

‘Now that’s what I’d call morphing’: Building a Queer Architecture in Caroline Bergvall’s *Éclat*

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Well, if a straight line be the shortest distance between two points, where would that leave us my dove

- Caroline Bergvall, *Éclat*

Space calls for action.

- Gaston Bachelard, *The Poetics of Space*

In recent theory relating to gender, sexuality and concepts of otherness, there have been increasing constellations of terms pertaining to spatiality. ‘Holes’ or ‘spaces’ in discourse are being addressed by theorists. The notion of being ‘outside’ or invisible as a minority has become a popular subject position for discussion, facilitated through a ‘deviation’ from social norms by following alternative ‘trajectories’ of desire. Bonnie Zimmerman, writing in 1992, notes that studies in sexuality have become ‘less [about] the act of seeing...than the place from which one sees’.¹ The critical shift from Lesbian and Gay Studies to Queer Theory from the mid-1990s onwards, coupled with Judith Butler’s groundbreaking work on gender, have placed emphasis on the malleability of both gender and sexuality. Identity is increasingly spatialised as the ‘self’ becomes perceived more as a mobile perspective or subject position than an identity per se. The focus thus becomes about where one stands and how one sees the world from that place, rather than any notion of what a body unchangeably or authentically is. Through tracking this shift alongside phenomenological thought, I want to examine the relationship between gender, sexuality and space in Caroline Bergvall’s *Éclat*, and demonstrate her creation of what I will term a ‘queer architecture’ within the text.

Gaston Bachelard’s *The Poetics of Space* demonstrates the relationship between identity and the space one inhabits. Bachelard examines aspects of the home and

¹ Bonnie Zimmerman, ‘Lesbians Like This and That: Some Notes on Lesbian Criticism for the Nineties’, *New Lesbian Criticism*, ed. Sally Munt (London: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1992) p. 3

their relationship to man's² psychological health and sense of identity. Our childhood home, Bachelard argues, is throughout our lives in a 'passionate liaison'³ with our bodies, affecting forever the way in which we experience space and learn to feel 'at home' in ourselves: 'We are the diagram of the functions of inhabiting that particular house, and all the other houses are but variations on a fundamental theme'.⁴ Bachelard's home is familiar to the extent that it orders being: 'in the life of a man, the house thrusts aside contingencies, its councils of continuity are unceasing. Without it, man would be a dispersed being'.⁵ Importantly, a defining ordering feature of Bachelard's home is its *linearity*. The (childhood or ideal) home is imagined as a 'vertical' house (in that it runs straight up from cellar to attic) and 'concentrated', in that 'it appeals to our consciousness of centrality',⁶ and thus it orders the psyche. The combination of the implication of at-oneness between self and home – its familiarity to and protection of the self – and the interrelated spatial ordering of home and self imply alignment, harmony and interdependence. This 'home' is a space of stability 'that has invited us to come out of ourselves'.⁷ This home is both subjective – in that it shapes or impresses itself upon the individual's physicality – and universal, in that this process stems from the arguably privileged presumption of a standardised notion of a (material) house and a (conceptual) home. In *The Poetics of Space*, a person is welcome and at ease in their home, relatively free from social, cultural and economic variations and restrictions. Such disruptions would perhaps result in an entirely different 'diagram' and thus produce a different kind of body, a different 'self'.

In *Queer Phenomenology*, Sara Ahmed uses existential phenomenology as a tool for examining how 'orientation' is variable and biased towards white heterosexual experience. Ahmed posits that 'phenomenology is full of queer moments',⁸ which are moments of 'disorientation', such as Bachelard's homeless and 'dispersed being'. In phenomenological theory, Ahmed argues, philosophical meaning arises from the

² I use the masculine not only because Bachelard does, but because the text as a whole privileges male experience, much of which is arguably not applicable to female experience

³ Gaston Bachelard, *The Poetics of Space* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1969) p. 15

⁴ *Ibid* p. 15

⁵ *Ibid* p. 7

⁶ *Ibid* p. 17

⁷ *Ibid* p. 11

⁸ Sara Ahmed, *Queer Phenomenology: Objects, Orientations, Others* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2006) p. 4

reorientation of the subject under these conditions, the ‘queer moment’ overcome. However, Ahmed argues for the significance of ‘disorientation’ as a way of understanding the queer body’s negotiation of socially biased space, so that these moments become ‘a source of vitality’,⁹ Thus, when a body departs from ‘the skin of the social’, positive reformulations of space, queered through a change in perception and spatial experience, might be possible. Through this paper, I want to examine aspects of ‘home’ space in *Éclat* to demonstrate how bodies and readers are *disorientated* and then queerly *reorientated* as the book works towards an innovative and temporary architecture of queer sexuality. This shift, effected by the reader’s identification with the ‘floreign’ guide, occurs in three stages: outsider status, occupation of domestic space, and a morphing of that space by the outsider. This morphing creates a temporary space which facilitates an ‘intimate immensity’ of sexual overflow. I will examine these stages through looking at architectural features of the house, and how they work as metaphorically significant political tools within the text.

2. The Book as ‘Home’

Éclat was originally presented –under the title *Éclat—Occupation des Lieux 1 – 10 –* as an audio guided tour of the Institute of Rot, a Victorian house and art space in London. The piece was reworked and (in collaboration with Marit Münzberg) designed in book form. The aesthetics of the book are akin to a map or guide, with graphics that hint at blueprints or architectural plans, and with verbal and graphic directions, signposts and instructions for the reader to navigate the space. *Éclat* seems aware of itself as a book, becoming a concrete object and drawing attention to its own construction. This is clear from the first two pages of text, ‘WEL is an occupation COME’¹⁰ being traced backward in grey on the next page, a concretisation of the material ‘shadow’ of words.

⁹ *Ibid* p. 4

¹⁰ Caroline Bergvall, *Éclat* (Lowestoft: Sound & Language, 1996) p. 7

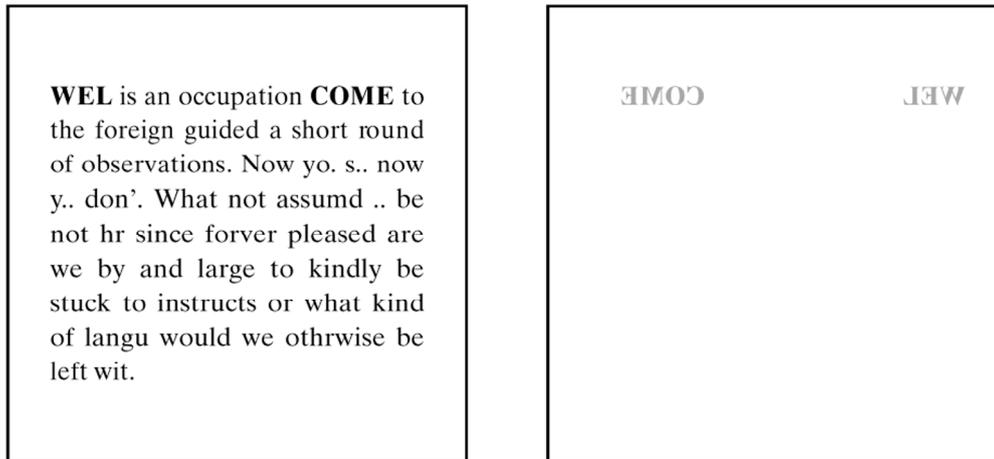


Figure 1. Caroline Bergvall, *Éclat*, pages 7-8

The capitalised and bold font of the ‘**WEL...COME**’ can be compared to a welcome mat or sign, an invitation to enter. However, the tracing of the word on the other side of the page have the effect of allowing the reader to view the ‘wrong ‘ or ‘back’ side of language, the backward or opposite of welcome, being unwelcome or shut out. Alternatively, one could see it as one sees the writing on a door, through glass, from the ‘wrong’ side, the reader having been welcomed in and viewing the word from the inside out. The word both implicates the book as a material object to be entered, and also introduces a dialectic of inside/outside which continues throughout the text.

The book is a ‘home’ because it is a space in which words reside, where they belong. Yet through Bergvall’s conscious design choices, which draw attention to the book as a book, what kind of language is or isn’t ‘at home’ there is questioned, and the book, like the notion of ‘home’, becomes a politicised social space in which neither writer or reader are always at ease or ‘wel...come’. Rachel Blau Duplessis, writing about Susan Howe’s treatment of the page, states that ‘the page is not neutral. Not blank, and not neutral. It is a territory’.¹¹ Through a formal reorientation of the book structure, and a conceptual reorientation of notions of home and belonging, *Éclat* treats both as territories and questions the inherent political and cultural bias of both.

3. Doorways & Outsider Status

¹¹ Rachel Blau DuPlessis: *The Pink Guitar* (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 2006) p. 131

*the door is an entire cosmos of the Half-open.*¹²
- Gaston Bachelard, *The Poetics of Space*

Éclat begins with a rigid structure. Thick black frames lie inside square pages, some with gaps or marks indicating entrances:

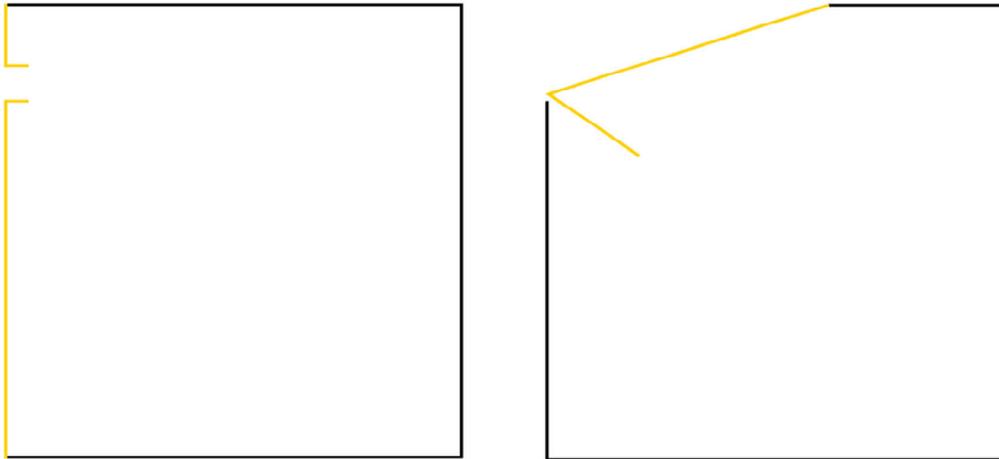


Figure 2. *Éclat*, pages 5 and 12

However, in second image above, the entrance is blocked. The shorter side of the yellow shape seems to indicate a door, as one would on the floor plan of a building, but it opens up to a wall or obstruction, closed in on itself. Bergvall's geometry is skewed or queered through the book. On the second page pictured, it is no longer clear how to enter into the space, the entrance being interior to it and leading, effectively, nowhere. The complication of doors as entrances to the page and to the text questions, politically, the accessibility of social space and language. Through problematising entrances in this, Bergvall also perhaps questions the privilege of the 'inside', perhaps translatable as citizenship, acceptance, the 'artist', being 'wel...come' to the space of house or book.

In addition to the visual doorframes which exist, at angles, in the book, doorways also exist as part of the 'guide' to the house:

1. This is not a doorframe and that is THAT (doorframe that)
divider: lines up intersections between room: and room: and
corridor: to join & split at each such:

¹² Bachelard, *The Poetics of Space*, p. 222

: : : : : HEREand : : : : :
Pull in & widen up & widen up & pull in. And not there: and nor
Here and nor there. Conflict exchange. Amassed pressure stimuli.¹³

It seems here that the reader is placed at an ‘intersection’ indicated by the ‘: : : : : HEREand : : : : :’, the point at which matter (from one room to another) and meaning are ‘pull[ed] in’ and organised. Standing in a doorframe, one is pulled from one room to another, and is also not in either room but rather a between-space, ‘nor / Here and nor there’, of ‘conflict exchange’. This example is typical of the way that Bergvall, through the way in which the book is structured and the language of instruction used, encourages us to dwell in the in-between spaces where the dialectic of inside/outside is undermined. Thus, concepts of ‘navigation’ and ‘orientation’ are complicated, as Bergvall always seems to be urging us outwards or between. If, as Ahmed argues, ‘sexual orientation might also be a matter of residence, of how we inhabit spaces’,¹⁴ then Bergvall’s text orientates us queerly in that we are encouraged to be lost, enter trapdoors, and linger in the between-spaces and doorways of the text. Our experience of the house is thus uncomfortable, and like the ‘foreign’ guide, we are the outsider on the inside.

Georges Perec writes that ‘the door breaks space in two, splits it, prevents osmosis, imposes a partition. On one side, me and my place, the private, the domestic...on the other side, other people, the world, the public, politics’.¹⁵ In this formulation, where the door signifies the separation between the personal and the public, political sphere, the text also serves as a half-open portal to both realms. Through the text, the personal is formulated as the political, and domestic space made public. This also resonates with Bachelard’s concepts of the half-open and the dialectics of inside and outside, particularly when thinking about systems of meaning through language in the text. Bachelard writes that ‘language bears within itself the dialectics of open and closed. Through *meaning* it encloses, while through poetic expression, it opens up’.¹⁶ Bergvall’s poetics is also queered through this metaphor of the doorframe, in that meaning, through plurilingualism and innovative writing techniques, is never fixed but also ‘between’. For example, by taking steps out of the doorframe in the text, one

¹³ Bergvall, *Éclat*, p. 9

¹⁴ Ahmed, *Queer Phenomenology*, p. 2

¹⁵ Georges Perec, *Species of Space and Other Pieces* (London: Penguin Books, 1997) p. 37

¹⁶ Bachelard, *The Poetics of Space*, p. 222

is 'leeving the treshold clearing grount'.¹⁷ Here, 'leeving' implies both 'leaving' and 'levee' - an artificial embankment built to stop the overflow of a river, a kind of preventative device, and 'grount' could be seen as somewhere between 'ground', territory, and 'grout', a paste used to fill crevices and gaps. The unconventional spelling also privileges plosive sounds – 'treshold', 'grount' – and forces increased emphasis on certain syllables, for example the extended 'lee' of 'leeving', creating the effect of a strange or foreign accent, a certain deliberateness and perhaps difficulty of articulation, and the effect of multiple and open meanings. The ground is being left, but spaces are also being filled in and barriers put up to prevent overspill. It is at once an open and a protective gesture, simultaneously reaching out and closing in.

The importance of the metaphorical significance of the doorway is furthered by Bergvall's notes and footnotes to these two pages. Lingering in the in-between, Bergvall warns, can be dangerous:

Note: That prolonged station at any such location brings about aphasia, loss of memory, nausea, inflammations, visionary spells, self-mutilations. That to use and modify* such symptoms, their unrelenting repetition (is not the same is not the same) threatens nationalism*

....

* *History shows and and and*

....

* *bearing in mind (the state of plastic) and in the knowledge that what seems and naturally & straight today will naturally appear and bent tomorrow.*¹⁸

Here, the very physical and undesirable symptoms of disorientation at the site of 'conflict exchange' become tools with which to 'use and modify' existing systems. There's an obvious parallel to be made here with Judith Butler's theory of gender and repetition:

Gender is the repeated stylization of the body, a set of repeated acts within a highly rigid regulatory frame that congeal over time to produce the appearance of a substance, of a natural sort of being'¹⁹

Butler questions ways of breaking out of this constructed framework, asking 'what kind of subversive repetition might call into question the regulatory practice of identity itself?'.²⁰ In Bergvall's text, to 'use and modify' the symptoms of bodily and political disorientation might question the 'regulatory frame' of the socially

¹⁷ Bergvall, *Éclat*, p. 10

¹⁸ *Ibid* pp. 9-10

¹⁹ Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble* (New York and London: Routledge, 1990) p. 45

²⁰ *Ibid* p. 44

constructed world to which we (whilst within the context of *Éclat*, at least) are exterior and unfamiliar. By staying with moments of disorientation through the text, a 'subversive repetition' of lostness occurs which undermines the ordering and geometrical, socially constructed space of the house, first to occupy and 'use' it against the grain of tradition, and then to *reorder* it within this disorientation, to 'modify' the house to create a 'bent' environment.

4. Living Rooms & 'Domestic' Occupation

'What does it mean, to live in a room? Is to live in a place to take possession of it?'²¹
- Georges Perec, *Species of Space*

Following the metaphor of the book as 'home' space which is socially constructed and politically weighty, I want to examine use of space in Bergvall's book as comparable to Bachelard's 'centrality' of the house. The spatial arrangement of language on the page can be read as being politically ordered to indicate central and liminal subject positions. Ahmed writes that 'the normalization of heterosexuality as an orientation toward "the other sex" can be redescribed in terms of the requirement to follow a straight line, whereby straightness gets attached to other values including decent, conventional, direct and honest'.²² Moving from the doorway to the living room of the house, the unease we find there can be seen as a comment on 'the ease with which heterosexual bodies can inhabit public space',²³ and the regulatory nature of these spaces upon bodies:

THIS. Is a living room. A front room. Owdooyoodoo. Owdooyoodoo. To cross into a rm of this kind that we may carry & conduct ourselves as if originating from resolved gender and normal art. Accurate, precise, seamlessly, well-adjusted. *You've crossed into the*. High ceiling open fire. Name the objects arranged and negotiated.²⁴

The move from the in-between of the doorframe to the highly socially regulated space of the living or 'front' room brings with it an awkwardness of order and proper conduct. We are aware of 'ourselves' as outsiders; we must 'conduct ourselves *as if* originating from resolved gender and normal art', implying that we know we don't. This is comparable to Ahmed's 'normalisation', the central positioning of this part of

²¹ Perec, *Species of Space and Other Pieces*, p. 24

²² Ahmed, *Queer Phenomenology*, p. 71

²³ *Ibid*, p. 101

²⁴ Bergvall, *Éclat*, p. 13

the text and the fairly conventional layout implying the pressure of clarity of communication and exchange in literature and public life. The phonetic spelling, 'owdooyoodoo' implies, like 'treshold' and 'grount', a deliberateness or carefulness of articulation stemming from an accented or unfamiliar entry to language. The stilted dialogue which follows also implies the regulatory force of social conduct: 'Ndeed. / Biscuit. / Thankyou ta'.²⁵ The body in this instance is carefully contained, monosyllabic, ordered and moulded into a shape which does not quite fit. Rituals of the house are queered or misinterpreted, domestication becoming 'domastication', a chewing up or mangling of domestic space rather than an adherence to it.

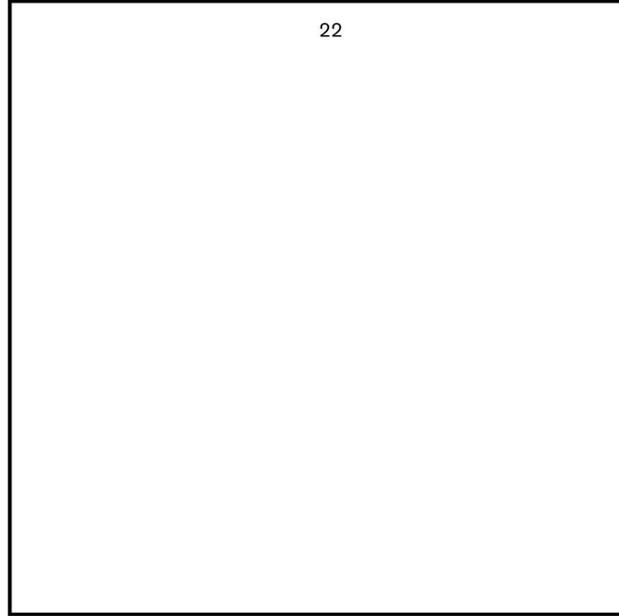
Ahmed writes that

becoming a lesbian still remains a difficult line to follow. The lesbian body does not extend the shape of this world, as a world organised around the form of the homosexual couple. Inhabiting a body that is not extended by the skin of the social means the world acquires a new shape and makes new impressions.²⁶

I would argue that the form of *Éclat* moves from the position of an outsider inhabiting the 'skin of the social', to a subversive occupation of this space, and finally towards a queer and alternate architecture where 'the world acquires a new shape'. The 'skin of the social' here also applies to the 'skin' or pages and form of the book, which is interrupted and questioned and microcosmic and macrocosmic levels. Whilst, as I will discuss, Bergvall makes use of the borders and margins of the text to highlight liminal subject positions, the 'main' and (often) bordered-in space of the page is often left largely or entirely blank, or treated as a palimpsestic chorus of half-erased voices.

²⁵ *Ibid* p. 13

²⁶ Ahmed, *Queer Phenomenology*, p. 21



(it wasn't easy at first then it became quite easy then easier then really easy, real easy, no probs, easy peasy, could do it in my sleep, then suddenly it wasn't easy, not easy at all, not at all easy, all o'er again)

Figure 3. Caroline Bergvall, *Éclat* p. 22

The page above illustrates, through the white space indicating silence, and the thick black frame implying the boundaries of 'official' space, the privilege of communication. The barely legible note at the bottom, '(it wasn't easy at first then it became quite easy then easier then really easy...then suddenly it wasn't easy, not easy at all, all over again)' further emphasises this. Its visual insignificance on the page and its appearance in parentheses reinforce the statement, which, through its repetitions, creates a linguistic cycle mirroring the historic difficulty and struggle to communicate which is not overcome in a single step of reversal. DuPlessis writes that '[a] woman's silence is a "social silence"', and negotiates 'how to depict the kinds and quantities of social silence at the core of works. Silence at the core, and silence inscribed in the absence of works'.²⁷ One could see Bergvall's practice as a search for

²⁷ DuPlessis, *The Pink Guitar* p. 143

tools of communication which at once attempt to move beyond and acknowledge this silence, in this instance by demonstrating the privileged and politically biased space of the page which must be tackled and overcome in order to write alternate histories and perspectives upon it.

This theme of silence and the struggle to speak is revisited spatially through the text several times. In the latter half of the text, many pages are blank or almost blank, seemingly erased. These blank pages are followed by pages in which sections of the text are pale, grey, merging into the white space, partial exclamations and fragments of communication:



Figure 4. Caroline Bergvall, *Éclat*, detail from p. 44

The palimpsestic overlaying and paleness of the text here indicates, simultaneously, struggle and excess in communication, a jumbled and rushed assertion of identity. The space in which language is allowed to live becomes a fraught battleground, and, when represented as such, this blank framed space is comparable to the uncomfortable socially regulated domesticity of the house.

5. Skirting; An Invasion from the Margins

skirt

• noun 1 a woman's outer garment fastened around the waist and hanging down around the legs. 2 the part of a coat or dress that hangs below the waist. 3 a surface that conceals or protects the wheels or underside of a vehicle or aircraft. 4 an animal's diaphragm and other membranes as food. 5 Brit. a cut of meat from the lower flank of an animal. 6 informal women regarded as objects of sexual desire.

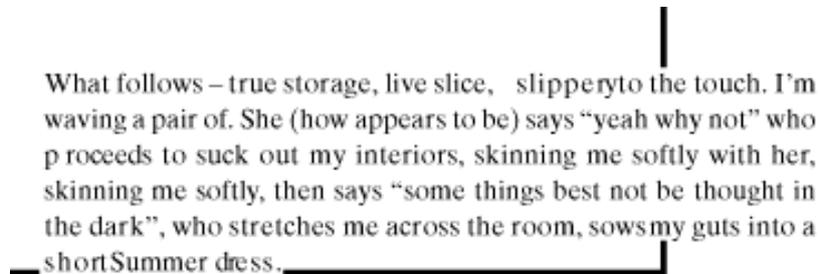
• verb (also skirt along/around) 1 go round or past the edge of. 2 avoid dealing with.

- O.E.D Definition

Bergvall writes of 'the floreigner her accentuated gait across the rooms, whose forbearance is a wonder to stabilise, whose skirting habits carry much relevance by way of occupancy'.²⁸ In the context of the book, 'skirting habits' carries two interrelated meanings: one of gender, a dress code or visual signal of femininity, and

²⁸ Bergvall, *Éclat* p. 31

one of spatial and political positioning on the outskirts. There is ‘something / about the / o u t s i d e’²⁹ as a spatial and political concern threaded through the book. Queer desire can be seen as ‘skirting’ or bordering ‘official’ space, bursting out from the margins and written in such a way that the styles and modes of expression contrast sharply:



What follows – true storage, live slice, slippery to the touch. I’m waving a pair of. She (how appears to be) says “yeah why not” who proceeds to suck out my interiors, skinning me softly with her, skinning me softly, then says “some things best not be thought in the dark”, who stretches me across the room, sows my guts into a short Summer dress.

figure 5. *Éclat*, detail from p. 13

The continuous sentence here indicates a rushing forth of desire, something silenced, opposing the staccato rhythms of ‘domestic’ exchange elsewhere on the page: ‘thankyou ta’. Whilst I would argue that Bergvall’s design choices in the text emphasise politically the ‘right’ to speak – the book being readable as a map of social space, acceptable bodies and modes of living – there’s also an element of freedom associated with skirting the borders of text and space. The positive power of the margins as a subcultural force is demonstrated through the text, and a reader becomes a part of the margins. Bergvall provides a reader with a map of their

²⁹ *Ibid*, p. 31

positioning in relation to the text and the house:

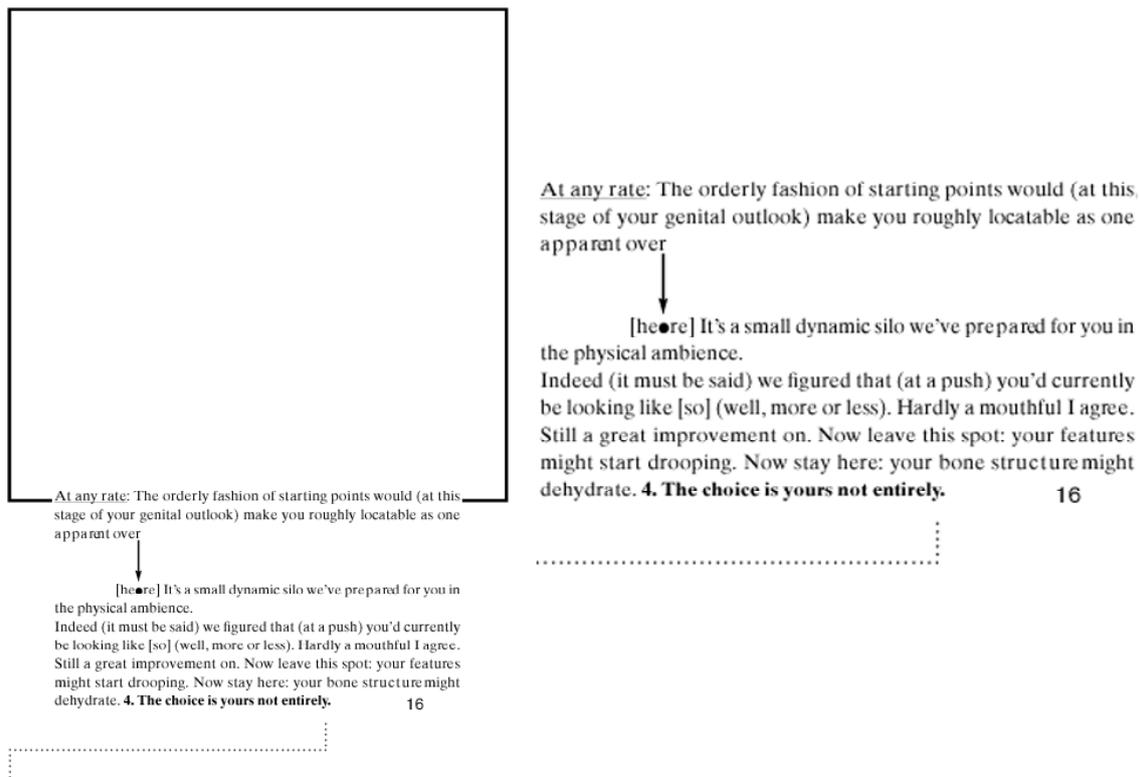


Figure 6. *Éclat*, p. 16, & enlarged detail

This starting position as dictated by sexuality or ‘genital outlook’ is a ‘silo’ (an underground chamber) outside of the bordered-in ‘main’ space of the page, and, like the doorway, it’s a risky position which carries with it symptoms of bodily disorder and disintegration, perhaps suggesting the powerful impact of culture upon bodies, the normative imprints of gender, sexuality, citizenship and national identity resulting in the impression of a whole and coherent readable body. Bergvall asks: ‘wonder about the long-term social arrangements of our reconstructed flesh?’³⁰ Queerness in *Éclat* functions not only to highlight the importance of non-normative identities but to call into question the constructed nature of *all* notions of fixed identity. Events of the margins disrupt the stability of the ‘central’ text. As the reader is being directed through graphics from their initial ‘genital outlook’ around the edges of bordered pages, the allegedly stable objects in the central and official space of the page undergo a transformative reworking:

³⁰*Ibid* p. 14

you're thinking about a
small object something
stable something stable
and precise something
stable precise and accurate
something stable precise
accurate and unchanging
and pleasing must be
pleasing come to think of it
that might make it unstable
unstable and imprecise and
changing OK lets say its
got to be a small pleasing
object a small pleasing
easily identifiable object
come to think of it whats an
easily identifiable object
a familiar object a usable
object (question) but then
whats familiar to you might
not be familiar to me and
whats usable to her might
not be usable to her and
what about pleasing just
think about that

Figure 7. *Éclat*, detail from p. 20

This serves as an example-in-practice of queer phenomenology in that ‘the place from which one sees’ (in this case, the margins) affects the material value attached to objects and space. Such an act is facilitated through a writing practice which utilises repetition in a similar manner to Butler’s, arguably a ‘subversive repetition’ which enables a transformational perception of the object in question. This is comparable to Gertrude Stein’s recurrent ‘a rose is a rose is a rose’, the passion of repetition in her writing resulting in a newness through sustained attention. In Stein’s repetition, she asserts, ‘the rose is red for the first time in English poetry for a hundred years’.³¹ Through such a renewal, Bergvall moves the margins progressively into a central position, the obviousness of ‘difference’ in subculture effecting a change in the perception of *all* space, objects and culture. The margins – through being a place in which the binaries of male/female, tenderness/violence, desire/disgust and so on are

³¹ quoted in Marjorie Perloff, *21st Century Modernism: The ‘New’ Poetics* (London: Blackwell, 2002) p. 53

broken down and reworked – bleed into the centre in order to undermine the assumed ‘naturalness’ of their construction and the barriers which keep them polarised. The ‘deadly elasticity of heterosexist presumption’³² – in Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick’s terms – upon which the social and spatial arrangement of the house and family unit are historically built – is challenged. The move from margin to centre, or, as I have outlined, the trajectory from outsider to occupation to the creation of a queer architectural framework, occurs slowly and hesitantly through the book, expanding and bleeding inward towards an ‘intimate immensity’ of sexuality which defies the borders and boundaries which have previously contained it.

6. ‘The incongruous meeting between a corridor and a trébuchement’: An Intimate Immensity

Loving one’s home is not about being fixed into a place, but rather it is about becoming part of a space where one has expanded one’s body, saturating the space with bodily matter: home as overflowing and flowing over
- Sara Ahmed, *Queer Phenomenology*

In phenomenological theory, intimacy with and at-home-ness in space leads to an extension of being. Bachelard writes of this as a kind of peace associated with the reconciliation of man and his space, and a position of repose and aloneness in this space: ‘the great stream of simple humility that is in the silent room flows into ourselves. The intimacy of the room becomes our intimacy’.³³ In Bachelard’s formulation, such ‘intimate immensity’ of dwelling signals a form of cosmological transcendence where man is so ‘at home’ and at one with his space that his being is at once validated and obliterated through its harmony with and resulting osmosis into its surrounding space. No such cosmological transcendence occurs within *Éclat*. However, I have kidnapped the term ‘intimate immensity’ from Bachelard in order to demonstrate the visceral relationship between self and space which occurs within the text. Having examined how elements of the traditional social space of ‘home’ have been systematically questioned, occupied, broken down and undermined from the margins, I would now like to look closely at the last few pages of *Éclat* in order to demonstrate how Bergvall constructs a necessarily temporary and yet politically

³² Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, *Tendencies* (London: Routledge, 1994) p. 68

³³ Bachelard, *The Poetics of Space*, p. 226

powerful form of queer architecture, using moments of ‘disorientation’ (what Ahmed labels in phenomenological theory as ‘queer moments’) to her advantage and facilitates an ‘intimate immensity’ of the sexual body within this temporary space.

Whilst I would argue that earlier parts of the book deal with outsider status and occupation of a domestic space by this outsider, the text and the bodies within the space become more territorially at ease as the book progresses, the powerfully political space of the margins beginning to occupy the central space and change or ‘morph’ it to its advantage. The body as (dis)orientated by the ‘floreign’ narrator becomes more confident with the solidity of space: ‘This is nice. *You’re standing on the landing* and it isn’t giving way under your feet’.³⁴ This solidity, arguably achieved through the renegotiation of ‘domastic’ objects and the foregrounding of subjectivity and spatial positioning as value-givers to material goods, leads to a performance of territory marking and bodily extension, an act of ‘intimate immensity’:

This insignificant detail fills you with such a sense of embossment it is so: elating so: unbelievable so: unbelievable that you exclaim

I!be!could!happy!here! and quickly lift up your and pull down your and squat and press out your happening vaginals, your instinctual drive, your cultural reticence, your dutiful intelligence, your cautious elaborations, your impeccable taste, in shots of urine all over the surface of this very perfect spot³⁵

Through this act of bodily extension, to ‘press’ oneself ‘out’ and spread oneself ‘all over the surface’ of a place, a territorial politics is at work. It is a politics that is both queer and feminist. Rather than being represented as part of a vessel for occupation or the facilitator of male sexual performance, genital fluid is here used as force for the political occupation of social space, a tool to facilitate visibility and ownership, and in this sense is a queer act, in that it deviates from heteronormative genital representation.

What follows this act is a visual queering of the architecture of book and house. The frame around the page is cut and skewed, a yellow section making a new page shape, defying the regular geometry of a room or a page:

³⁴ Bergvall, *Éclat*, p. 43

³⁵ *Ibid* p. 43

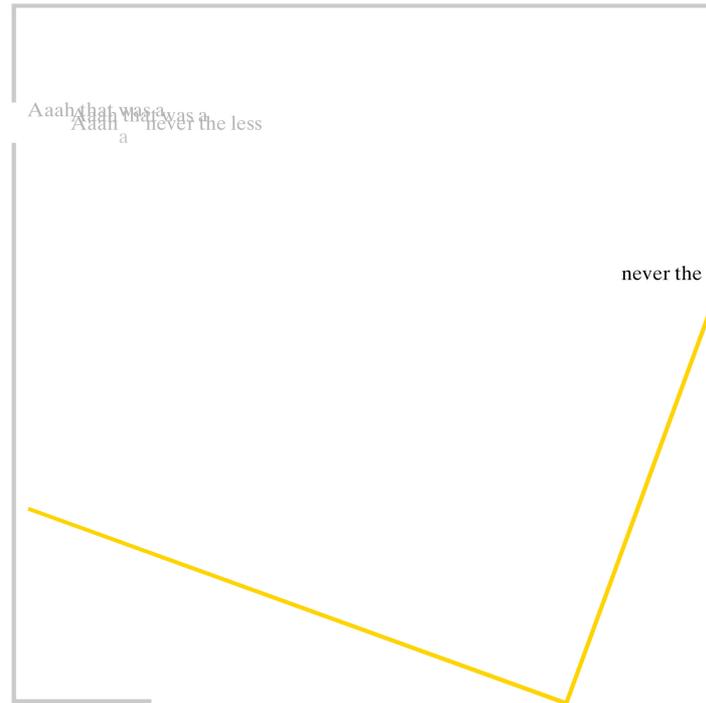


Figure 8. *Éclat*, p. 44

This act confuses the boundary between inside and outside, moving corners to the centre, and defies Bachelard's theory that 'the corner is a haven that ensures one of the things we prize most highly – immobility'.³⁶ In Bergvall's text, geography is movable and geometry undermined: 'what appears naturally & straight today will naturally appear and bent tomorrow',³⁷ we are told at the beginning of the book. At this point in the text, with corners centralised, it appears that we have reached the 'tomorrow', the occupation of space leading to increasing malleability and 'bent' architectures. If, as in Ahmed's formulation, 'phenomenology helps us to consider how sexuality involves ways of inhabiting and being inhabited by space',³⁸ then Bergvall's text, through a visual queering (that is, a coming out of alignment) of the book space, moves from a state of being inhabited, to inhabiting, and beyond to a reorientation which results in a reshaping of space as 'bent'. As Bergvall writes, 'to fit oneself perfectly quite is one thing but to deploy insides out one's own extensiveness now that's now that's'.³⁹ Bodies, failing to fit into the 'skin of the social' which does

³⁶ Bachelard, *The Poetics of Space*, p. 137

³⁷ Bergvall, *Éclat*, p. 10

³⁸ Ahmed, *Queer Phenomenology*, p. 67

³⁹ Bergvall, *Éclat*, p. 45

not extend non-geometrically to fit their form, must expand themselves outward to bend this mould with a sexuality which occupies a different kind of shape.

This act of territorial possession and the resulting bend in architectural structure results in the creation of a room, 'the one marked surg.r', a merging of 'sugar' (sweetness, titillation), 'surge' (a force) and 'surgeon' (to operate and change). This room is the culmination of Bergvall's reworking of the house, the fruition of her queer architecture. 'Its vastness s...ises you, takes you aback....Red deep carpets seem much at odds with the .est of the house'.⁴⁰ The decoration of the room implies pleasure, excess and comfort, in contrast with the uncomfortable and stilted domesticity of the living room earlier in the text, and the room's 'vastness' resonates with the act of 'deploy[ing] insides out' in 'extensiveness' of the body into space. This immensity, through the sexuality of the writing and language, is coupled with the intimacy of queer sexuality, itself expansive and unfixd. A woman (questionably – 'was a she a she'),⁴¹ viewed through desiring eyes, morphs the architecture of the room: 'Seems to be talking takes up more room...the sofa's popping out are the walls extruding the air seems hotter, tighter' as space moulds itself to sexuality. The body also expands and appears fluid: 'Coming out fast, she's conversing face down across a table her legs pushing a handful of her own up her indescribably big, her space-surround ambient organum'.⁴² 'Outsider' bodies have moved the margins into the centre, and the consequent shift in spatial arrangements results in a sexually permissive and indulgent queer space, which in turn allows bodies to become fluid, malleable and expansive. The form of writing also changes within this space, and results in a kind of saturated and expansive poetics. The sexual encounter is a spiritual (and arguably blasphemous) passage, full of repetitions and shifts, a textual *jouissance*:

Marymary slitless I discharge charge banged across the palastered all over the banged across the throb...I say blast what splendid cunts Mary saintl never let it be never let it be said are inward inwards so bless me bless me Mary pleine de grace for to extend inout one's outsides out.⁴³

This page can be read as a kind of orgasmic 'homecoming', the moment at which bodies and the space surrounding them are central and uncensored, the voice continuous and uninterrupted, the repetitions centring the focus to the point of

⁴⁰ *Ibid* p. 48

⁴¹ *Ibid* p. 48

⁴² *Ibid* p. 48

⁴³ *Ibid* p. 49

desire and functioning as a kind of metaphorical scaffolding for the language of textual pleasure.

However, this architecture is necessarily temporary and on the pages that follow there is a 'shlurp' as 'skin / pops / back / to its / curr / ent / conv / entio / nal / dime / nsio / ns.'⁴⁴ Coming full circle on this journey of disorientation and reorientation within and of space, the body emerges back into conventional space and is reformed accordingly. The final page of the text functions as a reflection on the critical necessity of this journey. 'A thinker once said girls make a gorgeous margin...crmonies of sweat 'n .isibility',⁴⁵ Bergvall writes, highlighting the need for a feminist and queer writing practice which might use 'adjectival distentions pooled into spectacles recombinant'⁴⁶ to create a 'morphing' and alternate portrait of space as queerly occupied. This questions, in Ahmed's words, 'the ease with which heterosexual bodies can inhabit public spaces', and the way in which these spaces shape bodies through 'behavioural accumulation'.

The temporary nature of the architecture Bergvall creates through the text is comparable to the queer movement itself. Annamarie Jagose writes that queer theory's 'definitional indeterminacy, its elasticity, is one of its constituent characteristics',⁴⁷ in that 'queer' is an umbrella term incorporating any non-normative instance of gender and sexuality, and that in its inclusiveness and mobility it functions as 'a negotiation of the very concept of identity itself'.⁴⁸ Similarly, in Bergvall's creation of queer space, concepts of sexuality, occupation and 'home' are not simply inverted or reclaimed, but, rather, opened up so that the binaries of gender, sexuality, insider/outsider and foreigner/citizen are bled into each other, resulting in a positively disorientating series of 'queer moments' in which the phenomenology of queer sexuality is imagined and explored. In my interview with Bergvall for this feature, I ask her why she writes, and she answers:

Initially, I wrote because I needed to appear, to find a way of appearing in the world. It was a very private basis. It was to give myself a place that I thought I could be in charge of, and that could somehow solidify me a bit. Out of that were built various layers of identity, of interests, of

⁴⁴ *Ibid* p. 53

⁴⁵ *Ibid* p. 55

⁴⁶ *Ibid* p. 55

⁴⁷ Annamarie Jagose, *Queer Theory* (Melbourne: Melbourne University Press, 1996) p. 1

⁴⁸ *Ibid*, p. 130

experience. The core of it was very much a question to myself: How do you exist? That's still very much there, how do I exist and how do *we* exist, collectively? What separates us?

There's a concept of spatiality at work here which is visible in *Éclat*, a kind of theory-in-practice of identity formation in relation to both social and artistic modes of existence and visibility. Through her practice, Bergvall carves out this explorational space with which to experiment with and question the politicised body in its stance towards the world, building temporary and imaginative queer architectures, shifting boundaries and thus allowing for new possibilities of poetics within temporary and formally innovative 'homes'.