart writes: 'It is a dilemma that all radical political movements face, namely the problem of challenging a form of power without accepting its own terms of reference and hence losing the battle before it has begun' (1989, 5). Similarly, when asked whether a 'dominated subject' can create their own discourse, Foucault replied: 'Resistance really always relies upon the situation against which it struggles' (1982/2000a, 168).

While resistance is made possible by the force that it resists (and vice versa), this does not mean that the form of that possibility is fixed or predetermined. Indeed, Foucault makes it clear that resistance is not simply a negation but a creative process (1982/2000a, 168). This is in part because resistance is never a pure reversal; it challenges power but in doing so forces power to respond, shift, change, manoeuvre in different ways which perpetually reconfigure the relationship. This is not to say that those reconfigurations are necessarily better (as they may serve to further entrench existing power relations or norms), but that counter-discourses open space for different configurations of power. Hence Foucault often talks about a 'field' of power relations that is open and contested rather than using a linear (or dialectic) concept of power that operates through binaries (or cycles) of assertion and negation.

For these reasons, the concept of reverse discourses may obscure the range of possible forms that resistant discourses can take, whether they be refusal, reversal, counter-play, avoidance, bypassing, creativity or something else. As Foucault cautions, 'we must not imagine a world of discourse divided between accepted discourse and excluded discourse, or between dominant discourse and the dominated one; but as a multiplicity of discursive elements that can come into play in

various strategies' (1978/1990, 100). Seeking to identify a set of characteristics or attributes that define counter-discourse or transgressive knowledge therefore is a misplaced task: instead we must inquire about the conditions in which particular strategies or techniques can be mobilized to alter relations of power and make intelligible other ways of knowing.

b) Insurrection of subjugated knowledges

If the idea of a counter-discourse or a reverse-discourse is too limiting for understanding the relationships between power, resistance and knowledge, we might turn to another concept within Foucault's work: the 'insurrection of subjugated knowledges'. In his 1976 lectures at the Collège de France, Foucault describes two kinds of subjugated knowledges. The first refers to 'historical contents that have been buried or masked in functional coherences or formal systematizations' (1976/2003, 7). These subjugated knowledges are 'blocks of historical knowledges that were present in the functional and systematic organizations, but which were masked' (1976/2003, 7). In other words, these are discourses that were embedded within particular institutions or discursive frameworks, but have been buried, masked or obscured in order for other (dominant) knowledge practices to be deployed or maintain their authority. In a second sense, subjugated knowledges refer to:

a whole series of knowledges that have been disqualified as nonconceptual knowledges, as insufficiently elaborated knowledges: naïve knowledges, hierarchically inferior knowledges, knowledges that are below the required level of erudition or scientificity. (1976/2003, 7-8)

These are knowledges which are not necessarily buried or obscured, but are nonetheless subordinated due to their discursive status; these knowledges are disqualified and discredited such that they do not count as legitimate or valid knowledge. So in both cases, subjugated knowledges are those that have been dominated or excluded through power relations that work to obscure or disqualify their legitimacy.

Most important about subjugated knowledges, however, is not so much what they say on their own terms, but what they reveal about broader knowledge norms and practices. In this sense, 'the insurrection of subjugated knowledges' is less about the valorisation of marginalised or subaltern knowledges and more about a process of revealing such knowledges in order to de-normalise and contest dominant ones. For the 'insurrection of subjugated knowledges' is what make possible a critique of the norms through which dominant knowledges are qualified as 'truth-effects' (Foucault 1976/2003, 7-8)

Here Foucault's methodology for revealing such knowledges becomes crucial as the processes of genealogical excavation both enables such knowledges to become visible and provides the means for critique (1976/2003, 7). As Foucault explains, genealogy is,

a sort of attempt to desubjugate historical knowledges, to set them free, or in other words to enable them to oppose and struggle against the coercion of a unitary, formal, and scientific discourse. The project of these disorderly and tattered genealogies is to reactivate local knowledges ... against the scientific hierarchicalization of knowledge and its intrinsic power-effects. (1976/2003, 10)⁷²

In this way genealogy offers a means of 'playing local, discontinuous, disqualified, or non-legitimized knowledges off against the unitary theoretical instance that claims to be able to filter them, organize them into a hierarchy, organize them in the name of a true body of knowledge' (1976/2003, 9).

The insurrection of subjugated knowledges thus serves as a useful concept for thinking about shifts or transformations in discourse. If every dominant knowledge practice operates through the suppression or disqualification of other knowledges that challenge that power, then shifts in power can emerge through 'insubordination'

⁷² Foucault also describes genealogy as a method for revealing 'the history of the present'—a way of understanding the conditions that have given rise to the knowledge, power and truth regimes of the present (1978/1995, 31). Inspired by Nietzsche's work on 'effective history', genealogy is a method that differs from more traditional historical approaches in that it neither seeks to uncover 'origins' or essence of historical events, nor document the unfolding of history in a linear sense. Rather, genealogy is an analysis of descent or emergence—a method which traces the multiplicity of forces, power relations and discursive processes which both give rise to 'events' and produce the 'truths' of the present (Foucault 1984b).

or 'insurrection' of subjugated knowledges. While one could argue that the unearthing of subjugated knowledges is not a form of knowledge production per se (merely the revelation or uncovering of something that already existed below the surface), the very process of that emergence or visibility can have transformative effects. It is possible that the unearthing process not only has transformative effects on other more dominant knowledges, but that buried knowledges also change in the process of their unearthing. Attention must therefore be paid to the process of their revealing, particularly in circumstances where that revealing works to dislodge, unsettle and question dominant knowledges which in turn opens up space for other knowledges to emerge.

The insurrection of subjugated knowledges thus potentially opens a space for transformation that is wider than a politics of reversal, for not only does the process of excavation reassert a whole *range* of other knowledges (which may not directly counter a dominant discourse but nonetheless contest it), it also works to decentre, or de-normalise those discourses which have a greater truth-bearing status. Such 'decentring' strategies may be particularly helpful in shifting attention to spaces of discursive possibility that were otherwise less visible. These openings are possible not because a counter-discourse directly challenges a dominant one, but because it bypasses or moves around that discourse in ways which can displace and decentre it. Carol Smart emphasizes the importance of 'decentring' strategies more broadly, which aim not to counter a particular discourse but to resist its normative or dominant status. Speaking of law, for example Smart suggests that rather than challenging law on its own terms (e.g. arguing cases on the terms established by the court), feminists ought to decentre the law itself (e.g. contesting the truth-effects of law and challenging the presumption that change must happen through the courts) (1989, 5). These are strategies which move beyond a counter-hegemonic politic and instead opens up space for broader political projects and strategies.

At the same time, the concept of 'subjugated knowledges' has been sometimes taken up as a means to simply valorise subaltern knowledges, rather than providing a basis from which to critique prevailing or dominant ones (Hartman 1992).

In this sense, we must be cautious of methods that are aimed primarily at 'recognizing' alternative knowledges; such tendencies run the risk of taking the critical the edge off processes of 'insurrection', and can move away from practices that actually challenge the conditions by which truth effects are generated.

c) Games of truth and power

A final way in which we might understand the production of knowledges is through what Foucault describes as 'power games' or 'games of truth'.⁷³ By 'game' Foucault refers to,

an ensemble of rules for the production of truth. It is not a game in the sense of imitating or entertaining...it is an ensemble of procedures which lead to a certain result, which can be considered in function of its principles and its rule of procedures, as valid or not, as winner or loser. (1984/1987, 127)

In this sense, power games or games of truth are about deploying knowledge or making discursive 'moves' in ways that not only manoeuvre strategically within a given playing field, but challenge, disrupt or transform the rules of the game in the process. Such strategic moves, of course, are always political by virtue of the fact that all knowledge practices are infused with, and enabled by, power relations. While these games are unpredictable in their outcomes and cannot be controlled by an individual or even a group, one can exercise strategic moves to influence the game with particular goals or aims in mind. So these games of truth should not be understood as simply the free play of discourse, but as situations where rules may be established but broken and the outcomes though unpredictable can be influenced. As Foucault explains,

We escaped then a domination of truth, not by playing a game that was a complete stranger to the game of truth, but in playing it

⁷³ See also Foucault's (1983/2001) discussion of 'parrhesiastic games' or games of truth-telling, as discussed in the lectures he gave at Berkeley in 1983. For secondary commentary see Peters (2003) and Scott (1996).

otherwise or in playing another game, another set, other trumps in the game of truth...we could only do this by playing a certain game of truth, showing what were the effects, showing that there were other rational possibilities, teaching people what they ignore about their own situation, on their conditions of work, on their exploitation (1984/1987, 126).

In other words, the purpose is not to escape the game itself, or to even create the perfect game, but to create the conditions through, 'which would allow these games of power to be played with a minimum of domination' (Foucault 1984/1987, 129). We can try to play the game (or alter the rules of the game) in ways that engage power strategically, in order to limit the effects of domination or violence. Moreover, in the process of playing the game, there are always openings for something new. As Foucault describes: 'There is always a possibility, in a given game of truth, to discover something else and to more or less change such and such a rule and sometimes even the totality of the game of truth' (1984/1987, 128). In this sense, resistant practices within games of truth may indeed include a generative capacity.

But of course, games are never played on equal terrains or by equally positioned actors.⁷⁴ Both the capacity to play the game strategically and the possibilities for altering the rules of the game are conditioned by the discursive histories, social practices and institutional norms that shape the game itself. As such, some moves are made more easily than others, and some players can deploy strategies that others cannot. Those who engage in games of truth by deploying disqualified, subjugated or resistant knowledges in order to undermine or expose the rules of the game may face considerable constraints or risks in attempting to play strategically. So the problem of resistance and the question of epistemological agency remain fraught.

⁷⁴ Indeed, Foucault's discussion of the ancient Greek practices of *parrhesia* specifically involves a speaker in a position of lesser power, speaking to one of greater power, or at the very least one speaking frankly in opposition to an established truth, in which the articulation of that truth poses a risk. Foucault gives the example of a philosopher challenging the sovereign or a tyrant; by speaking out against the tyranny of the sovereign, the philosopher faces the risk that the sovereign may become angry and punish, exile or even kill the philosopher (1983/2001, 16). See also Scott (1996).

A key problem, moreover, is that knowledge games or games of truth cannot be played in the abstract sense. One cannot predict or presume what a given 'game' will look like when it is played. Such moves must be played out in the concrete, materiality of discursive practice rather than in an abstract conceptual terrain. So while the concept of knowledge games may be a useful overarching frame in which to understand strategic knowledge/power 'moves' within social movement struggles, the utility of the concept is most useful in more localised and specific contexts, where particular moves, strategies and effects can be assessed in greater detail. Hence, it is such strategic moves—within more specific contexts—that will be explored in later chapters (particularly Chapters Six and Seven).

Conclusion

This chapter began by asking whether resistance produces knowledge (or particular ways of knowing) and if so whether such practices can move beyond simple negation (of that which they resist) and instead provoke something more creative or transformative. In some ways, this chapter has done more to problematise the very questions than to provide a clear and cogent set of answers. Indeed, it may be that while Foucault's analysis is immensely helpful for attending to the fluidity, relationally and embeddedness of power-knowledge relations in practice, it may be less helpful for documenting the actual micro-dynamics of epistemological change in practice. Nevertheless, it seems evident that whatever we might describe as 'resistant' epistemological practices (whether understood through counter- or reverse-discourses, insurgent knowledges or games of truth), these practices do have generative, creative and productive effects. While it may be methodologically spurious to try to isolate the forces of power and resistance in order to attribute knowledge effects to one or the other, it nevertheless seems clear that resistance plays a crucial role in the exercise and deployment of power-relations more broadly, and thus in the generation of knowledge-effects.

Given the dilemmas explored above, we might then ask whether it is prudent to develop an ‘analytics of knowledge-resistance’ for understanding these processes in more concrete and localised situations. In other words, do we need a more specific framework for understanding processes of resistant or transformative knowledge production? Such an endeavour must proceed cautiously. If we accept Foucault’s analysis of the knowledge-power nexus then our approach must be grounded in a critical genealogy—a questioning of the conditions that make resistant or transformative knowledges possible, rather than searching for definitive essence, origin or structure of transformative knowledges per se. Likewise, any strategy of transformation cannot make ‘freedom from power’ its goal. For Foucault, such a goal is impossible and undesirable. Rather, understanding practices of transformative knowledge production must be theorized in relation to specific techniques and relations of power via the power-knowledge nexus. Transformative epistemologies must be understood as ongoing strategies of negotiation, rather than a movement towards a final destination.

Foucault made it clear that he did not want his work to be taken as a broad ‘theory’ of power. In fact he was clearly wary of speaking about power in generalising terms (Foucault 1978/1990, 82; 1976/2003, 13). At most, he described his work as an ‘analytics of power’—a set of tools, starting points, or methodologies for thinking about relations and deployments of power in practice.⁷⁵ The task then is not to mount a ‘theory’ of knowledge-resistance or transformative-knowledge, but to identify a set methodological tools or starting points that might help orient us in understanding epistemological practices that do have some sort of transformative capacity or potential. As such, while the remaining chapters are broadly infused with a Foucauldian account of knowledge-power relations, I also turn to other scholars

⁷⁵ For Foucault, an analytics of power refers to a method for approaching power relations that attend specifically to power’s historical and contextual deployment. In other words, Foucault seeks tools for analysing what power ‘does’ and how it works in specific contexts rather than devising a universalising or totalising theory of what power ‘is’. See also Foucault’s broader comments about ‘theory’ during a 1978 interview, where describes himself as ‘an experimenter and not a theorist,’ explaining that he calls a theorist ‘someone who constructs a general system, either deductive or analytical, and applies it to different fields in a uniform way’ (1978/2000, 240).

and theoretical tools to develop my analysis further. By way of conclusion then, I sketch out below some broad analytical ‘orientation devices’ that might guide these investigations of transformative knowledge practices in more concrete situations.

First, an analysis of the conditions in which new or transformative knowledge practices emerge must move away from the binary of powerful and powerless when thinking about strategic agents or forces in power relations. Too often within social movement politics it is assumed that there is a clear distinction between those who ‘have power’ and those who do not. This dichotomy can be an important way of naming power relations, especially in identifying broader accumulative trends or institutional patterns. However, a simple dualism between powerful and powerless is limited on several fronts. Not only does such a binary fail to recognize the multiplicity and complexity of power relations (e.g. intersecting or interlocking power relations), but also fails to recognize the ways in which power relations are not static—even within a single relationship (e.g. Foucault’s comments about a conversation between an older and younger person, as noted above). Such binary frameworks fail to explain how relationships shift and change and how they often involve contradictions and conflicts. At the same time, power is never an equal relation and downplaying the powerful/powerless distinction certainly risks naturalizing or neutralizing the broader accumulative effects of power relations. It is therefore important to move away from the powerful/powerless binary, while still recognizing the uneven and unequal power relations that characterize any social situation. Rather than focussing on powerful/powerless, it is more fruitful to focus on strategic positions and locations that offer opportunities for epistemological ruptures and change. This is not to deny the reality that some individuals and groups of people do and can exercise, deploy or make use of power more easily than others, but to recognize the ever present spaces and opportunities for challenging and reconfiguring these relationships.⁷⁶

⁷⁶ At times throughout the remainder of this thesis, I do use continue to use terms such as ‘those in positions of power’ and ‘those more marginalised’ or ‘dominant’ and ‘subjugated groups’. In those instances, my intent is not to replicate a simply binary between those who ‘have power’ and those who do not, bur rather as a shorthand for referring to more entrenched patterns of power relations. As I hope is clear in my analysis, however, these positions are never fixed and always involve ongoing

Second, rather than approaching transformative knowledge practices as a practice of reversal or opposition to power, it is more fruitful to recognize the creative and transformative character of power-knowledge relations more broadly. Just as the powerful-powerless distinction between subject positions is not a particularly fruitful tool for evaluating processes of change, the notion of oppositional knowledge is too limiting. Moreover, a focus on oppositional discourses does not provide much space for thinking about how knowledge practices move beyond negation. Greater focus is needed on the creative and transformative nature of all power relations. As Foucault notes, 'Relations of power-knowledge are not static forms of distribution, they are "matrices of transformations"' (1978/1990, 99). If all power relations involve capacities for transformative change, then it is important to develop better analytic tools for assessing these matrices and for distinguishing between the kinds of transformations which reinforce norms of domination and those which open up space for remaking relations in less dominating ways. We must understand power in its transformative capacity and develop ways of understanding how social movements might play truth games more strategically.

Third, we must focus attention on the conditions of 'subjugated knowledges' and processes of 'insurrection' –not as a valorisation of marginalized knowledges per se, but as a means to understand the conditions through which some knowledges become normalised truth-effects and others become subordinated, dismissed or disqualified as irrational, irrelevant and illegitimate. This means it is not enough to simply document, assert or validate subaltern or 'subjugated' knowledges, but to focus on the process and conditions through which those knowledges are disqualified, and in turn how those disqualifications work to naturalise or reaffirm more dominant or hegemonic discourses.

Fourth, rather than looking at transformative knowledge in an abstract sense, it may be more analytically productive to focus on concrete knowledge practices. As Foucault makes clear, talking about power or resistance in generalised terms can be

shifts, negotiations and reconfigurations. See also Chapter Five, which uses the concept of 'entanglement' to think through relations of power that go beyond binaries of powerful/powerless, domination/resistance and pure/co-opted.

misleading. Not only does it risk falling prey to the kinds of totalising theories that Foucault was wary of, but it also tends to lose its analytic force. In this sense, a focus on concrete, situated and specific knowledge practices is more productive.

Finally rather than focusing on tensions between power and resistance, it is more analytically fruitful to focus on the power-knowledge effects that are generated from those tensions. If we think about power as 'the capacity to shape, facilitate and generate practices, processes and social relations' (Cooper 1994a, 436), then effects of power relations become the more pertinent point of analysis, rather than whether a particular strategic deployment can be classified as one of power or resistance. Moreover, if we understand power as the generation of effects (relations that are productive rather than simply repressive) then we need not demonize power and valorise resistance. Approaching questions of power-knowledge then becomes less about whether power is present (and ought to be challenged) and more about the impact of the effects that particular power relations generate (and whether those effects, when deemed harmful or oppressive, ought to be questioned or challenged). So in this sense, the traditional valorisation of resistance within social movement politics is not necessary; seeking to exercise power strategically (not in the traditional sense of exercising domination over others, but in the sense of generating particular kinds of effects) is something to be welcomed, albeit cautiously. At the same time, the capacity of social movements to engage in strategic knowledge practices must be understood as an ongoing process, a form of perpetual intervention. Such practices may be directed and intentional, but can never be fully predictable or controlled. In this sense, we must also be aware that the opening of new possibilities simultaneously invokes a politics of limits; for opening one space inevitably forecloses others (see Chapters Six and Seven for further discussion of the limits and possibilities of epistemological boundary crossing). Ultimately then our focus of analysis should be less about whether it is power or resistance at work, and instead about what kinds of practices generate what kinds of effects (both intended and otherwise).

Ultimately what we might take from Foucault's work is a politics and method of transformative epistemology that, following Nietzsche, starts by 'detaching the power of truth from the forms of hegemony, social, economic and cultural, within which it operates at the present time' (Foucault 1980, 133). This process of detaching the power of truth not only creates crucial points of epistemological rupture and change, but also opens transformative space for thinking and knowing 'otherwise'. In order to do this work, however, we must both remain open to new forms of knowing; we must actively question, undo and transform the knowledge practices we most hold dear. As Foucault remarked in an interview in 1978,

The experience through which we grasp the intelligibility of certain mechanisms (for example, imprisonment, punishment, and so on) and the way in which we are enabled to detach ourselves from them by perceiving them differently will be, at best, one and the same thing. (1978/2000)

It is precisely this question of experience—the means through which we come to both render things intelligible and perceive them differently—that I will consider in the next chapter. For the process of knowing and perceiving differently through experience also requires critical unpacking. Speaking about the language of fiction, Foucault suggests we take up practices of illumination, excavation and 'undoing'. In his words, we must no longer seek out or deploy a 'power that tirelessly produces images and makes them shine, but rather a power that undoes them, that lessens their overload, that infuses them with an inner transparency that illuminates them little by little until they burst and scatter in the lightness of the unimaginable' (Foucault 1987, 23).

Chapter 4

EXPERIENCE, EMBODIMENT AND THE SOCIAL TRANSFORMATION OF KNOWING

Introduction

An experience is something that one comes out of transformed.
(Foucault 2000, 239)

Imagination begins in experience; it is here that the conditions of possibility are shaped and determined. (Paulson 2010, 33)

What role does experience play in processes of epistemological change? Why do some experiences reconfirm what we already know while others prompt us to radically question our established modes of thought and understanding? How are experiential and embodied knowledge practices important for knowledge politics within social movements? While the previous chapter considered the role of 'resistance' in the generation of transformative epistemologies, this chapter turns to the phenomenon of 'experience' as a site of knowledge production. Moving away from questions of power and resistance at an abstract level, this chapter turns attention to more grounded, material and embodied forms of knowing and considers knowledge practices that are deemed as emerging from, or belonging to the realm of 'experience'.

Although widely critiqued, and largely out of theoretical fashion, 'experience' has historically played a central role in feminist, queer and critical race theories of knowledge and continues to retain much political significance in the way that alternative knowledges are deployed and legitimated within grassroots social movements. Activists, for example, regularly draw on their own experiences—whether personal histories of oppression, skills acquired through community organizing practices, observations gleaned from participatory research projects, or

popular education and conscious-raising activities—as key sources of knowledge and claims for legitimacy against more dominant knowledge forms. Many activists also describe—as I did in Chapter Two—how personal experiences of injustice prompted them to take up certain kinds of political organizing, suggesting that specific experiences may function as important catalysts for change.

Frequently dismissed as having less credibility than other forms of knowledge (e.g. scientific or ‘objective’ knowledge), experiential knowledge is nevertheless routinely relied upon in everyday practice as an important mode of ‘common sense’ knowing. In this way, the epistemic value of experience retains much currency beyond activist circles: teachers regularly rely on student experiences as pedagogical tools in the classroom, politicians draw from personal experiences of constituents to bolster support for legislative change, empirical researchers rely on narratives of experiences as vital sources of data. Even when not explicitly acknowledged, experience provides a key source of practical, informal and tacit knowledge in the ordinary daily lives of most people.

Experience provides an important site for exploring processes of transformative knowledge production because it is seen as something that generates concrete changes in understanding and perception; experience is often treated as a foundational source upon which new knowledge claims are based. Because the relationship between experience and knowledge is conceptualized as relatively close and fairly direct (i.e. one gains knowledge directly from experience), the specific process through which particular events or experiences are translated into formal knowledge claims is ripe for interrogation. The popular notion of a ‘life-changing experience’ also indicates the extent to which people attribute epistemological shifts to dramatic or intensely felt personal experiences. Moreover, because appeals to ‘marginalised’ experiences are regularly invoked by social movements as a strategy for challenging dominant knowledge norms, interrogating the processes and conditions of how such knowledge claims generate political effects may offer insights into ‘the insurrection of subjugated knowledges’ described in Chapter Three. Questioning the specific processes through which experiences are formulated into

politicised knowledge claims may not only help to understand processes of epistemological change more broadly, but to reveal the means through which subjugated knowledges are excavated, asserted and deployed in politically transformative ways.

Political invocations of experience both within and beyond activist politics are also important because they are tied closely to questions of embodiment, as the experience of one's body in society profoundly shapes the ways in which one comes to know the world (Prosser 1998; Roberts 2008, 25). Experience itself can be understood as a process in which we come to know the world *through* our bodies, particularly through perception, emotion, language, sensation and movement in time and space (Wilde 1999). As Margaret Lock suggests, 'the body mediates all reflection and action upon the world' (1993, 133). In this sense, paying attention to embodied forms of knowledge is important for contesting the conventional Cartesian dualism between mind and body, a paradigm that fails to attend to the ways in which 'thinking' and 'knowing' are mediated through our embodied lived experiences.

At the same time, the relationship between experience, embodiment and knowledge is highly contested (Throop 2003b). Key debates within identity politics, for example, often rest upon contentious distinctions in the ways that particular experiences are understood, interpreted and valued (Elliot 2001, 300; hooks 1991). Much contemporary political organizing still grapples with ongoing debates around the strategic use of experiential knowledge, particularly in decisions about how to privilege particular voices within social movement struggles, how to respond to conflicting experiential claims and how to invoke personal experience in ethical ways.

For example, within many social movements it is common practice for activists who have not directly experienced a particular form of injustice to follow the leadership of those who have, namely those who are 'most directly affected' by the issues at hand. Non-imprisoned activists who are working on prisoner justice issues, for example, aim to prioritise the views, analysis and opinions of prisoners or formerly incarcerated people when developing political strategies. This tactic is crucial both for countering the structural exclusion of prisoners on matters of

criminal justice policy and movement strategy, but also for ensuring that non-imprisoned organizers remain accountable to those they organize in the name of. However, since prisoners (like any group of people) are diverse and varied in their experiences and perspectives, and because there are considerable barriers at work in communicating across prison walls (see Chapter Six), practical questions arise around prioritising prisoner involvement. On the one hand, non-imprisoned activists need to be careful not to simply 'cherry pick' prisoner perspectives that conveniently fit with a predefined agenda or are most easily accessible. On the other hand, to uncritically accept prisoners' views is both practically unfeasible (because of differences among prisoners) and politically problematic (say, for example, if a white prisoner expresses views or strategies that reinforces racist or sexist norms).⁷⁷ Moreover, because of the unequal power relations between those inside and outside prison, decisions around how to foster space for prisoners' voices can be fraught with pragmatic dilemmas.⁷⁸ As such, non-imprisoned activists are constantly engaged in strategic, political and ethical questions around what it means in practice to prioritise the experiences and knowledge of those most directly affected by imprisonment.⁷⁹

Too often dilemmas about experience are framed as questions of authenticity, group identity and belonging (namely, which experiences or knowledges

⁷⁷ This example is not meant to suggest that prisoners are any more likely to hold racist or sexist views than non-imprisoned people. However, given the pervasiveness of racism and sexism in society at large, and the well-documented systemic racism and sexism within prison environments more specifically, it would be naïve to think that prisoners are immune to such beliefs. As such the example is useful for illustrating the complexities of making political choices about the strategic use of knowledge claims.

⁷⁸ For example, I am involved in a prisoner solidarity group, which regularly publishes a newsletter written by and for LGBT prisoners. The newsletter aims to provide a form for LGBT prisoners' voices to be amplified both inside and outside prison. But as non-imprisoned people who publish the newsletter, we are regularly faced with very practical and ethical dilemmas: Do we publish everything we receive? Should we edit the work and if so on what basis? What if we publish something that inadvertently puts a prisoner at risk (if they disclose something that has unexpected consequences)? What do we do when we feel it is necessary to make edits but cannot check with the prisoner (because they've been released or transferred and are no longer in contact)? So even in a context where we are explicitly aiming to provide a platform for prisoners' voices to be heard, we effectively become gatekeepers of knowledge, as we make decisions about what to print and how to present prisoners' writing.

⁷⁹ These dilemmas are further explored in the discussion of prisoner solidarity practices in Chapter Six. See also Lawston (2009).

are truly representative of a particular group of people and what knowledges and experiences define group belonging).⁸⁰ I would argue, however, that framing these debates on such terms misses important questions about *processes* of knowledge formation.⁸¹ The objection, for example, to the racist or sexist viewpoint hypothetically articulated by a prisoner, is not so much that it is an *inauthentic* perspective (i.e. it is unrepresentative), but rather that it is a *politically problematic* perspective (i.e. it stems from and reinforces dominant relations of racial power). In other words, such a perspective does not have much transformative potential as it serves to reinforce rather than shift the status quo. At the same time, it is important to understand *how* a prisoner has come to that perspective, rather than assuming that view indicates a static perception or core 'truth' about that prisoner (i.e., that individual is inherently racist, or that prisoners as a group are racist). Given the well-documented and widespread racism that is embedded with prison systems at large, it is quite possible that such racist views have been partly shaped, fostered and cultivated by the prison environment itself. Nevertheless, making connections between one's context and one's perception raises questions about the complex interactions between subject location, social norms, structures of meaning, power relations and embodied perceptions that come to shape the phenomenon we call 'experience.'

So the question of evaluating the transformative potential of experiential knowledges lies partly on an assessment of the meaning embedded in particular knowledge claims (the content of the claim), the agency and position of the one who claimed it (the context of the claim), and the means through which that knowledge

⁸⁰ See for example the feminist debates about the category of women, the problem of essentialism and the pitfalls of using experience to define group identity (Mohanty 1988, 1995; Spelman 1988; Fuss 1989; hooks 1991; Young 1994).

⁸¹ Steolzer and Yuval Davis make a similar point in their analysis of discussions about feminist standpoint theory: "there is little discussion as to how the transitions from positions to practices, practices to standpoints, knowledge, meaning, values and goals actually takes place (Stoetzler and Yuval-Davis 2002, 320).

claim was formed (the process of the claim).⁸² Underlying this dilemma, then, is a not simply a problem of epistemological authenticity or identity-formation, but a question of how, why and with what effect, experiential knowledge claims come to be formed. The other key question that arises within these dilemmas is what makes some experiences transformative and others not. If ‘experience’ can generate vital changes in our understanding of the world, do processes of political transformation require particular *kinds* of experiences, or certain ways of *interpreting and articulating* those experiences—or perhaps both? What exactly is ‘experience’ anyway?

In this chapter, I seek to explore the role of experience in processes of epistemological transformation. I begin by briefly sketching out the political significance of experience in processes of knowledge production, drawing specifically from feminist and critical race scholarship on standpoint epistemologies.⁸³ I then examine critiques of experience, and outline some conceptual limits of thinking through the relationships between experience, embodiment and epistemological change. These first two sections necessarily revisit feminist debates of the 1980s and 1990s, which considered the merits and limits of experience as a source of feminist epistemology. But rather than evaluating experiential knowledge for its truth-generating capacity or its role in identity-formation and group belonging (a key focus in these earlier debates), I want to reconsider experiential knowledge as a site of potential epistemological rupture. So in the third section, I consider how epistemological transformations might arise from particular narratives or deployments of experiential knowledge. There I consider the role of consciousness-raising, imagination and other interpretive tools in the processes through which

⁸² Of course, evaluating the *potential* of any knowledge is quite difficult, as the effects of that knowledge cannot be known in advance. Accordingly, any such assessment will inevitably be speculative.

⁸³ My decision to start from feminist, queer, and critical race deployments of experience is a deliberate political and methodological choice. While recognizing that epistemological and ontological dilemmas around ‘experience’ have a long history within western political thought, this chapter seeks to explore these debates through the lens of contemporary political dilemmas that activists regularly face, especially in their everyday efforts to open up space for alternative practices of knowing.

experiences are articulated, narrated and rendered politically intelligible. I argue that while 'experience' remains a conceptually elusive phenomenon when it comes to theorizing *processes* of knowledge production, it retains political importance for generating *narratives* of transformative knowledge. As such, this chapter navigates the tensions between recognizing the political and epistemological significance of experience on the one hand whilst also attending to its risks and dangers on the other. Specifically exploring the political stakes of deploying experiential and embodied knowledge practices within social movement contexts, the chapter seeks to better understand the perils and possibilities of experiential knowledge in processes of epistemological transformation.

The Political Significance of Experiential Knowledge

Experience can be understood as having two primary but overlapping functions in the process of knowledge production: first, experience provides a source of knowledge (the 'raw material' which forms the basis for how we come to know the world) and second, experience provides a source of legitimacy (a means of verifying claims by drawing on experience as evidence). While both elements are implicit within conventional paradigms of empirical analysis, experience itself is often politicized by activists, who seek to redefine the kinds of claims that count as legitimate knowledge. The politicization of individual and collective experience has been specifically deployed to draw attention to otherwise excluded voices, to challenge traditional gatekeepers of knowledge and to denaturalize dominant norms for producing and validating knowledge (Smith 1974).

Experiential knowledge claims, for example, have been crucial for the assertion of transgender rights. For if there is one key political demand that broadly unites the diversity of transgender activists it is an assertion of the fundamental right to self-determined gender identity. This claim is deeply embedded in experiential knowledge since the basis for self-determined identity lies primarily in one's experience of oneself. In this context, one's own experience of gender (i.e. one's self-

felt gender identity), takes definitional priority over socially assigned determinations of gender (i.e. the gender that one was assigned at birth or the gender that other people might attribute to you based on a particular reading of your body). Of course, the way in which one experiences oneself can change over time and is shaped by a complex range of social factors. One might initially identify as a butch lesbian and then later identify as a transgender man. This might be especially the case for people who first 'came out' at a time or place where 'transgender' was not a readily available identity category or when trans communities were less visible. As such, the shift from one identity to another could signal a change in self-perception (e.g. 'I was a lesbian before but I'm a trans man now) or a re-evaluation or re-interpretation of previous experiences (e.g. 'I actually felt male-identified all along, I just couldn't properly express it'). In this sense, not only do our experiences change, but so do our perceptions and narratives of those experiences. But regardless of how one's identity changes over time and despite the myriad of social factors that may shape it, a key argument among trans activists is that everyone should have the right to self-determine their own gender identity.

The success of this claim for gender self-determination relies on an assertion and validation of particular experiential knowledge claims (e.g. my own self-understanding or my embodied knowledge) as being more legitimate than other kinds of knowledge claims (e.g. traditional 'scientific' and 'medical' knowledges which maintain there are two proper sexes, male and female, and they are biologically fixed at birth).⁸⁴ The assertion that transgender politics has significance beyond trans-identified people also appeals to scales of experience (e.g. we all fail to conform to, and thereby suffer from, binary gender norms). In contexts where gender norms are still significantly governed by medical authorities, government officials, theological doctrine and corporate media, such appeals to personal experience can provide a vital counter-source of legitimacy and validation (Scott-Dixon 2006).

⁸⁴ Of course, there are 'medical' and 'scientific' knowledges that also contest the traditional male-female sex binary, but these does not reflect the dominant view. See for example Fausto-Sterling (1993) and Jordan-Young (2010).

As a source of knowledge, experience thus provides a key entry point for theorizing what is happening in the world without depending directly on traditional gatekeepers of knowledge (e.g., science, philosophy, religion). 'Consciousness-raising' groups, for example, rely on collective experience as a springboard for analysis, from which oppressed groups can theorize the power relations that underpin their social positions. In keeping with Marx's claim that knowledge and consciousness are shaped by material circumstances, political appeals to experience provide a means of naming and identifying one's material conditions, particularly for individuals and groups whose knowledge claims are routinely ignored, denied or dismissed. The collective sharing of, and reflection on, such experience is deemed to have transformative potential. Women's collective experiences of violence, for example, have provided an important political basis for identifying previously nameless or unarticulated phenomenon (e.g. sexual harassment, domestic violence or battered women's syndrome). Part of the political appeal of experience is that all people—regardless of their identity, social position, or education—have access to this form of knowledge. As such, all individuals and groups are, at least in theory, potentially empowered to speak for themselves about their understanding of how the world has treated them. Whether these knowledge claims are heard, understood or legitimated may be another matter (see Spivak 1988), but experience nonetheless provides an important access point for articulating knowledge.

Knowledge claims emerging from experiences of individuals and groups who are marginalized can thus provide a corrective to dominant social narratives, particularly common sense 'truths' which are treated as universal but actually reflect the views and interests of those in power (Code 1991). For example, when people of colour speak out about their experiences of being repeatedly singled out by police for stop and search, such information can be useful for challenging the state's claim that its laws apply equally to all. Indeed, such appeals to personal experience may be vital for exposing abusive power relations, particularly if other means of identifying such phenomenon are not available (e.g., if the state does not collect statistical data on the racial identities of those stopped for police searches). In this way, experiential

knowledge can constitute a kind of ‘truth-telling’ exercise in the sense of ‘fearless speech’ that Foucault describes in his 1983 lectures at Berkeley (Foucault 1983/2001). Such deployments of experiential knowledge do not necessarily involve the telling of a grand ‘Truth’ (in the sense of a universal knowledge claim or the confessional revelation of a deep authentic truth about the self), but a deployment of one’s own experience in order to challenge the powers that be—a speaking of one’s own truth to power (Valverde 2004).⁸⁵

Such appeals to experience can be especially powerful because they are not easily challenged on their own terms. Unless one resorts to accusations of false consciousness (which itself relies on a logic that either privileges one epistemological location over another or claims to transcend experience altogether), it is difficult to deny the ‘reality’ of individual’s experience. Broadly speaking, the validity of one person’s experience can only be trumped by competing experiences or by the assertion of supposedly higher status knowledge forms.

Authoritative claims to experience, however, are not only made by those who are oppressed or marginalised; those in positions of power also use experiential knowledge to reinforce hierarchy and reproduce dominant norms (hooks 1991). Likewise, subjugated groups can produce ‘conservative’ or ‘hegemonic’ knowledge claims from their experience just as easily as ‘radical’ or ‘transgressive’ ones. For example, people in criminalised communities might support ‘tough on crime’ legislation, women might oppose pay equity, or low-paid workers might support anti-union legislation.⁸⁶ For social movements who aim to deploy experiential knowledge in strategic ways, the question then arises: what makes the experience of one group

⁸⁵ As noted in the previous chapter, Foucault’s lectures consider the ancient Greek practices of *parrhesia*, which generally involve a speaker in a position of lesser power speaking to one of greater power in order to contest an established truth.

⁸⁶ Traditional strands of Marxist analysis would argue that such groups suffer from ‘false consciousness’ such that these views are the product of political ideology and hegemony. As many critics have pointed out, however, this view is politically problematic, not only for positing a ‘true consciousness’ that could exist ‘outside ideology’ but also for taking a patronizing view of popular opinion. Such accounts also do not necessarily explain why and how such ‘false consciousness’ is overcome in some cases but not others. However, while the question of why people act in ways that are contrary to their apparent interests is an important one, it is not my prime concern in this chapter and so I only briefly touch on it here.

more valuable, unique, pressing, or potentially transgressive than the experience-based knowledge claims of another? On what grounds and in what circumstances can particular groups claim 'epistemic privilege'?

Ethical claims underpin many arguments for privileging the experiences of those who are marginalized. These claims range from arguments that those in positions of power have an ethical duty to listen to those who are more marginalised, to the assertion that those who are oppressed have morally superior views. Some proponents of feminist standpoint theory, for example, claim that privileging women's knowledge will lead to a more socially just world (Hartsock 1997, 373). While the specific claim that some groups produce ethically superior knowledge by virtue of their social location is philosophically difficult to sustain, the ethical imperative to pay attention to subaltern knowledges nevertheless retains much political currency among activists and social-justice minded scholars alike.

Some prioritize the knowledge of marginalized groups on less explicitly ethical grounds, appealing instead to claims of epistemological acuity. Such arguments suggest that those who are marginalized have a better claim to particular truths than those in power. As Frederic Jamison describes,

Owing to its structural situation in the social order and to the specific forms of oppression and exploitations unique to that situation, each group lives the world in a phenomenologically specific way that allows it to see, or better still, that makes it unavoidable for that group to see and to know, features of the world that remain obscure, invisible, or merely occasional and secondary for other groups. (2004, 144)

For example, Marxists traditionally argue that those who experience labour exploitation (i.e., the proletarian worker) are in a better position to understand both the nature of capitalist oppression and the structure of wage-labour relations than those who authorize and benefit from that oppression (i.e., the bourgeoisie). Such insights arise not simply from the worker's socially marginal position, but because the working classes are at the centre of capitalist exploitation (which explains why, in the traditional Marxist view, the proletarian is epistemologically privileged while other socially marginalized groups are not). However, the privileged epistemological

position of working class subjects is only possible once the worker's 'consciousness' has been awoken from the slumber of dominant ideologies, a process that can only occur through particular social processes (e.g. experiencing the contradictions of capitalism (Marx and Engels 1848/2008, 1845/2004), following the leadership of the 'revolutionary vanguard' (Lenin 1902/1978), or revealed through the work of 'organic intellectuals' (Gramsci 1971)). Feminist and critical race scholars have extended Marxist theory beyond the confines of a single and unified proletarian class, to argue that women, people of colour, and other subjugated groups also have special insights into particular relations of power because of their material experiences of oppression (Bannerji 1995; Collins 1991; Laclau and Mouffe 1985 / 1996).

However, such claims of epistemic authority among the marginalised and oppressed (and corresponding ignorance among the powerful) can sometimes fail to distinguish between social understanding and political will; for those who exploit others may fully understand the oppressive nature of those relationships but simply choose to maintain them for political, economic and social benefit. In this sense, an exclusive focus on the experiences of the marginalised can sometimes leave unscrutinized the experiences of the more powerful while simultaneously subjecting the vulnerable to surveillance and regulation (Stoetzler and Yuval-Davis 2002, 319).⁸⁷

Likewise, although most standpoint feminists explicitly argue that epistemic privilege does not arise automatically by virtue of one's marginal social position and instead marks a *capacity* for critical consciousness (see Wylie 2004), it is unclear how, why and in what circumstances that capacity translates into actuality. In other words, why don't all subjugated groups experience radical consciousness by virtue of their position? What makes consciousness-raising activities 'successful' in some cases but not in others? Moreover, the diversity of views among and within subjugated groups raises questions about which particular perspective is most 'accurate' and should therefore be privileged within a group. A further problem is that such distinctions sometimes rest on preconceived ideas about what 'radical' ideas *should* be, thus

⁸⁷ Critical whiteness studies, analyses of 'hegemonic masculinities', and interrogations of heterosexuality are all examples of work that has tried to 'reverse the gaze' to focus on dominant yet 'unmarked' power relations and identity practices.

defeating the purpose of taking seriously the knowledge and views of that group since the answer is already determined in advance. The problem of epistemic privilege is thus a contentious one, as the epistemological accuracy of claims within any subjugated group is neither straightforward nor self-evident. In other words, one's social position cannot be simply taken as a de facto capacity for generating more 'accurate' knowledge claims. As such, there may be no rigorous justification for why the knowledge of those who are exploited is inherently better, more attuned to reality, less distorted than those who exploit—even if there are politically strategic reasons for claiming so (Hekman 1997; Hawkesworth 1989).

Even if those who are exploited do not have privileged access to 'truth', their perspectives may nonetheless warrant political prioritization for other reasons. There may be value in seeking out alternative or marginalised viewpoints (even if not ethically or epistemologically superior) on the simple basis that multiple perspectives in dialogic engagement provide a more complete picture for approximating 'truth' than singular positions (Collins 1991, 234-237; Stoetzler and Yuval-Davis 2002, 315). Appeals to epistemological pluralism may indeed help to constitute fundamentally counter-hegemonic positions by denaturalizing normative discourses, though they may at the same time simultaneously lapse into problems of relativism (Hawkesworth 1989).⁸⁸ Yet it is important to distinguish between preferential appeals to experience for the purposes of political strategy versus those making claim to grand truths. A preferential option for the knowledge of the oppressed might serve a pragmatic ethical response to a particular injustice, but it need not collapse into a claim that certain groups of people have a privileged access to truth in a universal or totalising sense (Valverde 2003, 10). Accordingly, political deployments of experience might be understood less as a kind of epistemological theory, and more as a social and political methodology (Wylie 2004, 340).

Trusting in the vantage point of those whose perspectives are marginalised and devalued may also have less to do with accessing truth, and more to do with

⁸⁸ Relativism becomes a problem, for example, when different criteria for assessing knowledge claims are treated as equally valid, thus making it impossible to assess the merits or limits of specific knowledges, particularly on ethical or political grounds.

practicing a politics of locatedness. As Donna Haraway argues, the foregrounding of ‘situated and embodied knowledges’ can work to challenge forms of ‘unlocatable, and so irresponsible, knowledge claims’ (1991, 191). In other words, drawing from the knowledge claims of the less powerful—and explicitly highlighting the social position from which that particular knowledge is articulated—can contest what Haraway describes as the traditional ‘god-trick’ of universal knowledge claims, which presume to see from everywhere and nowhere at the same time. Because situated knowledges are explicit about the specificity of their location, they are arguably more ‘self-aware’ and thus more potentially accountable. At the same time, we must be cautious against romanticizing and appropriating the perspectives of the less powerful. As Haraway describes ‘The standpoints of the subjugated are not “innocent” positions. On the contrary, they are preferred because in principle they are least likely to allow denial of the critical and interpretative core of all knowledge’ (1991, 191).

The possibility that ‘new’ forms of knowledge are generated from articulating experiences of alterity might offer a further justification for prioritizing the knowledge claims of those who are socially marginalised. Important political insights may arise when one’s own experiences conflict with what one already knows of the world (or the narratives that one has been told about the world), thus opening up space to question and challenge status quo knowledge claims. For example, many transgender people describe their identity as one in which they experience their gender identity differently from the gender they were assigned at birth. In other words, what they ‘know’ and ‘feel’ about their body and about their sense of self does not correspond with the narratives they have been told or learned about their body.⁸⁹ This experience of dissonance between self-knowledge and social-knowledge

⁸⁹ Many writers exploring different conditions of oppression have described a similar sense of embodied dissonance—a sense in one’s gut that something is not right, or a feeling of oppression as being inscribed in the body. Franz Fanon, for example, repeatedly uses metaphors of the body to describe the resistant impulses of the colonized subject. Referring to ‘muscular dreams’ of freedom and vitality that provide escape in the night, the ‘muscular reflex’ and ‘contraction’ of psychological resistance, and a sense of ‘violence rippling under the skin’, Fanon provides a highly embodied account of political and subjective dissonance (Fanon 1961/2004, 15, 16, 17, 31, 141, 161).

becomes a basis for challenging the existing norm (i.e. refusing to accept the gender one is assigned at birth, rejecting the gender binary, or questioning conventional assumptions about 'proper' masculinity and femininity).⁹⁰ In this sense, experience

can both confirm what is already known (we see what we have learned to see) and upset what has been taken for granted (when different meanings are in conflict we readjust our vision to take account of the conflict or to resolve it—that is what is meant by 'learning from experience,' though not everyone learns the same lesson or learns it at the same time or in the same way). (Scott 1991, 793)

The question that remains, then, is when, why and under what conditions do experiences prompt a rethinking of dominant knowledge norms, versus those which work to reinforce them? Why do some experiences evoke transformative epistemological effects whereas others do not? If it is also the case that people can hold on to contradictory views and manage to compartmentalise them, what accounts for the situations in which those tensions are maintained versus when those tensions invoke a more fundamental questioning and critique? I will return to these questions in the third section, but first I unpack in more detail some of the limits of experience as a source of knowledge in itself.

Critiques of Experience

Despite its political and epistemological appeal, the concept of experience poses several theoretical problems for considering the production of alternative knowledge. First, experience is not easily defined (Throop 2003a; Fox 2008; Davies and Davies 2007; Scott 1991). How does one distinguish, for example, between experience and empirical observation, between experience and emotion, or between experience and narration? Where does experience begin and end? As Joan Scott notes, 'What counts as experience is neither self-evident nor straightforward; it is always contested, and always therefore political' (1991, 797). The political dilemma

⁹⁰ For further discussion of 'dissonant' knowledge, see Chapter Six.

of defining experience is perhaps most evident in attempts to designate particular experiences as constituting, or belonging to, various identity-based groups. Fierce debates inevitably ensue from any attempt to define a group by particular experiences as such claims often digress into problematic distinctions between so called 'authentic' experiences versus 'imposter' knowledges, false-consciousness or ideological indoctrination.

The specific problem of defining group experience, though symptomatic of the limits of identity politics, is also connected to the problem of privileging unity and sameness over dissonance and difference (see Chapter Six). As critics of feminist standpoint theory have noted, tensions inevitably arise between privileging collective groups and simultaneously recognizing differences among group members. As Hekman asks, for example,

if we abandon a single axis of analysis, *the* standpoint of women, and instead try to accommodate the multiple, potentially infinite standpoints of diverse women, do we not also lose the analytic force of our argument? Or, in other words, how many axes can our arguments encompass before they slip into hopeless confusion? (Hekman 1997, 349; see also Young 1994)

This problem raises questions about whether experience must be tethered to group identity on the one hand or individual identity on the other. For if experience is only intelligible or meaningful as a register of either group or individual identity, its relevance for thinking through processes of knowledge-production may be limited to questions of subjectivity rather than broader questions of institutional or structural power.⁹¹

Second, experience-based knowledge is often treated in proprietary terms, which can obscure the social relations of power that produce both experience itself

⁹¹ As Iris Marion Young points out, while every individual person's experience may be unique, reducing experience to the level of the individual eliminates the capacity to address structural or systemic inequalities or injustices: 'Either we blame the victims (of oppression) and say that disadvantaged people's choices and capacities render them less competitive, or we attribute their disadvantage to the attitudes of individuals, who for whatever reason don't 'like' the disadvantaged one. In either case structural and political ways to address and rectify the disadvantage are written out the discourse'(1994, 718).

and whatever knowledge is deemed to arise from that experience. The idea that experience constitutes an accumulation of skills, competences or other social capital (e.g. an experienced employee) marks this proprietary relationship, whereby knowledge and experience are treated as commodity-like forms that are attached to particular individuals. Particularly when experience-based knowledge claims are expressed through ownership, (e.g. ‘this is my own experience, and no one can deny me that’) experience becomes highly individualized, such that it belongs to one person exclusively, even though others might have similar experiences and even while the meanings attributed to those experiences are filtered through broader social, historical and cultural norms.

Although proprietary claims to experience may be politically important in some circumstances, particularly for those whose knowledge-claims may be otherwise denied (e.g. survivors of sexual violence), the overall effect of individual ownership is to obscure the broader power relations that give rise to those experiences (e.g. violence becomes individualized rather than a consequence of social and institutional structures which foster and enable violence). Such proprietary relationships also tend to reinforce the assumption that the individual is the proper knowing unit, in the sense that the individual becomes the autonomous ‘interpreter’ of their own experience—a perspective that has been widely critiqued for reifying notions of autonomous rationality and for failing to attend to more collective, institutional and social processes of cognition and interpretation (Addelson 1993, 272). Although possessive relationships are sometimes expanded to encompass groups rather than individuals, the political effects are often similar: experience (and the knowledge that derives from it) becomes an object that can reveal social relations, rather than a social relation *in itself*. Moreover, the presumed capacity to possess experience implies that its meaning is somehow controlled by the individual or group who undergoes or interprets that experience—a condition that is most certainly illusory (Schlueter 2007, 326).

Perhaps the most fundamental problem with experience-based knowledge is the tendency to treat experience as a foundational category that naturalizes identity

and reifies the subject. As Joan Scott explains, 'When experience is taken as the origin of knowledge, the vision of the individual subject (the person who had the experience or the historian who recounts it) becomes the bedrock of evidence upon which explanation is built' (1991, 777). The critical point here is not simply that experience-based knowledge reinforces essentialist conceptions of identity (a common charge against feminist standpoint theory, which its proponents vehemently deny) (Wylie 2004, 341). Rather, when experience provides the explanatory starting point on the one hand, or the basis for knowledge-validation on the other, our analytic focus shifts away from the social relations that constitute subjects who experience, thereby camouflaging the social relations which give rise to experience itself. In other words, 'appeals to experience risk naturalizing ideologically conditioned categories that structure our experiences of self and world' (Stone-Mediatore 1998, 116).

Indeed, there is arguably no such thing as 'raw' experience; experience is always already mediated through social, political, geographic, economic and cultural frameworks that enable us to name, identify, interpret and feel particular events, sensations and feelings as experiences. The very process through which we 'derive' knowledge from those experiences – through narrative, interpretation, and analysis – is also mediated by social relations of power, which condition the possibilities of articulation (see Chapter Three). This is not to say that experience is socially *determined* (as these same forces enable subject agency and permit multiple readings of social experience), but rather, the way we come to know and understand experience is always socially, politically and historically, contingent. In short, the subject-who-experiences, the experience-of-experience and the knowledge-derived-from-experience are all conditioned by and mediated through social relations of power. As such 'experience is...not the origin of our explanation, but that which we want to explain' (Scott 1991, 797).

Scott's important critique poses a fundamental challenge for theorizing the relationship between experience and knowledge production: while it rightly critiques the foundationalist logic that was prevalent in earlier feminist work on experience, it

leaves largely unresolved the 'how' questions of explaining experience. Scott seems ready to abandon experience as a unit of analysis, in favour of a more general literary-discursive critique. Describing experience as 'a linguistic event', Scott suggests 'the question then becomes how to analyse language' (1991, 793). She argues that 'by situating and contextualizing that language . . . one historicizes the terms by which experience is represented and so historicizes "experience" itself' (Scott 1991, 795). Although Scott emphasizes that language is not merely symbolic but is itself a social practice with material effects (indeed, her point is that we must historicise and contextualise experience rather than treat it as a given), something may be nonetheless lost in placing experience in the primary register of linguistic analysis. Such a characterization potentially neglects the embodied, affective and social dimensions of phenomena that come to be known as experience. This is not to suggest that feelings and embodied sensations belong to an 'objective reality' outside language and meaning, but rather that these particular aspects of experience may not be fully captured through linguistic or discursive analysis. While there may be 'no outside the text' (to paraphrase Derrida), we must also recognize, as Hawkesworth argues, that 'the world is more than a text' (1989, 555). A near death experience, for example, arguably does not have the same physical, emotional, psychological effects as reading or having a conversation about death. In that sense, even though both 'encounters' with death are no doubt discursively produced (and both have material effects), there is something in the former that arguably produces different epistemological effects than the latter. Embodied theories of cognition also suggest that knowledge does not merely *describe* sensory, motor and introspective states, but can constitute a partial *simulation* of those states in the body. For example, when knowledge of a previous event is recalled through memory, language or thought, the original sensory states are partially re-enacted by the body (Barsalou et al. 2003). In this sense, particular kinds of experiential, sensory or embodied knowledges may trigger different somatic and interpretive effects than other kinds of knowledge (see also Shotwell 2011).

So even if we accept that experience cannot be *articulated* outside of language, and agree that experience is not the foundation of knowledge but an effect and process of knowledge production itself, it may be analytically productive to nevertheless preserve a distinction between epistemological phenomenon that are marked or read as experiential versus other kinds of knowledge (Nash 1994). Maintaining such a distinction is necessary, for example, to conceptualize the processes through which phenomenon initially read or marked as 'direct' or 'immediate' experience are then deployed, translated and transformed into formal knowledge claims. Such processes might be most visible in situations where previously unnamed or unintelligible phenomena emerge as something new or different from a previous form. It is this latter process that I want to interrogate, but one that is not satisfactorily explained in Scott's analysis.

There is arguably a difference between claiming that experience is socially mediated and therefore cannot be privileged as an unassailable foundation of knowledge (which is to reject the claim that experience is raw 'reality' and knowledge is interpretive 'representation'), and arguing that experience is nothing more than a linguistic or discursive phenomenon (everything is discourse). While both claims refuse a foundationalist logic, the second claim risks falling into the traps of what we might describe as dematerialised relativism.⁹² It may be important to recognise that despite the impossibility of narrating 'experience' outside of linguistic or discursive practices, there may be material and embodied elements of experience that exceed discursive articulation. The undetected effects of cancer, for example, can have very concrete and material effects on one's body long before "cancer" enters one's discursive and linguistic framework through the process of diagnosis. One may have an unconscious but 'intuitive' sense of being unwell—and a set of somatic effects that the body clearly experiences—even though such sensations may be only discursively understood retrospectively once the illness has been identified. This is not to say that discourse is not itself an embodied practice or that discursive

⁹² Scott's emphasis on historicising discourse, arguably seeks to avoid such a de-materialist relativism. So my point here is not meant to suggest that Scott's analysis dematerialised, but that the broader argument in favour of a literary or discursive analytical approach has some limits and risks.

practices do not have material effects. Rather it is to recognize that there may be some things which can be described as experience that cannot be simply reduced to the 'linguistic' or the 'discursive'. The dilemma here is not so much a problem of metaphysics (e.g. distinctions between representation and reality) as it is a problem of epistemological methodology (e.g. how do we distinguish between different kinds of knowledge practices and which conceptual tools best help with this task).

The relationship between experience and knowledge is further complicated by questions of subjectivity and agency. For experience is not simply a set of sensations, cognitions or perceptions that a pre-formed knowing subject encounters, but is part of the process through which subjects are formed and constituted. Teresa de Lauretis, for example, conceptualizes experience as a way of theorizing subjectivity. As she describes, experience is,

a process by which, for all social beings, subjectivity is constructed. Through the process one places oneself or is placed in social reality, and so perceives and comprehends as subjective (referring to, even originating in, oneself) those relations—material, economic, and interpersonal—which are in fact social and, in a larger perspective, historical. (de Lauretis 1984, 159)

From this perspective, experience and knowledge entail complex relationships between subject-formation, meaning-making and materiality. As John Schlueter further elaborates:

from the epistemological register of 'experience'...the meaning of the material *is* our experience of it, and that meaning's production occasions, indeed requires, the agency of the subject. In other words, meanings and culture are not monolithic forces that precede and determine the subject; rather, they are constantly enacted and repeated by the subject. In turn, the subject's 'meaningful experience' is what 'subjects' her to her cultural context. Construction, then, is not simply, or only, a name for created 'fictions' or 'fabrications', for stereotypes or exaggerations; rather, fundamentally, it signifies how cultural meanings *make possible experience* (which does not mean they precede and determine experience). (Schlueter 2007, 323)

It is not the subject who 'derives' knowledge from experience (or even makes experience possible); experience also makes the subject, which simultaneously

emerges from and produces social relations. Experience is therefore a site of perpetual agency since culture is constantly re-cited by experience, while at the same time ‘experience may exert leverage on meaning’ (Schlueter 2007, 325).

The conceptual difficulty with this schema, however, is that it renders opaque questions of process. To recognize that experience and knowledge (or experience and subjectivity) are mutually constitutive relations is to foreclose the possibility of considering this relationship as a process that can be mapped out by temporal moments or discrete event-like occurrences. One can investigate the *conditions* in which particular experiential knowledge claims come to be made, but not the dynamic *process* (or temporal unfolding) through which such experiential phenomena emerge. Hence we are faced with a conceptual aporia, a limit that demands either a rethinking of the process of experiential knowledge production, or an abandonment of questions of process in favour of genealogical excavations of conditionality. Either approach, however, requires that the concept of experience be further unpacked in relation to questions of epistemological transformation and change.

Experiences of Epistemological Transformation

Exploring the strategic benefits and risks of deploying ‘experience’ as a tool for challenging dominant knowledge claims may tell us something about the politics of experiential knowledge. But as noted above, such discussions do not necessarily reveal much about the *process* in which experiences—or interpretations of phenomena we identify as experience—generate new or transformative knowledges. Questions remain as to why and how some experiences engender processes of epistemological dissonance or rupture, whereas others simply reaffirm or build upon dominant norms of knowing. In some ways, this is a causal question that cannot be answered here, as it would require more detailed analysis of a particular circumstance, and even then causal relationships would be difficult to establish. So I want to consider this concern in a broadly conceptual way, in order to think

about investigating these questions in more specific situations. In this final section, I thus explore different ways of thinking about the processes and conditions in which experience can generate transformative epistemological effects.

If we start from the assumption that an individual or group's social position alone is not sufficient to explain the particular kinds of experiential knowledge that may be generated in a given situation, then we must look beyond individual knowers (and their experiences) to understand the broader circumstances of experiential change or rupture. Indeed, in considering the process in which subordinated subjects come to challenge their oppression, Laclau and Mouffe argue,

There is therefore nothing inevitable or natural in the different struggles against power, and it is necessary to explain in each case the reasons for their emergence and different modulations that they adopt. The struggle against subordination cannot be the result of the situation of subordination itself. (1985 / 1996, 152)

In other words, practices of organized, collective and conscious resistance (in contrast to the Foucauldian notion of resistance that is present in all relations of power—see Chapter Three) do not automatically flow from a situation of oppression itself. Likewise there is nothing inevitable about the transformative epistemological effects of experience; it is impossible to know in advance which experiences will generate epistemological rupture and which ones (or in which particular context) will work to reinforce dominant epistemologies or conventional ways of knowing. We must also recognize that some experiences may generate both effects at the same time. For this reason, it is important to attend to the particular social, historical and political circumstances which give rise to particular forms of 'experiential' knowledge in any given context.

Nevertheless, it is possible to think about the general processes through which transformative effects might be generated. Indeed, such analysis may be helpful for rethinking what constitutes 'experience' itself. For if we recognize that similar experiences can generate very different analytical or interpretive responses and that experience itself is an effect of relations of power, then perhaps it is not 'experience' itself that generates epistemological changes, but rather the social

practices of interpretation and meaning-making that bring that 'experience' into particular forms of political intelligibility. Yet the difficulty lies in deciphering where the points of interpretative rupture occur. For as noted above, we cannot assume that there is a 'raw' pre-discursive experience that exists prior to interpretation and can be traced according to a simple sequential chain-of-meaning. Even the most immediate sensory experiences are always already mediated. As Karen Fox notes,

human perception is complex and does not simply record what is 'out there.' The simple, physiological processes of perception require nonconscious screening processes. For example, the eye receives billions of bits of information of which the ocular nerve can only transmit a fraction. Clearly, selection and reduction of information is occurring even before values, predispositions, and interpretation occurs within the cognitive mind. (2008, 43)

Therefore any attempt to distinguish between 'experience' and 'interpretation' is to install a false distinction between embodied sensation and discursive cognition. All sensations, perceptions and experiences are not only interpreted, filtered and organized through the process of cognition, but the very capacity to experience sensations is predicated on an ability to interpret them (Throop 2003a, 225).

At the same time, the process of 'making sense' of experience is a dynamic one that may depend on multiple temporal registers. While recognizing that all forms of experience are socially mediated, some theorists of experience nonetheless make a distinction between more 'immediate' (sensory and effective) and 'mediate' (conceptual and representative) experiences (Throop 2003b, 379). In this sense there may be relevant epistemological and cognitive distinctions between 'living through' a sequence of events versus recounting or reflecting upon a series of events. There may be important differences between 'the fluidity and indeterminacy of experience in its sequential unfolding in the present moment and the "fixing", "ordering", "framing" and "regularization" of "structures of experience" with the retrospective imposition of meaning' (Throop 2003a, 223). This is not to say that one is closer to an objective reality or 'raw experience' but that the cognitive and interpretative modes of accessing those experiences may be organized differently.

Such distinctions require recognition of the complexity of temporal logics that structure understandings of experience. In conventional terms, experience is often understood as the knowledge, skills or competences that one accumulates over time and provides a basis of insight and response to future events. In this sense, the temporal relationship between knowledge and experience is imagined as a sequential one where experience precedes knowledge. In more philosophical terms, however, experience can be conceptualized as a phenomenological process of undergoing something—it is an exposure to, or perception of, the temporal unfolding of an ‘event’ or set of events.⁹³ Experience is also explicitly defined as the knowledge that one acquires from having observed, encountered or undergone a particular phenomenon.⁹⁴ Yet the temporal ordering of experience (in both its unfolding and its subsequent framing) is not necessarily a linear one, and may be shaped by a simultaneous synthesis of sensory orientations of past, present and future. The cognitive capacity to understand and make sense of an unfolding experience is arguably structured both by the lingering traces of past perceptions, feelings and sensations, and also through a sense of anticipation towards future horizons of experience. In this way, the experience of experience is always shaped by recurring tensions between forward and backward ‘horizons’ of awareness. As Jason Throop, drawing on Husserl, describes,

the horizon [of awareness] is therefore organized according to a quasi-spatial/temporal frame that extends forward in anticipatory ‘halos’ of protention toward the next arising moment of awareness, while simultaneously ‘sinking back’ from the nucleus of the present moment in the form of a ‘comet’s tail’ of retentional residues from past moments of awareness. (Throop 2003a, 230)

⁹³ Of course, the concept of ‘the event’ is just as elusive as the concept of ‘experience’ and its philosophical meaning been subject to considerable debate. However, for my purposes here, I use the term event in a more conventional way to refer to a set of happenings that are marked as belonging within a specifically bounded time and place.

⁹⁴ Experiences of the body are especially embedded in temporal narratives. Somatic changes like puberty, aging, or illness render a sense of “natural” time that can be felt in the body (Freeman 2007). As such the body itself is always already marked out and defined by time, and experience of embodiment are mediated through somatic temporalities. Even when experience is understood as a form of subject formation, this process occurs over time.

Here there are ongoing tensions between 'living experience within the flow of duration and reflection on the experience thus lived through' (Alfred Schultz quoted in Throop 2003a, 232). Interpretation is therefore not a process that simply occurs subsequently to experience, but is repeatedly present in each unfolding moment of observation or experience; it is therefore difficult to distinguish between the various modes of perception, interpretation and sensory understanding that constitute processes of experience (Throop 2003a, 225).

Rather than assuming that knowledge follows from experience, we might instead ask how, and in what ways, does knowledge arise from an anticipated experience of the future, or an imagined experience of the past? If new forms of thought, perception, knowing or sensation emerge from complex processes of overlapping and oscillating temporalities, then the temporal relationship between experience and knowledge might be less linear than conventionally understood. No longer can we presume that knowledge simply follows experience, but rather experience might follow knowledge, and knowledge might derive from an anticipated future—a radical imaginary—that has yet to come.

No doubt such imaginaries include the kinds of radical political visions that social movements advocate, but we might also consider more mundane forms of anticipation. I recall as a teenager, for example, spending considerable time imagining how my life would be different when I was older. As a 15-year old living in a small town in rural Canada, I often imagined how much better my life would be when I turned the magic age of 16 and could finally get my driver's licence, or when I could move out of my parents' house and live on my own. This anticipated future marked a hoped-for sense of 'liberation' (i.e. more freedom in my social life, less dependency on my parents). Arguably, my imagined sense of future-self shaped the ways I both expected the future to unfold, but also how I related to the world in that present moment. Conversely, I often wondered what my life would have been like if I had been born in a different time period (in my teenaged world, the 1960s seemed like a particularly good decade). I wondered how my experience of the world might be different in this imagined past. These imaginaries were no doubt shaped by the

memories of my 'actual' past (i.e. the mental images I had of previous events and experiences). So in this sense, my experience of being a 15-year old was both shaped by an imagined sense of the past and by an imagined expectation of the future. Arguably I developed certain kinds of knowledge from these temporal re-orderings and re-positionings of experience, particularly as my subsequent experiences were no doubt shaped by the imagination that framed my desires. Perception, imagination and experience were all intertwined, as these overlapping processes collectively shaped how I both imagined myself and understood my place in the world. So while our imagined pasts and anticipated futures may rely less on the perception of 'direct' sensory experience and more on the creative capacities of both imagination and fantasy, these perceptual vacillations between different temporalities no doubt produce generative effects.

Indeed, as many political theorists, activists and philosophers have argued, imagination is essential for political change. Whether we consider Kant's (1781/1998) ideas about imagination as productive, Cornelius Castoriadis's (1975/2005) concept of 'creative imagination', or Drucilla Cornell's (1995) concept of the 'imaginary domain', political thinkers have long argued the importance of imagination in generating new political possibilities. For some, imagination is a faculty that enables interpretation, for others it is a force of creativity or a resource for resisting reality.⁹⁵ But regardless of these differing views, imagination is broadly understood as a crucial element of social and political change. For we must be at least able to imagine the *possibility* of something different in order to actively and consciously seek any kind of change. In the words of Teresa de Lauretis, 'there is no politics without fantasy' (1999, 313).

In this sense, imagination can be understood as a key source of agency—a way of both envisioning how things *might* be otherwise, but also creating space to *make* things otherwise. As de Lauretis argues, 'Fantasy and desire are what move human beings and cannot be separated off from any form of human agency, whether

⁹⁵ For a useful overview of the 'radical imagination' particularly in the context of social movement struggles, see Haiven and Khasnabish (2010). See also Stoelzer and Yuval-Davis (2002), Mills (1959/2000) and Kelley (2002).

it is expressed in art, in daily living, or in political action' (1999, 314). For in order for transformative rupture to occur, there must be a degree of agency present in the given situation, as well as the *perception* or *awareness* of agency. As Paulo Freire famously describes in his work on the liberatory potential of critical pedagogy: 'In order for the oppressed to be able to wage the struggle for their liberation, they must perceive the reality of oppression not as a closed world from which there is no exit, but as a limiting situation which they can transform' (1970/2000, 49). Laclau and Mouffe make a similar point when distinguishing between what they call 'relations of subordination' and 'relations of oppression'. Whereas the former refers to any situation 'in which an agent is subjected to the decisions of another,' the latter describes situations in which 'those relations of subordination have transformed themselves into sites of antagonism' (Laclau and Mouffe 1985 / 1996, 154). In the situation of oppression then, the agent who is subjected to the will of another must see that subordination as a site of potential contestation—a situation that could be otherwise. For Laclau and Mouffe, it is only when agents have access to the interpretive tools that allow them to see their situation as one that is not natural or inevitable, that they will begin to contest that situation and make it a site of antagonism (Laclau and Mouffe 1985 / 1996, 155; Smith 1998, 8). In other words, they must be able to imagine the situation as otherwise.⁹⁶

What is particularly important in Laclau and Mouffe's description is that the shift from subordination to oppression is not one that necessarily ascribes a kind of false consciousness upon those in positions of marginalization or exploitation. Rather, it is a process through which alternative (albeit incomplete and contingent) understandings of one's situation become intelligible and thus change the nature of the relation of power from one of compliance to antagonism. In this sense Laclau and Mouffe avoid the problems of ideology and false consciousness that are dominant in

⁹⁶ Such a view is also potentially compatible with Foucault's 'games of truth' explored in the previous chapter. For in order to play these games strategically, one must be at least aware of the range of moves and strategies that would enable one to potentially shift the relations of power at work in the game. Even if one cannot predict the outcomes in advance, one must know that different outcomes are indeed possible; otherwise why play the game at all?

some streams of Marxist thought (which posit a truth that must be revealed). Instead they focus on the discursive tools and political resources that must be available to interpret one's situation in critical and transformative ways.⁹⁷ This is perhaps what remains powerful about the 'consciousness raising' activities that have been so crucial to feminist and critical race politics. Sharing experiences collectively can help to identify the ways in which certain experiences (such as domestic violence) are not 'isolated' individual events, but are connected to broader social relations of power. Identifying the ways that such phenomenon emerge from and sustain power relations can help challenge the seeming inevitability of those situations. Through such collective process, one can begin to see that one does not have to accept the status quo. Individual and collective imagination—the perception that an alternative state of being or experience is possible—is arguably crucial to this process.

At the same time, our imaginations—whether individual or collective—are not limitless. As Stoelzer and Yuval-Davis argue, 'imagination is situated; our imaginary horizons are affected by the positioning of our gaze' (2002, 327) In other words, just as our 'experience' is contained by the time, place and position of its unfolding, our imagination is bounded by its context. For as scholars of science fiction and fantasy remind us, even our wildest imaginations of the future are framed by the material conditions of the present. This is why science fiction is often as much of a commentary on the contemporary period in which it is written than it is a projection of the future. Attending to the 'situatedness' of imagination also returns us to the point that knowing practices (whether 'experiential', 'imaginative' or otherwise) can never be reduced to individual consciousness or cognitive autonomy. Imagination, like perception and interpretation, is a fundamentally social practice. Both constituted by, and constituent of, social relations, imagining agents are continually in process of becoming (and unbecoming) through such practices. Again, this is not to say that the material conditions of knowing are socially *determinative* of imagination,

⁹⁷ For Laclau and Mouffe, the necessary discursive tools are what they define as 'radical democratic discourses' but it is possible to imagine that alternative tools might also accomplish similar capacities for resistance and transformation.

but that imagination is not boundless; we can never fully escape the constraints of the material conditions of knowing.

The tensions between the 'situatedness' of experience and the 'situatedness' of imagination are, however, potentially generative. On the one hand, as Justin Paulson argues, 'Imagination begins in experience; it is here that the conditions of possibility are shaped and determined' (2010, 33). On the other hand, as Stoetzler and Yuval-Davis argue, 'it is our imagination that gives our experiences their particular meanings, their categories of reference' (Stoetzler and Yuval-Davis 2002, 327). So the relationship between imagination and experience is always in tension. To some extent then, positing a sharp distinction between a strategy of shifting the consciousness of knowing agents (i.e. changing one's interpretative framework) or seeking changes within the material conditions that give rise to consciousness (i.e. changing social conditions) is a false one; shifts in epistemological practice require both a conscious sense of agency and social conditions which allow changes to become intelligible. In other words, imagination both stems from material life, but also must be given material life to have political capacity.

But even if imagination cannot transcend experience, there is scope to play with it—stretching perception, extending interpretation, and expanding understanding. The very incompleteness and partiality of our experience requires us to fill the gaps in understanding with our own interpretive and imagined meanings. The creativity of imagination—part of the radical transformative capacity of thinking, as described in Chapter Two—allows us to push the meaning of experiences to new places and novel formations. We can stretch the horizon of possibilities not only in the sense of explicitly and self-consciously imagining an alternative state of affairs, but by mobilizing our perceptions and creative faculties (both individual and collective) to re-make, re-narrate and re-conceive of our experiences in new and different ways. So even if experience cannot be fully disentangled from imagination and perception, we can perhaps foster the conditions that best allow for this creative 'stretching' to occur.

The question at hand is then, what is needed to cultivate the capacity for radical imagination? How do we both keep possibilities alive and enable them to blossom and flourish? What techniques or strategies might be useful to enabling these transformations to occur? I will return to these questions in Chapter Seven, where I consider the creative potential of metaphor and analogy as linguistic practices that stretch meaning across contexts and in Chapter Five where I consider processes of 'co-optation' that block or restrict such creative practices. But in some ways, the stretching of our experience, also requires a potential 'undoing' of experience, as much as a recreation. As Paulson describes, '*radical* imagination *negates* experience, in whole or in part – which is to say, it negates the necessity of experience, and suggests as possible that which feels at some level inconceivable' (Paulson 2010, 34). In some ways Paulson is suggesting that we must undo our experience (what we know) in order to allow the new possibilities (the inconceivable) to flourish. This partial undoing, however, cannot be found in a desire to transcend our experience, but rather to make it anew. This requires, I think, practices of critical reflection and critique, which enable us to question our experience even as we deploy it (see Chapter Six). In this way, the stories we tell about our 'experiences' are potential resources for reordering experience itself (Stone-Mediatore 1998, 129).

Conclusion

The phenomenon of experience poses several problems for theorizing the production of transformative knowledge. Not only is experience itself an elusive concept, but its relationship to knowledge generation may be questioned on political, spatial, and temporal grounds. For if we cannot separate *what* we experience from *how* we understand that experience, then mapping the relationship between experience and knowledge formation is an endless challenge. Perhaps at most, we can say that 'experience is a mode of sense-making' that involves subjective, sensory encounters with material things and embedded social relations, a process through which we render those encounters as intelligible and imaginable (Lash 2006, 339). Perhaps this

recognition means being attentive to the particular process that such modes of sense-making entail and the kinds of political effects their strategic deployment generates.

It may be that other concepts—such as affect, narrative, subjectivity, and imagination—are more productive for thinking about the ways that such encounters generate transformative epistemologies or epistemological transformations. At the same time, it seems politically expedient not to dispense with experience altogether as site for political agency and epistemological inquiry. While the critiques above may warrant the abandonment of experience as an unproblematized *foundation* of knowledge, the political significance of experience as an embodied narrative form nonetheless remains a strategic tool within social movement contexts. In a political context where the most privileged among activists still speak too often for the most disenfranchised—often at the cost of building more effective, visionary and meaningful modes of political solidarity and struggle—there is still an acute pragmatic need to highlight the experiences and knowledges of those who are most directly affected by oppressive relations of power. The challenge then is to take up questions of experiential knowledge in new and more critical ways: to pay attention to the political work that experiential knowledge does, but also to recognize its limitations, and its impact on creating new possibilities for knowing.

Chapter 5

HEGEMONIC ENTANGLEMENTS:

Social movements and the epistemological politics of co-optation

Introduction

While previous chapters explored various conditions and processes that enable, create or make room for transformative epistemologies to emerge, this chapter considers forces that limit, block or undermine such processes. More specifically, this chapter explores how the problem of co-optation impacts practices of transformative knowledge production within social movements.⁹⁸ Drawing from a range of examples within feminist, queer and anti-racist organizing, this chapter is partly motivated by strategic concerns within grassroots social movements about how to best ward off processes that co-opt or assimilate activists' struggles. At the same time, this chapter seeks to explore the political underpinnings of the concept of co-optation itself, posing questions about its usefulness as a tool for thinking through problems of epistemological change and transformation.

For contemporary social movements, particularly those working towards 'radical' or systemic change, the problem of co-optation continues to generate considerable dilemma and debate. Whether taken up as questions of rhetorical strategy (e.g. should we use the language of rights for this campaign or does it feed liberal individualist norms?), as debates about legal and policy reform (e.g. will pursuing legal strategies narrow our political demands?) or as dilemmas about

⁹⁸While there are many potentially relevant factors that impede insurgent knowledge practices (e.g. lack of tools or resources, institutional or cultural barriers, etc.), I have chosen to focus specifically on the problem of co-optation, both because it is an ongoing concern within radical social movement contexts and because it allows for a concrete exploration of the dynamics between more transformative or insurgent knowledge practices and more dominant or hegemonic ones.

engaging with the state (e.g. should we demand state-run childcare or develop our own community-based alternatives?), concerns about co-optation come up regularly in social movement organizing. The problem of co-optation is also a key concern in discussions about balancing immediate needs with long term objectives, as short term strategies can sometimes end up comprising long term goals (Spade 2009).

Debates about co-optation within radical social movements have a long history—the classic Marxist debates about reform versus revolution providing a prime example⁹⁹—but such dilemmas resurface in different forms and at different moments to reveal the contours of historically specific power relations and struggles. The 1980s, for example, saw heated feminist debates about state co-optation in countries such as Canada, Britain and Australia, where ‘femocrats’ began making inroads in the welfare state bureaucracy with mixed success (Watson 1990). In the 1990s, gay, lesbian and transgender activists in North America deliberated over whether to focus on ‘recognition and inclusion’ such as same-sex marriage or to push more anti-assimilationist agendas (Herman 1994; Smith 1999; Warner 2002). More recently, as neoliberal forces roll back the welfare state and increasingly call upon civil society organizations to fill in the gap, fears of co-optation have resurfaced in terms of the ‘professionalization’ and ‘NGO-ization’ of activist struggles (Alvarez 1999; Smith 2007b; Rodríguez 2007). Changes in funding sources and organizing structures for grassroots organizations have generated further concerns, particularly with respect to activist autonomy from state, business and philanthropic agendas (INCITE! Women of Color Against Violence 2007).

As social movement histories have repeatedly demonstrated, activist anxieties about co-optation are well warranted. Activists and historians alike have documented countless occasions where government agencies, legal institutions, corporations and funding bodies have effectively de-radicalised activist agendas, diverted movement

⁹⁹ See for example Luxemburg (1908/2008). Despite the title, Luxemburg was not advocating a choice between reform on the one hand and revolution on the other, but rather sought to clarify the relationship between the two. For Luxemburg, reform was the means and revolution the goal. The key political question at stake, then, was around distinguishing between reforms that would enable versus those that would undermine revolutionary struggle.

resources and dissipated organizing energies (see for example Piven and Cloward 1979; Coy and Hedeem 2005). The appropriation of social movement discourse has also been used to foster new consumer markets, spin-doctor policy agendas, and justify oppressive state policies at home and abroad. The deployment of 'women's rights' to justify the 2001 US-led invasion of Afghanistan, and the increasing use of 'gay rights' in the Middle East to support the 'war on terror' provide particularly chilling examples (Hunt 2002; Haritaworn, Tauqir, and Erdem 2008; Puar 2007).

Problems of co-optation seem especially acute within the context of late capitalism. Not only does capitalism's endless search for new markets mean that activist discourses are perpetually in danger of being repackaged as corporate marketing strategies (see for example Frank and Weiland 1997; Klein 2000), but 'progressive' politics are increasingly interpreted and practiced through neoliberal paradigms and frameworks (Brown 2005c). Capitalism has demonstrated a stunning capacity to ensnarl, tame and reign-in even the most radical political projects by subsuming them within discourses that sit comfortably within neoliberal market agendas (e.g. individual rights, ethical consumerism, corporate responsibility, community participation, diversity, and alternative lifestyles). These discourses maintain a progressive political veneer while simultaneously divesting capacities to actually engage in systemic change. As such, it is increasingly difficult to even *think* beyond, let alone organize without recourse to, the logics of neoliberalism.¹⁰⁰ Of course, as will be explored below, the desire to claim a pure and innocent place

¹⁰⁰ Here, I follow David Harvey's general definition of neoliberalism as: 'a theory of political economic practices that proposes that human well-being can be best advanced by liberating individual entrepreneurial freedoms and skills within an institutional framework characterized by strong private property rights, free markets and free trade' (2005, 2). However, because this definition does not fully differentiate between classical liberalism and neoliberalism, I also find Wendy Brown's analysis helpful. Brown (2005b) argues that neoliberalism is not simply a set of economic policies that carry inadvertent social consequences, but a 'political rationality'—a way of thinking and governing conduct more generally—that extends market values beyond the market itself. For Brown, 'neoliberalism carries a social analysis that, when deployed as a form of governmentality, reaches from the soul of the citizen-subject to education policy to practices of empire...extending and disseminating market values to all institutions and social action' (Brown 2005b, 39-40). While Harvey and Brown's analysis are not dissimilar, Brown's emphasis on neoliberalism as political rationality is helpful in understanding the extent to which market logics have become deeply embedded within social life more broadly. See also Larner (2000; 2003).

outside hegemonic discourse is a false and impossible aim. At the same time, it is important not to overdetermine or oversimplify the influence of market logics, for neoliberalism is neither universally endorsed nor uniformly practiced as a hegemonic political-economic rationality. Likewise the effects of neoliberal policies are deeply varied across time and place. Nevertheless, owing to the ascendancy of neoliberalism on a broad global scale, the overall political landscape of possibility and imagination arguably looks quite different than it did even twenty or thirty years ago, and this impacts our understanding of what processes of co-optation look like and how they might be resisted.¹⁰¹

The problem of co-optation is not only relevant for questions of political strategy in a narrow instrumentalist sense of ‘what should we do’, and ‘how should we organize’; exploring concerns about the co-optation of insurgent knowledge can help think through processes of epistemological transformation more broadly. Not only do discussions of co-optation require that activists specify what they seek to ‘protect’ from co-optation, but they also raise questions about how of co-optation differs from other modes of change. As discussed below, there are considerable similarities between co-optation and transformation in both form and substance, raising important political questions about what distinguishes one from the other. As I will argue, the concept of co-optation may actually obscure more than it reveals, particularly when it reproduces static and bifurcated understandings of knowledge and power. Hence, this chapter aims to critically rethink the concept of co-optation in specific relation to its knowledge-power effects, in order to better understand processes of epistemological transformation.

In the first part of the chapter I consider the problem of co-optation in broad terms, exploring why it poses a recurring dilemma and ongoing source of debate for

¹⁰¹ This shift in landscape may stem in part from the end of the Cold War and the ‘end of history’ thesis whereby capitalism has supposedly triumphed over socialism. Although state socialism—as practised in various contexts—certainly failed to live up to the dreams of its architects, its official collapse has no doubt sustained the narrative that ‘there is no alternative’ to neoliberal capitalism. This narrative (which remains prevalent despite counter examples in Latin America and in light of ongoing economic crises) arguably plays an important role in the collective political imaginaries around what is possible in the contemporary political landscape.

social movements. In the second section, I examine these concerns within a specifically epistemological lens, considering how concerns about co-optation impact questions of knowledge production. There I consider the effects of co-optation not only on the content of activist knowledge claims but also on the form, structure and process of knowledge production more broadly. In the third section, I unpack some of the political and theoretical problems embedded within the concept of co-optation itself. I suggest that the language of co-optation frequently invokes a conservative, backwards-looking desire for purist forms of politics, which not only limits the kind of critical reflexivity that motivates concerns about co-optation in the first place, but also restricts the possibilities for broader political transformation. Further, I examine the relationship between co-optation and transformation and suggest that the two concepts are largely differentiated by their effects rather than by their mode of operation. I conclude by offering another metaphor—that of *hegemonic entanglements*—as a possibility for understanding the problems that the language of co-optation aims to address.

In seeking to better understand the processes that block, restrict or prohibit processes of epistemological transformation, this chapter develops the questions initially set out in Chapters One and Two around how to conceptualise processes of epistemological change—in this case, from the specific vantage point of constraining rather than enabling forces. It also builds on Chapter Three, by considering the complexity and non-linearity of negotiating power relations when seeking to challenge dominant knowledge practices. Extending the discussion in Chapter Four, it also considers how knowledge practices that are drawn from more ‘radical imaginaries’ can be curtailed when these visions get ‘entangled’ in constricting power relations.

Co-optation and Social Movement Politics

In a conventional sense, co-optation describes a process in which ideas, policies, labour or resources are diverted or used for a purpose that is different from their

usual or intended use. In these generic terms, co-optation marks a kind of re-possession or appropriation, a redeployment of something for different aims. In a more bureaucratic sense, co-optation refers to a management technique aimed at preserving organizational power and stability. From this perspective, co-optation describes ‘the process of absorbing new elements into the leadership or policy-determining structure of an organization as a means of averting threats to its stability or existence’ (Selznick 1949/1980, 13). Co-optation can also denote a strategic process of ‘winning someone over’ from one position to another. In this sense co-optation not only marks a ‘taming’ of potential threats, but a kind of extension or expansion of power—a way of increasing an organization’s size, strength or legitimacy by encompassing a greater body of people, resources, meanings or tools. From a social movement perspective, co-optation is often understood as a process in which movement energies are diverted, derailed or diffused either to prevent the pursuit of original goals or redirect them elsewhere. But irrespective of definition, questions of co-optation are always questions of power.

For the purposes of this chapter, I consider co-optation in a more explicitly epistemological register, not only to explore how social movement knowledge is subverted or appropriated, but how practices of co-optation shape and condition the possibilities of developing transformative epistemologies more broadly. Although I will examine the concept of co-optation in more depth below, I start with the following provisional definition: I consider co-optation as a practice of epistemological containment that achieves its effects through coercion, assimilation or appropriation. By containment, I refer to processes that establish limits or boundaries around particular knowledge practices, reconfigure knowledge forms or manage knowledge effects in order to generate particular outcomes. The coercive element distinguishes co-optation from other constraints on knowledge production (like direct censorship or repression).¹⁰² More specifically, co-optation operates by

¹⁰² One might compare for example, state responses to the ‘second wave’ women’s movement versus the American Indian Movement and the Black Panther Party in the United States. The former can be broadly characterized by a kind of selective adoption and co-optation of feminist values and ideals (see Fraser 2009) whereas the latter involved violent and forceful repression by the Federal Bureau of

exploiting or playing upon existing elements or desires associated with a particular knowledge (e.g. a desire for recognition or inclusion) or by channelling those desires into something else. From this perspective, co-optation is not a pollutant which 'taints' a previously 'pure' knowledge, but a practice of alteration that works with elements that are already embedded within that knowledge practice in order to reconfigure its potential effects. As such, co-optation does not include all kinds of discursive containment (since every single articulation of knowledge is always already constrained by the social, historical, economic and political context in which it is uttered, located or deployed).¹⁰³ Rather, co-optation is a mode of containment that works surreptitiously rather than antagonistically, either by operating through desire (to be included, affirmed, legitimated etc) or through appropriation and assimilation (selectively drawing from elements of an articulation to redeploy it differently).

Because co-optation works through practices of choice, freedom and desire (rather than repression or force), it could be described as a form of governmental power in the Foucauldian sense (or governmentality could be considered a form of co-optation). Indeed there are many resonances between practices of governmentality and co-optation.¹⁰⁴ However, I use the language of co-optation rather than governmentality for several reasons. First, while governmentality has become an important concept within many fields of scholarship (and in some ways its own field), social movement activists and scholars continue to use the language of co-optation. As social movements are the focus of this chapter, I see merit in using that context-specific lexicon. Second, governmentality is a technique of power that refers broadly to the art of governing (the conduct of conduct), rather than a strategic response to a particular demand or threat. For this reason, co-optation is a

Investigation (see for example Churchill and Vander Wall 2002). This is not to say that repression was never used against the women's movement, or that co-optation was not part of what undermined the American Indian Movement and Black Panther Party, but that in looking at the overall picture there are identifiable patterns and tendencies that worked to diminish both movements in strategically different ways.

¹⁰³ For a more full discussion on the politics of articulation, see Laclau and Mouffe (1985 / 1996).

¹⁰⁴ Governmentality, or the strategic 'conduct of conduct', is a technique of power that operates largely through one's desires, but also through the collection and deployment of particular kinds of knowledge practices, thus provides a good example of political-epistemological coercion through consent (Foucault 1978/1991; see Dean 1999/2010; Rose 1999/2004).

more specific concept for the concerns discussed here. Finally, powers of governmentality arguably operate through somewhat different techniques than powers of co-optation. Whereas co-optation largely governs through incorporation (a kind embodied envelopment, a pulling inwards or a subsuming within), governmentality operates from a more detached position, often described as 'governing at a distance'.¹⁰⁵ While social movements are no doubt 'governed at a distance' and subject to broad powers of governmentality, this chapter is more concerned with the specific processes where activists are governed through more direct forms of inclusion, participation and collaboration.

Processes of co-optation can occur intentionally when individual actors or organizations deliberately attempt to neutralize oppositional knowledge practices for strategic reasons, but also may occur less strategically when broader social, institutional and political forces of normalization usher dissident knowledge practices into more innocuous forms. When co-optation is used deliberately, it is often in response to a clear and definable 'threat' that is not effectively contained by other means. For example, according to a public relations manual for businesses entitled, *Managing Activism: A Guide to Dealing with Activists and Pressure Groups*, the best way to neutralize activists is to include them. Rather than ignoring, opposing or attempting to discrediting activist groups, corporations are advised to adopt 'a proactive strategy of relationship building, negotiation and conflict resolution' which treats activists as valid stakeholders rather than oppositional outsiders (Deegan 2001). Drawing from a range of case study examples, the manual argues that 'inclusion' tactics are more likely to persuade activists to compromise and will provide direct access to activist perspectives, which in turn enables better surveillance and management of future threats. Inclusion strategies can also generate other benefits for corporations, such as exploiting voluntary labour and

¹⁰⁵As Rose, O'Malley and Valverde describe, governmentality operates by 'acting from a center of calculation such as a government office or the headquarters of a nongovernmental organization, on the desires and activities of others who were spatially and organizationally distinct' (2006, 89; see also Rose 2000).

expertise, bolstering the corporation's image (i.e. increasing a reputation for 'corporate responsibility') and deflecting further critique from other activist groups.

Other forms of co-optation may be less directed or intentional, particularly when they occur through slow processes of institutional and policy change. In her recent book, *In An Abusive State: How Neoliberalism Appropriated the Feminist Movement Against Sexual Violence*, Kristen Bumiller (2008) documents how feminist anti-violence goals in the US have been funnelled into a 'law and order' agenda that has not effectively reduced gender violence, but has instead fuelled further violence through increased imprisonment, policing and social control. In Bumiller's analysis, politicians, state actors and corporations did not deliberately set out to repress the feminist anti-violence movement, but rather took up the goals and aims of the movement in ways that conveniently fulfilled other agendas.¹⁰⁶ As a consequence, feminist goals were not only derailed but the very problem of violence itself was re-conceptualised in ways that now make it more difficult to address. Although feminists have long identified violence against women as a problem stemming from patriarchy (and hence a social and political problem), it is now seen as primarily a law enforcement problem and a medical problem. As Bumiller describes, 'it has become nearly impossible to understand the causes and consequences of being a victim of violence in terms which do not fit squarely within the purview of medicine or criminal justice'—thus making it harder to address as a feminist issue (2008, 13). In short, even when processes of co-optation are not *intended* to undermine a movement, such outcomes may nonetheless occur

Co-optation can be also understood as a process through which insurgent knowledge practices become absorbed into hegemonic ones. By hegemonic, I do not simply mean dominant or powerful, but rather, knowledge practices which have become normalised through logics of universality and entrenched through practices of coercion. As Ernesto Laclau describes, hegemonic relations emerge when

¹⁰⁶ Barbara Cruikshank (1999), Hester Eisenstein (2005), Nancy Fraser (2009), and others have made similar arguments about the way that some feminist projects have been taken up in order to bolster corporate globalization, casualization of the labour force, declining wages, welfare-rollbacks and other economic austerity measures.

‘particularities which, without ceasing to become particularities, assume a function of universal representation’ (2000, 56).¹⁰⁷ In other words, hegemonic discourses emerge when the particular interests of a specific group come to be represented as universal and applicable to all, or take on the character of common sense. As Marxist legal scholars argue, for example, most property laws are designed to protect the particular interests of private property owners (including those who obtained their property through colonial theft, slavery, exploitation, etc.), but are framed as universal laws that apply to, protect and benefit everyone. As Anatole France famously stated, the law equally forbids the rich and poor from sleeping under bridges, begging in the streets or stealing bread—but clearly it is the wealthy who benefit and the poor who suffer from such laws. In this way, property laws not only create, reinforce and protect class hierarchies, but also work to normalize these divisions so that they appear natural and inevitable. For this reason, what is most powerful about a hegemonic discourse is that it shapes what Aletta Norval refers to as,

the horizon of intelligibility – a framework delineating what is possible, what can be said and done, what positions may legitimately be taken, what actions may be engaged in, and so forth...A discourse can be said to be hegemonic insofar as it succeeds in instituting and maintaining such a horizon. (1996, 4)

In epistemological terms, then, hegemonic discourses play a key role in establishing the broad conditions of knowing (both what we know and how we know it), by shaping and normalizing the boundaries of political articulation.

While hegemonic discourses are maintained partly through domination, repression and force (e.g. through police, courts, prisons and state violence), they are most powerfully secured through practices of normalization, which work to marshal

¹⁰⁷ Laclau identifies four elements to hegemonic relations: (1) unevenness of power; (2) a superseding of the universality / particularity binary such that the universal subverts the particular, and the particular becomes a locus of universal effects; (3); ‘the production of tangentially empty signifiers which, while maintaining the incommensurability between universal and particulars, enables the latter to take up the representation of the former’; and 4) ‘the terrain in which hegemony expands is that of the generalization of the relations of representation as conditions of the constitution of the social order’ (2000, 207).

support and consent for those discourses.¹⁰⁸ Contrary to notions of ‘false consciousness,’ which suggest that people are tricked or duped into accepting values, norms and conditions that contradict their ‘genuine’ interests, hegemonic discourses secure support by creating conditions which generate willing consent. As Robert Cox aptly describes, ‘Hegemony is like a pillow: it absorbs blows and sooner or later the would-be assailant will find it comfortable to rest upon’ (1996, 139). In other words, one does not need to dupe another to gain their consent; one merely has to create the conditions that will channel existing desires towards that aim. As such, co-optation is a key means through which hegemonic discourses sustain their legitimacy and popularity.

At the same time, a hegemonic discourse is never absolute, for, as Laclau describes, ‘A power which is total is no power at all’ (2000, 54).¹⁰⁹ Because hegemonic discourses are located at an incommensurable conjunction between the universal and the particular (and because language and meaning are always contested), the relationship is inherently unstable and therefore ripe for contestation. A key task for challenging hegemonic discourses, then, is to expose and intervene in the processes through which such discourses become normalized. In Gramscian terms, it is necessary to ‘provoke an organic crisis by attacking the hegemonic discourse’s universalistic pretension and its metaphoristic operation’ (Smith 1998, 189). By exposing the particularistic character of a hegemonic claim, for example, activists not only undermine the logic of the discourse itself, but create space for alternative articulations. This task is possible, not because activists position themselves as all-knowing or superior subjects who are outside hegemonic discourses, but because they are able to strategically exploit the limits, fissures and failures that are already embedded within the logic of hegemony itself.

¹⁰⁸ See also Althusser’s (1971) distinction between repressive state apparatuses (e.g. police, courts prisons) and ideological state apparatus (e.g. education, religion, family structures, cultural institutions).

¹⁰⁹ This point clearly resonates with Foucault’s assertion, discussed in Chapter Three, that power cannot operate without resistance. It also resonates with Foucault’s distinction between relations of power (where resistance is always present) and states of domination (which are more totalizing).

Activists who organize the World Social Forum under the banner ‘Another World Is Possible’, for example, deliberately seek to challenge the widespread claim, as Margaret Thatcher famously put it, that ‘there is no alternative’ to neoliberal globalization.¹¹⁰ By exposing the inconsistencies and repeated failures of neoliberal market logics, and by developing alternative practices which directly challenge the dominant view of what is possible, activists create space for new modes of social, economic and political organization to emerge. At the same time, tensions remain between *intervening in* and being *caught within* the contradictions of a hegemonic discourse. It is precisely for this reason that co-optation continues to pose such a strategic dilemma for social movements; movements must engage with hegemonic discourses and institutions in order to disrupt them, but the very process of engagement risks that the movement will slip into the logic of the very thing which it is trying to challenge.

Epistemological Effects of Co-optation

In their review of the literature on social movement co-optation, Patrick Coy and Timothy Hedeem (2005) identify several recurring patterns that work to undermine and control social movements: (1) the appropriation and redefinition of social movement discourse; (2) the inclusion of select movement actors—usually moderates rather than ‘radicals’—within organizations in order to serve institutional rather than social movement goals; (3) the implementation of modest symbolic policy reforms which avert demands for more radical and systemic change; and (4) the use of funding to moderate and control social movement agendas.¹¹¹ I would add (5) the

¹¹⁰ In contrast to the so-called TINA (there is no alternative) thesis, globalization activists such as Susan George have also asserted the TATA (there are thousands of alternatives) thesis, or the TAIA (there are infinite alternatives) thesis.

¹¹¹ Coy and Hedeem also map these processes onto four stages: Stage 1 occurs when the social movement articulates a set of grievances or demands and the state or vested interests begin to perceive the need for change (or feel pressure to at least acknowledge the grievances); Stage 2 involves both the integration or appropriation of social movement language and the inclusion of movement leaders in the policy making processes; Stage 3 involves the assimilation of social movement leaders and participants as well as a transformation of program goals; Stage 4 involves

commodification and objectification of activist knowledge through the commercialization of dissent. Although these patterns of co-optation are often discussed in terms of actors, interests and institutions (e.g. people who 'sell out', strategies that get derailed, or institutions that corrupt), I argue below that each kind of co-optation also bears significant consequences for practices of epistemological transformation more broadly. I describe five specific effects—depoliticising activist knowledges; deradicalising knowing subjects; shifting the focus on knowledge production; narrowing political imagination; and commodifying knowledge practices—which shape the conditions of knowing and the possibilities for epistemological transformation. I aim to demonstrate how practices of co-optation have the potential to not only shift activist agendas in terms of what actions and strategies are to be taken up, but also to fundamentally alter the political imaginations of social movements more broadly. In doing so, such processes reconfigure the possibilities for developing alternative ways of knowing and understanding the world.

Before considering these five forms of epistemological co-optation, it is important to emphasise that my analysis is not meant to suggest that co-optation is an inevitable or inescapable outcome of social movement engagements with the state or other institutions. In making these critiques I am not suggesting that social movements should refuse to work with the state or that positive results never arise from such engagements. My point is that when processes of co-optation *do* occur, the consequences are not limited to questions of political action in a narrow instrumentalist sense, but also generate broader epistemological effects that warrant attention. I also start from the assumption that knowledge practices are hybrid, and that any activist engagement with state or law will invariably affect the knowledge practices with which they are engaged. This is not to suggest that such engagements are inherently assimilationist; it is to recognize that knowledge is not a pure object to be traded or transferred between subjects, but a practice that changes through its

measures to routinize, regulate and professionalize social movement values and practices in order to both codify and institutionalise those practices, but also to create buffers against further challenges from the social movement (Coy and Hedeem 2005).

deployment within specific contexts (and this process can also change the subjects who engage in various knowledge practices). So the question is not whether activist engagements with that state or other potentially co-opting forces will alter activist knowledge (the answer is yes); the question is *how* will knowledge practices be altered and with what effect?

a) Appropriating activist discourse: depoliticising activist knowledge

Perhaps the most common example of epistemological co-optation arises when activist discourses are appropriated by other groups, institutions or organizational bodies. Most often this occurs when the knowledge, discourse or rhetoric of a social movement is adopted in order to denote official support for activist concerns, without actually making changes that reflect that discourse in practice. Politicians, for example, might selectively deploy the language of ‘gay rights’ in public speeches or add ‘sexual orientation’ to equality policy documents, without substantially addressing homophobia and heterosexism at an institutional level. In other cases, social movement discourse may be applied to an entirely different agenda for strategic reasons. The use of a discourse of women’s rights to justify the 2001 US military intervention in Afghanistan, for example, had little to do with appeasing feminist demands. Rather, it was primarily about garnering support for an unpopular war by putting a ‘humanitarian’ face on military aggression and by attempting to conceal the political and economic motives behind the intervention. Likewise, a discourse of respect for LGBT rights has sometimes been used by the European Union to discipline countries that seek to become member states—even when these values are not universally shared by existing member countries or when LGBT rights are not actually the primary driving force for why those countries are denied membership.¹¹²

These examples of co-optation illustrate how social movement discourse can become a kind of window-dressing that obscures a failure to meaningfully address movement demands. Even more problematic, however, is what happens to those

¹¹² For a discussion of the case of Romania, see Stychin (2003).

discourses *in the process* of appropriation, namely that they become depoliticised. For example, when corporations use ‘girl power’ to market products to young women, these appropriations are not simply presenting a superficial or ‘watered-down’ version of feminism; these deployments potentially work to change the broader cultural meaning of feminism itself. In such cases, the concept of feminism takes on new meanings and associations—sometimes in ways which undermine the broader objectives of feminist movements as defined ‘on the ground’ (see for example Riordan 2001; Dowsett 2010).¹¹³ So it is not just that a particular political strategy has failed or been taken up only on partial terms, but that the very possibilities for thinking, knowing and imagining those politics has changed. When social movement discourses are ‘filtered’ through institutional (i.e. legal, governmental, corporate) lenses, particularly those with greater access to popular channels of communication, it becomes more likely that those discourses will circulate in mainstream contexts and become the defining narrative. Part of this process, I would argue, occurs through a decoupling of the relationship between knowledge and power. By this I mean that the substantive content of a discourse (e.g. feminist calls for empowerment for women) becomes divested from an analysis of the power-relations (e.g. patriarchy) that gave rise to that particular knowledge claim. Of course, as Foucault argues, all knowledge practices are exercises of power, so in that sense there is no such thing as ‘depoliticised’ knowledge. So I use the term depoliticised to account for the processes by which questions of power *disappear or become obscured* from the way in which a particular knowledge is understood and deployed.

The academic institutionalization of the concept ‘intersectionality’ provides an example of the de-politicization of activist knowledge. The term ‘intersectionality analysis’ was first used by Kimberle Crenshaw in order to show how antidiscrimination law in the US failed to protect black women because it separated

¹¹³ Of course, there are multiple and diverse understandings of feminist values, which are both contested and changing. The point is that when corporations seek to market products to women using feminist-like slogans, the broader meaning of those feminist values (namely the way feminism is understood and imagined in popular culture) can change in the process.

racial discrimination from sex discrimination. Though Crenshaw is recognised for coining the term, her work emerged from a broader context of radical black feminist organizing, which sought to grapple with the problem of ‘multiple oppressions’.¹¹⁴ Drawing attention to the ways that identity-related oppressions ‘intersect’ and interact along various axis of power (rather than treating identity categories as mutually exclusive or analogous phenomenon which can be ‘added’ together), intersectionality analysis pushed feminist thinking to move beyond compartmentalised understandings of identity and develop more nuanced conceptions of power. In this way, although ‘intersectionality analysis’ was first deployed as a strategic tool within a liberal legal paradigm of antidiscrimination law, it gained popularity in feminist anti-racist work as well. It was taken up as shorthand for a broader methodology of conceptualising the complex relations between power, identity and oppression. The term is now used widely across disciplines, policy fields and institutions (Davis 2008).

Yet as Umut Erel, Jin Haritaworn, Encarnación Gutiérrez Rodríguez and Christian Klesse argue, in many contexts intersectionality has lost the anti-oppression impetus of its roots. Too often intersectionality is taken up as a kind of ‘tick-box’ exercise for ensuring ‘diversity’ (particularly for securing research funding), whereby the socioeconomic and political context of identity questions disappears from view. In the process, intersectionality has gone ‘from a resistant principle invented by anti-racist feminists to a mainstreamed shortcut that can instantly “politically correct” your output, the pain-free way’ (Erel et al. 2008, 285). The point is not simply that the concept is often applied in a superficial way, but that intersectionality’s explicitly anti-oppression impetus and critical drive gets stripped away via processes of depoliticization.¹¹⁵

¹¹⁴ See for example, Combahee River Collective (1977), Davis (1981), Moraga and Anzaldúa (1983), Anzaldúa (1987), and Mohanty (1988).

¹¹⁵ For an interesting discussion of the way that ‘diversity’ and ‘race equality’ politics have been depoliticised in a similar kind of tick-box fashion through the circulation of documents, see Ahmed (2007b). See also Puar (2011).

The depoliticization of intersectionality can also be seen in the way the concept has been taken up within the UK *Equality Act 2010*. The new Act, which was designed to bring different 'strands' of inequality (such as race, gender, sexuality, and disability) together for a more consistent and comprehensive protection, has been widely heralded as finally bringing intersectionality analysis into UK anti-discrimination law.¹¹⁶ However, despite its attempt to address multiple discrimination through a more integrated approach, the Act nonetheless limits its analysis to 'dual discrimination' based on 'protected characteristics'.¹¹⁷ In doing so, the Act reduces vectors of power that *produce* certain hierarchical categories to 'personal characteristics' or 'immutable attributes' that are deemed to *reside in the individual person*. Moreover, by limiting analysis to 'dual discrimination' the Act takes a primarily additive approach to multiple forms of discrimination and misses the crucial interlocking element that intersectionality analysis was meant to address. As Iyiola Solanke argues,

although using the language of intersectionality, British law has in fact deprived this concept of its content. In leaving the substance of the concept behind, the provision in the Equality Act has not made the analytical shift from single dimension to multiple consciousness. (2010, 4)

Clearly, while the overall effects of the *Equality Act* remain to be seen, critics are already raising concerns about its limitations.¹¹⁸

¹¹⁶ See for example Buttrick (2011) who describes the *Equality Act* as 'Intersectionality codified into UK employment law'. Secondary resources on the *Equality Act 2010* also frequently use the language of intersectionality, implying that the Act takes an intersectional approach. See for example Lewis (2010).

¹¹⁷ This restricted focus on dual oppression was apparently justified by the UK Equality Office's claim that discrimination based on more than two grounds is rare (less than 10% of cases), but also because of resistance from business leaders who felt that addressing multiple discrimination would be 'unduly burdensome' (Solanke 2010, 18-19; Moon 2011, 171-2). With the recent shift from a Labour government to a Conservative-led coalition government, the focus on socio-economic discrimination has become a moot point, as the new government announced in 2010 that the socio-economic duty would be scrapped (May 2010). For further discussion and commentary see Cooper (2011)

¹¹⁸ See for example Moon (2011) and Wollenberg (2010). Many thanks to Emily Grabham for helpful discussions of the UK Equality Act, as well as the helpful document she prepared, titled 'A Rough Guide to the Equality Act' for discussion at the Kent Centre for Law, Gender and Sexuality (Grabham 2010).

Highlighting these critiques of how intersectionality has been taken up in practice is not meant to suggest that ‘intersectionality’ ever had a pure or perfect form. Nor are these critiques meant to disregard the positive effects of its deployment in many contexts.¹¹⁹ Rather the point is to draw attention to a key problem of co-optation: when social movement knowledge is divorced or decoupled from both its context and analysis of power, the very meaning of that knowledge is altered—often in ways that dull its critical and transformative edge.¹²⁰

b) Inclusion and participation: deradicalising knowing subjects

Institutional processes of co-optation work not only by adopting social movement discourse, but also by drawing activists to participate within those institutions. Governments, businesses and charity organizations increasingly seek out representatives from ‘minority groups’ to act as consultants, spokespeople, researchers and committee members in order to increase their ‘diversity profile’ and widen ‘stakeholder’ participation (Ward 2008). While such practices can certainly generate important benefits for social movements (e.g. give voice and recognition to excluded groups, provide access to greater resources or institutional knowledge, develop relationships with key decision makers), they can also generate considerable risks. For example, an activist might join a committee or participate in a consultation only to find that her ‘input’ is distorted or ignored, her energies diverted and her critiques stifled. Or she might find that her participation, regardless of content, is used to legitimize a problematic process or decision. This is partly because inclusion practices often occur without a simultaneous transfer of decision-making power,

¹¹⁹ For an excellent discussion of the promises and limitations of the concept of intersectionality within the field of law, see Grabham et al. (2009). See also Davis (2008).

¹²⁰ See also Williams’ analysis of attempts to bring an ‘intersectionality’ analysis to bear on sentencing decisions involving Aboriginal women in Canada. Williams found that courts’ consideration of a range of intersecting contextual factors often worked to *increase* incarceration rates for Aboriginal women, as these factors were not treated as mitigating circumstances, but as signs of risk that must be managed via incarceration. Williams thus argues that the way ‘intersectionality’ analysis was taken up by the courts was problematic ‘because sentencing courts that receive this form of knowledge may act on it in ways that blunt its critical edge’ (Williams 2009, 80).

thereby resulting in only superficial change. As Selznick describes, 'The forms of participation are emphasized but action is channelled so as to fulfil the administrative functions while preserving the locus of significant decision in the hands of the initiating group' (1949/1980, 14). In other words, one becomes a member, but without a voice (Lopez 1997).

Such inclusion tactics can also mask more fundamental problems within an institution. For example, when police bodies respond to allegations of racism by recruiting more police officers from communities of colour, such policies can obscure institutional racism within the criminal justice system at large by suggesting that the problem lies with 'who' is doing the job, rather than in what the job entails (e.g. enforcing racist laws) or what power relations are embedded within that institution more broadly (e.g. racist police culture).¹²¹ Likewise, when feminist activists are invited to participate in state projects, their presence can give legitimacy to processes that may be profoundly *unfeminist*. Such partnerships can also take the energies of seasoned activists out of the movement, marking a key loss of organizing power and expertise at the grassroots level. Particularly when individual participation brings personal benefits (like employment, social status, etc.), individual activists may also find their loyalties shifting (i.e. from social movement goals to career aspirations). For many activists, questions about when and how to work strategically within state institutions, businesses or non-activist organizations are key issues of debate.

While activist dilemmas about participation often focus on questions of acts and deeds (e.g. how individuals can ensure their voices *are* heard, how to actually make an impact or how to avoid 'corruption' through participation), I would argue that practices of co-optation through participation also have a significant impact on the articulation, production and dissemination of social movement knowledge. Of key concern is not only what happens to the knowledge that activists bring to the

¹²¹ Some research has indicated that police recruited from marginalized groups sometimes police people in and from their own communities more harshly than others, as they attempt to prove themselves as legitimate and unbiased police officers. As Janet Foster (2004) notes, the pressure to adhere to police culture is very strong, and minority police recruits learn early on that being accepted by the group has primacy over their broader individual or community needs. See also Brown (2005a) and Irlbeck (2008).

institution (i.e. how it might get appropriated as discussed above), but also how institutions change the knowledge practices of activists themselves. In other words, activists are not merely at risk of being compromised in terms of how they act and organize, but also in terms of how they think and know. This is partly because activists often have to de-radicalise or modify their knowledge claims in order to be heard or understood within the institution.

Activists often discuss this issue in terms of political framing or knowledge 'translation'. Within the legal realm, for example, activists who launch legal challenges, submit amicus briefs or provide 'expert witness' testimony in court, must channel their arguments through particular legal discourses that will enable their claims to be recognised and heard by the court. As many public interest lawyers have noted, the recoding of activist claims into legal logics can not only change the *form* of that knowledge, but also the *substance*.¹²² Something is invariably lost in these processes of re-signification. While activists are usually aware of these limits and aim to use these discourses strategically, it can be difficult to avoid getting caught up in the institutional modes of thinking and knowing that are standard within that environment. Lawyers, for example, (even 'radical' ones) are not simply trained to *practice* law in a particular way; they are taught to *think* like lawyers.¹²³ Similarly, as Hester Eisenstein offers a warning from her own experience as a feminist engaged in state bureaucracy: 'In becoming a femocrat one is inevitably drawn into the politics and the ethos of the organization for which one is working' (Eisenstein 1990, 100).

Of course it is important to not overdetermine the influence of institutions or to underestimate the agency and creativity of those working strategically within institutional constraints. Just because activists engage in 'institutional talk' does not mean that they are unaware of the limitations of those discourses or that they support those frameworks without question. At the same time, it is important to recognize that when activists are invited to participate within institutional frameworks, they are not only ushered into particular kinds of acting and knowing,

¹²² See for example, Herman (1994), Gotell (1995), Valverde (1996) and Young (2002).

¹²³ See Spade (2010).

but are hailed as particular kinds of subjects (Althusser 1971). In other words, institutional processes of 'interpellation' hail activists as particular kinds of knowers and thinkers. While there is always the possibility of resisting such a hailing, it would be naïve to assume that an individual can fully escape the influence of these institutions, particularly if that individual is working as a lone voice or does not have strong allies with which to collaborate. Given the gaps between what can be *thought* by activists and what can be *articulated* in these institutional contexts, activists may find that their knowledge practices also change, particularly when they become accustomed to 'toning down' their language or re-framing their message in less radical ways.¹²⁴ In this sense, one can argue that practices of inclusion have the potential to not only depoliticise activist knowledges, but to also de-radicalise activists knowers.

c) Adopting symbolic reforms: shifting the focus of knowledge production

Institutional reform is another site of potential co-optation. Although policy reform, legislative change and bureaucratic re-organization are all crucial parts of social change, they also have the capacity to co-opt social movement agendas. Because institutions are usually slow to change (particularly if they are overly bureaucratic, mired in conflicting interests or bogged down by cumbersome policy protocols), they can be highly resistant to radical political transformation. When faced with opposition or critique from social movements, institutions will often adopt minimal changes to reduce the pressure of the demands, while nonetheless retaining underlying power relations and institutional structures. Angela Harris, drawing on the work of Reva Siegel, describes this process as 'preservation through transformation': a means through which institutional change maintains rather than alters the status

¹²⁴ See for example, Davina Cooper's discussion in *Sexing the City* (1994b), particularly Chapters Four and Eight, where she explores how ideological frameworks within institutions can restrict the boundaries of what is articulated and potentially even thought within those contexts.

quo, particularly through symbolic rather than material change. Drawing on the example of the 1954 landmark decision in *Brown v. Board of Education*, which formally ended racial segregation in US schools, Harris explores why, in the fifty years following that decision, racial segregation levels in the US remain virtually unchanged. As Harris argues, despite *Brown's* symbolic power as a major legal milestone in the struggle for racial equality in the US, taking stock of the material outcome of that decision demonstrates how law actually worked to tame, rather than implement, a radical vision of social and racial integration (Harris 2006). In other words, *Brown* is not simply a case where a legal judgment failed to be implemented, but rather, legal reform itself played a key role in that failure. As Harris describes, 'Law by its nature is conservative, and when calls for change that threaten to destabilize existing distributions of material and symbolic power are made, change through law will occur in ways that preserve existing distributions to the greatest extent possible' (2006, 1542).

Such institutional reforms impact activist knowledge production in several ways. First, institutions that adopt moderate reforms can neutralize social movement demands by publicly declaring that an important change has occurred—even when the change is minor or largely symbolic—thereby insulating against demands for further remedy.¹²⁵ Such reforms allow the governing institution to tell the official story of the problem and how it was addressed. Such narratives then shape the boundaries of 'reasonable' versus 'excessive' demands, which not only work to discredit activist groups who continue to press for further change, but also reframe what kinds of political claims activists can make in the future. The backlash against affirmative action in employment, for example, has often worked by framing political claims by feminists and people of colour as too demanding (e.g., by reframing claims for equality as 'special rights', or characterizing affirmative action as 'reverse-

¹²⁵ For example, in her study of gay and lesbian organizing at the municipal government level in Britain, Cooper notes that several activists felt that policy changes were made to placate groups rather than fully take their concerns into account. One advocate summed up these sentiments as: 'Let's do something nice for the poor people . . . Give them something to shut them up. But not too much' (Cooper 1994b, 96).

racism').¹²⁶ In this sense, when coupled with narratives that overlay the significance of those changes, moderate reforms can play a role in shifting discourses around what political demands are deemed possible and reasonable.

Second, because reforms usually require considerable resources for implementation, activist energies often get diverted into these processes. Activists who started out with radical goals—goals that require radical knowledge production practices for sustenance—find themselves instead tied up in depoliticised bureaucratic processes or working to support policy changes that they never fully endorsed in the first place. As the focus of energy shifts, the focus of knowledge production also changes; energy is channelled into research, policy formation and rhetorical strategies that facilitate more moderate reforms. In short, as social movement organizing energies are diverted, so are knowledge production capacities.

For example, it has become a common practice in cities across North America to undertake regular 'homeless counts' in order to measure scales of homelessness and housing insecurity. These projects literally count the number of people who are homeless on a given night in a particular city. The information is then used, in theory, to support policy changes. These projects are, however, massive exercises in knowledge production that do not necessarily generate significant political changes. In Toronto, for example, the 2009 Homeless Count was conducted by 1,400 outreach workers and volunteers and cost up to \$150,000 (Levy 2009). While these projects can provide useful information, they can also—as housing activists have repeatedly pointed out—turn into little more than 'form filling' exercises that do not actually provide an accurate picture of the homeless populations (Wellesley Institute 2009). Critics also argue that these studies are somewhat redundant: they merely add statistical evidence to what most housing outreach workers and antipoverty groups already know and can demonstrate through their activist and service provision work. Most importantly, these reports often produce the same recommendations year after year (e.g. build more affordable housing, increase rent controls, etc.) that are

¹²⁶ For a discussion of how equal rights are framed as 'special rights' and therefore 'excessive' and 'unreasonable' see Goldberg-Hiller and Milner (2003).

not—for a variety of political and financial reasons—actually implemented. As such, the research does not translate into concrete results for people living on the street yet it continues to be carried out year after year. In this sense, housing advocates' and volunteer energies get tied up in producing knowledge *about* homeless people rather than conducting research *for and in collaboration with* homeless people. Such knowledge production projects contrast significantly with the 'participatory action research' projects that radical grassroots antipoverty groups often undertake.¹²⁷ This is not to suggest that knowledge production undertaken in the name of 'moderate' institutional reforms do not have any merit or are not worth pursuing. Such strategies can and do open up numerous spaces for activists to extend their discourses rather than foreclose them. The point, however, is that even when such reforms advance activists causes in some ways, they can simultaneously divert activist knowledge production activities away from more radical projects.

d) Funding: narrowing political imagination

The co-optation of social movements also occurs through funding politics, whereby charities, foundations and government agencies attach strings (whether implicit or explicit) to grants, donations and resource allocation. While funders may not directly censor the organizations they support (although sometimes they do), funding criteria certainly influences the politics and priorities of social movement organizations, thus reducing the group's political autonomy (Morena 2006; Vincent 2006; Harcourt 2006). While debates about the impact of funding are longstanding within social movements (see for example Otitoju 1988; Schechter 1982), in recent years they have become an even greater concern. Indeed, the problem of foundation funding in North America has become so pervasive that activists now refer to the system of

¹²⁷ See for example, contributions in Frampton et al. (2006b), Hale (2008) and Sudbury and Okazawa-Rey (2009).

funding as the 'non-profit industrial complex' (NPIC).¹²⁸ As Dylan Rodríguez describes, the non-profit industrial complex is 'the set of symbiotic relationships that link together political and financial technologies of the state and owning-class proctorship and surveillance over public political intercourse, including and especially emergent progressive and leftists social movements' (2007, 21-22). As documented in a recent collection by INCITE! Women of Color Against Violence, the rise of non-profit foundations in the US has not only diverted massive amounts of public money into private hands (via tax credited donations) but has also circumvented community-driven organizing in favour of professionalized leadership, replaced membership-based fundraising in favour of elite donor funding and shifted resources from consciousness-raising support programs to depoliticized social service provision (INCITE! Women of Color Against Violence 2007; see also Spade 2009; Mananzala and Spade 2008).

Yet funding structures do not simply add bureaucracy, attach strings or create dependency within activist projects; the coercive effects of funding operate at a much deeper epistemological level by co-opting the political imagination of social movement organizations. As Rodríguez describes, 'More insidious than the raw structural constraints exerted by the foundation/state/non-profit nexus is the way in which this new industry grounds an epistemology—literally a *way of knowing* social change and resistance praxis—that is difficult to escape or rupture' (2007, 31, italics in original). For example, when funders require groups to measure and report their 'outputs,' meet quantifiable 'benchmarks' of success and 'market' their work as worthy of financial support, activist goals are funnelled into narrow, institutionalized visions of social change. Indeed, 'the overly bureaucratic formality and hierarchical (frequently elitist) structuring of the NPIC [Non-Profit Industrial Complex] has institutionalized more than just a series of hoops through which aspiring social change activists must jump—these institutional characteristics, in fact, *dictate the*

¹²⁸ The concept is also a spin-off from the term 'military-industrial-complex', first coined by US President Eisenhower to refer to the increasing dependency of the US economy on military spending. See Goldberg and Evans (1998/2009) and Gilmore (2005).

political vistas of NPIC organizations themselves' (Rodríguez 2007, 29, italics in original).

Many feminists activists, for example, have noted a key shift in the anti-violence movement: when the movement began, the key question was how to end violence against women, but increasingly this question has been replaced with how best to offer programming and support to women who experience violence (Smith 2007a, 11). While the two goals are not mutually exclusive, the former should drive the latter, not vice versa. However, changes to funding structures have worked to separate survival services from political organizing, thus privileging service provision and policy work over social mobilization and movement building (Spade 2009; Kivel 2007; Mananzala and Spade 2008). Limited funding pools can also generate competition among activist groups, which not only creates barriers to alliance work, but can also intensify existing hierarchies between groups (Jivraj and de Jong 2011). Moreover, because funding-cycles tend to operate on a short-term basis (i.e. one to five years), organizations that are dependent on external funding often lose their capacity to strategize and organize around long-term goals (Spade 2009, 302). So while funding structures may restrict or redirect the particular energies and priorities of social movement organizations, the greater danger may lie in the shifting and shaping of political visions more broadly, thus impacting directly on the epistemological horizons of political possibility.

e) Commodifying and commercializing dissent: objectifying knowledge

In recent years, market forces have proven to be particularly relentless in co-opting social movement agendas by appropriating activist discourse for advertising purposes. Corporate advertising campaigns now sell everything from diversity, ecology and empowerment to counterculture, rebellion and revolution, effectively transforming systemic critiques of racism, sexism and capitalism into hip consumer commodities (Frank and Weiland 1997; Klein 2000). It is no coincidence neoliberal politics readily embrace 'minority rights' claims since these struggles can be easily

translated into new niche markets (D'Emilio 1993; Chasin 2000; Sears 2005). Here the commercialization of activist struggle not only blurs the boundary between citizenship rights and consumer rights, but also tends to reinforce the interests, values and consumer power of the most class-privileged members of minority communities. Appeals to identity-based social movement politics are not only co-opted for profit, but can work to further exacerbate social inequalities. Examples include neo-imperialism through gay tourism, urban gentrification through gay business districts and corporatization through pride festival sponsorship (Knopp 1997; Ingebretsen 1999; Chasin 2000; Puar 2002b; Puar 2002a; Binnie 2004).

In one sense, commercialization and commodification mark yet another variation on the type of appropriation discussed previously. Indeed, because advertising constitutes a significant part of popular culture, the specific appropriation of activist iconography affects the way that activist discourses can be 'heard' and disseminated more broadly. For example, when the image of Che Guevara is used to represent Swatch Watch's latest 'revolution' marketing campaign, future activist deployments of his iconography are bound to be understood differently. Processes of commodification and commercialization thus effectively recode and redefine the meaning of social movement symbols, iconography and language in highly depoliticizing ways.

At the same time, I would suggest that these marketing strategies impact on activist knowledge practices in a more distinct, yet important, way: the commodification of social movement struggles also works to redefine the terms of activism itself. Many commentators have critiqued commercialization strategies for promoting a view that one can 'change the world through shopping'. Indeed, as exemplified by recent critiques of the (PRODUCT) RED brand campaign, which raises awareness and funds to address the AIDS pandemic in Africa, such campaigns allow people to feel that they have made a difference, even as they feed the very systems that exacerbate the problem they seek to address (Sarna-Wojcicki 2008; Richey and Ponte 2008; Phu 2010). When corporations successfully channel discourses of social

change into shopping slogans, the very terms of social movement politics are altered in depoliticising ways.

The commercialization and marketization of activist knowledge also treats knowledge as an object to be owned and possessed rather than as a means of knowing. Wearing a (PRODUCT) RED t-shirt or carrying a (PRODUCT) RED iPod, for example, operates as a kind of possession of activist knowledge—a way of demonstrating that one possesses awareness of, or concern about, the AIDS crisis in African, even if one does not actually know much about the issue (Phu 2010). In that sense, the iconography of concern operates as a kind of empty signifier—a symbol of knowledge that is not necessarily activated or engaged with. This is not to say that everyone who purchases such products is ignorant of the issues or that sporting such iconography has no benefit (wearing the branded T-shirt, for example, has the potential to spark a conversation that then facilitates engagement with the issues). Rather, the point is that one does not need to be fully aware of, or committed to, the issues to purchase the product, and that there is a contradiction in purchasing a product in order to *symbolically* further a cause, when the material conditions of producing that production may run counter to that cause. This capacity to ‘purchase’ one’s political or social views in such a way arguably works to depoliticise social movement messages; such practices reconfigure activist knowledge as objects to be appropriated and possessed rather than as potential forces for political change.

Limits of Co-optation

Underlying concerns about epistemological co-optation is an assumption that some knowledges are more radical than others or that some knowledges are more likely than others to instigate or enable social change. From an activist perspective, one might identify some knowledges that broadly reaffirm the status quo and others that challenge, resist or potentially transform social norms. Yet one cannot simply divide knowledge into two autonomous blocks that compete against each other for public authority and legitimacy. The relationships between different deployments of

knowledge—and the power relations they reproduce, enact and constitute—are far more messy and complex. As argued in Chapter Three, this is one of the problems with using concepts like ‘reverse-discourse’ or ‘counter hegemonic knowledges’ or even ‘resistant knowledge’; while these terms can be helpful in drawing attention to knowledge practices that challenge dominant epistemological frameworks, they also tend to reinforce binary oppositions that may obscure more than they reveal.

Such binary frameworks—and the language of co-optation itself—presume an oppositional politics, where one side must resist (or seek to replace) the forces of another (e.g. Gramscian hegemony/counter hegemony; Foucauldian discourse/reverse discourse). Although one may draw on different conceptual models, the language of co-optation generally tends to be embedded in binary oppositions, whether between powerful and non-powerful, activist knowledge and legal knowledge, local and state expertise. For example, one might conceptualise co-optation as a process of *absorption* whereby asymmetrical entities (whether they be institutions, bodies of knowledge or political paradigms) encounter each other, and the larger or more powerful entity absorbs the smaller one. Some of the inclusion tactics noted above—whether participation of individuals or appropriation of discourse—fit within this framework. Such models are prone, however, to overly functionalist or deterministic explanations because they begin with an asymmetrical view of power, rather than diffuse and embedded one, such that the outcome is already known in advance. Alternatively, one might examine processes of *mutual adaptation* where accommodation occurs on both sides in varying degrees, such that both sides evolve or change. Contract negotiations between unions and employers, for example, often begin with demands on each side, which are then altered and accommodated until both sides agree. *Autopoeisis theory* offers another model, which explains what happens when two separate systems of communication encounter each other. Because each side is understood as ‘operationally closed, but cognitively open’ the two systems cannot communicate directly (their knowledges are not directly translatable to each other), but each side nonetheless impacts on the other’s environment. Hence, one entity cannot directly change the other, but can

produce 'interferences' in the other's environment which then invoke changes of adaptation on either side (Teubner 1987; Luhmann 1988, 2004). Even if one considers *unintended effects* which occur beyond two sides (e.g. when a legal judgement creates effects 'outside' of law or far beyond the initial context) or resonate elsewhere beyond the two sides, the model still rests on a binary foundation.

Within these binary frameworks, the threat of co-optation is imagined as an external one, where the force of co-optation comes from the outside rather than from an embedded place within. But just as language is never pure to begin with, neither are political organizations or knowledge frameworks. As discussed above, knowledge practices can be assimilated in part because they contain within them elements that are conducive to co-optation. Fears of co-optation that present the threat as external thereby obscure streams of knowledge within activist discourse that are already prone to co-optation. For example, Jasbir Puar (2007) suggests that lesbian and gay complicity with the 'war on terror' is not exclusively about the co-optation of gay rights discourse, but emerges from particular forms of racism that are already entrenched within mainstream LGBT politics. As such, when the problem of co-optation is imagined as an external threat, we turn attention outwards in a way that can obscure problems within. In addition, we might assume that we are prone to being co-opted, but not that we co-opt others.

These binary divisions also create false distinctions between inside and outside in terms of social movement demands, organizing roles and knowledge practices. Drawing from debates about feminist engagements with state bureaucracy, Sophie Watson notes that accusations of co-optation often imply that feminist politics can be mapped onto a unified, coherent set of demands that exist prior to, and fully autonomously from the state (1990, 11). The result is a false choice between engaging the state and refusing outright, and between producing alternative knowledge and reinforcing hegemonic knowledge, as though such practices are mutually exclusive. As Sarah Elwood notes, 'Such conceptualizations overlook the possibility that the practices of community organizations might produce

multiple and diverse roles, relationships, spatial meanings, and forms of knowledge' (2006, 326). Indeed, choices about political strategy are much more complex than binary models can account for. As such, accusations of co-optation can sometimes work to discredit and obscure more nuanced and complex forms of critique (McFerron 1990, 204).

Fear of co-optation, I would argue, is partly driven by a desire for purity, and therefore invests itself in conservative (i.e. stabilising) rather than transformative politics. While warnings about co-optation may also be expressed in less regulatory terms (e.g. drawing attention to diversions, fostering self-reflexivity, questioning seductive forces), their aims are ultimately rooted in a politics of preservation that are not unlike the forces of co-optation itself (i.e. institutional preservation in Selznick's sense). In this way, discourses of co-optation can invoke backwards-looking politics—a kind of nostalgia that laments for the past (even if it that never actually existed) or a desire to hold on to the past in ways that work to limit the future (Brown 1995, 2005b; Roy 2009). As Foucault reminds us, if try too hard to protect that we which hold dear, we run the risk of building our own discourses of domination (Foucault 1976/2003, 11).

The desire for a position of pure critique that is outside or beyond that which one seeks to challenge is thus misguided. As Derrida remarks, 'we can pronounce not a single destructive proposition which has not already had to slip into the form, the logic, and the implicit postulations of precisely what it seeks to contest' (1978, 80-1). Hence, the desire for purity is not only a false representation of political struggle, but also an epistemological impossibility. For language—the main vehicle through which we articulate knowledge—is never absolute. By virtue of its unfixed and relational character, meaning-making is always a site of contestation; it is a struggle that is shaped not only by the intention of the one who expresses a particular knowledge, but by the broader social, political and historical conditions of its articulation. As Anna Marie Smith notes:

Every articulation is always partial, such that the meaning of these signifiers is never fixed once and for all. However, even when the

effects of past articulations are weakened, they are never totally lost; every signifier bears the traces of past articulations. (1998, 78)

In this sense, every articulation is always already co-opted to one extent or another; language and meaning can never be pure.

If 'pure' articulations are impossible, then concerns about co-optation might be measured in units of scale or degree; yet such designations do not necessarily avoid the pitfalls of the logic of purity itself. One merely shifts the boundary of pure/impure to a more moderated version: the line becomes one of acceptable or tolerable levels of impurity. One is then left with a dilemma of determining at what point on the scale one has been co-opted 'too much'—a formula which does not reveal much about the specificities of forces and dynamics of coercion. So the question still arises: how do we differentiate between different kinds knowledge and their transformative or restrictive effects? What specifically are activists trying to protect from co-optation? How do we identify, distinguish and conceptualize knowledge practices that have transformative potential from those that do not?

Rethinking the Relationship Between Co-optation and Transformation

Processes of co-optation are ambivalent, since in most cases they generate both gains and losses (Coy and Hedeem 2005, 406-8). For this reason some scholars have argued that the difference between co-optation and transformation is not easily distinguished (Swan and Fox 2010; Elwood 2006). Consider the introduction of same sex marriage in Canada: did it co-opt and assimilate radical queer politics within homo/heteronormative culture or did it transform the institution of marriage, making relationship norms less straight? No doubt the answer depends on one's criteria for measuring political success. Yet most activists and scholars, regardless of their position on marriage, would likely agree that both outcomes have occurred. This is not to take a neutral position on the debate (one could argue, for example, that the institution of marriage is indeed less straight than it was before, but that the

goal of transforming marriage is still misguided). At the same time, the co-optation framework may limit the scope of analysis to particular kinds of *outcomes* and may neglect issues of *process*. Whether or not queer politics were co-opted by same-sex marriage, for example, does not tell us who benefited most and least from the process of struggle.

From a more process-focussed perspective, the difference between co-optation and transformation is difficult to decipher. As discussed in Chapter Two, if transformation is not simply a rupture or a break in hegemonic discourse, but a change in the meanings, form and substance of knowledge, then it marks a kind of epistemological metamorphosis. Yet we could easily describe co-optation in the same way. As a form of epistemological containment that operates through assimilation, co-optation can be described as a process that transforms the meaning of that which it assimilates. Yet if this is the case, do processes of transformation also constitute a kind of co-optation (or reverse co-optation)? Or is co-optation about something different?

These dilemmas also raise questions about whether co-optation can be used strategically for transformative ends. If the state can co-opt social movements can social movements co-opt the state? Although processes of co-optation are usually assumed to arise from power imbalances (a more powerful entity is challenged by a less powerful one and the risks of co-optation are, by virtue of that imbalance, most acute for the less powerful) (Coy and Hedeem 2005, 406), a non-totalising view of power suggests that the reverse is also possible. The popular activist tactic of 'culture jamming' provides a good example. By 'touching up' or altering corporate advertisements, (e.g. by replacing the brand name 'Nike' with words 'child labour' alongside the 'swoosh' logo), activists subvert the original message in creative and ironic ways (Klein 2000). If we return to our earlier definition of co-optation as a form of epistemological containment and a way of extending one's power through the material offered by 'the other side', then ad-jamming does indeed seem to fit within this conception. By hijacking existing advertisements (whether physically 'touching up' billboards, altering clothing logos, etc.), or by creating fake advertisements using

slick corporate styled images, activists can successfully ‘jam’ advertising messages precisely by playing on the consumptive desires of the consumer public. In this sense, culture-jammers arguably contain the advertisement’s intended meaning (by preventing the original marketing message from circulating unchallenged) but also reconfigure it (by articulating or attaching new meanings to its symbolism). So the question arises: is this epistemological co-optation or transformation? When activists subvert or contain meaning, one could argue that they are also transforming it, as they open up space to think differently about those companies, products or possibly consumer culture more broadly. Following the major anti-sweatshop campaigns that were launched against Nike in the 1990s, it was almost impossible to think about Nike in an untarnished way, as the brand name had become synonymous with child labour. How then is activist co-optation of corporate knowledge different from the corporate co-optation of activist knowledge discussed above? Is one merely the inverse of the other? Or are the effects fundamentally different by virtue of the differential power relationship?

What is at stake here is clearly more than a question of semantics or a matter of the social position location from which a strategy is undertaken (i.e. when ‘they’ do it, it is co-optation, when ‘we’ do it is transformation). At the heart of these questions are concerns about how to distinguish between processes that facilitate openings for dissident knowledge and those that constrain them. Similar questions arise when we consider other processes of epistemological change. If, for example, new ideas and knowledges emerge from epistemological boundary crossing (e.g. when an idea from one epistemological community or context is adopted and redeployed in a different context) does this not constitute a form of co-optation? In such cases, one thing is arguably used in a way that potentially subsumes and assimilates its logic into another. Similarly, is analogy-work—a substitution of one thing to stand in for another—also a form of co-optation?¹²⁹ Perhaps the relationship between co-optation and transformation is closer than what is generally thought.

¹²⁹ For further discussion of analogy and epistemological border crossing, see Chapter Seven.

Part of the difficulty in distinguishing between processes of co-optation and transformation is that most processes of epistemological change involve some element of co-optation or assimilation, because no knowledge practice is ever 'pure.' Drawing from Laclau and Mouffe, Anna Marie Smith argues that all political claims are, to an extent, a co-optation of existing discourses. She notes: 'Political discourses attempt to give new meaning to key signifiers such as 'freedom' or 'democracy' as they struggle to become the interpretative frameworks through which we live our structural positionings' (1998, 78). In other words, because political articulations are constant struggles over meaning, they always entail efforts to reclaim and redeploy already existing concepts and narratives. In this sense, every act of political articulation is a kind of co-optation or assimilation.¹³⁰

While it is difficult to differentiate processes of co-optation and processes of transformation, it may be important to maintain some distinctions between the two. Co-optation, as argued above, is a process that tends to be conservative; it aims to limit and preserve. It works by closing down, restricting or protecting through diversion. By contrast, transformation arguably works by opening up, creating or making space for something new. So while it may be impossible to draw a clear line between the two, transformation and co-optation can be understood as different dimensions on a continuum or spectrum of change. One end of the spectrum marks changes that involve more restrictive movements or processes of containment whereas the other end marks changes that work to open or create space.

Of course there are limits to these distinctions as well; being open is not inherently better or more progressive than being closed. There are indeed situations

¹³⁰ If all articulations are both repetitions and reinventions of past discourses (i.e. repetition with a difference), then we are again faced with the question of what enables transformative articulations to emerge. In other words, what distinguishes between the minor shifts in discourse which inevitably arise by virtue of the fact that meaning-making is never closed (every articulation is always imperfect, partial and unfixed), and those major shifts which prompt a greater rethinking of the horizons of possibility? Laclau and Mouffe argue that transformation requires a crisis in hegemonic discourse (i.e. whereby the particularist nature of a claim which represents itself as universal is exposed, or when the logic of a hegemonic discourse fails). Such crises then create space for other discourses to emerge (e.g. what Laclau and Mouffe describe as 'radical democratic discourses') and for alternative epistemological frameworks to provide new ways of understanding a given situation (Laclau and Mouffe 1985 / 1996; see also Smith 1998).

where closure may be necessary or important. Sometimes closing down one thing is the only way to make room for another. So the question arises: how might we rethink the relationship between co-optation and transformation? How might we attend to processes that derail, restrict or dilute activist knowledge projects without falling prey to the conservative impulses that are embedded within the concept of co-optation? Moving away from the limits of co-optation, I offer a different metaphor—‘hegemonic entanglements’—for thinking about the problems that the language of co-optation seeks to address.¹³¹ As I argue below, this concept may be more helpful in thinking through the dilemmas that activists face when engaging in political strategies that are at risk of diluting or derailing activist agendas.

Hegemonic Entanglements

Entanglement is a condition of being twisted together or entwined, involved with; it speaks of intimacy gained even if it was resisted, ignored or uninvited. It is a term which may gesture towards a relationship or set of social relationships that is complicated, ensnaring, in a tangle, but which also implies a human foldedness. (Nuttall 2009, 1)

In order to move away from the binary logics invoked by the concept of co-optation, it is necessary to avoid analysis that divides knowledge practices into radical versus hegemonic blocks—or into categories of pure versus tainted. It is important to recognise that insurgent knowledge practices are always already caught up in that which they seek to contest; they are enmeshed in both dynamic power relations and

¹³¹ Although ‘entanglement’ is relatively common as a descriptive term, it has not been thoroughly developed as a conceptual tool in the social sciences and humanities. Several political histories, for example, use the word entanglement in their titles, but do not explicitly develop the term as a theoretical concept. As Sarah Nuttall notes, ‘Entanglement is an idea that has been explored by scholars in anthropology, history, sociology and literary studies, although always briefly and in passing rather than as a structuring concept in their work’ (Nuttall 2009, 1). Notable exceptions include Nuttall’s work, as well as Sharp et al. (2000) and Ingold (2007; 2008), whose work I rely on below. It is also worth noting that ‘entanglement’ has a specific meaning (and vast literature) in the context of quantum physics, where it describes a particular kind of correlation between subatomic particles. Entanglement is also a concept in US Constitutional theory, which refers to a test for evaluating relationships between religion and state.

shifting meaning-making processes. In this sense, we might imagine that every articulation of knowledge is comprised of tiny threads of meaning, each which bear the traces of past and future meanings, associations and articulations. The way we pull and weave those threads of meaning—and the way we move along those lines of knowing—shapes the way those meanings come to be articulated and understood. If we recognize that those threads are attached to meanings of both possibility and constraint, then we realise that we are in a constant process of both pulling and being pulled.

Each articulation marks threads of meaning that can both enable and entwine, create pressure and facilitate release—for each line of articulation is also a line of power. These threads carry with them a force of energy that allows some articulations to emerge more visibly, while others recede from view. These entanglements are bindings of power-knowledge (see Chapter Three). In this sense, each line or thread therefore does not indicate a boundary or a limit point, but a pathway and process of knowledge, an exercise in power. Each strand is a trace of movement from one place of knowing to another, a trace of the practice of connecting knowing practices together, an ongoing engagement in relations of knowledge/power.¹³² But to understand entanglement in this way, we must first rethink our understandings of ‘the line’ itself.

In his anthropological investigation of ‘the line’, Tim Ingold argues that we frequently think of lines in terms of boundaries rather than movements. To illustrate, Ingold invites us to take out a pen and a sheet of plain paper and draw a rough circle on the page. Looking at the circle we have drawn, he asks us to reflect on how we might interpret the line. If we approach the line as a totality, as though it simply appeared ready-drawn on the surface, the line forms what we recognise as a circle. In this view, the line establishes a ‘static perimeter, delineating the figure of the circle against the ground of an otherwise empty plane’ (2008, 1786). The line thus marks a

¹³² I would argue that my use of the concept of entanglement is broadly consistent with the Foucauldian approach developed in Chapter Three. See also the introductory chapter in Sharp et al.’s *Entanglements of Power* (Sharp et al. 2000), which explicitly uses the concept of entanglement to describe a Foucauldian understanding of power.

boundary, a division between inside and outside. Yet this is not how the line actually came into being. 'Strictly speaking,' Ingold says, '[the line] is the trace left by the gesture of your hand as, holding the pen...as it alighted on the surface and took a turn around before continuing on its way to wherever it would go and whatever it would do next' (2008, 1786). In this sense, the line marks a trace, a history of passage, a record of journey, a trajectory of movement. Contrasting the two perspectives—the line as boundary versus the line as movement—Ingold questions why we so often look at the line and see it as an enclosure that has been emptied of its movement. Ingold describes this shift as part of the 'logic of inversion'—a process which 'turn[s] the pathways along which life is lived into boundaries within which life is contained. Life, according to this logic, is reduced to an internal property of things that *occupy* the world but do not properly *inhabit* it' (Ingold 2008, 1796-7; see also Ingold 2007).

This difference in how the line is interpreted is significant in many ways, not least because 'A world that is occupied...is furnished with already-existing things . . . [whereas] one that is inhabited is woven from the strands of their continual coming-into-being' (Ingold 2008, 1797). While Ingold is primarily interested in what the line reveals about the social organization of life more broadly, his emphasis on the line as a trace of movement is useful for thinking about processes of epistemological transformation and containment. Ingold's analysis moves us away from imagining knowledge as an object that can be categorized along a boundary of pure or tainted, radical or co-opted, and instead moves us towards an understanding of knowledge as an ongoing practice and a process of becoming.

If we think about epistemological practices as entangled lines of movement (rather than intersecting boundaries) then we can begin to rethink how knowledge practices are caught up in ongoing processes of enablement and constraint. In conceptualising 'hegemonic entanglements' (entanglements that are caught up in more dominant knowledge practices) we can imagine a complex jumble of lines, threads and strings. Instead of one continuous line, we can imagine multiple strands that begin and end in different places. These strands are made of different shapes,

fibres, colours and sizes, each which mark out different histories and contexts of knowing. Some strands are rough and bristly like scratchy twine, others are thin and smooth like nylon thread and some are soft like finely spun wool. These lines and threads are intricately bound to each other in a series of knots, tangles and loops. Some threads sit firmly in their place, having become embedded in their place over time, as though sitting snugly in the groove of a well-worn path. Others are more ephemeral, marking the traces of a transient journey. Some entanglements are tightly knotted while others are loose as they meander in and around each other.

The entanglements are not like a web—a network of connected nodes and points joined together in a carefully sewn fashion. Rather, entanglements are what Ingold describes as ‘meshworks’ or assemblages (2007, 80-81, 100). While some lines are straight and ordered, others are playful; they are messy, dishevelled and chaotic, each interweaving through and across each other. In this sense, there is both structure and fluidity in the entanglements. For as some well-worn paths become sedimented over time, they form a structured meshwork that holds the entanglements in place. But the ebb and flow of articulations also means that the more structured are never absolute; they are always made and remade anew.

We might imagine ourselves as knowers who are caught within the entanglements, but we too are part of the lines and knots. We are beings who are coming into knowing. Entanglement becomes part of the thing which it entangles; there is no pure centre, no unitary being. The knot, as Ingold describes,

does not contain life but is rather formed of the very lines along which life is lived. These lines are bound together in the knot, but they are not bound by it. To the contrary they trail beyond it, only to become caught up with other lines in other knots... Every place, then, is a knot in the meshwork, and the threads from which it is traced are lines of wayfaring. (2007, 100)

Hence it is not ‘that organisms are entangled in relations. Rather, every organism—indeed, every thing—is itself an entanglement, a tissue of knots whose constituent strands, as they become tied up with other strands, in other bundles, make up the

meshwork' (2008, 1806). In this sense, we are entangled, but we also entangle others.

Whereas co-optation is usually understood as tainting a pure or originary source, entanglement more actively denotes an ongoing process or practice of struggle. Entanglement suggests a restriction of *movement* rather than a tainting of *substance*. If one is entangled in a meshwork or web, for example, one may be restricted in *particular kinds* movement, thought or articulation, but one nonetheless retains some capacity for agency; there is always space for some degree of motion. One may be released by one thread only to be pulled by another, or one might untie one knot only to create another. As we move, some strings become more taut, while others loosen. The push and pull tensions of entanglement affect both the entity that is entangled as well as the very forces of that entangle. Like a dog on a leash that pulls its owner, a body that is entangled effects the forces of entanglement through its movement.

Entanglements are both antagonistic and enveloping; the lines in which we become caught might include forceful restrictions (being ensnarled), mutual tensions (when a rope is pulled in different directions) or envelopments (when we are caressed by a movement that wraps around us in comfortable or soothing ways). In this sense entanglements can be both forceful and repressive, but also pleasurable and coercive. Entanglements can play on both fears and desires, in the sense that as particular entanglements take root, they become normalized (and we may cling to their security), but we may willingly move in the direction that particular entanglements pull; we may be seduced by enticing entanglements. Unlike co-optation, which generally refers to two competing blocks, entanglement also denotes multiple forces of boundary and restraint: multiple roots, various directions, interconnected and disconnected forces. We can be simultaneously entangled in strands that restrict us, while other tensions provide buoyancy in ways that are enabling. There is no 'pure' position; there is room for contradiction and tension.

It is within these tensions—these multiple entanglements—that a transformative project might be situated. The attempt to shift or alter the structure

of the entanglements—to make space for something new—is both about creating new lines and making room for other movements. Such a project is not about finding the ideal string or weaving the perfect cloth, nor is it about seeking to be free from all entanglements. For entanglements not only constraint us—they also enable us to move along and find our way. Recognizing these tensions is not to say that all entanglements are equal or generate equivalent effects. Rather, the project of transforming is about moving *strategically* within these meshworks in order to both be aware of the kinds entanglements in which we are enmeshed and to create space for new knots and articulations, new pathways and knowledges to emerge.¹³³

If knowledge is a process and practice, rather than an object, then processes of co-optation are those which derail or divert particular knowing processes, rather than tainting the purity of a knowledge object's substance. In thinking about this process through the metaphor of entanglements, we can understand epistemological constraints as those that block, restrict or redirect our pathways of knowing; they take our knowledge paths in particular directions or fail to give way to the creation of particular spaces of knowing. But questions of whether those redirections open up or close off, and where they move us to, require attention to the specificity of the line itself and how that line is entangled with others. This attention to specificity, complexity and multiplicity, as well as a capacity to map processes through the trace of the line, is part of what the metaphor of hegemonic entanglement offers.

We might think, for example, about debates over language. Activists and academics frequently engage in impassioned debates over terminology—whether about identity terms, political slogans or campaign descriptions. Consider the ongoing debates about 'sex work' versus 'prostitution', about the use and meaning of

¹³³ The analogy of entanglement may also be more fruitful for thinking about the temporality of movements and the movement of temporality (see for example Mbembe 2001, 8). Unlike co-optation, which arguably has a linear temporality (e.g., something was pure, then became tainted), entanglement allows for multiple temporalities. Entanglement bears the traces of past journeys, but at the same time, no clear beginning or end. Jasbir Puar, drawing from Manuel De Landa's work, suggests that 'the time of entanglement' is one that contests temporality in its conventionally linear form (Puar 2007, xxi). Entanglement may also be more compatible with feminist theories of cyclical or rhythmical time and with theories of queer time.

'transgender, 'transsexual' and 'trans', or about 'gay and lesbian' versus 'queer'. These debates over language are important because the linguistic choices we make have a bearing on the way political work is understood, interpreted and re-circulated; they are sites in which activists navigate entanglements of meaning. Such debates often involve discussions about what kinds of connotations are associated with particular terms, what kind of historical baggage a term might carry, who is likely to use that term and whether the term can be used in politically transformative ways.

Many prisoners' justice advocates, for example, argue against using the term 'offender' because it reduces people's complex identity to a singular label based on a one act (or set of acts) deemed to warrant criminal sanctions. Here an important distinction is made between *an offender* and *a person who was convicted of a criminal offence*. Interestingly enough, however, 'offender' was originally used as replacement for the terms 'criminal' and 'deviant', which are arguably more stigmatising (Roberts et al. 2010). Conversely, while the language of 'prisoner' also carries a strong stigma, many activists (both inside and outside prison) prefer this term over labels like 'inmate', because it does not try to disguise or sanitise the reality of being locked in a cell (Prison Research Education Action Project and Critical Resistance 2005). So when we trace the history and contextual use of particular knowledges (i.e. when we follow different lines of entangled meaning), we can also follow how meanings shift and change over time; we may be better able to understand how particular entanglements give way to different knowledge and meaning formations. Being attentive to such entanglements—and the way these entanglements both enable or block certain kinds of knowledge practices or certain kinds of knowledge orientations—means that our analysis has the potential to be more strategic. Rather than drawing a line between co-opted and non-co-opted (or more and less co-opted) terminology, we can be more selective about when to use particular knowledge claims over others.

At the same time, even when activists agree on using a particular term or phrase in a specific context, its meaning is never controllable. No matter how hard one might try to deploy language strategically, there is always a risk of getting

entangled in less desirable meanings. If we try to hold too closely to the meaning of something—if we try to retain a ‘pure’ or non-co-opted meaning—we may fail to recognise the ways in which we are always already entangled. But such entanglements need not be seen as totalizing. Just as ‘the very same processes that give us subjectivity and agency—individualization, most notably—also enable the authorities to subject us’, the very same processes that entangle us, also create opportunities for agency, resistance and movement (Valverde 1999, 666). By tracing the ever-changing entanglements of knowledge claims, we may be better positioned to use those claims strategically (or avoid using those claims) and we may discover spaces of agency and resistance in the process. In this sense, the concept of hegemonic entanglements may be useful for maintaining a kind of active vigilance around the kind of strategic knowledge games we play in politics.

Of course every concept has its own limits and boundaries, and the metaphor of hegemonic entanglements is not without its shortcomings. The metaphor does not tell us much about the environment in which we find (or make) the lines, nor does it tell us much about the origins of the lines. But as way of mapping out and thinking through specific processes in which knowledge practices are constrained, ‘hegemonic entanglements’ might offer some promise. When concerned about the problem of co-optation, we can look for the lines of power-knowledge in which we are entangled. We can look for the traces of where each line has been and where it is going. We can be attentive to the processes in which our movements might get us more or less entangled and how our knowledge movements might entangle others.

Conclusion

This chapter has sought to explore the problem of co-optation as it relates to questions of epistemological transformation and containment within social movement contexts. I have argued that models of co-optation that invoke static, bifurcated understandings of knowledge offer limited promise for thinking through strategic dilemmas within social movement struggles and for understanding

processes of epistemological change. Moving away from the concept of co-optation and rejecting the desire for a pure, untainted politics does not, however, mean accepting moderate, reformist or watered-down political projects. Rather it means recognizing the complexity of knowledge practices, the embeddedness of knowledge-power relations and the need for creative responses within complex hegemonic terrains. It means being attentive to the specificities of one's own knowledge practices as well as the community of knowers with which one engages, whether by choice, coercion or immersion. While the metaphor of hegemonic entanglements cannot itself resolve the ongoing strategic dilemmas that activists face, it might itself offer new ways of thinking about old problems. In this sense we might find within entanglements spaces for transformation.

Chapter 6

TRANSFORMING KNOWLEDGE ACROSS PRISON WALLS:

Resonance and dissonance in queer and transgender prisoner solidarity work

Introduction

'Solidarity' offers a powerful ideal within social movement politics, but is often difficult to practice. This is partly because the meaning of the term is highly contested and partly because its practical enactment is not always straightforward. As such, questions of solidarity have been central to ongoing debates about the politics of difference, the meaning of community, the nature of citizenship and the practice of shared struggle (Dean 1996, 1998; Young 2002; Gould 2007). The meaning of solidarity has also been a fundamental question for feminism, particularly since universal claims to womanhood have unravelled, thus denaturalizing assumptions about an automatic solidarity among women and posing key dilemmas about the grounds for collective struggle. Moreover, while the language of solidarity is common within many social movement struggles, the concept is sometimes deployed as a taken-for-granted term (Whalen 2007; Scholz 2008). Many groups rhetorically claim to be 'in solidarity' with others, for example, without necessarily defining the terms of that relationship. As such it is useful to re-examine solidarity within social movement practice, as it remains both a conceptual dilemma (e.g. what do we mean when we invoke the language of solidarity?) and a practical one (e.g. how to we engage in meaningful acts of solidarity?).

Although debates about solidarity are frequently taken up as questions of group formation, coalitional identities and political strategy, this chapter considers prisoner solidarity work as a potential site of epistemological transformation. Moving away from understandings of solidarity that privilege ontological categories of

'sameness' and 'difference' as a basis for unity among individuals and groups, this chapter considers solidarity as a political-epistemological practice in which engagements with 'resonant' and 'dissonant' knowledge generate new ways of knowing. Treating solidarity less as a social bond which links two distinct entities, and more as a power-knowledge practice that (re)constitutes those (knowing) entities themselves, I suggest that the transformative potential of solidarity lies less in its promise of unity and more in its capacity to challenge established relations of power, particularly among differently situated subjects.

Drawing from interviews with grassroots queer, trans and gender nonconforming¹³⁴ activists who engage in prisoner solidarity work in Canada, as well as from my own experience of running a pen pal project for queer and trans prisoners in Britain, I explore the challenges of engaging in solidarity work across prison walls.¹³⁵ I argue that critical, reflective solidarity work generates ongoing tensions between resonant and dissonant knowledge, which not only give rise to new political possibilities but may forestall the solidification, entrenchment and objectification of conventional notions of 'experience' that can undermine the political potential of solidarity itself. This chapter thus builds on the dilemmas of power, knowledge and resistance explored in Chapter Two, questions of experience that were raised in Chapter Three and the problem of co-optation in Chapter Five, by considering how

¹³⁴ Recognizing the inability of any single term to encapsulate the fluidity and specificity of people's gender and sexual identities, and noting both the overlapping and distinct dimensions of these identities, for the purposes of this chapter, I use gender and sexual identity terms in the following ways: By 'queer', I refer to people whose sexual desires, identities and practices do not conform to heterosexual norms (including, but also going beyond, lesbian, gay, bisexual, two-spirit, and queer-identified people). By trans, I refer to people who identify or express their gender differently than what is traditionally associated with the sex they were assigned at birth (e.g. they identify as transgender, transsexual, two-spirit, male-to-female; female-to-male). By gender nonconforming, I refer to people whose gender presentation or identity does not conform to gender norms or expectations but do not self-identify as trans (e.g. women who present in a masculine way, but nonetheless identify as women, non-trans identified androgynous, intersex, gender-fluid people).

¹³⁵ When referring to prisons, I include all forms of forced or coerced state custody, such as jails, prisons, children's detention centres, immigration detention centres, 'secure' hospital beds and psychiatric facilities. Using the term 'prison' to encompass such a wide range of carceral forms is not meant to deny the contextual specificity of each institution, but to recognize the related effects of confinement-based punishment, regulation and control. This definitional approach is also consistent with the way the term 'prison' is used by many of the activists I interviewed.

relationships between power, knowing, experience and resistance play out in the empirical site of prisoner solidarity work.

Prisoner solidarity work provides a fruitful site for exploring transformative knowledge practices for several reasons. First, solidarity is a term that both describes a concrete practice or action and provides a conceptual framework that shapes and defines a set of values, which in turn are attached to, or work to constitute, that practice. For example, prison activists often use 'solidarity' to describe a set of actions (such as letter writing, lobbying and advocacy) that are oriented around a particular aim (supporting prisoners), but also deploy the term as a kind of speech-act that performs a set of political values, affinities or ways of relating to others.¹³⁶ In this way, solidarity functions as a kind of orienting device that interprets, frames and constitutes certain practices. As such, the concept arguably also works to produce particular forms of knowing; solidarity is a form of meaning-making and way-finding that shapes how activists engage with and come to know others.

Second, given that deployments of solidarity are often fraught with ongoing political dilemmas and practical challenges (as will be further described below), solidarity is a dynamic process that perpetually creates impetus for change. Indeed, the challenges of solidarity work are not merely problems to be overcome; the political tensions, limits and dilemmas are generative. The difficulty of engaging in prisoner solidarity work requires a critical, reflective response that opens up potentialities for new forms of knowledge to emerge. As such, exploring the ways in which prison activists enact solidarity provides a helpful example through which to think about processes of epistemological transformation.

Third, most prisoner solidarity projects (in contrast to charity-based or service-oriented projects) seek fundamental social change rather than minor reform. Most of the groups and activists I interviewed, for example, explicitly identify as

¹³⁶ Here I refer broadly to J. L. Austin's concept of speech-act, which describes how certain kinds of speech work to enact that which it speaks (Austin 1962; see also Searle 1969). For example, when a group makes a public statement that explicitly declares their solidarity for another group, the statement arguably works to 'enact' or 'perform' that solidarity through its very declaration. At the same time, as I will discuss below, not all declarations are equally enacting; solidarity practices that have more transformative effects arguably require practices that go beyond mere declarations.

prison abolitionist, anti-capitalist or against border controls, and agree that fundamental social change is needed rather than mere reform. These activists see their work as explicitly part of broader social movements struggles to reduce or eliminate the use of prisons. Indeed, for many prison abolitionists, advancing the struggle to eliminate prisons is impossible (politically, pragmatically and ethically) without working directly with prisoners. So although prisoner solidarity work in itself might not fit within narrower definitions of social movement organising or conventional political protest, it was certainly seen as a key part of movement politics by the activists I interviewed. Moreover, because prisoner solidarity work is relatively underexplored in relation to social movement organising, it provides a rich site for exploring questions of activism and political transformation.

Fourth, the projects I consider take a distinctly 'queer' political approach to prisoner solidarity work, which I also suggest is epistemologically generative. By queer political approach (in contrast to a queer *subject identity* defined in footnote 134), I refer to a political ethos that not only addresses issues of gender and sexuality, but also questions the logic of what is considered to be 'the norm' within society. In contrast to more mainstream strands of lesbian and gay politics, which often seek to 'normalize' homosexuality in relation to heterosexuality, 'queer' seeks to question the norm itself and contest binary logics altogether (Butler 1993; Sedgwick 1990; Jagose 1996).¹³⁷ In doing so, a queer approach seeks to attend to the power relations that produce certain identity categories (such as heterosexual and homosexual) in the first place. Insisting on bringing a queer and trans perspective to prison organizing work and an anti-prison perspective to queer and trans activism, the prisoner solidarity activists considered in this chapter bring new insights to the relationships between gender/sexual norms and carceral deployments of power.

¹³⁷ My emphasis on a 'queer' approach is not meant to suggest that gay and lesbian politics are necessarily normative or always prioritise political recognition, inclusion and equality with heterosexuals. Certainly many of the more radical strands of lesbian and gay politics actively questioned norms, categories and identities long before the term 'queer' became fashionable. Rather, the distinction I am making is partly intended as a shorthand way of differentiating between approaches that are more broadly assimilatory and those that seek more actively to question the status quo.

This chapter begins with a brief overview of queer and trans prison activism in Canada, situated within broader Anglo-American trends of mass imprisonment on the one hand, and mainstream lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) politics on the other. In the second section, I offer a critique of the way that solidarity is conventionally understood as a unifying bond between two entities. I argue that the conventional view of solidarity not only fails to reflect the political ethos expressed by the queer and trans prison activists I interviewed, but is limited in its capacity for political transformation. By privileging sameness over difference, the unifying bond model of solidarity is not sufficiently attentive to power relations, is prone to disciplinary relationships, and risks political stagnancy. Responding to these limits, the third section offers an alternative way of thinking about solidarity work. Extending the discussion of experience and knowledge-production outlined in Chapter Two, I argue that common experiences, values, goals or identities need not provide the foundation for solidarity politics. Instead, I suggest that the interplay between 'resonant' and 'dissonant' knowledges can generate important political reverberations that disrupt dominant power relations and open space for critical, reflexive and transformative knowledge practices to emerge.

Context of Queer and Trans Prisoner Solidarity Work in North America

The past decade has seen the emergence of a new wave of grassroots queer and trans activism against imprisonment and policing. For example, queers and trans people are increasingly playing a visible role in the prison abolition movement in the US and Canada, new queer and trans prisoner solidarity groups have sprung up in both countries, and links between gender/sexuality and imprisonment are being more readily discussed in radical activist networks.¹³⁸ While many queer and trans prisoner solidarity groups have been established relatively recently, such organizing

¹³⁸ See for example Ritchie (2005), Prisoner Correspondence Project (2009c), Cammett (2009) Mogul, Ritchie and Whitlock (2011), and Stanley and Smith (2011).

work emerges from a much longer history of gender/sexuality-related activism against criminalization, imprisonment and punishment.

Because prisons, police, immigration officials and psychiatric institutions in North America and Europe have long punished people for transgressing sexual and gender norms, queer, trans and gender nonconforming people have an equally long tradition of resisting state practices of criminalization and social control (Warner 2002; Kunzel 2008b; Gan 2007; Kinsman 1996; Feinberg 1997). Decriminalization of same-gender sex acts, for example, marked a key demand of early homosexual movements that emerged in Europe at the end of the 1800s, and resistance to policing and punishment formed a prominent feature of the gay liberation movements of North America and Europe during the 1960s, 70s and early 1980s (Katz 1976; Kunzel 2008b; Blasius and Phelan 1997). While the 1969 Stonewall rebellion in New York City is perhaps the most well-known (albeit frequently misremembered)¹³⁹ example, many other collective acts of queer resistance in North America and Europe arose in direct response to similar cases of police violence and harassment. During the 1970s and 80s, gay pride demonstrations were regularly held outside police stations and jails, gay newsletters featured articles about criminalization concerns and several gay and lesbian organizations ran pen pal projects for prisoners (Kunzel 2008b). While concerns around policing and imprisonment now receive less attention among many LGBT groups in North America and Europe, numerous grassroots queer and trans groups still remain committed to these struggles.

Although most overtly homophobic and transphobic laws have been overturned in Canada, the UK and to a lesser degree the USA, the criminalization and punishment of queer, trans and gender nonconforming people nonetheless remains an acute problem. While the overall number of queer, trans and gender

¹³⁹ Although Stonewall is often considered the birthplace of the modern 'gay rights' movement (a movement that is often characterized as white, middle-class and gay), the Stonewall rebellion was led by working-class drag queens, butches and trans people of colour, and was also preceded by several other key actions such as the Compton Cafeteria Riots in San Francisco. Unfortunately this history is often obscured, thus erasing the role of trans people and queer activists of colour in the history of the movement. See Feinberg (1997), Gan (2007) and Retzliff (2007) and Stryker (2008).

nonconforming people behind bars is unknown,¹⁴⁰ a growing body of evidence suggests that LGBT people—particularly people of colour and those from poor economic backgrounds—are still disproportionately criminalised and imprisoned in North America and Europe (Stop Prisoner Rape and American Civil Liberties Union 2005; Amnesty International 2006; INCITE! Women of Color Against Violence 2008; Dick and Stonewall 2008; Sylvia Rivera Law Project 2007a; Broadus 2009; Marksamer 2008; Ritchie 2005; Findlay 1999; Whittle and Stephens 2001; Grant et al. 2011; Stanley and Smith 2011; Mogul, Ritchie, and Whitlock 2011). Trans activists in the San Francisco Bay area, for example, report that approximately half of the region’s 20,000 transgender residents have been in prison or jail (Lee 2008). Conditions inside prison are also a key concern, as queer, transgender and gender nonconforming people are frequently subject to high levels of harassment and abuse, commonly denied medical care and disproportionately placed in segregation (Arkles 2009; Lambie 2011; Broadus 2009; Grant et al. 2011).¹⁴¹

Such problems stem from broader punishment trends, including the dramatic rise in imprisonment rates on a global scale, but also a persistent criminalization of those who fall outside the norms of productive citizenry within contemporary modes of capitalism (Walmsley 2009; Sudbury 2005; Wacquant 2009). Never before has the

¹⁴⁰ Governments generally do not collect information on the sexual orientation and gender identities of prisoners so it is difficult to estimate LGBT prison populations. Moreover, prisoners are not always safe to disclose their gender or sexual identities. For example, prisoners may engage in same-sex or gender-variant activities without explicitly identifying as LGBT, or they may have legitimate concerns whether such disclosures will negatively impact psychological assessments and release plans—factors which all add further challenges to population estimates.

¹⁴¹ These policing and imprisonment trends appear to be the result of both direct and indirect forms of discrimination. Law enforcement officials directly attack queer, trans and gender nonconforming people by selectively enforcing laws and policies in transphobic and homophobic ways. For example, officials use discretionary powers to over-police and enact harsher penalties against queer and trans people, and engage in acts of violence, harassment and sexual assault against queer and trans people (Frazer 2005; American Friends Service Committee 2004; Mogul 2005; Grant et al. 2011).¹⁴¹ But perhaps more significantly, gender nonconforming people are funnelled into the criminal justice system as a result of broader patterns of discrimination and marginalization (FTM Safer Shelter Project 2008; Spade 2006; Mogul, Ritchie, and Whitlock 2011; Stanley and Smith 2011). Queer and trans youth, for example, face high risks of being homeless, unemployed, bullied at school, harassed on the street, denied social services, estranged from family and targeted by sexual violence—factors which greatly increase the risks of criminalization and imprisonment (Sylvia Rivera Law Project 2007a; Ritchie 2005; Marksamer 2008; FIERCE! 2004; FTM Safer Shelter Project 2008; Spade 2006; Amnesty International 2006; INCITE! Women of Color Against Violence 2008).

prison industrial complex¹⁴² been so powerful, particularly in Euro-Atlantic countries. While the US takes the global lead in locking up its people (with 1 in every 100 adults currently behind bars and more than 7.3 million people in prison, probation or parole),¹⁴³ Canada, Britain, Australia and other liberal democracies are rapidly following suit. England and Wales, for example, has nearly doubled its prison population since 1992 (Hussain, Capel, and Jeffery 2008) and continues to build new prisons. Likewise, Canada has recently passed tougher sentencing laws, and in January 2011 the federal government announced a \$158 million prison expansion plan (DeKeseredy 2009; Moore and Donohue 2008; Bronskill 2011).

Given the high social costs of imprisonment, the prison industrial complex has now become a key target of grassroots social movements more broadly, particularly among those who make connections between struggles against militarization, capitalism, globalization and imprisonment (Sudbury 2004). Recognizing that the penal system not only targets queer and trans people unjustly (especially those from communities of colour and from working class backgrounds) but also disproportionately criminalises other groups who face systemic discrimination and oppression, many queer and trans activists argue that the system itself is fundamentally unjust and needs to be challenged.

Contemporary queer and trans anti-prison activism has also emerged in response to mainstream lesbian and gay organizations whose political priorities often neglect issues of criminalization, poverty and punishment. Mainstream LGBT groups, for example, tend to exclude prisoners from their conceptions of community (e.g. LGBT resources are not written with prisoners in mind, LGBT groups do not undertake direct support for prisoners, etc.) or neglect issues that contribute to the imprisonment of LGBT people (such as poverty, homelessness, addiction, abuse and

¹⁴² The prison industrial complex is the network of governmental and private interests that use prisons as a response to social, political and economic problems. The prison industrial complex (PIC) includes all institutions, government branches, agencies and businesses that have a financial, organizational or political interest in maintaining the prison system, such as government departments of 'corrections', border control agencies, private companies that have service contracts inside prisons, security corporations, prison guard unions, and surveillance technology vendors (Goldberg and Evans 1998/2009; Gilmore 1998 2005; Herzing and Paglen 2005).

¹⁴³ See *Pew Centre on the States* (2008, 2009) and Austin et al. (2007).

racism).¹⁴⁴ Many LGBT organizations across North America (and Europe)¹⁴⁵ are increasingly adopting political strategies that extend rather than challenge policing and imprisonment (Agathangelou, Bassichis, and Spira 2008; Hanhardt 2008; Spade 2009). Whether supporting hate crime laws and 'safe streets' legislation, calling for increased 'community policing' in gay urban neighbourhoods, cracking down on sex workers or removing queer and trans homeless youth from gay business districts to make way for gentrified neighbourhoods, LGBT communities are increasingly complicit in broader criminalization trends (Valverde and Cirak 2003; Spade 2009; Lamble 2011; Knopp 1997). Indeed, given the popular LGBT support for hate-crime legislation, many queers now partly measure their citizenship status on grounds of whether the state is willing to imprison other people on their behalf (Spade and Willse 2000).¹⁴⁶

Many critics have suggested that the failure to prioritise issues of policing and imprisonment (as well as poverty, war and disability) is the result of mainstream groups being dominated by a white, middle-class leadership that has not fully taken on the issues that effect the most economically and racially disadvantaged members of queer and trans communities (Mananzala and Spade 2008). Critics have also suggested that the broader shift from gay liberation to LGBT rights has resulted in a

¹⁴⁴ For a transcript of discussions with prisoners about this problem see the *Prisoner Correspondence Project's* 'Imprisoned Pride' document (2008).

¹⁴⁵ Such trends are not exclusive to North America, but extend to other Anglo and European countries. For example, a British organization that was originally created in the 1980s to address police brutality against gays and lesbians, has since shifted its mandate to 'challenging homophobic and transphobic hate crime' and does so by working with police (GALOP 2006d, 2006e, 2009). Largely excluding state violence from its definition of hate crime, the organization's focus has shifted from one where the state is understood as a perpetrator of violence, to one where the state is deemed a protector against violence (GALOP 2006b, 2006a, 2006c, 2007). See also Haritaworn (2010) for a discussion of hate crime politics in the German context.

¹⁴⁶ In some cases, this extends to the death penalty: LGBT groups lobbying for the *Local Law Enforcement Hate Crime Prevention Act* in the US, (also known as the *Matthew Shepard and James Byrd, Jr. Hate Crimes Prevention Act*), recently found themselves in the unsavoury position of supporting legislation which, thanks to a Republican amendment, included the death penalty among its available sanctions. Although subsequently removed when the House and Senate versions of the bill were amalgamated in October 2009, the death penalty amendment was included in the version of the bill passed by the U.S. Senate on July 23, 2009. Despite its title, the act is not prevention-oriented, but rather prosecution driven; as stated in its purpose, the act provides "Federal assistance to States, local jurisdictions, and Indian tribes to prosecute hate crimes." See *Matthew Shepard and James Byrd, Jr. Hate Crimes Prevention Act 2009*.

'politics of respectability' that excludes anyone who does not conform to the new 'homonormative' ideals (Duggan 2003; Sycamore 2004).¹⁴⁷ As such, activists, scholars and political groups that are committed to anti-racist, anti-colonial, critical disability and class analyses have challenged the political values and priorities of more mainstream LGBT movements (Puar 2007; Spade 2007; Sycamore 2004; Stanley and Smith 2011; Prisoner Correspondence Project 2008).

Given these overlapping trends of prison expansion, targeted criminalization of queer and trans people and the shifting priorities of mainstream LGBT organizations, many grassroots queer and trans activists are enacting a renewed commitment to anti-prison and anti-criminalization politics. In the US, groups like the *Sylvia Rivera Law Project*¹⁴⁸ in New York, the *Transgender, Gender Variant and Intersex Justice Project*¹⁴⁹ in San Francisco, *Black and Pink*¹⁵⁰ in Boston, *Tranzmission*¹⁵¹ in North Carolina, *Hearts on a Wire*¹⁵² in Philadelphia, *Raised Voices*¹⁵³ in Seattle, the *Transformative Justice Law Project of Illinois*¹⁵⁴, and the *Write to Win Collective*¹⁵⁵ in Chicago all organize specifically around queer and trans prison issues. There are also a number of 'books to prisoners' projects that offer resources specifically for LGBT prisoners.¹⁵⁶ In Canada, the *Prisoner Correspondence Project*¹⁵⁷

¹⁴⁷ Regina Kunzel argues in the US context, for example, that queer prison activism declined in the 1980s and 1990s as gay and lesbian activists become increasingly preoccupied with liberal demands for rights, recognition and social inclusion. Prison issues, which became seen as a threat to new gay norms of respectability, were abandoned in favour of more 'winnable' legislative change. Even despite the resurgence of militant politics that emerged in the wake of the AIDS crisis of 80s and 90s, prison issues remained largely disconnected from these struggles (Kunzel 2008a, 222-224).

¹⁴⁸ See: <http://srjp.org/penpal>

¹⁴⁹ See: <http://www.tgijp.org>

¹⁵⁰ See: <http://www.blackandpink.org>

¹⁵¹ See: <http://www.myspace.com/tranzmissionasheville>

¹⁵² See: <http://community-justice.org/projects/roc/organizing/hearts-on-a-wire>

¹⁵³ See: <http://www.ingersollcenter.org/transgender-inmate-penpal-program-started-seattle>

¹⁵⁴ See: <http://www.tjlp.org/contact.html>

¹⁵⁵ See: <http://writetowin.wordpress.com>

¹⁵⁶ The *Prison Book Project* in Amherst, Massachusetts publishes an annual resource called 'Locked Out' which lists groups that provide resources for gay, lesbian, bisexual and queer prisoners in the US. See for example: <http://zinelibrary.info/lockedout-2010>

¹⁵⁷ See: <http://www.prisonercorrespondenceproject.com>

in Montreal, the *Prisoners' Justice Action Committee (PJAC)*¹⁵⁸ in Toronto, *Prisoners HIV/AIDS Support Action Network (PASAN)*¹⁵⁹ also in Toronto, and *Joint Effort*¹⁶⁰ in Vancouver all prioritize issues of gender and sexuality as related to criminalization. Whether addressing gender and sexuality issues through prison politics in general (e.g. *PJAC* and *Joint Effort*), or focussing specifically on providing support and services for queer and transgender prisoners (e.g. the *Prisoner Correspondence Project*, which runs a pen pal project for queer and trans prisoners), these groups strive to integrate a gender/sexuality analysis within prison struggles and an anti-prison analysis within LGBT struggles.

Although each project has its own particular aims, these groups conduct similar activities and are connected through regular communication and networking events.¹⁶¹ Most projects engage in four broad areas of work: direct prisoner support (e.g. linking inside and outside people through pen pal friendships, providing resources to prisoners, advocating for individual prisoners); public education (e.g. distributing literature, hosting events and spreading awareness of queer and trans prison issues); community building (e.g. providing a platform for prisoners' voices to be heard within broader LGBT communities; providing support to project participants both inside and outside prison; resource and skill-sharing); and policy change (e.g. challenging institutional policies, organizing against prison expansion, lobbying for legislative changes). Many of these groups explicitly identify as prison abolitionist or are broadly sympathetic to abolitionist aims.¹⁶²

¹⁵⁸ See: www.pjac.org

¹⁵⁹ See: <http://www.pasan.org>

¹⁶⁰ See: <http://www.vcn.bc.ca/august10/organizations/jointeffort.html>

¹⁶¹ There have been conferences and workshops where activists from these various groups have gathered, such as the *Transforming Justice Conference* in 2007 (Sylvia Rivera Law Project 2007b) and the *Critical Resistance Conference* in Oakland in 2008 (Critical Resistance 2008a, 2008c) discussed below. Activists involved in these projects also host regular group conference calls to discuss ongoing issues, share resources and provide mutual support.

¹⁶² Several groups explicitly endorse a prison abolition perspective in their literature and on their websites. Others take an abolitionist organizing perspective but do not explicitly identify as such for strategic purposes. Some groups do not identify as abolitionist but are run by members who take an abolitionist approach. This has also come up in both formal and informal conversations that I have had with many of these groups, through my own work in the Bent Bars Project in London, UK. Twelve of

The activists and organizers involved in these organizations are primarily queer and trans-identified, even within groups not specifically organized as 'by and for' queer and trans people. For example, while *Joint Effort* and the *Prisoners' Justice Action Committee* work on issues of imprisonment generally (rather than specifically around queer and trans prisoners) organizers in both groups noted that the majority of organizers were queer or trans-identified. Indeed, several of the activists I interviewed noted a disproportionate number of queer and trans-identified activists working on grassroots prison issues more broadly, whether within projects specifically for LGBT prisoners or around prison issues in general. For example, queer and trans issues were highly visible at the September 2008 prison abolition conference organized by *Critical Resistance*, a focus that was clearly reflected in the content of the workshops and the general makeup of conference participants (Critical Resistance 2008b; 2008a, personal observations).¹⁶³ While some activists see this phenomenon as an extension of earlier generations of queer and trans organizing, others attributed this to a greater likelihood for queer and trans people to be involved in activism more broadly. Some also noted a general overlap between activist networks and queer social scenes. For example, a few activists explained how they first got involved in prison activism in part because of a friend or lover who was already active on those issues. Several activists also suggested that the experiences of gender and sexuality-based oppression made queer and transgender people more likely to question social norms and potentially be more understanding of other kinds of oppression (Interview #3, 5 6, 10, 12). As one activist, Adam*^{*} described,

I think the experience of being queer definitely makes people a bit more likely to question social structures that lots of people take for

the fifteen activists I interviewed explicitly identified as abolitionist or indicated that they were broadly supportive of abolitionist politics.

¹⁶³ While some may attribute high queer and trans visibility to the fact that the conference was held in the San Francisco Bay area (which is known for its high LGBT population), the conference attracted participants from across North America as well as Australia, Brazil, El Salvador, England, France, Germany, Japan and Puerto Rico (Herzing 2009). Moreover, many of the key organizations involved in the conference have consistently highlighted and prioritized gender and sexuality issues as a point of focus in anti-prison organizing.

* Pseudonym

granted . . . and because queers usually aren't raised in queer families, they have to do that thinking for themselves. I also think that lots of folks end up gravitating towards radical politics because they feel different, and it gives them an opportunity to come out in a safer environment – or to sublimate their sexuality for a while by getting a bit too hardcore and organizing 24/7. And I think that some folks have gravitated to radical social justice movements from [more mainstream] queer organizing that is often so disappointing in terms of its politics. (Interview #3)¹⁶⁴

At the same time, several activists emphasized that without political analysis, experience alone was an insufficient explanation. As Adam noted, 'If personal experiences of oppression made people more likely to resist all forms of oppression and domination, the world would be a very different place' (Interview #3).

Among these activists, many define their work within the language of prisoner solidarity. The *Prisoner Correspondence Project* in Montreal, for example, which runs a pen pal project for queer and trans prisoners, is also known as the *Queer/Trans Prisoner Solidarity Project*. As described on its website, the project 'aims to reinstate prisoner justice and prisoner solidarity as a priority within queer movements' (Prisoner Correspondence Project 2009a). Likewise, *Joint Effort* defines itself as 'an all women prison abolitionist group involved in solidarity work with women prisoners' (PrisonJustice.ca). The *Prisoners' Justice Action Committee* also draws on the language of solidarity in its outreach materials, buttons and slogans. It also organizes an annual vigil for *Prisoner Justice Day*, which is described as 'a show of solidarity to remember those who have died behind bars' (PJAC 2007).

But what precisely forms the basis of solidarity? How do activists understand solidarity both conceptually and in practice? This chapter considers these questions by drawing on interviews with fifteen queer and trans-identified activists working on

¹⁶⁴ For ease and consistency of referencing interview material, I have numbered each of the interview transcripts (in order of the date on which they were conducted). Because some individuals wanted to be anonymous while others wanted to be named, references use the interview numbers, which are then supplemented in the text by real names, pseudonyms or other relevant details where appropriate.

issues of imprisonment and detention in the Canadian context.¹⁶⁵ Several were involved in the groups mentioned above (i.e. the *Prisoner Correspondence Project*, *Joint Effort*, the *Prisoners Justice Action Committee*) as well as groups working on related issues such as poverty, harm reduction, border controls, sex work, corporate globalization, etc.¹⁶⁶ Interviews took place in person, by telephone or through live internet chats (i.e. GoogleChat and Skype) and occurred between November 2008 and August 2009. The chapter also draws from my own experience of running a queer and trans prisoner pen pal project in the UK context and from informal conversations with activists running similar projects in the US.¹⁶⁷

For a number of political, practical and ethical reasons, I did not interview any currently incarcerated people who were involved in any of the above projects.¹⁶⁸

¹⁶⁵ Interviewees were sought primarily through my own organizing networks. I circulated a call for participants (see Appendix A) on various email list serves and I also contacted individual activists that I knew from my own involvement in organizing. The interview process was pre-approved by the Kent Law School's Research Ethics Advisory Group and conducted in accordance with the UK Socio-Legal Studies Association's *Statement of Principles of Ethical Research Practice* as well as the *Canadian Tri-Council Policy on Ethical Conduct for Research Involving Humans*, 1998 (with 2000, 2002 and 2005 amendments). Activists were given the option of using their own name or a pseudonym when quoted. For further discussion of the interview methodology see Chapter One.

¹⁶⁶ The activists I interviewed were predominantly working in urban centres (e.g. Toronto, Vancouver, Edmonton, Montreal, Hamilton and Peterborough), tended to be in their 20s and 30s, and included a mix of racial/ethnic identities and class backgrounds, though the majority were white. All interviewees self-identified as lesbian, gay, bisexual, queer or trans. This information was obtained by a voluntary demographics questionnaire included in the interview process (see Appendix C). Not all participants completed the questionnaire, so these demographics should be considered indicative only.

¹⁶⁷ There are of course, key differences between the phenomenon of imprisonment in Canada versus that of the US and Britain, as well as the state of LGBT politics in each country. These contextual differences no doubt shape how prisoner solidarity work is undertaken in each jurisdiction. However, because the pragmatic and political challenges of undertaking queer and trans prisoner solidarity work, as well as the motivations for undertaking such projects appear to be quite similar in all three contexts, some cross jurisdictional analysis is warranted. Moreover, because groups that focus specifically on queer and transgender prison issues tend to be relatively small and grassroots-based, there is considerable sharing of resources, strategies and conversations across national boundaries, which also suggests some commonality and relevance for the purposes of this chapter.

¹⁶⁸ Considerable logistical challenges arise when interviewing prisoners in general (e.g. gaining institutional permission, addressing ethical considerations around consent and confidentiality, gaining prisoner trust, ensuring prisoner safety and support, etc.). These barriers are particularly acute with LGBT and gender nonconforming prisoners, who face additional vulnerabilities and risks because of their sexual and gender identities. Beyond these concerns, however, I remain politically conflicted about undertaking academic research with prisoners. On the one hand, I believe it is crucial to include prisoners' direct perspectives in academic work, as prisoners' voices are often absent from discussions around the issues that directly affect them. On the other hand, academics have a long history of exploiting prisoners' knowledge in ways that ultimately benefit the researcher (i.e., bolstering one's

Where possible and appropriate, I have drawn from prisoners' perspectives where such materials are already available in the public domain (such as writing, audio recordings and other materials by prisoners), particularly materials that are circulated as part of the queer and trans solidarity projects mentioned above. However, such sources from openly LGBT-identified prisoners are still relatively rare, due to the kinds of censorship and safety risks that queer and trans people specifically face inside prison, but also because of a lack of resources for supporting prisoners' voices more generally (Prisoner Correspondence Project 2008; Huckelbury 2002; Bhogal 2008).¹⁶⁹ As such, it is worth emphasising that the analysis of prisoner solidarity work discussed in this chapter is largely limited to the vantage point of non-incarcerated people.

The Challenge of Solidarity Across Prison Walls

'Solidarity' is a highly contested term that means different things in different contexts (Gould and Scholz 2007; Harvey 2007). As one of the activists I interviewed said: 'Solidarity is definitely a really difficult concept to pin down, but it's so central to a lot of what we do' (Interview #4).¹⁷⁰ In general, however, the concept falls within two broad frameworks: (1) the social solidarity or social cohesion model; and 2) the political solidarity or mutual aid model.¹⁷¹ This section provides an overview of both

academic career or advancing institutional knowledge) without necessarily benefiting prisoners or their families. Community-based 'action research' is one way of addressing this dilemma, but was not viable in this particular context.

¹⁶⁹ This is not to deny the rich body of prisoner writing that is available or to undermine the influence of prisoners' writing on contemporary western intellectual and literary traditions. However, the most celebrated work tends to be produced by imprisoned intellectuals, 'political prisoners' and other prisoners of conscience, whereas writing (as well as oral traditions such as story-telling and music) taken up by more 'common' prisoners has received less attention. For a broad overview of the intellectual and political significance of prisoner writing see Gaucher (2002a).

¹⁷⁰ Many of the activists I interviewed echoed these sentiments. In fact, almost all the activists I interviewed struggled to define the term, noting the political difficulties and dilemmas of definition, even if the term was deemed important to their work.

¹⁷¹ Several sociologists and political philosophers have identified more detailed sub-categories of solidarity, which further elaborate on the character, function or motivating forces of solidarity bonds. Most famously, Durkheim (1893/1984) distinguishes between mechanical solidarity (based on shared identity or shared consciousness) and organic solidarity (based on the interdependency arising from

models and identifies the political challenges that arise from each, particularly in the context of prison-related work. By identifying the limits of conventional understandings of solidarity, I set the terrain for the final section of the chapter, which offers an alternative understanding of solidarity as epistemological practice.

Social solidarity is most commonly understood as a measure of collective cohesion or group formation. Emerging from the sociological traditions of Comte and Durkheim on the one hand, and social contract theory on the other, social solidarity describes levels of 'groupness' or collectivity (Scholz 2008). Providing a means to understand relationships between individuals and collectives, social solidarity assesses degrees of social integration and interdependence that bind together individuals or groups in mutually concerned relationships. This model usually includes both descriptive and normative elements, referring both to mutual attachment (integration) as well as mutual obligation (moral duty). Social solidarity is often described as a kind of social 'glue' that holds groups together in a shared sense of 'we-ness' (May 2007, 193; Rehg 2007, 7; Gould 2007). As David Heyd describes: 'Solidarity is a social force which contributes to the sustenance of the unity of a group of people. Like the solidity of physical bodies, it is what keeps an entity from disintegration' (2007, 118).

The literature on social solidarity is characterized by several recurring debates, including: what motivates relationships of solidarity and what conditions foster interest in the well-being of others (Rorty 1989; Gould 2007); whether solidarity is primarily an altruistic or self-interested social relation (Giugni and Passy 2001); what conditions and features provide the most robust forms of solidarity (Baurmann 1999; Rorty 1989); how solidarity mediates between individual autonomy and collective commonality (Mouffe 1995); and whether solidarity should be

the division of labour) but others have made further classifications. For example, Michael Hechter (1987) distinguishes between normative, structural and functional solidarity, Kurt Bayertz (1999) identifies social, moral, political and civil solidarity, Kate Nash (2009, Chapter Five) differentiates between 'thinner' and 'thicker' solidarity, and Jodi Dean explores affectional, conventional and reflective solidarity (1995). Underlying these various categorizations is a persistent effort to measure and compare levels of social cohesion, whether among social groups, within state settings, or across transnational borders. For my purposes it is not necessary to discuss them in detail here.

understood as a universal ideal or particularist practice (Schwartz 2007; Heyd 2007; Rippe 1998). Underlying these debates are primarily questions of how to maintain social order. Particularly among mainstream political theorists, solidarity is seen as problem of how to maintain social cohesion in the context of (post)modern, multicultural and pluralist nation states (Mouffe 1995). Here solidarity provides a conceptual framework for 'managing' difference; the language of solidarity signifies efforts to maintain social cohesion through citizenship norms, community stability and collective discipline. For some, solidarity provides a vital corrective to excesses of liberal individualism. In this view, solidarity offers a sense of community and connectedness in a world that is increasingly fragmented by individualization, self-interest and disparate social values (Schwartz 2007; May 2007; Brunkhorst 2007; Gould 2007). For others, solidarity sustains liberalism; relations of solidarity allow individual autonomy to flourish by promoting a sense of self-governing responsibility to others via mutual obligations and interdependencies (Khushf 1999; Rehg 2007). Whether liberal or communitarian in vision, however, the solidarity-as-social-cohesion framework primarily serves a normalizing function; it is a social relation that aims to smooth over difference, strengthen social ties and embed interdependent relationships. In this sense, social solidarity largely aims to strengthen the political status quo rather than transform it.¹⁷²

In contrast to the social model of solidarity, political solidarity describes justice-oriented collectivities largely aimed at disrupting or challenging the status quo. Unlike social solidarity, where group bonds emerge circumstantially from social integration or shared identity, political solidarity refers to bonds formed by intentional and politically motivated goals. As Scholz argues: 'it is the mutual commitment...that forms the unity of [political] solidarity, not shared feelings, experiences, identities or social locations' (Scholz 2007, 40). Grounded in Marxist, feminist and critical race traditions (and stemming from the tradition of the French

¹⁷² The normalising function of solidarity-as-cohesion is perhaps most evident when used in the service of nation-building projects that reinforce particular racial, gender and sexual norms and hierarchies. See for example Wimmer (1997) and Bannerji (2000).

Revolution), political solidarity can refer to bonds within groups (e.g. solidarity in a workers union), across groups (e.g. environmental and labour groups who work together to oppose a free trade agreement) or on an international scale (e.g. workers uniting across nations or continents) but most often emerges from collective opposition to injustice or oppression (Scholz 2007, 38). As Chandra Talpade Mohanty describes, political solidarity ‘foregrounds communities of people who have chosen to work and fight together’ (Mohanty 2003a, 7).

Like the social cohesion model of solidarity, political solidarity is also characterized by a concern for the well being of others, but is generally motivated by moral altruism rather than collectivized self-interest (Passy 2001). As Sundberg notes: ‘Solidarity movements are distinguished from other social movements in that solidarity activists are said to seek change or the transformation of power relations *for the benefit of others*, while participants in labour, feminist, queer, and environmental movements are said to mobilize *on their own behalf*’ (Sundberg 2007, 147, italics in original). Although this characterization presumes that one’s own struggles can be clearly distinguished from the struggles of others, it nonetheless captures the common understanding of political solidarity as an ethico-political relationship that extends beyond one’s own immediate interests. Political solidarity movements are thus characterised by efforts to defend the rights, interests and identities of others (Passy 2001). Unlike charity, however, solidarity work does not simply seek to alleviate the suffering of others, but aims to transform the conditions that create suffering or oppression in the first place. In this sense, political solidarity is often invoked through the metaphor of physical proximity, such as ‘standing with’ or ‘being on the side of’ a particular group in order to be express affiliation, connection and support.¹⁷³ Such articulations of political solidarity are enacted through coalitional politics that aim to challenge ‘divide and rule’ tactics that characterize capitalist social relations, particularly in contexts where social movement resources are scarce and groups are positioned as competing for funding,

¹⁷³ The ‘standing with’ metaphor is especially prevalent, but has been challenged by disability activists who point to its privileging of able-bodied norms.

recognition and attention. Seen as an opportunity to work together in shared struggles, political solidarity can be understood as a 'strategic orientation to build a stronger movement' where participants gain from collectively sharing resources, experience, knowledge and power (Binnie and Klesse 2011, 120).

Despite their important differences, both social and political models of solidarity are broadly characterized by the assertion of a common, unifying bond that links individuals and groups. Whether established through shared values, identity, experience, civic duties, kinship ties or political goals, solidarity is consistently described as a unifying force which links otherwise distinct entities. As David Jacobs writes in the introduction to a special journal issue on the topic, 'solidarity is a social bond of affection and identity that unites family, tribe, ethnic group and nation' (Jacobs 2007, 395). Similarly, Larry May notes: 'Solidarity involves the linking of individuals by a common bond of fellow feeling and reciprocity of attitude' (May 2007, 198). Despite considerable debate about the nature, form, basis and function of solidarity, the common unifying bond feature is fairly consistent (Dean 1995; Mohanty 2003a; Harvey 2007; Pensky 2007; Scholz 2007; Blum 2007; Heyd 2007; Nash 2009).

Although the ideal of solidarity-as-unifying-bond can provide an important call for collective responsibility over individual action, mutuality rather than self-interest, and shared struggle across difference, this framework nonetheless has several political and practical limits, particularly in the context of prison work. As I argue below, the emphasis on unity (a) does not adequately reflect the material conditions of prisoner solidarity work in practice; (b) necessitates a privileging of sameness over difference which is not representative of connections between many prisoners and (non-imprisoned) prison activists; (c) fails to grapple adequately with questions of power; and (d) can be used in highly disciplinary ways which lead to political stagnancy. While some elements of solidarity as a unifying force are certainly present in solidarity relationships that form between prisoners and non-prisoners, I argue below that 'unity' or 'common bonds' are not what gives solidarity work its transformative power. I suggest that what is most significant about solidarity work

lies not in the capacity to create a unified political front or to work towards a more cohesive sociality, but rather in the capacity to shift practices of knowing and thereby open spaces to challenge existing normalised relations of power. Before exploring this transformative epistemological potential, I will briefly outline the limits of the unity-through-common-bond model of solidarity in the context of queer and trans prison solidarity work.

a) Practical challenges of prisoner solidarity work

On a practical level, the capacity to establish unified bonds across prison walls is very difficult. While establishing such relationships is also challenging in other contexts (i.e. across national boundaries, in conditions of war, military occupation, economic deprivation, etc.), solidarity work across prison walls involves many obstacles that are unique to penal institutions. Prisons, by their very nature, are designed to prevent rather than foster relationships of connection and support. Prisons deliberately remove people from their communities, restrict their contact with family and friends and regulate their relationships with others. The basic capacity to speak directly to prisoners, for example, is limited. Visiting times are highly restricted, and are impacted by the time and cost involved in getting to and from prisons, which are often remotely located. In many institutions, visitors must speak to prisoners from behind physical barriers and are not permitted to hug prisoners or make physical contact. Most prisoners cannot receive incoming phone calls, and outgoing calls are controlled through restricted callers lists, call-access prohibitions and limits on funds for phone cards. Ingoing and outgoing mail is screened and sharing books or resources is often prohibited. Communication tools such as email and internet, which are frequently taken for granted in other organizing contexts, are simply not available to most prisoners.

The high number of remand prisoners, transfers and turnover rates also means that prison activists may only work with individual prisoners for brief and sporadic periods. Likewise, because most prisoners are held in institutions at a

considerable distance from their home communities, activists frequently lose contact with prisoners once they are released (particularly when activists are based near prison sites). In this context, the capacity to establish close ties or long-term bonds is spatially, temporarily and institutionally restricted. Stronger ties are most likely to be formed with long-term (e.g. life sentenced) prisoners, but these prisoners also tend to be those subject to the most control and regulation.

Building mutual relationships of trust is also extremely difficult in prison settings. Non-imprisoned people are taught to fear prisoners and these sentiments are exacerbated by prison regimes, which treat prisoners as perpetually dangerous. Many prisoners have significant (and well-founded) trust issues, which increase emotional barriers when connecting with others. Because prisons are not safe places for disclosing or addressing histories of abuse, trauma and harassment, maintaining emotional distance can be a necessary survival tactic. This is not to say that vital connections do not form among prisoners and between imprisoned and non-imprisoned people, but to recognize that prisons are structurally adverse to the kinds of social cohesion and bonding that are imagined in traditional conceptions of solidarity.

b) Privileging sameness over difference

Although questions around representations of sameness and difference are always central to conceptions of solidarity, the unity-through-common-bond framework consistently subordinates difference to commonality. The language of solidarity is regularly framed as a call to find 'unity despite difference' or 'commonality amongst diversity' (Gould 2007, 158, 162). As Richard Rorty describes, solidarity is 'the ability to see more and more traditional differences (of tribe, religion, race, customs, and the like) as unimportant when compared with similarities with respect to pain and humiliation—the ability to think of people wildly different from ourselves as included in the range of "us"' (Rorty 1989). While various thinkers continue to argue about which commonalities are foundational and question the basis of the 'us/them'

distinction, the definitional threshold ultimately lies in the capacity for sameness to trump difference.¹⁷⁴ Even among feminists who reject shared experience or ‘enforced commonality of oppression’ as a basis for solidarity and strenuously emphasize the political importance of acknowledging and embracing difference, the rejection of a commonality of shared experience is replaced with a commonality of political commitment (Mohanty 2003a, 7; hooks 1984, 65).¹⁷⁵

Yet when connections of solidarity are established across prison walls, they are not necessarily based on the traditional markers of commonality, such as shared experience, shared values or even ‘shared humanity’. As discussed in Chapter Four, common experience is neither a straightforward phenomenon nor an automatic basis for political collectivity. As June Jordan describes, ‘Partnership in misery does not necessarily provide for partnership in change: *When we get the monsters off our backs all of us may want to run in very different directions*’ (quoted in Shotwell 2011, 101). Moreover, while commonality of experience can be helpful for political organizing, it need not be a precondition for solidarity work.¹⁷⁶ Many of the prison

¹⁷⁴ It is worth noting here that unity does not necessarily depend on sameness of substance, identity or form, but does require some level of similarity in terms of goals or aims. For example, Durkheim’s concept of organic solidarity emerges from, rather than in spite of, difference. Unlike mechanical solidarity, which is formed from shared identity or consciousness, organic solidarity generates unity from the division of labour. Because individuals and groups take on specialized tasks that contribute to, but do not fully meet needs, each individual or group is dependent on the others in order to fulfil their broader aims. Hence, unity through mutual or interdependent interest is formed (Durkheim 1893/1984). Nevertheless, as will be noted later, a unity formed from functional differentiation is not necessarily any less prone to disciplinary relations than a unity formed from sameness.

¹⁷⁵ Chandra Talpade Mohanty, for example, well known for her critiques of the white western feminist uses of common experience as a basis for ‘sisterhood’ argues instead for a recognition of shared interests. As she states: ‘I define solidarity in terms of mutuality, accountability, and the recognition of common interests as the basis for relationships among diverse communities’ (Mohanty 2003a, 7). Importantly, Mohanty suggests that all three elements—mutuality, accountability and recognition of common interests—are important, thus moving away from the notion of an automatic solidarity based on shared interests.

¹⁷⁶ For example, while ex-prisoners often provide more experientially informed support to prisoners, non-imprisoned people can and should do solidarity work. In my experience of working on a prisoner pen pal project, many formerly incarcerated people opt to participate in prison solidarity projects (i.e. become a pen friend precisely because they understand what it is like to be inside). Yet many ex-prisoners struggle to survive post-release and cannot devote the same time, energy and resources to such work as non-formerly-incarcerated people. People released on parole or probation also sometimes face restrictions in communicating with currently incarcerated people or may want to distance themselves from the stigma of incarceration and therefore choose not to get involved in

solidarity activists I interviewed, particularly those who had not themselves experienced imprisonment, repeatedly emphasized the differences between their lives and those of prisoners (interviews, see also Lawston 2009). Several activists also cautioned against claiming shared experience on superficial or tokenistic grounds. For example, a white middle class university student who spends a night in jail following a political demonstration does not share the same experience as a working-class black migrant who has been imprisoned for several years for a drug trafficking charge. Here the differences in context, effect and material experience are arguably more relevant and important than the seeming commonalities. As such, activists' emphasis on the importance of difference clearly did not come from a place of 'othering' prisoners, but from recognition that difference is often materialised through privilege and power.¹⁷⁷ To claim commonality in such situations would 'collapse real difference into imagined sameness' (Shotwell 2011, 118).

Likewise, shared political goals are not necessarily the foundation of prison solidarity work. Although Scholz (2008, 34) argues that political solidarity unites individuals and groups not by shared circumstance, experience, identity or values (as in the case of social solidarity), but in their shared commitment to a particular political cause, such 'unity' is not necessarily present in relationships between prisoners and non-imprisoned activists. Many prison activists, for example, are motivated by abolitionist goals that are not necessarily shared by the majority of prisoners they work with (Lawston 2009). While both prisoners and non-prisoners may collectively endeavour to achieve certain aims (i.e. reducing harm or isolation in prison, ensuring access to resources, successfully obtaining parole, etc.), they are not

prisoner support work. Given these conditions it is important that non-imprisoned people take up prisoner solidarity work.

¹⁷⁷ Given the immense social stigma associated with imprisonment, there are considerable political risks at stake in emphasising difference between prisoners and non-prisoners as it can reinforce assumptions that prisoners are fundamentally different from non-imprisoned persons and can work to further dehumanise and render prisoners 'other'. Arguably dehumanization is precisely the means by which societies will tolerate otherwise intolerable actions (i.e. putting people in cages). At the same time, claims of sameness work to deny the material and structural injustice that prisoners face prior to, during and following incarceration.

necessarily invested in the same political project in doing so.¹⁷⁸ Indeed, several activists talked specifically about the challenges of doing solidarity work with people who have very different politics and values. As one activist noted, immigration detention activists regularly fight to stop deportations or imprisonment of people whose values are opposed to their own. However, ‘just because you don’t share their values doesn’t mean that you think they should be held in an immigration detention centre’ (Interview #8). Similarly, expressions of solidarity that are made by one group in support of another might not necessarily be reciprocated.¹⁷⁹

When a basis of unity cannot be established through commonality of experience, identity or values, solidarity claims often appeal to shared humanity or shared vulnerability (Turner and Rojek 2001).¹⁸⁰ As many scholars have pointed out, however, broad appeals to universal human solidarity are often too general to be meaningful. If humanity’s shared vulnerability were sufficient to bond us all to each other, we would not need specific instances of solidarity. As Richard Rorty notes, ‘our sense of solidarity is strongest when those with whom solidarity is expressed are thought of as “one of us,” where “us” means something smaller and more local than the human race’ (Rorty 1989, 191). Yet the impetus to care for others is always

¹⁷⁸ Sometimes these goals can contradict. An individual need to survive and get out of prison, for example, may involve strategies that conflict with abolitionist aims of challenging the system at large. Complying with rules or programme requirements to gain good behaviour status for release, or not speaking up about injustices faced by other prisoners, for example, can work to legitimise the very mechanisms that prevent other prisoners from being released.

¹⁷⁹ As one activist described ‘we stand in solidarity with other people, but they don’t necessarily stand in solidarity with us’ (Interview #8). This activist gave the example of the *Tadamon Collective* in Montreal, which is an anti-capitalist, anti-authoritarian, anti-nationalist organization that works in solidarity with struggles for self-determination in the ‘Middle East’ and includes support for Palestinian prisoners. *Tadamon* supports many groups in Palestine which welcome and embrace that support, but might not necessarily claim a reciprocal solidarity with *Tadamon*’s particular political values. Given that *Tadamon* explicitly identifies as a solidarity group (*Tadamon* means ‘solidarity’ in Arabic), the issue of non-reciprocity raises interesting questions around the extent to which reciprocity (and what kind of reciprocity) is necessary within solidarity relationships.

¹⁸⁰ Feminist care ethics rely on similar concepts of shared vulnerability as a basis for collective responsibility and social connection. Recognizing that all humans have bodily needs and shared vulnerabilities, feminist care theorists promote ‘care’ as both a moral relation and a social practice that sustains human existence and strengthens social connection. In this way ‘care ethics’ are akin to solidarity politics in offering a solution to the perceived loss of social connection that characterizes contemporary modern life. For an overview and critique of feminist care ethics, see Beasley and Bacchi (2007).

already structured by the 'we' formation; we tend to care most about those to whom we already see ourselves as most closely connected or related. For this reason Iris Marion Young argues that 'Political theorists and activists should distrust this desire for reciprocal recognition and identification with others . . . because it denies difference in the concrete sense of making it difficult for people to respect those with whom they do not identify' (1986, 12). Indeed, the impetus to care for others or join in solidarity relationships cannot be disentangled from the broader social norms, values and structures which construct some subjects as worthy of concern and others as undeserving (Dean 1995, 116-7; Scholz 2008, 240).

Such hierarchies of deservedness are particularly acute in the case of prisoners, who are regularly dehumanised or deemed unworthy of even the most basic human rights, whether it be voting rights, freedom from torture, forced labour, etc. Indeed prisoners are often deemed to have forfeited their basic human rights (if not their humanity itself) by virtue of their conviction. Appeals to universal human vulnerability also tend to generalize suffering in ways that obscure the unevenness of oppressions. Even if humans share vulnerability, we do not share that vulnerability equally. Some groups are politically, socially and economically more vulnerable than others. Talking about imprisonment in general terms, for example, fails to account for the ways in which particular groups of people (e.g. poor people, people of colour, people with mental health issues, etc.) are much more likely to be targeted by the prison system than others. To acknowledge the unequal distribution of suffering is not about engaging competitive victimization politics that are invested in injury (Razack and Fellows 1998; Brown 1995). Rather, it is to recognize that human vulnerability to suffering is highly political and choices about solidarity are likewise political. Solidarity based on universal humanity provides no means by which to differentiate struggles, and therefore is prone to reinforcing, rather than challenging, dominant norms about worthy and unworthy subjects.

c) The problem of power

Although both social and political models of solidarity tend to emphasise mutuality and reciprocity (particularly in order to move away from charity-based approaches), political solidarity work nonetheless frequently involves power relationships that are asymmetrical. Especially in the context of prison solidarity work, power differentials between prisoners and non-prisoners are quite significant, as prisoners' access to basic resources, choices and freedoms are severely restricted. Prisoners often face far greater risks when organizing inside than non-prisoners, particularly when punishments can mean solidarity confinement, loss of privileges or reprisals when seeking release and parole (Prisoner Correspondence Project 2008; Gaucher 2002b). As such, prisoners are not necessarily in a position to give the same kinds of mutual support or aid as those outside prison, even though they are often better placed to engage in relationships of mutual support with other prisoners. Likewise, because prisoner support is extremely limited, prisoners may not feel comfortable to challenge or disagree with the activists supporting them, for fear that any conflict or tension may result in the loss of vital support (see Lawston 2009, 659-60). While power differentials are invariably an issue within all solidarity relationships, they are especially acute in the context of imprisonment. Yet the conventional emphasis on solidarity-through-commonality and unity can obscure the significance of those power differentials.

To draw attention to the uneven relations of power which structure solidarity relationships is not to suggest that the positions of those inside and outside prison are fixed or predetermined or that these relationships can be simply mapped onto the conventional binary of those with power and those without (see discussion of power and positionality in Chapter Three). Nor is it to suggest that the benefits of solidarity work flow in only one direction, from outside in.¹⁸¹ To the contrary, many

¹⁸¹ Within any solidarity relationship there are always different *elements* or *aspects* of that relationship in which one person/group has privileged access to resources, knowledge, authority, legitimacy, etc. However, there may be other elements or aspects of that relationship that operate conversely. The nature of these relationships may also fluctuate and change so that even if some

people who work with prisoners derive considerable benefits in terms of knowledge, experience and social capital. As one activist noted,

my connection to the women I work with has developed over the years...I am more and more humbled by them...my connection to them is now much more as a student. I think I'm now aware of how little I actually know. (Interview #7)

Indeed, broader power structures often over-determine the positions of who is deemed to 'offer' versus 'need' solidarity in the first place and what counts as an act of solidarity—assumptions that have been repeatedly challenged by those positioned as on the receiving end (Mohanty 2003b; Bouteldja 2010; Binnie and Klesse 2011; Haritaworn, Tauqir, and Erdem 2008).¹⁸² Too often those in a more structurally-privileged position (e.g. non-imprisoned people) define the very terms of solidarity in the first place, replicating the power relations they seek to challenge. As Syrus, a non-imprisoned activist commented, thinking retrospectively about their own work:

It's the we on the outside [of prison] who get to define what solidarity looks like . . . and what did we actually mean when we said 'solidarity with sistas behind bars'?¹⁸³ What was the definition of solidarity? . . . if we did have a definition, where was the consultation with people on the inside to make that definition? (Interview #9)

Solidarity claims thus raise important questions around who acts in solidarity with who and on what terms—questions that are deeply structured by relations of power.

Herein lies what Scholz (2008) describes the 'paradox of the participation of the privileged'. While solidarity work necessarily involves participation from those who do not directly experience the injustice or oppression in question, such

patterns become more entrenched over time, positions are never permanently fixed or predetermined.

¹⁸² Beasley and Bacchi make a similar critique of feminist care ethics, arguing that 'vocabularies of trust and care...do not sufficiently challenge the dominant neo-liberal assumptions which conceive of sociality in terms of hierarchical distinctions between those characterized as dependent "others" as against those cast as autonomous individuals/citizens. With this starting point, the most that can be defended in terms of political change are mechanisms to protect the "weak" and the "vulnerable" from the worst effects of this inequality' (2007, 285).

¹⁸³ This phrase 'solidarity with sistas behind bars' is a reference to a slogan used on activist literature and made into buttons/badges worn by activists involved in that particular project.

participation can have effects that counter the intended aims of that relationship. For example, despite the best of intentions, participation from more privileged or dominant social groups can sometimes replicate existing hierarchies of power, undermine the capacity for those from traditionally oppressed group to speak out or reinforce problematic stereotypes. In her empirical analysis of transnational solidarity efforts to close the (military) School of the Americas, Juanita Sundberg demonstrates how well-intentioned solidarity work in the Americas is often deeply entangled with ongoing legacies of US imperialism (Sundberg 2007). Too often, when those who are in positions of privilege proclaim their solidarity with those who are oppressed, the latter can 'become [the] object of our intentions rather than co-agents for change' (Scholz 2008, 164). At the heart of this dilemma lies a capacity to recognise the significance of differential power relations without retrenching them—a capacity, as I argue below, that requires self-reflexivity and attentiveness to questions of privilege.

d) Unity as discipline and the problem of political stagnancy

In subordinating difference to commonality, the unity model of solidarity can also function as a disciplinary social relation. Despite its generally positive political status, unity often defines its boundaries through exclusion, preserves its integrity through regulation, and orders its collectivity through censure. Even when established through voluntary relations, unity requires self-regulation. For example, one sociologist defines solidarity as occurring when:

institutional norms are (1) widely known, accepted and applied; (2) widely enforced by strong sanctions continuously applied; (3) based on revered sources of authority; (4) internalized in individual personalities; (5) inculcated and strongly reinforced early in life; (6) and are objects of consistence and prevalent conformity. (Robin William, quoted in Lockwood 1992)

Similarly, Ronald Dworkin describes solidarity as 'a category that could be used by people with power to compel the allegiance of those without it' (quoted in Dean 1995, 114). Such disciplinary characterizations are not surprising, given that

Durkheim's original invocation of organic and mechanic solidarity emerged from a discussion of punishment, whereby it is 'solidarity that repressive law materially embodies'. Indeed Durkheim's understanding of solidarity emerges from an analysis of social order that arises from an individual's presumed 'need for discipline' and 'need for attachment to groups' (Durkheim 1893/1984). Perhaps for this reason, Clare Saunders describes solidarity as a 'double-edged-sword' within social movements. As she argues, solidarity has a tendency to foster sectarian divisions and promote antagonistic relationships with other groups who share broadly similar goals, experiences or politics but are nonetheless considered outsiders (Saunders 2008).

Several activists I interviewed were critical of the language of solidarity for that reason. As Ziysah explained:

I don't tend to use the word 'solidarity'...solidarity sometimes connotes for me that I am beholden to whatever I am in solidarity with - and where my views or actions diverge, I will be betraying something. It has this subconscious link to conformity, and I think that's what we're working against in the first place - the idea that it is even possible to establish an identity or a politic with clearly delineated boundaries. (Interview # 12)¹⁸⁴

Likewise, another activist noted that she 'tried to use the term solidarity to feel united with other activists but it actually has been a cloaking device for not being connected' (Interview #7). In her view,

solidarity can sometimes mean the fight for the bottom rung of the ladder. Lots of people think they are unified through negative personal experiences and when listening to them they actually end up sounding like they are striving to be the hardest done by group. (Interview #7)

For that reason, she critiqued the way that 'solidarity tries to use [sameness] to link us into action but fails because [it] generally tends to connect through suffering' (Interview #7).

¹⁸⁴ Jon Binne and Christian Klesse's (2011) research on LGBTQ activism in Central and Eastern Europe also found that some activists were cautious of the term solidarity for both similar and different reasons.

The risks of privileging 'unity', however, are not limited to questions of discipline, but also to problems of political stagnancy. For if solidarity bonds are founded in a sameness or commonality, then changes that threaten that relationship must be suppressed—an approach that leads to stagnant rather than transformative politics. As Dean notes: 'Conventional solidarities are threatened by questioning. Because the ties connecting members are mediated by histories and values beyond the group itself, a reflective attitude towards these very histories and values bring with it the risk of disintegration' (1995, 121). This is not to say that solidarity relationships should include no element of continuity or connectedness. Solidarity relationships must include elements of reliability and responsibility in order to thrive, particularly in contexts where the sense of trust or connection is fragile. However, such continuity must also embrace disagreement and dissent. As Secomb argues, 'Instead of insisting on consensus, community needs to be open to disagreement, resistance, and fracture. This expression of disagreement would not only allow a place for difference, it would also overcome stagnation and complacency, and generate transition and transformation' (Secomb 2000, 137).

Given these multiple limits, it seems necessary to move away from an ideal of solidarity which is based on unity, commonality and bonding, and move towards an understanding that is much more reflexive, transformative and attentive to power. It is important to clarify however, that I am not arguing against commonality (of experience, values, identity, etc.) as an important source of connection or as a meaningful relation within solidarity politics. Nor am I arguing that unity has no place within solidarity politics. Rather, as I hope will become clear below, I am arguing that in the case of prison solidarity work, it is neither commonality nor unity that gives solidarity its political power.

Resonance and Dissonance Across Prison Walls: Solidarity as transformative epistemology

Against the conventional view of solidarity, I want to suggest that the transformative potential of prisoner solidarity work lies less in its promise of unity through commonality and more in its capacity to challenge established relations of knowledge and power, particularly among differently situated subjects. Although commonality often serves as an initial point of *connection* between prisoners and non-prisoners in queer and trans solidarity projects (e.g. projects that are organized ‘by and for queer and trans people’ begin with a shared sense of sexual/gender identity), such similarities do not constitute the most politically transformative aspect of the work. I would argue that it is not so much a sense of *unity across difference* that is most generative in prison solidarity work, but rather that productive tensions arise between *resonant and dissonant knowledge relations* between participants, which then create opportunities to re-think, re-imagine and re-configure power-knowledge relations more broadly. By this I mean that prison solidarity work can be understood as critical practices of dialogue, reflection and meaning-making, where epistemological relationships—processes of interactive and collaborative knowing through differential power relations—are practised across prison walls. Precisely because of the differential experiences, social positions and power relations that emerge through these processes, such epistemological relationships are not characterised by unity or harmony, but by productive tensions—ongoing movements between resonant and dissonant ways of knowing. Moving away from solidarity’s traditional investment in categories of ‘sameness’ and ‘difference’, I will demonstrate below that solidarity practices are epistemologically generative in the sense that they create space for new ways of knowing and relating to others.

This rethinking of solidarity both draws on, and departs from, existing feminist and anti-racist scholarship on solidarity politics. Although much of this literature relies (albeit critically) on conventional definitions of solidarity that emphasize commonality (of experience, interests, identities or political commitments) across

difference, some scholars also link solidarity to critical and transformative epistemological practice. For example, Chandra Talpade Mohanty (2003a, 7) argues that feminist solidarity offers a principled way to ‘decolonise knowledge’; Nancy Fraser’s (1986) ‘discourse ethics’ framework suggests that solidarity-oriented dialogue can challenge traditional modes of articulation and interpretation and Sally Scholtz argues that practices of solidarity necessitates diverse epistemologies that recognise multiple and contradicting knowledge claims (2008, 181). Most recently, Alexis Shotwell argues that engaging in solidarity work can expose and disrupt people’s ‘commonsense understandings’ of racial and gendered norms in ways that generate important space for ‘knowing otherwise’ (Shotwell 2011, 98). Building on these links between solidarity and transformative knowledge practices, I aim to explore more fully the epistemological dimensions of solidarity work by extending such discussions to the specific example of prisoner justice work.

Few of the activists I interviewed—with one notable exception—described their work predominantly in terms of unity, bondedness, interdependence or shared experience.¹⁸⁵ Most of the activists instead described solidarity as a practice that aims to contest dominant power relations. Many also emphasized that practices of solidarity had shifted their understandings of themselves and their activist work in ways that were politically generative. These shifts were not simply about developing awareness, but about altering practices of knowing and relating to others, thus reconfiguring dominant power relations. In this sense, what activists described was shifting relationships of power/knowledge in a Foucauldian sense (as discussed in Chapter Three). Indeed, the activists I interviewed—as I will illustrate below—were consistently concerned about how relationships of knowledge and power are critically at stake in practices of solidarity.

¹⁸⁵ One of the activists that I interviewed did explicitly define solidarity as a practice of unity; for her solidarity means ‘I stand with you as one.’ However, she also emphasised that such unity must always be accompanied with an attentiveness to power and privilege: it is ‘unity...with awareness that the support factors arise due to inequalities in privilege (e.g. when I as a citizen stand in support of someone with non-status, I am aware of how the power dynamics of the state view that)’ (Interview #14). In this sense, her emphasis on being attentive to questions of power is consistent with the analysis I develop about prison solidarity work as a process of reconfiguring power-knowledge relations.

By invoking the language of resonance and dissonance, I am drawing directly from the analysis of one of the queer activists I interviewed, who used such terms to describe knowledge connections between prisoners and non-prisoners involved in the *Prisoner Correspondence Project* in Montreal. Liam used these terms to describe the ways in which the knowledge, experience, identities and values of prisoners both resonated and discorded with non-prisoners' self-awareness and understanding, thus generating politically productive shifts in knowledge. Building on Liam's analysis, I argue that engagements with resonant and dissonant knowledges are not just arbitrary elements within solidarity relationships, but are central to the kinds of politics that create spaces for broader social transformation. In order to develop this analysis, it is first important to explore the conceptual meanings of resonance and dissonance in order to link them more directly to practices of solidarity.

Resonance describes a form of reverberation: the prolongation, expansion or intensification of a sound through reflection, refraction or echo. A resonant sound is an articulation that continues to be heard beyond its original utterance. As such, the intensity of a resonant sound stems less from its original expression and more from its points of contact with other things. Resonance is therefore dynamic rather than solitary, interactive rather than self-contained. In reverberating against other bodies and entities, the resonant sound changes its quality, its tone, and meaning. In this way, resonance is not merely resounding; to resonate is to expand, intensify or amplify.

Resonance provides a useful metaphor for considering the epistemological dimensions of solidarity practices because it describes a process where one utterance interacts with another in mutually impactful and potentially transformative ways. Resonance can account for relationships that emerge from connection rather than commonality, from engagement rather than agreement, from interaction rather than interdependence. One does not have to share another's experience, values or identity to recognize its resonance with one's own life. We can feel the impact of another's experience—we can sense its resonance—without having to claim it as our own.

Like resonance, *dissonance* also describes a kind of reverberation, but one that invokes feelings of discontinuity. Dissonance describes a chord that is out of harmony, a combination of tones that are deemed to be in variance, at a state of unrest or needing completion. Dissonance generates a sense of being unresolved, of lingering in tension. Unlike difference, which demarcates its boundaries defiantly and determinedly, dissonance marks its limits more ambiguously; it wavers between positions. Dissonance invokes discomfort and unease rather than rejection or opposition.

The tensions that characterize dissonant knowledge are both provocative and productive. Unlike oppositional knowledges, which invite reaction and rejection, dissonant knowledges invite contemplation and consideration. The ongoing impulse to resolve the (unresolvable) tension is generative; one questions the cause of such unease and seeks to identify the elements that cause unrest. In this sense, dissonant knowledge does not threaten other knowledges, but instead opens up space for alternative understandings.

The metaphors of resonance and dissonance are helpful for several reasons. By moving away from categorizations of identities, values and experiences, they escape the essentialist tendencies that underpin logics of sameness and difference. The language of resonance and dissonance also encapsulates a sense of embodiment; one not only hears, but also feels, the reverberations and tensions of sounds in and against one's body. The language of resonance and dissonance thus captures the somatic and affective dynamics of solidarity work that extend beyond the kinds of deliberative rationality that tend to be over-privileged in discourse ethics and dialogic politics. One can feel the emotive push and pull of resonant and dissonant knowledges as they are experienced through the body.

As aural metaphors, dissonance and resonance are contingent upon listening. Listening, understood broadly, does not necessarily refer to the physical capacity to hear, but describes an openness and attentiveness to what another seeks to

communicate (Goggin 2009; Couldry 2009).¹⁸⁶ Indeed, many prison solidarity projects are letter-based, meaning that communication and voice are expressed in written (and sometimes through artwork) rather than oral form. The emphasis on listening is particularly important in the context of prison solidarity work, not only because prisoners' voices are seldom heard, but because prisoners cannot always speak easily or openly within prisons.¹⁸⁷ Whether using coded language, avoiding certain conversations, or simply being unable to speak about particular things for personal, institutional or safety reasons, prisoners cannot necessarily communicate easily or freely. As such, listening to prisoners requires more than simply hearing words that are uttered; listening means actively paying attention to silences, to gestures, to emotions, to unspoken communications that are written on the very bodies of prisoners.¹⁸⁸ It means listening to understand rather than listening to hear (Husband 2009).

Dissonance and resonance are also temporally continuous concepts. Unlike sameness and difference, which describe characteristics or attributes that are frozen in time, dissonance and resonance describe *processes*. Although sameness/difference and dissonance/resonance are both relational concepts (one element can only be defined in relation to the other), the former terms privilege the sedimented elements of the relation (the forms that become entrenched over time), which give the illusion of static characteristics. The latter terms privilege the relationships between, and the processes that are constitutive of, those elements. Resonance and dissonance are reflective rather than possessive, generative rather than normative.

¹⁸⁶ Many scholars have written on the importance of listening as a vehicle for social change, but also on the importance of 'listening across difference' within coalitional and solidarity politics. See for example, Bickford (1996), Butterwick (2003), Dreher (2009) and Thill (Thill 2009). For a discussion of the politics of listening in prison within the context of anthropological research, see Angel-Ajani (2004).

¹⁸⁷ This is especially the case for queer, trans and gender nonconforming prisoners with respect to issues of gender and sexuality (Prisoner Correspondence Project 2008, 2009c; Bent Bars Project 2009, 2010, 2011).

¹⁸⁸ For a discussion of the textured and multilayered quality of silence in court proceedings and the significance of non-verbal communication in asylum hearings, see Johnson (2011).

The tensions between resonant and dissonance knowledges allow for multiplicity, difference and contestation, or what Chantal Mouffe has described as 'agonistic pluralism' (Mouffe 2000). Agonistic relationships are those that involve dissent, disagreement and opposition but are expressed between adversaries rather than enemies, therefore requiring a reconfiguration of the traditional 'we/they' relation. The agonistic 'we/they' relation is not that of friend versus enemy, but between interlocutors. So unlike those who seek to overcome the 'we/they' distinction, Mouffe wants to reconfigure the relationship to render it more open to the kinds of gritty, contentious debates that are necessary for political struggle.¹⁸⁹ For Mouffe, 'we/they' relations in solidarity relationships cannot be escaped since

in order to live values as one's own, one also needs to perceive what are the limits to the practices that perpetuate those values, i.e. what is their 'constitutive outside', the 'them' which is the condition of possibility of the 'we' with its shared values (Mouffe 1995, 105).

From Mouffe's perspective, the problem lays not with the 'we/they' distinction itself, but rather when that relation is transformed into the friend/enemy distinction. This happens when the 'other' ceases to be considered as simply as different, and instead starts to be perceived as 'someone who is rejecting "our" identity and is threatening "our" values' (Mouffe 1995, 105). For Mouffe, the task for solidarity politics (and for pluralist democracies more broadly) is 'to construct the "them" in such a way that it is no longer perceived as an enemy but as an "adversary" i.e. somebody whose ideas we combat but whose right to defend those ideas we do not put into question' (Mouffe 2000, 15). In other words, the task is to transform antagonism (struggle between enemies) into agonism (struggle between adversaries) (Mouffe 1995, 105).

¹⁸⁹ Arguing that 'we' does not have to presuppose the existence of 'they', Jodi Dean advocates for 'an inclusive understanding of "we" whereby the strength of the bond connecting us stems from our mutual recognition of each other instead of from our exclusion of someone else' (Dean 1995). For Dean, the only 'they' that stands in opposition to the 'we' is one who would exclude or oppress; hence 'we call another to stand by us over and against an "other" who seeks to oppress us or who fails to recognize and include us' (Dean 1995, 126-7). In this sense, Dean's solidarity bonds are premised on the 'exclusion of exclusion' but I would argue that they nevertheless do not escape the we/they formation.

This emphasis on the need to create space for agonism in solidarity relationships complements the analysis of Jodi Dean, who argues for a 'reflective solidarity' that does not evade contention, but is grounded by it. For Dean, reflective solidarity means that,

the permanent risk of disagreement must itself become rationally transformed so as to provide a basis for solidarity. In contrast to conventional solidarity in which dissent always carries with it the potential for disruption, reflective solidarity builds dissent into its foundations. (Dean 1995, 123)

This embrace of dissent is necessary to avoid the false illusion of consensus that solidarity politics often claim. Just as care ethics are often over-sanitized and idealized, the solidarity ideal also tends to gloss over the intense, conflict laden and gritty aspects of social connection (Cooper 2007, 257). Yet the messy, and contentious aspects of solidarity relationships are not merely inconvenient problems to be reconciled; such forms of agonism are crucial to solidarity politics itself, particularly for relationships that refuse to subordinate difference to unity and remain persistently attentive to questions of power.¹⁹⁰

In fact, the tensions between resonant and dissonant knowledge are arguably what gives solidarity its transformative capacity. In this sense, solidarity relations do not simply make room for, or tolerate contention and difference, but include them as fundamental to the relation itself. As Audre Lorde has argued,

¹⁹⁰ Iris Marion Young also attempts to rethink solidarity as more attentive to difference, although her analysis is less pertinent here. Young uses the term 'differentiated solidarity' to describe 'a sense of commitment and justice owed to people, but precisely not on the basis of a fellow feeling or mutual identification' (Young 2002, 222). Young argues that the moral basis for solidarity lies in the simple fact that people live together and therefore live lives that are interdependent. Giving the examples of how an earthquake, a power outage or rush hour traffic jams potentially affects all the people who live together in a particular area whether or not they share values, identities or experiences, she argues: 'Distant strangers often need to care about and co-operate with one another enough to respond to local circumstances and problems that potentially affect most of them, which often originate from the confluence of their individualized actions' (Young 2002, 223). Here Young seems to combine the shared vulnerability/care ethics approach with Durkheim's theory of organic solidarity through interdependence (though she is less reliant on the division of labour). While her urban-centric framework is not particularly well-suited to the context of prison solidarity, it is nonetheless useful in its emphasis on difference and its insistence that solidarity does not need to be based in unified social bonds. Indeed, for Young, differentiated solidarity 'aims to balance values of generalized inclusion and respect with more particularist and local self-affirmation and expression' (Young 2002, 221).

Advocating the mere tolerance of difference ...is a total denial of the creative function of difference in our lives. Difference must be not merely tolerated, but seen as a fund of necessary polarities between which our creativity can spark like a dialectic (Lorde 1984, 111).

This capacity to spark creativity relies not on a static or essentialist notion of difference but in the relationships that generate and constitute processes of differentiation. The language of dissonance and resonance aims to describe those relationships, particularly in their creative, productive and generative capacities. Just as resonant and dissonant sounds generate new tones when they interact with other utterances and expressions, resonant and dissonant knowledges also interact in ways that generate new epistemological relations and new forms of knowing.

a) Understanding through resonance / dissonance: questioning implicit knowledge

Part of the capacity to generate new knowledge stems from tensions between what we already know and what we come to discover through encounters with other knowledges or forms of knowing. As discussed in Chapter Four, when our experience (or sense of experience) conflicts with dominant or 'commonsense' knowledge, the dissonance between the two can sometimes lead to productive reflection and critique. One activist, for example, described how her perception of prison changed when she was 13 and her uncle was imprisoned. As Sadie describes:

that was one of those moments when the world, the media, the politicians and the police were all saying 'bad people go to prison' but I knew my uncle wasn't bad, he was a nice guy who made some mistakes. So that was one of the earliest times I, personally, was conscious that prison wasn't what they say it is, and from then on I was always really aware of how devastating prison can be. (Interview #4)

Although Sadie refers to an early experience that contributed to her decision to get involved in prison-related activism, similar kinds of 'epiphanies' also occur in the process of solidarity work. Many pen pal projects are partly founded on the premise

that simply forming a correspondence or friendship with someone in prison can alter people's assumptions about prisoners in important ways.

Building relationships of solidarity, friendship and trust can shape how we interpret and understand particular aspects of another person's life, and how others interpret our lives. Ziyah described the experience of coming out as queer to some of the immigrants and undocumented people she works with:

There is always a moment of fear there for me. Will I lose this person's trust? Will this compromise my ability to work with this person? And even sometimes, will this person react violently? That hasn't happened fortunately. Instead, I feel I can see things happening inside that person—they are re-calculating, re-writing the story they've subconsciously written to fill in the unknown details about my life—maybe they are even remembering things they've heard in the news, and now applying my face to that otherwise unknowable group. Sometimes people ask me questions about it, it opens up this whole topic that would not have come up otherwise. I get the sense that because I have already built trust with these people, they are able to accept what I am telling them, they are able to make room for it in their minds, in their perceptions of reality. Whereas, if I had just met them in the street, they could have shut off to me and walked away. (Interview #12)

What Ziyah describes is a process of coming to understand or know differently—a capacity to shift understanding and rethink implicit knowledge—which emerges from relationships of solidarity. I have witnessed similar kinds of 'epistemological shifts' among non-imprisoned people—including within myself—when working with prisoners. Because the social stigma of criminalization is so strong, non-imprisoned people—even those firmly committed to prisoner support—sometimes struggle to reconcile preconceived perceptions of prisoners with their actual engagements with people in prison. Working through these dissonances in the context of solidarity work can undo taken-for-granted knowledge and thus generate new ways of thinking and understanding.

While such experiences of coming to know someone differently can also occur in other kinds of relationships (such as friendships or acquaintances), this sense of shifting expectations and understanding is particularly common in prison pen pal

projects. Participants on both sides of the walls frequently remark upon learning things that surprise them, interactions that shifted their perception, and experiences that altered their understanding. In the words of Gary, a prisoner who had a letter published in a solidarity newsletter written for queer and transgender prisoners in the British context:

I read the [previous] newsletter and it really opened my eyes to people's different views on the different kinds of sexuality. I didn't realise people had so many different views - I thought everyone thought the same. (Bent Bars Project 2011)

Here a prisoner is responding to writing by other prisoners (as the newsletter is written entirely by and for LGBT identified prisoners but compiled and published by the non-imprisoned participants in the project). Because prisoners are often forbidden from writing to other prisoners (particularly to people held in different wings or separate institutions), this movement of knowledge across prison walls—from one prisoner to another—can be as important as the knowledge relations between imprisoned and non-imprisoned persons (Bent Bars Project 2009, 2010, 2011). As Wullie, another prisoner, wrote:

The last newsletter was about coming out in prison and it had a major effect on my life as I was out to close family members but not to anyone else. After reading the newsletter I gave it a lot of deep thought and read it over and over, it answered many questions that I wanted to ask but didn't know who I could ask. The fact that the newsletter covered both the pros and cons was a big plus. After . . . going over it in my head I took the huge step, for me, of coming out . . . I felt, and still feel, there's a huge weight been lifted off my shoulders and I've never felt better within myself both mentally and physically. As expected there were the one or two idiots . . . who made an abusive comment or tried to put me down to others, but overall the support and acceptance of all was more than enough to let them roll off my back ... I'd like to give a massive thank you ... to those who submitted their thoughts, for making the first newsletter such an important one for both me and others. (Bent Bars Project 2010)¹⁹¹

¹⁹¹ While this particular comment was quite positive about 'coming out' in prison, it is important to note that many prisoners have less positive experiences of coming out. Moreover, as noted below,

In this case, we can see how prison solidarity projects not only have the potential to build exchange and connection between imprisoned and non-imprisoned people, but also among and between prisoners.

Yet it is not only dissonant knowledges that create shifts in thinking and knowing; resonant knowledge practices can also be generative. For example, in the case of prisoner correspondence projects, pen pals sometimes start with an acute sense of their differences, only to then discover through their correspondence that respective experiences resonate with each other in completely unexpected ways. Here I use the language of resonance (rather than similarity or commonality) deliberately. For while people might also discover ‘commonalities’ through writing to each other, it is the specific experience of resonance—the way knowledge encounters can generate a reverberation, reflection or refraction in thinking—that is relevant here. As noted above, one does not need to literally share the same experience or identify a commonality to feel a sense of resonance or connection with another. Whether established through a sense of resonance or dissonance, these connections can work to unsettle or disrupt dominant knowledge norms, and break down barriers between imprisoned and non-imprisoned people. Below I explore more specific dimensions and concrete examples of this capacity for relationships of solidarity to generate new possibilities for knowing and relating to others.

b) Solidarity as dialogue: negotiating knowledge, rethinking understanding

At the heart of prisoner solidarity work is an effort to link individuals and communities across prison walls. Because prisons function by separating people from their communities and depriving them of their liberties, simply breaking this isolation can provide a key form of resistance and survival. Particularly for queer, trans and

prisoners describe many different ways of expressing their sexual/gender identity that are not necessarily predicated on conventional understandings of being ‘out and proud’ (Prisoner Correspondence Project 2008; Bent Bars Project 2009, 2010, 2011)

gender nonconforming prisoners, establishing and sustaining community connections can be crucial, a strategy that is reflected in the organizing priorities of many queer and trans prisoner solidarity groups. As described by the *Prisoner Correspondence Project*, for example: 'The intention behind the project is to be allies to prisoner struggle, to intervene on the isolation of prison life, and the added isolation of queer and gay and trans prisoner experience' (Prisoner Correspondence Project 2009b). In most projects, such connections are largely formed through letter writing (and to a lesser extent, prison visits). As such, the vast majority of work that prison solidarity activists undertake occurs literally through practices of conversation, dialogue and friendship. Through these processes of communication, differences in position, power, experience and understanding quickly become apparent. As Liam described:

In this work, there is a really important and interesting tension that emerges between, acknowledging that to an extent this project is rooted in the recognition of shared experience (shared experience of queerness, marginality, policing, etc.) on the one hand, and on the other, a recognition that we're all affected differently by policing and imprisonment, and the need to operate from a recognition of these differences in privilege. (Interview #2)¹⁹²

In some ways, Liam's comments reflect the more conventional view of solidarity as connecting commonality across difference. But as Liam goes on to explain, what is significant about these tensions is *not* that such differences need to be 'overcome' in order to foster a sense of unity or commonality, but rather, such tensions—particularly when recognised as vectors of power and privilege—can generate critical reflection and dialogue that opens space for new knowledge.¹⁹³ Describing an

¹⁹² Liam also noted that the *Prisoner Correspondence Project* was in the process of developing resources specifically designed around 'negotiating power differentials' as it is an issue that comes up a lot in pen pal work (Interview #2).

¹⁹³ Although I use the term dialogue here, I would resist temptations to reduce solidarity to the kind of rational dialogue that is often celebrated among advocates of deliberative democracy. Such modes of dialogue tend to be too invested with a kind of disembodied, hyper-rationalist logic that underpins liberal individualism. As Chantal Mouffe and others have argued, deliberative democracy models deny the 'ineradicability of antagonism and the impossibility of achieving a fully inclusive rational consensus' (Mouffe 2000, 5) The concept of rational dialogue also tends to naturalize subjectivity (by assuming that dialogue occurs between pre-existing subjects rather than being constitutive of those subjects), commodify knowledge (by treating knowledge as an object of exchange or circulation,

ongoing conversation between prisoners and non-prisoners, the project provides communicative space in which to negotiate and understand these resonances and dissonances. In Liam's account:

this dialogue back and forth becomes about contending with our own experiences of marginalization...[it] is a process of us assimilating that information, reconciling it with our own analysis, or shifting our own ideas when they're challenged. And so these circuits or routes of information don't just go one way, but rather, these knowledges - I think - constitute each other in really important and essential ways. (Interview #2)

Giving a more specific example, Liam recounted an event he helped organize called 'Imprisoned Pride: How Queer Prisoners are Written Out of Mainstream Pride Movements.' This collaborative audio project invited queer and trans prisoners to record statements about 'their relationship to pride, its resonances / dissonances'. The recordings were then played at an event held during gay pride celebrations in Montreal and subsequently transcribed and made into a 'zine for public circulation (Prisoner Correspondence Project 2008). The event prompted an ongoing discussion between imprisoned and non-imprisoned queers, and as Liam described: 'a lot of really productive new knowledge and dialogue came out of it' (Interview #2). Liam noted how the discussions

forced us [non-imprisoned queers] to complicate our ideas about outness as an expression of pride, and closetedness as an expression of repressed sexuality...so what came up was that there were people who were living varied degrees of out-ness, yet this was always framed from the outset in terms of queer or GNC [gender nonconforming] survival. (interview #2)

Liam's comments reflect what Joseph and Lewis describe in *Common Differences*: 'Our differences made our own perceptions clearer in unexpected ways . . . Often this meant reformulating to each other things that each of us took entirely for granted on her own territory' (Joseph and Lewis 1986, 8). So it is not simply that one discovers

rather than a relation of power) and eschew affectivity (by privileging logic and rationality over passion and emotion).

something 'different' about another person, but that in doing so one is forced to confront one's own implicit, taken-for-granted knowledge and understanding. Alexis Shotwell suggests that these shifts in understanding are a vital aspect of solidarity work. As Shotwell explains, 'Because the practice of solidarity brings one's presuppositions, aspirations, and hopes into conversation and sometimes conflict with others' dreams and practices, it clearly show the limits, challenges and the importance of commonsense, implicit understandings' (2011, 98). In other words, these encounters lead to shifting perspectives, questioned norms and new ways of knowing.

As these experiences of resonance/dissonance are ongoing—coming up again and again—they can also generate a prolonged reflective effect. Like the musician who pauses on a dissonant cord, the unresolved tone holds its listener in abeyance, generating feelings of uncertainty and unease. In a similar way, moments of communicative dissonance can also give pause for reflection; they can unsettle assumptions and disrupt taken-for-granted knowledge. As Liam describes, 'a lot of our knowledge and analysis comes from identifying what doesn't resonate with us / our bodies / our experience of the world' (Interview #2). In this way, tensions between resonant and dissonant experiences can allow prisoners and non-prisoners to collectively develop new forms of understanding, connection and knowledge.

Because communication with prisoners is often slowed down through the pace of letter writing, the format of communication also creates space for reflection and contemplation. When you receive a letter, for example, sometimes you do not fully understand the meaning of what someone has written. Perhaps the person has used a phrase you are unfamiliar with or the meaning of a word is used ambiguously. Maybe they have alluded to something that they cannot discuss directly. Literacy issues or local lingo (e.g. prison slang) might also be an issue. In the world of instant communication (e.g. in direct conversation in person or on the phone, or even by email) one can immediately ask for clarification. But in the context of prisoner correspondence, which is subject to institutional screening and postal service time frames, one rarely gets an instantaneous response. In the wait time between letters,

there is a period for reflection, time to think about what was said and meant. Of course, just because there are temporal gaps between letters does not necessarily mean that one actually spends time reflecting; as discussed below, this process also requires commitment to openness and willingness for self-reflection. I want to be careful not to romanticise the communication barriers that prisoners face. At the same time, in my own experience of corresponding with prisoners, generating mental and emotional space for reflection is a significant part of the process; prisoners' words and experiences often remain present in my thoughts long after I have read their letters. Indeed, in the prisoner pen pal project that I am involved in, organizers often read letters aloud to each other, not only to discuss our collective response, but to reflect on what a prisoner has written. Further, because queer and transgender prisoner support projects must be especially vigilant around safety issues (i.e. not 'outing' someone accidentally or referring to issues that might cause problems if the correspondence is read by someone else), each letter requires a careful reading and a thoughtful response.

c) Attending to knowledge / power relationships: rethinking epistemic position and privilege

These processes of reflection can generate a greater sense of self-awareness, power and privilege. Mandy*, for example, described how working with criminalised sex workers and trans women shifted elements of her own self-understanding: 'they all had huge personal experiences to share and I think that motivated me...I realized my own privilege and my judgments of others' (Interview #7). Mandy described the particular impact of working with someone she called 'T':

T's differences are things I will never experience. Yet she affects my heart, which challenges me to re-think how I think about things...and I can't help but think of how that reality would be to live with and then I begin to look at other circumstances that I might have infringed upon

* pseudonym

people's own identities. It's different than T's experience, but I can get towards understanding through this analogy. (Interview #7)

Mandy notes here that she will never experience what T experiences and therefore does not attempt to claim so. In this sense there is a dissonant relation between each of their respective experiences. Yet it is precisely this sense of dissonance that prompts Mandy to think more critically about her own assumptions and understanding of the world. This leads her to question other situations where she might have inadvertently harmed others. In this sense, Mandy is rethinking what she has previously taken for granted, but is also questioning her own potential role in oppression or injustice. This relation of self-reflexivity and questioning is one of the most important and politically powerful aspects of solidarity relationships: the capacity to dislodge more privileged subjects from positions of presumed 'innocence' to those of responsibility and accountability. Such processes then enable activists to better identify, understand and target their own complicity in broader patterns of oppression and injustice.

Attentiveness to questions of difference, power and privilege was a recurring theme among the activists I interviewed. As Sadie noted, on terms quite similar to Liam's previous comments:

On the one hand, solidarity is built around having some common experience or identity, but there's also an inherent difference too. . . The biggest difference is that I am not incarcerated and yet I'm organizing around prison issues. So there's an inherent power dynamic – I have access to all sorts of resources and political channels, and well, even just basic mobility that is denied to folks on the inside. That power dynamic is one that we aren't choosing, in fact it's something we are actively trying to destroy. (Interview #4)

Similarly, another activist emphasised that working in solidarity requires 'awareness of my difference, recognition of my privilege' (Interview #14). For many activists, challenging these relationships of power is fundamental to solidarity work. As activist Helen Luu describes, 'Solidarity is about examining your relationship to power and what your privileges are ... if you want to be supporting somebody, you really have to recognize what your relationship is to their struggle all the time' (Luu 2003). For Luu,

solidarity involves 'supporting other people's struggles, acknowledging people's agency and their leadership rather than taking over (i.e. knowing when to step back), and above all acknowledging power dynamics and power structures' (Luu 2003).

Indeed, activists' emphasis on questions of power and privilege were not issues to be simply acknowledged in a token way. Being aware of one's position means recognizing how that location is relevant to forming perspectives, framing knowledge and generating understanding. As Connor described, prison is

such an entirely different world than the world outside and its worlds within that world, [so] we really have to check all of our assumptions and expectations and really be open to the difference – like its got a different language, different social codes, everything, and that's really important too. You don't have to be aware of all of [the differences], but you have to be aware that you are operating in someone else's world and take direction from them...so that's the most important thing. (Interview #11)

In other words, attending to power differentials means critically reflecting on one's epistemic position and recognizing the limits of one's perspective. This applies not only to formal knowledge, but also to emotional, affective and embodied knowledge. As Adam stated, for example: 'I think that it's impossible to understand being locked up on an emotional level unless you have been—and not to say that all forms of incarceration are the same, 'cause they're not, but there are commonalities of course' (Interview #3).

This emphasis on the limits of perspective and the importance of situated knowledge is reflected in the *Prisoners Correspondence Project's* 'Frequently Asked Questions' document, which explains why the project does not run background checks on prisoners' charge or conviction history. As the document states, the project's refusal to monitor prisoners charges and convictions, stems partly from a deliberate effort to support prisoners in retaining autonomy and control over how they are represented and partly from an insistence on not reducing prisoners' lives to the status of their charge or conviction. But it also stems from an awareness of the limits of knowledge. As stated on the project website: 'We believe that as individuals on the outside, we can never understand the complexities of any specific case or

reason why someone is inside, and we don't try to' (Prisoner Correspondence Project 2010). In other words, non-prisoners must be especially aware of, and attentive to, the limits of their knowledge and their perspective. Against institutional and charity-based models of prisoner support, which tend to presume that authorities know what is best for prisoners (and what information about prisoners is relevant for others to know), solidarity activists resist these disciplinary power-knowledge relationships.

Such encounters with questions of power and privilege mean not only understanding one's political work differently, but understanding one's sense of self differently as well. Liam noted that when people ask him about his identity (i.e. as queer, male, etc), he often includes 'currently non-incarcerated' as one of the descriptors. While describing oneself as 'currently non-incarcerated' potentially obscures the way in which some people are more likely to become incarcerated than others, the term also makes visible the precariousness of the freedom that many non-imprisoned people take for granted. More importantly, by explicitly identifying in this way—and by inserting such descriptors in contexts outside of prison work—Liam is not only drawing attention to his privilege as a non-incarcerated person, but also re-centring the experiences of prisoners by inserting questions of imprisonment into everyday conversations.

d) Taking the lead from prisoners: making space for subjugated knowledge

Prioritising the experience and knowledge of prisoners is another defining feature of solidarity work. As Sadie describes, solidarity

means actively trying to centre the experiences of those who are most marginalized and most directly affected by the issues we are talking about. In practice, this can mean that we have access to political channels to ensure that trans prisoners aren't put in automatic, PC [protective custody/segregation] all the time, so we do that, but we only do that because folks on the inside are saying 'hey this is a problem'. So it means a dialogue, which is hard to do because the

State regulates our relationships. That's part of the goal of having pen pal projects - to build dialogue and accountability for activists on the outside. (Interview #4)

Because prisoners' perspectives are consistently ignored, dismissed and devalued, making space for prisoners' knowledge marks both an effort to prioritise subordinated knowledge and to question the authority of knowing: As Liam described, new knowledge emerges from 'intense critique':

... this critique means confronting the invisibility of marginal voices and marginality more broadly: To confront the invisibility of prisoners in HIV prevention discourse, the invisibility of queers in the both carceral settings broadly and in prison organizing specifically, the invisibility of LGBTQ prisoners in LGBTQ movements, and the invisibility of those already dead, or dying from AIDS. In this confrontation we are asking the question, who has HIV narrative power ... who is permitted to create knowledge? (Interview #2)

From Liam's perspective,

that is one of the main strengths of the project; in that it's organized centrally around constant direct communication with queer/trans/GNC folks on the inside, so our analysis of prisons, incarceration, torture, abuse, sexual violence, medical negligence, etc. is all rooted in this communication. (Interview #2)

Re-centring prisoners' knowledge also translated into taking leadership from prisoners. As Sam explained, 'one of the concepts of solidarity for me, is about...actually meeting people where they are at...and responding to their needs and desires, as they articulate them' (Interview #6). Similarly, Connor noted:

If I go to a carpenter, and I say I want to help you build a house, I'm not going to take the plans away and start to do it, I'm gonna say you know what you're doing, give me some direction. I can swing a hammer, but...Being supportive of someone is very different from going in there and deciding what you're gonna do. (Interview #11)

Taking the lead from prisoners, however, is sometimes easier said than done. For example, one activist recounted a story of a prisoner who was facing pressure from family and community to fight his case in a particular way. This approach went

against the prisoner's beliefs and involved claiming things he didn't want to claim so he refused. As the activist described:

That was a very difficult solidarity to practice. You have someone who has been in prison for almost 30 years, whose family wants you to do something, all the activists want it, but the prisoner doesn't . . . You start to wonder, have the prison walls gotten to him? Is there something else going on? You get tempted to replace your thinking with his. But really, this guy was right on. It was a terrible legal and ideological strategy that quickly failed.¹⁹⁴

The point raised about whether the prison walls have 'gotten to him' reflects an important concern about the situation of prisoners' knowledge and the ways that institutionalization can also take hold of prisoners' understanding and awareness. Prisoners are certainly not immune to the oppressive logics of incarceration. Developing a political critique takes time and requires opportunities for self-education and exposure to alternative sources of analysis, something to which many prisoners do not have ready access. Simply accepting without question what prisoners have to say is problematic. As Adam noted:

I think that it's important to respect the voices and leadership of people who have direct experience with whatever issue we're organizing around- but true respect means challenging people when they're wrong. If I'm doing prison activism and a prisoner or ex-prisoner says something that I take issue with, I'm going to say something because that's the way I would want to be treated by a 'comrade' (Interview #3).

Here, Adam's comments reflect some of the tensions discussed in Chapter Four between the political significance and risks of experiential knowledge claims. On the one hand, Adam emphasises the importance of creating space for prisoners' experiences and knowledge to be articulated and heard, yet at the same time, recognizes that such knowledge claims cannot simply accepted without question. But differentiating between experiential knowledge claims that should be prioritised and those that should be challenged is never easy; who makes these decisions and on

¹⁹⁴ To protect confidentiality around this particular situation, the activist asked to remain anonymous.

what basis remains fraught questions. As such, these tensions between ‘taking the lead’ from prisoners and challenging prisoners can be politically risky and difficult to navigate. Particularly given the prevalence of institutional models of prisoner support where ‘experts’ (such as doctors, psychiatrists, parole officers, etc.) frequently determine what is best for prisoners, the importance of not assuming epistemic privilege is important. So ongoing questions arise as to when, and in what circumstances, non-imprisoned activists should defer to prisoners’ analysis and when they should challenge that analysis—a dilemma that is ongoing and not easily resolved.

These dilemmas also come up when negotiating between shorter-term reforms and long-term goals, an issue that is especially relevant for solidarity activists who are committed to prison abolition. As Sadie explains, ‘the tension comes into play because we want to make sure that in reforming the prison system we aren’t building it up’ (Interview #4). Jodie Lawston’s study of women’s anti-prison organizing in the US also highlights this dilemma, particularly for abolitionists. Lawston found that prisoners who were less privileged tended to want their lives to be improved in the short term, whereas those with more privilege were likely to support longer term and radical changes such as abolition. This posed considerable dilemmas. As one of Lawston’s interviewees described:

If we are to say we are representing prisoners’ needs we really need to represent those needs. That means taking direction from those women, not merely following our own agenda. This tends to get away from our goal of abolishing the prison system as women inside are more focused on service provision and really, reforms keeps the prison going (2009, 657).

At the same time, as Sadie pointed out, people who are most directly affected by prison and policing are not necessarily adverse to abolition. In Sadie’s experience:

I find that in a lot of the communities who are most directly affected by prison and policing (and I’m including border and immigration policing in that also), folks already would like to see a world without prisons. They might not use words like abolition, because that’s a term that is pretty limited to certain activist circles, but they know that prison doesn’t work. So I don’t need to ‘convince’ them. (Interview #4)

Negotiating tensions between strategic positions, however, is extremely difficult both politically and pragmatically. Because organizing resources are inevitably limited, activists (both inside and out) must make ongoing choices about which strategies to prioritize, and these choices are particularly difficult when different strategies contradict or undermine each other. For example, fighting for better conditions in prison (e.g. better health care, educational programmes, food, etc.) is essential to the survival of people inside, but such strategies can also translate into funnelling more resources into the prison system—a strategy that is directly counter to abolitionist strategies of diverting prison resources into community based alternatives.¹⁹⁵ As such, prison solidarity activists repeatedly emphasised the need for discussion and dialogue both inside and outside prison walls in order to make key decisions about political strategy.

These processes of dialogue and reflection—of bringing together different experiences and forms of knowledge—not only work to reveal knowledge that was previously invisible, but also generate new understandings and new forms of knowledge. In Liam’s words:

[the] knowledge we acquire through organizing work is different because it renders visible issues that are otherwise invisible / actively erased. It’s different because...[we] are forging space for interdisciplinary forms of knowledge; [it] works against the ways we discipline knowledge (like in school). So writing projects, audio projects, panels, guidelines, all overlap and inform one another in really essential ways. So I feel like what we’re asking a lot of the time is what knowledges emerge when we map this landscape out against our own stories and experiences. (Interview #2)

Liam describes this process as one of the main strengths of the *Prisoner Correspondence Project*: ‘that knowledge is nurtured in dialogue with our pen pals’ (Interview #2).

¹⁹⁵ As a means of negotiating these tensions, prison abolitionists often advocate a strategy of ‘non-reformist reforms’—strategic reforms which seek to support prisoners while simultaneously working to dismantle or undermine the prison system. As Angela Davis describes, drawing from Thomas Mathiesen’s work, non-reformist reform is ‘a notion of reform that furthers abolition; a reform that does not help to entrench the institution it is attempting to reform’ (quoted in Smith 2010). See also Mathiesen (1974), Faith (2000) and Sudbury (2009).

e) Reflexive knowing practices: fostering epistemological accountability

As many prison solidarity activists emphasize, part of the importance of fostering connections across prison walls is about creating channels of accountability. As noted in Chapter Four, prioritising the leadership, knowledge and experiences of those ‘most directly’ affected by prison—namely those who have experienced imprisonment first hand—can be a deliberate political strategy that surfaces forms of ‘subjugated knowledge’, but also ensures that non-imprisoned activists are directly accountable to the prisoners in whose name they organize. For example, the Boston based *Black and Pink* prisoner solidarity group has a ‘leadership circle’ to guide its activities, which prioritises experiences of prisoners. As described in its statement of principles:

We root our work in the experience of currently and formerly incarcerated people. To best maintain an accountable relationship to incarcerated people, half of those in the leadership circle are currently incarcerated. We also prioritize the voices of formerly incarcerated people as our free world members of the leadership circle. We know that those most impacted by the violence of the prison industrial complex are best equipped with the knowledge of how to tear it down. (Black and Pink 2011)

Here foregrounding prisoners’ knowledge and experience is seen as crucial. At the same time, because of the communication barriers involved in prison solidarity work, the diversity of prisoners’ views, and the dilemmas that can arise when following the leadership of others, the practice of accountability is not always straightforward or self-evident. As such, engaging in these forms of accountability requires constant interrogation and evaluation.

Indeed, many activists emphasize the need for perpetual reflexivity, self-awareness and self-critique. In other words, reflexivity requires ongoing critical interrogation of one’s actions, assumptions and taken-for-granted knowledge. Connor, for example, emphasized the need for,

being very aware of ourselves and what we bring to all the work that we do, when working with people inside. Like, what are our stereotypes, what are our shortcomings, what are our personal issues that are gonna mess this work up. (Interview #11)

Connor also talked about the need to perpetually rethink basic terms and ideas that might be taken for granted. In Connor's words,

Concepts like solidarity, like being allies, those sorts of things - we have to re-examine those all the time to just filter out the crap that gets embedded in that, to get rid of, as I said, these sort of protector/saviour attitudes that we can have that really mess work up, that don't do any good, and that take away the rights of people who we're offering help to. (Interview #11)

For this reason, several activists emphasised that solidarity is an ongoing process, rather than an end goal to be achieved. Sam, for example, described solidarity as an ongoing lesson—'a lifelong struggle'—that has to be 'learned over and over again' (interview #6). Likewise, when Ziysah described her broader political goals, she emphasized that these goals 'did not articulate an end result, but a [continuing] process.' As she said,

There is a Jewish saying that we are not expected to complete the work, but neither can we abstain from it ... I've realized that most of the work I've done, at best, is a piece of something I believe in, something I've invested faith in, some river that was running long before I was on the scene, and will keep running long after I'm gone (hopefully!). (Interview #12)

As such, a key element in solidarity work is a sense of critical perpetuity, a commitment to continually reworking and reflecting on the way in which one thinks about and engages in solidarity practices. Such commitment requires not so much a particular *kind* of knowledge, but a different *way* of knowing; one that is tentative, cautious and perpetually self-reflexive.

Such forms of tentative knowledge and self-reflection also mean being open to making mistakes, and not shying away from being called out for making them. As Connor described, solidarity is about,

being open to fucking up, and having to learn things, and people being upset, and all of the different kinds of experiences that can happen, but learning as much as possible from, ideally, from the words of people who have been inside, who are inside, about what that's like. (Interview #11)

These ongoing processes of self-reflection, dialogue and learning from mistakes are thus another crucial element of solidarity work.

Conclusion

Drawing from the example of grassroots queer and trans prison activism in Canada (and to a lesser extent the US and UK), this chapter has argued that the conventional understanding of solidarity as a unifying bond of commonality is limited in its prospects for transformative politics. Although conventional accounts may describe some elements of solidarity relationships, they do not reflect the key characteristics emphasized by the activists I interviewed. More importantly, I have argued that such conventional elements are not what give solidarity its transformative power, at least in the context of the activists I interviewed. As activists repeatedly asserted, solidarity relationships are about connections rather than bonds, about generative elements of difference rather than sameness, and about attentiveness to power rather than unity. Collectively, these queer and trans accounts of solidarity work emphasize the importance of epistemological relations, that is, relationships formed through practices of knowing, understanding and rethinking that challenge dominant relations of power.

The question of power is one that repeatedly surfaced in the analysis of the activists and remains complex and unresolved. On the one hand, prison activists were hyper aware of the differential power relations at work across prison walls, particularly in terms of varied levels of power and privilege for imprisoned versus non-imprisoned people. At times, this emphasis could be said to reinforce the conventional binary between powerful and powerless that I critiqued in Chapter Three. At the same time, activists did not treat the structural positioning of subjects

as fully entrenched or narrowly determining power-knowledge relations. Not only did activist repeatedly describe being humbled by their work with prisoners, noting how much they learned and gained from working with prisoners, but also sought to recognise the nuances and complexities of negotiating power relations between imprisoned and non-imprisoned on an ongoing basis. Centring prisoners' knowledge and experience was seen as one way of both recognising, challenging and reconfiguring power relations in different ways.

The question of experience was also a fraught one, as non-imprisoned activists sought to prioritise prisoner's experiential knowledge claims while not taking such claims for granted or ascribing an inherent truth to them. Here, activists' analysis revealed a continual working through in practice of some of the dilemmas discussed in Chapter Four around experiential knowledge. Indeed, I would argue the political importance of 'experience' as understood by these activists lies not in the capacity for such knowing practices to generate 'truth', but in providing a basis for critical dialogue, reflexive questioning and negotiating power.

One of the further dilemmas that remains unresolved in this chapter is the question of determining what constitutes a transformative process and how to identify knowledge practices that carry such transformative potential. As discussed in Chapter Two, we can never know in advance what knowledge practices will lead to and when they might block openings for more radical or transformative forms of change. Indeed, activists' reflections were primarily based on looking back at processes they deemed in retrospect to have created some sort of shift either in themselves or within their broader community of organising. Whether these hindsight reflections can serve as predictors of transformative process in the future is questionable, but they might indicate characteristics of processes that are more and less likely to generative such outcomes. At the same time, definitions of what constitutes 'radical change' also remain highly contested. Indeed, the differing priorities of imprisoned and non-imprisoned activists (for example around short term survival strategies versus long term political goals) gives rise to further questions around the role of power and privilege in shaping political priorities and defining the

terms of 'radical' versus 'reformist' politics (or 'transgressive' versus 'co-opted' strategies as discussed in Chapter Five)., Despite these unresolved issues, it seems clear that prisoner solidarity activists are actively engaged in, and committed to, knowledge practices that both challenge dominant power relations and create space for new political possibilities to emerge. Even if these processes occur in small and localised ways, they nonetheless seem to have a generative capacity the offers much promise and potential.

Chapter 7

QUEERING METAPHORS, DISORIENTING ANALOGIES: Transformative knowledge practices and the politics of conceptual border crossings

Introduction

We believe that as long as prisons exist, the closet will have to exist for the safety of those held in captivity; reform is not an option for the racist and homophobic prison industrial complex. Queers Against Prison rally under the banner: “NO MORE PRISONS! NO MORE CLOSETS!” (Queers Against Prisons 2010)¹⁹⁶

As queers our understanding of borders is clear: we reject the borders imposed between sexualities, between genders, between our abilities to live as we wish and the strictures imposed by the state that attempt [to] prevent us defining of our own ways of living. In a society which always attempts to strengthen the position of institutionalised power by making someone 'other' (whether this be by race/sexuality/gender or any other means) we refuse to accept this present condition of nations and borders, of a containment of people behind false boundaries that only serve to profit those who hold power. (Queers Without Borders 2005)¹⁹⁷

Seeking to make greater connections between issues of imprisonment and sexuality, queer and trans prison activists sometimes draw connections between ‘the closet’ and the prison.¹⁹⁸ By taking the metaphor of ‘the closet’, a concept that is

¹⁹⁶ Although the slogan ‘No More Prisons! No More Closets!’ is here attributed to the Queers Against Prisons in Philadelphia, it is a slogan that has been used more widely among queer anti-prison organizers in North America and Europe. See for example, Black and Pink (2010).

¹⁹⁷ For a similar statement from feminists, see Feminists Against Borders (2007).

¹⁹⁸ The slogan ‘No more prisons! No more closets’ does not necessarily treat prisons and closets as analogous per se, but the repetition of phrase-style does suggest a parallelism that invites similar kinds of comparative analysis. There are also other examples where more direct parallels and analogies between closets and prisons are made. In an article on the importance of addressing prison issues in ‘coming out’ campaigns, for example, Jason Lydon of *Black and Pink* describes prisons as ‘concrete

widely deployed within queer popular culture, and placing it alongside ‘the prison’, an issue which receives much less attention within LGBTQ politics, activists seek to link one form of oppression with another.¹⁹⁹ The message is simple: if you are concerned about one, you should be concerned about the other. Similarly, queer and trans activists involved in border and immigration work often make parallels between the regulation of gender/sexuality borders and the regulation of state/national borders. These analogies both extend previous tropes that have been prominent within Anglo-American queer and trans politics²⁰⁰ and also reflect strategic attempts to make immigration and border issues more of a priority within gender/sexuality struggles and vice versa. But what does it mean to make such comparisons? Is the regulation of state borders *really* like the regulation of gender borders? How does the metaphor of the closet work in relation to the prison? Do such analogies open up new forms of understanding and knowledge, or do they obscure important contextual differences that hinder meaningful political work? What are the political-epistemological effects of such analogies and metaphors?

This chapter explores the role of analogical and metaphorical²⁰¹ thinking in the generation of new forms of socially transformative knowledge.²⁰² It poses

closets.’ In Lydon’s words: ‘On National Coming Out Day, we would like to put a message out to queers that the concrete closets that keep people locked down, torn from their friends and families, brutalized by guards, and stuck in ongoing suffering need to be shut down’ (Lydon 2006).

¹⁹⁹ Although ‘the closet’ is an important metaphor within Anglo-American queer theory and politics (Sedgwick 1990), it has also been critiqued for suggesting being ‘out’ is a prerequisite for queer liberation, a presumption that tends to marginalise other practices of queer identity, expression and survival (see for example Jivraj and de Jong 2011; Prisoner Correspondence Project 2008; Ritchie 2010).

²⁰⁰ Gloria Anzaldúa’s (1987) work on ‘borderlands’ is perhaps most well known, but see also the debates on butch/trans borderlands (Halberstam 1998; Halberstam and Hale 1998; Hale 1998) autobiographic work on finding a bodily home (Prosser 1998) and the prevalence of metaphors on displacement, relocation, and border crossing in trans studies (Aizura 2006).

²⁰¹ Literary scholars make important distinctions between analogies and metaphors, both in terms of their operation and effects. For the purpose of this paper, these distinctions are not essential, as the main arguments I make apply broadly to both analogy and metaphor. Nevertheless, I use the term metaphor generally to refer to a meaning-making device which use one thing to represent another, in order to explain, clarify or elucidate; a metaphor uses one thing another as the vehicle through which to represent and illuminate another. I use the term analogy generally to refer to direct comparisons between two things, in order to demonstrate the similarities of both things. While metaphors tend to be more abstract and interpretive, analogies tend to be more concrete and direct. However, as will be explored below, both analogy and metaphor are prone to similar political effects in their deployment,

questions about the ways in which the strategic use of analogies and metaphors can, on the one hand, foster new forms of knowledge, understanding and analysis, and on the other, co-opt, assimilate or misappropriate concepts and experiences in ways that reinforce dominant relations of power. As such, this chapter revisits the dilemmas of experience in Chapter Four and co-option raised in Chapter Five, by considering these themes as they arise in the specific context of metaphoric and analogical political rhetoric. Drawing from a range of examples within queer and transgender organizing²⁰³ where activists strategically deploy analogies and metaphors for political effect, I consider the limits and possibilities of analogy and metaphor as potential sites of insurgent knowledge production.

Unlike the previous chapter, which draws primarily on activists' own analysis of their knowledge practices, this chapter takes examples of activists' knowledge claims (i.e. strategic deployments of analogy and metaphor,) and offers a critical reading of the modes through which those claims are made. As such, my role as researcher is less about documenting activist practices (as it was in the previous chapter) and more about interrogating the conceptual and symbolic effects of these meaning-making practices.²⁰⁴ Indeed, the chapter partly arose from my own dilemmas around the rhetorical use of analogy and metaphor in activist contexts. Seeking to make sense of why some deployments made me politically uneasy while

and hence I generally consider them both together throughout the analysis in this Chapter. So while metaphor is sometimes understood as a substitutive logic, whereas analogy is understood as a comparative logic, as I will argue below, both metaphors and analogies can be deployed in substitutive and comparative ways.

²⁰² As discussed in Chapter One and Chapter Two, I consider 'transformative knowledge' to be epistemological practices that create space or act as catalysts for broader forms of social and political change to occur.

²⁰³ In keeping with previous chapters, I use the term 'queer and trans organizing' to refer to both to activist work that is taken up by individuals who self-identify as queer, trans or gender nonconforming, and also to activist work that takes a 'queer' approach to politics and foregrounds issues of gender and sexuality. For further discussion of these terms, see Chapter One and Chapter Six.

²⁰⁴ By interrogating the symbolic, rhetorical and conceptual effects of activist deployments of analogy and metaphor, this chapter does not claim to evaluate the 'success' or 'failure' of particular examples in terms of whether they actually further specific activists goals. Such analysis is beyond the scope of this chapter. So while I argue throughout the chapter that these rhetorical practices have 'real' and material consequences, the aim of the chapter is to explore the questions at a more conceptual rather than empirical level.

others seemed more promising, I wanted to critically reflect on the political stakes of different kinds of analogic and metaphor practice more broadly.

In exploring the transformative potential of metaphoric and analogical thinking, this chapter also extends discussions from previous chapters about how processes of epistemological change occur. Because analogies and metaphors function by taking knowledge that is familiar or associated with one context and applying it to another (often in an unfamiliar or unexpected way), such deployments can be understood as processes of *epistemological border crossing*; analogy and metaphor literally move knowledge and understanding from one domain to another, potentially transforming meaning in the process. Exploring such 'knowledge movements' thus offers another way of thinking about the dynamics of epistemological change described in previous chapters. For example, if prison solidarity work offers a site of epistemological transformation (as argued in Chapter Six), such change is enabled in part by the movement of knowledge across boundaries; interactions between imprisoned and non-imprisoned people literally bring different experiences, knowledge and understanding across prison walls. At the same time, because epistemological border-crossings are shaped by the power relations that establish given boundaries in the first place, transformative change requires more than just knowledge movement; transformative epistemologies require shifts in power-knowledge relations (see Chapter Three).²⁰⁵ For this reason, the kinds of epistemological border-crossings I explore in this chapter should not be mistaken for instances of 'knowledge exchange'.²⁰⁶ Such a view not only reflects a

²⁰⁵ Although I use both the term 'borders' and 'boundaries' somewhat interchangeably in this chapter as the two are overlapping, I tend to use boundaries to refer to limit points (places of restriction or containment) and use borders to refer to liminal spaces (lines of distinction, thresholds and edges).

²⁰⁶ The framework of 'knowledge exchange' is also reminiscent (to make another analogy) of colonial relationships that have obscured the theft of land, resources and culture through discourses of 'cultural exchange'. For this reason, questions of epistemological location are crucial. As Walter D. Mignolo argues, the transformative potential of 'border thinking' depends on the position from which it is engaged: 'Border thinking from a territorial perspective becomes a machine of appropriation of the colonial differ/a/nces; the colonial difference as an object of study rather than as an epistemic potential. Border thinking from the perspective of subalternity is a machine for intellectual decolonization' (Mignolo 2000, 45).

commodified (and marketized) view of knowledge (i.e. individual subjects acquire objects of knowledge through relations of trade), but obscures the ways that knowing subjects and knowledge effects are themselves produced through relations of power (Foucault 1978/1990, 1980). Maintaining a clear focus on questions of power, this chapter seeks to understand how strategic efforts to 'move meaning' and 'shift understanding' through epistemological border crossing can both facilitate and hinder transformative possibilities for knowing and being.

The chapter starts with a brief overview of the epistemological and political significance of metaphoric and analogical practice. I then make two main arguments that attempt to navigate the political potentialities and pitfalls of analogy work. First, I argue that there is an important political distinction between analogies that primarily operate by substitution or likening, and analogies that operate by connecting or linking. While these distinctions are not absolute, I suggest that the former is generally more prone to the symbolic violence of universalist logics, whereas the latter offers more space for critical reflexive politics. Second, I argue that the directionality or orientation work of analogy is politically important, as analogies and metaphors operate by directing thinking and practice towards and away from particular objects, analysis and knowledges. I explore these arguments through specific examples drawn from queer and transgender activism, particularly activism focussed on issues of borders controls and migration. I conclude with some reflections on what gestures towards a queer, transformative metaphoric politics might entail.

Analogy, Metaphor and Political Meaning-Making

Although analogy and metaphor are sometimes treated as merely decorative literary devices, their fundamental significance for scientific, legal, and pedagogical thought is also recognized (Lakoff and Johnson 1980/2003; Ortony 1979; Sunstein 1993). The growing interdisciplinary field of cognitive linguistics, for example, has demonstrated how analogy and metaphor are not simply poetic embellishments, but provide

fundamental structure and content to thought and language more broadly (Danforth 2007). Likewise, philosophy of science scholars have argued that metaphors are more than descriptive tools, and instead form 'irreplaceable parts of the linguistic machinery of a scientific theory' (Richard Boyd quoted in Stepan 1986, 39). Such scholars have also shown how analogical and metaphoric thinking are crucial for problem solving, scientific discovery and technological innovation (Kuhn 1979, 414; Edge 1974, 135).²⁰⁷

In addition to these 'specialist' uses, analogies and metaphors also play a central role in everyday discourse. Metaphoric language is prevalent everywhere, even when unconsciously deployed. For example, the term 'sexual orientation' has become so commonplace, that it now functions largely as a literal term, even though it was initially used as a directional metaphor drawn from magnetism and navigation (Rictor Norton, cited in Ahmed 2006b, 69). Even young children engage in metaphoric and analogical description, whether mimicking adults or using creative language of their own as they learn to use language independently. This capacity, arises in part, because much metaphoric thinking is not an elite practice, but a form of description that draws from everyday, embodied and experiential modes of understanding.²⁰⁸

In simplest terms, analogy and metaphor work 'by invoking one meaning system to explain or clarify another' (Smith and Katz 1993, 69). Such invocations often draw heavily from experiential knowledges: metaphor works by applying a familiar experience, event or social relation (what metaphor theorists describe as the 'source domain') to a less familiar one, or one that requires explanation (the 'target domain'). Analogy and metaphor can also be used to understand the 'target domain' in new ways. For example, spatial experiences of embodiment (i.e., our physical experiences of being in space, taking up space, entering and leaving space, changing

²⁰⁷ Analogical thinking also constitutes a key part of legal reasoning, particularly when determining whether two situations are analogous and therefore worthy of equal treatment in law (Sunstein 1993).

²⁰⁸ The fact that analogical and metaphoric thinking is a common rather than elite practice is one of the reasons why I am interested in exploring it here. This is not to suggest that analogy and metaphor are inherently free from elitist usage (as the accessibility of any form of communication depends not only on its mode but also its content), but as forms of expression and analysis, they may be less hierarchical and more accessible than other strategies.

direction, etc.) are frequently used to explain more complex theoretical ideas (Smith and Katz 1993). Expressions like 'mapping the political terrain,' or 'opening up new understandings,' or 'exploring new horizons of thought' all rely on spatial metaphors of experience. Bodily distinctions (i.e. between head and heart, mind and body, left and right) play a central role in describing many key concepts in western thought. Susan Sontag, for example, notes how the political spectrum of left and right, though conventionally traced back to the French Revolution, likely persists in part from a social imagination that is still very much drawn from the body's orientation in space—left and right, top and bottom, forward and backward—as a means to describe social relations and political conflict (Sontag 1991/2002, 92).

While questions persist over whether all language is metaphorical or if we can make useful distinctions between literal and metaphoric language, it is clear that analogies and metaphors do more than simply describe a world, they also work to constitute it. Metaphor acts a 'a filter or screen which selects, organizes, and transforms what we see' (Miller 1979, 162). Through this filtering and framing, analogies and metaphors not only make connections, draw comparisons and develop new perceptions, but shape reality itself (Black 1962; Ortony 1979). As such, it is important to pay attention to 'the interconnectedness of metaphor and materiality' (Smith and Katz 1993, 68). Just as the constitutive nature of language has material implications, the consequences of analogy and metaphor are also experienced in highly material and embodied ways. As Susan Sontag argues so poignantly in *AIDS and its Metaphors*, the metaphors associated with illness can not only make the experience of thinking about illness worse than the illness itself, but can inhibit people from seeking treatment early enough or from getting proper treatment. In this sense, argues Sontag, myths and metaphors can literally kill (Sontag 1991/2002, 99).

At the same time, the constitutive power of analogy and metaphor should not be overstated; the capacity for metaphors to shape reality is simultaneously governed by the broader social, political and epistemological conditions that generate the terms of the metaphor itself (Quinn 1991). We do not simply choose

analogies and metaphors randomly; we are often 'seized' by a particular metaphor because its sense of relevance emerges from an existing repertoire of meanings and associations that already have significance within particular linguistic and cultural communities (Edge 1974, 137). Metaphors are therefore not the original creation of autonomously willed authors; metaphoric meaning arises from culturally specific and contextually contingent locations. Indeed, analogies and metaphors only make sense to those who share either the predispositions of their authors, or draw from what Max Black calls the localized 'system of associated commonplaces' (Black 1962, 40). In this sense, metaphors 'play upon the clusters of images, feelings and connotations that all words accumulate over time', collective meanings that are bound by time and place (Zashin and Chapman 1974, 310). In short, analogies and metaphors are both constituted by, and constitutive of, broader socio-cultural norms and practices.

Because metaphors play on multiple meanings and conceptual cross-mappings, they are laden with ambiguity. But it is precisely this flexibility and scope for interpretation that enables metaphor to extend beyond the already known and facilitate the stretching of ideas and concepts. Such suggestiveness, rather than a singularly defined or firmly entrenched meaning, gives metaphor its power to illuminate (Black 1979, 31, 39). As a result of this capacity to stretch meaning, analogy and metaphor are crucial modes of learning and creativity. Although some metaphors or analogies simply replicate existing modes of perception, others form important bridges between the known and unknown, thereby generating new understandings in the process (Ortony 1979; Petrie 1979; Sternberg, Tourangeau, and Nigro 1979). As Livingstone and Harrison describe, metaphors 'are heuristic devices for leaping across logical gaps in the process of which our minds must be stretched, our thinking transferred to a different level and "our conceptual forms prized open"' (Livingstone and Harrison 1981, 106). By transferring knowledge from a domain that is already known, to a domain that requires explanation, metaphoric and analogical thought open up new forms of understanding and perception (Gassmann and Zeschky 2008; Black 1979, 23). In this way, 'metaphor is one of the central ways of

leaping the epistemological chasm between old knowledge and radically new knowledge' (Petrie 1979, 440).

Of course, not all metaphors are generative, and the criteria for distinguishing between creative versus normalizing metaphors is not always clear (Schön 1979). Successful metaphors must capitalize upon existing norms, values and meanings in order to be intelligible, but must challenge and shift existing understandings in order to be generative or transformative. For this reason, some scholars suggest that the most unlikely or seemingly implausible metaphors are often the most productive and transformative (Gassmann and Zeschky 2008). Others, however, focus on the capacity for metaphors to impact cognitive structures. Hugh Petrie, for example, argues that radically new knowledge emerges when there is a change, rather than an assimilation or extension, of existing cognitive structures (Petrie 1979). For Petrie, if learning occurs either through processes of *assimilation*, whereby we alter our perceptions of experience to fit dominant concepts and modes of understanding, or through *accommodation* where we change our concepts and modes of understanding to fit our experience, then radical learning processes occur when cognitive structures are not merely altered or adjusted, but transformed. In this sense, metaphoric statements generate new knowledge and insight by not only changing perceptions of particular objects, but in altering the relationships between those objects and by shifting the modes by which those, and other objects, are understood (Zashin and Chapman 1974, 298). Yet if there is nothing inherently creative or new about metaphor as a linguistic form, then the task is to determine the conditions in which particular modes of metaphoric language have transformative capacity.

At the heart of analogical and metaphoric logic are tensions between similarity and difference, between known and unknown, between literal and figurative meanings. Although metaphor and simile are often presumed to highlight similarities and suppress disparities, it is precisely our awareness of the tensions between the two that gives a metaphor its expressive power (Zashin and Chapman

1974, 301).²⁰⁹ As Black describes, it is the tacit knowledge of literal meanings juxtaposed with figurative ones, which induce ‘the characteristic feeling of dissonance or “tension” between the focus and its literal “frame”’ (Black 1979, 22). By associating things which are fundamentally incompatible in their literal application to each other, metaphor invites novel negotiations of relationships between the familiar and the strange (Culler 1974; Miller 1979, 158).²¹⁰ Part of the work of metaphor, therefore lies in determining which similarities and differences matter in a particular context (Sunstein 1993, 745; Grillo and Wildman 1991).

By emphasizing one aspect over another, however, metaphor may obscure as well as illuminate (Miller 1979, 160). In this sense, all metaphoric work is political because metaphoric meaning turns on the privileging of particular similarities and differences over others. As Robert Unger notes, ‘The decision to liken one instance to another, or to distinguish them, turns on a judgement of what differences and similarities are most significant to the moral beliefs at stake’ (quoted in Grillo and Wildman 1991, 400). Lakoff and Johnson, for example, note how arguments are frequently described through the metaphor of war (e.g. ‘Your claims are indefensible,’ ‘They attacked every weak point in my argument,’ ‘I shot down all of your arguments’).²¹¹ But imagine if argument was viewed through another metaphor, say that of dance, where each participant is seen as a performer, whose goal is to perform in a balanced, creative and aesthetically pleasing way (Lakoff and Johnson 1980/2003, 5). Even the most seemingly banal metaphors often reflect and naturalize deeply embedded social norms, no matter how naturalized or unconsciously deployed they might be. Being ‘up’, for example, is often equated with happiness

²⁰⁹ There are similarities here in the way that relationships of solidarity are also presumed to privilege similarities over differences and yet, as argued in Chapter 6, it is the tensions between resonant and dissonant knowledge which can be most politically transformative.

²¹⁰ Of course, the conventional distinction between ‘figurative’ and ‘literal’ has also been challenged, with scholars such as Lakoff and Johnson arguing that metaphors are better understood as cognitive mapping tools (that work to stretch and create meaning across different domains) rather than substitutions between ‘literal’ and ‘figurative’ meanings’.

²¹¹ As many feminists have pointed out, military metaphors also tend to be highly gendered, can normalize combative relations and often glorify war. See also Susan Sontag’s critique of the prevalence of military metaphors within capitalist societies (1991/2002, 96-7).

(‘I’m feeling up,’ ‘that boosted my spirits,’ ‘thinking about her gives me a lift’), whereas being down is associated with sadness (‘I’m depressed’, ‘my spirits sank’, ‘I fell into depression’) (Lakoff and Johnson 1980/2003, 14). In this sense, metaphor contains the potential to not only sustain or reframe perceptions, but to alter broader social feelings and attitudes (Edge 1974, 140). In short, given language’s constitutive power, the political stakes of metaphoric and analogical analysis are high.²¹²

Indeed, the metaphoric stories people use to describe social problems carry implicit messages that not only influence social perceptions of those problems, but also solutions. Schön highlights, for example, the significance of metaphor within social policy work. Noting that the challenges of social policy work often have more to do with *problem setting* than with *problem solving*, Schön argues that the metaphors used to describe what is wrong and what needs fixing then play a central role in determining solutions (Schön 1979). Describing poverty as a social blight, for example, or immigration as an unstoppable flood, or HIV/AIDS as a plague, easily translates into calls to ‘clean up’ poor neighbourhoods, restrict immigration or stigmatise people with HIV/AIDS. In this way, ‘The successful metaphor does not merely provide answers to pre-existing questions: rather, by radically restructuring our perception of the situation, *it creates new questions, and in doing so, largely determines the nature of the answers*’ (Edge 1974, 136). In other words, analogies are politically important not only because they help set the analytic framework through which we perceive, approach, define particular social and political problems, but also how we act to address those problems (Stepan 1986, 52).

²¹² Recent debates in Canada (and elsewhere) over the term ‘Israeli Apartheid’ provide a case in point, as both activists and scholars vehemently disagree over whether it is appropriate to draw analogies between the current situation in Israel/Palestine and the former system of apartheid in South Africa. The debate has also included discussion on whether the term ‘apartheid’ is an analogical or literal term (see Jamjoum 2009). Debates are ongoing, but in Canada have involved an (unsuccessful) legislative motion to officially condemn the use of the term, attempts to prevent a group calling itself ‘Queers Against Israeli Apartheid’ from marching in the Toronto Gay Pride Parade, and efforts to ban the use of the term on several university campuses in Canada (Queers Against Israeli Apartheid 2010). For a broader discussion of the apartheid analogy debate, see Regan (2008), Goldberg, (2009), Bakan and Abu-Laban (2010), the Anti-Defamation League (League 2005).

As such, much critical scholarship has focussed on assessing the importance of particular metaphors to maintaining specific relations of power. A central task of postcolonial analysis, for example, has been to challenge the metaphoric terms through which colonial relations have been historically asserted and maintained (i.e. the feminization of 'the East' through the figuration of the 'Orient' as a woman, or the valorisation of lightness versus darkness in civilizational and enlightenment discourse (Said 1978; Schueller 2005). Critical disability scholars and activists have also challenged the way many ability-based metaphors work to implicitly pathologize people with disabilities (Sandahl 1999; Dolmage 2005; Thomas 2005; May and Ferri 2005; Vidali 2010). The political stakes of metaphors therefore lies in part in evaluating the merit and costs of particular metaphoric choices. However, I would suggest that the political dimensions of metaphor are not restricted to the linguistic content of particular metaphors but also can be found in its linguistic structure. As I will argue below, identifying patterns in metaphoric and analogical structures may be useful in differentiating between metaphors that tend to reinforce existing norms and those which open up space for challenging them.

Linking or Likening: the politics of analogical connection versus substitution

Of course, one cannot think without metaphors. But that does not mean there aren't some metaphors we might well abstain from or try to retire. (Sontag 1991/2002, 91)

While political analogy is a common tool among activists, not all analogies function in the same way. Analogy can operate as shorthand to convey complex political claims, as an explanatory device to assist understanding, or an emotive device to generate empathy for a given cause. Activists may draw on common metaphors as part of a general use of everyday metaphor, or may employ carefully chosen metaphors as strategic educational, emotive and rhetorical devices. Many anti-prison activists, for example, make comparisons between struggles to abolish slavery and struggles to

abolish prison. Drawing on the historic continuities between the racial logic of slavery and the racial logic of contemporary imprisonment (particularly in the US where the abolition of slavery via the 13th Amendment coincided with the introduction of the convict lease system), anti-prison activists argue that like slavery, the prison system is fundamentally inhumane and cannot be reformed; it must be abolished.²¹³ Also responding to assumptions that the abolition of prisons is little more than idealist fantasy, anti-prison activists emphasize that abolition of the slave trade was once viewed as equally utopian. The analogy thereby functions as a means to not only link past and present struggles, but also as a device to legitimize a less popularly accepted political aim by connecting it to a more widely endorsed one.²¹⁴

But political analogy work is a risky business. As Trina Grillo and Stephanie Wildman argue ‘the use of analogies provides both the key to greater understanding and the danger of false understanding’ (Grillo and Wildman 1991). Indeed, there is no shortage of problematic metaphors within social movement rhetoric, even when deployed by well-meaning activists. The campaigns that took place in the late 1990s and early 2000s in favour of same-sex marriage in Canada and the US, for example, relied on questionable comparisons between racial segregation laws and legal prohibitions on same-sex marriage. Although many of the legal advocates drew from more specific comparisons between the prohibitions on same-sex marriage and anti-

²¹³ In the United States the links between imprisonment and slavery are most apparent in the fact that the number of blacks in prison grew rapidly following the 13th amendment (and even more so after Jim Crow laws were overturned, and also following the US ‘war on drugs’) but also that several prisons were literally built on former plantation sites, which relied on prisoner labour once slavery was rendered illegal. For example, Angola State Penitentiary in Louisiana, the largest maximum-security prison in the United States, is named ‘Angola’ because it was built on a former slave plantation site, and most of the slaves had been forcibly brought to the US from Angola, Africa. For further discussion of the links between slavery and imprisonment in the US, see Patterson (1982) Davis (2003; 1998a, 1998b), Agozino (2003), Gilmore (2000), Hallett (2006, 2009), James (2005) and Alexander (Alexander 2010).

²¹⁴ This latter use of analogy is a major political strategy used by social groups across the political spectrum, such as hunters’ rights groups, fathers’ rights groups and smokers’ rights groups who seek legitimacy as groups worthy of rights protection (see for example Cooper 2004). For a compelling critique of the way that slavery/abolitionist discourse is used in the another context—that of sex work/prostitution—see Bernstein (2007) and Davidson (2006).

miscegenation laws which prohibited inter-racial marriages,²¹⁵ the wider public media campaigns extended comparisons to racial segregation more broadly (Lenon 2008, 131). One set of public ad campaigns released by Canadians for Equal Marriage in 2004, for example, depicted a park bench painted with a sign saying 'No Gays'. The corresponding caption read, 'If this is wrong, why is it right when it comes to marriage?'²¹⁶ Another depicted two water coolers in an office setting, one labelled 'gay' and one labelled 'straight' accompanied by the same caption (see Figure 1).²¹⁷ Such seemingly banal ads, which reference former U.S. segregation laws that legalized separate drinking fountains, recreational spaces, and transportation services for blacks and whites, imply that denying access to same-sex marriage is analogous to the history of racial segregation in North America.



Figure 1

²¹⁵ The most commonly referenced comparison is to *Loving v. Virginia*, 388 U.S. 1 (1967), which ended the ban on interracial marriage in the US.

²¹⁶ Ad entitled 'Park Bench' available at: http://www.egale.ca/extra/CEM_clip1.mpg

²¹⁷ Ad entitled 'Water Cooler' available at: http://www.egale.ca/extra/CEM_clip2.mpg

See also: http://www.egale.ca/extra/CEM_clip3.mpg

These 'like race' arguments are common and appear regularly in academic writing, activist literature and news media. For example, a blog post on the main webpage of the National Sexuality Resource Centre (a prominent sexual education and research institute in the US), included imagery that drew a similar analogy between racial segregation and gay discrimination. The post, written by Christopher White and entitled 'Why I'm such an angry Faggot,' discussed a range of homophobia related issues, but focussed on US prohibitions against same-sex marriage (namely the US Defence of Marriage Act and Proposition 8 in California). Although the text itself did not make any explicit 'like race' arguments, the post was accompanied by a large 1950's style cartoon of a archetypal business man in a suit, tie and bowler hat, wearing a rainbow triangle on his lapel, being physically silenced by a hand over his mouth (see Figure 2). Adorned on the sleeve of the silencing hand is the Republican Party elephant emblem, along with patriotic red, white and blue stripes. Emblazoned across the image are the words: 'Quiet, Faggot! Your kind belongs at the back of the bus!'²¹⁸ This image, much like the ads of the Campaign for Equal Marriage, evokes the history of US racial segregation laws as an analogy for critiquing the ban on same-sex marriage and the treatment of gays and lesbians in the US.

²¹⁸ This image is striking, not only for its implicit reference to racial segregation laws, but also for its evocation of a 'respectable' gay business man as the emblematic subject of rights entitlement. The rainbow triangle lapel pin signals a sexuality that is discrete and restrained, rather than flashy, noisy or excessive (as might be invoked by an image of radical protestors on a demonstration or a visibly camp queer aesthetic). The racial identity of the figure is also slightly ambiguous, though ostensibly reads as white. Originally posted June 15, 2009, available at: <http://nsrc.sfsu.edu/dialogues/blog/view/3539/5305>

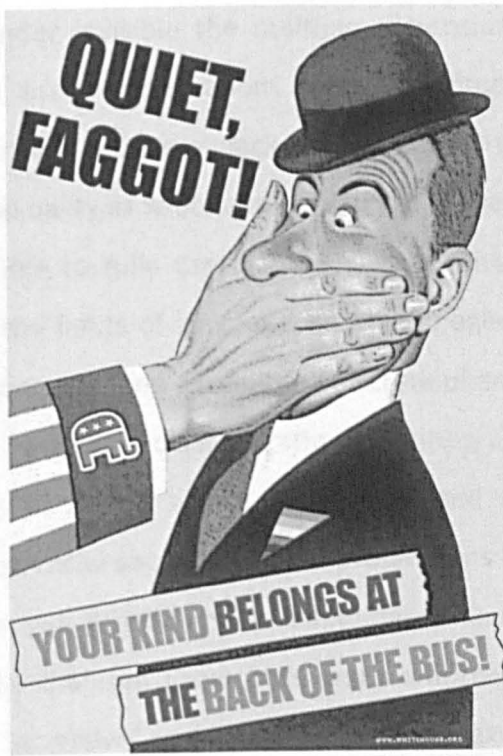


Figure 2

In many ways, the prevalence of such 'like race' analogies is not surprising, particularly within broader 'equal rights' legal culture of US and Canadian contexts, where proof of one instance of discrimination requires evidence it is analogous to another (Halley 2000). Protection from discrimination based on sexual orientation, for example, was only included within the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms, when it was deemed legally 'analogous' to the other discriminatory grounds already listed under section 15(1), namely race, national or ethnic origin, colour, religion, sex, age or mental or physical disability. So the broad use of 'rights' frameworks within liberal democracies (both within and beyond the courtroom), arguably contributes to broader social understandings of discrimination and oppression via 'analogous' terms.

Despite the pervasiveness of these analogies, however, many critical race scholars have challenged the use of 'like race' arguments (Crenshaw 1989; Carbado 2000; see also Halley 2000). First, such comparisons tend to treat various dimensions of identity (i.e. gender, sexuality and race) as discrete characteristics rather than mutually constitutive power relations. In doing so, such analogies tend to marginalize

and render invisible the multiple dimensions of subject positions and reproduce narrow assumptions about what constitutes the norm of particular identities. Comparisons between black rights and gay rights, for example, can work to racialise homosexuality as white and sexualise blackness as straight (Carbado 2000). While it is impossible to fully capture the complexities and nuances of any identity position within the limits of language, these analogies arguably reinforce dominant patterns of treating race and sexuality as discrete phenomenon.

Second, in disaggregating identities, such analogies often falsely separate the vectors of power which (re)produce and regulate those identities. The analogy between racial segregation and prohibitions on same-sex marriage, for example, can obscure the gender and sexuality-based dimensions of racial segregation laws (e.g. the way that Jim Crow laws were enforced and maintained through stereotypes about 'excessive' and 'dangerous' black sexuality), and deny how racial logics have informed campaigns for same-sex marriage (Bailey, Kandaswamy, and Richardson 2004). In her analysis of struggles for same-sex marriage in Canada, for example, Suzanne Lenon argues that gays and lesbians achieved a status worthy of marriage partly by appealing to national, neoliberal and civilization discourses that are highly classed and racialised (Lenon 2008).

Third, such comparisons often erase important contextual differences (Grillo and Wildman 1991, 404). For example, US laws prohibiting interracial relationships often carried criminal penalties (including punishment by imprisonment) that do not have an equivalent in the contemporary treatment of same-sex relationships in North America. To compare such laws without qualification can thus erase the differential consequences of their enforcement.²¹⁹ Likewise, the racial segregation laws referenced in the Campaign for Equal Marriage ads arguably have had drastically different material consequences than the contemporary denial of same-sex

²¹⁹ It is also worth noting that at the time the water cooler and park bench ads were released as part of the Canadians for Equal Marriage campaign, the struggle for same-sex marriage was largely a symbolic one, as the same-sex couples with common-law status had acquired virtually the same rights as married heterosexual couples. This is not to dismiss the symbolic and social value of marriage status, but to emphasise that the material gains won through equal marriage were significantly different from those achieved by the formal end to miscegenation and segregation laws in the US.

marriage.²²⁰ Moreover, using a US framing of racial inequality (i.e. Jim Crow / segregation laws) in the Canadian context raises important questions around how such metaphors move across national boundaries. On the one hand, this strategy plays into a universalising / decontextualized understanding of racial inequality, which presumes that a symbol of racial inequality in one location (i.e. separate water fountains for blacks and whites under US Jim Crow laws) can effectively represent all kinds of racial inequality elsewhere (i.e. in Canada).²²¹ On the other hand, the poster could be read as feeding into particular streams of Canadian nationalism, which posit an egalitarian, multicultural and peace-loving Canadian identity against a racially fractured, hierarchical and imperialist US identity. In this reading, the effectiveness of the analogy between race and sexuality relies on a (historically inaccurate) assumption that Canadians would never support racial segregation in the way that Americans did, as a basis from which to argue that Canadians should also not support marital 'segregation'.

Finally, critical race scholars have challenged the way that racial analogies often appropriate the struggles of people of colour without any accountability or commitment to an anti-racist agenda (Lenon 2008; Grillo and Wildman 1991). Comparisons between racial segregation and gay marriage in the Canadian equal marriage context, for example, seem less about drawing inspiration from, or paying homage to African American civil rights struggles, and more about appropriating another's oppression in order to claim legitimacy for oneself (Razack 2007).²²² As Schueller argues,

²²⁰ It is worth noting that struggle for same-sex marriage in Canada and the US also has different material consequences. Canada's more universal health care system, for example, means that marital status has less impact on access to health care services and other benefits, whereas US private insurance schemes are often tied to legally recognised spousal relationships.

²²¹ Although Canada certainly has a long history of racial inequality and segregation (and one that is often ignored in popular history), such practices were not rigidly enshrined in law through formal segregation laws as they were in the US. For a historical account of how racial inequality and segregation was *informally* codified and socially reproduced through Canadian legal institutions, see Backhouse (1999).

²²² This is not to suggest that such analogies never pay homage to earlier struggles. One of the lawyers involved in the Equal Marriage cases in Ontario and British Columbia, for example, argued that comparisons to rulings on racial segregation were made partly 'to give the court the courage to do the

despite the seeming equivalence suggested by the analogies, racial oppression . . . serves merely to illustrate the horrific nature of sexual oppression. The category of race is simply colonized under the broader category of sex, and the stark problems of systemic racial oppression are elided. (2005, 71)

As Suzanne Lenon describes of the Equal Marriage campaigns in Canada, the persistent comparison to formal segregation laws relies on a temporal logic that asserts particular understandings of progress, 'where heterosexist exclusions of lesbians and gay men *now* are like racist exclusions of inter-racial couples *then*' (Lenon 2008, 127). Not only does this locate racial segregation as a phenomenon of the past (rather than an ongoing and persistent problem)²²³ but also works to reposition white gays and lesbians as separate from, and bearing no responsibility for, patterns of racial segregation. In other words, the racial analogies in the same sex marriage campaigns do not disrupt normative racial hierarchies, but depend on them for their logic. In short, even well-meaning analogies, can end up replicating rather than challenging dominant relations of power.

Of course no analogy is perfect and every metaphor is inevitably limited. My point here is not to suggest that we can ever make 'pure' or uncompromised metaphors or that 'like race' analogies should always be avoided. But if we recognise that metaphors create specific discursive effects and some of these effects can perpetuate social harms, by what criteria do we measure the merit of a given comparison? How do we distinguish between analogies and metaphors that reinforce dominant relations of power and those that challenge them? What makes a metaphor or analogy 'conservative' or 'normative' versus 'radical' or 'transformative'? There are, of course, no easy answers to this question, and I do not suggest that one can devise any simple conclusions. However, below I argue that there is an important political distinction to be made between analogies that operate by linking/connection, and those that operate by likening/substitution. Although I

right thing' even if the broader public was not ready for, or would not support such a decision (Lenon 2008, 133).

²²³ For an compelling critique of the ways that racial segregation has persisted in the US despite laws to the contrary, see Harris (2006).

want to emphasise that it is impossible to make an absolute distinction between either form (and I do not want to overgeneralise the impact of each), I would nonetheless suggest that the political effects of likening and linking can be broadly distinguished. Making these distinctions may help illuminate some of the political-epistemological dilemmas of analogy and metaphor work.

In order to elaborate on the distinction between analogies that operate through linking and those that operate through likening, I want to first turn to some general distinctions that are commonly made by theorists of metaphor. Among traditional theorists of metaphor, there are three main theories of how metaphor works: the comparison view, the substitution view and the interaction view (Black 1979; Ortony 1979). The *comparison* theory treats metaphors as a literal paraphrase of similarity, a condensed or elliptic simile (Black 1979, 28). To take a recent example of the public outcry in Britain against the MPs' expense claims: the comment that 'MPs are pigs at the public trough' is a metaphoric version of the simile 'MPs behave like pigs'). In this view, a metaphor simply shows a similarity between two apparently dissimilar things (Petrie 1979, 442).

The *substitution* theory, though similar to the comparison theory, views one idea or concept or object as not simply compared to another, but as literally standing in for, or replacing another (Black 1979, 28). The substitution view of metaphor assumes that similarities already exist between the two things implicitly compared and the metaphor merely highlights or calls attention to those commonalities by replacing one for another (Zashin and Chapman 1974, 296). The substitution view thereby minimizes the creative potential of metaphor; this perspective presumes that metaphor offers an alternative way of expressing something that could be equally expressed in other words (e.g. MPs are greedy, indulgent, lazy, overpaid, excessive, etc).

By contrast, the *interaction* theory of metaphor, as described by Black operates more creatively. From this view, the metaphor functions by projecting upon one subject a set of implications and meanings associated with another subject, thereby changing the meaning of each, and generating new understandings in the

process. As Black describes, 'the presence of the primary subject incites the hearer to select some of the secondary subject's properties...[and] invites him to construct a parallel implication-complex that can fit the primary subject [which] reciprocally induces parallel changes in the secondary subject' (Black 1979, 29). In other words, because interactive metaphors 'bring together a *system* of implications, other features previously associated with only one subject in the metaphor are brought to bear on the other' (Stepan 1986, 47). From this perspective, interaction metaphors cannot be reduced to simple comparisons or 'like' statements without a loss in meaning; this is because metaphoric meaning is produced through the interaction of both elements and therefore embodies insights otherwise inexpressible (Black 1979, 34).

The interaction theory is important because it emphasizes the constitutive power of metaphor, as well as the capacity for metaphor to alter meaning of different words. Not only does the figure of the MP become more associated with pig-like qualities, but certain human behaviours are projected onto the pig. Further associations between the two may also spill over elsewhere or emerge from other historical uses, since one system of meanings become associated with another (e.g. the popularity of piggy banks as places to store their money, expressions like 'filthy rich,' 'dirty money' or 'rolling in cash', etc.).²²⁴ Not only does the interactive metaphor alter the meaning of each term, but changes the very relationship between the two, by linking them through their association.

I have highlighted these three different perspectives on metaphor not only because they impact on how we understand process of metaphoric meaning-making, but also because each has important political-epistemological implications. Both drawing from, and extending Black's distinction between the substitution and interaction theories of metaphor, I argue that there are important political distinctions between analogies that work primarily through likening or substitution

²²⁴ See also the public outcry in 2005, when the British Labour Party released campaign posters that pictured leading Jewish conservatives as flying pigs, clearly playing on anti-Semitic views (BBC News 2005).

and those that operate through linking or interaction.²²⁵ I argue that these two analogical moves generate different knowledge effects, which have important bearing on the possibilities for developing transformative modes of knowing and understanding.

All analogies and metaphors arguably operate through some form of substitution, by virtue of the fact that meaning is transferred from one context to another. However, I want to suggest that some metaphors transfer meaning primarily by *likening* one thing to another, and some metaphors transfer meaning primarily by *linking* one thing to another. To draw from the previous examples: The 'like race' arguments noted above operate primarily through a direct substitution of sexuality-based injustice for racially-based injustice. While there may be some implied links between racial segregation and the prohibition on same-sex marriage, the analogy is primarily established through substitution rather than connection; the analogy works by allowing one to stand in for the other. In contrast, the analogy between the abolition of slavery and the abolition of prisons relies primarily on a logic of connection rather than substitution. While some elements of substitution are present (i.e. the modern prison can stand in for the system of slavery), the more salient relation is one of connection (e.g. the prison system in North America is an extension of the legacy of slavery).²²⁶ In this sense, one is directly linked to the other. This relationship is established in part because the analogy is used to demonstrate how both institutions emerge from—and were sustained and normalised by—a

²²⁵ It is important to note, however, that I approach the distinctions between comparison, substitution and interaction, not as competing perspectives on how metaphor operates in a singular fashion, but more as frameworks that draw attention to different dimensions of metaphoric meaning-generation. So in my view, while most metaphors arguably include dimensions of each, some uses of metaphors rely more on one form than another, with important semantic and political implications.

²²⁶ It is worth noting that the links between prisons and slavery have also changed over time. Initial links were made on the basis of exploited labour (i.e. the exploitation of Black slave labour was replaced and extended through the convict lease system). Yet in the contemporary period, where the vast majority of prisoners do not actually perform labour (and instead spend most of their time locked in their cells), the links are made on the basis of social death (i.e. that the institution of prison extends the selective 'social death' and 'dehumanization' that was enacted through chattel slavery). See for example, Gilmore (2008, 2007), Gordon (2006) and Patterson (1982).

common cause or broader logic (i.e. racism). The argument then follows that if you want to truly abolish slavery, you must also abolish prisons.

Certainly there is a tension between on the one hand claiming that if slavery can be abolished so can prisons (a substitution logic) and on the other claiming that the slavery continues to exist through the institution of imprisonment (a linking logic). Yet I would argue that within these tensions, the connective logic works to reconfigure, complicate and supplement the substitutive logic so that the overall effect moves beyond the simple replacement of one entity for the other. In comparing social movements against slavery with those against prisons, for example, the prison/slavery analogy establishes a temporal and political bridge between anti-racist struggles of past and present. This bridging means that the racism of slavery and the racism of imprisonment are held more closely in proximity; they are viewed in direct relation to each other. Unlike the substitution-based segregation/marriage analogies, which arguably use racism as a temporary vehicle for illustrating the harms of homophobia but ultimately leave concerns about race behind, the prison/slavery analogy retains a more enduring focus on the racism that links both issues. So while there is clearly slippage and overlap between the metaphoric work of substitution and that of connection, I would argue that they each generate somewhat different – but nonetheless significant—political effects.

Because substitution-based metaphors function by replacing one thing with another, differences that threaten to undermine the logic of sameness must be downplayed. In contrast, because linking metaphors emphasize the relationship *between* the two entities, they arguably allow more room for similarities and differences to coexist or remain explicitly present. One could say that substitution metaphors operate more on an either/or logic whereas linking metaphors operate more on one of both/and. Of course, all analogical or metaphoric claims, by their very nature, require the selective highlighting and downplaying of particular features in order to function. So my point here is not that the connective-metaphors are free from the suppression of difference or that all substitution-based metaphors are inherently problematic. Rather, whereas substitution metaphors may require a

greater subordination of difference, linking metaphors may more easily hold space for differences to remain visible alongside similarities. As I will argue below, the tensions between these similarities and differences—much like the relationship between resonant and dissonant knowledges described in Chapter Six—may in turn be important for moving or transforming meaning in critical and novel ways.

Substitution-based metaphors may also be more susceptible to the problem of misappropriation previously noted. Aristotle defines metaphor precisely on these terms: 'Metaphor consists in giving the thing a name that belongs to something else' (Aristotle 1996, 34). While metaphor might be understood more positively as a form of creative 'borrowing' or transfer of meaning, the politics of who borrows and for what purpose is significant. As critics of cultural appropriation have demonstrated, the transfer of one thing to another domain is never politically neutral but is always embedded in wider power relations that structure both who feels entitled to 'take' and who stands to benefit or suffer from such borrowings. The problem of appropriation arises in part because metaphoric substitutions are rarely made on equal terms. Although the 'target' and 'source' domains may appear interchangeable, each concept does not hold equally the place of the other; one concept or domain is often used in service of another. While the power relations at work in connection-based metaphors are also unlikely to be equal, they are more likely to make visible a relationship between the two rather than simply absorbing or assimilating one into the logic of another (Schueller 2005, 69).

Moving away from comparison and substitution-based metaphors, I want to suggest that connective or *interactive* metaphors offer more politically transformative potential. More specifically, I would argue that metaphors that emphasize linking, connection, proximity and interaction, are more likely to draw attention to, and therefore potentially disrupt, normative power relations, than metaphors that emphasize parallels, similarities and likening. As suggested above, substitution-based metaphors tend to make more conservative, assimilatory gestures (in part because they require stabilization/entrenchment of one entity in order to assert its similarity to the other). In contrast, connection based metaphors may leave

more space for interrogation and contestation of both entities, by virtue of the fact that attention is focussed less on their similarity of their characteristics or attributes and more on the relationship between each other.

Here I am using interaction somewhat differently than in Black's classic theory of metaphor. Whereas Black uses the concept of interaction to explain how metaphors alter the character or meaning of both things that are compared (i.e. how each becomes more like the other or change the meaning of each), my use of interaction is more relational. I am less interested in how the two entities become alike, and more how each are situated in relationship to the other and what points of connection and interaction link the two. I focus on the relationship *between* the two entities—and their broader political effects—rather than the more narrow end-change in the meaning of each specific term, which results from bringing the two together. For Black interaction is a process that occurs from placing things together in a parallel form, such that their very character and meaning changes. By contrast, I am interested in the space between the two entities—the relationship and connections of linkage, and how processes of transformation might occur within that relationship.

Of course the relationship between linking and likening is not easily distinguished. As Sara Ahmed argues, likeness is often an effect of proximity rather than its cause (Ahmed 2007a, 123). Taking the expression (yet another analogy), 'like two peas in a pod,' Ahmed notes that anyone who has shelled peas knows that all peas are not actually alike. It is not so much that the peas are the same in character (i.e. in shape, size, colour etc.) but rather it is their proximity of shared residence that generates the sense of likeness. 'Likeness is thus not "in" the peas, let alone "in" the pod, but rather is an effect of their contiguity, of how they are touched by each other and envelop each other (Ahmed 2007a, 124). So when we say that siblings are like two peas in a pod, we are talking just as much about their proximity to each other as we are about some inherent sense of likeness. In the same way, we might think of substitution-based metaphors as those which focus on the peas as they are compared one to another when they are lined up side-by-side. By contrast, an interactive view might focus more on the lines of proximity or connection: the spaces

in the pod that are between each pea, which both connect each pea and allow each pea to 'link' and 'line up' in a row.

Priya Kandaswamy highlights the pedagogical significance of comparison versus connection when tackling issues of racism in classroom discussion. Kandaswamy notes how students often take two approaches to difference: 'Either they try to reduce difference to sameness by immediately focusing in on the possible points of commonality to their own experience or they treat difference as fundamentally disconnected from their own experience' (2007, 9). Kandaswamy gives the example of how white middle class students frequently respond to discussions about experiences of women of colour, either by pointing out how their own experiences are similar to those of women of colour, or by emphasizing how fundamentally different they are and therefore claiming to have nothing to say on the topic. But as Kandaswamy points out, neither position necessarily moves students to a more critical or reflexive perspective: 'Both of these positions allow white students to avoid questioning their white privilege by re-centering their own experience' (2007, 9). Rather than trying to make sameness/difference comparisons, Kandaswamy urges her students to take a relationality approach, which draws out connections between different experiences, in order to better understand how differences (including processes of racialization and 'whiteness') are co-produced.²²⁷ Students are encouraged to examine the way that women of colour experience their lives in particular ways, not despite of, or in separation from, but precisely *because* of the ways that white women live out their lives (i.e. through racial, classed, gendered and national/citizenship-based formations of labour, family relations, educational privileges, etc).²²⁸ Whereas the comparison approach tends to leave existing power relations unquestioned (either by mystifying difference through isolation, or obscuring difference through substitution/assimilation), the connection approach can

²²⁷ Indeed the ways that identity-markers of 'whiteness' and 'colour' are produced through power relations are themselves relational and contingent.

²²⁸ We can think of the way that a professional, white, middle-class woman, for example, may rely on the domestic labour of working class migrant women in the form of house cleaners, nannies, child-minders or food service workers.

render power relations more visible, and thus more open to challenge. In the same way, metaphors that operate through substitution and comparison may fall into similar traps of obscuring power relations. By contrast, metaphors which draw out connections and relationships may be more attentive to power relations between the two, and thus offer more politically transformative possibilities for understanding and analysis.

The problem that Kandaswamy highlights, however, is not merely about the limits of the sameness/difference binary as tools of analysis. Rather, her point is that without an attentiveness to relationality (i.e. the relationships between things that produce effects of similarity and difference), more privileged students can use sameness/difference comparisons to maintain an uncritical analytic focus on themselves and their own experiences, such that the conversations remain dominated by the more privileged in the room. Indeed one of the critiques of 'like race' analogies, is not only that white people use such comparisons to appropriate racism for their own (white-centred) purposes, but that such analogies deflect, redirect, or reorient, conversations away from race and towards something else (Grillo and Wildman 1991). For example, when a person of colour raises an issue about racism and a white person responds by comparing it to their own experience of a different oppression (e.g. a sexist or homophobic incident), the white person's comment, however well-intentioned, can work to deflect attention from racism. In such cases, 'like race' analogies serve as orientation devices which enable one group of people to maintain control of conversation by redirecting discussion towards particular topics and away from others. In a similar way, linking/connective metaphors may work to draw our attention to particular relationships and not others. For this reason, we need to turn to questions of direction and orientation in metaphor.

Reorienting Analogy: The political importance of metaphoric directionality

If, as Wittgenstein suggests, metaphor is about 'moving meaning' (from old to new, from known to unknown, from observable to speculative), then attentiveness to the where and how of those movements is important (Bannet 1997, 656). Metaphoric shifts in meaning, or 'emergent meanings' as Ricoeur describes, are always both spatial and temporal; they mark a move from one time and place to another (Ricoeur 1974). Indeed, the word *metaphor* comes from the Greek word *metapherein*, which literally means to carry from one place to another, or to transfer (Miller 1979, 156). But as noted earlier, metaphors operate through partial carryings: they transfer part of a meaning, phrase, or concept and attach it to another. Yet in turning towards one thing, we turn away from another. As we carry from one place we also leave something behind; there is something always lost in translation, left in transition. For this reason, as Bennet describes,

analogical reasoning has everything to do with how we 'go on' because both in our disciplines and in our every uses of language, we are always using analogies to translate familiar terms, concepts, and images from one place to another place, which might also be quite different. (Bannet 1997, 656).

In this sense, we might think of analogies and metaphors as 'orientation devices': they direct us towards or away from particular associations, they situate our analytic gaze in specific contexts, they shift our understandings and provide trajectories for interpretation.²²⁹

In this way we can consider the role of metaphor in directing bodies, identities, interests, gazes and politics towards some things more than others. Here, I

²²⁹ Thinking about metaphors as 'orientation devices' is, of course, to use a metaphor to describe metaphor. Doing so invites a kind of double critique. In that sense I recognise that in using the metaphor of orientation to pay attention to the directionality of meaning, the concept of 'orientation' itself turns our attention away from other approaches or ways of thinking about metaphor. So I want to emphasize that I use this metaphor deliberately not as a claim upon the 'truth' of metaphor, but as a tool that helps with understanding the role of metaphor in the context of questions of epistemological transformation.

want to consider how we might be more critically aware of the implications of such directions when deploying metaphors for political aims. Most broadly, I argue that the political power of metaphor lies primarily in its capacity to orient. More specifically, I argue there is an important political distinction between metaphors that move us to places of familiarity, retrenchment and enclosure and those which move us to places of strangeness, questioning and openness. Whereas the former tends to reinforce dominant epistemologies, I would suggest the latter opens up space for more transformative knowledge practices to emerge. For this reasons it becomes important to pay attention not only to the specific orientations of particular metaphors, but to broader patterns of metaphoric direction.

Sara Ahmed's work on queer phenomenology is helpful here. Considering how bodies are shaped and experienced through their orientations (i.e. the ways in which bodies extend, or are directed, towards some objects and not others), Ahmed emphasizes the political, social and spatial importance of directionality. If we consider the 'orienting' dimensions of particular social phenomenon, we can understand more clearly how power relations become habitualized, reinforced and naturalized over time. Heterosexuality, for example, can be understood as a kind of orientation, but not only in the conventional sense of 'sexual orientation' which indicates which objects of desire that a body might direct itself towards. For as Ahmed notes, 'If orientation is a matter of how we reside in space, then sexual orientation might also be a matter of residence, of how we inhabit spaces, and who or what we inhabit spaces with' (Ahmed 2006a, 543). Indeed, bodies are not 'straight' simply by virtue of their desires; rather 'bodies become straight by tending toward straight objects' (Ahmed 2006a, 557). In this sense, Ahmed considers how particular orientations function as 'straightening devices', modes and spaces that allow straight bodies to extend into them, and establish points of alignment rather than deviation. In other words, 'orientations' position particular bodies as belonging to some places and not others; a way of directing certain bodies towards some objects and not others; a way of keeping some objects within reach and others at a distance. In this sense, orientations are important processes not only because they

'direct' our attention in particular ways, but are means through which the world takes shape (Ahmed 2010). Moreover, if orientations are embodied locations from where the world unfolds, as Ahmed suggests, then changing those orientations might allow the world to unfold and be known differently (Ahmed 2007a, 152).

Ahmed's work invites us to pay attention to the ways in which bodies become oriented towards certain objects and not others. By objects, Ahmed refers not only to physical things, but also to styles, capacities, aspirations, techniques, habits (2007a, 154). Such orientations are not originary, but inherited. As Ahmed notes:

we do not just acquire our orientations because we find things here or there. Rather certain objects are available to us because of lines that we have already taken: our life courses follow a certain sequence, which is also a matter of following a direction or of being directed in a certain way (2006a, 554).

At the same time, we do not necessarily reproduce what we inherit. Though we may feel pressures to replicate and maintain tendencies towards objects that we have been previously oriented towards, we can also resist (Ahmed 2006b, 17). Such orientations are significant not only in how they maintain particular orderings of bodily attachment and belonging (i.e. these bodies belong here and not there, those bodies are attached to these objects and not those), but also 'how bodies take shape through tending toward objects that are reachable, which are available within the bodily horizon' (Ahmed 2006a, 543). Reformulating Ahmed, I want to question how transformative epistemologies take shape through metaphoric and analogic discourses that orient subjects towards particular ways of knowing, which in turn shape what kinds of projects and possibilities become available within the political horizon.

Analogies and metaphors, I argue, operate as orientation devices for meaning which direct attention towards some objects (and ways of knowing) and away from others. They orient not only bodies, but ideas and understandings, in ways which place some objects, practices and political possibilities within reach and others at a distance. When we think about metaphors as political orientation devices, we can begin to understand how metaphors can literally and symbolically orient bodies

towards particular political horizons and not others. This is not to say that metaphors have the power to literally move objects closer or farther away, but in directing our attention towards some objects or others, they can facilitate processes whereby the act of reaching for or turning away from those objects become more readily available. Metaphors might then be understood as tools that have the capacity to contribute to, or disrupt, the inheritance of orientations and tendencies that are already present.

If metaphors function as orientation devices, then a critical approach to political metaphor demands that we pose questions about the directionality of our metaphoric choices. Some questions we might pose:

- What does the analogy or metaphor place in reach, and for whom? What objects, ideas or resources are moved closer, or placed in view, by the metaphor and for whom?
- Who is making the analogy or metaphor and for what aim? Who is hearing it (or who is the intended audience) and how does its potential reception matter?
- Does the analogy or metaphor orient focus towards ourselves or others?
- Is the analogy or metaphor driven by a desire for legitimacy, recognition or inclusion?
- What feelings and emotions does the analogy or metaphor play on, elicit and provoke?
- Who or what is mobilized by the analogy or metaphor?

In order to explore some of these questions in more concrete terms, I now turn to some specific examples of analogies related to queer and trans border issues.

National Borders and Gender/Sexuality Borders: Substituting, connecting and (dis)orienting

This last section of the chapter considers queer and trans border analogies and metaphors. I have chosen this focus for several reasons. First, challenging 'borders' and 'boundaries' has long been a conceptual priority within queer and trans politics,²³⁰ and as such I want to revisit these concerns with a specific focus on how conceptual 'border work' is relevant to questions of epistemological transformation. This focus also stems from earlier concerns raised in Chapter Three around how to move beyond epistemologies of resistance and transgression (e.g. the mere crossing or breach of a line) to enable the possibilities of something new or different. Second, at a more material level, grassroots queer and trans activism around borders and immigration provides another example of organizing work that seeks to engage in more radical, transformative politics on the one hand, and more 'connective' politics on the other (see Chapters One and Two). Indeed, just as grassroots queer and trans activists in North America are increasingly organizing around issues of imprisonment and criminal justice, many such activists have also turned to struggles against state border controls and immigration detention.²³¹ Not only do queer and trans activists have a strong presence in anti-border groups like *No One Is Illegal*²³² but groups such

²³⁰ For example, queer theory has articulated itself as a post-identity politics that is more concerned with contesting the lines, norms and boundaries around identity rather than affirming any particular form of identity itself and trans politics has been deeply concerned with processes of transition or crossing at social, somatic and gender levels.

²³¹ For many, work around borders and prisons are part of the same struggle, as imprisonment for the purposes of criminal punishment and detention for the purpose of immigration control overlap significantly and are often managed and enforced through the same state and private security mechanisms.

²³² *No One Is Illegal* Canada has chapters in Montreal, Toronto, Ottawa and Vancouver and all have a strong queer presence in organizing. *No One Is Illegal* in Ottawa, for example, hosted a panel discussion on 'Queers in Radical Struggles' as part of the Ottawa's annual gay pride week activities, formed a *No One Is Illegal* contingent in the queer pride march, has issued statements about queer issues involving the police, organizes around issues of LGBT migrants and has links with queer groups. See: <http://noii-ottawa.blogspot.com/>. Similarly, references to queer and trans issues feature prominently in many statements and other. See for example the joint statement of *No One Is Illegal* Toronto, Ottawa, Vancouver and Montreal on the G8/G20 protests: <http://nooneisillegal-montreal.blogspot.com/2010/06/g20-toronto-no-fences-no-borders.html>

as *Queers for Economic Justice*²³³ and the *Audre Lorde Project*²³⁴ also explicitly prioritize issues of migration and border controls.²³⁵ Various loosely knit groups also organize broadly under the banner of *Queers Against Borders* and *Queers Without Borders*.²³⁶ Such groups not only bring a queer and trans perspective to issues of migration and border controls (and vice versa) but also call for ‘radical change’ rather than minor reforms (e.g. abolition of border controls and an end to immigration detention rather than changes to the detention/deportation process). Finally, the metaphors explored here extend across another set of borders, namely between the material and the conceptual. Activists take up rhetorical strategies that engage in conceptual border crossings whilst at the same time taking action strategies that address the material consequences of national border crossings. By considering both the conceptual and material dimensions of border crossings in tandem, my hope is that the emerging analysis will remain more attentive and accountable what is at stake—and what is possible—in relation to both.

Within Anglo American queer and trans literatures, border metaphors are not new. Much trans writing, for example, has described the literal and symbolic struggle of finding a bodily home, crossing from one identity to another, and experiencing gender exile (Hale 1998; Prosser 1998; Aizura 2006). Many writers have also drawn from Gloria Anzaldúa’s concept of the borderlands to describe gender ‘outlaws’ who

²³³ See: <http://q4ej.org/projects/immigration>;

²³⁴ See: <http://alp.org/>

²³⁵ There are several other grassroots LGBT groups in Canada that engage in important work on immigration issues including: the *Rainbow Refugee Action Network* (<http://rainbowrefugeecanada.wordpress.com>), *Arc en ciel D’Afrique* (African Rainbow) (<http://www.arcencielfdafrique.org>),²³⁵ the *Lesbian and Gay Immigration Task Force* (<http://www.legit.ca/>). However, because these groups are much more service-oriented in their mandate and reformist in their goals (i.e. they do not call for the same kinds of ‘radical’ transformation—like abolition of immigration detention or abolition of state border controls—I have not focussed on these groups here.

²³⁶ There are also queer groups working on border issues in the Israel/Palestine context, including *Queers Against Israeli Apartheid* (QAIA) in Toronto and *Queers Against Israeli Terrorism* (QUIT) in San Francisco. In many ways these groups are relevant to the discussion here as they are organized at the grassroots level, take a queer approach to issues not traditionally prioritized within LGBTQ politics, and have broadly transformative goals. Both groups have also raised interesting questions and debate about the use of analogy and metaphor (specifically around the term ‘Israeli Apartheid’ as noted above). However, I have not included these groups in my discussion here as the specific focus on Israel/Palestine is beyond the scope of my dissertation.

straddle the borders between male and female, masculine and feminine (Anzaldúa 1987). Grassroots activists—whether Queers Against Border activists, No One Is Illegal campaigners or refugee support workers—also take up border metaphors, albeit in different ways. Unlike the earlier border analogies, which used border concepts in largely symbolic and literary forms, queer and trans border activists increasingly make more direct connections between the violence of state borders and the violence of gender/sexuality borders. Below I consider four examples that make strategic use of metaphors in relation to questions of border crossing or regulation, three of which draw specific parallels between practices of border control and gender/sexuality regulation. As I try to demonstrate, however, the political-epistemological effects of each example are quite different. Each metaphor works to produce different orientations (of subjects, knowledge, objects) which ‘move meaning’ in different ways and with different political consequences.

a) Substituting victimhood

A transgender is like a refugee without citizenship. (Bird 2002)²³⁷

Though technically a simile, this statement functions in the same way as the substitution metaphor. The transgender person is deemed to stand in for the refugee; the experiences and associations of being a refugee (e.g. fearing persecution, being without home, denial of basic citizenship rights, restricted entry to particular spaces, and restricted freedom of movement) are transferred and attached to the experience of being transgender.

In several ways this metaphor ‘makes sense.’ Many trans people seek state recognition of their self-determined gender identity in order to access basic rights such as non-discrimination in employment, housing, health care and parental rights.

²³⁷ This comment was not drawn from my interviews with activists or from activist literature per se, but was published in a legal commentary on a marriage case involving a transsexual man in Australia. However, I have used it here as it is recited in several places, it encapsulates the kinds of claims that are sometimes made by trans activists, and it provides a useful contrast to the other examples that emerged in my research.

In this way, trans people literally seek some of the same citizenship rights that refugees seek through state recognition. Many trans people also describe and experience gender transitioning (or gender realignment) as a kind of 'crossing' or 'finding home', which may symbolically resonate with experiences of crossing formal boundaries or being literally without home. Queer and trans people in North America also experience homelessness at highly disproportionately rates, thus adding further parallels to the experience of being without home. In many instances, the policing of gender borders and the policing of state borders also intersect. Because many trans people's identity documents (i.e. passport, driver's licence, etc.) do not correspond with their self-expressed gender, border crossings which require proof of identity can result in harassment, assault and entry refusals. Moreover, trans people who are visibly marked as gender nonconforming are often subject to demands for proof of identity at other border locations. As Aren Aizura has described, 'For gender-variant bodies, the border at which identity documents are demanded might be located anywhere: in a public toilet, on the street, in a bank or a doctor's surgery' (2006, 290).

Though trans-border metaphors have facilitated rich and provocative analysis around the politics of transitioning, belonging, and embodiment, they also have their limits. First, such comparisons replicate the problem previously noted about asserting disaggregated identity norms; such comparison imply that being transgender and being a refugee are mutually exclusive experiences, thus denying the experiences of trans immigrants. Queer and trans immigrants have repeatedly spoken out against the erasure and marginalization of their experiences, both within (straight) immigrant advocacy groups and within mainstream non-immigrant LGBT groups (Audre Lorde Project 2006; Queers for Economic Justice 2009). As such, these substitution-based metaphors can work to obscure rather than draw linkages between migrant struggles and gender/sexuality-based oppression.

Second, the specific kinds of border crossing that (predominately white, non-migrant) trans activists often describe, usually differ dramatically in scope and scale

from the kinds of border crossings that economic migrants and refugees experience.

As Alex, a migrant justice activist, I interviewed stated:

I think the primary difference is that you are looking at a vastly different scale of regulation of bodies of people, right? You are talking about over half the world's population not being able to travel freely, not in the tourist sense, but in not being able to escape poverty or persecution, so it's a lot more stark reality . . . certainly there are issues of gender or sexual orientation being persecuted in a lot of different places . . . but when you have people within western Europe or North America talking about those policings in the same way, you aren't talking about death – I feel like it's a pretty poor comparison. (Interview #13)

The impact of a white middle class trans man, for example, being hassled at the airport when he attempts to go on holiday, for example, is considerably different from a (queer) refugee fleeing economic deprivation or military occupation, whose border crossing attempt may result in state detention or deportation. These differences cannot be easily divided into discrete categories that isolate gender borders from state borders, but reside firmly within broader structures of transnational capital, global migration, class mobility, war, poverty and gender/sexual violence. Yet each situation elicits considerably different social, economic and political consequences.

The failure to attend to such differences may arise in part from the selectiveness of trans border analogies. As noted above, metaphors involve only partial transfers of meaning, and in the case of trans border metaphors, the partiality often occurs at the expense of class and race analysis. Indeed many trans references to 'border crossings' and 'finding home' take place in isolation from larger border debates within postcolonial and migration struggles. Without attentiveness to these debates, white trans activists take border concepts and divest them of their relationship to nationhood, transnational capital flows, migration laws, and class mobility (Halberstam and Jagose 1999; Aizura 2006, 290). Moreover, as Aren Aizura points out, the politics of 'finding home' are often taken up by white trans activists in ways that not only institute domesticity and normativity as the privileged trajectory of citizenship, but also invoke heteronormative and homonormative notions of

nationhood in the process (2006, 290). Such talk of 'home' not only 'indexes the private sphere as the rightful place of politics, a certain fantasy-space in which difference is tamed through its submersive invisibility: behind closed doors' but also configures the quest for sexual and gendered rights as 'a quest for inclusion within the nation, circulated through an appeal to citizenship' (Aizura 2006, 295, 301).

Finally, claiming that a trans person is like a refugee exemplifies the risks of political appropriation, highlighted earlier. In this case, the primary attribute being claimed in the metaphor is victim status; the substitution-based metaphor is used to communicate one experience of pain and suffering through another. The comparison is made through a kind of 'me-too' identity politics, which declares (non-migrant) trans suffering as comparable to that of (non-trans) refugees.

But as Adi Kuntsman asks, 'What does it mean to communicate one injury through another, and who is entitled do this?' (Kuntsman 2008, 145). Here the location of those making such claims becomes significant, as some may be more entitled than others. Examining the claims of queer, Russian-speaking Jewish immigrants to Israel, who argue that the homophobic attacks they experience within their own communities are similar to experiences of anti-Semitism during the Holocaust, Kuntsman suggests that the viability of such claims are made possible through appeals to both a shared past and a collective sense of national belonging (2008, 140). As Kuntsman describes, the comparisons between the queer and Jewish victim constitute a kind of 'uncanny' doubleness, 'a form of connectedness and substitution that produces links between these two figures across history and generations' (2008, 137). Such comparisons not only suggest that both figures 'possess knowledge, feelings and experience in common with the other' but also bring forth the 'ghostly presence' of speaking for those who are not, and cannot, be there (Kuntsman 2008, 136, 137).

On the emotional level, [such comparison] serves as the best—or maybe even the only-way to communicate the injury of homophobia back to the imagined community of heterosexual immigrants. But at the same time, the substitution of homophobia by anti-Semitism is embedded in the Israeli national ethos that regards Jewish persecution as the greatest, most intolerable evil; as *that which must not happen*

again. Calling up the ghost of the Jewish victim marks homophobia as equally intolerable, and what is also important, equally dangerous. The political effects of this substitution are therefore complex ... they nationalise the injury of homophobia, claim the nation as a safe home, but also constitute Jewish victimhood as the universal marker of suffering. (Kuntsman 2008, 142, italics in original)

Unlike other frequently overused and often uncritical comparisons to the Holocaust, the capacity to make such claims with any legitimacy emerges from the presence of an already existing link, an appeal to a shared history and shared community. While the comparison may nonetheless suppress important differences between the two experiences, it is precisely this link, I would argue, that renders the comparison more than simple substitution; it is the connective relationship through past and present experiences which both resonate with, and link to, each figure. One's entitlement to claims of similarity may therefore rest in part on whether one already has a connection or link to that which one compares.

Of course, the question of who belongs to a given community or is deemed sufficiently 'worthy' of making particular claims is also subject to contestation. To make an over-simplified relationship between one's social location and one's entitlement to speak about particular issues also risks asserting problematic forms of identity essentialism. But at the same time, I would argue that particular claims can carry a different weight and take on a different meaning when spoken by particular people. For example, when family members of murder victims speak out against the death penalty, their voices can be much more powerful than others who might make similar statements (e.g. the family of the accused). David Szytbel makes a similar argument in his justification of comparisons between the treatment of animals and the treatment of European Jews during the Holocaust. Szytbel, who is himself the child of a Holocaust survivor, argues: 'The comparison between the Holocaust and the treatment of animals is especially dramatic when offered by culturally eminent Jews, or else actual Holocaust survivors' (Szytbel 2006).

But in such situations, particularly where the metaphoric choice is controversial, the subject position of those who *hear* the metaphor (or the intended audience to which a comment is directed) is as potentially important as the subject

position of the one who articulates it. So in the case of the claim that *'a transgender is like a refugee without citizenship'* the context of the claim matters. In this particular situation, the original statement was used within a legal case note about a marriage case in Australia and has no other explicit reference to refugee or immigration issues. However, this statement might have a different meaning if expressed by a trans child of refugees who was addressing a community of refugees. In such a situation, the position of both those who speak and those who hear the metaphor are potentially more linked to the issues at stake. At the same time, I do not wish to suggest that metaphors should never be made unless the speaker and/or hearer has some previous connection to both elements of the comparison; such a claim would both be unduly reductive and limit the very capacity for metaphors to 'move meaning' across different domains. Rather, what I want to argue is that the meanings generated by a given analogy or metaphor must be assessed within the specific context of their use; a metaphor may 'orient' or 'move meaning' differently, depending on who articulates it, who hears it and in what situation. This context is particularly important for distinguishing between analogies that are made in order to claim a common victim status and those that draw links or connections between different forms of oppression.

At a broader level, such appeals to victimhood may potentially feed into what Razack and Fellows (1998) describe as 'competing marginalities', whereby various groups assert that their suffering is equal to or worse than others as a means of claiming political legitimacy – a strategy that Razack and Fellows argue will inevitably fail. As others have argued elsewhere, such claims—which are ultimately invested in injury, victimhood and suffering—also have broader political limits, particularly in terms of the kind of political demands that can be made through such claims (Brown 1995). Such 'me too' recognition politics often translate into bids for inclusion within existing institutions of power, rather than challenging the relations of power that constitute those institutions. In this sense, such metaphors may orient us towards less transformative political goals and may hamper the capacity to think beyond established models or paradigms for political change. These broader problems

suggest the need to move away from victim-based substitution metaphors more generally, or perhaps a need to find alternative means and criteria for establishing legitimacy among groups seeking entitlements (see for example Cooper 2004).

b) Likening oppressions, linking resistances

'Any time we try to draw a clear boundary around gender we end up cutting somebody's flesh' [quoting genderqueer activist Emi Koyama].²³⁸ The imaginary lines that divide genders or sexualities do cut through us as queers. And the physical borders, which are also imagined at the first instance, that supposedly neatly divide nations also end up cutting through those individuals caught in between two or more places, rejected from one place, never quite fitting the next... So as a social worker, I can help someone try to fit into that second place. But when you have that personal experience of basically having your wholeness as a human challenged or sliced into, you realize that it's the borders themselves that need to shift. -Ziyah, Queer border activist and immigrant support worker (Interview #12)

On one reading, this comment draws a parallel between the regulation of state borders and the regulation of gender/sexuality borders. Drawing from her own experience of the ways that rigid gender/sexuality borders have 'cut through' her sense of 'wholeness as a human', Ziyah explains how she developed a critique of the way state borders also 'cut through bodies' and excise immigrants and refugees from the nation. In doing so, Ziyah partly appeals to a sense of shared humanity (and a desire for 'wholeness') that is grounded in the kind of universalist logic that allows one form of harm to be substituted by another. The similarity that is drawn, however, is not necessarily a standard substitution; the argument is focussed on the consequences of drawing borders (whether in relation to nation-states or genders—although neither are necessarily mutually exclusive in the comment), and highlights how a strategic move in one context may be strategically relevant in another (i.e. the challenging of borders themselves rather than simply offering support for those who

²³⁸ The original quote by Emi Koyama is from a roundtable discussion on the Michigan Women's Music Festival's gender policy. See Finkelstein et al. (2002).

experience the violence of borders). Here the power of the analogy lies less in the likening of two different oppressions and more in the linking of strategies of resistance.²³⁹ It is not that one is necessarily substituted for the other, but that both forms of violence are born from similar kinds of border logics and therefore might be challenged through similar tactics of resistance.

The directionality or 'orientation' of these comments is significant. Unlike the previous statement that 'a transgender is like a refugee without citizenship', which moves largely in one direction (i.e. from one experience of suffering to the other), Ziyah's analysis is more multidirectional; it moves back and forth between gender borders and state borders, addressing the linkages and relations between the two, rather than simply comparing or substituting them. But it also draws attention to the structural impact of border work, noting that borders are, in the first instance imagined, and therefore contestable, but also real in their material effects. There is also a movement between Ziyah's own experience as a queer person and the experience of the refugees and migrants she supports, as neither one nor the other is necessarily privileged; she remains attentive to both. But most importantly, the main point of the comment is around strategy; that regardless of what kinds of borders one is addressing, it is not enough to simply support those who cross boundaries; it is necessary to challenge the very structure of the borders themselves, particularly when those borders do violence both to those who cross them and those who are prevented from crossing.

Also striking about Ziyah's comment is her use of 'cutting' and 'slicing' metaphors. These metaphors draw attention to the ways that social dividing lines ('the imaginary lines that divide genders or sexualities') can be experienced in highly embodied ways. In this sense the metaphors challenge conventional divisions between the mind and body, in suggesting the anguish arising from imposed identity categories can be experienced as though one's flesh were literally being cut. The references to 'drawing lines' and 'imaginary lines' (of gender and sexuality but also of

²³⁹ For another interesting analysis of queer and migrant resistance see de Genova's comparison between the migrant slogan "¡Aquí Estamos, y No Nos Vamos!" [We are here, and we're not leaving] and the queer slogan "We're Here, We're Queer, Get Used to it!" (De Genova 2010).

nation states) also bring attention to the social nature of such divisions in the first place; these lines are not natural or inevitable but created, and therefore can be redrawn, undone or recreated. Although critiques around the socially and politically constructed nature of state borders, genders and sexualities have been made repeatedly by many scholars and activists alike, Ziyah's use of metaphors to encapsulate these critiques makes them potentially more accessible to a wider audience; one is not required to have a thorough understanding of feminist, queer or political theory to understand her point; the metaphors do the explanatory work.

At the same time, these metaphors around cutting and slicing might be contested. One might raise questions about the comparisons of scope and scale that were noted by Alex above. For those who experience the literal cutting of flesh in the assertion of particular somatic borders (e.g. intersex children for example, whose bodies may be surgically cut and altered to conform to particular norms around genital appearance), the analogy may seem inappropriate. Indeed, within the debates around whether transgender and transsexual identity should be distinguished, some have argued that it is important to recognise distinctions between those that undergo physical and medical interventions such as surgery and those who do not, because each have different levels of risk and different material consequences.²⁴⁰

Nevertheless, I would argue that what is most significant about Ziyah's comments is the way in which the metaphors 'orient' political meaning in particular ways. These orientations, I would argue, move in a direction that opens up space for more transformative epistemologies to emerge, because they move towards more fundamental change. While the capacity to support someone fitting into a particular place might seem like a more 'knowable' and achievable goal (and in this sense it could be understood as 'closer' on the political horizon), Ziyah makes it clear that such a position is inadequate. Her analysis urges us to look further along the political

²⁴⁰ At the same these distinctions have also been contested on the grounds that many people are not in a position to access such medical interventions (both because they are usually very expensive, and when surgery is funded by the government it is usually an extremely slow and bureaucratic process to get approved) and many deliberately do not choose such interventions.

horizon to something which might not seem as easily within reach (or might even seem utopian) but is nonetheless crucial in addressing the social harms at stake. In doing so, I would argue the metaphor not only moves meaning across the particular borders of gender, sexuality and nationality that are invoked in her comments, but invites her listener to move understanding to a place that might seem more challenging, fraught and difficult, but is also more necessary and urgent.

c) Analogies under erasure

Why is it such a 'crime' for a man to wear a dress? It doesn't need to be an actual crime for it to be somewhat enforced—not officially, but socially. Why do people feel threatened when those boundaries are crossed? Similarly, why do people feel so threatened about non-citizens coming over the national boundary illegally?

. . . I'm arguing here that people who cross gender borders and people who cross national borders (specifically those who cross national borders into a first world country from a non-first world country, and more specifically crossing from Mexico into the US) have a common struggle. The two cannot be equated, because there are many limits to the comparison, but there are various parallels between the two struggles.

We're talking about divisions created between people so as to keep power, wealth, and privilege in the hands of certain people. The rules and regulations, and the shape those borders take, do not always match up in the different manifestations of the bordered divisions . . . We mustn't forget the overlap that occurs here as well. There are national-border crossers who are also gender-border crossers. We can't really separate these two issues, because for so many people, they are intimately related. – Workshop text titled 'Gender Borders and National Borders', posted on Delete the Border Website (2007)

The analogies drawn here are made cautiously and tenuously. Each time a comparison or connection is made, a caveat or slight undoing of that connection is also expressed. For example, the author argues that those who cross gender borders and those who cross national borders share a common struggle, but then quickly asserts that the two cannot be equated. Further comparisons are made, followed by

another caveat: 'we mustn't forget the overlap that occurs here as well.' It is as though the connections are made and then undone, or 'put under erasure' to borrow from Derrida (1976/1997). The result of such erasures is a set of claims that make tentative links, but do so with mindfulness of the potential dangers that arise from overstated metaphors and overdrawn analogies. The effect is also one of ongoing movement—a statement that moves in one direction then folds back over itself; another direction is taken, with yet a further return, a going over of already worn ground and a making of new pathways at the same time. It is this kind of multi-directionality, and the formulation of multiple connections that can be highly generative. What is clear in the comments (and the larger text as a whole) is a deliberate effort to focus on the multiple, multi-layered and interconnected borders of gender, state, labour, migration that require attention and struggle.

As argued above, there are significant distinctions between metaphors that compare two things (in this case, gender borders and state borders) in order to mobilize around one or the other, and those which are made in order to link them as a strategy and to mobilize around both issues together. In this example, as the full text of this workshop makes clear, there is a clear intention to make non-migrant queer and trans activists more aware of the relevance of border issues for queer and trans people, and to make non-queer, non-trans migrant activists more aware of the issues of queer migrants. In this way, the strategic use of metaphors invoked in the workshop (and the overall workshop itself) reflects a conscious effort to link and connect, rather than liken and substitute. In doing so, the workshop seeks to 'reorient' queer politics away from the issues that have preoccupied more racially and class privileged people in LGBT struggles (especially white middle class gays and lesbians) and towards issues that are faced by those who are more often marginalised within official representations of queer and trans struggles (i.e. migrants, prisoners, queer and trans people of colour, those from low income communities, etc.). In engaging in such 'reorienting' endeavours, queers work to make space for new perspectives, strategies and knowledges that otherwise might remain invisible, silenced or subjugated.

The analogies in this passage 'open' thinking spaces through the combined effects of several different strategies. First, the analogies between gender borders and national borders are initially expressed through a set of open-ended questions rather than closed statements, questions that invite reflection and contemplation. In this way the metaphors are used to foster new thinking space and openings for understanding. Second, the key point of comparison in these initial questions is less focussed on the harm and suffering experienced by those who defy borders, but on the reactions of those who uphold them or are threatened by their disruption. In asking why are people so threatened by both the crossing of gender borders and the crossing of state borders, the workshop seeks to unpack how particular norms (or reactions that sustain norms) are normalised or naturalised. Likewise the next point of comparison is the 'shared struggle' between those who cross gender borders and those who cross national borders (a commonality that is subject to the caveats noted above) but again one that is focussed on resistance and struggle rather than victimization or shared suffering. Third, the analysis remains attentive to questions of power and privilege. By specifying, for example, a focus on 'those who cross national borders into a first world country from a non-first world country', the workshop text draws attention to the fact that not all border crossings have the same meaning; some border crossings are more threatening than others. Likewise, the final point of comparison is focussed on the intentions behind, and effects of, drawing gender borders and state borders. By arguing that both gender borders and state borders create divisions that 'keep power, wealth and privilege in the hands of certain people,' but that there are 'different manifestations of the bordered divisions', the author is not suggesting that the borders create the same divisions or the same effects, but that both are about retaining hierarchies of power and privilege that warrant intervention and challenge. In this sense, the ultimate 'orienting work' of the analogies in this passage is to direct attention to questions of power, not only to denaturalise particular boundaries which produce hierarchies of power, but to open up possibilities to intervene, challenge and change them.

d) Reverse analogies and delinking metaphors

As a final example, I consider a set of analogies that work not only through linking or likening, but also through de-linking and disassociating. In January 2011, responding to a wave of legal and policy reforms designed to increase immigration controls and target 'human traffickers', No One Is Illegal Vancouver released a set of posters titled 'I am a Human Smuggler'. One poster depicts a black and white image of Harriet Tubman accompanied by the following text:

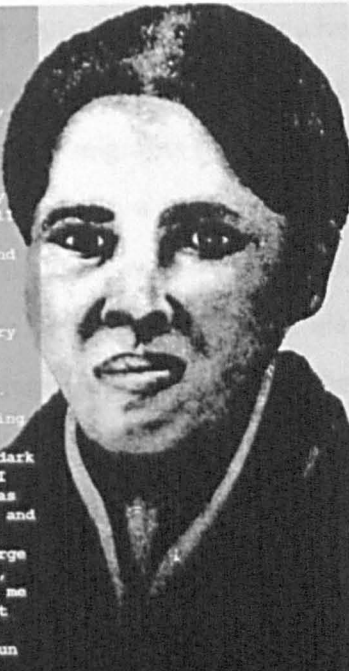
My name is Harriet Tubman. Some people call me 'Moses'. I was born into slavery in Maryland. In 1849 I escaped to Philadelphia, then returned to rescue my family. Slowly, for 11 years, I brought relatives with me, and guided more than 70 other slaves to freedom using the network of antislavery activists and safe houses known as the Underground Railroad. I usually worked during the winter when the nights are long and dark and used disguises. I helped guide people as far north as Canada, and helped newly freed slaves find work. Large rewards were offered, but no one suspected me as a petite five foot tall slave with a disability who had run away years before. (No One Is Illegal 2011)

In large bold letters under the image is the simple statement: 'I am a human smuggler'. Underneath the caption, smaller text states: 'Criminalising smuggling and trafficking cannot prevent the migration of those seeking safety and freedom. Reject anti-smuggling and anti-trafficking legislation' (see Figure 3).

The second poster, similarly styled, depicts Irena Sender accompanied by the following text:

My name is Irena Sendler. I was a Polish Catholic Social worker in German-occupied Warsaw during WWII. In December 1942, the newly created Zegota (the Council to Aid Jews) nominated me to head its children's section. Under the pretext of conducting sanitary inspections during a typhoid outbreak, I visited the Warsaw Ghetto and smuggled out Jewish children in boxes, suitcases, trolleys and trams. I used the old courthouse as one of the main routes for smuggling out children. I provided false documents and shelter in individual and groups homes. I saved 2,500 Jewish children. (No One Is Illegal 2011)

The text and image are captioned with the same 'I am a human smuggler' title and accompanied by the same text about criminalising smuggling and trafficking (see Figure 4).



My name is Harriet Tubman. Some people call me "Moses". I was born into slavery in Maryland.

In 1849 I escaped to Philadelphia, then returned to rescue my family. Slowly, for 11 years, I brought relatives with me, and guided more than 70 other slaves to freedom using the network of antislavery activists and safe houses known as the Underground Railroad.


I usually worked during the winter when the nights are long and dark and used disguises. I helped guide people as far north as Canada, and helped newly freed slaves find work. Large rewards were offered, but no one suspected me as a petite five foot tall slave with a disability who had run away years before.

I am a human smuggler

Criminalizing smuggling and trafficking cannot prevent the migration of those seeking safety and freedom. Reject anti-smuggling and anti-trafficking legislation.

nooneisillegal.org

Figure 3



My name is Irena Sendler. I was a Polish Catholic Social Worker in German-occupied Warsaw during WWII.

In December 1942, the newly created Żegota (the Council to Aid Jews) nominated me to head its children's section. Under the pretext of conducting sanitary inspections during a typhoid outbreak, I visited the Warsaw Ghetto and smuggled out Jewish babies and small children in boxes, suitcases, trolleys, and trams.

I used the old courthouse as one of the main routes for smuggling out children. I provided false documents and shelter in individual and group homes. I saved 2,500 Jewish children.

I am a human smuggler

Criminalizing smuggling and trafficking cannot prevent the migration of those seeking safety and freedom. Reject anti-smuggling and anti-trafficking legislation.

nooneisillegal.org

Figure 4

Within the contemporary political context where concerns about human trafficking are increasingly used to strengthen border controls and criminalise undocumented migrants (Kempadoo 2005; Koyama 2011; Davidson 2006), these posters mark a strategic attempt to intervene in the 'common sense' discourses around human smuggling and trafficking.²⁴¹ Given that those who facilitate

²⁴¹ In this sense, we might also read the posters as taking up 'strategic knowledge moves' in the Foucauldian sense of 'games of truth' discussed in Chapter Three. For in many ways, the posters speak an alternative truth, or contest common sense truths that are prevalent within the mainstream trafficking discourses.

undocumented migration networks are regularly portrayed in corporate media as unscrupulous, exploitative and criminal figures (particularly when contrasted with 'innocent victims' of trafficking), these posters challenge these representations and make a bold critique of anti-trafficking/anti-immigration discourse more broadly. Such critiques not only challenge those who take fiercely anti-immigration views, but also contest the logic of those who support anti-trafficking legislation in the name of 'protecting' or 'saving' migrants from victimization.

Although the 'I am a human smuggler' posters do not specifically reference issues around sexuality, I would argue that there is something nonetheless 'queer' about them. In the same way that queer was previously used as a term of denigration and (like many other negative labels) has been positively reclaimed, the term 'human smuggler' is also being re-appropriated. A term that is generally associated with negative characteristics (criminality, exploitation, abuse) is re-associated with positive characteristics (liberation, survival and resistance). In the processes of making these disassociations and re-associations, the posters effectively enact a kind of queer critique – a disruption of norms deemed to belong to a particular subject/identity position, and embrace of dissident or non-normative subjectivities, and an intervention in the power relations that justify logics of social control and regulation.

On one level, these posters can be interpreted as substitution-typed metaphors: the contemporary criminalised figure of the 'human smuggler' is replaced with the historic figures of Tubman and Sandler, who could be characterised as 'human liberationists' or 'resistant smugglers'. In this way, one figure is meant to stand in for the other in order to assert a relationship of commonality. Here we might question what it means to compare situations that are marked by significantly different times and places. What does it mean, for example, to compare the circumstances of those fleeing slavery or death camps in the past from those fleeing war, poverty or other forms of persecution in the present? How are these examples similar and how are they different? Yet the substitution in these posters differs somewhat from the technique used in the transgender/refugee analogy or the same-

sex marriage/racial segregation metaphor. Unlike analogies and metaphors that emphasise the similarities of two things in order to emphasise the negativity or injustice of both, the human smuggler posters effectively take something that is assumed to be negative (human smuggling) and reasserts it as something positive (resistance). I would argue these posters thus work a kind of 'reverse analogy' or 'disconnecting metaphor' as they are trying to replace something negative with something positive, in order to disrupt or disconnect the 'common sense' associations of the former. In this sense, the re-signification of 'human smuggler' figure facilitates a process of linking and de-linking.

I would also suggest that it is not coincidental that No One Is Illegal chose to depict women as powerful examples of resistant smuggling. In a political context where women are often seen as the exemplary victims of 'human trafficking' (and as figures who need to be rescued by the state), the posters offer counter-examples of women who did not need to be 'saved' but were involved in 'saving' themselves (in the case of Tubman) and others (in the case of both Tubman and Sendler). Of course, this is not to deny the suffering and injustice that they also endured— as Tubman's narrative on the poster indicates, she herself fled from slavery (and although not noted on the poster narrative, Sendler was tortured and punished for her actions). But in positioning both women as figures of resistance (particularly in emphasising Tubman as a figure who was unsuspected due to her 'small stature' and her status as a women), the poster invites its audience to recognise the agency of those conventionally read as victims and to look for resistance in potentially unexpected places.

In contrast to analogies that compare suffering, the 'I am a human smuggler' posters emphasize resistance. In their commentary of the posters, No One Is Illegal states:

We affirm human smuggling as an often necessary pathway to protection and freedom. Human smuggling exists as a symptom in a broader context of increasing border controls, repressive immigration policies, and racist security processes that cast migrants as undesirable human cargo.

We also reject anti-trafficking legislation that perpetuates exploitation of women and children through policies of detention and deportation. In actuality, the state is the biggest culprit in the trafficking of humans – importing hundreds of thousands of exploitable migrant labour to the fields and homes of Canadians to toil under conditions of servitude and legally denying them basic rights.

Rather than despair, historic resistance from within the walls of detention centres to human underground railroads has inspired us to create a poster series ‘I am a human smuggler.’ (No One Is Illegal 2011)

No doubt the suggestion that smuggling is a necessary pathway to protection and freedom, can work to romanticize the countries (like Canada) where refugees seek shelter. However, the subsequent analysis, which acknowledges the exploitative use of migrant labour in Canada, works to counteract this (much like the analogies under erasure described below). Moreover, by comparing these historic and contemporary acts of resistance, the posters not only work to recast criminalised behaviour as vital acts of survival, but offer these examples as potential inspiration for, and recognition of, resistance to border controls more widely.

Of course, there are no doubt individuals who exploit and profit from the contemporary underground networks of undocumented border crossing, in contrast to figures like Tubman or Sendler.²⁴² But the posters do not necessarily deny this possibility so much as they question presumptions that human smuggling is inherently wrong and should be criminalised.²⁴³ Hence the posters take a deliberately provocative position, intentionally trying to disrupt or challenge these norms. In this sense, these metaphors used here can be understood as ‘disorienting’ or ‘reorienting’ devices in so far as they aim to disrupt the mainstream framing of the

²⁴² Sendler is recognised as one of the “Righteous Among Nations” at Yad Vashem (see: http://www1.yadvashem.org/righteous_new/poland/sendler.html), and one of the criteria for receiving this honour is that assistance or support given to Jews was made without expectation or receipt of financial reward or personal gain.

²⁴³ Indeed, I would argue that it is significant that the posters use the phrase ‘I am a human smuggler’ rather than ‘I am a human trafficker’, as the former term has more associations with subversive political tendencies, whereas the latter has connotations with larger scale trade operations, profit-making and business deals.

debates and create space for questioning the very terms of discussion. In doing so, the posters arguably create space for alternative ways of thinking about issues of migration and border controls.

Conclusion

This chapter has explored some of the political possibilities and limitations of analogy and metaphor work, particularly in relation to examples from queer and trans politics. I have argued that the use of analogy and metaphor matters politically, not only because of the material and symbolic consequences of making links and comparisons, but also because analogies and metaphors can operate as 'orientation devices' that shift or reassert particular modes of thinking and knowing. I have also suggested that there are important political differences between analogies and metaphors that function primarily through linking or connecting and those that function through likening or substitution.

While recognizing that such distinctions can never be fully demarcated (and acknowledging that in privileging one over another, I have asserted a framework that itself 'orients' analysis in a particular way with particular effects, some which are no doubt limited), I have nonetheless attempted to tease out some differences in order to consider analogy and metaphor as specific sites in which transformative knowledge practices might occur. This focus arose from an interest in the ways that metaphoric and analogical practice, by associating things not conventionally understood in relation to each other, might open up space for alternative forms of knowing and understanding to emerge. But if, as I have argued above, there is nothing inherently 'progressive' or 'conservative' about metaphoric and analogical form, and such distinctions depend on context, directionality and deployment, then how can we draw meaningful conclusions about the political use of analogy and metaphor more broadly? How might analogy and metaphor be deployed to best draw out its transformative potential? What might a queer, critical, transformative politics of analogy and metaphor entail?

While these questions do not have easy answers, I offer some tentative thoughts for establishing a critical approach to metaphoric and analogical work. First, a critical, transformative politics of analogy and metaphor requires a recognition that metaphoric meaning never remains within the author's control. A careful attempt to articulate a nuanced and critically-expressed *linking* metaphor, can be easily (re)interpreted and subsequently (re)articulated as a *likening* metaphor.²⁴⁴ Particularly if we take seriously Black's assertion that analogies and metaphors are interactive, then the association of one thing with another, will impact the meaning and relationship of both. So despite one's efforts to highlight important distinctions between one and another in usage, the very decision to associate two things inevitably may link them in ways that exceed an author's intended meaning.²⁴⁵

Second, transformative metaphoric work demands an explicit attentiveness to the conditions that produce particular metaphoric and analogical choices, the location of those who make the analogy or metaphor, and the effects that are generated by metaphoric or analogical deployments. It matters who makes particular analogies and metaphors and why. It also matters who is the audience of that metaphor and how that metaphor is situated within the broader debates within that context. Without such attentiveness, analogies and metaphors that aim to challenge or reconfigure particular relations of power may instead work to reproduce them.

Third, a transformative politics of analogy and metaphor might be one that is willing to refuse particular analogies and metaphors altogether. Some activists (including several that I interviewed) explicitly resist making analogies between

²⁴⁴ For example, I recall reading a callout made by Queers Against Borders UK for a workshop entitled 'Moving Genders' which was held at the No Borders Camp at Gatwick Airport in September 2007. The purpose of the workshop was to host 'An open discussion on the relationship between national borders, gender and sexuality. Or, how any challenge to one requires a challenge to the other.' In telling a friend about the workshop, I remember describing the workshop as one that would discuss the similarities between the regulation of gender borders and national borders. In the process of 'translating' the callout to my friend, I enacted precisely the kind of substitution based metaphor that I have critiqued above, a short hand that did not actually reflect the actual callout, which was expressed in far more nuanced and relational terms. In my mind, the association between the two somehow morphed into a substitution, even though the actual text of the callout did not do so.

²⁴⁵ See also Sara Ahmed's (2011) work on 'Problematic Proximities' where she argues that sometimes just placing two things in proximity with each other (without directly comparing or substituting them) can nevertheless generate troublesome effects.

gender borders and state borders, for the very reason that they are politically limited and unable to convey the specificities, links or nuances of the issues at stake. Instead, these activists opt to explain their analysis through less metaphorical language and through more direct explanation.²⁴⁶ Moving away from analogies and metaphors and speaking more directly about issues may mean not being able to express political ideas in easy slogans or quick sound-bites, but may allow ideas to be conveyed in more politically sophisticated and accurate ways.

Finally and most importantly, transformative politics of analogy and metaphor must remain attentive to questions of power. Questions need to be posed around who benefits from particular metaphoric choices and who does not? How do broader political effects (and orientations) of political analogies have an impact on the capacity for particular groups to have their claims heard or to organize around issues that may be already marginalised or excluded? What are the broad political-epistemological effects of analogic and metaphoric choices?

Such a politics might prioritise metaphors that 'disorient' and 'reorient' in ways that create space for new knowledge and new understandings of the world to emerge. This would involve an intentional effort to pursue analogies and metaphors that disrupt conventional modes of thinking or reorient attention to structures of power that are ignored or normalised. At the same time, as Sara Ahmed cautions, we must be wary of queer politics that would romanticize 'disorientation' as necessarily radical, or assume that deviation is always on the side of the progressive or transformative. As Ahmed notes

²⁴⁶ See for example, the document entitled 'Queers and Immigration: A Visionary Statement,' which was written by Queers for Economic Justice and endorsed by more than 50 organizations. The statement moves away from metaphoric comparisons between gender borders and state borders, and instead reframes the discussions to put queer migrant people at the centre of analysis. As they note, even though LGBTQ rights and immigration are both among the most divisive and contentious issues in the US, 'There is little discussion of how immigration is also an issue for queer people, and even less analysis of the structural similarities between queer and immigrant struggles . . . The immigrant advocacy movement places undue emphasis on heteronormative relationships and conceptions of normality in an effort to gain basic citizenship rights. The mainstream LGBTQ rights movement tends to focus on those immigrants who are partners of US citizens. This leaves out the predicament of, for instance, single people and/or those who do not define themselves within conventional relationships like marriage or conjugality. Both movements are depriving themselves of the power and strategic insights that LGBTQ immigrants can provide' (Queers For Economic Justice 2008).

Bodies that experience disorientation can be defensive, as they reach out for support or as they search for a place to reground and reorient their relation to the world. So, too, the forms of politics that proceed from disorientation can be conservative, depending on the 'aims' of their gestures, depending on how they seek to (re)ground themselves. (Ahmed 2007a, 158)

Likewise, efforts to 'enforce' deviance can become yet another form of disciplinary regulation. Bodies which are already disoriented, particularly those whose disorientations stem from experiences of oppression and violence, may also need support in becoming (re)oriented rather than more disoriented. So the question of who is disoriented and why also becomes crucial (Ahmed 2007a, 160).

Ultimately, whatever analogical, metaphoric or other rhetorical devices are used strategically to 'move meaning' and 'shift understanding', their capacity to enact transformative epistemologies will only ever be partial. Not only do critical articulators of analogies and metaphors require critical readers, but the conditions in which particular metaphors themselves become possible is subject to the broader political-epistemological landscape in which they are situated. So in considering the political-epistemological work of analogy and metaphor in this chapter, I do not wish to overstate their transformative power. Capacities to think and know differently and possibilities for acting and being differently ultimately cannot be separated. So the work of thinking and knowing the world differently in order to create alternative possibilities is also be the work of acting and being in the world differently. As such there is ongoing need for strategies that foster critical openness, reflexivity and possibility in thought and action, in knowing and being, and as I will suggest in the conclusion, in understanding and becoming.

Chapter 8

CONCLUSION:

Emergent Possibilities and Future Transformations

At the heart of this project has been a broad concern about the relationship between social movements, knowledge production and political change. Starting from an assumption that knowledge does not simply represent the world but also works to constitute it, this thesis has sought to understand the role of social movement knowledge practices in shaping the conditions of political possibility. It has questioned the processes through which knowing practices shift and change, focussing particularly on those that give way for new political possibilities to emerge. Inspired by social movements that insist there are viable alternatives to current modes of social, political and economic organization, this thesis has examined the role that knowledge practices play in creating space for such alternatives.

In each of the preceding chapters, I have considered different ways of understanding the conditions, processes and politics of *knowing otherwise*. That is, I have sought to conceptualise various means through which individual and collective knowers come to understand the world in new and different ways. Focussing specifically on what I call *transformative epistemologies* and *epistemological transformations*, I have examined processes that not only disrupt or challenge more conventional practices of knowing but also enable broader forms of political change to occur. In this way, I have considered processes through which knowledge practices give rise to new horizons for thought and action.

Each substantive chapter has examined processes of *epistemological transformation* through a different concept and set of relationships. These concepts—*resistance, experience, co-optation, solidarity and analogy*—were chosen both for their relevance to the more abstract questions that underpin this thesis, but also as terms that have political significance within social movement contexts. These

concepts are central to many activist projects yet nonetheless pose ongoing dilemmas in their deployment. So while the analysis in this thesis has been primarily methodological rather than empirical (i.e. I use concepts as tools to explore different ways of understanding epistemological transformation rather than offering a historical or genealogical account of a particular epistemological shift), the project was nevertheless empirically driven. Indeed, because the project was motivated both by activist struggles around specific material problems (e.g. prisons, borders, globalization) and by activist concerns around particular strategic dilemmas (e.g. solidarity work, problems of co-optation, rhetorical strategies, etc.), my analysis has relied heavily on examples from these organizing contexts.

Seeking to better understand the processes, conditions and politics of epistemological transformation, the thesis has explored questions in four main areas: (1) how to conceptualise processes of epistemological change in social movement contexts; (2) how to understand the interface between material and conceptual dimensions of knowledge in processes of epistemological change; (3) how to understand the role of knowledge relationships or *knowing relations* in generating space for social and political possibilities and (4) how to understand what is politically at stake in the various strategies that social movements use to challenge dominant forms of knowledge.

In responding to these questions, my analysis has explored four overlapping themes. Namely, this thesis has explored questions of *movement*, *connection*, *materiality* and *power* in processes of epistemological change. In this final chapter, I will revisit the arguments of the preceding chapters through the lens of these four themes. These themes generate further questions, which, like the overarching questions that motivate this project, are not easily resolved. As such, my purpose in this final chapter is not to provide definitive answers or conclusions, but to reflect on how my thinking has changed in the process of undertaking this project. Indeed, I have come to see the themes developed in this thesis less as answers to the questions originally posed and more as analytic tools or focus-points that might guide empirical analyses of epistemological transformation in other contexts. Before

reviewing the themes, however, I will briefly summarize the main points of each substantive chapter in order to retrace how my thinking has unfolded through the development of the thesis.

After setting out the background context, key terms and main themes in Chapter One, Chapter Two examined the relationship between social movements and knowledge production. Arguing that the existing literature on social movements tends to treat knowledge as an object or resource rather than a social practice, I argued for greater attentiveness to *processes* of knowledge production within social movements contexts. Seeking a more dynamic account, Chapter Two considered what the concept of 'transformation' offers for understanding processes of epistemological change. I suggested that 'transformative epistemologies' and 'epistemological transformation' are useful concepts for understanding knowledge practices that not only challenge dominant forms of knowing but also reconfigure relations of power.

Turning to questions of power in more detail, Chapter Three explored the relationship between power, resistance and knowledge production. Revisiting Foucault's work on power/knowledge, this chapter considered resistance as a mode of epistemological agency within social movement contexts. But rather than examining resistance in the conventional sense of an oppositional force moving against power, I considered resistance as an epistemological relation; I asked whether resistance has a specific generative capacity in processes of knowledge production. Arguing, however, that power and resistance are relational forces, rather than oppositional entities (i.e. they are constituted by and through each other, rather than being distinct entities which conflict when in contact), I suggested that a focus on the generative potential of resistance is not analytically fruitful. Instead, I suggested that the productive capacity of resistance is best examined by tracing how specific power-knowledge relations unfold in particular contexts, and by tracing the epistemological effects that such relations generate.

Seeking to ground my analysis in more material and embodied knowledge practices, Chapter Four explored the role of experience in processes of

epistemological transformation. This chapter stemmed partly from a desire to understand what makes some experiences transformative and others not, but also from a set of ongoing dilemmas around the political use of ‘experience’ within activist contexts. Recognising both the importance of experiential knowledge as a tool within social movement struggles, yet also being aware of its risks and misuses, I sought to understand the significance of experience in processes of epistemological transformation. I argued that while experience should not be treated as a foundational category of knowledge, the political significance of embodied and experientially marked knowledge practices nonetheless remains strategically important for transformative political narratives.

After initially exploring processes that generate new possibilities of knowing, Chapter Five turned to processes that block, constrain or limit such possibilities. More specifically, I examined the epistemological effects of co-optation within social movement contexts. Arguing that the concept of co-optation tends to invoke conservative, static and binary understandings of knowledge-power relations, I suggested that ‘hegemonic entanglements’ might be more fruitful for understanding the dynamism of epistemological change. I suggested that examining how knowledge practices are entangled with one another can facilitate a greater awareness and a more dynamic account of the ongoing risks, dangers and possibilities of strategic knowledge moves. Tracing these entanglements, I argued, also avoids the problematic desire for purist politics—without watering down or de-radicalising political goals.

In the remaining substantive chapters, I considered two empirical sites of knowledge production within social movements. Chapter Six explored the epistemological dimensions of prisoner solidarity practices. Drawing from interviews with queer and trans prison activists in Canada, I argued that while solidarity is often understood as an ontological bond of commonality or unity, the transformative potential of such practices lies more in solidarity’s epistemological dimensions. Attending to the tensions between ‘resonant’ and ‘dissonant’ knowledges that arise within relationships of solidarity, I argued that such tensions can create space for

subjugated knowledges to emerge, facilitate openings for reflexive politics, and foster greater accountability among differently-situated subjects.

Moving from prison activism to border activism, Chapter Seven explored the political effects of border activists' strategic deployments of metaphor and analogy. I considered the ways in which activist deployments of metaphor can sometimes work to reinforce, and sometimes to transform, dominant relations of power. Making a distinction between metaphors and analogies that operate primarily through linking or connection and those that primarily operate through likening or substitution, I argued that the former may offer more transformative potential as a strategic knowledge practice.

Taken together, the chapters collectively explore several distinct yet but interlinked themes. First, in seeking to better conceptualise and understand processes of epistemological change, this project has considered epistemological transformation as processes of movement. As noted in the introduction, the dynamism and complexity of processes of change are difficult to encapsulate in thought and language. Because language tends to pin things down in static units of analysis, it is challenging to convey *how* change happens in more process-oriented ways. Taking up that challenge, I have sought to better conceptualise the ways that epistemological changes unfold, particularly in the context of social movement struggles.

Recognising the fluidity, dynamism and ever-changing character of all knowledge practices, I have considered different kinds of knowledge movement, including processes that move meaning; practices that shift relationships between knowers, and strategies that reconfigure knowledge-power relations. Chapter Six considered the movement of knowledge across prison walls and argued that these movements can be epistemologically generative. Tracing the oscillations between 'resonant' and 'dissonant' forms of knowledge, I explored how such ongoing movements can prompt a critical rethinking of one's sense of self and sense of others. Similarly, in Chapter Seven, I considered how moving meaning across

boundaries—from one context to another through the use of analogy and metaphor—can potentially generate new forms of new modes of understanding.

In thinking about processes of epistemological change as practices of movement, I have endeavoured to capture the dynamism of epistemological change (i.e. the ways that knowledge practices are constantly in flux), without obscuring the contextual specificity of those changes (i.e. the particular and localised ways that such movements take place). Moreover, because this project emerged from a specific interest in social movement efforts to generate space for new political possibilities, I have emphasised the broader political effects of such knowledge movements. In particular, I have highlighted the political importance of direction and orientation. As my analysis of linking and likening metaphors in Chapter Seven demonstrated, the navigational force of knowledge movements works to focus attention, shape awareness and direct understanding in politically significant ways.

A second theme relates to changes in knowledge relationships, or what I called *knowing relations*. Processes of epistemological transformation, I argued, can be understood as changing relationships of connection and disconnection. For if knowledge practices operate by moving meaning and reorienting understanding, they also work to alter relationships among and between knowers and knowledges. When considering the movement of knowledge across prison walls in Chapter Six, for example, I argued that these movements are important not because they are forms of ‘knowledge exchange’ (i.e. the transfer of a knowledge object from one place to another), but because these movements work to work to reconfigure the knowing relationships between differently situated subjects.

In focussing on knowledge movements and knowing relations, I have sought to avoid binary logics that offer more static and deterministic explanation of epistemological change. Chapter Three, for example, problematized approaches that divide knowledge into powerful and resistant blocks (or hegemonic and counter hegemonic ones), which compete against each other for legitimacy. Rejecting these binaries, however, did not mean denying the uneven and unequal character of knowledge-power relations. Rather, by attending to the fluidity, complexity, and

instability of such relations, I sought to explore the possibilities for change that arise even in circumstances where power relations are grossly uneven. Indeed, as discussed in Chapter Six, the different structural positionings of activists (such as those inside and outside prison) create constant challenges for negotiating relationships of knowing. Likewise in Chapter Five, I argued that co-optation is a limited tool for thinking about processes which block, assimilate or appropriate transformative knowledge practices because it asserts a false opposition between 'pure' and 'tainted' knowledges. Drawing from Tim Ingold's (2007; 2008) work on 'the line as movement' rather than boundary, Chapter Five suggested that tracing lines of entanglement offers a better way of understanding how knowledge practices are restricted or redirected in their enactments.

A third recurring theme is the role of power in processes of epistemological transformation. As set out in the introduction and developed in Chapter Three, this thesis began with the Foucauldian assumption that practices of knowing are deeply entwined with relations of power. Recognising the power-knowledge nexus, however, does not necessarily explain how power relations play out in processes of epistemological change. Hence a key task in this thesis has been to trace the operation of power relations in specific processes of epistemological change. Exploring the tensions between power as a restrictive and enabling force, I have sought to grapple with the problem of agency in knowledge-power relationships. Chapter Five, for example, considered the problem of co-optation within social movements within a specifically epistemological register, in order to rethink how power-knowledge relations operate in practices that constrain, limit and subvert strategies of political transformation. Likewise, in Chapter Six, I considered the complexities of power-knowledge relations that arise in prison solidarity work, and argued that these complexities can play out in several different, albeit overlapping ways. Of course, as discussed in Chapter Three, power is itself always moving in the sense that it is a relation rather than an entity, an enabling force rather than an object to be possessed. As such, the knowledge-power nexus is constantly in flux, and therefore difficult to tease out and trace.

A fourth theme relates to questions around the interface of the 'material' and the 'conceptual' in processes of epistemological transformation. For if knowledge is more than a set of ideas *about* the world, but is also a practice that *intervenes* in that world, then processes of epistemological change encompass both material and conceptual dimensions. But because the relationship between the 'material' and the 'conceptual' is exceedingly fraught, the role of this relationship in questions of epistemological change is difficult to determine. Without claiming to resolve this dilemma, this project has nonetheless sought to better understand how concepts move through the material world and how the material world moves through concepts.

In Chapter Four, for example, I grappled with the problem of experience as both material phenomenon and as conceptual framework. Negotiating the tensions between experience as a sensuous, embodied, and materially grounded phenomena, and experience as a narrative practice, I argued that it is impossible to determine where the 'sensory' (i.e. material) and 'interpretive' (i.e. conceptual) dimensions of experience begin and end. These tensions pose a challenge for understanding processes of epistemological change because it is unclear whether transformation requires a change in the material circumstance of experience or a shift in the conceptual frameworks through which we come to know 'experience'—or both. At the same time, the inability to resolve this tension does not require an abandonment of political appeals to 'experiential knowledge'. Rather, it means that what we identify as experience—and how we deploy experiential knowledge claims—must be always subject to scrutiny, albeit in ethical and self-reflective ways.

In negotiating the material and conceptual dimensions of epistemological change, this project has resisted approaches that treat knowledge as a pure representation of reality on the one hand, or the brute constructor of reality on the other. I have also argued that knowing processes are more than just interpretive processes that differ according to vantage point. Instead, I have examined how knowing practices emerge from particular material conditions, but also organise, direct and orient our thinking and acting in ways that generate material effects. In

this sense I have sought to move beyond questions of perspective and consider knowledge practices as much more interventionist and material. For the problem with perspectival approaches is that the object of perspective (e.g. 'reality') is often taken for granted. As discussed in Chapter Two, this is a problem with 'frames' analysis, which is common in social movement literatures: the focus on the frame does not do enough to unpack, unsettle and question what is assumed to be the 'reality' behind the frame. This problem also arose in Chapter Four, where I argued for an approach that takes seriously the 'situated' nature of all knowing practices, but also troubles a perspectival approach that would reduce 'experience' to a mere interpretation of an otherwise raw material reality.

In exploring the materiality of concepts, I have sought to understand what concepts 'do' and how they 'shape understanding' in politically significant ways. I have questioned, troubled and worked through a specific set of concepts, exploring their generative capacities but also their limits. Perhaps an easier way out of these dilemmas would be to abandon those concepts together; to identify their flaws and move on to something else. But as I set out in the introduction, this project is motivated by a politics that is not satisfied with 'negative critique' and is interested in more generative analysis. Of course, negations are often necessary to make room for creations. As such I do not wish to falsely valorise the creative over the deconstructive. Rather, my point is to emphasize that the political ethos motivating this project is one of generating possibility—of forging critique in order to create cracks and crevice for alternatives to emerge, for things to be otherwise. As such, I have endeavoured to think about how we might use particular concepts differently. No doubt, I have held onto these concepts, in part because of my own activist investment in them; they are tools that continue to have relevance within the particular communities, context and locations in which I organise. But every concept has its limits and if, as I discussed in Chapter Five, we are to avoid the conservative effects of a desire for purist political strategies, then part of the task is not to seek out perfect tools, but to use the tools we have with an explicit recognition of their strengths and limits, their possibilities and risks. At the same time, some of the newer

conceptual tools I have developed in this thesis—the concept of hegemonic entanglements, the idea of resonant and dissonant knowledge practices, the concept of knowing relations—requires further development to fully consider their usefulness.

One of the key limits of this thesis is that the questions that drive the analysis are both broad-based and open-ended and yet the ‘answers’ or responses that it has generated are specific and contextual. Had the thesis continued along the path it began, namely as a more contained empirical study of particular activists knowledge practices ‘on the ground’, it might have developed more streamlined analysis and more specific conclusions. As such, the conclusions developed here, though broad in their claims are necessarily tentative and provisional in their potential application. Indeed, the methodological approach of using material situations to think through concepts and vice versa has the inherent limit of producing tensions between the generality of concepts and the specificity of material contexts, where both exceed the other in different ways. As such, there are points in which the more abstract conceptual arguments developed in the earlier chapters sit in tension with some of concrete material findings in the empirical work of the latter chapters. I would argue, however, that these tensions are potentially generative. Like the productive relationship between resonant and dissonant knowledges discussed in Chapter Six, the tensions, slippages and points of incongruence between the conceptual and the material may also have productive effects. Indeed, these tensions can bring to the surface new problems and questions to be explored. Moreover, part of the aim of this thesis has been to explore and develop a set of thinking tools or ways of knowing that might be generative in their application. As such, my hope is that despite its limits, this project may offer some small insights into questions and dilemmas around knowledge production and social change that arise in social movement struggles.

Finally, while this project has focussed on questions about the transformative possibilities of *knowing*, I want to conclude with a few remarks about the politics of *not knowing*. During my interviews, I asked several prison activists about the strategies they use for explicitly advocating abolitionist politics. More specifically, I

asked how they respond to the frequent charge that prison abolition is an unrealistic and overly idealist goal. While many activists talked about different ways of making prison abolition seem less utopian, one activist emphatically stated the opposite: we need to be *more* utopian he said. In Connor's words, 'We can't dream big enough...it can be even better than we can possibly imagine' (Interview #11). Against the common assumption that reality often translates into something less than our hopes and dreams (i.e. something more disappointing), Connor suggested that the future might exceed our imaginations. While in some ways Connor's view reflects a strategic idealism that is commonly invoked in social movements contexts, his comments also struck me as an important reminder about the political importance of *not knowing*. In other words, *not knowing* what the future might hold is not necessarily a limit (or a failure to propose an adequate alternative to the present); *not knowing* can be an opportunity for forging a future that exceeds the present realms of possibility. Indeed, as Mieke Bal notes, 'knowing that one does not know opens many possibilities' (Bal 2002, 328). Here what both Bal and Connor refer to is not the 'not knowing' of ignorance, but the self-awareness of *knowing that one doesn't know*. In this sense, *knowing* is not always generative: knowing can sometime operate as a stopping point, limit or blockage. When we think we know something—particularly when we take it as fact or take it as given—knowing can become a barrier to alternative ways of thinking and spaces of imagination. By contrast, *not knowing* can emerge when certain ways of thinking get unstuck, un-entrenched, unblocked from the normal groves and comfortable passageways that we are accustomed to. In this sense, *not knowing* can be generative.

Elizabeth Grosz raises similar concerns when she asks, 'Is knowledge opposed to the future? Is the future inherently unknowable?' Thinking through this question, she suggests that although some forms of knowing may indeed be unable to think the future, the relationship between (present) knowing and (future) becoming is not incompatible. Rather,

If dominant modes of knowledge (causal, statistical) are incapable of envisioning the absolutely new, maybe other modes of knowing, other forms of thinking, need to be proposed. Only if thinking is itself part of

the provenance of the new—which clearly involves a new account of what thought is—can thinking be an appropriate modality for dealing with the future, for coping with and producing the new. (Grosz 1999b, 21).

So while we cannot think outside ‘the conditions of possibility that we live with’ (Mol 1998, 75), we can nevertheless seek out practices of thinking, knowing and becoming that work to alter those conditions. For knowledge practices are themselves ways of becoming, of making and knowing the future. In other words, because nothing can be fully or completely known, we are always in process of coming to know. So the challenge is to find ways of thinking, knowing and becoming that facilitate space for other conditions of possibility to emerge. Indeed, it may be the best means we have for making the world otherwise.

Appendix A – Research Call for Participants

CALL FOR PARTICIPANTS:

Queer / Trans / LGBT activists working on Prison, Border, or Globalization issues in Canada

I am interviewing people for a research project on grassroots queer / trans activism in the Canadian context. I'm looking for people who:

[A] Self-identify as Queer, Trans, Gender-Non-Conforming, LGBTQ or strongly affiliate with queer/trans politics**

--and--

[B] Have been involved in organizing / activism in Canada around any of the following issues:

1) PRISON ISSUES: prisoners' justice, prison abolition, prisoner solidarity, immigration detention, psychiatric detention, criminalization of poverty, police brutality, deaths in custody, racial profiling, security certificates, anti-terrorism policing, prison privatization, etc.

2) BORDER ISSUES: No One Is Illegal campaigns, No Borders campaigns, refugee/asylum support, border/migration controls, immigration raids, immigration detention, migrant workers organizing, asylum and sanctuary projects, anti-colonial struggles, etc.

3) ANTI-CAPITALISM / GLOBALIZATION ISSUES: economic justice, anti-globalization, alternative globalization, global justice, free trade, neoliberalism, privatization, corporatization, commercialization, consumerism, poverty and homelessness, squatting, war and militarization, etc.

**Queer / Trans / Gender-Non-Conforming / LGBTQ is open to self-definition and includes, but is not limited to: queer, trans, transgender, transsexual, two-spirit, MtF, FtM, lesbian, gay, bisexual, women-loving-women, men-loving-men, dykes, bois, grrls, androgynous, trannyfags, trykes, butches, femmes, kings, queens, pan-gendered, pan-sexual, genderqueer, intersex, gai, same-sex loving, gender-variant, maricones, queer crips, battyboys, banjee boys, bulldaggers, bears, cubs, lalas, tongzhi, homos, nancy boys, faeries, fags, aggressives and other gender/sexually non-conforming people.

Participation:

Participation is voluntary and involves an interview either by telephone, e-mail, instant message (e.g. skype, msn, googlechat,) or in person. Interviews consist of an informal, open-ended conversation about your analysis and experiences as an activist or organizer. Interviews will take 1-2 hours and would include a short (1-page) questionnaire on demographic information (like age, gender, racial identity, class, region, etc).

Overview of Research Project:

The project, entitled *Transforming Bodies of Knowledge: legal institutions, queer/trans activism and social movement politics in Canada*, examines how queer and trans politics connect with grassroots activism in three areas: (1) prisoner justice issues; (2) border/migration/refugee issues; and (3) anti-capitalist/globalization issues. A key goal of the research is to explore how queer/trans activists generate socially-transformative knowledge, by engaging in alternative modes of understanding and analysis. Focusing on the processes through which activists create knowledge, the project explores themes of experience, resistance, cooptation and transformation. The research is funded by the British Commonwealth Scholarship Commission and is supervised by Professor Davina Cooper.

Background on Researcher:

I am a gender/queer activist who has been involved in struggles around prison abolition, antipoverty/homelessness, antiracism and globalization issues, primarily in the Canadian context, but also in the United Kingdom. This project is part of my PhD research, which I am currently completing at the Centre for Law, Gender & Sexuality at the University of Kent, Canterbury, UK.

If you are interested in participating in this project, or would like more information, please contact:

Sarah Lambie
AHRC Research Centre for Law, Gender & Sexuality
University of Kent
Canterbury, Kent CT2 7NS
United Kingdom
Tel (UK): +44 1227 824288
E-mail: S.R.Lambie@kent.ac.uk
<http://www.kent.ac.uk/clgs/members/people/lambie.htm>

Appendix B – Participant Consent Form

Informed Consent Form

This form is for you to give your consent to be a participant in the research project, *“Transforming Bodies of Knowledge: legal institutions, queer/trans activism and social movement politics in Canada.”* This research project is being carried out by Sarah Lamble and funded by the Commonwealth Scholarship Commission. It is supervised by Professor Davina Cooper. The purpose of the project is to gather information about queer and transgender activism in Canada, which is focused on the areas of (a) prisoners justice; (b) border / migration / asylum issues; and (c) globalization.

Your name:

Address:

Telephone #:

Yes No

I understand what taking part in the research project will involve.

Yes No

I give my permission for the interview to be audio-recorded.

Yes No

I wish to remain anonymous (I understand the researcher will take steps to ensure my anonymity and the confidentiality of my responses if I wish to be anonymous).

Yes No

I understand that my participation is entirely voluntary and I can change my mind at any time. I can withdraw my consent at any time.

Yes No

I consent to taking part in the research project.

Signed:

Date:

Name of Researcher: Sarah Lamble
Kent Law School, University of Kent, Canterbury, CT2 7NS, United Kingdom
Telephone Number: +44 (0)1227 824288
E-mail: S.R.Lamble@kent.ac.uk

Appendix C – Participant Questionnaire

DEMOGRAPHICS QUESTIONNAIRE

This questionnaire is part of the research project “Transforming Bodies of Knowledge: legal institutions, queer/trans activism and social movement politics in Canada”, carried out by Sarah Lamble (University of Kent, Canterbury, United Kingdom). The purpose of this questionnaire is to gather background information about project participants.

The questions are intentionally open ended so you can use whatever language / terms you feel most comfortable using. You do not have to answer any questions if you prefer not to share that information. If you need more space, please use the other side of the page.

1. What is your age?
2. In what city/region do you live?
3. What is the highest level of formal education you have completed?
4. How would you describe your gender / sex identity?
5. How would you describe your sexual orientation / sexual identity?
6. How would you describe your class / economic background?
7. How would you describe your racial identity?
8. How would you describe your ethnic identity?
9. What is your first / primary language(s)?
10. Do you identify as a person with a disability?
11. What is your own approximate yearly income?
12. What is your approximate household income?
13. Are there any other aspects of your identity that you wish to note as significant?
14. Do you give permission for the above information to be used alongside interview material (for example, your self-described gender identity could be included in a description which accompanies a quotation by you)? Yes No

[Note: If you opted to remain anonymous for the project – as indicated on the signed consent form – then your anonymity will be protected, even if you answer “yes” to the above question.]

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