

**Sticky Stories:
Joe Orton, Queer History, Queer Dramaturgy.
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Joe Orton, commonly thought of as a playwright of risqué farces in the 1960s, was a very present figure for a while in the gay community in the UK in the late 1980s and early 1990s (perhaps because his biography was published late in the 1970s, his diaries in 1986 and a film based on the diaries released 1987). His presence in 1980s and 1990s gay culture was in part because he met a death worthy of column inches and, importantly, he stood as emblematic of a past homosexual who refused to curb his sexuality whilst living in a conservative social context. In England and Wales, homosexuality was not criminalised in the 1980s and 1990s as it had been in the 1950s and 1960s, but there were present homophobic social values and legislation (Section 28, unequal age of consent) that resonated with the context within which Orton was writing and his work was first being produced.¹ Orton's figure as a queer and a playwright stood as both inspiration and a lesson from the past, one that reminded queers and gays in the 1980s and 1990s that the fight for equality does not end with a change in the legal status of homosexuality, or indeed in the 2010s, with equal marriage.

Yet in recent years Orton's work has fallen out of favour and does not appear as often as it once did on the queer cultural landscape. There are many reasons for this, not least of all that the kind of work that Orton makes might not register as queer or even gay now. It may be that Orton is not all that present as a queer or a gay playwright precisely because the current understanding of these terms did not exist for Orton in the same way (and since the 1980s and 1990s there is apparently little energy to claim him as such). Of course, the terms queer and

gay were used by Orton in his life (he uses both in his diaries), but because these terms are historically contingent, it makes sense that they existed differently than they do now – queer and gay as terms have been subject to significant change since the later 1960s. Thus, this article positions ‘homosexual’, ‘queer’ and ‘gay’ as terms that have a temporal location and history, and indicate particular lineages and politics.

Playing a large part in the culture, lived experience and discourse of homosexuals, gays and queers since the 1960s has been this changing lexicon of identification and, latterly disidentification, or anti-identification.² These terms have a complex history, which is outside the scope of this article, but in Orton’s historical context, the term homosexual reflects the prevalent medical/social/legislative discourses of the time (though in common parlance, queer was both pejorative and an identification - it ‘gained ground as a loose term for sexual strangeness from around World War I’ (Cook, Mills, Trambach and Cocks 2007, 156) also see Westwood (1960)) and Orton refers to himself as queer and homosexual in many places throughout his diaries. Gay, as a term is associated with the rise of gay rights in the late 1960s and into the 1970s, when Orton’s plays were gaining notoriety. Indeed, some early visions of gayness, in particular from the short-lived but influential Gay Liberation Front (GLF, see Walter 1980 and Weeks 1977), shared some of the energy of Orton’s own attitudes towards straight society of the time: “I want nothing to do with the civilisation they made” Orton notes in his diaries (Orton 1996, 187).

Queer currently is not, necessarily, an identity position, but a critical radical positioning concerning the processes of normalisation around gender, sexuality and their intersections with any number of other identity markers, such as race and class.³ And, queerness involves a

rejection of mainstream heteronormativity, which resonates with Orton's readings and representations of dominant culture, particularly where he draws his characters as corrupted by failing to live up to the standards they or their society set, (such as Truscott in *Loot*, Kemp in *Entertaining Mr Sloane* and Dr Prentice in *What The Butler Saw*). Hence, queer from the 1980s and 1990s onward in its original and second wave forms (Castiglia and Reed 2011) presents a radical resistance to the normalising processes of identity itself – but its energy is often rambunctious, resistive, angry, playful and sex-positive and despite its appearance after Orton's death, it reflects his energy as it appears in his diaries. Thus, terms related to sexual identity and sexuality are difficult to parse historically and stick to each other and to other identity markers in difficult ways, this stickiness is a central theme of this paper and is an image that returns.

The discussion in this article seeks as a key energy the ways in which it is possible to engage with sticky stories from the theatrical past to see in a general sense what impact past queers have on current ideas, especially when they appear problematically. It also asks how we might fold-in the radical or the progressive impulses of past queer figures, without stabilising them, sanitising them, or rendering them visible in terms only relatable to the present. As such, in part, this paper seeks to account for moments of Orton's popularity in the 1980s and 1990s and for the recent absence of him from queer discourses about theatre and performance, whilst also offering a critical approach that presents the opportunity of paying mind to a queer Orton without assuming that being homosexual in the 1950s and 1960s is like being queer in the 2010s. This is a knotty problem for queer work from the past.⁴ To account for the position of Orton in queer discourses, both in the present and in the recent past, this discussion begins with recent ideas of queer dramaturgy and queer time, then moves on to an examination of

theatrical form in relation to homosexuality. By offering a strategy, via low form and bodily knowing, the paper describes one way of engaging with Orton that resists the recirculation of some of the more difficultly sticky elements of his life and work.

Queer dramaturgy as recently described by Alyson Campbell and myself, looks not to the literary or the genre of a work to find its queerness – as it is not only embedded in text – but includes the complex and contingent nature of what the work does in a given social, temporal, geographical context:

What is clear to us is that queer dramaturgy ... is less concerned with the 'gay canon' or gay literary traditions as they appear in theatre and performance (though queer work might appear in mainstream venues, occasionally), but rather queer work as we see it is fundamentally connected to performance that is often hived off from literary traditions in theatre: that is, forms of low-brow and popular performance, often in cabarets or nightclubs. Popular forms are often seen as the poor cousin of literary work ... in a scholarly hierarchy that values literariness. Though this is an historical position having less purchase now... (Campbell and Farrier 2016, 6)

According to this position, the work or the production itself is not the only condition of its potential queerness, rather it is how it renders its potential queerness in a specifically located moment and place. Therefore, of course, *Loot*, for instance can be produced as light comic entertainment in one context and seen as a radical comment on heteronormativity at a different time and place. This may account for a curious circumstance that Andrew Wyllie points out; 'Orton's work, as recalled in the 1980s, comes across as far more shocking than the 1960s reviews suggest' (2009, 130). And Orton wants to shock as much as he wants acceptance from the public, he notes that because of his success the 'public will accept me... But I am a success because I have taken a hatchet to them and hacked my way in' (Orton in

Lahr 2002, 144). Alongside Orton hacking, it is fruitful to test his works by looking to the historical moments of their writing and production to examine that in relation to theatrical form, whilst bearing in mind a queer approach to thinking about historical sources and time.

J/Jack Halberstam and others note that time serves a function of normalisation, heteronormative time lets society know what is normal, when milestone events should be happening, mapped across a lifetime. Halberstam writes that:

normative narratives of time ... form the base of nearly every definition of the human in almost all of our modes of understanding, from the profession of psychoanalysis and medicine, to socioeconomic and demographic studies on which every sort of state policy is based, to our understandings of the affective and the aesthetic (2005, 152).

That is, Halberstam argues that understandings of identity, human-hood, or subjectivity are related to time embedded in a culture, a culture where time is aligned with family, reproduction and productivity. Time has a deep relationship to a politics of identity and an inability or unwillingness to attend to its normalities can produce material social castigation to those who do not/cannot live within this reproductive time. Thus, there is a direct link between queer time and queer history. Like the relations of time to individual identities and subjectivities in the world, doing queer history is as much about rendering people from the past in a way that does not seek to normalise their temporal otherness, as it is about doing history queerly.

The thinking of Elizabeth Freeman helps underpin in what ways queers like Orton might be dealt with in time. Freeman's work beautifully asks:

Might some bodies, by registering on their very surface the co-presence of several historically contingent events, social movements and/or collective pleasures, complicate or displace the centrality of gender-transitive drag to queer performativity? Might they articulate instead a kind of temporal transitivity that does not leave feminism, femininity, or other so-called anachronisms behind? (Freeman 2010, 63).

Freeman argues that queer work on time should not only sustain a focus on gender fluidity, but also, through queer visions of time, offer a way of connecting 'queer performativity to disavowed political histories' (p. 65). In and through a temporal transitivity, Freeman offers a way of thinking about queerness before gay liberation. She does this with a look to the low, the body, the quotidian, the everyday ordinary, with a focus on low-ranking historical knowledges, knowledges that might be bodily. Orton's diaries and letters are full of this kind of knowledge.

Orton demonstrates his understanding of bodily knowledge through his ability to recognize, pick up and have sex with strangers at a time of legislative prohibition, this required a particularly attuned set of knowledges. For instance, in July 1967 Orton recalls in his diary how he chatted with a stranger to figure out if another person, head to toe in biker leather, apparently cruising in a lavatory, was involved in police entrapment because he was behaving oddly. Orton coolly works out if there is a bike with the biker, and the stranger notes 'you get some queer bastards around these toilets' (Orton, 1996: 248). The kinds of etiquette, knowing looks and subtle negotiation required for his sexual conquests (they often appear in his diaries as such) attest to his understanding of such knowledge. He brings this to his work and interweaves it with highbrow structures or high ranking forms of knowledge manifest in an understanding of theatre history and plays (often exemplified by the epigraph accompanying the scripts). Orton is aware of the classic structures and allusions he makes in his writing whilst

also understanding how important it is for characters' sexuality to stimulate desire in his audience; Mr. Sloane must be desirable and menacing, Hall and Dennis in *Loot* need to be open to any number of forms of sensation related to desire and Mrs Prentice in *What The Butler Saw* must have a knowledge of sexuality set outside normative (or what may be considered decent for the time) expectations:

PRENTICE. How dare you say that! Your book on the climax in the female is largely autobiographical. (Pause. He stares.) Or have you been masquerading as a sexually responsive woman?

MRS PRENTICE. My uterine contractions have been bogus for some time! (2014, 371-2).

And later she says in response to Mr Prentice refusing the idea of a male secretary that he might 'Try a boy for a change. You're a rich man. You can afford the luxuries of life' (373), which is of course what he appears to do later on in the act.

The foregrounding of the low, reflecting the point above about cruising knowledge, is in contrast to the highbrow and classical connections Orton makes in his diaries, letters and plays themselves – for example he thinks of the ending of *What The Butler Saw* as 'Euripidean' (Orton 1996: 242). There is a reflection here in that there are also high forms of historical knowledge around homosexuality, which have a relationship to social forms. The prevalent, high ranking version of gay history ends not in a challenge to heteronormativity, but with homonormativity that does not contest the society outside of the terms of equality set by heteronormativity – simply put, gays may press for marriage whereas queer questions the fundamental idea of it. Lisa Duggan sets it as:

the new homonormativity – it is a politics that does not contest dominant heteronormative assumptions and institutions, but upholds and sustains them, whilst promising the possibly of a demobilized gay constituency and privatized depoliticized gay culture anchored in domesticity and consumption (Duggan 2003, 58).

This sustenance of heteronormative institutions is not the kind of gay liberation aimed at by radical homosexual groups like the GLF, around when *What the Butler Saw* was playing in London in the late 1960s, but rather reflects a queer position and such queerness for Freeman holds an opportunity:

If we imagine ‘queer’ as a set of possibilities produced out of temporal and historical difference, to see the manipulation of time as a way to produce both bodies and relationalities (or even non relationality), we encounter a more productively porous queer studies, one shaped by and reshaping not only various disciplines but also the studies of race, nation, migration, and postcolony. Indeed, this queer studies meets critical race theory and postcolonial studies in its understanding that what has not yet entered the historical records, and what is not yet culturally legible, is often encountered in embodied, non rational forms: as ghosts, scars, gods (Freeman 2007, 159).

By bringing this way of thinking queerness to Orton there is an important impact for readings of his work that look across temporalities – particularly queer readings that do this (like the one I am doing in this discussion) of which there are surprisingly few. Such queer readings should not only look for parallels in the time of the original and the time of its production (as I do below with the 1980s and 1990s) but also open an opportunity for the bodily and the illegible to form part of an understanding of a dramatic work and performance (and, perhaps, the life-work that Orton leaves in his diaries and letters) as I will come on to explore in the final section of the paper.

Sticky Stories.

It is difficult not to start an engagement with Orton's life story without beginning at his sticky end – it hangs about any discussion of his work. By placing the work in its historical period it is inevitable that there will be a brushing up against Orton the human in the world with Orton the playwright present in his texts. In my short reading of Orton's work and life here, there repeatedly returns 'sticky stories'; narratives that doggedly persist or stick about as discussion of queer dramaturgy progresses. Portions of Orton's life and particular elements in his writing stick around, and to a twenty first century audience sometime stick out of the performance in ways that perhaps were less obviously visible in their original productions. Sensitivity to these sticky bits of Orton is in part a manifestation of my desire not to wrap him up and present a neat package in a queer sense, because there should be an eye on the sticky in his work. I am speaking here of its embedded misogyny and racism. Given queer's sensitivity to intersectionality, these elements need attention and accounting for, or at least should be highlighted as germane in any reading or interaction with the writing. The sticky misogyny and racism in Orton's life and writing could be explained away through recourse to the historical context, by looking to their normalisation in the historical milieu. But, the focus of this article is on the operation of the plays now and so there is no desire to minimise or unstick these elements. Indeed, it could be that these sticky elements are, in part, what has driven Orton from being so clearly part of current queer culture. There are other stickinesses too, that return against a desire to bring them up – those of Orton's life and death, of his sexuality and his 'star status'.

In the 1980s and 1990s when the popularity of, and interest in, Orton's life and work was high, there materialised the development of first wave queer theory, a positionality that connects with Orton's life as it was then narrated – particularly his radical refusal to play by the rules of his historical moment echoed with the newly radical queer, itself embodying a complex past built on radical rejection deeply rooted in the AIDS crisis.⁵ That is, Orton in his everyday life would refuse to be quiet about his sexuality, from visiting his agent's office with his partner, and thereby potentially dangerously 'outing' himself, to his refusal to lower his voice when speaking about gay sex in public to the extent that Kenneth Halliwell accuses him of 'verbal exhibitionism!' (Orton 1996, 259). Halliwell's exclamation was in part because Joe was 'in a rage' as a result of a situation where he could not as easily fuck an adolescent he had seen on Brighton beach in the way he could 'in an Arab county', it made 'England intolerable' (Orton 1996, 259). This typifies some of the 'difficult' or stickier parts of working with Orton that did not critically appear very much in the period of popularity in the '80s and '90s. As laid out above, these sticky elements in Orton focus attention on the plays' easy racism and disdain for women. Simon Shepherd notes that Orton's plays: '...invite their audiences to laugh at women who are trivial and silly and at women who are bossy and menacing.' (1989, 113) And that in Orton's work:

On the one hand we can see his attack on masculinity, which would potentially link with the arguments of feminists, but on the other hand, the hatred of powerful women, which would serve to reinforce traditional misogyny. This hatred of powerful woman had more in it than the hatred of purity campaigners, I suspect [he refers here to campaigners like Mary Whitehouse⁶]. There is probably a deep and uninspected hatred of lesbianism. (115)

In a similar vein, Linda Streit describes how Orton reduces 'women to a mere commodity' (2004, 249) and Francesca Coppa observes that 'women seem to bear the brunt of Orton's

attack on heterosexual British society' (1997, 18).⁷ Compounded with this, Ian Barnard looks at Orton's relationship with race and comes to note:

Representations of men of color and interracial relationships ... that ... appear to be uncomplicatedly racist, can be found in literary and other artistic works... White Western homoerotic writing in the tradition of Paul Bowles, Andre Gide, Jean Genet, William Burroughs and Joe Orton often describes autobiographical encounters with men of color in white tourist sexual destinations (Tangiers, Bangkok etc.) with a mixture of unflinching racism and self-castigation on the part of authors and narrators. (Barnard 2003, 41)

Certainly, Orton's trips to Tangiers in May-June of 1967 reflect this observation. Orton's diaries are full of the objectification of young men and adolescents and he speaks of the locals he meets, or employs, with a disdain that is not present when he describes the sexual contact he has in England. This is a key sticking point, that is irresolvable in the current discussion, but it is not left alone here, below there is an extension of the consideration of how such stickinesses might complicate working with Orton. Now there is a turn to form to see some of the strategies Orton uses to deal with his own sticky situation – how to show homosexuals on stage in the context within which he finds himself.

Form

Although from 1958, the 'Lord Chamberlain decided to permit responsible treatment of homosexuality' in plays (Sinfield in Coppa 2003, 87), governmental theatre censorship in the UK was not lifted until 1968, a year after Orton's death. Therefore, homosexuality in Orton's plays appears in a coded form, in a way that mirrors lived experience of homosexuals in environments where they might be arrested for their activities; their twilight world.⁸ Around this time, it would not be surprising in cities like London to hear Polari, or old gay speak, as a

mode of communication that mirrors Orton's coded world on stage. Polari was a slang language that served to both protect its speakers and also provided a means by which homosexuals could recognise one another. The historian Matt Cook observes that polari was a linguistic practice through which men enacted their difference, it was simultaneously a tactic of concealment, evasion and invisibility (Cook 2005, 152).⁹ Of course all theatrical worlds are coded in some way, Orton's likewise, but he offers not only latent (and maybe to some, blatant) homosexuality, but curiously, like others before him, he uses a particular theatrical form, farce, that is often associated with conservatism (see Smith 1989 p.x).

This link with an apparent conservative form such as farce is connected to the context in which the work was made present, it can be read in part as a survival strategy because farce maintains an acceptable façade, whilst its indirectness offers a way of speaking about homosexuality. And, in Orton's plays sexuality 'represented a threat to the old order' (Lahr 2002, 155), which chimes with the energy present in Orton's works and life. But, of course, there were rules about homosexuality appearing on stage and consequently explicit homosexuality is coded, but in terms of decoding, 'by the mid-1960s ... nearly everyone knew what was being talked about' (Sinfield 1999, 275). Orton used this open secret in *What The Butler Saw*, for instance, by drawing 'attention to the trappings of conventional farce' which he 'then turns... to his own more serious ends' (Lahr 2002, 260). This decoding, which would require a knowledgeable audience sits alongside a sense that homosexuality was being spoken of more freely in the context. Indeed, the Wolfenden Committee (the Committee on Homosexual Offences and Prostitution) produced its report in 1957 and was widely discussed (but it took another decade for the law against homosexuality to be changed in England and Wales). This kind of narrative implies a level of tolerance in the theatre that should not be generalised for the world in which

the theatre sat. For instance, in Gordon Westwood's 1960 sociological study: *A Minority. A Report on the Life of the Male Homosexual in Great Britain*, personal testimonies about the everyday life of homosexuals can be found. In these testimonies the violence faced by homosexuals is constantly reiterated, a great deal of the violence coming from people in authority, one participant describes his experiences:

Some people are so incensed by the idea of homosexuals that police methods that wouldn't be tolerated for a moment in other crimes are allowed when they are after queers. A lawyer friend of mine laughed at the way the Wolfenden Committee had been misled about police methods. He said 'Good God, surely they don't believe that!'. The worst thing is this threat of exposure or violence which the police use to persuade people to tell tales about others. I don't think there's much more than mild physical violence, but they're not above threatening more if they think it will persuade a person to plead guilty (Westwood 1960, 139).

Orton knew about the corruption of those in positions of power too, he notes when in prison that he understood the violence issued against homosexuals from those in place to enforce the law. Although Orton was not directly beaten by police whilst in custody, he deduced that obsequiousness is the best strategy when they were hanging around menacingly, he 'found the best thing was to be as nice as possible and as utterly vulnerable as possible' (in Lahr 2002, 86). Whilst, conversely, in his plays he works to question institutions of the state, thus he undermines amongst many other aspects; employment, the police, the water board, the church, monarchy and, of course, the family. In *What The Butler Saw*, Orton makes a point about what might happen in custody:

PRENTICE. You imagine you'll be safe from acts of indecency in a police station?
GERALDINE. Of course.
PRENTICE. I wish I shared your optimism (1976, 410).

At this point, Geraldine is dressed as a boy, which only enhances the comedy and undermines police probity by implying their homosexuality. Likewise in *Loot*, Orton also fashions situations that undermine the police (or representations of power):

TRUSCOTT. ... You're an honest lad. (*He smiles and puts an arm around DENNIS'S shoulders.*) Are you prepared to co-operate with me? I'll see you're all right.

DENNIS *edges away.*

DENNIS. I'll put in a good word for you.
(*nervous, laughing to hid [sic] his embarrassment*). Can't we stand away from the window? I don't want anybody to see me talking to a policeman.

TRUSCOTT. I'm not a policeman.

DENNIS. Aren't you?

TRUSCOTT. No. I'm from the Metropolitan Water Board.

DENNIS. You're the law! You gave me a kicking down the station.

TRUSCOTT.. I don't remember doing so.

DENNIS. Well, it's all in the day's work to you, isn't it?

TRUSCOTT. What were you doing down the station?

DENNIS. I was on sus.

TRUSCOTT. What were you suspected of?

DENNIS. The bank job.

TRUSCOTT. And you complain you were beaten?

DENNIS. Yes.

TRUSCOTT. Did you tell anyone?

DENNIS. Yes.

TRUSCOTT. Who?

DENNIS. The officer in charge.

TRUSCOTT. What did he say?

DENNIS. Nothing.

TRUSCOTT. Why not?

DENNIS. He was out of breath from kicking (1976, 245-6).

In many of the works, Orton labours to undermine other social formations too, as John Bull and Frances Gray note;

In *Slone*, Orton created a role for himself in a rearranged 'family'. First killing off the unwanted 'dadda' and then being willingly co-erced into

servicing both the handsome Ed and his sister, the peculiar mixture of spinsterly lust and maternal coyness (Bull & Gray, 1981, 78).

Orton depicted his society as corrupt and he demonstrates a deep suspicion of the received wisdom of the family and the state's agents (police, doctors) in part because he had been on the sharp end of it, not least of all that in the early 1960s he and Kenneth Halliwell ended up with a custodial sentences for the crime of defacing library books – a seemingly harsh experience given the slightness of the crime that Orton understood was passed to them 'because we're queers' (in Lahr 2002, 86). Although the 1960s are often pinpointed as a time of social change, this change was not world-shattering all at once and was patchy geographically and temporally in its progress. Another sociologist, Jeffery Weeks, reminds that the 1960s 'for moral conservatives... was the decade in which a cultural revolution fatally undermined the core values of family' (2007, 19) but that this version of the 1960s was not present until the latter part of the decade or well in to the 1970s. As ever, there are historical complexities here in that there would have been homosexuals who had found a way of surviving and thriving in such a context and would wish to maintain the *status quo* when the law was changing in the late 1960s. Though his open sexuality and on the street sexual activity places Orton as a refuser of the strictures of the society in which he lived, this sometimes conflicted with his desires for and the pressures under which he found himself in the material world.

According to Shepherd, Orton was pressured to temper his homosexuality by other homosexuals in more powerful positions, he notes:

The power of the closeted, and anti-liberation, homosexual men insisted that Orton would get on as a star while he played the role of masculine charmer ... He was constructed by the world around him and although

he was ripe for such construction they had the money and the power (Shepherd 1989, 166).

Many of these 'anti-liberation homosexuals' were invested in the theatre scene and benefitted from its present structure and yet Orton wanted commercial success in the theatre, whilst not making commercial theatre, he wanted to write excellent plays that he felt were artistically and commercially successful. Although Lahr says that Orton 'was quick to edit any signs of faggotry in the presentation of his characters' (2002, 157) and offers only one example of when Orton does this to a character, it clear that in the historical context the on-stage representation of homosexuality would have been commercially sensitive. Orton wanted to write plays as successfully as Oscar Wilde's *The Importance of Being Earnest* (in Lahr 2002, 277, also see John Bull's contribution to this special edition for a longer description of Orton's relationship with success). It is this tension between the desire to undermine power structures that generate normative identities in the world as he sees it, whilst also desiring material success in the terms of that normativity combined with his illegal homosexuality that makes for a complexity in understanding Orton's positioning both in his social and theatrical environment. This energy brought from a tension of being both repelled and attracted is reflected in *Entertaining Mr Sloane*, for instance when Sloane chides Ed for having no principles, Ed responds passionately, Sloane senses Ed's mix of respectability and latent sexuality:

ED. One thing I wanted to give you - my principals. Oh, I'm disillusioned. I feel I'm doing no good at all.

SLOANE. I'm very bad. Only you can help me on the road to a useful life. (*Pause.*) A couple of years ago I met a man similar to yourself. Same outlook on life. A dead ringer for you as far as physique went. He was an expert on the adolescent male body. He'd completed an exhaustive study of his subject before I met him. During the course of one magical night he talked to me of his principals – offered

me a job if I would accept them. Like a fool I turned him down. What an opportunity I lost, Ed. If you were to make the same demands, I'd answer loudly in the affirmative.

Pause.

ED. You mean that?
SLOANE. In future you'd have nothing to complain of.
ED. You really mean what you say?
SLOANE. Let me live with you. I'd wear my jeans out in your service.
 Cook for you.
ED. I eat out.
SLOANE. Bring you your tea in bed.
ED. Only women drink tea in bed.
SLOANE. You being me my tea in bed, then. Any arrangement you fancy (Orton 1976, 135).

Ed wants to maintain a sense of a principled acceptable heterosexual masculinity, whilst also lusting after Sloane. Certainly by depicting this tension Orton in part exposes a construction of normativity. He saw this in other places on the theatrical terrain. For instance, in March 1967 when observing the fashion for representing madness in theatre, where once madness was viewed in a theatrical way at places like Bedlam, Orton writes:

Now a director and actors recreate a madhouse in a theatre. Let's look at mad people. At queer people. They only have to look in their mirrors. Kenneth H. said, 'In what the Butler Saw you're writing of madness.' 'Yes,' I said, 'but there isn't a lunatic in sight – just the doctors and nurses'. (1996, 115).

This kind of willingness to expose in his plays the corruption of the society in which he was writing was because Orton has a working bodily understanding (pleasure?) of such corruption – when in custody he had been propositioned by officers for instance (in Lahr, 2002, 197). Orton's world then was not one that blithely accepted middle class values, but he often chooses a set designed to make a middle class audience feel secure, for a while. He does not want to reject all forms of convention in his plays, he notes that 'you can't reject tradition

completely' and that in *What the Butler Saw*, he plans a play that has 'conventional form' (Orton 1996, 242, fn 1). Halliwell too understood that the 'set's middle-class and French windowy' appearance would make audiences feel at home, at least visually (250). This knowing approach to the manipulation of form to appear conventional does on the one hand question extant social hierarchies, but on the other, does not explode what it normally looks like, at least in the first instance. Thus although Orton undermines farce, its energies are still angled towards normativity and as such his plays will be influenced by this drive.

C.W.E Bigsby characterises farce as conservative because its workings are in a 'world of partial beings, role players whose mask is constantly in danger of slipping, even if this is conveniently reinstated at the climax of the play' (1982, 53-4). In farce things get mixed up, the vicar loses his trousers and the social hierarchy gets upset – but only to resettle itself to normality in the end. Farce is not really seen as a serious attempt to make a point in the way that, perhaps, Pinter's plays did at the same time. Yet, it is hard not to notice when engaging with Orton's early plays that they appear somewhat Pintersque. Alan Sinfield (1999) notes this link with 'Pinter in Orton's *Entertaining Mr Sloane*' (269) for example, where '... although Pinteresque motifs, deriving from the thriller, contribute an air of menace, the violence in this case is not arbitrary, pathological, paranoid or metaphysical' (185). Even when Orton wanted to disassociate his writing from the 'mystery school' (Orton in Lahr 1976, 17) this link persists. Orton's menace is grounded in sexuality. And Orton's resistance to restating the mask in the way that Bigsby implies, certainly at the end of *What the Butler Saw*, could be a place where the dramaturgy most closely comes to queerness.

Yet, Orton's farce in terms of its relation to queer dramaturgy is interesting. Although, as Bull and Gray note, 'Orton was not a great structural innovator' and that the 'plotting of plays perplexed, rather than interested him' (1981, 80) it is clear that by the time *What the Butler Saw* was written, Orton had found a form in which the disruptive elements of sexuality force the plot along. The form mirrors in some ways Orton's sexuality, Lesley Smith recognises this in 1976, by observing

...the illegality and rebelliousness of Orton's life – partly forced on him by the legal and social penalties attached to homosexuality – are harnessed in his drama to the subversive and anarchic energies of farce (Smith in Evans 2014, 148).

What is intimated at in earlier work is more fully present in *What the Butler Saw*, which maybe propelled by Orton's desire to fully explore the farcical endpoints of the attempt to maintain a coherent and respectable face. He understood that his work springs from his experience of sexuality and its potential to upset the status quo. When, in July 1967, Orton met Achmed Ossman who was thinking of producing his works in a non-western context, they begin to speak of *Entertaining Mr Sloane* in relation to Pinter's *The Homecoming*. Ossman in conversation wonders if Pinter had been influenced by *Sloane*, Orton thinks that he was:

The Homecoming couldn't have been written without *Sloane*. And, you know in a way the second act – although I admire it very much – isn't true. Harold, I'm sure, would never share anyone sexually. I would. And so *Sloane* springs from the way I think. *The Homecoming* doesn't spring from the way Harold thinks (1996, 238).

For the discussion here, it might be more accurate to surmise that the play comes from the way that Orton lived, as much as how he thought. Orton's homosexuality and the kind of life he had to live because of it was an energy that aimed to undo the return of the mask, the

righting of the *status quo*. Orton connected his sexuality to the energy to destruct, he finds 'lust indistinguishable from anger' (1996, 260) and this manifests in his use of farce. That is,

Orton's fascination with the anarchic potential of human behaviour made any firm resolution of the plot narrative difficult. There is a plot which must be resolved, but this does not appear that it matters much what the conclusion is, as long as it brings the particular events to a point of stasis (Bull & Gray, 1981, 80)

This is another persistently sticky element, an apparent constant return to the disruptive force of sexuality, especially homosexuality and that the 'homosexual problem' (for it is often discussed as a problem or as illness, see Shepherd 1989, 35) which forms in Orton's plays a structural device that mirrors Pinter's menace. Fransesca Coppa notes that the link with Pinter is very significant not only because it might articulate the milieu of form in which Orton was writing, but also that such

...intertextuality with Pinter is extremely important, since Orton has [...] detailed the 'menace' in the 'theater of menace'; it is as if Orton has said "I have seen the menace and it is *me*". The importance of this should not be underestimated, as it provides one of the many answers to the critics who do not find Orton to be an adequately 'gay' playwright. Orton's telling of Pinter's 'secret', his mentioning of one of the 'unmentionables' of the theater of menace is a distinctively 'gay' maneuver (Coppa 1997, 20).

Although it is not clear here which critics do not see Orton as a gay enough playwright, the manoeuvre that 'mentions the unmentionable' is, I would say, rather a queer move than a gay one, in that it seeks to expose a particular social structure. Queer, from its earliest forms was a strategy for exposing social constructions in places where solidity is assumed to lay (as with queer readings of the connection of biology to gender and sex) it unpicked discourses to

examine their relative power in a structure of sexuality. Admittedly some of the radical gay positions in the early 1970s might also ring true here as noted above with the GLF, but gay is more often associated with a movement of assimilation, rather than radicalism. But the stickiness here is one where Orton's social and historical positioning accounts in some way for the structure of the plays in and through his sexuality as noted above.

Although Orton wanted mainstream success, which may imply a deference to dominant norms, it is equally apparent that Orton is far from an assimilationist and this manifests in the work. But, I venture, when disentangling the way in which Orton is present in his texts, or exploring how his life outside his writing accounts for some of the inner workings of his plays, specificity is important: which Orton is being spoken about?

How Orton's plays and their author are present for current queerness should attend to this question of specificity. Is the vision of Orton as Lahr or as Shepherd sees him, as he is edited in his diaries, or in the testimonies from the people with whom he worked? That is, there is the Orton in theatre-land, the Orton in the diaries and what has been called the Orton industry – particularly by Shepherd, who uses the phrase throughout his 1989 volume – and considerations made of Orton the pederast (Coppa 1997). The challenge is that these different Ortons are sticky, to speak of one is in some way to reference another, in part because Orton's status as a playwright and 'star' interrupts any clear division. This is compounded when considering Orton's representation in film by Stephen Frears (screenplay by Alan Bennett) and an on-stage in Simon Bent's *Prick Up Your Ears* (2009), which seemed through a watered down campiness, to render Orton not as forthright as he appears in his diaries. It seems clear that Orton functions for contemporary audiences in 2009 in a similar mode following Lahr's vision

of Orton: the genius who was cut down in his prime by a jealous and older, less successful lover (who was balding – something that Lahr turns to again and again – Simon Shepherd at length takes to task the heteronormative underpinning of Lahr’s biography of Orton and notes too Lahr’s connection of baldness with the corrupt Halliwell, saying ‘never has baldness borne responsibility for so many horrors. The book could even have been titled *The Sorry Saga of Halliwell’s Hair* (1989, 27)).¹⁰

The campiness often played in Orton’s productions might be purposeful - camp, so often seen as asinine, politically useless and weak is anything other than this, especially in a context where being camp was an indicator of queerness, a queerness that could end with being arrested (it still can in certain parts of our world and continues to elicit violence in liberal societies). Orton’s relationship to camp is, like his relationship to mainstream success, complicated and contradictory. Orton did not like camp as a form of identity or as a moniker for his plays, he notes early on that *The Ruffian on the Stair* should not be ‘camp’ (in Lahr 2002, 130) seeing the presence of camp as a sign of immature work. Yet, he also wrote the character of Truscott for Kenneth Williams, a performer whose camp credentials were widely known. Indeed the endless re-writing of *Loot* as it played could be seen in part problem solving how to make the play function in order for commercial success as much as working around Williams’ camp manner for a character that functions as the play’s menace.

Camp in the UK, perhaps through its deployment in light entertainment in the hands of people like Williams has apparently had its sting removed. Perhaps as the stickiness of the misogyny and easy racism of Orton’s historical context is played down, the energy and power of campiness is also reduced to, seemingly, a bit of harmless fun. So, as the once menacing Mr

Sloane appears in a room (not unlike the menacing Goldberg and McCann in Pinter's *The Birthday Party*) leather-clad and sexy, he becomes less dangerous than he is camp, his presentation typifies engaging with a queer past in which what was dangerous is now been rendered innocuous.

For instance, emblematic of seeing Orton as harmless fun is a review from Charles Spencer of the *Daily Telegraph* of a production of *Loot* in 1998, where he comes to say 'we probably have more sympathy for them [Orton's plays] thirty years on, since our current culture gives even more public credence to greed and personal gain' (Spencer 1998 in Streit 2004, 249). Shepherd also notes that Orton might resonate with an audience in the 1980s because of the rise of individualism (Shepherd 1989, 161-2). Likewise, with a review of *Entertaining Mr Sloane* playing in Leicester (Orton's hometown) in 2012, where *The Stage's* Pat Ashworth notes 'the farce, with its onslaught on hypocrisy and bigotry, no longer carries Orton's ironic 1964 health warning, 'Not for the narrow-minded'' (Ashworth 2012). Although, conversely sometimes a review notes that shock still works, for instance Michael Billington writing of a production of *Entertaining Mr Sloane* in 2009 says 'I've never before seen a version of this play that pushed its comedy and violence to such limits, or that spelt out so clearly its affinity with the work of Harold Pinter' (Billington 2009). Although this kind of description of a production is rarely seen.

Wyllie accounts for the disjunction between reviews in the past with those in the present by arguing that the past critics did not engage with the shocking nature of the plays so as not to give them credence, as if engaging with them means dealing with sexuality, principally homosexuality (Wyllie notes though that audiences were more shocked than the reviews appear to show (2009, 132)). For the discussion here, this curious situation could explain why

(burgeoning) queer ideas of the 1980s and 1990s seemed to view the plays as queerer than they appeared in their original historical context because they unpicked heteronormativity in a rambunctious way and this struck a chord with a new version of queerness. What could be explained away as simply the energy of the 1960s stage is more likely in the 1980s and 1990s to chime with the developing anti-normativity of queerness. Shock may still appear in recent productions, but an audience in the 2010s might feel this for different reasons, for instance, Peter Brown notices the brutality for an audience in 2012 of *What the Butler Saw* at the Vaudeville theatre London who might be focussed on the fact that 'rape and child abuse are all treated rather casually' (2012).

Added to the specificity of community, location and temporality that present an alignment that might produce queer dramaturgy is the important element of who is making the work and who is watching it. Thus in the 1980s and 1990s where there were very few popular representations of radical queers at a time that gayness was being challenged by the political project of queer theory, Orton's writing, and the representations of it that presented him as anti-normative in his time, offered a queer alternative. That is, although the comedy may not have changed that much, Orton's representation elsewhere in the historical context exposed for a moment the potential queerness of the plays for audiences ready to connect with it. And, of course, at the same time there were plenty of discourses about the 'homosexual problem' in the press, reflecting the 1960s, except in the 1980s and 1990s the 'homosexual problem' was focussed on HIV and the AIDS crisis. As such there is a mirrored alignment between Orton as a homosexual in his society and a 1980s and 1990s position of gays as social pariahs. And as Coppa comments above when speaking of the menace in Orton and its relationship with Pinter's plays, Orton's work says "'I have seen the menace and it is *me*'" (Coppa 1997, 20). It

was very clearly present to gays and queers in the 1980s and 1990s that they were a menace (this can be easily seen with the discourses surrounding ‘good AIDS’ and ‘bad AIDS’) – not least of all in terms of a threat to public health and the institution of the family and marriage.¹¹

As ever, discourses of homosexuality are caught up with images of disease, they have a history of characterising homosexuality as contagious. This kind of image of contagion was also projected onto the reviews and descriptions of the plays. Lahr notes that ‘the words “sick” and “filth” so often levelled at Orton’s work contain a fear of infection’ (2002, 188). This fear of infection that Orton’s work brought about in its original context may have been part of its queer resonance in the 1980s and 1990s. That is, the works’ reputation built in part from their original reception as sick and infectious, along with Orton’s refusal to temper such images (indeed encouraging them through the Edna Welthorpe letters) might also have chimed with the way that queers were present in the 1980s and 1990s popular reactionary press and discourse. The popular press do not seem to see the literary allusions Orton makes, because they are focussed on its disease and contribution to the breakdown of decorum springing up all over the 1960s.

As such, it is clear that Orton’s works might only awkwardly fit the definition of queer dramaturgy above because they *are* literary - they have, for instance, been linked to the structure of tragedy (Evans 2014) and in other places to (albeit problematically) ‘universality’ (Streit 2004, 252) and farce has a long literary history. And although elements of his works for some of the 1980s and 1990s were very queer because of resounding parallels between the two periods, time moves on and those re-soundings lose their intensity. Perhaps this is a contributory factor to Orton not appearing very much recently in the landscape of queer and

gay culture. Yet, queer dramaturgy emphasises the alignments of audience with the work in a specific time, place and political context. As such the refusal to adhere to social propriety produced by power structures for Orton in the 1960s resonated very much with the AIDS crisis in the 1980s and 1990s and this could mean that for a while the work was queer by these terms, but as it resonates less, its queerness wanes.

However, sensing trans-temporal correlates is only one way of thinking queer dramaturgy, one that relies on trans-historical alignments, or reverberations, reflections and echoes. There are other ways of thinking about how queer might be rendered when looking at Orton's plays in both their historical context and in new productions, even when they appear normative and only played for laughs. Thus the final task at hand is to find a way of engaging with Orton that pays mind to the work in this way whilst also attending to the plurality of Ortons in a way that does not flatten his radicalism through the terms of the now.

Wearing Time.

If there is a sense that Orton's work has lost its potential for queerness because its relation to the politics of the now makes for difficulties (as I have noted, it is racist and misogynist), then it is worth exploring if there are other potential ways that it might be seen or felt as queer. The holding aloft of the penis of Winston Churchill (a bit of a statue that has been broken off in a gas explosion) at the end of *What the Butler Saw*, the description of the young naked male bank robbers in *Loot*, or Mike's 'forays into an underworld where men make appointments to meet in public lavatories' (Sinfield 2003, 88) in *The Ruffian on the Stair* – and many more like moments – are not only comedic, but instants that are ripe for reading in terms of desire,

present in the now. A desire, which does not feature as high-ranking knowledge, might lead to a form of knowing, understanding or connecting, a process that Freeman refers to as erotohistoriography:

Erotohistoriography admits that contact with historical materials can be precipitated by particular bodily dispositions, and that these connections may elicit bodily responses, even pleasurable ones, that are themselves a form of understanding. It sees the body as a method, and historical consciousness as something intimately involved with corporeal sensations (2010, 95–6).

The queer appeal of Orton's work, and a knowledge of it, could be aroused by a particular bodily disposition and bodily knowledge in an audience. That is, the sexy menace of the early work presents a way of connecting with it across time, through a bodily knowledge of the kinds of transgressive desire being aroused and how it can be used pleurably to explode socially accepted mores. It presents a position that is appealing to queer looking and thinking. It is not claimed here that it is simply a piqued desire that renders potential for queerness, but there is in particular reading positions recognition and bodily understanding of what is potential in the performance – and this resonance is potentially queer. To be clear, Freeman is not calling for a 'fully present past' (2010, 96) so that it might be understood through historical accuracy, but rather to value historical understanding as wrapped in desire that might puncture temporality, that might arouse desire as understanding.

Where there are historical depictions that desire accuracy, these higher-ranking forms of knowledge function to undo stickiness by emphasizing the 'then' not the bodily dispositions of the audience of the now. For instance, where Orton and his lover Kenneth Halliwell appear on stage they are coded in this way, in the 2009 production of *Prick up Your Ears*, Aleks Sierz

(2009) describes the depiction of Halliwell as '1960s camp'. For some reason, again, campiness in this sense is facile and does not engage with the progressiveness of what was a homosexual relationship in a context where this was illegal; a non-monogamous intergenerational relationship, which involved open discussion about others being part of their sex life and an openness to what might now be called sex tourism. Orton, when giving advice to Kenneth Williams, who was feeling 'low and depressed' says 'you must do whatever you like... as long as you enjoy it and don't hurt anyone else, that is all that matters', he goes on to say 'get yourself fucked if you want to. Get yourself anything you want' (1996, 251). His advice to Williams and his own life choices read as a particularly modern version of a queer lifestyle – one that is resisting the throes of hetero – and homonormativity, and of which a present queer might have a bodily understanding, in a current context that only apparently values monogamous, age-symmetrical relationships validated through institutions such as (gay) marriage.

So, if the depiction of Halliwell and Orton can be seen as camp, but that is in some way describing something that looks (and feels!) decidedly queer, then by the same token there is a possibility that in the coded campiness of the plays, there also lays a window to the more queer and the less gay. That is, there are bodily dispositions, or forms of non-rational understanding situated bodily and locally that might connect with some of the potentially radical elements of the work.

In other words, there is a way that queer might engage with the versions of Orton produced that renders them radical in their presentation not through a sense of demanding for them to become more Pinteresque or more progressive, but that in bodily orientations and proclivities

for reading, something else, something nascent and not yet legible is present. If this process of decoding through bodily dispositions, or through reading positions sensitive to time and temporalities, solidify as the container for low forms of knowledge (I am keen to note here that reading positions are bodily positions, given that reading happens between bodies) there is an opportunity to enter through a veneer of an appeal to mainstream audiences (read more conservative). Such sensitivities too are the reason why, perhaps, Orton used farce. A position that argues that farce allows a frisson, a brush with the naughty only in the process of righting any challenge to the *status quo*, is somehow a position that does not hold that in the process of being upset the *status quo* might be seen as constructed, or that there are other ways of being in the world, even if only hinted at. Or indeed, that audience members might be remembering more fully the upset than they are the righting of the on-stage world. Orton's use of farce is expedient in a context where there was a policing of homosexuality on stage.

Certainly, by the time Orton gets to *What The Butler Saw*, he had a very clear sense of how the speed of the farce moves so rapidly as to expose the processes of normativity. Although Orton refers to the play as 'conventional form' and was developing 'ideas... for a fourth play [that] won't be conventional form at all', (1996, 242, fn.1) Lahr comments that 'his plot required the kind of accelerating momentum in which at a certain speed personality starts to disintegrate' (2002, 258). The activation of velocity-disintegration available in the farce form extends to Orton a way to expose through the effort to maintain decency and decorum, social structures and crack them in a fatal way. Orton understood that farce allowed this kind of function, he says, when speaking about the 'naturalistic movement' that

You can't do anything except discuss Mavis's new hat... in naturalistic plays I couldn't make any comment of what kind of policeman Truscott is, or the law, or the big general things of the Establishment' (1996, 210, fn.1)

Orton found a form that allowed the showing of a queer possible, however the form, thought and felt as conservative by some critics and audiences, is the cover, the misdirection, the sleight of hand that allows non-normative positions to be present. And Orton's knowing use of farce questions normativity in that he presents a world that is not 'realistic but journalistic' (Coppa 1997, 11) in its depiction of identity positions, in so doing he shows that the predicaments and plot twists in Orton's farce are driven by desire, rather than simply situation. The slip of a social mask present in farce implies that it can be righted, but at the end of Orton's work the mask is fatally shattered. Orton understood and felt able, perhaps through his own bodily disposition in relation to the homosexuals and queers of his time, to 'play lip service to a specific genre, which he then proceeds to rather ruthlessly undermine' (Streit 2004, 251). Orton presents a 1960s onstage world fuelled by the kinds of normativity circulated in popular media (particularly newspapers). The world the papers and authority present is morally stable; where this is not the case, this is because of an attack from liberal ideals. At the same time outside the theatre such a morally just and stable society found acceptable in its power structures the beating and police entrapment of homosexuals, some of these police were themselves homosexual, as one of Westwood's anonymous contributors puts it at this time: 'I suppose it depends on how they feel. One night they want sex and the next night they'll run you in' (1960, 142). In showing propriety manifest in popular ideas of authority and morality as corrupt and maintained by a sense of blind belief (I am put in mind here of the character of McLeavy in *Loot*, who has faith in social institutions like the police, but is the only one who is arrested) Orton mentions the unmentionable. In some way he does a bit of a queer job of

showing normativity, whilst his private life gave him the energy, knowledge and bodily position to understand such dishonesty.

Yet there are other bodily dispositions, other sticky stories from the past that might not sit so well, seeing the queer potential of the work marred by misogyny and racism (and in the lives of Halliwell and Orton too). Orton has been represented as a trailblazer, he epitomized at certain recent historical points the possible future for the queer, but of course he cannot be divorced from the social context in which he lived and wrote. In this way it is tempting to read the lack of sensitivity to issues of race and gender as part of the tabloid nature of the representations or simply a sign of the times – given the content of newspaper depictions – but there were other dramas working with much more sensitivity about these issues in the 1960s (the BBC's *Cathy Come Home* in 1966 is emblematic here). Likewise, other writers at the time were addressing a post-war re-evaluation of class. Orton's plays are situated in a theatre environment that celebrated the depiction of the working classes and/or a youthful questioning of received wisdoms: John Osborne's *Look Back in Anger* and Arnold Wesker's trilogy 1958-60 (Orton's breakthrough radio play *The Ruffian on the Stair* was broadcast in 1964, the same year as Pinter's *The Homecoming*). Shelagh Delaney's *A Taste of Honey* was produced in 1958 and looked at the relations of class with gender and race. Some of these artists, particularly the men were associated with the Angry Young Man moniker. Although such a school is seen as radical, Weeks notes that '...the playwrights and novelists who earned this description were notably misogynistic and homophobic' (2007, 21), that is, where the rare homosexual appears in this work they usually do so negatively and from a heterosexual viewpoint. Such dramas engaged their content as social critique and represented in serious ways a 'new' Britain in the post war years – one that might be more focussed on working class

worlds rather than middle class values (Brook in Lea and Schoene 2003). So, although Orton's plays might reflect the reactionary media as a device, it is clear that there were other writers at the time who were taking a different route – Orton may have been working in an environment where casual everyday prejudice was more accepted, but there were other writers working at the same time, exploding such prejudices.

By following these lines Orton can appear for queers as a little like a beloved uncle who is great fun – but who would be (so much) more palatable if only he were more reconstructed about his attitude to women, race, rape, child abuse etc. And, like a 'funny uncle' he deserves to be challenged. It is not good enough to simply say "ah but that's uncle Joe, he doesn't mean much by it". This is the challenge of engaging with Orton's work for queers and perhaps why it has fallen out of favour for a while – maybe in the turn from radical gay to queer and then to second wave queer its apparent there is much lacking in Orton that unpicks attitudes to women and race. And given that queerness is fueled by an anti-normative drive, there is a lot in Orton that is normative and he 'was far from candid' (Sinfield 1999, 25) in his work.¹² Yet even as early as 1983, Johnathan Dollimore sensed in Orton's writing a post-gay queer sensitivity, particularly in *What The Butler Saw*, he argues that the play indicates 'the arbitrary and narrowness of gender roles, and that they are socially ascribed rather than naturally given' (in Sinfield 1999, 282).

There is an early connection here between what Dollimore sees in *What the Butler Saw*, a bit before what the 'other' Butler saw (I'm referring to Judith) except in its early articulation she explores a grander stage outside the theatre, though not divorced from performance communities. Likewise, other playwrights also noted that identities were functions of the social

rather than the biological and spent time unhinging the connection, according to Sinfield, Orton fits well as an early part of a tradition of queer plays that understand this desire to expose normative gendered constructions, he traces a lineage to Martin Sherman, Caryl Churchill, Harvey Fierstein, Larry Kramer, Neil Bartlett, Tony Kushner, Jonathan Harvey, Mark Ravenhill, as well as to *Split Britches*, for instance (Sinfield 2003, 94). And there could be added to this list *Gay Sweatshop*.

The task for current queer readings is to account for any resonance his writing might have for contemporary queerness without allowing for the stickiness of the past to be wiped away, the bumpiness to be smoothed over. This bumpiness is formed of Orton's refusal to easily fit into the role of a radical progressive, his refusal to be easily 'reclaimed' and loded, refusal to be a proto-modern queer, refusal to apparently be aware of how he recirculated the kinds of negative dominance from which he himself explicitly suffered, particularly in relation to class and sexuality. The challenge for this work is to find a way of liking and working with uncle Joe whilst also challenging his outmoded attitudes and constant refusals, for if he goes unchallenged we might come unstuck in many uncomfortable ways.¹³

¹ In 1967 the age of consent for homosexual men was 21, it was lowered in 1994 to 18 and in 2001 equalised with heterosexuals at 16. Section 28, known as it was making its way through the legislative process as Clause 28, was a piece of legislation embedded in the 'the Local Government Act 1988 [which] prohibited local authorities from "promoting" homosexuality or gay "pretended family relationships", and prevented councils spending money on educational materials and projects perceived to promote a gay lifestyle.' (Gillian 2003). In 2009 the prime minister apologised for it. It was first proposed in 1986 and while in operation caused fear and phobia in schools, particularly, who often did not teach about homosexuality for fear of the section.

² I am particularly thinking here of writers and theorists such as José Esteban Muñoz's work on disidentification (1999) and Lee Edleman's work on the queer negative (2004).

³ However, in recent times many people do use it as a marker of identity – formally, and for this discussion, queer post '80s and '90s is properly a refusal of fixed identity.

4 In formulating a theory around queer attachment, Sally R. Munt, by way of Sara Ahmed, notes this stickiness too and puts it to action in her argument through affect and emotion, she also notes that sticky, might also ‘recall the dual significance of ‘tacky’ as in gummy and cheap and even the accusation/appellation ‘Queer!’ sticks...’ (Munt 2007, 12). There may be unexplored resonances here with the discussion as it develops later in this article, particularly as it comes to talk about the popular and low forms of theatre that might be understood and articulated as tacky.

5 Max H Kirsch notes when speaking of queer’s development, as a set of critical ideas, proclivities and positioning, has via HIV and AIDS fostered ‘alliances formed in reaction to the AIDS pandemic’ (2000, 16). A good case in point would be groups like AIDS Coalition To Unleash Power (ACTUP).

6 Mary Whitehouse (1910-2001) was a reactionary social campaigner strongly opposed to social liberalism, particularly as it appeared in media. She founded National Viewers’ and Listeners’ Association.

7 Here I have curtailed the quotation to illustrate an argument, but it is important to note that Coppa sees this attack on women as shouldered mainly by them, but ‘no one escapes unscathed’ (2004:18).

8 I use the phrase ‘twilight world’ as it was a common phrase originating in the 1950s popular discourse, see historian Rictor Norton’s on this (<http://rictornorton.co.uk/social14.htm>). A phrase that still echoes today.

9 Famously the BBC radio comedy sketch show, *Round the Horne* (first broadcast 1965-1968) featured two characters, Julian and Sandy (played by Hugh Paddick and Kenneth Williams), who spoke polari. Although the extent to which the audience fully understood the resonance of the gay-speak is by no means certain, it was very popular and the audience found the characters and polari very funny. Given its popularity at the time, it is safe to say that polari was part of the social lexicography, or language landscape of the period, even if its beginnings and importance to homosexuals was less understood.

10 Later Shepherd in response to the negative reports from other homosexuals interviewed for the Lahr biography, suggests yet another title for it – ‘*Revenge of the Closet Queens*’ (26).

11 In part good AIDS/bad AIDS is a popular discourse about the source of transmission of the HIV virus. Thus ‘Good AIDS’ [is] the kind contracted from contaminated blood’ and ‘Bad AIDS [is] the one associated with gays and drug addicts’ (Walton in Aguilar 2000, 253)

12 This antinormative drive is fundamental to the workings of queerness as Robyn Wiegman and Elizabeth A Wilson understand; ‘...nearly every queer theoretical itinerary of analysis that now matters is informed by the prevailing supposition that a critique of normativity marks the spot where queer and theory meet’ (2015, 1).

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