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QUEER FEELINGS, POLITICAL POTENTIAL: TRACING AFFECT IN PERFORMANCE SPACES

by

DYLAN MCCARTHY BLACKSTON

Under the Direction of Dr. Susan Talburt

ABSTRACT

This thesis layers theories of affect circulation, queer performance participation, counterpublics, and queer space and time with ethnographic work performed in queer performance spaces. In so doing, the thesis explores affective networks in queer performance spaces in order to begin a theoretical analysis of the connecting affects amongst queer performance participants. In my interviews, I found affective connections which I explored as keywords. These keywords express affects that, in part, create the affective networks of queer performance participants.

INDEX WORDS: Affect, Queer, Performance, Counterpublic, Feelings

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A Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of

Master of Arts

in the College of Arts and Sciences

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DYLAN MCCARTHY BLACKSTON

Committee Chair: Susan Talburt

Committee: Amira Jarmakani

Juliana Kubala

Electronic Version Approved:

Office of Graduate Studies

College of Arts and Sciences

Georgia State University

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DEDICATION

To sweetest V: for your partnership, care, respect, and edits, with sincerest gratitude, tenderness, and intense desire. Your affective investments in me are immensely appreciated.

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1 INTRODUCTION

Queer performance has endless potential, infinite futures, and cannot be perfectly reproduced in other spaces or times. The potential of queer performance is unbounded because it never exists as a truth that is told, shared, or performed as unalterable. Rather, queer performance dances in between the floorboards of the stage, thumps through walls swelling with the angst, relationality, fear, and sexual energy of the people present in the room. Queer performance is not an appearance and disappearance, but rather it is a "kernel of a potentiality that is transmitted to audiences … [it] facilitates modes of belonging, especially minoritarian belonging" (Muñoz, 2009, p. 98-99). Queer performance can take on many forms: for example, spokenword, performance art, dance, theatre, hip-hop, drag, and musical acts.

The word queer, in this case, can refer to non-normative sexualities[1] or acts that involve defying heteronormative expectations of one's sexualities, genders, and/or life narrative (e.g., college, marriage, family, economic success), overall. This thesis is focused on defiances of more than, simply, sexualities, though in the interview analyses in Chapter 2, queer presents a fusion of meanings for participants and myself. After all, queer is not just about one's sexuality or one's defiances of heteronormative life narratives; rather, queer is political in multiple manners, which is to say that queer performance, like many other queer participatory spaces, is engaged with politics. These political acts may or may not be intentional; however, they contain potentiality and imaginings that shift or create anew a plethora of ways of being in the world.

[1] In this case, non-normative does not mean not standard. To say such would be to imply that heterosexuality is the standard or the "original" (referring to Judith Butler) sexuality. Rather, non-normative attempts to defy identification categories of sexuality. The specific forms of these defiances and what genitals are involved in sexual interactions matter much less than the idea of queer.

For example, there is a "kernel of potentiality" present in Athens Boys Choir's (Harvey Katz) performance[2] of the spokenword piece "Ez Heeb." Though not a part of the research for this project, this performance provides a useful example with which to contextualize some of the key terminologies and ideas that ground this thesis. In "Ez Heeb," Katz humorously reflects on the ways in which he identifies with his family's Jewish culture just as he subverts certain gendered expectations placed on him throughout his life. At once, the performer talks of his grandmother's expectations of her granddaughter (Katz) to marry a doctor (presumably a male-sexed doctor), while also discussing his bris and Bar Mitzvah — both terms typically applied to ceremonies for boys in Judaism. While performing, Katz ironically and humorously plays his Bat Mitzvah (a ceremony for girls in Judaism) party video in the background. In this post-Bat Mitzvah party video, the performance participants see the artist at twelve years old, clothed in a white dress and dancing with his father. Additionally, as Katz is finishing the piece, the sound in his video comes to the fore as the partying pre-teen states, "Goodbye, everyone. I hope you had a great time at my Bat Mitzvah. And I'll be looking forward to seeing you at my wedding." As a result of Katz's presentation of a visual history that both conflicts with and supports his verbalized poem, he is performing disidentification[3] with his family and his normative Jewish upbringing. He is neither disconnecting from his history nor wholly accepting it as a linear path to whom he has become.

---

[2] The specific performance to which I am referring took place on September 3, 2010 at the Drunken Unicorn in Atlanta, Georgia.

[3] Disidentification is described in much greater detail in the following few pages. In short, it is term used by José Esteban Muñoz (1999) to explore how queers and people of color "tactically misrecognize" the hails of dominant ideologies in order to relate to certain aspects of dominant culture while still defying white hegemony and hetero-normativity's creep into all aspects of their lives.

Furthermore, because of his personal disidentification, his history is not congruent with those of other participants in the performance space, yet their similarly disjointed histories create a relation through various intersections. Alternate or skewed memories shape not just individuals, but the individuals' multiple identities and reasons for participation in a queer counterpublic.[4] Ideas of fluid, dynamic 'communities' of queers have become key components in decentralizing the parallel rhetoric of one person equaling one identity. As a result, an affective discourse and affective networks begin to take shape and are expanded by people with unexpected relations, relations formed even though people in the performance space do not share a single history or a single-binding identity. This is important insomuch as a space can only be queered and continued if it provides room for expansive inclusion of needs, discourse metamorphosis, and spatial variance. Thus, there must be a relation among strangers that is specific enough to bind them, while divergent enough to accept all participants' non-normative, evolving personal histories. Hence, the type of relation among strangers in a counterpublic is one of its distinguishing factors from a public. It is likely that shared participation in space and shared affective discourse enables not the creation of a 'community' but something much more radical in the lives of those participating.[5] This not only implies that there are transformative powers constituted in the queered space, but also figuratively outside of the space — back

[4] Loosely, counterpublics are publics that are non-normative and in opposition to the the dominant public. Michael Warner (2002) notes that the relations amongst strangers in counterpublics vary from those present in dominant publics because there is generally a sexuality/gender non-normativity that is binding. He also argues that there are alternate discourses in counterpublics. While I use his understanding of counterpublics as a grounding theory throughout this thesis, I also greatly expand the possibilities of counterpublics and disagree with the inflexibility (specifically when theorizing affect) of the counterpublics that Warner describes.

[5] As Miranda Joseph (2002) argues, communities often revolve around shared identity. Furthermore, they often elide variance and dissatisfaction by constructing themselves (through dominant discourses) as utopian retreats devoid of problems. They also serve as 'the local,' which fundamentally assumes that there are relationships between community members based on any number of factors that may or may not be present. As a result, I am using affect theory to critique community as the sole proprietor of identity, identity formation, and perhaps most importantly, affect, affect circulation, and movement.

home, if you will. Thus, the circulation of affect in counterpublic performance spaces urges continued transformation outside of the performance space through circulation of an evolving discourse by performance participants.

The majority of this thesis is dedicated to exploring these felt connections and affective networks among queer performance counterpublic participants as well as the shifting discourses of those counterpublics. But most importantly, I will analyze predispositions and moods as they open up possibilities for certain affects, as well as the affects that emerge in relational spaces. I intend to provide a thematic tracing of affects that are relationally built through queer performance participation.

Much queer theory focusing on queer worldmaking strategies and queered subcultures has been produced recently. I further this line of inquiry by researching participants' affect and engagement with queer performance. More specifically, I question what motivations for participation are present and what participants are affectively seeking by engaging in queer performance spaces. I consider whether the affective connections and reasons for participation that are present and/or result from participation could recirculate through yet-to-be created queer spaces.

I employ Michael Warner's theorization of counterpublics to explore queer discourses and physical formations in and beyond performance spaces. In more detail, I use Michael Warner's specific engagement with counterpublics and first explore their basic differences from publics — namely, alternate relations among strangers and a sense of conflict with the dominant public. However, these counterpublics, particularly as they fail to encapsulate queer performance cultures, are not wholly satisfying as a theoretical tool. Instead, I consider what affec-

tive investments, aside from conflict and sexuality, enhance the intensely affective qualities of engagement. I argue that it is far more than an interest in a particular queer performer or particular types of sexualities or genders that draws people to these spaces. Rather, in addition to the affect that comes through the door (we cannot, after all, make a day's feelings vanish at each portal), the desire to participate in queer performance emanates from a shared relation through disjointed histories, fragmentary glances of possibilities, and apertures in linearity.

Furthermore, I use performance space as a tool to examine the creation and proliferation of affective networks. I use the word space metaphorically rather than as an actual enclosure. I employ the word space to articulate fluctuating sets of affective connection that produce contingent relations not based on overall "community membership." Additionally, I engage with the theory of disidentification as explored by José Esteban Muñoz. Muñoz explains that disidentification is a term used to understand how queers and people of color relate to, identify with, and embody certain familial/normative expectations while defying the infusion of normative actions into every aspect of their lives. I take up his work to explore disidentification within the lives of queer performance participants. I also use the frameworks of queer counterpublics and performance cultures as tools to explore the importance of affective networks and discourses in proliferating participants' experiences of relationality/disconnection/negativity/intensity.

Importantly, even as I am using counterpublics and performance cultures as frameworks for relationality and affect, I will not romanticize queer performance spaces by implying that they lack exclusionary practices, only that counterpublic participants can manifest queer potential for relational and narrative forms of connection. However, it is important to note a preva-

lent assumption that all people who are tangentially related to one another — through, for example, sexual attraction, gender fluidity, or non-heterosexual behavior — have the same understanding of and relation to each other. That assumption overreaches and elides the "hip factor"[6] that can be involved in queer counterpublic participation. Notwithstanding, I assert that affect and queerness are multifarious and can change based on the participants and networks being considered. While these spaces and performance participants are not necessarily creating utopian bubbles, they do provide a venue for affect circulation that is neither entirely inclusive nor wholly exclusive. As I explore in great detail in this thesis, queer performance counterpublics are not utopias devoid of exclusion; moreover, feelings of exclusion can produce negative affect. However, certain versions of negative affect (it is impossible to know which ones) can be productive; the forms of historical reengagement that I am exploring can utilize many forms of disjointedness as means to productively employ negativity to formulate other or new possibilities for relationality.

With ample discussion about audience perception in performance spaces, counterpublic spaces and participants, circulation of affect around a common object, and revisions to linear time thus producing queer time, it seems that the critical next question has been explored very little. What happens when the show is over? With what affective shifts do these performance participants leave the queered performance space and what affective motivations proliferate participation? Even as performance participants are differently positioned and have differing relations to one another within a queer counterpublic, how does their participation enable new discourses to take shape? What do those discourses look and feel like? What affect is produced

[6] By "hip factor," I am referring to the cliquishness that can accompany any group membership.

or manifests in the performance space and does that affect shift the movements and fleeting subjectivities of participants?

Methods

We come together.

We come together because there is so much feeling built up in us because of and since coming together the last time. These emotions began to intensify the last time that someone in one's friend group was yelled at or beaten. These emotions intensified more when we dealt with issues in our own lives. These are not merely stereotypes or tropes used to evoke sadness; they are histories and stories of the present. When I walk into the door of a bar or other venue to see a performance, I never leave those feelings at the door. Instead, hearing someone scream at me on stage in speedos makes me feel more. Queer counterpublic performance includes as much anger as it does humor, as much rage as it does camp. These affects take root in us and emerge through dancing, yelling, hating, protesting, fucking, laughing, loving, crying, fighting, organizing. They create a relation between us.

We are about to depart.

The performance is over. I feel situated in a queer space. I feel hanging limbs tired from movement, full of sensations. I am a part of a discourse — a silent or loud understanding with others around me. I feel exuberant. Nothing can stop me, but everything around me is making me pause. I stare at the slightly-slanted wooden surface on stilts and behind a veil of cloudy, humid air stands a performer removing gear — clearing away the sense-inducing equipment so well-used just minutes ago. I will remember these feelings, this feeling, and I will harness its potential. Where and how it will reemerge is yet to be known.

But before we leave.

There are affects circulating amongst the crowd. Feelings of connection between participants have ebbed and flowed throughout the performance, but now I hear banter around me. What do you want to do now — stay here or go somewhere else? Want to grab a drink? Want to come over? Want to dance? This is part of the show. I will call this relationality a result of performance participant affect circulation, and I will argue that these affective networks produce affective discourses where seemingly normative feelings take on entirely new meanings. Moreover, I contend that affect existing among queer performance participants plays an instrumental role in exploring the affective networks that produce and intensify the desire for participation.

A final note.

To make this argument, I participated in performance spaces and interviewed other participants at the show. I conducted semi-structured interviews[7] assessing, in part, what types of relationships were present among the people in the performance space, whether the space felt queer to, or was queered by, the participants, what participants expressed as their primary reasons for gathering, and what was being felt individually and in the space, more generally. These last two assessments were especially critical in attempting to explore how and if these feelings, or if the affect created through participation in the space, played a role in future orientations toward the affect created in relational space. But just as queer is not singular in name or knowable in form, nor are the causes and effects of certain relational engagements fully knowable.

[7] See Appendix A for the list of non-performer sample interview questions and Appendix B for the list of performer sample interview questions.

Therefore, instead of seeking an answer, I explored some connections between queer performance participation and affective discourses, especially as they relate to space, place, desire, and temporal shifts.

My interview questions were broadly structured so that they were simple to say and easy to understand. That said, I was not fixated on following the questions word-for-word, especially if an interviewee responded in a manner that clearly guided the discussion in a different direction. Therefore, I began with a set of questions[8] that were segmented into themes of feeling, connection, space, and outside-of-performance life, but I allowed for a fluid flow between sections depending upon the direction in which the conversation meandered. I actively listened to participants' responses so that I could "move the interview forward as much as possible by building on what the participant [had] begun to share" (Seidman, 1998, p. 66). I followed conversational cues so that I received more in-depth responses. I took hand-written notes of responses, writing down phrases and words that would jog my memory. I chose to take notes rather than record the interviews simply because of the loud environments in which my research took place. I numbered the responses question-by-question so that I could connect narratives and phrases to the particular idea with which we had begun (even if their response was a story that was only vaguely related to the question). I spent a few hours the day after each performance going through my notes and writing up, in narrative form, everything that I had written down — I attempted to reconstruct the conversation to the best of my ability. From there, I pared down the full narrative by looking for themes (later keywords) either in idea,

[8] See appendices A and B for sample interview questions.

word, or phrase. I then more thoroughly connected the narrative to the theoretical underpinnings of my research, taking out irrelevant details from the text.

I allowed a great deal of fluidity in my questioning. I hoped that the participant felt as though the interview was not totally unidirectional, but rather, adjusted as it began to take the shape of an actual conversation. I recognized that individuals may have had varied feelings about certain words or relations to certain words. For example, given my belief that the word queer lacks formally defined edges, when using it, I considered how class and race, in particular, may alter affective investment in the word or feelings of exclusion/inclusion, more generally (Rubin and Rubin, 2005, p. 131). Therefore, as I noted these varying relationships to words like queer, I adjusted my questions to allow for a more in-depth explanation of how a participant felt, for example, that racism and classism also existed within their queer performance counterpublics.

I coupled interview responses with theories of affect circulation, counterpublic participation, and queer space and time. In so doing, I researched affective networks in queer performance spaces to begin a theoretical exploration of some of the connecting affects amongst queer performance participants. This is, in part, where finding themes and keywords in interviewee responses came to the fore. I initially intended to locate themes from my interviews and explore what those themes meant for the proliferation of spaces. However, space[9] quickly became a tool to explore affect circulation; the spaces were themselves events or gatherings rather than stable structures where certain affect circulation could be expected. Furthermore,

[9] I examined what space was in the context of my research as well as the history of the term. Space was formerly seen as an indicator of time and only shifted to our current usage (as enclosure) as private land ownership became prevalent (Berland, 2005, p. 334). The shift from time as space to space as enclosure is related to cultural expectations of measurement (Berland, 2005, p. 334) and of course, affect cannot be measured in such conclusive manners.

while I certainly noted themes, I also repeatedly heard keywords which I wanted to explore more, particularly as their usages varied from normative notions of the words' meanings. As a form of analysis, themes felt too unifying and stagnant; keywords felt more diffuse and nodal. Therefore, the keywords I explore are, in part, thematic, but they are more interconnected and fleeting than themes. Moreover, even as the purpose of keyword analysis — as initiated by Raymond Williams in his seminal text *Keywords: A Vocabulary of Culture and Society* — is to historicize words by tracing their usages over time and finding connections between uses in various contexts, these keywords were defined primarily as a structure of feeling.

Structures of feelings, according to Jonathan Flatley's reading of Williams, are not-yet-determined but possibly soon-to-be-cemented ideologies (Flatley, 2008, p. 26). This foundational and critical idea enables a cross-disciplinary and cross-cultural analysis of certain words. Moreover, it enables an analysis of ideology in fluid terms. However, the structures of feeling that Williams so usefully describes lack a substantive analysis of movement and affect because they are confined to not-yet-determined but possibly soon-to-be-cemented ideologies. Ideologies are certainly changing, but as will be explained later in this chapter, they are not based in movements or feelings. While the words' relationships to societal oppressions and social privileges are disentangled from superficial usages, their particular meanings when used by the oppressed (or by a subcultural group) are often left untouched, particularly when keywords/phrases are being used to describe non-normative feelings. Providing this critique is not to say that the book did not do enough; after all, Williams was beginning an exploration that has served at least the past two generations of scholars extraordinarily well. Rather, I find the idea of keywords so useful that I wanted to expand what analysis keywords enable. Instead of

finding themes and historicizing words, I attempt to historicize affective terms inasmuch as those terms and phrases are involved in queer performance participation. I trace affects as movements — feelings that, in many cases, find their beginnings in non-normative and fluctuating placements. In the first chapter I will explain moods, affect, and the relationships between the two in greater detail. For now, however, I introduce keywords in a perfunctory manner to provide an entry into what will come.

As a result of the encroachment of keywords on my initial idea of themes, I found a distinction between the two necessary. Themes functioned to give a broad framework for analysis. Whereas keywords might present themselves through themes, themes require much deeper analysis in order to be considered keywords. For example, the word "comfort" continually popped up in my interviews. Yet comfort did not necessarily have anything to do with feelings of warmth, physical affection, or safety. Rather, the word expressed a much more non-normative meaning that defied, in many ways, liberal notions of privacy and individualism — notions that implicitly sideline affect since affect only occurs through relational interactions between beings and other beings or objects. As such, seeking and finding comfort was a theme that appeared in my research; however, the relationship between queer comfort and queers' interactions with the idea of comfort through participation in queer performance spaces required that I explore comfort as a keyword. Only then could I understand how the queer feeling of comfort related to broader historical and normative notions of comfort.

I am engaging in this exploration to answer a seemingly simple question: What happens when the show is over? In order to do so, my research encompassed a variety of elements: to explore affective networks in queer counterpublic performance spaces, to analyze what affec-

tive discourse/s may take shape in queer counterpublic performance spaces, and to consider whether these discourses and affective networks shift multiple aspects of the lives of performance participants.

I layered aforementioned theoretical explorations with interview analysis to search for affective themes relating to queer performance participation. This thesis, therefore, is organized as a gathering of information rather than a result of a study. Just as keywords shift over time and become and undo previous engagements with cultural ideas and ideals, affective terms cannot be narrowly foreclosed as “the same” in other contexts, eras, or groups. Expansion from this initial affective discourse is welcome; let this serve as a base rather than the base. Bases move too; they are never (and should never be) as stable as we give them credit for being.

In chapter one, I navigate how the main theories I explore have been engaged by other scholars. The chapter is dedicated to overlapping theories of queer counterpublic/subcultural gatherings, discourse creation and proliferation, affect, risk, and the queer temporalities. Queer temporalities, elsewhere in this thesis, is framed by grouping what participants say about their past experiences and how those experiences shift their affective investment in queer performance and more generally, queer life. Obviously, there is not just one formation of queer life just as there is not one trajectory for any life; however, I do identify themes that intervene in the heterosexual life narrative to assess, to the best of my ability, how those interventions alternately situate queer performance participants’ desires to engage in a different type of connection to one another and to their own affective investments in queer performance participation. Therefore, risk is not merely present in the fear of being physically or emotionally abused

for one's participation in queer performance; rather, risk intends to explore, for example, the monetary risks that performers take in defying the 9:00-5:00 capitalist mentality, and more specifically, the risk of not following a normative trajectory — at least in one way or another — toward normative adulthood and normative maturity.

Chapter 2 is devoted to interview analysis. The chapter serves to share participants' responses in narrative form while also explicating some connections their responses have with theories of counterpublic participation, affect, discourse creation, and temporality. I mainly focus on a descriptive analysis in Chapter 2, providing readers with specific responses to questions and enabling some initial themes to surface. The chapter narratively explores each show that I participated in as well as providing information garnered from the 3-5 interviews (including performer interviews at some shows but not at others) that were conducted at each performance. Some of these interviews took place as an event was beginning, some during the event, and some toward the end of the event. If relevant (and often it was), I have noted their placement in the evening's timeline. As a conversation developed, the questions in my appendices shifted, though I stayed within what I came to view as my question sections. Those main sections are feelings, connections, spatial assessments, and alterations in outside-of-performance-space life due to performance participation. Furthermore, I only participated in each of these events once. In this chapter, you will find some brief narratives and some lengthy ones. I was able to attend 5 shows and interview 15 people, a number that includes 3 performers and 12 performance participants. Readers are encouraged to seek key themes and theoretical connections while enjoying the conversational reprieve from theoretical inundation! The

chapter is intended to lay the groundwork for a more extensive analysis in the chapter that follows.

Chapter 3 takes up the idea of affective networks in greater detail. Rather than the segmented overview of interviews and performances as described in Chapter 2, Chapter 3 attempts to use the themes that surfaced in the previous chapter to navigate the affective networks of queer performance participation. To do so, I segment the chapter into a series of affective keywords which create what I call an affective discourse of queer performance participation. This affective discourse is not created solely through previous relationships with other queers, as I presupposed. Rather, there are often affective connections that bring people together. In this work, affective networks are not synonyms for gatherings, though gatherings serve as forums in my study. Maybe a more precise connection would be an analogy: affective networks are to gatherings as communities are to space. Here, affective networks are not solely based on common or uncommon identity as in a community; instead, they are based in sets of disjointedly similar historical experiences, risks, breaks in linearity, and feelings. Communities, then, are focused on coming together (perhaps in a physical space) for a common goal or purpose. Affective networks, on the other hand, are focused on gatherings of feelings and moods that allow for certain affects to emerge. As a result, it seems apt to explore affective networks through a series of keywords to analyze similar and dissimilar feelings conveyed by people whose bodies and feelings have gathered.

Chapter 4 functions as a conclusion, though there are no charts, graphs, or certain results to transmit to readers. Alternatively, I briefly complete the analysis begun in Chapter 3 by providing a few ideas about how this exploration of affective networks and affective discourses

has transformative capacities beyond those which I have noted. But do not fret, I, like you, do have ideas about what some of those capacities might be and Chapter 4 serves as a forum for sharing some of those potentialities. After all, I too have an affective investment in queer performance.

Lastly, in asking these questions and compiling this research, I do not attempt to place myself in the space as an objective observer, but rather, as a full participant. By full participant, I mean that I engaged in the performance as a counterpublic participant, which is certainly not to say that my immediate motives for engagement were the same as those of other participants. I engaged in a different type of participant observation than most other people in the room. As a researcher who is a performer and participant in queer spaces, my interest is personal, intentional, and affect-laden. I had no desire to separate myself from this work. I recognize that, in the past and in the present, I am a performer who has engaged in queer performance counterpublics to varying degrees and with varying types of affective investment. I acknowledge that this previous submersion alters my ability to “step outside” or “see the outside” of my research. This excites me. If, as Judith Butler (1993) postulates, queerness is indeed the boundary of the normative and, in fact, creates the normative by providing it with its “outside” (p. xxiv), any attempt to “step outside” could only be read as an attempt to “step inside” of the boundary of the normative to inhabit a heteronormative position which I neither want to occupy nor aspire to cooperate with in my research. Instead, I will remain firmly planted in boundary space, into which I was both forcefully pushed and kindly received.

I am aware that, because of my consistent participation in queer performance counterpublics, it may be asserted that I cannot see the possible exclusionary practices that do exist

within queer counterpublics. To a degree, this is a fair assessment; however, rather than viewing this as wholly 'bad,' I will explore how this affect and affective exclusion can be productive. As for my possibly privileged position within the research (might I note, this possible privilege is not necessarily negative), all I can do to temper this is employ Donna Haraway's (1988) theorization of situated knowledges by remaining cognizant of my position, by practicing reflexivity (Guba and Lincoln, 2005) in my engagement with this topic, by speaking thoughtfully about exclusions that I do notice, and by committing to maintain accountability for that which I put into the world, both verbally and in my writing.

A Review of the Literature

Counterpublics, Affect, Ruptures, Risk, and Keywords

To answer my research questions, I engage in the following conversations: participation — as both necessary for some participants and risky for some participants — in queer counterpublics, queer ruptures to place and temporal linearity, and the growing, broad area of affect scholarship as it pertains to my research. These conversations provide means to discuss how knowledge, belonging, and affect are transferred among subjects present in specific spaces and epochs. As such, I will analyze their relevance to the proliferation of queer affective networks.

Engagement in Counterpublics

Participants in a queer counterpublic are rarely present by accident. They share at least an interest in queer performance. In this study, I investigate how willing engagement in queer performance spaces furthers the oppositional qualities of a queer counterpublic through shifts away from dominant discourses, inclusion of non-normatively timed lives, and performance participant affect. As Muñoz (2009) states, "there is indeed something about the transforma-

tive power of nightlife that queers and people of color have always clung to" (p. 108). However, the transformational power of nightlife/counterpublic participation is not merely present in the space, but also beyond it. In fact, Warner (2002) notes that queer counterpublic participation has the capacity to metamorphose private lives (p. 57). Rather than just focusing on private lives in the liberal sense of privacy, I explore the transformational capacities generated by queer counterpublic participation and how affective discourses that take shape in queer performance spaces alter outside-of-performance-space lives.

Discourse can be defined as "an instrument and an effect of power, but also a hindrance, a stumbling-block, a point of resistance and a starting point of an opposing strategy" (Foucault, 1978, p. 101). The discourse of a queer counterpublic is, in many ways, oppositional to the discourses of the dominant public; however, this does not mean that the discourse is stable or that it is derived directly from dominant discourses. "Discourses are tactical elements or blocks operating in the field of force relations; there can exist different and even contradictory discourses within the same strategy; they can, on the contrary, circulate without changing their form from one strategy to another, opposing strategy" (Foucault, 1978, p. 101-102). Discourses often contain certain statements which "constitute the parameters" of available subject positions for people of a given epoch (Mills, 1997, p. 56). However, "what constitutes the boundaries of a discourse is very unclear" (Mills, 1997, p. 55). Therefore, in this case, when referring to a queer counterpublic discourse, the position of those employing the discourse is relevant, specifically as these positions relate to the forcefield of power in which queer discourses take shape. Put more simply, while queer counterpublic performance participants are subjects of and to multiple discourses, they may also formulate new discourses, thereby opening up new

subject positions that are not available within dominant discourses. Formulating an understanding of new and shifting subject positions — positions opened up by new discourses that, at least partially, render those positions intelligible within queer counterpublics — is a primary impetus for exploring evolving discourses within queer performance counterpublics. Furthermore, understanding discourse as a set of affective terms and phrases which structure intelligibility, rather than a dominant way of speaking, is critical to this analysis.

However, rendering intelligibility via discourse or new subject positions is not an attempt to place participants in the grids of ideology or discourse (Massumi, 2002, p. 3). An exploration of affect does shift this stymying move toward stable subject positions. As Brian Massumi (2002) states, "On the list of distinctions between artifact and thing, body and object — and even thought and matter. Not only do these relay in reciprocal becomings together they ally in process. They are tinged with event" (p. 11). These events may take place under the conditions of counterpublic participation, but those conditions are not based solely on who is performing or what the space looks like. Instead, the conditions are contingent and synchronous with moods and movements of subjects and objects present (possibly not present in a physical manner) at the "event."

Michael Warner (2002) posits that subjects form a counterpublic due to the alternate relationships among strangers present in a space as well as the intention of the formation. Queers populating a performance space in a given moment are present in the counterpublic because they are in opposition to, in conflict with, the normative public (Warner, 2002). This is not to say that one singular performance or a string of performances creates a public or counterpublic; rather, interactive, reflexive discourse is necessary (Warner, 2002). The reflexivity of

this discourse might be read in the affective similarities and dissimilarities in participants' motivations for participation. Moreover, here, a public is not represented by public space in the traditionally explored public/private dichotomy; many queers, after all, may recognize neither privacy (home) and public (out of home) in the same light as the dominant culture. Lastly, counterpublics are useful tools in exploring queer performance; however, because they prize resistance and shifts in subject positions (the enlightened, resisting, liberal subject), they are not entirely satisfying in understanding the roles that affects and movements play in expanding beyond the grids of ideology and discourse. Counterpublics are no more stable than publics; they just happen to be a version of queer worldmaking that begins a move away from heteronormative structures of relationality and sociality.

In addition to the alternate discourse, sexualities, and genders that bring individuals together, the relationship among performance participants is guided by an orientation toward the subject who is performing. The bond is not simply a desire to see a performance; it animates a shared set of non-normative desires and is animated by it. "The first dimension [in becoming] — the experience's just-beginning-to-stir in the more-than of its own coming activity — is the relational dimension of the event's occurring … To be some-thing-doing effectively is to be felt; to register (if only in effect)" (Massumi, 2011, p. 3, emphasis in original). There is a felt connection between relation to the event and self-relation. These events happen in concurrence and are not about internal and external feelings; rather, events are constantly-occurring connections between mood, sociality, and affect. It is not that disidentification or mood necessarily occur at the individual level first. Instead, there are deep imbrications between the individual and the social such that shifts in mood and affect cannot be read as wholly either personal or

collective. Furthermore, I would argue that in queer performance spaces, individual is not really individual at all. These connections will be explored in much greater detail in the following section on affect.

Through personal disidentification, queers create and participate in counterpublics by relating to individuals with similarly disjointed identifications. Disidentification is the process by which an individual reacts to mainstream media inundation (though one can certainly disidentify with other mainstream institutions, as well) in unexpected ways as a means of identifying neither wholly with the mainstream nor wholly outside of it (Muñoz, 1999). Disidentification is a creative and productive process through which queers find other ways of being in the world. This concept could encompass identifying with familial expectations while also defying their infusion into every aspect of one's present and future subjectivities, as in Katz's performance. Idiosyncratic histories do not isolate queer participants, but rather, have the potential to bring them together (Cvetkovich, 2003, p. 174). Therefore, it is idiosyncratic histories that contain potential to gather affects rather than individual histories that separate people whom have gathered.

Affect

Within any discourse is a set of parameters around how certain feelings and experiences are to be processed, specifically as they burgeon in communion with others. Banes and Lepecki (2007) state that "language, memory, affect, sensation, perception, and historical and cultural forces find themselves in a deep chiasmatic intersubjective relationality, where each element in the relation is continuously crossing and being crossed by all the others" (p. 6-7). Within a queer performance counterpublic — where relations among strangers are specific and where

there is a conflictual relationship with the dominant public — many of these commonly imbricated forces may be 'crossing' in differing manners than they do in the dominant public. The "intersubjective" state of a counterpublic performance participant may be imbued with felt experiences that are specific to queer lives. For example, this specificity could entail a different set of physical fears or a history of 'corrective' abuse that resulted from varying gender presentations or sexual acts. Thus the 'crossing' forces could be producing different relations based upon the affective (pre)dispositions of queer people in the space as well as the affect emerging and circulating amongst those same people as a result of participation.

These affective (pre)dispositions are arguably oriented by mood (Flatley, 2008, p. 17). Jonathan Flatley (2008) states that in addition to affect, "Mood is an important concept as well, as a kind of state of readiness for some affects and not others (i.e., in an irritable mood some things are annoying that otherwise may not be)" (p. 17). Here, there is a distinction between mood and affect, but also relational interactions intersect with mood to create affect. Furthermore, Flatley implies that being in an irritable mood means that one's interactions with other objects/beings is more likely to produce an annoyance with that object/being rather than an annoyance with the reason one was irritable in the first place. After all, "Even though it is by way of moods that we know how we are in relation to the situation we are in, this, however, does not mean that we are necessarily aware of our moods" (Flatley, 2008, p. 21, emphasis in original). Moods are not necessarily conscious and in fact, one may only become conscious of one's mood when it is "particularly dramatic or intense" (Flatley, 2008, p. 22). Moreover, Flatley discusses mood as an epoch in his description of the meloncholia of modernism; however, he draws from Martin Heidegger to define mood (which Heidegger calls *Stimmung*). Heidegger's

original intention in describing mood was to discuss feelings, not periods of time. Therefore, while I use Flatley's discussion of mood to describe the capacity of moods to orient one toward certain affects instead of others, I use Heidegger's particular version of mood-as-feeling rather than Flatley's mood-as-epoch.

There is no stagnancy; affects are moving and are often, in part, determined by the moods in which we find ourselves prior to engaging in a specific social activity. Yet the movements of affects and the moods that often orient one toward particular affects instead of others does not mean that one moves from one subject position into another (or that one will inevitably shift in a certain direction, with regard to the affect created via interactions with others) because of one's affective (pre)dispositions/moods. If that were the case, the variability and movement of affect would re-place and fix one within a grid of possible feelings, subject positions, and agentive actions, something that Brian Massumi asserts is in opposition to the potentiality of affect.

More succinctly, performance participant affect is not defined solely by that which is created in a performance space. Rather, it is the manifestation of what affect individuals are oriented toward before coming to the show (mood), that which is produced during the show in tandem with mood changes, as well as what occurs after the show is over. Ahmed notes that from Teresa Brennan's work, one can gather that, "if bodies do not arrive in neutral, if we are always in some way or another moody, then what we will receive as an impression will depend on our affective situation ... After all, to receive is to act. To receive an impression is to make an impression" (Ahmed, 2010, p. 36-37). This connection engages the idea that affect is not necessarily contagious, but definitely contingent (Ahmed, 2010).

Affect can be defined in myriad ways, including a desire, feeling, or intention (*Oxford English Dictionary*, affect, n.). These three brief 'definitions' simultaneously imply yearning and the application of attention or observation. These three definitions convey a desire for and a focus on relation and feeling that requires both focus on an object and relating to all of the affective (pre)dispositions/moods that have led to the current circulation of affect within oneself and amongst a larger body of performance participants. Though the participants in a queer performance counterpublic share a relation among strangers, the relationship between each participant and the circulating performance object may be different (Ahmed, 2010, p. 36). Put simply, it is necessary to complicate the idea that the performer is the sole object of focus. Therefore, I view the physical bodies and affective (pre)dispositions of counterpublic performance participants as fluidities and networks of feelings rather than solidified, cohesive subjects. Individuals have multiple foci between and amongst each other even as they are focused on the same object, as a whole. As Sara Ahmed (2010) notes, "To be affected by something is to evaluate that thing ... To give value to things is to shape what is near us" (p. 31). Affect involves evaluating those around you; however, affective evaluations move in many directions. Anytime one is evaluating another, another is evaluating one. However, this does not mean that these evaluations — like one's moods — are necessarily conscious feelings or efforts.

Given the incessant circulation of affect when we are placed near others, it is odd that when one seeks a definition of affective that the 'value' placed on affect is low. The word affective relates to emotion but is defined negatively in contrast to rational thinking and intellect (*Oxford English Dictionary*, affective, adj.). Yet queered spaces are structured through "affective networks" (Cvetkovich, 2003, p. 173) that are formed in relation to time, space, and perfor-

mance and which engage "felt experiences that can be mobilized in a range of directions, including the construction of cultures and publics" (Cvetkovich, 2003, p. 47). The range of directions and the possible mobilizations of affect are, therefore, always emergent (Massumi, 2002, p. 9) and move within, between, and among queer performance participants. Thus, these spaces are not necessarily rational or irrational, but relational. They are not built on "what emotions are" for a subject but "what emotions do" when in relation to a broader context (Ahmed, 2004, p. 4). The same goes for the moods that emerge from internal emotional states; it is not what moods are, but what they do (what affects they are oriented toward) in social situations. As such, queer performances are not simply "individualistic rebellion[s]" (Muñoz, 1999, p. 145); instead, performers are, at once, creating and participating in a new discourse to be circulated among people who have oft-intangible, though wholly affective relationship to one another. These relations are, in part, built in everyday lives, activism, and participation in performances.

Sara Ahmed (2004) discusses the idea of having such strong feelings about a performance or space that one expects other participants to share those feelings. However, she notes this is not always the case, leading her to state, "But these feelings not only heighten tension, they are also in tension" (Ahmed, 2004, p. 10, emphasis in original). She is not arguing that it is not the "feeling-in-common" (Ahmed, 2004, p. 11) that affects a group sensation; rather, it is our relationship to the objects toward which we are focusing our attention that simultaneously binds and also divides how affect is circulating in spaces. After all, "we don't necessarily have the same relationship to the feelings" (Ahmed, 2004, p. 10). Through affect's circulation among the counterpublic, queers imbue potential in one another. "[Potential is] fleeting and amorph-

ous, it lives as a residue or resonance in an emergent assemblage of disparate forms and realms of life. Yet it can be seen as palpable as a physical trace" (Stewart , 2007, p. 21). Potentiality does not exist in the present; it exists beyond performances (Muñoz, 2009). The performance is not completed and perfect in the instance of its enactment. As such, these versions of unfinished or unpolished performance can actually be read as perpetual urges for becoming rather than attempting to perfect the imperfectible present. As Muñoz (2009) states, "The performances of amateurism, in both punk and ... [some] queer performance, signal a refusal of mastery and an insistence on process and becoming" (p. 106). This "insistence" on "becoming" could be read as shifts in a counterpublic's affective discourse and as the manner by which performance-driven affect circulation continues its work outside the venue.

Risking Participation

Queer counterpublics also serve as "affective networks" (Cvetkovich, 2003, p. 173) where participants with varied histories and reasons for attending decide to come together. It is critical to note how risk shapes the formation and transformation of the relation amongst strangers within counterpublics. Because counterpublics do not exist subsumed under the dominant public, but rather, in conflict with it, there is a certain degree of risk involved in participating in them. However, taking a risk is not necessarily the same as being resistant to the dominant paradigms of sexuality and gender. As a result, Warner's conception of counterpublics maintains a grid-like binary of dominant/not-dominant, wherein one can move between subject positions and counterpublics — and can be agentive in actively resisting the dominant public — but cannot get outside of the grids of ideology and discourse. When discussing positions within these grids, Massumi (2002) notes, "Of course, a body occupying one position on the grid might

succeed in making a move to occupy another position … But this doesn't change the fact that what defines the body is not the movement itself, only its beginning and endpoints. Movement is entirely subordinated to the positions it connects" (p. 3). As a result, I attempt to separate risk from positional movement. Just as movement must not only be viewed as necessary to shift from one situated position to another, so must risk be separated from the view that it is only necessary to progress out of and toward 'something better.' Risk involves movement and affect, but does not always lead to pre-defined boxes into which one inevitably jumps.

Both Muñoz and Halberstam discuss the concept of risk, albeit in differing ways. Halberstam (2005) notes:

> For some queer subjects, time and space are limned by risks they are willing to take: the transgender person who risks his life by passing in a small town, the subcultural musicians who risk their livelihoods by immersing themselves in nonlucrative practices, the queer performers who destabilize the normative values that make everyone else feel safe and secure. (p. 10)

The sense of privatized, domestic safety that is encompassed by heteronormative discourse is part of what a queer performance counterpublic opposes. In terms of how risk conflicts with the heteronormative life narrative, Muñoz refers to Pedro Zamora[10] when he notes, "Pedro discusses the need to 'risk' being with Sean. He points to the ways in which this relationship, within the confines of his tragically abbreviated temporality, forms a new space of self, identity, and relationality" (Muñoz, 1999, p. 159). Furthermore, in relation to activism, Cvetkovich (2003) draws from interviews with former AIDS activists from ACT UP to note that "the specter of death added to the stakes of friendship" (p. 173). The risk involved in participation is evident in the acute possibility of losing a friend or lover.

[10] Pedro Zamora was one of the first HIV positive gay men to receive a great deal of attention via his activism and participation on the Real World: San Francisco, which aired in the early 1990s.

While not necessarily as tragically conceived, “affective networks” connect participants in queer performance counterpublics. These “affective networks” also supply an arena to express one’s rage, needs, pleasures, and desires. Cvetkovich (2003) notes that, “There is a significant link between performance art and testimony in terms of a shared desire to build culture out of memory. The life stories of performance art are often structured around, if not traumatic experience, moments of intense affect that are transformative or revealing” (p. 26). These “moments of intense affect,” produced by the “life stories” of performers and performance participants are transformative in both the instance of their occurrence as well as the instance of sharing them. As a result, they connect people in a counterpublic in transformative ways. This can be noted in the aforementioned Athens Boys Choir performance. Katz is not merely sharing his history; he is transforming his relationship to that history and including other people in the process. And this is a risky move. Yet this risk is part of the movement and affect present in queer performance spaces. This form of risk is part of an affective network present amongst queer performance participants. Not necessarily through their identical stories, but rather, in their similarly disjointed relations to the past and present, performance participants can relate through reworked history and the simultaneous risk and pleasure of participation.

Queer Apertures: Identity, Time, Temporalities, Memory

This idea of reworked history points to the importance of theorizing queered time in unstructuring queer lives. Queer time is a defiance of straight time (Muñoz 2009) or chrononormativity (Freeman, 2010), a type of time promoted through the heterosexual life narrative of one’s mature adulthood being attained through marriage and child-rearing. Rather than a ‘true’ narrative that matches present perceptions of a person, the fluid queer counterpublic discourse

is partially built around its participants' varying relations to time. The discourse is an amalgam of 'truth,' desire, memory, and hope. Because the participants in a counterpublic are more likely to have different histories than they are perceived to have had (e.g., a transman who is expected to have had a 'normal' boyhood), the discourse is altered, re-worked, and shows dynamic qualities that do not perpetuate the circulation of the same normative histories. This dynamism occurs even as there are urges from heteronormative structures of power to normalize and invisibilize queer feelings and histories.

Time is also queered through the redeployment of the past to create an alternate present and future (Halberstam, 2005; Love, 2001; Muñoz, 2009). By removing the single trajectory involved in straight time, the present and future are not known (Muñoz, 2009). Thus, queer time is less about the literal passage of time and more about queer temporalities insomuch as they skew the linearity of straight time in order to reproduce, recreate, redeploy, and rework history in the present. Queer temporalities are related to movements away from, through, and around the expected life timelines of non-queer people. As a result, I expand the idea of queer time beyond the solidifying aspects of the word, time, by theorizing queer temporalities. These temporalities certainly do queer straight time, but that is not all they do. To say that all they do is queer straight time would be to imply that straight time is uniformly the same, which it is not. After all, the aforementioned straight life narrative is, in actuality, a set of expectations of people that are not always met by people who identify with or are marked as the word, heterosexual.

This queer version of looking back at one's history in order to redeploy it could be misconstrued as hopeless nostalgia intending to conceal or repair past trauma to create a present

form of hope. As Heather Love (2001) notes, “It is crucial to find ways of creating and sustaining political hope. But hope that is achieved at the expense of the past cannot serve the future” (p. 29). Therefore, while the past is often full of, for example, shame, loss, and despair, it still must be reckoned with, at least in a fragmentary fashion, in order to alter the present or future. Many writers have discussed productive versus futile nostalgia to explore this topic (Boym, 2001; Gopinath, 2010; Muñoz, 2009; Young, 2005). Young (2005) posits that preservation of memories and mementos is a form of worldmaking rather than a mere longing for a place or time when things were ‘different,’ ‘better,’ or ‘simpler.’ Comparably, Svetlana Boym (2001) asserts that “reflective nostalgia” evokes both “individual and cultural memory” (p. 49) and notes that “the past is not made in the image of the present or seen as foreboding of some present disaster; rather, the past opens up a multitude of potentialities, nonteleological possibilities of historical development” (p. 50). Furthermore, as Gopinath (2010) notes in her of the work of visual artist Allan deSouza, individuals in diaspora — especially those reared in a different location than their parents — do not ‘know’ a single history based on a single set of experiences. As such, there is a possibility to reinvent and perform the past alternately. Like Gopinath’s assertions about visual artists in diaspora, queer live performers reinvent history to reveal that while ‘knowing,’ in the non-fragmented sense, can be empowering in instances, ‘knowing’ can also foreclose the future of burgeoning feelings, whether they be negative, positive, or not-yet defined.

José Esteban Muñoz (2009) invokes the idea of concrete utopia to explore the topic of potentiality. He offers readers this idea in opposition to the romantic version of utopia which is often idealistic and naïve. Muñoz (2009) summons Ernst Bloch’s ‘no-longer-conscious’ theory to

explore the 'not-yet-here' — the potential of imagining an alternate past to supply and replenish the present and future with queer hope. Furthermore, Muñoz (2009) discusses identity politics at great length. He notes, "gay pragmatic organizing is in direct opposition to the idealist thought that I associate as endemic to the forward-dawning queerness that calls on the no-longer-conscious in the service of imagining futurity" (p. 21). In part, this is a critique of stagnant identity as well as community. As will be discussed in a moment, identities often universalize people and falsely conflate their movements and experiences by pushing them into communities which may or may not represent them.

Identities may be useful in temporary performance, in their ability to create momentary subversion, or in their capacity to frighten and compel straight people, but it is in their immobility and mainstream assimilation that they lose their power. At that point, they have lost both their fluctuation and their opposition. As such, they are no longer sites of resistance. While I critique liberal notions of resistance in this thesis, I want to be clear that if resistance is not read as a progress narrative whereby one can wholly subvert dominant paradigms of gender and sexuality through performative actions, the concept of resistance can still be useful. As mentioned briefly in the introduction to this thesis, queer is not a sexuality or an identity, in any singular manner. Rather, queerness only exists in its ability to disrupt identities (a distinctly political project), not as yet another identity (Edelman, 2004).

With regard to queer performance, then, participants are enacting a political project even as they are or are not enacting certain sexual acts that could narrowly define them as queer, gay, straight, bisexual, or any other sexual category of people. Moreover, even as queer can be depoliticized in certain instances, it cannot be apolitical without becoming something

other than queer. It is in the naming of desire that queer acts become identities and it is in this naming that they can become an inclusive/exclusive binary that wholly defies the notion of queering binaries of sexuality and gender, generally. As such, it is important that the discourses and spaces of the queer counterpublic maintain their transformative openness by adapting to fit the ever-evolving needs of its participants and as a result, adapt its potential in the lives of participants and their abilities to multiply queer affective discourse.

Part of this openness is altering the romantic idea of community (recognized here as impossible utopia) to a different notion — a gathering. Gatherings are fluid variations that rest in the interstices of affective networks and comings-together. If one sees communities as sites of similar practices, "sites of consensus," or "public spheres" (Joseph, 2002, p. xix), one ignores the various and shifting affects of its participants. Furthermore, single identities are based in pre-supposed behaviors that stagnate necessary fluctuation (either between identities or non-identities) and ignore the shifting needs of various participants for the "good of the group." An affective network, then, "is the event of place in part in the simple sense of the coming together of the previously unrelated, a constellation of processes rather than a thing" (Massey, 2005, p. 141, emphasis mine). Place can be redefined from heteronormative versions of both time and private/public space.

In a more creative frame, place can be imagined beyond community; it can be imagined as a un-natural landscape of various affective investments, non-linear historical re-workings, and shifting identities. As Doreen Massey (2005) states:

> There can be no assumption of pre-given coherence, or of community or collective identity. Rather the throwntogetherness of place demands negotiation. In sharp contrast to the view of place as settled and pre-given, with a coherence only to be disturbed by 'external' forces, places as presented here in a sense ne-

> cessitate invention; they pose a challenge. They implicate us, perforce, in the lives of human others... (p. 141)

Place and "throwntogetherness" are posited here as a non-communitarian version of coming-together. The "throwntogetherness" encompasses affects and timelines not often theorized in the "pre-given" comings-together of identity communities. As previously cited, Ahmed (2010) notes that "to be affected" means one is evaluating another and that another is evaluating one (p. 31). The implication here is that there is not automatic membership as in an identitarian community; instead affective (pre)dispositions shape our evaluations and perceptions of others and of ourselves in contact with others.

Keywords

In *Keywords: A Vocabulary of Culture and Society* (1985), Raymond Williams attempts to lessen the "discourse of expertise" (Burgett and Hendler, 2007, p. 3) that has formed itself around certain words and instead, provide a cultural vocabulary of words that can be both interconnected and idiosyncratic. In the case of my research, the process of seeking interconnections and idiosyncracies respects the usages rather than a fixed set of feelings or assumptions about what a particular group should feel based on their participation in certain contexts. Whereas the usual goal of a keyword analysis is to trace terms' usages across time and context (Bennett, Grossberg, Morris, 2005, xx), I trace affects across various performances to find the interconnections and idiosyncracies of various feelings.

Williams (1985) notes that while keywords should be explored in relation to their context, "meaning can never be wholly dissolved into context" (p. 22). As such, connecting keywords to different themes displaces their dominance and centrality in relation to certain ideas, disciplines (Talburt and Lesko, 2012, p. 8), and/or contexts; similarly, connecting various affec-

tive keywords displaces their normative meanings and associates them differently with various groups. In defying the simplistic reading of separating various keywords into “simple units” (Williams, 1985, p. 23), Williams notes:

> In practice many of these processes begin within the complex and variable sense of particular words, and the only way to show this, as examples of how networks of usage, reference and perspective are developed, is to concentrate, ‘for the moment,’ on what can then properly be seen as internal structures. This is not to impede but to make possible the sense of an extended and intricate vocabulary, within which both the variable words and their varied and variable interrelations are in practice active. (p. 23; emphasis mine)

Williams finds that keywords must be seen as a constantly fluctuating set of terms that are, in fact, active and have usages that vary depending upon the internal structures of the words and where they are used. While this complexity notes the oscillation of usage, it does not assess the moods that, in part, influence how and under what conditions affects emerge and are modified in non-normative manners. It addresses culture (which is built in part upon relational understandings of societal structures and expectations) as separate from feelings and affect. Keywords may not only be used differently within different groups; rather, they may be used differently depending upon the affective network of people and feelings present in any social situation. Just as events are active, moods and affects are active in their concurrence with events. As a result, I find it critical to explore affective keywords to integrate networks of feelings into the larger project of seeking a shifting and nuanced cultural vocabulary of keywords. Furthermore, the process of exploring affective keywords explodes the idea of affective placements and rather, finds contentment (albeit, only temporarily) in the irrational (in feelings), in movements that constantly create and recreate what is real. Real is not stable. More importantly, affects are not stable. They are contingent upon moods, movements, and relations.

Moving Forward and Sideways

In the next chapter, I move from the density of these scholarly conversations and into narrative explorations of performance space interviews I conducted between January 2012 and March 2012. While I do make some theoretical connections to Chapter 1, I also jump between events and begin to construct themes and a set of affective keywords, the latter of which is explored in much greater detail in Chapter 3.

2 INTERVIEW ANALYSIS AND EMERGING THEMES

Before proceeding directly to performance analyses, I want to very briefly give a sense of what Atlanta's queer performance scene looks like. Atlanta is a very large city where a wide variety of people with vastly different ethnicities, sexualities and sexual community structures, races, and classes, live. This is present in any large city, right? In short, yes. However, Atlanta also has an interesting placement within a conservative state in a historically conservative region of the country. As a result, connections amongst queer performance participants often exist outside of performance spaces as well; namely, these connections are present in activist circles, non-performance social settings, and housing situations. Furthermore, while this thesis addresses affective keywords I found among performance participants, it would be foolish to state that I have covered the vastly variant responses I might have gotten had my interview questions been pointed in other directions. For example, had I not simply asked about what disconnections participants felt and rather, been more pointed with regard to specific disconnections (e.g., racial, ethnic, class disconnects), I might have gotten different answers. As a result, I do not believe these affective keywords to be wholly representative of queer performance participants. Rather, they are a beginning to much larger explorations to come. Atlanta has small performance poetry circles (performance poetry occurs in at least two Atlanta venues, but there are multiple open mic events where poets gather) with a high number of overlapping participants. It has radical queer groups whose participants are heavily involved in performance (both music and performance art), activism (as far as I can tell, most recently, many of these people have been involved in restorative justice models of community care, immigrant rights and anti-death penalty activism, but this is definitely not an exhaustive list), and sustain-

able living. It has a mainstream gay community who might be more apt to participate in the gay club scene and whose activism might involve participation in Gay Pride events in support of gay marriage or gay people serving openly in the military. Atlanta also has groups of academics who may or may not fit into any one of the aforementioned groups wholly, but who are still involved in many of these performance/activist circles.

Clearly, Atlanta's queer performance participants are not uniform. Furthermore, their political beliefs and reasons for participating in performances vary significantly. Where one group may put a critique of capitalism at the forefront of their performance and activist actions, another group may overtly support capitalism and the corporatization of gayness. Yet there are some affective ties that I found by participating in different types of queer performance spaces which I will explore in great detail throughout the rest of this thesis.

2.1 Performance 1: Art Amok! Slam, featuring Gus Wood

Karen Garrabrant is the organizer of Atlanta's slam poetry team, Art Amok.[11] Karen also co-facilitates a monthly open-mic called Cliterati at Charis Books and More.[12] I participated in a Friday the 13th (2012) slam, which was Art Amok's inaugural event in a new space, In Tune Studio.[13] When I say participated, I mean it in multiple ways. First, I was present to do my interviews; second, having been a part of the performance poetry circuit, I do know a few of the regular performers in the group; third, I was asked to be a judge of the slam. This was my first

[11] For more information about Art Amok!, see their website: http://artamokslam.mgillson.webfactional.com/?page_id=35

[12] Charis Books and More is a feminist bookstore and community event venue in Little Five Points, an area of Atlanta, Georgia. It is one of the few remaining feminist bookstores in the United States.

[13] In Tune Studio is a "cooperative of musicians" who offer private music lessons and a performance venue. On their website (http://www.intunestudioatlanta.com/), they state, "Our vision for our relationship with the community involves providing performance opportunities for our students, which in turn provides entertainment for our neighbors."

time judging a slam (judges are not permitted to perform in the slam), but I knew the basic premise. Over the course of the year, Art Amok holds multiple slam contests where points are aggregated for participating poets. The top poets then join Art Amok! at slam competitions, in which they vie against other slam teams in other cities. Because points are aggregated, many of the same poets are repeatedly attending these slams; therefore, there is a higher chance that participants know one another, have heard each others' poems multiple times, and/or have strong relationships created through their performance participation.

Given the connections of both performers and performance participants due to repeated exposure to one another's work, many of the interview responses I received contained a sense of kindness and support for other participants, one I propose is not often present at events that occur in singularity. Furthermore, it is my position that the slaminatrix, Karen Garrabrant, has worked to build a group based in support, feminism, and acceptance, and this position is supported by many of the responses that I received in the interview process.

Interview with Feature Poet Gus Wood: An Exploration[14]

After the performance, I first interviewed the featured poet, Gus Wood. Gus is a young poet who "came up" with Art Amok, has been performing for four years, and is now in college in Ohio. Though Gus has participated in Art Amok slams before, he was the featured poet; he opened the slam with a full set of poems. Gus describes Atlanta and Art Amok as his poetry "home base," but he has performed in other locations on "more than a few occasions." Gus rattled off poetry that was both jolting and humorous, gross and delicate, tender and tough. It is interesting to note that this young poet was not reading from the page; instead, he read a few

[14] Unless otherwise noted, use of quotation marks in my analysis of interviews denotes direct statements by the participants with whom I spoke.

poems from his laptop, holding the computer just in front of the microphone. At the time, I wondered if this was comfortable for him; he kept apologizing to the crowd for it, but it was unclear whether that was because of the supposed formality of featuring or a more personal feeling of discomfort with the practice of reading from the screen. After the show, when asked how he thought his performance went, he expressed that he felt confident that participants liked his performance, but he wished he had been more prepared and had not had to hold a computer as it made him feel disconnected from people listening to him, thereby making it difficult to gauge their reactions. On the other hand, he said that he knew most of the people in the room and further noted that while they had all met through performance poetry, there was a bond present. Therefore, he seemed less concerned with gauging their reactions than he might be with a group of participants with whom he had no personal or poetry-related connections.

Derivative Poetry

Gus's last comment regarding his feelings about his performance was that some of his poems were "too derivative." To explain what he meant by derivative, I will note that many of his poems were constructed by retelling life narratives of characters from myths[15] and super hero stories. For example, his story of Superman was told by juxtaposing Superman's ability to be accepted in tights with Gus's own cross-dressing enactments and fantasies. Gus questioned whether Superman changed in secret because he, too, was ashamed of his jaunt into women's apparel or if it was fear of others' perceptions of him that kept his heroic transvestism literally closeted.

[15] One such example was his refiguring of the myth, "The Rape of Persephone."

For me, Gus's poetry fused stories of Superman with his own life in such a tender way as to make his words poignant while light (he is talking about a superhero, after all). In "Superman," Gus states:

> You and me Clark [Clark Kent/Superman], we both need costumes to be ourselves.
> So I need to know, did it take you long to grow into yours?
> How long before you could move mountains, save lives, stay as strong as you clearly are?
> To change in a phone booth and leave your shame ringing like the unending dial tone of the phone you left hanging off the hook?
> Tell me Superman, how do I wear what I want and still be invincible?
> How do I stop bullets when they're fired from whispers and sideways glances?
> Tell me, if you can, how long before Lois lets you wear the cape to bed?

Just in this short example, Gus goes from a comparison between himself and Superman, to exploring his admiration of Superman's bravery with regard to clothing, leading him to wonder when he will get to the point where he can ignore sneers and "sideways glances" (or worse, violence). Yet, he ends with a slightly serious, slightly humorous question about Superman's sex life. I thought this ending enabled Gus to steer the poem toward an exploration of sex and sexuality in relation to humor, rather than it only being an exploration of sex and sexuality in relation to shame and sadness. He told me that "sad is honest" and when people share their histories, it can be incredibly useful. But he wants to do so without perpetuating sadness and sometimes, he thinks people dwell in their sadness to keep writing about it and that's not always useful. He said, "it's like addiction, you don't want to keep shooting up just to write about it." A poem does not have to be sad to be serious or relatable to other participants, but it can certainly help some participants invest in the performer in a different way. Moreover, is not re-performing trauma another way of skewing history or at least changing its power over the present?

Karen had noted before the show that Gus has grown tremendously as a poet and has more recently begun poetically sharing his non-normative desires. I was not sure what she meant until I heard his poetry. In not claiming a specific identity and only discussing his desires in parallel with the possible struggles of a mainstream superhero, Gus queered the very notion of simply telling his historical or present performances of gender variance. This was a creative and intriguing way to fuse two separate lives, two sets of unknown circumstances and desires (after all, we do not actually know how Superman felt), and two plausibly shared feelings of shame and shaming.

Was the Space Queered or Was It Already 'That Way?'

I put 'that way' in quotes for a couple of reasons. First, affect is often as elusive as the language of calling someone 'that way' (meaning, gay) — a Southern manner by which sexuality is both discussed and present while also clouded and covert. Second, whether one feels that one is in a radical or conservative space, for example, can play a role in the affect felt at a performance. Affective networks that develop as a result of some communion of mood cannot be easily contained or controlled by four walls. As such, what role do the participants have in creating the affect — those feelings of comfort or discomfort burgeoning from the experiences one has dealt with throughout one's day as well as the new experiences and sensations circulating the room? Gus Wood and I explored this question in our interview. When asked if the space was queer or queered by those present, he responded, "no one would get fucked with for doing crossdressing poetry," obviously referring in part to a lack of negative reaction to his own work. Gus thought the space was "tolerant" of queerness, but the people gathered and their affective relationships and respect for one another is what allowed the space to "be queered." But Gus

had something more interesting to say about the way the space felt and about how the content of the performances plays a role in the circulating affect.

Art Amok! and Space

Art Amok! describes itself on its website:

> Art Amok! is a consciously populist, socially-engaged artistic organization. We embrace opportunities for multimedia collaboration and experimental art that pulls a steamboat through the heart. One of our goals is to put Atlanta poets on the map as a place of national poetic and experiential consciousness. We believe the artistic community is a place for social critique, constructive dialogue, mutual encouragement, challenging preconceptions, and bringing ourselves back to life. We strive to provide this space at our events.[16] [emphasis added]

Their focus on consciousness, community, and space attracted my attention. In part because the work of Art Amok! intends to make Atlanta into a noteworthy location of "experiential consciousness," I want to briefly explore their statement. The use of the words "artistic community" explains what it is intended to be for those who actively participate by performing, but what of everyone else? Furthermore, Art Amok! says it "provide[s] this space," implying that the space is the artistic community — a "consciously populist" community of artists. But again, what of the non-performers who are present? "Experiential consciousness" seems to provide a clue. The community seems built by participation in many forms, comings-into-being through experiences of the performances of others. Here, one becomes conscious by experiencing the reperformance of others' histories — the act of listening, feeling, and relating to their art. This form of contingent affect is built through one's presence with other queer people rather than through the simple act of performing a poem. After all, one is performing the act of coming to know another through a relationality that is not merely about being present; rather than mere

[16] http://artamokslam.mgillson.webfactional.com/?page_id=35

presence, it is through a combination of feeling what is being said from and around the stage, feeling what affective (pre)disposition one is in from previous experiences, feeling one's own history busting at the seams, and feeling the affective presence of other participants in the space that is being created by some confluence thereof.

One participant I interviewed stated that he liked, "letting [him]self get drawn into people's stories." He is a regular participant in slams and had performed that evening. He is very familiar with almost everyone in the room and has heard many of them perform on multiple occasions. Moreover, he noted that he had met most of the people present through performance, but many had become his friends. In fact, three people present had once been his roommates. I interviewed him at the end of the evening and when I asked what his favorite performance of the evening was, he said that he could not choose, but that there was a different energy present than usual and that a couple of people who were typically more exuberant brought a muted energy to the stage, which he said was an interesting shift. I followed up by asking if he thought the unusually muted performances of the two people to whom he was referring made the space or the performance feel less powerful, to which he replied, "No, everyone nailed it."

I asked another person if she knew people present at the performance from other contexts to which she responded, "Kind of, but always poetry-related. I mean, poetry is sort of just what I do with my time." When I inquired further about how her participation was or was not driven by the people who regularly participate, she said they made her feel "comfy," "at home," "supported," and "like a rockstar." This was interesting to me as this participant's poems during the slam had been explicitly queer and the poetry of other participants varied

wildly on the spectrum of sexual subject matter. For example, in the poems of several male poets, there were overt references to their heterosexuality. In the interviewee's poetry, there were overtly queer references. I questioned the participant as to whether she felt the space was queer, queered by the people in it, or uncomfortable in any way. She started by saying that the majority of the people present were "queerish" and allies and then she paused. A previous interviewee was close by and is close friends with the person to whom I was presently speaking. He interjected, "wait, allies sets them apart and they are a part." The interviewee strongly affirmed what her friend had just stated and thanked him for clarifying. Then the interviewee paused a second longer before looking as though she had just had a thought. She said, "wait, the winning poet (a woman) had a strap-on reference in her poem and she won!" (parenthetical note added) and then went on to note that surely her win is an implication of an "open environment."

2.2 Performance 2: God-des and She

God-des and She are a duo based in Austin, Texas who performed a show on January 14th, 2012 at My Sister's Room, a lesbian bar in the East Atlanta Village neighborhood of Atlanta, Georgia. God-des and She have been performing together for six years, though each of their individual performance careers go back much further. The duo tour often, noting that they are particularly drawn to hit the road when they either have the energy and line-up or when they need money. In particular, She[17] noted that since the economic downturn, they have been performing more. In my interviews, this was the first time an artist so directly discussed the need for money as a reason for touring. For many, touring is expensive and can only provide a lucra-

[17] When discussing my interview with God-des and She, any capitalized "She" refers to the musician rather than the pronoun.

tive opportunity if they are playing in a city where they have a big fan base or at colleges, where contracts guarantee a certain amount to the performer/s. Given that many performers have other employment, it is a risk to be a full-time artist. For example, one is not guaranteed the possibility of health insurance. Furthermore, in stepping outside of the possibility of a hetero-normative — or homonormative, for that matter — life narrative (e.g., courtship, marriage, re-production, property ownership) and being further distanced from that narrative by a lack of consistent employment, queer performers may be taking an even bigger jump from main-stream expectations than their heterosexual/normatively gendered performer counterparts. I asked them if they hoped to continue touring forever; they said yes. Right now, it's the only way that they can guarantee, oddly enough, some monetary stability, and She noted that she could not imagine working a restaurant job again at her age (I believe she is in her late thirties).

Along the lines of dream careers, She told me that her high school best friend recently posted a facebook note of what the 15-year-old She had written in his (She's best friend) high school yearbook. In short, She told me that even at fifteen, she had been explicit about what she was going to do with her life — move to New York City and be a working musician. She told me that she did exactly what she said she would. Similarly, God-des told me that years ago when she worked at a cafe in Madison, Wisconsin, she met a promoter, whom at the time, she thought would help her catch a break. The promoter sat in God-des's old Lincoln Towncar and patiently listened to her CD. God-des did not hear from the promoter again until years later, after one of the duo's songs was featured on the L-Word. The promoter wrote God-des a mes-sage saying how happy she was that God-des had "made it" and how she knew she had it in her.

Contextualizing the Show

God-des and She were performing on the first night of new ownership at My Sister's Room. The bar had just switched from a drag performance space, where DJs spun late at night and dancing was prevalent, to a sports bar theme. The new owners added multiple televisions, two pool tables, and football pennants drape the bar. This alteration has not necessarily changed the clientele of the bar (typically very early twenties, predominantly white), especially not on the first night, but it certainly changed the context in which a lesbian hip-hop duo takes the stage. The performance participants were a mix of predominantly younger gay women, though there were certainly other genders, age ranges, and sexualities represented. My Sister's Room was fun, though there was a certain sense of awe at seeing a nationally known act that made the space oddly cool. I say oddly because it was not a "hip" cool, maybe more of a young dyke form of cool. However, in my conversation with the duo before the show, I did not read them as hyper cool. They were quite easy to talk to and did not have a cocky air about them at all.

God-des and She told me that they love the "community" that they have developed in Atlanta due to having performed here multiple times. They stated that they have made friends here with whom they stay in touch. And if not friends, they certainly saw familiar faces in the crowd. Most importantly, they noted that they are a bit reclusive before their shows, not because they feel disconnected from the people in the space, but to build up their energy to perform. They said that once they hit the stage, there are "fleeting connections" and there is "energy exchanged" that bind/s them to other performance participants. However, they believe that the 'real' connections often happen after the shows when they are talking to people

and selling their merchandise. She noted that even after “awkward shows,” She is always “touched by someone’s story.” As I continued talking to the duo, they began sharing more about how many times participants have said what a difference one or more of their songs has made in their lives — everything from getting them through cancer, major car accidents, or being a gay soldier in Iraq. A lot of these exchanges occur after shows, though a great many occur through emails that result in the fan coming to the show to express their gratitude to the band. I asked what outcomes these exchanges had on the performers and they said that they make them feel more connected to their art and to the people who like it. Moreover, they noted that the exchanges fuel their performances.

Considering the heartfelt stories they were telling me, I half expected all of their lyrics to be about life triumphs and sorrow. While this was the case in some songs, many were fun, funny, and very sexual. When performing, one often wants to mix politics, humor, and sass to enable a certain consciousness to circulate while also maintaining the fun of the show. In this performance, they primarily stuck to funny tracks, but their politics were present in their performance through their on-stage banter. Though they certainly conveyed a gay progress narrative through their focus on issues like gay marriage and the overturn of Don’t Ask, Don’t Tell, the fact that they were making clear statements of their politics was important in helping me to understand how their reach could be so broad. Furthermore, after the show, I listened to one of their albums in full and found tracks that mixed political hope and anger in much more overt manners.

For example, in the song “This is the Life,” God-des discusses the class struggles involved in being a queer performer. She states:

> It's a constant battle tryin' to support my family.
> Something's not right with my parents' social security.
> My dad is 65, workin' 50 hours a week.
> That tears at my soul, so many nights I can't sleep.

On the same album,[18] "Hey Mister President," God-des states:

> How convenient is it that your friends own all the companies
> that provide the weapons to the U.S. military?
> Now you own the pipelines all over Iraq,
> You made your daddy proud, you stole what he never got.
> The money for the war could've gone to social security, you're more concerned with oil than you are about the elderly.
> The funds that you wasted on just a couple of bombs, could've gone to feed the kids of all the single moms.
> You define capitalism in all its worst ways …
> You care more about preventing gays from getting married
> than you do about preventing your soldiers from being buried.
> So many schools are lacking necessary supplies, and it's only getting worse cuz no assistance you'll provide.
> Prescription medicine is becoming so expensive,
> you must have the companies giving you a percentage.

As one can tell, God-des and She are not limited to fun. They address a wide range of social and political problems in their work. Their live show was fun, upbeat, and sexual, but as I mentioned, their between-song banter was not apolitical. Even though they did not include overtly political songs in their actual performance, they address politics.

Shifting from lyrics and post-show stories, I want to address more about the space in which their performance took place. We were sitting in a lesbian bar talking about spaces being or not being queer and while many lesbian spaces may not 'feel' the same as queer spaces, there may be more of a shared connection between the two than between, for example, a lesbian bar of most sorts and a Hard Rock Cafe (anywhere). However, God-des and She noted that there have been instances in which performance participants' affect has overcome the

[18] These excerpts both come from the album, "Stand Up," released in mid-2008.

straightness of a space. They noted how this occurred in their performances at places such as the House of Blues (the Chicago location), the Knitting Factory (Brooklyn location), and the Metro (Chicago). Interestingly, they also had this experience at Whiskey a Go Go (Los Angeles). At that show, God-des and She were opening for The Vixens and came on stage to greet a crowd who, at first, were simply ready for the much-anticipated headliner to come on stage. According to God-des and She, the crowd did not like the idea of waiting through the opening act's performance. However, God-des and She said they "blew it up"; not only were they invited back to headline, they were flown in to perform, an infrequent occurrence for a venue that rarely needs to pay for its performers' travel to their venue. Performers typically jump at the chance and make it happen without thinking twice.

Shifting Subjectivities

This invitation back to a hip (Whiskey a Go Go), but not necessarily queer space, certainly shows some affective and relational connections between the band and other performance participants. In fact, the band was invited by one performance participant to come learn to make fry bread on her Reservation, has been brought eggs from someone's chicken coop, and has performed at a few weddings for people who came to their shows and expressed intense connection to the band and their work. There are definitely affective connections between the band and multiple groups of performance participants who, based on the stories of the band, seem to have shifting subjectivities that their performance participation propels. As mentioned earlier, one fan emailed the duo about how their music had helped to get her through a major car accident. God-des and She said that their show was the first event (outside her home or hospital) to which she had walked. The person had worked hard in physical thera-

py so that she could walk to see her favorite performers take the stage. She followed up this anecdote by stating, “We certainly don’t cure people, but maybe our music can give people the strength to cure themselves. I don’t know, maybe we can help to bring people back.” I do not believe that this woman’s interest in walking to this show was purely about seeing God-des and She. I could be wrong, but it seems the participant was also desiring some connections to the whole scene — connections she could not attain from just listening to their CD on repeat at home. Not only did her embodiment shift the evening she walked to the show, but maybe she came into being a little bit that night. Having not interviewed her, I am quite sure that my engagement in her story may be shifting its meaning; however, maybe that simply means that both of our subjectivities shifted from participating in a God-des and She performance. The story felt cheesy; however, who am I to judge what role music and performance can play in someone’s life? Moreover, perhaps some of the affective connections that I am wholly invested in exploring are shrouded in these somewhat cheesy narratives. Conceivably, these cheesy narratives are a means by which to bring certain queer affect back from the dead.

2.3 Performance 3: Ladystache featuring DJ Vicki Powell

Before the Dancing

Before heading to the fourth annual facial-hair-mandatory event Ladystache at the Highland Inn Ballroom, I had dinner with a few friends on the heated front patio of the restaurant next door. As we were eating, I noticed a variety of people coming and going whom I rarely see in the Poncey Highlands area of Atlanta, Georgia. Poncey Highlands, or least the small stretch of it on which the Highland Ballroom is located, is predominantly inhabited and visited by an early to mid-twenties hipster crowd, riding fixed gear bikes. Down the street, there is typically a larg-

er age range of people present at Manuel's, the official Democrat bar of Atlanta. The Highland Inn, an actual hotel, is located above the 'ballroom' — a space more reminiscent of a DJ driven dance space than a ballroom. Perhaps that is its charm. In years prior, the Ladystache event took place at Bellissima, a midtown lesbian bar in midtown which closed just weeks before this year's event. Therefore, the event took place in a drastically different type of space this year. Because the event was taking place in a non-gay bar outside of midtown Atlanta,[19] I was curious to know if participants felt that the event was different than in previous years.

As I sat next door eating dinner, I was pleasantly surprised to find that the people whom I saw around me were mostly mustached lesbians and queer-looking people from their late-twenties to mid-fifties. Apparently, the proximity of this restaurant to the bar next door was an apt choice for many of us who were planning to wander over to the event. I was quickly making friends with folks looking to cover their upper lips; I had a pack of adhesive mustaches and was giving them away. People seemed excited for Ladystache. As we wandered over to the bar at around 10:15, I saw many of the same people I had seen either eating or walking by the restaurant a bit earlier. It felt great; it felt queer. I surveyed the event for a few minutes as DJ Vicki Powell began playing beats. The space was not filled, but filling. Before things really got going, I found a participant to interview. Luckily, the three interviews I conducted that night were almost evenly spaced throughout the event — one as the event was beginning, one around midnight, and the last one around 1:30 in the morning.

The Disconnect Unbegun

[19] Midtown Atlanta is home to many gay-owned and- frequented restaurants, bars, and clubs. There is a large population of affluent, white gay men in Midtown, though it is a very diverse neighborhood. Gay Pride occurs in Piedmont Park, which is in Midtown and functions as the core of the neighborhood.

The first participant I talked to had an amazing mustache that included pink gemstones and black dots, creating a double handlebar shape. Her friend had invited her to the event and she noted that she is always both nervous and excited coming into queer spaces. This is not to make queer space either purely about the type of bar (gay or straight) or purely about the number of queer people in the space. However, these two facets of space do matter with regard to how, if, and through what means, a space can be(come) queered. I asked why nervous and excited and she told me coming into queer events as an adult is different and affirming, but as a younger person, it used to feel like a "meat factory." I asked what was affirming about it and she said that she feels more comfortable both participating and people-watching, whereas she used to be unable to do the latter without feeling excluded, especially early in an event before the space gets crowded. She had not been to this space before and she told me that it was too early in the evening to feel any real disconnect with the space or the people in it. She was still "scoping out the scene."

This participant did have an interesting view of her queerness. She told me that she had grown up with lesbian moms so she had always been around an older lesbian contingent. But while she had grown up in that environment, she was just now making queer friends in spaces where she felt represented,[20] regardless of whether the language of queer was used. She told me that queer was a part of her, but not her identity. She also told me that the event felt more like a gathering than a performance and that she felt she could connect differently in this space. I asked whether that shaped whether the space was being queered or was queer and she said, yes, it was definitely being queered by the people in it, though she noted it felt very different

[20] This form of 'representation' was not totally clear. I believe she was implying that she felt represented in a looser, non-identity-specific manner, but I could be overly inferring.

from a gay bar. Furthermore, I think her note about it being more of a gathering than a performance was likely because one is not actively watching a DJ or listening to original lyrics. In this case, people were gathering to dance and show off their mustaches rather than to 'see a show.' The movements of a DJ, while interesting to watch for a moment, are not the primary focus. Rather, the focus is on feeling beats and moving one's body. As a result, maybe the gathering was more about bodies interacting with other bodies in different manners than the interactions that are present at musical/spokenword/hip-hop performances.

I found this interview striking in many ways. Not only did the participant mention the environment of her upbringing and how it varied from the queer spaces in which she now participates, she also mentioned the ways in which she had felt excluded from queer spaces before. To me, these sentiments seemed somewhat oxymoronic and that is exactly how many people enter these spaces. One does not check personal history or previous experiences at the door before going into a bar. Rather, those experiences and the affective state one is in prior to a performance event certainly shape at least the initial feelings one has after entering a performance space. It was also interesting that her subjectivity had shifted since she began participating in these spaces, possibly due to her age,[21] possibly because the spaces have shifted over time, or possibly because her affective investments in the people typically present at these events has increased. She seemed to know a lot of people around her, but noted that one particular friend had invited her and that she would not have come had she not been actually going in with someone. Yes, participation had altered her personal life as she has met many people at these events with whom she otherwise might not have had contact. Yet, she was still

[21] I am not sure of her age, though I would guess mid- to late-twenties. While certainly still young, I would argue that one's participation (in many spaces) is often very different when one is 18 versus when one is a decade older.

shy and unable to tackle participating in these events if she had to go alone. I think this is a pretty general feeling, particularly at dance events, though I could be wrong.

Disconnections in the Space

People who seemed particularly connected to dance parties and/or DJ Vicki were dancing frantically while those who were not seemed to be looking around, awkwardly trying to get into the music. At that point in the evening (about half-way through the event), I talked to another participant whose responses were very different from my first interviewee. This participant told me that she had come to the event last year and that she thought it was among the best events of 2011 even though mustaches had already become mainstream and as a result, annoyingly ubiquitous. The rise in mustache popularity was one of her main reasons for saying that the event was not as good as last years' event. Her other reason had to do with location.

This interviewee felt that because of these two reasons, the crowd and the space were not as full of "ladies and genderqueer" people. She cited multiple cisgendered men pushing through the crowd as an example of what was less present in 2011. Furthermore, she noted that Bellissima was a much smaller space and allowed one to mix in with a less "dudely" crowd. I asked how she felt coming to the event, and she told me that her workday had been really difficult and she felt whiney and like a complainer before arriving. She began to feel better once she was around a few friends at dinner, but once at the event, she felt disconnected again. She was surprised by how few people she knew and how disconnected she felt given her experience at the event a year ago. I was surprised by how discontented she felt and wondered if this was part of her difficult day continued or a combination of the affect of her day with a situational

feeling of discomfort in the space. As a result, I jumped back to her earlier statement about the space feeling “dudely.”

I asked her if she felt like this was a queer space or if it was being queered by the people in it. She responded by noting that last year’s space and location felt queer and that this year, neither did. I probed a bit further, asking if this non-queer space felt like it was being queered by the event taking place inside of it. She said, “honestly, the number of queer people [here] isn’t enough to take it over.” Put into theoretical terms, she did not believe that the environment was being queered by the circulation of affect because there did not seem to be enough queer affect to bind people into “taking over” the space. The empirical value placed on queering that this interviewee noted when she said the “number of queer people” was somewhat striking. She seemed to attach queer affect directly to queer bodies. This was a very interesting shift from my first interview. Granted, it was further along in the evening and the crowd had changed and grown. Yet it seemed that for this respondent, it had grown in normative affect rather than through the release and circulation of queer affect. My first and second interviewees were friends with one another. In fact, my first interviewee said that the second interviewee had invited her to the show. Yet despite their shared connection prior to entering the space, both their personal histories and their present affective investments in the space drastically differed in a way that I found quite compelling.

I thought exploring the second interviewee’s affective investments in queer performance participation would help to clarify some of these differences. As a result, I asked her if she thought participation in these types of events shifted or altered her personal life and if so, for better or worse? Her response was very thoughtful and engaging. First, she told me that she

is a public school teacher, who had taught all day before coming out at night. When she began teaching, a teacher-friend who is also queer told her that she must go out as much as possible on the weekends, especially Friday nights, in order to maintain a "life" and a departure from their heteronormative work environment.

Even still, the interviewee has mixed experiences on her weekend outings. She told me that she often has to push herself to go out and usually does so in the hope that she will "get what she needs." I asked what getting what she needs is; she responded that she meant that she desired to be connected to queer people and to let go of her day. While letting go of one's affective state simply by going to a queer event might seem impossible, participation in these spaces can shift one's affective state through the circulation of affect in the space. It is not merely a balance where 50 people walk in with 'negative affect' and 51 people walk in with 'positive affect' thereby tipping the scales in the positive direction. Rather, there is a much more disjointed affect that can be created — one that could harness the potential of the space to be queer. After all, this interviewee comes into these spaces literally attempting to feel different than she has throughout her workday. It is almost as if she looks to queer performance spaces as an antidote to the rigidity and limiting interactional possibilities present in U.S. public schools. Her work environment might put her in a particular (negative) mood. However, I do not want to conflate her participation in queer performance to escape a negative mood with an inevitable search for a positive mood. Negative and positive are simple words that elide the more nuanced mood-shift possibilities that this participant could conceivably experience through participation. Thus, as Flatley (2008) notes, she might be oriented toward particular affects over others because of her mood/s (p. 17). Therefore, when she notes that she only

“sometimes feels like it was worth it,” I take that as a sign that maybe she has not been oriented toward the ‘fun’ of the evening in a manner that will allow for certain pleasures to burgeon. She noted that sometimes she notices a drastic shift in her mood, but not always for the better.

Again, as stated earlier in this thesis, one might only notice one’s moods when they are particularly intense (Flatley, 2008, p. 21). As a result, one might be searching for a drastic shift to deal with a noticeable mood. But what if that mood is not so intense that one engages with it as a conscious mood? How does that shift one’s orientations toward certain affects and not others? The energy the interviewee puts into pushing herself to go out makes her invest in the evening being “worth it.” Therefore, there is a much greater chance of disappointment. Going out and participating in queer performance events is only “sometimes what [she] needs” but if she does not go out, then she feels like she does not know what she could have felt otherwise.

Most of us know the feeling of being in one’s pajamas on a Friday at 9:00 pm and being thoroughly satisfied. On the other hand, one can be in pajamas at 9:00 pm on a Friday night and feel totally dissatisfied, reclusive, and unable to process what one is missing. It seems that this interviewee was affectively invested in the people she sees when she is out and in the places where she goes out. Yet, this was not consistent, and her investment seemed to shift not just with the fun of the event, but with the event’s outcome on her personal life as well as the capacity for her participation to shift the affective disappointment that built up during her workday. She noted that when she goes out, she always worries that the event will not be what she had hoped for or needed. In this case, it was clear she was happy she had come out for part of the evening, but was certainly disappointed in the event itself.

Somewhere in the Middle?

My last interview took place toward the end of the evening with a person who was not friends with my first two interviewees. This person told me that her day had also been rough and that she came out to relieve some of her anxiety and unwind. She wished there were more events like Ladystache, but felt like if there were, the event would lose its "edge." I think by "edge" she was referring to the excitement and anticipation that accompanies an annual event. Because this participant had been present the whole night, I thought she might be able to offer a different type of insight into her feelings on her connections to other folks in the room as well as to the space. Unlike my second interviewee, she did not feel a disconnect with the space. Rather, she noted that DJ Vicki always brings a diverse group of people together and that she felt comfortable in the space.

I urged her to talk more about the space by asking about the queerness of it. I was curious to know her thoughts on whether the space was generally queer or was being queered by the people in the room. Furthermore, I wondered what affective investments she had in performance participation and how those investments shifted by event, by space, by participants present, or some fusion thereof. She noted that the space was "queer friendly" though not necessarily "queer." She thought, however, that the space was being "queered" because of the people in the room as well as the DJ who was performing.[22] It was not queer all the time. In fact, as I mentioned earlier and this participant echoed, events like this rarely happen in Poncey Highlands because the area is more hipster than it is queer. I was interested in understanding why this participant still goes to these events regardless of space.

[22] DJ Vicki Powell is known to be queer and DJs at a lot of events where gay people gather. This participant noted that DJ Vicki draws a "diverse" group of people to her dance nights.

Similar to my second interviewee, she felt that participation did sometimes shift and/or build her personal life. She cited a “need for balance” between her work life and her outside-of-work life. She noted that unfortunately, she does not get this amount of diversity and comfort in other parts of her life. The word comfort kept inserting itself into our conversation, and after the interview upon reviewing my notes and my memory, I wondered if seeking comfort was a motivation for this participant to be a part of these events. Is comfort what other people are seeking when they participate in these types of groups and performances? Is an affective desire for comfort the same as the desire for relief from the normative work structures in which these two interviewees find themselves on a daily basis? Here, comfort seems to be gained by a relationality only harnessed through participation. Unlike many normative statements that comfort is being in the home, protected, hugged, it seems that these queer participants find something comforting about being around one another in a public space. I immediately thought back to a José Esteban Muñoz quotation from my literature review: “There is indeed something about the transformative powers of nightlife that queers and people of color have always clung to” (p. 108). For queer people, is comfort often absent from the liberal ideal of the private home, given that normative family structures have often excluded queer people? As a result, is there a comfort in the relational capacities of queer performance participation? Are queers affectively invested in finding comfort, finding connection, finding escape?

2.4 Performance 4: Sir Lady Indee; Father Figure; Elliot; Snake, Shark, Broken Heart

The Warehouse is not a bar. It is a living/performance/hang space with thick plastic draping the ceiling and an old-fashioned barn door type entryway. I found myself in a totally different world when I walked inside. The Warehouse is located on Edgewood Avenue, a busy

Atlanta street even more trafficked here due to the space's proximity to a ramp onto Interstate 85. I was swiftly carried into another world where book-lined shelves covered the walls of the tiny corner stage. As people began to mull about and chat, everyone pulled out the libations that they had brought along. A tip jar for the two traveling performers (Sir Lady Indee and Elliot/Sticks and Stones) kept recirculating itself for new arrivals. I found myself somewhat mesmerized by the gathering while at the same time, feeling like I was somewhat of an outsider. These people all seemed to know each other quite well and even while I knew a few of them, it felt more like a big family gathering than a typical performance.

As the small room began to get crowded, I stepped outside to talk to people. One of the people who was performing in the first band, Father Figure, was nervously smoking a cigarette. He mentioned that he was nervous because they had just formed and had only performed together a few times. His anxiety was palpable but part of the energy of the space for him. He was summoned inside and quickly made his way onto the stage with the other people in his group. They played a mostly upbeat set of four or five songs as the crowd began to dance a bit. As they finished up, it was announced that there would be a little break while the next performer set up.

Adolescent Connections and Identity Formation

I quickly found a couple of people to interview. These two people were at the show together but had just met a day prior. One of them was visiting from Brooklyn and the other was showing her around Atlanta. As a result, their experiences of Atlanta and of this gathering were

very different. Yet they also shared interest in the performance as well as historical similarities that bound them in an interesting way. I will split my analysis of this interview to some degree; however, given that their responses were feeding off of one another a bit, I feel it important to maintain some strong connections. Both of these people had busy days, one saying she came to be relieved of her stress, the other seeking an affinity to Atlanta and its queers. The local participant knew she could gain relief from her busy day by participating in the space while the other had no idea what her evening would be like. She is thinking about moving to Atlanta and was trying to experience Atlanta and said she was doing quite a bit of "regional questioning" the night of the show.

Furthermore, the local interviewee knew many of the people in the room in other ways, including shared participation in activism, performance, school, and housing. I asked about whether these circles of people, or specifically this space, felt queer to her. More specifically, I asked what her connections to the people in the room were as well as whether this was a queer venue or simply a performance space in which anyone might be invited to play. With regard to the space being queer, she said yes, but noted that not everyone in the room was queer; rather, the gathering was "more radical than just queer." With regard to her connections to people in the space, she knew the performers personally and was around this group of people a great deal. I was curious about how this relational understanding of the people in the room shifted her experiences in additional ways, both personal and otherwise. She said, of course, participation was a big part of her social life, but more importantly, she went back to the idea of space. This space felt like a lot of the spaces she had gone to as a high school student. She stated, "I spent lots of time at punk shows in basements before I was 21." I was curious to know

if there was a means by which she connected to this specific space in addition to the people in it. Was there something about both the people and the specific "type" of space that we were in to which this participant was drawn? She noted that the space was important because at punk shows in high school, she learned to move her body in new ways. For this participant, the most important aspect of being in punk spaces as a young person was learning to navigate space, to move and be physical in a non-violent way.

This aspect of corporeal experience and its relationship to safety and violence struck a chord for me. I was interested in continuing the conversation about what that meant to her as an adult, but before I could do so, the other participant jumped in to add some similar insight, though less about physical movement. She noted that she used to come to shows like this as part of her identity — as in, her identity was built around always being in attendance. She was the person who goes to shows, the person who was always 'there.' Now, however, she said she does not own that identity or use performance as a space to necessarily develop new identities or subject positions; rather, it is important for her to be in spaces with other people who "came into being in that way." She thought they shared a particular "warm bond" because of their similar experiences of identity formation. I am not sure if she was referring to a 'gay' identity or being a part of a gay identitarian space; however, she was implying that personal identification with certain words or groups was not as necessary for her at this point in life as it had previously been. The other interviewee (the local person) spoke up in total agreement. She noted that she is also closest to people who shared similar adolescent experiences. In fact, she wants to be around people who grew up "watching Daria and listening to Smashing Pumpkins" or at least people who have a strong understanding and connection to what that means for her expe-

rience. Then the Brooklyn visitor said, this feels like a "larger organismic thing." The next performers were beginning so we had to stop talking.

Shifting Organisms

I began thinking about how this "larger organismic thing" was clearly not related solely to this space or this gathering. Rather, there was a historical similarity that these two participants found important in the development and evolution of the 'thing that is now.' The next performer was Sir Lady Indee, a spokenword and performance artist who was touring with the third performer Elliot, who performs as Sticks and Stones. They both hail from Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. Sir Lady Indee started with two spokenword pieces which they[23] said, while old, provided some of their history and historical ways of thinking that shaped who they are now. One of the pieces, for example, was called "Womyn with a Y," harkening back to a feminist ideal of taking the men out of women. It was a sweet piece. Their next piece provided participants with a relatively detailed version of the performer's history. In it, they spoke of losing their mother suddenly as a child and living with multiple people in a three-bedroom starter home where they came into adolescence seeking any bad distraction that they could find. However, at some point in high school they began performing. Through performance, they began to feel theirself [24] differently. In the piece, Indee said, "I lost myself in front of an audience. I became myself in front of an audience." When I heard that line, I immediately related it back to the conversation I had just before their performance. There was a noteworthy connection, some "coming into being" that occurred through performance participation during adolescence.

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[23] Sir Lady Indee is a self-identified genderqueer person (announced on stage). As such, I am using the plural pronoun 'they' for a single person rather than a singular pronoun he/she/ze/se because I am not sure with what pronouns the performer identifies (if any at all).

[24] Again, while theirself is not a word, it is a new pronoun to represent a single person.

Moreover, there was a burgeoning theme between identity formation and physical movement that was becoming clearer even as I noted how contrary that idea was to Massumi's (2002) argument that identity positions and movement are contradictory. As explored in my literature review, Massumi (2002) notes that movement cannot be fully examined (if at all) by noting moves from one subject position/identity to another. However, like the participants I had interviewed, there were present movements and affects that were based in past identities. As such, it seems necessary not to disavow identity formation as important even as it only explores movement within the grids of ideology and discourse. Rather, movements do exist within grids, but affect can expand and explode the idea of movements only existing within grids.

Partial Exposures

Sir Lady Indee's last piece was very different. Indee pushed the play button and their recorded voice became audible through speakers. In the recording, they began reading off what could best be described as a mental list they had made for theirself. A few of the items were about food and eating, particularly the simultaneous cultural push to indulge in and worrying about food intake. There was an insinuation of having to deal with our culture's complicated relationship to food and diet, but it was also humorous (roughly paraphrasing one list item: make sure to eat copious amounts of starches in the morning because they are delicious). Other list items were about being friendly but not freaking out someone at the bus stop "like you did that one time." Participants seemed engaged in the humor and the hurt; we were all quietly listening and thoroughly engaged.

As the lengthy list was playing, Sir Lady Indee began taking their clothes off and wrapping their body in plastic wrap. In just underwear, they continue wrapping theirself until they

are wearing a plastic wrap tube top, then a shoulderless dress. This all happens by the time they reach list number 16 or so. They were exposing their private thoughts through the speakers as they were exposing and covering up their body. Granted, the coverage was transparent, making the point of partial exposure more obvious. They put on a blonde wig as the list faded away and the refrain to a popular pop song began to play. It was "Tick Tock" by Kesha. Indee proceeded to dance in a pre-planned but fun and spastic manner for about thirty seconds until they turned their back to the crowd for a moment. As the music faded they turned back around and had exposed their chest to the crowd. At that moment, performance participants (including me) did not seem stunned by the exposure, but they did seemed stunned by the unexpected act that was being performed. Because Indee had started with older spokenword pieces, which were vastly different from the performance piece they were presenting now, it was as if the drastic shift made the performance much more intense. As the piece suddenly concluded, people stared earnestly at the performer. In this very brief instance, the connections between participants felt palpable; the affect circulating felt knowing but surprised, completely understood yet stunned and stirred. Just as that moment (quite literally five seconds at most) of affective connection was stirred, Indee bowed their head as the applause and congratulatory yelling began.

I went back to my interview notes to relate what I was feeling at the end of this performance to what had been said earlier. There was a heightened level of exposure not just present because the performer had literally exposed their body, but also because they had exposed their internal thoughts to the other participants in the space. Whilst looking through my interview notes, I overheard people saying how much they had enjoyed the performance so far. I

had written down something (a verbatim quotation) during one of my interviews during the evening: “It’s the experience of being commonly moved.” That was noted right after the “larger organismic thing” quotation. I am suggesting that there is something about the disruption of linear history, the disruption of normative gender expressions (both overtly on stage as well as Indee’s statement about being genderqueer), and the similarly noted adolescent experiences that interviewees explained, which may be a part of the connection in the space. It is not merely an indication that there must actually be connections via friendships, activism, or home sharing; after all, one of my participants does not live in Atlanta and had only known one person in the room for a day. Yet she had similar feelings to the person who did have a vast array of connections to people in the space.

Therefore, the affective ties I am investigating are not necessarily based in personal connection or space. Was there some comfort in knowing that while personal histories were disjointed in both location and familial experiences, there was still some adolescent desire or ‘knowledge’ that tied queers in the space? Furthermore, was this adolescent desire or ‘knowledge’ based in relational understandings of similar queer subject formations or similar politically radical subject formations, even as those identities and forms of subjecthood were not the same stirrings/movements of their current connections? Surely, I thought, there was some connection between the two as well as some subtle, if not obvious, disconnections between the experiences invoked by each formerly inhabited situated position and the positionless affect currently circulating.

The last performance of the evening was the band Snake, Shark, Broken Heart. I had not seen them play in their current formation, though I recognized one of the band members from

other activist/musician events. Their performance was upbeat and a great end to the evening. The amount of participants had dwindled as the evening progressed and oddly, many people left after the performance of Elliot/Sticks and Stones (he performed in between Sir Lady Indee and Snake, Shark, Broken Heart). His music was beautiful, but it was shoegaze-y, lyrical, and sleepy. That is not a bad thing; however, the evening was clearly waning and people were growing tired. Snake, Shark, Broken Heart picked the beat back up a bit, but by then, it was late. I could continue to talk about their performance, but I was tired at that point, too, and Sir Lady Indee had stolen the show. The electric part of the evening felt like it had dissipated, especially knowing that we could see the last band perform again soon.

2.5 Performance 5: Ramona and the Swimsuits; Leslie and the Lys

Though members of Ramona and the Swimsuits and Leslie and the Lys play instruments, they are more of a campy theatrical performance than a musical act. Not only do the performers in the band wear very ornate costumes,[25] their songs often make less sense than their outfits. This certainly makes the performance entertaining, though it does get somewhat redundant after a while. The bands performed on a Sunday night at 529, a recently reappropriated space (the performance space was formerly a restaurant) on Flat Shoals Road in East Atlanta Village. I do not know how long the space has been used for performances or what types of acts they typically attract. At the start, the bar seemed laid-back and interesting.

Having seen Leslie and the Lys twice before and Ramona and the Swimsuits once, I had a strong notion of what the show would 'feel like.' Importantly, in this case, I had just seen both

[25] Ramona and the Swimsuits wear swimsuits and spandex shorts during their performance. Leslie Hall, the frontwoman in Leslie and the Lys wears her signature gold unitard, thick belt, and oversized glasses.

bands perform just one short week prior. However, they had performed at least 3 times since I had last seen them and had travelled (via van) from Tucson, Arizona all the way to Atlanta. As a result, it was hard to say how similar or dissimilar the performances would be. Additionally, I saw Leslie and the Lys perform in Boston about 7 or 8 years ago when they were just starting out. Both bands are from Aimes, Iowa. The people gathered for their show were 99% white, about half presenting as male and half female, even as the bands have only one male between them, of about 6 people. Many people had on gem sweaters, an important part of Leslie's performance routine. She has a gem sweater contest at each of her shows where she chooses the best gem sweater amongst those being worn by participants, brings that person on-stage, and gives them a completely bizarre (but hilarious) name like Kitty Glitter Shimmer Sweater (I am totally making that one up). I remember her doing this in Boston, though then, all of the gem sweater wearers got to walk up on stage to be chosen. Now, it is only the winner; however, the process remains mostly unchanged.

Ramona and the Swimsuits took the stage first. Ramona, the lead singer and banterer, was dressed in a swimsuit, bloomers, ripped stockings, high heals, large plastic-frame glasses, and had her hair in a teased out side-top ponytail with a big blue scrunchie. The stage was set up with their instruments, but also two stuffed mannequin-like dolls called "The Judys," who provide pre-recorded commentary between songs (both of the Judy's have Leslie's voice, oddly enough), which is very amusing the first few times it occurs. Ramona would talk back to the Judys as well in a campy routine they had clearly practiced many times before. Before the first song, Ramona noted that she wrote it when she was living with her mom after college. It was completely nonsensical, thereby making the point that she was very bored and thinking very

random thoughts when she did not have a job or school to occupy her time. Oddly, however, she did not really address the class privilege of being able to live with her mom after college or "eating her mom's food" without providing anything for the house. She brought up "being broke" periodically, but never in a political context. I found this particularly odd considering how prevalent the critique of the neoliberal state, or in much more mainstream terms, use of a phrase like 'economic recession,' is at this time. Her second song was about being a grown up and how she is not meant to be a grown-up. I would absolutely love to say that there was something queer about this notion of 'not growing up' – some non-linear, non-normative tie-in to add to the scholarly conversations that I engaged with in my literature review. But I cannot. While her desire not to be a grown-up may, in part, be due to a queer departure from the hete-ronormative life narrative, it primarily seemed to be a more ignorant assessment of the role that class hierarchies play in many peoples' lives. I could be absolutely wrong and she may come from a very poor background, thus making her jump into performance and touring a huge risk for her; however, it did not feel that way. I will explain more of why in a moment, but I also want to address a "cover song" that the band did.

Ramona started by saying, "we're going to perform a great song just okay… It's a cover song." I did not know the song, but I did get excited by the idea of covering a song just okay. I was thrilled with the idea of a cover song because there was something so overt in her voice that said, 'this will not be a copy of the original' or at the very least, 'we have no goal of making this perfect.' Unfortunately, the banter and the performance was exactly the same as it had been when I had seen them the week before. This is not to say that one should not or does not get into set routines and movements when performing in a different location everyday. That

would be exhausting. All performers “re-use” funny jokes, silly banter, awkward movements, and lyrical emphases depending on what reactions participants have had before. That said, it seems slightly different with a cover song and certainly different when one leads two shows by saying the exact same thing about how well or not well they will perform the song. Furthermore, all of her banter was exactly the same, even talking about her “translucent skin” and how prone it is to sunburn. It was true routine: in the same song at each show she sang each refrain on her back kicking her legs in the air, in between the same songs at each show she bantered with the Judys in the same way. The other performance participants, however, seemed to be enthralled… just as I had been the week before. It made me feel like a jerk to be so judgmental, but I also feel that others were enjoying it more than I was because I had so recently seen the same act.

What seemed so lacking, for me, was any political investment in performance. Her lyrics were funny, but they did not ever address class issues or ever use the awkwardness she was presenting (which was more practiced than natural) to make a political point. I immediately thought back to Jack Halberstam’s (2011) work, entitled “Keeping Time with Lesbians on Ecstasy.” In the chapter, Halberstam focuses on how Lesbians on Ecstasy queers dyke hits by acts such as the Indigo Girls and Tracy Chapman. Halberstam (2011) notes, “rather than just parodying [the music] or casting it as maudlin, folksy, and therefore anachronistic, [Lesbians on Ecstasy] reworks it for new audiences. The band may recycle the songs musically, but it also holds on to some core sensibility in the song or in the tempo or in the mood of the music, resituating the political messages for a new political context” (p. 336). Being campy can certainly be political or not, but camp – with regard to campy drag performances – usually entails making fun of some-

thing, someone, or being funny in the mix of a larger performance that might be both political and fun. As Susan Sontag so rightfully states, “To camp is a mode of seduction -- one which employs flamboyant mannerisms susceptible of a double interpretation; gestures full of duplicity, with a witty meaning for cognoscenti and another, more impersonal, for outsiders” (1964, p. 281). Camp is not superficial; it is multilayered in its political intentions. Ramona and the Swimsuits were certainly fun, but I think queerness, while not always serious, is not just about being fun. Just as gay men’s camp has often been depoliticized by mainstream co-optation and has been predominantly subsumed under the broader umbrella of assimilationist drag, the Ramona and the Swimsuits performance, which used similar ‘campy’ hilarity and over-the-top antics, had been subsumed under the broader umbrella of simply being weird-cool. There was not a sense, in the particular song (which again, I did not know) they were covering, that there was any goal of reformulating its purpose or political message to better suit the time period in which it was being performed.

Similarly, Leslie and the Lys were incredibly humorous, but lacked any darkness at all. The affect in the room felt warm, but it also felt apolitical. On the other hand, as I looked around, I did not see the same people that I have at the previous shows at which I have interviewed participants. The crowd seemed more interested in costume (a very wonderfully queer thing, no?) and fashion than the use of costume to subvert customary genderings. As one of the people I interviewed noted, “They came for costume and dance, which is a worthy reason to come together, but somehow, it didn’t feel like a queer reason to come together.” How odd! She went on to note that there was a sense of escapism, silliness, and release present at the

show and that people were clearly having a good time. However, she said that there was also an “escape from the political that didn’t feel good somehow.”

I do not believe any of these comments or the show, more generally, should be read as a sign that the performers do not have political stances or take political actions to push against dominant structures of sexuality and gender. Furthermore, fun is important! I do recognize the need to gather and create a group affect maintained by positively shifting moods. In queer gatherings, we often dwell in critique, negativity, anger, shame, and sadness; but we also have fun. Unfortunately, there was an odd lack of political engagement and an even odder lack of participants I know to be politically engaged whom I have seen in packs at other shows. As I continued my interview, I wanted to understand how this apolitical stance was shifting the affect amongst participants. I asked a participant more about the queerness of the space. Was it somehow queer because there were a lot of queer people in the space wearing gem sweaters? Was the literal enclosure in which we found ourselves, already ‘queer’? The participant responded by noting that it was not a queer space even though “there were tons of homos in the room.” She continued by saying that she did not see many of the “same people out” as she typically did and that while she felt comfortable with acting/being/looking queer in the space, the performance felt “more hip than queer.”

I found the distinction between hip and queer to be of particular interest because I have also felt some subtle differences before. For example, in my second performance analysis (Ladystache), I noted that the area in which Highland Ballroom is located was more of fixed-gear riding, hipster type of area than a ‘queer’ area. As a result, while I often find that there is considerably less social conservativism in hipster areas, the affect of these areas is not typically

‘queer’ because the sociality of queer people is not necessarily present. As such, queer — with respect to sexuality and gender — affect is often lacking. I asked the participant more about how being in a “more hip than queer” performance space made her feel. Her answer: lonely.

She did not feel “unsafe or threatened,” but she did feel lonely. And she went on to note that she felt lonely specifically because she felt that the performers and performance participants were not coming together with “some cause behind the performance.” I do not think she meant a literal cause, as in fundraising for a form of cancer; rather, I think she meant, politics were evaded to such a degree that she felt like she could not connect her negative, angsty, annoyed, sad, scared, powerful, lustful mood/s (or whatever her mood/s may have been) to the objects/beings in the room. Instead, she felt as if her political intentions were pushed back; they were against the affect that was supposed to be circulated amongst participants. The performance was planned; the performance was routine. Things were supposed to go a certain way. However, this participant was unable to orient her moods toward the ‘correct’ affect. She had hoped for ‘something more’ and had not found it at this performance.

Having participated in the performance space of these two bands in another state just a week before, I was totally struck by this sense of loneliness. When in Tucson, I thought the reason that I felt simultaneously humored but disconnected was because I was around people I did not know, in a city I did not know, at a venue I did not know. I thought I was lonely because I was stressed and nervous about being somewhere completely new. However, having seen the routine of the performance again and having spoken to a participant who is an Atlantan, who seemed to know a few people in the space, and who had never seen the act, I was struck by how similar our feelings about the show were. Not to be completely narcissistic, but she was

quite eloquently able to express what I had not been able to — queer is fun, but queer is political. Queer is lonely without affective connection and political engagement.

3 AFFECTIVE NETWORKS: AN ANALYSIS OF AFFECTIVE KEYWORDS

3.1 Affective Networks

Throughout this research, I have been seeking to find answers to somewhat obscure questions regarding the proliferation of space, discursive shifts, as well as the potential that participation in queer performance spaces offers or creates. These questions engage feelings, moods, connectivity, relationality, investments, and the partial fusion thereof — namely, affect. What I have sought by interviewing participants in performance spaces is to engage with theories of affect, queerness, performance subcultures, and feminist/queer social movements, in order to facilitate a discussion about what role affective investments in queer performance counterpublics play in enhancing other forms of relational participation in queer spaces. However, as noted in my introduction, my research led me in other directions.

For example, whereas the proliferation of queer spaces was my primary focus at the start, I quickly realized that space also involves movements. As a result, I used queer performance spaces as a tool to explore affective networks and the proliferation of various forms of affect. Furthermore, it became clear that relationality and the affect that burgeons from it were not strictly confined to 'a space,' in literal terms. Therefore, exploring space (in the literal sense) limited the potential of navigating affect. Very early on, I knew that I needed to think of space not as an enclosure. Instead, I began to use space as a tool to examine fluctuating affective connections based in contingent relations among performance participants. I thought there were connections that could, at least temporarily, set aside trite assumptions of gay "community" or membership in any particular queer "community." What I have found, however, has

shifted both my perceptions of space and my perceptions of community and community gatherings, generally.

What is interesting about these affective networks that community membership does not encompass? At the start of this research, I was not sure that there was much difference. However, when exploring this topic through an affective framework, I found that there are not always connections between people based in friendships, sex or acquaintance. Rather, there are certain affectively-based reasons that people come to shows. As I realized this to be the case, I developed two more questions with which I began my analysis. Why are these people participating? And what affects connect them? Throughout my interviews, I found a great deal of affective connections. As a result, I have compiled a few affective keywords/phrases with which to begin analyzing the affective networks of connections among queer performance participants. Two of these words/phrases are connecting ideas garnered through my interviews (comfort and queer temporalities); the other three (escape, warm bonds, loneliness) are words/phrases participants directly stated in their interview responses. In the following five keyword entries, there are many overlaps. The words are intertwined and desire each others' company.

3.2 Affective Keywords

Escape

In my literature review, I briefly analyzed the risk involved in participation in queer performance spaces, whether as a performance participant or a performer. As I was analyzing my interview responses, I often found that rather than solely risk, there is an oft-concurrent though sometimes solo introduction of another keyword — escape. The affective desire to escape does

not entirely rest in the tired trope of the 'coming out' narrative. While escaping from any oppressive family environment can be a form of escape, the dimensions of escape shift as time passes. Furthermore, through the coming out narrative, the person escaping is individually responsible for their escape. Yet their escape is seen as necessary for them to be honest with those around them, namely the people with whom they have a fear of being honest. It is a paradoxical narrative to say the least. The narrative places no value in changing systemic and familial structures that force people into escapist conditions. So what is one escaping from beyond "coming out" to flee a bad situation at home? After all, many of the participants are not at an age where they are living with their parents or other blood relations. It does not seem as though most queer performance participants use the word escape to fulfill the 'truth' tales of the coming out narrative. Instead, escape is multiplied to include bad days, poor working conditions, heteronormative expecations in various situations in one's life. Escape is deeply tied to a desire for affective connection.

Therefore, by dimensions of escape, I mean to multiply the ways in which we think of escape. Throughout my research, I found that participants did maintain a desire to escape heteronormative life structures (e.g., a teacher escaping the public school system by participating in queer performances), but the escapes were framed as possibilities for affective connection rather than a means by which to avoid violent family structures. These escapes seemed differently hopeful. They were not simply an 'escape from,' but also an 'escape to.' Whereas a liberal notion of escape might be inaptly confined to narratives such as 'escaping from poverty' (via participation in neoliberal enterprises, of course), many queers and people of color are impacted by class hierarchies in manners that do not easily allow for such clean escapes. This is

not to say that the 'bootstraps' narrative is possible for anyone. However, it is to say that queers and people of color are differently positioned within hierarchies of power, particularly with regard to issues of political economy. Furthermore, there are actions that queers take through their participation in queer performance spaces that are not about seeking success (necessarily) in typical terms. There may still be a desire to 'get to the big city,' but it is not just to earn money (after all, 'good jobs' are often few and far between for gender non-normative people). Rather, there is a desire to escape 'to the big city' in order to fulfill sexual desires as well as some alternate form of safety, though that safety may or may not be available in any place. As such, it is not just about a defiance of heteronormative life narratives, it is also about the enactment of alternate possibilities — movements, actions, affect, and sociality rather than simply resistance, defiance, and unfulfilled expectations.

Escape from the political may be another reason that queer people participate in performances. However, this form of escape may be disconcerting for people who feel uncomfortable abandoning the political, even in their attempts to 'have fun.' During the Leslie and the Lys/Ramona and the Swimsuits performances, one could feel a complete lack of politics in the room. Again, this is not meant to imply that the performers did not have political viewpoints, only that those viewpoints were not even remotely related to any of their songs. In my interviews, it was clear that the apolitical features of the performance were unnerving for some participants. While politics do not need to be the central theme for affective connection to proliferate, the presence of politics is critical to certain affective connections. If queer is political, so must the affective connections in queer performance spaces be, in part, political or at the very least, have political/politicized implications. As noted throughout this thesis, queers 'cling to'

nightlife not merely because it is fun, but because of the "transformative power[s]" that relationality enables (Muñoz, 2009, p. 108). The "transformational powers" likely include an engagement with politics and the opportunity to explore and embody different versions of genders and sexualities than are normative, expected, or accepted in other spaces. The fun involved in participation is likely 'because' of the inclusion of these possible transformative potentialities, not in spite of them.

Again, I am not attempting to make transformative potentialities into a phrase synonymous with typical notions of resistance. Notions of resistance tend to invoke liberal subjecthood (Mahmood, 2005); moreover, they re-place performance participants within the grid of ideology, in which they resist, transcend, and progress. While these forms of resistance may occur, the transformative potentialities of participation are present in the affective networks of the people gathered. Escaping is not simply resisting. I feel that the affect of escape is the need for the "throwntogetherness" (Massey, 2005, p. 141) of a gathering and a setting aside of some (certainly not all) of the day's annoyances, while still maintaining some awareness of one's political investments in participation and in the world around one. This affective engagement with others may not necessarily be sought; however, it seems to be the affect that burgeons as queer performance participants gather.

Comfort

As briefly explained earlier, the queered idea of 'comfort' continued to present itself to me throughout my interviews. Comfort, in the queered sense, had little to do with ideas of liberal subjecthood, in part garnered through privacy. Affect does not exist in private; it only burgeons through relational contact. As a result, comfort was immediately a questionable word

as it clearly defied liberal concepts such as individualism and private family. Instead, comfort surfaced as an affect through participation in queer performance spaces. Simply seeking comfort through one's contact with others in performance spaces defied normative ideas of the word. One participant noted comfort in being around other people who had shared similar adolescent experiences, even if their current experiences (or a plethora of other life experiences) had varied drastically. For her (the interviewee), there was some comfort in knowing that there was some small slice of non-normative history shared amongst people in the space. The participant called this relational knowledge a "warm bond."[26]

At another show, an interviewee suggested that she sought comfort through queer performance participation. She was not as interested in experiencing the "warm bond" of disjointedly similar comings-into being. Rather, she overtly noted that her job in the homophobic environment of a public school required that she push herself to find comfort elsewhere. In her case, she was searching for affective connections that would fulfill a need she had for comfort. Again, going into a relational space to seek comfort is in direct defiance of liberal notions of privacy. This is not to say that queers are the only people who seek comfort in public. In many ways, 'the public,' as it is incorrectly defined as a site of moral and political consensus, is a place where majoritarian comfort may be sought in order to justify one's 'private' moral and political positions. However, I argue that the reasons for seeking comfort in this manner, vary significantly from those that queers might have.

At yet another show, a participant mentioned feeling "at home" when at Art Amok! poetry performances. These feelings of being "at home" directly defy notions of comfort found

[26] Warm bond is bolded because I will explore the phrase as a keyword of its own.

in the private home. They relay the idea that a queer version of home is often a non-private social home. Here, a social home is not the same as the social sphere versus the political or private spheres in either Arendt's or Habermas's terms. Rather, the social home, in one of its many queered iterations, entails discomfort with the private sphere and the rise of the social to overtake the private in an entirely different way. The traditional, liberal view of privacy was, in many ways, altogether unimportant and unsatisfying to the participants I interviewed. That view of privacy encompassed neither their desires nor arenas in which they found comfort. This is not meant to imply that comfort was/is never sought by staying at home for the night; rather, it is to say that comfort, in a queer iteration, is not wholly identifiable through the action of staying home. Instead, amongst queer performance participants, comfort has another dimension that is unintelligible when defined in wholly liberal terms.

Warm Bond

The phrase, "warm bond," was noted by one of the participants I interviewed. This was the only time that the affective phrase was used, but it was an affect that I felt at other performances. Warm bonds could be reduced to feelings of love, affection, friendship, or family ties. This reduction is not to say that warm bonds are entirely about privacy. However, the bond, seen in this light, is reduced to literal knowledge of another person. One might not 'know' why they feel affection or love for someone else, but to have those feelings, one generally 'knows' the other person, to some degree.[27]

In particular, the person who used the phrase to define her feelings in the space was not personally acquainted with everyone in the room (though a great many). That said, I do not be-

[27] I am certainly not implying that the trite 'love at first sight' feeling is impossible, only that it is atypical and does not always turn out to be long-lasting once one has partaken of multiple sightings.

lieve that she necessarily felt "warmth" toward them all in any intimate way. She did, however, recognize a bond that was more historical — one that bound many people at the gathering in an experience-based manner. In Chapter 3, I noted that the participant threw out culturally specific references to explain who she feels comfortable around. For example, she said that she wants to be around people who grew up "watching Daria and listening to Smashing Pumpkins." I have certainly watched Daria and listened to Smashing Pumpkins; but in all honesty, even while I liked Daria, I did not watch a lot of TV in high school or college (it aired from 1997-2002[28]) and I did not ever become a huge fan of Smashing Pumpkins. But, I knew her queerish references, and I knew that they were not just generational references. Regardless, the participant expressed a warm bond present through historical connections to certain referents, experiences, and feelings rather than through actual intimacy in the present moment. A warm bond is about past similarities of comings-into being as much as it is about present connections amongst the people gathered in a queer performance space.

The idea of seeking the moving target of a warm bond also concurs with a statement I made much earlier in this thesis: queer performance participants are not just coming to the show because they like the person/people performing. Rather, they are seeking affective connection with other queers. Furthermore, the affect they are identifying in the space is not the same affect which might permeate a 'straight' space. Of course, people want to 'go out' for a variety of reasons that might overlap with those of others; yet, there was a different engagement with connecting that feels more prevalent in queer performance spaces. This, in some ways, goes back to the variation between private, liberal comfort, and comfort in its manifold

[28] http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Daria

queer formations. There is a warm bond amongst queers that might enable a certain dimension of comfort unavailable in other spaces.

Warm bonds are also a part of political engagement. While the participant I have been referencing was not at the show to be political, she had activist connections with other people present. In fact, she noted that the space was not necessarily as queer as it was radical. As a result, I would say that there are warm bonds that may actually be present through noticeable, present actions that take place within affective and social movements. But social movements often have a great deal more to do with moving toward a goal, whether that goal is flexibly sought or not. By flexibly sought, I mean that sometimes goals shift over the course of time due to new needs of the movement's participants or new assessments of what is possible as a result of the movement's actions. However, these shifts and new assessments often come at the exclusion of the needs of many participants.[29] Nonetheless, many social movements are concerned with forward-thinking progress, and often disband once a chosen 'result' has been sought and attained. Yet movements, with regard to affect, are not always forward thinking, progressive ones even as they create and recreate the present. Again, movements have a great deal to do with affects. Movements are multiple, but I am using movements with regard to affect. Therefore, while there may be warm bonds that are present, tangible, and based in physical/emotional forms of intimacy, there may also be warm bonds that are historical, intangible, and enlivened even when intimacy is lacking.

[29] Two examples of exclusion are the women's suffrage movement eventually excluding Black women from the list of women who should be allowed to vote as well as the current shifts in gay politics away from sexual liberation and critiques of capitalism, and toward narrow critiques of the military's "Don't Ask, Don't Tell" policy and marriage rights. As such, social movements often have a great deal to do with identity and linearity unlike affective movements, which are often non-identitarian and non-linear or at least, not progressive.

Queer Temporalities

What are the affects of queer temporalities? That question is far too large to tackle in this thesis. However, some of the affects of queer temporalities became apparent in the context of queer performance spaces. Furthermore, reenactments of supposedly 'set' historical life events were reworked in these spaces. Disjointedly similar histories are a truly common thread throughout the keywords upon which I am reflecting, but the feeling of queer history presented itself with enough differences to make a keyword analysis necessary. I have already touched on historical experiential knowledges in my analysis of the keyword phrase "warm bonds"; therefore, in this more specific analysis of the affect of queer temporalities, I will focus on ways in which disjointedly similar histories are literally shared within queer performance spaces.

For example, in Sir Lady Indee's performance, participants heard/saw the performer share their history in two different ways: through the previously explored pre-recorded list during one of their performance pieces and through their spokenword piece in which they literally share their personal life narrative. In the case of the list, participants were able to connect with different items. Indee clearly focused on humorous and sensitive internal thoughts. With regard to more sensitive thoughts, Indee noted their relationship to food, a relationship that was wrought with both a battle with and a love for food. This history did not seem as if it had ended; the battle had not been won or lost. Rather, it was a constantly evolving affective engagement with the binaries of healthy/unhealthy, fat/skinny, productive/lazy, immoral/moral. Thus, their history was not content to remain in the past. Instead, it was temporally set in multiple time periods, multiple temporalities.

It was easy for participants to connect to at least some part of this history, though more difficult to note was the historical reworking that Indee was presenting. When analyzing the combination of Indee's actions and words, one could feel the comfort and angst that they had around food. One could feel that at different points, the performer had felt different issues with food. Yet, these various historical points that Indee shared did not seem linear; Indee had not 'overcome' the issues that so many people living in Western cultures also have. There was not necessarily progress; rather, there was fluctuation in the relationships. But by presenting their relationships to food in this way, they were imagining how one's relationships to food could be variant. In so doing, they opened a window for performance participants to do the same. As a result, history became present and future, thus not temporally located in the past. It became full of potential rather than where Indee had come from. Indee had not elided the past in favor of the present or future; they had shown how unmarked these temporalities were, are, and can be.

In the spokenword piece, in which Indee literally shared their history, they were not so fluid in their presentation of various life experiences and issues. However, they did not negate the past when exploring the potentialities of the present, something that often happens in stories of triumph. Indee had not triumphed or transcended their past. Instead, they had enlivened the past in the present. I would argue that this enlivenment is a queer reworking of history that connects participants within queer performance spaces. In addition to re-workings that create alternate imaginaries of past, present, and future for both performers and performance participants, there is also an affect of non-progression that formulates itself within queer performance spaces. Even in my discussion of warm bonds, this affect of non-progression is present.

For example, warm bonds that are present due to similar adolescent referents and experiences also entail a sense of non-progression inasmuch as having progressed in age has not necessarily progressed one's connections to other participants. By this, I mean that many of the connections between participants are not based in the present. The connections have not necessarily increased, decreased, or progressed over time. Many bonds might be set in the past, but still feel warm in the present. Just as bonds of the past were created without regard for other differences (e.g., experiences, family structures, class, race), those same bonds may reappear without regard for current disconnections. In short, these 'historical' bonds may connect people even if people do not share the same present connections. As such, warm bonds are as historical as they are present.

Loneliness

Where is the politics? Where is the fun? Where are my friends? The final performance I participated in finally allowed me to shift my thinking away from queer spaces as possibly exclusionary and toward a different affect: loneliness. I had heard tinges of this keyword in other forms such as lonely, alone, and loner. However, one of my final interviewees clarified and succinctly defined her feelings of loneliness at the Ramona and the Swimsuits/Leslie and the Lys show. Because I shared her sense of loneliness at that performance, it was easy to think that it was likely the affect I had formerly viewed very narrowly as exclusion. Whereas exclusion implies an active or institutionalized (i.e., based in overt or subtle racist individual and institutional exclusions) attempt by others to make someone feel unwanted (though this is an implication, not what is necessarily happening), loneliness implies a more self-motivated feeling. But as we know, affects are not internal and they are certainly not individually 'created.' Therefore, if one

is in a 'blue mood' or is feeling lonely, one is more oriented toward the affect of loneliness when one is in a performance space. That said, loneliness is not purely the affective result of a lonely mood.

What does loneliness in queer performance spaces feel like, then? In my final interview, loneliness seemed to be driven not by feelings of exclusion, but rather, by the exclusion of politics from the performance. For the participant to whom I spoke, political engagement on the part of the performers was deeply imbricated with political hope. In short, without political engagement (one that both the interviewee and myself felt), there was a feeling of loneliness. There was a sense that without politics, queerness is simply about having fun. Of course, queerness is fun; but again, it is not just fun. Moreover, the humor of the performance could not be thoroughly enjoyed because the humor was not mixed with political messages, messages that seemed innate because of the queerness of the performers, but somehow intentionally avoided. The absence of political awareness also sent potential into absentia. As such, history was not re-worked and was overtly avoided in order to fully embrace the 'fun' of the present. Yet the fun could not be fully embraced without the presence of affective history.

Therefore, loneliness may stem from an intense mood state that burgeons into an affect when one is in the presence of others, but it may also emerge when queerness is at once present and overlooked. More specifically, it may occur as an affect when disidentification with normative structures and "tactical misrecognition" of interpellating mechanisms (e.g., the state, the family, the church) is not an imaginary of the performance. There is a difference between wearing amazingly funny costumes and singing songs that do not make a lot of sense and making those defiances of normative expectations a part of a broader political point. Without such

a point, queer performance participants may feel a sense of political hopelessness, leading to an affect of loneliness. This is, of course, assuming that queerness is political, which I argue that it always is.

4 REFLECTIONS

Why affect? I undertook this research to theorize the proliferation of queer spaces. My original research questions were: What happens when the show is over? How do these performance participants leave the queered performance space and create new ones? Even as performance participants are differently positioned and have differing relations to one another within a queer counterpublic, how does their participation enable new discourses to take shape? What affect was produced or manifested itself in the performance space and has that affect shaped the abilities of performance participants to partake in the creation of other fluid, evolving queer spaces? Yet, as I read more affect theory and began to participate and interview in queer performance spaces, the nudges toward various theories and books[30] that my thesis committee had previously given me began to make more sense. Between their comments and the ethnographic work that I had just begun, I realized that my questions were no longer about space, alone. As mentioned in the beginning of Chapter 3, space is not stagnant and replicable in a literal sense. It is a tool through which to navigate affects and affective networks, not the other way around.

Once I had a better grasp on the role of space within my research, I formulated different questions with which to move forward. For example, rather than simply questioning what discourses take shape within queer performance counterpublics, I found it necessary to look beyond the limiting analytics of discourse and counterpublics. I chose not to explore what discourses (how language is used within various structural contexts and power structures) take shape but rather, what affective keywords might be relevant to the creation of an affective dis-

[30] For example, they suggested Against the Romance of Community to help with my critique of community membership and For Space to guide my understanding of space as an ever-changing event — a "throwntogetherness."

course (how language was used in a specific context — queer performance spaces — to express desires, feelings, and non-normative histories). The latter is more than language used amongst structures of power; it is affects composed and discussed amongst queer performance participants, even as those feelings are, in part, constructed in relation to heteronormative power structures.

Discourse, here, was not about the use of words under certain structural conditions. Rather, it was a discourse of feelings that I attempted to develop. I wanted to know what affective keywords queer performance participants used to describe their experiences within performance spaces. I hope that the affective keywords I felt, heard, and analyzed — while a basis for much further exploration — serve as an entryway into grappling with the role of affect and movement in the development and proliferation of networks of feelings in queer performance spaces. There were other, potentially important keywords which did not present themselves thematically in such overt ways (e.g., politics, relief, home). While important, they presented themselves under broader themes, such as comfort and loneliness. However, with more interviews, the feelings associated with politics and relief might have taken on more nuanced dimensions that may have prompted me to explore them as affective keywords.

The interviews for this research were done over a short two-month period during the performance 'low season' (post-holidays, pre-springtime). As a result, there is more to be done. However, I was able to participate in a variety of performances — as you have read, everything from performance poetry, a DJ dance party, a low-key gathering of bands and performance artists, a theatrical camp production, and a lesbian rap duo. Therefore, while this research is not complete (I would not want it to be), it has successfully enabled me to formulate more ques-

tions with regard to affect. Moreover, it serves as a broad and diverse base of performances/performance types with which to both expand and narrow my questions about affect in queer performance spaces.

The queer performance participants whom I interviewed gave me a great deal of insight into how their historical experiences threaded through their current engagements in queer performance spaces. Moreover, they were able to express, via what I call affective keywords, how certain historical identity formations have moved them toward a non-tangible sense of belonging — a belonging not necessarily based on community/identity membership. The affect of the queer performance participants I interviewed was multifariously dependent upon their literal connections to other people in the room as well as their experiential connections to other people in the room. Furthermore, it was guided by some commitment to political engagement, even as the events occurring might be more fun than political. As a result, the capacity and potentialities of queer performance participation was not merely in the future, but also in the present and past.

The transformational powers of participation might be in those moments of connection between subject, object, performance, and space. As Jonathan Flatley (2008) so aptly notes, orientations toward certain affects over others are the result of some convergence of moods. These moods, because they are altered by the events of one's day, are not totally individual; but they are not affects either. Moods are not always conscious and are often only noticed in their more intense forms. Affects, on the other hand, are only felt in communion with others' — more specifically, in communion with the moods of others.

So what is the potential of this research? What are the transformative capacities of affect amongst queer performance participants? These are not questions that are easily identifiable, thus the answers are not measurable. However, I have shown that there are relational affects, disjointedly uniting historical experiences, and breaks from liberal subjecthood that move into the present and disrupt the linearity of events in time.

Potential, in the case of queer performance participants and the spaces they inhabit, is not confined to 'what is to come,' but also 'what is' and 'what has been.' This is a simple statement and would be true of any gathering of people, right? Yes. But within queer performance, the 'what is' and 'what has been' are best shown through an engagement with non-normative affect. Without exploring these gatherings through an affective frame, one could simply define this group, sociologically, as a sexual/gender minority community (a counterpublic) who is gathering because of their shared resistance to dominant paradigms of sexuality and gender. That assessment would only reconstruct the grid of ideology and discourse (and of enlightenment thought, more generally) that Massumi (2002) rightfully critiques. It would imply that these gatherings are wholly based around oppression. Furthermore, it would imply that the histories of those gathered are only unified in their similar oppressions, which is certainly not always true. It would be without nuance. It would be without feeling. It would be without affect; it would, in fact, limit the potential that affects have to take on fleeting, amorphous shapes.

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APPENDICES

Appendix A

Non-Performer Sample Interview Questions

1) FEELINGS: Why did you come to the show tonight?
    a. How did you feel before coming to the show?
    b. How do you feel now that you're here/now that the show is over?

2) CONNECTION TO PERFORMER: Do you know the performer/s personally? Would you call the performer/s a friend?

3) CONNECTION TO EVERYONE: Have you seen any of the people in the room at previous shows? About how many?
    a. Do you know them through any other contexts?
        1)What are your relationships with them?
        2)Even though you may know them, do you feel any disconnection with the people in this space? E.g., feeling left out, negative, positive, included, welcomed, excluded, etc.

4) SPACE: Would you consider this space a queer space?
    a. Is that because of the venue we're in or the people who are in the venue?
    b. Do you like this space?
    c. Does it feel like this on other nights that you've been here or it dependent upon what's going on?

5) PERSONAL LIFE: How do you feel attending shows like this affects you? Your personal life?

6) FAVE: What was your fave piece/song tonight?
    a. Why? An adjective is fine – e.g., fun, funny, sad, real

7) FUTURE: Do you have plans to attend any other shows in the near future? If yes, who?

Appendix B

Performer Sample Interview Questions

1) TIME and TRAVEL: How long have you been performing? Do you tour a lot? If so, how often are you on the road?

2) FEELINGS: Feelings before or after
    a. Before: You pumped to perform tonight? How were you feeling before

arriving? How are you feeling now? Ask for adjectives.

b. After: How do you feel that your performance went today/tonight? Do you feel different than you did before the show? Ask for adjectives.

3) IF MULTIPLE GROUPS: If there is more than one person/group performing —
   a. Do you know the other performer/s personally?
   b. Would you call the other performer/s a friend?

4) CONNECTIONS TO EVERYONE: Have you seen any of the people in the room at previous shows? About how many?
   1)Do you know them through any other contexts?
   a. What are your relationships with them?
   b. Even though you know them, do you feel any disconnection with the people in this space? E.g., feeling left out, negative, positive, included, welcomed, excluded, etc.

5) SPACE: Would you consider this space a queer space?
   1) Is that because of the venue we're in or the people who are in the venue?
   2) Do you like this space? Does it feel like this on other nights that you've been here?

6) PERSONAL: How do you feel performing at shows like this affects you? Your personal life?

7) FUTURE: Do you plan to continue performing/touring for the rest of your life?

Appendix C

List of Performances

January 13, 2012: Art Amok! Slam Poetry Competition, featuring Gus Wood
January 14, 2012: God-des and She
January 20, 2012: Ladystache, featuring DJ Vicki Powell
February 3, 2012: Father Figure; Sir Lady Indee; Elliot/Sticks and Stones; Snake, Shark, Broken Heart
March 11, 2012: Ramona and the Swimsuits; Leslie and the Lys