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Jamie Heckert

**Love without borders?
Intimacy, identity
and the state of
compulsory monogamy**

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Throughout my life somebody has always tried to set the boundaries of who and what I will be allowed to be [. . .]. What is common to these boundary lines is that their most destructive power lies in what I can be persuaded to do to myself — the walls of fear, shame, and guilt I can be encouraged to build in my own mind. [. . .] I am to hide myself, and hate myself, and never risk exposing what might be true about my life. I have learned through great sorrow that all systems of oppression feed on public silence and private terrorization. [. . .] For all of us, it is the public expression of desire that is embattled, any deviation from what we are supposed to want and be, how we are supposed to behave.

Dorothy Allison (1995:116–117)

The state is not something which can be destroyed by a revolution, but is a condition, a certain relationship between human beings, a mode of human behaviour; we destroy it by contracting other relationships, by behaving differently.

Gustav Landauer (1910/2005:165)

For some, non-monogamy or polyamory might be lifestyle choices, alternative sexual identities added to a growing list of sexual minorities: a proud, beautiful diversity or a range of shameful immoralities, depending on the eyes of the beholder. I can appreciate the appeal of political strategies based on stable identities: they fit into dominant political structures and patterns of relationships; they offer an obvious route for expressing desires for dignity and understanding. I can even understand the temptation to label immoral the practices of others that I don't understand, that I find painful to witness. I've done it. My concern here is less to do with right or wrong and more about the placing of borders around the imagination.

This chapter is about borders, about possibilities, about behaving differently. It has developed out of a larger research project in which I tried to clarify my own understanding of 'sexual orientation,' to imagine different possibilities for the everyday politics of sexuality (Heckert, 2005). After having been heavily involved in what is now

called identity politics and then very, very strongly opposed to such strategies (Heckert, 2004), I wanted to think through more carefully both how people experience this [end p255] notion of sexual orientation identity. I hoped understanding those experiences might help me both empathise with those attracted to Pride and imagine alternatives. Influenced by the work of queer women of colour who draw connections between borders of gender, race, nation and sexuality (e.g. Anzaldúa, 1987), by the border-crossing nature of my own life, as well as by my involvement in an anarchism engaged with everyday borders and policing, I invited as interview partners (a phrase I take from Klesse, 2006) folk whose intimate relationships crossed borders of sexual orientation categories.

Alongside other questions about sexual identities, practices and desires, I asked about their relationship status in terms of monogamy, how that decision was made, and how they continued to communicate about it. Challenging the assumptions of one advisor who, discussing my methodology, asked, ‘Do you mean promiscuous couples?’, eight of my interview partners were in relationships they defined as monogamous, while five were in non-monogamous relationships with one other person, and three were maintaining multiple ongoing romantic and/or sexual relationships. In terms of categories of race and nation, they all identified as white and all had come from the overdeveloped world; seven were born outside of the UK and English was a second language for four of them. Although class varied in terms of income, job status and parental status, all of my interview partners had access to a broad range of social, political and cultural resources. All could be described as left-wing with a minority being politically engaged, including three involved in anarchist politics. Apart from two men living in small towns, the interview partners lived in large urban areas in either England or Scotland. Partners ranged in age from mid-20s to late-60s, with an average of 35 (for more on methodology, see Heckert, 2010a).

I make sense of their stories here by developing a theoretical story inspired by a re-reading of Adrienne Rich’s ‘Compulsory Heterosexuality and Lesbian Existence’ (1980/1999). My reading is influenced by Deleuze and Guattari’s (1999) anarchist theorising of the State and the nomad (amongst, as ever, the infinite diversity of life). I offer

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this story as an invitation, one of many possible ways of making sense of the fragments of interview stories I share below.

The state of compulsory monogamy

Adrienne Rich's essay (1980/1999) offered critical insights and questions to the dominant (feminist) discourse of heterosexuality as natural fact and lesbian desire as minority taste. In doing so, her challenge to the construction of a hetero/homo division was one of a number of influences precipitating the development of queer theory (Garber, 2001). Her argument, as I understand it now, was that patriarchal and capitalist societies use repression, [end p256] both subtle and overt, to control the flows of women's emotional and erotic energies. Writing and speaking of heterosexuality as natural, she argued, fails to recognise not only the forms of compulsion which are involved in its institutionalisation, but also a huge range of ways in which women derive emotional sustenance from their intimacy with other women. She called for recognition of lesbian existence, the historical and continuing realities of women's physical passions for each other, as part of a lesbian continuum. Overflowing the medicalising category of lesbianism as a form of genital-centred orientation, and embracing "many more forms of primary intensity between and among women, including the sharing of a rich inner life, the bonding against male tyranny, the giving and receiving of practical and political support" (p 210), the lesbian continuum is offered as a gift, inviting women to recognise the sources of their power. In doing so, Rich enacts a form of anti-authoritarian method. "[L]ook at those creating viable alternatives, try to figure out what might be larger implications of what they are (already) doing, and then offer those ideas back, not as prescriptions, but as contributions, possibilities — as gifts" (Graeber, 2004: 11–12).

Inspired by this feminist critique of heterosexuality as institution and offering new ways of understanding and experiencing relationships, I attempt here to do something similar in relation to monogamy from an anarchist perspective. In doing so, I'm not the first to criticise monogamy as institution intertwined with hierarchy.

Long before it was publicly questioned by other women, anarchist feminists in the US and UK at the turn of the 20th century challenged the role of the State apparatus, capitalism and patriarchy in coercing women into marriage and compulsory monogamy (a compulsion not applied so strongly to many men). In a powerful critique of normative relationships, Voltairine de Cleyre wrote in 1907, “In short, I would have men and women so arrange their lives that they shall always, at all times, be free beings in this regard as in all others. The limits of abstinence or indulgence can be fixed by the individual alone, what is normal for one being excess for another, and what is excess at one period of life being normal at another” (2004:14; for more on anarchist critiques of compulsory monogamy, see also Alexander, n.d.; Goldman, 1917/1969; Greenway, 2003, 2009; Haaland, 1993; Jose, 2005; Kissack, 2008; Kolářová, n.d.; Marso, 2003; Passet, 2003). More recently, compulsory monogamy has been tied into contemporary consumer capitalism and notions of ownership (McPheeters, 1999), patriarchal religion (Stelboun, 1999), race and class (Willey, 2003), and gender and compulsory heterosexuality (Rosa, 1994). The relationship between compulsory monogamy and so many forms of hierarchy makes it an important point of analysis for anarchist politics. More specifically, for queer politics, the incomprehensibility of alternatives to heterosexuality and homosexuality stem, in part, from the romantic, monogamous ideal of one person being able to fulfill all of one’s needs (see e.g. Queen, 1995). Indeed, bisexuality has long been criticised based [end p257] on assumptions of its incompatibility with monogamy, and the assumption that monogamy is an intrinsically superior characteristic of relationships (Murray, 1995; Norrgard, 1991; Rust, 1993).

Before going further, I know that I, amongst others, have read the lesbian continuum as a form of lesbian hierarchy (Heckert, 2005), where some women are positioned as more feminist (that is, more lesbian) than others. While demands for lesbian purity and stronger commitments to women have sometimes become a component of particular lesbian feminisms (see e.g. Echols, 1992; Frye, 1983; Leeds Revolutionary Feminist Group, 1981; Rust, 1995), it is certainly not the only context where a discourse of liberation can become intertwined with practices of domination, particularly through claiming

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a moral high ground. Indeed, it’s a common pattern in hierarchical cultures. Feminists, for example, have criticised the way in which a discourse of sexual liberation was mobilised in the 1960s and 70s to justify the sexual harassment and rape of women by men: ‘Hey, baby, what’s the matter? I thought you were liberated!’ (see Jeffreys, 1990). This is paralleled in recent history by claims of women’s liberation made in corporate media and by US and UK military leaders to justify bombing the people of Afghanistan and Iraq (see, e.g. New York Times, 2001; see for critique, e.g. Chew, 2005; INCITE!, 2006; Sevcik, 2003; Viner, 2002). Patterns of moral hierarchy and constructions of borders between ‘us’ and ‘them’ are also to be found in discourses of both monogamy and polyamory where romantic love (associated with polyamory or mature relationships) is positioned over and above sexual pleasure (associated with promiscuity and immaturity) (Klesse, 2006; 2007). In each of these cases, violence is facilitated through acts of representation. For Deleuze, a critique of representation is “something absolutely fundamental: the indignity of speaking for others” (Deleuze, 1977; see also, May, 1994; Sullivan, 2005; Tormey, 2006). For Rich, this is the “control of consciousness”, the erasing of possibilities (e.g., lesbian possibilities) through authoritatively telling stories of “the way things are” (p 219). Whereas Deleuze, Rich and others explicitly attempt to avoid the indignity of representation, the State depends on it.

Deleuze and Guattari understand the State as “a process of capture of flows of all kinds, populations, commodities or commerce, money or capital” (1987/1999:386). So, too, the flows of eroticism, desire and emotion. For Deleuze and Guattari, “the operation that constitutes the essence of the State” is overcoding (1972/1977:199). We all code the world, making sense of things with categories. Overcoding, however, is a claim of authority to impose on others the real or true code, the *right* way to make sense of life. Whether indigenous, feminine, queer, local, particular, intimate or otherwise Other, other forms of wisdom, knowledge or storytelling are always dangerous to the State and become targets to overcode, fit, fix. At the same time, the State depends absolutely on these enemies, or as Foucault once put it, “politics is the continuation of war by other means” (1976/2003:15; see also, Butler, 2008; Greenway, 2005 on enemies of the

State). The First [end p258] Emperor of China provides one of many historic and ongoing examples of overcoding in action.

One of the imperial progresses he undertook to mark the boundaries of his newly conquered realm was impeded by local goddesses. In retribution, he ordered 3,000 convicts to chop down all the trees covering the goddesses' sacred mountain and to paint the mountain red, a color associated with condemned criminals. This is a graphic example of imperial overcoding: the Emperor sweeps down to impose his judgment, literally leaving his mark as he transforms the earth, usurping the powers associated with a local sacred site as part of a unifying circuit around the realm (Dean and Massumi, 1992:24).

Overcoding is not limited to the state as apparatus, embodied by the law or the despot, but is a decentralised pattern¹ supporting, and supported by, the state as apparatus. I see in Rich's dismissal of the word lesbianism as 'clinical and limiting' a critique of overcoding (p 210), in which "disparate practices are brought together under a single category or principle, and are given their comprehensibility as variations of that category or principle. What was different becomes merely another mode of the same." (May, 1994: 106). *Lesbianism* is often used as a diagnosis, an effect of claims of knowledge/power to define others as normal or deviant. The diversity of women's experiences is overcoded, their own knowledges subjugated to medical authority.

The *lesbian continuum*, on the other hand, refuses overcoding, containment, control. Is there really a border, Rich asks, between erotic desire between women and heterosexuality? Is "lesbianism" another State, in which one can be a tourist or a lifelong resident, a criminal, (Clune, 2003) spy or traitor (Hemmings, 1993) or a devoted citizen? Or does erotic sensuality between women connect with other desires, other experiences, continuously, creatively overflowing patriarchal borders? In a clear affirmative response to this last

¹ Deleuze & Guattari refer to this pattern, at both macro and micro levels, as the state-form.

because I understand moralising as a strategy for denying pain (Nietzsche, 1969; for discussion, see also Brown, 1995; Newman, 2004). While the State, with its attendant psychologies of control, constructs pleasure and pain as distinct and opposite, all the better for utilising (threats of) torture, poverty or shame and (tantalising hints of) ecstasy, wealth or community as tools of manipulation, I know pleasure and pain are not opposites. Both are an awareness of life, and what is the erotic if not a profound awareness of being alive?

Anarchy, like polyamory, is so often rejected as nice sounding but fundamentally impossible. Rejections for both range from unquestionable, and unquestioning, claims about human nature to a somewhat more open, but still 'realistic', assessment of what the people around them, or even themselves, are like. Graffiti from the anarchistic student-worker uprising of May 1968 in Paris, proclaimed "Be realistic, demand the impossible" (see also Marshall, 2007). I love the way in which this questions any supposed border between the realistic and impossible and I recognise how, in its historic context, it suggested the possibility of more profound transformations than wage reforms demanded by bureaucratic unions. At the same time as I am inspired by that moment in history, my gut flinches at the word 'demand'. Of whom do I demand? I'm weary of demands in relationships, including the one I have with myself. Indeed, it seems to me [end p265] that openness in relationships involves a letting go of demands. I prefer to *invite the impossible*, experiencing grief when 'reality' seems all too solid and unforgiving or joy when I find what I imagined impossible happening (and I often do!).

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⁴ They may, of course, simultaneously express other things, including fear or fury over sexual violence and a powerful desire for mutuality, empathy and respect.

While this nomadism shares a certain similarity to the freedom of Giddens' (1992) concept of the "pure relationship", which he also suggests should not necessarily last until death, I suggest that there are crucial differences. His notion of a transformation of intimacy depends on a story of gender equality in the context of global capitalism that I, among others, find inconsistent with our own experiences and with empirical research (see e.g., Jamieson, 1999; Tyler, 2004; Wilson, 2004). I suggest Giddens, with his commitments to a third way between a free market and a welfare state (2000), understates the ways in which experiences of intimate relationships [end p264] are intimately intertwined with the patterns of gendered, sexualised and racialised hierarchies and the profit-orientated relations of domination essential to state and capital.

Love/Anarchy: An erotic continuum

My own life has been deeply enriched by my awareness of polyamorous existence and I fully support efforts to share that knowledge, to help others imagine their own lives differently (Le Guin, 2004). At the same time, I want to stretch the concept of polyamory potentially even to its own undoing, much as Rich aimed to do with lesbianism. Don't most people have multiple loves? What happens when romantic love is separated from love for family or friends, for plants, animals and land, for oneself and for life itself? Klesse reminds us of a strong feminist tradition questioning the dangers, for women particularly, of idealising romantic love (2006), a concern that also applies to the love of nature (Heller, 1999). How can we be our own lovers (Heckert, forthcoming), lovers of the land (Dunbar-Ortiz, 2008; Macy, 2007; Starhawk, 2004; Sullivan, 2008), lovers of diverse others in diverse ways? "What we must work on, it seems to me, is not so much to liberate our desires but to make ourselves infinitely more susceptible to pleasure" (Foucault, 1989:310). For me, this has meant a (continual) letting go moral high ground. Why? Both because hierarchies of values or pleasure involve a form of representation, of speaking for others⁴ (Rubin, 1984/1993), AND

question, I see a powerful affinity between the lesbian continuum and Deleuze and Guattari's concept of nomadism. Both emphasise a multiplicity of flows, of connections, of possibilities; both resist overcoding. For the lesbian continuum, this is a refusal to allow experiences of sensuality, eroticism, love and resistance to be divided and judged; instead, undermining the ways in which compulsory heterosexuality "fragments the erotic from the emotional in a way that women find impoverishing and painful" (Rich, 1999:203), and recognising the power of practices, of lives which overflow patriarchal borders of what constitutes political acts or revolutionary situations.

Resisting the reduction and erasure of possibilities, the overcoding of connections between women, Rich offers an expansive recognition of those connections as essential to feminism. In a similar vein, I propose that an expansive understanding of non-monogamy, an erotic continuum if you [end p259] like, may offer an energising and empowering contribution to anarchism and to practices of freedom more broadly. My argument has an affinity with Klesse's call for "a truly pluralistic sexual ethics that may embrace the diversity of non-monogamous sexual and intimate practices" (2006:566), questioning a hierarchical binary of ethical/unethical. Similarly, it also attempts to undermine, or overflow, any clear border between monogamy and non-monogamy just as Klesse questions the border constructed between "polyamory and its 'others'" (p.565).

Overflowing monogamy

As I've argued elsewhere, anarchism can be understood as the production of conditions that support and nurture the development of human potential for sustaining relationships with themselves, each other and our living planet (Heckert, 2005; 2010b). For some people, at some times, these conditions may include deciding to have sexual relations with only one other person. While *imposed borders* and overcoding claims of knowledge/power are incomprehensible to nomadic intimacies, negotiated, autonomous, *self-organised boundaries* are different. "The nomad has a territory; he [sic] follows customary

paths; he goes from one point to another; he is not ignorant of points (water points, dwelling points, assembly points, etc.). [. . .] even though the nomadic trajectory may follow trails or customary routes, it does not fulfil the function of the sedentary road, which is to *parcel out a closed space to people*” (Deleuze and Guattari, 1987/1999:380). Nomadic space is open “without borders or enclosure” (ibid.). While the nomad knows, deeply and profoundly, that she can go *anywhere*, that no borders can contain her, she does not have to go *everywhere*. Whereas borders are constructed as unquestionably right, denying any historicity or specificity, ignoring expressions of needs, desires and emotions, boundaries are what is right at the time, for particular people involved in a particular situation. Whereas borders claim the hardness of walls, whether physically as in Berlin (1961–1989) or the West Bank, or psychically as in the carefully trained performance of the (mostly male) bodies that patrol and enforce them, boundaries suggest a softness, a gentleness that offers security without control. Whereas borders claim the unquestionable and rigid authority of law, boundaries have a fluidity, and openness to change; more a riverbank, less a stone canal. Borders demand respect, boundaries invite it. Borders divide desirables from undesirables, boundaries respect the diversity of desires. Borders, too, can soften, becoming boundaries, while what once was a boundary can become rigid, fixed, demanding (Lao Tzu, 1997).

Similar to Kath Albury’s (2002) exploration of possibilities of “ethical heterosex” as alternatives to compulsory heterosexuality, nomadic boundaries involve ongoing and open communication, respect and trust. My interview partners described relationships that overflowed any border between [end p260] monogamy and non-monogamy². Perhaps this border is untenable, anyway. Murray (1995: 294) described running a nonmonogamy workshops where she asked people to offer their definitions of monogamous relationships:

² At the same time, I’m wary of romanticising these relationships, one of which I was later told by an interview partner that she had come to understand as an abusive relationship.

which always necessarily involve change including growth, death, decay and rebirth. To deny these possibilities, it seems to me, necessarily takes a great deal of emotional energy. Rich might agree, suggesting as she did that “the lie of compulsory female heterosexuality [. . .] creates, specifically, a profound falseness, hypocrisy, and hysteria in the heterosexual dialogue, for every heterosexual relationship is lived in the queasy strobelight of that lie. However we choose to identify ourselves, however we find ourselves labeled, it flickers across and distorts our lives” (p.215). Intertwined with the lie of compulsory heterosexuality is the lie of compulsory monogamy, that desire for romantic and erotic intimacy with only one other person is natural, unaffected by economic, social and political patterns of a culture. A sense of empowerment, then, may be found in the profound awareness that there are other possibilities, whether or not one is drawn to them at any given time.

For freedom is meaningless unless it includes the freedom to say ‘no’. A segment of my interview with Douglas discussing the challenges of being married and also wanting to deeply and openly explore relationships with other men illustrates this well.

I said “look, maybe we should just pack it in. Maybe we should just live separately and see each other and be friends and . . .”. She said “no, I don’t want that.” I said “but I want to have relationships. I feel bad that I’m exploring this bit of me that’s been on ice for a long time and you’re not.” She said “I don’t need it. That’s not what I’m looking for”. And she’s very straightforward about that. [. . .] we’re lucky that we’ve got what we’ve got.

This example might seem very unusual in comparison to many people’s relationships. But, I suggest such open discussion about future possibilities may make explicit what happens implicitly. Partnerships, like any form of social organisation, are not fixed objects but ongoing processes. They are continuously produced and negotiated. If we fail to recognise our capacity to change our relationships, whether with friends, partners, neighbours, colleagues or ‘authorities’, we are doomed to remain trapped within the borders of State.

just being ourselves and being together' and we hadn't had a dirty look from anybody. Yeah. That was nice.

Another crucial aspect of the anarchist tradition is the importance of people joining together freely into relationships for particular purposes (e.g., running a social centre or raising kids, organising a protest or running an erotic games night). Voluntary disassociation always remains an option (Mueller, 2003). I see this as being very different from the State which is based on a story justifying its continued existence indefinitely. Whether the story is the divine right of kings or the one about a social contract that we all agreed to before we were born, State relationships are not voluntary. Indeed, a number of feminists have compared the social relationship of the State to domestic violence (e.g., Brown, 1995; Bumille, 2008) – what else is a relationship where someone says that whatever they do is for your own protection and that you can never leave them to organise your own relationships on different terms? Perhaps then practicing relationships in unState-like ways includes accepting that they end.

Only a few people talked openly about the possibility of their relationships ending in their interviews. Undermining a romantic story of everlasting love, Sandra and her partner have openly acknowledged that it may not be “until death do us part”.

We also, along with our monogamy agreement, we also have made it very plain [. . .] if we broke up I would be very upset and cry a lot and things like that but I can live without you and I know that and you know that. So I suppose that kind of tempers any over-emotionalism that goes with feeling jealous or if he was to find somebody else . . . I'd be upset no matter who it was but, at the same time, I know I would go on.

While this may seem a pessimistic approach to relationships, it seems to me that just as many people find profound emotional strength in the acceptance of their own mortality (Batchelor, 1998), some might also find a [end p263] profound sense of freedom in accepting that relationships, too, are organic, living, mortal things

For some, monogamy means one can have casual sex outside the relationship, but not any emotional attachment. For others, it means love and intimacy are okay, just no sex. For some people the emphasis on monogamy applies to one's own behaviour, for others it applies to one's partner's behaviour. For some people, it means one couldn't even have lunch with or fantasise about anyone who could ever be a prospective sexual partner.

Understanding a relationship in terms of nomadic boundaries evades claims of superiority for particular notions of monogamy, non-monogamy or polyamory and the borders on which they rely. Instead, we might practice and share relational skills, including fundamentally, the dignity of listening to each other (see Marcos, 2005; Rosenberg, 2003). If the anarchist/poststructuralist argument that our subjectivities are the result of our practices (Ferguson, 2004; May, 2001; McWhorter, 2004) is in any way true, then our capacity to develop egalitarian relational skills may be stunted by our participation in fixed hierarchies. Here, many of us learn to practice skills of domination and submission, conformity, secrecy, and defensiveness (Schmidt, 2000) in order to survive. In an anarchy of nomadic boundaries, participants in a relationship create space to discuss, define and refine their boundaries, which are always open to change (see Roseneil, 2000). Interview partners described a wide variety of arrangements with regards to boundaries around pornography, discussion of attractions to others, and different agreements about sex or romance with people outside a relationship. None of them took monogamy (whatever that is) for granted.

* * *

Melissa and her partner have had many discussions about boundaries in their relationship and they had agreed not to have sex with other people, unless they are both sharing sex with a third person. At one point, they discussed the possibility of a triad relationship with a mutual friend.

my friend's girlfriend was abroad and [the two of them] were kind of breaking up, but because they decided to go back together, [the triad] didn't happen. And I was quite open to the fact that [a triad] would happen but then [the couple] got back together. . . . I discussed this with my partner but I didn't dare to suggest it to [my friend] at that point yet because I wanted to also respect her girlfriend. [But . . .] we talked about it and I think that would have been quite cool. [end p261]

Here, the borders that define a conventional relationship are denied and alternatives are openly discussed. Furthermore, these discussions include an emphasis on respect for herself, her partner and prospective partners.

I happened to meet Melissa several months after the interview, where I got an insight into the ongoing process of boundary production and change. Melissa told me how her partner had had an experience where he was very tempted to have sex with someone else and how this had encouraged him to rethink his position on monogamy (or polyfidelity³) as morally superior. Melissa was very happy that this opened discussion between them; she'd felt conflicted because she did not want to be in a monogamous heterosexual relationship for the rest of her life and at the same time valued her relationship with her partner. Since then, they had a threesome with another woman, an experience they are both open to repeating. Melissa was excited about the increasing openness of their discussions and was looking forward to future possibilities of the threesome with another man or having multiple partnerships, though she's concerned about pushing boundaries. Maintaining a good relationship, especially long-distance, is difficult enough, she said, without pushing.

Anne also wants to have a more open relationship and at the same time was aware of her own insecurities.

I feel constrained by the norm, by monogamy [. . .], but then at the same time as I've said, I think I'd feel quite threatened if

³ A form of polyamorous group marriage wherein all members consider each other to be primary partners and agree to be sexual only with other members of this group (Wikipedia, 2009).

[he] and I did actually have an open relationship. So I want me to have an open relationship and him to not have. [laughter]

Perhaps this, too, could be considered an expression of intimate nomadism which is never an *achievement* of complete comfort with sexuality and relationships, but an ongoing process of questioning and undermining the rigid borders of state-forms while acknowledging one's own and others emotional needs for boundaries. This runs parallel to anarchist and anti-authoritarian discussions of democracy as an ongoing, open, participatory and egalitarian process of asking questions rather than as any authoritative advocacy of a particular system of organisation or governance (see Notes from Nowhere, 2003; Nunes, 2005; Sitrin, 2006). At the same time, I read her laughter as a sign of shame (Scheff, 1990) for expressing the statist fantasy that security comes from control.

Douglas, meanwhile, emphasised the strength of the emotional bond he shares with his wife in the context of their nonmonogamy.

It was reassuring for her always to meet the men that I was close to because she liked them. She liked them. She enjoyed them. She realised this wasn't some horrific thing that was . . . that was OK. If she met someone that she could relax physically with who happened to be a woman, who was totally accepted with me, that would be fine too. Or [end p262] men. But we do . . . the thing is that we do have a very strong loyalty to each other, that's very emotional. We would cross bridges to sort things out for each other.

For Erica, too, spaces of acceptance of diverse possibilities were liberating, and a clear contrast to her experiences of homonormative policing of lesbian and gay spaces.

I remember being at [a queer, autonomous] sex party and just being so happy because my lover was there somewhere and I was doing my thing and I knew he was doing his thing and then we got together at some time in the morning and I just thought 'oh, this so blissful'. [. . .] I felt 'this is OK. This is like