VENTRILQUEER:
FINDING VOICE IN THE STRANGE BOYHOODS OF DISNEY PRINCESSES

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Abstract

This thesis considers two samples from the Disney Princess film canon as texts that can speak to, and be reclaimed in the name of, queer experience. Ron Clements and John Musker’s *The Little Mermaid* (1989), and Nathan Greno and Byron Howard’s *Tangled* (2011) are the texts examined to propose such a notion. These texts have been selected for the significance they bear to my queer life. Conceived within the qualitative methodological tradition of autoethnography, the autobiographical genre of writing where personal and lived experiences are related back to the cultural, this thesis utilises the autoethnographic mode as both text and method to interpret *Tangled* and *The Little Mermaid*. Comparative to other qualitative methods, autoethnography enables this project’s exploration of the different ways in which one can receive, interpret, reclaim, and experiment with the type of texts one can produce when playing with voice. Operating on a less obvious level, this thesis critiques language as a symbolic order of gender binarism and heterosexuality through unconventional writing practices. By narrating my coming out story through *Tangled* as a creative vessel, Chapter Two mobilises Ken Plummer’s notion of the coming-out post-narrative. Using *The Little Mermaid*, Chapter Three examines a queer relation to temporality that draws on José Esteban Muñoz’s theory of futurity to offer, in the lexicon of Eve Sedgwick, a reparative model for thinking about queer ontology.
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Prologue

One of the oldest memories I carry with me about the pleasures of play takes me back to the year I turned five. I was small in my yellow shirt, curious, and in a room brimming with nerve-crumpled pinafores, clag glue and towering tote trays. It was my first day of kindergarten.

Too revved up by a morning full of posed photographs, oversized leather shoes, and big boy backpacks, I wrenched myself out of Mamá’s grip, and sauntered over to a table where the rest of the kindergartners had been plopped. It was lined with blue scissor baskets, confetti, cardboard, and crayons. Drawn to the confetti, I plucked out and amassed red cellophane slivers for the collage we were instructed to make.

I was amazed by this new place—so full of kids. All I the excitement I had come to know before this day was contained by the childless bus trips to the post office I went on with mum, once a week.

I took in the sensory smorgasboard of textures and colours—smells, too: I still remember the floral wafts of Mrs Acompora’s hair, and the sticky sweetness of forgotten strawberry rollups that accumulated at the bottom of my bag. Even today, the scent of a classroom on the first day back from the Christmas break compares to nothing else in my olfactory memory database. It was the smell of excitement, the smell of brand new pencils and crisp notebooks, the smell that promised new friendships.

Mum watched on with a cohort of nervously chattering, photo-taking mothers. I can’t remember whether she was crying or smiling; by that stage I was too busy dipping a thick-bristled paintbrush into a well of glue to take heed of her. What I do
recall, in between my fun with glue, was Mum’s warm, square hand waving a signal of departure through the glass window when it was time for her to leave. “Ciao, hijo. Bye, son,” she mouthed, eyes brown and bright, just before joining the cavalcade of parents en route to the common room. My stubby fingers wriggled their goodbyes, “Ciao, Mamá.”

This is the side of mum I recall with nostalgia. It was nice to see her not brandishing a wooden spoon—her weapon of choice were I ever to be caught playing with my sister’s Ariel mermaid doll. My parents had decided Ariel was off limits to me after Dad had caught me grooming her red tresses one Saturday afternoon. (I thought he had fallen asleep, as is tradition to do so in our house on the Sabbath, the day of rest.)

I had sneaked into my sister’s room, pried open the third drawer of her white dresser, and rummaged through her bag of scantily clad beauties to find my Ariel. She was my favourite Disney Princess because of the way her hair moved underwater. Dad found me on the floor, in flagrante, brushing Ariel. He was not happy. From that day onward, he banished Ariel and her sisters to a place only the girls in my house knew.

As I sat at the appropriately sized kindergarten desk, tugging on the brightest slivers of red cellophane for my collage to recreate the thing I loved most, Ariel’s hair, I thought about what had become Mum’s mantra: “Don’t let the other boys see you playing with dolls. You’ll get picked on.” Tight-lipped and naïve, I acquiesced to the voice of my mother, a perpetual hum at the back of my mind, and hacked at the long, flowing streamers to create something else.

Even though I guarded my fascination with dolls, princesses, braids and brushes as per my mother’s loving caveat, the boys still found ways to pick on me.
Chapter One:

Introduction to Ventriloqueer

This thesis is an exploration of queer voice, story, and the types of texts a queer voice can produce when bringing together personal accounts of queer experience,¹ and queer theoretical inquiry. To explore queer voice and story, this project engages with a close reading of two Disney Princess films that are significant to my own life story—Ron Clements and John Musker’s *The Little Mermaid* (1989), and Nathan Greno and Byron Howard’s *Tangled* (2011). These particular mermaid and tower maiden texts are significant to my life for the ways in which they “unleashed a kind of magical consciousness upon” (Halberstam, 2011: 21) a younger version of myself, enabling that young self to conjure utopic worlds of comfort, joy, consolation and hope. The commitment this thesis has to a queer politics of hope is very much a product of those worlds. By layering my personal narratives over the interpretive exegeses of these two films, I demonstrate how these films can speak to, and be reclaimed in the name of, queer experience. In the process of proving how these films can be made available to queer readings, I make a modest intervention into the scholarship on coming-out narratives, and the scholarship on queer relation to time. This thesis understands ‘queer’ as a designation for non-‘normative’ sexual identities. The renomination of queer as a designation for gay and lesbian persons in this thesis supports “an ontological challenge to dominant labeling philosophies” used

¹Part of this work reflects upon my personal accounts of queer experience, which are formatted into short stories. Feminist social science theorist, Susan E. Chase, defines this type of reflection as “narrative inquiry,” which can be thought of as “an amalgam of interdisciplinary analytic lenses, diverse disciplinary approaches, and both traditional and innovative methods—all revolving around an interest in biographical particulars as narrated by the one who lives them” (2005:651).
to stabilize discrete gender categories lodged in the divided phrase “Gay and Lesbian” (Meyer 1994: 1, emphasis added).

In more than one sense, this thesis is a product of failure and ambivalence. Its first mark of failure has to do with how little it matches up with the initial project of exposure I had in mind when honours thesis proposals were due for submission. I planned to uncover Disney Princess Films as ‘insidious’ texts that propagated a culture of cosmetic surgery in young girls. I aborted this approach, and its accompanying set of critical arguments, after many months of producing failed drafts and uninspired ideological critiques that borrowed their authority from abstruse theoretical language. Feeling voiceless, and incredibly stupid, I put all writing on hiatus. That was the second mark of failure—sort of giving up.

To echo Judith Halberstam failure is not bad. ² And neither is ambivalence. On the contrary, failure is good. Ambivalence is also good. So good, indeed, they bring me to this thesis’ third mark of successful failure: failing failing to give up. During my exile from the lands of success, I was supplied with a repurposed sense of failure—the prima materia upon which this thesis is based. I saw my misfiring foray into the world of an honours thesis as a “detour en route to something else” (Hall, 1991: 43). Casting an eye on my past with a repurposed sense of failure, I was able to recognise my failed interpolations into normative masculinity as an energising force to the research and writing processes of this thesis. My voice, my stories, my memories of failure became sources of joy and honour where they had once been embarrassing, hidden parts of my life.

² In her book, The Queer Art of Failure (2011), Halberstam offers the following insight: “Under certain circumstances [,] failing, losing, forgetting, unmaking, undoing, unbecoming, [and] not knowing may in fact offer more creative, more cooperative, more surprising ways of being in the world” (3).
Failure can produce beautiful things. This thesis is largely about the beauty of alternative, ‘failed’ ways of knowing, speaking, and writing. It uses the ‘failure’ of knowledges in Disney texts that have been subjugated, disqualified, made irreverent and nonsensical by a tradition of high theory critical thinking to reclaim, through interpretive exegeses, aspects of queer experience that have been downgraded or made shameful. Any piece of academic work “motored” along by the whimsical wisdom of Disney Princesses runs the risk of not being taken seriously (Halberstam 2011: 6). However, this thesis reclaims the serious value of disparaged pop cultural texts by thinking of them with renewed vigour, and beyond traditional ideological critiques. By looking for “counter-knowledges in the realm of popular culture and in relation to queer lives” (19), this thesis understands Disney Princess texts as more complex than what they are, and indeed should be.

Methodology

This thesis is conceived within the qualitative methodological tradition of autoethnography. Autoethnography, which entered the circuitries of cultural studies in 1979 (Reed-Danahay, 1997: 9), is an “approach to research and writing that seeks to

3 Although Carolyn Ellis and Arthur P. Bochner flag 1975 as the year Karl Heider introduced autoethnography into anthropology, there is one important distinction that makes Hayano’s interpretation of autoethnography more comprehensive than Karl Heider’s. This distinction credits Hayano as the more-deserving originator of the term (Ellis & Bochner, 2000: 739). Unlike Hayano, Karl Heider, in his indigenous anthropological study of the Dani people from the Central Highlands of Western New Guinea, describes the “auto-ethnography” of the Dani in ethnic nationalistic terms—as autochthonous since the article is based on “the Dani’s own account of what [their] people do” (1975: 3; Reed-Danahay, 1997: 4). Heider’s fashioning of autoethnography is problematic for the way in which it centralises indigeneity and native-ness. Hayano rightly identifies Heider’s connection of ‘native’ to autoethnography as less than correct by realising the potential for insiders, as well as ‘natives,’ to be fieldworkers capable of autoethnography.

For Hayano, autoethnography depends not so much on the characteristics of the fieldworker conducting a study about their own people, but more on the validity of anthropological data that is obtained through participant observation (Reed-Danahay, 1997: 5). According to Hayano, the important measure for autoethnographers to hold, ‘native’ or otherwise, is that they “possess the qualities of often
describe and systematically analyse personal experience in order to understand cultural experience” (Adams, Ellis & Bochner, 2011: 273). Autoethnography is both method and text in its placement of the self within a social context to produce a self-narrative—an appropriate vessel to contain the multiple projects of “Ventriloqueer”: exploring voice, recalling experience, interpreting, producing, and speaking through queer text(s). I utilise the autoethnographic method for the ways in which it: (a) diverges away from, and indeed “challenges”, canonical ways of doing research (Adams, Ellis & Bochner, 2011: 272); (b) creates new understandings of relationships between authors, audiences, and texts (Barthes, 1997; Derrida, 1978; Radway, 1984); and (c) “accommodates subjectivity, emotionality, and the researcher’s influence on the research” he or she conducts (Adams, Ellis & Bochner, 2011: 274).

Autoethnographic writing is evocative. It seeks to invite and engage readers into a “lived [,] felt experience” (Jones 2005: 764).

The figuring of autoethnography in this thesis partly borrows from the work of anthropologist Deborah Reed-Danahay. Specialising in the field of French regional autobiographies and childhood memoirs, Reed-Danahay’s account of autoethnography combines “native anthropology,”4 where people who were formerly permanent self-identification with a group [,] and full internal membership, as recognised by themselves and the people of whom they are a part” (1979: 100). My application of autoethnography, while in consideration of Heider’s ‘native’ offerings, finds more compatibility with Hayano’s autoethnographical notion of “insider.” The term native, particularly used within the context of indigenous anthropology (westerner observes non-westerner), is charged with the valencies of outdated hierarchies. “Insider,” on the other hand, is more inclusive and it satisfactorily captures the “double-consciousness” of autoethnography, which imagines the researcher as much an insider as an outside observer (Boyd, 2008: 215; Reed-Danahay, 1997: 9).

4 This project can be situated alongside the contours of native anthropology, where I conduct a study of my queer experiences to add to the conversations—sociological reviews, or ethnographies—about gay experience. Here I refer to David Halperin’s How to be Gay (2012), and D. A Miller’s A Place for Us: Essays on the Broadway Musical (1999) as the studies I wish to broaden by adding my own Australian-Chilean autobiographical queer experiential inflections. In this regard, it stays true to the template of ethnic autobiography as it draws on the personal narrative of my life. My thesis is also autobiographically ethnographic in its use of “minoritarian” autobiography to energise an ethnography.
subjects of ethnography become authors of studies over their own groups; “ethnic autobiography,” personal narratives written by ethnic minorities; and “autobiographical ethnography,” in which anthropologists interject their own personal experiences into ethnographic writing (1997: 2).

Not unlike Reed-Danahay’s account of autoethnography, this project animates autoethnography to operate at the combined capacity of “ethnographic autobiography,” neo-5“native autobiography,” and “reflexive ethnography,” where: (a) systematic sociological introspection is voiced in the first person, (b) the writing concerns the experiences of the culture of which I am a ‘native’, and (c) where narration of self opens up space to explore the tensions between culture and self, ethnography and autobiography, theory and emotion, narrative and discourse (Ellis, 1991; Brandes, 1982: 202; Pratt, 1994: 28; Reed-Danahay, 1997: 8).

I strive to achieve the “triadic balance” upon which auto-ethnography relies by writing within the triple axes of self (auto), culture (ethno) and process (graphy) (Chang, 2008: 48; Ellis & Bochner, 2000: 740), using the emotional landscape of my early life as a medium to map the relationships between Disney princess narratives, my aborted heteronormativity and my negotiation of the latter’s disconnectedness from the former. In the process of mapping these connections and failed negotiations, this

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5 “Neo” for two reasons: (a), because I the term native, particularly used in the context of indigenous anthropology (westerner observes non-westerner) is charged with the valencies of out-dated hierarchies; and (b), because ‘neo’-native autobiography reappropriates the dominant-white-man-observes-ostensibly-disempowered-non-white-subject power dynamic of indigenous anthropology in its aim to create a study of experience about and for queer individuals unlike myself.
thesis also explores the ways in which one can receive, interpret, reclaim, and experiment with the types of texts one can produce when playing with voice.

I am interested in using the emotional landscape of my early life to navigate “unregulated territories”\(^6\) that contain my relationships with Disney princess narratives (Halberstam, 2011: 7). The textual portrait I craft uses the methodological genre of reflexive self-narrative to canvas Self as process, or the accumulation of processes (Shermann & Webb, 1994: 257). It is my location, interpretation, articulation and confrontation of these processes that serves as the epistemological and ontological nexus upon which my research turns (Spry, 2001: 711; Santoro, 2011: 120).

Enabling this articulation and interpretation is the textually diverse autoethnographic format which can make use of a range of writing styles including anything from personal essays (Krieger, 1991), experiential texts (Denzin, 1997), to ethnobiography (Lejeune, 1989) and critical autobiographies (Church, 1995). It is in no way contained by these four, of course; autoethnography is where multiple genres of writing coalesce, as Ellis and Bochner note when they list more than thirty styles of writing that fall under the rubric of autoethnography in their chapter “Autoethnography, Personal Narrative, and Personal Reflexivity,” in the SAGE Handbook of Qualitative Research (2000: 733-765). Because autoethnography is constituted by a variation of writing genres—what anthropologist Clifford Geertz refers to as a “blurred genre”—multiple understandings of the method are inevitable (1983: 27). This is perhaps one of the most appealing attributes of the methodology,\(^6\)

\(^6\) Some of the unregulated territory this thesis stumbles into is that of ambivalence. Ambivalence generated out of frictions between hope and loss, ambivalences about the loss of hope, hope in loss and being lost in hopefulness.
its flexibility. The flexible nature of autoethnographic writing practice allows for reconciliation between intellect and experience, emotion and theory, the personal and the cultural. It mobilises a style of writing that functions as both an agent of self discovery while still having social inquiry at its core (Ellis & Bochner, 2000: 746).

**Camp style**

Operating on a less obvious level, this thesis constructs queerness as a process of identity that can be evinced in writing. For the majority of my life, books, words and dictionaries have been the one unfailing source of comfort and respite. Lunch and recess during high school saw the boys chase after balls, bruises and touchdowns on the back oval, and even though my interests lay dangerously close to theirs, I felt at odds within their milieu, so I would boycott their combat and retreat to the library where I felt safe enacting my own secret kind of faggotry. I pored through reams of dictionary pages jotting down words I thought were fascinating. Long words. Strange words. Pavonine. Pulchritudinous. Cynosure. I would write personal essays calibrated to redress the mode of rough, brawny manliness everyone in my grade thought was cool. No one ever read my essays of course. They were mine: by me, for me. I could be myself on the page, fill the crisp whiteness with opinionated ink. On the page, I could also express what I would never dare speak. I wrote poems about boys readjusting wisps of my hair, fanned out of place by the wind while we frolicked on a grassy knoll. I fell in love writing polysyllable. I identified with the words I found in the dictionary because, like me, no one knew how to pronounce, let alone embrace their atypicality, their complicated diacritical marks, and misconstrued strangeness.
Without sounding like an embittered recluse, maintaining interpersonal relationships has always proven a difficult, demanding and often unrewarding venture. People can be capricious creatures. They leave, come back, change their minds, forget to reply, feign remorse and rarely offer to pay for dinner. Books and films, on the other hand, do not come with their own set of emotional dynamisms, nor do they rack up the same emotional debt people can incur when they leave. Texts are malleable and constant, unlike interpersonal relations, which are forever shifting. The unflinching reliability afforded by my books, and my movies, opened up whole new ways of seeing, writing, speaking, and knowing. In my failure to fit in, I opened up “alternative horizon[s] of experience” (Farmer 2000: 26), and, as literary theorist Ellis Hanson writes, accommodating spaces of reason “with access to formations of meaning, pleasure and consumption not readily available in the realm of public culture” (Hanson, 1999: 7). To a self-loathing gay boy raised in a Seventh Day Adventist household, these alternative horizons of experience meant the difference between swallowing a handful of lethal pills, and holding firm in the promise of tomorrow.

My autoethnographic writing—at times, deliberately, at others, accidentally—queers the act of “languaging”\(^\text{7}\) identity by generating a style that is decidedly Camp in its phrasal constructions, word choice, and syntax.\(^\text{8}\) Read as cumbersome because of its floridity, or syntactically defective because of idiosyncratic word choice, the queer ‘voice’ in my writing is the product of a negotiated ventriloquism. It captures the struggle to be heard as queer while still using the voice and language of other

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\(^8\) All the while obeying major orthographic conventions like punctuation, word breaks and capitalizations.
It captures the uncertainty of not knowing when to speak with a voice that is authentically queer, that is, a voice not hindered by convention, or academic propriety. Part of the reason why I put the writing of this thesis on hiatus in its early stages was because the rigidities and pretensions of high theory squashed my interests in low, popular culture. My voice was lost in the boom of words I could not pronounce.

The poetics of camp enacted by this thesis takes full advantage of the resources of language that exemplify (queer) deviations from dominant academic writing culture *par excellence*—poems, metaphors, and personal narratives (Foster, 1997). Camp in this instance is more than just an uproariously ostentatious, extravagantly-over-the-top *style* of queerness; camp, here, refers as well to the “strategies and tactics of queer parody,”¹⁰ which use camp as an apparatus of critique (Meyer, 1994: 8). While still writing within the conventions of an honours thesis, the synthesis of stories, and queer theoretical inquiry contained by this piece of writing embraces a poetics of campness, where “camp [.] conceptualised as parody,” celebrates, through exaggeration, the decadence of gay argot to indirectly critique a lack of acceptance for it. To write with flair¹¹ is to reject accepted and *expected* forms of white, heterosexist language within the academy that privileges a particular community of interlocutors.

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⁹ To speak with authority in the academy is to speak through others: “to feel authorised and the be authorised to voice our own contributions to the body of scholarship in our field, we are in daily dire need of authoritative scholarly accompaniment” (Potgieter & Smit, 2008: 216).

¹⁰ The writing of this thesis, as the product of a critical, queer parodic praxis, relies on the definitions of parody put forward by Canadian literary theorist Linda Hutcheon, who explains the “intertextual manipulation of multiple conventions,” as “an extended repetition with critical difference” (Hutcheon, 1985: 7; Meyer, 1994: 8).

¹¹ While I may have some agency in word choice and sentence structure, the colour of my language is grayed by a format that privileges syntactical order. Where I am able to splash my writing with the language of camp, I am inspired by Sedgwick to use it for its “highly interruptive affective variety,” for its “fascination with ventriloquistic experimentation”, and for its “historically dense exploration” of the reparative (Sedgwick 2003: 150).
On the weakness of autoethnography

The writing practices of autoethnography do, of course, have their weaknesses. For instance, memory, the “fundamental medium of ethnography,” as Heewon Chang writes, is not always a friend to autoethnography (2008: 72). The writing of autoethnography has the tendency to reveal partial truths, and is sometimes unreliable and unpredictable because it relies heavily on memory, which is notorious for selecting, (re)shaping, limiting, and distorting the past (Chang, 2008: 72). In autoethnographic research there is no such thing as orthodox reliability since the creation of personal narratives comes from a situated location that tries to make the present, the imagined future and remembered past cohere (Ellis & Bochner, 2000: 751).

While the volatile nature of memory and memory recollection could be seen as a destabilising force to the methodological integrity of autoethnography—for instance, I found myself writing twenty-seven pages of field notes about my first break up—it is an equally rehabilitating force to the process of authentic writing. It is true that self-introspection cannot be too indulgent. Otherwise a research project could potentially become too personal, or exceedingly self-centred. However, if one is kept rigorously disciplined by the intentionality of the research process (Chang, 2008: 91), as I have been in regulating and systematising memory recollection, the emotional energies of the researcher’s life processes can fuel the intellectual trajectory of their project to create a text that inspires, reflects, reclaims, and educates. In this thesis accurate remembering is not necessarily a goal of supreme importance. Memory and experience are used differently—catalytically—to reclaim, in a queer
voice, aspects of queer experience that have been downgraded, downplayed or made shameful.

In order to regulate the composition of stories about past experiences, I have made use of Chang’s autoethnographic technique of ‘inventorying the self’, as a means of “not only collecting but also evaluating and organizing data,” (2008: 76, original emphasis). Inventorying the self relies on meticulous note taking—rigour that is thought to be absent from autoethnographical writing. I kept a journal that contained my accounts of the past, and accounts of the emotions I felt when analysing artefacts from the past (Borchard, 1998), like the backpack I wore to school during kindergarten (Goodall, 2006), and texts (Neuman, 1999; Thomas, 2010)—my books, mum’s photo albums and, of course, my Princess movies. Further regulation of reflectional pieces of writing involved editing, composing and recomposing, selecting and de-selecting data to form a hierarchy of importance (Chang, 2008: 76).

Unfavourable evaluations that understand autoethnography as a methodology that relies too heavily on the volatility of memory, should be tackled with the position that language is not and will never be transparent enough to provide one single and absolute standard of truth: validity, to Ellis and Bochner, is not about reproducing an exact, unflawed, mirrored account of what happened. Rather, autoethnographic validity is about making the process of “witnessing” possible (Denzin, 2004; Ellis & Bochner, 2006), creating verisimilitude and dynamic connections between people through feelings of lived sameness—creating something that “evokes in readers a feeling that the experience described is life-like, believable and possible” (Ellis and Bochner 2000: 751). The autoethnographic method’s validity to the politics of this project has
more to do with its capacity give voice, using memory, to individuals that may have felt voiceless before writing autoethnographically (Boylorn, 2006; Jago, 2002).

Reparative reading practice

To think of the validity and reliability of autoethnography in this way is to invoke queer literary theorist Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick’s call to the practice of reparative reading. Seeing the merit in failed, pop cultural texts as alternative sources of knowledge is to recognise that knowledge can come from beyond symmetrical, dualistic epistemologies of good and bad, right and wrong,\(^\text{12}\) high and low theory.

Informed by the psychoanalytic tradition of Melanie Klein and the Affect Theory of Silvan Tomkins, in her chapter titled “Paranoid Reading and Reparative Reading, or, You’re so Paranoid, You Probably Think This Essay is About You,” Sedgwick identifies the epistemological practice of paranoid reading as a sanctioned methodological practice of knowing that has become more of a “mandatory injunction” within critical academic projects, rather than that which it should be, “a possibility among other possibilities” of reading and interpreting the world (2003: 126). In a paranoid epistemology, it is implausible to propose that knowledge could arise accidentally, without looking for it, or without having to demystify anything: “paranoia is characterised by placing, in practice, an extraordinary stress on the efficacy of knowledge per se—knowledge in the form of exposure” (138). A paranoid

\(^{12}\) Highlighting the importance of mistakes and failure in queer reading and writing has much to do with “loosening the traumatic, inevitable-seeming connection between mistakes and humiliation,” “taking the terror out of error,” and making “the making of mistakes sexy, creative, even cognitively powerful” (Litvak qtd. in Sedgwick, 2003).
epistemology relies on a “faith in exposure” (139), that is, anticipating a visible problem that needs to be solved and demystified.

To read through a paranoid hermeneutic is to be hypersensitive, “terribly alert,” to a packages of negativity that anticipate all which could be wrong in the world (or the object of suspicion), so as to avoid disillusionment and maximise the “operative goal of seeking positive affect” (Sedgwick 2003: 128). To occupy a position in keeping with the paranoid imperative is to “forestall” surprise, particularly the surprise of pain (Sedgwick 2003: 137, original emphasis). Moreover, to only engage with the paranoid imperative is to decidedly rule out multiplicitous ways of feeling, knowing, and being as a pre-emptive, self-preservative manoeuvre.

Sedgwick is right to note that reading the world through a paranoid hermeneutics of suspicion is but one way of organising and filtering knowledge: “paranoia knows some things well and others poorly” (Sedgwick, 2003: 130). Adding to Sedgwick, I propose that the paranoid imperative does not know some things at all—for instance, how to deduce meaning outside the explanatory structures of suspicion, or how to welcome the possibility of surprise. It is this deficit that calls for new ways of reading, interpreting, receiving not just texts—but the world as well.

To adopt a reparative lens is to see, and seek to know hope, as Sedgwick writes:

[H]ope, often a fracturing, even a traumatic thing to experience, is among the energies by which the reparatively positioned reader tries to organise the fragments and part-objects she encounters or creates. Because the reader has room to realise that the future may be different from the present, it is also possible for her to entertain such profoundly painful, profoundly relieving, ethically crucial possibilities as that the past, in turn, could have happened differently from that it actually did (2003: 146).
I propose that reparative reading practices are useful in thinking about queer experience because they open up new ways of seeing by clearing up existing visual fogs.

This thesis avoids the methodological centrality of paranoia by reading Disney princess texts reparatively—rather than in the way critical pedagogue Henry Giroux does, as objects of suspicion that require demystification, unveiling, and exposing. He writes:

> Given the influence that Disney ideology has on children, it is imperative for parents, teachers, and other adults to understand how such films influence the value of the children who view them. As a producer of children’s culture, Disney should not be given an easy pardon because it is defined as a citadel of fun and good cheer. On the contrary, as one of the primary institutions constructing childhood culture in the United States, Disney warrants healthy suspicion and critical debate.  

(1999: 90)

If I were to engage in a paranoid reading of *Snow White and the Seven Dwarves* (1937) for instance, my close analysis would produce something in the order of a classic ideological critique. Reading Snow White’s death, and subsequent entombment in a glass coffin through an epistemology of paranoia could give rise to feminist readings of Snow white as a passive object of the male gaze. As she defies death through slumber, Snow White transitions from an unruly, unmarried girl to a respectable, married woman of domesticity. She undergoes a period of incubation to become ‘acceptable’ for the Prince.

A paranoid urge to demystify and expose the ‘insidious’ ideologies contained within *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs* (1937) would strive to reveal a harmful portrayal of femininity, one that is “ultimately subordinate to dominant male narratives” (Giroux, 1999: 99). However, this is one possibility among many other interpretive possibilities. A reparative understanding of femininity in *Snow White*
might also consider the evil step-mother’s femininity as an equally viable site of exegesis. By transforming herself into an ugly crone, the wicked witch destabilises notions of the beautiful, “exposing its technologically and culturally constitutive origins and political consequences” (Morgan 1991: 45). It could be proposed that the evil step-mother stages a “performance-oriented form of revolt” against accepted notions of feminine beauty revealing herself to be a very powerful figure of subversion (45). This brief example of reparative reading demonstrates that to only engage with the paranoid imperative is to decidedly rule out multiplicitous ways of reading, thinking, and knowing.

The reason why I choose reparative reading practices over paranoid ones in my reading of the Princess films has to do with this project’s commitment to anti-pessimistic queer politics, and my wish to revere the texts which gave me hope, consolation, comfort, pleasure, joy and reparation in times of sadness.

Outline

Chapter two continues to use a reparative framework by using the Rapunzel post-narrative of Tangled to revitalize the “tired and clichéd” genre of queer testimony (Plummer, 1995: 131). In narrating my coming-out story through the Disney tale of Rapunzel, I offer unique access to knowledge by representing a way, among other ways of seeking, finding and organising the knowledge of experience (Sedgwick, 2003: 130). Instead of using the most salient feature of the original master narrative to exemplify how Disney princess texts can speak to queer experience (Rapunzel’s hair), Chapter Two surveys voice and journey as exploratory metaphors of queer experience. The mandatory injunction of reading Rapunzel’s hair as a queer metaphor is but a possibility among other possibilities.
Chapter Three considers a queer relation to temporality using the work of queer performance studies scholar José Esteban Muñoz. This chapter puts into opposition two different threads of queer theory: the anti-relational queer theory of Lee Edelman and the utopian queer theory of José Esteban Muñoz. I provide a brief outline and critique of the anti-utopian thesis central to Lee Edelman’s work in *No Future* (2004). To demonstrate how Disney Princess texts speak to, and can be reclaimed in the name of, queer experience, Chapter Three conducts an interpretive exegesis of John Musker and Ron Clement’s (1989) *The Little Mermaid*. Through a close reading, it is proposed that Ariel, the protagonist princess, can be thought of as a character that can be made available to a queer reading because of her relationship to time.  

Since the very act of writing this thesis for me is a gesture steeped in reclamatory catharsis, by the end of this project I wish to have produced a text that not only creates a reparative understanding of queer ontology through Disney, I also want compose a thesis that distinguishes me from the voiceless child I once was. As well as being a thesis about loss, hope, and ambivalence, I, too, want it to be in the score of reclamation and redemption through deferred action, “belated understanding,” “retro causality”: *Nachträglichkeit*, to use a Derridean term, whereby events from the past ripen to acquire meaning only when read through their future consequences (Stockton 2009: 14).

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13 Ariel’s desire for access, mobility and independence in the terrestrial world speaks to a queer, forward-casting longing to obtain access, mobility and independence in a largely homophobic, heterosexist world. Always struggling to break free from parental scrutiny, pining for love, forever longing to explore the uncharted land of freedom, Ariel’s struggles are not too dissonant from those of the queer person. Narrations from moments of my own life are used as cases in point.
Chapter Two

Towers, Chains and Witches: Post-narratives, Entrapment and Queer Dreaming

“I’ve come to learn that all our stories add up to the same imprisonment.”
—Paul Monette, Becoming a Man, p. 2

Ow! The cat’s miaow

Every evening, to the playful envy of my Dad, Mumsicles put together a beetroot, lettuce, tomato and cheese treat in the kitchen for her only kitten. Mieowxi, she called me. In summer she would emerge from the kitchen to a chorus of cicadas, brandishing golden crusts on a white plate, the smell of washed tomato clinging to her hands.

In winter, those hands brought me warmth in a cup filled to the brim with brown steaming sweetness. We dug up fuzzy blankets and hot water bottles from the medicine cabinet, turned up the heaters and watched TV as a family. Familia. Mum would let me bring my treats into the living room on the condition that her carpet was kept clean. “No crumbs, no stains, gatito [kitten]”. “Fine,” I mewed back. Catching the crumbs and the splashes of
beetroot juice on my plate, I sat, purring at Mum’s feet as we watched makeover shows and Nigella Lawson’s baking tutorials.

Those years shed themselves of me, leaving evidence on Mum’s mantel piece: school photos tracked my transition from yellow to blue to white; elementary, junior, senior. I eventually turned nineteen. Purrs became hisses. Mum’s suspicions about boys in silver cars mattered more than crumbs on the carpet.

I was careless about where I left my cherry lip balm, my blush; evidence of the self I wanted to hide. I stuffed Mum’s suspicions in the pockets of my jeans. It was not long until they eventually became discoveries. I stopped going to Mum’s face for warmth. It was the most dangerous place in the world. It silently knew things.

I stayed away from her gaze but I clung to every hug she offered, counting down the seconds left of embrace with dread, aware that it could be our last. I stopped measuring my hand in the palm of hers, once a chart of my growth, the spread of her fingers now charted the growth of distance between us.

Needless to say, the evenings I spent wiping purple stains off the carpet in the living room became fewer and fewer. Mum became someone else, a familiar face of strangeness, a freckled complexion awash with the surges of shame and menopause. She didn’t look at me much. I longed for her
to once again become the pink-voiced angel who taught me how to tie my shoes, the warm hand that sought my chubby fingers at every crossing on the way to school, my benevolent “Reina,” my queen. But she was lost to me in her own denial of what I was becoming, what I had always been.

She spoke without saying anything. I said even less. Not all at once but gradually, the murmur running between us grew louder. There was no relief in sighs.

“Mum, I’m gay,” I said on the eighth of February 2012 at roughly three thirty. Days of doleful slumping and mournful weeping around the house over a boy led to the conversation I’d had in my head with her many times before.

‘What’s wrong? You can talk to me about anything. I’m your mother.’ She clutched my hand. Maybe she knew I did not want to cross this road alone.

‘It’s nothing. I just need to be by myself for a few days. I feel sad.’

‘About what.’

‘You wouldn’t understand. Can I be left alone, please.’ Her eyes hungered for an answer. Our hands, sweaty, remain clasped.

‘Dimelo, lo presiento. Tell me, I already pre-sense what this is about.’

*Did you always know?*

I couldn’t look at her in the eye, I felt embarrassed. This was my secret shame. How could she pre-sense anything? No one else but myself knew. I looked out
the window, silence collecting in the air. I gathered my words and translated them into Spanish as best I could. I had a pimple on my left cheek. “This is hard for me to say…I’ve known for years… but I’m pretty sure that I am gay”.

In that moment, I relinquished my mother to an uncertain future. I knew things might never be the same between us. In that moment, I gambled away years worth of goodnight kisses for the freedom of a clear conscience.

Mum’s brown irises were all I could look at. I had entered the most dangerous place in the world by my own volition. Every other object in the room became a smudge. She didn’t cry. She didn’t yell. She didn’t kick me out like I had expected. She let go of my hand, wiped the sweat from her palms and stared at my pimple.

‘What do you mean, “you’re gay”? ’
I never imagined for it to be as agonizing as it was.

‘I … like men. I’m not attracted to women.’

‘Are you sure?’
Too scared to show any signs of annoyance, I nodded affirmatively.

‘I wouldn’t put the both of us through this if I wasn’t 100% sure.’

She probed me with questions in search of answers that made my confession less real. With enough guided reflection maybe I would realise that this was probably just a phase; that I didn’t know what I wanted because I had never tried girl before.
When my answers failed to appease, she wounded me with her own sores, ‘How could anybody love you looking like this,’ she spoke at the cyst on my cheek: ‘I’m not going to tell your father. You will.’

Chapter outline

This chapter utilizes the work of literary theorist Ken Plummer on the queer life-writing genre as a conceptual framework to propose that Disney Princess films are texts that can speak to, and can be reclaimed in the name of queer experience. The analyses made by this chapter draw inspiration from a tradition of feminist film analysis, which examines “the complex entanglements of identity, voice, intersubjectivity, textualities and sexualities” (Jay & Glasgow 1990: 2). In Plummer’s framework, the coming-out narrative is one that is contained within the triple axes of “suffering, surviving and surpassing” (Plummer 1995: 49). By reading Rapunzel’s tale of pain, perseverance and progression through the triangulation of suffering, surviving and surpassing—evident in my own queer narrative—I propose, through interpretive exegesis and close reading, that Nathan Greno and Byron Howard’s refashioned Disney version of the Grimm classic, Tangled (2010), gives new form to Plummer’s idea of the coming-out narrative. The creation of symmetry between Rapunzel’s tale and those of my own embraces a “modernist” shift in queer

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14 Although Plummer specifically refers to ‘gay and lesbian’ coming-out stories, I continue to favor the term ‘queer’ for its capacity to destabilize discrete gender categories.  
16 Here I refer to Nathan Greno and Byron Howard’s characterisation of Rapunzel in Tangled (2010).  
17 By this Plummer refers to the shifts from traditional sexual story telling at the “century’s end” (1995: 131)—both in what is said and how it is said: “sexual stories are fracturing into stories of difference, multiplicity and a plural universe” (1995: 134). That is, how a stories of gay sexuality are loaded with the potential to splinter into other stories, which can give rise to new ways of reading: “stories themselves appear to be proliferating and fracturing to suit the multiple and saturated selves that seem to befit the times” (Broad & Crawley 2004: 43).
story telling that reinvigorates the “tired and clichéd”\(^{18}\) genre of queer testimony (Plummer 1995: 131). By forging new strategies of telling a queer story, my queer story, I engage with Sedgwick’s imagining of the reparative both methodologically and textually to produce something of a post-narrative.\(^{19}\)

**Tradition: a synopsis of that crescendoed, cacophonous din**

Nathan Greno and Byron Howard’s film version of Rapunzel strays in a few ways from the most popular version first published by the Brothers Grimm in *Children’s and Household Tales*, which first appeared in 1812.\(^{20}\) The Grimm telling of Rapunzel’s tale opens with the story of a couple that attempt—in vain—to conceive a child. One day, the wife is overcome by wild craving for rampion\(^{21}\) to the point where she would rather die than live without tasting it. The rampion, however, only grows in the garden of their neighbour, Dame Gothel, a powerful enchantress. The husband, wanting to satisfy his wife’s powerful cravings, climbs into the enchantress’s garden to pluck a tuft of rampion, cost what it will. He does this without being caught for two nights.\(^{22}\) But on the third night, Dame Gothel catches him *in flagrante*. Furious, she threatens his life.\(^{23}\) However, after recognising his petty larceny as an act of love, the enchantress comes to an agreement: the wife can have as

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\(^{18}\) The coming out story, Plummer writes, may have been told “so often” and perhaps in the same repeated context of woe “that [it is] reaching exhaustion,” becoming something of a “crescendoed […] cacophonous din.” (131-2).

\(^{19}\) Here I invoke Plummer’s notion of “post-narrative” to signal coming out stories, and ways of telling them which depart from the traditional format: “As we enter the so-called ‘post-paradigmatic’ era—of post-modernity, post-Fordism, post-feminism, post-history, post-sexuality, post-everything!—then we could expect a post-narrative to be emerging” (Plummer 1995: 131).

\(^{20}\) This chapter utilizes the 1883 edition translated by Lucy Crane (2009: 68-72).

\(^{21}\) *Rapunzel* in German.

\(^{22}\) His wife’s appetite for rampion is whetted every time she eats it.

\(^{23}\) “How dare you climb over into my garden like a thief and steal my rampion! It shall be worse for you!” (Grimm & Grimm 2009: 69).
much rampion as she needs on the condition that they hand over their first child. Distressed, the husband promises everything.

To claim what was promised to her, The enchantress appears at the birth of the child, a girl, who, in keeping with fairy tale hyperbole, was the most “beautiful child on the planet” (Grimm & Grimm 2009: 65). She names the fair child Rapunzel, after the plant her mother crazily hungered for. On the year of her twelfth birthday, Rapunzel is locked in a tower with no doors or stairs, but the enchantress is not cruel enough to deny Rapunzel daily provisions. Every day, she calls out “O’ Rapunzel, Rapunzel! Let down your hair,” and at the sound of this refrain, Rapunzel unbinds all of her twenty ells\(^24\) worth of golden hair, winding it by a hook near the window to haul Dame Gothel up from down below.

Riding through the woods one day, the King’s son hears Rapunzel singing and is besotted by her songbird voice. He follows it to the tower where she is imprisoned, and witnesses the spectacle of the enchantress climbing up Rapunzel’s golden braid. Amazed, he takes note.\(^25\) The next day, he mimics the enchantress’s call and climbs up Rapunzel’s braid to profess his love, and claim Rapunzel as his bride.\(^26\) Rapunzel agrees, thinking to herself, “I certainly like him much better than old Mother Gothel” (Grimm & Grimm 2009: 71).

\(^{24}\) An ell is a unit of measurement approximating the distance from the elbow to the wrist, which is something in the order of 37 inches (Grimm 2009 [1883]: 68).

\(^{25}\) “Since that is the ladder, I will climb it and seek my fortune” (71).

\(^{26}\) In the 1812 version, the tale was “laconic about the question of marriage between Rapunzel and the Prince”; engagement is only ever mentioned in the definitive edition of 1857—a necessary revision for it to be accepted into the Victorian nursery fare (Warner 2010: 330).
Fashioning a ladder made out of silk so that she can climb in and out of her
tower every night at her leisure, Rapunzel keeps her affair clandestine—that is until
her tongue slips. In passing, she remarks how slow the enchantress is to ascend,
comparing her laboured climbed to that of the Prince’s nimble climb: “Mother Gothel,
how is it that you climb up here so slowly, and the king’s son is with me in a
moment?” (Grimm & Grimm 2009: 71). Furious, Dame Gothel, takes a hack at
Rapunzel’s hair, and banishes her into the desert. Dame Gothel’s wrath does not
finish with Rapunzel. Dame Gothel lures the Prince with Rapunzel’s severed hair. He
climbs the tower thinking he will be untied with his beloved, but upon seeing the
witch, and hearing her curses, he springs from the tower and falls into a bush of
thorns that put his eyes out.

The Prince wanders for several years in misery until one day he hears what he
thinks are Rapunzel’s dulcet tones. It is indeed Rapunzel, with twin babies, a boy and
a girl (who have been born in the Prince’s interval of absence). Rapunzel recognises
him, falls at his side, and weeps at his neck. Hear tears restore his vision and they live
happily ever after.

_Tangled: a synopsis of a queer post-narrative_

The fiftieth animated feature film in the Disney animated classics series,
_Tangled_ (2010), “rejects the unities and uniformities” of conventional fairy tales and
embraces “conflict and discontinuity of tradition” (Plummer 1995: 133). Opening
with Flynn, the rogue bandit Rapunzel enlists as her guide through the forest, and not
Rapunzel herself, *Tangled* fractures some\(^{27}\) of the orthodoxies\(^{28}\) left by the Grimm Brothers ‘Rapunzel’ master narrative (Jencks 1987: 7).

“Once upon a time,”\(^{29}\) Flynn tells us, “a single drop of sunlight fell from the heavens. From this small drop grew a magical golden flower. It had the ability to heal the sick and injured” (Fogelman 2010). In this telling of the tale, Rapunzel’s story starts with the healing properties of a magic golden sun flower. It cures a very sick, very pregnant, and much beloved queen who later gives birth to a healthy baby with beautiful golden hair. She is named her Rapunzel.\(^{30}\) Mother Gothel, the malignant enchantress who hoarded\(^{31}\) and hid the golden flower’s healing powers for hundreds of years before it was snipped from her garden, hears about how, and by whom, her flower was used. Because she cannot live without the magic of the golden flower, which has now been absorbed by the queen’s daughter in utero, Gothel breaks into the King and Queen’s castle, and vanishes into the night, baby Rapunzel tucked under her arm. Gothel flees deep into the forest, where she raises Rapunzel as her as her own in a tower.\(^{32}\)

Every year on Rapunzel’s birthday, the King and Queen release thousands of lanterns into the sky in the hope that their lost princess might, one day, be guided by

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\(^{27}\) A master narrative can still be fractured or dispersed by keeping, retexualising and revisioning some traditional forms to create a pastiche of the original, (Plummer 1995: 140).

\(^{28}\) Unwilling to be contained by the strictures of tradition, *Tangled* que(e)ries the importance of virginity—and the anxiety of premarital sex—had in Jacob and Wilhelm Grimm’s grand Rapunzel narrative (Warner, 2010: 334). There is more emphasis placed on liberation, self-discovery and agency.

\(^{29}\) See footnote number 27.

\(^{30}\) To celebrate her birth, the King and Queen launch a lantern into the sky, but their joy is short-lived.

\(^{31}\) By singing to it, she stays eternally young: “Flower gleam and glow, let your power shine, make the clock reverse, bring back what once was mine. Heal what has been hurt, change the fates’ design, save what has been lost, bring back what once was mine,” (Menken & Slater 2010a).

\(^{32}\) She makes the most of Rapunzel’s supernatural hair, brushing it every day to stay young. Just as the sun flower’s magic was activated by song, so too, is Rapunzel’s hair. Every time Rapunzel sings the healing incantation, her hair pulsates with light and cures all ills.
them, and return home. 33 On the day before her eighteenth birthday, Rapunzel expresses her desire to see the lanterns from outside her tower. Unimpressed, Gothel demands that Rapunzel never talk about wanting to leave the tower or the lanterns.

While mother Gothel is away on a three-day expedition fetching sea shells, Flynn Rider, the rogue bandit escaping punishment from both the authorities and royal thieves, stumbles upon the tower Rapunzel has been confined to since her abduction. 34 The pair wander through the forest fending off ruffians, royal guards, narrowly escape death. They fall in love in the process. Once at the Kingdom, Flynn and Rapunzel unwittingly confirm Rapunzel’s birth right as the lost princess (Magnussen 2012: 295). 35

With the help of the royal thieves, the Stabbington brothers, Gothel has Flynn imprisoned to keep Rapunzel’s regal status undisclosed. The Stabbington brothers bind Flynn and the stolen crown to the mast of a ship, and direct the ship to the palace guards. Rapunzel is taken back to her tower.

Flynn escapes to save Rapunzel who, in his absence, has a series of epiphanies that confirm her birth right as the lost princess. 36 Flynn comes to the rescue of

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33 Rapunzel does not know she is the lost Princess, but every year, Rapunzel looks out of her window, yearning to chase the lanterns back to their place of origin, somehow knowing that they are meant for her.
34 He scales Rapunzel’s tower using a bow and arrow, looking for respite, or a place to hide the lost princess’s stolen crown, which he has snatched from the royal thieves. Once in her tower, Rapunzel ensnares Flynn with her hair and agrees to let him go on the condition that he act as her guide to the lanterns. He accepts.
35 Because the discovery is made unwittingly, no one is informed.
36 R: [To Gothel, angrily] “I am the lost Princess, aren’t I?” [Gothel, mouth agape looks on stunned]. R: “Did, I mumble, mother—or should I even call you that?” G: “Rapunzel, do you even hear yourself? Why would you ask such a ridiculous question?” [Gothel goes in to hug Rapunzel]. [Rapunzel deflects Gothel’s advance with a push]. R: “It was you!” G: [with snarl on lip] Everything I did was to protect you.
Rapunzel, but is fatally wounded by Gothel’s knife for his gallantry. As Rapunzel kneels at Flynn’s side, ready to heal him with her magic hair, Flynn, with his last ounce of strength, cuts Rapunzel’s hair with a shard of glass, knowing that it will effectively kill Gothel. Gothel’s youth is sucked from her. She trips out of the tower window and plummets to her death. Flynn also dies, not having the magic of Rapunzel’s hair to heal him. Rapunzel’s tears revive him nonetheless.

The pair ride back to the kingdom where Rapunzel is reunited with her biological mother and father. They all live happily ever after.

Entangled in Queerness: a Queer reading of Tangled—when will my life begin?

Rapunzel’s imprisonment in the tower for what is all of eighteen years speaks to the slow incubation of queer selfhood, which can be anything but pleasant (Holmes 1988; Penelope & Wolfe, 1989; Umans 1988). As my account of that precarious, pre-coming-out period will attest to, the incubation of queer selfhood can be a time filled to the brim with self-doubt, silence, denial, and ambivalence. By reading Rapunzel’s narrative through Plummer’s coming-out framework, this section of Chapter Two

G: [Rapunzel body slams Gothel into wall]. “Rapunzel—”
R: “I’ve spent my entire life hiding from people who would use me for my power—”
G: “Rapunzel!”
R: “—But I should have been hiding from you!”
G: “Where will you go, he [Flynn] wont be there for you.”
R: “What did you do to him?”
G: “That criminal is to be hanged for his crimes.”
R: “No!”
G: “Now, now. It’s all right. Listen to me. Everything is as it should be [goes to pat Rapunzel.
R: [Apprehending Gothel’s hand] ”No! You were wrong about the world. And you were wrong about me. And I will never let you use my hair again!”
[Rapunzel pushes Gothel. Gothel bumps into Vanity, knocks it over. It smashes]
[Rapunzel runs into her room]
G: [to herself] “You want me to be the bad guy? Fine. Now I’m the bad guy.”

pays close attention to four\textsuperscript{38} musical numbers in \textit{Tangled}, demonstrating how they can speak to and be reclaimed in the name of my queer experience. The following songs are surveyed: “When Will my Life Begin” (Menken & Slater 2010b), “When Will my Life Begin (Reprise)” (Menken & Slater 2010c), “Mother Knows Best” (Menken & Slater 2010d), and “I’ve Got a Dream” (Menken & Slater 2010e).

\textbf{Figure 1}: Rapunzel wistfully stares out of her tower, wanting to be near the lanterns.

Rapunzel sings of the outside world—the world of grassy knolls, craggy mountains and colourful kingdoms beyond the walls of her tower—in a way that is redolent of how I imagined the world once I came out: a scary, uncertain, but blindingly exhilarating place: “look at the world, so close and I’m half way to it. Look at it all—so big—do I even dare? Look at me, I just have to do it! \textit{Should I?}—no—here I go!” (Menken & Slater 2010b). She sings with an inextinguishable yearning to know, and a deep enchantment for, the undiscovered things that are yet to come: “and I’ll keep wonderin’ and wonderin’, and wonderin’ when will my life begin?”

\textsuperscript{38}“When Will my Life Begin (Reprise)” is a continuation of “When will my Life Begin”. Because the tune is fractured by dialogue and shifting scenes, I consider the piece in two separate sections (2010a, and 2010b). Another key point to bear in mind is the space in which the reprise is sung—\textit{outside} of the tower: “When Will my Life Begin?” occurs as a musical soliloquy \textit{inside} the tower. The reprise is still a musical soliloquy of sorts, but because it is sung in the presence of Flynn, it could also be a musical monologue.
(Menken & Slater 2010a; Menken & Slater 2010b). Even though there is enough fear and doubt in Rapunzel’s song to evacuate all urgency from her desire to see what lies on the other side of the window ledge, she finds enough courage to *survive* and *surpass* the *suffering* of fear and doubt by springing out of the tower with the grace of a bungee jump.

![Rapunzel leaps from her tower and into the world.](image)

Rapunzel’s definitive leap, as effortless as it appears, is not without its confusion and inner turmoil. Before Rapunzel is ready to openly announce, and later act upon, her desire to witness the ember of floating lights in person, she first engages with a methodical, rational weighing of possibilities. Rapunzel knows this is not what her (foster) mother wants for her life—as harmless as watching lanterns may be—but Rapunzel knows that it must be done, and has been anticipating its approach: “This is it! Today’s a very big day, Pascal39! I’m *finally* gonna do it! I’m gonna ask her! It’s time!” (Fogelman 2010). Rapunzel’s excitement is always undercut by the anxiety of having her ideas repudiated by Gothel.

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39 Pascal is Rapunzel’s pet gecko – her one source of friendship.
I dreaded the thought of telling my mother that I liked men. It was constantly on my mind. When I was eleven, I kept myself motivated about living in the present by seeing the world through a forward casting gaze, telling myself that in a few years’ time maybe the thoughts I had about men would wear off, that I would never have to sit down and tell my Mamá what she did not want to hear, that the arrival of the future might bring with it resolution and peace. The thought of telling the truth was exciting, but that excitement—about finding enduring reciprocity, about being able to blow my lover’s bruises into the sea—was undercut by the dread of disappointing the people I loved the most. It was something I put off, time and time again. I went to bed many a night wonderin’ how and when my life would begin—and every time I fell asleep on the conclusion that it would start only after I told my parents.

Not unlike Rapunzel, very few people knew about my desires to step out of my hidden tower. In fact, no one officially knew—suspicions and rumours were always abundant—until my senior years in high school. And even then, acutely aware of how fast news could travel back to my conservative family, the people who were told had previously proved their valour with silence. Plummer writes, “coming out involves problems of disclosure […] the story is told to a specific other, usually in the ‘strictest confidence’[…] In many gay stories, a close friend is often confided in before coming out occurs” (1995: 58).

\(^{40}\) Queer relation to temporality becomes the theme of exploration in Chapter Three.
Although the luminescence of the lanterns is no secret\textsuperscript{41} because it is visible to all,\textsuperscript{42} Rapunzel guards the privacy of her desire to see the lanterns in the sky \textit{outside of the tower} as though it were a secret. Pascal is the only one who is told in the strictest confidence. She longingly sings to \textit{herself}, when Pascal is not around, about venturing outside: “what is it like, out there where they glow?” (Menken, A. & Slater, G. 2010a). These are musings she has kept hidden for, what is inferred by the lyric “now that I’m older, mother might just let me go,” a long time (Menken, A. & Slater, G. 2010a). Communicating these wishes interpersonally constitutes the risk of being spurned, and this is why Rapunzel waits until the right moment to rupture her vow of silence.

\textbf{Figure 3:} “Today’s a very big day, Pascal! I’m \textit{finally} gonna do it!” (Fogelman 2010).

\textsuperscript{41} Rapunzel sings “now that I’m older, Mother might just let me go,” implying that the topic of venturing out of the tower may have been broached before, or at least acknowledged but never openly discussed. This bears some relation to negotiating queerness with family members; sometimes the topic is broached and discussed at length, other times it is acknowledged but never openly discussed (Bruhm 2004).

\textsuperscript{42} “We always knew you were gay, Milo,” became a standard response to my coming out.
Figure 4: Pascal reacts to Rapunzel’s declaration by puffing out his chest with pride and encouragement as if to say “You can do this; I believe in you.”

Figure 5: Pascal urges Rapunzel to keep speaking. Scared by Gothel’s reaction of disapproval, Rapunzel starts to mumble and her voice drops out entirely. Rapunzel looks over at Pascal for strength.

Mother knows less

Of course, when Rapunzel does finally open up to Mother Gothel about her desire to see the lanterns, she is met with bitter rejection, nonrecognition and haughty didacticism.43

Rapunzel: “Well, I was hoping you would take me to see the floating lights”
Mother Gothel: [condescendingly]“Oh, you mean the stars.”44
Rapunzel: “That’s the thing, I’ve charted stars, and they’re always constant—but these, they appear every year on my birthday, mother. Only on my

43 Haughty didacticism which then turns into a jaunty show tune, “Mother Knows Best.”
44 The way in which Mother Gothel cooingly corrects Rapunzel resembles my mother’s nonrecognition of my same sex attraction as just a phasal thing: “are you sure, maybe it’s just a phase.”
birthday. And I can’t help but feel they’re meant for me. I need to see them, mother, and not just from my window. In person; I have to know what they are!” (Fogelman, 2010).

Figure 6: Here we see Gothel and Rapunzel locked in a shame-humiliation reaction after Rapunzel’s communications about wanting to come out of the tower fail to effectively arouse a positive reaction from Gothel (Basch 1976: 765).

Gothel’s incredulity toward, and impatience at, Rapunzel’s account of the lanterns thwart Rapunzel’s desire for human communication and connection. She wants to connect and communicate outside her closet-tower, outside of where she lives in “nonrecognition” (Gould: 2009: 221). She wants to find a voice outside the tower. By invalidating Rapunzel’s conclusions about the differences between lanterns and stars, “you mean the stars” (Fogelman 2010) Gothel effectively thwarts Rapunzel’s desire to be heard, making Rapunzel question the authority of her voice. She is left to feel that volatile—and what can be thought of as a distinctly queer—affect, shame.46

“Shame,” writes queer theorist Deborah Gould, “floods one when a desired circuit of communication with another is disrupted by nonrecognition […] When a revealed wish for communion is met with nonrecognition, when one’s attempt at

45 I do not wish to universalize shame as a fundamental experience of all queer people because “the degree to which queer people escape humiliation and degradation is highly variable” (Adam 2009: 304). However I do draw on my life narrative and the work left by queer theorist Jennifer Moon to suggest that experiences synonymous with shame—ambivalence, secrecy, embarrassment—do play some part, and can lead to feelings of shame, in the life of a queer person.

46 Cf. Jennifer Moon: “shame is an inescapable part of gay identity […] shame adheres to any position of social alienation or nonconformity” (Moon 2009: 359).
identification though communication fails to be taken up, one might feel, in Tomkins’ words, “naked, defeated, alienated, lacking in dignity or worth” (Tomkins cited in Gould 2009: 222). Arms folded, head downward, Rapunzel tries to cover the nudity of her shame in not being heard, and spoken over. Hands clasped, mouth closed, I gazed out of my room’s window, wounded by Mamá’s reaction of denial, of nonrecognition “are you sure it’s not just phase?”

Gothel’s nonrecognition of Rapunzel escalates into song. “Mother knows best,” indexes how little she actually knows about the world beyond the tower, and, still using Tangled as a metaphor for my own queer experience, how little my own mother knew about the gay world. In an attempt to frighten Rapunzel into staying ‘safely’ confined in her tower, Gothel, using the paranoid imperative, identifies a catalogue of obstacles that would supposedly render Rapunzel a staggering mess, were she ever accomplish her goal of leaving the tower:

Mother knows best, listen to your mother, it’s a scary world out there. Mother knows best, one way or another, something will go wrong I swear! Ruffians! Thugs! Poison Ivy! Quicksand! Cannibals, and snakes. The plague. Also, large bugs. Men with pointy teeth! And—STOP! No more: you’ll just upset me!

(Menken & Slater 2010d).

Gothel’s song about ruffians and thugs echoes the broad and often incorrect generalisations made about the gay world, particularly indictments laid against gay sex practices that paint gay men as narcissistic, self-destructive, sex-
crazed, and emotionally dysfunctional fascists (Crimp 2002). For instance, when Gothel sings about “the plague,” and “large bugs,” she reproduces the microbial hype that coexisted with the early identification of the AIDS epidemic. The terror and manipulation in Gothel’s song about dirty, bestial men outside the tower, recreates the symbolic role “dirt and germs have played in the social organisation of sexual difference,” particularly the sexual difference of gay men (Patton 1986: 11). One of the first concerns Mamá expressed about the lifestyle I had ‘chosen’ for myself had to do with the life-span of gay men with AIDS: “you will end up in a hospital bed, chupado. You will die, Camilo.”

Figure 9: Aids, the plague.

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47 For an account of how even in contemporary times, this microbial hype still exists, refer to Stover and Northridge’s (2013) article.
48 In Spanish, chupado is a colloquial way to describe somebody who is very skinny. It is the past participle of chupar which means ‘to suck’.
In spite of Gothel’s macabre forewarnings, Rapunzel continues to dream, and sing about dreaming and wonderin’, even once she’s escaped her tower. Rapunzel’s dreaming, a type of forward casting gaze toward the future continues to inform the way she relates to the present time. It keeps her animated: “I’ve got a dream, (she’s got a dream)! I’ve got a dream, (she’s got a dream)! I just want to see the floating lanterns gleam! And with every passing hour, I’m so glad I left my tower! Like all you lovely folks, I’ve got a dream” (Menken & Slater 2010e). Rapunzel’s dreams of freedom and self-
discovery keep her moving forward. The lovely folks to whom Rapunzel refers here are a community of ruffians that reside in a bar with the unlikely title of “The Snuggly Duckling”. These are the ruffians and thugs Gothel’s song “Mother Knows Best” described. But as Rapunzel finds, they hardly live up to the ignominious reputation they were slapped with in Gothel’s song. They too have dreams like Rapunzel, only gentler and softer: “Tor would like to quit and be a florist. Gunther does interior design. Ulf is into mime, Atilla’s cupcakes are sublime. Bruiser knits, Killer sews, Fang does little puppet shows, and Vladimir collects ceramic unicorns” (Slater and Menken 2010e).

Figure 13: Atilla brandishing his sublime cupcakes.

Figure 14: Killer and Bruiser sewing and knitting, respectively.
Through the telling and hearing of each other’s dreams, each other’s stories, at The Snuggly Duckling, Rapunzel and the ruffians are bound into community. The formation of community through sharing stories mimics the dialectic formed by coming out narratives and communities in the queer world, as Plummer writes: “for narratives to flourish, there must be a [receptive] community to hear; for communities to hear, there must be stories which weave together their history, their identity, their politics”—stories that tell themselves and others who they are where they came from, and what they dream about (Plummer 1995: 87; Pettit 1996). On a cloudy night in August last year, I attended a coming-out-by-fairy-light event hosted by one of the queer collectives at the University of Sydney, SHADES. These events provide a forum in which queer individuals can share their tales of coming out, and not coming out—tales of queer life. As I sat there in the half-light of wax candles and lanterns amidst the rustle of skittle wrappers, I heard my life echoed in the stories of others and felt an enveloping sense of comfort in being able to connect with identities in difference. Cynical about notions of a queer community, I was hesitant to attend the event,
however, after that night I became more involved with the queer student community for the ways in which I felt accompanied in my sadness.

Community fosters hope. Hope brings joy. The following chapter will explore how a joyfully queer, forward-dawning relation to temporality can equip an individual with wings and a license to dream, possibly the most powerful weapons in an arsenal used to combat intolerance and the messy sludge of pessimism.

Chapter Three

Someday my Prince will come: Hope, Utopic Optimism and Futurity

In the last chapter, we were at one with the despairs of Rapunzel, the “lost child,” confined, forlorn, and hidden at the top of an insurmountable tower. But as her hairy narrative grew, we also traced Rapunzel’s shift from entrapment to liberation, from confinement to community. In a similar vein, this chapter shifts, leaving behind affliction to focus on excitement and optimism—hope, even. Having already mapped out some of the woeful terrain that can come with being a denizen of the Queer kingdom in “Towers, Chains and Witches: Entrapment and Queer Dreaming,” we need to recall that despair and shame are not the only affects central to the experience
of queerness\textsuperscript{50}. Queerness is more than anguish. To treat pain and shame as obligatory and resonating themes of queer experience is to memorialise the idiocy of those incapable of seeing that love and desire are more than purchases in genital ‘compatibility’.

Queerness too invites joy. Bursting, sparkling, effervescent, vibrant joy. But all too often that joy, when it is not overshadowed by grief, gets mistaken for the sparkle of gay pride, or the bursting of tears—a reaction to the build up of dust after years spent in the closet. Unlike pride, which carries within it paranoid, collective, reactionary,\textsuperscript{51} performative, and almost vengeful valencies that sassily lisp “We will perform happiness to spite all of you who were/are in disaccord with our queerness”, the joy talked about here is the one summoned by hope, a queer hope that cannot be touched by the venom of the cognates for poofter, faggot, punce, or dyke.

Without sticking any banners\textsuperscript{52} to a picket in the name of pride, this chapter wishes to re-arouse a sense of double meaning back into the word ‘gay.’ By that I mean this chapter wishes to reinstate the original ‘carefree,’ ‘happy,’ and ‘bright’ invocations ‘gay’ once contained but have now dropped out of use to accommodate meanings that mobilise ‘gay’ as either a state of being or a scathing jibe that gets thrown around like a dodge-ball on the schoolyard playground. If there is room for gay to be coterminous with poofter, and things like anguish and crying (by default), then there is room for an archive of associations that enable ‘gaiety’ and ‘mirth’ to be conjured up by that three-lettered adjective.

\textsuperscript{50}While pain, suffering and shame are able to be thought of as generating a reparative capacity, as "productive" for queers—as potential organisers "of a discourse of queer counterpublicity" (Moon, 2009: 359)—to engage in a conversation with this idea, the conversation it deserves, long and through, is beyond the scope of this paper. For further elaboration, see Moon

\textsuperscript{51}Here I draw from David Halperin and Valerie Traub’s critique of the gay pride movement: “Gay pride does not even make sense without some reference to the shame of being gay, and its very successes (to say nothing of its failures), testify to the intensity of its ongoing struggle with shame” (2009: 3).

\textsuperscript{52}Even if this project were about pride, at any rate, it involves more pixels than picket signs.
The critical project of this chapter arises as a response to the recurring theme of pessimism that has become a nucleus of sorts in accounts and retellings of queer experience. While the collective articulation of sorrow can build community and give solace to others in similar predicaments, the prominence of such pessimism also has the potential to eclipse notions of happiness and joy that are just as applicable to queer life as suffering, surpassing and surviving (Plummer, 1995; Miller, 1998; Munt, 2007; Muñoz 2009; Love 2007). Disability theorist Michael Snediker identifies this dominating and organising theme within queer theoretical discourse as “queer pessimism”, the “tropaic gravitation toward negative affect” that jettisons optimism as “epithetically premature” (2009: 4). To think of optimism as premature is to engage with an epistemology of paranoia, as discussed in chapter one, where one pre-emptively anticipates and becomes “terribly alert”, to a packages of negativity before they even happen so as to avoid disillusionment and maximise the “operative goal of seeking positive affect” (Sedgwick, 2003: 138). The ultimate goal is happiness of a kind—just re-routed via pessimism.

Traipsing down a path less trodden, one lined with more blossoming flowers than thorns, keeping our gaze skyward to pave a more optimistic trajectory for those left in the wake of queer tears this chapter—through a mobilisation of Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick’s call to the practice of reparative reading—hones in on the positive affects of queerness not dissimilar to hope, as crucial sites of exploration. Accounts of queerness that treat dereliction and suffering as privileged synonyms (Snediker, 2009: 4) are momentarilly placed to the side to expand upon an epistemology of queerness that smiles. Subsequently, the focal points of this chapter are hope, optimism, and the
relation to temporality hope and optimism\textsuperscript{53} can give rise to. (That hope is commensurate with optimism is a matter this section clears up a little later on.)

Making a case for the personal and political importance of positive affect, this section puts to use the theories of queer performance studies scholar José Esteban Muñoz about a queer relation to time in \textit{Cruising Utopia: The Then and There of Queer Futurity} (2009). Special attention is paid to Muñoz’s concept of futurity, “a refunctioned notion of utopia in the service of subaltern politics that envisions a future in the present” (2009: 49). To continue with the previous chapter’s work of reading Disney Princess films as texts that speak to, and can be reclaimed\textsuperscript{54} in the name of queer experience, I leave Rapunzel behind to investigate the narrative of another Disney princes, Ariel, from John Musker and Ron Clement’s (1989) \textit{The Little Mermaid}.\textsuperscript{55} I locate Muñoz’s concept of a queer, present sense of the future,\textsuperscript{56} in Ariel’s desire to belong to another world. Using fragments from my own life to justify

\textsuperscript{53}Hope and optimism are not the same. This difference is elaborated upon in the section titled “Hope and optimism: crucial differences” on .

\textsuperscript{54}In an attempt to locate my own ficto-critical autoethnographically orientated analysis of \textit{The Little Mermaid} within the larger interdisciplinary project of queer cultural studies, Muñoz’s postulations on utopic futurity have been instrumental in enabling me to understand my own Disney spectatorship as a manifestation of queer utopianism, as a way of vicariously crafting a vision for the future through spectatorship and disidentification (with normative masculinity). Viewing and enjoying the Disney Princess film canon, I have learned, can be a Queer practice where queerness, as a utopic formation, is a formation based on an economy of desire (2009: 4). And desiring a thing—romance, belonging, enduring reciprocity—that is not yet here, that is yet to come (Muñoz 2009: 4).

\textsuperscript{55}\textit{The Little Mermaid} has tremendous significance to my life. Watching and re-watching it as a boy, the movie became a shield I used to withstand the disabling cultural forces hell-bent on “extinguish[ing my] faggotry” (Muñoz 1999: 37). I could retreat to the bath, pretend to have long hair and splash away taunts from the boys who would not let me join their soccer games because I chased the ball with a skip. I tried to fit in with them because it would have made Mum and Dad proud. It would have been a refreshing change from the clouds of oestrogen I was so used to. When my attempts at befriending the boys lacked success, books and Disney films gave me something to aspire to: if Ariel could prosper below such turbulent waters, then surely, animated by animation, I too could endure hardship in the clouds for just a little bit longer while I excitedly waited for what was ‘yet to come,’ what I hoped would come: acceptance, love and joy.

\textsuperscript{56}As well as describing a \textit{present} sense of the future, futurity is also used to refer to a \textit{time}, and a \textit{place} that is not yet here (Muñoz, 2009:100), a utopian ideal that “decadently” critiques of the “banality” present (Muñoz, 2009:111).
how Ariel’s narrative can be made available to such a reading, it is proposed that Ariel embodies a queer, forward-dawning relation to temporality.\footnote{Ariel’s desire for access, mobility and independence in the terrestrial world speaks to a \textit{queer}, forward-casting longing to obtain access, mobility and independence in a largely homophobic, heterosexist world. Always struggling to break free from parental scrutiny, pining for love, forever longing to explore the uncharted land of freedom, Ariel’s struggles are not too dissonant from those of the queer person. Many of the troubles evident in Ariel’s life, I unconsciously experienced. Only through belated understanding and recollection am I able to situate myself within Ariel’s narrative of suffering, surpassing and surviving.}

In advocating hope as a hermeneutic through which queer people can envision a present sense of their futures, this chapter puts two different threads of queer theory into opposition in an attempt to at once define and resist a pessimistic, antiutopian mode of queer theory while embracing the set up of its optimistic, utopic, futural counter-theory. Since the introduction of this chapter has already launched José Esteban Muñoz as the scholar with whom I engage conceptually for this close reading, I now introduce Lee Edelman as the opposing theorist whose work this section critically examines.

**Edelman on the limits of futurity**

The core tenets of my argument for this section are situated within the wider field of queer and feminist debates about the queer subject’s relation to the triple threaded modality of time. Lee Edelman’s book \textit{No Future} (2004) is made relevant to this discussion of queer temporality for the ways in which it articulates the anti-utopian\footnote{A theory spearheaded by Leo Bersani in one of the most seminal antiutopian, anti-futural texts, \textit{Hemos} (1995).} mode of queer theory. In a nutshell, the anti-utopian\footnote{Also known as Anti-social queer theory. Here, the use of the term \textit{Anti-social} gestures toward Halberstam’s utilization of it in her paper “The Anti-social Turn in Queer Studies,” where she describes queer theory under the influence of Leo Bersani’s understanding of sex between men as “anti-communitarian, self-shattering, and anti-identarian”—as facilitating the move away from “projects of redemption, reconstruction, restoration, reclamation and towards what can only be called”} mode in queer theory...
claims to be less naïve by decentring positivity, a redemptive politics of affirmation,
and a politics founded on hope for an imagined future.

A queer relation to temporality that is oriented toward the future, that is
always on the lookout for the-something-better that is yet to come, according to
Edelman, reflects a queerness that insists on hope as its only affirmation. It does not
promise or guarantee anything: “such queerness proposes, in place of the good,
something I want to call ‘better,’ though it promises, in more than one sense of the
phrase, absolutely nothing” (5). Rather than reject the ascription of negativity to the
queer, Edelman suggests that it might be politically productive to accept and even
embrace a “disidentification” with “the promise of futurity” for the strategic purpose
of properly entering the political sphere:

“[B]y denying our identification with the negativity of this [death] drive, and
hence our identification from the promise of futurity, those of us inhabiting
the place of the queer may be able to cast off that queerness and enter the
properly political sphere, but only by shifting the figural burden of queerness
to someone else” (2004: 27).

Queer politics, according to Edelman, relies too much on forward projection, and an
over-investment in homophobic and heterosexist meanings of hope crafted in the
image of the child, an emblem of reproductive futurity. Unlike Muñoz, who envisions
the future as an event full of promise and potential, a utopia, Edelman’s treatise
vilifies a politics of hope toward the future as purely symbolic—as a hermeneutic
always operating in the direction of a future reality that is rooted in distortions of the
past. There actually is no future for queers in Edelman’s treatise:

We might like to believe that with patience, with work, with generous
contributions to lobbying groups or generous participation in activist groups

an anti-social, negative and antirelational theory of sexuality” (Halberstam 2008: 140; Bersani 1986;
Bersani 1996).
or generous doses of legal savvy and electoral sophistication, the future will hold a place for us—a place at the political table that won’t have to come at the cost of the places we will seek in the bed or the bar or the baths. But there are no queers in that future as there can be no future for queers, chosen as they are to bear the bad tidings that the can be no future at all: that the future, as Annie’s hymn to the hope of “Tomorrow” understands, is “always/A day/away” (2004: 30).

Edelman’s distance from a politics of hope, and the redemptive project of futurity place his treatise on queer temporality within the anti-utopian queer theory rubric because, in the radically realist-bordering-pessimist tradition of Leo Bersani, Edelman engages with pessimistic realism to critique the function of utopianism as a “poor substitute for critical intervention” to the state of queer ontology (Muñoz 2009: 6). Versed in the tradition of Lacanian psychoanalysis, Edelman appropriates the theories of Symptom, Symbol and (the death) Drive in his futureless project to passionately abject-ify the reliance gay and lesbian politics have upon the ideology of a hopeful future, which according to Edelman is kept alive by deceptive meanings and misrecognitions:

[L]ike the network of signifying relations that forms the Lacanian symbolic—the register of the speaking subject and the order of the law—politics may function as the framework within which we experience social reality, but only insofar as it compels us to experience that reality in the form of a fantasy: the fantasy, precisely, of form as such, of an order, an organisation, that assures the stability of our identities as subjects and the coherence of the imaginary totalisations through which those identities appear to us in recognizable form (2004: 7).

60 In order to place Lee Edelman’s work within a genealogy of Anti-social queer theory, it would do us well to briefly contextualise No Future by indexing a key anti-utopian text that inform a large part of Edelman’s polemic: Leo Bersani’s Homos (1995). Perhaps the most notable similarity between Leo Bersani’s Homos and Lee Edelman’s No Future is the feature of death drive within their theses. In Freudian psychoanalysis, the death drive is a propulsion toward, as the name suggests, self destruction and death itself. Bersani’s understanding of the death drive in Homos is not so much about death per se. His interests lie in aligning sexuality, particularly male homosexuality, with the death drive’s tendencies toward self destruction to suggest that it might be “politically productive rather than detrimental, to cease resisting the assumption that” “to be penetrated is to abdicate power.” (Dean 2008 124; Bersani 1987: 212). Perhaps not so much a pull toward death, but a pull toward the negative affects presumed to be contained by death and pain, Bersani identifies Masochism, gratification derived from a form of self-destructive humiliation, as a corrosive, “homophobic representation of homosexuality” that should be embraced, even if it is with pain “at least provisionally” for strategic purposes (Bersani qtd in Dean 2008; Dean 2008: 125).
The actual future, according to Edelman, is continually deferred by time itself when “fantasies that reproduce the past through displacement,” in the form of optimistic futurity, become incentives to better living (2004: 30-31).

Rankling more than his fair share of scholars (Snediker 2009; Dean 2008; Halberstam 2008), Edelman interrogates the validity of a queer politics of hope based upon a present sense of the future by figuring the queer that relates to temporality with a future orientation as pathos laden: “forever near the goal of a union they’ll never in fact achieve, [they’re] held in thrall by a future continually deferred by time itself, constrained to pursue the dream of a day when today and tomorrow are one” (2004: 30). He forecloses the thought of a queer future as mere fantasy, a stalling strategy queers use to “delay the actualisation of social reality, transmitting it to the future it aims to bequeath to its inner child” (2004: 29). A quick reduction of Edelman’s argument into summary reads the following way: planning for the queer future, ‘someday,’ is all well and good, until someday is today, or even worse, until someday becomes the yesterday that was lost in overzealous planning and contemplative astonishment about that which was to come. Edelman’s treatise identifies the tendency for queers to envision their lives through a lens of reproductive futurity as a venture in predestined disillusionment—because a politic that foregrounds the universalising emblem of the child, a product of heterosexuality, can never honestly vitalise a queer anything, especially not hope for the future.

Hope and optimism: crucial differences

The border between hope and optimism is a tenuous one. If this border were ever to be illustrated on a blank piece of paper, a linear arrangement of division would
not suffice. A messy, swirly, cycloidal conceptual border would be more accurate, where lines overlap, thicken, disappear and cover ground in the place where others do not. At any rate, border suggests the divisive organisation of proximal, adjoining territories. Like adjoining territories, hope and optimism neighbour one another. For the intents and purposes of this chapter a distinction must be made between the two. The distinction is this: hope and optimism are differentiated by their different relationships to time. Hope is futural, “the emotional modality that permits us to access futurity, par excellence” (Muñoz 2009: 98). Whereas optimism, not entirely barred from stretching into the future, is a “social relation involving attachments that organise the present,” a “scene of negotiated sustenances that make life bearable as it presents itself ambivalently, unevenly, incoherently” (Berlant 2011: 14, emphasis added). Where optimism is the organising principle of the present, hope is the organising principle of the future. Elaborating upon this idea is disability theorist Michael Snediker who, on queer hope, writes that “[h]ope is promissory; hope is a horizon” (2009: 16). Drawing on Judith Butler, Snediker notes that “hope differs from that of queer optimism” in that “hope held-as-promissory (as “possibility”), is “emergent at the limits of our schemes of intelligibility” (2009: 16, Butler qtd. in Snediker). Optimism is more immediate to present schemes of intelligibility whereas hope, though “not predictive nor even necessarily precise about its objects” is normally seen to be future-directed (Barcan 2013: 174). Hope is the thing we feel when we do not know what awaits us on the other side of the corner. It is a projection of optimism—an affect of the present—into the future. It is where “we ask ourselves what it might mean to continue in a dialogue where no common ground can be

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61 That is to say that hope contains and involves the nature of promise, where promise is more or less an assurance on which expectation is to be based.
assumed, where one is, as it were, at the limits of what one knows yet still under the
demand to offer and receive acknowledgment” (Butler 2005: 21-22).

**If not this, then what? Futurity**

In the work of Edelman, futurism is too blindly committed to the metaphorical
figure of tomorrow, ‘the child,’ and this is where the future in his treatise becomes
contrary to queerness because a future that is reliant on figurative and/or metaphorical
procreation does not take into account queer sexual dissidence. While I do not
completely disagree with Edelman, his polemic against the future for queers, which
only resonates on the level of *reproductive* futurity, vilifies a queer politics of hope,
and a queer politics of hope only shares a somewhat arbitrary relation to reproductive
futurity. For instance a queer person can be hopeful about things that do not involve
procreation. A procreative future is but one ontological possibility among others.
Edelman uses the child as hope’s arch-metaphor.

Despite the only ever-ambiguous promise for queers of a hopeful future
imagined via procreative metaphors, queers continue to live, labour and enact queer
worlds in the *present*. As well as being a treatise about a queer future, Muñoz, too,
considers the validity of the present by insisting that a queer utopic relation to time
calls upon on the present’s dialectical relationship to the future, where a negation of
the present “that which merely is”, points to “what should be” (Bloch & Adorno,
1988: 12). That is to say, having a general sense of what is not working for the queer
person in the present can provide a clearer idea of what may work in the service of the
queer person for the future. In order to sketch blueprints for a more live-able future,
distant or near, one must factor in the deficits of the present. Here the future is not separate from the present, nor from the past either; they are connected, as Muñoz explains: “the dialectical movement that I am attempting to explicate is the interface between an engagement with the no-longer conscious [past] and the not-yet-here [the future]” (Muñoz, 2009: 87). Futurity, a present sense of the future, relies on the present as well as the past to provide “both a utopian kernel and an anticipatory illumination” (Muñoz, 2009: 91).

While Edelman draws on psychoanalysis to construct his argument, Muñoz draws on Marxism. Guided by idealist German philosophy, particularly the work of Marxist German philosopher Ernst Bloch, Muñoz’s theorisation of queer relationship to time places emphasis upon the then and there of futurity—a present sense of the future, what I, or what you, understand now or today as that which is yet to come tomorrow (2009: xi, original emphasis). Muñoz—writing with a sentiment similar to that of Heather Love when she writes “given the scene of destruction at our backs, queers feel compelled to keep moving on toward a brighter future” (Love, 2007: 162)—casts futurity as a critique of the dominant order of the present, as a way of envisioning utopia to propel the queer individual onward: “queerness is a structuring and educated mode of desiring that allows us to see and feel beyond the quagmire of the present. The here and now is a prison house” (Muñoz 2009: 1, emphases added). So shrill are his disdainful cries against the temporal contours of present, Muñoz slathers the idea of ‘today’ with the designation of “quagmire”, a soft boggy area of land that gives way underfoot that should be approached with caution (2009: 1). More striking than the metaphor of the quagmire is Muñoz’s use of the present as a “prison
house”— an illustration that implies, a sentence of confinement, not unlike Rapunzel’s confinement. The future is freedom. Hope is bail.

“Queerness is not yet here” – the maxim that underscores most of Muñoz work—appeals to the suggestion, where Muñoz overlays the temporal with the ontological, that we “hold queerness in a sort of ontologically humble state, under a conceptual grid in which we do not claim to always already know queerness in the world” (2009: 22). Here, a refusal of the paranoid impulse to demystify and expose, and know, insists upon a more reparative understanding of the uncertainty and ambivalence of queerness as process, as becoming.

Muñoz’s forward glance into the untapped, unknown pleasures of the future, rely on hope as hermeneutic that propels the queer onward. I am in greater concordance with Muñoz’s anti-antiutopian queer theory because it imagines queerness as a temporal arrangement that “lets us feel that this world is not enough, that indeed something is missing” (2009: 1). Queer politics, queer ontology needs a dose of utopianism, because “Utopia lets us” 62 conceptualize spaces “outside of heteronormativity, new worlds, new realities that are not irrevocably constrained by the HIV/AIDS pandemic and institutionalised state homophobia” (Muñoz, 2009: 35).

Without ever knowing the terminology for it, I have always engaged with the reality of the present by thinking about that which was and is to come. Even as a child, I can hardly recall ever appreciating the present tense. For me it was, and still is

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62 Here Muñoz uses ‘us’ to address people that have been “caught up in the HIV/AIDS pandemic—people that have been affected in ways that are both direct and relational, subjects who might be women, or men, queer or straight” (2009: 195). ‘Us’ is used as a unifying thread, “a node of commonality within a moment and space of chaos and immeasurable loss” (Ibid.).
about either over-contemplating the past\textsuperscript{63}, or planning for a mythologised future.

What there was in kindergarten was not enough. What there is now is not enough.

There is always more to come, more to anticipate as Muñoz, on Utopia, writes:

“The here and now is simply not enough. Queerness should and could be about a desire for another way of being in both the world and time, a desire that resists mandates to accept that which is not enough [...] utopia is not prescriptive; it renders potential blueprints of a world not quite here, a horizon of possibility, not a fixed schema. It is productive to think about Utopia as flux, a temporal disorganisation, as a moment when the here and the now is transcended by a then and there that could be and indeed should be”\textsuperscript{(2009: 96-97).}

Looking in the mirror at the pseudo-folliculitis on my skin, the pimple on my right cheek, I lulled myself with visions of a day where I would never again have to worry about how the sun cast its light on my face. \textit{In a few months, if you consume enough sunflower kernels and oregano oil pills, you will be beautiful. Someday, after you tell your parents you are gay, you won’t have to lie to anyone about where or who you are. It will get better.} Even now, writing this thesis, a futural orientation is what propels me onward. \textit{When you finish writing this thesis you will be able to enjoy the bristles of the sun on your skin upon a bed of sand. Think of all the opportunities you will have, academically, socially, and financially. It will get better.}

A present sense of the future, according to Muñoz, is central to the state of being gay or lesbian because “queerness is not simply a being but a \textit{doing for} and

\textsuperscript{63}Kathryn Bond Stockton’s notion of the queer child, deserves some adumbration here. In Stockton’s conceptual economy, a queer child is one that grows to the side, a child that “delays” and “hangs, suicide-like, in spectral forms,” instead of taking the normative upward trajectory of most straight children (2009: 4). The concept of delay is important to a consideration of queer relations to temporality because (although it centralises the past), like Muñoz’s concept of futurity, “a warm illumination of a horizon imbued with potentiality,” Stockton’s idea of delay also relies on the \textit{horizontal}: instead of growing in a vertical movement, hence the term “growing up,” the development of the queer child includes sideways and backwards motions (2009: 4). Stockton conjures another term “Backwards birth” in which the child, having no established forms to hold itself in the public or legal fields is left unavailable to itself in the present—a time that is not yet queer, or ready for the child’s queerness—and can only become their true selves once the idea of themselves as a straight child dies for the queer one to be delivered: “whenever (parental) plans for [the child’s] straight destination have died, the designation ‘homosexual child,’ or even ‘gay kid,’ may finally, retrospectively be applied” (2009: 6).
toward a future” (2009: 1, emphasis added). For many years, I withheld vital information from my family circle about my sexual orientation because the timing was wrong. I was being, or rather not being for the future. During this period of my life, living in the present as an embodied chamber of secrets, I held my tongue as an act of paranoia that more or less secured the certainty of a future with my family. Not saying anything shielded me from the explosions of negative affect that could have ensued, and led to me being spurned. “Queerness,” writes Muñoz, “is essentially about the rejection of a here and now[,] and an insistence on the potentiality or concrete possibility of another world,” because the present is a wasteland not yet ready for queerness (2009: 1).

A hopeful understanding of the future is important to the queer individual because accepting the world as it is now with all of its unfinished, unpolished and imperfect realities would be to fall into graves of complacency, it is to die unfulfilled without seeing what was to come, what will be. A present sense of the future demands that the following question be asked: why give in to a stale present when a politically transformative future can be ushered into fruition by and through a politics of hope and the notion of potentiality? Muñoz prompts us into thinking that it is better to understand queer relation to time as having a similar valence to what French Philosopher Alain Badiou refers to as the thing-that-is-not-yet-imagined, what Italian philosopher Giorgio Agamben calls potentiality, what Bloch would say operates in the realm of the not-quite-conscious, what Muñoz calls the not-yet-here (Badiou 2005; Bloch 1995; Bloch 1998; Agamben 1999; Agamben 2000; Muñoz 2009: 22). A queer forward-dawning relation to temporality begs for us to sing with the assurance Ariel has about belonging when she warbles at the peak of her tune “I don't know when, I don't know how, but I know something’s starting right now. Watch and you'll
see, someday I’ll be part of that world.” That world being one of transformative political presentness, not future-ness, where forbidden loves just happen and escape social stigmatization.

Not unlike Ariel’s Tomorrow, my tomorrow as a queer person has been filled with today’s untapped promise—untapped because today is the wrong time to enact a new tomorrow; untapped because in order to realise a tomorrow fecund with actualised promise, one must first contemplate “the limitations of an alienating” and “binding presentness” to evoke a utopic tomorrow (Muñoz 2009: 5). We must get a sense of what is not working today in order to rule it out for tomorrow. Bloch calls this critical methodology of contemplation “astonished contemplation” (1988: 18-70) where a scrutiny of the present enables the establishment of blueprints for a smoother running, more live-able, less torturous future (Muñoz 2009). Not doing anything today, dreaming about the future might seem like, childish, fruitless passivity and idealisitic wastefulness to the antisocial queer theorist like Edelman but lack of action is a form of radical passivsim where doing nothing is refusing to do something. At least that is my understanding of what Muñoz means when he opens his book with “Queerness is not yet here,” and “we are not yet queer” (2009: 1). “We are not yet queer” because we refuse to be queer in a time that imposes upon us constricting margins. We are not yet queer because to be wholly (utopically) queer is to live and love freely in a time where homosexuality and lesbianism are not considered “very dangerous sign[s] of the apocalypse”—words of Patriarch Kirill I, leader of the Russian Orthodox Church (Herszenhor 2013). Whole queerness, true queerness, free queerness is futurity, the opposite of now and today, which is replete with binding and alienating limitations. Tomorrow is freedom. Limitless queerness comes tomorrow.
Tomorrow and its Queer Daughters

The way in which Ariel pines for life on land mirrors the way in which I have pined for life within a politically transformative future as a queer person; where the ocean is an amalgam of present and past, land is futurity, land is fantasy spatialised.

Figure 16: Ariel’s dreams lie beyond the horizon.
Ariel’s utopic relation to temporality is a queer one for the ways in which it calls upon the present’s dialectical relationship to the future. Above, Ariel wistfully invokes the future from what can be read as an interface between the past and the future—a stone-cold, rocky present devoid of the warm sun in which Ariel would like to lay, “the warm illumination of a horizon imbued with potentiality” (Muñoz 2009: 1) which is available only in the future: *Up where they walk/up where they run/up where they stay all day in the sun, /wandering free—wish I could be part of that world* (Menken & Ashman, 1988). Ariel does not cast her gaze backward, nor does she look down to contemplate the presentness of her environment; she only has eyes for that which is to come from beyond the horizon, therefore enacting a mode of utopic, queer futurity that enables her to feel beyond the quagmire of the present. Even when she is under the water, her eyes are forever cast upward, dreaming about those worlds beyond the ocean floor.

**Figure 17 & 18:** Ariel’s skyward gaze.

Her body writhes in figure 16, unable to contain the coiled excitement she has about a future that is just on the cusp of the present. The eye follows a vector aligned with Ariel’s astonished, forward-casting gaze, starting on the upper left hand side,
skimming the clouds, brushing down into the evergreens to rest upon the shore where her prince hobbles further into the kingdom. The kingdom, Ariel’s reprieve from what Ernst Bloch would call the ‘darkness of the lived instant’ (Bloch 1998: 340) is again something that cannot be materialised into the scope of vision for either the mermaid or the spectator of the mermaid because, while the certainty of its existence is there, the present-ness of the scene is not wide enough to contain a sense of something that is to come—a landscape that extends into the territory of futurity (Muñoz 2009: 5).

Figure 19: Ariel, imprisoned by the confines of her present, dreams of nothing more than being up where they walk, up where they run. There is nothing for her in the quagmire of the ocean.
To reach her ultimate goal of passing in the human world, Ariel strikes up a Mephistophelean deal with the resident sea witch, Ursula. Ariel is to be granted human form, through Ursula’s command over the dark arts, on the condition that she forfeit her voice. This is not dissimilar to the way in which I thought I needed forfeit my authentic queer voice to ‘pass’ in the academic world.
Tales of attachment, voice, and respite
For you are all children of light, children of the day. We are not of the night or of the darkness.

1 Thessalonians 5:5

When I was a little boy, I was scared of the dark. Terrified of it, in fact. Everyday after 5pm that billowing mist of black tentacles emerged to taunt me about the Sun’s departure. Night was the medium dark cosmic spirits used as a means to appear inside my room. They had plans of implanting me with cerebral tracking devices.

I don’t know where my fear may have sprung from but I suspect it could have had something to do with my parents’ religious beliefs or the sci-fi shows my sisters watched after school during the 90’s. Devout Seventh-Day Adventists, my parents were, and still are, the type of people who buzz with the charge of the Lord after every Saturday sermon. My parents worship on the Sabbath. If you ask them why they will come forth with Exodus 20:8: Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy. Six days you shall labor, and do all your work, but the seventh day is a Sabbath to the Lord your God. They like to recite biblical verses and quote chunks of prophesy from the second book of Revelation whenever a conversation remotely steers in that direction. For them, religion, morality and the second coming of Christ are paramount.

The Adventist community—where the seventh day of the week, Saturday, is observed as a sacredly ordained day of rest from Friday Sunset to Saturday Sunset—teaches a theology based around two principles, good and evil, light and dark that are “regarded as self-existent and eternal [and] ought to remain separate” (Burktit 1922: 263):

Light is shed upon the righteous and joy on the upright in heart (Psalm 97: 11).

But if anyone walks in the night, he stumbles because the light is not in him [sic] (John 11:10)

Because I have sinned against Him, I will bear the LORD’s wrath, until he pleads my case and establishes my right. He will bring me out into the light; I will see his righteousness (Micah 7:9)
Let your light shine before men, that they may see your good deeds and praise your father in heaven (Matthew 5: 16).

Lightness and darkness cannot co-exist as harmonious forces. They are always dichotomised, at war with one another, competing for the everlasting fate of the soul, or at least that’s what I have come to understand from almost twenty-one years of weekly indoctrination. As the highly esteemed\(^{64}\) Seventh Day Adventist prophetess, Ellen G. White writes:

> When there is no special effort made to resist his power, when indifference prevails in the church and the world, Satan is not concerned; for he is in no danger of losing those whom he is leading captive at his will. But when the attention is called to eternal things, and souls are inquiring, "What must I do to be saved?" he is on the ground, seeking to match his power against the power of Christ and to counteract the influence of the Holy Spirit (1888: 518).

You could say my fear of the dark was perhaps more than just a childish phase and more of a complex transposition, or even a manifestation of the biblical expounding I grew up with. I often recall the horror I felt at three in morning, the time where evil spirits are supposedly at their most rampant. I would lie awake with an open door and open bible in case the shadows in the dark materialised. That was my evacuation plan: Read verses to the aliens so that they would disappear. If they did not, run, as fast as the cream coloured corridors of my house allowed, straight to my parents’ room. Much to their discomposure, I liked to sleep with the light on for most of the night, or until Dad left for work.

The clarity that comes with age (or the commodity of electricity) reduces my phobias to trivialities. But at the time, they were very real. Sleep was something I preferred to go without. I did try reading the bible on many occasions, but the book of Exodus and Leviticus scarcely offered any material that eased the task of staying

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\(^{64}\) Within the Seventh-Day Adventist community.
awake. I kept myself roused with a book of tales my mum bought for me to prevent myself from being the casualty of an extra-terrestrial demon attack.

Some nights the reading was empty skimming – something I did to prove (to the forces watching me) that I was awake and not incapacitated by the physiological follies of sleep. Other nights I devoured the words on the page with an appetite so voracious I could hardly move at the end of the tale on account of my being so bloated with images of love, resolution and happiness. Like Ariel, I clung to the truth of other worlds. I longed for the day I could enter those worlds.

Figure 23: Some light reading.

Figure 24: Ariel cradles her books, sources of respite.
My stories made me happy. They make me happy. As a boy, to the chagrin of my Mamá, I read my stories, and watched my movies, memorising entire scripts in Spanish because my parents would not buy the videos for me in English. They did, however, rent Princess movies for my sisters from a local video store that leased novellas and films in Spanish. Every time I entered the Uruguayan video den, I went straight to the third aisle scanning the shelves for the familiar green and purple cover of *La Sirenita, (The Little Mermaid)*. I handed it to my sister, who would tell Dad it was for her. From a young age, I learned how to speak with the voice of others when my voice was not sufficient.

65 The Little Mermaid was my big sister’s favourite movie as well. I relished the times she did not come to the Uruguayan video store because I could picked out all Princess movies and tell my Dad they were for her.
Conclusion:
Disney Princesses to the Rescue

The love I have for my Princesses has never expired. It has remained strong, regardless of jeers, or the progression of time. The love I have for my Princesses is inviolable. Even as a nineteen year old boy, I could not contain my excitement for the cinema release of Tangled. I watched it a total of seven times, and on each occasion I was appreciably older than the miniature girls in the theatre. I still get emotional watching my Princesses warble longingly, on a few occasions to the point of tears, because I see my narratives of entrapment, loss, and hope played out before me. I hear my own voice echoed back. I hold on tightly to these texts because they impose upon my life a relative coherence and continuity—they provide me with utopic landscapes that feel like proper places of belonging in a world that is not yet ready for my queerness (Cowie 1984: 101). This in turn informs my relation to temporality, never settling for the quagmire of the present.

I have cried many times during the process of this research. Some bad tears; others good, but very rarely have they been bad tears. One of those cathartic lachrymal moments happened during D. A. Miller’s account of ‘musical boys’:

The archaeology of the post-war gay male subject regularly turns up a cache of original cast albums. These were used, scholars now believe, in a puberty rite that, though it was conducted by single individuals in secret and shame, was nonetheless so widely diffused as to remain, for several generations, as practically normative for gay men, as it was almost known among straight ones. The boys destines, as it was said, to be musical, would descended into the basement of their parents home, and there they would sing and dance to recorded Broadway music (in one variant, merely mime singing and dancing) under the magical belief that, having lent the score the depth of their own abjection, they might then borrow all its fantastic hope that their solitary condition would end in glory and triumph. In contradistinction to other 66

66 “Man” feels like something of a misnomer when I apply it to myself.
puberty rites, including their own, the only body fluids to pour forth in this one—but they did so copiously, orgiastically—were tears (1998:11, emphasis added).

I saw my story connected to a wider context of queer testimony, and my voice joined in unison. I hope that the production of this text invokes a similar sense of community.

I entered this project thinking of myself as a dummy, in more than one sense of the word—a dumb, voiceless puppet only capable of intelligible speech through ventriloquy. However, during the process of writing this thesis, through the stories of mermaids and tower maidens, I have been able to see myself as more than just a “figure of prosopopoeia,” (de Man, 1998: 14) that is, a figure of ventriloquy. I have watched myself recover more than just my voice. Feeling my spirits rise as I tune out the thrum of deadlines and word-counts, I give in to that gentle, accomplished silence, and I hear joy spouting from the mouth of that boy I tried to silence with a voice that was never my own. The stories of my life, the stories of my princesses, the story of this thesis pays a tribute to the worlds of hope that instructed me to wait my turn, and hold out for ‘someday’. That day is today.

Reference List


-----2010d ‘Mother Knows Best’. Walt Disney Records.
-----2010e ‘I’ve Got a Dream’. Walt Disney Records.
-----2010f ‘I see the Light’. Walt Disney Records.


