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## 'GAY MARRIAGE', LESBIAN WEDDING

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### Abstract

*This paper juxtaposes analysis of the current prominence of the debate over 'gay marriage' with a story of one lesbian wedding. It contextualises non-heterosexual marriages with an historical account of female-female marriages suggesting that they both are part of a long history and an entirely new phenomenon. In particular the paper draws on Canadian sociologist Mariana Valverde's (2006) claim that we are seeing a historically unique sexual object/subject - 'the respectable same sex couple'. It suggests that the conditions for the emergence of this new entity lie in neo-liberal economics and politics, the practices of identity-conferring consumption in particular, as well as in the efforts of gay and lesbian and other activists and those keen to live the life of 'the respectable same sex couple'. The paper draws on Judith Butler's analysis of 'gay marriage' to urge caution and critical thinking in relation to the state, the site to which most campaigning on gay marriage is directed, and draws attention in particular to the racialised nature of the state in Australia. It concludes, however, with a return to the singular lesbian wedding to argue that the effects of any one embodiment of new or transitional social and cultural forms cannot be contained by any one categorisation.*

### Introduction: The Wedding

One weekend in June 1999, at home in Hobart, my nephew Stuart and I were visited by two lesbian friends of his (and acquaintances of mine) who were visiting from Sydney. Lucy and Dare announced over afternoon tea that they had decided to get married at the end of the year at Lucy's parents' rural home in the north of Tasmania. I was completely taken aback when Lucy and Dare asked me if I would be their marriage celebrant ... and I eventually said 'yes'. Specially printed invitations to 'a wedding' went out in good time. Guests were referred to a gift registry at *Peters of Kensington*.<sup>1</sup> I visited

Dare and Lucy in Sydney on one occasion before the wedding and, with a few drinks, we had a great time laughing and working out a plan for the wedding ceremony (they had done lots of research and thinking). It wasn't until I visited them the day before the wedding, and saw *the marquee* on the back lawn behind Lucy's parents' home, in front of her father's vineyard, that it sunk in that this was for real: *this was a wedding*.

The guests were composed in roughly equal numbers of Lucy's family, incorporating four generations, and old family friends, and friends of Lucy's and Dare's, mostly thirty-something dykes from Sydney, who were camping around the vineyard. Dare's sister had flown from Canada to represent her family at the ceremony. We were a mostly white, mostly middle class group of people of a wide age range. I was accompanied by my girlfriend Vicki and our friend Kate, a Christmas visitor from Adelaide, who Lucy and Dare had graciously invited to the wedding. The three of us had all performed as drag kings at Feast, Adelaide's queer cultural festival, and Kate and Vicki attended the wedding in drag. I chose a more sedate costume, in keeping with my role and need not to upstage the brides.

The afternoon wedding ceremony was a mixture of traditions. The weather was perfect. After drinks in the house guests were asked to move out to the marquee. Dare had stayed the night some distance away and we waited for her to arrive. She and Lucy had not seen each other's outfits. Dare's floor-length dress was red and purple with gold trim; Lucy's waistcoat, made by her mother and finished only the day before, was of similar colours and was worn over a t-shirt and pants. The dress and the waistcoat were both made from Asian garments recut to be western formal wear, symbolising for them the combination of tradition and current location. When Dare arrived the two women walked through an archway, which had been constructed by Stuart and another friend, to join the rest of us inside the marquee. The ceremony was loosely constructed around the elements of a (European, Christian) traditional wedding as described in a wedding book that Dare had

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<sup>1</sup> *Peters of Kensington* is a nationally known Sydney retail outlet that specialises in handling wedding gift registers.

purchased from a Sydney newsagent but also drew from second-wave feminist spiritual practises and included an acknowledgment of the Aboriginal ownership of the land where we gathered. Lucy's sister and others lead us in song, including a song by Tiddas,<sup>2</sup> and different friends had different speaking roles. Lucy and Dare exchanged vows and the final act of the wedding involved everyone coming to the stage at the front of the marquee where the proceedings were conducted and choosing a pebble to place in a spiral pattern on the wedding table. My role was minimal. I did not pronounce the couple married, but rather deferred to their own authority to declare themselves married to each other.

Lucy and Dare had engaged a local caterer for the wedding reception, also held in the marquee, and Lucy's father provided the wines. Speeches were made by Lucy's father and brother, Dare's sister, a friend, and the two brides. Lucy and Dare had handmade all the dinner plates from which we ate at a commercial workshop near their home in Sydney and everyone left with a plate with 'Dare and Lucy, December 1999' inscribed on the back as a memento.

I want to use this story of queer cultural production to reflect historically on the contemporary phenomenon of the lesbian or gay wedding, and the political issue of 'gay marriage'. I introduce these reflections with a story of a specific wedding in order to juxtapose some general comments I make about the issue of 'gay marriage', and the possible exclusions and foreclosures in the cultural and political realm that debate around the issue enacts, with attention to one particular wedding and the multiple and contradictory meanings that it both constructed and deconstructed.

### **A History**

Let me begin by stating that the wedding I describe is part of a long history of marriages between women. In an article published in 2005 (Baird, 2005) I traced the available history of female-female relationships as they have been documented in the small but growing body of lesbian history in Australia. Early female

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<sup>2</sup> Tiddas were a threepiece band made up of two Aboriginal women and one non-Aboriginal woman who played around Australia and recorded music through the 1990s.

anthropologists documented relationships between Aboriginal women in several locations. The historiography of non-Aboriginal women's relationships begins with attention to documents from the convict period that show sexual and emotional relationships between women that included gender diversity among the partners and fierce determination on the part of women who wanted to be together. Many of the stories of relationships between women that have been excavated indicate relationships that have been lived as marriages. Doubtless there have also been women who shared sexual and emotional intimacy, and economic and other practical support, who did not experience themselves as married, but many have described themselves through the classic trope of marriage - *union*. The historiography of marriages and other relationships divides into accounts of relationships between women, and those between men with female bodies and women, the latter often living openly as man and wife.<sup>3</sup> Conventionally gendered women living in relationships with other women have generally not publicly identified themselves as married couples until very recently but autobiographical accounts from women living in the 1950s and since tell of private marriage ceremonies and rituals that included the exchange of rings and change of name by one or both women among other practices.

In my discussion of this history (Baird, 2005) I made the point that the exclusive reservation of the legal status of marriage for relationships between men and women has been based on the repeated exclusion from cultural legitimacy of marriages between women (and no doubt between men). In several cases from the lesbian historiography it was not just that marriages between women were judged to be not legitimate. Often the authority and status of heterosexual marriage, and the authority and conjugal rights of a male husband, were built on the delegitimation of the relationship between the women and the delegitimation of female claims to gender or sexual authority (e.g., Ford, 1995). Building on this account of the reliance of the superior identity of heterosexual marriage on the exclusion of lesbian and other queer

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<sup>3</sup> This broad brush divide is overly simplistic and collapses a wide variety of female bodied people and relationships among them and significant historiographical debates about the importance of these categorisations. For example see Halberstam 1998.

marriages, I used Judith Butler's (1991) clever deconstruction of the hegemonic binary relationship between heterosexuality and homosexuality, where heterosexuality is the original and homosexuality is the copy, to make two other points. First, that we should not see marriages between women as simply mimicry or appropriation of the heterosexual form. It is not that they are something else entirely, nor that they are not in some ways influenced by the forms of (legal) heterosexual marriage but, to borrow from Butler, they are not *determined* by them (pp. 313-4). Further, we must reject the superior value given to heterosexual marriage forms.

With respect to my claiming of a long history of female-female marriages (and I assume of male-male marriage) it is, however, notable that lesbian and gay couples are almost entirely absent in the history of the post-Stonewall gay and lesbian rights movements in Australia. In the historical accounts of the gay and lesbian movements (e.g., Willett, 2000) couples hardly figure at all and it was not until the early-mid 1990s that the legal recognition of lesbian and gay relationships became part of the political agenda of the various lesbian and gay activist groups. While the emergence of the Gay Liberation movement ushered in an unprecedented visibility for homosexuality, and the 'reverse discourse' of homosexuality (Foucault, 1990) took on a new cultural confidence as well as a new style of political resistance, couples have not been at the forefront of the representation of the movement, in its own materials or in its representation in popular media. I have argued (Baird, 2005, p. 256) that, at least in the early days of gay and lesbian movements in Australia, homosexual partnerships were too shameful for the more conservative liberal reform organisations of the movement and too respectable for the gay liberation and radical lesbian groups.

### **Gay Marriage and 'the Respectable Same-Sex Couple'**

The article that I wrote three years ago pivoted on the national publicity achieved by prominent media medico Kerryn Phelps and teacher Jackie Stricker when they married in 1997. Their marriage was celebrated first by a liberal rabbi in New York and then later confirmed at a lavish wedding party in Sydney, making headlines in

both the mainstream and then the gay and lesbian press (Mitchell, 2002). While the demand for the legal recognition of 'same sex relationships' at the state level had been the key issue for lesbian and gay politics in Australia since the mid 1990s, (and has been largely successful), the demand to legalise gay marriage, a separate matter of federal jurisdiction, was not prominent in this period. Gay marriage leap-frogged to the front of the political agenda only when, in the lead-up to the 2004 federal election, the incumbent Coalition government, with support from the Labor party, explicitly legislated against it.<sup>4</sup> The government was responding to legal action initiated by a small number of lesbian and gay couples who had married legally in Canada and were seeking legal status for their overseas marriages in Australia. It was also recognising an issue with potentially divisive election value. Kerryn and Jackie's marriage was not the first to feature prominently in the Australian media, although it did establish a new standard for the normalisation of lesbian (and gay) marriages. In the three years since the Australian government insisted that marriage was between a man and a woman Sir Elton John has married his male partner of many years in the UK (in December 2005) and received the usual media attention that comes to celebrities of his stature; the US television series *Queer As Folk*, which screens in Australia, has featured two marriages involving lead characters in its last two series which screened in 2004 and 2005; and, locally, the marriage of Adelaide gay activist Ian Purcell to his long-time partner Stephen Leahy in Canada in July 2006 featured prominently in the Adelaide press on their return (Wheatley, 2006). Gay marriage is now a political issue on which mainstream politicians comment as a matter of course (e.g., Anon.).

I have found a brief article by Canadian scholar Mariana Valverde (2006) extraordinarily helpful in understanding the normalisation of gay and lesbian couples and the recent prominence of gay marriage as a political issue. While my 2005 article placed contemporary gay and lesbian couples in a historically continuous tradition, Valverde takes the opposite approach. She announces a *discontinuity*, indeed a new entity in the history of sexuality. Both following and superceding Michel Foucault's (1990) ground-

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<sup>4</sup> A brief but comprehensive overview of state and federal legislation, reformed and in need of reform, can be found in HREOC 2007.

breaking work in the history of sexuality, she claims that there is a new object (and so subject) emerging out of the space previously filled only by 'homosexuality'. She recalls a passage from a 1987 book by another French philosopher, Jean Baudrillard, which while admiring Foucault, predicted that the 'sexuality' that he so brilliantly identified for us was already then 'in the process of disappearing' (Baudrillard quoted in Valverde, p. 156). For Valverde the demise of 'sexuality' is signalled by the 'respectable same-sex couple'.

A brief rehearsal of her argument is needed for my purposes here. Valverde (2006) starts with the now widely-accepted Foucauldian account that asserts that 'homosexuality' (and indeed 'sexuality') is a historically recent invention. It has only been since the middle of the nineteenth century that sexual acts between men (the standard case) or between women have signified a deep-seated truth about those who participate in them. Before that time the acts were significant, primarily as sin, and might attract punishment, but they did not reveal an essential truth about those who did them. Valverde writes that 'sexuality – in the West but not in the East – came to be regarded as that which is most secret and therefore most authentic about "the self", the key, in other words, to personal identity' (p. 155). The era, up to the 1970s at least, where "the homosexual" was probably the most successful of all deviant identities' (p. 156) was characterised by attempts to identify and classify this person, through a variety of disciplinary gazes, medicine and the psy disciplines prominent among them. An early effect of the Gay Liberation movements that appeared in many Western countries in the early 1970s was the growth of identity based politics where gay men and lesbians themselves fortified this discourse of 'the homosexual', embracing this identity with pride rather than being tormented and shamed by it.

Valverde (2006) identifies three historically recent phenomena that challenge this identity based model of sexuality in general, and 'the homosexual' in particular. First, she refers to the refusal of identity categories by those, often homosexually active individuals, who choose the amorphous and fluid label 'queer' over identity labels that tend to narrow or specify (like 'gay' or 'lesbian'). Second, she points to the invention in AIDS discourse of the category 'men who

have sex with men'. She claims that AIDS experts are disinterested in these men's identities. They are, through a public health framework, concerned only with their behaviours. The centrepiece of her argument is that we are witnessing a post homosexual era is the 'respectable same-sex couple'. She observes that this couple is not understood with reference to truths about their inner selves. Nor are they understood, interestingly, with reference to sex. They are *not* 'two homosexuals added together' (p. 156). They are something quite new.

It is relevant to note that Valverde writes from Canada, where gay and lesbian marriage was legalised nationally in 2005 and where gay and lesbian couples come from all around the world to marry. She is thus also in close proximity to the USA where gay marriage has achieved prominence as a political issue in the 2000s and where several state or municipal jurisdictions have legalised gay marriage – although only in Massachusetts has the legislation which enables legal marriage for lesbian and gay couples remained. She makes her argument about the arrival of the 'respectable same-sex couple' through consideration of legal rulings concerning lesbian and gay couples in Canada's Supreme Court and media representations and her own observations of gay and lesbian wedding couples. What she finds is gay and lesbian couples defined not as 'homosexuals', those deviants identified through their sexual practices and understood to be essentially different to those who occupy the unmarked category of the normal. Rather she finds 'respectable same sex couples' defined through financial concerns, consumption and wedding plans.

Nobody cares about their sexuality – including, apparently, the parties involved. The nonsexual transactions that make up the everyday fabric of coupledness are what the [legal and media] texts find worth recounting. In the *Star* [Canada's largest circulation daily] one finds that the narrative of the happy Toronto couple is wholly made up of florists' bills and plane tickets for relatives. The narrative of the divorcing couple of the M and H Supreme Court decision, for its part, is made up of joint tenancy agreements and bank loan documents (2006, p. 162).

Valverde does not mention 'love' among the defining features of the 'respectable same sex couple'. In my observations 'love' is apparent in many popular representations of lesbian and gay weddings and marriages, and in the demands

for legal gay marriage. The website for Australian Marriage Equality, the national group focused solely on the legalisation of gay marriage, begins 'For many Australians marriage is a profoundly meaningful way to demonstrate love and commitment.' (Australian Marriage Equality). Carl and Andrew, the two men who star in 'Just Married', the Australian documentary made in response to the Australian federal government's move against gay marriage in 2004 (Jones, 2005), repeatedly profess their love for each other, and members of both men's biological families repeatedly testify to this love. References to sex are muted. Love has historically been opposed to sex in discourses of sexuality, with heterosexuality signifying the former and homosexuality the latter. Love thus helps to broaden the distance between 'the homosexual' and 'respectable same sex couples' even further. Damien Riggs (2006) argues that the invocation of 'love' plays a similar role in campaigns for the rights of gay and lesbian parents. It does so, however, by aligning them with 'the forms of national love that are currently sanctioned, which are founded upon both the disavowal of Indigenous sovereignty and the construction of other groups of people as enemies of the nation' (p. 82).

Valverde's (2006) argument – cheeky as it is – is highly appealing. It is not inconsistent with other accounts of historical change in the lives of gay and lesbian people in the post-Stonewall, post second wave feminism, era. Sociologist Steven Seidman and his colleagues (1999), for example, have argued that 'the closet', the hinge that divides "a private life where homosexuality can be expressed and a public life where one passes as heterosexual" (p. 19), is declining in social significance in the USA. Their research, based in interviews conducted in the mid 1990s, finds that many gay and lesbian individuals have subjectively 'normalized' and socially 'routinized' their homosexuality. They locate the closet, and the practice of coming out, as emblematic of a pre-Stonewall period, where secrecy-disclosure and private-public were binaries that created the heightened self-consciousness of the homosexual. As these binary structures and the discourse of sexuality that produces them break down in contemporary social and cultural life (if not yet fully in social policy and the law) individuals are less likely to locate their homosexuality as the central element of their identities. This account is not inconsistent with

Valverde's analysis, but catching hold of her dramatic and prescient vision of an entirely new object/subject of history, and the shift in historical eras it announces, seems to me to promise more explanatory power than Seidman et al's relatively more measured identification of trends.

Valverde's (2006) argument explains why couples have been so absent, as publicly identified activist subjects and as objects of political debate, in Australian gay and lesbian activism until the last ten years, and in popular culture representations until even more recently. In a discursive field dominated by 'the homosexual', the couple in all its banality was not the point. Sex was. And it was sex, whether sinful, or pathological, or the site of difference and pride, that was the site of identity construction. But sex is not the ground for the construction of the 'respectable same sex couple'. Valverde's argument also explains what I have always regarded as the curious adoption, by lawmakers, politicians, and *gay and lesbian activists themselves*, of the term 'same sex couple'. The replacement of 'homosexual' or 'lesbian' and 'gay' with 'same sex' effects in this context what Valverde refers to as the 'desexualisation of gay rights' (p. 161). This shift not only turns away from sexuality in categorising these relationships, but arguably also from gender as it positions lesbian and gay relationships through an (essentialist) discourse of sex, an observation which requires more thought than I have space for here. Valverde's argument also explains why, in Australia, the public face of gay marriage campaigns is more often than not couples in their twenties and thirties. Those who have grown up in the wake of the social changes initiated by feminism and lesbian and gay activism but often with no cultural memory of the sexual past and its politics are most likely to locate themselves in a field marked by the 'respectable same sex couple'.

Her argument is speculative. It is also clearly political. Valverde (2006) makes little attempt to hide her derision of the wedding couples. She notes that the middle class soon-to-be-married male couple who feature in the Toronto *Star's* 2004 Pride Day special section are obsessed with "the color scheme, the food, the entertainment, and the guest list" and describes this as "a feminist nightmare" (p. 159 ). I can

only agree. (I can, however, also appreciate the politics and aesthetics of their camp hysteria). Her implied opposition is to their consumerism, their respectability and their foreshortened political horizon.

### **The Conditions for the New**

Economics is one place to start to explain the conditions of this historical shift, and indeed economics has been identified elsewhere as the primary site of sexual citizenship for gay men and, secondarily, lesbians (Evans, 1993). In her contemporary Marxist critique of 'white weddings' in the USA published in 1999, Chrys Ingraham identifies what she brilliantly describes as 'the wedding-industrial complex'. This multibillion dollar transnational wedding industry includes "the sale of a diverse range of products, many of which are produced outside the US" (p. 28). The industrial complex in turn relies on what she calls the "wedding-ideological complex" (p. 82). Ingraham observes the ways that race and class structure both the industrial and ideological complexes. White middle class women are those with most power to consume wedding products (p. 31) and "the icon of the beautiful white bride" works to persuade us all that "what counts as beautiful and marriageable is white" (p. 97). Her main argument, however, locates the wedding as a lynchpin of the dominance of the institution of heterosexuality. Ingraham notes debates among gay and lesbian communities about the value of fighting for the right to legal marriage but, writing just before the turn of the century, she does not seem prepared for the gusto with which North American gay and lesbian communities have embraced the institution of marriage and the practice of weddings. Nor does she anticipate the degree to which the wedding industrial and ideological complexes have begun to embrace gay and lesbian communities, even if evidenced only in advertisements in the gay and lesbian press, including for the services of registered civil celebrants.

But consumption and a place within the wedding industrial and ideological complexes are not the only way that mainstream institutions and ideologies might provide the conditions for the 'respectable same sex couple'. In an article that discusses the place of the socially progressive relationship reform enacted in Tasmania in 2003 (Baird, 2006) I have argued that the

comparative ease with which the legislation was passed was in part an effect of the discourse of 'the new Tasmania'. This term refers to an alleged economic and social rejuvenation in Tasmania and functions as a branding of the state which allows and demands progressive liberal signs of Tasmania's desirability in a global economy. 'The new Tasmania' makes legible gay tourism, gay home ownership, gay rights, gay investment and, since 2003, the legal recognition of lesbian and gay couples. While the reform would not have happened without the energies of gay and lesbian activists, it also falls firmly into the phenomenon that Arnaldo Cruz-Malavé and Martin Manalansan Jr (2002) describe as a rather sinister mode of globalization: "the appropriation and deployment of queer subjectivities, cultures and political agendas for the legitimation of hegemonic institutions presently in discursive crisis" (p. 5). This mode is also at work in the recent announcement by Telstra, Australia's leading telco, of an overhaul of staff policies to remove all discrimination against lesbian and gay employees. A critical account characterises Telstra's twenty-first century neo-liberal work culture by "the setting of ever-increasing performance targets and rigorous monitoring of individuals' time and movements" (McDermott, 2007, n.p.). Those employees in gay and lesbian relationships who work under these conditions will, however, no longer be denied the same entitlements as their heterosexual counterparts (Karvelas 2007). Whether as consumers or employees, investors, tourists or home owners, gay and lesbian couples have a place in global neo-liberal futures.

It is not my argument that new historical objects/subjects are simply the creation of the unstoppable forces of consumerism and capitalism or the neo-liberal re-ordering of all kinds of citizenship. And, of course, neither 'gay' and 'global' nor 'gay' and 'capitalism' are necessarily opposing terms. In a searing critique of global trends geographer Heidi Nast (2002) argues that "certain EuroWhite-identified gay men – relatively youthful, of some means, and typically childless – are well positioned to take advantage of key avenues of exploitation and profiteering in postindustrial world orders" (p. 890). She writes of "the coming political and economic age of gay white men" (p. 899). But even without the political power of wealthy white gay men the 'respectable same sex couple'

is a product of the desires and actions of not only those lesbian and gay activists and their supporters who fight for relationship law reform but all those lesbian and gay couples who live through the increasingly available subject position that this term describes. In the socially conservative climate that has dominated Australia for at least the last decade it is no wonder that respectability is an attractive position to inhabit for all those who have the economic and cultural capital to do so.

Of course Mariana Valverde's (2006) account of the emergence of 'the respectable same sex couple' is a broad brush account. It identifies a new object/subject that is not yet fully formed, and certainly not yet fully welcomed around the world. At the moment it is only South Africa, Canada, Spain, Netherlands, Belgium and the US state of Massachusetts that offer equal marriage rights to same sex couples (Australian Marriage Equality). While I have a sense that legal same sex marriage is inevitable in Australia, it is currently not supported by either major political party in this country and is actively opposed by the organised and influential Christian Right (Maddox, 2005). Concomitantly, the discourse of sexuality that Foucault claims emerged in the middle of the nineteenth century is still apparent in many sectors of contemporary society. Institutional discrimination, harassment and homophobia-related violence, the more subtle and omnipresent signs of heteronormativity and the marginalised subjectivities that these practices generate, are all still with us. It is likely that even the most successfully respectable same-sex couples still negotiate the closet in some aspects of their lives. But 'the sexual self-management practices' that are the hallmark of the formation of 'the homosexual' are these days, according to Seidman et al (1999), "more situation-specific than patterning of a whole way of life" (p. 11). It is also the case that respectable same sex couples are not unmarked by the queer politics and aesthetics that Valverde (2006) claims are co-emergent with 'the respectable same sex couple'.

Valverde (2006) herself captures the historically transitional nature of lesbian wedding couples in San Francisco when she comments on the number of lesbian brides dressed in conventional white wedding dresses. "It was very difficult to tell whether the wedding dresses were being worn in straight-up imitation of marriage or in

playful parody", she writes. "It is quite possible, given the mixed feelings gays and lesbians have about marriage, that the wearers were not themselves very clear about their intentions" (p. 158). The arrival of 'the respectable same sex couple' that she locates in these possibly semiotically confused lesbians contrasts, however, with a queer cultural production performed ten years earlier in the Sydney Gay and Lesbian Mardi Gras. In 1994 a group of women participated in the parade dressed as brides. They were clearly not embodying, nor were they seeking, respectability or legal legitimisation. Their costumes consisted of white bra tops and white tulle mid-length skirts; some carried riding crops, some wore white top hats. They were not organised in couples. Sarah Zetlein's discussion (1995) of the brides claims them for a playful queer politics. The Mardi Gras bride, she claims, "incorporates a self-conscious awareness of the law's legitimising and illegitimising effects, and plays them accordingly" (p. 56). Jump back to the present where brides, and grooms, feature in Adelaide's 2007 Feast festival, the theme for which is 'love'. The festival this year includes 'Loved Up – the Wedding of the Year' (Feast, p. 6) where 'many couples [will] publicly declare their love and commitment for each other' in a public park and then celebrate indoors with 'queered-up' traditional wedding practices. Feast 2007 also hosts the launch of 'Gay and Lesbian Celebrations', Australia's first online same-sex celebrations directory which will include "trends and tips from South Australia's industry experts" and guide consumers to "local gay friendly suppliers" (see [www.gayandlesbiancelebrations.com.au](http://www.gayandlesbiancelebrations.com.au)).

## The State

So where does this account of a transitional moment in the history of sexuality (which may be the demise of 'sexuality') leave me with respect to the political campaigns for legal gay marriage? My reluctance to support these campaigns stems primarily from their turn towards the state. Judith Butler's essay on gay marriage (2004; see also Brandzel, 2005) lays out many of my concerns. She cautions that pinning one's hopes on recognition by the state means being defined by the terms already set by the state. Further, such inclusion involves the creation of new lines of division, separating the legitimate and the about-to-be legitimate from



those relationships and sexual practices which become more intensively inscribed as illegible. The focus on gay marriage thus involves a foreclosure of the political field. It is worth remembering in this context that while we may desire the state's recognition the state desires our recognition and validation in return. States can use their liberal reforms to demonstrate their commitment to human rights to international bodies or to attract tourists or to smooth over internal dissent (Baird, 2006).

My reservations are particularly sharp in relation to the racialised nature of the state in Australia. It has not only been non-heterosexual relationships that have been excluded from legal definitions of marriage. The 'white Australian' state has also defined legal marriage by excluding Indigenous forms and by actively preventing and undermining marriages involving Indigenous people. The marriages and family relationships of non-Anglo migrants and refugees have also been treated in discriminatory fashion. (Baird, 2005; see also Brook, 1997; Ganter, 1998; Haskins & Maynard, 2005; Kunek, 1993). I do not have the space here to elaborate these histories but suffice to say the racist history that underpins past disrespect for Aboriginal and many migrant marriages and families has not been accounted for and the state from which we seek the legal recognition of gay marriage is a state based on 'patriarchal white sovereignty' and the concomitant denial of the sovereignty of Aboriginal peoples (Moreton-Robinson, 2004).

### **Conclusion: The Wedding**

Those of us who urge a critical relation to campaigns for state recognition of gay marriage do not, however, always consider the new forms of resistance that will grow from the new regimes of regulation to which legally married gay and lesbian couples will be subjected. (One of the many fascinating elements of the wedding industrial complex as narrated by Chrys Ingraham (1999) is the emergence of wedding industry consumer advocates in the late 1990s). Resistance may be the most interesting aspect of the history to come of 'the respectable same sex couple'. Following Valverde (2006) it may also be fruitful to think more about how other regimes of social and cultural life may shift as the divide between hetero and homo*sexuality* as it has been solidified in marriage law, economics

and culture evaporates.

I wish to conclude with a return to the wedding in which I played a minor role. As I hope was clear in the telling of that particular story, Lucy and Dare's wedding was rich with multiple and contradictory meanings. The nuances of this singular event are not captured by any broad brush historical or political analysis. As Judith Halberstam (1998, pp. 75-110) has shown in her account of the formation of new female sexual and gender identities in the early decades of the twentieth century, the classificatory systems through which experts seek to understand new objects rarely do justice to the experience and discourse of those being classified. In this context the analysis proposed by Valverde, a feminist expert, is no different. The meaning of Lucy and Dare's wedding for the large group of people who participated cannot be pinned down to any one coherent set of meanings that belong only to one historical era. (No doubt this is true of all individual lesbian and gay weddings). Their wedding was marked by clear signs of feminism, anti-racism, lesbian and gay pride, a dash of queer, and clear respect for family and tradition and good hospitality. Conventional hierarchies between these terms were impossible to find. In fact the whole thing was a little queer. Pondering whether the dykes camped in the vineyard had appropriated the trappings of the middle class Tasmanian family, or whether the family had appropriated Sydney dyke culture, or whether this was simply white middle class liberalism and tolerance working overtime in all directions, were not productive calculations. Those who could not find a way to make comfortable sense of the mix had stayed away. Dare and Lucy's was no doubt one of many weddings in Tasmania that summer that made their small contribution to the local tourist industry (and to *Peters of Kensington*). They were simultaneously part of a long sub-cultural history, shaped by its post Stonewall and post Women's Liberation inflections, and the harbingers of a new historical entity.

My favourite story from the wedding came in its aftermath. A number of straight friends to whom I said 'I officiated at a lesbian wedding over Christmas' replied with 'I didn't know you were a wedding celebrant'. I am not and never have been. What was remarkable about these small amnesias about the legal status of lesbian marriages and those authorised to conduct them

was the performative power of my declaration, and the marriage between Lucy and Dare to which it testified, to create me as a wedding celebrant. I enjoyed the wedding and later being mistaken for a (legally certified) wedding celebrant. I enjoyed the way my confused listeners borrowed from the law yet without paying interest on the loan.

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### Author Note

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