

Introduction

Same old

In April 2014 an account on Tumblr caused a small stir in the online press. *Buzzfeed*, *Slate* and the *Huffington Post* all ran stories about *Boyfriend Twin*, a blog dedicated to collecting pictures of (predominantly) gay male couples who look exactly alike: that is, like identical twins. ‘Because what’s sexier than dating yourself?’ asks the blog’s irreverent tagline.¹ The account garnered a range of responses, from a mixture of curiosity and unease at the uncanniness of the twins (‘We’re not entirely sure how we feel about this,’ said the *Huff Post* (Nichols 2014; see also Broderick 2014)), to mild disappointment about the fundamental conservatism apparently expressed in their attraction to each other (Bloomer 2014), an idea that draws on a wider tendency to imagine attachments to familiarity and similarity as politically reactionary. A contributor quoted in the *Slate* article briefly addresses one reservation about the phenomenon – that it ‘confirms the whole dumb Freudian model of homosexuality as a kind of narcissism’ (Bloomer 2014) – but *Boyfriend Twin* also playfully highlights something undeniable in culture that grounds this reservation: that within the terms we have for understanding sexual attraction, and for understanding what are often assumed to be the most consequential dividing lines between us, gay people are defined as being attracted to that which is ‘the same’ as us. The still dominant terms we have for understanding sexual definition – heterosexual and homosexual – split sexual definition on the basis of the perceived sameness or difference of the gender of one’s sexual object. Of the myriad ways of defining sexual desire and orientation that could have endured from nineteenth-century sexology, it is sameness and difference along the axes of sex and gender that continue to shape

dominant understandings of sexual identity most powerfully. Within this paradigm, the distinctiveness of gay people has in part been defined by our orientation towards sameness.

Since its emergence as arguably the most prestigious framework for scholarly understanding of non-heterosexual desire and culture in Anglophone academia, queer theory has consistently troubled queer people's association with sameness. In influential works, scholars as diverse as Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, Michael Warner and Sara Ahmed have all compellingly suggested that our culture's definition of queers in this way is misguided and problematic. Sedgwick, for example, homes in on the historical moment in the late nineteenth century often credited with the crystallisation of modern sexual identity. In a reading of Oscar Wilde's play *The Importance of Being Earnest* (1895), she suggests that critics play into the 'homogenizing heterosexist scientism of homo/hetero' (Sedgwick 1993: 67) when they read gay desire in the play in relation to sameness, ignoring, for example, Wilde's apparent investment in eroticised differences in age. Wilde's play resists the "'homosexual' homo-genization' (ibid.: 58) taking place with particular vigour at the time of his writing and continued by scholars today. In an influential essay on the prominent psychoanalytic definition of gay desire, Warner has similarly argued that imagining only gay attraction as a love of the same is a displacement of the narcissism in all desire. Defining gay desire as a 'sexuality of sameness' (Warner 1990: 203) serves an ideological purpose for dominant culture to convince itself that not all sexuality – including normative heterosexuality – is reliant on a kind of narcissism or ego-erotics. He argues that the self-evident fact that gay people are obviously interested in those who are different from them – that their interest is in more than 'relations of mere sameness' (ibid.: 191) – throws into relief the ideological function of defining gay people as oriented towards the same. Sara Ahmed (2006: 96), in her book *Queer Phenomenology* (2006), argues that the 'association between homosexuality and sameness is crucial to the pathologizing of homosexuality as a perversion that leads the body astray'. Therefore, this idea 'needs to be contested' (ibid.). As we can see, queer scholarship has tended to understand queers' association with sameness as the tool of a dominant order seeking to marginalise and misrepresent queer lives.

This scepticism about understanding homosexuality as an attraction to a 'sameness' in gender also overlaps with an orientation against a much wider range of related ideas. As with much criticism tied however

nominally to a desire for political transformation in the name of marginalised people, queer theoretical writing tends to rely on positions in which it poses values like heterogeneity, variety, multiplicity and change in opposition to a prevailing order that is imagined as seeking sameness in the forms of homogeneity, fixity, mainstreaming and conformity. The wider rhetorical and political commitments of queer theoretical work are shared with other kinds of cultural criticism with similar roots in post-structuralist theory and in scholarship whose focus is the politics of specifically social differences: race, class, gender and dis/ability, to name only a few. But these commitments in turn also borrow from an even wider cultural dispensation, beyond leftist thought, in which whatever is related to sameness is maligned, devalued, denigrated. Queer theory's frequent orientation, then, lines up with the power of many ideas that broadly embody or express the definitional sameness of homosexuality to magnetise censure and hostility: for example, boredom, repetition, plagiarism, copying, banality, the status quo, ordinariness, habit, predictability, quietism, stasis, formalism, stagnation, statism, regulation, convention, automation, consumerism, mass production, complicity and standardisation.

But what is it about these ideas that tends to seem so problematic? Even as it has maligned sameness, queer theory has also provided persuasive terms for understanding the roots of its own aversion. It was the contention of foundational work by scholars such as Sedgwick, Warner, Judith Butler and Lee Edelman that the marginalisation of non-heterosexual people was not only a matter of the material treatment of a given body of people but was underpinned by some of the most deep-seated philosophical and cultural assumptions. In the famous opening to *Epistemology of the Closet* (1990), for example, Sedgwick (1990: 1) writes that 'an understanding of virtually any aspect of modern Western culture must be, not merely incomplete, but damaged in its central substance to the degree that it does not incorporate a critical analysis of modern homo/heterosexual definition.' That is, the centrality of homo/hetero definition as a means for understanding sexuality and personal identity in the modern West means that it is 'full of implication, however confusing, for even the ostensibly least sexual aspects of personal existence' (ibid.: 2). Sedgwick gives a long list of examples of discursive nodes, or binary hierarchies, that might be inflected by this split: 'secrecy/disclosure, knowledge/ignorance, private/public, masculine/feminine, majority/minority, innocence/initiation, natural/artificial,

new/old, discipline/terrorism, canonic/noncanonic, wholeness/decadence, urbane/provincial, domestic/foreign, health/illness' (ibid.: 11). This universalising move, which was shared in alternative form by other theorists, was crucial to the self-understanding of the new field of queer theory and has indelibly marked subsequent queer theorising: rather than focusing solely on the culture and experiences of those defined as lesbian and gay, queer theoretical work was able to find the inscriptions of sexual power structures in the apparently least sexual of places.² However, whilst one of the nodes that Sedgwick mentions is, of course, the split 'same/different' (ibid.), it seemed to Sedgwick (and it has seemed to many others) that an anti-homophobic inquiry should proceed in the name of the different and difference. For example, one of the many axioms that make up Sedgwick's introduction to *Epistemology* is '[p]eople are different from each other', but the correlative fact is seemingly ignored: if everyone is different from each other then, if this is true, they at least have their difference from everyone else to make them all the same (ibid.: 22). As we will see in various ways over the following pages, one move that Sedgwick's sense of the universal significance of sexual definition has authorised has been to imagine that anything related in any way at all to difference, deviance or transgression can be embraced as what necessarily pertains to non-hetero sexualities. But reading this another way, the centrality of sexual definition to many forms of knowledge can also be read in the disregard that our culture and our theoretical frameworks have shown towards sameness, tending most often to take it for granted that difference is the necessary sign of political and ethical effectiveness.

The link forged by Sedgwick (and others) between queerness and forms of 'difference' responds to how a dominant culture has marginalised queers through precisely this link: by rendering us abject outsiders. In this respect, Sedgwick's move can be understood within the framework of Foucauldian 'reverse' discourse. Foucault (1998: 101) famously writes that, at a crucial point in the history of sexuality, homosexuals began to adopt the medical terms that had been used to discredit them: 'homosexuality began to speak in its own behalf, to demand that its legitimacy or "naturalness" be acknowledged, often in the same vocabulary, using the same categories by which it was medically disqualified'. There was, therefore, a certain strategy of defiance and deflation in adopting these terms that had pathologised queers as abnormal, deflating the power of those terms to disqualify by embracing them. As

Heather Love (2007: 2) reminds us, the embrace of the word 'queer' in late 1980s activism was a similar strategy: taking a slur and repurposing it for political ends. The strategy of queer activism and theory was to embrace the abject difference that queers had been imagined to embody. However, there has been much less scope to explore how the discourse on the link between queers and sameness might also be 'reversed': instead, this association is one, as we saw above, that it has seemed more appropriate to aversively resist. Queer scholars have arguably been selective about which terms that have been used to denigrate homosexuality they might defiantly embrace.

A more recent trend in queer scholarship, however, has begun to look to a wider range of ideas with which queers have historically been associated. Scholars in this evolving anti-redemptive strain in queer theory such as Edelman (2004), Love (2007), Elizabeth Freeman (2010), Jack Halberstam (2011) and Kadji Amin (2017) have looked to ideas that have been deemed unduly negative, backward or otherwise out of step with the political project of queer studies in order to question aspects of the field's foundational self-understanding. Not all of these scholars have proposed a defiant embrace of the ideas they discuss, but all share an interest in exploring what the affirmative or redemptive project of queer theory may have precluded. Scholars such as Love and Amin have examined how historical queers have often made use of, or understood themselves through, terms that contemporary *queer politics and theory* have denigrated. Arguably this is a slight variation on 'reverse' discourse: queers are not here defiantly speaking back to a dominant order using its own terms but rather, through in some ways embodying the dominant or apparently problematic, are framed as having something to teach a queer theory that may have presumptively excluded a given set of ideas.

Same old develops this queer theoretical work of exploring how queers have operationalised and embodied terms and ideas that are in tension with the values of contemporary queer theory. Over the next four chapters, I dwell in particular on more moments in queer culture, like *Boyfriend Twin*, which play on or invest in sameness in a way that is at odds with contemporary scholarly assumptions. I argue that aspects of past and present queer cultures can and do make us think again about the frameworks that queer theory has provided. Each of the chapters takes an idea that queer scholarship has defined itself in opposition to, understanding this opposition as closely related to queer theory's

defining aversion to sameness, and explores how that idea has been central to aspects of queer culture in the long twentieth century. The historical period I focus on begins in the late nineteenth century around the time of the Wilde trials in 1895 and moves forward through the emergence of lesbian and gay liberation movements to the present day. This is a significant period in queer history that is understood by historians to have been responsible for the 'homo/hetero' sexual definition that now seems so crucial to our understandings of human subjectivity and that also saw the emergence of a visible, publicly available and established queer culture (Weeks 1989). Focusing on this period, the specific cultural lens I use in this book is literature or literary writing, but each chapter also opens out on to empirical and social aspects of queer culture. For example, I use feminist speculative fiction from across the twentieth century to interrogate queer theory's framing of 'reproduction' as a dreary commitment to 'more of the same' and to revisit the value of same-sex communities. A range of 'lesbian middle-brow' novels from the earlier twentieth century, I argue, both formally and thematically equate lesbianism with ordinariness and encourage reflection on the queer opposition to normativity, foregrounding the important reasons for some queer investments in ordinariness. Another chapter looks at fiction on sexual seriality and sexual typing from the later part of the twentieth century, as well as the practice of listing, documenting or recording sexual partners, to explore its investments in the kind of 'reductionism' that queer theoretical writing often assumes to be bad. And in the chapter that follows this introduction, I start with *fin-de-siècle* queer aestheticism to interrogate queer scholarship's investment in usefulness or 'making a difference' and as a way of registering other forms of scepticism towards utility that have been a part of queer history, such as in the liberationist writing of Guy Hocquenghem. To the list at the end of the third paragraph of this Introduction, then, we could add the ideas that structure each of the following chapters: uselessness, reproduction, normativity and reductionism.

In what follows of this book, I will be describing a paradoxical and counterintuitive situation in which many of those phenomena that have seemed most anathema to queer scholars are associated with the sameness that in modern Western sexual definition has also marked homosexuality. In its very structure, I will suggest, queer theory maintains a paradoxical gay-aversiveness. Such gay aversiveness was famously the subject of Leo Bersani's *Homos* (1995), a powerful critique of queer

theory from the mid-1990s, which he opened with the provocative conclusion that 'No one wants to be called a homosexual' (Bersani 1995: 1). For Bersani, queer theory's disdain for lesbian and gay sexual identities echoed the denigrated status of these identities within the broader culture and, moreover, made little sense for a field that could, or should, have been interested in the specificity of gay forms of being. In this book, I chart how this disdain for homosexuality carries through into the aversion towards a much broader set of ideas that embody or express sameness.³ Not only does no one want to be called a homosexual, but no one wants anything to do with the sameness that has defined homosexuals either.

Literary or imaginative writing is, in various ways, a helpful route in to a discussion of the place of sameness within queer theory and culture. For one thing, it is not, on the whole, regarded as argumentative or expository writing and so is not marked by the need to persuade that defines, say, politically engaged scholarship. This need to persuade can make engaged scholarship more strongly attached to ideas related to difference which more often tend to generate agreement and approval. (What political project, after all, could hope to win support by the promise to keep things the same?) The frameworks available for studying fictional writing also encourage us to think most emphatically about both form and content and so to take account of the wide array of ways of addressing sameness that we can see in queer culture. Equally, some of the most influential queer theoretical formulations were devised via literary readings and there is a distinct tradition of queer literary scholarship, which is not the case for all aspects of queer culture. It therefore seems appropriate to ground a critique of queer theory in a sense on its own terms – via the kinds of literary readings that were so integral to its early formation. Moreover, this book's investment in such readings is also a structural investment in sameness as there are already queer accounts in one way or another of most of the works I address in the following chapters. They are all taken from a significant period in the history of queer culture, as I have indicated above. In emerging from this context, the literary works I address perhaps cannot help but speak to wider concerns of queer life and to the extratextual worlds that made them, as well as to arguments in queer theory and scholarship. Equally, we should not underestimate the agency of literary works within social life. For example, scholars have often argued that Radclyffe Hall's *The Well of Loneliness* (1928) played a crucial role in formulating

and disseminating a version of modern lesbian identity, as I discuss in Chapter 3. On the level of content, too, these literary works show us that standing against the forms of sameness that contemporary theory opposes has no necessary or transhistorical relation to queer lives and histories. Stephen Gordon in *The Well*, for example, longs to be normal in a way that makes little sense in the context of contemporary queer frameworks with their opposition to all forms of normativity. The readings of imaginative literature, then, are a starting point for raising questions of broader significance and consequence across queer culture: for example, about lesbian ordinariness, about sexual typing and about the need to establish and reproduce cultures as well as disrupt them.

But what is the practical importance, in the end, of this attention to sameness? For one thing, the readings in the chapters that follow bring into focus the modest social value of the ideas they explore. In the chapter on queer aestheticism, we see that Henry James's novels show that if one does not 'make a difference' then one is at least not making things worse. The utopian worlds of feminist speculative fiction show that 'reproduction' – literalised as a process of creating 'more of the same' – need not seem as problematic as it often does in queer scholarship when what is being reproduced are non-homophobic utopian worlds. The protagonists of lesbian middle-brow writing encourage us to view queer subjects' desire to be normal through more sympathetic eyes, showing how conformity and normality can provide a welcome respite from the otherwise exhausting burden of censure and disapprobation. Finally, writing in the genre of the 'stud file', or the catalogue of sexual partners, shows that reducing people to sexual types or numbers can be the occasion for erotic pleasure. In a more theoretical register, reducing people in this way can also help to foreground some of the ethical potential of being 'reduced' or abandoning the commitments to human individuality and complexity that can lead to aggression and violence. But beyond the direct values of these forms of sameness, attending to them in the way that I do here also has what, following Love (2007: 12), I would call a 'diagnostic usefulness'. In her now classic book *Feeling Backward* (2007), attention to 'negative' affect in queer history helps to diagnose the enduring experiences of marginalisation and victimhood in the present. My approach in *Same old*, however, can help us diagnose the displacement sometimes at work when undesirable social forces are associated with sameness. For example, in Chapter 2, I note how many scholars have suggested that Charlotte

Perkins Gilman's reproductive maternalism goes hand in hand with a questionable racial politics prevalent within late nineteenth and early twentieth-century feminism. In these scholars' accounts, racism always generates an imagination of pure and unsullied reproduction and any valorisation of reproduction will be similarly imbricated in a chauvinistic attachment to a certain racial formation. Whilst it seems clear that strong forms of racism frequently rely on fantasy images of non-hybrid racial continuation, it seems less clear to me that any concept of reproduction will be tied to a particular racial formation. I argue that scholars, such as the critics of Gilman who suggest that it is reproduction per se that is problematically racist, are relying on the rhetorical force and authority that accrues from associating any given idea, political process or interpretative move with sameness. 'Reproduction' as a commitment to keeping things the same names the problem in shorthand, but is not able on its own to explain adequately the workings of racism. It is not clear that sameness and its cognate ideas are necessarily discriminatory. By the same token, it is not clear that difference and its cognate ideas will necessarily be anti-homophobic, anti-sexist or anti-racist, but to celebrate these cognate ideas does draw on a general tendency of concepts related to difference to generate approval and agreement. Not only does such a celebration frequently rely on tacit assumptions about sameness, but it also obscures the workings of those social forces that are often cited as queer theory's antagonists and which in the forms of discrimination, marginalisation and intolerance seem more often to work through insidious forms of differentiation.

However, I do not intend to argue, as some have done, for abandoning difference altogether, where 'difference' means specifically social difference. As we will see, a number of scholars and commentators on the political left have, at various points in recent times, suggested that a politics focused on social differences – often known as 'identity politics' – has got in the way of a more general and effective emancipatory politics. By contrast, I do not see the politics of social difference becoming any less significant in our times. Instead, my interest is in why consequential social identities – sexuality, race, class, gender, dis/ability – seem more important or interesting when presented in the abstract as *differences* rather than in terms of the specific, material identities that they are. Why does *queerness* – mobile, dynamic, flexible – seem more compelling to scholars and activists than the seemingly intractable categories that continue to shape people's lives: *gayness*, *lesbianism*,

bisexuality? This may seem like the kind of cultural materialist position which was prevalent in the 1990s and argued in favour of concrete social identities against the apparent postmodern excesses of queer theory (Morton 1996; Sinfield 1998). But it is also about the formal or rhetorical associations that accrue to ideas: how ‘identity’ does not just point to social realities but at the same time connotes fixity and coherence. Why have queer scholars reversed the discourse on queer difference but not on queer sameness? There are stark rhetorical battle lines drawn across scholarship and activism that see good forms of difference opposed to apparently bad or reactionary forms of sameness. But taken together, the chapters in this book offer a challenge to this situation by showing that queer culture is frequently many of the things that queer theory disapproves of: useless, reproductive, normative, and reductive. In light of the works I address, I argue, we can interrogate the ease with which what seems unbearable or undesirable about almost any phenomenon can be displaced on to some form of sameness: the unpleasantness of a commute on to the fact that it is done every single day, the emptiness of a job on to the repetitiveness of the tasks it involves, the intolerableness of a heterosexist and racist world on to the forms of conformism that they are frequently taken to require. To supplement the approaches sometimes named as the ‘politics of difference’, then, I offer the ‘politics of sameness’, which is intended to be an optic through which to interrogate how forms of sameness come to seem inherently problematic. Being against sameness, I argue, does not help us understand fully how social problems work. To make this point, over the following chapters I offer a series of careful readings of concepts that embody a maligned sameness to interrogate the critical idealism that would presumptively position them as firm antagonists for any kind of engaged scholarship.

Repetition without a difference

‘Clones go home.’ These are the words that the artist Keith Haring famously stencilled on to the pavements of New York’s East Village in the 1980s (Kolossa 2004: 15). The ‘clones’ that the slogan targets were the seemingly identical gay men – in uniforms of plaid shirts, jeans and moustaches (some of them, no doubt, boyfriend twins) – who were perceived to be dampening the bohemian air of the neighbourhood with their sense of conformist masculinity imported from the more

upmarket West Village. Haring's sentiment has been echoed by other community voices who have similarly found something to deride in clones' unthinking attachment to sameness, their apparently herd-like mentality and lack of independent thought (Holleran 1982). The image on the front cover of this book, for example, taken from David Shenton's graphic novel *Stanley and the Mask of Mystery* (1983), gently mocks the clone's misplaced sense of individuality in the context of his fundamental conformity. In specifically queer theoretical discourse, where clones, or related ideas around identical repetition in queer culture, have been addressed, it has not been to celebrate a simple investment in being like others or the enjoyment of sameness, but rather to recuperate this figure to prestigious theoretical models about the dissolution of self, meaning and language. For example, Tim Dean has suggested that clone figures can be seen to emblemise the model of ontological breakdown, or de-differentiation, that has been elaborated by Leo Bersani over the last twenty years or so (which I discuss in more detail below), in which Bersani has identified decentred and dispersed forms of human subjectivity operating in aspects of queer life, as well as in high art. Dean (2002: 30) also uses heuristics such as Derridean *différance* or the Lacanian Real, or what he calls 'otherness', to represent this 'zone of undifferentiation', or an 'ontological sameness' (ibid.: 31) which resists identity in so far as, in this account, identities make things discrete from other things. The clones' desire to look similar to other people is freighted with a theoretical weight which turns that desire into another expression of prestigious accounts of the dissolution of the self. The simple attachment to type and taxonomy that we continue to see throughout contemporary queer culture – bear, butch, femme, daddy, twink – becomes interesting only as it can be transformed into an emblem for self-difference. The clone, I suggest, is a model for how sameness has been treated in queer scholarship: either straightforwardly maligned, or else, where celebrated, celebrated for something other than the simple fact of sameness.

The scholarly gesture in which a form of 'sameness' actually works against *sameness* – understood as integration, coherence and substance – has been foundational for queer theoretical writing. For example, we have seen this repeatedly in critiques of what has arguably been the most enduring antagonist of queer scholarship: *identity*, where this means self-sameness, or stable and enduring being. Judith Butler's account of the performativity of gender is perhaps the most famous

version of this, where she argues that the forced repetitions necessary to consolidate gender identity also allow for repetitions with a difference that create opportunities for living gender otherwise. The opportunity of repetition is when it is not actually exact repetition. But this is an opportunity built into repetition from the start as, according to Butler's theoretical model, exact repetition is simply not possible. Drawing on post-structuralist tenets, Butler argues that self-present identities constitute 'ontological locales' that are 'fundamentally uninhabitable' (ibid.: 186). The idea of any self-presence is fundamentally undercut by the means of its enunciation: the repetition required to perform gendered identity actually works against the 'economy of the same' and its 'reductive efforts of univocal signification' (ibid.: 132). As I discuss in more detail in Chapter 4, Butler has returned to this model repeatedly in her writing to show that the need to repeat which is fundamental to meaning-making will also, always, inevitably, lead to instability and difference. The model has proved singularly adaptable to the various contexts of her work: gender identity, re-signifying hate speech and even reconceptualising universality. It has also been very influential for other scholars and we can see the spirit of it when Dean (2002: 31) claims, in the essay mentioned above, that the clone figures a 'sameness irreducible to identity', or a kind of sameness (like Butler's repetition) that undercuts belief in fixity and coherence.

Another key influence for Dean, as mentioned briefly, is the work of Bersani. Even though he is the theorist to have offered the most sustained treatment specifically of sameness in queer studies, as with others Bersani nevertheless marshals this against 'identity'. For example, *Homos* is framed as a critique of what he perceived to be an excessive anti-identitarianism in early 1990s queer theory which precluded thought about the specificities and affordances of sexual identity. But attending to the specificity of gay identity in his work reveals, for him, how homosexual identity actually contains within it the possibility of figuring the breakdown of any specificity or identity whatsoever. The 'category of homosexuality' (Bersani 1995: 5), or what he prefers to call 'homo-ness' (ibid. 7), provides him with a model for figuring a non-antagonistic way of relating in so far as it involves understanding oneself as in some sense 'the same' as what one is relating to and therefore does not aggressively uphold differences. 'Sameness' is therefore a heuristic for understanding this less strictly differentiated and more mobile version of subjectivity. Homosexuality is valuable as a model for Bersani

only in so far as it is an 'anti-identitarian identity' (ibid.: 101), in so far as it can be formulated as containing the mobility that always undoes fixed identities. If Bersani is sometimes associated with the formulation of a model of gay desire as self-shattering, it is also the case that what homo-ness facilitates is a process of 'self-extension' (ibid.: 7). That is, homo-ness designates a universal correspondence of being within which human subjects are no longer definitively differentiated but exist as relay points in a constant mobility of minutely differing forms. In homo-ness subjects are inescapably continuous with the world around them. The self is not destroyed, but is dissipated in a 'vast network of *near sameness*, a network characterized by relations of inaccurate replication' (ibid.: 146, original italics). Sameness is valuable in so far as it is not really fully itself: it remains 'inaccurate', 'near' rather than fully centred.

If Bersani's terms for understanding sameness have been influential, I would argue that it is because, as for Butler, they map on to prestigious theoretical models that have on the whole tended to have forms of *difference* as their foundations. For example, even though he has distanced himself from 'deconstructive readings' (Bersani 2010: 172), it would seem to me that a key precursor to Bersani's work is deconstruction. (Dean implicitly makes a similar point in the essay cited above when he also offers Derridean *différance* as a heuristic for understanding the clone.) In a well-known formulation, Derrida (2002: 26) writes that there are 'only, everywhere, differences'. In the Derridean account of signification, there is no final point of authentic meaning, only signs pointing to other signs, always introducing some detour or deferral in meaning. For Bersani (2010: 147), similarly, it is crucial that 'differences are inviolable'. The point is that for both thinkers there's something necessary or inevitable about how sameness is never possible: either the fact of our situatedness within signification or the necessary spatial expansiveness of subjectivity means that difference is just inevitable. Within this metaphysical tradition, difference is the proper condition of the world: faith in identity, substance, stability etc. is misplaced, if not pernicious. The transit of this idea through various kinds of scholarship in the 1980s and 1990s would be difficult to track comprehensively, given how widespread the consensus is, but we could certainly see it taken up influentially by literary scholars (Barbara Johnson (1980; 1987)), queer theorists (Lee Edelman (1994)) and political theorists (Iris Marion Young (1990)). In terms that have become well-used, Johnson (1980: x, original italics) writes of this post-structuralist difference as

necessitating ‘differences *within*’ that split any self-defined unity from itself in contrast to ‘differences *between*’ that separate self-contained entities from each other. This difference within is something like a transcendental necessity. The way in which signification works, and our necessary situatedness within signification, means that self-identity is impossible: we are all subjects of the signifier, subject to the impossibility of our identities and separated from what we think of as ourselves. An upshot of this post-structuralist consensus has been to see any belief in a kind of integrated wholeness as a politically problematic fiction. For example, in *Homographesis* (1994), arguably the most sustained piece of queer post-structuralist criticism ever produced, Edelman (xix) dismisses such belief as a commitment to the ‘logic of the same’: he offers his own analysis to ‘deconstruct the repressive ideology of similitude or identity itself’ (ibid.: 22–3). The repressiveness of identity and similitude, however, seems to be left implicit in its association with the ‘logic of the same’.

Beyond Bersani, other thinkers who have very valuably highlighted the links between sameness, queerness and homosexuality also often draw on a related theoretical lineage. Madhavi Menon has recently offered an account not of queer sameness but of queer universalism or what she calls ‘indifference’. The kind of ‘difference’ to which Menon (2015: 3) is opposed is social difference, understood along familiar lines: ‘identitarian difference’ that leads to ‘identity politics’ which misrepresents the social complexities of existence and can be problematically divisive. By contrast, the universalism or indifference that she endorses is an inevitable force that disrupts the formulation of stable differences: ‘a universal structure that is the failure of identity’ (ibid.: 22). What makes this universalism ‘queer’ is its resistance to stability and also its relation to ‘desire’ understood in psychoanalytic terms as a fundamentally corrosive and disruptive force, rather than any relation to historical (identitarian) queers (ibid.: 16). We can see in this account the spirit of post-structuralism, of Butler and Bersani, but Menon’s most explicit debt is to another theorist: Alain Badiou and his critique of ethical systems based on the recognition of differences, such as those that predominate in contemporary multiculturalism. As Badiou (2001: 25, original italics) writes in his short polemic *Ethics*, ‘Infinite alterity is quite simply *what there is*’. Therefore ‘differences hold no interest for thought’ and ‘amount to nothing more than the infinite and self-evident multiplicity of human-kind’ (ibid.: 26). The more properly ethical task

consists in '*recognizing the Same*' (ibid.: 25, original italics). This means actively working towards generic truths that emerge as 'events' or radical breaks in any given social situation: differences are simply what is the case and The Same erupts as a radical difference (singular) that interrupts this status quo. Badiou argues for an ethics that thinks in terms of generic truths that are entirely indifferent to everyday differences: 'Only a truth is, as such, *indifferent to differences*' (ibid.: 27, original italics). Within Badiou's ethics and politics of radical newness the only things that are acceptable are constant revolution and innovation: the only ethical position is to encourage transformation constantly and tirelessly. There is no room for stability or the continuity of what is established: 'The Same' is only in the service of radical difference in the form of radical change. To argue against difference, Badiou turns it into a form of sameness: the simple and banal fact of what is the case, the uninteresting status quo.

As we have seen, then, work that explores 'sameness' is also often pitched against 'identity' and 'identity politics'. While they approach the question from a specific angle and have specific theoretical and political axes to grind, the writers above join a diverse range of scholars who have, in various ways over the last twenty years, taken the politics focused on social difference to task for stressing too extensively how people differ from each and for not spending enough effort on articulating forms of common experience or common social good. Other scholars from at least the mid-1990s have sought to move away from particularity, specificity and difference as a means of rejuvenating calls for a general emancipatory politics on the left. We could trace this position more broadly across the social sciences (Wendy Brown (1995)) and the humanities (Amanda Anderson (2006)), as well as specifically within queer theory (James Penney (2014)). While these writers by no means represent a united trend, they all indicate an undercurrent of thinking along the same lines: their positions signal a movement away from an emphasis on social differentiation towards a theory on the left that more emphatically makes claims about collective forms of life and communal political goals. Penney, for example, also draws on the work of Badiou to critique queer theory for being too caught up in sexuality to consider broader projects for social change. A Badiouian Event, by contrast, addresses itself to people on the level of 'generic humanity' (Penney 2014: 187). His work therefore offers the possibility of 'general social emancipation' (ibid.: 47) in contrast to queer theory's

apparently self-interested factionalism. We see commentary on the left returning to this idea again and again. A recent version can be found in Mark Lilla's *The Once and Future Liberal* (2017) which blames 'identity politics' for the splintering of the left that, he claims, led to the election of Donald Trump. The embrace of sameness or universalism by queer critics arguably goes hand in hand with this larger tradition of rejecting 'identity politics'.

By contrast with some of these preceding positions, the kinds of sameness that I am concerned with in this book are not those that portend a grand ontological disintegration or that seek to move away specifically from social differences. Such differences may certainly be the causes of violent disagreement, but they also offer the possibility of pleasure and empowerment and, moreover, show no sign of becoming any less operative or significant. If anything they are becoming more and more relevant in a way that perhaps brings into question the utopianism of the strong anti-identitarianism in queer theory from the early 1990s. Indeed, an interest in sameness does not have to mean abandoning social difference – embracing sameness can also mean embracing social 'identity' as that which has been widely maligned for the apparent limitation it imposes on broader movements for social transformation. Rather than the philosophical accounts of sameness that draw on Lacan and Badiou, I am interested in how a much wider range of everyday ideas suffer a simple fate of being denigrated: the desire to be 'like' others, a commitment to keeping things as they are, a simple lack of interest in innovation. Often these ideas do appear in queer theory in slightly more grandiose forms: normativity, reproduction, reductiveness. These are not necessarily 'everyday' ideas in these forms, but alongside 'identity' they are certainly more systematically disavowed or rejected in the everyday or ordinary business as usual of queer theory. Sameness, in Badiou as much as Bersani, has meant the dissolution of the self and familiar boundaries, the dramatic traversal of limits and containers. It has not really been a reconceptualisation of what is important to these thinkers – which remains mobility, innovation, etc. – but rather a renaming of what is best in the service of those ideas. *Sameness which means sameness* remains a problem in this work: conformity, limitation, the status quo, identity, integration. It is these persistent antagonists of queer theory and critical theory more broadly that are my concern in what follows.

Certainly, there is a scattered history of recognising the importance of these ideas for specifically queer scholarship that runs from the late 1980s to the present day. I have already mentioned the recent work of Menon to articulate what she calls a queer universalism or 'indifference'. Similarly to Dean, Mikko Tuhkanen (2002a) has also drawn on the work of Bersani to contribute to the conversation on queer sameness, but has largely tended to follow him in imagining the idea of sameness as primarily valuable in so far as it indexes a grand (at least in terms of its theoretical articulation) ontological disintegration. Jonathan Flatley has focused not on sameness but on 'likeness' in the life and work of Andy Warhol. Flatley (2017: 7) argues that Warhol's tendency to 'like' a lot of things, as well as his interest in forms of repetition and serial collecting, were ways of imagining 'new, queer forms of affection and relationality' based more on the apprehension of similarity than of differences. We can see echoes of Bersani in Flatley's account and, as with Bersani, Flatley is keen to distinguish what he is offering from a belief or faith in identity: 'It is important to emphasize that this being *alike*, this "lived similarity", is both experientially and conceptually distinct from being equal or identical' (ibid.: 5, original italics).⁴

Yet there are other scholars who have offered more thoroughgoing interrogations of the theoretical co-ordinates that underlie these contributions. For example, there is a fascinating moment in Diana Fuss's *Essentially Speaking* (1989), which is not the book usually regarded as Fuss's primary contribution to queer theory (that is, her edited collection *Inside/Out* (1991)), where she suggests that the prevalent post-structuralist scepticism towards essence presumes in favour of difference, in a way that is particularly pertinent for lesbian and gay studies. Within post-structuralist feminist theory, the 'signification of "homo" has been linked to the politics of the phallocratic "Same," whereas the meaning of "hetero" has been associated just as insistently with the more respectable politics of "Difference"' (Fuss 1989: 111). Within this theory, then, 'heterosexuality operates as the apotheosis of "heterogeneity" and functions to displace what is perceived to be the more conservative, reactionary effects of the practice of "homogeneity"' (ibid.). Fuss asks an important question: 'Is there, in fact, an anti-homosexual bias in current theories of sexual difference, and if so, how has a de-privileging of the "homo" in favor of the "hetero" operated to keep these theories of sexual difference in place?' (ibid.). Around the same time, in another volume that has

arguably fallen out of the canon of queer theoretical texts, the collection edited by Cadden and Boone, *Engendering Men: The Question of Male Feminist Criticism*, Wayne Koestenbaum (1990: 182) traces the birth of 'gay reading' back to Oscar Wilde's interest in mechanical reproduction and copies: 'gay criticism needs to develop a theory of typing or copying that wipes the tarnish off clones'. 'To consider replication degrading is, literally, homophobic: *afraid of the same*' (ibid.: 182–3, original italics). Slightly more recently, Brad Epps (2001) has critiqued the 'fetish of fluidity' in queer theory, arguing that its own penchant for the mobile has itself become paradoxically fixed as its proper commitment and moves too quickly to the rejection of identities that still operate in the world. But despite this suggestive, scattered history, considerations of sameness have never been sustainedly established as the basis from which queer thought should proceed. On the contrary, what has been perceived as the proper motivator for queer theory is *difference*, understood not only as social difference but also as a much wider field of ideas sometimes only tenuously, if at all, related to the differences entrenched in the structures of social life. It has been, and remains, difficult to shake the assumption that *difference* is the necessary anchor for any socially progressive, politically engaged kind of theory and activism.

The homo in homonationalism

A range of influential scholars have argued the opposite of many of the positions in the previous section: namely, that queer theory is not attentive enough to various forms of social difference which should be brought more firmly within the queer theoretical purview. However, these scholars also share a conviction that this should not mean something involving 'identity' or 'identity politics': there is agreement, across apparent theoretical divides, that these should be avoided. For example, in an important special issue of *Social Text*, the editors David Eng, Judith Halberstam and José Esteban Muñoz (2005: 1) set the scene for a critique of queer theory on the basis that it is too focused on sexuality and not attentive enough to other kinds of difference, calling for a 'renewed queer studies' that commits with greater clarity and vigour to intersectionality. 'Surely, queer studies promises more than a history of gay men, a sociology of gay male sex clubs, an anthropology of gay male tourism, a survey of gay male aesthetics' (ibid.: 12). The intersectional approach that they endorse opposes the 'homogeneity' and

‘universalizing tendencies’ (ibid.: 13) of ‘reactionary (identity) politics’ (ibid.: 4). Eng (2010: 41) has continued this critique in his monograph *The Feeling of Kinship* in which he argues for a ‘renewed intersectional approach’ in queer studies. For Eng, this renewal is an important means of combating ‘queer liberalism’, or the neoliberal political formation in which certain lesbian and gay subjects are afforded civil rights on the proviso that they conform to normative kinship arrangements by buying into a kind of ‘identity politics’ (ibid.: xi). Intersectionality is intended to bring back to view the social differences that queer liberalism apparently attempts to flatten and, in particular, bring to light the processes of racialisation that attend liberal rights claims. The move to assimilate to a liberal model is a forgetting of ‘social difference’ (ibid.: 10) and intersectionality is meant to bring this back into the frame. Jasbir Puar has taken these arguments a step further by arguing that we need to complement intersectional analyses with a rubric of assemblage. For Puar (2007: 212), intersectionality remains insufficiently dynamic because it conceptualises component parts of identity as ‘separable analytics’ that can be ‘disassembled’, whereas assemblage theory ‘is more attuned to interwoven forces that merge and dissipate time, space, and body against linearity, coherency, and permanency’. Intersectionality encases difference ‘within a structural container that simply wishes the messiness of identity into a formulaic grid, producing analogies in its wake’ (ibid.). Puar’s argument is made in the context of her account of ‘homonationalism’, or what she calls a ‘structure of modernity’ (Puar 2013: 337), in which lesbian and gay minority difference is actually used by nation states to bolster nationalist projects, or, in other words, becomes a form of ‘identity politics’ (Puar 2007: 211). Intersectionality has become another form of ‘diversity management’ (Puar 2012a: 53) rather than a genuine way of attending to difference. For her, assemblage promises a better solution.

These interventions have also been amongst the latest in a wider range of longstanding reservations about how difference can be co-opted, commodified or otherwise distorted by institutions and governments as well as interpretative practices: that is, how difference can be solidified into ‘identity’. For example, the analysis of homonationalism is only a recent development in work that has noted how difference can be institutionalised in the form of corporate commitments to diversity, which really only attend to those differences that have been sanitised, depoliticised, ratified and pre-defined as acceptable. Versions

of this account can be found in arguments from the 1990s against the tokenistic inclusion of ethnic minorities (Spivak and Gunew 1993), or against the commodification or appropriation of minority racial identities (hooks 1992: 21–39), or against an ‘empty pluralism’ that treats frictions arising from social difference only as a matter of personal prejudice rather than structural inequality (Mohanty 2003: 193). More recent versions can be found in accounts of the ‘non-performativity’ of diversity cultures which only pay lip service to difference (Ahmed 2012: 116), or the institutionalisation of new social movement difference in the post-1968 university and the way in which ‘power’ can work ‘through difference in order to manage its insurgent possibilities’ (Ferguson 2012: 4). These scholars all provide warnings against how difference can be downplayed even as it seems to be being honoured or protected: they provide warnings against not taking difference seriously enough. Writing specifically about feminist theory, Janet Jakobsen (1998: 26) suggests that the ‘politics of ‘difference’’, with difference in quotation marks, is problematic, not because of anything to do with difference, which is still celebrated, but because it plays into the ‘economy of the same’ in US politics, which rewards social movements who are able to articulate themselves as a unity. The resulting ‘reductive pluralism’ is no good because it turns difference into ‘homogeneity’ (ibid.: 10). In ‘reductive pluralism,’ ‘empty pluralism’ and ‘diversity management’, then, difference is a problem because it becomes like sameness.

The rhetorical alignment of many of these thinkers has a varied genealogy. On the one hand, there are the post-structuralist foundations from the previous sections, though Puar’s interest in assemblage arguably owes more to Gilles Deleuze than to Derrida. However, queer of colour (and other) analyses have insisted that queer theoretical work that is interested in intersectionality draws, often tacitly, on feminist work from the preceding decades (Muñoz 1999: 6–11, 21–2; Ferguson 2004). Certainly, we can see that a shift in the rhetoric of women of colour feminism has been particularly influential in this regard. In 1977, the Combahee River Collective (1983: 210) can offer their approach to ‘struggling against racial, sexual, heterosexual, and class oppression’ by understanding these oppressions as ‘interlocking’ as a form of ‘identity politics’ (ibid.: 211), in so far as it derives from their identities as black women. However, later writers such as Cherríe Moraga, Gloria Anzaldúa and Audre Lorde all embraced *difference*, rather than identity, as that which mainstream feminist thought had not adequately recognised.

Mainstream feminism came to be associated with 'homogeneity' and an adequate account of social life with difference (Lorde 1984: 116; see also Moraga and Anzaldúa 1983). Indeed, we can see this influence in Butler's work that I cited above; it is not only metaphysical difference but intersecting social differences that undermine the notion of a univocal identity (Butler 1999: 7). Queer theoretical work, then, begins to appear at a time when it seems newly possible or appropriate to combine post-structuralist and sociological forms of difference. In the words of William B. Turner's (2000: 134) genealogy of queer theory, 'in an important sense, "queer" served as the conceptual connection between the politics of difference that some feminists, lesbians, and gay men had cultivated and the philosophical language of difference that Foucault, among others, initiated'. In this account, queer theory emerges to provide something like an exemplary relation to difference understood in philosophical *and* sociological terms: it channels both the energies of politicised writers defending social difference from the apparent risk of homogenisation or reduction to stereotype and a post-structuralist scepticism towards the project of establishing fixed unities. However, this also means that difference began to lose its specificity – rather than a means of making sure people were paying attention to social identity, or paying attention to the ramifications of social categories within social life, it transformed into a wider field of ideas often taken to be implicitly good. For example, in a well-cited essay, Cornel West (1990: 29) credits 'Black diaspora women' over the preceding decade with the move towards the 'new cultural politics of difference' that he celebrates for how it seeks to 'trash the monolithic and homogeneous in the name of diversity, multiplicity and heterogeneity' (ibid.: 19). But it is not clear what logical relation 'diversity, multiplicity and heterogeneity' actually have to consequential social categories, even as these have been the ideas that a wide range of socially engaged scholarship has privileged.

Returning to Puar and Eng, we might ask in a similar vein what logical relation the 'homo' and the 'queer' have to the social forces that they critique. All the thinkers in the first paragraph in this section take a common approach in so far as they associate the nationalism and liberalism they anatomise not only with undesirable forms of sameness (universalism, grids, homogeneity) but also with gay people, whether that's the gay men in the nightclubs in the *Social Text* issue or the lesbian and gay liberal subjects living under homonationalism. For example, for

Eng and Puar, the historical shift that they name as ‘queer liberalism’ and ‘homonationalism’ respectively, and what is presented as most problematic about this shift, does not have any fundamentally necessary relation to gay people. Puar (2013: 337) calls homonationalism a ‘structure of modernity’: it names a shift to a new historical phase in which the forms of minority difference that might previously have offered radical political potential are actually celebrated and utilised by modern nation states for their state-building and neo-imperialist ends. Any other form of maligned (or apparently formerly maligned) minority difference might be the basis for a similar argument. Yet there seems to be something uniquely rhetorically compelling about the ‘homo’ prefix. Similarly, for Eng, the problem with ‘queer liberalism’ is that it is a form of liberalism, where liberalism means a political position that is deliberately blind to social differences because it is attached to abstract freedom and equality. The problem in queer liberalism actually has no specific intrinsic relation to queers: it is a generic force for flattening social difference. Yet queers again seem like the easiest or most appropriate target, perhaps because of the sameness that this form of liberalism seems to be bringing about: it locates queerness in the ‘private sphere of intimacy, family, and bourgeois respectability as *sameness*’ (Eng 2010: 43, original italics). In Puar’s and Eng’s analyses gay people seem somehow better suited to carrying the burden of the unacceptable forms of sameness associated with liberalism and nationalism. These scholars suggest most strongly the relation that I am arguing undergirds much aversion to sameness. They materialise the link between gay people and sameness that this book is about.

Could it be, then, that the longstanding, extraordinarily durable and oft-repeated injunction against *identity* is one way that queer theory has maintained a paradoxical gay-aversiveness at its core? It is ideas like ‘identity’ that frequently form the foils for queer theoretical argumentation, as well as ideas like homogeneity, coherency and grids that we have seen scholars such as Puar and Eng malign, which I explore in this book. As discussed above, my approach does not accord with the more prominent models available for understanding ‘sameness’ in queer scholarship and culture, which imagine it as a force of grand ontological disintegration with profound ethical implications. A project with closer ambitions to mine is another that I mentioned above: Koestenbaum’s (1990: 182) argument, really from before the moment of queer theory, that ‘gay criticism needs to develop a theory of typing or copying that

wipes the tarnish off clones'. Rather than an account that recuperates the clone to established and highly prestigious theoretical models (the kind of account we saw Dean provide at the beginning of the previous section), Koestenbaum calls for gay criticism to come up with adequate tools for accounting for the clone's interest in types and copies. By the same token, over the chapters that follow, I explore the manifest ways in which queers have performed investments in the kinds of sameness that queer scholarship has tended to distance itself from structurally.

Rather than with Bersani's particular account of sameness, then, my approach has more in common with a separate set of ramifications of his work. That is, Bersani's interest in 'sameness' stems from a broader project: his scepticism towards what he famously called the prevailing 'culture of redemption' in which art in particular, but also life more broadly, can be seen as valuable only if it is redemptive, exalts humanity, protects human dignity and has an agency in the world that can be seen as a vector of the Good (Bersani 1990). Such investment in human sovereignty can lead to violent defensiveness, such that abandoning proud identities and recognising the 'sameness' of humanity with itself and the world can create less aggressive being. For Bersani, abandoning the redemptive imperative is a way to embrace this 'sameness'. Whilst they have not necessarily taken up his interest in sameness per se, various scholars such as Edelman, Love, Freeman, Halberstam and Amin have continued to explore the implications for queer theory of refusing to embrace the culture of redemption in the way that he does. Whether arguing for a completely unmotivated embrace of negativity as a means of refusing the imperative of redemption (Edelman 2004), or for paying attention to affects, experiences and objects of study which may read as irredeemably backward or out-of-date (Love 2007; Freeman 2010; Halberstam 2011), these scholars have revealed what redemptive approaches have obscured. Love (2007: 2) suggests that queer theory in particular lends itself to such anti-redemptive positions because the very slur that names the field ('queer') has always 'evoked a long history of insult and abuse'. Amin has also recently contributed to scholarship in this vein by examining the attachments of Jean Genet to phenomena that queer thought has tended to see as problematic, such as racial fetishisation and pederastic desire. By fully accounting for the 'disturbing attachments' of Genet, and thereby de-idealising him in the canon of queer thought, Amin (2017: 4) suggests that a fuller account of social life is made possible, making space for 'disturbing attachments' to 'race,

history, and geopolitics'. My ambition in the following pages is to do something similar: I identify a critical idealism structured around the rejection of sameness in queer theory and show how the specificity and particularity of queer culture is at odds with this in consequential ways.

Whilst the temptation to abandon all redemption, such as that provided by justification in terms of political usefulness, is strong, I nevertheless want to try to articulate something similar to Amin's project or Love's (2007: 12) sense of the 'diagnostic usefulness' of queer abjection. On the one hand, as I argue in Chapter 1, the imperative to justify an approach in terms of its usefulness, or the 'difference' it makes, is part of the rhetorical dispensation that I am seeking to interrogate. The epistemological project of this book would suggest that the implicit power of appeals to making a difference is linked to the similarly taken-for-granted hierarchy of difference over sameness in sexual definition. On the other hand, this epistemological inquiry is nevertheless attended by an ethical or practical one: to what extent does a default privileging of difference and denigration of sameness obscure the functioning of the social forces against which much queer theoretical writing would seek to organise itself? My suggestion is that engaging with sameness might be a way to focus greater attention on how social domination functions. A casual association of the forces of social domination with sameness may provide a neat rhetorical shorthand, it may appeal to what often seems a default sense that sameness is damaging and unhelpful, but it does not necessarily adequately explain the functioning of that domination. However, whilst Love looks specifically at negative queer affect from the past as a way of acknowledging that those ways of feeling bad are not necessarily things we have got over, this book is not about affect. I do not survey ways of feeling bad in queer representation as a means to show how such bad feelings continue to structure queer lives and alert us to the enduring, intimate effects of homophobia, which Love registers so eloquently. I do, however, share with Love a refusal to jettison what seems out of place. In my case, what has come to seem out of place are the forms of sameness that are surveyed in the chapters that follow. The chapters help to diagnose those situations in which a constant aversion to sameness might obscure scenarios in which, say, homophobia or sexism or racism do not function through forms of sameness at all. The diagnostic purpose of the book, then, would be to invite us to think more carefully about where and in what ways, exactly, sameness might be a problem or the cause of a problem. Surely

it cannot just be *because it is sameness*, or, if this is the case, then surely we must think about where the idea that sameness in itself is a problem comes from.

In this regard, *Same old* is also influenced by systematic attempts to understand the habits and shapes of entire fields of study, such as in the recent work of Robyn Wiegman. In *Object Lessons* (2012), Wiegman (1) charts how participants in what she calls 'identity knowledges' formulate their objects of study so as to reassure themselves that the work they undertake with these objects in mind will serve their social justice goals. Wiegman seeks to study the political desires that motivate identity knowledges, to examine the sense that we can ever make our objects of study adequate to the political importance that we invest them with. Acknowledging that there are many ways in which scholars have answered the question of what will provide the most politically defensible forms of scholarship, Wiegman seeks to examine the 'answer's ardent pursuit' (ibid.: 5), or the very act of seeking an object that will finally provide the politically pure analysis sought. Wiegman seeks to 'interrupt' the idea that 'if only we find the right discourse, object of study, or analytic tool, our critical practice will be adequate to the political commitments that inspire it' (ibid.: 2–3). She moves away from the 'golden rule' that 'objects and analytics of study can be made to deliver everything we want from them' (ibid.: 28). She remains convinced of the idea that 'objects can resist what we try to make of them' (ibid.: 30). I'm doing something like that in this book: showing how queer subjects frustrate the radicality we might prefer to invest in them, in so far as radicality is commonly indexed primarily to investments in difference. That is, it is my suggestion that making forms of difference the necessary shibboleths of queer-positive political engagement is not necessarily a way of ensuring a queer-positive politics. People marginalised because of sexual nonconformity have no necessary relation to difference: their lives are not more accurately reflected by forms of difference. For example, Wiegman briefly discusses the example of the AIDS crisis to show how the critical idealism of queer theory's staunch anti-normativity does not enable understanding of how queer investments in marriage might be a way of healing some historical injuries that arose as a result of the crisis, during which, say, intimate partners were denied access to their dying or dead loved ones (ibid.: 339–40). Amin has also recently powerfully drawn on Wiegman's work to make his argument that it is only when the ideals of queer theory are deflated

that space is made for thinking through the actual particularities of social life.

In this book, then, I am continuing in the vein of Wiegman and Amin to ask fundamental questions about what the role of queer scholars and scholarship is and should be. On the one hand, should it be to learn the protocols and imperatives of a specific academic field which has been influenced by a range of prestigious French theoretical texts, and bears the hallmarks of many of the assumptions that thread through contemporary engaged scholarship, so as to secure legitimacy and belonging within that field? On the other hand, should it be to be interested in all the manifold ways of living, of giving expression and form to, non-heterosexual existence, even as this may conflict with the imperatives of that field as it is currently imagined? At the beginning of this section, I quoted Eng, Halberstam and Muñoz (2005: 12) in their argument that 'queer studies promises more than a history of gay men, a sociology of gay male sex clubs, an anthropology of gay male tourism, a survey of gay male aesthetics'. To my mind, though, there are unfortunately no established protocols within history, sociology or anthropology for any kind of analysis like this. That which queer studies is supposedly moving beyond would surely need to have secured some level of legitimacy for the point here to be anything other than a rhetorical one. In the chapters that follow, what I offer strays perhaps too close to the 'survey of gay male aesthetics' that they mention. Many of the works that I address are linked to the kinds of lesbian and gay identities that scholars such as Eng et al. have often called for us to move beyond. By contrast, I do not imagine that these identities are inherently politically pernicious. In this book, I dwell on these identities and their expression in a range of literary works, on the myriad ways of giving form to queerness that these works allow access to, and indeed would argue that even now there is no scholarly framework for taking a 'survey of gay male aesthetics' seriously. But I also argue that doing this can help to revise some of the most prevalent and durable theoretical frameworks that queer scholarship operates within.

It gets blander

Few aspects of lesbian and gay aesthetics have combined an undeniable centrality to queer lives with a manifest tendency towards sameness quite so clearly as coming out stories. Across the genres in which they

have appeared, these stories have often been deemed repetitive, formulaic and boring, relying on stock characters like the troubled teenager and stock plots like the final, harmonious integration of a lesbian, gay or bisexual identity. In this latter respect they are also liable to attract the ire of the many scholars addressed in the previous paragraphs whose intellectual projects have centred on the debunking of stable identity and a preference for avant-garde forms. Still, though, as a genre, they will not seem to go away, transforming their tedious repetitiveness into a dogged persistence, continuing to manifest aesthetic as well as political shortcomings. However, it is much less common to recognise that the boring repetitiveness of these stories may be connected to the material conditions of minority cultural production. When a culture has few formal institutions for its transmission, dissemination and development, its proponents are likely to have to go over what others have done before and see others going over what they may think of as already achieved. It may be necessary to repeat the same positions again and again when there are no grounds from which to feel that one's culture is securely established. A boring repetitiveness may be tied in to the experience of social marginality. I want to suggest here that we should recognise how queer culture shares with other minority cultures this necessary tendency towards sameness. Might minority cultures, out of necessity, be boring?

The assumption that guides literary commentary on coming out stories is that they should certainly *not* be boring. For example, in one of her many essays on aspects of lesbian and gay literature, the author Dorothy Allison (1995: 199) laments the 'monotonous regularity' with which coming out novels were published in the wake of Rita Mae Brown's bestselling *Rubyfruit Jungle* from 1973. Similarly, in an oft-cited article, Sarah Schulman critiques lesbian writers for writing coming out novels in which the characters' lesbian sexuality is the primary focus of the work. She complains that much lesbian fiction is 'preachy and didactic, filled with stiff, one-dimensional characters' (Schulman 1995: 166). Moreover, the narrative structures and writing styles are 'uptight and repetitious' (ibid.). She calls on writers to 'stop re-proving the same formulaic arguments' in order to better represent the 'complexities' of lesbian and gay lives (ibid.: 168). Writing in a more scholarly-theoretical vein, Judith Roof (1996: 111) discusses a character from the TV series *Roseanne* who comes out as lesbian in the 1992–93 season of the show, and registers her disappointment at this declaration of identity as an

aesthetic judgement: the character Nancy becomes ‘boring’ whereas she had previously been dynamic and irreverent. In any case, we see that many of the aesthetic judgements that have been made about coming out stories cluster around a set of ideas: boredom, monotony, repetitiveness.

But it isn’t just in terms of their apparent aesthetic failings that coming out stories have been critiqued. The coming out story’s political shortcoming has been imagined as its promotion of a stable, coherent sexual identity. While coming out stories take many generic forms – autobiographical testimonials, novels and young adult fiction – they all share a focus on recognising, accepting and publicising a sexual identity and preference. In her book-length study of the genre, Esther Saxey (2008: 15–33) traces its roots back to the consciousness-raising groups of second-wave feminism and related novels of emerging feminist consciousness by authors such as Marge Piercy, Marilyn French and Margaret Atwood. Just as feminists sought to share experiences of making female identity in a patriarchal world in order to empower others, so queer people have sought to share their coming out stories for similar reasons. But this focus on identity is one of the key characteristics for which it has been critiqued over the years. For example, Roof’s critique that I cited above is primarily made on philosophical grounds. She suggests that the narrative structure of these stories, in which teenage tribulations frequently lead to a final resolution in adult sexuality, privileges a standard developmental model that is overlaid with heterosexual meanings. The stories mimic the Freudian account of heterosexuality as what proper and healthy adults will eventually grow into. Their emphasis on a final and coherent realisation of identity, even as this is a non-heterosexual identity, is a way of reinscribing what Roof (1996: xxxv) calls this ‘heteronarrative’. Embodying the particular style of queer literary and cultural studies scholarship that emerged in the 1990s, Roof imagines any commitment to a coherent identity as problematically caught up in a presumptively heterosexual logic. Reading the stories collected in an anthology from the early 1990s called *What a Lesbian Looks Like* (1992) put together by the National Lesbian and Gay Survey in the UK, Roof (1996: 104) laments that they all have the ‘same narrative structure’. She bemoans this tendency of lesbian and gay writing to replicate the defining structures of heterosexual narrative: she asks wearily, ‘Why is the story always the same?’ (ibid.: xxvi). As I have

indicated, though, queer stories, more than any, may have good reason for repeatedly being the same.

Certainly, the stories do, frequently, seem to repeat themselves. For example, the editors of *The Coming Out Stories*, a canonical anthology published in 1980 by the lesbian-feminist Persephone Press, recognise in their introduction that contributions to the volume are defined by similarities and patterns (Stanley and Wolfe 1980: xvii). One contributor, Deidre McCalla, is able to recognise the repetitiveness that tends to mark coming out stories by wearily distinguishing her own story from them: 'There were no long, painful years of suffering in silence, nor any early adolescent fears of being sexually different. I never went to a summer camp and to the best of my recollection, never had a crush on any of my gym teachers' (ibid.: 12). She identifies many of the key milestones in the coming out stories in this anthology, but other life experiences she might have picked up on that appear with striking regularity include being from a small or non-metropolitan town (ibid.: 7, 23, 79), finding new freedoms while studying for an advanced degree (ibid.: 31, 60, 100) or ending their stories on the final, triumphant recognition of lesbian identity and community (ibid.: 43, 78, 124). It is this latter aspect, of course, that is also particularly important. In their introduction the editors suggest that the lives of out lesbians have been omitted from the historical record and that their anthology is a small step towards correcting this omission so that women going through similar experiences in the future will not have to find their own ways completely in the dark, or, in other words, so that they have a blueprint for their own identities to copy or emulate.

Perhaps this built-in repetitiveness is why coming out stories themselves continue to be repeated. That is, if the ambitions of the editors of *The Coming Out Stories* are to give gay people some legs to stand on during the development of their non-heterosexual consciousness, then it's clear that their efforts are themselves part of a repetitive, or iterative, process that is still, and may always be, ongoing. We see evidence of this in the continuing popularity of coming out stories in high-profile campaigns such as the 'It Gets Better' project started in 2010 in the US by the popular relationship columnist Dan Savage. Originally begun as a video uploaded to YouTube addressed to gay teenagers, the project has grown into something much larger with tens of thousands of videos now uploaded to its dedicated website and hundreds of thousands of

followers on Twitter. Amongst the project's outputs is an anthology of short testimonials: *It Gets Better: Coming Out, Overcoming Bullying, and Creating a Life Worth Living* (2011). Whilst this is different from the earlier coming out stories in many ways (it's published by a major mainstream publisher, and features essays from heterosexual celebrities and politicians as well as from everyday LGBTQ people), there are also many similarities. For example, in an overwhelming majority of the first-person accounts, the narrator will describe feelings of difference and alienation from a small-town religious or else otherwise highly traditional background. This is followed by bullying at high school, accompanied by suicidal thoughts, or even a suicide attempt. Things get much better after high school or in college: many end up surrounded by supportive friends and with a long-term partner. The *It Gets Better* project has garnered new criticisms, beyond the more common reservations about the coming out story's investment in identity: queer scholars have also critiqued it for the normalised image of queer life that it seems to promote and for privileging the exceptionalism of queer youth suicide over more structural and entrenched forms of everyday inequality (Puar 2012b). Sidestepping these critiques somewhat, my interest is in the repetition that this volume also embodies. Sometimes it's almost as if the contributors to the volume recognise that their stories are likely to seem uninteresting and frequently the actual process of coming out is quickly skirted over or else is revealed to be banal. One contributor, Darren Hayes, former lead singer of the band Savage Garden, explicitly recognises the potential of coming out stories to bore their audiences: self-effacingly he writes, 'You don't need to know my long, boring coming-out story', even as he has been enlisted to provide exactly this (Savage and Miller 2012: 151).

But just as the stories in these volumes are marked by kinds of repetition, many of the contributors recognise that coming out is, by definition, a repetitive process. 'There are more scenes, more ways to come out. The process is a long one, going on daily' (Martha Pillow in Stanley and Wolfe 1980: 10). 'There are more entries – many more comings out since then' (Ellen Roe Anthony in *ibid.*: 69). 'I think coming out is a life-long process' (Caryl B. Bentley in *ibid.*: 79). One story makes the point by repeating the phrase 'I had come out' in relation to different scenarios (*ibid.*: 53–5). Within a presumptively heterosexual world, a non-heterosexual person has to come out again and again, in every new context defined by those presumptions. Moreover, the editors

of *The Coming Out Stories* make it clear that coming out involves gradual self-realisation as women develop a lesbian consciousness out of the scraps that dominant culture provides for them. With no models for what a lesbian life might look like, they recognise that the women in the anthology have had to piece together gradually what they can from the materials available. In the introduction to *Testimonies* (1988), another early collection of coming out stories, Tina Portillo writes that the stories in the volume will be 'the kind of history-book-making testimonials that we all need' (Holmes 1988: 8). Without solid institutions for passing on and developing queer history and culture, queer people are left having to reinvent the wheel, and Portillo's hope is that *Testimonies* is a step towards a situation where queers don't have to constantly do this. Karen Barber, the author of the Introduction to the second edition of *Testimonies*, agrees: 'Each story told becomes a part of our community's history, reminding us how times have changed, or as the case may be, how much things have stayed the same' (Barber and Holmes 1994: 7). The editors of *The Coming Out Stories* also suggest that the stories serve to right the historical wrong in which lesbian history has been concealed: 'Our anthology represents that ongoing process of rediscovery of ourselves, our continuing reclamation of our lives and our strengths' (Stanley and Wolfe 1980: xv). It is the lack of this history and the lack of institutions for transmitting it that result in the repetitiveness of queer experience, which coming out stories emblematised and embody.

The stories dramatise this need for most robust information flows in how their narrators frequently dwell on teachers, reading and libraries. Some of the contributors are themselves school instructors who induct students into the ways of lesbian life (e.g. Roselle Pineda in Holmes and Tust 2002: 104), but overwhelmingly the narrators across all the volumes I have addressed so far (and more) are at some point students with formative romantic interest in their teachers: gym teachers, English teachers or generalists (Stanley and Wolfe 1980: 71, 100, 156, 209, 221, 233; Holmes 1988: 35, 54, 60, 94, 105, 142; Barber and Holmes 1994: 102, 52; Holmes and Tust 2002: 25, 36). Teachers, of course, are people who promise access to information and knowledge; they are guides and mentors at formative points in life. Books can also play this role and many of the narrators of these stories are keen readers. One of them has an 'insatiable desire for reading' (Stanley and Wolfe 1980: 25). Another scrabbles for information: 'I read what I could find on the

subject of homosexuality to try to understand where it came from, what it meant' (ibid.: 165). For another, the only way she survived was 'through books' (ibid.: 233). Another 'voraciously read[s] novels, biographies and autobiographies about famous women's lives and the difficulties and choices we faced' (Holmes 1988: 88). Another tells us: 'I was very into books as a child and read pretty much everything I could get my hands on' (Holmes and Tust 2002: 94). The institutions that frequently facilitate access to all these books are libraries. The contributors to all volumes find lifelines in libraries that furnish them with access to materials that help them understand their incipient sexual identities. As children, contributors spend their weekends in their local libraries where they gain 'priceless' knowledge that they carry 'secretly' and 'proudly' (Stanley and Wolfe 1980: 196, see also 236), later studying 'abnormal psychology textbooks' (ibid.: 79), and using university library catalogues for 'tracking down psychiatric books which described in gruesome detail the case histories of "female homosexuals" and left nothing to the imagination' (ibid.: 156). Others use the university library to meet future love interests (ibid.: 96), form relationships with trainee librarians (ibid.: 239) or become librarians themselves (Sarah Holmes, editor or co-editor of all volumes of *Testimonies*, is described as a 'corporate librarian' (Holmes and Tust 2002: back cover)). The stories paint pictures of people thirsty for knowledge: lusting after teachers in particular, finding a lifeline in a library (and often working in one) and reading whatever they can get their hands on. The narrators are desperate to find ways to learn other than through (painful) experience and, as we have seen in the explicit terms in which the collections are framed, to enable others to bypass this experience too. Combined with their framing as tools to fill in gaps in the historical record, the stories begin to suggest the importance of a specifically sexual politics of information management.

The absence of robust and reliable sources of information has social and political consequences. Without the structures in place to learn about the advances of those who have gone before, without ways of passing on collective memory, LGBTQ culture is often given no choice but to start from scratch, going over what may have already been done elsewhere. In her more recent writing, Schulman has taken up this issue in her commentary on the state of LGBT literature. Rather than criticising authors' writing, though, she has instead lamented the lack of

support structures for LGBT literary culture. This leaves LGBT authors to fight for attention from the kinds of mainstream support structures within which their work is often made to seem like a minority irrelevance, or which tend to assume that LGBT content precludes writing from the category of serious literature. Combined with the absence of structures for passing on established culture and collective memory in gay communities, this leads to the repetition of scenarios from the past. An example she gives is an apparent 'glitch' on Amazon in April 2009 which removed all titles listed as 'lesbian and gay' from its bestsellers lists as part of a policy of de-ranking 'adult' material. Schulman's contention is that the reaction to this from the LGBT community would have been stronger if there were more robust structures for schooling people in how exactly this kind of thing has happened before and has been the way in which the mainstream has belittled LGBT cultural production: simply as pornographic 'adult content' (Schulman 2012: 133–53). As we have seen, the coming out story is often imagined as a way of providing some of the collective memory that Schulman is talking about, laying some of the groundwork for those emerging into LGBT culture. However, we could also suggest that these stories embody in some way the problem that they overcome: the seemingly redundant repetition of what has already gone before. Yet, as the literary scholar Jane Elliott (2006: 1701) reminds us in her discussion of the tendency of feminist theory to conflate the new and different with the politically valuable, 'things may stay true longer than they stay interesting'. If coming out stories are not interesting, then we might recognise that this has as much to do with the necessity of repetition that comes from being in a minority position as it does with the failure of cultural imagination. Can we accept that there might be good reasons that being boring should be a part of gay culture?

Coming out stories then help us think more broadly about sameness and queer culture. On one hand, if the repetition that these stories embody so well is a product of our social marginality, then we might suggest that this is something that the true liberation of queers would free us from. But at the same time perhaps there's scope for us to see that this boredom is not just something that we are doomed to, but something we might recognise as structurally necessary, or even embrace. One way to understand this is to return to the idea of 'reverse' discourse: we are put in a position where our marginality makes us need to repeat.

We could fight against this, invite queers to reinvent themselves and create something new, but we could also take the position of repetition that a dominant culture has ascribed to us and find enjoyment or power in this. Coming out stories, as I have said, embody the problem that they are also supposed to overcome: they are highly repetitive, but they are supposed to alleviate repetition, or form an information network that means that future queers don't have to go over the same ground again. However, at the same time, the stories offer models to follow, actually facilitating repetition, or, in theory, making it easier to repeat. Critiques of coming out stories for being repetitive perhaps ignore something fundamental about queer and other minority experience: that it is intimately bound up with boring repetition. Marginal lives are likely also to be repetitive ones. Coming out stories help us see that there may, in specific ways, be an intimate connection between sameness and queer culture.

The following chapters continue to explore this conjunction: queer culture's enduring investment in the forms of sameness that queer theoretical frameworks have been less good at honouring or recognising. The first chapter examines the place of uselessness in the history of queer representation by looking back to the moment of *fin-de-siècle* aestheticism. I examine how the aestheticist reservations about the utilitarianism and vulgarity of late nineteenth-century society were also reservations about the value or necessity of difference (legible most clearly in the idiomatic rendering of usefulness as 'making a difference'). Whilst many queer aesthetes who resisted the imperatives of utility could be appropriate here, I focus in particular on two protagonists from the novels of Henry James: Rowland Mallet in *Roderick Hudson* (1875) and Gabriel Nash in *The Tragic Muse* (1890). Rowland and Gabriel are repeatedly associated neither with a revolutionary socialism (advocated by Oscar Wilde), nor with a sensuous appreciation of art (advocated by Walter Pater) but rather with 'theory' or 'theories'. Like James himself, they are aesthetic characters deemed impractical and overly analytical: thoroughly useless, their inclinations are to leave things mostly the same. I imagine their particular brand of theoretical uselessness as an interesting counterpoint to recent scholarship in queer studies that we have already encountered and that has sought to refigure what can be considered meaningfully political by turning its attention to the idea of failure or to apparently 'useless' affective states. Where this embrace of queer failure or uselessness is imagined to have some form of political

potency, or in other words is imagined to be useful, Rowland and Gabriel receive no such redemption. Situated in a history in which queer theory itself has been subject to charges of uselessness from scholars apparently better attuned to the materialities of lived experience, Rowland and Gabriel serve to flag up a longer history of intimate connection between queers and uselessness.

Chapter 2 examines lesbian feminist speculative fiction from across the twentieth century in order to reconsider queer theory's widespread rejection of reproduction, particularly in the wake of Edelman's (2004: 2) influential critique of 'reproductive futurism'. The ease with which Edelman rejects reproduction is imagined to have something to do with its rhetorical association (in his rhetoric and beyond) with copying, or creating more of the same. Edelman rejects not just biological reproduction, however, but all forms of reproduction, including the perpetuation of all social and political forms, which he imagines to be necessarily tied up with a dominant heteronormativity. The theoretical foundations of his argument (derived from deconstruction and psychoanalysis) make it impossible for him to see any kind of sameness as anything other than the embodiment of a pernicious and conservative order. However, in novels ranging from Charlotte Perkins Gilman's *Herland* (1915) to Nicola Griffith's *Ammonite* (1993), and many in between, I argue that the worlds presented are structured around forms of reproduction – biological and social copying (and sometimes literalised in the form of cloning) – that are none the less in no way heterosexual and certainly not heteronormative. Moreover, these novels dramatise the importance of structures for reproduction – for keeping things the same – especially where the conditions being reproduced are the result of minoritarian struggle.

Chapter 3 begins by noting that, of all the things that could be credited with a structuring role in the formation of modern lesbian identity, scholars often return to something as ordinary and dowdy as a middle-brow novel: Hall's *Well of Loneliness*. I read Hall's work, alongside that of other 'lesbian middlebrow' writers from the early twentieth century against queer theory's longstanding rejection of normativity. From its earliest articulations, queer scholarship has taken it for granted that its enemies are, in Warner's (1993: xxvi) oft-cited phrase, 'regimes of the normal', but the sharpness of this critique has morphed into a more general position in which any kind of normativity or conformism is intrinsically suspect. By contrast, in *The Well*, the famous lesbian

protagonist Stephen Gordon longs to be normal precisely because of its association with sameness and the opportunity it provides to be 'like' everyone else. In Hall's earlier novel *The Unlit Lamp* (1924), the protagonist Joan Ogden's unwillingness to change the life of familial conformity that she finds in many ways stifling and intolerable leads her to abandon hope of making a life with her female lover: she chooses the path that embodies a regime of the normal. In Mary Renault's *The Friendly Young Ladies* (1944), written, according to Renault, in response to Hall, the lesbian couple of the novel's title repeatedly see themselves as emphatically 'ordinary'. These middle-brow novels are the occasion to reflect on what keeps anti-normativity at the heart of queer theoretical strategy: the opportunity it provides of opposing a stultifying, conformist, assimilationist sameness.

In agreement with some of his critics, the fourth chapter suggests that John Rechy's fictional writings are reductive. Whilst Rechy protests against his frequent categorisation as a 'gay writer' in terms of the problematic limitation and reduction it apparently constitutes, his fictional (and semi-fictional) writings such as *City of Night* (1963), *Numbers* (1967) and *The Sexual Outlaw* (1977), amongst others, repeatedly embody and represent the forms of reduction he decries. They are 'reduced' to descriptions of a gay casual sex world that is itself described as performing various kinds of 'reduction'. In this, it is part of a broader tradition of writing in the vein of the 'stud file', or the account of sexual seriality that we can see across twentieth-century queer writing in the work of Samuel Steward, Renaud Camus, Jane Delynn or Samuel Delany. However, both post-structuralist commitments to non-identity and 'politics of difference' approaches have opposed reductionism because of the limitation and sameness that it would seem to impose. It is in this chapter that I provide the most sustained reading of the work of Bersani, who articulates the potential value of reduction in the context of his broader argument endorsing 'homo-ness'. However, Bersani ultimately echoes the consensus against reduction, endorsing an enabling reductionism in opposition to a static, limiting and homogenising version. Rechy's writing, I argue, facilitates both the endorsement and the interrogation of Bersani's terms: in the end, we see that Rechy does not reject the forms of reductionism that Bersani does in order to give a familiar and comprehensible rhetorical shape to his work. This chapter suggests that Rechy's writing in particular encourages us to

recognise the reductiveness of queer culture, which queer theory may prefer to disavow.

Taken together, the following chapters challenge the assumption that we must at all costs avoid the useless, reproductive, normative and reductive. There is no logical reasoning that accompanies the assertion that these ideas necessarily lead to undesired or unwanted ends. Instead, the assumption that often attends these ideas is that sameness itself *is* the unwanted and undesired end. Whilst I am not necessarily looking for something better, for an approach that will fully redeem what I might be seen to be suggesting is the failure of extant queer theory, I do provide an account of what underwrites some common rhetorical formations in queer theoretical writing. This point is borne out by the inconsistencies in the chapters that follow. For example, whilst Chapter 1 suggests that the apparent necessity of usefulness is related to how the useful can be seen to make a difference, hence rendering the useless a realm of abject, unpalatable sameness, subsequent chapters also relate the *useful* to forms of sameness. For example, in Chapter 3, in *The Well of Loneliness*, Stephen Gordon's desire to be useful is imagined to be part of her desire to be normal, ordinary and unremarkable. In Chapter 2, usefulness and efficiency for Gilman signify homogenised, hyper-utilitarian factory-like processes which reduce human individuality. Contradictions like this mean that this book does not offer any clear form of sameness to embrace: I do not suggest that, say, if only we embrace either uselessness or usefulness we will arrive at a perfected politics. The point is not to say that one approach or the other is the right one, that, say, uselessness is always associated with sameness and so therefore embracing it will offer a politics or way of life that can offer some salvation from any current shortcomings. Instead, the point is to show how forms of sameness can be adapted to fit rhetorical context. When arguing in favour of the useless, utilitarian logics are cold, excessively rational, machine-like, inhuman and homogenising. When arguing in favour of the useful, that which is not instrumentalised is seen as an ineffectual, murky swamp of indistinction. Both situations can provide the opportunity of opposing some form of sameness. This is the point, then: that forms of sameness frequently give shape to what we oppose, and, moreover, they seem to many, including queer theoretical scholars, somehow better suited or more appropriate for doing so. I would evoke Bersani (1995: 1) again: 'No one wants to be called a

homosexual.' Even decrying those phenomena that it has often seemed most important for queer work to oppose, then, may be ways of aligning against the sameness that also defines homosexuality.

Notes

- 1 See www.boyfriendtwin.tumblr.com.
- 2 For related arguments see: Butler 1999; Edelman 1994; Warner 1993.
- 3 I discuss Bersani at more length below and in Chapter 4. More recently, David Halperin (2012: 50) has made the case for the value of a 'traditional gay male culture' that has a durability in the world that, he argues, queer theory has taught us to feel is suspiciously essentialist and problematically backward. I discuss Halperin at more length in the Coda.
- 4 Although her account is not emphatically queer in the way that Flatley's is, Kaja Silverman has offered an account of 'analogy' that also echoes Bersani. Silverman (2009) argues that, until the sixteenth century, analogy and resemblance played a much larger role in prevalent conceptions of the world than they have since this point. She seeks to uncover attachments to a similar kind of resemblance in a range of modern artists and suggests that they imagined this resemblance to offer 'another kind of human relationality' (ibid.: 4).