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Author: Nicola Winterson, 8806295980

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Supervisor: Terese Ånving

Exploring posthuman subjectivities: a case study of LGBTQ Asian and Pacific
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Abstract:

This research has explored the intersection between the subject, activism, and posthuman theory, setting out to investigate whether posthuman theoretical understandings can be applied to contemporaneous subjects. Using NVivo software, a qualitative data analysis is conducted into 17 autobiographical texts taken from the anthology *Restoried Selves* (Kumashiro 2011). This analysis finds that these subjects do not seem to explicitly understand themselves in posthuman terms, and indeed in many cases replicate humanist understandings of the self, but that in some ways, a posthuman framing can implicitly be attributed to these subjects and their activism.

Keywords:

Posthumanism; subjectivity; activism; identity

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1. Introduction

There is change in the air. The world is undergoing significant transformations on multiple fronts, such as: within technology and networks e.g. the wide dissemination and availability of the internet, 3D printing; in the biotechnological medical world e.g. cloning, genetically modified food, gene therapy, artificially grown tissue and “body banking” (Åsberg & Neimanis 2013; Haraway 2008); in military operations e.g. drones, state sponsored cyber-attacks (Haraway 1991; Braidotti 2013, 2006; Puar 2005; Hovenden et al. 2013). Moreover, many have identified a fundamental shift in capitalism and a global restructuring of capitalist production, causing a feminisation (Perrons 2004), de-masculinisation or ‘precarisation’ of the labour market (Hardgrove, McDowell & Rootham 2015; Beck 1992, 2000: Beck & Beck-Gernsheim 2000), occurring particularly at the lower levels of the labour market, including traditional industry (as above), but also non-traditional industries such as care work (Boris & Salazar Parreñas 2010) and sex work (Bernstein 2010). At the same time, there have been radical reductions in social security or ‘welfare’ provisions and a privatisation of national services under neoliberal governments (Haraway 1991: 166-169; Masquelier 2013).

These transformations are simultaneously happening *within the subject*. According to Haraway (2013) we are all already cyborgs, since we humans¹ are already modified and continually modifying ourselves. These modifications could be as simple as paying for laser eye surgery to enhance vision, receiving a pacemaker, or could be as complex as controlling the movement of a robotic arm with one’s mind². As a bringing together of two elements, the cybernetic and the organism, Haraway’s cyborg is an attempt to overcome the binary distinctions that have come to dominate our consciousness - binarisms like human and non-human, machine and organic, nature and culture. The cyborg is thus neither nature *nor* culture, but rather a hybrid of both and more. This is because the cyborg is not limited by and to binaries (50).

Since such a fundamental shift is occurring, there has been a subsequent declaration that a new and improved theory of the subject is needed to understand these changes. For instance, Braidotti (2013) argues that “... we need new frameworks for the identification of common points of reference and values in order to come to terms with the staggering transformations

¹ Perhaps the assumption that only humans will read this thesis is misplaced – considering the proliferation of anti-plagiarism software that will be reading this thesis as well? Lund University uses URKUND, which you can read about here: <http://www.lub.lu.se/en/search-systems-and-tools/urkund>

² <https://www.newscientist.com/article/dn26703-thought-control-makes-robot-arm-grab-and-move-objects/>

we are witnessing” (196). Such an alternative theoretical understanding, it is argued, can be found within posthuman theory. Posthuman feminist scholarship has positioned itself as instrumental in opening up alternative avenues through which we can understand the subject, such as rendering unintelligible nature/ culture, human/ non-human, organic/ machine binarisms (Haraway 2013) whilst linking inextricably humans to the so-called ‘natural world’ that has been constructed as wholly separate and inferior to humans since the Enlightenment era (Åsberg & Neimanis 2013; Federici 2004). More than this, posthumanist scholarship introduces what Braidotti calls “... a qualitative shift in our thinking about what exactly is the basic unit of common reference for our species, our polity and our relationship to the other inhabitants of this planet.” (Braidotti 2013: 1-2). Our new uncertain world has opened up “opportunities” (12) to recreate understandings of subjectivity, and feminist posthuman theorists are argue for their responsibility for these new constructions (Haraway 1991: 150; Braidotti 2013).

As indicated above, posthuman theory is predicated on the collapse of the nature-culture binary, and the subsequent (or even simultaneous) need to conceive of new ways of understanding subjectivity (Åsberg & Neimanis 2013; Braidotti 2013; Scott 2001; Neimanis 2013; Haraway 1991) as humans now placed on a *continuum*, rather than on the “culture” half of the “nature/ culture” *binary* (Åsberg & Neimanis 2013; Braidotti 2013). Thus, posthuman theorists position themselves as responsible for creating “... adequate theoretical and imaginary representations for our lived conditions...” (Braidotti 2013: 187). This includes, but of course is not limited to the issue of subjectivity. Subjectivity as a topic is one quite central to posthuman theory, primarily because subjectivity is the site where multiple matters converge, and, conversely, the subject is a unifying thread among different issues and aspects of these posthuman times (42).

1.1. Aims and research question

One of the spaces where posthuman theorists are creating these new representations for our lived conditions -as Braidotti (2013) argues above- is within the field of politics. Removal of the traditional Humanist subject in favour of a posthuman one is not to remove or to lessen the need for political action and subversion, but rather the opposite. In *Posthuman, All Too Human* Braidotti (2006) argues that:

“The hyper-reality of the nomadic or cyborg post-human predicament does not wipe out politics or the need for political resistance: it just makes it more necessary than ever to work towards a radical redefinition of political action.” (203)

This notion - of creating a ‘radical redefinition’ of political action- is part of the creation new ‘theoretical representations of our lived conditions’ (Braidotti 2013: 187) that Braidotti argues for, and has been focal point for a number of theorists. For example, Papadopoulos (2010) rethinks the possibilities for posthumanism within radical left projects and social movements. He argues that over time, the focus of social movements and radical left projects has shifted onto ‘social power’ (which I take to mean an identity based activism), which promotes an anthropocentric worldview and subsumes ‘true justice’ rather than being properly liberatory. It is in this context that Papadopoulos asks how left politics can become more posthuman, and vice versa (144). Papadopoulos’ article helps to form the background to this research because given that his main argument is that organisations focused on “social power” cannot or will not be posthuman in nature, I am interested to see if this assertion is borne in my own research too.

Following these insights, I am interested not only how in posthuman theory can create new ways of understanding subjectivity and political action, but also in how the individuals who engage in political action (such as activism) understand themselves as subjects, as well as how they operationalise notions of ‘individual’, ‘agency’, ‘non-human’, in an era where humanist understandings are still widespread enough to be considered common sense.

I argue that situating these questions within an organisation aimed at “social power”, or more specifically, on the activists within such an organisation, is an interesting avenue through which to explore the intersection between the subject, activism, and posthuman theory. Part of the logic behind this is the belief that those who engage in identity based activism (alternatively described as ‘social power’ activism by Papadopoulos 2010) will have considered and reconsidered their identity positionings, both as individuals and as activists more than non-activists, and so be able to reflect more on themselves as subjects, and the intersection between their activism and subject identity.

Research aims

- To explore posthuman theoretical approaches to subjectivity;
- To explore the intersection between the subject, activism, and posthuman theory;
- To see if activists understand their subjectivity in posthuman ways;

Research questions

1. In what ways, if any, can critical posthuman theory be used to understand the subjectivity of those who engage in identity based, political activism?
2. How do activists within identity based organisations or associations understand and explain their own subjectivities?

I am seeking to understand whether posthuman approaches to subjectivity can be compatible with these activists' understandings and declarations of their own subjectivities. These questions also try to understand how a posthumanist framing of the individual can work within modern politically oriented rights based organisations, which are purportedly based on an 'individualist' self (Papadopoulos 2010; Masquelier 2013).

1.2. Research design

Autobiographical texts within the anthology *Restoried Selves: Autobiographies of Queer Asian/ Pacific American Activists* (Kumashiro 2011) will be analysed as part of exploring these questions and aims. The analysis will be conducted using the help of NVivo, a qualitative data analysis software. NVivo will enable the electronic storage of all materials, memos and coding associated with this thesis project.

I consider that I am conducting a feminist research into posthuman theory, and the intersection between the subject, activism, and posthuman theory, vis-à-vis an analysis of the autobiographical accounts within this anthology. More than this, a range of theories inform the 'ethico-onto-epistem-ological' (Barad, 2007; Lykke, 2010) outline of this thesis, which affect my understandings of the subject, and the methodologies and methods utilised to analyse the texts from *Restoried Selves*.

1.3. Research delimitations

In general, limiting the scope of one's research is beneficial in some ways, but detrimental in others. This is primarily because it is difficult to achieve equilibrium between narrowing down ones research focus whilst still aiming to contribute to the wider field of knowledge. However the fields of subjectivity and activism are huge and multifaceted in their own right. Hence, in order to create an understandable and coherent analysis of the intersection between the subject, activism, and posthuman theory, I have decided to focus the wider issue of subjectivity onto a

specific site, that of Lesbian, Bisexual, Gay, Trans* and Queer (henceforth LGBTQ³) and Asian and/or Pacific American (henceforth APA) identified activists. LGBTQ and race-based activist groups are exemplary cases of ‘identity based’ activist groups and so I argue that this thesis will yield particularly compelling insights via the autobiographical texts of activists, who arguably focus their activism on what Papadopoulos (2010) calls ‘social power’ and are thus specifically interesting in the context of these discussions about subjectivity, activism and posthumanism. One key delimitation of utilising autobiographical texts of LGBTQ APA activists is that although these texts will give me insight into how these individuals’ subjectivities, and perhaps their processes of subjectification⁴, but perhaps cannot be made widely replicable to other activists groups, or to a non-activist LGBTQ and/or APA population.

1.4. Schematic outline for this thesis

After this introduction into the research, and presentation of the research aims and questions, I will go on in chapter 2 to provide a critical description and overview of the current state of academic knowledge relating to and background of posthuman theory. After this, in chapter 3, I will present the theoretical starting points of my research, including a discussion about and a justification for choosing these theories. In chapter 4, I will present, discuss and substantiate the methods I have chosen to use for this research, and provide a comprehensive outline of my ontological, epistemological, ethical and methodological starting points. There will also be an introduction to the empirical material that will be analysed for this research. Following this, chapter 5 will be an analysis of the material in relation to the research aims and questions, which are laid out above, then a discussion in chapter 6 will follow about what these findings mean in the context of previous research and the theoretical underpinnings of this research, and a critical view for the results from the analysis. In the concluding chapter, I will reflect on the research question and the methodologies used, and provide suggestions for further research.

2. Definitions and Literature Review

During this thesis, I will utilise the terms posthumanism, Humanism and anti-humanism extensively. Therefore it is necessary to define these terms with regards to how they will be operationalised. I will expand these on these definitions with an analysis and debate regarding

³ I have attempted to retain as inclusive a definition as I can, to account for the multiple subject positioning of the authors within this anthology. However, for the sake of reader clarity, I have and will continue to utilise the well-known acronym LGBTQ, summarised here: <http://www.liberateyourself.co.uk/lgbtq/what-is-lgbtq/>

⁴ For more on subjectification, see Foucault’s *The subject and Power* (1982); *Discipline and Punish* (1977)

the current state of knowledge in the field of posthuman theory, generating the background from which the analysis of the thesis will occur.

2.1 Definitions

Posthumanism

When discussing posthumanism, it is important to note that there are different meanings of the term ‘posthuman’ and ‘posthumanism’ in different contexts. In academia for example, posthumanism is understood as a cultural critique and a challenge to the Humanities, whereas in a wider cultural context, it is understood to mean robotics, cybernetics and the like. I mean to follow Braidotti in her use of ‘critical Posthumanism’⁵. As a brief overview, critical posthuman theory is a strand of posthumanism deriving from anti-humanist philosophies of subjectivity (Braidotti 2013: 38), whose foundational theories are firstly anti-humanism, which is defined and delimited below; secondly, postcolonial and race theorists -theories which consider the Enlightenment failed in its own ideals; and thirdly, ecology and environmentalist theories -which focuses on interconnectedness and rejects individualism (46-7). It is important to state that I do not use posthumanism to describe a technophilic ‘trans-humanism’, which is the hope that technology will ‘enhance’ bodies, doing away with the inconveniences of aging, ailments and in some cases death. This is a culmination of what Åsberg and Neimanis (2013) call “...the desire to realize the disembodied human self of the Enlightenment, purified and enhanced by science, medicine, and technology...” (5). This is a self which has achieved its ultimate separation from both nature and culture - an individual (in the traditional conceptualisation) segregated from and placed above others. I argue that this is a concept that disregards vulnerability, and privileges certain kinds of bodies over others and is therefore incompatible with the posthumanist theory I am operationalising.

Humanism

Humanism is a philosophical movement which emphasises the individual agency of ‘human beings’, and traditionally favours the doctrines of critical thinking, empiricism and secularism. Humanist theory remains so pervasive it is often held as ‘common sense’ (Braidotti, 2013: 1). Federici (2004) discusses how, in the Enlightenment era of the West in early 1600s to late

⁵ For reader clarity I will henceforth use the terms posthuman theory and posthumanism rather than ‘critical posthumanism’. This is because I take understand that critical posthumanism is a central strand within wider posthuman theory, as well as the primary operationalisation of the term that I use in this thesis. This is unless of course I am specifically discussing another branch of posthumanism, e.g. analytical posthumanism, in which case this will be explicitly stated within the text.

1700s philosophers such as Descartes (1972) and Hobbes (1981), while different philosophically, generated enduring binarisms, divorcing the ‘rational self’, or ‘soul’ from corporeal baseness and nature (Federici 2004: 148). At the same time, a ‘mercantile bourgeoisie’ -with a deeply ingrained protestant ethic and awareness of these new philosophical understandings of the self- emerged, seeking to ‘remould’ the lower class⁶ in line with capitalistic need (135). This leads Federici to assert that: *“We can see, in other words, that the human body and not the steam engine, and not even the clock, was the first machine developed by capitalism.”* (146, original emphasis). With nature reduced to baseness, it too was constructed as Other to the newly emerged rational subject. And just like nature could be “caught in a system of subjection,” (Foucault 1977: 26) so could the body (Federici 2004: 140).

While some theorists argue that the concept of ‘subject’ is normative and limiting (Puar 2012), Posthuman theorists generally recognise that some subject positioning is important (with certain caveats) as a site for ‘political accountability, collective imaginaries and shared aspirations’ (Braidotti 2013:102). However, the subject as it has been understood within Humanism is problematic, not least because whilst generally understood as ‘universal’, the Humanist ideal of ‘the subject’ has not been extended to vast swathes of people, such as those positioned as non-white, non-male, those who are working class or somehow inferior - overall, those that have been cast as “Other” (Federici 2004: 152; Braidotti 2013: 1). The Other has been racialised, naturalised as well as dehumanised within Humanism, leading Braidotti (2013) to argue that “What seems absolutely clear to me is the historical, ethical and political necessity to overcome this notion [of the Humanist subject], in light of its history of unfulfilled promises and unacknowledged brutality” (51). This shift is needed, and it is not to be seen as a crisis but rather as an opportunity to create alternative theorisations of the subject.

Anti-humanism

Anti-humanist, or else alter-humanist (Kumar 2011) thinkers and activists have levelled important critique towards Humanism, including drawing attention to the fact that both the concept and ideals of ‘individualism’, and the ‘universal man’ are historical constructs, and not ‘intrinsic’ to subjects. Moreover, the anti-humanist perspective has historically been central to many social and political movements in recent history, indeed for Braidotti (2013) anti-

⁶ Lower classes, not yet working classes. As Federici (2004) makes clear, previous to these changes, the lower classes were serfs and artisans and had to be moulded through centuries of violence to become the working class (135)

humanist theoretical thinkers and activists have been a significant source for posthuman theory, but it is important to note that the association between anti-humanism and posthumanism is not inevitable or even necessary (25).

Anti/ alter-humanists - whilst still decrying the ‘abuse’ of Humanist ideals/ principles- largely uphold the basic premises and ideals of Humanism (Kumar 2011; Fanon 2008), whereas posthuman theorists argue that Humanism and Humanists ideals should not be rebuilt, but rather completely overcome (Braidotti 2013; Haraway 1991; Åsberg & Neimanis 2013).

2.2. The posthuman field

Recently posthuman theory has become more central within the trans- and post-disciplinary social sciences, as evidenced by the establishment of research centres⁷ dedicated to the study of posthumanities, special issues on posthumanities in established journals⁸ and a proliferation in articles discussing or utilising posthuman themes.

Posthuman theorists can be found to discuss and analyse a wide range of issues, very much in line with their post- or trans-disciplinary approach. However, as indicated in the introduction, there are a few essential starting points of posthuman theory. For instance, one vital aspect of posthuman theory is its position as challenger the humanities and to Humanism more broadly, arguing that they are insufficient tools to understand the human’s increasingly complex enmeshment in relationships with non-human animals, the environment, technology (and so on) within our era of *Anthropocene*, where humans have a dominant and dominating influence on the environment, climate, and life on this planet more extensively, and in more ways than ever before (Neimanis 2013; Braidotti 2013).

As discussed in the introduction, there is hardly a site where this challenge is more fierce and multi-levelled than that of subjectivity. For instance, Åsberg and Neimanis (2013) argue that while the humanistic Enlightenment ideals of a subject, contained and individual, underpins “... many if not all of our social, political, economic and legal frameworks in the Western world...” (2), it is obvious that this subject is ‘disintegrating before our very eyes’ (Ibid) and

⁷ See for example the work with the ‘posthumanities hub’ at Linköping University, Sweden.

⁸ See for example the special issues of *NORA: Nordic Journal of Feminist and Gender Research* (2011, 19:4) and *European Journal of Women's Studies* (2010, 17:4)

so posthuman theorists work to reconsider the ontology of bodies, and present new forms of being in the space that this disintegration has created.

Indeed, other theorists emphasise that the embodied and embedded subject is vitally important to posthuman theories (Braidotti 2013; Currier 2003; Scott 2001). Barad (2003) creates a posthumanist materialist reworking of the concept of performativity (811), whilst arguing that power is material, and not just social, we need to account for the material, embodied situations of *all* bodies and *all* forms of agency (not just human ones). For Åsberg and Neimanis (2013), building new conceptions of the subject entails recognising the symbiosis humans have with other beings like bacteria, arguing that humans are companion species to these other beings (see also Haraway 2008: 16-17). Simultaneously, posthuman theories of subjectivity are building understandings that humans are not “in here” and the environment is “out there” and that we are instead inextricably linked. With these new understandings, Åsberg and Neimanis argue that to ‘reconsider the ontologies of bodies’ (4) is to reconfigure individualist conceptions of agency and the subject. In this understanding the subject is embedded in practices of affectivity and of care and concern for others. In short, “....engagement is key to feminist posthuman ethics; *concerns for alterity and care for others is prior to selfhood.*” (21, emphasis added).

Whilst Åsberg and Neimanis emphasise the responsibility of posthuman selves, others such as Offermann (2012) argues posthuman subjects create an opportunity for subversion and that “Through the interconnections and hybridizations, body-subjects can emerge which are able to subvert the efforts of normalization of the existing, heteronormative and phallogocentric regime of sexuality. This ability constitutes the *political potential* for a queer-feminist agenda” (3, emphasis added). This notion of political potential, based on an emphasis of the posthuman body-subject and its interconnections, acts as an important insight into posthuman theorisations of how this political subversion may occur, especially when considered as complementary to the notion of feminist posthuman ethics as set forward by Åsberg and Neimanis (2013).

Along the same vein, other posthuman theorists describe how the boundary between the previously binary categories of “human” and “animal” have been breached. On the one hand, the more the animal sciences ‘discover’ about animals, the harder it is to maintain the boundaries that have distinguished and set above the human from non-human. On the other hand, bio-genetic technologies are “post-anthropocentric’ in that non-human animals, the

environment and humans universally fall under capitalistic market imperatives and are exploited (Haraway 1991; Braidotti 2013). At the same time, new networks and technologies break down the boundary between physical and non-physical worlds and the distinction between human and machine (Haraway 1991: 153, 164-5; Currier 2003).

Other theorists argue that posthuman theories of subjectivity have similarities to other theories. Hoogland (2002) for instance, sees posthuman theories of the body as similar to the psychoanalytic idea of the 'body ego', where the body "... becomes a shifting and fundamentally dynamic site of human-machinic interaction within a no less changeable set of both symbolic and material impossibilities, both real and imaginary." (223). It is therefore important to be mindful of these background influences, in addition to the influences laid out by Braidotti (2013) which are discussed above.

Methodological beginnings for posthuman theorists

Indeed, several posthuman theorists have utilized Braidotti's figurations (Lykke, 2010; Braidotti, 2006) as a tool to understand these new posthuman subjects. Collard (2012) argues that figurations are a "... powerful means by which to interrogate naturalized narratives and by which to suggest new ones. But figures can also be subjects of interrogation themselves. (523). For instance, understanding ourselves as a companion species, rather than merely human, enables us to reconsider our responsibilities towards others - it is in this context that Neimanis asks us to see ourselves within the 'figuration' of a bodies of water (Neimanis, 2013). Similarly, Collard (2012) utilises the figuration of 'cougars', and Åsberg and Neimanis (2013) utilise figurations such as 'Alzheimer bodies' (15) when constructing new ontologies of bodies (4). However, perhaps the best known figuration is that of the Cyborg (Haraway, 1991). As the cyborg is thus neither nature *nor* culture, but rather a hybrid of both and more, it allows us to see alternative non-binary configurations of the subject.

Conversely, Kirkup (2013) points out that while "[the cyborg's] usefulness for cultural deconstruction of gender has become apparent, but its usefulness as a tool for material change is yet to be proved." (5). Therefore it is important to recognize that posthuman research on the subject have until now been almost entirely theoretical, or a 'becoming' - a subject yet to come, one that is mapped out. Given this, I plan to research contemporaneous, embodied subjects, in order to add to a body of literature which focuses on the material aspect of posthuman theory. By doing this I hope to consider posthuman theory from a new perspective, that is, when

analysing contemporary LGBTQ APA identified activist subjects, and examining their reflections of their own subjectivities and processes of subjectification.

We can see that the literature here indicates that questions of posthuman subjectivity heighten the need to focus on political action, however, theoretical models regarding subjectivities and activism has been the primary methodological starting point for research. It is much harder to find any empirical analyses of contemporary activist subjects. As such, during this research, I hope to generate a methodological starting point for posthuman theorists who wish to conduct research on ‘real world’ subjects, rather than exclusively with theoretical and hypothetical framings.

Critique of posthuman theory

Posthumanism challenges the idealised “man” of Humanist theory, just as binaries are broken down in our contemporary society. Bodies are central to this challenge, but identity (subjectivity) still remains crucial, posthuman/cyborg theory does not break away from it. Whilst generally supportive of posthuman theory, Currier (2003) echoes Kirby’s (1997) critique of posthuman or cyborg theory when arguing that the hybridised cyborg is reliant upon the distinct and discrete ‘components’ of the hybridization. By this Currier means that “... in so far as the hybrid cyborg is forged in the intermeshing of technology with a body, in a process of addition, it leaves largely intact those two categories – (human) body and technology – that preceded the conjunction” (Currier 2003: 323). Currier rightly pinpoints the centrality of the subject to much posthuman theory, but I disagree that recognising or emphasising the body as a category is somehow incorrect. This is because posthuman theory generally recognises the embodied self as a central component to the subject, while recognising the ontological reality of a physical self (Braidotti 2013; Åsberg and Neimanis 2013; Barad 2003), which is different to Kirby and Currier’s constructions, which argue that the body is culturally does not exist prior to discourse. However, this point will be elaborated on further in the methodology chapter, rather than here.

Another critique levelled at posthuman theory is provided by Deckha (2012), who argues that within posthuman theorisations, gender is often prioritised of as the central dimension of injustice, which is to the expense of other axes of difference. Negating race and cultural difference as equally valid starting points for analysis makes inclusive and subversive research impossible to achieve and so “...This residual essentialism thus renders the analysis

conceptually incomplete and even inaccurate” (533). This article has been particularly useful to help me understand this potential pitfall of posthumanist theory. While Deckha focuses specifically on race and cultural dimensions, other factors such as class are clearly important too and as such, I have been mindful of dimensions in addition to gender in this research - whilst still retaining a feminist approach to this research.

3. Theoretical Framework

In this section I will outline the foundational theories upon which this thesis is based. My research is rooted in posthuman theory. Consequentially, the theoretical framework of this thesis also functions as a route through which I can explore posthuman theoretical approaches to subjectivity, and begin to explore the intersection between this theory, the subject and activism, both of which are defined ‘research aims’ within the introduction. These theoretical beginnings also inform the analysis of the anthology *Restoried Selves*, which is conducted as part of answering my research questions.

The following theoretical chapter will focus on: posthuman theory; theories of agency and subjectivity; Assemblage theory; social movement theory and posthuman approaches to activism.

3.1. Posthuman approaches to subjectivity

As discussed above, the terms ‘posthuman’ and ‘posthumanism’ have been theorised in different ways; thus the theory I am operationalising is specifically ‘critical posthumanism’ (following Braidotti 2013). Moreover, while there are certainly links between posthumanist theory with previous feminist scholarship and work -especially when one considers how feminist scholarship has been central to questioning the rational detached scientism of other scholarship, and drawing attention to and disturbing the idea of binary gender- I certainly see that posthuman feminist scholarship has been instrumental in opening up alternative avenues through which to understand ourselves. As I have discussed previously, posthuman theorists have deconstructed binarisms (Haraway 2013) and linked humans back to nature and the so-called ‘natural world’ (Åsberg & Neimanis 2013). Indeed in the age of the cyborg (Haraway 1991) such binaries, once held as so important in Western thought, become irrelevant and superfluous. This illuminates to us that which we once perceived as ‘natural’ was never really so - it merely has taken the appearance of ‘natural’ in the Western consciousness (Haraway

2013: 54). It then follows that there is no such thing as a ‘natural self’, an individual human body contained from, and separate to, the rest of nature. This change is wholesale. Within posthuman theory “Man is displaced by the breakdown not only of categories, such as the Human, which define him, but also of the very logic of identity through which those categories are articulated and maintained.” (Currier 2003: 321). However, the Humanist subject is a body/subject that we live the legacy of (Åsberg & Neimanis 2013: 2; Braidotti 2013).

It is within this framework that posthuman theorists focus on subjectivity. As Braidotti argues “... a focus on subjectivity is necessary because this notion enables us to string together issues that are currently scattered across a number of domains” (Braidotti, 2013: 42). Accordingly, the central tenets of posthumanist approaches to the subject will be detailed here.

Firstly, posthumanism aims to theoretically conceive of subjects that are above and beyond traditional Humanistic and Enlightenment understandings and ideals. Indeed, Åsberg and Neimanis (2012) conceptualise agency outside the dominant paradigms of Enlightenment thought, which as we have discussed privilege the individual subject, considering it as separate to and above the constructed category of nature. Their ‘brief and partial inventory of bodies’ includes a call for us to -among other things- recognise the symbiotic relationship that humans have with the bacteria that occupy our bodies and genomes (7-8) and for us to break down the distinction we have of that the environment is ‘out there’ and we are ‘in here’ (9). Thus, the posthuman subject has agency to the extent that to be a subject is to exist within the relational continuum of the everyday, and to be part of the world which forms them, rather than be separate to it.

This entanglement does not mean that the posthuman subject ceases to render binaries superfluous and unintelligible whilst deconstructing that which is considered ‘natural’. Quite the opposite. To be embedded in an ethics of care which considers others before self, is a reconsideration the ontologies of bodies’ utilising what Åsberg and Neimanis (2013) call *feminist posthuman ethics*. Within this conceptualisation, posthuman selves are embedded in affectivity and practices of care and concern (21). To follow this new ontology of bodies is to contest the binaries on which the Enlightenment Man claims a sense of self – which is, of the self as distinctly individual, as separate to and above ‘nature’. This reconfigures individualist conceptions of agency and selfhood, and builds an understanding that all bodies are interconnected, not just human ones. It also emphasises that posthuman theorists are not

focusing primarily on the subject, but rather on the interactions, interdependence and interrelation between the self and everything/ everyone else.

Braidotti (2013) follows this argument of ethics, asserting that “Posthuman subjectivity expresses an embodied and embedded and hence partial form of accountability, based on a strong sense of collectivity, relationality and hence community building.” (49) This is an “...ethics of becoming” (Ibid). This emphasises that posthumanist theorists wish to investigate the meanings of posthuman bodies while remaining attentive embodied experiences (such as the role of class, gender, ethnicity etc.) as they are within the often universalising ventures of technology (Haraway, 1991; Braidotti 2006; 2013). Within posthuman conceptualisations of the subject there is a shift away from a Humanist ‘man-versus-nature’ conception of self towards an interconnected and inherently reliant self that is fundamentally integrated with ‘nature’ (environment, internal and wider), non-human animals etc. This is a space where the material (‘matter’) and the subject can converge.

Posthumanist theory, as outlined above, is the foundation of the theoretical standpoint for this thesis. From the broad starting point of posthumanist theory, I have been intrigued as to what happens to the notion of individual agency, of resistance and subversion in this new posthuman scholarship. I feel that posthuman theory is somewhat overlooked or else underutilised within academia, and so by conducting this research I hope to draw attention to the ways in which posthuman theory can be utilised. Moreover, I hope to add to the growing body of literature that works with posthuman theory in various ways.

3.2. Theories of subjectivity and agency

So, following posthuman theory, it is easy to see how our conception of the individual can be radically altered. It is within this framing that I attempt to further explore and understand Humanist conceptions of the individual as an agent/ subject. When considering individual agency and subjectivity, does existing ‘Humanist’ scholarship become a wholly inadequate and outmoded tool to understanding of agency within the posthumanist era? This question will become increasingly pertinent when it comes to analysing the individual subject’s sense of themselves. To explore this idea, it is useful to be *au fait* with the varying conceptions of agency and subjectivity as they have been understood and debated in key literature.

Within the Western feminist tradition at least, agency is the possibility to act as a subject. The notion of *individual* agency, moreover, remains pervasive, even within a Western feminist tradition which has come to critique it for negating the collective aspects of agency. In *The Psychic Life of Power* (1997), Butler contends that power *forms* and is *performed* by the subject. As a subject, one cannot exist without power. Moreover, power acts within us (within our psyches), forming us as subjects from the point of passionate attachment, which itself is an induction into power (67). Through this it becomes necessary to understand how power is subjectively performed and the process of subjection. This point is similar to Foucault (1978), who generally understands that the subject does not precede power relations, he sees power primarily in terms of the structures of society, which are unstable and historically situated (159). However Butler diverges from Foucault when she argues that the subject only becomes understandable through exploring the psychic life of the subject and the performance of power (Butler 1997: 2). Indeed, performances can inscribe something on the subject, but, at its base, it is the performance *itself* which constitutes the subject (119). To put it another way, power is performative; it is an action, and the act of power is inscribed on the body, and through its inscription, a subject is formed. Thus to say that power is imposed from above at a structural level negates or ignores how power works at the level of the subject's psyche. This sentiment is echoed in Butler's later works, too. In *Giving an Account of Oneself* (2005), for example, Butler points out the role that the social plays in forming the individual agent, arguing that agency is what happens when we enact the responsibility to give an account of oneself. In this book Butler also describes the possibility for an agent to destabilise power, stating that this is based on ones relations to others, and in these relations one is "opaque" to oneself and vulnerable to others (46). Thus to undo norms, we need to resist, and we can only resist when we acknowledge our limits of understanding- this is the moral responsibility to give an account of oneself (135).

However, these notions have themselves been criticised as an inherently Western conflation of autonomy and agency. Following from this, Mohanty (2003) has argued for a recognition of *difference*, in opposition to Western feminism which argues for a shared identity based on the idea of *commonality* of experience (108). Mohanty is opposed to the imposition of the notion of a 'sameness of experience', because it conceals the fact that the 'sameness of experience' is firmly anchored "in the notion of individual self" (115) specific to Western thought and Western feminism. Subsequent to this, a key standpoint of these critiques is the *anti-resistance thesis*, which questions the assumption that agency is primarily (or can only be) demonstrated

in individual resistance mode. For example, Mahmood (2005) suggests that freedom is as normative to feminism as it is to liberalism (10) meaning that there is an inability for Western feminism to see agency within ‘unfamiliar others’, which not only manifests itself in the failure to see resistance in unfamiliar modes, but also in the insistence that independent resistance is agency’s primary sign. Ergo, the idea of women’s agency as identical with resistance to relations of domination is the naturalization of freedom as a social idea. Mahmood argues that agency cannot be understood in advance of an analysis of specific modes of being, and so, in order to understand those who do not seek to challenge or subvert power, we need to detach the notion of agency from the goals of progressive politics (14), and understand that agency can be formed through attachment to norms and not only resistance of norms. Because norms are performed, inhabited and experienced in a variety of ways, Mahmood argues that agency should instead be measured at the contextual level, by examining how norms are practised (22). In this understanding, agency is bound up within historically and culturally specific disciplines through which a subject is formed.

Considering the conceptions of agency put forward by theorists such as Butler and Mahmood, one can conclude that there is more than an element of the social to agency and subjectivity. All in all, Mahmood would not disagree with Butler that power *forms* and is *performed* by the subject. Rather, by utilising the works of Mahmood and other postcolonial thinkers, it should not be argued that there is any universal singular agency, but that agency is *formed* through norms within historical and social contexts and *performed* through bodily practices - as the capacities and skills required to undertake particular kinds of moral actions. It is clear that we must not assume that all agents are inhabiting an inherently resistive, individual mode of being. When doing this we are favouring a notion of collective, or social agency over and above the notion of *individual* agency.

With these conceptualisations and considering the academic literature, the question becomes how are we then to understand ourselves, agency and subjectivity outside of the dialectical paradigms of what human beings are? Following both Butler (1993, 1997, 2005) and Mahmood (2005), we must also recognise that the self cannot be formed without relations to others. This is important to consider when asking whether any aspects of previous “Humanist” literature on the subject be analogous with posthuman theory is perhaps looking in the wrong direction. Within the context of this research, these ‘Humanist’ conceptions of the subject form an important background theory. Since the activists which form my empirical analysis may not

utilise posthuman conceptions of the self, it becomes important to understand the alternative theorisations through which they may understand themselves. It is also with this in mind that I have discussed Assemblage theory, as an alternative configuration of the subject.

3.3. Assemblage theory

My entryway into the field of posthumanist scholarship was not, as one might assume, Haraway's seminal work in the field of posthumanism, *A Cyborg Manifesto* (1991, 2013), but rather through the work of Puar, and her focus on the Deleuzian concept of 'Assemblage' in *Queer Times, Queer Assemblages* (2005). In this article, Puar generates dialogue between the concept of Assemblages and that of Intersectionality - primarily Intersectionality as developed from the works of Crenshaw (1991). Intersectionality has since become a central perspective and ethos in feminist research (Puar 2012; 2005), and functions as a structural phenomenon which presumes that analytical categories of identity (race, gender, class etc.), while intersecting with one another, are nonetheless categories which can be separated and disassembled. Puar argues that "Intersectionality demands knowing, naming and thus stabilizing of identity across space and time [...]. As a tool of diversity management, and a mantra of liberal multiculturalism, intersectionality colludes with the disciplinary apparatus of the state" (Puar 2005: 128). It is through this debate that Puar argues for the theory of Assemblages instead of Intersectionality. Assemblages, it is argued, "allows for becoming/s beyond being/s." (Ibid), as it focuses on 'tactile economies', which highlight touch, sensation and the like - things which "affect over what is assumed to be legible through the visible" (134).

Puar also argues that the concept of the subject itself is already normative, so, although Intersectionality theory decentres the normative subject of feminism, it remains normative as long as it is wedded to the concept of subject (Puar 2012: 63). According to Puar, her explanation of an Assemblage is the culmination -or bringing together- of tactile economies within one space/ time, is not even necessarily localised on human bodies (57). An assemblage is thus not only understood at the individual -or micro/ meso/ macro- level(s), it can also be used to understand the assemblages of complex configurations. This is a way of de-privileging the human body as the central category of experience, as has been the case in Humanist theories of the subject. It is here we can see the possible links between posthuman theory and Assemblages. Currier (2003), while critical of certain aspects of posthuman theory (see above), argues that Assemblage theory can work with posthuman theory to create a 'new means of thinking both bodies and technologies and the conditions of their intersections' (324). By

thinking of the body as an assemblage, one can overcome the ‘logic of identity’ which unifies and thus ameliorates differences of experience. At the same time Assemblage theory foregrounds connection and linkages as ‘assembled between bodies and technologies’ (336), reconfiguring our frames of references and knowledge, while not denying the political or the material (328).

It is this focus on the material, interweaving the self and the wider world which uncovered for me new visions of what it means to be, and that led me on to further ‘post subject’ conceptualizations of the body. It seemed to me that the concept of Assemblage can take into consideration the environment, the material and the immediate as important factors in a complex moment-in-time relations, instead of being bound to notions of individual identity and individual relations to structure, institutions etc. From this starting point, I was turned on to the works of Haraway and other posthumanist writers and theorists. However, the primary disconnect between Assemblage and posthuman theory is within the subject. As I have previously argued, the embodied and embedded subject is vitally important to posthuman theories (Braidotti 2013; Currier 2003; Scott 2001; Barad 2003). But conversely, within proponents of Assemblage theory such as Puar (2012) identify Assemblage theory as ‘post subject’. Puar argues that “identity is an encounter, an event, an accident, in fact. Identities are multicausal, multidirectional, liminal; traces aren’t always self-evident.” (59). Indeed, for Deleuze and Guattari (1987, in Landström 2007), the original proponents of Assemblage theory, subjectivity does not express an essential ‘core’ that is within bodies, but is rather ‘an effect of actions performed in assemblages of several humans and non-humans’ (Landström 2007: 17).

On the other hand, I agree that because within Assemblage theory, since subjectivity is regarded primarily through its embeddedness and its assemblage (which is an expression of the material) - it is the focus on the embodied and tactile nature of the subject that provides grounds for a reconciliation of the posthuman and the assembled subject. Moreover, Landström (2007) argues that using Assemblage *with* posthuman theory can dispel critiques that are levied towards both, such as the critique that Assemblage theory removes gender as a fixed starting point for analysis (17, see also Deckha 2012). To reiterate, the similarities and links between Assemblage theory and posthuman theory are clear, as Landström states “While the modern subject was a product explained by its past, the non-humanist perspective *features the assemblage as moving towards the future*. The human element of such ‘post-human’ subjects

may be understood to aim towards connections with others” (20, original emphasis). This understanding constitutes Assemblage theory as a part of, or complementary to, the posthuman subject, and as such I will bear Assemblage theory in mind when conducting the analysis for this thesis.

3.4. Social movement theory and “life politics”

Social movement theorists also argue that social movements have been ambivalent historically, sometimes subversive and at others acquiescent to power/ structure (Wennerhag 2010: 25; Browne & Bakshi 2013: 258), and as such investigate not only the underlying causes or motivations to engage in activism, how and in what ways activism manifests itself but also, importantly, the consequences of this activism.

Browne and Bakshi (2013) for instance seek to understand the consequences of activism in their study of what they call ‘insider activists’ - those that are simultaneously activists and working within government institutions. In the UK, as in many other countries, there has been extensive legislative change to the rights of LGBTQ persons⁹. Traditionally LGBTQ groups have been opposed to the state but within the context of shifting legislation and movements away from police persecution and violence of LGBTQ people has led some activists to take a more ‘legitimate’ i.e. state sanctioned approach to their activism (254). However at the same time these changes, although welcome, have led “Some (radical, queer and other) activists/scholars [to] assert that working with/for the state forces complicity, compliance and co-option...” and creates a de-politicisation of sexual politics (Ibid).

It is within this context that they explore the perspective of these activists on their activism and their experiences of “working within”. They argue that “...‘insider activists’ multiple negotiations and identities required them to be within the system and at times simultaneously outside of it. This illustrates the complexities of LGBT politics as well as indicating the toll such activism can take” (Browne & Bakshi 2013: 261). Overall their result is a nuanced look at activism, which concludes somewhere in between the two absolutes that on the one hand, the state de-radicalises LGBTQ activism absolutely, and, on the other that LGBTQ activism is only possible when enacted ‘outside’, always opposing normalisation. They confirmed that while these activists’ work from within was certainly co-opted by the government institution

⁹ These changes will be more thoroughly detailed in section 4.3.1.

in which they worked and other institutions such as the police, "...deradicalisation and loss of activism are not always, or necessarily, the result of working within and with the state" (255). Moreover, although this study will consider both 'insider' and 'outsider' activists, the work of Browne and Bakshi (2013) will remain important as a reminder to take a nuanced look at the implications and consequences of activism, and to understand the complexities of LGBTQ activism.

Another consideration of social movement theorists is to examine the consequences of individualism on social movements and activism. Although the notion of individualisation must be situated historically (Sörbom & Wennerhag 2013: 454), the issue of individualisation and its apparent effects on both identification with, and activism within, social justice movements appears as a source of anxiety for social movement theorists. According to Masquelier (2013) the worry is how the emergence and entrenchment of neoliberal capitalism and 'highly competitive' individualism engenders "...a serious challenge for a critique aimed at resisting capitalism from the standpoint of culture" (396). While neoliberal capitalism has generated 'essential values' of the self -such as the values of autonomy (in ones working and personal life), creativity, and above all 'unhindered self-realization' (399-400) - it is also true that "...the precariousness of a life totally exposed to flexible and unregulated markets precludes the possibility of making them an attainable goal for the majority of individuals" (405-6). It is from this understanding of individuals, as enmeshed in unfettered individuality and self-realization that prompts concerns, since it is theorised that individuals will be unwilling or unable to participate in activism under these conditions.

However, the notion that individuals are less inclined to participate in social justice movements cannot reasonably argued to be true, but rather one can see how the character of participation in social movements has changed over time. According to Sörbom and Wennerhag (2013), there are two types of activism that people engage in. The foremost is identified as "organisational belonging", which is equated with membership and loyalty to collective political efforts. Latterly, "life politics" is a form of activism that is individualised, disembedded - a politics of self-fulfilment. Although "life politics" activism has become more prevalent, and "organisational belonging" has declined over time, it is also clear that "... the kind of individualization entailed by life politics or 'artistic critique' cannot so easily be equated with social atomization, selfishness, and sheer individualism" (474). Furthermore, the difference between "life politics" and "organisational belonging" modes of action are *not* the

difference between individual and collective political action, because “Politics is always undertaken in relation to an imagined collective or on the basis of collective values.” (472).

As previously discussed I will site this research within activists who engage in so-called “life politics”, more commonly known as “identity politics”. I will examine how these activists understand their activism and what motivates their activism in order to explore the intersection between the subject, activism, and posthuman theory. This constitutes one part of this research process and one of my research aims.

It is in this context that I will contribute to social movement theoretical understandings of activists. Since this research will analyse LGBTQ activists, who would ostensibly be considered as engaging in “life politics”, Sörbom and Wennerhag’s (2013) notion of an ‘imagined collective’ will be an important concept within this research. Moreover, the argument that those who participate in “life politics” are individualised, disembedded and engaged in a politics of self-fulfilment will also be considered, especially vis-à-vis posthuman approaches to activism which are described below.

3.5. Posthuman approaches to activism

As mentioned above, Masquelier (2013) is concerned about how the emergence ‘highly competitive’ individualism makes impossible the critique and subversion of neoliberal capitalism. He thus seeks to find a unity between various oppressed groups, and argues that although these groups face different oppressions, as well as differing access to the means of change, “...unity between [oppressed groups] can effectively be identified if the prospects of justice, security and emancipation are treated as matters depending on the reconciliation of humanity with nature” (408).

How then does the posthuman individual, as part of an embedded ‘feminist ethics of care’ and firmly reconciled with nature (Åsberg & Neimanis 2012) engage in political activism, and moreover, how do social movements and organisations take into account the posthuman subject? Papadopoulos (2010) argues that although posthumanism can be found at the ‘heart’ of such movements historically, this has changed over time and now contemporary focus of such groups is on “social power”, which subsumes true justice and liberation. Papadopoulos then aims to rethink the possibilities for posthumanism within radical left projects and social movements, and so it is in this context that he asks:

“The question is then: how can we think posthumanism and radical left politics outside of mainstream posthumanism as well as outside dominant left traditions that focus solely on the obtaining of social power? How can left politics become more posthumanist (again) and how can posthumanism become more left again?” (144)

Papadopoulos argues that the key to making left politics more posthumanist is in the space to make alternative forms of life (not just human life) - justice is in making these forms of life (or “” as he calls them) possible - as long as they engage primarily with ‘matter’.

Moreover, I am interested in how organisations operationalise notions of the ‘individual’, ‘agency’, and ‘non-human’, in an era where Humanist understandings are still widespread enough to be considered ‘common sense’. Papadopoulos (2010) argues that the key to making left politics more posthumanist and creating true justice is in making new forms of life (“alter-ontologies”) possible - as long as they engage primarily with ‘matter’. The idea of political organisations that are focused primarily on ‘matter’ (which, in my reading, means simply the material world) is indeed an intriguing one. However, I am aware that the majority of contemporary social justice organisations, at least in the Western world, are focused instead on what Papadopoulos calls “social power” (purportedly a Humanist endeavour). But rather than dismissing all of these organisations as -at best- misguided and at worst anthropocentric idealisations which subsume true justice, I seek to understand how a social justice approach can encompass a posthuman framing. Important to my analysis will be the argument that the emergence of “life politics” (Sörbom & Wennerhag 2013) or “social power” activism (Papadopoulos 2010) does not necessarily equate to individualisation and a loss of collective power, as argued above (Sörbom & Wennerhag 2013; Masquelier 2013), as well as Masquelier’s (2013) notion of ‘reconciling humanity with nature’.

Central to this is to explore if a posthumanist framing of the individual, as defined above, can work within so-called “social power”, or organisations focused on obtaining political rights, which are based on an individualist “social power” perspective. This for me begins at the notion of the subject. This is because I assert, following the work of key posthuman authors (Braidotti 2013; Åsberg & Neimanis 2013; Neimanis 2013; Masquelier 2013) that the notion of ‘subject’ or ‘subjectivity’ is not totally incompatible with posthuman theory, but rather I believe that popular and academic notions of the self must shift away from a Humanist ‘man-versus-nature’ conception of self towards an interconnected and inherently reliant self that is fundamentally integrated with ‘nature’ (environment, internal and wider), non-human animals etc. This is a

space where the material ('matter') and the subject can converge. I am therefore interested to uncover how we can imagine the subject in posthuman political organisation.

4. Methods and Methodology

This chapter will provide insight into starting points for research, as well as the methods that will be utilised throughout the remainder of this thesis. Since broadly speaking, I am coming from a feminist approach to research, this chapter will detail how I am implementing the term and how feminist approaches affect this research. After this, I will discuss in turn the ontological, epistemological¹⁰, methodological¹¹ and ethical bases, and how this reflects upon the methods decided upon to conduct this research. After this outline, I will discuss my 'ethico-onto-epistem-ology' construct a justification and motivation for the methods (i.e. the techniques or processes by which the research will be completed) chosen, all via a discussion of the challenges faced by novice researchers like myself.

4.1. Feminist Research

While some have argued that feminist researchers have not been able to wholly escape Enlightenment ideals of progress and emancipation (Ramazanoğlu & Holland 2002: 36; Braidotti 2013), nonetheless feminist methodologies have been consistently critical of the Enlightenment focus on dualisms, 'scientism' and its focus on 'absolute truth' etc.

While methodology, methods, epistemology, and even ethical considerations are interconnected, they are certainly distinct in their meanings and applications (Lykke 2010: 144). Broadly speaking, I and my research are coming from a feminist epistemological and methodological starting point. Clearly feminist methodologies, like most research methodologies, are subject to much debate and divergence. But I mean to follow Ramazanoğlu & Holland (2002) in their claim that rather than being distinguished by its subjects, its methods or techniques of research, or even its epistemologies and ontologies, feminist research is distinguished by "... the relations between epistemology and politics in feminist research." (15). Similarly, Lykke (2010) argues that while feminist epistemological and methodological

¹⁰ As a definition, "Epistemology is a philosophical term referring to the setting up of criteria for the production of scientific knowledge and definitions of what science is." (Lykke 2010: 125) - it is the question of 'how can we know' or 'how can we uncover/ understand/ research' phenomena

¹¹ As a definition, "Used loosely, 'method' indicates a general approach to research [...]. A methodology in social research comprises rules that specify how social investigation should be approached." (Ramazanoğlu & Holland 2002: 11)

positions are diverse, one primary uniting factor of feminist research is “...the engendering of transformations of scientific and scholarly production” (143). Another important distinguishing factor of feminist research the centring of oneself amongst the division and debate and to establish a *claim* of being a feminist researcher (Ramazanoğlu & Holland 2002: 146). I thus position myself and stake my claim as a feminist researcher, and this thesis as feminist research.

4.2. “Ethico-onto-epistem-ology”: epistemological, ontological, ethical and methodological beginnings

As discussed above, on a general level I follow Barad’s (2007, 2003) claim that ethics, ontology and epistemology are interwoven - leading her to coin the portmanteau ‘ethico-onto-epistem-ology’ (2007: 185 as cited in Lykke 2010: 159). However, for the sake of reader clarity, I will discuss in turn my ethical, ontological and epistemological starting points, and how this reflects upon the methodological course and methods decided upon in this research.

4.2.1. Epistemology

Within feminist research there is no singular or universal epistemology. However, the feminist epistemological field intersects and is in dialogue with many different theories, strands of thought and debates in ways that are varied and non-linear -i.e. not developing over time, but rather running in parallel to one another (Harding 1986; Lykke 2010). Simultaneously, one can discern imbrication and ‘shared starting points’ between these varied epistemological positions (Lykke 2010). There is overlap mainly because the ‘axiom’ -basic assumption or principle- of feminist researchers is that of “... the interconnectedness of context and knower...” (128), which remains attentive to the position of the researcher and the researched.

This overlap is also reflected in my own research. I am firmly materialist, but do not hold completely to a standpoint/ strong objectivity theory (Harding 1991; Smith 2005) or intersectional epistemology (Crenshaw 1991). Rather, within this research I come from a posthumanist perspective, strongly influenced by various stands of thought, such as: the work of Braidotti (2013, 2006), who has been discussed extensively already, but chapter the I will discuss the methodological ramifications of her theories; Puar and Deleuze & Guattari’s concept of ‘Assemblage’ (Puar 2005, 2012; Deleuze and Guattari 1987); as I have elaborated on in theory chapter; Haraway’s concept of ‘situated knowledges’ (1988, 1991) and Barad’s ‘agential realism’ (2003, 2007). I will discuss these theories in due course. Indeed, I align my

methodologies most strongly with what Lykke (2010) calls ‘feminist postconstructionists’ or ‘corpomaterialists’, but what I understand primarily as new materialist/ posthumanist.

4.2.2. Methodology

Following Lykke’s call for methodological plurality (Lykke 2010: 161), I am utilising a range of theories to inform the methodological outline of this thesis: Barad’s ‘agential realism’, and Haraway’s concepts of ‘site’ and ‘sight’ and situated knowledges. As you can see, these are similar stances to those outlined in my ‘epistemological’ sub-chapter (4.2.1.). This may be because one’s epistemological beginnings have distinct repercussions for research, as Lykke (2010) suggests that “... different epistemological positions have different implications in terms of methodologies and methods” (145). This is also in line with Barad’s (2007) concept of ‘ethico-onto-epistem-ology’, which binds together the epistemological, the ethical and the ontological.

To elaborate on this point further, Barad’s (2007) establishment as a ‘New Materialist’ theorist¹² arises with her concept of ‘agential realism’, which argues that there is no *a priori* separation or boundary between what Lykke (2010) calls the ‘researcher subject’ and the ‘object of research’. Instead “...they [the researcher subject/ object of research] are always to be considered as parts of the same world and reality and involved in continuous intra-actions with each other” (151). On the other hand however, a defined boundary between the two is important to conduct research. This understanding has had a significant impact on my methodology. It has enabled me to acknowledge that the researcher subject and object of research are in intra-action with each other *but* that both need to be ‘delimited’ -which is to say defined- and put into context (Barad 2003; 2007). At the same time, however, the relationship between both is defined but always under the understanding that it is unfixed, unstable and momentary (Barad 2007; Lykke 2010: 151).

The knowledge that is created from this relationship between the subject researcher and object of research is inherently partial, context specific, or, as Braidotti (2013) puts it ‘embodied and embedded’. The idea of these situated -embodied and embedded- knowledges is exemplified in Haraway’s (1988) tools of ‘siting’ and ‘sighting’. ‘Site’ and ‘sight’ are two aspects of ‘situatedness’ within the theory of situated knowledges. Methodologically speaking, this means

¹² See the work of van der Tuin (2014) for a more thorough overview of New Materialism

to enact ‘siting’ on the one hand, which is the edict for a researcher be reflexive about their situatedness and context, and ‘sighting’ on the other, which is to visibilise the research technologies/ apparatuses which ‘reconfigure spacetime-matter’ (Barad 2007: 142), or in other words ‘construct’ the object of research (Lykke 2010: 152). This methods and methodology chapter in all its detail is an effort towards enacting both ‘site’ and ‘sight’ methodologies, but it also part of an endeavour to engage in reflexive thought throughout this entire thesis.

Although we as researchers are to be reflexive regarding our situation and context, research should still be ‘objective’, but not in the traditional understanding, but rather only as within the context of the situated research. Indeed, Haraway (1991, 1988) understands the historical specificity of what is generally considered “objective” science, without deconstructing and invalidating scientific knowledge and the possibility of objectivity. Haraway instead fosters an understanding of objectivity that is based in critical thought and reflexivity - what she calls ‘feminist critical empiricism’. The basis of feminist critical empiricism is the end to the dichotomy of constructivism versus objectivism and instead the creation of “partial, locatable, critical knowledges sustaining the possibility of webs of connections called solidarity in politics and shared conversations in epistemology” (Haraway 1988: 584). These knowledges are embodied and strictly located and they acknowledge not only these standpoints, but also the limits to them.

Similarly to Barad, Haraway (1991) emphasises that ‘situated knowledges’ build in accountability by emphasising moral responsibility/ accountability as researcher’s for our interpretation of reality and that “Situated knowledges are always *marked* knowledges; they are re-markings, reorientatings [sic], of the great maps that globalized and the heterogeneous body of the world in the history of masculinist capitalism and colonialism” (111, original emphasis). Barad’s ‘agential realism’ incorporates an ‘ethics of knowing’ (1996: 183 in Lykke 2010: 159), where ontology, epistemology and ethics are all bound together.

As a recap, the concepts of agential realism (Barad 2007), ‘site’ and ‘sight’ and situated knowledges (Haraway 1988), are of particular methodological importance to this research, and they have enabled me to construct this research in the terms that I have. They also provide an important ethical perspective, which will be discussed in section 4.2.4. Moreover, I contend that ‘matter-realist’ methodologies (Braidotti 2013, Lykke 2010) have been especially influential for this research, which can be evidenced by the research questions and aims which

consider an explicitly empirical case, and by the focus I have provided on the material during the analysis of this empirical material.

4.2.3. Ontology

My ontological understanding is based upon the supposition that bodies are materially there/ here, but also discursively formulated. For instance, following Barad's concept of 'agential realism' (which is discussed above), specifically as it can be seen as in dialogue with Butler's *Bodies that Matter* (1993) means that we can see how "... on the one hand, the performativity of discourses shaped bodily matter, *but*, on the other hand, following Barad's argument, it implies that bodily matter, moreover, should be understood as performatively acting in and of itself" (Lykke 2010: 121). In this understanding, the material and the discursive are 'conjoined' (Barad 2003: 823). Moreover Lykke (2010), discussing Braidotti (2013, 2006) and Grosz (1994), argues that both are "...taking a starting point in the body and bodily differences and to see these as an unavoidable ontological basis [...] is in no way equivalent to an essentialist fixing of categories". This is because the body is not static, unitary but rather a process (Lykke 2010: 150).

Thus my ontological understandings begin from here, and a declaration that *bodies do matter, they are matter*. Materialistically, we exist, although we are mediated through discourse (as discussed above Lykke 2010 and Barad 2003). Moreover, following Braidotti (2013), I emphasise a posthuman understanding of life (*Zoë*), the interconnectedness of all Life, that we are collections of matter (water, bacteria and so on) are embodied and embedded into context, intimately connected effective/affective towards Life.

4.2.4. Ethics

I understand that ethics are intimately bound with the process of research, and that being accountable to the 'objects of research' for my interpretation of reality is one space where I can enact my ethical obligations (Haraway 1991). Additionally to this is the ethical imperative to acknowledge my partiality, situatedness, and to *visibilise* (through 'site' and 'sight') the (always partial) situation of myself as the researcher and the tools I use (Ibid). This ethical imperative has impacted on this thesis in numerous ways, including influencing me to situate myself within the text of this research using personal pronouns, rather than retaining detached, neutral language (something that was deemed necessary during my earlier academic career).

There is also an understanding that I -as researcher- and the objects of research are defined and placed into context with one another. This is true irrespective of the objects of research - in my case the authors of the autobiographical texts within *Restoried Selves* (Kumashiro 2011). This is because although my empirical material is a secondary analysis of texts, it is clear that I and the authors of these texts are still to be "...considered as parts of the same world and reality and involved in continuous intra-actions with each other" (Lykke 2010: 151). I am interpreting and representing these autobiographical accounts whilst remaining aware that I as a researcher am not similarly positioned, since I do not identify as Asian or Pacific American, and have little experience of American culture beyond that which I have seen in the media. Thus, I strive to represent these authors in ways that are respectful (such as refusing to alter the pronouns and self-descriptions they have used in-text), and remain aware of the privileges that both I as researcher have for being able to conduct this research, and that these authors have had to be able to broadcast their narratives in this anthology.

4.3. Methods

In order to better examine the intersection between posthuman theory, the subject and activism, an empirical case was decided upon. This will allow me, as a researcher into this topic, to 'narrow' down my field of vision, and to 'embody' and 'embedded' what can be rather philosophical discussions of subjectivity onto a real life case.

Both secondary literature and primary data collection via interviews were considered as options research into my chosen topic. Initially, I had planned to conduct semi-structured interviews with volunteers and activists within an organisation in the United Kingdom. Unfortunately, for various reasons, I was unable to realise both the quality and quantity of interviews that I had planned. Happily however, I came across the anthology *Restoried Selves: Autobiographies of Queer Asian/ Pacific American Activists* (Kumashiro 2011) and could see immediately that it was an excellent source of reflections on ideas of the subject and activism and decided that I would conduct an analysis of the autobiographical texts within *Restoried Selves*.

4.3.1 Participants

The 'participants' or 'objects of research', to continue Lykke's (2010) coinage, in this research are all contributors to the anthology *Restoried Selves: Autobiographies of Queer Asian/ Pacific American Activists* (Kumashiro 2011). Their autobiographical texts and poetry, which reflects on their identities, activism and life story, will be a useful resource to help explore the

intersection between posthuman theory, subjectivity and activism. There is a great degree of variability with regards to these author's racial/ethnic/national identification, gender/sex identification and sexuality identification, and their status as either 'insider' or 'outsider' activists (Browne & Bakshi 2013) but nonetheless they have submitted their chapters to this anthology, indicating that they -at least in some sense- relate to the terms *Queer, Asian/ Pacific American* and *Activist*. The authors, in order of their chapters, are as follows:

1. Pabitra Benjamin
2. Nur-e-alam S. Chisty
3. Lance Collins
4. Roland Sintos Coloma
5. Alain Anh-Tuan Dang
6. Wei Ming Dariotis
7. TC Duong
8. Loren R. Javier
9. Kevin K. Kumashiro
10. David C. Lee
11. Jeanette Mei Gim Lee
12. Cristina M. Misa
13. Pauline Park
14. k. terumi shorb
15. Wendy M. Thompson
16. "You Yun"
17. Helen Zia

There is scant information regarding how these contributors were selected for this anthology. Within the preface and acknowledgements of *Restoried Selves*, editor Kumashiro (2011) asserts that "Queer Asian/Pacific Americans who engage in various forms of antioppressive activism have come together to share their autobiographies" (xxiii) and that "Many activists wrote autobiographies that could not be included in this volume..." (xxvii) This would indicate that the authors submitted texts to this anthology, rather than being interviewed. The varying styles, forms and content between the texts in addition to the fact that these texts are all written in the first person would further indicate that these are texts that have been submitted and accepted by the editor. However, from this, one cannot see how these particular authors were chosen as contributors to this anthology, how their contributions were formed and how or if their contributions were edited.

Within the preface we can see that the aim of this anthology is to contribute to the body of LGBTQ APA activist literature (xxiv). This is done by creating new counter representations of LGBTQ APA individuals, who have traditionally been misrepresented or overlooked in both APA and LGBTQ communities within the wider social context both historically as well as contemporaneously (xxiii).

In the United States of America¹³, the location within which this anthology is sited, there has been a hugely polarised debate regarding LGBTQ rights. On the one hand, there have been recent shifts towards increasing these social rights, such as legalising the adoption of children by same-sex couples, and a recognition of marriage between same-sex couples, both of which have been enacted nationwide in 2015. However, the backlash to these recent rulings has been immense and forms part of a wider push-back against and rescinding of LGBTQ rights both in the USA and around the world (Schneider 2014). Although these precise rulings are more recent than this anthology, the debates regarding LGBTQ rights have a wider historical context and so it is worth bearing these in mind when reading these autobiographical texts.

4.3.2. Overview of Research Process

I am using a case study research design. This kind of research design hopes to explore the phenomena of subjectivity, and, it is intended, opens up avenues to explore posthumanist conceptions of self. Moreover, as discussed above, Feminist methodologies will shape the kind of inquiry, the steps and the data analysis in the following ways. As a feminist researcher, feminist methodologies also inform my general worldview, which is inseparable from the research I conduct and thus the “final narrative” of this research.

For a description of the research process itself:

1. First, I conducted a general reading of all autobiographical accounts within the *Restoried Selves* anthology;
2. Secondly, I conducted a specific read through of the text, gathering “variable type” information under nodes in NVivo;

¹³ For brevity I will only discuss here the debates as they have occurred within the USA. However, similar debates have been occurring elsewhere in the world, at the same time as LGBTQ/ Human rights have been rescinded in other parts of the world e.g. Russia, Uganda and to a lesser extent Kenya, India and Nigeria.

3. Thirdly, I conducted an in-depth, line by line analysis of the text, annotating as well as making note of keywords and themes within NVivo;
4. After this in-depth read through, both the text and the annotations were read through to generate initial ‘nodes’ for coding in NVivo. These nodes were created from themes found within the text, as well as certain posthuman themes (posthuman approaches to subjectivity, posthuman approaches to activism).

There was clearly a large degree of imbrication between these nodes, this is the reason I have allowed for double coding. From the annotations, and from a further read through, nodes/codes were grouped together, and the ‘main’ or ‘most important’ codes emerged, creating categories or themes.

4.3.3. Overview of data analysis

As previously discussed, I am using agential realism and situated knowledges as part of my analytical strategy (Lykke 2010: 150). Moreover, I am using posthuman theories, specifically posthuman theories of the subject, as part of the theoretical and methodological background to this thesis. My analysis intends to explore whether there are indicators of posthuman thought within these autobiographical texts and I am thus ‘reading into’ the data with these theories in mind. One could argue that what I am doing is inherently positivist, which is, having a theory and testing it with the data obtained, as opposed to a qualitative, constructivist or grounded theory approach whereby one has data and attempts to extract theory from it. However, my analysis seeks not so much to “test” posthuman theory, but rather seeks to explore phenomena of subjectivity and activism *through the lens of* posthuman theory and in the process explore posthuman theory itself. I am, however, attempting to complete a ‘holistic’ view of the data, bearing in mind my essentially partial knowledge and worldview. But by ‘holistic’ I mean considering the setting for the data, and that analysis involves “... multiple elements and factors at the same time.” (Bazeley 2013: 27).

Restoried Selves (Kumashiro 2011) has created text based data for me, in the form of autobiographical writing and poetry from 17 LGBTQ identified Asian and Pacific Islander activists. The primary tool that I have used for my thesis project is NVivo, specifically ‘NVivo 10’. Unlike for quantitative data analysis, where the use of computer software is commonplace, there are concerns levied towards the use of computer assisted *qualitative* data analysis software (CAQDAS) such as NVivo. Bryman (2012) outlines several of these concerns, which include: CAQDAS being hard grasp; concerns regarding fragmenting or decontextualising of

ones data and loss of narrative flow; that CAQDAS are unworkable in a group research project; and the argument that CAQDAS is based in grounded theory which may not be compatible to all research (592-3). These concerns have been very valuable when considering whether or not to use NVivo software (particularly concerns regarding the possible fragmentation or decontextualisation of my data), but like Bryman, I decided that for this particular data and within the scope of this particular project, using a CAQDAS was worthwhile (593). I have used NVivo to:

- store data (document copy of *Restoried Selves*; my notes on the data (book))
- ‘code’ this data via ‘nodes’
- keep ‘variable-type’ information, should it exist within the text (such as gender identification, sexuality identification, national/racial/’belonging’ identification)
- maintain records of all of the above for transparency (Bazeley & Jackson 2013: 23)

However, contrary to the recommendations of Bazeley and Jackson (Ibid), I have been unable to use NVivo as part of this development of this research project, including the research question, theoretical background and so on. I have only been able to use NVivo for the analysis of this thesis. This is due to an assortment of practical issues, such as: finding computer tools inefficient at understanding or helping me to conceptualise my thoughts regarding the topics of posthumanism, subjectivity and activism. Rather, I used brainstorming techniques. Thus instead of using NVivo as recommended, my earlier ‘mapping’, ‘journaling’ and topic explorations were conducted via physical rather than electronic means.

Coding in NVivo has been conducted through a ‘slicing’ of the text - applying multiple codes to a single passage of text, slicing indicates that the researcher subject will take a ‘layered’ view, seeing the data in terms of category rather than document (Bazeley & Jackson 2013: 74-5). In line with my research question, I have not completed a ‘grounded theory’ analysis (which is to say, looking from the ‘ground up’ in the data), but as I am looking to understand *in what ways, if any, critical posthuman theory can be used to understand the subjectivity of those who engage in political or identity based activism*, this means that I have ‘looked into’ the text with certain themes already in mind, without attempting to ‘generate’ data. Nonetheless, conducting the analysis involved a significant, in-depth reading of the texts to ‘bring out’ other themes that emerge from the data, more broadly to begin with, and afterwards in a more refined ways, and in ways directly related to the research question.

5. Analysis

My research aim is to explore the intersection between the subject, activism and posthuman theory. As described in the methodology section, my analysis will centre around the 17 autobiographical accounts that are in the anthology *Restoried Selves* (Kumashiro 2011), exploring how these self-identified activists understand and describe their subjectivities and process of subjectification, as well as the motivations for and reflections on their activism. Simultaneously, I have analysed their autobiographical texts with a framing of posthuman theories of subjectivity, to identify whether posthuman theory can be used to understand the subjectivities of activists. I consider, then, that I have both been ‘reading into’ and ‘reading from’ the data simultaneously - whilst remaining critically aware of the dangers of generating data or putting words into the mouths of these authors all the while. This is in line with my research questions, which are as follows:

1. Can posthumanist theory be used to understand the subjectivities of activists within their embodied and embedded locations? Especially considering activists within *political* organisations geared toward “social power”.
2. How do activists within identity based organisations or associations understand and explain their own subjectivities?

However, it should be reiterated at this point that I am not ‘testing’ either posthuman theory or the authors of these autobiographical accounts, but I am rather exploring how and if posthuman understandings and framings of the individual can adequately describe the subjectivity of those who engage in identity based political activism. Thus, I have attempted to refrain from generating hypotheses about whether posthuman theory will ‘work’ in these contexts.

5.1. Main themes

Certain themes have emerged from the text, which will be discussed in turn. Below I will describe these themes and describe their interconnection or divergence and analyse the impact of these findings on my research.

As *Restoried Selves* (Kumashiro 2011) is subtitled *Autobiographies of Queer Asian/ Pacific American Activists*, it is somewhat unsurprisingly very rich in reflections about being an Asian and/or Pacific American, LGBT and/or Queer identified activist. During my analysis of these

texts, it became increasingly clear that these authors discuss extensively their subjectivities and processes of subjectification, and how this is related to their activism and in some cases their identity as activists. There is a deal of interconnection between the themes that arise in these texts, but I have noticed that this imbrication is particularly strong with the themes of *activism* and *identity*.

During this analysis chapter I will describe my main findings from these texts, assessing the topics of identity and activism separately in so far as they are distinct, but will describe the overlap and connections between these categories when appropriate. Each of these sub-categorisations reveal the facets of activism or identity that these authors have conveyed the importance of: building up knowledge of their processes of subjectification; the background to their activism; the reasons for their activism; and the people whom they do their activism for. Moreover, this analysis will recurrently refer to the theoretical underpinnings of this thesis, insofar as they impact on the research aims and questions that I am exploring. These theories include: posthuman approaches to subjectivity; theories of subjectivity and agency; Assemblage theory; social movement theory; and posthuman approaches to activism.

5.2. Posthuman reflections

This research has focused on exploring how and if posthuman understandings and framings of the individual can adequately describe the subjectivity of those who engage in identity based political activism. This the autobiographical texts in *Restoried Selves* (Kumashiro 2013) have been analysed with a framing centred on posthuman theories of subjectivity. The primary aspects of posthuman subjectivities that I have been looking for have been focused on whether the identity, subjectivities and subjectification/ identification processes coincide with posthumanist understandings and theorisations on the self. While the topic of posthuman subjectivities has been uncovered in depth in section 3.1. of this thesis, very briefly, I have been looking for an indication that these authors link themselves, or their activism, to wider communities, to the wider world -the 'environment', *Zoë* (Braidotti 2013) or Life. Moreover, understandings of relationality, connection to others and care of or for others would be an indication of posthumanist-like understandings of self, and positionality in the world.

5.2.1. Recognition of partial perspective

In many of these texts, there was reflection on the idea of the self as inherently partial, or having a partial perspective. The term partial in these contexts indicates that the self is existing in part,

and is either incomplete or not ‘whole’ (and not in the process of becoming whole), which indicates a shift away from Humanist conceptions of the self which is understood as complete, or on route to becoming ‘complete’. The idea of partial perspective was shown most clearly in relation to reflections on the autobiographical account itself - authors such as Wei Ming and Kevin K. recognised as constructed the autobiographical account as inherently partial, as there are aspects that are shown and aspects that are not:

“I begin to question my presumptuousness of telling a story about me in my youth. There is no way to tell a story that captures the whole of experience. Any story I tell is only one reading of me in my youth. Can I tell “my” story in ways that address the complexities of who I was while making explicit that, even when doing so, my story cannot help but be a partial story? Can I tell my story in ways that invite the readers of my story to reflect on different ways of reading this story and on the insights and knowledges and emotions and changes that each reading makes possible as well as impossible?” (Kevin K.)

Here Kevin K. is expressing that the autobiographical account is situated in particular time and place. Moreover, the reader as well as the writer are positioned and partial in front of the account. Again, this is an *inherently* partial account – within the context of this format (autobiographical texts, each being around 10-15 pages long) there is no way to portray a life in its entirety. Indeed, it is even asserted that there are multiple ways of looking, or ‘readings’ at the same context. Within the methodology and theory section, I have analysed at length the importance of partial perspective to posthuman understandings (Haraway 1991, 1988; Braidotti 2013), which understands that to be embodied and embedded within a politics of location is fundamentally partial, this is an expression of posthuman subjectivity (Braidotti 2013: 49)

5.2.2. To be embodied and embedded

Related to the idea of having a partial perspective is a recognition of the importance of being part of communities, and understanding the self as contextual and relational. Using Braidotti’s (2013) terminology, I suggest that these reflections are about being ‘embodied’ and ‘embedded’. For instance, Wei Ming, Wendy M., Pauline and k. terumi shorb all discuss how their physical -embodied- selves acts as a confrontation, a confusion or a challenge to binary understandings of the self (specifically in these cases in terms of race and/or sexuality and/or gender). For instance, when reflecting on her activism Wei Ming states that:

“... sometimes it is the presence of my body, queer and hapa, that is making the statement.”

The notion of embodied experience is aligned with the material self within, k. terumi shorb's chapter, which discusses their activism, self-presentation and self-understanding that rejects binaries, but asserts that s/he still creates space for truth claims and a recognition of material experiences and conditions. Pauline's embodied experiences, while rather different to k. terumi shorb's, still emphasises throughout her autobiographical account the importance of her embodied self, and the relation of her body to her activist work. She details several instances (being the only transgendered person in one organisation, prompting the renaming of a 'Gay and Lesbian centre' to be a centre for 'LGBT communities'; prompting the bylaws and mission statements of the *Out People of Color Political Action Club* and the *Gay Asian & Pacific Islander Men of New York* to become more explicitly trans* inclusive), explicitly stating that her embodied "difference" as a transgendered person of colour and Korean adoptee has been significant in affecting these changes.

5.2.3. Emphasis on connection to and care for others

In certain author's narratives, there was an explicit reference to the author seeing themselves in connection to others, and as embedded in relationships of care to others. For instance Alain emphasises that his activist work can only enact change through his working relation to others. Additionally to Alain, Wei Ming asserts that she "wouldn't exist" without the support of her communities. Wei Ming further indicates that identities are not only personal (something one 'has') but they are also 'enacted' -they are performed and embodied. She argues that she requires the support of her communities just as the community requires support from her, and thus she is indicating that she is embedded in a relationship of care. Just as k. terumi shorb and Wendy M., who understand that the narratives that they build (as discussed above) are for and part of a wider community of people, based in their own experiences of invisibilisation or essentialisation/ racist representation within the media or within their communities. These positions would seemingly indicate a *feminist posthuman ethics* as defined by Åsberg and Neimanis (2013) and a posthuman subjectivity as defined by Braidotti (2013), however, I would argue that they do not. The primary reason for this is that these understandings of connection and care for others extends mainly to *similar others*, such as those with similar subject positionings as APA and/or LGBTQ. For instance, part of Loren R.'s engagement is in order to "...create role models and decrease stereotypes so that the journey isn't so bumpy ... [for] ... queer Asian Americans". Similarly, Alain engages in activism hoping to enact change for "queer youth buried deep in the closet", and Lance fights colonialism for his "peoples", arguing that "We need our own ways to understand our desires, our communities". I am not

aiming to diminish the value of these author's activism, or to portray them as selfish for engaging in the activism that they do. Indeed, as we will discuss in due course, there is dire need for creating alternative representations of LGBTQ APA people. Rather, I am seeking to understand whether posthuman approaches to subjectivity can be compatible with these activists' understandings and assertions of their own subjectivities, and in this regard, I understand that these authors' assertions do not accord with posthuman theories of subjectivity. The solitary exception to this approach is within the text of Wei Ming, who states that:

“Now I understand that becoming a bi bi grrrl, a bisexual hapa feminist, is a process of enacting my identities. It isn't just about me and how I see myself or how I ask others to see me. It's also about being a part of communities. I wouldn't exist without my communities to support me, so I need to support them. My communities include my family. My communities include people I may not at first see as being like me. My job is to recognize our connections and to create them, and to encourage the same from others.” (Wei Ming)

Wei Ming's account is significant in this regard, primarily because it perceives of community as consisting of similar and dissimilar others.

5.3. Humanist framings

I have previously analysed the conceptions of agency put forward by theorists such as Butler (1993, 1997, 2005) and Mahmood (2005), arguing that concepts of the social and power are central to Humanist understandings of agency and subjectivity. At the same time, it is important not assume that all agents are inhabiting an inherently resistive, individual mode of being. In addition to these postmodern and postcolonial modes of seeing the self, I have also discussed classical Humanist notions of the self, which positions the self as part of a mind/body duality, positioning oneself as separate from nature and repeating notions of Otherness.

As asserted above, within *Restoried Selves* (Kumashiro 2011) there is a lot reflection upon the individuals' processes of subjectification in these autobiographical texts. I argue that subjectivity and agency are primarily seen through Humanist lenses in several key ways, such as reflecting on life as a process of becoming a 'true self' and emphasising how the lack of representation (of LGBTQ APA people) has affected their processes of self-identification, delaying the discovery and/ or articulation of their 'true self'.

5.3.1. Identity as a process of becoming

Many of these narratives contain a discourse of identity as a process, occurring over time. Indeed, Alain talks about his “... long process of personal identity formation”. The notion of identity as a process is found in particular relation to coming out narratives. For example Pauline relays her narrative of first coming out as gay, and later as transgendered.

Within the narrative of identity as a process, however, I could see, repeated again and again, that there is an implicit assumption that there is a ‘true self’ is which is discovered, uncovered or articulated as part of a process of “becoming”. To provide a selection of the many examples from the many found in these texts:

“People are either straight or gay, I thought. Not until college did I find a name for my queer desires, and not until then did I come out to myself or to others as bisexual.” (Kevin K.)

“Just remember, no matter what you do, you can’t escape who you truly are.” (David C.)

“Perhaps I had always been a bisexual; I just never knew the “correct” term.” (Roland)
 “Growing up in an evangelical Protestant household with devoutly Lutheran parents and grandparents, I realized instinctively that I could not be who I truly was until I reached adulthood...” (Pauline)

I argue that this theme, that of the “true self” relates strongly to the discourses of discovery which discuss how identification relies on representation the self in similar others (this point will be elaborated on in section 5.3.2.). Indeed, classical humanist understandings of the self posit that there is a true self beyond and above the embodied self, which is the “mind” or “soul” of Cartesian mind/ body dualism (Descartes 1972; Federici 2004). This is a self that is being repeated here. Although posthuman ontologies understand the material realities of bodies, these material embodied self, however this is a self that is discursively formulated, but no classical “self” as it is understood above. The self is rather relational, always partial and contextual.

5.3.2. Importance of representation in subjectification and identification

Many of the autobiographical texts discussed the issue of representation, or rather lack of representation. This lack of representation was shown to affect these authors’ processes of self-identification, leading in some accounts to (initial) self ‘misidentification’ and in others, to delaying the discovery and/ or articulation of their ‘true self’, as discussed above.

Lack of representation can be from within communities or social milieu. For instance, Nur-e-alam S. discusses:

“Fearing rejection, especially having witnessed quotidian homophobia in both my Asian and my “American” communities, I felt once again left to cope with my confusion alone. I remember thinking that I was the only queer male of color living in this world.”

These problems of representation were also described as within the media too. In these accounts, media representations of Asian and/or Pacific Americans do not go beyond the 'surface' or the stereotypical, leading either to misrepresentation or to essentialised representations (or else outright invisibilisation, as Cristina M. describes). In other accounts, the emphasis was that LGBTQ and/or APA people were depicted in stereotypical and racist ways (David C.; Loren R). For these authors, the lack of representation presented a serious problem, in that they could not accept themselves as simultaneously racialised (as APA) and sexualised (as LGBTQ) because of a lack of representations of those who are simultaneously queer and Asian LGBTQ individuals. For instance, Loren R. explores how his self-identity was affected by lack of media representations of Asian American LGBTQ people:

“In fact, I didn't see any Filipino American, let alone Asian American, gay person on television or in the movies. I would tell myself, “only white men can be gay”.”

Lance and David C. both discuss this problem was not contained within the mainstream media, but also how LGBTQ can erase or essentialise of people of colour. These representations either represent APA people as ‘exotic’ and ‘sexualised’ others’ (Lance) or, as David C. writes:

“White male bodies are sprawled across magazines, tabloids, billboards, gay TV, movies, and gay clubs. Asians are rendered invisible in the gay community—and yeah, it's like a racial slur.”

These accounts show the need for ‘role models’ to actualize identities, and emphasise that media representations are important, and not trivial to one’s sense of self – especially since they are shown to open up space for multiple identity formations. Consequently, in many narratives, a source of activism for these authors was to “broadcast narratives” (David C.) of their lives as dual/ multiply identified people, and to forge their own representations. Broadcasting narratives was seen as important in two ways; both as a source of personal power - a claiming of one’s own agency (Wendy M.) but also creating narratives to help similarly people (LGBTQ APA) forge their own identities (k. terumi shorb; David C.; Loren R.; Helen). As David C. Lee so elegantly puts it:

“We as people of color must broadcast our narratives. We must speak out for ourselves because we will be disappointed if we always rely on others to speak for us. Our narratives make us visible.”

This once again generates the perception that the authors of these texts understand themselves in primarily Humanistic ways, because it positions their subjectification process as on the path of becoming a “true self”, hindered by lack of representations, leading to misidentification and delaying the discovery and/ or articulation of their ‘true self’.

5.3.3. “Double, not just half” - dual or multiple identities

Although the authors have hugely different identifications, family backgrounds and childhood experiences, nearly universal in these texts was a reflection upon being dual or multiply identified. For most, there was a *process* of ‘coming to terms with’ or actualizing dual or multiple identities, for example:

“I had been so caught up in feeling not-Chinese that I couldn't comprehend the possibility of being Chinese-and-something. So things really changed for me in college. I started to understand that I could be “Asian American.” [...]. To begin to see myself as Chinese American in a positive sense, I had to accept that my European heritage was part of who I am; who I am is both of these things, double, not just half.” (Wei Ming)

There was also defiance and a declaration of pride in multiple or dual identities, especially in the face of those who demand that they pick a ‘side’ (either to choose to accentuate a single racial identification over another, or to emphasise racial or sexual identifications, depending on the instance). For example:

“Living in a constant state of negotiation between my Samoan and Mexican families, I came to understand being biracial as having identities to respect and own rather than having to show loyalty toward only one.” (Cristina M. Lisa)

These accounts emphasise that it is possible to be multiple identified and to show/ assemble particular –partial- aspects of the self in certain settings. Moreover, within these accounts, an important recurring theme was a desire for a recognition of difference, and the ability to have their dual/ multiple identities recognised, without essentialisation or tokenisation. There was also a discussion of finding a space where these identities can be shown or lived at the same time, rather than having to compartmentalize/ disguise/ minimize one part of the self (for instance, a repeated theme through these texts is having to downplay LGBT identity when in APA groups, or play down racialised identity within LGBT groups - this will be discussed below). These are spaces that seem to be sought out or created, rather than ‘found’.

“What is so powerful about being in any queer people of color space is that I don't have to choose which part of my identity to leave behind. My identities are all a part of me even though I am often asked to leave some or all of them behind. By creating such spaces and developing allies, I hope that AAPI people and people of color will never have to leave their identities behind.” (TC Duong)

Another interesting point to consider is that in these texts there is a focus on intersectionality, as described by Crenshaw (1991). Intersectionality in these texts are both mutually supporting oppressions, as well as identity intersections. For instance, Loren R., Kevin K., Jeanette, k. terumi shorb and Wei Ming all explicitly utilise the term “intersection” or “intersectionality” in their autobiographical texts. Moreover, the notion of dual or multiple identities acknowledges that while intersecting with one another, identities are nonetheless categories which can be separated and disassembled, although of course this is not preferable to most of the authors who seek to find spaces where their multiple identifications can cohere, and there is no expectation or demand to minimise or disguise one or more aspects of the self. Pauline is a notable exception to this, as she argues that:

“... I am invariably “the other” in any group that I’m in, whether it be the only openly transgendered woman or the only Asian in an LGBT organization, the only LGBT/queer person in an Asian American organization, or the only adoptee in an API group. However, in an age of identity politics, such difference is not necessarily a bad thing, and instead can be used to enhance inclusivity and diversity.”

Thus, she draws attention to her difference (including in physical ways, see above) in order to affect change.

These accounts thus seem to refute Assemblage theory understandings of the self. As a reminder, an assemblage is the culmination -or bringing together- of tactile economies within one space/ time, which is not even necessarily localised on human bodies (Puar 2012: 57), tactile economies are more ontological than epistemological as they highlight touch, sensation etc. – basically material things (Puar 2005: 134). The Intersectionality discussed by these authors emphasizes the intersection between identity as well as (possibly but not necessarily material) oppressions, and do not emphasise tactile economies.

5.4. Approaches to activism

While again, these authors have hugely different identifications, family backgrounds and childhood experiences, their approaches to activism generally supports the assertion of Sörbom

and Wennerhag (2013) that “Politics is always undertaken in relation to an imagined collective or on the basis of collective values” (472). As I have already discussed, to a large (but by no means universal) extent within these texts, this ‘imagined collective’ is comprised of similarly identified others.

The notion of an imagined collective constituted both the described motivation for engaging in activism, as well as the purpose (and imagined beneficiaries) of activism for these authors. The imagined collective also constitutes the background support through which activism is considered possible. For example, Kevin K. expresses that “Engaging in activism requires support. And ideas. And love” and that these things are provided to him by his close friends and fellow activists.

Notably, Alain indicates that the primary impetus for his activism is his own “personal struggle in accepting his queer identity” and that:

“That is the conclusion I have come to in assessing my life. I fight oppression as a means to fight my own oppression.”

However this seems to be a minority expression, as more often than not, these authors affirmed that they engaged in activism for others –albeit similarly identified others– within the paradigm of the ‘imagined collective’. Within this, though, motivations for activism often mirrored the findings from section 5.3.2., emphasising the importance of representation in subjectification and identification. For instance David C., Kevin K., Loren R., Nur-e-alam S., Wendy M., Cristina M., k. terumi shorb and Helen all explicitly disclosed that increasing and improving representations (both within communities and within the media) would help others ‘like them’ with their journeys to proper self-identification, whilst at the same time noting that there were no such representations when they were growing up and coming out into the world.

5.5. Conclusion to analysis chapter

In this chapter, I have presented the main themes from *Restoried Selves* (Kumashiro 2011), and discussed the analysis of these themes, which have included:

- Posthuman facets of activism and identity; connection and care for others; embodied and embedded; partial perspective;
- Humanist facets of activism and identity; “true self”, and the importance of representation to identification, dual or multiple identities;

- Reflections on intersectionality, assemblage and activism.

I have also compared my data with that the data and standpoints expressed by other academics, considering points of similarity and difference, especially considering whether my findings are consistent with the theoretical standpoints taken in this thesis. From these starting points, I will generate a reply to my research questions.

6. Discussion

Throughout my research, my aims along with my questions have been guiding the research process. For the discussion chapter, I will examine my research aims and questions and analyse how the data has helped to respond to them. After this I will discuss my data and identify the themes that have developed through the analysis of this data. Through this, I will assess the potential significance or impact of these themes in line with the theoretical positions outlined earlier in this thesis.

My aims have been to: *explore posthuman theoretical approaches to subjectivity*: during the theory chapter of this thesis, I have explored posthuman theoretical approaches to subjectivity. During the analysis chapter, I have expanded on these theoretical affirmations with my own analysis, which indicates the ways in which the authors of the autobiographical accounts do or do not uphold these theoretical approaches. Another aim of mine has been to *explore the intersection between the subject, activism, and posthuman theory*: during the theoretical, methodological chapters of this thesis, I have explored these intersections extensively, and will continue to expand on these themes below. Finally, I have aimed to *see if activists understand their subjectivity in posthuman ways*: as the analysis chapter has shown, there are no explicit indications that these activists describe or understand their subjectivity in such ways. However, I would rather suppose that one could understand that aspects of their descriptions of their subjectivities as posthuman, rather than seeing that these activists themselves understand their subjectivities in posthuman ways. Following a discussion of my research aims, I will now explore my research questions, and consider how these questions have been resolved.

6.1. Reflection on analysis findings

One can certainly see that *aspects* of posthuman theory can be used to understand the subjectivity of those who engage in identity based, political activism, especially when focusing on embodied experiences (especially with regard to racial discrimination, denigration and

homophobia) and on 'partial perspective' - a recognition and understanding that not only are the autobiographical accounts themselves partial from the perspective of the author, but also embedded and understood in the context of the reader.

However, it seems clear that these authors do not explicitly utilise posthuman theories of the self when describing their own subjectivities. Instead, in these texts there is a focus on the intersection of multiple identity categories (Crenshaw 1991). Intersectionality in these texts describes both mutually supporting oppressions and identity intersections. Moreover, the notion of dual or multiple identities acknowledges that while intersecting with one another, identities are nonetheless comprised of categories which can be separated and disassembled. The intersectionality discussed by these authors emphasises the intersection between identity as well as (possibly but not necessarily material) oppressions, and do not emphasise tactile economies or an Assemblage based understanding of identity or subjectivity (Puar 2005).

Thus, I conclude that posthuman theories of subjectivity, by and large, cannot be used to completely understand the subjectivity of those who engage in identity based activism, at least within the scope of this thesis and the autobiographical texts considered here. This is because the authors here have not described their subjectivities, identity formation and activism within posthuman framings, but also because they understand themselves in largely humanistic ways. Posthumanism has theoretical understandings of what subjectivity is *or can be* within a posthuman world – a world that we are already said to be living in (after all, we are already said to be living in posthuman times, we are already cyborgs according to Haraway 1991, 2013), but these understandings do not figure largely in the lives of these particular activists. However posthuman theory cannot adequately explain, or, more accurately, does not feature as a framing reference for these authors in several key ways.

Firstly, posthumanist theorists wish to investigate the meanings of posthuman bodies while remaining attentive embodied to experiences and oppressions as they are within the often universalising ventures of technology. However, within these autobiographical accounts, the authors do not -by and large- attempt to reconfigure individualist conceptions of agency and selfhood, or attempt to create understandings that suggest that *all* bodies are interconnected. There is an understanding promoted by some authors that focuses on the importance of communities to a sense of self which emphasises that the individual by themselves cannot

affect change. However, these accounts do not go so far as to suggest interconnection and inter-reliance on *all* earth others, such as the environment or non-human animals.

Following on from this, within these autobiographical accounts, it is clear that these authors do not emphasise, as some posthuman theorists do, that posthuman selves are embedded in affectivity, practices of care and concern for others. For instance, when Åsberg and Neimanis (2013) argue that “...engagement is key to feminist posthuman ethics; concerns for alterity and care for others is prior to selfhood” (Ibid: 21), this means that this new ontology of bodies is contesting the binaries on which the Enlightenment Man claims a sense of self – which is as distinctly individual, as separate to and above ‘nature’. Within these accounts, there is a large degree of care for others; but to the extent that these others are placed above the self is not evident within the text. Moreover, while concerns for alterity (which is, a state of otherness/difference) are evidenced more widely within the text, these concerns are not limitless, and are almost exclusively discussed in terms of what I have called ‘similar others’ -most usually LGBTQ APA identified people.

Furthermore there is also no indication in the data that posthuman theory can be used to understand the subjectivity of those who engage in identity based political activism. Some of the authors’ texts that have been analysed display acknowledgement of partial perspective, which is shown most clearly in relation to reflections on the autobiographical account itself, specifically declaring the autobiographical account as constructed and thus inherently partial. Moreover, reflections on the centrality of embodied and embedded experiences describe how the physical embodied self can act as a confrontation, a confusion or a challenge to binary understandings of self (in terms of race and/or sexuality and/or gender). This would seemingly indicate that posthumanist understandings of the subject –as partial, interconnected, inherently reliant on others and above all embodied and embedded (Braidotti 2013, Haraway, 1991)- are being reiterated and underlined. However, on reflection, I assert that these accounts largely establish the importance of the embodied self *to activism*, rather than to a *sense of self*. This because an embodied self is primarily discussed in relation to ones activism in these accounts. One exception to this is k. terumi shorb, who discusses her/his embodiment in relation to both their activism and sense of self, since it is her/his masculine presenting but feminine identified body which in and of itself acts as a confrontation or challenge to heteronormative and cis-sexist normativity and thus is a source of her/his activism.

When analysing these accounts, I have found that the assertion of Sörbom and Wennerhag (2013), that activism is always conducted with an imagined collective on the basis of collective values is almost universally repeated. Not only has the notion of an imagined collective constituted both the motivation for engaging in activism, as well as the purpose (and imagined beneficiaries) of activism, the imagined collective also constitutes the background support/community through which activism is considered possible. Thus I maintain that although these activists, ostensibly engaging in individualised “life politics” nonetheless both understand their activism through and are motivated to engage in activism through a real or imagined collective.

Conversely, when returning to the assertions of Papadopoulos (2010), we can see that within these texts there was little focus on ‘matter’, which he argues is the key to making left politics more posthumanist. However, I am rather conflicted on this point. For instance, I argue that these authors’ focus on enhancing or increasing representations of LGBTQ APA people, which is ostensibly an ‘immaterial’ endeavour, will as an impact lead to material change in people’s lives. Perhaps being able to “come to terms” with the ‘true self’ can be important to the material realities of those who are depressed, or feel ashamed of who they are or what they want to be. Perhaps this shows that I understand the ‘material’ in a fundamentally different way to Papadopoulos? Or rather, perhaps it is because these activists do not focus exclusively, or even primarily on changing material conditions that precludes them from Papadopoulos’ understanding of what makes a left posthuman gesture.

Another aspect of Papadopoulos’ (2010) argument to ‘make the left more posthuman again, and vice versa’ is to promoting ‘alter-ontologies’, or making new/different forms of life possible. Here is where I can certainly see parallels between Papadopoulos’ theories and the accounts of these activists. I argue that universally in these authors’ texts is a desire to create a space for themselves and similar others. This could indicate that while, by and large, these authors do not understand their subjectivities in posthuman ways -they do not use posthuman understandings nor do they for the most part indicate that their subjectivities adhere to a posthuman framing of subjectivity- perhaps it is their actions that speak most loudly to a posthuman understanding of activism, at least insofar as it is promoted by Papadopoulos. However within other theorisations of posthuman activism such as Åsberg and Neimanis’ (2013) *feminist posthuman ethics*, the authors of these autobiographical accounts do not seem to indicate adherence to these standards (see above).

7. Conclusion

This research has sought to explore the intersection between the subject, activism, and posthuman theory and has determined that self-identified activists do not seem to explicitly understand themselves as posthuman subjects, but that in some ways, a posthuman framing can implicitly be attributed to these subjects and their activism. This research has also set out to investigate whether posthuman theoretical understandings of the subject can be applied to contemporaneous subjects.

The general theoretical literature indicates that questions of posthuman subjectivity heighten the need to focus on political action, however, theoretical models regarding subjectivities and activism have overtaken empirical analysis of real life activist subjects. It is within this context that I have asked:

1. Can posthumanist theory be used to understand the subjectivities of activists? Especially considering activists within political organisations or associations geared toward “social power” or “life politics”.
2. How do activists within identity based organisations or associations understand and explain their own subjectivities?

The remainder of this chapter will firstly provide a synthesis of empirical finding as answers to research questions, then analyse the theoretical implications of this thesis. Finally I will consider the future direction and direction of further research.

7.1. Synthesis of empirical findings

When considered broadly, this research has uncovered several interesting insights into the subjectivities of activists that engage in so called “identity politics” or “social power” oriented organisations. For instance, the important emphasis that these authors placed on the ‘imagined collective’, which provided both a motivation for engaging in activism and a source of support for activists, enabled activists to position themselves within a framework of connection and care for others.

Moreover, since I hadn’t hypothesised how these activists would understand themselves, only seeking to understand whether they utilised posthuman understandings, it was interesting to me to uncover just how important humanist understandings (such as the ‘true self’) were to these authors. This is shown especially with discussions regarding representation which

indicated how the representation of similar others, both within communities and within the media, is very important in the process of becoming the ‘true self’. Additionally, it was noteworthy that the impetus create representations, or to be representational of LGBTQ APA people formed a significant motivation for some of these authors. Linked to this is the notion of embodiment, and the relation of embodiment to representation and activism. This is important as it shows a link between the material and that which is usually considered intangible (self-understanding, subjectivities and self-representation).

Within the analysis and discussion chapters, I have explored multiple facets within the broad topics of posthuman theory, the subject and activism. The overall conclusions that I have drawn are that: first and foremost, posthuman theory can only be used in a limited way to understand the subjectivities of activists, and that secondly, these subjects do not describe themselves in posthuman terms, and even rather in many cases seem to understand themselves in explicitly humanist terms.

7.2. Theoretical implications of this thesis

As I have discovered that contemporary activists form a subjectivity that is radically different from posthuman theory’s approaches to subjectivity and to activism I conclude that overall, within wider posthuman theory, and for posthuman theorists, this research could act as a site of reflection. More specifically, as posthuman theory of the subject focuses on embodied and embedded experiences, these “real life” accounts should be useful, as a starting point to create alternative theorizations of the self. Even though some posthuman theorists are primarily mapping out a *proposed* theory of the subject (Åsberg & Neimanis 2013, for example), the analysis here may be useful, for instance, to fully understand the starting point from which to understand and investigate the contemporary subject. Since my research begins from the ontological understanding that the material body the starting point for all research but simultaneously acknowledging that these bodies are mediated through discourse (Lykke 2010; Barad 2003). From here, I have constructed my ‘ethico-onto-epistem-ology’ explicitly in order to explore the intersection between the posthuman, subjectivity and activism. Thus, I consider that I have contributed methodologically to posthuman theory, by providing a framework -for posthuman theorists or those wishing to explore posthuman theory- to be able to conduct empirical research into similar issues.

Aside from the theoretical implications for posthuman theory, this thesis also has relevance for social movement theory and Assemblage theory. For example, the emphasis in these authors' accounts on their 'imagined community' reinforce the theoretical assertions of Sörbom and Wennerhag (2013). Additionally since these activists do not focus exclusively, or even primarily on changing material conditions, this precludes them from Papadopoulos' (2010) understanding of what makes a left posthuman gesture. Indeed in some ways, the findings discussed here reinforces Papadopoulos' claim that contemporary political organisations are focused on 'social power' which has also been termed "identity politics" or else 'life politics' (following Sörbom & Wennerhag 2013), and are thus incompatible with posthuman politics and organisations, which centre the material and 'alter-ontologies' (Papadopoulos 2010: 144-5). However, I have asserted that, on reflection, these authors' focus on enhancing or increasing representations of LGBTQ APA people, which is ostensibly an 'immaterial' endeavour, could lead to *material* change in people's lives, thus opening up a space for posthuman politics within the very organisations that Papadopoulos claims cannot become posthuman.

7.3. Future direction and direction of further research

I feel that this research can be valuable in several ways, such as: embedding posthuman research in the so-called "real world", taking it from the realm of theory and applying it to material human subjects; understanding whether or not posthuman theory can be used to understand their subjectivity and subjectification processes; exploring whether these activists understand themselves in posthuman ways, or using posthuman framings (even if these framings are not specifically mentioned); and using methodology appropriate to the subject, whilst creating a well thought through methodological framework that can be utilised by future social researchers.

It is within this framework that I would like to suggest recommendations for future research. These are avenues that have not been explored during this research project, but would be interesting to investigate in the near future. These suggestions include:

- Conducting similar research, utilising similar methodologies, but within different activist groups, such as groups that could be considered as not necessarily identity based, such as environmental or animal rights groups. This would enable the researcher to understand any similarities or differences between the subjectivities and processes of subjectification within these groups.

- Collecting and analysing primary data on the same topic of LGBT APA activists - this would enable future researchers to probe activists more directly with questions about posthumanism; for instance to explore what remains unanswered in this thesis that is whether these authors had heard of or understood posthuman theory. Given that posthuman theory does not currently have widespread currency, this may have affected the autobiographical accounts and the reflections contained therein. For instance, the accounts may have been demonstrably more “posthuman” if the authors had been exposed to posthuman theory, but that is simply conjecture without further research to explore it.

7.3.1. Delimitations

As a direct consequence of this thesis’ methodology, the study encountered a number of limitations, which need to be considered. For instance, conducting a secondary data analysis rather than collecting primary data of course limits me as researcher to the data that is available. However in some ways researching with secondary data has also be seen as beneficial since it has allowed me to analyse potentially a greater volume of in depth texts than may have been possible to obtain given the constraints of this research.

7.4. Concluding thoughts

The world is indeed undergoing significant transformations. And posthumanism offers interesting theoretical insights into the concepts of the subject and activism within this rapidly and radically changing world. But posthuman theorists need to stretch beyond the theoretical in order to truly realise its aims. To be instrumental in opening up alternative avenues through which we can comprehend the subject, activism and identity, posthuman theory needs to take into account personal understandings of the self.

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