

CONSTELLATIONS OF ELSEWHERE:
QUEER AND TRANS* YOUTH LIVES
IN SUBURBAN TORONTO

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ABSTRACT

Loneliness, isolation, and suicide are endemic among queer and transgender youth. This problem is particularly acute for those who live in the suburbs, where queer and trans* social infrastructure—the places and relationships necessary for queer and trans* public life—is scarce. This thesis explores how queer and trans* youth negotiate the cisheteronormative social infrastructure of suburban Toronto, how their everyday practices of dwelling shift the possibilities that this infrastructure affords, and how they build grassroots social infrastructure in Toronto’s suburban elsewheres. Drawing upon go-along interviews with 11 queer and trans* youth, 46 photos of meaningful everyday places shared by these youth, participant observation at a peer-led queer and trans* youth drop-in program in Scarborough, and interviews with 5 drop-in program staff, I sketch a constellation of suburban elsewheres within which queer and trans* youth make their lives. This eclectic array of places includes abandoned buildings, cemeteries, urban forests, overlooked shorelines, the ambivalent place of the cisheteronormative family home, ordinary places of transit, drop-in peer support programs, and countercultural punk and rave scenes. As I outline this fragmented suburban geography, I argue that Toronto’s neoliberal urban governance renders the lives of queer and trans* youth increasingly precarious. I contend that, in response to this precarity, queer and trans* youth build grassroots forms of social infrastructure in their everyday lives that enables them to survive and thrive in Toronto’s suburbs.

KEYWORDS: Queer, transgender, youth, counterculture, precarity, suicide, suburbs, Toronto

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CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

THE QUESTION OF QUEER AND TRANS* LIFE IN TORONTO'S SUB/URBS

You can't be what you were
So you'd better start being
Just what you are
The time is now, it's running out
It's running running running out
-Fugazi

I. MAKING SENSE OUT OF SO MUCH SENSELESSNESS

Across the Global North, a reactionary coalition of white supremacists, evangelical Christians, fascists, and so-called 'gender-critical feminists' are advancing what Catherine J. Nash and Kath Browne (2020) call a "heteroactivist" anti-trans*¹ politics, campaigning to erase queer and trans* people from public life and assert control over trans* healthcare, the institutionalized processes whereby trans* people radically transform their bodies, and, in turn, their gender embodiments (see Kinney et al. 2022; Todd 2023; Sharrow 2021).² Youth are often at the center of these struggles for two interconnected reasons: first, control over youth is necessary for reactionary groups to control the social reproduction of cisheteronormative social relations; and secondly, legal and cultural limits on youth autonomy render them more susceptible to familial and state discipline. At the same time, queer and trans* youth suffer from an endemic of loneliness, isolation, and suicide, which intensified during the COVID-19 pandemic (Kingsbury et al. 2022; Jones et al. 2022; Wozolek et al. 2016). Things are even worse for queer and trans* youth living in the suburbs, where life-saving places of queer and trans community are few and far between. This thesis considers the lives of queer and trans* youth in Toronto's suburbs. It asks: how does the cisheteronormativity

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1. Here, I employ 'anti-trans*' in lieu of the more conventional 'transphobic' in order to allude to the parallels (and intersections) with anti-black violence and to emphasize the organized character of this socio-political phenomenon.
 2. As I was writing this chapter, CBC reported that a former University of Waterloo student attacked a gender studies class at the university, stabbing the professor and two students (see Shetty 2023).

of Toronto's suburbs affect the lives of queer and trans* youth, especially during the COVID-19 pandemic? Where do these youth make their lives, and how do they build community? And finally, how do queer and trans* youth survive and thrive in Toronto's suburbs?

Queer and trans* youth are the focus of this study because their radical embodiments challenge the status quo of suburban space. Embodiment is the dialectic between body and world, the quotidian relations of being that constitute the spacetimes we call *life*. As Nigel Thrift (1997, 150) reminds us, playful, quotidian experimentation with embodiment can become “the grounds for configuring an alternative way of being that eludes the grasp of power.” In other words, queer and trans* ways of being challenge the social reproduction of what the feminist scholar María Lugones (2007; 2010) terms ‘the colonial/modern gender system:’ the logic of categorization that segregates being into intersecting, hierarchical dichotomies of human/nonhuman, white/colored, man/woman, gay/straight, abled/disabled, and otherwise, and in doing so, renders some peoples as less-than-human others. This analytical framework takes race, gender, and sexuality to be crucial technologies of power that enabled a Euro-American colonial elite to dominate the world:

Under the imposed gender framework, the bourgeois white Europeans were civilized; they were fully human. The hierarchical dichotomy as a mark of the human also became a normative tool to damn the colonized. The behaviors of the colonized and their personalities/souls were judged as bestial and thus non-gendered, promiscuous, grotesquely sexual, and sinful... Hermaphrodites, sodomites, viragos, and the colonized were all understood to be aberrations of male perfection. (Lugones 2010, 744)

These divide-and-conquer technologies of power cast a long shadow into the present of settler-colonial nations like the United States and Canada, continuing to shape subjectivity and sociality in ways that secure the social reproduction of colonial modernity.

The existence of life beyond the categories of colonial modernity challenges the symbiosis of the settler state and cisheteronormative society—which is to say, a society in which heterosexuality and the gender binary are coherent and unremarkable propositions. By cisheteronormativity, I

mean the social, economic, and political systems that structure desire and discipline to make heterosexual, binary-gendered life compulsory, as well as those which adjudicate the ‘queer’ exceptions to this straight, white line (Rich 2003 [1980]; Warner 1991; Berlant and Warner 1998; Duggan 2003). For those who are not accepted as exceptions that prove the rule—namely, intersectionally marginalized queer and trans* people of color—life in a cisheteronormative world often means social death or existential annihilation. Despite this cisheteronormative violence, queer and trans* people continue to overflow binary categories of gender and sexuality. This is precisely why the anti-trans movement is so focused on children and youth: anti-trans coalitions seek to secure the reproduction of colonial modernity by dominating the lives of queer and trans* youth, restricting their modes of embodiment and erasing their transitivity from public life. This genocidal politics has dire repercussions on the wellbeing of queer and trans* youth: it undermines the possibility of queer and trans* futures, exacerbating affects of loneliness and isolation, and, in turn, amplifies the endemic problem of queer and trans* youth suicide (Gonzalez et al. 2018; dickey [sic] and Budge 2020). In this way, there is a tragic ambivalence to the open question of queer and trans* life—while estrangement from the world of colonial modernity can lead to beautiful modes of living otherwise, it all too often results in the self-annihilation.

Here, I employ a notion of queerness and transitivity that foregrounds embodiment. In this view, queerness and transitivity become complimentary forces. As the queer theorist Douglas Crimp (1989, 10) wrote at the height of the AIDS pandemic, “The social and political barbarism we daily encounter requires no explanation whatsoever for our militancy.” Queerness is this militant antagonism to the violent order of colonial modernity. In contrast, transitivity is the boundlessness of being. Or, as the queer and trans* theorist Lucas Crawford (2015, 14) writes, transitivity is “the very ubiquity of constant transformation for all” that “traverses and undoes the demarcation

of a body's inside and outside." Together, queerness and transitivity constitute a being-otherwise that militates against the violent order of colonial modernity at the same time as it fabulously exceeds these inherited categories. This understanding is deftly elucidated by the social theorist bell hooks (hooks et al. 2014, 1:27:15–1:28:29; emphasis mine):

I often identify myself as *queer-pas-gay*... all of our lives, we've experienced ourselves as queer, as not belonging. Queer not as being about who you're having sex with—that can be a dimension of it—but queer as being about the self that is at odds with everything around it... [That which] has to invent and create and find a place to speak and to thrive and to live... I think it's so crucial that trans people are at the front of that, because among trans people, the imagination is called forth in the reconstructing and re-envisioning of self and of possibility.

Queerness and transitivity are thus articulated through each other: the queerness of transitivity is its evocation of boundlessness in world dissected by the violent logic of colonial modernity; the transitivity of queerness is the way that militancy creates the conditions of possibility for boundless embodiments. For youth living in the colonial modern present, queerness and transness can be an antidote to the immiseration of binary categorization. As Muñoz (2018, 658) writes, "We are desperate and we need to get used to it. But not get used to it as in resigning ourselves to the inevitable and congealed narratives of the present. No, instead it's about getting used to the aleatory and wild nature of life, the ways in which we find and make sense out of so much senselessness." Here, Muñoz is pointing toward the queer militancy of punk aesthetics—but we might equally understand it as the punk spirit of queer and trans* embodiments. Recall the words of Ian MacKaye, of the legendary punk band Fugazi: "You can't be what you were—so you'd better start being just what you are!" For those of us struggling to make sense of the absurdity of colonial modernity, then, queer and trans* embodiments can be a way to make sense out of so much senselessness.

Following the cultural theorist Jack Halberstam, I choose to render the prefix 'trans' with an asterisk to signify this boundlessness. As Halberstam (2018, 4) writes: "the asterisk modifies the

meaning of transitivity by refusing to situate transition in relation to a destination, a final form, a specific shape, or an established configuration of desire and identity. The asterisk holds off the certainty of diagnosis; it keeps at bay any sense of knowing in advance what the meaning of this or that gender variant form may be, and perhaps most importantly, it makes trans* people the authors of their own categorizations.” Further, the star-shaped form of the asterisk obliquely alludes to the history of radical trans* activism via ‘Street Transgender Action Revolutionaries’ (STAR), a mutual aid collective founded by Sylvia Rivera and Marsha P. Johnson in 1970 that housed young trans* people evicted by their biological families (See Johnson 1972; Cohen 2004). In this way, the signifier ‘trans*’ indicates the ontological and historical boundlessness of transgender life. Henceforth, I refer to these militant and boundless embodiments with the conjunctive ‘queer and trans*,’ abbreviated for convenience as Q&T*. In doing so, I seek to shift discourse away from *a priori* categories of identity and ‘community’ and instead examine the militant and boundless embodiments of human beings, however they may identify themselves.

I take as my subject of analysis, then, not a ‘LGBT,’ ‘LGBTQ,’ ‘LGBTQIA+,’ or ‘LGBTQ2S’ community³—rather, I study how queer and trans* life navigates “multifaceted constellations of power” (Oswin 2008, 100). In doing so, I build upon a body of recent scholarship of largely graduate students and early-career scholars that is beginning to cohere under the banner of trans* geographies. Trans* geographies represents a break from the subfield of geographies of sexuality, which sidesteps trans* experience altogether, as well as the subfield of queer geographies, which often reduces trans* experience to what the trans* scholar Susan Stryker (2004, 214) describes as “merely another (easily detached) genre of sexual identity rather than... something that cuts across existing sexualities.” In contrast, trans* geographies engage the specific spatialities and

3. Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Queer, Intersex, Asexual, and 2-Spirited, variously.

temporalities that characterize trans* life in the world of colonial modernity (Doan 2007; 2010; Rosenberg 2017; 2021; Brice 2020; Wölfe Hazard 2022; Todd 2023; Smith et al. 2023; for review, see Todd 2021). In the spirit of these brilliant trans* scholars, I am concerned with not just the structures of violence that shape the landscapes within which Q&T* youth dwell, but the ordinary and extraordinary practices by which they not only survive, but thrive.

Herein, I bring this line of inquiry to bear upon the particular landscapes of suburban Toronto. Suburbs are the liminal spaces between the urban and the rural. While they are popularly imagined as low-density, auto-centric residential neighborhoods dotted by white picket fences and little boxes made of ticky-tacky, contemporary suburban space is constituted by not just suburban residential neighborhoods, but high-rise ‘towers in the park,’ villages-cum-commuter-towns, office complexes, and logistics centers, and more. Suburbs, then, are something akin to a Wittgensteinian language game: a flexible signifier with different meaning in different contexts.⁴ Popular urban regional imaginaries figure the Greater Toronto Area (GTA) as a walkable, cosmopolitan urban core surrounded by a car-oriented, conservative suburbs—or, as one scholar opined, “Vienna surrounded by Phoenix” (Fielder 2011, 68). Yet, the urban areas of the old city of Toronto are marked by large neighborhoods of single-family, semi-detached homes characteristic of the city’s nineteenth century suburban expansion. In addition, recent empirical research demonstrates a diversity of urban and suburban morphologies and communities in Toronto’s inner and outer suburbs, suggesting that parts of suburban Toronto may in fact be more urban than neighborhoods in the urban

4. A few examples may be in order. First, a conventional low-density, single-family residential neighborhood such as West Scarborough is ‘suburban’ because it reproduces conventional imaginaries of suburban space. Second, a diverse, rapidly-growing city like Brampton is ‘suburban’ because of its segregated land uses and the proportion of its population that commutes across the city-region for work. Finally, a high-rise city such as Mississauga is ‘suburban’ because of its historical linkages to the city of Toronto. This set illustrates how the adjective ‘suburban’ trades upon multiple meanings of the term ‘suburb.’ This begs the question: is ‘suburban’ a morphological term, or is it a discursive term linked to particular spatial imaginaries?

core (Young and Keil 2014; Keil and Addie 2015; Keil 2015). In response to empirical evidence demonstrating that suburbs across the globe have transformed in dramatic, heterogeneous ways over the last three decades, some scholars proclaim that we have entered a ‘post-suburban’ era in which the fragmented, diverse landscapes of peripheral municipalities have scrambled the distinctions between urban and suburban (Teaford 1996; Phelps and Wu 2011; Keil 2013; Keil 2020a). Yet, another strain of research cuts against the grain of this narrative of progressive post-suburbanization, suggesting that subaltern suburbanisms may be lurking in the archives (Lewis 2004; Weise 2005; McManus and Ethington 2007; Bain et al. 2020). What are we to make of ‘the suburbs’ if they have always been more complex than they appear? In the vein of Bruno Latour, I contend that we have never been suburban. Or rather, the distinction between urban and suburban has never been as solid as it has been imagined: what we call ‘suburbanization’ in the settler-colonial states of North America is a particular development of older processes of colonial modern urbanization concerned with social stability and territorial control (Veracini 2012). Here, I take a skeptical view toward the popular suburban spatial imaginaries of the white picket fence, as well as academic claims of progressive post-suburbanisms, and I employ the term ‘sub/urbs’ to signify the ambivalent distinctions between the urban and suburban.

‘The suburbs’ are an odd space to study Q&T* life. As Alison Bain and Julie Podmore (2021) explain, popular spatial imaginaries position cities as the *sine qua non* for Q&T* life, rendering ‘suburban’ and rural space as incubators of cisheteronormative social reproduction. These imaginaries are buttressed both by queer geographies that fix their gaze firmly on the urban, as well as suburban geographies that refuse to consider the possibility of Q&T* life. To be sure: this spatial imaginary is grounded in a long history of cisheteronormative social reproduction in Anglo-American sub/urbs (Hayden 2003; Beauregard 2006). Yet, this metronormative imaginary masks the

ambivalent queer and trans* spatialities of both cities and sub/urbs, such as the vicious exclusions of white metropolitan gay culture and the vibrant working class and queer of color lives outside of the metropole (Halberstam 2005; Herring 2010; Tongson 2011). Studying queer and trans* sub/urban life, then, is a rather queer task, deconstructing metronormative spatial imaginaries and showing how Q&T* life can survive and thrive in sub/urban space.

This thesis draws upon fieldwork I conducted from October of 2021 to December of 2022, including go-along, participatory photographic interviews with eleven Q&T* youth living across Toronto's suburban periphery, participant observation at a LGBTQ2S youth drop-in program in Scarborough, the easternmost borough of the City of Toronto, and in-person, semi-structured interviews with five program staff (see Figure 3.1). Throughout, participants are referred to with songbird names as pseudonyms, such as Meadowlark, Mockingbird, Pipit, and Thrasher. In doing so, I take inspiration from the Q&T* naming practice of one participant, who chose the name of a songbird in order to express their femininity through their affinity with more-than-human being (Y05). By employing this unconventional [pseudo]naming practice as I share participants' stories, I hope to evoke these songbirds' beauty, delicacy, and resilience as I explore the contrapuntal relationship between the vibrant beauty of Q&T* lives and the violent precarity of the world within which they live.

In addition, I refer to participants with the pronouns and identity markers they expressed, alternating between pronouns when they use multiple sets (see Figure 3.3). Over the last decade, Q&T* youth have developed a rich vocabulary to describe a myriad of gender and sexual embodiments that transgress and transcend the colonial modern binaries of straight/gay and man/woman. Central among these is nonbinary gender: gender embodiments that are neither conventionally masculine nor feminine, instead mixing—or, perhaps, mutating—masculine and feminine aspects

into new gender embodiments that, for some, transcend any framework of masculinity and femininity altogether. These modes of being are not static: like transmasculine and transfeminine (often shortened as transmasc and trasfemme) gender embodiments, nonbinary embodiments are boundless modes of play that shapeshift the dialectic between the body across time and place. This rather queer ecology of embodiments does not respect any clear distinction between gender and sexuality. Rather, it views these categories as entangled with—and indeed, mutually constituted by—other axes of social differentiation, namely race, nationality, and ethnicity.

A large majority of participants identified as trans*, and more than half of participants identified specifically as nonbinary (see Figure 3.3). These perspectives are largely foreign to the discipline of Geography (see March 2021; Todd 2023). By bringing a spatial analytic to these Q&T* embodiments, I aim to enrich our understanding of the complex interrelationships between body, place, space, and power that shape Q&T* life in the world of colonial modernity, as well as the everyday ways that Q&T* youth differently inhabit Toronto's sub/urbs. In doing so, I refuse to produce another catalog of cisheteronormative violence: rather, I explore how Q&T* youth push back against the precarious spatialities of cisheteronormativity in their everyday lives. As I explore the places, relationships, and affects that shape these youths' lives, I argue that they create the infrastructure for Q&T* futures through their practices of dwelling otherwise. In doing so, I contend, they transform fragments of sub/urban space into meaningful constellations of elsewhere.

2. INTERLUDE: THE CASE OF THE BLOOR VIADUCT

To illustrate how Q&T* practices of dwelling otherwise can constitute a life-saving infrastructure that transforms the capacity of sub/urban places, I turn to a brief story about my own experiences dwelling in the underbelly of the Bloor Viaduct. Rising 130 feet from the bottom of Toronto's largest valley, the Bloor Viaduct is an iconic Toronto landmark. The double-decked truss arch

bridge stretches 960 meters across the Don River, the bustling Don Valley Parkway, and a stretch of Canadian National railroad, its imposing concrete pillars and vaulting steel tresses expressing the domination of colonial-modern planning over the wild landscapes of the Don Valley that once marked the edge of the city. Officially christened the Prince Edward Viaduct⁵ shortly after its completion in 1919, the bridge constituted a reliable alternative over the lower, flood-prone bridges that crisscrossed the Don Valley. By facilitating the movement of people and resources between Toronto's urban core and its growing periphery, the Bloor Viaduct was a critical piece of infrastructure supporting Toronto's twentieth-century eastward suburbanization, laying the groundwork for the transformation of the cottage country east of Toronto into a populous suburban area (Rose 1984; McMinn 1999; Polo 2004; Luka 2006).

The geographer Ann Murnaghan argues that "Dealing with nature in the process of urbanization has been the hallmark of the last 150 years in Canada" (2013, 47). The Bloor Viaduct is an unusually sanguine effort to dominate the wild nature of the Don Valley—a threat to the colonial modern order of metropolitan Toronto.⁶ Today, the Bloor Viaduct is an essential piece of Toronto's transit infrastructure: the upper deck carries pedestrian, bicycle, automobile, and bus traffic between Toronto's downtown core and the eastern half of the city, while the lower deck conducts the Bloor–Danforth subway, which spans the city's inner suburbs from Kipling station in Etobicoke to Kennedy station in Scarborough. The Bloor Viaduct is not just a critical piece of Toronto's urban infrastructure, in the past and in the present, but a monumental symbol of the process of settler-colonial urbanization that transformed the city of Toronto from a military outpost to a

5. Here, I call it the Bloor Viaduct, or simply the Viaduct, to reflect its most common name.

6. Since its colonial genesis, Toronto's urban governance has been defined by a focus on utility and frugality. The Bloor Viaduct is the exception that proves this rule: in 1912, city elites leveraged its proximity to the wealthy suburb of Rosedale to secure a \$1.7 million budget for a monumental symbol of modern Toronto's waxing cultural and political capital (Rose 1984; Murnaghan 2013).

modest regional capital, and eventually the largest city in Canada and a central node in the global economy.

The Bloor Viaduct also signifies the grim cost of this urban vitality. In the century after its completion, more than 400 people have ended their lives from the bridge, and the Viaduct is the most frequented bridge for suicide in the world, besides San Francisco's Golden Gate Bridge (Sinyor et al. 2017). Local newspapers have constructed a morbid archive of these moments of self-annihilation, speculating upon their causes and effects in an effort to make meaning from death by suicide.⁷ A 1945 story from the *Toronto Star* is typical in this way, noting that "A well-dressed woman" with "no identification papers" and "only a few cigarettes and some car tickets" jumped from the Viaduct. Yet, the article is remarkable because of the morbid curiosity with which it attempts to visualize her death: the photo is annotated with a dotted line and 'X' which purports to visualize the literal trajectory toward self-annihilation.⁸ As the article reports:

A well-dressed woman about 35 plunged to her death 100 feet from the Bloor St. viaduct into [the] Rosedale ravine today. She was seen to leap over the parapet by Henry Goble. There was no identification papers in her purse, only a few cigarettes and some car tickets, stated [Patrol Sergeant] Herbert Rehill. The woman was dressed in a blue tailored coat with velvet collar, a one-piece dark mauve dress, a black felt hat with black shoes, and flesh-colored silk hose... She was wearing a gold wedding ring with the initials G.D. engraved on the inside and the date Dec. 24, 1927. (*Toronto Star*, 30 November 1945)

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7. This genre of journalism is related to an urban moral panic regarding suicide: "The association of suicide, vice, urbanization, and modernity gained intensity in the beginning of the nineteenth century... Informing and exacerbating all of this was a fear of gender chaos: women, it seemed, were becoming more like men and men, more like women" (Kushner 1993, 462). These relationships were well-established by the end of Canada's long Victorian era, resulting in a popular imaginary that connected suicide with gendered notions of urban vice.
8. "The 100-foot fall is indicated by the dotted line," *Toronto Star*, 1 December 1945, photograph, [The Toronto Star Photograph Archives](#). The 'X' at the of the image is partly cropped from the photo. See also "Brother Identifies Death Leap Victim," *Toronto Star*, 30 November 1945.

Who was this woman, dressed in such haute couture as a “tailored coat with velvet collar,” chic dress, dandyish hat, and silk stockings?⁹ What thoughts crossed her mind before—and after—she leapt from this mortal coil? The cultural theorist José Esteban Muñoz (2009, 167) argues that “[q]ueerness and that particular modality of loss known as suicide seem linked.” Thus, we might wonder: is there a shimmer of queerness about this act—a sheen of a velvet collar, fluttering in the wind? The straightened archive of popular journals leaves us with more questions than when we began: why would the woman who seemingly has everything balk at all she’s inherited—why would she refuse to reproduce that which she’s been given?

These questions have haunted the Viaduct since its construction. Things came to a head in the 1990s, when a moral panic over suicide by jumping coincided with several high-profile youth suicides at the Viaduct. In 1997, a controversial proposal for a suicide barrier was approved by the city council. Yet—in an echo of the debates over the Viaduct’s aesthetics nearly a century earlier—a mere fence would not suffice, and a national design competition produced the ‘Luminous Veil,’ a dual-layered ‘fabric’ of steel cables supported by a series of steel masts that juts outward from the top of the bridge.¹⁰ At night, the “veil” is lit with colorful lights, producing a “shimmering, tremulous quality” that, in the view of one commentator, evokes “the ephemeral and tenuous nature of the divide between life and death” (Polo 2004, 23). While the illuminated armature of the barrier might seem dramatically different from the architecture of the Viaduct, architectural critics highlight their contiguous commitment to aesthetic modernism (McMinn 1999, Polo 2004). This aesthetic modernism works hand-in-glove with the disciplining impulse of colonial modernity: Just

9. Note that war rationing rendered all fabrics, but especially silk, hard to come by in the 1940s.

10. As one scholar noted: “at the time of the barrier’s commencement, the frequency of suicides at the site was one every 22 days” (Smith 2004, 3). Since the construction of the steel armature was completed in 2003, the barrier has almost completely prevented suicides at the Viaduct (Sinyor et al. 2010; 2017).



FIGURE 1.1, Q&T* DANCERS INHABIT THE CENTURY-OLD UNDERBELLY OF THE BLOOR VIADUCT¹¹

as the steel struts of the Bloor Viaduct work to tame the wild ungovernability of nature, the steel armature of the so-called Luminous Veil works to constrain the hysteric ungovernability of suicide.

The Bloor Viaduct, then, is ambivalent infrastructure. On one hand, it reproduces the ravenous hunger of the modern city, securing the flows of materials and people that sustain the capitalist urban metabolism of Toronto. Further, it evinces the deadly cost of this extractivism: the domination of wild ecologies, the urban morbidities of precarious labor, and the endemic problem of suicide. On the other hand, the forms of mobility afforded by the Viaduct can be used for more than just the (re)production of the colonial city—the Viaduct also makes possible a queer kind of urban public life. From underneath the surface of the Bloor Viaduct, I contend, we might gain another view into the affordances of this infrastructure (see Figure 1.1), as I recorded in my notes:

11. Author's photo.

It's a cool night, late summer. I am wandering: finding my way into the valley, feeling the soft touch of dew on the grass, the breeze a gentle portent of the coming autumn. The valley is quiet at night—the abundance of floræ offer a space of solace from the intensity of the city. Further, down a flight of metal stairs, and I find myself walking a service road alongside the expressway. On the horizon, I see the glow beneath the bridge: lonely, almost beckoning. The car noise fades, and I can feel the bass in the distance. Closer now, they've setup lights below, beacons to wandering souls. A few of us, together, turn the corner and—

The boom thunder boom of the train above blends seamlessly into the beat beat beats escaping from the heart-mind-body of the DJ. The crowd is a bacchanal potpourri of gender: scanty twink, higher than the moon, letting it all out—butch lesbians, dressed to the nines, with looks that match—transfemmes above it all, radiating a beauty that demands recognition—and others, forms shifting shaping shifting, in and out and in and out and—strange among strangers, I let the music shake me to my core. For a moment, I disappear into a small sea of bodies bodies bodies—pastpresentfuture becomes here here here—not now just here not anywhere just here. A deep breath in, and my hands touch yours. Arms fingers hands in the air air air—for a moment, just a moment, I see myself through your eyes—and we're up up up mid- air air air. Sweat glistening our skin, hair reverberating all directions: touching laughing crying screaming, being together, being one with ourselves. The beat thunder beat takes off off off—

I step away, into the quiet of the valley. I take a deep breath in, a long breath out. Again. In, out. Again. Together, we sit, feeling the rhythm of the river. Silent, we are, and—for just a moment—language becomes unnecessary. In, out. Again—

Walking through the valley, now. This time, not quiet: my ears are ringing, still vibrating from the energy of the sound. I hear the songs of crickets, the croons of owls, and the sways of trees. Back up the stairs, moving slowly—who's in a hurry? Later, at the bus stop, I close my eyes. In, out. Again. Plug in headphones—Lorraine James: 'we're building something new.' I feel the city beneath my feet. In, out. Again. We're building something new.¹²

This vignette sketches the ways that raving can become an egress from the precarity of the city for Q&T* youth. The performances of music and dance can stage a transformative encounter between Q&T* others that has the capacity to shift one's orientation toward themselves and the world. What is queer about a bridge? *We* are queer about a bridge: in this moment of queer and trans* being-in-common, we augmented the affordances of the Viaduct, our queer and trans*

12. Author's notes, 19 September 2022.

embodiments rendering it more than infrastructure for colonial modern life and death. What does it mean to dance in such proximity to the specter of annihilation?

3. TOWARD A CONSTELLATION OF SUB/URBAN ELSEWHERES

In this thesis, I explore the fabulousness of Q&T* youth life that we glimpsed in the underbelly of the Viaduct: the dialectic of militant antagonism and being-boundless that challenges the binary logic of colonial modernity. In doing so, I sketch out a constellation of elsewheres across Toronto where youth dwell otherwise. Here, I employ the concept of constellations in the sense articulated by Jack Gieseke: “a fleeting landscape of [places] imploding, even as their light still reaches us long after they’re gone... these places are carried in and on” through the memories and bodies of Q&T* youth, and “in the paths they continue to take between these [guiding] stars” (2020, xvii). I argue that Q&T* youth create the infrastructure for Q&T* futures in Toronto’s sub/urbs by transforming fragments of sub/urban space into meaningful constellations of elsewheres.

In Chapter Two, I sketch out the contours of Q&T* youth life, beginning with the question of suicide. Suicide is endemic among Q&T* youth in the Global North, yet there is little research in geography that considers its relationship to the everyday spatialities of Q&T* youth lives. The question of suicide requires us to rethink the relationship between Q&T* youth and sub/urban space. To do so, I place the extant literature of queer youth geographies in dialogue with recent conversations about how the social dimensions of infrastructure and the infrastructural quality of sociality shape sub/urban life. I ground this conversation with Judith Butler’s conception of precarity: the unequal distribution of vulnerability (2004; 2015). This alternative ontology of urban dwelling allows me to consider how precarity renders Q&T* futures unimaginable while Q&T* youth appropriate sub/urban elsewheres to create space for Q&T* embodiments to thrive in the present and beyond.

In Chapter Three, I explain how the ethical framework of this research shaped the research design and fieldwork practice. Drawing from feminist, queer, and participatory action research ethics, I develop a research ethics of mutual aid centered upon practices of care, resourcing, and knowledge co-creation. I discuss how my fieldwork was complicated by my social position *vis-à-vis* participants: as a young, white, nonbinary, queer American new to Toronto, I negotiated shifting perceptions of myself as a researcher, volunteer, confidant, and peer throughout the course of my research. I was neither a clear insider nor a clear outsider to my participants, and the conjunctions and disjunctions of our experiences of Toronto seeded a rich dialogue about Q&T* life in the city region.

In Chapter Four, I draw upon participants' interviews and photographs to explore how Q&T* youths' experiences of precarity orient them otherwise toward the urban region—or, in other words, how precarity conditions “the spatial expressions, experiences and lives of the metropolis’ [gender and] sexual others” (Bain and Podmore 2021, 1255). Drawing from the phenomenology of Martin Heidegger and Sara Ahmed, I describe these orientations as uncanny sub/urbanisms: the practice of making home elsewhere that emerges in response to the unhomeliness of the cisheteronormative household. In narrating this chapter, I begin with Q&T* experiences negotiating the ambivalent infrastructure of the household, emphasizing how the social, legal, and architectural form of the household amplifies precarity for Q&T* youth. Then, I look outward, exploring how public transit infrastructure connects Q&T* youth to other homely places, namely the institutionalized social infrastructure of drop-in peer support groups. Finally, I return to the household with a different perspective, examining how Q&T* youth augmented the social infrastructure of the household during the cataclysmic time of the COVID-19 lockdown. In doing so, I demonstrate that

the rather queer affect of unhomeliness catalyzes other orientations toward the city region which, in turn, seed the possibilities for Q&T*sub/urban futures.

Then, in Chapter Five, I show how these uncanny sub/urbanisms take place in the elsewheres of sub/urban Toronto, such as abandoned buildings, cemeteries, urban forests, and lakeshores. I place participants' interviews and photographs in dialogue with the conception of wildness developed by the queer theorists José Esteban Muñoz and Jack Halberstam, exploring an eclectic array of places across Toronto's sub/urban periphery where Q&T* youth develop the capacity to survive and thrive. As I illustrated with the prelude to this thesis, it is precisely because these wild places are overlooked by the hegemonic gaze that they afford youth the capacity to experiment with alternative intimacies and embodiments of gender and sexuality. In addition, I consider the wildness of the countercultural scenes that sprout up from these urban elsewheres, which constitute a sort of uncommon commons where weedy desires for life otherwise exceed the binary categories of colonial modernity. Altogether, I argue that in the face of precarity, Q&T* youth take root in the cracks of the metropolis, growing a grassroots social infrastructure that binds together Q&T* life across Toronto's sub/urbs.

Finally, in Chapter Six, I bring the themes of this thesis in dialogue with each other to sketch the constellations of sub/urban elsewheres where Q&T* youth dwell. In doing so, I hope to evoke the Q&T* spirit of punk that Muñoz (2018, 658) so beautifully illustrated: "that annihilative force, that refusal of cohesion and insistence on scatteredness, partiality, and the impossible act of not only living but also striving that are accomplished in an uncommon commons." This ethos of being-in-common not despite, but through difference echoes the notion of punk articulated by Fugazi's Ian MacKaye (in Sonnichsen 2019, 6): "Punk has no single definition... but to me it has always meant the underground, the place where conventional approaches to life can be taken to

task. I don't think of it as so much of a 'movement,' rather than a constant parallel world that has been around for as long as there has been an 'overground.'" Without this parallel world of the queer punk commons, this research would not have been possible. To pay my respects, I begin each chapter with a brief *intermezzo*: an epigraph drawn from the archive of punk music, including Fugazi, Kimya Dawson,¹³ The Clash, Bikini Kill, and Sleater-Kinney. These songs echo through this constellation of sub/urban elsewheres, whether in the headphones of Q&T* youth dancing in bedrooms or riding the bus, as covers performed at riotous punk shows, or as mantras that make possible the impossibility of not just living, but thriving amid the wretched precarity of the strung-out present.

13. While Kimya Dawson's music usually employs acoustic instrumentation, their spirit is just as punk as the like of Darby Crash or Henry Rollins.

CHAPTER TWO: SUB/URBAN GEOGRAPHIES OF QUEER & TRANS* LIFE

SOCIAL INFRASTRUCTURE, PRECARITY, AND SLOW DEATH

If you want to kill yourself
Remember that I love you
Call me up before you're dead
We can make some plans instead
Send me an IM, I'll be your friend

-Kimya Dawson

I. INTRODUCTION: THE QUESTION OF SUICIDE

Depression, anxiety, and suicide are endemic among Q&T* youth. This problem was exacerbated during the COVID-19 lockdowns, when many youth were quarantined with their biological families and cut off from Q&T* public life. It is no coincidence that in the first half of 2021, almost one year into the pandemic, more than 25% of queer American adolescents attempted suicide (Jones et al. 2022). There is little empirical data on the Canadian context,¹ but a recent exploratory study found that Canadian queer youth were 2 to 3 times more likely to attempt suicide than their peers; Canadian trans* youth were nearly 8 times more likely to attempt suicide. As the authors explained, this data is almost certainly an undercount: “Adolescents who die by suicide cannot be sampled, and are therefore not represented in this research” (Kingsbury et al. 2022, 772). Another research team was equally blunt: “queer [and trans] youth report more concerning trajectories of both suicidal ideation and suicidal behaviors over time, with a younger age of onset of suicidality, a disproportionately higher number of suicide attempts, *and a stronger desire to die*” (Williams et al. 2022, 2; emphasis mine).² Why are so many Q&T* youth choosing to end their lives?

1. Canada does not disaggregate suicide data by gender or sexual minority status, resulting in a lacuna of data.

2. Similar research confirms this trend across the Global North, including in the United States, Australia, and New Zealand (See Hatchel et al. 2021).

The philosopher Simon Critchley writes that “there is nothing more human than suicide” (2020, 22). David Hume believed that “no man ever threw away life, while it was worth keeping” (2020, 107). Thus, it seems suicide is human, all too human: “Without pleasure, [there can be] no life; the struggle for pleasure is the struggle for life” (Nietzsche 1996 [1878], 56). Rather than understand depression, anxiety, and suicide as inhuman illnesses, philosophers provoke us to consider how these phenomena are tragic responses to human problems. What could possibly render a life not worth keeping?

“The connection between suicide and urban life has deep roots in Western thought” (Kushner 1993, 462). Sociologists have long argued that community cohesion and social marginalization drive large-scale shifts in suicide rates via the affects of isolation and loneliness (Durkheim 2006 [1897]; Wray et al. 2011; Abrutyn and Mueller 2014; Mueller and Abrutyn 2016; Lee and Lee 2020; Copeland 2023).³ In geography, there is a paucity of research on suicide, but extant work demonstrates that its underlying causes are geographically differentiated, and that place is central to how people end their lives (Dorling and Gunnell 2003; Stevenson 2016; Balayannis and Cook 2016). The largest body of literature on Q&T* youth suicide lies at the nexus between psychology, psychiatry, and public health (Russel and Fish 2016; dickey [sic] and Budge 2020; Kingsbury et al. 2022; Hatchel et al. 2021; Williams et al. 2022). However, this body of research remains constrained by the positivist epistemology of the health sciences, which causes even the most critical of interventions to fall back upon individualized notions of marginalization, illness, and intervention.⁴

3. However, sociologists have largely ignored the particular experiences of Q&T* people, with the notable exception of Bethany Everett (2015), who found that shifts from straight to gay sexual orientations leads to an increase in depressive symptoms. Thus, although sociology provides a useful framework for considering the social causes of suicide, it offers only general insights into the experiences of Q&T* youth.

4. McDermott and Roen (2016) articulate this argument in more detail, providing a substantive critique of the ‘minority stress’ framework and the individualization of the phenomenon of suicide via psychopathologization.

If colonial modernity makes Q&T* suicide endemic, then “the surprise is not that suicide is common, it’s that it’s not inevitable” (Stanley 2021, 93–94). Q&T* youth suicide is better understood as part and parcel of a broader crisis of well-being, driven by myriad exclusions and the production of group-differentiated loneliness and isolation. To understand this phenomenon, we must consider the social and spatial patterns that create a world in which Q&T* lives are not worth keeping. I lay the groundwork for studying these everyday practices that resist precarity and slow death by developing a conception of precarity that explains the root causes of Q&T* isolation, hopelessness, and suicide, placing the philosophy of precarity and slow death in dialogue with critical urban and suburban geographies. Then, I review the queer geographies literature through the conceptual lens of social infrastructure to explore how gender and sexual others create the places and relationships necessary for challenging precarity, albeit in uneven and problematic ways. Finally, I review the literature on queer youth geographies and histories of Q&T* resistance to consider how youth push back against precarity in their everyday lives.

2. PRECARIETY AND SLOW DEATH

To understand precarity, I turn to the philosophy of Judith Butler. She has systematically explored the concept of precarity (and its ontological twin, vulnerability⁵) throughout the last twenty years of her work (e.g., Butler 2004; 2005; 2009; 2015; Butler et al. 2016). To summarize: precarity is the condition of being vulnerable to others. The ontological condition of vulnerability is the capacity to be changed by the actions of others—consensual or not—and it follows from our condition as embodied beings inhabiting a world with others. As she writes, “The body implies mortality,

5. Or “precariousness,” as Butler sometimes describes it. As one scholar notes, there is a not-insignificant amount of slippage between “vulnerability,” “precariousness,” and “precarity” across Butler’s large oeuvre (Mills 2015). Here, I chose to exclusively use the term vulnerability in order to avoid confusion with the concept of precarity.

vulnerability, agency: the skin and the flesh expose us to the gaze of others, but also to touch, and to violence, and bodies put us at risk of becoming the agency and instrument of all these as well” (2004, 26). In this way, our embodiment in a social world does not just enable us to *do*, but to be *un-done* by others—human or otherwise.

What distinguishes Butler’s conception of vulnerability from other philosophical accounts is her argument that vulnerability constitutes the grounds for ethical action. According to this view, we are thrown into this world by fiat, not by choice, and we must inhabit it with vulnerable others whose actions will affect us in unpredictable ways. Butler explains this predicament, writing: “I am already bound to you, and this is what it means to be the self I am, receptive to you in ways that I cannot fully predict or control. This is also, clearly, the condition of my injurability as well, and in this way my answerability and my injurability are bound up with one another” (Butler 2015, 110). She concludes that we must aid each other in order to avoid mutual ruin: “In other words, you may frighten me and threaten me, but my obligation to you must remain firm.” (ibid). This duty for solidarity in the face of more-than-human vulnerability grounds all ethical obligations to other beings.

It goes without saying: although we may be universally vulnerable, vulnerability is not *experienced* universally. Precarity, then, is the contingent experience of vulnerability, shaped by history, economy, politics, society, and culture. For Butler, it is precisely because all beings are vulnerable—regardless of our contingent experiences of precarity—that everyone is ethically obligated to act in solidarity. This allows her to argue that a politics of liberation is ethically necessary: “precarity is indissociable from that dimension of politics that addresses the organization and protection of bodily needs. Precarity exposes our sociality, the fragile and necessary dimensions of our interdependency” (2015, 119). Lynda Johnston (2018, 929) explains the geographic

implications of this argument: “by adopting and stretching concepts of precarity, precariousness, insecurity and vulnerability, feminist and queer geographers are able to examine how genders and sexualities matter when faced with the fragmentation of societal bonds, social and political governance, senses of entitlement and feelings of belonging.” In other words, the concept of precarity clarifies how the structure of this world affords some the possibility of overlooking their vulnerability at the expense of others for whom vulnerability may be the defining quality of everyday life.

Indeed, in the “fucked-up here and now” (Harney and Moten 2013, 51), precarity transforms the everyday milieus of Q&T* youth into places of immiseration. We can trace this precarious world through patterns of violence: Q&T* youth are disproportionately likely to experience bullying, intimate family violence, and homelessness (Earnshaw et al. 2016; Russel and Fish 2016; Beam 2018; Abramovich et al. 2022). In short, cisheteronormativity renders Q&T* youth more vulnerable to being undone by others.

The queer theorist Lauren Berlant (2007, 754) names this condition of life as slow death: the “wearing out of a population and the deterioration of people in that population that is very nearly a defining condition of their experience and historical existence” (c.f. Fanon 2004 [1961]). Crucially, slow death is not a crisis; it is ordinary, even banal, and occurs not in flashpoints, but in the drawn out temporalities of everyday life. In this, I echo Ruth Wilson Gilmore’s conception of racism: “the state-sanctioned and/or extralegal production and exploitation of group-differentiated vulnerabilities to premature death, in distinct yet densely interconnected political geographies” (2022, 107). Unlike forms of state violence such as policing, which act directly upon subaltern bodies, slow violence is diffuse. We can see slow violence both in what it makes present: hunger, migraines, brain fog, exhaustion; and in what it makes absent: happiness, health, human

flourishing. This condition blurs the distinctions between life and death—in turn, the death of the good life produces a life worse than death.

Slow death is the shadow of biopower: the sovereign compulsion to make populations live. In contradistinction to this positive biopolitics, slow death is a technology of abandonment that utilizes biopower negatively, obscuring its causes and effects (Berlant 2007; Puar 2012a). For example, medicine—the biopolitical profession *par excellence*—diagnoses slow death as illness, a set of symptoms that lie squarely in the domain of the individual (c.f. Foucault 2003a [1963]; 1986). In this way, medical discourse produces health as a normative concept: those who conform to social norms are empowered with the capacities of a ‘healthy’ body, and those who cannot—or will not—be normal are debilitated (Berlant 2007; Puar 2012b; see also McDermott and Roen 2016). Thus, depression, anxiety, and suicide are seen as consequences of brain chemistry, or of an individual’s social experiences, rather than the products of colonial modernity. It is not so much that medical diagnoses are incorrect as they are incomplete. The concept of precarity, via slow death, illuminates the broader picture. In this way, I follow the lead of the queer theorist Jasbir Puar:

I want to shift the registers of this conversation about 'queer suicide' from pathologization versus normativization of sexual identity to questions of bodily capacity, debility, disability, precarity, and populations. This is not to dismiss these queer suicides but to ask what kinds of 'slow deaths' have been ongoing that a suicide might represent an escape from. It is also to 'slow' the act of suicide down—to offer a concomitant yet different temporality of relating to living and dying. (2012a, 152)

Drawing from crip theorists like Robert McRuer (2006), Puar helps us understand that Q&T* suicides are not simply the product of clinical illness or social norms. Rather, these events are the punctuation of life stories of debilitation produced by the disciplining effects of colonial modernity. It is in this wretched way that precarious worlds render Q&T* youth particularly vulnerable, creating the conditions for their everyday lives to become slow deaths.

3. PRECARIOUS QUEER AND TRANS* YOUTH LIVES

For the last two decades, geographers have documented how queer youth⁶ in the Global North are ensnared by cisheteronormative society and the liberal state. Following the foundational work of queer theorist Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick (1990), early interventions explored the ambivalent space of the heteronuclear family home for queer youth: how the form of the family constrains the lives of these youth, and how navigating the process of ‘coming out’ to their families can transform the space of the home and the relationships that constitute home life, sometimes for the better, sometimes for the worse (Johnston and Bell 1995; Valentine et al. 2003; Gorman-Murray 2008). As Gil Valentine, Tracey Skelton, and Ruth Butler (2003, 483) write, “a gradual reduction in the benefits that young people are entitled... and rising housing costs... mean that many young people are being pitched into a state of semidependency on their families.” In other words: multiple marginalizations circumscribe the agency of youth within their adult relationships, intensifying the effects of precarity. Although Andrew Gorman-Murray (2008) points out that parents can be accepting and supportive of queer youth at home, the well-being of these youth remains contingent upon the actions and opinions of parents—accepting or otherwise (Valentine, Skelton, and Butler 2003; Schroeder 2015). In this way, the multiple marginalizations that Q&T* youth face render the family home a place of ambivalent possibilities (Bain and Sharp forthcoming). One bisexual, trans* youth in Toledo, Ohio described their ostensibly inclusive home as, “kind of like a prison *and* a sanctuary” (Schroeder 2015, 794). Regardless of whether families are affirming or hostile, queer youth must manage familial relationships and negotiate the matrix of cisheteronormativity.

Another line of inquiry explores the experiences of sexual minority youth in education. Christopher Schroeder’s (2012, 647) foundational work in this area explored the unequal power relations

6. There is no agreed-upon definition of ‘youth’ in this literature; it can refer to anyone from primary-school-aged children to so-called young adults in their mid- to late-twenties.

of educational and extracurricular LGBTQ youth programs, arguing that “The spatiality of queer youths’ everyday lives is highly contingent on adultist practices.” Within schools, cisheteronormativity is (re)produced through everyday interactions with peers, teachers, parents, staff, and administrators, disciplining the bodyminds of Q&T* youth by marking some behaviors, embodiments, and intimacies as deviant and profane. This, in turn, calcifies schools as institutions that reproduce heterosexual, cisgender subjects (Schroeder 2012; Nayak and Kehily 2013; J. Hall 2020; Nayak and Bonner-Thompson 2022; c.f. Butler 1990; Foucault 2003a [1986]). Some schools in North America reject a culture of heterosexual chauvinism, instead adopting liberal values of tolerance that permit Q&T* inclusion for those who conform with the demands of respectability. These schools allow Q&T* students a degree of explicit expression of gendered and sexualized difference, as well as the formation of affinity organizations such as Gay-Straight Alliances (GSAs),⁷ a contingent and flexible social form that can provide social support, affinity programming, or means to push back against cisheteronormative policy (Schroeder 2012; Bain and Podmore 2020; Nayak and Bonner-Thompson 2022). Indeed, the right to form a GSA is legally protected by the province of Ontario.⁸ Although Q&T* youth can and do push back against liberal and conservative cultures within schools (Bain and Podmore 2020), they must do so with and through adult allies who are constrained by cisheteronormative hegemony (Schroeder 2012). In short, although schools are central nodes of discipline for Q&T* youth, they can also be sites for youth to push back against cisheteronormativity.

7. Alternately: ‘gender and sexuality alliance,’ or ‘queer-straight alliance’

8. Following two high-profile suicides of Q&T* youth in Ontario, the Ontario Legislature, led by the Liberal and New Democratic Parties, overcame stiff opposition from the Provincial Catholic School Boards to pass the *Accepting Schools Act* of 2012 (Howlett 2012). The act amended the *Education Act* to, among other things, establish a legal definition of bullying, mandate that school boards create an equity and inclusion policy, and prevent school boards from blocking students from organizing school groups or activities relating to gender and sexuality, including GSAs. Ontario, Legislative Assembly, *Education Act*, §§ 1, 169.1, 303.1.

Similarly, religious institutions can be sites of both inclusion and marginalization. Like schools, churches and other religious institutions are heterogenous organizations where individual opinions about Q&T* life can differ from the institutional line. Johan Andersson et al. (2011) note that for some churches, social outreach mandates can supersede the congregations' beliefs about gender and sexuality, rendering these churches ambivalent spaces of care for Q&T* youth who may be dependent upon social services to meet their basic needs. Schroeder (2012) shows how brittle these institutional commitments to allyship may be, as control over resources and space ultimately lies with adults—usually straight—and not with Q&T* youth themselves. As he writes, “Adults’ organizing is not simply a matter of constraining and enabling youth but a matter of the limits of time-space, most often controlled by (other) adults through adultist practices” (Schroeder 2012, 644). More research is necessary to explore the nuanced experiences of Q&T* youth within religious institutions: major interventions in this area (e.g. Seitz 2017) focus almost exclusively on the experiences of adults, and the literature as a whole is biased toward Christian organizations. We can conclude that while religious institutions may offer supports to address the precarity of Q&T* youth, their adultist exclusions simultaneously reproduce youth precarity.

More recently, geographers have begun to study Q&T* lives beyond sites typically associated with childhood. This small body of work considers how the governance of public space disciplines Q&T* youth—particularly youth of color—and how these youth reassert agency through everyday practices of resistance. Planning scholars Clara Irazábal and Claudia Huerta (2015) describe how Q&T* youth of color in New York City’s West Village push back against the multiple marginalizations of homophobic and transphobic family life, exclusionary social service providers, and normative restrictions of public space. Similarly, Rae Rosenberg (2017; 2021) explores how Q&T* youth of color in Toronto exploit their surplus visibility to challenge racialized homonormativity

with their embodied presence, including within the spaces of the gay village which purport to offer safety for queer and trans* people. As he writes, these everyday spatial practices “offer[] moments in which Black queer/transness can dance through [Toronto’s Church-Wellesley] village and facilitate Black LGBTQ community formation – by inspiring youth to become politically active, and also allowing youth to engage the space together, on their own terms” (2021, 1409). Elsewhere, Q&T* youth employ strategies of in/visibility; Maria Rodó-de-Zárate (2015) explores how lesbian youth in Portugal manage their visibility in public space to evade cisheteronormative discipline and homophobic violence. This small body of work shows that youth develop place-specific strategies to challenge their precarious position within public space.

Altogether, the contours of precarity for Q&T* youth are worlded through homes, schools, social services, churches, and other everyday places. The matrix of cisheteronormativity is woven throughout these heterogenous places, producing variegated geographies of inclusion and marginalization that amplify the effects of precarity. The structural position of Q&T* youth as both property of their biological family and subjects of state control work together to marginalize expressions of ‘deviant’ gender and sexuality and intensify these youths’ experiences of precarity. Despite two decades of research on Q&T* youth, these perspectives—particularly those of trans* and nonbinary youth—remain marginal to the larger queer geographies literature. As one recent review explains, “In copious edited collections and journal special issues on the geographies of sexuality,” to which I would add geographies of gender as well, “children and young people are frequently overlooked, under-researched, and absented,” (Nayak and Bonner-Thompson 2022, 1246). Although a more systematic account of the precarious geographies of Q&T* youth life is necessary, the extant research clearly demonstrates that heteronormative institutions at every scale,

particularly the nuclear family and compulsory education, employ technologies of discipline and punishment that amplify the precarity of Q&T* youth.

Atmospheres of colonial modern violence condense into worlds of cisheteronormative precarity. As legal minors, Q&T* children occupy a liminal position between person and property, and are particularly exposed to state and familial violence. Further, many of those who reach the age of majority face a brutal double bind: stay with biological families that reject their humanity, or eke out a living in the neoliberal city by themselves. Thus, the structural marginalization of Q&T* youth intensifies their experiences of vulnerability in the neoliberal city. It is not rhetorical excess to say that Q&T* youth have no future in this world. The immiseration of precarity can render everyday life as slow death, making it seem as though Q&T* lives are not worth living. The slow *life-in-death* of precarity cannot continue.

4. QUEER AND TRANS* SOCIAL INFRASTRUCTURE

How, then, do Q&T* people challenge precarity? By building the infrastructure for Q&T* life to survive and thrive in the present. If “a future without place is simply inconceivable” (Cresswell 2004, 33), then queer and trans* places, and the infrastructure that interconnects them, enable us to imagine alternative futures where Q&T* life can flourish. Here, I employ Berlant’s conception of infrastructure (2016, 394): “that which binds us to the world in movement and keeps the world practically bound to itself.” Conventionally understood as the physical and sometimes ecological supports for human life, recent research on infrastructure has begun to conceive of infrastructure as dynamic assemblages of material and social relations across time and space. In this view, infrastructure is a palimpsest: its meaning shifts over time as it mediates between the worlds of the past and the future (Morris 2021). Foregrounding the social constitution of infrastructure allows us to

better understand the lifespan—and, the afterlives—of infrastructure: how it is made and remade through everyday life (Newman 2020, 4).

The sociologist Ian Hutchby (2001) argues that the multiplicity of ways that infrastructure is used are framed by the properties of the object, not the intent of its planners. Drawing from the field of human ecology, he argues that infrastructure⁹ affords capacities for action that depend on the relationship between the object and the beings that inhabit it (Gibson, 1979; c.f. Heidegger 1996 [1927]). In this way, the relation between the properties of infrastructure and the beings that inhabit it create a historically contingent matrix of affordances that shifts across space and time, providing a heterogenous and often ambivalent array of capacities for action. Alan Latham and Jack Layton (2019) draw upon this conception of affordances to explore how infrastructure is used, arguing that the infrastructure of the city affords capacities for socialization that produce urban public life.

However, others have critiqued this notion of social infrastructure that focuses only on the social dimensions of ‘hard’ infrastructure. This alternative strand of social infrastructure research draws on feminist conceptions of social reproduction to analyze how “the fleshy, messy, and indeterminate stuff of everyday life” is necessarily infrastructural—both because it supports ‘hard’ infrastructure and because its affordances are necessary for us to go on living (S. Hall 2020; Katz 2001, 711; Peake et al. 2021). As Sarah Marie Hall (2020, 92) argues, “To see social reproduction as social infrastructure is to highlight the sheer interconnectedness of the material and immaterial components that sustain life, the market and the state.” Thus, ‘hard’ infrastructure like sidewalks, bridges, and public transit is social because its affordances both generate and depend upon social relations, and social reproduction is infrastructural because of how its capacities for action keep the world bound to itself.

9. Hutchby uses the term ‘technology’ rather than ‘infrastructure.’ This does not pose a serious problem for us, as we can view infrastructure as a kind of technology, perhaps at a larger scale.

Because infrastructure is contingently produced, it does not afford equal capacities to all. For privileged subjects, infrastructure works transparently: they are able to extend themselves through infrastructure, augmenting their capacities and enabling them to act in and upon the world. In contrast, subjects marginalized by the dominant logic of infrastructure cannot simply access its affordances: rather than experience the object of infrastructure as an extension of themselves, infrastructure's others often become objects to be acted upon (Ahmed 2006). For example, transit infrastructure can constrain, rather than extend, the mobilities of Q&T* youth by rendering them as objects of the unwanted attention of police and homophobic or transphobic passengers (Lubitow et al. 2017; 2020). By extending the capacities of straight subjects while objectifying Q&T*, infrastructure can be cisheteronormative.

In contrast with cisheteronormative infrastructure, queer infrastructure extends the capacities of queer, and sometimes trans*, subjects. Queer social infrastructure is constituted by the places and relationships that bind queer people together. The urbanist Ben Campkin (2020) argues that networks of queer nightlife, often found in historically gay districts—such as San Francisco's Castro district, New York City's Greenwich Village, Chicago's Boystown, and Toronto's Church-Wellesley Village—are one form of queer social infrastructure, creating space for queer intimacies and relationships in otherwise straight cities (see also Gotkin 2019). Indeed, queer place-making practices render the gay village not just an identarian enclave: these individual and collective practices of establishing meaningful relationships with the human and more-than-human beings in one's milieu render the village a node in emergent queer counter-worlds (Tuan 2008 [1977]; Cresswell 2004). In this way, nightlife, cruising, and gay public cultures are more than opportunities for erotic pleasure and communal belonging. As Max Andrucki (2021; 2022) argues, they constitute practices of communal care that work to undo the precarity produced by heteronormative worlds.

However, the social infrastructure of the gay village does not afford equal capacities for all. Geographers have long critiqued the myriad exclusions of the gay village.¹⁰ The high visibility of gay nightlife spaces in the village obscures the presence of lesbians, whose public cultures are less anchored to commercial spaces (Valentine 1995; Nash and Bain 2007; Giesecking 2020). Similarly, the investment in commercial nightlife at the expense of other forms of queer public life limits the affordances of the village for youth (Valentine and Skelton 2003; Reck 2009; Rosenberg 2017). Gay villages are saturated with transphobia, ranging from tacit exclusion to gendered harassment to outright violence (Doan 2007; Browne and Lim 2010). The implicit whiteness of the gay village marginalizes queers of color from the public life of the gayborhood: these racialized exclusions amplify the unjust affordances of this queer social infrastructure, especially for trans* youth of color (Tucker 2009; Haritaworn 2015; Rosenberg 2017).¹¹ Comparatively little has been written on the ableism of the gay village, yet norms of dis/ability work hand-in-glove with these other structures of exclusion to create a hierarchy of bodies and subjects within purportedly inclusive gay spaces (See R. Butler 2001; Gotkin 2019).

Despite these regimes of exclusion, gay villages remain important nodes of queer social infrastructure because they function as high-visibility entry points for those who remain in the closet or have just come out. As Petra Doan (2007, 64) notes, even though the culture of the gay village

10. Geographic critiques of the gayborhood (Oswin 2008; Brown 2008; Hubbard 2011; Brown 2014) became more widespread in response to critical accounts of ascendant politics of LGBT assimilation, especially Halberstam's (2005) notion of metronormativity (also Duggan 2003; Halberstam 2005; Puar 2007; Herring 2010; Tongson 2011).

11. Geographers have made similar arguments against LGBT Pride festivals (Johnston 2005; Johnston 2007; Browne 2007; Podmore 2015; Rosenberg 2021). Pride festivals are popularly imagined within the legacy of queer riots, such as the 1966 Compton's Cafeteria riot in San Francisco's Tenderloin and the 1969 Stonewall riots in New York City's Greenwich Village (Chisholm 2016; Stryker and Silverman 2005; Stryker 2021; New York Public Library 2019). Yet, global Pride festivals have morphed into corporatized sites of homonormative gay tourism that work hand-in-glove with police to sanitize urban space (Chisholm 2016; Haritaworn et al. 2019).

is rife with homonormative exclusions, it contains liminal places that afford the possibility to “explore a different gender” and sexuality “within the confines of [a] relatively safe space.” Despite the violent exclusions of gayborhoods, they remain “something that, to borrow Spivak’s phrase, queers cannot not want” (Oswin 2008, 100). This is especially true for youth, who may not have personal networks of Q&T* community to support queer public life. Indeed, as Rosenberg (2021) notes, youth actively challenge the ageist, transphobic, and racist logics of exclusions of the gay village through their everyday appropriations of its urban spaces. Thus, while gay villages afford some youth the opportunity to experiment with new modes of gender and sexual embodiment, Q&T* youth must challenge the dominant logics of its institutionalized social infrastructure in order to manifest livable futures.

Social service organizations are another form of social infrastructure that offers ambivalent affordances for Q&T* youth. The mainstream LGBT movement in the Global North has successfully advocated for *de jure* prohibitions against service discrimination on the basis of gender and sexuality and for specialized services for queer and trans* people (Mananzala and Spade 2008; Beam 2018; England 2022). Yet, nonprofit social service organizations often reproduce the exclusions they seek to address.¹² For example, in the case of emergency housing services, the administration of gender-segregated services, punitive policies regarding sex and drug use, and restrictions about expressing gender and sexual identity can push Q&T* youth out of emergency shelter and back onto the street (Abramovich 2012; England 2021). Further, emergency shelter infrastructure can be a site of homophobic and transphobic violence at the hands of staff and other shelter residents (Abramovich 2012; Ecker 2016). Institutionalized social infrastructure presents a

12. Scholars and activists have long critiqued nonprofit social service organizations along these lines (Wolch 1990; INCITE! 2007; Manazala and Spade 2008; Beam 2018; Gilmore 2022).

double bind for Q&T* youth: negotiate the discipline of service providers, or navigate precarity on their own.

Gay villages and LGBT social services form two nodes in larger networks of queer social infrastructure that span the city-region. Geographers have proposed a number of concepts to explain the spatiality of these queer counter-worlds. Responding to Gavin Brown's (2008, 1216) call to "study sexualities as they are lived across the whole city," the sociologist Amin Ghaziani (2014; 2019) argues that queer people make their lives through "queer archipelagos": an array of spaces across the city. In his analysis of the everyday geographies of lesbians and queers in New York City, Jack Giesecking (2020, 198) refers to these formations as constellations: "queer feminist geographical imagination of urban pasts, presents, and futures that dislodges lesbians and queers (sexual and 'other'-wise) from the lgbtq [sic] fixation on neighborhood liberation." These queer counter-worlds are made possible by infrastructures of urban mobility: contingent, embodied, and power-laden practices of movement enable differential degrees of access to the city (Cresswell 2010). Building upon this insight, Catherine Jean Nash and Andrew Gorman-Murray (2014; 2017) describe how queer urban mobilities enable access to a variety of "queer-friendly neighborhoods" across the city-region, such as Toronto's Queen West. Unlike gay villages, these places facilitate community-building across gendered and sexualized difference through institutions and symbols that signify a heterogenous queer belonging (Gorman-Murray and Waitt 2009; Nash 2013). These instances of queer place-making emerge in fragmented, uneven formation across, around, and through the metropolitan region.

This includes the suburbs. Although Q&T* people have always lived in suburban communities, "metronormative" imaginaries of gender and sexual difference erase Q&T* lives outside of the urban core (Podmore and Bain 2021). As a result, queer geographies have almost exclusively

focused on urban space. Alison Bain and Julie Podmore demonstrate that queer suburbanites—adults and youth alike—leverage the resources and relationships of their milieus to contest and repair the unjust affordances of suburban social infrastructure. Their recent body of work explores the micro-politics of LGBTQ2S lives in the suburbs of Vancouver, particularly how these youth and their “insider activist” allies challenge exclusions in schools (Bain and Podmore 2020; 2021a), libraries (Bain and Podmore 2019; 2021a; Bain 2022), out-of-school programs (2021a; 2021b), and municipal governance (2021a). The case of schools is indicative: Bain and Podmore argue that the refusal to remain invisible within a cisheteronormative institution produces “surplus visibility” that is both a lifeline that enables queer suburban counter-worlding as well as a liability that can catalyze discipline and punishment (Bain and Podmore 2020). Altogether, this recent research shows how Q&T* suburbanites appropriate suburban social infrastructure for other ends, using these institutions to nurture queer life outside of the urban core.

In sum, queer social infrastructure is the network of places, technologies, and relationships that binds queer people together, creating the possibility of queer public life across the metropolitan region. However, queer social infrastructure is rift with myriad exclusions—exacerbating the precarity of multiply-marginalized queer and trans* subjects. If institutions of queer social infrastructure do not afford equal capacities for all, how do Q&T* others survive the precarity of the colonial-modern metropolis?

5. CHALLENGING PRECARITY WITH GRASSROOTS SOCIAL INFRASTRUCTURE

In the face of these myriad exclusions, Q&T* others create grassroots forms of social infrastructure through activism, everyday resistance, and mutual aid. Queer activists often make disruptive, highly-visible interventions in urban space to draw attention to heteronormative violence and enact

fleeting performances of alternative worlds. Gavin Brown (2015) locates the genesis of queer activism in transnational AIDS activism that emerged in the 1980s. Equipped with the analytical tools of a then-emergent queer theory, organizations like ACT UP and Queer Nation worked to build a coalitional, anti-normative political movement to organize against the mass death of the AIDS pandemic and the heteronormative world that brought it into being.¹³ In the 2000s, groups such as Queerupton, Gay Shame, SexPanic!, and the Pink Panthers continued this legacy by explicitly connecting anti-normative street politics with an anarchist commitment to autonomy (Brown 2007; Shepard 2010; Jeppesen 2010; Brown 2015). Sandra Jeppesen's account of "direct action vomiting" exemplifies this sort of street activism: a carnivalesque challenge to cisheteronormativity grounded in what scholar-activist Benjamin Shepard (2009, 239) describes as "an abundant affirmative view of a lustier, richer experience of urban living." Thus, through theatrical performances that challenge the binary logic of colonial modernity, queer activists stage open-ended encounters through which alternative relationships can emerge.

Of course, queer activism does not just occur in the street. Groups such as *FIERCE*¹⁴ and *The Audre Lorde Project* organize Q&T* youth in efforts to develop autonomous forms of social infrastructure such as community centers and neighborhood 'safe spaces' that are run by and for them (Goh 2018; Irazábal and Huerta 2016). Even though these campaigns may not be successful in securing access to physical space in the neoliberal city, they nevertheless "offer alternative social-spatial relations" through their organizing, which demonstrates "the possibility of continued difference in the city" (Goh 2018, 474).¹⁵ Similarly, everyday acts of resistance can also constitute

13. For the definitive account of ACT UP, see Schulman 2021. On Queer Nation, see Stryker 2015 (2004); Gray 2009; also Berlant 1997.

14. "Fabulous Independent Educated Radicals for Community Empowerment" (Manazala and Spade 2008, 62).

15. I take this invocation of "difference" in the Deleuzian sense: the possibility of actualizing other virtual worlds.

activist practices of queer counter-worlding (see Ghaziani 2021). Rae Rosenberg (2021) argues that homeless Q&T* youth of color practice everyday forms of activism by strategically inhabiting the white space of the Church-Wellesley Village. These practices “offer moments in which Black queer/transness can dance through the village and facilitate Black LGBTQ community formation by... allowing youth to engage the space together, on their own terms” (Rosenberg 2021, 1409).¹⁶ These everyday practices shift the relationships between these youth and the spaces that exclude them—in so doing, they bring other worlds into being. As Ahmed writes, (2019, 219): “the stories of the exhaustion of inhabiting worlds that do not accommodate us, the stories of the weary and the worn, the teary and the torn are the same stories as the stories of inventiveness, of creating something, of making something.” In other words, the everyday resistance of living amid precarity is a queer sort of dwelling.

By dwelling, I have in mind the spatialities and temporalities of embodiment: the rhythms of difference and repetition that constitute life-with-others. This notion has its roots in Heidegger’s radical reconception of space as an event rather than an a priori container (c.f. Elden 2004; Lefebvre 1991). Yet, following the work of Emmanuel Levinas, I critique Heidegger’s orientation of dwelling inward toward a reactionary fantasy of the self-sufficient subject. Levinas demonstrates that this notion of Autarchic dwelling is, in fact, premised upon the erasure of being’s constitutive relations with the other;¹⁷ in doing so, he reconceptualizes dwelling as the navigation of the threshold between self and other, or between home and world (Harrison 2007). In this way, Q&T* dwelling constitutes an everyday resistance to the cisheteronormativity of the colonial-modern metropolis.

16. This work resonates with recent work on Q&T* embodiment in cultural studies, such as madison moore’s brilliant (2018) study on fabulousness and Q&T* style.

17. We can say that ‘*Habito, ergo sum*’ is tautological: *habito* can only entail *sum* insofar as it is conjugated—that is, only insofar as its utterance is oriented toward another.

In addition to activism and everyday resistance, Q&T* networks of care world the city otherwise. These grassroots forms of social infrastructure augment, and sometimes supplant, the ambivalent affordances of institutionalized social infrastructure.¹⁸ One form of collective care is mutual aid: cultivating collective capacities for autonomy (Shepard 2010; Heckert and Cleminson 2011; Shepard 2012). The trans* scholar-activist Dean Spade (2020, 136) writes that “[m]utual aid is a form of political participation in which people take responsibility for caring for one another and changing political conditions, not just through symbolic acts or putting pressure on their representatives in government but by actually building new social relations that are more survivable.” These practices of collective care can occur at many scales, from cooking a meal for a sick neighbor to distributing resources across a city in the wake of a natural disaster. Precarity is reproduced in no small part because marginalized groups are too exhausted to advocate for themselves; by shifting the paradigm from service provision to mutual aid, movements for change can build collective analysis and power within the most precarious communities.

Indeed, mutual aid work is, in a profound way, how crips, queers, and people of color have always survived and thrived (Piepzna-Samarasinha 2018; Arani 2020). An excellent example is *Street Transgender¹⁹ Action Revolutionaries* (STAR), a direct action group founded by Syliva Riviera and Marsha P. Johnson in 1970 which provided shelter for houseless trans* youth in New York City. As one scholar notes, “STAR House was significant as the first communal shelter on record that explicitly served [trans] youth and adults. It provided sustenance, emotional support,

18. Edith England makes the provocative argument that institutionalized social infrastructure in fact relies upon the grassroots: “even apparently inclusive systems are supported by the work of trans communities. They create care practices anchored in a understanding of need and precarity derived from marginalization. This work is seldom acknowledged by those providing services yet offers an essential psychological and emotional support which enables trans people to tolerate a hard-to-navigate, invisibilizing system” (2022, 10).

19. Originally, “Transvestite.” Later in the organization’s history, Riviera would change its name to reflect shifts in language among her trans community.

and a sense of spiritual harmony. Free gender expression was the norm. In addition, STAR House was a base for political organizing” (Cohen 2004, 198). Despite its short-lived lifespan, STAR House afforded Riviera, Johnson, and others the opportunity to intervene in marches and demonstrations, as well as build solidarity with other aspects of the gay liberation movement (Cohen 2004). Further, STAR would go on to inspire other gender and sexual outlaws to organize for more-than-survival, such as the legal services group *The Sylvia Riviera Law Project* and the emergency shelter organization *Sylvia’s Place* (Manazala and Spade 2008; Shepard 2013). Independent from the nonprofit industrial complex, these groups organize the praxis of mutual aid into a more durable form, building grassroots social infrastructure that affords Q&T* people the capacity to survive.

Thus, Q&T* people employ activism, everyday resistance, and mutual aid to challenge the slow life-in-death of precarity. In doing so, they demonstrate that ordinary and extraordinary actions can world the city otherwise, realizing the possibilities of queer counter-worlds. Yet, as Ahmed (2019, 229) argues, “it is not enough to affirm the queerness of use,” or queer uses of place. Rather, to actualize a Q&T* world entails the annihilation of precarity. She continues, “To bring out the queerness of use requires more than an act of affirmation: it requires a world dismantling effort. In order for queer use to be possible, in order to recover a potential that has not simply been lost but stolen, there is work to do” (ibid). The (re)production of grassroots social infrastructure is one form of such work: “creating a shelter and disrupting usage can refer to the same action” (ibid). In other words, building Q&T* places and unbuilding places of precarity can be one in the same. It is these forms of grassroots social infrastructure that afford gendered and sexualized others the capacity to challenge precarity—that is, to imagine collective futures and the capacity to actualize a life worth living.

In sum: precarity is the spatial and social patterns that hedge the vulnerability of a privileged few at the expense of the majority, rendering Q&T* life as slow death. Extant social infrastructure in the sub/urbs is rife with cisheteronormative exclusions, and the lack of institutionalized queer social infrastructure in suburban space renders Q&T* youth particularly precarious. Queer social infrastructure attempts to challenge this precarity by binding queer people together. Yet, the affordances of queer social infrastructure like nightlife and institutionalized social services are often ambivalent, reproducing gendered, racialized, ableist, and ageist exclusions. In response, these other-ed others—particularly queers of color, trans* people, and youth—create grassroots forms of infrastructure that work to build a world in which all lives could be worth living. There is little empirical research on forms of grassroots Q&T* social infrastructure in sub/urban space. In the chapters that follow, I will explore the constellations of places that form such grassroots social infrastructure, affording Q&T* youth the capacity to survive and thrive in Toronto's suburbs.

CHAPTER THREE: RESEARCHING WITH AND FOR QUEER AND TRANS* YOUTH

PRACTICING AN ETHICS OF MUTUAL AID

Make do with what you have
Take what you can get
Pay no mind to us
We're just a minor threat
-Minor Threat

I. INTRODUCTION: NEGOTIATING PRECARITY

How should researchers work with such precarious participants? Participatory action research (PAR) is a methodology that works to address precarity by engaging participants in research design, data collection, knowledge production, and knowledge dissemination (Pain 2003; 2004; Cahill 2007; Cahill et al. 2007; Ybarra 2014; Gilmore 2022). By working with participants to shape the areas of inquiry and research outcomes, PAR can use the research process to channel action that challenges the precarity of participants' communities. Because of its high standard of participant involvement in research design and outcomes, PAR requires well-developed relationships with community members and organizations. This, in turn, requires time: a scarce resource in the neoliberal university, particularly for graduate students (Mountz et al. 2015; Smyth et al. 2019; Loyd et al. 2023). I found myself echoing questions posed by Laura Pulido (2008, 345): "I knew that I was in a vulnerable position, but I also knew that I could not refrain from involvement—What kind of person would I be? I would not be the person that I wanted to be or saw myself as. Could I live with myself?" Participatory research is muddling through the duty to change the world in an institution with a primary imperative to merely interpret it. This is "a messy, often slow, engagement of ideology, power, politics, and context" (Cahill et al. 2010, 408) that requires scholars to pick up the tools at-hand and work from the positions they find themselves in. In response to this bind, I developed my own ethical paradigm for participatory research in the neoliberal

university. This ethics of researching with and for queer youth reimagines the practice of research as mutual aid.

If, as Butler (2015) argues, we have an ethical duty to others because of our shared condition of vulnerability, then, ethical research must be grounded in the practice of solidarity. Further, if both researcher and participant occupy differential positions of vulnerability, then this solidarity can take form as mutual aid: “a form of political” and ethical¹ “participation in which people take responsibility for caring for one another and changing political conditions, not just through symbolic acts... but by actually building new social relations that are more survivable” (Spade 2020, 136). Or, in the words of the groundbreaking punk band Minor Threat: “Make do with what you have; take what you can get; pay no mind to us; we’re just a minor threat.” By applying an ethics of mutual aid in our research and our everyday lives, we can shift the social and spatial patterns that constitute precarity, however modestly.

As I muddled through participatory research, I practiced methods that engaged participants as knowledge co-creators, working with their endogenous analyses to challenge hegemonic cultural norms and academic orthodoxy and understand their everyday Q&T* worlds. I endeavored to not simply produce knowledge, but to change their worlds—in admittedly small, but still meaningful ways—whether by care-fully listening to participants’ life stories, by redistributing capital to un- or under-employed participants, or by helping to sustain the organizations that they rely upon in their everyday lives. This work required careful development of care-*full* relationships. Building rapport entails navigating a matrix of social, political, and institutional power relations that affects participants and researchers in complex and often surprising ways (Katz 1994; Pulido 2008;

1. Of course, the ethical and the political are not identical. Ethics is concerned with the question: ‘what *ought* we do?’ In contrast, politics is concerned with the question: ‘what *can* we do?’ Following Butler, we can see mutual aid as an answer to both questions.

Rosenberg 2019). As a White, nonbinary, queer American new to Toronto, I was neither straightforwardly an outsider or an insider. My academic expertise and personal background caused absurd juxtapositions: moments of ecstatic recognition (like when one participant described the euphoric gender embodiment of raving) that were contrasted with moments of foolish confusion (like when another participant had to explain the location of Guelph, Ontario). These challenges were amplified when discussing emotional personal experiences, and I had to walk a fine line between actively listening to participants' stories and querying them for the necessary context to make sense of their experiences. While the differences between the social positions of myself and participants created challenges for understanding and interpreting their stories, they also served as an epistemic friction that ground away at my preconceptions and helped me grapple with the complexities of Q&T* life in suburban Toronto from my position in Toronto's urban core.

In this chapter, I explain how an ethics of mutual aid guided my methodological decisions and choices in the field. First, I outline three aspects of a research ethics of mutual aid: care, resourcing, and knowledge co-creation. Next, I explain how the ethical imperative of knowledge co-creation shaped my methods, outlining how participant observation, go-along interviews, and participatory photography enable youth to tell their own stories and build their own analyses of precarity. Then, I recount my experiences conducting fieldwork in sub/urban Toronto, discussing my imperfect attempts to negotiate the contradictions of participatory research in the neoliberal academy. Finally, I discuss my strategy for coding and analyzing my dataset, concluding with reflections on the analytical limitations of participatory methods, and how researchers could address them.

2. AN ETHICS OF MUTUAL AID

I drew upon feminist, queer, and participatory action research ethics in order to articulate how researchers should research with and for participants in the restrictive environment of the

neoliberal university (Rose 1997; Oswin 2008; Detamore 2010; Browne and Nash 2010; Di Feliciano et al. 2017; Eaves 2017; Bain and Podmore 2020; Rosenberg 2022). This ethics of mutual aid emphasizes the importance of taking responsibility for each other across difference in order to address our vulnerabilities. In the context of research, an ethics of mutual aid entails practicing care, redistributing resources, and creating knowledge together.

Feminist philosophers have long argued that care is an ethical necessity because of our inherent vulnerability (Sevenhuijsen 1998; Edwards and Mauthner 2002; Butler 2004; 2015; Peake and Sharp forthcoming). Importantly, a universal duty to provide care does not necessarily follow from an ethic of care: practicing an ethic of care “could also mean deciding not to provide care, because one cannot agree with another person’s needs claims... or because one possesses insufficient means to meet or satisfy them, or because these claims conflict too strongly with one’s own needs or [ethical] convictions” (Sevenhuijsen 1998, 84). In this way, an ethic of care is less about imparting moral value upon *acts* of care as it is about internalizing *virtues* of care—such as reflexivity and solidarity—in accordance with a duty to account for the needs of other beings.

An ethic of care often manifests in ordinary moments of affect and embodiment during the research process. For instance, during interviews, I provided food and drink with which participants and I could sustain our bodies; I built in breaks for us to self-regulate by, for example, using the bathroom; and, I was sensitive to the emotional intensity of some topics of conversation, giving participants breaks and social ‘outs’ in order to avoid discussing intense, negative experiences. In one extreme case, this intuitive practice of care manifested as a gentle and forgiving response to one participant’s repeated, last-minute cancellations of our scheduled interviews. When I learned that this disruptive behavior was a result of this participant’s houselessness, I helped connect him to emergency housing and support resources. These ordinary and extraordinary moments of care

were supported by my research design: my open-ended, flexible interview schedule enabled me to bring a contextual sensitivity to participants' needs to bear upon our conversations; go-along interviews empowered participants to choose a location that fit their sensory, embodied, and logistical needs; and my research budget enabled me to divert resources toward practices of care.

Thus, a care ethic dovetails with a framework of mutual aid in the practice of diverting resources from the university to research participants. As Paul Routledge and Kate Derickson (2015) write, resourcing is the empowerment of grassroots groups by redistributing of financial and material resources, building organizational capacity, and facilitating networks of solidarity. Drawing from the scholar-activist tradition, resourcing is articulated at the scale of the organization, working to help grassroots movements become autonomous and independent from academic gatekeepers (see also Derickson and Routledge 2015). I employ resourcing both at the scale of the organization and the scale of the individual research participant. As a graduate student with limited financial resources and labor, I was not able to resource partner organizations on the scale that Routledge and Derickson imagine. Yet, by contributing to the everyday social reproductive labor of Toby's Place, I was able to help sustain, if not expand, the capacities of the organization. Indeed, in one case, I was able to help keep the doors of its regular drop-in programming open by filling in for the lead facilitator of the program when they were ill. By engaging with partner organizations, rather than simply observing them, my ordinary social labor helped sustain their capacities to provide social space for Q&T* youth. At the scale of the individual, resourcing is about identifying the needs of participants, and mobilizing social, financial, and material resources to meet them in care-full ways. Several participants were not employed at the time of our conversation, and the honorarium helped them fill this financial gap. By mobilizing the modest pockets of

research funding available to me through the university, I was able to address, in a small but not insignificant fashion, the financial precarity of participants.

Lastly, an ethic of mutual aid requires the deconstruction of the classical hierarchy between researcher and participant and, in turn, the recognition that participants co-create knowledge. As Spade (2020) argues, building shared analysis is an essential aspect of mutual aid practices because it enables people to imagine collective solutions to the problem of slow death and, in turn, treats affects of loneliness and isolation. This resonates with the methodologies of participatory action researchers, which facilitate “researching with, rather than on participants” (Cahill et al. 2007, 312). Perhaps the most striking moment of knowledge co-creation occurred while I was visiting a LGBTQ affinity space at a university campus in suburban Toronto. Reflecting upon the difficulty of establishing an accurate definition of suburban space, I asked the youth present: “How do we know we’re really in a suburb?” One youth pointed to a row of detached, single-family homes with 2-car garages and wide lawns, as if agitated by my epistemological navel-gazing: “Of course we’re in a suburb; look at the houses across the street!” In other instances, the open-ended nature of my interview questions enabled participants to steer our conversation to the areas they viewed as most important, often bringing up their difficulties finding affordable housing and employment that pays a living wage. By engaging participants not simply as informants, but as experts who already have substantive analyses of their own lives, I grounded my fieldwork in the immediacy of their difficult lives: the challenges of making ends meet in a city where Q&T* youth lives are devalued; the tensions of cohabitating with biological family; and the existential uncertainty about whether a livable future is possible. In this way, knowledge co-creation draws upon the firsthand expertise of participants to build a shared understanding that is not just more accurate, but embedded with the capacity to transform body/minds racked by despair.

An ethic of mutual aid creates a research practice that is caring and care-full, that mobilizes resources to meet the needs of participants, and treats participants as knowledge co-creators. An ethic of mutual aid is grounded in our shared vulnerability and the unpredictability of the research encounter. While this constitutes a more modest intervention than, for example, participatory action methodologies, its flexibility affords researchers the capacity for ethical, meaningful research amid the constraints of graduate research. This echoes Halberstam's poetic description of fugitive being-in-common: "It ends with love, exchange, fellowship. It ends as it begins, in motion, in between various modes of being and belonging, and on the way to new economies of giving, taking, being with and for" (in Harney and Moten 2013, 5). In this way, an ethic of mutual aid means not simply conducting research on Q&T* youth, but researching with and for them: co-creating knowledge and actualizing relations of care in order to steal a glimpse of other possible worlds.

3. PARTICIPATORY METHODS AND KNOWLEDGE CO-CREATION

I employed participant observation, go-along interviews, and participatory photography in order to understand how youth place-making and community-building practices help them survive and thrive in Toronto's sub/urbs. I began with participant observation in Q&T* youth drop-in programs in order to understand the context of Q&T* youth life in Toronto's suburbs. Participant observation foregrounds the thick, "skein of relations and cultural constructions" that animate participants' lives (Herbert 2000, 551; Benson and Nagar 2006; Kusenbach 2003), foregrounding the diverse ways that Q&T* youth inhabit the precarious landscapes of sub/urban Toronto.

Go-along interviews enabled participants to tell their own stories, providing rich insight into the everyday lives of Q&T* youth in Toronto's sub/urbs. Go-along interviews are interviews that take place in a meaningful, everyday location of a participant's choice (Kusenbach 2003; Carpiano

2009).² Because they take place *in* the landscape in question, go-along interviews, whether mobile or stationary, provide unique insights into the relationship between people and place.³ This is because memory is embodied and, consequentially, emplaced: the effect of the relation between self, activity, and environment (Evans and Jones 2011; Spinney 2015; Fuchs 2016; Finlay and Bowman 2017). As one researcher remarks, “Navigating familiar environments full of personal landmarks in many ways resembles going through the pages of a personal photo album or diary” (Kusenbach 2003, 472; c.f. de Certeau 1988). When the researcher moves through a memory-laden landscape with a participant, their presence serves as a sort of rupture to the lamination of self, landscape, and memory, enabling the participant to be at once present with and distant from their memory. The first four interviews I conducted were mobile, and they did indeed open up unexpected moments of reflection.⁴ In one memorable instance, a participant’s anecdote about their habitual visits to a cemetery in their neighborhood led us to walk to the place in question, which, in turn prompted a sustained reflection on the challenges of finding alternative places to be-in-public in the participant’s home neighborhood (Y01). In another, a participant’s perception of an ivy-laden building reminded them of the Ontario Science Center, somewhere they would visit with their parents, which, in turn, prompted a conversation about their parental relationships and experiences of

2 Initially, I had planned to conduct mobile interviews, but the cold, rainy weather of Toronto’s autumn forced me to move interviews indoors midway through my fieldwork. Weather is often noted as a barrier to implementing mobile interviews (Finlay and Bowman 2017; Evans and Jones 2011; Carpiano 2009). To compensate, mobile interviews could take place inside large public spaces, or they could happen along a public transit ride. This particular adaptation poses a difficulty for suburban researchers, as these spaces are less common in suburban space than in urban cores. Only one of my participants chose such a suitable location, the Scarborough Town Centre, and he expressed a preference to remain stationary (Y09).

3. Outdoor go-along interviews also provided intrinsic mitigation to the spread of COVID-19.

4. Mobile interviews also break up the awkward stagnation that can occur in sit-down interviews. One mobile interview (Y02) lasted more than two hours, during which we walked almost 5 kilometers. Without the somatic stimulation of walking and the conversation sparked by the landscape itself, I think the interview would have concluded much sooner.

coming out (Y04). Had we been in a more controlled setting, these spatial resonances would not have provoked conversation, although we might have discussed similar topics and themes anyway.

I complemented go-along interviews with participatory photography in order to gain a fuller sense of the range of places that shape participants' everyday lives. As the cultural theorist Roland Barthes (1981) noted, viewing photographs has a capacity to puncture the taken-for-grantedness of the relationship between self and environment. Thus, they function analogously to go-along interviews, providing a unique entry-point to discussing the relationship between participants and their meaningful, everyday places. Researchers who work with participant photographs employ a number of methods, including photovoice (McIntyre 2003; Sutton-Brown 2014; Bain et al. 2015), photo-elicitation (Harper 2002; Bain and Podmore 2021), and auto-photography (Noland 2006; Johnsen et al. 2008). Many of these methods are grounded in the tradition of feminist, participatory action research, and researchers emphasize how these methods can empower participants to set the focus of research and more directly express their own messages to audiences (Johnsen et al. 2008; Sutton-Brown 2014). However, it is important to remember that photographs are not transparent signifiers—rather, they are embedded within cultures of visual production. As Gillian Rose argues, visual methods do not simply communicate information through what is—or is not—depicted; by “focus[ing] on *visibility* rather than *visuality*,” researchers “sidestep[] the understanding of images as meaningful objects central to symbolic and communicative activity that is core to many theorizations of contemporary visual culture” (2014, 32). Thus, I prefer to describe my use of such methods as ‘participatory photography,’ a term that foregrounds this genealogy and does not equivocate photography with linguistic meaning-making. Later in this chapter, I explain how participants’ photos evince a culture of compulsory visualization structured by smartphones and social media.

For now, suffice it to say that tapping into this visual culture with participatory photography provided glimpses into where and how participants made their lives.

Together, participant observation, go-along interviews, and participatory photography enabled me to directly experience of the everyday places of Q&T* youth in Toronto's sub/urbs. These methods actualized an ethics of mutual aid by engaging participants as active knowledge co-creators. My open-ended go-along interviews enabled participants to shape the research agenda by telling their own stories. Indeed, it is through participants' stories that the themes of precarity and wildness emerged into the foreground of this research. In addition, go-along interviews and participatory photography gave participants the agency to creatively engage (or, refuse) the research themes as they chose the locations of interviews, selected which photographs to share, and decided how to discuss their images. With these participatory methods, participants guided me through the networks of places, relationships, and affects that shape their lives.

4. MUDDLING THROUGH PARTICIPATORY RESEARCH

My fieldwork took shape across three distinct stages. The first began in October of 2021, amid the COVID-19 pandemic and just before the Omicron wave hit Toronto, when I reached out to organizations that provided social services for Q&T* youth in suburban Toronto. Many groups had closed down due to the pandemic restrictions or losses of grant funding, but I was able to get in touch with two active organizations: Queer & Connected and Toby's Place (henceforth Q&C and TP, respectively). Q&C is a program funded by Family Service Toronto that facilitates virtual peer-support groups for Q&T* youth in Toronto and across Ontario. TP is a 'ministry'—a subsidiary organization—of the Birchcliff Bluffs United Church (BBUC) that facilitates weekly drop-in programming for Q&T* youth in West Scarborough, and it is one of the only public social

programs for Q&T* youth in Scarborough (see Figure 4.2).⁵ I was invited to become a member of Q&C's advisory committee in January of 2022, attending bimonthly virtual meetings where the program coordinator reported on the status of the program and committee members provided feedback and suggestions to improve youth engagement. After compounding logistical delays caused by the Omicron wave of COVID-19, I began the second stage in May of 2022, when I started volunteering in-person at TP. From May to December, I commuted to Scarborough from downtown Toronto and volunteered at TP's weekly drop-in program. Here, I performed the ordinary but necessary labor of setting up tables, chairs, and craft supplies; chatting with youth about their weeks; participating in activities, such as chess and art projects; and assisting with clean-up efforts such as dishwashing and taking out trash. While this engagement may seem mundane, when performed with an ethic of care for participants it becomes meaningful work that sustains a place of being-in-common.

Further, observing these everyday activities provided a rich ethnographic backdrop of firsthand knowledge about the everyday lives of Q&T* youth and the complexities of facilitating meaningful queer social spaces in suburban Toronto. After each evening at TP, I would write field notes during my lengthy commute back to Toronto across two subway lines and one bus route. Often, scheduled busses would arrive late, or not arrive at all. I experienced frequent train delays: in one particularly bad instance, a stabbing on my train coincided with a disruption at another station on my subway line, which resulted in a service suspension that added another 90 minutes to my late-night trip home. In this way, transit to and from my field sites did not just give me time to practice ethnography via collecting fieldnotes, but also gave me firsthand experience of the regimes of sub/urban mobility which participants negotiate in their everyday lives.

5. Although TP is supported by BBUC, it does not promote any religion, and it styles itself as a non-denominational space.

The third stage of my fieldwork began in September of 2022, after I received Research Ethics Board (REB) clearance and began interviewing participants. Participants chose a meaningful, everyday place for our conversations (see Figure 3.1; Appendix B: Interview Metadata), which ranged in length from just under an hour to more than two hours, with an average of just under two hours. Participants were provided a \$50 cash honorarium in recognition of their time and expert knowledge on the research questions. Refreshments were also provided to participants during interviews. Before each interview, I invited participants to share three to five photos of other meaningful, everyday places to talk about during our conversation.⁶ Some participants were confused about what sorts of photos to share, so I provided a series of prompts for participants, including “a place where they feel [un]seen as themselves,” “a place where they feel [un]safe to express their identity,” “a place that brings them up when life is hard,” “or, if you are comfortable, a place where you have experienced something difficult” (see Appendix A: Fieldwork Materials).⁷ Discussion of participants’ photographs usually occurred in the middle of interviews, after participants had finished describing the location of the interview and before I posed follow-up questions about key themes. During mobile interviews, this position had a practical function as well: it afforded us a moment to sit down and rest. I opened discussion of each photo by asking participants to simply (or rather, not-so-simply) describe the content of the image, and this exercise often opened into lengthy, detailed discussions of the places depicted in the photos.

With few exceptions, participants drew upon photographs that they had already taken. The fact that most participants, particularly younger ones, had an archive of ordinary and extraordinary photographs on-hand speaks to the ways in which a culture of compulsory visualization has

6. Participants sent as many as six and as few as two photos, with an average of four images per participant.

7. Prompts were worded carefully as to assure participants that they did not necessarily need to share traumatic or emotionally intense photos while still leaving the possibility open, in order to avoid biasing the data toward ‘positive’ places.

become dominant for youth (see Casid 2018). The near-universal use of visual social media platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, Snapchat, and TikTok via camera-laden smartphones means that engaging with this visual culture is effectively mandatory, even if youth themselves have ambivalent relationships with it. There were a range of expressions of this visual culture: most photos were ordinary smartphone photographs, many were thoughtfully framed in order to capture particular affects, and a few were artful film photographs (Y06-02; Y07-06). There is often a strong social dimension to practices of youth photography, as Blackbird, a white nonbinary and queer youth from the York region explains: “This picture was taken in my old area, outside my high school... we’d kind of just go and explore that after school... That was kind of a place that we’d go to explore and take pictures of. We’d do photography stuff there. We’d be dumb teenagers there” (Y01). However, almost all of the photos shared by participants did not depict people. Of the few photos that did depict others, most were shared by one participant who asked that they not be published to protect their privacy. I attribute the apparent contradiction between the photograph dataset and these practices of youth photography to the wording of the informed consent form, which instructed participants to secure the consent of others before sharing their images with me. Such consent can be awkward, bothersome, or even impossible to obtain, if participants do not have the ability to contact subjects of any given photograph. In retrospect, it seems likely that this stock language, chosen to avoid snags during the Research Ethics Board review process, shaped the ways that participants chose to share their personal photograph archives.

Participants took this kind of personal visual archive for granted to such a degree that multiple participants summoned photographs during interviews to illustrate their narratives. However, others lacked an archive of portraits of themselves and friends, because maintaining this kind of photographic archive risked outing themselves to their family. Magpie, a Vietnamese queer and

transmasc youth from Brampton, explained that after a family member discovered their queer sexuality through their Instagram account, “I developed huge amounts of anxiety about social media and pictures. That’s also why I don’t have a lot of pictures of myself, and I don’t post a lot of pictures... I don’t have any pictures of myself” (Y07). As a result, they developed strategies for navigating the ambiguous consequences of online visibility, such as shifting their activity to a private, alternate account⁸ where followers are closely moderated: “I have some [Instagram] highlights, now. I sometimes post on my [private Instagram account] story, but also, the only people who follow me here are my queer friends” (Y07). Thus, while participant photographs were a reliable source of qualitative data, these archives were still laden with the cisheteronormative power relations of compulsory visualization.

Because I prompted participants to share photos of meaningful, everyday places, I expected that most of the photos shared would be located near their home neighborhoods. While there were significant clusters of photos near participants’ home neighborhoods in West Scarborough and Brampton, each participant shared photos that were taken across the GTA, with significant clusters located in the waterfront and urban core of downtown Toronto (see Figure 3.1). In this way, the open-ended nature of participatory photography challenged my assumption that participants’ everyday lives would take place largely around their home neighborhoods, and highlighted the fact that public transit affords a capacity for city-regional mobility that enables some Q&T* youth to geographically extend their lives across the GTA. Participatory photography proved to be a useful counterpart to go-along interviews, providing invaluable data about the range and quality of places in participants’ everyday lives.

8. They ironically refer to this as their “cis-het-sona account” (Y07).

The combination of go-along interviews with participatory photography constituted a flexible assemblage of methods that helped me build rapport with participants. Each interview began with a brief explanation of the project and a formal conversation about potential risks and benefits of participation, participants' anonymity, data storage plans, and participants' legal rights; consequently, participants often began interviews in a guarded, hesitant way.⁹ This was in no small part because the quasi-legal consent forms imply that participants must use their legal names; after several participants expressed concern about whether they were being asked to sign with their legal deadname,¹⁰ I learned to explain early on in the consent process that participants did not need to sign with their legal name, and could use a name of their choice. Because the formalized consent process foregrounded the formal relationships between myself as 'the researcher' and youth as 'the participants',¹¹ youth took long amounts of time to answer opening questions like "tell me about yourself?" and "how do you identify?" as if they were trying to determine what 'the right answer' would be in an academic context, or perhaps figure out what I wanted to hear. The conversational, semi-structured format of my interviews helped me break down this stiff affect and build a more intimate connection between myself and participants throughout the course of our conversation. The discussion of each participant's photos was often a turning point in the course of the interview: after describing the images and explaining their meaning, participants seemed to be more

9. My research training had primed me to worry about the risk of 'coercion;' consequently, my anxiety about explaining the risks and benefits of my research during the formal consent process distracted me from more important tasks, such as introducing myself and explaining the aims of my project (c.f. Haggerty 2004). Ironically, by overemphasizing the formal consent process, I was, in fact, giving participants less information about myself and my project with which to judge whether to participate.

10. Trans* people often change their names to reflect their gender, and they may or may not choose to pursue legal name changes as well. The term 'deadname' refers to a birth or legal name that is no longer used in everyday life.

11. Unsurprisingly, this was less of an issue with participants who I had previously gotten to know as a volunteer at Toby's Place.

comfortable steering the conversation to areas of interest to them. This, in turn, developed a sense of trust between us that enabled participants to share more emotionally intense experiences.

The conversational dimension of my interviews was supported by my positional affinities with participants. As a queer, nonbinary, gender non-conforming young person, many participants' stories resonated with me, and I drew upon my own life in order to ask relevant, caring questions. Conversely, my frictive differences with participants also moved our conversations forward. For example, my lack of knowledge about the differing connotations of East versus West Scarborough prompted several participants to explain this cultural geography. However, these frictions were not always generative. As feminist geographers have long argued, researchers always occupy particular social and political positions within the field of power that constitutes fieldwork, and these positions have strong effects upon how we produce knowledge (Katz 1994; England 1994; Peake 2017). Many of my participants were Q&T* people of color, and this difference between our social positions led some participants to be hesitant when discussing, for example, issues of racialized exclusion from Q&T* community spaces. As Rose (1997) argues, we can never fully account for the effects of our social and political positions. In this vein, I hope to "inscribe into our research practices some absences and fallibilities while recognizing that the significance of this does not rest entirely in our own hands" (Rose 1997, 319).

While building rapport with participants during our conversations came easily to me, participant recruitment was difficult. Many participants who expressed interest became unreachable after an initial exchange of messages. While it is impossible to know why individuals decided not to participate, I hypothesize that youth experiences of precarity, exacerbated by the lingering effects of the pandemic, made it difficult for many participants to commit the time and energy necessary to engage with the project. Initially, I worked with TP's program coordinators to circulate physical

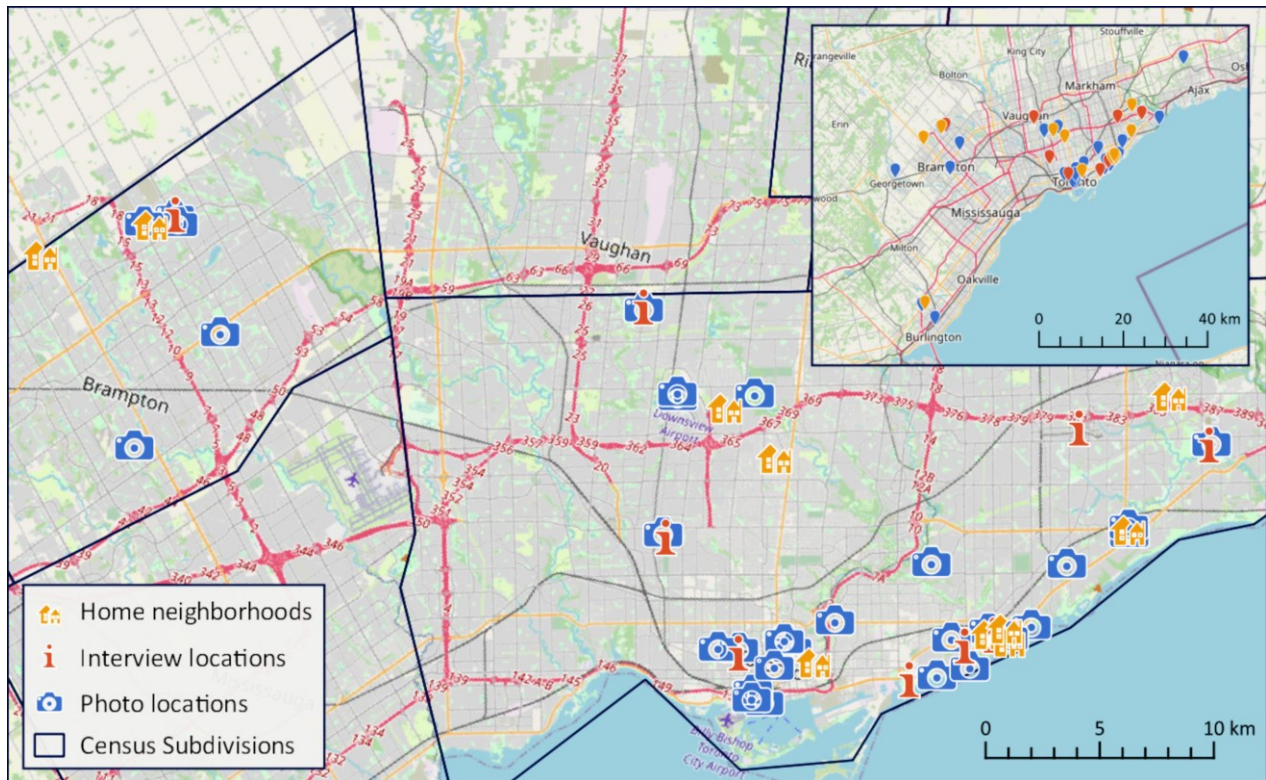


FIGURE 3.1, PARTICIPANTS' HOME NEIGHBORHOODS, INTERVIEW LOCATIONS, AND PHOTO LOCATIONS

and virtual flyers in order to gather a cohort of 15–20 Q&T* youth, aged 16–26, who lived in Scarborough and had participated in TP's drop-in programming (see Appendix A: Fieldwork Materials). However, participation in TP's programming was waning at that time, and I was only able to reach 4 participants this way. After six weeks of recruitment through TP, I decided to expand my geographic focus to the entire GTA in order to broaden the pool of possible participants, and I worked with TP, Q&C, and a number of college-based Q&T* affinity groups to circulate my recruitment materials through their virtual channels. Fortunately, these digital materials were shared widely—one benefit of social media. Of the 23 youth who responded to my call for participants, I was able to interview nine. Two participants referred their partners to the project, and this brought the total number of youth participants to eleven. As a result of these changes in my recruitment strategy, a cluster of participants lived in West Scarborough, but others were dispersed throughout

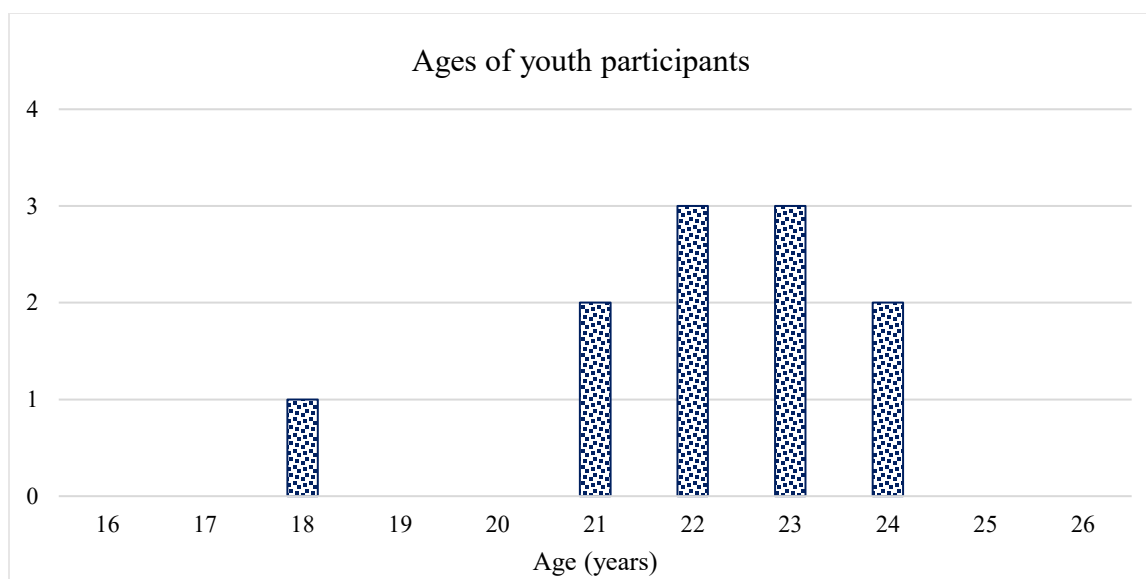


FIGURE 3.2, AGES OF YOUTH PARTICIPANTS

the GTA, as far away as Burlington, Ontario (see Figure 3.1). Participants did not necessarily see themselves as representative of their home neighborhoods, and they spent much of their time outside of their neighborhoods, especially in downtown Toronto. These orientations toward the sub/urban region of Toronto were reflected in participants' choices of interview locations and photos, which were distributed across the GTA.

The average age of participants was 22 years old; the majority ($n=10$) were between 21 and 24 years old, with one being 18 years of age (see Figure 3.2). A majority of participants identified as nonbinary ($n=6$) and as queer ($n=6$), and a minority identified as trans* ($n=4$),¹² as gay ($n=3$), and as bisexual ($n=2$). Three participants identified as men, and no participants identified as women. This is not to say that no participants identified with femininity; rather, feminine participants, described themselves as trans*, nonbinary, and queer. Some participants were skeptical of staking

12. In my analysis, I use the term trans* to refer to transgender, nonbinary, genderqueer, and other gender nonconforming identities. However, here I disaggregate trans* from nonbinary in order to distinguish between how participants self-identified.

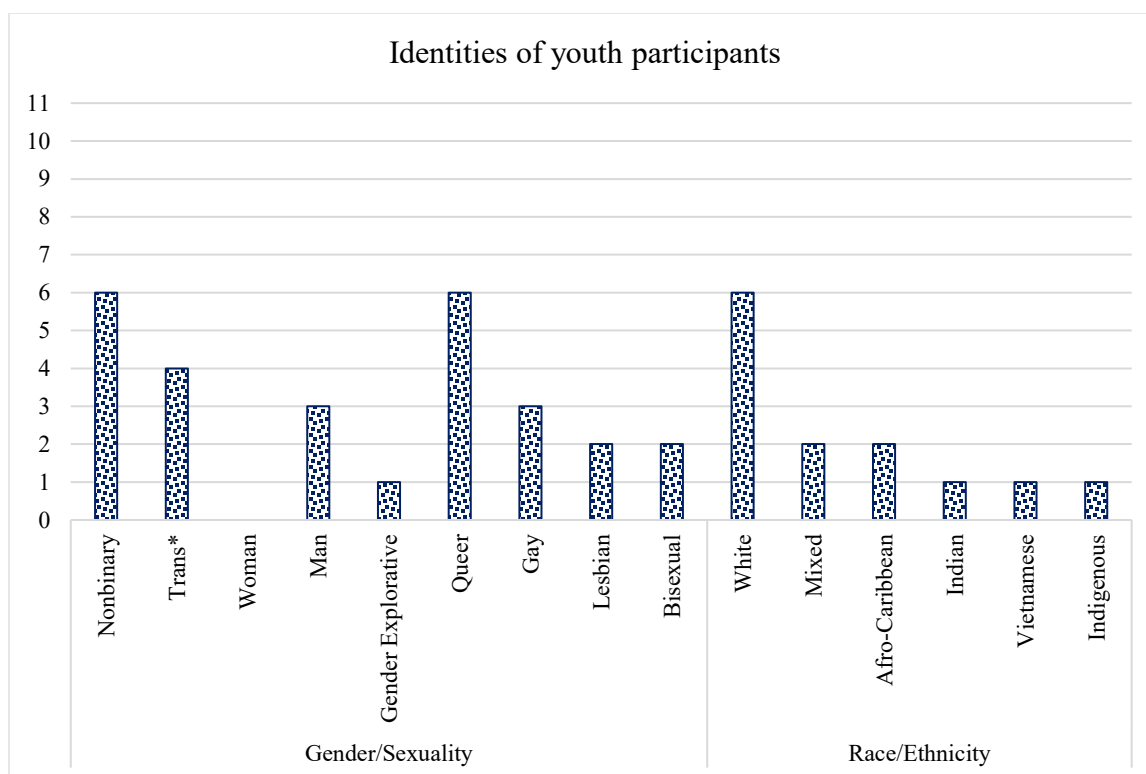


FIGURE 3.3, IDENTITIES OF YOUTH PARTICIPANTS

out specific identity claims, preferring the ambiguous signifiers of nonbinary and queer.¹³ For instance, when asked about how they would like to be referred to in this project, Junco, a youth from Scarborough, provocatively declared: “I guess I fall into that... nonbinary category. But, whatever you want to call me—I don’t give a crap!” (Yo8). Many participants used they/them pronouns, a common choice for Q&T* people who do not want to use either set of the gendered, singular pronouns. Others use multiple sets of pronouns, most often they/them and he/him, or they/them and she/her. Robin, a trans* lesbian youth from Scarborough, disidentified with womanhood and intentionally chose to use it/its pronouns in order to strategically challenge gender norms and anthropocentric worldviews in its everyday life. As it explains, “part of the reason I picked it/its pronouns is because of that, and the way that I see our connection with every other living thing

13. Queer operated as a floating signifier for many participants, who used it to describe gender, sexuality, and sometimes both.

around us. There are so many things that are just as alive as you or me that we still call ‘it’, right?” (Y04). Just over half (n=6) of the youth participants identified as White, and others identified as people of color, some identifying with multiple ethnic groups (see Figure 3.3). Some Q&T* youth of color participants expressed difficulty reconciling their diasporic genders and sexualities with the framework and English-language terminology of gender fluidity that is common in Q&T* spaces. As Thrasher, an Afro-Caribbean participant explains:

It’s also been nice to hear other diasporic Caribbean people speak of their pronouns. I’ve been hearing things like: not they/them, dey/dem... I wish that there was more proof [visibility] of pronoun [diversity] specifically. I’ve done a lot of research around... the language that Caribbean, specifically Jamaican, people use that is genderless and things like that... But, I need the terms. What did you call each other? What did we say?... I think that’s why I have certain issues with using ‘genderqueer’ and [terms] like that. In the spaces that I’m in, when I meet people who identify that way, a lot of them are white. And, I find that a lot of their views on gender actually aren’t the same as mine. (Y03)

Thrasher described themselves as “gender-explorative,” rather than “genderqueer” in an effort to disidentify with this implicit whiteness of queer identification. Throughout this thesis, I foreground participants’ own conceptions of gender and sexuality, building upon their endogenous analyses to contextualize the spatialities of these alternative embodiments.

In October, I decided to augment my data from youth participants by interviewing current and former staff at TP in order to understand different perspectives on the operation of institutionalized social infrastructure. After filing an amendment with the REB, this methodological change was swiftly approved. By December, I had interviewed five staff members: two of TP’s recent program coordinators, one of TP’s former program coordinators, and two BBUC staff who worked closely with the program (see Appendix B: Interview Metadata). For convenience, I conducted some staff interviews in groups. Importantly, I interviewed the TP program coordinators separately from the BBUC staff so that each group felt comfortable discussing tensions with the other groups. Thus, I

ended up with three interviews, ranging in length from just over an hour to nearly 3 hours. These conversations provided insight into the workings of TP and the structural challenges that staff faced when navigating the tensions between funding requirements, institutional values, and the needs of program participants. The interviews with TP's program coordinators took on a casual tone, particularly the interview with the two recent coordinators who I had worked with while volunteering at TP. However, the interview with BBUC staff was much more formal. While it would be an exaggeration to describe these staff as 'elites,' the power differential between us resulted in similar challenges to those inherent in so-called elite interviews (see Harvey 2011). BBUC staff were more likely to challenge my questions, and they indirectly refused to answer on a few occasions, resisting enquiries into areas that they viewed as 'church business' unrelated to my research. Despite these difficulties, these interviews were invaluable for their insight into the structural challenges facing Q&T* youth social service organizations.

Altogether, the fieldwork process took about a year, beginning with the initial stages of organizational outreach in 2021, progressing to participant observation at TP in mid-2022, and concluding with the 11 youth interviews and 3 staff interviews in late 2022. Conducting participatory research on such a strict timeline was a difficult endeavor, primarily because of the time required to build rapport with partner organizations and develop trusting relationships with participants. Nevertheless, these efforts are necessary for research animated by an ethics of mutual aid. This participatory methodology enabled me to not just gather richer data about participants' lives, but to help sustain the organizations that care for Q&T* youth in sub/urban Toronto.

5. DATA CODING, ANALYSIS, AND LIMITATIONS

Data were coded abductively: in dialogue between theory and empirical data.¹⁴ The literature on queer and trans* geographies, in conjunction with my specific research questions, led me to draft an initial set of parent codes at the outset of the coding process: PLACES, AFFECT, RELATIONSHIPS, PANDEMIC, and EVERYDAY RESISTANCE. I added an additional parent code based on my fieldnotes: PRECARIETY. Child codes and sub-codes were added inductively as I coded interview transcripts. On several occasions, I had to break up child codes in order to better distinguish between interrelated phenomena, or different aspects of the same phenomena. For instance, I split HOME and HOUSING to allow me to compare the participants' descriptions of spaces of rest and care (home) with their reflections upon the social and economic space of the household (housing).¹⁵ In addition, I had initially coded participant's experiences of Q&T* community to the AFFECT sub-code QUEER & TRANS FLOURISHING, but this resulted in a sub-code with a significant share of content that was more about micropolitics than affect. As a result, I re-coded these passages to BEING-IN-COMMON, a sub-code of EVERYDAY RESISTANCE. I repeated this process for the codes INSTITUTIONALIZED SOCIAL INFRASTRUCTURE and GRASSROOTS SOCIAL INFRASTRUCTURE, as well as STRESS, ISOLATION & LONELINESS, and SLOW DEATH. During the coding process, I nested some child codes within others, particularly those with few entries. For instance, few participants had siblings, so I nested SIBLINGS and PARENTS within the child code FAMILY. Along similar lines, my inductive coding produced child codes for participants' experiences with Toronto's RAVE, PUNK music, and KINK

14. I employed the qualitative analysis software NVivo during the coding process. The multimedia capacities of this software enabled photographs to be coded simultaneously with interviews, and for specific transcript passages to be associated with each photograph. This was a useful organizational tool as I analyzed participant photographs qualitatively, but because of the relatively small amount of data associated with each photograph, I was unable to produce useful quantitative analysis. With a larger dataset, I could have categorized participant photos and qualitatively analyzed the relationships between photos and thematic codes.

15. I elaborate upon this distinction in Chapter Four.

communities. Because of the similarities between these materials, I aggregated them into the COUNTERCULTURAL COMMUNITY child code, nesting it under the grassroots social infrastructure child code in order to understand associations between these forms of collective life and the PLACES, RELATIONSHIPS, and AFFECTS of participants' lives. Altogether, this process resulted in 7 parent codes and 33 child codes (see Appendix C: Codebook). The PLACES, RELATIONSHIPS, and AFFECT parent codes contained the majority of the child codes, enabling me to understand the different components of participants' everyday spatialities.

Figure 3.4 illustrates the qualitative associations between sub-codes. This dendrogram sorts codes into clusters based upon their similarity and displays the clusters in order of similarity, with the most similar codes being clustered in the latitudinal center of the dendrogram. Child codes with small volumes of data, such as SIBLINGS, were agglomerated in order to improve the consistency of the cluster comparisons. Unsurprisingly, the codes THE CITY and TRANSIT, as well as FAMILY and PARENTS, are the most similar sets of codes. Interestingly, these two sets of codes had a strong correlation with each other, and they are part of a sub-cluster that includes MOBILITY and STRESS. Cluster 10 also includes a sub-cluster composed of the SUBURBS and VIRTUAL PLACES, as well as COVID-19 and SLOW DEATH, as well as another sub-cluster composed of HOUSING and INSTITUTIONALIZED SOCIAL INFRASTRUCTURE. This cluster suggests that housing, family relationships, and fragmented sub/urban mobilities shape the contours of precarity for participants. Also of interest here is Cluster 9, which demonstrates a close relationship between housing AFFORDABILITY and the affects of ISOLATION & LONELINESS. These correlations serve as the basis for Chapter Four, which explores how family and housing shape the spatialities of Q&T* youth life in Toronto's suburbs, and how they navigate the uneven mobilities of the sub/urbs in order to access institutionalized social infrastructure such as drop-in social service programs that work to

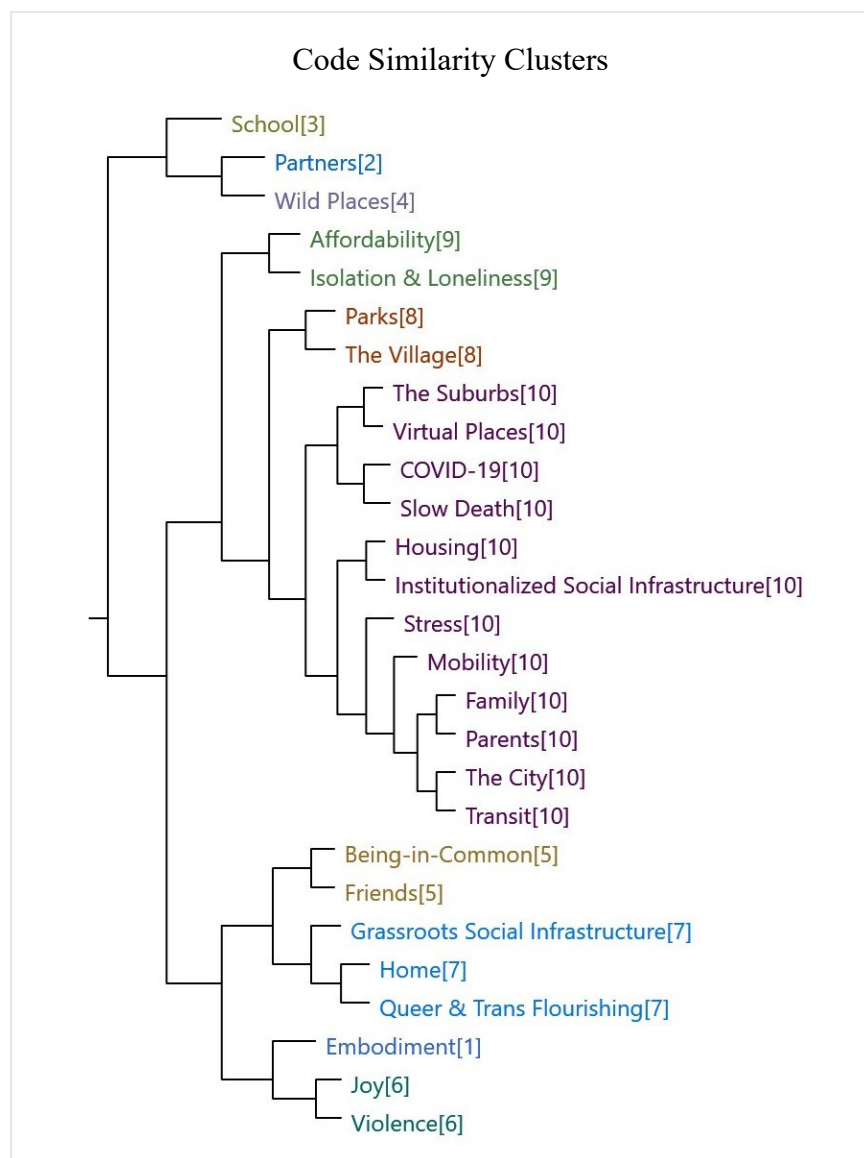


FIGURE 3.4, CODE SIMILARITY CLUSTERS

address their precarity. Clusters 5 and 7 are constituted respectively by BEING-IN-COMMON and FRIENDS, as well as GRASSROOTS SOCIAL INFRASTRUCTURE, HOME, and QUEER & TRANS FLOURISHING. These clusters suggest that friendship and youth-led places of conviviality challenge precarity and facilitate Q&T* youth flourishing. As such, these clusters serve as the basis for Chapter Five, which unpacks participants' experiences of grassroots social infrastructure and examines where Q&T* youth build these communities in Toronto's sub/urbs.

Figure 3.4 also shows the outlier clusters of this dataset. The proximity of clusters 2, 3, and 4 is especially perplexing because each of these clusters is constituted by only a single code: PARTNERS, SCHOOL, and WILD PLACES, respectively. This association seems to be a product of the limited scale of my dataset, as my conversations with participants did not linger much on schools,¹⁶ and less than half of participants discussed relationships with their partners. While the size of the dataset was affected by factors largely outside of my control, it nevertheless limits the generalizability of the findings I present in Chapters Four and Five. Ultimately, this thesis is an exploratory study, and future research is necessary to flesh out its findings.

This is perhaps another challenge of participatory research methodologies: the additional time and effort required to conduct participatory research can lead to smaller datasets and less generalizable findings. I attempted to mitigate this limitation with my research design, which provided participant observation, interview, and participatory photography data about how and where Q&T* youth make their lives in sub/urban Toronto. If an ethic of mutual aid requires that we employ methodologies that may produce data with limited generalizability, then a wider array of participatory research is needed to get a fuller picture of, in this case, the nuance of Q&T* youth life in the sub/urban periphery. This resonates with a core tenant of feminist research: that knowledge is necessarily partial, contingent upon the knower (Harding 1986; England 1994; Rose 1997; Haraway 1998). If we consider participatory research guided by an ethics of mutual aid in dialogue with feminist standpoint theory, then we can appreciate that limited generalizability need not be epistemically detrimental. Rather, through a multiplicity of participatory research endeavors, a research ethics of mutual aid can produce a ‘strong objectivity’ of partial knowledges co-produced with participants. This thesis, then, constitutes a modest step toward such epistemic horizons.

16. The longest conversations associated with education were about university LGBTQ2S campus centers, which were primarily coded to INSTITUTIONALIZED SOCIAL INFRASTRUCTURE (Y04; Y06; Y07; Y09).

CHAPTER FOUR: UNCANNY SUB/URBANISMS

HOME, URBAN MOBILITY, AND INSTITUTIONALIZED SOCIAL INFRASTRUCTURE

If I go, there will be trouble
If I stay, there will be double
So, you gotta let me know:
Should I stay or should I go?

-The Clash

I. INTRODUCTION: PRECARIITY AND SUB/URBANIZATION

Q&T* youth precarity in Toronto's suburbs is undergirded by its cisheteronormative social infrastructure. That is, the unaffordable housing infrastructure, fragmented transit infrastructure, and unequally distributed institutions of Q&T* community-building render sub/urban Q&T* youth disproportionately vulnerable. These youth face greater barriers to accessing essential, life-affirming places of community, which translate into less access and, in turn, an increased vulnerability to the loneliness, isolation, and suicide that is endemic to Q&T* youth. I found that Q&T* youth developed strategies of dwelling in and around the city in order to address the problems of sub/urban social infrastructure, particularly the precarity of the cisheteronormative household. This precarity was amplified during the COVID-19 pandemic, when Ontario's provincial lockdown policies further restricted access to Q&T* social infrastructure. When some of these strategies were made unviable during the pandemic lockdown, youth augmented the form of the cisheteronormative household, shifting its affordances and making space for Q&T* life.

To contextualize the precarity of Q&T* youth life in sub/urban Toronto, I review the sub/urbanization of the GTA with a focus on housing and transit infrastructure. The sub/urbanization of Toronto began with European colonization, transforming First Nations territory first into a colonial military outpost, then to a provincial node in economies of finance, resource extraction, and

industrial production, and finally to the metropolitan *entrepot*¹ of today: a polycentric urban region of more than 6 million people (Bolduc et al. 2021; Jacob 2022; Freeman 2010; Harris 2004; Relph 2014; Sorensen and Hess 2015). Housing was central to this process. Toronto’s contemporary housing infrastructure can be traced through the British notion of real property and the colonial survey to the social infrastructure of ‘homesteading.’ In the late eighteenth century, colonial administrators bound together the legal unit of the plot, the architectural form of the home, and the social relations of the family in the form of the ‘homestead,’ in order to dispossess Indigenous peoples of their lands, consolidate power in the hands of a white, male elite, and produce surplus value for landowners (Jacob 2022; Damiani and Piper 2022; Greer 2018). As the urban sociologist Craig Willse (2015, 33) argues, “The result of these colonial implantations is a conceptualization of race”—and, I would add, gender²—“through and as property forms and property rights. Property forms and rights in turn provide political and economic reinforcement of the racial subordination they put in place.” In the last 25 years, the Canadian state has facilitated the financialization of the GTA’s housing infrastructure, the gentrification of the urban core, and the disinvestment of the GTA’s racialized suburbs (Cowen 2005; Hulchanski 2010; Lo et al. 2015; Joy and Vogel 2015). This uneven development of housing infrastructure worked hand-in-glove with the unequal provision of public transit infrastructure and the state’s focus on automobilities (Lo et al. 2015; Mettke 2015). Altogether, Toronto’s neoliberal turn produced a fragmented region that is not quite urban but not quite

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1. At the end of the millennium, Toronto had become what the “the world’s entrepot for extraction... an important site of command and control for the finance-extractive-infrastructure nexus” (Cowen 2020, 481–82).
 2. Women were not legally permitted to own property in Ontario until the end of the nineteenth century, rendering them economically, socially, and in an intimate sense, materially dependent upon men (Backhouse 1988). For decades thereafter, women were systemically excluded from the Canadian housing market: “Women are invisible, subsumed within a framework of ‘family’; and the particular family form dominant in housing policy is that of the patriarchal, privatized nuclear family” (Novac 1995, 53).

suburban: in this sub/urban space, wealth and poverty may be in close physical proximity but are nevertheless worlds apart.

Again, housing infrastructure is central to this precarious worlding. As Nicholas Blomley notes, “the word *precarious* was first used in the English language for a property relationship where a person is granted access to property at the pleasure or will of another” (Blackwell et al. 2022, 138). From the time of its colonial settlement, Toronto’s housing infrastructure has concentrated wealth, power, and control over the fundamental resource of shelter in the hands of a minority. The high cost of housing—which is to say, the classed provision of housing infrastructure—is central to the precarious worlding of sub/urban Toronto, especially for youth, who often depend upon their biological family for access to shelter. A 2016 Statistics Canada Report found that in the Toronto Census Metropolitan Area (CMA), 57% of youth aged 20 to 29 lived with their parents—a figure which rises to more than 75% in the suburbs of Richmond Hill, Vaughan, and Pickering (Milan 2016).³ Present numbers are almost certainly higher, given the increasing cost of housing in the GTA and the number of youth who returned to the homestead of their biological families during the COVID-19 pandemic. Those who cannot afford to own housing must conform to the normative image of the model tenant, and those who cannot afford to rent must conform to the whims of those willing to house them. Foucault connected the structure of property division, the architecture of the household, and the disciplining effects of tenancy thus:

The very grid pattern, the very layout, of the estate articulated, in a sort of perpendicular way, the disciplinary mechanisms that controlled the body, or bodies, by localizing families (one to a house) and individuals (one to a room). The layout, the fact that individuals were made visible, and the normalization of behavior meant that a sort of spontaneous policing

3. Across Canada, the proportion of youth living with their parents was significantly higher for so-called “visible minority” youth, 51.5%, than those who identified as “not a visible minority,” 39.6% (Statistics Canada 2011). Specific data regarding racialized differences at the scale of the Toronto CMA was not reported. This difference is likely due to multiple factors, including both the racialization of poverty as well as cultural differences regarding the appropriate age for youth to move out of the family home.

or control was carried out by the spatial layout of the town itself. (Foucault 2003b, 251; In Willse 2015, 31)

In this way, the social infrastructure of housing disciplines—and straightens—subjects at the same time as it produces uneven geographies of agency across the sub/urban region.

In this way, social infrastructure congeals to afford some the possibility of life and to foreclose the lives of others. Or, drawing from the work of the philosopher Sara Ahmed (2006, 51), objects work together to orient us toward some lives, and away from others: “When things are orientated they are facing the right way: in other words, the objects around the body allow the body itself to be extended.” Social infrastructure is nothing more, and nothing less, than the agglomeration of objects and their orientations: in our embodied inhabitation of social infrastructure, we shape and are shaped by its field of power. Elsewhere, Bain and I (forthcoming) have explored how housing is a central nexus of social infrastructure for Q&T* people in suburban Toronto. As we will see, the social infrastructure of housing grounds Q&T* youths’ everyday practices of sub/urban dwelling. Housing works with other forms of sub/urban social infrastructure, such as transit, to shape not just the affordances of sub/urban networks of social infrastructure, but youths’ very orientations toward the city region of Toronto.

We could say that the affect of not-being-at-home—or *being-not-at-home*, the German *unheimlich*—is rather uncanny.⁴ In the twentieth century, Sigmund Freud’s *Das Unheimliche* was translated in to English as *The Uncanny*, mapping the notion of unfamiliarity or revealedness of the German *unheimlich* to the weirdness or supernatural associations of the English *uncanny*.

4. The etymological roots of the word uncanny lie in the old Scottish word *vincannie*, referring to the character of mischief or malice. By the eighteenth century, the English *uncanny* had cemented an association with the supernatural, and over the next two hundred years, its usage would retain traces of the occult while broadening to refer more generally to the dangerous, the weird, or the unsettling (Oxford English Dictionary, s.v.). The ‘uncanny valley’ effect refers to the unsettling feeling of misrecognizing a thing—usually a doll or a machine—as a being.

Freud wrote that the *unheimlich* is that feeling of strange familiarity that signifies a rupture of one's experience of the world, a shift in perspective that enables us to conceive of that which is normally concealed, to notice phenomena that we normally take for granted (Krell 1997; Fisher 2016). Freud's notion bears an uncanny resemblance to that of Martin Heidegger, who thought of the *unheimlich* not as a response to sublimated phenomena, but as an existential condition.⁵ If we recall Butler's (2015) assertion that we are thrown into the world not by our own choosing, we can begin to understand Heidegger's argument that *unheimlich* is essential to *dasein*, or there-being: we are forlorn, not at home in the world in which we have been thrown into—not at home in the world in which we make our lives (Withy 2015). The quality of homeliness is manufactured, and not afforded equally to all. The world, then, is more of a home to some than others. In this way, the affect of the uncanny—in this case, not feeling at home in the cisheteronormative household—is the fissure by which many Q&T* youth come to know the strange truth that we are not at home in the world. It is through this strange affective-ontological circuit that these experiences of precarity at home shape how Q&T* youth orient themselves toward the precarious landscapes of the sub/urbs. In what follows, I explore the uncanny sub/urbanisms of Q&T* youth, beginning with the cisheteronormative household, expanding outward through transit to places of institutionalized social infrastructure, and then returning to the home, but differently, discussing how Q&T* youth challenge the precarity of the household during the extraordinary moment of the COVID-19 pandemic.

5. Heidegger deliberately does not refer to Freud in his development of the *unheimlich*, even though he was certainly aware of Freud's writings on the subject.

2. HOUSING AND (UN)HOMELINESS

It should come as no surprise that housing was at the center of participants' experiences of precarity. Housing is ambivalent social infrastructure for Q&T* youth, and its affordances vary dramatically with the social, economic, and legal relations that constitute it. Here, I distinguish between housing and the home: the home is a contested, political space for social reproduction, where people can tend to each other's physiological, social, and emotional needs (Tuan 2004; Blunt 2005). Following Willse (2015, 2), I refer to this systemic analysis of the home as housing, and the particular instance of housing as the household: not simply a place for living, but an assemblage of legal dwelling rights, property markets, architectural forms, and social relationships—"a technology for the organization and distribution of life, health, illness, and death." This distinction helps explain why passages of interviews coded to 'HOUSING' were associated with 'STRESS' and 'SLOW DEATH' (Figure 3.4, Cluster 10), while their discussions of home were associated with 'FLOURISHING' (Figure 3.4, Cluster 7). As Schroeder (2015) suggests, when a house becomes a home, it can be a sanctuary for Q&T* youth, but when a household remains a place of bare life, it is more akin to a prison.

Few of the youth interviewed for my study can even afford to rent dwelling space shared with friends, and for many, access to dwelling space is contingent upon the will of their parents. Pipit, a white, Q&T* lesbian youth from Scarborough, reports significant class divisions between Q&T* youth who can afford to rent, and those who cannot: "My friends who are coming from elsewhere, whose parents do not live in Toronto, who went to university in Toronto, I think come from more money than I do. I think their parents are often paying for their apartments" (Y02). Of the eleven participants interviewed in this study, nine lived with their biological parents in single-family households, one could afford to rent in the GTA by splitting the cost of an apartment with their

partner, and the final participant lived in social housing in downtown Toronto after being kicked out by his parents. The challenge of cohabitating with one's biological family is amplified for Q&T* youth, who often face homophobia or transphobia from their families. Meadowlark, a white trans* youth from Burlington, puts it bluntly: "My dad has a lot he needs to work on: it makes my home life not super emotionally safe. There was a while where there would be transphobic statements... My dad routinely reminds me that it's his house, and I just *get* this room..." (Y10). In a similar way, Pipit explains how their relationship with their parents is central to their experience of precarity:

It is very difficult being in this scenario in which—I love my mom to bits, I have a very good relationship with my mom... My father and I have a fairly bad relationship, but I need him to like me enough to continue tolerating me, or I will be dead. You know? I'm sure that there are friends who would help me if I got kicked out of my house, but I am in a position in which I have to rely on the charity of others to an extent... I got good grades, I graduated [from university] with distinction. I can't find a job that will pay me a living wage. And, most of the people I know can't find jobs that will pay them living wages... I think we're all in this position in which we're adults but we need our parents to still like us enough for us to not be dead... I feel like I can't be myself around my family, because if I'm myself around my family, then I'm screwed. So, I have to be very, very careful. (Y02)

Here, Pipit explains that the juxtaposition of their experience of precarity and their transphobic father's control over their shelter forces them to choose between the physical danger of homelessness and the hazard of a social death where "I can't be myself around my family" (Y02). This resonates with the observations of Valentine, Skelton, and Butler (2003, 495): "Individuals negotiate these complex emotions by playing on the differential relationships that they have with individual family members." Managing the visibility of Q&T* embodiment is one of the strategies that youth must develop for managing family relationships in order to maintain access to dwelling space—in the end, youth have no legal rights to dwell in their parents' homes, and their access to dwelling is contingent upon their parents' desires. Participants described many such micro-political

strategies, including performances of gender or sexual normativity, censorship of their speech or other forms of self-expression, wardrobe restrictions, performances of compensatory household labor, and tactical avoidance of social interactions. Thrasher, an Afro-Caribbean Q&T* youth from Scarborough, described the stress of these everyday practices of relationship management:

So, I lived with [my Dad], and, he kind of leveraged that: the fact that I was living with him... because my mom kicked me out... He knew I didn't have another home to go to, and that's why some of his conditions—like, I have to go to church with him on Sundays, otherwise he'll kick me out. Or, I cannot wear this tiny skirt... So, I would wear tighter things to make myself feel like I could shape my body... and he hated that. So, [he exerted] a lot of control in those ways... I think that what I learned from that is that... just because someone's family doesn't mean you're going to get along with them. I know that I learned that prior with my mom, but it was like learning it again in a completely different way. The conflict that exists isn't always going to be violent—physically violent—but it can be violent in different ways. (Y03)

Similarly to Pipit, Thrasher identified their parents' control over their shelter as the conduit for anti-trans violence.⁶ In the face of this cisheteronormative violence, Q&T* youth come together to help each other survive and thrive. As Magpie, a Vietnamese queer and transmasculine youth from Brampton, explains:

A lot of [my] friend group is trans, too, and we've had to help make contingency plans for friends who might need to escape their homes or move out of their place... Thankfully, we haven't had to act on those plans. One of my friends, who I lived about twenty minutes away from—I was actively his emergency plan, because I had the car. Since he couldn't drive, he had way less ability to get out and go and move between things. (Y07)

In this way, the unequal affordances of shelter and mobility of sub/urban social infrastructure render Q&T* youth more vulnerable to cisheteronormative violence from family. In this environment, youth must be each other's emergency infrastructure, providing critical aid in the face of the precarious abandonment of the colonial modern metropolis.

6. Much like other forms of cisheteropatriarchal violence, such as sexual assault, this form of anti-trans violence is often perpetuated through intimate relationships (see Hereth 2021; Durso and Gates 2021).

By vesting control of the home and its inhabitants in the hands of parental owners or leaseholders, at the exclusion of the youth who reside with them, the legal-architectural form of the household undergirds this intimately structural violence that Pipit, Thrasher, and other participants describe. In this way, the unjust provision of housing infrastructure in the GTA, structured by property ownership and market exchange, forces many Q&T* youth to navigate unsupportive, tense, and sometimes violent parental relationships in order to maintain a place to live—and, ultimately, “to not be dead” (Yo2). Thus, the social infrastructure of housing is a technology for the reproduction of cisheteronormativity, forcing Q&T* youth to discipline their gender and sexuality under the deadly threat of homelessness.

Caring relationships can transform the form of the household into a place of solace, where Q&T* youth and their loved ones can tend to each other’s social, emotional, and physiological needs. While the privacy of the household can work to occlude violence within the family, it can also afford Q&T* youth the capacity for gender and sexual experimentation. Junco, a white non-binary and queer youth from Scarborough, described how the presence of their stepdad in the family home had a chilling effect on their speech, style, and expressions of gender and sexuality: “Even though I had my own room, the walls were paper thin.” When their stepdad was “kicked out” of the family home, they described an embodied sense of relief from the stress of self-censorship: “I can actually breathe!” As they elaborate:

Nowadays, you’ll catch me walking around the house in a freaking skirt. My mom goes: ‘hah, looks good!’ and flashes me a thumbs up. Before that, you wouldn’t catch me wearing anything less than jeans or sweatpants. I wouldn’t even dare to wear shorts that were actually short... in the house is one thing, when you’re wearing something, but when you step out of the house, it feels different. Wearing a crop top and booty shorts for the first time outside of the house was like, ‘wow, that’s wind on my legs! Wow!’ It felt a little bit nerve-racking at first, but then it felt nice—like, ‘I should do this more often.’ This is what I’d been missing out on. (Yo8)

As Junco explains, the household can function as an Orwellian space of discipline and surveillance. Recalling Foucault's comments at the outset of this chapter, we can see how the panoptic architectures of the cisheteronormative household can force youth to police not just their speech, but their embodiments—their very relation with the world. In contrast, we can see how these architectures can be inhabited differently. When Q&T* youth dwell with life-affirming companions, the privacy of the household affords greater capacities to care for each other's needs and the capacity to experiment with alternative embodiments. This resonates with Giesecking's (2020, 227) observation that lesbian "U-hauling"—moving in with one's partner relatively early in one's relationship—is a cultural response to the brutal realities of housing in precarious sub/urban space.

Thrasher explains that before they moved in with their partner, "I was incredibly anxious, I remember shutting myself in—I was fearful to go and see people. I was just not well." Echoing Junco, they note that after moving in with their partner, "I can just breathe!" They continue, "now that I'm at home, I don't experience social anxiety to that same extent at all. I thought it was just a me thing, but it wasn't just a me thing: it was an environment thing" (Y03; see Figure 4.1). It is no coincidence that Thrasher's photo centers on a window: their last apartment was dark and claustrophobic—living in the West End of Toronto, they could not afford a dwelling space where they could breathe fresh air. In this way, breathing is a metaphor for the porousness of dwelling in the threshold between self and world: life amid atmospheres of violence can be slowly suffocating, and a place of care is more than just a breath of fresh air—livable homes are like oxygen, a fundamental resource for a flourishing life. As Ahmed (2006, 11) writes, "Loving one's home is not about being fixed into a place, but rather it is about becoming part of a space where one has expanded one's body, saturating the space with bodily matter: home as overflowing and flowing over." In this way, Q&T* youth can extend themselves in the architectures of the home, augmenting the



FIGURE 4.1, THRASHER LOOKS OUT A WINDOW OF THEIR SHARED APARTMENT (Y03-03)

affordances of this social infrastructure as they actualize alternative embodiments of gender and sexuality. If Q&T* youth have no place to call home in Toronto's sub/urban worlds, then they cannot imagine a future for themselves. As Blackbird, a white nonbinary and queer youth from North York, explains: "With the housing market these days, [living in the GTA is] not super realistic... I think I don't really know what my future will look like: I don't know where I'm going to live; I don't know if I'll have someone, or a partner, who I'll live with; I don't know if I'm going to have kids; I don't know if I'm going to have a stable job. So, there's a lot of unknowns" (Y01).

Blackbird’s description illustrates the interconnections between housing, precarity, and futurity: because housing infrastructure in the GTA forecloses Q&T* youth the capacity to plan and actualize their futures, these youth are forced to deal with uncertainty, exclusion, and violence in the present.

This exploration into participants’ experience of housing suggests that Q&T* youth address the ambivalent affordances of the home by engaging with social infrastructure elsewhere. I return to the question of housing later in the chapter, exploring how youths’ practices of dwelling augment the affordances of housing infrastructure, when I discuss how the COVID-19 pandemic changed the spatialities of participants’ lives. But first, I consider how the unjust affordances of housing infrastructure shaped the spatialities of Q&T* youth lives before the pandemic, animating circulations between the sub/urban household, transit infrastructure, and institutionalized social infrastructure elsewhere in the GTA.

3. INSTITUTIONALIZED SOCIAL INFRASTRUCTURE AND URBAN-REGIONAL MOBILITY

Q&T* social infrastructure is not equally distributed across the city-region: explicit LGBTQ2S social services, community centers, and nightlife spaces are concentrated downtown and in several “queer-friendly” neighborhoods in the urban core (Nash 2013; Nash and Gorman-Murray 2014; see Figure 4.2). This problem is exacerbated for youth under 19, who, in Canada, are legally barred from nightlife places that serve alcohol, which are central nodes of queer social networks (see Campkin 2020). Consequently, social spaces like drop-in social programs are some of the only non-educational institutionalized forms of social infrastructure for Q&T* youth—a sort of home-away-from-home. Drop-in programs are often supported by neighborhood community centers, nonprofit social service organizations, or religious institutions, and they are often facilitated by

social workers and younger Q&T* ‘peer mentors.’ Drop-in programs are informal social spaces that can provide Q&T* youth the space to make friends outside of their neighborhoods or schools, to experiment with their gender and sexuality, to try on different clothing and makeup, and to feel less alone in the world. As Killdeer, a nonbinary, bisexual, “mixed” ethnicity youth from Scarborough explains about the drop-in peer-support program Toby’s Place:

It was central to my life because it was a very calm space... There were a lot of kids there who were getting bullied at school, a lot of art kids, drama kids, ‘weird’ kids. Thinking back now, it was also a space where I felt I could ‘unmask’ a little bit. I didn’t have to socially perform in the same way... It was acceptable for me to just be. Especially, like, go-arounds: people sharing their name, pronouns, answering questions—it was a place that fostered community. (Y11)

Killdeer’s reflections suggest that institutionalized social infrastructure best supports Q&T* youth when they create semi-structured, open-ended social space for youth to build relationships outside of the disciplining environments of home and school, facilitating a process of coming-to-know oneself with and through their engagements with others. Junco underscored how this open-ended aspect of Toby’s Place helped them explore their gender and sexuality: “it played a much bigger role than I’d normally talk about. Like, yeah: the first time I wore makeup was down here. It was great. Something small like that, some people think, ‘oh, it’s just makeup.’ But for me, no—figuring out stuff for myself, I felt like I could actually wear it and not be beaten up in the streets like my parents said would happen...” (Y07). This illustrates the critical import of drop-in programs for queer and trans* youth who do not feel at home in the family household: for some youth, these places of institutionalized social infrastructure afford the capacity to build Q&T* community.

Yet, these drop-in programs are not equally distributed throughout the city-region. Most active drop-in programs are concentrated downtown, and almost all of them are located within the City

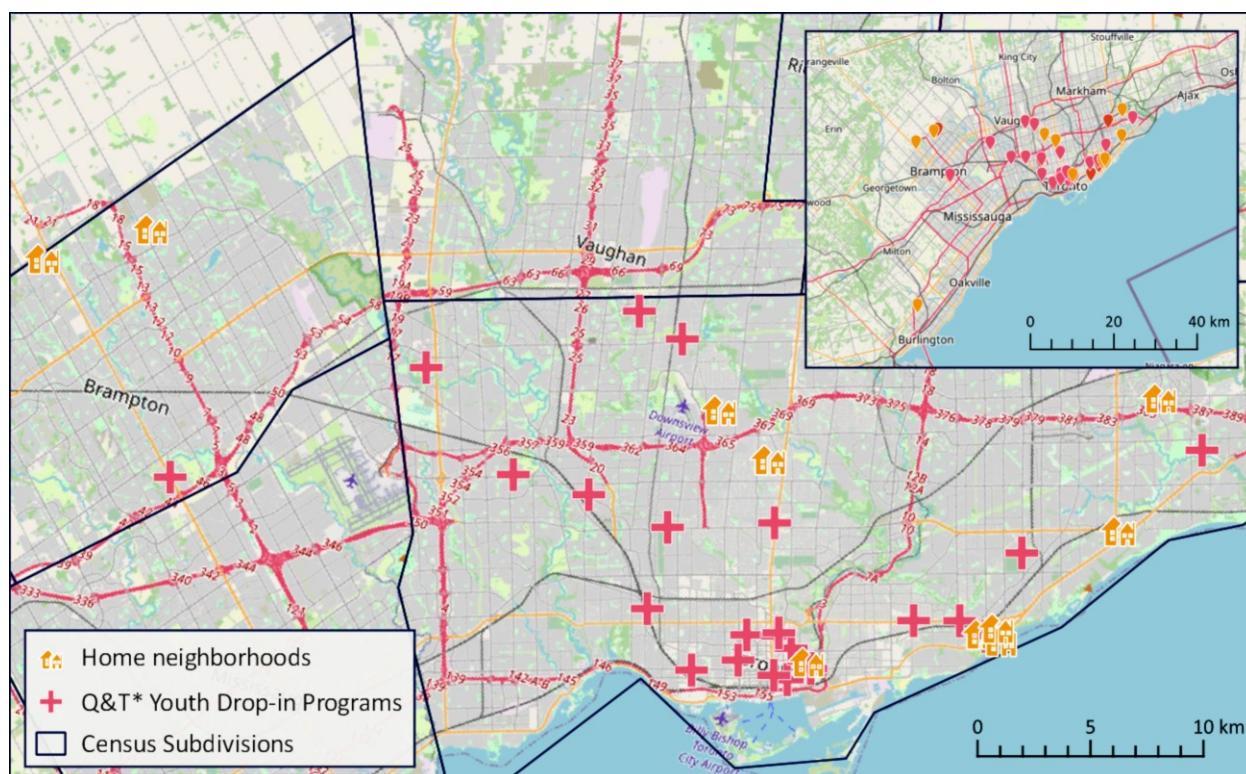


FIGURE 4.2, ACTIVE Q&T* YOUTH DROP-IN PROGRAMS AND PARTICIPANT HOME NEIGHBORHOODS⁷

of Toronto. There are 25 Q&T* youth drop-in programs that serve the approximately 775,000 youth⁸ in the GTA: 10 are downtown,⁹ 13 are elsewhere in the Toronto census subdivision, one is in Brampton, and one is in Oshawa (see Figure 4.2). Interestingly, several groups located in Toronto's suburbs were associated with universities.¹⁰ Suburban universities can be more liberal than their host communities when it comes to LGBTQ2S inclusion, and they can offer significant spatial and financial resources for Q&T* youth to build their own social infrastructure. Robin explains that their student-run LGBTQ campus center was a lifeline during an extremely difficult period in

7. Peer-support groups frequently close because nonprofits cannot access sustainable sources of funding. This map depicts peer support groups for Q&T* youth as of May 2023. It does not represent school GSAs, general LGBTQ2S+ support groups, programs that had not met in the last six months, or the handful of programs that were operating in a virtual capacity.

8. Youth ages 15 to 29 in the Toronto Census Metropolitan area (Statistics Canada, 2022). Data is not disaggregated by sexuality, making it difficult to estimate the number of Q&T* youth in the GTA.

9. South of Bloor Street, east of the Don Valley, and West of Dufferin Street.

10. University of Toronto-Scarborough, York University, and George Brown College.

their life: “It saved me. Every part of these last couple of years here [at university] would be worse without it” (Y04). For Robin, the campus center’s proximity and long hours of operation rendered it much more accessible than places of institutionalized social infrastructure downtown, which necessitate an hours-long commute after a full day of work or study. As a result, their LGBTQ campus center became the most important place of Q&T* community in their life:

It’s a place where I can fully be myself, and it’s full of friends. It’s something that is very unique to this school, specifically. Instead of a club meeting, or whatever, it is a room that we have full access to, all day, every day, with little to no oversight. So, it’s a space that has been a lot to a lot of different people. We have a kettle in there, we have snacks, we have drinks. Lots of people have slept there overnight, if they haven’t been able to go home for any reason. It’s a space that—because of the fact that it is completely student-controlled, and completely gay-controlled—is so open and loving and able to be anything. (Y04).

Magpie also noted how these student-run campus centers can provide critical aid for Q&T* students who may face the threat of homelessness:

For a fact, we’ve had friends or people who have been dealing with houselessness and have crashed here in the interim... Actually, you wouldn’t know now, but [the student center] used to—in my first year, a lot of people who didn’t have a place to crash were sleeping all around the student center at night. It was, like, a prominent thing. But then the student center changed some stuff, or tightened certain security things, so they weren’t able to crash here anymore. Which was brutal. I thought that was really cruel. A lot of those folks came here in the Winter, especially... We are sitting on a futon couch [in our space]: that is intentional. I think that’s the best I can say.” (Y07)

In this way, drop-in peer support programs can function as a home away from home—or perhaps more accurately, a home away from the household—for Q&T* youth. As Robin and Magpie explain, the peer-controlled aspect of these places affords Q&T* youth a space for socialization, recreation, and rest away from the surveilling gaze of straight peers and adults. One participant



FIGURE 4.3, A MURAL AND MANY COUCHES ARE CENTRAL TO THE COMMON SPACE AT TBLGAY (Y07-01)

shared a photo of one such place of institutionalized social infrastructure: TBLGAY,¹¹ a Q&T* youth organization at York University (See Figure 4.3). As we see in this photo, youth make homely this place of institutionalized social infrastructure by painting murals on walls; using couches, pillows, and even a stuffed *Blåhaj*¹² shark to create a comfortable place for socialization and rest; and providing access to amenities like snacks, drinks, bathrooms, and refrigeration. For Q&T* youth who are also university students, LGBTQ campus centers can be essential places of social infrastructure. Beyond affording capacities for socialization and relaxation, many also offer

11. TBLGAY stands for Trans, Bisexual, Lesbian, Gay, and Asexual [at] York [University]. According to collective members, the organization has been in more or less continual operation since its founding as one of Canada's first 'homophile' organizations in the 1970s.

12. *Blåhaj* is a one-meter-long stuffed shark produced by the Swedish furniture company Ikea. For reasons that are not entirely clear, the large plush became an iconic meme in the online trans community, perhaps due to its eminent hug-ability and its aesthetic similarity to the pink and blue colors of the trans flag. Unfortunately, the TBLGAY *Blåhaj* was just outside the frame of this photo (Figure 4.3).

mutual aid services. For instance, one group facilitates a “gender-affirming items order,” a program that provides students “the gender-affirming gear that they wanted” but might not be able to afford, such as binders, wigs, or makeup (Yo6). Importantly, this means that these forms of youth-controlled institutionalized social infrastructure can, in modest but not insignificant ways, catch youth who fall through the gaps of cisheteronormative social infrastructure. But regardless of their commendable use of university resources and campus space, campus centers are shaped by the same injustices as the universities that they are part of—the racialized and classed exclusions of university admissions processes shape who can access these campus spaces. As a result, there are even fewer institutionalized social spaces in Toronto’s suburbs for those Q&T* youth who do not have access to a university campus—perpetuating the unequal distribution of Q&T* social infrastructure across the sub/urban region of Toronto.

Consequently, many Q&T* youth must travel across the GTA in order to access spaces of community. Extensive and uneven networks of public and private transit infrastructure connect the urban region of Toronto, producing differential regimes of urban mobility between the urban core and the suburban periphery (Mettke 2015). These, in turn, affect youth access to institutionalized social infrastructure. As Robin quips, the TTC is “unfortunately one of the most effective transit systems on this continent,” because of the high degree of mobility it affords to residents relative to other North American cities, although “it can also be unreliable, it can be dirty, it can be loud, it can be waiting in the rain, it can be construction projects and awkward detours” (Yo4). Few participants had access to cars, and several did not know how to drive. Public transit enables a high degree of core-periphery mobility for those who live near Toronto’s three main subway lines. Participants who lived farther from central transit corridors often combined private car transit—whether catching rides with friends and family, hailing cabs, or using ride-share apps—with public

transit in order to balance stress, cost, and time. Suburban youth combine personal car journeys, cab rides, local busses, regional busses, commuter rail, light rail, streetcar, subway, and pedestrian transit in order to get around the fragmented urban region of Toronto. These assemblages are particularly difficult for cross-periphery journeys. As Magpie explains:

My partner... has to drive to a GO station, take the GO bus—that comes sometimes only once per hour—to the Highway 407 TTC station, and then take the TTC to York [University]. That means he's paying GO fare, he's paying gas, and TTC fare there and back every time he comes [to the Q&T* affinity space on campus]. I pay \$3, because I have a free transfer between my busses. (Y07)

Magpie's story illustrates the dramatically different urban-regional mobilities available to Q&T* youth living in sub/urban Toronto. Those who live within walking distance or a 15-minute transit ride to a subway line reported that it takes “about an hour,” “like an hour,” or “an hour-ish” to travel to Toronto's urban core (Y02; Y03; Y04; Y06; Y08). For those who live in transit-poor neighborhoods, journeys can take two or more hours, especially with traffic, transit delays, and transit service suspensions. Q&T* youth face the double bind of high housing costs in the urban core and barriers to mobility in the urban periphery. This uneven distribution of social infrastructure across the GTA forces Q&T* youth to take exhausting journeys in order to access drop-in programs and other places of community. As Robin explains:

[Transit] adds two hours to everything you want to do downtown... To get there when [things] start, I will have to leave before I can [eat], and then I'll be getting home at 11:00 or 12:00. And, I like to go to bed at 11:00... It adds that much of a barrier to everything. If I lived near Church [street], I could walk to a place and drop in, and only have to travel, like, five minutes to get home. (Y04)

Robin's experience shows how the unequal affordances of transit infrastructure create complex regimes of in/accessibility to institutionalized queer social infrastructure in Toronto's Church-Wellesley Village. For Q&T* youth who live far from the Village or the ‘queer-friendly’ neighborhoods of downtown Toronto, local nodes of queer social infrastructure such as drop-in



FIGURE 4.4, THE BRAMLEA BUS TERMINAL, BRAMPTON, ONTARIO (Yo6-03)

programs are all the more necessary. Thus, the sub/urban worlding of the GTA and its unevenly distributed social infrastructure amplify the precarity of Q&T* youth, particularly for those who rely upon drop-in programs to escape unhomely households.

Q&T* suburban youth spend hours each week in transit across the GTA, and patterns of inhabitation of these ‘in-between spaces’ of transit can lend them a homely character. Nuthatch, a nonbinary Afro-Caribbean youth from Brampton explained their experience of a regional bus terminal: “It feels oddly comforting. It’s always busy; there’s always people going back and forth; you never really feel alone there. And it’s always exciting, because you’re about to go somewhere!” (Yo6; see Figure 4.4). In this way, Toronto’s flawed transit infrastructure can become part of youths’ everyday rhythms, enabling them to extend their body/minds across the urban region via objects-in-motion.

Yet, not everyone can feel at home on transit: the urban-regional mobility of Q&T* youth is limited by the safety of public transit, particularly for Q&T* youth of color (Lubitow et al. 2017; 2020). Public transit infrastructure in the GTA is cisheteronormative insofar as it extends the mobilities of straight subjects while limiting the mobilities of Q&T* youth. Nuthatch explains that, while they feel comfortable at the Bramlea Bus Terminal (see Figure 4.4), homophobia and transphobia shape their experiences of suburban mobility:

Occasionally you'll hear people [in Brampton] saying slurs sometimes, but it never really escalates into anything violent. The sentiment is still there: you still get those stares. I have a friend—they dress a lot more flamboyant, I guess. They'll wear long skirts and very colorful clothing, earrings and all that. They've definitely gotten a lot of comments in Brampton, but not so much in downtown [Toronto]. (Y06)

As Nuthatch illustrates, transit infrastructure can strip agency from Q&T* riders through the cisheteronormative gaze of others, which renders Q&T* youth objects of harassment and violence. Meadowlark explains how the contours of this unwanted visibility are shaped by intersecting structures of marginalization: “For me specifically, being a white, cis-passing trans man, the TTC has never felt unsafe... I think that the TTC is a place where there are going to be people, and it's going to have all of the ills of the city itself” (Y10). Not just inheriting the “ills of the city,” the transit infrastructure of precarity unequally distributes vulnerability by making it more difficult for intersectionally marginalized Q&T* youth on the urban periphery to traverse the urban region. For Q&T* youth in Toronto's suburbs, transit infrastructure affords ambivalent urban-regional mobilities, providing opportunities to access social infrastructure across the GTA—but with a financial, temporal, and emotional cost.

Thus, the uneven distribution of social infrastructure forces many Q&T* youth to travel across the urban region in order to access places of community. This may be why Nuthatch, like other

participants, described themselves as being 'from' Toronto, rather than calling their suburban municipality home:

I would say Toronto... because I feel a little bit more connection with Toronto than Brampton. And it's sad, because I really want to have a close relationship with Brampton, but it's very hard to like the area. It's very hard to like it here... I don't feel much of an identity with Brampton. I feel like this interview might suggest otherwise, but to me, I just live here. Really, I spend a lot of my time in Toronto. Or, with my family, who live in North York area. Or, just going out downtown. Like, I sleep here, and then I go into the city. (Yo6)

Not at home in the sub/urbs, not at home in the cisheteronormative household: many Q&T* youth must make their homes elsewhere. Drop-in programs can function as homes away from the household, places of social reproduction where youth can make friends, build community, and experiment with their gender and sexuality. Transit infrastructure provides necessary connections to these essential places of Q&T* community, but for youth in transit-poor sub/urban neighborhoods, this urban mobility comes at a cost of time and money. Fragmented regimes of sub/urban mobility exacerbate the unequal distribution of institutionalized Q&T* social infrastructure in the GTA, rendering sub/urban Q&T* youth more vulnerable to the loneliness, isolation, and suicide endemic among Q&T* youth. Next, I return to the household, explaining how this precarity was exacerbated during the COVID-19 pandemic by Ontario's provincial lockdown policy and, in turn, how Q&T* youth challenged this precarity through their everyday practices of dwelling.

4. DWELLING IN AND BEYOND THE HOUSEHOLD DURING THE COVID-19 LOCKDOWN

The COVID-19 pandemic transformed life in the GTA. After three years, there have been more than 800,000 recorded infections and 8,200 recorded deaths in the region (Public Health Agency of

Canada, 24 May 2023),¹³ but even these staggering figures fail to capture how deeply the pandemic affected life in Toronto. In March of 2020, the Province of Ontario declared a state of emergency—closing businesses, shifting education online, restricting access to public spaces, limiting indoor and outdoor gatherings, and requiring masks, and later, vaccinations, for accessing indoor public spaces—in a bid to avoid the collapse of the provincial healthcare system. As workplaces and schools shifted online, many found themselves spending days on end isolated in their homes, only leaving for groceries and other ‘essential’ tasks. Meanwhile, workers in healthcare, transit, logistics, and grocery industries (among other ‘essential’ sectors) risked infection and burnout to sustain their livelihoods and provide essential social reproductive labor for the province. Keil (2020b, 5) notes that “When COVID-19 arrived, it mattered *where* in the city you lived. Intersectionalities of racialization, poverty and other forms of marginalization with location in certain parts of the Toronto region created a mix of heightened, often catastrophic vulnerability.” In January of 2022, just as the Omicron variant crashed over Toronto in a wave of sickness, misery, and pain, the province began lifting its lockdown restrictions. By May of 2022, the lockdown was lifted. Yet, the region remains haunted by the “catastrophic vulnerability” produced by the ongoing pandemic: social distancing markers and pandemic-era signage remains peppered across the urban landscape; urban-regional mobilities have not returned to pre-COVID rhythms, and many spaces in the urban core remain eerily empty; innumerable people are still debilitated by long COVID; and the traumas of lockdown and isolation lurk just under the surface of our psyches.

Thus, we must understand the pandemic not just as the novel coronavirus, but the social and psychological illness produced by the biopolitical efforts to govern its spread which together wrought a cascade of slow death across the precarious sub/urban landscapes of the GTA. To echo

13. These numbers are likely undercounts, due to changing testing regimes and criteria for measuring fatalities.

the cultural theorist Mark Fisher (2011, 126): this phenomenon “was not experienced collectively: on the contrary, it precisely took the form of the decomposition of collectivity in new modes of atomization.” For Q&T* youth, the atomization of social life during the pandemic was itself a pandemic of isolation—for many, the consequence of surviving the novel coronavirus was the risk of dying from loneliness. In Toronto, the lockdown obliterated the careful and individualized rhythms that Q&T* youth used to address the ambivalent affordances of the household. As Pipit explains:

For most of 2020, I did not leave my house. I didn’t even really do outdoor things: I picked up my medication, like, once a month, and that was pretty much it. I very much holed myself up in my room for a long time... I definitely did not leave my house for, like, a year and a half. Until I was fully vaccinated, I didn’t start regularly going out. And even then, not as often as I used to. I used to go out all of the time; I used to never be home. Especially in high school, I was never home. (Y02)

Pipit illustrates how Ontario’s lockdown assumed a particular subject: that of a homeowner or secure renter who has the space to be socially self-sufficient in the household. By restricting access to public space and limiting social interactions to household bubbles, the lockdown policy implicitly judged social isolation with the household unit as safer than social interaction with strangers in public. This is not necessarily true for Q&T* youth: as this chapter has established, the cisheteronormative household can be a place of intense surveillance and violence, whereas public space can afford essential opportunities for socialization. In this way, the lockdown effectively shrunk youths’ worlds to the size of the household. “When you inhabit such a world,” Ahmed (2019, 201) explains, “you can feel like you are watching yourself disappear: watching your own life unravel, thread by thread. No one has willed or intended your disappearance. They are kind; they are welcoming. But just slowly, just slowly, as talk of family, of heterosexuality as the future, of lives that you do not live, just slowly, just slowly, you disappear.” Even in kind or welcoming families, the

constant appearance of the cisheteronormative life can produce a disappearance—a slow life-in-death—of Q&T* ways of living.

For those without supportive families—not to mention those without a household to weather the lockdown—despair was immanent. In the United States, 26.3 percent of queer high school students attempted suicide during the first half of 2021 (Jones et al. 2022)—similar data is not available for Canada. No participants explicitly discussed suicidal attempts or ideations, and consequently, it is impossible for us to know how, precisely, the phenomenon of Q&T* youth suicide has, or has not, affected their lives. The subject of suicide itself resists knowing, in part because of its affective intensity and the difficulty of discussing it—but also because, as many researchers of suicide note, those who choose to end their own lives are no longer around to explain themselves. Yet, the sheer scale of the slow death brought forth upon Q&T* youth forces us to look for the traces of death within an imperfect archive—in this case, to explore how the precipitously open question of Q&T* youth futurity haunted conversations with youth participants.

I suggest that the question of slow death—and thus, inexorably, the suicide epidemic—is the background of participants' discussions of precarity, home, and futurity in sub/urban Toronto. As Ahmed (2019, 12) notes, "Drawing on phenomenology, we can understand the background as spatial, as what is around an object that appears distinct insofar as what is around it is 'dimly perceived.'" In this way, the precarious sub/urbs take shape as the space of slow death: a murky terrain of circumlocution, rather than explicit identification. Thus, we must trace the hauntings of slow death within more ordinary, almost mundane, signs. Mental health is one such concept that we could say is haunted by the specter of slow death. Fisher (2011) argues that in a neoliberal society, individualized conceptions of stress and mental health may be the only language available for many to articulate their experiences of slow death. Many participants alluded to the affects of

loneliness and isolation by describing the sudden rupture from their everyday places and the stultifying effects of long time spent in the cisheteronormative household. As Killdeer explains, the stresses of the lockdown were just as much about the novel coronavirus as they were about the power relationships that lay beneath the surface of home life before the pandemic:

I think my relationship with my parents has been difficult for the majority of my life... In terms of the pandemic, it was like, strained because I physically could not go anywhere else. Like, did not have an excuse to get out of the house for six or seven hours a day—because I wasn't at school. I wasn't able to just say, 'oh, I'm going to [a friend's] house for three hours after school.' I had to be at home. Especially in the beginning, that put major strain on those already difficult relationships. I really started struggling with my mental health around that time, too. (YII)

Killdeer's story helps us to see how participants' struggles with mental health are struggles for a life worth living. Faced with an indefinite confinement at home, Q&T* youth took to (un)building the very architectures of the household in order to afford the capacities to survive the lockdown.

Yet, the bedroom is not free from parental governance: recall Junco's fear of being overheard talking about gender or sexuality by his stepdad, or Meadowlark's father declaring that they "just get" to stay in the bedroom—not make the space their own. Further, during the pandemic, the social capacities of the bedroom were curtailed by lockdown policies against cross-household socialization. Killdeer notes that the intense emotional ambivalence of the pandemic-era bedroom prompted them to share the photo:

There's my plants. I have a guitar. [Tongue-in-cheek] It's a pile of my shit. My makeup. I took this picture because it was my room... I think that was for the prompt that said, 'A PLACE WHERE I EXPERIENCED SOMETHING DIFFICULT,' but also, 'A PLACE THAT BRINGS ME UP WHEN I'M FEELING DOWN.' And that [decision] was because my room was my entire world for, like, close to two years. A lot went down in that space: like, a lot has gone down there! I've had some of my most difficult moments, where I was feeling really alone and I was really struggling. I was like, 'my whole life was in my room!' But also, I've been laughing to tears with my friends on the phone there. Or, I've had friends stay over. Some really high points. It was my space, where I felt safe. I felt I had sovereignty over that space. (YII; see Figure 4.5).



FIGURE 4.5, FOR KILLDEER, “MY WHOLE LIFE WAS IN MY [BED]ROOM” DURING THE PANDEMIC (Y11-05)

Here, Killdeer explains how the lockdown condensed the full spectrum of life’s affects to the place of the bedroom, from intense loneliness and isolation, to erudite self-discovery, to jubilant being-in-common with friends, both in-person and online. In contrast with much of the household, Q&T* youth often have greater control over the environment of the bedroom and more autonomy over what goes on inside. As evinced by Killdeer’s “pile of shit” depicted in their photo, the bedroom is where Q&T* youth can experiment with clothing or makeup, practice instruments or make art,



FIGURE 4.6, A CORNER OF ROBIN'S BEDROOM, WITH GUITARS, COMPUTER, AND TRANS* FLAG (Y04-02)

read books or watch films, or catch up with friends. For Killdeer and many other participants, the bedroom became an essential place of refuge during lockdown. Youth who had a greater degree of control over their bedrooms were able to exploit the architectures of the household in order to produce a quotidian degree of stability amid the intense uncertainty of the pandemic. Robin explains that, although its bedroom is “the space where I’ve had to be for the last few years,” their control over the space afforded them the capacity to survive, and perhaps thrive amid the constraints of the cisheteropatriarchal household:

My room is my space where I feel most safe and comfortable. As someone with sensory issues as well, and issues with fears of contamination, it is a space that I control that is safe. It has all the things I like in it... The main reason why I chose this picture was because this is the space that I’ve most been able to make my own. I have a computer there that has got me through a lot of bad times—both with video games and with Netflix and everything [on

the internet]. I've got my trans flag back there that I've finally been able to hang up in my room—I bought it in, like, high school for a pride parade. (Y04; see Figure 4.6)

Note that the computer is central in both Robin's photo of its room and in the orientation of the room itself. Ordinary artifacts of life such as food, drink, medicine, and body care supplies surround the machine, suggesting long periods of lockdown time spent living online. Indeed, it is almost misleading to describe this as the corner of the room: the computer displays function as windows into virtual space, extending the space of the bedroom through the internet.

Youth adopted technologies such as Facetime, Tumblr, Instagram, Snapchat, and Discord—just to name a few common examples—long before the pandemic. Yet, these virtual spaces became even more important during the lockdown, when youth employed these technologies to maintain their friendships, access virtual drop-in programming, and connect with communities of shared interests. Several participants (Y04; Y07; Y08; Y10) discussed Discord, an online communications platform that Q&T* youth used both to connect with extant networks of online Q&T* community, often centered upon collective subcultural interests, and to build their own virtual places for their friends to gather and socialize. Discord was originally developed for gamers, and its primary innovation was the combination of IRC (Internet Relay Chat) capabilities with live voice and video communication channels in an online portal that is easily accessible to those without technical computing skills. These myriad modes of communication are organized into a server with virtual 'rooms' that youth can customize to suit their particular interests and communicative needs. In this way, Discord is a flexible and scalable internet communications technology that can function as a highly configurable virtual space for Q&T* youth sociality. Unlike social media platforms like Facebook, Instagram, or Twitter, Discord empowers users to be in control over their servers, not just through its flexible channel structure, but by providing robust content moderation tools and

aesthetic customization tools.¹⁴ In this way, Q&T* youth can shape not just the form, but the aesthetics of their Discord server, using custom names, stickers, and reactions to make homely this digital space.

Virtual social infrastructure facilitates a coming-together across distance that can be difficult, if not impossible, to recreate in physical space across extensive city-regional geographies. Thus, internet communications technologies such as Discord were critical nodes of social infrastructure for Q&T* youth, who were often cut off from physical spaces of community and sequestered in unhomely households during the lockdowns. During the pandemic lockdown, Q&T* youth mitigated the risks of contracting the novel coronavirus and those of isolation and loneliness by augmenting the social infrastructure of the bedroom with internet communications technologies. These modes of dwelling blurred the boundaries between physical and virtual space and enabled Q&T* youth to build life-affirming places of community that addressed the rampant loneliness and isolation of the lockdown era.

5. CONCLUSIONS: UNCANNY SUB/URBANISMS

If feeling-at-home in the world is to enjoy the capacity to extend one's body/mind across space and time, then feeling-at-home is a way of orienting oneself to the world. For those gendered and sexual others who are oriented differently, feeling as though one is not-at-home—or, indeed, not having a place to call home—is a rift that threatens both mobility and futurity. For those oriented otherwise, the unhomely homestead may be a place where it is impossible to foresee a future. If we seriously grapple with the *unheimlich* of being, we can see that the feeling of settlement, of

14. It must be noted that Discord retains ultimate control over access to the platform and data of its users. Unlike other digital communications platforms, Discord does not make revenue by extracting and processing user data; rather, the company claims that the bulk of its revenue comes from sales of its premium “Nitro” subscription service.

being-at-home, coheres through our orientations toward objects such as the household. Furthermore, if orientations toward the household shape orientations toward broader worlds, then the anti-futurity of precarity uncannily haunts both the household and wider sub/urban spatialities.

It is precisely because the at-hand social infrastructure of sub/urban Toronto denies Q&T* youth the capacity to lead flourishing lives that they must extend their bodies throughout the sub/urban region. Through my interviews with participants, I found that the unaffordable housing infrastructure of the GTA forces Q&T* youth to remain with their biological family, which is often disempowering and sometimes violent. Many participants felt that a future in which they could have a space to call home in Toronto is not possible, and this was a significant source of distress. The precarity of Q&T* life in sub/urban Toronto was amplified by the unequal distribution of institutionalized social infrastructure, which is concentrated in the urban core. Participants developed strategies of dwelling across the sub/urban city region in order to access life-affirming places of community. In doing so, they navigated the unequal affordances of Toronto's fragmented transit infrastructure, which rendered some participants as objects of threatening visibility rather than empowering them as mobile subjects. The pandemic metastasized precarity, spreading its cancerous growths to new corners of Toronto's sub/urbs. The pandemic lockdown closed down many nodes of institutionalized Q&T* social infrastructure and shrunk the spatialities of many participants' lives, with some rarely leaving their home neighborhoods. In response to this intensification of precarity, participants augmented the affordances of the cisheteronormative household, especially the bedroom, employing internet communications technologies to build community through virtual space. These everyday responses to precarity suggest an orientation toward sub/urban landscapes: an uncanny sub/urbanism catalyzed by the punctum of being-not-at-home and constituted by everyday practices of making homely the elsewheres of the urban periphery.

CHAPTER FIVE: CONSTELLATIONS OF ELSEWHERE

WILD PLACES, COUNTERCULTURAL COMMONS, AND GRASSROOTS SOCIAL INFRASTRUCTURE

I got a proposition, goes something like this:
Dare ya to do what you want
Dare ya to be who you will
Dare ya to cry right out loud
You get so emotional, baby!
-Bikini Kill

I. INTRODUCTION: UNCANNY SUBURBANISMS & WILD DESIRE

Constellations of Q&T* youth life exceed the ‘somewhere’ places of home, transit, and institutionalized social infrastructure: throughout the course of their everyday lives, Q&T* youth also take up the ‘elsewheres’ of the sub/urban periphery. These uncanny practices of dwelling scramble the boundaries between the urban and suburban, the near and the far, the familiar and the strange through a *wildness* that resists enclosure and takes roots in abandoned places. I found that Q&T* youth build places of community in the overlooked spaces of Toronto’s urban periphery where they can experiment with embodiments of gender and sexuality that exceed the categories of colonial modernity. Further, for many participants, countercultural communities were essential nodes of social infrastructure, affording the capacity for a Q&T* sort of public life that enabled participants to survive and thrive in Toronto’s sub/urbs. In these sub/urban elsewheres, these youths’ lives blossom into the ecstatic beauty of the Q&T* sensorium: the smell, sound, touch, taste, and feeling of embodiments and intimacies beyond the cisheteropatriarchal binaries of gender and sexuality.

These practices of dwelling are also an orientation, or attunement, toward the commons that Muñoz describes as “this desire to be with, and to be alongside in the face of the various enclosures that consume us” (2020, 140). Here, I take Muñoz to be working with a Deleuzian sort of desire—

which is to say, a generative one, not one defined by lack: “what we desire, what we invest our desire in, is a social formation, and in this sense desire is always positive. Lack appears only at the level of interest, because the social formation – the infrastructure – in which we have already invested our desire has in turn produced that lack” (Smith 2011, 136). From this perspective, the desire to be with becomes not a nostalgic urge to possess the relations that one lacks, but to experience the being-in-common of manifest difference—less a community than communion: the touching, the feeling, of other body/minds.

Desire helps us traverse the common path between the *unheimlich* and wildness—the path between being-not-at-home in the world and dwelling beyond the world of precarity. In these wild places, the refusal of precarious inheritances copulates with the desire for another world, germinating a kind of grassroots social infrastructure that can afford Q&T* youth the capacity to imagine their own futures. Here, I explore the wild places in the sub/urban periphery and wild-spirited countercultures in which suburban Q&T* youth dwell. Throughout my interviews with youth participants, these places and communities emerged as a grassroots social infrastructure that provided crucial opportunities for Q&T* youth to be *out* in public. This relationship is evinced by the strong association between the codes of GRASSROOTS SOCIAL INFRASTRUCTURE and QUEER & TRANS FLOURISHING. Along with HOME, BEING-IN-COMMON, and FRIENDS, these codes formed the second strongest cluster of themes among the interviews with youth participants (see Figure 3.4). This confluence suggests that constellations of grassroots social infrastructure, including cyborg architectures of the home, wild places in the sub/urban periphery, and countercultural communities, facilitate a sense of commons that sustains Q&T* youth life in the GTA. This resonates with the photos submitted by participants as well: nearly two-thirds of photos (n=29) shared by participants depicted wild places or grassroots social infrastructure. In this chapter, I demonstrate how Q&T*

youth grow a grassroots social infrastructure in the wild elsewheres of the colonial modern metropolis, engaging their wild desires to exceed the categories of colonial modernity and tend to the seeds of other worlds.

2. WILD PLACES: INTIMACIES, EMBODIMENT, AND GRASSROOTS SOCIAL INFRASTRUCTURE

I turn to the concept of wildness in order to explain the sense of seductive uncertainty that calls Q&T* youth to the *elsewheres* of Toronto's urban periphery. Drawing from the work of the queer theorists José Esteban Muñoz and Jack Halberstam, I understand wildness as that which exists not outside, but in the shadow of what the feminist philosopher María Lugones called "the colonial/modern gender system" (2007, 201–02; 2010). Wildness is the constitutive other of colonial modernity: the excess of being that seeps between the cracks of the racialized, gendered, and anthropocentric categories of colonial ontology—the excess that sometimes overflows these categories entirely, exposing the raw violence at the foundation of modernity and the possibility for the world to become otherwise. Wildness is intimately related to embodiment: what Nigel Thrift (1997, 142) describes as "the body-subject, not the body, engaged in joint body-practices of becoming." The existence of wild embodiments of gender and sexuality indicates the failure of the colonial/modern gender system to completely control the body as it is lived. Further, these alternative ways of being demonstrate the boundless capacity of everyday Q&T* life to overflow the ruinous atomization of colonial modernity.

Building on the unfinished work of his late friend and colleague, Halberstam attempts to explain the uncanny allure of the wild for those who are not-at-home in the world of colonial modernity:

The wild... is not a destination, nor is it an identity. Rather, the wild is the un/place where people left outside of domesticity reside—small children, animals, and ruined adults, an

anticommunity of wildness. We find survivors, humans who have lost all belief in the concept of humanity as something noble empathetic, and uplifting... [We encounter those] for whom concepts like order, civilization, goodness, and right mean nothing and fail to provide the protection they imply. For the wild things, the violence of the world has been revealed, and nothing can ever be the same. (Halberstam 2020, 117)

Here, Halberstam does not explain what precisely is meant by the designation “un/place,” but I take it to signify some-where in common with the *unheimlich*: the sense of rupture when one discovers the unhomeliness of the world—the moment when the meaning, the place-ness, of space seems to turn on its head. To dwell in these wild places, then, is to queer their use—to recognize them as more than the wastes of colonial modernity.

Peeling wallpaper, sagging curtains, a chair that almost beckons to the viewer: this photo of an abandoned household illustrates the uncanny allure of wild places (Figure 5.1). The decrepit architecture of the abandoned house represents this notion of unplacelessness: both the uncanny emptiness of the precarious landscapes that Q&T* youth turn away from, as well as the uncanny meaning that they find in overlooked spaces in the shadow of the city. When they cannot—or will not—dwell in institutionalized social infrastructure, Q&T* youth make their lives in wild places like this, appropriating the surplus space of the neoliberal city as a sort of grassroots social infrastructure. As Blackbird explains, these abandoned places have a particular kind of allure: “I think, on a personal level, I feel very drawn to, like decay and strange things. I like the scavenger hunt of discovering things, or seeing unique things you don’t really see in other places... I do really like exploring spaces [where] you’re not supposed to go” (Y01). This desire to evade the secure confines of the colonial modern metropolis attracted Blackbird and their friends to these urban elsewhere, transforming them into everyday places of youth sociality. While this impulse is hardly exclusive to Q&T* youth—indeed, geographers have argued that abandoned urban places are



FIGURE 5.1, AN ABANDONED HOUSE SERVED AS AN EVERYDAY PLACE OF Q&T* SOCIALITY (Y01-01)

important for youth of all stripes (Edensor et al. 2011)—these wild places take on an additional import for Q&T* youth who are not-at-home in the cisheteronormative household. As Blackbird explains:

So, this picture [Figure 5.1] was taken in my old area, outside my high school, on our way home that we'd walk every day. There was a strip of abandoned homes, and we'd kind of just go and explore that after school or at lunch. I was also very in to urban exploration—and I still am, and I think that's something I really enjoy doing, and I find adventure, and wonder, and comfort in. That was kind of a place that we'd go to explore and take pictures of. We'd do photography stuff there. We'd be dumb teenagers there. [Laughs] Yeah. We'd pass it every day. (Y01)

Blackbird continues, explaining that these spaces are particularly important for youth who are not 'out' to their peers, or who are still coming to understand themselves: "I... had two main friend groups... one was a bunch of girls... most of them at the time weren't out, but slowly, one-by-one, over the years, [they] have been like, [tongue-in-cheek] 'oh, wait, I'm gay? Weird.' [Laughter] All [of them] are queer, neurodiverse" (Y01). In contrast with institutionalized spaces of queer social infrastructure, which may pressure youth to render themselves legible as LGBT, or as a straight



FIGURE 5.2, MAGPIE EXPLORES THE GRAFFITIED RUINS OF A PAPER MILL WITH THEIR LOVER (Y07-05)

‘ally,’ wild places take no names—which is to say, these sub/urban elsewheres refuse a neoliberal politics of identification. Wildness, as it happens, takes one as they are.

The overlooked aspect of wild places made them indispensable for Q&T* youth looking for social places outside of the household during the pandemic lockdown, when the province closed indoor social spaces and even, for a time, limited the capacity to gather outdoors with people outside of the household. Magpie describes how they used wild places to meet up with their lover during lockdown:

It was hard, at first, figuring out how and when we could meet up and hang out during the pandemic. [The province said], ‘here’s your bubble; try not to go out of your house; only go grocery shopping. You can stay in your bubble, but remember that your bubble doesn’t include these other people outside.’ Restaurants were closed, cafes were closed... My partner and I were both living at our homes, in the suburbs. [We would go] urban exploring

[at] an abandoned paper mill [Figure 5.2]. We went to a ghost town, too. We already had an enjoyment of doing those things pre-pandemic... There's all these murals in there, and it's pretty cool. The first time [we went together], we went to check out this really old house in Toronto—because what else could you really do [during lockdown]? (Y07)

In this way, we can understand the desire to explore abandoned homes, ghost towns, derelict industrial zones—the allure of wild places—as the desire to build social and amorous connections outside of the household, which is to say, outside of the house that modernity built.¹ As they dwell in these abandoned places, youth leave traces on the landscape, such as the graffiti that we see in Magpie's picture of the abandoned paper mill (Figure 5.2). In doing so, Q&T* youth participate in a long history of squatting in the ruins of precarity, a parallel world that exposes the contingent fragility of the colonial modern metropolis.

Cemeteries, too, functioned as everyday places of sociality for participants where the borders of the colonial/modern gender system could be thrown into flux. Cemeteries are quasi-public spaces that are regulated in different ways than other sorts of wild spaces. Historically, cemeteries were modelled after the design of public parks, and they have served as spaces of reflection and recreation. Some scholars attribute this fact to the beauty of the landscape: “Cemeteries, particularly the older ones, often have a varied landscape with rolling topography, diverse vegetation, and historical infrastructure that may encourage recreational visitors” (Quinton and Duinker 2019, 256). Yet, some participants evinced a less virginal relationship to these landscapes: as Blackbird explains: “I find cemeteries to be very calming. Some people don't. [Laughs] I like dead things”

1. “The house that modernity built sits on a foundation of separability, which enables the production of categories and modes of valuation and measurement that divide, separate, and create the world as we know it inside the house, thereby foreclosing other possibilities... However, the house is actually quite precarious, given that its externalized costs always threaten to undermine its structural integrity. This is not because what is external to the house is itself violent, but rather because violence is the condition of possibility for the house itself: claiming ownership of land, cordoning off the rest of the world, and engaging in highly toxic methods of resource extraction and social (re)production to build and maintain it.” (Stein et al. 2017, 73).



FIGURE 5.3, JUNCO AND THEIR FRIENDS WOULD MEET UP IN THIS CEMETERY AFTER DARK (Yo8-01)

(Yo1). They continue: “I think that a lot of people, especially in Western society, have an interesting relationship with death: it’s very taboo, you want to avoid it, it’s like, scary and upsetting, you don’t want to talk about it. But, I definitely feel like a draw to it, almost... I find it very interesting” (Yo1). Interesting, alluring, or desirable—there is an uncanny eros to the space of the cemetery. While during the day, cemeteries serve as places of mourning, albeit with the occasional recreational interloper, during the night, the allure of the cemetery brings other visitors. For Junco, the cemetery was an everyday meeting place for their friends: “I don’t think we’ve ever gone there [Figure 5.3] when there was any kind of daylight outside. It would be better at night anyway, and [we often went] during the time of year... in the fall or early spring, when it gets darker sooner” (Yo8).

In addition to fostering Q&T* socialities, cemeteries have long served as sites of gay cruising. As Matthew Gandy (2012) notes, for “the saprophytic gloom of the cemetery provides an ideal habitat” not just for beetles and fungi, but for queer intimacies as well. Gavin Brown contends that,



FIGURE 5.4. A PATCH OF URBAN FOREST THAT SHELTERS Q&T* INTIMACIES AND SOCIALITIES (Y01-02)

in places like cemeteries, cruisers “are drawn into relational structures not only with other men’s bodies, but the fabric of the space in which their encounters occur” (2008, 929). Thus, we might say that wild places—such as the cemetery, in certain conditions—can foster subjectivities outside of the episteme of colonial modernity: blurring the lines between subject and object, person and place, living and otherwise. As Blackbird remarks: “My policy is [that] they’re dead, so [laughter]... they don’t really [care]. When I’m dead, I won’t really care: I want people to dance on my grave! You know? Like, have fun!” (Y01). In this way, the specter of death animates the nocturnal wildness of the cemetery: an encounter that takes up symbols of annihilation as the occasion for a celebration of the vitality of Q&T* life.

Urban forests are another such place on the urban periphery. Like cemeteries, it is well-known that forests—urban or otherwise—facilitate queer intimacies, such as hookups and cruising (e.g. Bell and Valentine 1995; Catungal and McCann 2010; Mortimer-Sandilands and Erickson 2010; Patrick 2014). As the planning scholar Gordon Brent Ingram notes, “patches of dense forest” in

Vancouver's West End "have remained refuges for men to engage in intimate acts while avoiding detection," and a "urban subculture of men and women enjoying nature in the West End flourished with little public acknowledgment for over half a century—with a male subculture focused on anonymous sex and a female sports subculture built around social solidarity and furtive romances" (in Mortimer-Sandilands and Erickson 2010, 268, 270). The rich ecologies of urban forests, sheltered by the great boughs of trees and the sultry fronds of bushes and ferns, provide an ecological niche not just for more-than-human wildlife, but for human intimacies and societies that exceed the regulation of the colonial modern metropolis. The visual privacy afforded by forestial flora and the aural masking afforded by woodland fauna shelter Q&T* youth from the regulation of parents, neighbors, and police (see Figure 5.4). As Blackbird explains:

Throughout high school and most times when I go to visit my friends who still live up there, we go to [the forest; Figure 5.4]—because it was kind of the hangout spot where everyone would go to. Back then: to drink, to go on adventures, to explore, to do dumb things at night... It was quiet, it was secluded enough that we could just kind of have fun and not be bothered—and, like, in North York, there really aren't a lot of cool spaces to hang out... It was a nice place to have a bit of adventure: to be able to be in public, not at someone's house, but also kind of private enough for us to be ourselves, have a bit of fun, and be a bit obnoxious. (YOI)

Blackbird's experience shows how urban forests can function as open-ended spaces of play that afford capacities for sociality that the securitized public places of the colonial modern metropolis, such as schools and malls, might foreclose. Urban forests, then, offer shelter not just for erotic desire, but other impulses, too, such as the rowdy youthful desire to have a bit of mischievous, obnoxious fun.

Like urban forests, the privacy of rocky, overlooked stretches of the shores of Lake Ontario affords both weeds—like the Goldenrod pictured in several participants' photos (Figure 5.5, Figure 5.6, and Figure 6.1)—and Q&T* youth the chance to take root in Toronto's urban periphery. As



FIGURE 5.5, GOLDENROD ON A ROCKY SHORE WHERE PIPIT WOULD MEET WITH LOVERS (Y02-01)

Darren Patrick (2014, 193) noted, the wildness of weedy beings “has to do as much with its disruption of normal or mainstream modes of thinking and doing urban ecology and forestry as it does with some more fine-grained details related to its frequently ‘unruly’ character and capacities.” In this case, this unruliness is made possible by the liminal quality of the lakeshore: not quite water, but not exactly land. These intertidal zones afford Q&T* youth a niche to experiment with gender and sexuality outside of the colonial/modern binary: swimwear, for instance, is an accessible entry-point for youth to explore alternative embodiments of gender and sexuality, and the waters of Lake Ontario provide for easy clean-up for romantic trysts. Pipit explains how the overlooked, ‘weedy’ character of these places that draws Q&T* youth:

You don’t really lay on the beach. It’s very rocky... Which, I think, is actually in some ways another benefit: it prevents other people from coming to the beach... people don’t go

unless they need the privacy. You can also see there's a lot of plants in this picture [Figure 5.5]. Because it's not something—people from the city don't come down and maintain this beach at all. It's kind of overgrown, and there's often flowers and plants and stuff popping out from the rocky area near the water.

I know a lot of [Q&T*] people... who spend a lot of time in beach areas in Scarborough that are hard to access by car and therefore have less people... I think if you are attempting to hide that you are on a date with someone, if you are wanting to hold hands and walk by the beach and have a cute little date with someone who you do not necessarily want people to see who you are with [for example] because of homophobia... or transphobia... (Y02)

As Pipit explains, it is precisely because these wild stretches of shoreline are unnoticed by those who find themselves at home in the colonial modern metropolis that they become desirable places for Q&T* youth to dwell. These habits of dwelling did not stop at the shores themselves: the “nice little trail” of desire lines leads to “overgrown” pockets of desire, such as “an entrance to the city sewers” that’s been broken open. Pipit continues, explaining how “all the walls are graffitied, and people go in and do art on the walls... I knew a bunch of lesbian couples that would go down there and... make out in the sewer, which I can't imagine smells pleasant” (Y02).

We might view these habits of making out in the wastes of a sewer a perverse sort of intimacy—or, a queer appropriation of this urban infrastructure. Indeed, “queer use,” Ahmed writes, “might require a certain willingness to be perverse, to deviate from the straight path, the right path” (2019, 201). These paths to elsewhere, these desire lines that orient us toward wild places, are, for Ahmed, “indeed traces of desire; where people have taken different routes to get to this point or to that point. It is certainly desire that helps generate a lesbian”—and, I would add, queer and trans*—“landscape, a ground that is shaped by the paths that we follow in deviating from the straight line” (2006, 20). Desire, then, appears as constitutive of landscapes, of worlds. Not coincidentally, Deleuze understood desire as the soul of becoming. As one commentator writes, “if desire is productive or causal, then its product is itself real (and not illusory or noumenal),” then



FIGURE 5.6, GOLDENROD, LOONS, AND Q&T* YOUTH DWELL AROUND THE SHORELINE (Y08-03)

“the entire socio-political field, Deleuze argues, must be seen as the historically determined product of desire” (Smith 2011, 138). Desire, here, refers not simply to *eros*, but to the multiplicity of unconscious drives that animate being. Indeed, we have seen how wild places bring together *eros* with *philia*, the love of friends; *storge*, the love of chosen family; and *agape*, the love of the world.² It is through these wild desires that Q&T* youth transform quotidian elsewheres of the sub/urban periphery into places of grassroots social infrastructure. In these places, wild desires entangle themselves with the allure of the weird, the gross, the eerie. Together, they spawn unruly orientations that constitute a *jeté* out the window³ from the house that modernity built—or, perhaps, an egress that opens the colonial-modern household to the wild desires of sub/urban elsewheres.

2. Often understood as the love of God, if we recall John 1:1, we can think of *agape* as the love of the world by way of the Presocratic *logos*: the unity of being (Hadot 1995).

3. “A gesture is not a full-fledged resistance, but it is a moment when that overwhelming frame of a here and now, a spatial and temporal order that is calibrated against one, is resisted” (Muñoz 2009, 162).

3. UNCOMMON COMMONS: DESIRE AND COUNTERCULTURAL SCENES

Halberstam's conception of wildness builds upon the work of Muñoz, who saw wildness in what he called the uncommon commons of countercultural scenes. Muñoz's writing on wildness is part of a larger, unfinished project on the liberatory potential of queer of color cultures: how these forms of artistic and cultural production enable multiply marginalized groups to survive and thrive the ongoing violence of colonial modernity. In other words, Muñoz was concerned with how cultures, and the scenes that sprout up around them, afford queers of color the capacity for survival and thrivance via a subaltern public life—what Harney and Moten describe as “that radical occupied-elsewhere, that utopic commonunderground [sic] of this dystopia, the funkyed-up here and now of this anacentric particularity that we occupy and with which we are preoccupied” (2013, 51). These uncommon commons are often found in countercultural scenes, such as the punk rock, rave, and performance art scenes that sprout up in sub/urbs after war, economic calamity, or social upheaval. While these countercultures often take root in wild places on the sub/urban periphery—such as abandoned warehouses, bridges, and urban forests⁴—they can also inhabit places in the urban center—namely, the queer social infrastructure of nightlife. Yet, in contrast with the institutionalized queer social infrastructure of nightlife, these grassroots countercultures are driven not by the profit motive, but the wild desire to experiment with gender and sexual embodiments outside of the colonial modern binary. These radically occupied sub/urban elsewheres are animated by a queer punk spirit of refusing the violence of precarity and actualizing the utopic potential of worlds otherwise. For Muñoz, “having the beat,” or feeling the wildness of desire, “opens one up

4. “A few rave groups that I'd go to would normally do outdoor events. They'd do some under the DVP [Don Valley Parkway], on those roads out there. But, as the weather's getting colder, it's not really as worthwhile to do it while it's 2 degrees outside. They start when it's, like, 9:00 or 10:00, and they go almost all the way to sunrise” (Yo8).

to abuse and the sense of being generally creeped out by the world of ordinary social relations,” (2018, 654). In other words, Q&T* desire punctures the manufactured homeliness of the sub/urbs, cultivating the uncanny feeling that colonial modern society is not what it seems, and, in turn, opening up the possibility both of cisheteronormative violence and modes of dwelling otherwise.

Thus, for Muñoz, the affect of wildness animates the uncommon commons of countercultural scenes:

The spot that [the iconic punk band] X marks is the wildness of the gift that is, was, and will be punk and its mode of being common and in-common within the commonness of the everyday, that wild thing we know and feel as the longness of the strungout present. I mean strung out as durational and under duress. [X’s album] *Wild Gift*... is simultaneously about immediacy and the *longue durée* in the way it isn’t about representing a congealed historical moment. The wildness of punk and its commons is that annihilative force, that refusal of cohesion and insistence on scatteredness, partiality, and the impossible act of not only living but also striving that are accomplished in an uncommon commons.

We can trace the pulse of this wild desire through other pieces of countercultural production: for instance, when the legendary Kathleen Hanna, frontwoman of the feminist punk band Bikini Kill, cries, “Dare ya to do what you want, Dare ya to be who you will, Dare ya to cry right out loud,” Hanna impels the audience to follow their wild desires—to get “so emotional, baby!” In the face of the collective immiseration of colonial modernity, Hanna provokes dwellers in these uncommon commons to take up the impossible task of living and striving in the elsewheres of precarious sub/urban landscapes.

These uncommon commons are driven by queer of color cultures, but they are not identitarian happenings. Rather, in these scenes that take root in the shadow of precarity, manifold forms of difference come together: “brownness and queerness, like other vectors of particularity, such as blackness, indigeneity, [and] Asianness... all comingle, are adjacent, sometimes provisionally interlocking in situational commonness” (Muñoz 2020, 133). For Muñoz, this brownness signifies

the shared subjectivity of racialized others of colonial modernity. Connected but not reducible to conceptions of *Latinx* or *latinidad* subjectivity, ‘brownness’ is Muñoz’s effort to foreground the rather queer culture of racialized colonial/modern alterity. As he explains:

There is one crucial difference [between brownness and queerness] for me. I suggest queerness is in the horizon, forward dawning and not-yet-here. Brownness diverges from my definition of queerness. Brownness is already here. Brownness is vast, present and vital. It is the onto-poetic state... of a majority of those who exist, strive, and flourish within the vast trajectory of multiple and intersecting regimes of colonial violence. (Muñoz 2020, 122).

Brownness, then, is queer insofar as it looks toward the horizon, working to actualize queer worlds that are always-already just out of reach. We might also say that queerness is brown, insofar as queer of color politics have always driven Q&T* movements for liberation, and queer of color aesthetics have always been at the center of Q&T* modes of artistic and cultural production. In this way, the uncommon commons of countercultural scenes constitute a social infrastructure for a sort of public life for those othered by the colonial/modern gender system.

Participants described the uncommon commons of Toronto’s rave and punk scene as places of Q&T* being-in-common: places where they can encounter difference and follow their desires to do what they want and be who they will. The wildness of these countercultural scenes affords some Q&T* youth the capacity to actualize embodiments of gender and sexuality that are stigmatized in more ordinary public spaces. Nuthatch recalls the unwanted attention that their gender and sexuality attracted while travelling from Brampton to Toronto for a punk show:

I was walking to my friend’s house [before the show,] because he lives very close to the bus station, and we were going to go to the terminal. And people were just staring at me. It was weird. I didn’t like it... I wore something that was a little more outlandish than usual... It was a black t-shirt and cargos that were similar to the Tripp pants—I call it the ‘beginner’s Tripp pants,’ because it was, like, Urban Outfitters that I thrifted. It was that, [plus] platform [heels], and a spike collar with some cool earrings... I was really excited. (Yo6).

As Nuthatch illustrates, the signifiers of Q&T* embodiment that spark gender euphoria in the uncommon commons of counterculture can generate an undesirable degree of visibility to the cisheteronormative gaze of straight transit riders. Rosefinch described a similar experience when he wore a full face of drag makeup to a queer venue downtown: “being in transit while you’re dressed this way—like, subway or bus—that is a traumatic experience. The tension of people looking at you—What are they thinking? Are they going to say anything? What are they going to say? [My partner and I] recently [were harassed] on the subway, so it makes travelling while wearing your queerness a difficult experience” (Y05).

In contrast with spaces of public transit that suppress difference with the scrutiny of surveillance, the uncommon commons manifests difference through a bacchanal becoming. As Nuthatch continues, “I was going to a punk concert... Nova Twins... this amazing British punk/metal duo. They’re both Black, and it was amazing going to a show where the demographic was, like, the majority of the audience wasn’t white. I felt amazing. It was so nice. I didn’t feel claustrophobic... I felt very comfortable in the space, which was nice” (Y06). For Nuthatch, the queer of color punk scene afforded them the capacity to embody their gender and sexuality in ways that were alien to their home neighborhood in Brampton. Toronto’s rave scene played a similar role in the lives of other participants. As Thrasher describes, an experimental queer of color rave enabled them to feel an extraordinary kind of gender euphoria:

I think it was pretty wild to be—people would call it ‘genderqueer’ or ‘nonbinary’—I don’t like those words, I kind of go for ‘gender-explorative’ now... It was nice to be able to explore with fans, and like leather, and like chains, and things like that [at raves]. Because those don’t really belong to anyone, and they don’t belong to any one [gender] anyways... I went dancing once, and this person who I thought was really good looking gave me a kiss. And, I was like, ‘woah, wow!’ And, there was somebody beside me who was like, ‘oh, that person [Thrasher] is gay,’ and I was like, ‘oh, okay,’ and they were like, ‘but you’re like, man-adjacent.’ And I was like... That was so great. I would say that it did

allow me to express it: I think people saw it a lot more than [other places of their life].
(Yo3)

This sort of Q&T* visibility afforded by the uncommon commons of counterculture is a powerful antidote to the erasures of anti-trans politics described in Chapter One. In these places, circuits of desire nurture rich ecologies of gender and sexual embodiments—feminine, masculine, nonbinary, everything in between, and everything beyond. When I asked whether they can embody their gender differently than normal at raves, Junco responded: “Oh, fuck yeah!” They continue:

[At raves,] I can wear more conventionally feminine clothing. I can wear crop-tops, I can wear scraps of clothing, I can wear short-shorts, I can wear fishnets. A lot of people don’t consider that ‘appropriate’ for someone who’s [assigned male at birth] to wear. But, down there [raving], nobody gives a fuck what you’re born as. If you look good, if you’re having fun, it doesn’t matter what you look like. Wear whatever the hell you want, enjoy yourself. I can express myself: I can have whatever color of hair I want, I can wear whatever I want.
(Yo8)

“Wear whatever you want, enjoy yourself”—Junco’s quippy summary of this rave echoed Hanna’s punk provocation. Through makeup, fashion, fetish gear, high heels, and other aesthetic choices, youth inhabited masculinity and femininity in other ways, mixing and matching to manifest what the cultural theorist madison moore [sic] describes as ‘fabulousness:’ a way-of-being that “radiates an otherworldly, nonconforming, alien, and mythical self that startles and captivates us aesthetically because it stretches what we think is possible” (2018, 23).⁵ In this way, Toronto’s punk and rave scenes provided Q&T* youth a space where they could experiment with their gender embodiment in ways that fabulously exceed the colonial/modern gender binary.

These forms of gender embodiment exceed fashion—indeed, they only come to life as they are inhabited in motion. One central mode of countercultural Q&T* embodiment is dance. Martin Zebracki (2016) notes that the embodiment of the techno scene “feels like a dynamic

5. Fisher (2004, n.p.): “Glam IS punk; historically and conceptually.”

*‘Gesamtkunstwerk’*⁶ between the electric beats, the lights, the bodies, the floor, and so on and so forth...” As he continues, “it yearns after a celebration of life to be danced to” (2016, 115–16; emphasis mine). We might say the same of dance elsewhere: whether in a techno club, a punk show under a bridge, or a rave in an abandoned factory, dance grasps at the vivid ecstasy of life itself. As Thrift (1997, 147) notes, dance is less about a politics of oppression and resistance; rather, “dance is [more] about using the body to conjure up virtual, as-if worlds by configuring alternative ways of being through play, ways of being which can become claims to something more.” In countercultural scenes, such embodiments are often co-constituted by psychoactive substances: Johan Andersson (2022, 463), following the Q&T* cultural theorist Paul Preciado (2013 [2008]), describes this assemblage of desire, embodiment, and drugs as open-ended “*pharmacolibidinal* constellations” that make other modes of being-in-common possible. As the cultural theorist McKenzie Wark (2023, 29) argues, these substances “can have a metonymic function, optional parts for making another city for another life, another body for another life.” Indeed, the psychoactive substances of countercultural scenes—or, we might say, *psychopharmacolibidinal* constellations—can have a transcendental effect on Q&T* youth consciousness and embodiment, a visceral aid to the process of unlearning the binary logic of colonial modernity.

Yet, just like other forms of Q&T* social infrastructure, these affordances are messy and ambivalent: these epiphanal experiences can coexist with the dangers of addiction and overdose. In response to the challenges of dwelling within psychopharmacolibidinal constellations, Q&T* countercultures have developed an infrastructure of collective care. As Junco explains, a sophisticated set of harm-reduction practices is common among Toronto’s rave scene: “Obviously, in the rave scene, there’s a lot of recreational drug use, and if they see anything that’s off, they’ll mention

6. A Wagnerian term often translated as ‘total-work-of-art.’ In aesthetics, it refers to an artwork that employs myriad forms; in cultural theory, it refers to the totality of phenomenal experience.

it immediately to someone who can [help], or they'll go and help, themselves. A lot of them carry Naloxone.⁷ *They just care for people...*" (Yo8). Here, Junco reminds us of the care labor that undergirds these uncommon commons—a robust network of social and material relationships is necessary to maintain the grassroots social infrastructure that constitutes a Q&T* mode of public life. If these modes of social reproduction are themselves infrastructural (S. Hall 2020), then we can, following Deleuze, understand desire itself as infrastructural as well (Andrucki 2021; 2022).⁸ The uncommon commons of countercultural scenes is a sort of grassroots social infrastructure that enables some Q&T* youth to survive and thrive in Toronto's sub/urbs. Further, it affords these youth the capacity to practice a being-in-common that persists into the future. Dancing out of their bodies, dancing out of their minds, these *psychopharmacolibidinal* constellations open up possibilities for alternative forms of gender and sexual embodiment, alternative modes of dwelling, and, possibly, alternative timbres of spacetime itself. As Thrasher describes, experimental sonic aesthetics, the practice of dance, and Q&T* embodiments can come together in a becoming-otherwise that feels like it exceeds even the boundaries of the self:

I liked the experimentalism of some of [the queer DJs]. I like the ways they mixed in my cultural music—like, reggae, dancehall, soca—in with, like, techno, house, more drumming beats, things like that. I was like, 'what? You can do that?' So, I would follow people like that... I think that dancing—it may be just me—but it definitely relates to my gender in a way. The fluidity, the movement, the being-in-community, [being-]in-space. I felt like I took up the whole room, but I was a tiny person in a fairly tiny room. (Yo3)

Thrasher's story echoes Wark's description of ravespace: "Self and world disappear, and with them the friction between self and world, merging into the sonic shimmer mix" (2023, 29). In these

7. Naloxone, commonly known by the brand name Narcan, blocks the brain's opioid receptors and can stop an opioid overdose. Its proliferation is a response to the decades-long epidemic of fentanyl overdoses.

8. Indeed, Andrucki argues that queer desire—here, read narrowly as erotic desire—itself constitutes "a form of queer social reproduction that circumvents the distinctions between public and private, friendship and love, and politics and sex as it facilitates care through multiple modes of *annular* encounter with others" (2021, 1371).

moments of being-in-common, the brute fact of difference reveals in wild, ecstatic desire the multiplicitous nature of worlding. Dancing, touching, sweating, loving—is that the sun there, over the horizon? In these moments of manifest vitality, we can catch a glimpse—fleeting, yes, but no less real—of rays of desire from queerer futures.

The micro-temporalities of dancing resonate with the larger rhythms of countercultural scenes: while some Q&T* youth are deeply committed, others participate less frequently, dwelling in a wider range of cultural places. So too do scenes grow and wither with the tides of collective desire, flowering with beautiful energy before scattering their seeds windward to germinate elsewhere. The case of Toronto's Q&T* rave scene during the COVID-19 pandemic is indicative: amid the restrictions of Ontario's lockdown, ravers drifted apart into an array of outdoor parties, online bedroom raves, and other attempts to creatively negotiate lockdown restrictions. As Thrasher explains:

that didn't feel—It's not the same... there's a synergy when you're all in a room, especially with the lights colored, or off, or whatever. And, yeah. I really did miss that... In my own life during the pandemic, filling that gap was really difficult. It looked like me turning off the lights in my room, just dancing around for a while, getting really good speakers so it felt like [the music] was moving through my body. Like, very sensory things. Putting on makeup. Just doing it up for myself. But, the missing piece was the community portion of it [visibility and embodied connection]. (Y03)

During the pandemic, then, Q&T* desires found different modes of expression. Yet, not unlike wildflowers whose seeds only take root after the blaze of a wildfire, raves began to bloom once the lockdown had ended and COVID-19 mitigation measures were widely in use: “When I finally stepped back in the scene, it was different: it seemed like there was so much more intention around it. Like, people were coming to dance! They were coming to cut up! [Laughter]... You could almost feel the desperation sometimes: like, we needed this!” (Y03).

Thus, the micro-temporalities of dancing in ecstasy resonate with both the meso-temporalities of countercultural involvement, where intense experiences of being-in-common can sustain Q&T* youth across long stretches of time, as well as the macro-temporalities of countercultural scenes, which grow and wither according to currents of desire and broader sociopolitical events. At each scale, the wild seeds of desire are ignited by the intensity of being-in-common across difference, blossoming into mutant embodiments that (re)produce the parallel worlds of Q&T* life. It is through these multiscale ecologies that the uncommon commons of counterculture cares for constellations of difference that fabulously exceed slow death.

4. CONCLUSIONS: WORLDING OTHERWISE IN THE CRACKS OF THE METROPOLIS

Faced with the precarity of colonial modernity, Q&T* youth build grassroots social infrastructure—homely places away from the household—in sub/urban elsewhere. Like the weeds that sprout up in the cracks of sub/urban Toronto’s many parking lots, these forms of being-in-common refuse the categories of the colonial/modern gender system and afford the capacity to embody gender and sexuality otherwise. This chapter has examined two forms of this grassroots social infrastructure: wild places and uncommon commons. Wild places, such as abandoned buildings, cemeteries, and the depreciated greenfields of urban forests and lakeshores, are excesses of colonial modernity where Q&T* desires can take root. Uncommon commons, such as punk, rave, or other countercultural scenes, can inhabit these wild places in the sub/urban periphery, but they can also re-wild the institutionalized social infrastructure of queer counter-worlds, namely, nightlife. Altogether, I found that these forms of grassroots social infrastructure helped participants survive and thrive the precarity of sub/urban Toronto.

The (re)production of grassroots social infrastructure is part of the double-movement of uncanny suburbanisms: being-not-at-home in the world of colonial modernity, Q&T* youth dwell in its surplus places, affording the capacity for a queer sort of public life, a being-in-common in the cracks of the metropolis. As Sara Ahmed (2019, 201) writes, “Perhaps the potential to queer use,” which is to say, to use queerly, “might reside somewhere between our bodies and our worlds.” We can understand the queer dwelling of uncanny sub/urbanisms as a mode of queer use: the dialectical movement between the manifest vitality of Q&T* bodies—living, breathing, dancing, fucking in the wild abandon of an uncommon commons—and the asymptotic, just out of reach horizon of queer worlds. Partially, fragmented, and uneven: in these constellations of sub/urban elsewheres, Q&T* youth are seeding the infrastructure for imagining futures of flourishing through difference.

CHAPTER SIX: CONCLUSIONS

SURVIVING AND THRIVING IN TORONTO'S SUB/URBS

There are no cities, no cities to love
It's not the cities, it's the weather we love
It's not the weather, it's the people we love
-Sleater-Kinney

THEY TRIED TO BURY US—THEY DIDN'T KNOW WE ARE SEEDS¹

There are no cities to love: the precarity of the colonial modern metropolis hedges the vulnerability of a rank and gross few by amplifying the vulnerability of the majority. In Toronto, housing infrastructure is central to precarity, concentrating control over the essential resource of shelter in the hands of a few in order to keep the majority ensnared in the interlocking matrix of colonial modernity. Toronto's precarious sub/urbs are uniquely wretched for Q&T* youth, who face not just the unjust affordances of sub/urban social infrastructure, but an insurgent anti-trans politics, the endemic affects of isolation and loneliness, and the precipitously open question of futurity—is this a life worth living? This is a trick question, for there is only one answer: *No*. The tragedy of precarity is that slow death all too often saps the capacity for living otherwise, making it seem as though the only way out is self-annihilation. Yet, Q&T* youth lives evince an alternative: a double-negation of colonial modern futurity that fails to fail properly, and in doing so, manifests alternative ways of being.

How, then, do Q&T* youth survive and thrive in Toronto's sub/urbs? The answers are as different as the participants of this research. I found that youth challenge the cisheteronormativity of the family household, by augmenting the space of the bedroom with the virtual places of community, by extending themselves through transit infrastructure to access institutionalized Q&T* social

1. "Widely cited as a Mexican proverb because of its frequent use by the Zapatistas and then in response to the loss of the Ayotzinapa 43, this verse has since been traced to the Greek poet Dinos Christianopoulos" (Cowen and LaDuke 2020, 265).



FIGURE 6.1, THRASHER COMMUNES WITH A PATCH OF GOLDENROD (Y03-01)

infrastructure across the GTA, and by making homely overlooked spaces in Toronto's sub/urban periphery. In these constellations of elsewheres, then, weedy subjectivities and wild embodiments take root, seeding grassroots infrastructure for other worlds—other futures. Thrasher's experience epitomizes this ethos:

[Since lockdown,] I've become a homebody... a homebody that loves being in grass, and dirt... Maybe ten, fifteen minutes away [from their home in Scarborough], there's a community garden, which is really really beautiful... But, I took a picture of the goldenrod [instead] because I fucking love goldenrod. People call it a weed, and I'm like, 'fuck you! No! It's amazing!' In a lot of Indigenous cultures, it's considered the sun: like, how brightening it is.

I did a little bit of studying on it... and I found out that, like, goldenrod is actually really good... [at addressing] specifically different kinds of fungus that erupt into eczema. I was able to create it into a kind of salve. So, it's been really beautiful to go out and see goldenrod, to see different plants, to engage with them and leave them where they are. Sometimes, engage with them and ask them, 'hey, is it okay if I take a piece of you and bring it home?' [Laughter]... [And,] to be able to learn a little bit more—not necessarily about the properties of the plant, but the virtues: how it just exists in space, what it smells like, and what that smell does to me...

What I see in this photo [Figure 6.1] is just mounds and mounds of Goldenrod, and I also see a little abandoned-looking farmhouse... I haven't [ever explored the farmhouse]—it's always locked. It's called, like, colonel-something [Cornell Campbell House],² so I'm like, [tongue-in-cheek] 'hm, it's giving racism. It's giving slavery'... So, it's interesting that, in this photo, mounds and mounds of goldenrod exist despite the clear history of harm that's been done there. So, I think that's what I see: I see—I'm not going to say peace—but emerging into peace... surviving, thriving, and emerging despite the history that exists there.

I think that's one of the reasons I'm so drawn to goldenrod: just the fact that it exists sometimes, and you'll see it really close to cement. Like, 'what are you doing there?' But it's happy, and it's living. Maybe not happy, but it's living. And, that's kind of enough. So, I think that's one of the reasons that I took this photo. I know it doesn't show the garden and the leaves... but it shows one of the main things I was drawn to when I went there. (Y03)

The question of Q&T* life in the sub/urbs might well be summarized as: what are you doing there?

The answer might be symbolized as goldenrod: surviving, thriving, and emerging despite this history of harm. Thus, in their ordinary and extraordinary practices of dwelling across the sub/urban elsewheres of Toronto, Q&T* youth build other ways of being that militate against and overflow the categories of colonial modernity.

In the uncanny presence of goldenrod throughout this research, we can see a counterpoint to the uncanny absence of suicide: that weedy persistence to take root and bloom in violent

2. The Cornell Campbell House is definitely 'giving colonialism.' According to amateur historians: "One of Scarborough's earliest pioneers was William Cornell, who came to Scarborough from Rhode Island through Oswego... In 1800, he was a squatter at this location, which he cleared and built a log cabin... William Cornell was hardworking, industrious, and enterprising and serves as a good role model for any period in history." (Toronto Historical Association, n.d.)

landscapes of precarity—or at the very least, to pass on the seeds to the next generation. The overflowing vibrance of goldenrod is not unlike the vivacious lives of Q&T* youth we have seen herein, from the underbelly of the Bloor Viaduct to the intimate bedrooms of the family household—from the ordinary places of drop-in peer support programs to the extraordinary places of the uncommon commons. Altogether, these weedy modes of dwelling teach us to reframe the question of suicide: whether we may take arms together against our sea of troubles and, by surviving and thriving, end them. This is the Q&T* ethos of wildness: the stubborn dialectic between militancy and boundlessness that affords us the capacity to manifest the impossibilities of colonial modernity—that refusal of coherence and embrace of partiality, that refusal of identity and embrace of embodiment, that refusal of teleology and embrace of the “aleatory and wild nature of life” (Muñoz 2018, 658).

In this thesis, I have sketched out the constellations of elsewheres that emerge when “you can’t be what you were, [and] you’d better start being just what you are.” Drawing from conceptions of precarity and slow death developed by Judith Butler, Lauren Berlant, and Jasbir Puar, I argued that precarity renders Q&T* futures impossible, posing the precipitously open question of suicide: whether to end the troubles of colonial modernity in self-annihilation, or by taking up arms together to become who we are, and in so doing unbuild the infrastructure of the metropolis. Here, I contribute to an emerging body of literature on the geographies of Q&T* youth that works to understand not just the violence of the colonial modern gender system, but the ordinary and extraordinary ways that Q&T* youth survive and thrive amid these landscapes of precarity. This research constitutes one of a handful of geographies that takes seriously the spatial affects of gender transitivity and the particular experiences of trans* and nonbinary youth (Rosenberg 2021; Todd 2023; Smith et al. 2023). Yet, much more work has yet to come if we are to understand the

myriad forms of Q&T* youth life not just in the Global North, but across the globe. In this line of inquiry, the question of suicide is inevitable. Geographers carrying out this research must critically analyze the relationship between the colonial/modern gender system, the endemic phenomenon of Q&T* loneliness and isolation, contemporary anti-trans political movements, and Q&T* youth suicide. By sidestepping the epistemological limits of the health sciences, the answer to the question of Q&T* youth suicide seems deceptively simple: “If you want to kill yourself, remember that I love you. Call me up before you're dead, we can make some plans instead.” These are not the master-plans of metropolis, for the master’s plans cannot dismantle the household modernity built. Rather, “our plans instead” chart an improvisational encounter with difference: “We move through it and it moves with us, out beyond the settlements, out beyond the redevelopment, where black night is falling, where we hate to be alone, back inside to sleep till morning, drink till morning, plan till morning, as the common embrace, right inside, and around, in the surround” (Moten and Harney 2013, 19). Scholars ought to step into the surround, get lost for a while, and explore how being-in-common is a practice of planning for the future that orients Q&T* youth otherwise toward the colonial modern metropolis.

By investigating these modes of alternative planning for futures otherwise, I have put forth another ontology of sub/urban life: one not concerned with laws of movements and motions, but rather with how worlds take shape through trans-scalar phenomena that shift the ground beneath our feet and the matter between our ears. Policy, after all, is just paper unless it can affect the everyday lives of people. I suggest that future sub/urban research focus less on official policy and planning *per se*, and instead engage the ways that these sub/urban politics are taken up, challenged, or ignored in everyday life. The compliment of this ontology is an ethics of research as mutual aid: we must not only interpret the world, but work to change it. By looking backward toward histories

of Q&T* mutual aid organizations, I suggested that, in small but meaningful ways, our research can help challenge precarity by sustaining grassroots social infrastructure. This ethics of mutual aid impels researchers in the neoliberal university to engage the contradictions of our research and work with and for participants to find out how we can enact more just social relations in the messy realities of the present. In other words: “make do with what you have—take what you can get—pay no mind to us: we’re just a minor threat.”

Drawing from go-along interviews, participatory photography, and participant observation with Q&T* youth in sub/urban Toronto, I have illustrated the double bind of sub/urban precarity: “If I go, there will be trouble, if I stay, there will be double.” I have shown how the unjust provision of social infrastructure across the Greater Toronto Area—including the uneven geographies of institutionalized queer social infrastructure, the fragmented mobilities of public transit infrastructure, and the ambivalent affordances of the cisheteronormative household—render Q&T* youth more vulnerable to slow death. This brings the perspectives of Q&T* youth to recent debates about the geographies of infrastructure, demonstrating that the social infrastructure of the metropolis (re)produces the binary logic of colonial modernity by differentially affording the capacity for life—or, by unjustly distributing vulnerability to death. As participants explained, the infrastructure of sub/urban dwelling shapes space not just by how it enables subjects to act in the present, but by how it affords subjects the capacity to imagine a future. Further, I have explored how Q&T* youth negotiated the unjust affordances of sub/urban social infrastructure during the extraordinary period of the COVID-19 lockdown, demonstrating how youth worked to unbuild the architecture of the cisheteronormative household when their worlds were made to wither under Ontario’s provincial lockdown policies. Stuck in the household, unable to access institutionalized queer social

infrastructure, Q&T* youth developed cyborg infrastructures that augmented the place of the bedroom with the virtual space of internet communications technologies.

I proposed the concept of uncanny sub/urbanisms to explain how the *unheimlich*, or the affect of being not-at-home, transformed Q&T* participants' orientations toward sub/urban Toronto. Drawing from the phenomenology of Martin Heidegger and Sara Ahmed, I argued that the *unheimlich* punctures the tidy categories of colonial modernity and prompts Q&T* youth to dwell amid a constellation of places across the colonial modern metropolis, including institutionalized places of queer social infrastructure, the quotidian places of transit, virtual places accessed through internet communications technologies, and wild places in the sub/urban periphery, such as abandoned buildings, cemeteries, urban forests, and overlooked lakeshores. This wide array of places constitutes a social infrastructure for a queer sort of public life. In doing so, I have demonstrated that Q&T* youth are not just another 'diverse' constituency of Toronto's suburbs, but that their practices of dwelling create constellations of elsewheres that span the sub/urban region. Sub/urban scholars must engage the actually existing sub/urbanisms of Q&T* youth, not just as another 'lens' for analyzing sub/urban space, but as endogenous theories of space that challenge both popular suburban imaginaries and narratives of 'progressive suburbanisms.' For many Q&T* youth, life in the sub/urbs is not elective, but a grim necessity of precarity. Their uncanny sub/urbanisms reflect this unhomeliness, suggesting that Toronto's sub/urbs are not as tame as they have been portrayed.

Thinking with José Esteban Muñoz and Jack Halberstam's conception of wildness, I explored how uncanny sub/urbanisms afford Q&T* youth the capacity to channel their desires into alternative embodiments of gender and sexuality. In sketching out this constellation of sub/urban elsewheres, I have illustrated how wild places can nurture the uncommon commons of countercultural

scenes, places where Q&T* youth can hail each other with a triple dare: “Dare ya to do what you want, Dare ya to be who you will, Dare ya to cry right out loud,” creating space for each other to “get so emotional, baby!” In these uncommon commons, the militant boundlessness of Q&T* youth overflows the categories of colonial modernity through the ecstatic reverie of dance—a communing of desire with and through the difference of being and the repetition of becoming. If these modes of being-in-common inhabit space differently by dwelling in sub/urban elsewheres, then they inhabit time differently, too. The moments of affective intensity that punctuate the dance toward sunrise echo both the long nights out that sustain the quotidian periods of Q&T* life and the cycles of growth, flowering, and death that drive the long life cycles of the uncommon commons. Flourishing scenes transmit their memories as seeds of alternative worlds that travel across space and time, taking root elsewhere—pockets of potential waiting patiently, indefatigably, for the conditions ripe to take root. I have shown how these constellations of sub/urban elsewheres constitute forms of grassroots social infrastructure for Q&T* youth, affording the capacity for experimentation with alternative embodiments of gender and sexuality and, in turn, the capacity to imagine futures where Q&T* life can not just survive, but thrive. Much more work is necessary to understand these ordinary and extraordinary ways that Q&T* youth dwell in the shadow of the colonial modern metropolis, and how grassroots social infrastructure sustains Q&T* life in the present and the future. It is my hope that this exploratory study can lay the groundwork for such research by helping scholars feel the wildness of these uncommon commons.

Thus, being-in-common is not elective, but necessary for those living the slow deaths of colonial modern precarity. We are thrown into such a wretched world not by our own choosing: here, “There are no cities, no cities to love—It’s not the cities, it’s the weather we love—It’s not the weather, it’s the people we love.” It’s the people we love—perhaps, in the fabulous vivaciousness

of these queer and trans* relations, we might find an answer to the absurd question of suicide. It's the people we love—it's through the spark of wild desires, dwelling on the threshold between friends, strangers, and lovers, that queer and trans* youth survive and thrive in the precarity of Toronto's sub/urbs.

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APPENDIX A: FIELDWORK MATERIALS

I. INTERVIEW SCHEDULE

- Introduction
 - Describe the study;
 - review participation requirements & compensation logistics;
 - and confirm informed consent.
 - Start recorder.
1. Tell me about yourself.
 2. Tell me about the photos you've brought.
 3. What role does this place play in your life?
 - a) What happens there? What do you like to do there?
 - b) Who do you go with? Who don't you go with?
 - c) How do you feel when you're there?
 - d) How often do you go, and on which occasions?
 - e) How does it shape your habits, or everyday actions?
 - * How does the internet effect how you engage with this place?
 4. How do you get there? And, how do you usually get around?
 - a) What is your experience getting around town? Around the GTA?
 - b) How do the transit/mobility options [infrastructure] in your community effect your everyday life?
 5. How do the suburbs limit, or, create space for, you to be yourself?
 6. Where in your community do you feel like you can be yourself?
 7. How do you build your social connections?
 - * How does the internet effect your social connections?
 8. How do you feel [dis]connected to your community?

Snowball sampling: do you know anyone who might be interested in participating in this study?

2. CONSENT FORM

Informed Consent Form

More than survival: Queer youth place-making in Suburban Toronto

Wiley Sharp, Masters Candidate, Department of Geography, York University

Purpose of the Research:

The study seeks to understand how LGBTQ2S (henceforth, queer) youth make meaningful places in their everyday lives, as well as the broader social effects of these place-making practices. Through interviews with youth themselves and discussion of their photographs of queer suburban places, the study connects everyday habits, social relationships, and queer places in suburban Toronto. Findings from the study will be published as part of the researcher's Master's thesis.

What You Will Be Asked to Do in the Research:

Participants will select a meaningful everyday place for the location of the interview. Prior to the interview, participants will share photos (2 or 3 suggested; up to 5) of a queer place in their everyday lives. Content of the photos could include:

- a place where they feel [un]seen as themselves;
- a place where they feel [un]safe to express their identity;
- a place where they like to hang out with[out] friends;
- a place that brings them up when life is hard;
- or, if you are comfortable, a place where you have experienced something difficult.

Please obtain verbal consent before including photos of others.

Then, participants will join in a 90-120 minute mobile interview at the chosen location. Interviews will occur in two halves: stationary and mobile. During the stationary part, we will talk about why they submitted these photos and what the places in the images mean to them. During the mobile part, we will move around the landscape of the chosen location and talk about how they inhabit the place and what it means to them.

The interview structure is flexible, and participants will work with the researcher to establish the order of the two parts and account for mobility access needs.

Participants will be compensated \$50 cash in recognition of their participation in the study.

Risks and Discomforts:

Social discomfort is possible if participation is unintentionally disclosed to others (e.g. participation is observed in a public place). Emotional discomfort is possible if discussing sensitive or intense experiences.

Participants are free to select a location in accordance with their desires for privacy and/or anonymity, and participation can occur online, if necessary.

Should emotional distress arise during participation, participants should withdraw participation. Consider the following support resources if experiencing emotional distress:

- LGBT YouthLine: confidential peer support for LGBTQ2S folks. Phone: 1-800-268-9699, Text: 647-694-4245
- Trans Lifeline: confidential peer support for trans folks. Phone: 877-565-8860, 877-330-6366
- Youthspace.ca: anonymous emotional support service. Text: 778-783-0177

Benefits of the Research and Benefits to You:

Participants will contribute to emerging understandings of queer life in suburban Canada. Participants will receive \$50 compensation for sharing their time and experiences.

Voluntary Participation and Withdrawal:

Your participation in the study is completely voluntary and you may choose to stop participating at any time. Your decision not to volunteer, to stop participating, or to refuse to answer particular questions will not influence the nature of the ongoing relationship you may have with the researchers or study staff, or the nature of your relationship with York University either now, or in the future.

If you decide to stop participating, you may withdraw without penalty, financial or otherwise, and you will still receive the promised compensation.

In the event you withdraw from the study, all associated data collected will be immediately destroyed wherever possible. Should you wish to withdraw after the study, you will have the option to also withdraw your data up until the analysis is complete.

COVID-19:

The researcher will be fully vaccinated and in compliance with provincial and university COVID-19 mitigation policies. If you are a member of a vulnerable group with respect to COVID-19 (e.g., immuno-compromised), please discuss your participation with the research team. Please communicate your COVID-19 mitigation preferences to the researcher ahead of the interview; the process of the interview will be adjusted according to your preferences (e.g. occurring entirely outside; socially distanced; and / or with masks).

Confidentiality & Data Management:

Interviews will be recorded on a digital voice recorder. Recordings will be transcribed, and destroyed as soon as the accuracy of transcripts has been confirmed. Recordings and transcripts will be stored on an encrypted laptop, and backups will be stored on an encrypted drive located at York University. Electronic data will be stored until April 2023, at which point it will be deleted from the research laptop and the backup drive will be erased. No print data will be created. Only the researcher will have access to the information.

Unless you choose otherwise, all information you supply during the research will be held in confidence and unless you specifically indicate your consent, your name will not appear in any report or publication of the research. Confidentiality will be provided to the fullest extent possible by law.

Questions About the Research?

If you have questions about the research in general or about your role in the study, please feel free to contact me at [REDACTED]. You may also contact my supervisor, Alison Bain, at [REDACTED] or the Graduate Program in Geography at [REDACTED].

This research has received ethics review and approval by the Delegated Ethics Review Committee, which is delegated authority to review research ethics protocols by the Human Participants Review Sub-Committee, York University's Ethics Review Board, and conforms to the standards of the Canadian Tri-Council Research Ethics guidelines. If you have any questions about this process, or about your rights as a participant in the study, please contact the Sr. Manager & Policy Advisor for the Office of Research Ethics, 5th Floor, Kaneff Tower, York University.

Legal Rights and Signatures:

I, _____ consent to participate in *More than survival: Queer youth place-making in Suburban Toronto* conducted by Wiley Sharp. I understand the nature of this project and wish to participate. I am not waiving any of my legal rights by signing this form. My signature below indicates my consent.

Signature _____
Participant

Date _____

Signature _____
Principal Investigator

Date _____

3. RECRUITMENT MATERIALS

Seeking participants for research on LGBTQ2S+ youth in suburban GTA!

Share your experiences about:

- life in the suburbs
- social and community spaces
- queerness and everyday life

Participation involves a 90-minute interview. Participants will be provided a \$50 honorarium.

For more information, visit
<https://bit.ly/3d4gHtD>
or email bwsharp@yorku.ca.



APPENDIX B: INTERVIEW METADATA

I. YOUTH INTERVIEWS

No.	Date	Duration	Location(s)	Mobile?	Transit Route
Y01	4-Oct-22	1:47:53	Beltline trail (Caledonia and Castlefield), Prospect Cemetery (Eglinton)	Y	52 bus to bus transfer
Y02	7-Oct-22	2:11:41	Woodbine Beach	Y	1 subway to Queen streetcar
Y03	12-Oct-22	1:51:52	Kensington Market, Bellevue Square Park, TPL Sanderson Branch	Y	1 subway to 2 subway, walk
Y04	21-Oct-22	1:55:16	U of T Scarborough	Y	Cab out; 995 bus to York Mills and subway back
Y05	9-Nov-22	1:51:57	Online	N	N/A
Y06	15-Nov-22	1:45:56	Springdale Library	N	Driven out; cab, GO bus, subway back
Y07	24-Nov-22	2:25:04	TBLGAY	N	52 bus to Line 1 to York; same route back
Y08	28-Nov-22	1:37:33	Toby's Place	N	Line 1 to Line 2 subway to 12 bus out; driven back
Y09	1-Dec-22	0:54:09	Scarborough Town Center	N	Line 1 to York Mills, bus out; Line 3 to line 2 to line 1 subway back
Y10	2-Dec-22	1:48:12	TBLGAY	N	52 bus to Line 1 to York
Y11	6-Dec-22	2:20:45	Starbucks, Kingston & Victoria Park	N	Line 1 to line 2 subway out to 12 bus; same route back

2. STAFF INTERVIEWS

No.	Participant	Date	Duration	Location	Transit Route
S01	Toby's Place (TP) Program Coordinators	5-Dec-22	2:53:18	The Only Café (Danforth Ave)	Line 1 to Line 2 subway out and back
S02	Former TP Program Coordinator	7-Dec-22	1:09:52	Online	N/A
S03	Birchcliff Bluffs United Church Staff	12-Dec-22	1:30:28	Birchcliff Bluffs United Church	Line 1 to Line 2 subway to 12 bus out; same route back

APPENDIX C: CODEBOOK

AFFECT

EMBODIMENT
JOY
QUEER & TRANS FLOURISHING
STRESS
ISOLATION & LONELINESS

PANDEMIC

LOCKDOWN
MITIGATION

PLACES

HOME
 BEDROOM
 HOUSING
INSTITUTIONALIZED SOCIAL INFRASTRUCTURE
PARKS
SCHOOL
THE CITY
 DOWNTOWN
 THE VILLAGE
 WEST END
THE SUBURBS
TRANSIT
VIRTUAL PLACES
WILD PLACES

PRECARITY

AFFORDABILITY
MOBILITY
SLOW DEATH
VIOLENCE

RELATIONSHIPS

FAMILY
 PARENTS
 SIBLINGS
FRIENDS
PARTNERS

EVERYDAY RESISTANCE

BEING-IN-COMMON
GRASSROOTS SOCIAL INFRASTRUCTURE
 COUNTERCULTURAL COMMUNITY