

The Death of Subculture
Abstracted Digital Embodiments of Desire

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ABSTRACT

The internet has become the primary method for connecting people, sharing information and exchanging cultural content on both a global and local level, with Queer digital publics attempting to capture the plurality and temporality of subcultural Queer life. This paper, however, will focus on the limitations and boundaries of these Queer digital publics, and the ways in which they contribute to and produce globalized homonationalism, transhistorical narratives and erode local identities, in attempt to create a universalized Queer identity and an imagined liberation. These manufactured nationalist formations inscribe and validate subjecthood through the engendering, absorption, erasure and disenfranchisement of racial-others to whom are typically farthest from whiteness, leading to the seeming retreatment of local and regional memories and subcultures. Using metaphorical archives and the concept of myth, mythos, and mythologies, I will argue that Queer mythos is generated through the assemblages of collective ownership and the binding between metaphorical archives and memory markets and will examine how these myths develop through different digital mediums. Additionally, this paper will consider the ways in which ephemera and aesthetics, through fashion, can construct cultural canon, memory production, and the global circulation of desire. New digital traditions could show the West how little we actually know about Queer life and subcultures, supporting comprehensive coverage for those who do not associate with Queerness but experience ideality relevant to where they may exist.

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Chapter One: Introduction

Generally speaking, digital platforms have become the primary way knowledge, stories, news, and myth are disseminated to the mass public, significantly affecting how we participate and own. Nearly half of the world's population has internet access, whether under extremely limited and regulated circumstances or made generally freely accessible and widespread.¹ In regions with widespread internet access, the internet has increasingly become the dominant method for connecting people and publics through the circulation of both global and local news, information and sharing cultural content.² ⁱⁱⁱ Moreover, it is an excellent way for myth and culture to blend; digital space has an instant feeling, and on a global scale, it is really easy to 'Frankenstein' together a culture built on appropriated and remixed memory. What is less talked about is how voyeuristic it is, and how it can regulate and operate by applying similar methods that social theorists discuss in the maintenance and planning of physical space.

The interpolation of Queer memory and the rapid development of universalism, globalization and nationalism have led to the seeming retreat in the power of local and regional memories.ⁱⁱⁱ We find ourselves in a digital age that expands social space and reinforces regulatory functions that affirm and contain. For those on the occident, the rapid expansion and globalization of Queerness feels like an attack on pluralism and nuance. Solidarities and allegiance replace pluralities, distances and nuance; spaces that were once held for the other have waned due to trends that lean towards hierarchal and nationalistic projects. Subculture, time and inheritance are significantly affected by globalization, which relies on regulatory methods like

¹ "Global Connectivity | Office of the Secretary-General's Envoy on Technology," accessed December 31, 2024, <https://www.un.org/techenvoy/content/global-connectivity>.

² Ivan Raykoff, "Queer Patriotism in the Eurovision Song Contest," in *The Oxford Handbook of Music and Queerness*, ed. Fred Everett Maus and Sheila Whiteley (Oxford University Press, 2022), 505.

domination, fusion and appropriation. Universal and globalist projects inherently depend on the cultural exclusion, erasure and dispossession of groups. Erasure and disenfranchisement are both a symptom and cure, which, when acknowledged, are defended as an inevitable certainty for and liberatory greater good and the desire for a Queer future.³ This fusion is a hierarchical movement that economizes desires into an owned objective where sexual and gender pluralities are dispossessed and absorbed.⁴

The ambition for a universal Queer public leans into approaches like homonationalism, which relies on exceptionalism, empire, and homogenization. Homonationalism becomes an excellent tool because it is engineered through the abstraction of a group affinity for a diaspora with no definitive homeland.⁵ This manufactured group affinity is culturally and politically motivated and is organized on the assumption of a shared culture and universal commonality. These manufactured nationalist formations inscribe and validate subjecthood through the engendering, absorption, erasure and disenfranchisement of racial-others to whom are typically the farthest from whiteness. Coined by Jasbir Puar in *Terrorist Assemblages*, homonationalism:

Corresponds with the coming out of the exceptionalism of American empire. Further, this brand of homosexuality operates as a regulatory script not only of normative gayness, queerness, or homosexuality, but also of the racial and national norms that reinforce these sexual subjects. There is a commitment to the global dominant ascendancy of whiteness that is implicated in the propagation of the United States as empires as well as the alliance between this propagation and this brand of homosexuality.⁶

Lauran Berlant and Michael Warner define Queer culture as a world-making project that is

“difficult to contextualize as a culture;” knowledge is typically developed amongst mobile sites

³ Ryan Powell, “Queer Interstates: Cultural Geography and Social Contact in Kansas City Trucking and El Paso Wrecking Corp.,” in *Queering the Countryside: New Frontiers in Rural Queer Studies*, ed. Mary L. Gray, Colin R. Johnson, and Brian J. Gilley (New York University Press, 2016), 181.

⁴ José Esteban Muñoz, *Cruising Utopia the Then and There of Queer Futurity* (New York: New York University Press, 2009), 26.

⁵ Sara Ahmed, *The Promise of Happiness* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2010), 127.

⁶ Jasbir Puar, *Terrorist Assemblages* (Duke University Press, 2017), <http://www.jstor.org.ezproxy.library.yorku.ca/stable/j.ctv125jg6f>, 2.

and includes large populations that cannot be mapped. Without a map, Queer world-making relies on emotional, relational, and ephemeral connections⁷. When Queer culture becomes a nationality, American exceptionalism and the commitment to the ascendancy of whiteness can subtly imagine itself through a fantasy of multicultural and peaceful unity towards a shared object of desire or promise of happiness.⁸

In many ways, digital space and Queer digital space function in a similar fashion to how Henri Lefebvre and Jane Jacobs examines the creation of space and public space. The physical and digital share a core functional framework; their production, mechanisms and investments are very similar, thus their ability to inform our social and cultural realities is also shared.⁹ While space itself is temporal, the social relationships that operate within is what produces public space; public as regulatory power is developed over time and can be enacted as a tool to maintain its investments. Those in power can use the public to develop culture, values and history to define a hierarchy between normative and barbarism.¹⁰ To maintain the status quo, the state may invest in and employ various public tools and technologies, such as planning neighbourhoods to create differences and separation between civilizations. Additionally, educational and preservation investments, including museums and archives, validate normative culture through memory, myth, and historical affinities or differences between domestic civilizations.

Jacobs's work in *The Death and Life of Great American Cities* was primarily focused on how urban planning determines the local needs of residents, and how intent-designed neighbourhoods maintain public order; however, I argue that homonationalism across digital

⁷ Lauren Berlant and Michael Warner, "Sex in Public," *Critical Inquiry* 24, no. 2 (1998), 561.

⁸ Lauren Berlant and Elizabeth Freeman, "Queer Nationality," *Boundary 2* 19, no. 1 (1992), 153.

⁹ Henri Lefebvre, *The Production of Space* (Malden, MA: Blackwell Pub, 2005), 116.

¹⁰ Jane Jacobs, *The Death and Life of Great American Cities*, Vintage Books edition (New York: Vintage Books, 1992), 71-72.

space is also an intent-designed neighbourhood, defining the local needs of residents across a landless diaspora. Regarding needs, José Esteban Muñoz discusses how Queer space as a landless temporality means that it is not something physical that can be planned like a neighbourhood, but rather, it is an idealist trajectory that informs and directs our desires.¹¹ I argue that intent designed digital space typically creates Queer space by describing the needs of the diaspora through an ethnological and historical approach. Memory as a need reflects a local reality or trauma, and despite being landless, it can capture, organize and manufacture this local nostalgia for its residents across vast distances and cultures.

Approaching Queer space and the development of Queer and homonationalism under similar conditions to those of Lefebvre and Jacobs's work, and applying them to the development of Queer public space and planning digital publics can provide insight into power, subversion, authority and phenomenological consciousness in Queer space. While broad in use, contemporary Queer applications can inform the mechanisms contributing the how sexuality, fashion, and spirit can be interpreted into an ideology. The temporality and lack of physicality, along with the idealistic nature of Queer space, mean that investing in preservation tools like archives is especially important to sustain domination. Exercising tools such as Queer emotional archives are intrinsic because they can emerge from a specific narrative of Queer life, curated memories can be canonized and amplified by reactions, relations and identification with augmented versions of representation.

For Jack Halberstam, the temporality of Queerness invokes a need to re-theorize the concept, role, and modes of the archive and considering the temporality of Queer memory inheritance will effectuate a greater capability of recording and tracing subcultural Queer life. Halberstam

¹¹ José Esteban Muñoz, *Cruising Utopia the Then and There of Queer Futurity* (New York: New York University Press, 2009), 28.

contends that part of this process of re-theorizing refers to us considering Queer archives as:

“Not simply a repository; it is also a theory of cultural relevance, a construction of collective memory, and a complex record of Queer activity. In order for the archive to function, it requires users, interpreters, and cultural historians to wade through material and piece together the jigsaw puzzle of Queer history in the making. While some work of the work of Queer archiving certainly falls to academic, cultural producers also play a big role in constructing Queer genealogies and memories.”¹²

To a certain extent, traditional archival practices are tools of status; they are selective and, in some cases, a discriminatory process that grants the privileged status of existence to specific people or groups.¹³ One significant consequence of a homonationalist approach to archiving is that it relies on these traditional practices, but without a clear identification of who makes up the selective body. The universalization of Queer memory relies on intellectual colonialism, which, when applied, can produce a manufactured transcription of Queer existence. This is a vigorously selective process that depends on the universalization of language, absorption of identity and the assumption that everything can be read as Queer, consequently resulting in a fashioned system that erases and replaces life into their image.

Halberstam alludes to the potential that digital archiving has to keep up with subcultures in real-time. While they did acknowledge the existence of some unofficial online sites, their book was published in 2005, and it was still heavily rooted in the hypothesis of digital realities.¹⁴ The potentiality of the internet was and continues to be a popular discourse, but it was technologically limited and not reflective of where we are today. In 2005, Google introduced Google Maps, the iPhone didn't exist, and broadband internet was only starting to replace dial-up access in urban centres. While chatrooms have existed since the 1990s, the monopolization of

¹² J. Jack Halberstam, *In a Queer Time & Place: Transgender Bodies, Subcultural Lives* (New York: New York University Press, 2005), 169-70.

¹³ Abigail De Kosnik, *Rogue Archives : Digital Cultural Memory and Media Fandom* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: The MIT Press, 2016), 16.

¹⁴ J. Jack Halberstam, *In a Queer Time & Place: Transgender Bodies, Subcultural Lives* (New York: New York University Press, 2005), 169.

social networks that were specifically made for global connections was a relatively new concept. For example, MySpace, one of the first community platforms to reach global audiences, was launched a few years prior in 2003 and Tumblr, which became a popular site for Queer networking, counterpublics and metaphorical archives, was launched in 2007.¹⁵ iv

Tumblr is significant because it laid the groundwork for the re-negotiation of the function and purpose of the archive and was an early inclination toward the homogenization of a globalized aesthetic and the encroachment of transhistorical mythologies. Moreover, it foreshadowed the fragility of the connective tissue localized subculture relies on to inherit its distinctive values, safety, and substance from generation to generation.^v The preservation of ephemeral and aesthetic elements is consistently referenced in discourses regarding the practical methodology of the archival conservation of Queer life. Ephemeral and aesthetic images are not just objects, but can also serve as sites for forums, public debate, and engaging with different pedagogies.¹⁶

The subject of archiving concerning Queer culture, preservation, as a resource of community and knowledge, is extremely broad and covers many different areas, theories, and ideas. However, this paper will focus on metaphorical archives as defined by Abigail De Kosnik in *Rogue Archives: Digital Cultural Memory and Media Fandom* (2016), which will enable me to study the development of myth, mythos and mythologies, as well as homonationalism, universalism. Moreover, the informality of metaphorical archives as a natural experience one is met with every day informs how digital passive participation and myth attract and expand the power they hold to contain, appropriate, and interpret identities.

¹⁵ Paul Byron et al., “‘Hey, I’m Having These Experiences’: Tumblr Use and Young People’s Queer Connections,” *International Journal of Communication (Online)*, 2019, 2242.

¹⁶ José Esteban Muñoz, *Cruising Utopia the Then and There of Queer Futurity* (New York: New York University Press, 2009), 62.

Myth is a code of signification; it is a sum of signs, a type of selected speech, and a material that has already undergone transformation. Neither an object, concept, nor ideal, a myth is constructed from aspects of human history; however, a myth can only possess a historical foundation because the loss of its historical quality constitutes its essence. Under specific conditions, myth can privatize history by stripping it of its significance for universal and global consumption.¹⁷ Roland Barthes argues that one defining characteristic of myth is that it is always a form of language robbery. Myth is speech that is stolen and later restored, albeit its restoration is never returned to the same state from which it was stolen from.¹⁸ The function of myth is not denial, but rather to purify and make innocent. By simplifying and drawing on a historical foundation, the signifying language is less an explanation and more a natural justification for a statement of fact, thereby manufacturing an intrinsic image of reality.¹⁹

Dekosnik clearly distinguishes between what she considers a digital archive and a metaphorical archive, which both exist over the Internet. Digital archives (sometimes informally referred to as internet archives) are similar to traditional archives; they are also tools to distribute, preserve, and rely on some form of organized labour to keep the archive operational. Digital archives are far more fragile than traditional archives and must be constantly reviewed; sites can shut down without active management. Digital archives face similar challenges and functional characteristics of physical community archives (a subset of traditional archives) because they rely on repetitive labour and the participation of professional and non-professional archivists. Digital archives specifically rely on professional and non-professional archivists to

¹⁷ Roland. Barthes, *Mythologies: The Complete Edition, in a New Translation*, trans. Richard Howard and Annette. Lavers (New York: Hill and Wang, 2013), 217.

¹⁸ Roland. Barthes, *Mythologies: The Complete Edition, in a New Translation*, trans. Richard Howard and Annette. Lavers (New York: Hill and Wang, 2013), 242

¹⁹ Roland. Barthes, *Mythologies: The Complete Edition, in a New Translation*, trans. Richard Howard and Annette. Lavers (New York: Hill and Wang, 2013), 256.

maintain operational organization by debugging, processing material or submissions, and paying for servers. Like traditional archives, the managing participants or volunteers represent the archive to interested members of the public.²⁰

Whether traditional or digital, these archives are institutionally informed in their methodology, and whether they use archival principles like The Rules of Archival Description (RAD) or develop their own principles, both are organized. I focus on metaphorical archives because they reflect the seemingly disorganized nature of digital space. They are metaphorical because rather than a curated collection of materials, it is the disorganized way one opens up each media text and puts it into circulation. They are less structured and rely on audience members to open data, take, expand or transform the source data to be played back, and the preservation what they see. It is a process of interpreting or attaching media to various symbols or references from the source data. This can illustrate the process of people sharing meaning, augmenting, remixing, and making memories that can develop into cultural dominance across digital platforms.²¹ Unlike a digital archive, which is an organized collective representing a community or group, metaphorical archives are much more temporal. They rely on interpretation and memory to represent a community or how one interprets an identity, whether it be one's own or a group.

With the emergence of national Queerness and digital publics, I argue that Queer mythos is generated through the assemblage of collective ownership and the binding between metaphorical archives and memory markets. Queer mythos is especially influential when weaponized across digital publics; it is the United States' propagation of homonational norms, desires, and

²⁰ Abigail De Kosnik, *Rogue Archives : Digital Cultural Memory and Media Fandom* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: The MIT Press, 2016), 6.

²¹ Abigail De Kosnik, *Rogue Archives : Digital Cultural Memory and Media Fandom* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: The MIT Press, 2016), 8.

subjecthood. It is a cultural population of stolen languages in of which are translated into a series of comparative memories and feelings closest to the United States' definition of whiteness, creating the borders of homonormative empire. Queer mythical speech is the reduction of sexuality and gender; when caught by myth, language that is not English and furthest from homonormative identifiers are stolen and, if returned, they return with new definitions that are naturalized, purified and complementary to a homonationalist brand of Queerness.

A quintessential characteristic of Queer mythos is its ability to de-localize subculture. As a semiological system, it refuses to provide context to materials, reducing them to a signifying function. Queer mythos is distinctive for its investment in a natural sexual and gendered global reality in which all Queerness can see itself reflected. It is a utilitarian approach to postulate a reality specifically concerned with the reconditioning of subculture into myth. Moreover, Queer myth constructs alongside empire, constituted through homonormative nostalgia that has been worked on and transformed into a natural overlapping of privatized history to reaffirm cultural value and subjecthood.

The effect of Queer ephemera and aesthetics studies is constantly referred to amongst discourse concerned with the ways one can achieve and preserve Queer subcultural life; however, their discussions are primarily focused on representations in visual art, public art and performance art. Queer aesthetics can be a method to map social relations, transport knowledge and visualize the change in subcultural trends. I will also focus on ephemeral and aesthetic contributions using fashion as a method to study how one can construct cultural canon, memory production, and the global circulation of desire.

Speaking from my own experience, the study of fashion, dress and style as an academic field beyond conservation, historical preservation and costume is typically looked down upon because

it is perceived to be superficial, lacks substance, is low-brow and frivolous. However, the frivolity or perception of frivolity is what informs my research approach and interests. Everyone has a relationship with fashion because it is an experience one is met with every day; it is an interactionist and symbolic process that can explain certain aspects of human behaviour. While fashion language is significant when studying the systems of fashion, I focus on the non-verbal signification and sartorial experience of fashion, dress, and style as a mechanism to explore the complex relationship between heritage, myth, fantasy, identity and belonging. Sartorial embodiments can be a linking tool between identity, body, memory, and subculture, and represent the subjective nature of meaning and value.²²

This paper will explore the temporality of metaphorical archives and how it affects the process of Queer worldmaking, homonationalism, and the production of cultural memory. It will also examine the development of myth and mythology through different mediums accessible over the internet and how it can be reflected in the physical lived experience. Against dominating discourse, which focuses on the potentiality of Queer digital publics as a means to capture the plurality and temporality of subcultural Queer life; instead, I will primarily focus on the limitations of Queer digital publics as a means to rapidly globalize cultural homonationalism, produce transhistorical narratives, and absorb local identities in the name of universalism, the promise of happiness and an imagined liberation.

Drawing on Muñoz's theory that Queerness is an ideality that can never be touched and a rejection of the now, as well as his work on disengagement which argues that a Queer utopia is a method to imagine and world-making outside of heteronormativity, I argue that the function of metaphorical archives and the internet's globalist reach severely limit the ability to imagine life

²² Roberto Filippello, "Aesthetics and Politics of the Fashion Image: A Queer Perspective," *Aisthesis (Florence, Italy)* 11, no. 2 (2018), 82-83.

outside of homonormativity by augmenting, remixing, and reinterpreting memory into a transhistorical narrative that are typically Western leaning manufactured projects. The process of the intellectual colonial project transcribes Queerness into a hierarchal culture that espouses unity and sets a standard to which all things are compared and read through, limiting phenomenological consciousness and the ability to imagine Queerness in the liminal space described by Muñoz.

Occupying Queerness across digital publics is a political project that relies on one's willingness to adopt a transcription of collective interpretations, including memory, emotions, and symbols and become nostalgic for a fantasy to which one can return to (regardless of location) and actualize in our daily lives from the language one uses, the colours one may identify with, and the rights one may demand. There are many directions and experiences one can approach the internet with and search for community; for the sake of clarity and my own limitations, this paper will focus primarily on how these imbalances reflect and affect the Western experience of Queer digital literacy. It is an action performed that consciously and subconsciously illustrates how little the West knows about "the other" and how little the West is interested in learning about the other.

I will explore the abstract and temporal experience of Queer digital public and how it can regulate and direct attention to different or new objects. Using the 2017 interview by *Billboard* titled "Spilling the Tea: The Queens Kiki on Gay Dating Apps & Lady Gaga's "Born This Way," involving Tamar Braxton, and *RuPaul's Drag Race* alum Mariah Balenciaga, Derrick Barry, Willam Belli, Pandora Boxx, and Manila Luzon I will examine the development of Queer mythos, how culture emerges across digital spaces and the collective commercialization of remixed memory markets affect how one preserve, inherits, and passes down identities and

obligations. Through the chain “Marsha P. Johnson Didn’t Throw the First Brick at Stonewall” on the subreddit community “r/askgaybros,” I will review how the digital centralization and homonormativity structures regulate memory and determine the social production of metaphorical archives which capture Queer nostalgic emotion and pressures a conformist system of hierarchal desires.

I will expand on memory-making through platforms focused on communication and transnational world-making and consider if the inherent dominating force of the West across digital publics makes it impossible to recognize elsewhere beyond the Western context. I will explore how Western-produced platforms can consciously and subconsciously be inherently colonial projects through *The Dyke Project’s* deployment of *Queering the Map*; I will examine how colonial ownership of nostalgia that begins in the digital public naturalizes homonormative identities for the physical, social public. *The Dyke Projects’* public activism, which selected a series of stories from *Queering the Map* (all of which were located in Palestine), contributes to the discussion on homonormative assumptions, hierarchal civilization, colonial rationalizations and the lived dangers of owning trauma that may not necessarily be ours to own.

I will explore how fashion can change the experience of embodying and recognizing the desire for hegemony and whether fashioned mobilities can save subculture, offering a distinct direction in which one may want their body to be seen and reject the impositions of homonormative dominance through members of the defunct Russian art collective *O-Zine* who take an aesthetically conscious approach to document and address the damage of Western narratives places on those who exist on the occident and the danger of intellectual colonialism.

Finally, this paper will reflect on the question of whether the internet has killed Queer subculture? Fashion is a collective project comprising its own formal and informal rules,

culminating in legitimized factions of culture and subculture. Like language, it is incredibly social and contributes to the representations of relationships, transformations, and transitions one wears daily and the dynamic intersection between cultural memory, time, and myth that one can extract from and remix into new narratives.²³ Specifically in the context of Queerness, fashion is conversational; it is a springboard of social-sartorial conversations full of symbols, signs, and aesthetics that proliferate digital and metaphorical archives and represent development and nationalism.²⁴

Unlike chapters One and Two, I engage with fashion because it does not always rely on linguistics to differentiate or appropriate culture; yet, it can still be adopted, engaged with and interpreted. Language, fashion, dress, and style are largely subjective and arbitrary, full of mistranslations, but they are influential and regulatory; they can imply, maintain, and dissimulate normative social structures and the space between. I argue that amongst all the arbitrariness and semiotics, it is an archive that refuses to accept itself as an object meant to be frozen and untouched. Instead, the temporal and rapid evolution and repetitive cycling means it is the space where myth, mythical, and mythologies can be organically challenged amongst digital publics and enacted physically wherever one lives.

Fashion theory, together with the study of digital space through metaphorical archives, is an alternative method to studying the everyday experience of Queer subjecthood and an analytical approach to document and address the damages of textual and intellectual colonialism has on subcultures. Through the analysis of the above case studies, I will argue that fashion, dress and style can be a means for subculture to disengage with intellectual colonialism and to add nuance

²³ Yuniya Kawamura, *Fashion-Ology: An Introduction to Fashion Studies*, Dress, Body, Culture (Oxford, UK ; Berg, 2005), 105-6.

²⁴ Heike Jenss, *Fashioning Memory: Vintage Style and Youth Culture*, Dress and Fashion Research (London ; Bloomsbury Academic, an imprint of Bloomsbury Publishing, Plc, 2015), 7.

to online discourse and maintain what I think is necessary distances.

Chapter Two: Nobody Died at Stonewall - Digital Normativity

This chapter takes its lead from Henri Lefebvre's *The Production of Space* and Jane Jacobs *The Death and Life of Great American Cities*; both are foundational to the study of space, and their work on absolute, abstract and contradictory space informs my analysis and approach to its contemporary Queer digital applications. When in conversation with Sarah Ahmed's *Queer Phenomenology: Orientations, Objects, Others*, I considered how Queer bodies inhabit and apprehend our shared inhabitations as well as the development of digital cultural structures, energy and phenomenological consciousness. Space (whether digital or not) structures the process of developing cultural memory because it informs the value of a myth to be the logical reason a group may include or exclude certain bodies.²⁵ Digitally, myth as a logic is constituted by the rapid loss of historical quality; this loss transforms into human nature, making regulatory power difficult to recognize as well as separate from.

I intend to take an alternative approach by looking at digital space not as a vast connective ecosystem through the study of social media, data, and algorithms, but rather as a metaphorical archive representative of a small, structured, relational public. I am interested in how homonationalism integrates and invests into Queer metaphorical archives to remix memory, shrink space between and diminish the relevancy of relational spatial consciousness in the pursuit of nationhood.

I am also interested in how, despite not having a definitive motherland, homonationalism approaches nationality and can still rely on a geographically relevant argument. I argue that the

²⁵ Roland. Barthes, *Mythologies*, trans. Annette. Lavers (New York: Hill and Wang, 1972), 226.

applications of metaphorical archives make geography a lateral experience, and it is through a digitally lateral reality that homonationalism can create borders. These borders transfer the burdens and obligations to homogenize onto the individual. Those farthest from whiteness face significantly more pressure to adapt and increased accountability to model civility, reproduce the cultural memory and have faith in the desire to inhabit.

Social space, while abstract, is constituted through a set of established, defined, and regulated relations; for Henri Lefebvre, “space implies, contains, and dissimulates social relationships - and this despite the fact that space is not a thing but rather a set of relations between things (objects and products).”²⁶ It can be divided into three functional categories: absolute, contradictory, and abstract. Absolute space is temporal, and it is everywhere, while contradictory space is the logical arm that determines inclusion and exclusion. Abstract space is the actionable arm where homogenization and regulatory strategies can be applied. Each function influences and regulates what is and is not visible, controlling and constituting what is the public versus the private and informs the normative social structures we live by.²⁷

Public space is a produced social reality that is inherently political, neither object nor subject; it produces carefully calculated relations and forms created by the state. These productions essentially draw a line in the sand between civilization and the weird, strange, foreign.²⁸ Jane Jacobs explores how a state may administer and assemble our notions of development by analyzing the functional role of sidewalks as a produced and regulated social space.

Like a line in the sand, the sidewalk artfully subdivides and creates opposition which can be wielded. The sidewalk is a border between barbarism and civilization; it is a public space, and

²⁶ Henri Lefebvre, *The Production of Space* (Malden, MA: Blackwell Pub, 2005), 83.

²⁷ Henri Lefebvre, *The Production of Space* (Malden, MA: Blackwell Pub, 2005), 320..

²⁸ Henri Lefebvre, *The Production of Space* (Malden, MA: Blackwell Pub, 2005), 294.

while one can walk on any sidewalk, it mediates integration and social segregation. A fence may be an obvious example of separating space, but the sidewalk is artful because it creates the uncomfortable feeling of not belonging. Coming from origins far more profound and more complicated than just race and socioeconomic status, it naturally regulates what neighbourhoods we may visit, the stores we may shop from, and how we watch one another.²⁹

Sarah Ahmed builds her sense of Queer phenomenology similar to that of Lefebvre and Jacobs, arguing that space is a product that is always oriented towards or against objects. However, a queer application extends beyond how we inhabit or apprehend our shared experiences; it is also concerned with the direction of energy and how the regulation of energy mediates integration and social segregation from great distances.³⁰ Queer phenomenology arises when we begin to direct our attention towards different and new objects that are in less proximity. The recognition of proximity unsettles space as we continue to deviate and move toward deviant objects, calling into question the logic and origin of subdivision, occupation, movement and desire.³¹

For José Esteban Muñoz, Queer space is not here and may never arrive; instead, Queerness is a spatial idealist trajectory that directs our bodies towards looking beyond the here and now but rather towards futurity. Muñoz argues that the purpose of Queer temporality is to “wrest ourselves from the present’s stultifying hold, to know our Queerness as a belonging in particularity that is not dictated or organized around the spirit of the political impasse that characterizes the present.”³² Likewise, Jack Halberstam suggests that Queer space is the “act of

²⁹ Jane Jacobs, *The Death and Life of Great American Cities*, Vintage Books edition (New York: Vintage Books, 1992), 71-72.

³⁰ Sara Ahmed, *Queer Phenomenology: Orientations, Objects, Others* (Duke University Press, 2006), <https://doi.org/10.1215/9780822388074>, 3.

³¹ Sara Ahmed, *Queer Phenomenology: Orientations, Objects, Others* (Duke University Press, 2006), <https://doi.org/10.1215/9780822388074>, 27.

³² José Esteban Muñoz, *Cruising Utopia the Then and There of Queer Futurity* (New York: New York University

place-making within postmodernism in which Queer people engage and describes a new understanding of how space enabled by the production of Queer counterpublics.”³³ Both argue that a significant distinction is that Queer space is especially engaged with time and spirit and how spirit and placemaking inform the boundaries and economies of Queer desire, as it travels, translates, and exchanges.

Digital space can shrink the distances between objects and remix time; what was once distant is now seemingly close together, and objects become indistinguishable. This makes it much more challenging to consider how one inhabits and directs one’s energy toward the ‘who’ or ‘what.’ Moreover, digital space creates an increasingly tricky system to engage with concepts like Queer temporality and orientations because it warps how time and distance are perceived. On a global scale, these remixes, picking apart and shrinking, could be catastrophic for the survival of subcultures and counterpublics.

Gabriel Menottie and Antonio Fernandez-Vicente argue that digital space produces an illusion or fictional world in which one can pick and choose what they want to see, a self-made reality where once distant imaginaries are now on the same plane of reality and where one can disconnect from uncertain or uncontrolled space.³⁴ The utilitarian defence of homonationalism relies on these connections and disconnections; myth suppresses the meaning and wields distances to interpret the object and determine how it is described rather than the message.³⁵

The temporality of digital space creates a perfect system in which myth can also invest in

Press, 2009), 28.

³³ Jack Halberstam, *In a Queer Time & Place: Transgender Bodies, Subcultural Lives* (New York: New York University Press, 2005). 6.

³⁴ Gabriel Menottie and Antonio Fernandez-Vicente, “Myths of the Digital Age,” in *Barthes’ Mythologies Today: Readings of Contemporary Culture*, ed. Julian McDougall and Pete Bennett, 1st ed., vol. 52, Routledge Research in Cultural and Media Studies (Oxford: Routledge, 2013), 46-47.

³⁵ Roland. Barthes, *Mythologies*, trans. Annette. Lavers (New York: Hill and Wang, 1972), 117.

universalist structures where everyone can recognize themselves. The metaphorical archive is a fertile space for myth to grow and form because myth exists in its own time and space. Like the metaphorical archive myth relies on a foundation of selected parts of human history because “myth is a type of speech chosen by history” and presents itself simultaneously as full and empty of meaning. Myth is an especially important tool for creating national identities because it can remove the complexities of other realities; it is a sum of signs that speaks for all of history by imposing an understanding of reality that is deprived of enough history or context so one can enjoy an object without needing an explanation of the ‘who’ or ‘what.’³⁶

Yuniya Kawamura in *Doing Research in Fashion and Dress: An Introduction to Qualitative Methods*, summarizes Barthes’s defining difference between myth, mythical, and mythologies. Myth is a delusion to be exposed, the mythical or second order is the desire to investigate and expose, and mythologies is the study of meaning and how value is created and occurs in everyday life or social usage.³⁷ Kawamura’s summarization, along with Barthes’s original text (1972), will lay the foundation for my approach to exploring the binding of state, memory, and Queer mythologizations.

Global Versus Local: Producing a Queer Memory

There is difficulty introducing a question around Queer memory when considering the impacts of the Internet on globalization and capitalism. There is certainly a power in identifying language; what terms we direct ourselves towards indicates our proximity towards or away from capitalism and global powers. For Halberstam, the question of global versus local is never natural or balanced; they exist by their proximity and position towards a specific power and out

³⁶ Roland. Barthes, *Mythologies*, trans. Annette. Lavers (New York: Hill and Wang, 1972), 156.

³⁷ Yuniya Kawamura, *Doing Research in Fashion and Dress: An Introduction to Qualitative Methods* (New York: Bloomsbury Visual Arts, 2020).

of the struggles they contain.³⁸ Continuing, a globalist Queer identity is geo-specific, determined by its power, class, and position; under these conditions, our bodies may only exist when we are positioned toward this global identity, and we may cease to exist when we change towards oppositional directions. Furthermore, these distanced or oppositional cultures are not symmetrical or balanced; there is a hierarchy and loaned power in sameness that can be given and taken at will. These theories are crucial when we examine the influence of relational proximity and provide insight into power and subversion; a globalist and universal Queer language, identity, culture, and ephemera connections can be distilled and simplified towards marketization and consumption. Its simplification administers Queerness with a limited amount of flexibility, but enough flexibility that it may represent an infinite plurality translatable and identifiable for all.

Ryan Powell examines the marketing and commercialization of Queerness during the Gay liberation movement in the U.S. For Powell, Queer media is to represent Queerness as an unapologetic identity, conveying the Queer as a reproductive member of society that is consumerist but also ready to fight for gay rights. Visibility, marketing, unification, and aesthetics become vital to the liberation and survival of Queer culture.³⁹ But who determines what an unapologetic Queer space looks like, and where does it come from?

For Scott Herring, the commercial success of metropolitan sites like New York City and San Francisco are memorialized as a Gay success story, a Gay promise of the future and a hub of art, culture and community. Herring argues that the American Gay liberation movement during the

³⁸ J. Jack Halberstam, *In a Queer Time & Place: Transgender Bodies, Subcultural Lives* (New York: New York University Press, 2005), 6.

³⁹ Ryan Powell, "Queer Interstates: Cultural Geography and Social Contact in Kansas City Trucking and El Paso Wrecking Corp.," in *Queering the Countryside: New Frontiers in Rural Queer Studies*, ed. Mary L. Gray, Colin R. Johnson, and Brian J. Gilley (New York University Press, 2016), 181.

'60s, '70s, and '80s developed cities like New York and San Francisco into a refuge site for the rural Queer person travelling towards Queerness and community. The refugee camps become a final destination and a promise that "somewhere else, things must be different and better."⁴⁰

Rurality becomes a slur as the city develops into a social reality of Queer space and time; the city becomes a promise, a vision of desire, and a social fantasy centred on cartography, lines, destinations, and one's proximity toward these promised spaces.⁴¹

Returning to the narratological history of Queer culture and world-making concerning the development and dominance of a metronormative Queer culture identity. Lauren Berlant and Michael Warner's work on intimate publics, counterpublics, and Queer world-making becomes essential to understand how Queer worlds form and are activated. Berlant and Warner argue that intimacy and institutions are crucial when identifying the relationship between hegemonic doctrine and heteronormative public life writing:

Heteronormativity is more than ideology, prejudice, or phobia against gays and lesbians; it is produced in almost every aspect of the forms and arrangements of social life: nationality, the state, and the law; commerce; medicine; and education, as well as in the conventions and effects of narrativity, romance, and other protected spaces of culture.⁴² Intimacy might seem like a private entity, but for Berlant and Warner, intimacy is mediated by its relationship with the public. If the public is a produced social reality, then intimacy hinges on the relations and regulations of politics and work from private life; intimacy is always somewhere else, and like the ever-growing metronormative Queer desire, it is imagined and prescribed as a "promised safe haven" constructed by the public.⁴³

But what is a Queer public, who does it serve, and how is it remembered in popular media? In Western-aligned media, there is a narratological tradition of a promise of happiness through

⁴⁰ Scott Herring, *Another Country: Queer Anti-Urbanism* (New York: New York University Press, 2010), 4.

⁴¹ Scott Herring, *Another Country: Queer Anti-Urbanism* (New York: New York University Press, 2010), 13.

⁴² Lauren Berlant and Michael Warner, "Sex in Public," *Critical Inquiry* 24, no. 2 (1998), 555.

⁴³ Lauren Berlant and Michael Warner, "Sex in Public," *Critical Inquiry* 24, no. 2 (1998), 553.

Queer liberation and an imagined choice between private intimacy and public visibility. Pushback against this narrative, against the transitory route from rural to urban, and against a globalized Queer identity almost always leads to unhappiness and disaster. Halberstam explains that Queer memory stems from a narrative trauma; it is from our relationship to this trauma that Queer life emerges from.⁴⁴ If Queer life survives on shared memories, then memory cannot be fixed but rather operates as a rolling ball of information that everyone, in one way or another, can participate in. If Queer memory is unfixed, it is only natural to assume that popular media's ability to travel and allow instant participation and consumption must advance culture and create more space for plurality and Queer imaginings. However, for Halberstam, a Queer tradition of popular media is state news, hookup ads, zines etc. are signalling to determine factors that decide what Queer existence lives and what are erased.⁴⁵ As a relational public, Queer media becomes a cultural project that illuminates how little we actually know about Queer life outside of the metronormative periphery; Queer life and culture thus become a mythologization of itself determined by a selective tradition produced and administered by minority existences onto the majority.

The 2017 interview by *Billboard* titled "Spilling the Tea: The Queens Kiki on Gay Dating Apps & Lady Gaga's "Born This Way," involving Tamar Braxton, and *RuPaul's Drag Race* alum Mariah Balenciaga, Derrick Barry, Willam Belli, Pandora Boxx, and Manila Luzon illustrates the malleability of Queer cultural memory, its rapid marketization, and its mythologization of the Stonewall Uprising. I will specifically focus on the discourse between Barry and Belli rememberings and their application of Stonewall as a universal Queer cultural

⁴⁴ J. Jack Halberstam, *In a Queer Time & Place: Transgender Bodies, Subcultural Lives* (New York: New York University Press, 2005), 24.

⁴⁵ J. Jack Halberstam, *In a Queer Time & Place: Transgender Bodies, Subcultural Lives* (New York: New York University Press, 2005), 35.

memory.

For many, Stonewall is considered the cataclysmic and motivating force that transformed the gay liberation movement. It is also considered to be one of the most important or THE most important moment in Gay history. Its legacy has led to some key observations regarding the social impact following. For some, Stonewall is regarded as the moment when people began to see homosexuals as a minority group rather than criminals or mentally ill. Others consider it the converging moment between the 'slower' liberalism homophile movement and the energetic confrontational political action approach.⁴⁶ However, despite its importance, nearly all aspects of the event are contested, such as how it started, who was there, who owned the Stonewall Inn, and whether it should be referred to as a riot or uprising. The majority of detailed accounts agree on some key details, which, for the sake of simplicity, I will summarize as a very brief history of Stonewall as an event.

Stonewall (whether it be a riot, rebellion, revolution, or uprising) was a series of violent protests that began on June 28th, 1969, in Greenwich Village at the Stonewall Inn. There is a debate as to how long the event lasted, but all agree it was not a one-day event. The Stonewall Inn, which is often referred to as a gay bar, operated as a private club which served a primarily gay, lesbian and transgender clientele, which was subjected to regular raids by the New York Police Department's (NYPD).⁴⁷ Following an uptick of raids by the NYPD, the Stonewall Inn was shut down by the First Division on June 28th, on the grounds of selling illegal alcohol. Tensions flared between ejected patrons and the NYPD, resulting in the NYPD retreating into the bar, which was subsequently set on fire (it is unclear who started the fire; different accounts

⁴⁶ Jason Baumann et al., *The Stonewall Reader*, Penguin Classics (Penguin Books, 2019), 15.

⁴⁷ Jason Baumann et al., *The Stonewall Reader*, Penguin Classics (Penguin Books, 2019), 15.

argue that police started the fire, while others state the crowd started it).⁴⁸ Some of the most debated details concern the ‘why’ aspect, including whether a brick was thrown, who threw the first brick, and whether the brick started the event. Who led the event and had the most to lose, with some emphasizing that gay men were the most important participants, while others argue that drag queens, Transgender women, and sex workers led the movement. Other contentious details include that high emotions spurred the event due to the death of Judy Garland, who was being buried the same day.^{vi}

The conversation that sparked Barry’s admonishing was mainly about a generational divide between the experiences of older Queer people and younger Queer people, not knowing their history. There is also an emphasis on the younger Queer generation’s physical inaction in the community and shrinking visibility, arguing that they (the younger generation) take Queer visibility for granted. Barry and Pandora Boxx state that to be visible is to “bring the party,” and Queerness needs to be universal for us to progress.⁴⁹

Barry uses the Stonewall uprising as an example of an essential Queer cultural memory that is being forgotten and an example of the younger Queer generation’s problem. Just as quickly as Barry proposes, there is a universal Queer history that every Queer person should remember and identify with; her hypocrisy is revealed in that she doesn’t even remember the history of Stonewall. When pressed to summarize the history and importance of Stonewall by Tamar Braxton, Barry states, “That was fighting for Gay rights, and people were killed!”⁵⁰ This retelling of Stonewall is emotionally charged; Stonewall, in some ways, has become a myth and rallying

⁴⁸ Dick Leitsch, “The Hairpin Drop Heard Around the World,” in *The Stonewall Reader*, ed. editor. New York Public Library et al., Penguin Classics (Penguin Books, 2019), 92.

⁴⁹ “Spilling The Tea”: The Queens Kiki on Gay Dating Apps & Lady Gaga’s “Born This Way,” 2017, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yBtji0rAFC8>.

⁵⁰ “Spilling The Tea”: The Queens Kiki on Gay Dating Apps & Lady Gaga’s “Born This Way,” 2017, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yBtji0rAFC8>.

cry for Queer liberation that we cling to, especially for those who direct their bodies toward American Queer liberatory social realities.

We can argue that Barry's retelling of Stonewall is a grossly simplified and marketable product or used as a catch-all term that celebrates everything and nothing at the same time. Barry cannot supply a who, what, and where in her retelling; we only know a why, which is broadly Gay rights. We can apply Judith Butler's ideas around performativity to Barry's statement; here, a carefully selected moment in American Queer history is "propelled into an endless repetition of itself," appropriating and misremembering itself until it becomes a "core" Queer memory that assumes itself as a memorable origin and derivative of Queer activism that can be applied onto everyone and must be imitated.⁵¹

While I gave a precursor to Barry's statement, in reality, the circulating clip is only twelve seconds long, while the entire conversation lasts about thirteen minutes. The conversation, in short, is as follows:

Derrick Barry: Like when people don't know what stonewall is. You know what I mean?

Tamar Braxton: Won- won't you tell everybody what that is?

Derrick Barry: That was... fighting for gay rights, and people were killed.

Willam Belli: Nobody was killed at Stonewall.

Derrick Barry: N-nobody was killed?

Willam Belli: Nobody was killed at Stonewall.⁵²

Willam's quick correction to Barry's declaration that "people died" at Stonewall becomes the butt of the joke. The humour lies in the fact that Barry makes her declaration with such earnest confidence and seriousness, while Willam's quick correction is deadpanned, exhausted without making eye contact with Barry. Barry's "n-nobody was killed" is in disbelief, brows furrowed and confused, looking to make eye contact with Willam. Willam gives a different retelling of

⁵¹ Judith Butler, "Imitation and Gender Insubordination," in *The Lesbian and Gay Studies Reader*, ed. Henry Abelove, Michèle Aina Barale, and David Halperin (Routledge, 1993) 31.

⁵² "Spilling The Tea": *The Queens Kiki on Gay Dating Apps & Lady Gaga's "Born This Way,"* 2017, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yBtji0rAFC8>.

Stonewall that elaborates on her memory of the who, what, when, where and why. But Willam doesn't disagree with Pandora Boxx and Barry's critique of Queer youths not knowing their history or being activists in the community. While memory is nuanced, membership is not; Willam calls out Queer youth who are not actively and physically orienting themselves around a specific Queer history. For Willam, Queer youth who are primarily online and not orienting themselves around a physical Queer community are "slacktivists" and need to stop.

Interestingly, Tamar asks a follow-up question: "What would your advice be to the younger generation who's coming up and all the hard work we have all done for Gay rights?" When she states "we," she moves her arms around the table, indicating that the various Drag Race alum Derrick Barry, Willam Belli, Mariah Balenciaga, Pandora Boxx, and Manila Luzon landing back at herself as representatives or the faces of Gay rights, history, activism, and future. There are clear limitations and assumptions being not only made but emphasized in this conversation and presenting these individuals as the representing voices of the Queer rights, activism community, history, and THE voice of what Queer should be going forward. At no point do any of the Queens in their retelling of Queer history indicate they were at Stonewall, participated in an uprising or activism during the American Gay Liberation Movement, but based on Tamar's proximity to them and their association as well-loved Queens from *RuPaul's Drag Race*, space becomes a regulated social reality. Tamar (as a *non-Drag Race Alum*) and, by extension, those who watch this video participate and orient themselves around an interpretive idea of Queer reality, history, memory, and futurity based on five *RuPaul's Drag Race* contestants and in this specific moment, becomes a truth.

This is not to say that Stonewall means nothing; I simply want to use the mythologization of Stonewall as an example of the murkiness and temporal relation we have to Queer memory and

its expanding nature across media. In a way, it has become a cultural tradition memorialized across a Queer digital culture. Abigail defines digital memory as:

an extreme multiplicity of archives and a multitude of personal cultural canons derived from those archives - many millions of canons - of - one return to individual choice... in the working of a digital cultural memory gives way to a proliferation of tradition.⁵³

Returning to Ahmed, they posit that positioning our body towards or away is to take a position of good versus bad, to align ourselves with a specific cultural tradition or reject it.⁵⁴ Applying the theorization of the relational and regulatory power of the public and development as tools by which can be wielded and weaponized against differentiated populations to the proliferation of Queer culture across digital platforms emphasizes the magnitude of maintaining a personal affinity with myth without motherland nor truth to bind burden, obligation and faith with a Queer nationality.⁵⁵

There is a general assumption that digital publics (the internet) are generally free, accessible and exempt from the state and regulatory tools, representing an illusionary rebalancing of power where the ability to proliferate and add to a cultural canon is an equitable opportunity and individual responsibility.⁵⁶ However, the transition of Stonewall from memory to myth shows that digital does not mean equitable and that when creating a cultural canon across digital publics, the balance between what matters and nothing matters is fundamental to its function and is an important perspective to consider when examining digital interpretations of myth. Does the history matter for it to become canon, and does it matter when and where Stonewall happened once it becomes a myth?

⁵³ Abigail De Kosnik, *Rogue Archives: Digital Cultural Memory and Media Fandom* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: The MIT Press, 2016), 74.

⁵⁴ Sara Ahmed, *Queer Phenomenology: Orientations, Objects, Others* (Duke University Press, 2006), <https://doi.org/10.1215/9780822388074>, 27.

⁵⁵ Jane Jacobs, *The Death and Life of Great American Cities*, Vintage Books edition (New York: Vintage Books, 1992), 71-72.

⁵⁶ Abigail De Kosnik, *Rogue Archives: Digital Cultural Memory and Media Fandom* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: The MIT Press, 2016), 94.

Myth points out and makes one understand something, for Barry Stonewall as a myth emphasizes the positive and transgressive power in Queer physical spaces and ones duty to recite these histories. While Willam's interpretation points out the contemporary issue of Queer "slacktivism" on the internet arguing it is the antithesis of honouring Queer elders. For both, Stonewall speaks for all history without providing an explanation to its relevancy beyond America, it contributes to the way that a Queer nation may perceive the world around it and its expression of time and space through a self-made reality.

Memory and Spatial Consciousness

De Kosnik's work exploring the Internet as a digital and cultural archive explores the emotional connection between digital archives and the power of Queering them; drawing from the world of Halberstam and Cvetkovic's work, she writes:

The library is not simply a repository; it is also a theory of cultural relevance, a construction of collective memory, and a complex record of Queer activity... The Queer subcultural archive, in other words, is a record of Queer history in the making.⁵⁷

Exploring the Internet as an archive, whether digital or metaphorical calls attention to the difficulty of preserving history under traditional archival methods; under new digital conditions, social memory rapidly develops, performs, and globally adapts regardless of fact, fiction and nuance. The Internet's fluidity, as we saw in the clip of Barry and Belli's remembering Stonewall, is an example of how the Internet provides the power and authorization of just about anyone to preserve a selective history and administer social and cultural memory without sources.⁵⁸ De Kosnik emphasizes that "memory is the technology by which a society survives." In a traditional archive, professional preservationists collect, circulate, and preserve culture and

⁵⁷ Abigail De Kosnik, *Rogue Archives: Digital Cultural Memory and Media Fandom* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: The MIT Press, 2016), 139.

⁵⁸ Abigail De Kosnik, *Rogue Archives: Digital Cultural Memory and Media Fandom* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: The MIT Press, 2016), 26.

its history; whether employed by the state, educational institutions or operating as an independent archive, a minority of professionals and or experts play a pivotal role in determining a modern state history, culture, and its normative or civilizing conceptions of space, publics and desires prioritizing citations, historical data, and relevancy to the time.⁵⁹

It may seem silly to define something as vast as the Internet, and I will certainly not try to. Still, it is essential to consider its role in producing remote publics, loosening memories, and making everyone active participants in defining a social reality. Like many others who study digital public, *Reddit* is an interesting space that gives us all the privilege and status to write our own histories and, most importantly, tell you what your histories should be. I will explore the *Reddit* chain “Marsha P. Johnson Didn’t Throw the First Brick at Stonewall” on the subreddit community “r/askgaybros.”⁶⁰ This thread is part of the many retellings of Stonewall across the digital public and an example of the troubling ways that metronormative memories as a regulatory figure proliferate the relational and social power of public and development, its relationship to whiteness, heteronormativity and colonial projects.

I focus on this *Reddit* thread because I think it holds value when considering Halberstam, Muñoz and Ahmed’s work on Queer space and time. It’s important to note that this *Reddit* thread does not specify where anyone is located; we do not know if the Original poster (Op) or respondents are in America, North America, or even in an English-speaking country. However, the thread is in English, and its discourse focuses exclusively on Queer history broadly from an American and Western lens which we can discern plays a pivotal role in the Op’s and respondents’ positionality towards or against a universal Queer memory, culture and social

⁵⁹ Abigail De Kosnik, *Rogue Archives: Digital Cultural Memory and Media Fandom* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: The MIT Press, 2016), 28.

⁶⁰ Original Poster “Marsha P. Johnson Didn’t Throw the First Brick at Stonewall,” *Reddit Post, R/Askgaybros*, June 3, 2020, www.reddit.com/r/askgaybros/comments/gvqgmt/marsha_p_johnson_didnt_throw_the_first_brick_at/.

reality. Like the RoundTable interview, in this thread, the consensus is that Queer memory must honour specific figures (that don't include BIPOC and Trans people at Stonewall) who are made up of a majority of white cisgender gay or lesbian "icons," whether they be alive, dead, out, in the closet, or assumed to be on the spectrum of the LGBT community. For the thread, the focus on BIPOC and Trans contributions is forced onto them, an attack on their identities and ultimately "fake news."

Op's central critique of the retelling of Stonewall is its emphasis on Marsha P. Johnson's participation and the cultural legacy she represents in media. For Op, representing Johnson as a "core figure" in the Gay Liberation Movement is a gross misrepresentation of Stonewall, the legacy of the Gay Liberation Movement and misinforms the impact of trans and BIPOC people as a minority that led and be thankful for and placing the "true" leaders of white cis-gay men to the periphery; in other words, op feels that the story of Stonewall has been appropriated by BIPOC (as a sort of reversal of whitewashing) and what I will call "colourwashing." Op argues that this misrepresentation of BIPOC contributions is "dangerous" and cites that a TikTok video sparked their anger by retelling Stonewall centred around Black and Trans people. Op states that the danger in this video is its view count of over 300k sharing an incorrect history, and, by extension, any retelling of Stonewall centred around BIPOC bodies is dangerous because it actively erases every other Queer activist.

One commentor, whom I will refer to as Respondent One, was particularly inspired by Op's post and particularly interesting because, like Barry's blunder, it exemplifies the regulatory and proximal relationship we hold to Queer memory. Moreover, its location is part of a communicative digital discourse (and not a YouTube interview made by a large American entertainment producer) that reveals the colonial and imperial powers the American

mythologization of Queer memory holds in the production of a Queer future. Their argument throughout the thread is two-pronged; first, they state that people telling them that Marsha P. Johnson contributed to their rights makes them angry and provides a list of names (with a majority of them being white and cis) as either who we should be thankful for our Gay rights or are martyrs and murdered by Aids as opposed to Johnson's "lack of relativity." Secondly, they dehumanize Johnson by misgendering (referring to Johnson as "He"), and relegating her as an unnotable "prostitute."⁶¹ This thread, and specifically Respondent One's post, is an example of how digital publics are wielded as imperialist and colonial tools that produce a remixed and unstabilized alternative social memory and cultural identities determined by their proximity to the state's prescribed Queer existence.

While long, I think it is crucial to quote Respondent One's list of Queer heroes we as a Queer community should and need to honour. Respondent One lists the following names.

Karl Heinrich Ulrichs? Magnus Hirschfeld? Harvey Milk? Larry Kramer? Frank Kameny? Harry Hay? Edith Windsor? Bayard Rustin? Cleve Jones? Gilbert Baker? Chuck Renslow? Bob Mizer? Phyllis Lyon and Barbara Gittings? Mayor Moscone? Billie Jean King? James Baldwin? Members of the Mattachine Society, Daughters of Bilitis, ACT UP, Society for Human Rights or the Gay Liberation Front? Those murdered by AIDS, which put a human face to the word gay, like Freddie Mercury, Rock Hudson, Robert Mapplethorpe, Keith Haring, Glenn Burke, Bobbi Campbell, Sylvester, Liberace, Anthony Perkins, Robert Reed? Matthew Shepard? Langston Hughes? Storme DeLarverie? Mark Segal? President Obama.⁶²

This is not just a list of suggested names that Respondent One believes we should honour, but a narratological history that Respondent One feels is a universal gay truth; for them, there is an emancipatory action of directing their body towards these figures, and there is an enlightened elitism to know and feel a connection to these figures. For Respondent One, these names

⁶¹ Respondent One, "Marsha P. Johnson Didn't Throw the First Brick at Stonewall," Reddit Post, *R/Askgaybros*, June 3, 2020, www.reddit.com/r/askgaybros/comments/gvqgmt/marsha_p_johnson_didnt_throw_the_first_brick_at/.

⁶² Respondent One, "Marsha P. Johnson Didn't Throw the First Brick at Stonewall," Reddit Post, *R/Askgaybros*, June 3, 2020, www.reddit.com/r/askgaybros/comments/gvqgmt/marsha_p_johnson_didnt_throw_the_first_brick_at/.

represent Queer world-making and a promised future.

How do we read the history of these names in this thread? First, many of the names in this thread, like in the case of Barry and Stonewall, are misremembered or left as vague figures that are never really connected to any one argument; however, regardless of whether it is fact or fiction, the relationship these names represent to the Respondent One and the thread is, in this case, the social truth. The archive of Queer memory emerges from the thread's identification with a specific version or narrative for different reasons bolstered and determined by reactions.⁶³ For example, Mathew Shepherd is listed in the category of "those murdered by Aids;" Mathew Shepherd's tragic death is well-known as a murder victim and not that of HIV/AIDS.⁶⁴ Unlike Barry, Respondent One is never corrected on this statement; in this space and time, for those who read the statement, don't read the statement or don't know who Mathew Shepherd was, Mathew Shepherd becomes a martyr and victim of HIV/AIDS. In this example, the digital cultural tradition of Shepherd is produced in a specific time and space and becomes a social reality in which members may orient themselves around an "supposedly informed" truth and knowledge.⁶⁵ Shepherd's name is a blip in this list that is not mentioned by anyone other than Respondent One, so what makes them an informed and knowledgeable source? In short, nothing. For De Kosnik, what makes digital publics and the internet an archive of discourse radical is that it "rejects the selective tradition of culture that is selected by a minority of experts."⁶⁶ The Internet is the 'wild, wild, west,' where everybody can be right; citations are murky, memory is temporal, and space,

⁶³ J. Jack Halberstam, *In a Queer Time & Place: Transgender Bodies, Subcultural Lives* (New York: New York University Press, 2005). 6.

⁶⁴ James Brooke, "Gay Man Dies From Attack, Fanning Outrage and Debate," *The New York Times*, October 13, 1998, sec. U.S., <https://www.nytimes.com/1998/10/13/us/gay-man-dies-from-attack-fanning-outrage-and-debate.html>.

⁶⁵ Abigail De Kosnik, *Rogue Archives: Digital Cultural Memory and Media Fandom* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: The MIT Press, 2016), 94.

⁶⁶ Abigail De Kosnik, *Rogue Archives: Digital Cultural Memory and Media Fandom* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: The MIT Press, 2016), 73.

whilst not always pinpointable on a map, determines our reality and desire. Facts and evidence are unregulated and relative to the conversation; who is speaking, who is reading, and most importantly, who is questioning or responding determines the temporal existence of truth on the Internet. The consequence of “everybody is right if nobody tells you you’re wrong” I think is especially evident in Respondent One’s comment because it alludes to the larger issue of the proximal power space has to inform the boundaries, memories and economies of Queer desire is administered through its marketing and commercialization of Queer existence and its relationship with the Gay liberation movement in the U.S.

Secondly, Respondent One uses the dehumanization of Marsha P. Johnson as supportive evidence and reasoning as to why Johnson shouldn’t be celebrated and why her memory attacks Respondent One’s Queer identity, existence and world. Respondent One writes:

Marsha was wonderful! After a night of partying, she stumbles across the Stonewall Riots at 2AM, and decides to protest. Great! She helped find “Street Transvestite Action Revolutionaries.” Cool. All I’m saying is that she didn’t start shit... RuPaul has done more than Marsha P Johnson, honestly... All what Marsha has done is prostitute themselves and get murdered.⁶⁷

Respondent One’s second argument is a bold statement that illustrates Powell’s critique of Queer marketing and commercialization in media. Continuing Power argues that Queer marketing represents the Queer body as an assimilable consumerist who is also proud to be Gay and a vital tool for the liberation and survival of Queer culture.⁶⁸ Respondent One distances themselves from Johnson, othering her as a non-assimilable body distant from their own existence and, for them, an irreconcilable opposing figure of what Respondent One considers as Queer liberation should and can be.

⁶⁷ Respondant One, “Marsha P. Johnson Didn’t Throw the First Brick at Stonewall,” Reddit Post, *R/Askgaybros*, June 3, 2020, www.reddit.com/r/askgaybros/comments/gvqgmt/marsha_p_johnson_didnt_throw_the_first_brick_at/.

⁶⁸ Ryan Powell, “Queer Interstates: Cultural Geography and Social Contact in Kansas City Trucking and El Paso Wrecking Corp.,” in *Queering the Countryside: New Frontiers in Rural Queer Studies*, ed. Mary L. Gray, Colin R. Johnson, and Brian J. Gilley (New York University Press, 2016), 181.

Respondent One whittles down Martha P. Johnson to barely a person; instead, they describe Johnson as a person but to someone who has done nothing more than “prostitute themselves and get murdered.” Respondent One argues that “Gay Icons” such as RuPaul, George Takei, and Ian McKellen are more important because they represent what a Gay man looks like and, by extension, the personification of Queer culture embodying what Respondent One believes what a Queer future means. For Respondent One, remembering specific “icons” signals the Queer body's ability to participate in a heteronormative society, not just the freedom but the responsibility of Queer bodies to contribute to consumption and capitalist culture. However, Respondent One’s mixed and selective history also indicates how little the community may know about Queer life outside of these white figures and contributes to the metronormative narrative of primitive Queerness and the orientations of Queer self among homonationalist desires.

The Queer subject as a part of a nationality that can be regulated as a model minority which can perform in all aspects of a heteronormative, capitalist, and consumerist world.⁶⁹ Queer affiliations functions as a system of relational commonalities that fabricate the series of social practices, symbols, myths, and commitments that Queer culture constructs history and nation upon. This evolution from individual or subculture to nation thus expects loyalty and linearity to be seen; unassimilable bodies are a contagion indicating a spot of trouble that the Queer national must reject, avoid, and distance themselves from.⁷⁰ Unlike RuPaul, George Takei, and Ian McKellen, Respondent One sees Marsha P. Johnson as a figure who has done nothing but “stumble” across Gay history. She did not fit into what Respondent One feels a Gay person

⁶⁹ Jasbir Puar, “The Turban Is Not a Hat: Queer Diaspora and the Practices of Profiling,” in *Terrorist Assemblages* (Duke University Press, 2017), 182.

⁷⁰ Jasbir Puar, “The Turban Is Not a Hat: Queer Diaspora and the Practices of Profiling,” in *Terrorist Assemblages* (Duke University Press, 2017), 172.

“should look like.” She was not rich, and unlike respondent One’s examples of “what Gay men look like,” they see Johnson’s prostitution to be an unregulated spot of trouble; Johnson represents a lower primitive Queer existence that denies her the privilege of existence. In contrast, Respondent One believes RuPaul, Takei, and McKellen hold capitalist and marketable values fiscally and socially; their marketability and ability to fit this mould affords them the privilege of existence and memory.

In the case of both the *Reddit* post and the RoundTable interview with Drag Race alum Derrick Barry, Willam Belli, Pandora Boxx, Manila Luzon and Mariah Balenciaga, Queer memory plays a paramount role in both crafting their identities as Queer people, Drag Queen, and Gay men. Remembering the work that was done in the 1960s, 70s, and 80s is a critical driving point for them to legitimize their own existence and visibility, and it is one that I am not criticizing. What is interesting for me is that the identity that Queer becomes a nation-state for them which we should be thankful for. Jasbir Puar coined the term “homonationalism” as a re-composition of race and nation that organizes a positive allegiance between the nation-state and the homonormative body.⁷¹ Queerness that associates with Americanness becomes an exception; naturalization and normalization of homonormative sexuality that positions its desires around heteronormative is deemed as an assimilable body and a model minority.

As we can see in these two examples, for them, homonationalism is aligned with a specific slice of the history of American Gay Liberation; for Respondent One, Stonewall is a blip; by relegating it to a figurative role, digital retellings of Stonewall are located in an abstract space where homogenization and homonationalism can exercise their pressure to repress and reduce

⁷¹ Jasbir Puar, “The Turban Is Not a Hat: Queer Diaspora and the Practices of Profiling,” in *Terrorist Assemblages* (Duke University Press, 2017), 173.

killing off the surrounding space that may be considered to be negative to the social order.⁷²

Barry and Respondent One's centralization of Queer personhood, expels periphery elements that are at the core of the spaces themselves – this exclusion and centralization provides a justification to their argument, justifies, and rationalizes trauma as a means for assimilation.⁷³

The othered body of Marsha P. Johnson, for respondent one, should not be memorialized as a Queer national hero; she is unassimilable, takes up too much space, and takes space from their White homonormative and liberal heroes whether they were out or participated in activism for Gay liberation. By taking the appropriative action of wrapping our desires around a heteronormative model and mythologizing a Queer nationalist identity, we begin to commercialize, market, and administer across media the social and relation truth, the unassimilable body (Johnson) is a victim of systemic oppression, and racialization takes on second anxiety as a relational feared and hated object.⁷⁴ In the RoundTable, to be invisible, not participate in the homonationalist fight, and not be educated on your (Queer) history is critical because it indicates that one: you take the rights you have now for granted and two: your inability to share the same loyalties and values the Queen believe to be a universal truth and a promise of an unhappy future. Ahmed writes that the colonial framework emphasizes the tool of educational training to teach “good habits,” instilling shared values, manners, and a love for a specific identity, creating the “class of personage.”⁷⁵

While myth itself is not eternal, it intends to justify its providence of untraceable history into an unalterable world hierarchy, where anxieties become contingencies, contingencies become

⁷² Henri Lefebvre, *The Production of Space* (Malden, MA: Blackwell Pub, 2005), 307.

⁷³ Henri Lefebvre, *The Production of Space* (Malden, MA: Blackwell Pub, 2005), 333.

⁷⁴ Jasbir Puar, “The Turban Is Not a Hat: Queer Diaspora and the Practices of Profiling,” in *Terrorist Assemblages* (Duke University Press, 2017), 186.

⁷⁵ Sara Ahmed, *The Promise of Happiness* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2010), 129.

nature, and nature becomes the eternal natural order. As such, the anxiety-ridden myth, which relies on selected parts of history and imposes itself onto everything, is a contingency that appears natural and eternal in which we should all see ourselves. The eternal naturalness of this order seems applicable and translatable; the myth is not the object of Stonewall, but Stonewall becomes a myth by how we talk about it. From a Western positionality, this is nearly impossible to combat; the illusion of security of the mobility of the internet. Barthes argues that everything can be myth writing:

The universe is infinitely fertile in suggestions. Every object in the world can pass from a closed, silent existence to an oral state, open to appropriation by society, for there is no law, whether natural or not, which forbids talking about things... Mythical speech is made of material which has *already* been worked on so as to make it suitable for communication: it is because of all the materials of myth (whether pictorial or written_ presuppose a signifying consciousness that once can reason about them while discounting their substance.⁷⁶

Myth provides how Op and Barry apply semiological symbols such as Stonewall and Marsha. P. Johnson, Liberace, and President Obama arbitrarily perceived reality that is suitable for communication by simplifying them into a sum of signs; a sense of social space is absorbed into an imagined nostalgia where myth, symbols, and signs become an authentic Queer reality.

Chapter Three: Theorizing the Queer Map

This chapter will approach the question of how a Queer digital public, as both a space and an archive, disrupts the normative production and movement of cultural memory, public space, positionally, and diaspora beyond the temporal confines of a specific event producing new kinds of counter public in both virtual and physical spaces. Guided by this question, this chapter will also engage with Queer digital publics as an interventional media can play with borders, power,

⁷⁶ Roland. Barthes, *Mythologies*, trans. Annette. Lavers (New York: Hill and Wang, 1972), 107-8

unsettle Queer metro and homonormativity, and muddles the binary between the public and private troubling Queer memory. I will engage with *Queering the Map* as part of the exhibition *Sex + Desires + Data* and as a standalone project, both created by the founder, Lucas LaRochelle. Using *Queering the Map*, I will examine how it may enable counterpublics, challenge traditional means of collecting and preserving and applying transhistorical Queer history, disrupt notions of public and private and how Queer digital memories and futures are prioritized and archived in the physical public.

In 2018, I remembered hearing about *Queering the Map* over social media. It struck me as an exciting new project because, first, it reminded me of the format of the anonymous personals in magazines, classified ads, and Craigslist (before they took that down too); these ads were typically filled with sexual desires, cocks of varying sizes, and a specific kind of code like m4m, m4t, t4t, and so on. However, *Queering the Map* offered something softer and more intimate; the space between anonymity provided something far more different than sexual flings, many posts being solemn memoirs of the personal and affective experience of the mundane. Created by Lucas LaRochelle in 2018, *Queering the Map* “is a community-generated counter-mapping platform for digitally archiving LGBTQ2IA+ experience in relation to physical space⁷⁷.” This emphasis and preservation of the minutia of Queer life unsettles the narratological homonationalist vacuum that exists in both Barry and the *Reddit* thread as the Queer public.

I hadn’t thought much about *Queering the Map* since 2018; I’ve heard news about it here and there but never took the time to revisit the website. I knew it had blown up since 2018, full of pins across the globe; even in such “impossible spaces” or “impossible times,” in 2023, I had the chance to revisit Montreal for a conference. I took the time to visit the PHI Centre to see the

⁷⁷ Lucas LaRochelle, “Queering The Map,” *Queering The Map*, accessed October 5, 2023, <https://www.queeringthemap.com/>.

immersive exhibition *Sex + Desires + Data*, which aimed to explore the connection between sexuality and technology.”⁷⁸ The immersive exhibition consisted of a series of experiences or installations you walked through. An AI chatbot guided you through the exhibit from your phone and knew where you were through a GPS tracker you wore around your neck. This bot asked you about sexual fantasies, feelings, and reactions to each part of the exhibit. The exhibit was comprised of six experiences, including playing a dating game to compare feelings and data metrics for compatibility, a room constructed by AI-generated genitals based on top porn category searches depicting mangled, bumpy, grotesque, only vaguely resembling genitals but not clear as to what kind of genital, across the walls. As you moved from one wall to another, the images grew with you, following the pace of your steps. The next part had you walk through a corridor filled with tablet screens full of the chats of a transgender woman sharing her trans identity. Replies were filled with kinks, anger, and overwhelming questions about her genital status. The third and fourth stops were in the same room and included you listening and sharing sexual confessions in booths that resembled a confessional booth from the Catholic church; on the other side of the room was a large machine that both looked and didn’t look like a genital, it retracted and grew with your touches depending on its aggressiveness or tenderness. The fifth stop was a virtual porn set in which you could interact with a series of VR technology, including headsets, laptops, and tablet. The final stop was an adaptation of *Queering the Map*, which was broken into two parts, including a projection room that blasts stories across the walls and floors, mashing them together and moving constantly. Outside the projection room was a large screen version of *Queering the Map*, similar to its usual state as an interactive map of pins you can click

⁷⁸ Immersive Experience | Phi Centre | Montreal,” Sex, desire and data, accessed October 4, 2023, <https://sddexperience.com/en/experience-immersive-sdd-montreal>.

and read; however, it restricts the ability to add and populate.⁷⁹

I don't think I realized how big *Queering the Map* had become in 2018; *Queering the Map* felt empty outside of its urban pockets in North America; however, in its 2023 versions, pins were strewn across the map, in varying densities from rural to urban across the world. A slow archive of stories, desires, confessions, love, and first and last moments are accessible regardless of where they came from; by leaning heavily on its user-generated epistemological accounts and memoirs of lived realities, *Queering the Map* explores the imaginary, destabilizing Queer mythos by giving a space to engage with Queer domesticity and social inclusion beyond the recognizable.

Whether as an abstract projection or interactive map, in *Queering the Map*, Queer existences are not illustrated or represented based on specific parameters or determined legal metric systems; instead, it gives a platform or space for more nuanced stories told by the people who created them and about the things they felt were relevant to them in that moment, time, and space. Tenderness is felt everywhere on the invisible map in the here and now: selective histories, homonationalism, rainbow flags, pink-washing, or particular determinants of existence are not overtly prevalent or mandatory to exist on the platform.⁸⁰ Moreover, as a platform or art installation, *Queering the Map* is unique because its existence and application do not stop at its digital presence; it moves and has been applied both in specific physical and digital contexts that challenge the lack of knowledge of Queer lives outside of any fixed centres, divine orders and acknowledges its plurality of Queer space and temporal ripples.⁸¹

⁷⁹ Immersive Experience | Phi Centre | Montreal,” Sex, desire and data, accessed October 4, 2023, <https://sddexperience.com/en/experience-immersive-sdd-montreal>.

⁸⁰ Ash Watson et al., “What Matters in the Queer Archive? Technologies of Memory and Queering the Map,” *The Sociological Review*, September 21, 2023, 00380261231199861, <https://doi.org/10.1177/00380261231199861>, 12.

⁸¹ J. Jack Halberstam, *In a Queer Time & Place: Transgender Bodies, Subcultural Lives* (New York: New York University Press, 2005), 35-7.

The Internet, digital media, and growing interactive capabilities of technology from participatory memory creation to interactive mapping technology create a sustainable space to archive and preserve stories, knowledge, reports, lives and the existences of Queer beyond the typical recording of archival necessary or sought after data collection including dates, names, gender, sexualities, context, and so on.⁸² As explored through the Reddit thread and Barry's recounting of Stonewall, the power of shared collective memory, recounting, and opinions relevance rests not just in the knowledge produced or producers but, most importantly, the consumers and how they may connect, share, weaponize and administer knowledge. Whether factual or not, the knowledge you seek out is propelled by the longing for Queer exposure, education, and tradition and the urge to share, pass down, and participate in.⁸³

Lefebvre argues that social realities are produced and reproduced into normative social structures through these temporal spaces and under specific conditions; by creating an absolute space that seemingly embodies everything must be moveable and temporal to comprehend and legitimize specific groups' existences through the repetitive evidence of logical relationships of inclusion and exclusion to centralize space and define contradictory spaces where the strange, hostile, and supposedly primitive people exist.⁸⁴ The Murkiness of the Internet as a temporal space where anything goes, questioning and pushing the selective and traditional means by which knowledge is preserved and disseminated back to the public troubles the conditions in which the physical, social public and normative social realities can reproduce, comprehend groups, centralize and legitimize through the exclusionary system. Exclusionary policing of

⁸² Ash Watson et al., "What Matters in the Queer Archive? Technologies of Memory and Queering the Map," *The Sociological Review*, September 21, 2023, 00380261231199861, <https://doi.org/10.1177/00380261231199861>, 12.

⁸³ Abigail De Kosnik, *Rogue Archives: Digital Cultural Memory and Media Fandom* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: The MIT Press, 2016), 141.

⁸⁴ Henri Lefebvre, *The Production of Space* (Malden, MA: Blackwell Pub, 2005), 294.

digital public spaces becomes nearly impossible when the strange, foreign, subversive and unproductive control public platforms, evolve and reorganize from one platform to another.

However, while it may be nearly impossible to control the transnational reach of subcultures across the digital public, the internet's seemingly infiniteness can reproduce and distribute normative means or the inclusion of specific characteristics of a traditionally excluded group. Homonationalism and homonormative representations through generalized intimacies, the centralization of memories, desires, and activism exposes specific social reality as a directional tool toward hegemony and exclusion. In many ways, digital publics can perform and operate under the same conditions as the relational public, as Jane Jacobs explores through the function of sidewalks. Like sidewalks, state powers can wield the digital public to produce and sustain a regulatory public that administers and assembles the notions of development, what is developed, and who belongs.⁸⁵ Furthermore, much like the sidewalk, digital platforms have the potential to be used as a tool to mitigate public interaction and social inclusion, to marginalize a community or to validate violence against "undesirable or primitive communities."⁸⁶ However, whereas the sidewalk for Jacobs is a localized tool administered to specific communities or neighbourhoods, the internet expands the relational public beyond a city sidewalk and is expansive and infinite by extension. While infinite, the Internet and what you see are regulated subtly through language, ads, location, web browsers, personal settings, and laws.

It is crucial to remember that the Internet has a dual existence; one, it is an active social and regulatory public that produces and sustains the notions of development, space, regulation,

⁸⁵ Jane Jacobs, *The Death and Life of Great American Cities*, Vintage Books edition (New York: Vintage Books, 1992), 71-72.

⁸⁶ Jane Jacobs, *The Death and Life of Great American Cities*, Vintage Books edition (New York: Vintage Books, 1992), 71-72.

divine orders, and fixed centres.⁸⁷ Secondly, it is an archive of digital cultural memory that lives and breathes, generating and preserving an infinite multiplicity of life stretching further as technology advances and accessibility evolves.⁸⁸ There is an “it’s a small world” aspect to the Queer digital public; we can see this in the re-telling of Stonewall in both Barry’s interview and the Reddit thread; everyone knows the same names and that they are essential whether the affiliation in memory is factual or not. Moreover, the Internet can be the ‘wild, wild west,’ but it is critical to remember that ‘wild’ is subjective to where tamed is. Likewise, I argue that a Queer digital public is directional, and a Queer digital phenomenology expands as a duality that still holds the potential to destabilize and unsettle notions of space, how we move and how we organize it in both digital and physical realities.⁸⁹

Feeling the Otherwise and Fueling the Here

Queering the Map, as both a digital archive and a social community, it functions across accessible transnational networks; represented by pins, there is no one way of remembering or sharing; it is a space for the *otherwise* to exist and preserve themselves and others in the here and now. Unlike a traditional archive, *Queering the Map* describes itself as user-driven platform for digital archiving stating:

Queering the Map is a community generated counter-mapping platform for digitally archiving LGBTQ2IA+ experience in relation to physical space. The platform provides an interface to collaboratively record the cartography of queer life—from park benches to the middle of the ocean—in order to preserve our histories and unfolding realities, which continue to be invalidated, contested, and erased. From collective action to stories of coming out, encounters with violence to moments of

⁸⁷ Henri Lefebvre, *The Production of Space* (Malden, MA: Blackwell Pub, 2005), 235-6.

⁸⁸ Abigail De Kosnik, *Rogue Archives: Digital Cultural Memory and Media Fandom* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: The MIT Press, 2016), 97.

⁸⁹ Sara Ahmed, *Queer Phenomenology: Orientations, Objects, Others* (Duke University Press, 2006), <https://doi.org/10.1215/9780822388074>.

rapturous love, Queering the Map functions as a living archive of queer life.⁹⁰ As a community and digital archive that is propelled by the user, *Queering the Map* takes up the affective task as a repository or archive of knowledge and feeling while still generating a sense of community and collective ownership.⁹¹ It is seemingly unlimited in its reach or power across language, culture, and borders; here, the line between barbarism and enlightenment is stretched and muddled beyond the local but across international political relations and complexities where life is amplified and rippled outward without any blaring specific urban to rural; creating a special kind of virtual relational public that addresses the periphery determined by the active user's location. While there is no format, posts are generally written from a first-person perspective as one-off memories in conversations with another anonymous user and, more predominantly, those whose existences stand frozen in nostalgia. While Queering the Map is generally user-driven, it does inform users that a small team of moderators from the community ensures safety and anonymity, control when posts are added to the map but states that this system "is not about policing expressions or identities."⁹²

The Queer community has a special relationship to story-telling through memoir, and it plays a critical role in creating Queer desires, futurity, and identity. We can see its lasting effect through the dominating power of spatial desire as narratological metronormativity and metrosexuality during the Queer liberation movement, consequently leading to the erasure of Queer rural desires pushing theming farther and farther to the periphery. These temporal oral histories lead to normative visions of Queerness, hierarchies of desires, identities, and racial

⁹⁰ "Queering The Map - About Us," Queering The Map, accessed November 9, 2024, <https://www.queeringthemap.com/>.

⁹¹ Abigail De Kosnik, *Rogue Archives: Digital Cultural Memory and Media Fandom* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: The MIT Press, 2016), 139.

⁹² "Queering The Map - Moderation," Queering The Map, accessed November 9, 2024, <https://www.queeringthemap.com/>.

marginalization.⁹³ This tradition has grown exponentially with Queerly political campaigns such as the *It Gets Better* campaign and the worldwide success of television like RuPaul's Drag Race.^{94 95} Trauma and vulnerable themes such as this are common throughout the show, and it is a requirement for the top Queens before the finale to provide testimony to their younger selves, communicating the hardships to expect and how things will be better in the future. Trauma is the glue that holds these stories together; the feeling of somewhere else is better, and the one-way trip sustains what Queer memory, community and identity is. Cvetkovich argues that the memoir is the chosen genre because of its relationship to trauma culture, its elasticity and breadth for the mundane, and its ability to run counter-collective, encouraging the personal and affective experience⁹⁶; nostalgia in memoirs relies on a personal affective dimension by way of a political presence to take up space; as such *Queering the Map* muddles and troubles the recollection of normative publics; as a digital assemblage of Queer nostalgia, it provides an innovative archival tool, that creates and sustains counter-publicities that can reject Queer hegemony and renegotiating public space through borderless cartography.

In short, the dissent that *Queering the Map* produces consequently creates disorder and discomfort in homonationalism, pushing the boundaries of public intimacy conflicts with its conceptions and feelings in and towards specific spaces. This not only preserves but highlights the historically overlooked mundane and imagines the peripheral Queer experience (peripheral is determined by the location and experience of the user); and perhaps this might be the Queer imaginary in action providing the possibility of another world, determined by the user's local and

⁹³ Scott Herring, *Another Country: Queer Anti-Urbanism* (New York: New York University Press, 2010), 15.

⁹⁴ "Home - It Gets Better Canada," *It Gets Better Canada*, July 16, 2024, <https://itgetsbettercanada.org/>.

⁹⁵ "RuPaul's Drag Race" (MTV, n.d.).

⁹⁶ Ann Cvetkovich, *An Archive of Feelings: Trauma, Sexuality, and Lesbian Public Cultures* (Durham, UNITED STATES: Duke University Press, 2003), <http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/york/detail.action?docID=1167862>, 211.

proximity to their selected pin that you must orient yourself around regardless of any time or space. Pins are temporal, existing within the here and now, past, present, and future; there is no taxonomy, only a story of feeling without names or dates; they are lost amongst each other.⁹⁷

Sara Ahmed contends that the relationship between trauma and the tradition of unhappy stories in the Queer community, and specifically in the practice of fiction writing, can be a political gift. There is a duality in unhappy endings in Queer fiction because it allows for the censorship of Queer imaginaries to be published while simultaneously adding stories to a growing cultural canon towards resistance and visibility.⁹⁸ However, Ahmed warns that when this reliance on unhappiness begins to dominate what stories we preserve in Queer archives and how we make them accessible, we begin to produce a moral distinction within the community; the interpretation of non-fiction as a literal relationship between happiness and unhappiness as spaces creates a distinct direction in which bodies must move.⁹⁹ Representing happiness as a distinct space and linear traction toward it presumes there is a universal commonality amongst all Queer people and that there are specific political commitments and social practices that demand allegiance. Bodies that remain in unhappy perpetuity by these standards are unassimilable; for Puar, the unassimilable become impossible by their presence as they expose the missing diaspora and trouble the cultural canon.¹⁰⁰

To this effect for the Queer nation, unhappy bodies in unhappy spaces and happy bodies in happy spaces can exist, but happy bodies in unhappy spaces cannot. While unhappy stories in the archive and research can be a *gift*, limiting how and if we can talk about happiness sustains the

⁹⁷ José Esteban Muñoz, *Cruising Utopia the Then and There of Queer Futurity* (New York: New York University Press, 2009), 73.

⁹⁸ Sara Ahmed, *The Promise of Happiness* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2010), 88.

⁹⁹ Sara Ahmed, *The Promise of Happiness* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2010), 89.

¹⁰⁰ Jasbir Puar, "The Turban Is Not a Hat: Queer Diaspora and the Practices of Profiling," in *Terrorist Assemblages* (Duke University Press, 2017), 172

colonial tradition and framework of what Eve Tuck calls “damage narratives.”¹⁰¹ Tuck specifically applies her work on damage narratives to the Indigenous community’s relationship with colonials and the colonizer’s demand for trauma stories for marginal political or social gains. However, as Queer trauma canon grows across digital publics and diasporic desire is pushed further to the periphery, Tuck’s work can be applied to Queer and colonial relationships to trauma and the political demand for trauma stories from both external researchers and political powers but also internally by its own community. Tuck outlines a series of demands that trauma narratives must adhere to under this colonial framework, one that oppressed bodies can only speak about pain. Two, it pathologizes a community to only be heard or identifiable by their pain. Third, it must only address the deficits within a community without acknowledging the colonial history that contributes to the current inequalities and generational trauma. Fourth, by designing this approach to document trauma, failure, and deficit, colonial power can absolve its contribution to current inequalities without addressing solutions or developing opportunities towards equality.¹⁰²

For Ahmed, unhappiness in *The Well of Loneliness and Lost and Delirious* is where the loss of the straight relationship may be in jeopardy; to come out is to concede that all other happiness may cease to exist and that by “turning straight is to turn away from Queer objects of choice which register as grief before grief can be covered over.”¹⁰³ This assumes that recognition of one’s happiness rests on the ability to accept happiness as a conditional gift from a straight world; to refuse is to threaten the ability to be seen and, sometimes, live.¹⁰⁴ As Tuck explores the

¹⁰¹ Eve Tuck, “Suspending Damages: A letter to Communities,” *Harvard Educational Review* 79, no. 3 (Fall 2009) 414.

¹⁰² Eve Tuck, “Suspending Damages: A letter to Communities,” *Harvard Educational Review* 79, no. 3 (Fall 2009) 414.

¹⁰³ Sara Ahmed, *The Promise of Happiness* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2010), 104.

¹⁰⁴ Sara Ahmed, *The Promise of Happiness* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2010), 106.

conditional exchange between researchers and Indigenous recognition by way of trauma, so too is the ability to tell Queer stories beyond trauma. Queer stories are conditional by way of unhappy stories; they represent a violent warning of a *or else*, the gift of recognition of accepting that your happiness is a gift also absolves the state as the cause of unhappiness using the marginalization, the criminalization, and the murder of Queer bodies from any guilt. While happy stories may be shared, they should not be mistaken as what Tuck calls desire-informed narratives; pseudo-desire stories are often wrapped around a warning of unhappiness; these stories can be a thank-you story of gratefulness to the straight world for the gift of happiness, strategically erasing the labour of rage from Queer activists of not just accepting the gift to occupy but demanding to create or take up space.

Queering the Map explores the imaginary and potentiality of what desire-informed narratives can be when they are not pushed to the margins. As an affective geography of self-regulation, the feeling of self and the feeling of others who sit on the periphery make *Queering the Map* an effective rogue archive. Tuck considers the radical power of desire narratives as its ability to inform on the active happiness, the multiplicity of moments, its ability to hold strengths that contribute to trauma accountable, producing a complex picture of experience, joy, laughter, love, nostalgia, rage, and affect better representing the lived experiences.¹⁰⁵ *Queering the Map* offers the ability to create such complex rendering of a geographical space, whether it is determined as a happy or unhappy Queer space; by mapping such complex representations, *Queering the Map* breaks away from homonationalism and the reliance on linearity, conditional happiness but instead forces straightness to turn towards Queer objects whether or not it tells stories of grief.

¹⁰⁵ Eve Tuck, "Suspending Damages: Aletter to Communities," *Harvard Educational Review* 79, no. 3 (Fall 2009) 420.

Here and There: Domestic Archives in the Public

Applying these theories, *Queering the Map* challenges and unsettles nostalgia by subverting dominant narratives - as a *counterarchive*, it dissembles the traditional affective push and pull of a relational public rather than reproducing the distinct nostalgic rhetoric of languages of freedom, nationhood, and the ‘good old days’ by revealing either current or historical inaccuracies the absent spaces. Stephen Vider’s *domestic archive*, constituted by the “... practices, relationships, and affects—the ephemeral and embodied as well as the material,” challenges traditional activist discourses by emphasizing the private life as a site of power where political struggle relationships emerging marginalized perspectives that are typically rendered obsolete by the mainstream instead of representations of grand narratives of unity, oneness, and progress.¹⁰⁶ *Queering the Map* works towards realizing a counter public that sits in the middle of discourses on Queer actualities; rather than relying on activist discourses that emphasize public life as the root of the political with slogans like “Gay Power,” “lesbian helpers,” or “out of the closet and into the street,” instead, it stimulates emergent narratives by bringing the private into the public without pinkwashing narratives of progress or oneness. This is not to say marches, unity, and oneness should have no space; it simply points toward an alternative way of exploring a Queer future beyond the pinkwashed way toward the development of a Queer space in what the West would consider ‘hostile territories.’

While you cannot determine a date or time when exploring *Queering the Map*, stories may contextualize or point towards a specific political or social event that may contribute to the reason why an individual may make a post. Stories of the private contextualized by a public event may be activated through activism by third parties by taking these private stories that may

¹⁰⁶ Stephen Vider, “Public Disclosures of Private Realities,” *The Public Historian* 41, no. 2 (2019), 166-68.

typically be sought out by other Queers into the public, forcing straightness to turn towards marginalized Queer perspectives or experiences. In October of 2023, *The Dyke Project*, a trans, cis and non-binary dyke collective located in the U.K., hacked a series of signs across London's transit routes displaying pins from *Queering the Map* located in Palestine.¹⁰⁷ *The Dyke Project's* focus on Palestine is in response to the Israeli occupation of Palestine, the escalation of Israel's apartheid regime and the breaking of international law committed by Israel, such as genocide, collective punishment, including cutting off the supply of food, water, electricity, and medicine from the Gaza Strip (2.2 million Palestinians). Other methods include the indiscriminate bombing of hospitals, civilian populations, as well as designated safe zones, refugee and residential areas.¹⁰⁸ vii In 2024, the International Court of Justice ruled that Israel's occupation of Palestinian territories was unlawful and in breach of international law.¹⁰⁹

Totalling in just over a hundred ads, *The Dyke Project*, in their mission statement, wrote:

We hacked 100 ads across the TfL tube, bus and rail networks to share Queer Palestinian stories and to show that, as Queers, we stand with Palestine.

The stories come from @queeringthe map, a project that has featured the testimonies of Queer Gazans who have been subject to the intensified Israeli bombardment over the recent weeks.

As Queers who recognize the impact of colonialism and state violence, we are calling for an end to British funding of Israel's military and an END TO THE OCCUPATION.

While Israel uses "pinkwashing" and the guise of progressive Queer politics to distract from and legitimize its violence against Palestinians, we say NOT IN OUR NAME.

¹⁰⁷ The Dyke Project, "Today, We Hacked 100 Ads across TfL Tube, Bus and Rail Networks to Share Queer Palestinian Stories, and to Show That Queers Stand with Palestine," *Instagram*, October 2023, https://www.instagram.com/p/Cy5dxlziJO/?img_index=1.

¹⁰⁸ Vocies4 London, *International Queer Solidarity with Palestine Open Letter*, October 2023, <https://voices4london.org.uk/blog/open-letter-queers-solidarity-palestine/>.

¹⁰⁹ International Court of Justice, *Summary of the Advisory Opinion of 19 July 2024* (The International Court of Justice, 2024), <https://www.icj-cij.org/sites/default/files/case-related/186/186-20240719-sum-01-00-en.pdf>.

A free Palestine in Solidarity,
The Dyke Project¹¹⁰

The Dyke Project's use of *Queering the Map* troubles the use of nostalgia within the Queer community; taking *Queering the Map* out of a digital found space produces a dynamic, affective re-articulation of what the Queer imaginary and the social and political reality of Queerness outside of the West may look like. While *The Dyke Project* isn't anonymous to the project, the anonymity of *Queering the Map* contests the performance of homonationalist rhetoric; here, "the collective is watching the watcher and provides a much-needed counter publicity of the state's power."¹¹¹ On your daily commute, each hacked poster critiques and encourages responses to the mechanisms of colonial power, demanding viewers to consider whether they agree with it beyond the localized in the physical public. It destabilizes the notions of what a Queer identity looks like; possibly contradictory, it troubles the mythology of Queerness that foregrounds conflict as a universal struggle for visibility, but instead destabilizes the mythos of Queerness, reorienting bodies to address that the West's pinkwashing may exacerbate this struggle.

¹¹⁰ The Dyke Project, "Today, We Hacked 100 Ads across Tfl Tube, Bus and Rail Networks to Share Queer Palestinian Stories, and to Show That Queers Stand with Palestine," *Instagram*, October 2023, https://www.instagram.com/p/Cy5dxlziJO/?img_index=1.

¹¹¹ José Esteban Muñoz, *Cruising Utopia the Then and There of Queer Futurity* (New York: New York University Press, 2009), 62.



Figure One: Screenshot of the second image from the October 27, 2023, The Dyke Project's Instagram post. Figure credit: *The Dyke Project*.



Figure Two: First screenshot of the comment section of the October 27, 2023, The Dyke Project’s Instagram post. Figure credit: *The Dyke Project*.

Muñoz states that the sticker may proliferate the surveillance technologies or exist outside of the state's electronic eye; however, the merging between the digital and physical public and the advancement of technological surveillance has undoubtedly complicated the ability and the intention to be anonymous, further complicating its potentiality for anonymity towards the contesting of pinkwashing colonial rhetoric and its ability to provide a localized counter-publicity.¹¹² For example, whereas the stickers described by Muñoz may be associated with perhaps an organization with limited participatory or membership visibility, *The Dyke Project's* hacking goes beyond the signs associated with each bus stop; its recognition and public power come from both *Queering the Map* as a digital archive of belonging while simultaneously drawing attention to the physical participatory act of installing the hacked signs. The intention of both publicity and ownership complicates the function of performing objects, and the hacking of signs does not just illicit a local response from commuters across the one hundred signs in London; rather than choosing anonymity, *The Dyke Project's* desire to claim ownership over social media and the signs draws a transnational public debate across social media that functions opposite to *Queering the Map's* platform of modular anonymous participation.

However, while running counter to *Queering the Map's* unmediated Queer imaginary by removing the characteristic of wandering temporal desire, the public performance still functions as a method to challenge colonial pinkwashing and Queer mythos – like stickering the curation of quotes as performing object aim to illicit responses, become a site for public debate of social issues outside of mediated public spheres, and demand for critical thinking towards political actions amongst local populations. For Muñoz, the cheapness of stickering and its anonymity is paramount, writing, “While technologies of surveillance colonize symbolic space, the

¹¹² José Esteban Muñoz, *Cruising Utopia the Then and There of Queer Futurity* (New York: New York University Press, 2009), 62.

anonymous performance of stickering contests rhetorization and imagines another moment: a time and place outside of the state's electronic eyes... this working collective is watching the watcher and provides a much needed counterpublicity to the state's power."¹¹³

¹¹³ José Esteban Muñoz, *Cruising Utopia the Then and There of Queer Futurity* (New York: New York University Press, 2009), 62.

Robert Street

JCDecaux

Quelle: Global Post Palestine
https://www.globalpost.com/news/middle-east/2023/10/27/queer-community-stands-with-palestinian-siblings/

A place were I kissed my first crash. Being gay in Gaza is hard but somehow it was fun. I made out with a lot of boys in my neighborhood. I thought everyone is gay to some level.

The Queer community stands with our Palestinian siblings. We all deserve freedom, safety, and belonging.

We call for an end to the occupation and an end to the British funding and arming of Israel's military.

None of us are free until all of us are free.

#freepalestine TheDykeProject

thedykeproject · Follow
London, England, UK

maor.nathaniel 71w
OMG Bunch of 🤡🤡🤡! You do know that the Palestinian LGBTQ community seeks shelter in Israel right?! 🇮🇱 Because they are NOT SAFE in Palestine!! So stop this nonsense if you really care for the Palestinian LGBTQ community. 🇮🇱🇮🇱

28 likes Reply

natan_london 71w
What a bunch of idiots. Gay Palestinians seek asylum in Israel. Israel has the biggest and probably the only pride in the Middle East!! If you really care about them you should be marching with Israel and not with terror. Thank you.

8 likes Reply

17,901 likes
October 27, 2023

Add a comment...

Figure Three: Screenshot of the first image from the October 27, 2023, The Dyke Project's Instagram post. Figure credit: *The Dyke Project*.

By taking documenting photos of the performance and posting them on *The Dyke Project's* Instagram removes anonymity, providing a very different kind of counter-publicity than any local discourse could provide now but eliciting and expanding public debate. While no longer anonymous, the Instagram post provides a starting point for public debate and lucidity toward political action; Queer belonging and desire may be initially defined by a pinkwashed perspective incentivized by *The Dyke Project's* political motive, but the interpolation of the experiences and perspectives told marginalized. Minority means that your local interpretation of space isn't reliant on fantasies of the outside but rather a debate on a peripheral reality.¹¹⁴

To debate the validity of memories on *Queering the Map* by their ability to be identified and categorized relegates any pin's relevance to its ability to fit within a Queer mythos. For Muñoz, Queerness is filled to be lost and illegible to the straight man map or about heteronormativity, veering away from heterosexuality not determined by outness or visibility.¹¹⁵ This is not to say *The Dyke Projects'* wrestling of *Queering the Map* into the physical public is inherently wrong. Still, in some ways, it is counterintuitive to its function of anonymity, lostness, and undebatable memories or truths. *Queering the Map* was never quiet, nor was it ever not political, and like any other platform, it does fall victim to the 'wild, wild west' aspect of the internet; but whereas the *Reddit* thread or Barry's retelling of Stonewall can be in some ways fact-checked, the purpose of *Queering the Map* is not necessarily about relaying historical fact to prove a point but memorialize for yourself an experienced truth without conversation. For the Queer eye, the posters challenge and engages with homonormativity and use memoirs and nostalgia as a way to bolster a political objective; the posters stabilize the naturalized homonationalist political identity

¹¹⁴ Eve Tuck, "Suspending Damages: Aletter to Communities," *Harvard Educational Review* 79, no. 3 (Fall 2009), 412.

¹¹⁵ José Esteban Muñoz, *Cruising Utopia the Then and There of Queer Futurity* (New York: New York University Press, 2009), 73.

of the other, both taunting and strengthening the *mythos* of a Queer time and space forcing themselves into a space where alternative identities, spaces, perspectives can be selected, articulated, and marketed for the mass public.



Figure Four: Second screenshot of the comment section of the October 27, 2023, The Dyke Project's Instagram post. Figure credit: *The Dyke Project*.

Domestic Archives in Art

Queering the Map as part of *Sex + Desires + Data* sort of sits on the line between the *stickering* of Queer nostalgia and the rogue Queer digital archive. As an exhibition, we can make a few assumptions; one, unlike the hacking of signage, the participant is actively choosing to be in the space, potentially knowing that *Queering the Map* is there; and two, unlike a Queer rogue archive, the participant may not be there specifically for *Queering the Map*; and three as a pay to enter space it is presented in a controlled public space that relies on the participants willing intent to experience the space. Entrance into the exhibition is on a controlled schedule of pre-purchased tickets that are spread out into a series of increments. The attendants manage the movement of bodies throughout the exhibition by stopping you from initially entering and fitting you with a locator around your neck; they then instruct you to sit in a corner and talk to Max, the AI chatbot who communicates with you throughout the exhibition. This is a subtle way to force the participants to accept one of the most crucial and uncomfortable parts of the experience and prevents a bottlenecking effect that puts too many people in a room at the same time. Comprised of six smaller installations, connected and strung together, it communicates the subtle relationship between the relational public and the digital and physical experience.; feeling, orientation, positionality, public and private intimacy, sex, and futurity are all archived in both a physical and digital format.

Max (AI chatbot) is the string that ties it all together, taking over the task of following and re-directing your body throughout the exhibition, asking you questions that prompt you to tell him your darkest sexual secrets or fantasies. Moreover, the installations move with you, strewn across walls in varying formats; your randomized screen name and conversations are public for everyone to see; by sharing your secrets and intimacies in real-time, you see others' reactions, creating an innate feeling of shame and anxiety, wondering if someone will recognize you. This,

however, is not quite doxxing because the author of each post is still anonymous; the knowledge that the author of the scandalous messages is in the room compels you to become abundantly aware of yourself, assembling a feeling of what belongs and what does not; this feeling may be exacerbated when you recognize your message. This physical uncomfortableness of transgressing a threshold that one does not usually face through anonymous digital participation translates the subtleness of a relational public and abstract between digital and physical, becoming ever more evident with each step you take. The exhibitions occupying space, or the space between the object and body, demand the tensions of visibility, invisibility, privacy, public, personal, political, ephemera, nostalgia and memoir are uncomfortably felt simultaneously. You are directed by this uncomfortable feeling, re-orienting your bodies through each installation, subtly instructing us how to inhabit and what we should direct energy towards.¹¹⁶

Queering the Map is the exhibition's last stop, broken up into two parts, including an external larger interactive version of the platform where participants can choose pins and an internal projection room made up of posts from the map but without geographical notations or choice. It is essential to contextualize the installation amongst the wider exhibition itself; one, *Queering the Map* is the only installation that takes up two rooms; it is the only installation that gives the active participant a choice to choose what stories they want to hear and from where, three, it is the only installation where your choices can be seen publicly. Moreover, by demanding that your choice(s) be made publicly, in many ways, it is the culmination of the uncomfortableness you felt throughout the exhibition and where (if you choose to interact) the

¹¹⁶ Sara Ahmed, *Queer Phenomenology: Orientations, Objects, Others* (Duke University Press, 2006), <https://doi.org/10.1215/9780822388074>, 3.

tensions of abstract space are felt and tested.¹¹⁷ In its installation format, *Queering the Map* still presents a space for the otherwise, allowing them to preserve themselves and others in the here and now. It continues its affective task to be a domestic archive and repository of knowledge and feelings. However, while it still generates a sense of community in this format, it may not generate a feeling of collective ownership because it has removed the option to post and add to the community.¹¹⁸

The pressure of time and the participant's physical movement into the next rooms significantly limits its ability to run counter-collective; the slow desire to find, consume, and most significantly, confront Queer memory and how little one may know about Queer life elsewhere may (depending on the pins you choose) not be prompted.¹¹⁹ Like *The Dyke Projects* 'hacking,' the installation's effort to impact the majority rather than invite participants to slowly engage freely and populate privately limits the platform's ability to cut through the relational public and be lost in its own Queer time and space. Focusing on its impact on the mass public contributes to what Richard Sennott calls social disorder, where the tensions and conflicts of public space inhabitants feel are used to bolster and unify communities.¹²⁰ Moreover, the public time and space pressure of the first part of the installation removes one of the most important parts of *Queering the Map* (in its original format), which is its ability to sustain the Queer tradition of memoir, to be lost and limits the emancipatory action of participating towards Queer world-making.

This pressure to move forward is not limited to the installation *Queering the Map*; it is a

¹¹⁷ Henri Lefebvre, *The Production of Space* (Malden, MA: Blackwell Pub, 2005), 318.

¹¹⁸ Abigail De Kosnik, *Rogue Archives: Digital Cultural Memory and Media Fandom* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: The MIT Press, 2016), 139.

¹¹⁹ J. Jack Halberstam, *In a Queer Time & Place: Transgender Bodies, Subcultural Lives* (New York: New York University Press, 2005), 35-7.

¹²⁰ Richard Sennett and Sendra Pablo, *Designing Disorder: Experiments and Disruptions in the City* (Verso Books, 2022), 66.

compounded pressure built through the entire exhibition. For example, there is an innate pressure to move forward in the exhibition; every part of the exhibition relies on me to move forward with subtle signs like the movement of text following me as I step forward but never backward if I stand in one place for too long Max invites me to move forward while asking me questions about what I thought of the previous exhibition. It is a natural process to keep moving forward through each installation; the knowledge that people are behind me waiting for me to move consciously surrounds the viewer, whether you're waiting to sit in a booth to listen to secrets, touch a vaguely genital like structure, or operate VR technology the knowledge that someone is waiting propels the viewer forward. That rushed feeling culminates at the interactive screen; not only is the viewer fully aware of their time, but the publicness of their choices, the time they spend reading their choice, and potentially the pushing viewer out of the decision-making seat runs counter to the slow process of a rogue digital archive. The lack of choice is specifically critical here as I continue towards the second half of the installation; a successful digital archive promotes deep engagement, informed knowledge, and participation in a subculture where you can feel equally part of a community as a bystander.¹²¹

The second half of the installation sits around the corner in a separate room where moving text projections from *Queering the Map* envelope every surface. Notably, this reimaged format removes four distinct aesthetic parts of *Queering the Map* that neither preceding examples do; one, it has removed the colour pink from being the central colour. Instead, pink is used sparingly, replaced by the emittance of neutral shades of navy blue, black, and white. Two, it removes the distinctive and recognizable pins and bubble design. Three, it eliminates the map entirely, and four, it removes the ability to choose where on a map you want to explore and, most notably,

¹²¹ Abigail De Kosnik, *Rogue Archives: Digital Cultural Memory and Media Fandom* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: The MIT Press, 2016), 97.

how long you can explore.

Standing in the space, surrounded by projections, I noticed an immediate feeling of awe, almost feeling overwhelmed by the text flying across the room; after a while, one almost became immune to the vagueness. As the images passed my eyes, I found myself and others around me focusing on specific pieces of text and following them around the spaces while ignoring others. That original lost feeling was gone, and I and the walls began to feel legible.

As an abstract Queer map, the projection room plays with Queer lostness as established by Muñoz as the intention to be lost and ineligible to heteronormative mappings of space.¹²² Removing the stagnancy of a visual map disorients the ability to be oriented towards or away from Queer objects; recognition of unhappiness or happiness is rendered almost ineligible when the periphery, conditions, activism, memoir and local move in random directions that flash in and out of sight.¹²³ However, removing the stagnancy of a map may disorient. The longer I spent time in the room, the more I started to map my surroundings, re-positioning my body as I turned around in the room, looked up and down, and started reading the text. When the awe experience begins to fade, the text begins to repeat itself, and my eye begins to follow specific texts, a specific and directed digital assemblage of Queer nostalgia; the lost feelings dissolve, and a map fills itself out. Other participants standing in the room also began to orient themselves to stories that they saw themselves in, pointing out specific things and chatting about texts they related to.

Without the map, it engages with homonormativity and the Queer diaspora by building a digital assemblage of Queer nostalgia mapped and wrapped around the viewer. The Queer periphery is pushed farther and farther out of your eyesight as the viewer begins to engage with

¹²² José Esteban Muñoz, *Cruising Utopia the Then and There of Queer Futurity* (New York: New York University Press, 2009), 73.

¹²³ Sara Ahmed, *The Promise of Happiness* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2010), 106.

texts that regurgitate pinkwashed keywords. Moreover, the repetition of text runs counter to *Queering the Map* in its original format. In this new format, the selective tradition of archival work returns with the removal of participatory engagement and replaced by curated text. Curating what text should be shown consequently also determines what bodies and experiences are recognized; to be selected for the projection room grants certain bodies the status of being archivable, and to be chosen for the projection room means to be selected for the status of existence.¹²⁴

Moreover, the repetition of critical homonormative language chosen to represent the Queer diaspora consequently erases the elaborate and complex Queer cultures and lives that exist beyond curated texts and rushed experiences; in this format, the viewers are not pushed to consider Queer life beyond their local community. The ability to follow the selective keywords creates an innate affinity towards what they determine as cultural relevancy based on their locality, providing a safe feeling rather than being faced with how little they may know about Queer life beyond what is locale and safe.¹²⁵ Without the map, everything is local; it removes the ability to orient or disorient from spaces across the world and creates an assumption of commonality amongst all Queer or non-heterosexual lives.¹²⁶

Queering the Map's unique platform as a user-driven digital archive makes it a malleable platform that can be reimagined across mediums beyond the original website. It has the potential to disassemble Queer mythos and slow the push and pull of relational publics standing distinctly apart from a united Queer nostalgia reliant on a feeling of oneness. As a digital archive,

¹²⁴ Abigail De Kosnik, *Rogue Archives: Digital Cultural Memory and Media Fandom* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: The MIT Press, 2016), 16

¹²⁵ J. Jack Halberstam, *In a Queer Time & Place: Transgender Bodies, Subcultural Lives* (New York: New York University Press, 2005), 35-7.

¹²⁶ Sara Ahmed, *The Promise of Happiness* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2010), 89.

Queering the Map stands somewhere in the middle, actualizing a digital counterpublic that creates space for emerging marginalized narratives from the slow and domestic private into the public while simultaneously giving equal opportunity for the grand homonormative narratives.

However, its radicalness is determined by how a user or users may wield it as a tool; *Queering the Map* also has the potential to drown out marginalized voices, misrepresent or place identities and categorizations, universalize stories, and orient bodies towards a homonationalist identity. By removing the core participatory nature of *Queering the Map*, it may be used as a localized directional tool that conditions and sustains a regulatory Queer public assembling notion of development, belonging, and social inclusion, contributing to the mythologization of a universal Queer cultural memory and identity.

Chapter Four: Essentializing Subcultural Aesthetics

In the previous chapters, I explored the development of gender, space, and participatory collective memory building across Queer digital publics while examining the temporal nature of Queer digital space and memory and through the development and function of rogue archives and the digital culture industry, I explored how mass media may accelerate Queer mythos; as a digital public, it offers infinite affordances to amend, select and extract from the source material, re-interpret and remix. Feelings and facts become muddled with each example, producing a cultural canon that emerges from one's own version of a narrative for whatever motive, regardless of the source material.¹²⁷ In a constant state of production, the Queer Digital public relies on the audience to construct, circulate, and concentrate around a universal or assumed commonality among all Queer people. The regulatory relational Queer public reproduces a hierarchy that determines the social inclusion or exclusion of Queer existences. Motive is central, and the centralization of collective Queer memory and homonormative desires may dominate as the neutral; its neutrality also demands that digital publics provide the means to imagine the otherwise, engage with the domestic archive, and preserve the possibility of another world.¹²⁸

This chapter will explore how the collective activity of fashion, style, and dress across digital publics has changed the spectral experience of embodying desire. Moreover, this chapter will explore how Queer sartorial objects contribute to the uneven distribution of knowledge and how they negotiate collective memory, desire, identity, and personage through dress. Like the digital platforms explored, queer fashion mobilities across digital publics create a distinct direction in

¹²⁷ J. Jack Halberstam, *In a Queer Time & Place: Transgender Bodies, Subcultural Lives* (New York: New York University Press, 2005), 25.

¹²⁸ Abigail De Kosnik, *Rogue Archives: Digital Cultural Memory and Media Fandom* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: The MIT Press, 2016), 279

which bodies may move and the means by which they may embody their desires. Through fashion, I will continue to explore the production Queer cultural memory and the imposition of normative social structure across digital publics and mass media by examining the intersections between social, aesthetics and social imitation, colonial readings and how they develop the present.

Focusing exclusively on linguistic methods to construct and circulate homonormative mythos and the Queer canon consequently excludes the critical element of ephemeral visual aesthetics as a source record of transitions and transformations that can also be selected, possessed and exploited. As explored in previous chapters, Queer mythos is generated by collective ownership that is not grounded or legitimized by factual origin but rather by a population constructing ownership and memory together.¹²⁹ Likewise, for Yuniya Kawamura, in *Fashion-ology*, aesthetic and fashion culture is a collective activity that a single entity or designer does not create; instead, Kawamura argues that it is through a large population of people in society will adopt dress to ‘become’ fashion, identity, and culture. Style.¹³⁰ Moreover, Kawamura differentiates between what fashion is and what dress writing is, “fashion is not the visible clothing but the invisible elements included in clothing.”¹³¹ This differentiation is critical when considering the connection between fashion, digital culture, public and mythos.

Dress and clothing are essential when considering the development of Queer cultural memory; fashion is conversational; it functions as a social-sartorial conversation exploring the dynamic intersections between age, time, social and relational public, and the development of

¹²⁹ Abigail De Kosnik, *Rogue Archives: Digital Cultural Memory and Media Fandom* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: The MIT Press, 2016), 139.

¹³⁰ Yuniya Kawamura, *Fashion-Ology: An Introduction to Fashion Studies*, Dress, Body, Culture (Oxford, UK ; Berg, 2005), 1.

¹³¹ Yuniya Kawamura, *Fashion-Ology: An Introduction to Fashion Studies*, Dress, Body, Culture (Oxford, UK ; Berg, 2005), 4.

cultural memory and articulating group identities.¹³² Fashion, dress, and style function as a visible link between the body and identity, acting as visual production in which Queerness can be created, circulated, and incorporated into one's being. DeKosnik defines archontic production as a method of deeply engaging with the archive of media culture; from this archive of source texts, objects, and memories, the collective body can select and extract what one wants and reproduce it for its means to produce culture and canon.¹³³ Archontic productions reveal that digital popular culture is enacting its archival practice that refuses to accept objects as frozen or untouched; instead, it is the appropriation and transformation of an existing narrative that seizes upon a collection to possess and expands and exploits it to create new narratives.¹³⁴ The activeness and participatory nature of digital archives represent a promise of movement and futurity; likewise, the life of Queer aesthetics and fashion across digital platforms may possess but never are just records of the past. Dress is the look, and fashion is the selected and possessed story that affirms the narrative and its meaning; it is a cultural caricature of the collective digital Queer canon, separating, segregating, and embodying mythos.

I argue that the Queer selective use of aesthetics and fashion as transient representations of the Queer body's relationship between social inclusion and exclusion is a space that domestic archives can be embodied, actualized and visualized on both digital and physical public at the same time. The subtle ways in which abstract space homogenizes a population through the pressure, reduction and eventual elimination of surround are amplified evermore when applied to the sartorial representation of homonormativity. The repetition of selected sartorial and aesthetic

¹³² Joanne Entwistle, *The Fashioned Body : Fashion, Dress and Modern Social Theory*, Third edition. (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2023), 114.

¹³³ Abigail De Kosnik, *Rogue Archives: Digital Cultural Memory and Media Fandom* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: The MIT Press, 2016), 34.

¹³⁴ Abigail De Kosnik, *Rogue Archives: Digital Cultural Memory and Media Fandom* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: The MIT Press, 2016), 279.

representations of the everyday Queer allows for a significant population to recognize the Queer gaze and, most importantly, mimic it. The spectatorial experience implies that not just an emotion or memory is shared but also a look at Queer existence.¹³⁵

Unlike Derrick Barry, the Reddit Forum, or Queering the Map, sartorial methods are not inherently presented as stories to be preached or lessons that one needs to agree with; instead, fashion is a social strategy governed by ‘taste’ that is to be mimicked, in which that key signifier of social identities, boundaries, and class is sustained artfully camouflaged by a promise of equality.¹³⁶ Like the three previous examples, the referential mimicking of a type of dress or, in their cases, stories all point towards a referential cultural desire or value to participate; the mythos of homonormativity through stories and memoirs is directive and reliant on the willingness to seek out, participate and engage deeply with a specific forum or subculture; fashion mythos is a trend, tailored to the physical that is everchanging, reproducing a collective desire that we can all mimic in the everyday. You can wear the repository of feelings, subtly connecting Queer intimacies, memories, and life across digital and physical publics at the same time.

Moreover, like the forums, blogs, and conversations examined previously, dress is a tool that can communicate the means of desire that typifies the Queer canon so it may be translated, passed down, and project a definitive Queer style or ‘look’ that promises liberation, futurity, and happiness. By tastemaking Queer fashion, ‘look’ becomes a hierarchy that defines what normative visions of Queer aesthetics should look like and creates a Queer-fashioned mobility.¹³⁷

¹³⁵ Catherine Baker, “Re-Reading the Queer Female Gaze in the 1990s: Spectatorship, Fashion and the Duality of Identification and Desire,” in *Revisiting the Gaze: The Fashioned Body and the Politics of Looking*, by Morna Laing and Jacki Willson, Dress Cultures Ser. (London: Bloomsbury Visual Arts, 2020), 217.

¹³⁶ Yuniya Kawamura, *Fashion-Ology: An Introduction to Fashion Studies*, Dress, Body, Culture (Oxford, UK ; Berg, 2005), 26.

¹³⁷ Scott Herring, *Another Country: Queer Anti-Urbanism* (New York: New York University Press, 2010), 16.

By Queer-fashioned mobility, I mean how ‘look’ may contribute towards a broader narrative representing the individuals and the world in which they exist. Engaging with Lefebvre, I argue that Queer fashioned mobility is how one may wear the production of space and indicate where among the social order they may be permitted; space is a symbiotic relationship between inclusion and exclusion; fashioned mobility represents the opening and closing of the doors by aesthetically determining a Queer centrality, periphery, texture, representation of the surrounding, and the existence of a group.¹³⁸

Playing Dress-up

Fashion is the space in the spectral experience of desire that may be amplified and visualized that negotiates between the desire to be and the desire to be with; through sartorial modes of communication, Queer spectatorship toward bodies becomes seemingly unthreatening; fashion and dress create a distinction between noticing and desiring a body versus desiring bodies in heteronormative spaces. For Baker, the fashion magazine offers a safe space in which the Queer imagination and desires may be felt; under certain conditions, consumerism may enable the individual to desire and embody their Queerness. Barker contends that the cycle of “desiring to resemble and the desire to consume permeates the moment of spectatorship,” Queer desiring’s of the body as an object and its embodiment become normative through the means of socially performing fashion. The purchase of a magazine and the act of desiring may not be threatening or an indication of one’s sexuality or gender identity; moreover, it may even allow for a level of genderfucking to slip through so long as it is read in the name of fashion. For the sake of art and fashion, a cis-straight man may socially perform gender transgressions like wearing makeup, dressing in drag or fashioning an alter ego with limited tolerance.¹³⁹

¹³⁸ Henri Lefebvre, *The Production of Space* (Malden, MA: Blackwell Pub, 2005), 236.

¹³⁹ Catherine Baker, “Re-Reading the Queer Female Gaze in the 1990s: Spectatorship, Fashion and the Duality of

However, I would like to make a clear distinction between sartorial performances of gender and Queer desiring through cross-dressing or drag versus cross-dressing for the sake of performance. Both are forms of cross-dressing, cross-dressing and drag represent two very different sartorial displays and articulations of one meaning of gender, power in mobility, stabilizing or destabilizing of presumptions and threats.¹⁴⁰ For example, cross-dressing for the sake of comedy has a long history in film and media; for John Phillips, cross-dressing in media is unthreatening when represented as a “necessary deception” that leads to comic misunderstandings. What makes this form of cross-dressing unthreatening is that normative heterosexual and cis-gender links are maintained and often represented through comical unease and secret longing for the opposite sex attraction, the audience's desire for this kind of gender performance in one knowledge of the true gender, and the ‘digging’ at the end of the show.¹⁴¹

For example, in the film *White Chicks*, a central factor of comical landing is found in Latrell’s performance of what they think being a woman is like.¹⁴² While In *She’s the Man*, Amanda Bynes’s character Viola cross-dresses as her brother Sebastien to continue playing soccer, comedy lands in Viola/Sebastien’s feminine masculinity and deception of gender, such as tampons in the nose, peeing, and her attraction for teammate Duke a cis-man.¹⁴³ Neither of these examples is threatening because there is no Queer desire for the body or the embodiment of normative mobility through the means of socially performing fashion regardless of permanency, nor is the performance a collective activity that communicates the desire to clone and universalism.^{viii}

Identification and Desire,” in *Revisiting the Gaze : The Fashioned Body and the Politics of Looking*, by Morna Laing and Jacki Willson, Dress Cultures Ser. (London: Bloomsbury Visual Arts, 2020), 200.

¹⁴⁰ Adam. Geczy and Vicki. Karaminas, *Queer Style*, Subcultural Style Series (London ; Bloomsbury, 2013), 139.

¹⁴¹ John Phillips, “Cross-Dressing in Film Comedy,” in *Transgender on Screen* (Basingstoke, Hampshire ; Palgrave Macmillan, 2006), 53-54.

¹⁴² *White Chicks*, Comedy (Sony Pictures Releasing, 2004).

¹⁴³ *She’s The Man*, Comedy (DreamWorks Distribution, LLC, 2006).

Across digital publics, Queer spectatorship has expanded; visions of gender transgressive aesthetics are ever more accessible, and the collective activity of fashion and the adoption of style for a time results in the centralization of a mythos of Queer cultural values to be established and emulated.¹⁴⁴ Fashion is a myth that has no concrete substance but continues through the embodiment of the collective experience and consciousness of the normative. The centralization of Queer fashion and aesthetics and the expansive ways it is disseminated across mass digital publics have changed how style and values are communicated. Whereas in magazines, seasons diffused trends, desire, and gendered performance; Queer aesthetics are globalized, changing how memory, culture, and feelings are legitimized.¹⁴⁵

In the previous chapters, I explored the role of the past, stories, and identity across globalized digital publics propelled by the desire to connect and how they may be administered to produce a dominating canon of cultural memory. Across forums, videos, art installations and public protests, the emphasis of ‘our’ Queer memory and, by extension, ‘our duty’ to memorialize canon that essentializes Queer mythos and homo-nationalism. The media we consume, produce, and repost represents the self and engages with cultural memory regardless of fact or ‘realness.’ The participatory joy of consuming (viewership), engaging (movement) and producing normative social boundaries applies to social sartorial exchanges. In contrast, the previous examples were limited to the digital self and social sartorial exchanges, whether physical or digital, eliciting a similar feeling of joy and community that engages with cultural memory, presence, and performance. For Heike Jenss, sartorial memories engage with the community through the performative process of “acting out the past” as a dynamic way of remembering. For

¹⁴⁴ Yuniya Kawamura, *Fashion-Ology: An Introduction to Fashion Studies*, Dress, Body, Culture (Oxford, UK ; Berg, 2005), 25.

¹⁴⁵ Yuniya Kawamura, *Fashion-Ology: An Introduction to Fashion Studies*, Dress, Body, Culture (Oxford, UK ; Berg, 2005), 105-6

Henke, performing fashion preserves and reproduces a selective history by acting out a particular point of history or memory in the present. Whereas Henke explored fashion and memory through vintage fashion trends and youth culture, the performative nature of selecting and social sartorial exchanges remains an apt way to examine Queer communication and cultural memory.¹⁴⁶

Like *Queering the Map*, there is also a feeling of joy and closedness in viewing the other through fashion; social sartorial exchanges develop textured ways in which Queer memory selects, preserves and reproduces community through a style or look creating familiarity or a visual cue to knowledge associated with and its contextual relationship with the social space it exists or worn in. For Adam Geczy and Vicki Karamis, what makes Queer fashion integral to Queer studies is its ability to construct and identify material desires, tastes, community and social space writing “ Queer is something far more lived, experienced, enjoyed, and suffered than it is theoretical.”¹⁴⁷ Unlike digital forums Queer style can be a subtle or unsubtle material way to experience history, joy, the present, theoretical and imaginary that can be wrapped around our bodies and communicates the understanding of self, the context of the other, and a critique of the emerging.

Queerness as a subculture across digital platforms relies on a general sameness among the community while simultaneously articulating their rejection of the dominant. Likewise, fashion and subculture rely on this balance between sameness amongst and otherness against. Whereas community amongst digital platforms permits a level of public in private through one’s ability to share stories and participate anonymously and remotely, fashion, dress, and digital platforms permit representation and participation digitally, privately, and publicly in physical forms.

¹⁴⁶ Heike Jenss, *Fashioning Memory : Vintage Style and Youth Culture*, Dress and Fashion Research (London ; Bloomsbury Academic, an imprint of Bloomsbury Publishing, Plc, 2015), 7.

¹⁴⁷ Adam. Geczy and Vicki. Karaminas, *Queer Style*, Subcultural Style Series (London; Bloomsbury, 2013), 3.

Joanne Entwistle explores fashion and subcultures as the connective tissues that group and articulate their substance and the particular knowledge and behaviours associated with and its boundaries.¹⁴⁸ Applying a canon of Queer style creates knowingness and preservationist quality. Queer aesthetics emphasizes the crucial markers of social values and identity; Queerness is not just collective memory but also a lifestyle to be worn. Entwistle writes

Conventions of dress attempt to transform flesh into something recognizable and meaningful to culture; a body that does not conform, that transgresses such cultural codes, is likely to cause offence and outrage and be met with scorn or incredulity. This is one of the reasons why the dress is a matter of morality: dressed improperly; we are uncomfortable; we feel ourselves open to social condemnation.¹⁴⁹

Nobody is exempt from uncomfortable feelings; a person uninterested in dress or style consciously dresses prudently to express their rejection of style or sartorial conscience; the sartorial-conscious person may even feel exempt from their consciousness by expressing their subversive rejection of fashion by focusing on a specific type of aestheticism that focuses on minimalism and utilitarianism rather than what they deem as vanity and stuff.¹⁵⁰

However, nobody is exempt, and fashion is not just stuff, as best summarized by Miranda Priestly's cerulean monologue in *The Devil Wears Prada*, where she elaborates on fashion, dress, and the social body always has a sartorial consciousness, saying:

This... "stuff"? Oh, okay. I see. You think this has nothing to do with you. You... go to your closet, and you select... I don't know, that lumpy blue sweater, for instance, because you're trying to tell the world that you take yourself too seriously to care about what you put on your back, but what you don't know is that that sweater is not just blue, it's not turquoise, it's not lapis, it's actually cerulean... However, that blue represents millions of dollars of countless jobs, and it's sort of comical how you think that you've made a choice that exempts you from the fashion industry when, in fact, you're wearing a

¹⁴⁸ Joanne Entwistle, *The Fashioned Body : Fashion, Dress and Modern Social Theory*, Third edition. (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2023), 137.

¹⁴⁹ Joanne Entwistle, *The Fashioned Body : Fashion, Dress and Modern Social Theory*, Third edition. (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2023), 8.

¹⁵⁰ Joanne Entwistle, *The Fashioned Body : Fashion, Dress and Modern Social Theory*, Third edition. (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2023), 8.

sweater that was selected for you by the people in this room... from a pile of “stuff.”¹⁵¹ Nobody is exempt from Queer style, its associations with subcultural trends, social connotations and memories. Applying Muñoz’s exploration of localized counter-publicity through stickering, fashion is another avenue, being a cheap or expensive method to disrupt space and perform to illicit a response from spectators; however, whereas Muñoz stickers as a demand for a response, fashion, while it does communicate a message, it does not always overtly demand for a response nor feel like an inherently Queer choice.

Taking fashion to digital platforms means, like stickering, which relies on localized disruptions, so does adopting Queer fashion aesthetics, style, and trends to disrupt the local. However, across a digital platform, the power of invoking responses and conversations across a more comprehensive community is not restricted by the context of a single moment when you face a political sticker.¹⁵² Still, its development of the canonic association with the Queer trendsetter exists beyond developing a visual canon complete of intention, mass society, and media markets point towards the breaking down of traditional communities and their bonds. A more comprehensive coverage of concerns undercuts what we may consider professional norms and standards for editorial coverage. Fashion contributions to participatory propaganda rely both on broadcasters and smaller influencers to share and link mutual awareness of Queer aesthetics developing conscience and consciousness beyond what is proximal and amassing into Queer diaspora.¹⁵³

Considering sartorial consciousness, performance and intention, I argue that Queer style and the body falls into three categories; 1) The Queer body adopts Queer style, 2) The Queer body

¹⁵¹ *The Devil Wears Prada* (20th Century Studios, 2006).

¹⁵² José Esteban Muñoz, *Cruising Utopia the Then and There of Queer Futurity* (New York: New York University Press, 2009), 62.

¹⁵³ Paul Starr, “The Relational Public,” *Sociological Theory* 39, no. 2 (June 2021): 72, <https://doi.org/10.1177/07352751211004660>, 73.

wants to adopt the style but is restricted and cannot, and 3) The Queer body does not want to adopt or be associated with a Queer style. Metronormativity and homonormative aesthetics give leeway to one's immobility; if one's adoption of subcultural style represents one's commitments and investment into a community, location and immobility to adopt and assimilate may even emphasize and empower the Queer diaspora. Like the various platforms and videos explored, if Queer is presumed as a nation with a collective cultural memory, canon and nationalist feeling or fervour, then it must also have a national dress replicable; the collective activity of adoption, imitations, and assimilation concentrates itself into a sartorial performance of Queer belonging and exclusion. Moreover, like Barry's expression of Stonewall as an emotion of the Dyke Project's use of *Queering the Map* to illicit a sympathetic response - one's inability to adapt to an aesthetic carries an equal level of weight. Crucially, there must be an intention to adopt a homonormative style, whether it be the 'uniform' or aspects of the community; the response's intent is to illustrate a cultural likeness.

The third category has no or very little desire to adopt homonormative cultural symbols and aesthetics- a subculture in a subculture, the body imagines and visualizes another world where their desires can be actualized without the constraints and comparative between homonationalism and self-image. The third category is crucial for the development of Queer space, time and the imaginary because rather than an action or something to purchase, it is a feeling that unsettles the Queer sensibilities and feelings. The wearable archive of feelings in which it sits on by accident not only represents a cultural critique or response to homonationalism but simultaneously illustrates how little we know about sexual pluralities and aesthetics on the periphery.¹⁵⁴ The mythos of Queer style contributes to the eroticization of the

¹⁵⁴ Jack Halberstam, *In a Queer Time & Place: Transgender Bodies, Subcultural Lives* (New York: New York University Press, 2005), 31.

other who cannot participate in the culture. Moreover, it reaffirms the fantasy of the other and utilizes damaged narratives as a method to describe a canonical truth. Evidenced by pain, Queer style represents the perception and application of one's desires, boundaries, and associated memories; it passively re-orient and positions the body towards a dominating Queer neutral¹⁵⁵ Like the desire for rurality, one's choice to reject assimilation may illicit a feeling of sexual primitiveness to their desires; dress is another avenue of regulation, as international industry and accessibility by media expand the dominating power of Western homonormativity, where the regional aspect of Queer style represents itself as an easily reproducible and empowers the promotion of a hierarchy based on one's closeness or ability to adopt an aesthetic in line with homonormative, nationalist and metronormative sensibilities and power.¹⁵⁶ Crucially, while I argue that Queer style is inherently political, the absence and choice to stylize without a clear political and activist statement emphasizes the affective experience of feelings, social and spatial relations and the archiving of feelings as explored by Cvetkovich.¹⁵⁷

Lost in Translation - Queer Textures on the Occident

For Shoshana Rosenberg and Megan Sharp, a manifestation of feeling and participation in aesthetic subcultures can articulate an embodied experience that is visceral and explicit and troubles the way one may be perceived. It utilizes archived memory and confronts how one may exist in the world, their nearness to homonormative objects and a reminder of normative relational publics.¹⁵⁸ Like *Queering The Map* and the *Reddit Forum* making available a digital

¹⁵⁵ Sara Ahmed, *Queer Phenomenology: Orientations, Objects, Others* (Duke University Press, 2006), <https://doi.org/10.1215/9780822388074>, 27.

¹⁵⁶ Scott Herring, *Another Country: Queer Anti-Urbanism* (New York: New York University Press, 2010) 21.

¹⁵⁷ Ann Cvetkovich, *An Archive of Feelings: Trauma, Sexuality, and Lesbian Public Cultures* (Durham, UNITED STATES: Duke University Press, 2003), <http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/york/detail.action?docID=1167862>, 211.

¹⁵⁸ Shoshana Rosenberg and Megan Sharp, "Documenting Queer(Ed) Punk Histories: Instagram, Archives and Ephemerality," *Queer Studies in Media & Pop Culture* 3, no. 2 (June 1, 2018): 168.

repository of Queer fashion and style creates a means by which individuals who were once fashion outsiders can now fully participate in ephemeral discourse, production, dissemination and the assemblages of Queer aesthetics. Virtual spaces can texturize and connect social worlds that otherwise may not have interacted; they readily consume imagery, emerging dialogues and ideologies and create what can be considered a temporal cultural canon.¹⁵⁹

However, unlike the previous examples discussed, Queer aesthetics, even across digital publics and the chaos it may eschew, still rely on a certain level of historical authenticity that must be visualized. I use authenticity rather than fact because whereas the Reddit Thread Derrick Barry's retelling of Stonewall, Queering the Map, and the Dyke Project focus on retelling a story, sartorial consciousness is a textured feeling to be worn. Context can certainly be muddled in digital discourse; it cannot remix the source material beyond recognition - the ephemeral grounding of a 'look' does not mean it is protected from appropriation, but rather that image and that the performance of dress illustrates a history, desires and the phenomenological divide between space, culture, selfhood, and othering pushing back against hegemony through the virtual linking between curiosity and authenticity. Robert Filipello contends that

The role of Queer aesthetics is, then, to map out social relations and worldviews as well as compel their affective transmission and dissemination to the public. Seen from this angle, the aesthetic gesture might actualize collective utopias by conceptualizing new worlds (via an act of Queer worldmaking) that are unconstrained by heteronormativity. For example, the visual representation of unconventional body types and attitudes can dislodge desire from the dominant imprints that organize dominant erotic imagination and can gesture towards the experience of new forms of inclusionary belonging and collectivity. By pursuing an affective reconfiguration of the present, Queer aesthetics seeks to unearth the affective resources for the *otherwiseness* and the quotidian.¹⁶⁰

¹⁵⁹ Kelly L. Reddy-Best, "The Politicization of Fashion in Virtual Queer Spaces: A Case Study of Saint Harridan, One of the Pioneering Queer Fashion Brands in the Twenty-First Century," in *Crossing Gender Boundaries: Fashion to Create, Disrupt and Transcend*, by Ben Barry Andrew Reilly (Intellect, 2020) 101,

¹⁶⁰ Roberto Filippello, "Aesthetics and Politics of the Fashion Image: A Queer Perspective," *Aisthesis (Florence, Italy)* 11, no. 2 (2018), 82.

A sartorial-conscious approach engages with Tuck's work on damaged narratives, exploring authenticity, imagined spaces, and desire through dress as it grapples with colonial manipulation and weaponization of homonationalism, oppression, and the documentation of pain and suffering, as well as colonial fantasy.¹⁶¹

Russian artist and model Angel Ulyanov (Ангел Ульянов) and, by extension, the now defunct Russian art collective *O-Zine* take an aesthetically conscious approach towards the documenting of dress and style, authenticity, and social relations and tackle the damaged focused narrative of the West's perception of Queer Russian life or lack of life, as an online publication that challenges LGBTQ oppression in Russian while staying acutely Russian and aware of their difference from Queer peers in other countries. The producer of the collective, Dmitry Kozachenko, raised the issue of pride, rights and identity in Russia, stating, "Western culture is very ahead in terms of sexuality and gender... Our reality is different, but it also makes our own Queer culture different and special. We didn't have Stonewall, we have no pride – but in these circumstances, something new, political and fierce is born."¹⁶²

International and domestic borders, aesthetics and desires are especially relevant to the texturization and stylization of the collective as they engage with the pressure to assimilate into homonationalist hegemony and Western domination. Style and dress are crucial to how the collective navigates Queer narratives and the balance between engaging with and rejecting the Post-Stonewall homo-normativity sweeping across the globe.¹⁶³ The discourse they interact with is not so much interested in mirroring the West's perception of Russian Queer life as devoid and

¹⁶¹ Eve Tuck, "Suspending Damages: A letter to Communities," *Harvard Educational Review* 79, no. 3 (Fall 2009) 420.

¹⁶² Anastasiia Fedorova, "Queer St Petersburg: Dispatches from the Front Lines of Russia's LGBTQ Creative Revolution," *The Calvert Journal*, 2019, <https://www.calvertjournal.com/features/show/11287/queer-st-petersburg-o-zine-lgbtq-revolution>.

¹⁶³ Scott Herring, *Another Country: Queer Anti-Urbanism* (New York: New York University Press, 2010), 17.

traumatic, but rather in reclaiming, subverting, and Queering Russian stereotypes through a transgressive style that supports Russian Queer creative youth. Photographer Artem Emelianov states, “In this project, we were trying to tell their stories, but also to find out what “Russian Queer is and what it looks like...Bears, balalaikas, furs, and onion domes are for us just as funny as the stale, heteronormative ideas stuck in the heads of the majority.”¹⁶⁴

The club song and music video for *Давай замутим* or “Davai Zamutin” is an example of how fashion and style as a method of signification without language can be a strong tool for minority communities and those most disenfranchised by intellectual colonialism to fight against reductive pathologizations. I argue that Ulyanov’s aesthetic and stylization depathologize because they speak to the challenges, resources, and social reality of Russia. Rather than taking a damage approach, it captures the active and complex multiplicity of desire, informed by lifetimes of experiences.¹⁶⁵

Ulyanov engages with Gopnik culture and aesthetics, such as Adidas tracksuits and buzzcuts, as both an instigator and a dismantler of the tension, violence, and social rifts between Russian, Gopnik, and queer cultures. Gopnik is a pejorative and sometimes defamatory name for a subculture in Russia.^{ix} The subculture is commonly associated with government social neglect, a community of limited social mobility, male working-class youth, and masculinity.¹⁶⁶ Rather than an ideology, it is most recognizable by a specific style of dress, congregation as a group, and the ‘Gopnik squat.’¹⁶⁷ While it is a community that may be associated with negative connotations, it

¹⁶⁴ Anastasiia Fedorova, “Queer Moscow: Dispatches from the Front Lines of Russia’s LGBTQ Creative Revolution,” *The Calvert Journal*, 2019, <https://www.new-east-archive.org/features/show/11285/queer-moscow-online-lgbtq-revolution>.

¹⁶⁵ Eve Tuck, “Suspending Damages: Aletter to Communities,” *Harvard Educational Review* 79, no. 3 (2009), 415.

¹⁶⁶ Michele A. Berdy, “Thugs, Rednecks, Nationalists: Understanding Russia’s Gopnik Culture,” *The Moscow Times*, April 10, 2014, <https://www.themoscowtimes.com/2014/04/10/thugs-rednecks-nationalists-understanding-russias-gopnik-culture-a33852>.

¹⁶⁷ Pepe Gopnik, “Pepe Gopnik Memes Unite Cultures with Humor,” *Medium* (blog), July 2, 2020, <https://medium.com/@pepegopniketh/pepe-gopnik-memes-unite-cultures-with-humor-c64fab886985>.

is not necessarily a subculture that sits on the periphery of the Russian society and faces violence, discrimination and legal restrictions like that of the Queer community in Russia.

Born out of the 1980s, over digital platforms, it has become a victim of cultural appropriation, ethnic stereotyping, crude generalizations, and racism over Western platforms. Colonial appropriation of ‘Gopnik’ aesthetics is most notable in the Western satirization of fashion and dress, whittled down to an aesthetic with very little substance and emulated by Adidas tracksuits, shaved heads, and squats.¹⁶⁸ The satirization erases cultural memory, and the real social marginalization, alienation, and the government's apathy for the working-class are evoked in the media.¹⁶⁹

¹⁶⁸ Sasha Raspopina, “Opinion: Can Slav and Gopnik Memes Do Real Damage?,” *New East Digital Archive*, December 13, 2016, <https://www.new-east-archive.org/articles/show/7350/gopniks-slavs-squatting-memes>.

¹⁶⁹ Olaf Jablonski, “Chavs and Gopniks Comparing Subcultures,” *Medium*, February 25, 2019, <https://medium.com/@olafvontj/chavs-and-gopniks-comparing-subcultures-70cbf3ab00a8>.

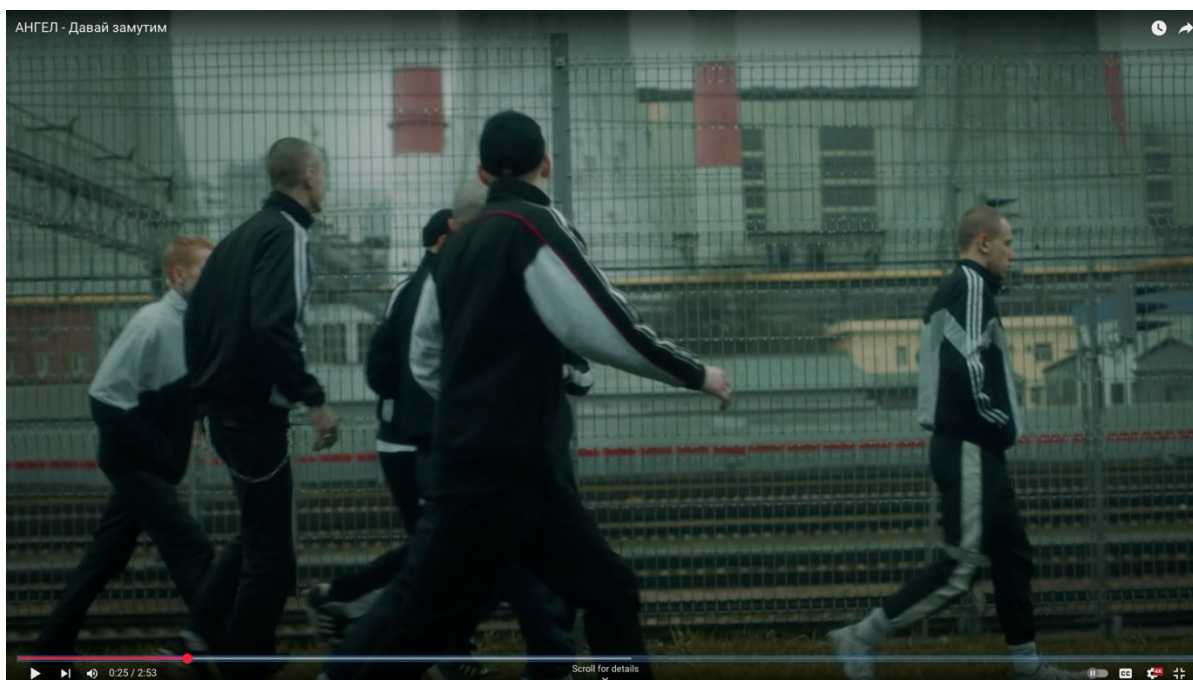


Figure Five: First screenshot from the *Давай замутим* Music Video. Figure credit: Angel Ulyanov.

The video begins with a group of Gopnik youth travelling through a bleak-looking urban city, participating in destruction and violence on both buildings and citizens. The violence culminated in a tense standoff moment at night in an empty underpass between the youths in their blue tracksuits and shaved heads and Ulyanov, who wore an alternative version of the ‘Gopnik’ style, complete with a red tracksuit, lime-green top, and buzzed green hair.¹⁷⁰ Ulyanov’s style is a ‘camped’ version of the traditional aesthetic that “proposes a comic vision of the world, but not a bitter or polemical comedy.”¹⁷¹

The Camp style is a crucial component of exploring local productions of futurity and feeling signified by fashion and aesthetics. Colour subversion illustrates the othering of the character as a different kind of envisioning of the gopnik culture, staying true to some stereotyping, the alternative style takes an unserious approach to seriously imagining and developing a Queered counterpublic focused on Russian intimacies and desire.¹⁷²

The plurality of digital space enables Ulyanov to participate and contribute to the collective cultural project of Russian-centric Queer imaginings.¹⁷³ As a digital performance relying on Russian sartorial conversation rather than Western Queer language and the song being in Russian, it may be wielded as a tool of digital assemblages, creating counter-publicity, rejecting hegemony, renegotiating, connecting, and supplying historically overlooked perspectives and intimate experiences.¹⁷⁴ By imagining the cultural project through fashion and

¹⁷⁰ *Давай замутим*, Video, Music Video, 2019, <https://youtu.be/NetBsW8hIok>.

¹⁷¹ Susan Sontag, “Notes on ‘Camp’,” in *Camp: Queer Aesthetics and the Performing Subject*, ed. Fabio Cleto (Edinburgh University Press, 2022), 63, <https://doi.org/10.1515/9781474465809-006>.

¹⁷² Lauren Berlant and Michael Warner, “Sex in Public,” *Critical Inquiry* 24, no. 2 (1998), 558, <https://doi.org/10.1086/448884>.

¹⁷³ J. Jack Halberstam, *In a Queer Time & Place: Transgender Bodies, Subcultural Lives* (New York: New York University Press, 2005), 35.

¹⁷⁴ Anne Ring Petersen and Sabine Dahl Nielsen, “The Reconfiguration of Publics and Spaces through Art: Strategies of Agitation and Amelioration,” *Journal of Aesthetics & Culture* 13, no. 1 (January 1, 2021), <https://doi.org/10.1080/20004214.2021.1898766>.

performance, aesthetic dissent rejects and disrupts the obfuscation, absorption, and simplification of a Russian Queer imaginary. Methods that intellectual colonialism relies on, such as unifying narratives, absorption, and the dispossession of local power, struggle to maintain its grounding because, regardless if one tries to call it Queer or add a rainbow flag, for a Russian audience, the integrity and substance of culture is not in danger because the local relevancy cannot be separated from Ulyanov's sartorial representations.

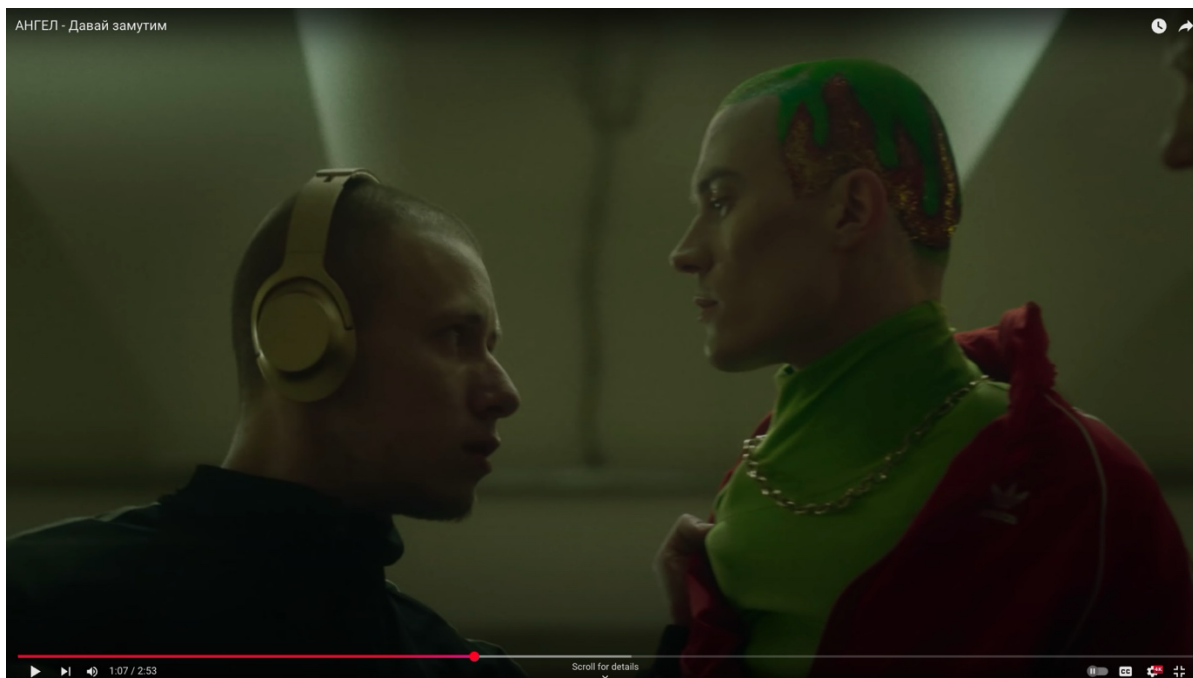


Figure Six: Second screenshot from the *Давай замутим* Music Video. Figure credit: Angel Ulyanov.

Participating in the development of digital cultural memory, Ulyanov's video is an example of archontic productions in action, a participatory process that deeply engages with cultural memory and transforms existing narratives. It is participatory in nature, contributing, creating and affirming acutely Russian desires, aesthetics, memories, ad spaced into the Queer canon.¹⁷⁵ Digital access is a critical component because, whether in Russia or elsewhere, the visualization of fashion, aesthetics, and feeling is made accessible in our own homes. Like the other platforms explored, it is an ambiguous space where one can watch, participate, learn and interact with the video, placing it in a public/private grey space of hyper-visibility and secrecy. With the hypervisibility and domination of Western Queer representation, identity, and mythos in media, sharing specifically Russian identities, art and gender over digital platforms and space points towards a perpetual moving digital culture that moves, collects, preserves and transforms existing narratives to represent the self authentically.¹⁷⁶

A digital contribution, like the *Reddit* Thread and retelling of Stonewall, Ulyanov's Queer imagining functions in a temporal space that exists and is relevant while one is watching, sharing or thinking of the performance. However, Ulyanov's performance, imagination and aesthetics exist outside of Western Queer mythos, which may lead one to assume that Ulyanov's performance represents Russian reality. Again, whether factual or not does not necessarily matter to the viewer; the Internet provides the power and authorization of just about anyone to preserve a selective history and administer social and cultural memory without due process or citation of sources.¹⁷⁷ However, unlike the previous examples explored, Ulyanov's art practice focuses on

¹⁷⁵ Abigail De Kosnik, *Rogue Archives: Digital Cultural Memory and Media Fandom* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: The MIT Press, 2016), 279.

¹⁷⁶ Abigail De Kosnik, *Rogue Archives: Digital Cultural Memory and Media Fandom* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: The MIT Press, 2016), 279.

¹⁷⁷ Abigail De Kosnik, *Rogue Archives: Digital Cultural Memory and Media Fandom* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: The MIT Press, 2016), 26.

Russian Queer experiences from an acutely Russian perspective that specifically does not attempt to translate their message to Western audiences, whether by language, fashion or Western Queer symbols like the Rainbow flag. Nor does it try to mimic Western Queer liberation or translate it to be adopted by Russians by using similar methods. Like *Queering the Map*, everything about the performance, aesthetic and fashion is almost solely focused on Russian and Eastern European audiences; from a Queer phenomenological approach, Western Queerness is not adopted, nor does it act as naturality or is it treated as a line of desire to be measured by and aspire to be. Perception is oriented around a Russian to be perceived and performed for their audience - a “new Queered” perspective emerges that refuses to align itself with a good or bad narrative that homonationalism tends to police and apply to sexual and gender diverse experiences.¹⁷⁸

By not just changing perspectives but also intended audiences, it challenges Western audiences to acknowledge how little they know about Queer life and Queer experiences beyond what is translatable or tangible and refuses the pathologization of Russian Queer experiences to be measured by deficit and inequalities comparable to Western Queer liberation and experiences.¹⁷⁹ Removing the West from not just the narrative but also the intended audience confronts Western Queer colonialism and homonationalism regardless of where the viewer may exist; homonationalism and Western Queer mythos seeps into everything transnational and seemingly encompassing by presenting a story that captures the elaborate and complex cultures of Russian experiences, Queer or nor engages with Halberstam’s look at the global versus local as a frame of reference; the scale is not balanced, and frames of reference are skewed to reflect

¹⁷⁸ Sara Ahmed, *Queer Phenomenology: Orientations, Objects, Others* (Duke University Press, 2006), <https://doi.org/10.1215/9780822388074>, 27.

¹⁷⁹ Eve Tuck, “Suspending Damages: Aletter to Communities,” *Harvard Educational Review* 79, no. 3 (Fall 2009), 414.

but also perform for rainbow capitalism. The removal of the West in Ulyanov's visual representation of Russian aesthetics engages with Queer time and space, especially when the performance, art, fashion, and aesthetics speak to the existence of struggles, history, pleasure, and desire that they contain rather than that of outside.¹⁸⁰

¹⁸⁰ J. Jack Halberstam, *In a Queer Time & Place: Transgender Bodies, Subcultural Lives* (New York: New York University Press, 2005), 6.



Figure Seven: Third screenshot from the *Давай замутим* Music Video. Figure credit: Angel Ulyanov.

The sartorial conversations and dynamic cultural production performed in the video are critical to its ability to de-pathologize Russian Queer experiences; the video is not entirely independent of the West. The art of voguing in the video illustrates the connecting factor and action between a distinctly Russian point of view and that of Western Queer culture.^x Ulyanov's use of voguing is of interest because, while certainly originating from American ballroom culture, every aesthetic image and point of view points towards Russian aesthetics, imagery, and an imagined social reality. While voguing is visually engaging, I argue that it is difficult for a foreign audience to overlook the Russian perspective.

Drag Balls and voguing, can be traced back as far as 1869 in Harlem. Ballroom culture as we know it today began in the 1960s in response to the pageant world's pressure on specifically African American drag queens to adhere to white beauty standards, such as 'whitening up' of their skin, to have a chance to win.^{181 xi} Crystal LaBeija and The House of LaBeija are pioneers and are credited as both the first ballroom house and host of the first all (The 1st Annual House of LaBeija Ball).¹⁸² Houses compete in ballroom competitions, such as 'walking' a category, and voguing. Voguing is a dance style that combines break-dancing, humour, and model-like posing. 'Old way' is associated with a focus on angles, lines, miming and elements of martial arts to tell a story, while new way focuses on elements such as spins, dips, and duck-walks to tell a story.^{xii}

xiii

Rather than focusing on voguing as an American story to express Queer realities voguing becomes a method in which Russian futurity and counterpublicity may participate today, rather than mimicking or expressing a desire to lose their Russianness for something Western tomorrow. Voguing definitely influences the narrative; however, the digital space it exists in

¹⁸¹ Adam. Geczy and Vicki. Karaminas, *Queer Style*, Subcultural Style Series (Bloomsbury, 2013), 179.

¹⁸² "History | Royal House of LaBeija," accessed September 1, 2025, <https://www.royalhouseoflabeija.com/history>.

supports a platform to develop Queer feelings remotely that extends beyond the Western eye of pleasure and capitalism by supporting a platform to explore self-representation and establish connections beyond physical accessibilities and language.¹⁸³ The hypervisibility of Queerness, in conjunction with sharing specifically Russian identities over digital space and using the art of voguing, engages and challenges masculinities and violence whilst imagining a Queer Russia.

A subtle counter-publicity remains relevant as one watches the video that is catching a wider net across the internet, and like *Queer the Map* and the *Dyke Project's* use of *Queering the Map*, it functions as a performing object that elicits responses, becoming an informal space of public debate and thought; pressing play whether alone or with a group engages with social and political issues that are enjoyed and imagines from supposedly outside of state public surveillance building towards a potential feeling of counterpublicity. Like the stickering effect, Ulyanov creates a digital footprint of almost universal accessibility that “functions as a mode of political pedagogy that intends to publicize the state’s machinations of power.”¹⁸⁴ We don’t need to be in Moscow or speak Russian to witness, relate or participate in this world-making process, nor must we wear an Adidas tracksuit to feel a Russian experience; the appropriation of Gopnik culture continues to be a point of contention, especially the appropriation and satire appropriation of ‘Gopnik’ fashion and style by the West; however, its digital accessibility gives space for political and social engagement and challenging the West’s colonial gaze on not just Eastern Europe but that of homonationalist struggling survival - challenging mythos and the assumption of emptiness narratives provide a Queer space and the time reflect on and contribute

¹⁸³ Mark Hain, “We Are Here for You. The It Gets Better Project, Queering Rural Space, and Cultivating Queer Media Literacy,” in *Queering the Country Side*, ed. Mary L. Gray, Collin R. Johnson, and Brian J. Gilley (New York: New York University Press, 2016), 164.

¹⁸⁴ José Esteban Muñoz, *Cruising Utopia: The Then and There of Queer Futurity* (New York: New York University Press, 2009), 61-2.

to the development of something different potentially “witnessing a new form of future in the present.”¹⁸⁵

Ulyanov’s use of an Adidas tracksuit as a means of sartorial conversations plays into that feeling of “something new, political and fierce” described by Kozachenko. Relying on sartorial conversations rather than language or oral traditions breaks from the previous examples and pushes viewers to develop an almost interrogative method of reading beyond Western Queer mythos. Pushing and emphasizing retrospective differences by sartorial means may compel one to reflect on one’s own occupation of space, phenomenologically reorganizing collective attachment to Western Queer feelings and troubling sensible happy objects associated with homonationalism and homonormativity.¹⁸⁶

In *Queer Style*, Geczy and Karaminas explore the use of uniforms, conflicting riffs and the distortion of style and undermining of authority through the BDSM community’s use of military uniforms and Nazi uniforms as signals of citizenship, parody and the performance of self. Quoting from Jennifer Craik’s *Uniforms Exposed: From Conformity to Transgression*, Craik writes

Uniforms are ambiguous masks of appearance, on the one hand, intending to unambiguously place the attributes and role of the person, yet, on the other, part of a complex social play that can be deliberately appropriated, subverted, and rejected.^{187 188}

Geczy and Karaminas clarify that the use of Nazi uniforms in the BDSM community is a “riff on rather appropriates Nazi dress; likewise, I make a similar distinction in Ulyanov’s use of *Gopnik* aesthetics. Specifically, Ulyanov’s use of the Adidas tracksuit is a conflicting riff on a

¹⁸⁵ José Esteban Muñoz, *Cruising Utopia the Then and There of Queer Futurity* (New York: New York University Press, 2009), 61-2.

¹⁸⁶ Roberto Filippello, “Aesthetics and Politics of the Fashion Image: A Queer Perspective,” *Aisthesis (Florence, Italy)* 11, no. 2 (2018), 83.

¹⁸⁷ Adam. Geczy and Vicki. Karaminas, *Queer Style*, Subcultural Style Series (London ; Bloomsbury, 2013), 106.

¹⁸⁸ Jennifer. Craik, *Uniforms Exposed: From Conformity to Transgression*, English ed., Dress, Body, Culture (Oxford, UK ; Berg, 2005), 6.

community that has a violent history with homosexual communities. Moreover, the Adidas tracksuit is distorted rung through a few iterations, taking more and more artistic liberties from the traditional dark colour to a red tracksuit against neon green shirts and a stylistic belt to a cinched and cropped version of the original suit that, like the BDSM community's use of military uniforms leans on the side of "a seductive exaggeration teetering precariously on the kitsch."¹⁸⁹ While the style has been riffed on, I would not argue this to be an appropriation; the distortion of style and uniform is not necessarily a mockery of the culture, joke or meme. The potential 'dragging' of the tracksuit is indicative of the distinction between sartorial performances of gender and Queer desiring through cross-dressing or drag versus cross-dressing for the sake of performance as described above.

I would not characterize the effeminacy of the voguing *Gopnik* from beginning to end in the music video as an inherently Queer motif but rather an example of what Kozachenko eludes to in their art practice and imagining of what Russian Queer is and what it looks like explored through the reclamation, subversion and Queering Russian stereotypes through transgressive style. The stylistic choices eschewed are not inherently comparable to Western gay male stereotyping of similar bodies, such as the 'twink' described as a "slim, relatively hairless body, and is young-looking."¹⁹⁰ Vytنيorgu explores twink and bottom stereotyping drawing on the BBC documentary *Olly Alexander: Growing Up Gay* and a clip of Olly dressed in a jockstrap, covered in gold paint and in a "doggy style" position. I draw upon this comparison because for Vytنيorgu, "the golden color of the paint gestures at the way in which twink bottoms can be idolized as sex objects."¹⁹¹

¹⁸⁹ Adam. Geczy and Vicki. Karaminas, *Queer Style*, Subcultural Style Series (London ; Bloomsbury, 2013), 106.

¹⁹⁰ Richard Vytنيorgu, "Twinks, Fairies, and Queens: A Historical Inquiry into Effeminate Gay Bottom Identity," *Journal of Homosexuality* 71, no. 7 (2024): 1608.

¹⁹¹ Richard Vytنيorgu, "Twinks, Fairies, and Queens: A Historical Inquiry into Effeminate Gay Bottom Identity,"

The voguing *Gopnik* character shares features of ‘twinkness’ as defined by Vytنيورгу, such being young, thin, hairless and painted gold towards the end of the video; however, I argue that the styling of this character and the evolutions of the tracksuit and body throughout the video is not inherently a representation or mimicking of ‘twink’ culture nor does the gold paint elude to an effeminacy indicative of ‘twink’ identities and submissiveness. Characteristics that point towards effeminacy, submissiveness, and gayness within the West are not the same in *Gopnik* culture: straightness nor masculinity are not questioned by the skinniness, hairlessness, and youthfulness of the *Gopnik* stereotyping.

On the contrary, these shared characteristics within the music videos context are more indicative of toxic masculinity, brashness, petty crime, violence and brutishness. While the gold paint certainly points toward something Queer in feeling, it does not point toward an idealization of sexual conquest nor submissiveness. Violence surrounds the character, but I argue it is not lustful violence or belittling to assert dominance; the dancer is equally violent in their performance, attacking each movement with precision and breaking the fourth wall, staring down at you surrounded by a now passed-out audience. While perhaps a dream fantasy, the music video’s characterization of the voguing *Gopnik* hits on the Russian-centric approach to exploring Russian homosexuality and fluidity.

However, I must acknowledge that the sartorial sampling of aesthetics is central to the development of culture, style, and fashion; after all, the development and evolving nature of fashion is rooted in imitation while still in the pursuit of new tastes and ideas.¹⁹² Regardless, my argument isn’t that the video represents a complete annexation from Western influence which

Journal of Homosexuality 71, no. 7 (2024): 1612.

¹⁹² Yuniya Kawamura, *Fashion-Ology: An Introduction to Fashion Studies*, Dress, Body, Culture (Oxford, UK ; Berg, 2005), 20.

today, across the digital world, is nearly impossible; I argue that the meaningfulness of the video does not rely on a sampling of Western Queer aesthetics nor a pinkwashed appropriation of what ‘Queer Russianness’ is. Instead, the music video illustrates one way of creating and communicating sexuality for a Queer Russian gaze rather than one that performs homonationalism pinkwashing for the West’s Queer validation. The use of stereotypes that typically sit on the occident or the backseat of sexual and artistic representations of identity, desire, complex multiplicities and active life that match the day-to-day experience resists assimilation and ideational essentialization.¹⁹³

While the tracksuit itself may represent a subculture that can communicate one’s socio-economic status, the tracksuit as a Queer symbol troubles a Queer system that is reliant on the universalization of Western-centric homonationalism, Queer mythos, and symbols. Considering homonationalism as an empire-building project transforms Queer happiness into a market full of conditions, exchanges, and restrictions to be not just accepted but represented amongst a universalized Queer belonging. As a Queer empire - symbols synonymous with assumed Queer freedoms in the West become a means by which Queer empire becomes a historical reality of sharing and an ideal to be imagined and desired for.¹⁹⁴ Ulyanov’s use of the tracksuit circumvents not just Queer representation but alternative modes of feeling, representing and imagining Queer joy and pleasure. Ulyanov illustrates the exclusionary process of othering bodies and Queer perspectives, not by the Western trend of memoir, coming out, homonormativity, liberation and suffering, but rather by playing exclusively with Russian hyper-masculinity and violence.

Desire becomes a process of informed seeking and assembled multiplicity, sartorial

¹⁹³ Stephen Amico, “How to Do Things with Theory: Cultural ‘Transcription,’ ‘Queerness,’ and Ukrainian Pop,” in *The Oxford Handbook of Music and Queerness*, ed. Fred Everett Maus and Sheila Whiteley (Oxford University Press, 2022), 603.

¹⁹⁴ Sara Ahmed, *The Promise of Happiness* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2010), 132.

conversations, and movement is an active process of refusing to lose the complexity of experiences, perspectives and representations¹⁹⁵. There is a connective Queer desire that seeks to embody a feeling of a Queer now and the imaginary. While Queerness may never come, Dress enables a specific kind of conversation and breadth that troubles Queer conventions and collective utilitarianism; it may function as the missing connector that can articulate the relationship of Queer imaginaries when traditional methods of memoir, the construction of mythos, and phenomenological centralization of Queer desires. Removing language and relying on the sartorial provides a unique Queer space to experience and feel the active and participatory embodiment of Queer feelings and imagined utopia. Perspective and context are re-oriented; the sartorial provides a level of leniency, a plurality that memoir and language may not afford. The visual, dress and the embodiment of both to work on our bodies not only articulate self-hood and the leniency of the visual creates how narrative may be told, but the Queer periphery may also be witnessed, and ‘othered’ interpretations of Queer desires are validated. Moreover, the spectatorial experience of watching and experiencing Ulyanov’s stylizations of Queer imaginaries may provide a means by which one may be pushed to identify and assess cultural cues to visualize and decentralize the worldmaking process where fantasy, social reality and social performance blur.¹⁹⁶

The fact that Willam and Derrick Barry were in total drag during the roundtable discussion is especially relevant like Ulyanov’s playful Queering of Russian Masculinity and O-Zine’s collective use of fashion, drag and performance to open conversations regarding Queerness

¹⁹⁵ Eve Tuck, “Suspending Damages: A Letter to Communities,” *Harvard Educational Review* 79, no. 3 (Fall 2009) 420.

¹⁹⁶ Catherine Baker, “Re-Reading the Queer Female Gaze in the 1990s: Spectatorship, Fashion and the Duality of Identification and Desire,” in *Revisiting the Gaze: The Fashioned Body and the Politics of Looking*, by Morna Laing and Jacki Willson, Dress Cultures Ser. (London: Bloomsbury Visual Arts, 2020), 201.

outside of Western mythos and dogma - Barry and Willam's style of drag is broadly American in style; their form of drag affords them a level of passing or realness when performing femininity. While in drag, they are also summarizing the American history and feelings attached to Stonewall as a universal feeling that demands and assumes that all Queer people must not only connect with but is rooted in the Queer experience of world-making: homonationalism, multiculturalism and happy multiculturalism blurs amongst each other. Queer empire employed through the universalization of Queer morality, national ideal and loyalty are not lost in the conversation.¹⁹⁷ Liberation through suffering is a core talking point - both reference their ability to do drag as a full-time gig through the suffering of specifically American Queer bodies to reference a universal Queer desire or a national ideal that promotes a system of othering the periphery. Not only is Queerness universal - but the digital reach that Willam and Barry control provides them a powerful means to re-condition Queer empire; their international reach is through drag and American Queer aesthetics. The reach of their drag personas not only demands a duty of thankfulness to those who fought at Stonewall and throughout the American Gay Liberation movement, but most importantly, there is a duty for universal Queer mourning.¹⁹⁸

While homonationalism may use the sartorial to re-emphasize happy multi-culturalism, empire and the centralization of a Western Queer desire to be universal - I argue that the homonationalist approach, interpretation and performance through fashion certainly open Queer conversations, its reliance on empire, universalization, and othering cannot compel a viewer to re-think oneself phenomenologically. The digital public provides platforms for online communities to grow and participate in the assembly of style and cultural identity. The othering nature of Queer empire and homonationalism has a limited scope when imaging Queerness - the

¹⁹⁷ Sara Ahmed, *The Promise of Happiness* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2010), 127.

¹⁹⁸ Sara Ahmed, *The Promise of Happiness* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2010), 132.

embodiment of mythos and sameness limits the body to articulate self-hood in a way that those on the periphery by the example of *O-Zine* and Ulyonov may approach the imaginary and compel new perspectives.

Is it Queer?

It is critical to acknowledge that the sartorial reaches beyond how one may apply Western Queer discourses in the process of othering sexual minorities; there is also the serious implication of applying Queer(ed) sartorial readings and theory to objects and performances outside of its field of discipline that intrinsically relies on a Western focused assumption. I elude to this point of contention by examining Ulyanov's stylization, homonationalism, and the universalization of aesthetics, which is especially relevant to performative and asymmetrical power when one may read an object as Queer and the distortion of local sources. Ulyanov's stylization of the Adidas tracksuit and buzzcuts has an extremely localized relevancy that highlights social inequality, tensions, and the history of Russia; however, simply reading the aesthetic as Queer may mean that its Russian relevancy may be lost in translation supplemented by Western aesthetics and through analysis that is based on what symbols the West can identify rather than comprehending what is.

While focused on musical transcription, Stephen Amico argues in addition to the perpetuating nature of intellectual colonialism to maintain cultural hierarchies and stereotypes, there is a textual assimilative aspect to Queer universalism that also risks Queering the other.¹⁹⁹ Likewise, this is especially relevant to the production of Queer styles and sartorial conversations

¹⁹⁹ Stephen Amico, "How to Do Things with Theory: Cultural 'Transcription,' 'Queerness,' and Ukrainian Pop," in *The Oxford Handbook of Music and Queerness*, ed. Fred Everett Maus and Sheila Whiteley (Oxford University Press, 2022), <https://doi.org/10.1093/oxfordhb/9780199793525.013.75>, 603.

because, like music, sartorial relevancy and comprehension aren't reliant on language but rather a combination of symbols and historical and localized values. Amico explores musical transcriptions of Queerness through the Ukrainian outrageously gaudy character Verka Serduchka, performed by the cis-male, identifying Andrei Danilko as an example of intellectual assimilation.



Figure Eight: Screenshot of 2007 Verka Serduchka Eurovision performance. Figure credit: Eurovision Song Contest

Serduchka and Ulyanov's use of aesthetics and stylization, while very different in look, touch on similar issues of Queer self-determination, stereotyping and performance of gender; however, Ulyanov being a member of the Russian Queer Collective O-Zine means that his music video can justifiably be read as something both made for and inspired by non-heterosexual audiences and cultures. Serduchka, however, does not have a Queer origin but is read as a drag character by Western audiences; in fact, Serduchka is a satirical cross-dressing character that shares many of the same characteristics that Phillips considers when defining the differences between cross-dressing versus drag in media. Like the representation of cross-dressing in the films *White Chicks* and *She's The Man*, I argue that the Serduchka character is not a drag character, at least in the Queer sense of drag. She is a cultural icon in Ukraine popularized by her participation in the highly political Eurovision Song Contest, coming second place in 2007.

Eurovision, founded in 1956 by the European Broadcasting Union, is an international a-political song contest that seeks to foster peace and brotherhood amongst European nations through 'bad' pop music. However, despite their intention to be non-political, Eurovision is nothing but political, from the banning of flags from contested nations, including Palestine and Crimea, to the entrance of non-European countries into the competition, such as Israel and Australia as well as the banning of the Rainbow Flag.²⁰⁰ Taking an a-political approach results in that very year, countries represent their nation and national identity through meaningless English, resentment, ethnic tensions, and regional and cultural context wrapped into seemingly non-political 'bad' pop music.

Despite the over-the-top campiness of Eurovision, it is not inherently Queer; Queer people have competed and even won in the competition; North America's recent introduction to

²⁰⁰ Ivan Raykoff, "Queer Patriotism in the Eurovision Song Contest," in *The Oxford Handbook of Music and Queerness*, ed. Fred Everett Maus and Sheila Whiteley (Oxford University Press, 2022), 516.

Eurovision (US and Canada) hits on the issue of homonationalist essentialism that disconnects and distorts culturally specific representation to resemble that of a globalist focused universal Queer identity. Serduchka's success and mobility within Ukraine are because Ukrainians read her as an unthreatening character; her personification through satirical comedy is rooted in gaudy aesthetics, and the audience's knowledge of the performer is cis-gender and straight, and her character is a satirical performance of the opposite gender rather than a drag performance. Queer applications through homonationalism on the Serduchka character certainly follow the trend of generalization and assimilation. Still, it highlights the sartorial colonial actions in appropriating symbols and the distancing and dissolution of cultural and local sources.²⁰¹

²⁰¹ Stephen Amico, "How to Do Things with Theory: Cultural 'Transcription,' 'Queerness,' and Ukrainian Pop," in *The Oxford Handbook of Music and Queerness*, ed. Fred Everett Maus and Sheila Whiteley (Oxford University Press, 2022), 603.



Figure Nine: Screenshot from Verka Serduchka - Dancing Russia Goodbye (Концерт до Дня Незалежності України 2022). Figure credit: Verka Serduchka Official

Like Ulyanov's Russian-centric aesthetic and stylization, Serduchka's aesthetic is gaudy and beyond the ridiculously large balloon-like breasts, she drips with Sartorial illustrations of Ukrainian national identity and historical tensions that rely on geographical and cultural context that subtly evade any direct political ire from Eurovision anti-political policing. Serduchka wears a large soviet star on her head covered in disco-ball tiles (in music videos, this star may flash red, accompanied by an alarm similar to a bomb alert in a warzone); additionally, she wears a sequined military-esque uniform with male performers wearing silver WWII era German military-like uniforms. The use of military and specifically Nazi-like military uniforms is not unlike how Geczy and Karaminas (2013) describe the Gay BDSM community applying the uniform as signals of citizenship, parody and the performance of self.²⁰² However, for Ukrainians, Serduchka's use of the uniform is not Queer focused; instead, it parodies Ukraine's history during WWII and Soviet Russia and the tensions it continues to hold.²⁰³ For Raykoff, the troubling nature of reading objects from solely Queer nationalist lines that prioritizes essentialization and homogenization, we lose the cultural context of the characters breaking of binaries. The drag persona certainly blurs gender identity and performance; by reading it through a Queer nationalistic lens, we lose the complex intersections of national and cultural identity and fail to consider the other 'in-between' spaces, such as how audiences at home and abroad may read the local and global context of the performance.

²⁰² Adam. Geczy and Vicki. Karaminas, *Queer Style*, Subcultural Style Series (London ; Bloomsbury, 2013), 106.

Chapter Five: Conclusion

Throughout this writing process, I kept asking myself whether the internet has killed subcultures; where can I find elements of subcultures when universalism contextualizes, transcribes, and absorbs dimensions of subcultures, picking away at parts until they become unrecognizable? The rapid globalization that the internet affords has led to what seems like short-term memory loss across the metaphoric archive. Subculture has become like a dress-up box where somehow, in the effort to differentiate, it has led to an organized one-dimensional shared culture and universal commonality. Shared commonality is and always will be an intrinsic part of subculture; it is the connective tissue that influences individual and collective practices, histories, and rituals, but subculture is not developed solely on shared commonality. Subculture is an umbrella term; traditionally, its development across different locations can happen laterally and may be influenced by one another, but the success of one community does not mean another community will share the same success. While both communities may share an affinity or be part of a larger community, each community is a result of a series of factors such as local traditions, tolerance, demographics, transit, and economic conditions. Unlike the internet, interest alone is not enough to claim membership or participation; local development affords communities local control, to be a member, one may have to meet specific standards, interview, be recommended by someone in the community, and be excommunicated for not respecting boundaries.²⁰⁴ The ‘dress-up box’ is a consequence of removing local context from practices, histories, and rituals; without local context, the connective tissues have nothing to connect to.

Where can the fantasy of Queer futurity go when the past and future become a singular

²⁰⁴ Gayle Rubin, “The Catacombs: A Temple of the Butthole,” in *Deviations* (New York: Duke University Press, 2020), 227.

voice? What one may have had to do to gain entrance to a specific community, such as frequenting specific areas, meeting people, earning trust, secret invites, and the feeling of “if you know, you know,” have become experiences of the past, myths, and almost relics. Zines are public workshops on Eventbrite; one can watch warehouse raves on YouTube or live streams from their home and still feel like they belong or represent “the culture.” Of course, subculture will never completely go away; wherever there is a culture, it must exist, but can it grow, be radical, angry, intimate, and erotic organically; if we pick away at parts to normalize, can they still raise eyebrows or are they all inherently doomed for assimilation?

Rather than kill, I argue that the internet has killed respect for subcultures. This can be done in overtly violent and aggressive ways, such as a disregard and dehumanization of a subculture or the people who may affiliate themselves with said subculture. Additionally, it may be done through subtle methods that strip the subculture of its individuality, sovereignty, and history, absorbing it through a retrospective fantasy of unity. Regardless of whether it is overt or subtle, the internet casts an asymmetrical social description, determining who is remembered and, most importantly, how one remembers. How one remembers is a subconscious act of affiliation with Queer myths, it is the binding of the state and the delusion of myth in action. Metaphorical archives rely on this summation because it creates national identities, removes complexities and is ideologically appropriative. For Barthes, myth invests in universalism, which, in the best outcome, becomes a summation of signs representing a historical reality that is ambiguous, rational, irrefutable and eternal.²⁰⁵

The analog evolution of myth-building is a long-term investment toward an impossible eternity. While it may have an origin date, a myth exists in its own time and place through a

²⁰⁵ Roland. Barthes, *Mythologies*, trans. Annette. Lavers (New York: Hill and Wang, 1972), 155-56.

process of diluting analytical thinking and delusion; a myth may attempt to explain hierarchy, disfranchisement and systemic violence; however, its summation of signs, symbols, and reflections does not impose a conclusion. The postulation of an analog Queer myth is made up of generalized nuances that are relevant to a system of order that distances but does not necessarily erase history; myth holds history at its disposal, leaving a sliver of space for a subculture and originality to exist and be respected for its originality but most importantly for one to recognize themselves in.

The digital evolution of myth is a process of rapid theorization; unlike analog, digital dissemination to the public is a pedagogical method for determining conclusions. Under the conditions explored, the internet necessitates consensus and fact regardless of nuances, consequently limiting phenomenological consciousness and leading to the digital reaping of subculture and the erasure of the mobile sites that Queer world-making was once built upon. Phenomenological consciousness is an especially important factor because it contextualizes the effect that digital space's ability to shrink the distances between objects has on the homogenization and development of a universal Queer culture.

When distance becomes indistinguishable, it becomes more challenging to consider how one inhabits and directs one's energy toward the 'who' or 'what.' Queerness becomes one-dimensional when everything is seemingly on the same plan, sharing a series of inherent commonalities, histories, and experiences. While the internet is mobile, the digital reaping of subculture and the erasure of the local context of subcultures that Queer world-making was once built upon substantiates the illusionary or fictional world in which one can pick and choose what they want to see in ones' reality. The digital age may afford one the feeling of choice to select and circumvent regulatory powers, whether digital or physical, space is strictly delimited through

social relations that inform and reproduce notions of normalization regulating and maintaining public order and cultural canon.²⁰⁶ Indistinguishable distances and the illusion of choice consequently qualify intellectual colonialism, cultural exclusion, the development of transhistorical narratives and the de-contextualization of culture in our physical realities. The pivotal and influential power that conclusive myths serve in cultural production and homogenization critically limits Queerness as an ideality because they produce an object that Queerness should touch: they define that dream and the reality one should desire to be a part of.²⁰⁷

Conclusive myths are generated content produced for an online community that serves as a means of subcultural digital networks to express affinity, cultural knowledge, histories, modalities, and informed commentary on the content. As mentioned above, the respect and traditions of gaining entrance to a specific subculture have fundamentally changed. What was once a slow and participatory process of earning trust and community building has been replaced by a new digital tradition where subculture is a passive experience that one can subscribe to or buy into a membership.²⁰⁸ One can be a fully vested member without engaging with the community; membership is purchased through the cultural productions made available to them online. When a membership is a subscription, the production of informed commentary is no longer a symbiotic relationship of exchanged ideas and interpretations developed through a participatory experience; instead, commentary is produced through monopolizing, augmenting and remixing memory that becomes representative of a global community.

²⁰⁶ Gabriel Menottie and Antonio Fernandez-Vicente, "Myths of the Digital Age," in *Barthes' Mythologies Today: Readings of Contemporary Culture*, ed. Julian McDougall and Pete Bennett, 1st ed., vol. 52, Routledge Research in Cultural and Media Studies (Oxford: Routledge, 2013), 46-47.

²⁰⁷ José Esteban Muñoz, *Cruising Utopia the Then and There of Queer Futurity* (New York: New York University Press, 2009), 1.

²⁰⁸ Abigail De Kosnik, *Rogue Archives: Digital Cultural Memory and Media Fandom* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: The MIT Press, 2016), 98.

The singularity of passive membership through subscription provides one the feeling of rights without engagement or inheritance. One may not only feel that they are a part of the culture but that they have a right to the culture, the right to own the culture, the right to define the culture and the right to determine the histories and myths that inform the prescription of knowledge and desires. Moreover, subscription substantiates the illusionary, circumvents phenomenological consciousness, and regulates and provides a proximal hierarchy to a global public transforming culture into a nation.

Homonationalism is rooted in the Western experience, demanding that those on the periphery and proximally distanced bend to their myths, culture, language, symbols, desires and the West's interpretation of the periphery. Methods such as intellectual colonialism and damage narratives contribute to the pathologization of a community, determine what voices and messages one finds, and perpetuate the naturalness of Western centralized dominance.²⁰⁹ To an extent, the culture of the Queer world revolves around the West and for those in the West, it is a natural feeling intrinsically built into the way we experience the world. The natural sense of homonormativity, civilization, and moral judgement is crucial when considering the global implications of new digital traditions, passive memberships, and remixed memories on the physical experience and prescribed actionable one must meet.

Barry's interpretation of Stonewall assumes that every Queer person experiences a similar emotional connection and is intrinsic to Queer culture. Willam's interpretation of Stonewall enables them to define a community and the power to pass judgment on the action or inaction of the community based on their emotional connection and recollection of the event. Both utilize the myth of Stonewall to capture the desire for a homonationalist culture, motivated conformity,

²⁰⁹ Eve Tuck, "Suspending Damages: A letter to Communities," *Harvard Educational Review* 79, no. 3 (Fall 2009) 414.

and the importance of the community re-investing in the myth. For Barry and Willam, the culture survives a receptive cycle that invests in the past. Likewise, the *Reddit* thread invests in myth to determine and impose what constitutes the bedrock of a globalist culture; memory is a method of attack and emphasizes that among these new digital traditions, normative desires do not rely on one physical proximity such as New York or San Francisco to be part of Queer culture. The shrinking of space centralizes the West, which means that subscription and belonging to a community and culture are rooted in one's proximity to the West-informed homonationalist desire.

Proximity to Western desire is especially relevant to the *Dyke Project's* use of *Queering The Map* to protest because membership to the culture and the right to live are intrinsically linked to the Palestinian's proximity to a collective desire. The protest is meant for a Western audience and influences *The Dyke Project's* method to humanize Palestinians by both simplifying and contextualizing their experiences through a Western Queer lens; it is supposed to be representative of a global Queer brotherhood, uses posts written in English and specifically chose pins that express an affinity towards homonationalist desire. The responses to the post illustrate the Western influence on membership, highlight the impact of myth, and show how the shrinking of space contributes to the simplification of culture and subculture. The comments in opposition deny humanization, membership, and the right to live by focusing on how far away Palestinian and broadly Arabic and Islamic desires are from the West.²¹⁰

Regardless of the response, each party invests into a series of conclusive myths to illustrate a fantasy of Queer consensus and commonality; the summation and investment into myth explain the un-symmetrical hierarchal system that places the West at the center. Each example does not

²¹⁰ Roland. Barthes, *Mythologies*, trans. Annette. Lavers (New York: Hill and Wang, 1972), 156.

explain why these myths embody an unalterable system or how they became, but they do demand that existence is intrinsically linked to one's ability to recognize oneself in this image of Queerness. The material is arbitrary because the myth is constructed through a semiological system that focuses on the summation of associations, regardless of reality or fact. OP's selection of events that never happened, such as Mathew Shepherd dying from HIV/AIDS, Barry saying that people died during Stonewall or *The Dyke Projects*' use of the collaborative and anonymous record of *Queering the Map*, can still be representative of globally nationalistic identity and still have the same impactful influence among these new digital traditions.²¹¹ Each of these examples relies on elements of fear, anxiety, and nostalgia to capture and reinforce the preference for imitation over originality. Associations with fear, honour and loss, whether it be history or rights, articulate why myth and transcription of the other are integral; each case is concerned with the "what if," such as what if homonormative liberation never reaches the other, what if the other is not made for me and associates it with the fear that authoritative power homonormative traditions could be undermined without myth and repetitive imitation.²¹²

Fashion and aesthetics provide an alternative approach and perhaps one of the last methods to resist the death of subculture while still participating in these new digital traditions. Fashion and dress regardless of where it lives, is the invisible element that links the body to culture. Its invisibility affords fashion mobilities to generate visible productions; fashion is conversational; it functions as a social-sartorial conversation because it takes advantage of the arbitrariness of language and myth and is instead tailored to the physical and localized traditions. Fashion can certainly be used as an assimilative and consumerist tool, but as a home for subculture, it offers a

²¹¹ Roland Barthes, *Mythologies*, trans. Annette Lavers (New York: Hill and Wang, 1972), 108.

²¹² Gabriel Menottie and Antonio Fernandez-Vicente, "Myths of the Digital Age," in *Barthes' Mythologies Today: Readings of Contemporary Culture*, ed. Julian McDougall and Pete Bennett, 1st ed., vol. 52, Routledge Research in Cultural and Media Studies (Oxford: Routledge, 2013), 46-47.

safe space in which the Queer imagination and desires may be felt without bending to homonormativity.²¹³

Whereas the above examples demonstrate perhaps a lack of phenomenological consciousness, sartorial consciousness is informed by material subversiveness and refuses to lose the complexity of experiences, perspectives and representations²¹⁴. It is always participatory, whether expressing disinterest, trying to fit in, feeling above material desires, pushing boundaries, communicating subcultural authenticity, or the imaginary. Fashion is participatory and is always an action against communicating what one may be a part of. The material subversiveness that Queer sartorial representations demand and represent doesn't inherently need to demand the right to exist or be recognized by the public through the fantasy of damage and suffering because as long as there are people, the localized, sovereign and subcultural context survives. Fashioned mobilities mean that homonormative audiences do not restrict the movement; fashion culture is a collective activity that a single entity or designer does not create.

Digital traditions have influenced new trends and a culture of picking and choosing parts of aesthetics. Still, regardless of conformation and colonial appropriations, the material is never arbitrary because reality is informed by the local subculture: the complexity of localized relevancy, respect, values, symbols and development is sustained for and by the intended audience. Not waiting for homonormative responses and validation means that fashion and dress can disrupt the narcissism of pinkwashing, whether or not I misinterpreted Angel Ulyanov's art, the tracksuits, and the Russian experience for the intended audience's complex cultural symbols

²¹³ Catherine Baker, "Re-Reading the Queer Female Gaze in the 1990s: Spectatorship, Fashion and the Duality of Identification and Desire," in *Revisiting the Gaze: The Fashioned Body and the Politics of Looking*, by Morna Laing and Jacki Willson, Dress Cultures Ser. (London: Bloomsbury Visual Arts, 2020), 200.

²¹⁴ Eve Tuck, "Suspending Damages: A Letter to Communities," *Harvard Educational Review* 79, no. 3 (Fall 2009) 420.

and the affective experience can still compel new perspectives; sartorial consciousness maintains the sovereignty of unassimilable myths, reality can be different, and liberatory desires can be imagined beyond homonormative utilitarian approaches.

Attempts to appropriate and absorb the sovereignty of fashion and dress call attention to the colonial system that homonationalism is rooted in; you can fake unity, try to assimilate, co-opt pieces of a subculture, wear the right clothes, or speak the slang but fashioned mobilities and sartorial consciousness means that one cannot fake culture nor separate it from the body. Cultural sovereignty is especially apparent when homonationalism attempts to appropriate a non-Queer body; when homonormative powers attempt to associate Verka Serduchka as drag queen, it highlights intellectual colonialism and the simplification and stripping process of pinkwashing. Despite these assimilative and associative attempts, the Serduchka character was not made for a homonormative nor a Western audience; the character is personified through fashion and subverts Queer appropriations because for a Ukrainian or Eastern European audience, Ukrainian-informed symbols that represent identity, and historical tensions, aestheticism, and satirization never go away.

The naturalness of a Western-centric homonormative culture is a difficult feeling to wrestle with, especially when one is located in the West and poses many limitations as I explored subculture, metaphorical archives, digital Queer experiences, and myth. These limitations include but are not limited to geographical locations, language barriers, and culture. Queerness can surely represent an ideality, but the ideality does not need to be rooted in the word “Queer.” Halberstam considered the potential of digital space as a method to capture plurality, ideality and temporality of Queer life and subcultures; new digital traditions could show the West how little we actually know, supporting comprehensive coverage for those who do not associate with

Queerness but experience ideality relevant to where they may exist.

I do believe that the internet has only bolstered homogenization, the expulsion of those on the occident, and has the potential to kill subculture, but I do not only consider the internet through a nihilistic lens; it is not a system that only eliminates and chips away at the culture. The connective nature of the internet has made culture and the status of being part of a culture a passive and subscriber experience, the empty spaces where a subculture may have once occupied certainly feels like the empty studios the Buggles sang about in “Video Killed The Radio Star,” but radio and radio stars are not dead and nor will subculture and existences beyond homonormative validations will ever die if you look for them.²¹⁵

²¹⁵ The Buggles, *Video Killed the Radio Star*, The Age of Plastic (Island, 1979).

Endnotes

ⁱ In regions where the internet is widespread the circulation of news does not inherently mean that international news, entertainment content or communication is available. Interferences such as state regulation or capitalist regulation such as pay-walls limits the shareability of information. Virtual private networks (VPNs) provide users with the ability to bypass censorship and securely transmit data; however, the ability to access VPNs is a turbulent system relying on a level of tech literacy and regular monitoring especially during times of crisis. See Buyantueva for more information on using VPNs in regions under heavy state digital regulations.

ⁱⁱ Mediums predating the dominance of the internet such as newspapers, periodicals, and radio continue exercise influence. However, their decline in popularity has critically the organization of mass society, determining public space and the ‘organic’ development of mutual awareness and communication.

ⁱⁱⁱ I would like to acknowledge that the word and use of Queer is a controversial in linguistics. I use it here for the sake of simplicity.

^{iv} My focus is not on platform or social media studies. Information and digital studies covers a wide range of fields which includes specialized fields such as social media and platform data. My research is concerned with cultural memory and heritage, digital sociology, and textile aesthetics of counter-culture media which also falls under the umbrella of information and digital studies.

^v I should acknowledge here that the social media platform Tumblr is a vital part of early Queer digital participation and the development of methods and approaches to shrinking, disposing of, and reimaging memory; however, the focus of this research is on myth, heritage, social experiences, relationships, and not the technological design of social media.

^{vi} There has been a lot written about Stonewall as an event and its social impact. For more information about Stonewall I recommend David Carter’s *Stonewall: The Riots That Sparked the Gay Revolution*.

^{vii} On July 19, 2024, The International Court of Justice ruled that Israel’s occupation of Palestinian territories including Gaza, the West Bank, and East Jerusalem is unlawful and in violation of international law. The ruling called for Israel to pay reparations for damage and exploitation of resources, the full withdrawal from the territories and the immediate removal of settlers from the West Bank and East Jerusalem.

^{viii} The Queer community, cross dressing and drag has had an even longer history and relationship in theatre and cabaret. This relationship is unique to their mediums and audiences. For more information I recommend reading the work of Barbra Brownie, Fabio Cleto, and listening to the community.

^{ix} Over social media these characteristics and aesthetics have become representative of memes. Despite being distinct subcultures is commonly compared to the United Kingdoms ‘chav’ culture which shares similar aesthetics.

^x I would like to note that while I do reference “Voguing” and ballroom for the sake of simplicity; this may not be an accurate identification. Voguing as part of ballroom is part of a specific subculture, scene, and history. As the dance continues to be pushed into the mainstream through shows like *RuPaul’s Drag Race* leaders amongst the ballroom scene have cautioned these performances as ‘noguing.’ Leiomy Maldonado, a well know legend amongst the ballroom scene defines the difference between voguing, virgin vogue and noguing stating that “virgin vogue means you’re studying videos/attending classes to learn from voguers. Noguing is more so someone seeing vogue and just imitating and displaying voguing however they feel it is because they’re ‘dancers.’” I am not part of the ballroom scene and therefore cannot define if the performance in Ulyanov’s video is vogue, virgin voguing, or noguing.

^{xi} See the 1968 documentary *The Queen*.

^{xii} To learn more about the house system and ballroom categories I recommend attending a ball.

^{xiii} New and old way is different from noguing because while different in style, they are both ball categories that developed in the ballroom and house systems. Noguing is often associated as mimicking new style. One common way to tell the difference is the stylistic and terminological distinction between spins/dips (voguing), and ‘death drops’ (noguing) which was popularized on RuPaul’s Drag Race.

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