QUEER BODIES AND SETTLEMENTS:
The pertinence of queer theory in the fields of queer history and trans politics, disability and ‘curative education’, quantum physics and experimental art – an interdisciplinary and transnational account of three socio-cultural and filmic research projects

Submitted by Stefan Jack Garel to the University of Exeter as a thesis for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in Film, October 2008-11-14

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STEFAN GAREL..............................................................
ABSTRACT

What is queer? What is queer? What is queer theory? Where can it go from here? This thesis sets out to explore the origins and influences of queer theory before investigating the present and the future spaces (ie, bodies and settlements) it can potentially move into. Three distinct experiments of fieldwork and ethnographic filmmaking test the truths and potentialities of queer theory when relating to queer bodies and settlements. That is to say that each chapter balances a film and its supporting text by embracing the value and urgency of practice led research.

The first chapter questions queer history and details the importance of emerging trans politics in the post-gender, leftist, avant-garde, queer activist and militant space of Bologna. Queer bodies, case one: transgender and transsexual perspectives. Settlements, case one: Bologna and Lido di Classe (Italy).

The second chapter considers the interface between disability theory and queer theory with particular attention paid to the practical theory of ‘curative education’. Defined by Rudolf Steiner in 1922 and further developed by Karl König with the foundation of the Camphill movement in 1944, curative education privileges the social model over the medical model in the field of disability so that disability is in fact ability. Queer bodies, case two: learning differences and disabilities perspectives. Settlements, case two: Berlin (Germany), Chatou and La Rochelle (France), Barry and Glasallt Fawr (Wales, United Kingdom).

The third chapter uses queer perspectives to promote the relevance of quantum physics to the human body, thus involving contemporary dance, physical theatre and the arts more generally to address and redress the chiasm between science and technology on the one hand, and arts, humanities and socio-cultural sciences on the other. Queer bodies, case three: the inescapably queer reality of the physical world. Settlements, case three: multiple locations in Tuscany (Italy), and Thamesmead, London (England, United Kingdom).

This thesis brings notions of queer and otherness deceptively close to notions of the self. Otherness and queerness become mirrors in which our own queerness comes into view.
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To what makes it all worth while.
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