Haunted Sex: Queer Art and the Spectral Politics of Cruising

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Declaration

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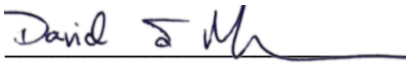
Signed: 

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I want to thank Prem Sahib, Marc Adelman, Stuart Sandford, Danny Jauregui, Zach Blas, and Dean Sameshima for their consent to include images of their work.

Abstract

Haunted Sex: Queer Art and the Spectral Politics of Cruising

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This research project examines cruising-related artworks from the past fifteen years to explore the impact that cultural developments and new technologies have had on discourses relating to queer sexuality. Theorising queer sex as haunted – by the sting of abjection, the trauma of loss, the idealistic hopes of liberation and queer futurity – it demonstrates how the gravitational force of these spectral pasts and inchoate futures can overburden sex with meaning, agency and ethicopolitical potential. By adopting an *eidolontological* mode of analysis – a novel critical methodology I developed that combines hauntology with the concept of the *eidolon* – each chapter explores artistic case studies undergirded by feelings of crisis, lack and unease. Turning towards these negative feelings allows me to untangle the hauntological dimensions of present-day perspectives on public sex. Cruising can chafe with contemporary homonormative and queer ideals relating to pride, visibility, agency and the careful management of self. Instead of reactively idealising these practices as queerly radical, this project turns towards the complicated aspects of cruising cultures. Each chapter delves into queer sex's unsettling impurities to determine what we can learn from anxious cruising discourses that foreground the risks of forgetting (Chapter 2), promiscuity and addiction (Chapter 3), silence and invisibility (Chapter 4), and mediated intimacies (Chapter 5). In doing so, the PhD works to deidealise and *deperilise* dissident sex, untethering it from the responsibility of realising utopia or dystopia.

Introduction

This PhD examines how cruising cultures are represented and remembered within contemporary art as a way of exploring the hauntological dimensions of queer sex. It proposes that discourses relating to cruisy, promiscuous sex are haunted both by spectral pasts and future-oriented ideals. It argues that *perilising* and idealising accounts of queer sex overburden it with anxiety, fear, and the responsibility of realising a better future. In contrast to the extant research on art and cruising cultures, the project focuses on art created in the last fifteen years (Gove, 2000; Turner, 2003; Anderson, 2019; Weinberg, 2019; Parlett, 2022). Doing so allows the research to explore the impact cultural developments and new technologies have had on discourses relating to queer sexuality, be it the introduction of effective anti-retroviral treatments and pre-exposure prophylaxis, the rise of digital cruising technologies or the recent creative investment in queer cultural memory. The contemporary focus of this research and its reflexive approach to sexual politics and theory represents a new body of work in the realm of queer and memory studies.

The hauntological dimensions of the research are best illustrated by turning to a case study: artist Marc Adelman's *Stelen (Columns)* (2007-2011). Located near the Brandenburg Gate, the Memorial to the Murdered Jews of Europe in Berlin consists of a field of 2711 grey concrete pillars or "stelae" (Stevens, 2012, p. 37). When you enter, the narrow gaps between the looming pillars force you into a single file and gradually cut you off from the outside world. The memorial's architect, Peter Eisenman, purposefully created a space that would act and speak through the body. It taps into corporeal sensations of alienation, diminution and restriction, thereby establishing a phenomenological link to the lived experiences of the Holocaust.

Figure 1 Stelen (2007-2011) by Marc Adelman

[Archival pigment prints on Canson Infinity Platine Fibre Rag, 4 1/2 x 3 1/2" each]

Artist Marc Adelman's *Stelen* consists of over a hundred images, copied from a gay dating website, of men posing in the Eisenman memorial. Included as part of the 2011 Jewish Museum exhibition entitled *Composed: Identity, Politics, Sex*, Adelman offered some context on the photos in an interview on his work. The artist highlighted how "the butch aesthetic" and maze-like structure of the monument mirrored the spaces associated with cruising (Adelman, 2012).

Cruising is the queer cultural practice of seeking out and identifying potential sexual partners in public space. Historically, cruising cultures emerged as a response to disciplinary power, as homosexuals could be pursued simply for "holding a cigarette in an effeminate way" or

demonstrating “affectation in hand movements” (Jacobs, 1963, p. 260). Queer people had to develop visual or verbal codes that privately signalled their sexuality. In the early 1900s, for example, wearing a red tie was a discreet way to announce one’s homosexuality to others in the know (Ellis, 1915, p. 300). Similarly, in the 1960s, the handkerchief code secretly communicated one’s sexual preferences in a public setting (Reilly and Saethre, 2013, p. 69). From a contemporary standpoint, the popularity of the location-based hookup app like *Grindr* demonstrates how cruising lives on today as it gives queer people a private method of identifying their sexual peers in public space (Miles, 2020).

Although commonly referred to as ‘public sex’, the term is somewhat of a misnomer. David Bell explains that, though it usually takes place in a place commonly regarded as public, when it comes to “the identities of the participants, their knowledge of each other, and the wider ‘public’ knowledge of the activities that go on in a particular setting”, cruising is experienced as deeply private (1995a, p. 280). It is, as art historian David Getsy describes, a risk-laden “performance of the private in public”, a fraught articulation of sociality that can render one vulnerable to exposure and harm (2008, p. 17).

Adelman insisted that dismissing the *Stelen* images as profane ignored both the complex histories of cruising and the hauntological dimensions of queer culture (Adelman, 2012). In an interview, Adelman (2012) pointed to Getsy’s meditation on cruising as “a synecdoche of a larger, life-long process of looking for, finding, losing, and looking again for intersubjective connections” (Getsy, 2008, p. 18). The symbolic connection of gay sexual sociality to yearning and loss chimed with Adelman’s reading of the Holocaust memorial selfies as highlighting:

> […] the predominantly unconscious ways in which the AIDS epidemic of the 1980s reverberates through contemporary queer life. Jewish lives and queer lives have been both

> informed as well as transformed by loss. It's a central aspect to both cultures and one that has greatly influenced my understanding of the images that comprise *Stelen* and their relationship to the cultural history of HIV and AIDS. To live a queer life is to a live a life that is ineluctably haunted.
> (Adelman, 2012)

For Adelman, the past is not inert. It exerts a ghostly force on the present. The spectral traces of the AIDS crisis are evident in the actions of these gay men in the Holocaust memorial, with the photographs representing an unconscious collective reaction to the traumatic echoes of history.

Jacques Derrida (1994) used hauntology to explain the agency of the past in the present: how previous historical events and political ideas appear as ghostly revenants in contemporary sociopolitical issues and debates. More recently, Møller and Ledin (2021) adapted Derrida's concept to their analysis of contemporary HIV prevention strategies. They utilise viral hauntology to describe how older, morality-driven sex panics tend to recur in discourses on contemporary queer sexual behaviours. Likewise, in *Positive Images,* Dion Kagan explores how the anxieties of the crisis years are not a thing of the past; they persist as a ghostly "unresolved presence" in the cultures of the Global North (2018, p. 7). Although the 'post-crisis'[1] period is defined by advances in the treatment and prevention of HIV, the "whore cultures of liberation" (p. 219) still haunt ideas about queer sex in the present with fresh moral panics abounding around practices such as barebacking, gift giving, chemsex and public sex.[2] Yet, the hauntological dimensions of the AIDS

[1] Kagan's (2018) use of the term 'post-crisis' refers to the period after the introduction of antiretroviral drugs in 1996. However, its use does not imply that the HIV/AIDS pandemic is 'over' in any real sense. Instead, it describes how, in the Global North, understandings of HIV/AIDS have shifted from "a state of crisis to one of chronicity" (p. 15).

[2] A barebacker is someone who has sex "without a condom", a bugchaser is an "HIV negative person looking to get infected with HIV" and a giftgiver is an "HIV positive person looking to infect someone who is not infected with the virus" (Walter, 2016, p. 22). Chemsex refers "to the use of recreational drugs within sex, especially crystal methamphetamine (crystal meth), GHB and mephedrone" (p. 40). These practices are frequently the spectacular focus

pandemic – the feelings of loss and the affective echoes of trauma – also inform queer anti-(homo)normative perspectives on sex. As Møller and Ledin explain, viral hauntology influences how, in the post-crisis era, "gay communities imagine gay sexual sociability to be virtuous, sustainable" and "transgressive" (2021, p. 148). Therefore, while Adelman reads the proliferation of Holocaust Memorial profile pictures as a symptom of viral hauntology, arguably, it is Adelman himself who exemplifies the hauntological pull of the past. For the artist, the quotidian act of taking a selfie is imbued with significance and sincerity – it becomes a node in a shimmering web of collective memorialisation.

Adelman's work was removed after the museum received complaints from men whose images had been appropriated without consent (*Statement Regarding Marc Adelman Work*, 2012). Shortly after being cut from the exhibition, Adelman was forwarded a link to the website *Grindr Remembers* (2014). Like his work, it consists of photographs collected from *Grindr* of gay men's selfies in the Holocaust memorial. Queer author Jennifer Mills (2013) was horrified by the images she scrolled through on *Grindr Remembers*, writing in a blog post that they were "a portrait of a human failing" (para. 4) and a clear demonstration of the "ahistorical reality of online encounters" (para. 4). She went on to insist that:

> [t]he history of the Holocaust is the history of homosexuality. It is ours to care for […] These predominantly white males have not forgotten because they are evil; they have forgotten because they have so much incentive to forget. That is privilege in action – the privilege of amnesia. When the world is a smorgasbord of casual hookups, the opportunities to forget are everywhere. […] By decontextualising ourselves from our own cultural histories and our membership in a common humanity, we not only forget, we fail

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of media sex panics. For example, VICE Media (2015) made a moralising and fear-mongering documentary on chemsex, while Channel 4 (2024) did the same for bug chasing in the UK.

> to bear witness – not only to the past, but to the injustices which go on all around us. While these images were taken, fascists were gathering literally just around the corner. (paras 5–6)

Whereas Adelman sees the men as acting in relation to the past, Mills views the selfies as indexical of a worrying form of sociohistorical amnesia that is accelerated and aggravated by the contemporary availability of casual sex.

Stuart Hall deployed the notion of the cultural dope to describe the belief that people who consumed commercially produced culture are "living in a permanent state of false consciousness", unable to "tell that what they are being fed is an updated form of the opium of the people" (1981, p. 232). The cultural dope ghosts through Mill's rhetoric as the forms of consumption she associates with online cruising culture leave gay men exposed to a dehistoricising force that will, through a Lethe-like power, see gay men sleepwalk into fascism.

Firstly, it is important to clarify that many social groups utilise the memorial space in a ludic or sexual manner. Although the shifting landscape and altered visibility were intended to evoke negative feelings, its resemblance to a maze makes it an "ideal playground" for games of tag and hide-and-seek (Krause, 2015, p. 59). Visitors frequently clamber onto *stellae* to jump onto successively taller pillars, seemingly unable to resist the "tremendous stimulus and opportunity" afforded by the physical space (Stevens, 2012, p. 47). Others – taking advantage of the striking and "dynamic backdrop" – snap selfies among the *stellae* (Getsy, 2019a, p. 189). As night approaches and darkness floods the space, amorous couples can be heard to "bill and coo in the Stelenfeld" (Krause, 2015, p. 68). The central location of the monument also saw events like the

Football World Cup or a techno music festival spill over into the site (Stevens, 2012, p. 44).[3] In short, the appropriation and subversion of the space beyond its intended function is an ever-present reality that is not solely the remit of gay men.

Valentina Rozas-Krause also notes that memorial profile pictures are not a gay phenomenon; they are also "a ubiquitous presence" on other platforms like Instagram and Facebook (2015, p. 67). However, uploading the photos to a queer hookup app or dating profile brings them into the realm of the sexual. It is the intimation of queer sex that supercharges these images with a host of contradictory meanings. This slight reference to the practice of cruising – taking a photograph is not part of the semiotics of public sex – becomes a metonym for the actions and morality of an entire cultural group.

Within Adelman and Mills's reactions, we can see the discursive machinations of sexuality outlined by Michel Foucault (1978) in *The History of Sexuality Volume 1*. Here, Foucault explicates how sex came to be "a problem of truth" (p. 56) in Western culture. Constituting sex as something to be confessed, studied, and laid bare spawned a whole host of interpretative and therapeutic strategies to help decipher its hidden meanings. Whereas formerly, the church and the clinic chiefly commanded the will to know the truth of sex, today, this imperative has been internalised. According to the academic, "it is up to us to extract the truth of sex" (p. 77), mining it for shards of revelatory self-knowledge. In the case of these selfies, we are being told that the

[3] Black American artist Carrie Mae Weems's 2013 video piece *Holocaust Memorial* was also filmed among the *stellae*. In the video, the artist performed a ritual dance between the pillars, her moving body acting as "a witness and guide […] through the trauma of history" (Weems, 2023). Writing about the connection between Black and Jewish communities, the artist stated "that there's a shared sense of struggle" that "forms an incredible bond between these two apparently very different groups of people" (2014, p. 69).

innocuous act of taking a photo belies a deeper meaning about gay men and their sexual culture.

These diverging responses to the holocaust memorial selfies are animated by the past, by the force that queer history exerts on the present. In Adelman's case, these men are "ineluctably haunted" by the echoes of the AIDS pandemic; it ghosts through their movements in the present (Adelman, 2012). For Mills (2013), *Grindr* users' mindless consumption of frivolous, promiscuous sex drags them backwards into an apolitical form of forgetting. It is a shocking denial of the responsibility to remember a shared history of oppression. Out of this rhetoric, queer sex emerges as an exceptional force, one that can be generative or destructive. In both cases, the men in question exhibit a warped kind of agency, their actions betraying either an unconscious reaction to past trauma or empty-willed consumption.

The case study of the Eisenman memorial photographs reveals how, within queer culture, sex – particularly cruisy, promiscuous, 'public' sex – is laden with a host of contradictory meanings and attachments. Cruising – be it in the park, sauna, or ether of the internet – is a culturally charged practice. It raises a flurry of conflicting discourses on identity and community, health and addiction, (in)visibility and the privatisation of sexuality. These discourses tend to be marked by a strange, contradictory temporality, simultaneously connoting shame-laden pasts and novel queer futures. In theorising queer sex as haunted – by the sting of abjection, the trauma of loss, the hopes of liberation and queer futurity – this research explores how the cultural response to this spectrality can overburden sex with anxiety, aspiration, and idealism. The layering of queer sex with power and meaning is precisely what Foucault (1978) warned against in *The History of Sexuality*, for "it is the agency of sex that we must break away from" (p. 157) if we want to counter the discursive and disciplinary effects of sexuality.

In *Cruising Utopia*, Jose Esteban Muñoz wrote that "books of criticism that simply glamorize the ontology of gay male cruising are more often than not simply boring" (2009, p. 18). In contradistinction to the reparative-oriented texts that Muñoz was critiquing – which tend to swaddle dissident sexual practices in the valorising language of ethicopolitical possibility – this research project is focused on dissecting the hauntological dimensions of contemporary discourses on cruising. It argues that understanding how queer sex is haunted untethers it from the burden of realising dystopia/utopia and allows us "to learn to live with ghosts" that whisper stories of past ignominies and delights (Derrida, 1994, pp. xvii-xviii). While this is not the first body of research to apply the concept of hauntology to public sex cultures (Anderson, 2019), its focus on the spectral dimensions of contemporary cruising discourses represents a novel way of theorising the relationship between sex, temporality and the formation of cultural ideals.[4]

The following chapters examine artistic case studies from the past fifteen years to determine how cruising cultures are mythologised, idealised and pathologised within contemporary sexual politics. Chapter 1 provides the theoretical framing and methodological approach of the research project. By foregrounding the relationship between abjection and public sex, it demonstrates how the spectre of historical oppression ghosts through homonormative and queer discourses on cruisy, promiscuous sex. The chapter outlines the *eidolontological* approach

[4] Fiona Anderson's *Cruising the Dead River* examines art and writing relating to the New York Waterfront in the late 1970s and early 1980s. This area was once a bustling site of trade and activity, but it fell into economic decline with "the rise of air transportation and white-collar urban labour" in the '60s (Anderson, 2019, p. 2). The collapse of the West Side Highway in the early '70s further isolated the space as huge swathes of "the harbour were cut off from the main body of Manhattan" (p. 2). In Anderson's text, the "strange temporality of this ruined place" (p. 6) is evident in the spectral figures populating David Wojnarowicz's accounts of cruising the Westside piers. *Cruising the Dead River* is focused on a particular sociohistorical context – the gentrification of the New York Waterfront in the 1980s. In contrast to Anderson's hauntological analysis, this research project is focused on contemporary discourses relating to cruising cultures.

of the PhD, *eidolontology* being a concept that encapsulates both hauntology – the impact of the past in the present – and the force exerted by cultural ideals. Adopting an *eidolontological* approach requires me to select cruising-related artworks for analysis animated by feelings of unease, crisis, or lack. Focusing on these negative feelings allows me to explore the spectres and ideals influencing cruising discourses and sexual politics in the present.

Chapter 2 focuses exclusively on archival art relating to cruising cultures. These works are all marked by a nostalgic or melancholic attachment to lost spaces and practices. In analysing these works, it explores how the cultural imperative to preserve the sexual past can ossify cruising cultures into an idealised cultural image that conserves the hierarchies and hegemonies of race and gender. Drawing on the work of artist Prem Sahib, it demonstrates how reflective nostalgia (Boym, 2008) can offer a way to preserve the past while leaving it open to critique. The final portion of the chapter addresses creative encounters with archival lack. By contrasting artworks that engage a queer spectral method with ones that prioritise probative documents, it highlights the productive possibilities inherent to archival silence.

Chapter 3 examines the connection between viral hauntology and cruising cultures by comparing John Walter's exhibition *Alien Sex Club* (2016) with Matthew Todd's (2016) book *Straight Jacket.* By approaching contemporary public sex cultures through the lens of addiction, both Walter and Todd re-pathologise cruisers as regressive figures of unreason. This negative approach to pleasure – coupled with the works' focus on an unsullied form of absolute agency – reflects the contemporary neoliberal ideal of self-management. Tracing the spectre of disability within these "re-crisis" (Kagan, 2018) discourses leads me towards a *deperilising* perspective on pleasure and sovereignty: Berlant's (2007) concept of lateral agency.

Chapter 5 concentrates on how cruising, past and present, has been bonded to ideas of invisibility, impotence and silence. Examining the art of Dries Verhoeven and Prem Sahib, the chapter problematises the turn towards reparative visibility politics, demonstrating how contemporary demands to be queerly legible are undergirded by neoliberal rationalities. The chapter deidealises (Amin, 2017) the reification of queer visibility into a potent political tool and *deperilises* the closet space by engaging theories of opacity and (il)legibility.

Chapter 6 examines discourses on the emergence and popularity of digital cruising technologies such as *Sniffies* and *Grindr*. It highlights how nostalgic-tinged critiques of virtual cruising – they are viewed as triggering the neglect of physical space, a loss of authentic sociality, neoliberal marketisation and commodification – tend to establish a temporal break between an idealised time of 'true' cruising and the shallow, inauthentic socialities of the present. By exploring the continuities between the past and the present, the chapter deidealises melancholic phantasies of a lost culture of sexual possibility.

If queer movements are haunted by a spectre, it is the spectre of abjection.

Rahul Rao, *Out of Time: The Queer Politics of Postcoloniality*, 2020

1. Public Sex Fantasies: From Abjection to Idealisation

This chapter provides the theoretical background and hauntological framework for this research project by exploring how the spectre of abjection has been instrumental in shaping gay/queer politics, theory, and identity.[5] The first section uses historical and contemporary sex panics relating to queer sexuality – from the infamous Purple Pamphlet in 1964 to the undercover cruising sting Project Marie in 2016 – to explore how queer public sex operates as an abject spectacle within dominant culture. It demonstrates how the abjection of cruisy sex shores up the boundaries of heteronormative propriety, a heterosexist public realm and homonormative identity. Focusing on contemporary gay respectability politics, the chapter isolates cruising's position as an abject anachronism as the secrecy and anonymity of the practice raise the spectre of an oppressive past, one that chafes uncomfortably with the forward motion of political progress narratives.

The second section examines the queer theoretical investment in sex as an object of reparative academic enquiry. Taking inspiration from Anna Marie Jagose (2012), Kadji Amin (2017) and Heather Love's (2009) reflexive approach to queer theory, it demonstrates how the historical – and ongoing – denigration of queer sexuality inspires a reactive impulse to protect and

[5] The distinction I make here between gay and queer politics follows the one Peter Drucker (2015) makes between neoliberal gay normality and radical queer sexual politics. As I will demonstrate, mainstream gay politics embraces the delimitation of sexuality to the private sphere in a bid to garner mainstream acceptance. Conversely, radical queer politics tends to rail against the privatisation of sexuality. When I use the term 'gay politics', I am – except where I am referencing movements or political shifts, e.g. the 1960s US homophile movements or the rise of 1980s gay neoconservativism– referring to homonormative respectability politics. Likewise, my use of 'queer politics' references anti-normative, anti-homonormative positions.

value it. By looking at queer theory texts relating to sex – from Tim Dean's (2009) *Unlimited Intimacy* to João Florêncio's (2020) academic study of pig masculinities – it highlights how non-normative sex is valorised as holding a unique ethicopolitical value. Cruisy, promiscuous sex is charged with the power to forge more equitable connections and queerer futures. Much like sex panics *perilise* deviant sex as a destructive force, this idealisation of queer sex accords it a moral value and generative power that feeds into "the agency of sex" (Foucault, 1978, p. 157).

Having explored *perilising* and idealising accounts of cruisy sex, the final section establishes the *eidolontological* framework of the PhD. *Eidolontology* encapsulates the demands that ghosts and cultural ideals both place on the present, offering a way to diagnose how spectral pasts and futures inform queer culture's relationship to sex.

1.1 Cruising Backwards: Public Sex and Pastness

1.1.1 The Spectre of Closeted Abjection

The deviant, promiscuous homosexual is a longstanding abject figure within Western culture. In *The Homosexual Problem,* Psychotherapist Alfred Adler described homosexuality as an insidious "spectre" that haunted a society losing the battle against its aberrant spread (1917, p. 268). Judith Butler highlights the generative qualities of abjection as heterosexuality has realised its normative boundaries through a sustained, repetitive "repudiation of its own homosexual possibility" (1998, p. 227). After all, as Jonathan Ned Katz (2007) explored, heterosexuality was not always understood as signifying 'natural' sexuality; this association with normativity only came into being through an oppositional relationship with pathological same-sex desire.

Although the Latin roots of abjection imply the casting out of an object, Julia Kristeva's *Powers of Horror* describes the abject as "something rejected from which one does not part" (1982, p. 4). It remains within the psyche as a shadowy spectre that "haunts the subject as its inner constitutive boundary" (McClintock, 2013, p. 71). The abject assures the subject of their "perpetual danger and the need to confirm boundaries and order" (Kristeva, 1982, p. 9). Butler underscores the social, *extrapsychic* dimensions of abjection by pointing out how it is key to forming "culturally hegemonic identities" along the lines of race, sexuality and gender (1990, p. 70).

The historically abject status of homosexuality has meant that queer identities and intimacies have long felt the sting of denigration and pathologisation. As previously outlined, this outsider status has served a regulatory function: Bell insists that "society needs its citizen-perverts to act as markers of the limits of the moral economy of citizenship" (1995b, p. 144). However, abjection has also been instrumental in the formation of gay and queer identities as the historical experience of outsiderhood exerts a hauntological force on the politics of sex, visibility, and categorisation. In *Capitalism and Gay Identity*, John D'Emilio explains that, in the absence of tangible homosexual history, the early US gay movement drew on a shared experience of isolation, which they "read backwards in time" (2007, p. 250). This means that, when looking at the history of homosexuality, there is a tendency to see it as "a progressive, even teleological, evolution from pre-modern repression, silence, and invisibility to modern visibility and sexual freedom" (Roscoe and Murray, 1997, p. 5). This is reflected in the dominant narrative of gay liberation, where the transformative power of the reverse discourse transfigured "shame into pride, secrecy into visibility and social exclusion into outsider glamour" (Love, 2009, p. 28). This repurposing of negative feelings and experiences into something identity-affirming tends to reify the idea that

those in the past were all dominated by an "undifferentiated, terrible oppression" (D'Emilio, 2007, p. 250). Consequently, queer history becomes a dark place populated by an "abject multitude against whose experience we define our own liberation" (Love, 2009, p. 10). The historical dimensions of this shame/pride dialectic are evident in the opening of Matthew Todd's (2016) self-help-style book *Straight Jacket: How to be Gay and Happy.*

Sporting a striking testimonial from Elton John on its essentiality "for every gay person on the planet", the book's blurb claims to offer gay men a way through "depression, drug abuse and sex addiction" so they can "finally get the lives they really want". A former editor of the British gay lifestyle magazine *Attitude*, Todd's book opens with an excerpt from a 1967 BBC2 documentary focused on the decriminalisation of homosexuality. A man, face hidden from the camera, recounts his experiences cruising public toilets in London.

> **Man:** I know that I am probably different to a lot of normal other homosexuals; they probably went round to toilets to find somebody to have sexual relations with, but I wanted someone for company. [One day] I went into this toilet, I suppose two or three times over the course of an afternoon, and I came out and somebody, a young person, said they was arresting me for importuning. So they took me to some police station, took my fingerprint and said that I would have to stay there until I appeared in court on Monday […] I couldn't believe just because I wanted somebody to love me and to have friendship with I had to suffer all this […]
>
> **Interviewer:** Do you think you need help?
>
> **Man:** Yes, I do. I think everybody that is a homosexual needs help. They need someone – that's what I'm searching for now – I need someone with whom I can share my life. That's all I need. But it seems that it's wrong.[6]

[6] Ironically, although the 2017 Turing Law was intended to deliver "posthumous pardons" (Rao, 2020, p. 125) and disregard the convictions of those persecuted by homophobic UK law, the man from the BBC2 documentary is not within its remit as his offence, "sex in a public lavatory", remains a crime (Jeyasingham, 2010).

(p. 3)

Todd juxtaposes this man's impossible plight for same-sex love with the gay wedding of friends held "on the roof deck of the National Theatre overlooking the Thames" (p. 4). Todd is careful to select a good historical subject, one that articulates his homosexuality in terms of a desire for love, not sex. He exhibits the "complex of sincere gay feelings" that Jane Ward pinpoints as constitutive of contemporary homonormative subjectivity: "the desire to fall in gay love, to have a gay family, to be out and proud" (2015, p. 49). Within this 'love is love' style progress narrative, the man is a tragic historical figure that signifies an unrealised productive good gay life while public sex is purely a symptom of an oppressive past. This association of public sex cultures with pastness is also evident in UK LGBT rights activist James Wharton's statement on commercial sex venues in 2014. Reacting to the death of a man in a gay sauna, Wharton was quoted in a news article as insisting that such spaces should "be history" and that the men who frequented them needed "to grow up" as "the days when we gathered in clandestine fashion for the want of a network or a sexual outlet are surely long gone" (Brown, 2014). For Wharton, an "over-and-done-with" oppressive past will continue to impinge on the present as long as these cruising spaces exist (Gordon, 2008, p. xvi).

It is undoubtedly true that cruising culture cultures are rooted in a history of oppression and disciplinary surveillance. In the face of societal rejection and arrest, queers became sensitive to the potential of a glance held a beat too long or the hidden subtext in a seemingly innocuous question asked on the street. They learned to read the secret affordances offered by public spaces: the out-of-the-way campus toilet, the quiet layby, the empty suburban park at night. As Berlant and Warner outline in *Sex in Public,* this reliance on opportunity created an ephemeral queer world,

a "space of entrances, exits, unsystematised lines of acquaintance, projected horizons" and "incommensurate geographies" (1998, p. 558). In analysing the cruiser's fugacious relationship to space, Sharif Mowlabocus turns to French philosopher Michel de Certeau's theory of the "tactical" (Mowlabocus, 2016b, p. 394, 2016a, p. 118).

In *The Practice of Everyday Life*, de Certeau states that when a group is subordinated to a dominant power and lacks the coherent security of their own space, they draw on opportunistic, time-dependent practices that forge transient spaces "on the wing" (1984, p. xix). He provides operative examples such as "clever tricks, knowing how to get away with things, hunter's cunning, manoeuvres" and "joyful discoveries" (p. xx). Cruising emerged as a spatial tactic: it provided queer people with the means to carve out brief moments of same-sex contact amid oppression and homophobia. But, whatever the group wins through their practices, "it does not keep" (p. xix) as the spaces they elaborate are ephemeral by nature. Mowlabocus states: "What may be a public sex environment (PSE) on Thursday evening may well be nothing more than a public convenience on Friday morning" (2016a, p. 118). Tactical cruising spaces are not stable, autonomous zones of queer hedonism that offer security and succour from the external world. Historically, many men faced the constant "threat of violence, blackmail, loss of employment, arrest, imprisonment, and humiliation" in frequenting these spaces (Bérubé, 2003, p. 34).

Given the instability of traditional cruising grounds, the development of gay commercial sex venues, such as the one drawing Wharton's ire, can be considered in terms of de Certeau's (1984) conceptualisation of strategies. Strategies, in contrast to the transitory resistance of tactics, involve "a subject with will and power" – be it a "proprietor, an enterprise, a city" or another institution – that forges a bounded "proper" space (p. xix). Commercial venues such as sex clubs,

saunas and bathhouses provide queer people with their "own place" (p. 36) as a respite from the heterosexist and homophobic external environment.

Heather Love highlights how the dominant view of the past as a site of "shame and secrecy" means that "the effects of this history are often understood simply as historical waste products, visible traces of homophobia considered shaming in themselves" (2009, p. 71). For Wharton, cruising the bathhouse is to muddy the present with the historical spectre of a clandestine and repressed identity. Cruising becomes an abject anachronism that delineates the boundaries of a contemporary gay identity defined in terms of proud (albeit respectable) visibility. Therefore, Wharton's charge of backwardness is underwritten by a spatiotemporal dimension, as the cruising space is bound to the political impotence and invisibility of the closet space. Marrying the cruising ground to the closet tends to overlay queer spaces with an evolutionary teleology. Traditional cruising spaces like public parks and toilets emerge as tactical steppingstones in a progressive movement towards stable gay space and identity.[7] While it is undoubtedly true that inchoate sexual identities and subjectivities have bloomed into being within these spaces, positioning them as synonymous with the closet establishes the cruiser as existing in spatiotemporal distinction to out gay men. They appear asynchronous to one another: the cruisers clinging to a shadowy past of lurking, fearful invisibility while contemporary queers boldly embrace the visibility associated with claiming a public identity.

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[7] For example, William E. Jones, an artist examined in the following chapter, theorises that some men continue to choose cruising grounds over gay bars because "the closet still holds an appeal for a few die-hards" (Feaster, 2008b). Likewise, artist Dries Verhoeven from Chapter 4 questions if *Grindr* is comparable to "the parking lot as a meeting point for miserable married men who hadn't yet accepted their inclinations" (Verhoeven, 2014a). This association reinforces the evolutionary logic undergirding contemporary gay identity: there is a linear progressive movement from "repression, silence, and invisibility to modern visibility and sexual freedom" (Roscoe and Murray, 1997, p. 5).

In his introduction to Thomas Roma's photobook, *In the Vale of Cashmere* – a cruising ground in Brooklyn's Prospect Park mainly frequented by black and Latino men – G. Winston James writes that for many men, the park was "a final destination" not "a way station to the greater gay world" (2015, p. 11). He insists that some of them, himself included, frequented this space because they drew "a sense of power and resistance" from it, "not because we had few or no other options through which to engage with other men" (p. 11). Therefore, charting a linear progression between tactical cruising grounds/strategic gay spaces and closeted/out life can impose a spatiotemporal logic that leaves us blind to the diversity and complexity of sexual experience. In Wharton's case, levelling the contemporary cruiser with charges of immaturity and "arrested development" overlays an inaccurate, progressivist logic on space and identity (Dinshaw, 2012, p. 4).

In *Time and the Other,* Johannes Fabian discusses how the "allochronism of anthropology" (2014, p. 32) configures the anthropologist and their objects of study as not being "of the same age" (p. 159). This "denial of coevalness" also dominated early studies of homosexuality (p. 25). Neville Hoad states that "the language of the telos of evolution" is evident in the "sexological, psychoanalytic and anthropological" research on homosexuals; they are peppered with terms like "arrest," "retardation," "decadence", and "degeneration" (2018, p. 78). C. Riley Snorton (2014) notes that this 'denial of coevalness' is retained within the progress narrative of the closet. It draws "on an implicit colonialist sensibility that figures the 'dark secrecy' of the closet with the pre-modern and primitive and the subsequent open consciousness of an 'outside' of the closet with modernity and Civilization" (2014, p. 29). This association of the closet with regression and primitivism is apparent in how the Down Low (DL) – a term that is associated with straight-

identified men who have sex with men – was discussed in the 2000s. Sex-panic-tinged media reports on the 'phenomenon' of the DL tended to revolve exclusively around men of colour, stoking "racist stereotypes concerning an irresponsible and irrepressible Black male sexuality" (Roach, 2021, p. 110). Accounts of the DL were also underwritten by an evolutionary logic as the dominant explanation was that straight men of colour engaged in gay sex because they could not "come out due to elevated levels of homophobia in their ethnoracial communities" (Ward, 2015, p. 6).

Looking at the practice of cruising more expansively, Michael Warner notes that "studies of the tearoom and bathhouse cultures of sex have shown that many men who participate in public sex do not see it as an expression of political identity" (2000, p. 165). Likewise, Pat Califia highlighted that "[s]ome tearoom cruisers identify primarily as fathers and husbands and don't place much significance on their sexual proclivities" (2000, p. 25). Although cruising spaces and the DL trouble "the dominant in/out mentality of the gay liberationist closet narrative", these virtual and physical spaces are viewed as the remit of backwards figures clinging to the shadows of a pre-liberatory past (Roach, 2021, p. 111).

The closet metaphor operates as a powerful progress narrative: it is a rubric that equates the absence of an enthusiastically claimed gay identity with shame and homophobia, which are, in turn, regarded as anachronistic relics of a retreating past.[8] Yet, gay progress narratives can be unstable. Much like the border in abjection, they need repeated reinforcement. Love explains that, within "the darkroom of liberation, the 'negative' of the closet case or the isolated protogay child is developed into a photograph of an out, proud gay man" (2009, p. 20). She insists that "the trace

[8] The connection between cruising and visibility politics will be explored in greater detail in Chapter 4.

of those forgotten is visible right on the surface of this image, a ghostly sign of the reversibility of reverse discourse" (p. 20). This chimes with Elizabeth Grosz's description of the abject as "the underside of a stable subjective identity" (1989, p. 72): it exposes the disorientating instability of the self and the need to affirm one's boundaries through repudiation so as not to "slide back into the chaos from which it is formed" (p. 74).

Wharton's admonishment to "grow up" and leave promiscuous sex behind is an incitement to take on a mature identity. To do otherwise is to regress into the miasma of the past, destroying all that has been gained in the process. In the news article, he cautions that public sex cultures mark the gay community "as different for the wrong reason" and hand homophobes "ammunition" to attack the wider community (Brown, 2014). In a similar vein, Todd's book repeatedly links gay unhappiness to sex, arguing at one point that ignorance and homophobia are, in part, due to gay culture being "so boundary-less and heavily sexualised" (2018, p. 91). Homophobia becomes the responsibility of the oppressed, not the oppressor, with the excessive behaviour of 'bad' queers heralded as originating or aggravating it. It is the responsibility of good queers to reinforce the progress narrative associated with the reverse discourse, leaving the darkness of the past behind by moving unerringly into a future of proud visibility and mainstream acceptance. Wharton's focus on publicity is reflective of mainstream gay politics' strategic prioritisation of normative forms of visibility as a way of assuring dominant culture that "we are just like you" (T., 2020, p. 78). Numerous waves of Western gay respectability politics have sought to distance themselves from unruly and unpalatable queers – the promiscuous, sadomasochistic, pederastic and gender non-conforming – who pose a barrier to assimilation (Warner, 2000; Gunther, 2001; Valentine, 2007; Ferguson, 2018). At the same time, abjection is a strange admixture of "condemnation and

yearning" (Kristeva, 1982, p. 10). If the borders of a stable identity are contingent on the repeated repudiation of what is deemed outside it, then the abject must be conjured for rejection again and again. Sex panics centred on deviant queer sexuality require the cultivation of a spectacle of abject otherness to affirm the boundaries of heteronormative propriety.[9] In short, it is dominant culture – and homonormative respectability politics – that breathes life into a fantasised spectacle of queer public sex.

1.1.2 Pervert Fantasies and the Phantom Public

In his book *Cruising Culture,* Ben Gove highlights the titillating and spectacular aspects of the heteronormative repudiation of queer promiscuity; how dominant culture "repeatedly resurrects, publicly airs and (re)produces, those otherwise disavowed fantasies and fears" (2000, p. 13). Take, for example, the Florida Legislative Investigation Committee's (FLIC) infamous 1964 report on sexual deviance entitled *Homosexuality and Citizenship in Florida* – although it is often referred to as the Purple Pamphlet owing to its cover. The pamphlet was drafted to determine and describe the extent to which homosexuals had inveigled their way into government agencies. It was primarily aimed at "state administrators and personnel officers", although the committee stressed that its findings would "be of value to all citizens; for every parent and every individual concerned with the moral climate of the state" (FLIC, 1964, p. Preface). The peril implied by the report – an apparent attempt to foment a moral panic – was emphasised by its assertion that the problem of homosexuality was growing and in need of urgent address. In a section entitled "Why be

[9] Chapter 3 examines how the abject spectacle of cruisy sex is used to police the behaviour of contemporary queers, encouraging them to become responsible neoliberal sexual subjects.

concerned?", the report fictionalised a series of troubling homosexual vignettes to awaken the public to the danger lurking furtively in their midst:

> In late evening a well-dressed teacher enters the men's room of a large Central Florida shopping centre. He enters a stall toilet, noting that the adjacent booth is occupied. There is a hole about the size of a fifty-cent piece carved through the partition separating the stall. The teacher places a finger through the hole and then withdraws it. The finger of the unknown occupant of the next stall appears. The teacher then inserts his sex organ through the hole to perform in less than five minutes, a homosexual act with a partner he never sees and to whom he need not speak.
> (FLIC, 1964, p. Why be Concerned?)

By repeatedly specifying that this man is a teacher, the report emphasises his corrupt proximity to children, and the remark on his immaculate dress accentuates his ability to dissemble as an upstanding member of society.

In the United States, queerness is repeatedly portrayed as a corrupting force that can lead the impressionable young mind astray, diverting them from the rightful course of hetero/cisnormativity. The flurry of legislation prohibiting or limiting the discussion of sexual and gender identity in schools – so-called "Don't Say Gay bills" – in 2022 is a testament to the tenacity of this linkage between queerness, contamination and ideological seduction (Jones and Franklin, 2022; Davis, 2023). What I want to focus on, though, is how queerness, and queer sex in particular, is spectacularised as an abject threat to the public that requires surveillance and control. With the Purple Pamphlet, the fictionalised account of an anonymous bathroom encounter penned by the FLIC foreshadows the most sensationalist aspect of the report: the photograph of a faceless figure crouched before a glory hole drilled in a toilet partition. The man being fellated on the other side looks towards the camera, but his gaze is erased by a censorship bar. The description beneath the image warns the viewer that encounters like the one pictured "take place every day in virtually

every State" and notes, in disbelieving horror, that even "the removal of the toilet stall doors" to enable the photo to be taken was not enough to deter the cruisers (FLIC, 1964, p. Public Sex). Despite this, Richard Meyer points out the inherent paradox in this tableau, namely that "Like the police camera itself, the removal of the toilet stall door anticipates – and helps produce – the visible image of illicit homosexuality" (Meyer, 2002, p. 174). The shocking publicity of this sex act has been cultivated by law enforcement; it bolsters the FLIC's carefully constructed phantasy of abject deviancy's pollution of the public realm.

Meyer's book – an excellent examination of homosexuality, US politics and the censorship of art – explores how sex panics relating to queer artworks have often invented their images of deviancy to justify intervention. In 1989, Reverend Pat Robertson set his sights on the erotic photographs of Robert Mapplethorpe. Robertson drafted a direct mail letter, printed by the Christian Coalition, that was distributed along with a sealed red envelope. Inside the red envelope was a single sheet of paper – with an enumerated list – headed by two dramatic, albeit slightly contradictory, statements. The first is: "I encourage you to exercise your freedom immediately by destroying the vulgar information about the photographs." The second states: "TAX-PAYER FUNDED Photographs Too Vulgar to Print" (Freeman, 2017, p. 247). Meyer notes that in enclosing their list in a striking red envelope – and teasingly labelling it with "the warning (or promise) of graphic imagery" – Reverend Robertson created his own erotic "staging of homosexuality" (2002, p. 4). Furthermore, in the enumerated description of artworks, item seven on the list – "A photo of naked children in bed with a naked man" – did not exist; it was a fantasy created by Robertson to justify the censorship of Mapplethorpe's work (2002, p. 4). A similar creative intervention was also at play in Reverend Donald Wildmon's attempt to censor an

exhibition by artist David Wojnarowicz in 1990.

Wojnarowicz's use of pornographic images in *Sex Series* (1990) came under fire from Wildmon and the American Family Association (AFA). *Sex Series* is a group of eight photomontages, each one showing an expansive scene printed in negative: a long train winds its way on a track, paratroopers plunge towards the distant patchwork of fields below their plane, a ship billows steam as it cuts through the negativised white of the sea. In the corner of each work is a smaller circular image, also in negative, that depicts a sex act. However, far from being a titillating experience, Wojnarowicz's manipulation of these sexual images, as well as his insertion of them in "radically discontinuous fields", immediately dissipates any potential eroticism presented by his use of pornography (Meyer, 2002, p. 255). The artist described his choice of imagery as relating to ideas "about examination and/or surveillance" (Wojnarowicz, 1989).

The work was to be exhibited in a retrospective at Illinois State University, and the National Endowment for the Arts (NEA) was to fund some of the costs of the exhibition. Incensed by the use of public funds for homoerotic art, Wildmon and the AFA drafted some 200,000 flyers denouncing the work with the header "Your Tax Dollars Helped Pay for These Works of Art" (Meyer, 2002, p. 255). Their vehement objection to the use of public funds was grounded in outrage that homosexuality had breached the confines of the private, arrogating the right to display itself in public. Wildmon's flyer cut and collaged the small circular details from Wojnarowicz's *Sex Series* and combined these fragments with another thirteen elements poached from other collages – including an image of Jesus Christ – thereby misrepresenting Wojnarowicz's work as being solely steeped in the twin shame of pornography and blasphemy (Rizk, 2005, p. 16). As Wojnarowicz noted, Wildmon and the AFA "were creating pieces entirely of their own": lewd,

pornographic fantasies that were intended to provoke censorial action (Masters, 1990).

Meyer states that casting queer sexuality as an abject threat requires dominant culture to construct "their own theatre of sexual acts and deviance, their own fantasies of erotic exchange and transgression" (2002, p. 5). Although these case studies relate to the US political landscape between the 1960s and 1990s, when it comes to cruising, the abject spectre of the homosexual pervert is continuously reanimated and spectacularised by law enforcement and the media in the West. *Project Marie* was an undercover Toronto police operation which sanctioned 72 men for cruising the forest and car park of Marie Curtis Park in 2016. In his book *Park Cruising,* Marcus McCann (2023) – a lawyer who helped mount the legal defence for the men caught in the sting – highlighted how, in the wake of the police operation, a news report on the operation opened with a series of panic-inducing vignettes:

> A registered sex offender apprehended after exposing himself within the vicinity of children. Two men charged for engaging in sexual activity in a car at a busy parking lot over the lunch hour. A male park patron observed naked near a popular splashpad in broad daylight. Numerous men caught with their pants down in the bushes off a well-used cycling trail.
> (Guardian, 2016)

There are echoes of the Purple Pamphlet here in how the article connects one perversity (paedophilia) with another one (cruising). This conflation is reflective of the idea that sex is an innately destructive force that, if left unchecked, will spiral downwards into increasing moral depravity. The tacit implication within this article is that these sex acts are connected and interchangeable examples of sexual perversity that have sullied a public space. However, this *perilising*, abject spectacle of sexual perversion was – much like the previously explicated sex panics – a fantasied image of unbridled deviance. During *Project Marie,* nobody was caught

having *actual* sex in the park. The public sex in question, as always, existed chiefly in the virtual realm of speculation and abject phantasy. Furthermore, the event that triggered the undercover operation – an "incident of flashing near a children's play area" (McCann, 2023, p. 78) – took place in a part of the park that was not a cruising area.[10] As McCann notes, a key figure in the undercover operation, Constable Kevin Ward, "used his status as a heterosexual married man with a young child to explain the raid. He was cleaning up the park for other families like his" (p. 80). This idea that the park was being purged of a deviant threat to heteronormative propriety was compounded by the police department's announcement that they would hold "a candlelight vigil" (p. 88) at dusk through the cruising pathways to celebrate the eradication of the practice from the park. McCann viewed this policing PR stunt as a blatant appropriation of historical "Take Back the Night" feminist marches. *Project Marie* is a fascinating contemporary case study because the bare semiotics of public sex – men congregating in a park at night – was used to reanimate the spectre of the homosexual pervert as an abject threat to the public realm. It was a threat so dire that it required a ritual-like purging of deviancy – I envisage police officers brandishing their lit candles as if burning sage while pacing the cruising pathways – to 'reset' the park to an unsullied state. However, Laud Humphreys' infamous *Tearoom Trade* exposed the fallacy at the heart of public sex: it is incredibly rare for tearoom encounters to be "viewed by anyone other than the

[10] This resonates with the genesis of the infamous Mansfield Tearoom operation in Ohio in 1962. In August of that year, the Mansfield News Journal ran an article on a local police operation to capture sex deviates in a public bathroom. The sting was brought about by the arrest of Jerrell R. Howell for the murder of two young girls (Gaynor, 1962). On his capture, Howell informed the arresting officers that he had first engaged in sex in the men's room beneath Mansfield's Central Park, presumably to indicate the genesis of his criminality (Jones, 2008). With the community reeling from the girls' violent deaths, the police were eager to diffuse public upset. The tearoom represented an opportunity to assuage concerns in the community and reassert law enforcement's control in the area. Something similar was happening with *Project Marie* in 2016, police launched a public offensive on generalised perversity as a way of 'cleaning up' the area.

participants" (1975, p. 157).[11] Humphreys insisted that claims an unwitting public could happen upon tearoom sex ignored how the practice was focused on minimising the risk of "offending straight people" (p. 164). This chimed with a review of US legal actions against homosexuality in the 1960s, which found that police departments rarely received complaints from citizens "about solicitations by homosexuals" (Gallo *et al.*, 1965, p. 698). Likewise, a 1980s study on police operations in public toilets in Ohio found that decoy usage often spiked just before local elections as law enforcement departments were urged to crack down on emotive, public-pleasing targets like homosexuality and prostitution (Gray, 1988).

From a contemporary standpoint, most cruisers still want to avoid being seen. McCann highlights how message boards catering to the practice contain warnings against "engaging too openly", "straying outside traditional cruising areas", or leaving "discarded clothing or condoms on paths" (2023, p. 39). Likewise, in 2017, New York Port Authority police halted their use of police decoys in restrooms after a series of lawsuits accused them of "discrimination and false arrests" (Closson and Wong, 2022). The former Port Authority police commander was forced to admit that public complaints regarding sex in the monitored restroom were "few and far between" (Riley, 2022). Therefore, historical and contemporary disciplinary approaches to cruising manipulate, exaggerate and spectacularise the *publicness* of the act to amplify the harm it poses to the public. Yet the public that is being protected by cruising stings is itself a heteronormative

[11] Humphreys – a sociologist and an Episcopal priest – is notorious for his unorthodox and duplicitous methods of gathering research data. He posed as a "watchqueen" – someone who acts as a lookout, nodding assent or coughing a discreet warning when required – so he could move about the cruising space undetected (Humphreys, 1975, p. 27). He even traced tearoom participants' license plates and adopted a disguise to visit married men's homes under the pretence of surveying "male social health", a subterfuge that allowed him to gather "information on marital relationships and sex" (p. 41).

fantasy.

In a 2010 study on the policing of sexuality in New South Wales, an officer explained that if a heterosexual couple were witnessed kissing in a public park at night, no intervention would be necessary. But, if two men were to share a kiss in the same scenario, "then this behaviour could be categorised as offensive because it could be deemed to be 'threatening' to those who witness it" (Johnson, 2010, p. 406). In this case, and with *Project Marie*, the potential harm posed by publicised queerness revolves around a phantom public: a wholly imagined hapless victim who stands as a metonym for the heteronormative family or the child[12]. In the absence of 'true' victims, anxieties around cruising – and public expressions of queerness in general – settle on the *possible* harm it poses to the integrity of a public realm that it apprehended as inherently heterosexual and family-friendly. Much like with *Project Marie*, where the bare semiotics of cruising were used to cultivate a spectacularised abject threat, contemporary conservative rhetoric tends to treat any signifier of queerness as being synonymous with sex. From calls for the censorship of LGBT-themed books in public/school libraries (Faller, 2023; Roche, 2023) to restrictions on drag venues/performances (Squirrell and Davey, 2023) and the demonisation of gender non-conforming teachers (Villarreal, 2024), these moral panics reanimate the spectre of the lurking homosexual deviant who pollutes the public realm and the minds of children with their alterity. This fantasised image of public sex is repeatedly resurrected and paraded because the abjection of queerness has a spatialised outcome: the wholesale ejection of queerness from the public realm.

[12] This echoes Lee Edelman's writing, in *No Future* (2004), on how the child is idealised as a cultural symbol of futurity that reinforces heteronormative values.

This spatialisation of abjection, where non-normative sexuality is placed outside the public sphere, is itself a spectral relation as heterosexuality affirms its legitimacy by summoning its "uncanny double": queerness (Merck, 2000, p. 48). However, as Muñoz writes in *Cruising Utopia,* the "spectre of public sex" is also conjured by gay "conservative factions" as a way of affirming "a legitimate sanitised gay world" (2009, p. 46). Much like heterosexual identity and propriety have been formed out of an abject relation with the homosexual deviant, so too has homonormative identity; it draws on the same spectacularised imagery of unbounded public sexuality.

1.1.3 Good/Bad Gays and Sexual Privatisation

From a contemporary perspective, the homonormative focus on the illicit spectacle of queer sexuality is readily apparent in the cyclical furore regarding contemporary pride celebrations. 'Pride discourse', like the celebrations themselves, consists of yearly debates, played out in news articles and internet comments, on the nature of pride celebrations. In 2020, the Coronavirus pandemic meant in-person parades were cancelled, with organisers pivoting to virtual events and celebrations (Yurcaba, 2021). It seemed logical that, in the absence of parades, the yearly debates would also be on hiatus, but come June, pride discourse once again lumbered into action. Seemingly sparked by the scandalously abject image of a man wearing a coquettishly tied bandana around one leg, *Twitter* reflexively frothed with angry disputes over nudity, kink and fetish at Pride (Smith, 2020).[13]

In 2021, the debate's inevitable resurface brought an article from gay journalist Skylar

[13] Kink, in these arguments, refers to the wearing of fetish gear such as "leather, harnesses, puppy hoods [and] leashes" (López, 2021).

Baker-Jordan. Published in the UK newspaper *The Independent,* Baker-Jordan's piece approached the issue on the grounds of consent: wearing fetish gear in public was, in the journalist's view, tantamount to witnessing an 'illicit' sexual act. Once again, the phantom public was portrayed as an injured party as onlookers were forced "to unwillingly participate" in another's kink (Baker Jordan, 2021). Baker-Jordan was careful to express that he had no issue with kinky sex itself, just the fact that people had arrogated the right to express something private in the public realm. His article instigates a clear boundary between appropriate and inappropriate queer visibility, insisting that:

> There is a massive difference between a lesbian woman being able to display a photo of her and her wife on her desk and someone putting up a picture of a sex scene that could be out of *Fifty Shades of Grey*. A man holding hands with his husband is not the same as a man holding his "pup's" leash as he leads him around on all fours, clad in leather and wearing a gimp mask. In both instances, the former is about *who* you love, while the latter is about *how* you have sex.
> (Baker Jordan, 2021, emphasis in original)

Much like with Todd's historical cruiser, appropriate public queerness is centred on a palatable, non-threatening identity predicated on a love object, not a sexual one. Sex belongs solely to the private/domestic sphere. This delineation between good and bad publicity cultivates a directive to self-monitor one's expression, a disciplinary dynamic that can be traced to the decriminalisation of homosexuality in the West.

In the UK, the introduction of the Sexual Offenses Act in 1967 decriminalised homosexuality between consenting adults in the home (Herzog, 2011). However, the zone of privacy that was afforded to homosexuals also punitively demarcated what was allowable in public

space.[14] The act was used as an exclusionary tool to cloister "prostituted women and homosexual men away from the streets and public conveniences" (Gleeson, 2007, pp. 14–15). As Derek McGhee argues, this relegation of homosexuality to the private sphere established two subject positions: "the 'good homosexual', whose membership was provisional on his circumspection, and 'the ordinary citizen' presented as the easily offended 'innocent' who must be protected from witnessing homosexual acts" (2004, p. 359). In other words, the decriminalisation of homosexuality solidified the spatial abjection of queerness and the need to defend a vulnerable phantom public.

In 1987, Margaret Thatcher's Section 28, which prohibited local authorities from publishing, promoting, or teaching homosexuality in schools, continued this delimitation of homosexuality to the private realm. In her analysis of the parliamentary debates surrounding the Act's introduction, Anna Marie Smith highlighted the continued enforcement of a good/bad subject position:

> The good subject is closeted in every sense of the term, hidden and contained within closed frontiers, while the bad element comes out of the closet, shows itself and refuses to be contained. The goodness of the homosexual consists precisely in her self-limiting, fixed subjecthood status, an otherness which knows her proper place. The badness of bad gayness lies in its *unfixity* and *'excessiveness'*, its insatiable drive towards expansion and self-reproduction, its contamination of the space of normalcy through its entry of the wrong orifices, and, above all, its pursuit of unlimited bodily pleasure.
> (Smith 1990, p. 51, emphasis added)

[14] The introduction of the 1967 act made it easier for the police to bring charges against incidences of cruising. Ten years after its introduction, the "recorded incidence of indecency between males doubled, the number of prosecutions trebled, and the number of convictions quadrupled" (Weeks, 2017, p. 346).

The outlines of the bad gay are evident in Baker-Jordan's (2021) invented imagery of publicised sexual excess, but he also set his sights on kink's damning unfixity. He made a distinction between gayness as a sexual orientation – which he described in essentialist terms as "innate and immutable" – and kink, which he clarified as a changeable "sexual preference" practised by gay and straight people alike.

The idea that sexuality is a stable essence arising within the body is a longstanding gay political strategy. Shane Phelan (2010) notes that it was incorporated by the Human Rights Campaign (HRC) in their work on gay rights in the 1990s. Strategic essentialism allowed gay politics to take up a defensive, non-threatening position. It stressed that gay people were not worthy of discrimination or hate because "(a) they can't help it; (b) sexuality is innate, so your kids aren't at risk of being recruited; and (c) they are really like us in most ways" (Phelan, 2010, p. 102). However, adopting an essentialist view of sexuality requires a "proscriptive cultural insistence upon absolute continuity and linearity" in terms of homosexual identity (Gove, 2000, p. 98). For gay politics, as seen in Baker-Jordan's article, this means disavowing anything that destabilises the integrity of homosexuality as naturally signifying "a people" (Lane, 1999, p. 252).

In the afterword to *Butch/Femme*, a collection of essays on lesbian gender edited by Sally Munt, Butler asks if we have "begun to construct heterosexuality as a normative monolith" against which we assure ourselves of our own "unambiguous and uncontaminated sexual opposition" (1998, p. 226). In this polarised view of sexual identity, there is no space for "contamination" across categories (p. 227). For Baker-Jordan, the unfixity of kink inspires border anxiety; it is a crossing point between straight and gay that must be elided to ensure the purity of gay identity. The author was so at pains to extricate BDSM from LGBT culture that he outlined an extraordinary

revisionist account of gay liberatory politics centred on achieving domesticated privacy:

> No one is oppressed because they're kinky, certainly not in any way that is comparable to the past and even current oppression and marginalization faced by LGBT people. LGBT people built a community and a political coalition because we were oppressed on the basis of who we love and who we are. This gives us a shared struggle and history, as our fight against laws like Section 28 in the UK or Proposition 8 in California illustrates. We have mutual political interests built out of a common oppression. Kink and BDSM, however, are enjoyed by people of all sexual orientations. There is no unifying political identity to practitioners of BDSM […] The struggle for lesbian, gay, and bisexual equality was always about gaining parity with straight people and straight couples, of having our relationships recognized as equally valid and legitimate. *It has never been about our sex lives*.
> (Baker Jordan, 2021, emphasis added)

The assertion that no one has ever been oppressed for being kinky is an extraordinary ahistorical statement.

In 1989, in the United Kingdom, for example, *Operation Spanner* saw a group of 16 gay men who had engaged in consensual sadomasochistic sex put on trial (Bell, 1995b). Men who had assumed dominant roles were convicted of assault, while the submissives "were convicted of aiding and abetting assaults upon themselves" (White, 2006, p. 167). Likewise, the Bolton 7 were convicted in 1998 after the police seized camera footage of them participating in group sex. Their conviction meant they had to sign onto the sex offenders register (Outrage!, 1998). Bell refers to another case from the 1990s where "body piercing for purely decorative purposes was deemed lawful, but the deriving of any sexual pleasure (from either piercer or client, or both) during the act of piercing commuted that act to an assault" (1995a, p. 284). Looking at the history of the policing of homosexuality more expansively, it is clear that officers did not differentiate between handholding, kissing, or effeminate mannerisms (Jacobs, 1963; Moran, 2002; Lvovsky, 2021); all these acts were regarded as perverse signifiers of homosexual intent.

The dehistoricising manner in which Baker-Jordan approaches LGBTQ+ identity reflects what Lauren Berlant called "dead citizenship" (1995, p. 382). Queer identities are "no longer open to history" (p. 382). Instead, they are "dead, frozen, fixed or at rest" (p. 383). If, as Stuart Hall claims, "identities are the names we give to the different ways we are positioned by and position ourselves within, the narratives of the past", then the history Baker-Jordan sketches into being is a mythic homonormative one (2015, p. 394). In this ahistorical frozen image, queer oppression is connected to an abstract form of homophobia; it is a vague, transhistorical force that suppresses same-sex love. In this mythic image of the past, complex histories and sociopolitical realities are smoothed into an easy, post-liberationist narrative that affirms a depoliticised, homonormative gay identity in the present. Identity becomes something akin to "iconicity": a private immutable trait existing outside of history (Berlant, 1995, p. 383).

For Baker-Jordan, sexuality is, as Berlant and Warner outlined in *Sex in Public,* a "property of subjectivity rather than a publicly or counterpublicly accessible culture" (1998, p. 559). Publicised queer sexuality exists in abject relation to respectable gay identity, reinforcing the spatial dynamic introduced in the previous section in the process. Queers, Shane Phelan states, are told "to leave our desiring bodies at home. Our differences as lesbian or gay people become nothing more than a question of whom we go home to" (2010, p. 102). This shrinking of queer public life and the delimitation of sexuality to the private sphere is reflective of what Lisa Duggan (2002) calls neoliberal homonormativity.

Neoliberalism is the dominant economic system that responsibilises citizens to take charge of their potential as "human capital" (Beistegui, 2018, p. 211). This focus on self-actualisation and management leads to the erosion of "public institutions and spaces for democratic public life"

(Duggan and Johnson, 2003, p. xii). Neoliberal homonormativity follows a similar spatial logic: the radical call of the 1960s gay movements for a "right-to-privacy-in-public: a zone of immunity from state regulation, surveillance, and harassment" (p. 181) are cast aside in the 1980s in favour of the "public recognition of a domesticated, depoliticized privacy" (p. 191). Baker-Jordan's article is a paragon of homonormative rhetoric as the desexualised good gay subject is formed through the cultivation of fantasised panic icons of unbounded public sexuality.

In this section, and the previous ones, I have explored how contemporary gay identity politics promulgates both an abject relation with the past and an illusory progress narrative that charts a seamless movement from oppression to proud visibility. The instability of this progress narrative means that spectral traces of this past must be rationalised as an immature attachment to the closet or evidence of the regressive homophobia of racial communities. But this process coheres around a respectable form of queer identity, one that delimits sexuality to the private realm. Queer sexuality's sequestration is enforced and reinforced through spectacles of deviancy which summon a phantom public and the spectre of public sexuality to trigger an abject encounter. Whereas mainstream gay politics has cast public sex as a backward practice, the following section explores how queer theory has taken a different route, binding it to the forward motion of bold political action and resistance, as well as ethical possibility.

1.2 Cruising Forwards: Sex and Utopic Aspiration

1.2.1 Queer Theory's Exceptional Sex

Queer intimacies have long felt the sting of abjection and denigration. Berlant and Warner assert that historically, queer people have not benefited from the heterosexual privilege of a publicly

elevated identity supported by a "matrix" of cultural, legal and material discourses/institutions (1998, p. 562). Instead, queer people developed counter-intimacies – "girlfriends, gal pals, fuckbuddies, tricks" – all of which lacked a legitimising tether "to domestic space, to kinship, to the couple form, to property, or the nation" (p. 558). The ephemerality of these intimacies – their transitory existence compared to the institutionally entrenched couple form – is frequently presented as proof of their illegitimacy. They are "pale imitations or ugly corruptions" of the 'real' connections associated with heteronormative romantic love (McGlotten, 2013, p. 7). Likewise, in *Thinking Sex*, Gayle Rubin (1984) describes how, within Western cultures, sexual acts are judged according to a moral hierarchy of good and bad behaviours. In this framework, monogamous sex between married heterosexuals is the height of respectability, whereas queer promiscuity is intuitively understood as corrupting and immoral. Only good sex – sex that is heterosexual and monogamous – is "accorded moral complexity" (1984, p. 282). Conversely, bad sex is denoted as abject and "devoid of all emotional nuance" (p. 282). In the face of this devaluation of ephemeral, non-normative intimacies, queer theory has frequently adopted a defensive strategy of proving the ethical and moral superiority of queer forms of relating.

Moral panics and hierarchies that stigmatise queer intimacies should undoubtedly be divested of their disciplinary power. Nevertheless, as Jagose states, reparative theory that clings to the "political potential of subcultural sexual practices" (2012, p. 188) simply inverts Rubin's (1984) hierarchy to establish the value and importance of queer sociosexual practices.[15] Leo

[15] Similar critiques have been made about pro-sex feminism. Ann Ferguson points out that feminist pro-sexuality frameworks rely on "oppositional practices" that transgress "socially respectable categories of sexuality and [refuse] to draw the line on what counts as politically correct sexuality" (1984, p. 109). As Glick notes, "this refusal […] leaves intact the notion that some sexualities are more liberatory than others, and the most liberatory ones of all should serve as the foundation for a politics of resistance" (2000, p. 24).

Bersani alluded to this in the early years of the AIDS pandemic when he described "a frenzied epic of displacement in the discourse on sexuality" (1987, p. 220). In the face of homophobic AIDS rhetoric, gay cruising cultures were often memorialised as utopic democracies of unparalleled "diversity and pluralism" (p. 220). He points to Dennis Altman's romanticised descriptions of promiscuous same-sex encounters in American bathhouses as a "Whitmanesque democracy"; a novel form "of brotherhood far removed from the male bonding of rank, hierarchy, and competition that characterizes much of the outside world" (Altman, 1982, pp. 79–80). Despite Bersani's warnings against formulating "bathhouses as laboratories of ethical liberalism", many texts continue this intellectual investment in proving the moral superiority of queer socialities (1987, p. 222).

Like Altmann, Aaron Betsky describes the gay bathhouse in terms of a levelling of "class distinctions" (1997, p. 142). Alex Espinoza's (2019) recent book *Cruising: An Intimate History of a Radical Pastime* makes similar radical claims. He insists cruising is "founded on equality" and that it is "devoid of the power dynamics that plague heterosexual interactions" (p. 32). Likewise, Samuel Delany's seminal text *Times Square Red, Times Square Blue* approaches public sex in terms of transformations to the social, describing sex in New York City porn theatres as fostering a vital and generative form of "interclass contact" (1999, p. 111). In contradistinction to this, Patricia Stuelke's (2021) analysis of Delany's accounts of sex with poor and homeless men critiques the author for eroticising, rather than interrogating, the inequities generated by a racial capitalist system. She points out that Delany presents "cross-racial, cross-class sexual contact as the ultimate act and end of solidarity" without ever showing how interclass contact benefits the individual of lower social standing (p. 62). In a similar vein, Tim Dean's reparative reading of

bareback cultures approaches street cruising as a virtuous practice, one that cultivates an "ethical philosophy of living" due to its inherent openness to strangers (2009, p. 5). Dean's text is an attempt to universalise cruising as an ethically pure form of relating. He dismisses the sociohistorical dimensions of its formation as "a localized gay male practice" to insist that it is "available to anyone, irrespective of gender or sexuality" (p. 5).[16] For Dean, cruising is not only "ethically exemplary" (p. xii) but uniquely generative because queer promiscuity "gives birth to other forms of adventurousness—political, cultural, intellectual" (p. 5). Whereas Jagose points out that the idealisation of queer sex inverts Rubin's moral hierarchy, in *Cruising Culture*, Gove warns that valorising promiscuity merely repurposes heteronormative discourses that present "monogamy and/or marriage as the solution to myriad complex social problems" (2000, p. 190).

In all of these texts, public sex is accorded moral complexity on the basis that it cultivates an ideal "democratic life" and a valuable "civic sensibility" (Goldberg, 2020, pp. 261–262). This idealisation of dissident queer sex is itself "the oblique work of shame" (Butler, 1998, p. 227). What was once cast as society's downfall – homosexual perversion – is inverted into a bastion of ethics and a progressive reordering of the social. As Amin states, queer theory reworks these non-normative socialities so that they are "better, more authentic, and more pleasurable" and capable

[16] Firstly, as women in many parts of the world do not have the same privilege and agency that men do in moving through the public realm, it is difficult to see how a radical openness to strangers can be transmuted into a universal ethics that cuts through social and material inequalities. Secondly, Mark Turner states that the chief difficulty with attempting to pin down and establish a history of cruising, or any queer history for that matter, is "getting the story down without levelling it out" (Turner, 2003, p. 43). While public sex cultures are evident in different cultures and periods, it is important to resist the urge to simplify cruising into a transhistorical, unified cultural practice, as Dean does here. Instead, we need to regard cruising as a "site-specific" activity, attending to how it is shaped and transformed by a whole array of "social determinants" between different times and places (Turner, 2003, p. 9). Dean's valorisation of traditional public sex practices will be explored in more depth in Chapter 5 with respect to the digital turn in cruising.

of articulating "real-life alternatives to existing relations of oppression" (2017, p. 6). Yet, idealising queer intimacies in this manner necessitates placing them "outside the conditions of the historical" (Amin, 2016a, p. 107) so that they become "autonomous from social power" (Amin, 2017, p. 44). Therefore, much like the iconicity of homonormative gay identity admits only a narrow, self-actualising view of history, the elevation of same-sex intimacies to ethical exemplars of "erotic egalitarianism" requires a similarly myopic view of the sociohistorical present (Hekma, 2008).

Cruising cultures are not autonomous zones of queer resistance. They are products of the social and are innervated by the categories of class, race, and gender.[17] The notion that sex offers a route outside of the social is a feature of a radical strand of queer theory, aptly classified as anti-social or anti-relational. Amin (2017) cites its origins in the work of French theorist Guy Hocquenhem (1978). The author describes Hocquenhem's "affective orientation" to sex as *liberationist negativity,* given that it centred on "the corrosive effects of queer sexuality on identity and the social order" (2017, p. 79). Amin sees an "affective similarity" (p. 213, n66) between Hocquenhem's work and the psychoanalytically informed theories of Leo Bersani (1996), Lee Edelman (2004) and Tim Dean (2009). All these authors share a utopic attachment to sex as an

[17] As Gove notes, gay black men in America were frequently excluded by both commercial venues and outdoor cruising grounds while concurrently finding themselves subject to "the white fetishization of black male sexual virility" (2000, p. 29). Writing on his experience of this strange dichotomy in the 1980s, poet Essex Hemphill noted that, although black men were welcome in bathhouses and other spaces, they were "more tolerant of black men because they enhanced the sexual ambience, but that same tolerance did not always continue once the sun began to rise" (Simmons and Hemphill, 1991, p. xix). Jane Ward also points out how whiteness was central to the construction of the tearoom space. In America, in the 1960s, tearooms "were, by and large, racially segregated spaces, where white men could expect to interact sexually with other white men" (2015, p. 73). She highlights the "white solidarity" at play in the tearoom circuit studied by Laud Humphreys: how "white male informants provided Humphreys, a white male researcher, with tips about where to find the best and most 'active' tearooms" (p. 75). She also notes that a plainclothes officer gave Humphreys directions to a tearoom because it "provided the opportunity to close ranks on black men and affirm his allegiance to whiteness" (p. 75).

escape hatch from "subjectivity, selfhood, and power" (Amin, 2017, p. 213, n66). Dean's (2022) most recent text, *Hatred of Sex*, co-written with Oliver Davis, continues this theoretical investment in sex as a route beyond the social. So-called "deplorable sex" – that is, sex that "approaches a threshold of intensity" – is presented as "disintegrating the human ego and violating its ideals, including its political ideals, in the service of pleasure" (p. 42). *Hatred of Sex* is animated by a distaste for queer theory's ostensible pivot towards intersectionality, an epistemological orientation the authors believe has resulted in the "institutional domestication" of sex by associating it with "gender and race" (p. 47). Sex, they believe, is entirely "inassimilable to intersectionality" because it is inherently a "resistance to identity" (p. 64). Instead, it is, in their words, "otherdimensional" (p. 64): it exists on a separate plane entirely to the categories of race, class and gender.

Robert Sember critiques Hocquenhem's view of cruising "as an escape from the social" because the erasure of race through gay sex is an impossible fantasy (1999, p. 60). The body, he insists, exists "as a collection of relations that cannot be homogenized via an ego-effacing eroticism" (p. 60). As Cynthia Willett argues: "We cannot step outside of modern systems of racial and sexual politics into a private sanctuary any more than we can step outside of our skin" (2001, p. 170). During sex, one does not gain access to some primordial pre-social zone devoid of the dynamics of race, class, or gender.[18]

This section has explored the tendency within queer theory to exceptionalise sex as a catalyst for social change and an ideal medium for the elaboration of fresh ethicopolitical possibilities.

[18] Muñoz (2006) once called antirelational queer theory "the gay white man's last stand" (p. 825) because its separation of race from sexuality generates "a crypto-universal white gay subject that is weirdly atemporal" (Muñoz 2009, p. 94).

Queer sex is elevated to embody "political progress, sexual egalitarianism, and muscular and volitional resistance to norms" (Amin, 2017, p. 36). To sustain the radical potential inherent to sex, queer theory needs to focus its attention on objects of study that contain the affirmative glimmer of these liberal ideals.

1.2.2 Hopeful Queer Objects

In *Orgasmology*, Jagose notes that within queer theory, the forms of sex that are considered political are the ones that are "keyed to productive action" (2012, p. 199). She turns to the fake orgasm, concentrating on how its illegibility and unproductivity run counter to conceptualisations of the political as synonymous with "agency, action, and intentionality" (p. 199). Jagose explains queer theory's attachment to sex as a site for social transformation, tracing a genealogical line to Foucault's (1978) *The History of Sexuality.* Here, Foucault declared, somewhat enigmatically, that "[t]he rallying point for the counterattack against the deployment of sexuality ought not to be sex-desire, but bodies and pleasures" (1978, p. 157). Kane Race (2009) points out that the meaning of this statement becomes more apparent when looking at the numerous interviews Foucault gave on his work. This distinction between sex/desire and bodies/pleasures is concerned with ideas about truth and "their relation to expert knowledge" (p. xi). Foucault explained that both:

> […] medicine and psychoanalysis have made extensive use of this notion of desire, precisely as a `kind of instrument for establishing the intelligibility of a sexual pleasure and thus for standardizing it in terms of normality. Tell me what your desire is, and I'll tell you who you are. I'll tell you if you're sick or not.
> (2011, p. 389)

For Foucault, pleasure was something that existed outside the disciplinary regime of sexuality. It was unbound from "a psychoanalytic ethos of lack" or "the reproductive imperative" (Musser,

2014, p. 8).[19] Whereas desire is tangled up with the psychological interiority of sexual subjectivity, "pleasure is concerned with intensification and the temporary dissolution of the subject"; it is something that can productively "detach the individual from the stable, coherent identity through which modern sexuality is administered and regulated" (Jagose, 2012, p. 187). Amy Allen explains that this dissolution of the subject is not "a wholesale rejection of subjectivity"; instead, Foucault's approach is better understood as "desubjection" (2007, p. 60). It is a way to work against and with power relations to alter our relationship to ourselves as subjects.

The collected volumes of Foucault's *History of Sexuality* can be understood as "a genealogy of modern subjectivity": they explore how cultural conceptualisations of selfhood shift over time, from ancient Greece to the time of Christianity (Dean and Zamora, 2021, p. 60). Foucault's central concern was "the technologies through which we constitute ourselves as ethical subjects" (p. 60). For example, the movement towards "Christian techniques of the self", which were grounded in confession, positioned the self as "a book that we must decipher, and not something that must be constructed" (Foucault, 1999, pp. 168–169). For Foucault, the self is not something "to be liberated or excavated" (2023, p. 14), for "the self is nothing else than the historical correlation of the technology built in our history" (2016, p. 76). Instead of a final destination or outcome, "liberty is a practice" (1989, p. 264). It is something we work on by intervening in technologies of subjection.

Turning to Greco-Roman antiquity allowed Foucault to explore different, more

[19] As I will explore in Chapter 3, bodies and pleasures have been readily subsumed into neoliberal-fuelled gay discourses that present cruising as sex addiction.

autonomous approaches to constituting the subject. Ones that were not centred on excavating the self but "experiencing" it (Dean and Zamora, 2021, p. 94). Technologies of the self are:

> […] techniques which permit individuals to effect by their own means, and with the help of others (or under the direction of others), a certain number of operations on their own bodies, on their own souls, on their own thoughts, on their own conduct; and this, in a manner so as to transform themselves, to modify themselves and to attain a certain state of perfection, of happiness, of purity, of enlightenment; to become a sage, a sorcerer, to break through to the light, to immortality, to insensibility.
> (Foucault, 2023, p. 4)

This was not to say that Foucault advocated a return to Greco-Roman ethics.[20] Instead, he was pointing out that there were different ways of exploring self-knowledge that "could create interesting spaces for experimentation" (Dean and Zamora, 2021, p. 118). Pleasure was something that could allow a creative exploration of the self:

> Sexuality is something that we ourselves create – it is our own creation, and much more than the discovery of a secret side of our desire. We have to understand that with our desires, through our desires, go new forms of relationships, new forms of love, new forms of creation. Sex is not a fatality: it's a possibility for creative life.
> (Foucault, 1997a, p. 163)

Within sexual subcultures of gay men, Foucault saw how the use of pleasure could develop "a homosexual askesis that would make us work on ourselves and invent, I do not say discover, a manner of being that is *still improbable*" (Foucault 1997, p. 137, emphasis added).

Jagose points out that Foucault was not exceptionalising gay sex as innately liberatory.

[20] Foucault (1990) stressed in *The Use of Pleasure* that Greco-Roman "sexual ethics […] rested on a very harsh system of inequalities and constraints (particularly in conjunction with women and slaves)" (p. 253).

Instead, he was highlighting how the sexual creativity associated with these subcultures could engender forms of "innovation" that "strategically refuse the regulatory system of sexuality" (2012, p. 188). However, this turn towards novelty, creativity and futurity fosters a particular orientation to sex. One that brims with the "optimism that gay male public-sex cultures will thereby secure new ways of life" (p. 199). Foucault's homosexual askesis provides the basis for a speculative form of queer theory, one that sites a kernel of utopian ethicopolitical possibility within queer sexual socialities. I refer to this as *sexual ideality politics*.[21]

Sexual ideality politics is not concerned with actual transformations to the sociopolitical realm; instead, it dwells in the heady optimism of futural possibility. For example, in *Saint Foucault,* David Halperin (2000) frames the sexual practices of fisting and BDSM as creative forms of Foucauldian askesis. He claims them as "utopian political practices" that employ "the shattering force of intense bodily pleasure" to destabilize the taken-for-granted boundaries of the self, opening a horizon of potentiality for "ongoing ethical elaboration" and "future transformation" in the process (2000, p. 97). To quote Lynn Huffer, Halperin's interpretation of sexual askesis requires one to "pulverize the self" through extreme sensation to generate a new, freer one (2010, p. 271). Mari Ruti notes that queer theory that presents the unravelling of "sovereign subjectivity" as a noble and virtuous practice tends to affirm the wholly impractical idea that "the less of a subject the queer subject is, the more powerful it becomes" (2017, p. 161). Furthermore, this glorification of a heroic sexual subject who can withstand their own obliteration

[21] The term ideality politics comes from Castiglia and Reed's (2012) *If Memory Serves***.** Here the authors outline the importance of idealism in creating a gay "politics of the possible, a politics of change and expansion" (p. 37). Ideality politics is motivated by the optimistic "desire for new forms of sociability and community" (p. 36); even as it looks to the past it points to the future. I will explore the limitations of Castiglia and Reed's reparative approach to queer memory in the following chapter.

tends to ignore the fact that radical self-abnegation is often just "the privilege of white gay male subjects who are seeking to take a vacation from their will" (p. 186). Despite this, more recent queer texts have deepened this connection between queer sexual practices and political ideality.

Tom Roach's (2021) *Screen Love* revolves around exploring if digital cruising – on a location-based hookup app such as *Grindr* – might be "an experiment in queer sociability" (p. 96) that yields a potent "ethical promise" (p. 48). Roach theorises the digital interface as opening users to an experience of self-subtracting fungibility. In his view, logging into the *Grindr* grid and seeing a slew of avatars trains users to view themselves "not as complex individuals with psychological depth" but as interchangeable "images and services" (p. 26). This experience of fungibility tempers "the aggressive ego of homo economicus" (p. 27), which, under neoliberalism, is continuously orientated towards the individualised work of self-actualisation. He explains that "being fungible is the very antithesis of manhood as it has come to be defined in male-dominated American society: individualistic, competitive, controlling, and impenetrable. An ethics of fungibility emphasises vulnerability, egolessness, and self-substitution" (p. 22). Roach is careful to state that in no way is he "arguing that race, class, gender or any other significant social identity marker magically disappear in m4m forums" (p. 54). It is not the case "that users become social and sexual equals in some imaginary online hookup utopia" (p. 54). His central thesis is that the digital affordances of the app *might* "attune us to the rhythms of a queer sociability and 'naturalize' us as citizens of an antisocial collection" (p. 27) thereby teaching us "to relate in ways that exceed neoliberal aims" (p. 26). Roach's text chimes with the utopic dimensions of Foucault's (1997) homosexual askesis. However, as with the exceptionalising queer texts examined in the previous section, Roach continues the selective focus on same-sex intimacies by situating the blueprint to some hitherto

unseen form of ethics within queer sexual cultures.

João Florêncio's (2020) book on gay pig masculinities is another text that charts a more ethical future through novel sexual practices. Unlike the categories of bears or otters, which are based on physical characteristics, gay pigs are defined by "their sexual preferences and the intensity with which they live their sexual lives and pursuit of sexual pleasure" (p. 9). Pigs embrace sexual excess and come together based on "a shared sexual ethos" (p. 10) of transgression. Pig sex, according to Florêncio, requires participants to "embrace toxicity in order to enact a becoming or augmentation of their (masculine) subjectivities" (p. 91). The academic aligns this process with Foucault's askesis: it is "a practice that both creates and cares for the self" (p. 91). For Florêncio, the radicalism of pig sex lies in the fact that it is "processual in nature" (p.140). The sexual practices they elaborate together are based not "on the sameness of what gay men are, on their cloneness, but on the self-augmenting resonances of what they do with one another" (p. 135). Florêncio explains the futural possibilities within pig-ethics:

> […] the kind of speculative thinking I'm attempting here aims towards an ethics of hospitality whereby the latter is always-already understood as the unconditional welcoming of the other in the self. In undoing the autonomy of their own embodied subjectivities and in enacting forms of sociability based on doing rather than having-in-common—that is, without falling prey to the dominant specular logics of identity and recognition—gay "pigs" can help us think towards new forms of inhuman relationality and develop an embodied ethics, helping us speculate about alternatives to the divides and distinctions that have sustained the European project of modernity, and to the violence that always comes with each and every taxonomy of life and being.
> (p.162)

In the above quote, Florêncio positions pig sex as ripe with ethical potential because it foregrounds a doing-in-common, not having-in-common. However, turning to Ward's (2015) description of

hazing rituals among 'straight' frat boys in *Not Gay* exposes the exceptionalising dimensions of the academic's theorisation of pig masculinities. After all, the activities these young men take part in are also a process-driven embrace of toxicity that enacts "a becoming or augmentation of their (masculine) subjectivities" (Florêncio, 2020, p. 91). During the ritual known as 'the elephant walk', naked participants "stand in a circular formation, with one thumb in their mouth and the other in the anus of the young, typically white, man in front of them"; they then move in a circle "like circus elephants connected by tail and trunk" (Ward, 2015, pp. 1–2). Ward explains that "the men involved believed they were doing something productive" with this bodily ritual (p. 4). In penetrating one another and wrestling with the interdiction against same-sex contact, they felt they were taking part "in something urgent and powerful—a form of bonding comparable to what soldiers experience during times of war, and a kind of relief and triumph comparable to freedom" (p. 4). In braving the extremity of the elephant walk, these youths work on themselves collectively to develop and rework their relationship to power and masculinity. Yet only one of these process-driven, askesis-orientated reworkings of masculinity is open for queer speculative engagement. It is the anti-normative charge associated with queer sex that enables gay pigs to carry the utopian blueprint for a radical embodied ethics. Jagose claims there is a "tautological conviction" within queer theory "that transformative political potential attaches by default to queer sexual practice, that it is the queerness of erotic practice that makes it recognizable as political" (2012, p. 182). As seen with Halperin, Roach and Florêncio's work, queer theory sets its intellectual sites on particular objects, that is, on certain kinds of sex.

In a text on queer theory's objects of study, Amin states that:

> […] the problem, as I see it, is not that Queer Studies has provided an academic home for Utopian sensibilities or for the project of seeking that which is uncapturable by power, but rather that, in the process, queer has become ontologized as the name of whatever object seems to realize these aspirations.
> (2016a, p. 105)

According to Amin, queer theory settles on objects that are "capable of producing novelty, eluding power, and generating alternatives" because this is key to establishing the theoretical field's use value (p. 105). Concentrating on the utopian value of queer intimacies is a way of ensuring "the infinite productivity of queerness and futurity of Queer Studies" within the academy (p. 105). This is a sentiment echoed by Jordy Rosenberg, who sees queer studies as engendering an epistemological orientation towards asserting the inherent "productivity of queerness" (2014, sec. 8). As I argue in the following section by drawing on Amin's (2016b, 2017) work, this orientation towards productivity, futurity and novelty can be understood in terms of the hauntological effects of a turbulent past marked both by the pain of societal abjection and the hope spawned by emergent queer politics.

Robyn Wiegman writes:

> A progress narrative is, quite obviously, a temporal formation, but […] it is also a wish—to get past the beginning, to make good use of time, to know where one is going. If we read its operations only to condemn the false promises it makes, we risk overlooking the power the wish holds [...]
> (2012, p. 91)

Wiegman highlights the affective dimensions of a progress narrative and how it is imbued with feelings of hope and futurity. Homonormativity longs for the security of a stable, accepted identity. Queer theory looks to the horizon for a better word. Even anti-social theory, in longing for a way outside the social, is constituted by a utopic force. Explicating the progress narratives woven into

these perspectives is not to expose a naive investment in futurity. Instead, this research underscores the affective lure of the wish at their centre: the longing for normality, safety, for something more than this, for something that shatters everything – identity, class, the social, and even our sense of self.

1.2.3 The Affective Lure of the Bang Narrative

Jack Halberstam uses the term "bang narratives" to describe queer texts that position "the plucky queer as a heroic freedom fighter in a world of puritans" (2011, p. 150). In these texts, public sex is couched in the language of political action and queer resistance. For example, in *The Sexual Outlaw,* John Rechy (1989) documents the queer underground of Los Angeles in the 1970s. Rechy's descriptions of cruising frequently veer into rhapsodic accounts of the cruiser as a sexual iconoclast who makes "a radical statement" each time he has sex in the street. In a similar vein, Jeffrey Weeks describes the gay macho style of the 1970s as "semiotic guerrilla warfare" (1985, p. 191), a phrasing that suggests bold anti-normative sexual dissidence. In contrast, Hal Fischer states in *Gay Semiotics* that the individual items making up the gay macho style – the keys, jeans, earrings, handkerchiefs – were "essentially neutral in the culture at large" (1977, p. 15). They were only legible as a queer style to certain people in the know.[22] Likewise, Gove points out that Rechy's sexual outlaw – "a modern-day martyr crossed with an action hero" (2000, p. 47) – loses their radical sheen once the author admits that "gay promiscuity is visible only to homosexuals and to the cops" (Rechy, 1989, p. 99). These are admittedly older texts that should be contextualised in terms of their sociohistorical climates: this was a period when queer movements were pushing

[22] This queer relationship to opacity and (il)legibility is explored in detail in Chapter 4.

back against oppression to demand a right to privacy in public. Yet, as I have explored already, idealising sex as a potent catalyst for political and social change is a persistent scholarly attachment within queer studies.

Patrick Moore's *Beyond Shame* – which will be examined in greater detail in the following chapter – revolves around the 1970s sexual subcultures of New York City, specifically commercial sex venues such as *The Mineshaft*.[23] His book is intended as a clarion call for a new generation, an insistence that they continue the "great social experiment initiated by gay men using their bodies and sexual creativity", something he believes was "the true sexual revolution" (2004, p. 4). Within this text, now defunct New York sex clubs are not sites of sexual sociality or queer culture; through Moore's lionisation, they become harbingers of a "social change" that match "the more radical elements of that era's anti-war, civil rights, and feminist movements" (p. xxiv). AIDS truncated their "astonishing experiment", which, Moore attests, "might have transformed America by creating entirely new models of sexual interaction" (p. 4).

It is crucial to historicise Moore's approach as a reaction to the homophobic AIDS crisis rhetoric that forged a *contrapasso* link between the promiscuity of the 1970s sexual revolution and the emergence of the disease in the 1980s. The author's text was intended to serve as a bulwark against this tendency to construe the now-lost sexual past "as a site of infectious irresponsibility" (Castiglia and Reed, 2012, p. 2). Nonetheless, his phantasy of radical political eros coheres around an ideal image of hypermasculine gay sex clubs, one that creates a "living-up-to-them dynamic"

[23] Sex clubs like *The Mineshaft* and *The Anvil*, which closed in the 1980s, were sexual spaces that grew to prominence in 1970s New York. They aimed, through their dark and labyrinthine structures, to recreate the secret cruising grounds of the city within the safety of their walls (Tattelman, 2005, p. 302)

(Dean, 2009, p. 23) for a time when gay men had the "courageous willingness to risk absolutely everything" for their desires (Moore, 2004, p. xxv). To Moore, sex in these spaces was not sociable, playful or pleasurable; it was a serious ritual undertaken by "grim-faced men who knew in their hearts that they were embarking on a journey from which they might never return" (p. 23). In *Manhood and Politics*, Wendy Brown states that the "historical symbiosis of courage and manliness" is based on a "willingness to risk death for an abstract aim" (1988, p. 206). Therefore, "courage", for a man, is indelibly linked to "overcoming bodily fears and overcoming concerns for life" (p. 206). This is apparent in Moore's focus on a heroic, masculine form of self-abnegation, which echoes Halperin's (2000) earlier pulverising take on sexual askesis.

In his analysis of discourses of gay shame, Halberstam critiques the way "white gay male" politics concentrates its "energies on simply rebuilding the self that shame dismantled rather than taking apart the social processes that project shame onto queer subjects in the first place" (Halberstam, 2005b, p. 224). Instead of unpacking how heteronormativity, sexual moralising, state-mandated homophobia, and neoliberal public policy have fostered tenacious negative feelings around queer sexuality, Moore opts to glorify what he considers injuriously abject – public sex venues – into glowing points of identification. Whereas the dominant narrative around collective queer sex venues presented them as sites of risk and self-abnegation, Moore's hagiographical account of these spaces inverts, rather than interrogates, this association. These men morph into noble risk takers elaborating novel forms of relating that could open new horizons of unrealised social possibility. This idealisation yields yet another bang narrative of sexual daring and risk: instead of uncoupling them from moralising narratives of self-harm and personal destruction, the leather-clad men of *The Mineshaft* are forced to occupy the role of martyr to sexual

radicalism. Like Baker-Jordan's homonormative reading of the past and identity, they are rendered into one-dimensional icons embodying an idealised sexual past and a specularised better future.

Halberstam attributes the prevalence of cruising bang narratives to the fact that queer studies is "endlessly seduced by the idea that sexual expression is in and of itself a revolutionary act" (2011, p. 150). Yet, there is an affective dimension to queer exceptionalism and ideality politics; they shimmer with hope and anticipation for a new and better world. Amin highlights the hauntological dimensions of this affective orientation, arguing that the vocal valorisation of queer sexual practices is a direct response to a "damaging legacy of shame and stigma" (2017, p. 6). This idealisation of dissident queer sex is again "the oblique work of shame" (Butler, 1998, p. 227); it is an attempt to transmute the spectre of homosexual abjection into something politically and/or socially generative. Amin specifies that past ignominies are not the only things haunting queer theory: its "field habitus remains infused" by "the intoxicating sexual utopianism of the 1970s" (2017, p. 107) and the "political and transgressive charge of the early 1990s moment" (2016b, p. 182). Queer theory is haunted by the optimistic feelings that cling to these historical periods; they exert "a gravitational pull" on how queer erotics are apprehended in the present (2017, p. 107).

The pull of the past creates an urgent demand to protect subcultural sexual practices, as evidenced in the theoretical idealisation of cruising spaces as zones of revolutionary change and ethical possibility. Given the previously outlined history of outsiderhood and abjection, this might seem like a worthy strategy. Nonetheless, while cruising spaces are valuable tactical/strategic spatial productions, these sexual heterotopias and sites of carnivalesque abandon did not – and still

do not – have world-changing agency.[24] They may be emancipatory and revelatory, but they are not revolutionary. Furthermore, theorising queer sex as speaking "in the tongue of liberation" requires it to be rigorously dissected for proof of its radicalism (Jagose, 2012, p. 2). If Foucault's work demonstrated that connecting sex to an inner truth allowed it to become enmeshed within biopower, then siting a kernel of ethicopolitcal potentiality in non-normative sexual behaviours risks reinstating the same epistemological imperative around sex. That is anti-homonormative texts that argue queer sex is "legitimately associated with the honor of a political cause" reaffirm and remain trapped in the discursive machinations of sexuality (Foucault, 1978, p. 6). Therefore, the idealisation of queer sex not only affirms the *Rubinesque* value system, it also bolsters a "will to knowledge" (p. 12) with respect to sexuality.

This chapter has explored how the past – be it the spectre of abjection or the forward-dawning hopes of gay/queer liberation – can haunt sexual perspectives, ideals, and identities. By looking at contemporary theoretical and artistic representations of cruising cultures, this research unravels the complicated lines of force innervating contemporary sexual discourses and ideality politics. In the following section, I explain how the concept of *eidolontology* will be used to explore the research question and guide the methodological approach of the PhD.

1.3 Eidolontology: A Hauntological Approach

[24] João Florêncio argues that "the logics of liminality, just like those of Bahktin's carnivalesque, are socially conservative. That is, their primary function is to maintain order rather than troubling it" (2020, p. 137). From this perspective, heterotopic and carnivalesque sexual spaces can function as sites of "hedonistic escapism" that do not challenge social hierarchies and inequalities (p. 137). As Pat Califia pithily states: "I do not believe that we can fuck our way to freedom" (1988, p. 15).

In ancient Greek literature, an *eidolon* was a spectre or a ghost, but it can also connote an idealised person or thing ('eidolon', 2008). *Eidolontology*, a portmanteau of *eidolon* and hauntology, offers a way to explore how spectral pasts and futures shape queer ideals relating to sex in the present. Adopting an *eidolontological* approach to cruising cultures untethers queer sex from polarising perspectives that position it as a harbinger of recidivist doom or novel sociopolitical transformations.

Cruising spaces are polysemic zones of same-sex contact: people explore sexual identities and subjectivities in these spaces, while others might want to suspend or forget them. These can be spaces of pleasure and queer communion, but they can also be laced with feelings of fear, confusion, and shame. Ignoring the contradictory complexity of cruising allows these practices to be funnelled into simplified political narratives of shameful pre-liberatory invisibility or bold sexual radicalism. The former ignores how cruising fostered the forms of intersubjective visibility and queer association that were integral to the formation of modern homosexual identity, and the latter misinterprets public sex as inherently resistive, ethical, or anti-normative. It is, of course, appealing to think of queer sex, so frequently cast as deviant and dangerous, as an exceptional medium for radical sociopolitical transformation. However, as I have explored in this chapter, this process forces sex onto a tottering pedestal; it becomes overburdened with agency, power and all of the "outsized hopes" of queer futurity (Amin, 2017, p. 108). The idealisation of sex as a queerly resistant force also places it "outside the conditions of the historical present so that it might be purified of any compromising relation to normativity" (Amin, 2016a, p. 107). As Amin insists, if we truly want to embrace and understand "the variegated textures of queer", then we have to "deidealize the queer imaginaries we treasure the most" (2017, p. 175).

Deidealisation is “a form of the reparative that acknowledges messiness and damage” (p. 11). It can teach us, as Derrida hoped, “to learn to live with ghosts” (1994, pp. xvii–xviii) instead of attempting to “redeem or critique the imperfect and messy relations” they embody (Amin, 2017, p. 79). By exposing the complexities of the past, *eidolontology deperilises* sex-negative perspectives on cruising as destructive while also deidealising its position as an anti-normative or utopian practice within queer studies.

Eidolontology exposes the hauntological and idealising lines of force, but it also provides me with a methodology to select and analyse the art-related case studies that form this research project. This methodological approach is inspired by Amin’s reworking of a Foucauldian form of historical analysis:

> Genealogy is a critical method of analysis, as it reveals the ongoingness of pasts usually thought `to be quite distant, the temporal incoherence of a present fragmented by the survival of prior historical practices, and the political motivation of all attempts to definitively separate “present” from “past,” “radical” from “retrograde” modes of sexuality.
> (Amin 2017, p. 29)

Amin expands the genealogical method to include affective dynamics. This is of particular interest for this project, given that sex is often loaded with conflictual affective perspectives. Amin’s approach, aptly named attachment genealogy, is predicated on exploring feelings of unease within theory. The author looks to queer objects that clash uncomfortably with the contemporary “field disposition” (p. 31) of queer studies, which aims to bolster ideals relating to “political progress, sexual egalitarianism, and muscular and volitional resistance to norms” (p. 36). For example, Amin asks why queer theory accepts Daddy/Boy roleplay “but not intergenerational pederasty, why the black submissive’s embrace of ‘extravagant abjection’ in an interracial scene but not the white

bottom's racial fetishism, why incarcerated queers' calls for prison abolition, but not their quieter moments of pleasure in incarceration" (p. 14). Amin's point relates to the fact that only good queer objects that are capable "capable of producing novelty, eluding power, and generating alternatives" are generally deemed worthy of theoretical attention (2016a, p. 105).

This idea of unease chimes with the notion of the ideal sitting within the concept of *eidolontology*. Ideals often generate discomfort because the gap between the subject and the ideal image leaves room for the critical "torments of the superego"; there is a discomfiting "nagging sense of failing to live up to the ideal" (Dean, 2009, p. 23). In the following chapters, I focus on cruising-related artworks informed by feelings of crisis, lack and unease. Turning towards these negative reactions allows me to question what contemporary gay/queer ideal the practice disturbs or what spectre from the past (the AIDS crisis, gay liberatory politics) – or future (the good gay life, queer futurity) has irrupted uncomfortably into the present. Cruising, as the following chapters will explore, can chafe with contemporary homonormative and queer ideals relating to pride, visibility, agency and the careful management of self. Instead of reactively idealising the practice as queerly radical, *eidolontology* turns towards the complicated aspects of cruising cultures, embracing their unsettling "queer impurities" to determine what we can learn from anxious cruising discourses that foreground the risks of forgetting, addiction, invisibility, and commercialisation (Amin, 2017, p. 175).

1.4 Synthesis

This chapter has explored the processes of abjection, *perilisation* and idealisation that cling to cruisy sex. Homonormative informed discourses overlay cruising practices with a constrictive,

evolutive temporality: public sex is both a painful relic of an oppressive past and a stepping stone towards a proud, public gay identity. Conversely, queer perspectives can imbue non-normative sex with a sense of ideality: it becomes a catalyst for a better, more egalitarian future. Haunted by oppressive pasts and hopeful futures, queer sex is overburdened with agency and meaning. This chapter introduces the concept of *eidolontology* as a way of unravelling the hauntological and idealising dimensions of queer sex. In the following chapters, adopting an *eidolontological* approach to contemporary cruising discourses allows me to trace the gravitational force spectral pasts, progress narratives, and gay/queer political ideals exert on cultural conceptions of public sex.

While this chapter has outlined the methodological approach for the research project, it has also provided the theoretical background for the following chapters. Exploring historical and contemporary sex panics demonstrated how cruising has functioned as an abject spectacle that shores up the bounds of hetero/homonormative propriety. Chapter 3 returns to these *abjectifying* dynamics to explore how contemporary discourses on HIV and promiscuity deploy the cruiser as a disciplinary panic icon, one that is critical in shaping the boundaries of the good neoliberal sexual subject.

This chapter has also explored the historical delimitation of homosexuality to the private sphere and the construction of the public realm as a heterosexist, family-friendly space. Chapter 4 demonstrates how this fraught relationship with publicity and visibility haunts contemporary cruising discourses that foreground the negative dimensions of invisibility, secrecy and the closet space.

This contextualising chapter has foregrounded how abjection lingers within idealising

accounts of cruising as a practice pregnant with ethicopolitical potential. Yet, this valorisation of non-normative queer sex merely reinstates, rather than interrogates, the moral framework Rubin diagnosed as overlaying all sex. Chapter 5 explores how the rise of digital cruising triggers anxiety-laden discourses relating to the demise of authentic intimacies, traditions and agency. It demonstrates how nostalgic attempts to preserve 'true' cruising practices impose an ethical and theoretical divide between unmediated and mediated intimacies.

The following chapter focuses on archival art relating to cruising cultures. In the face of loss, trauma and archival absence, there is a pressing desire to redeem and remember a queer sexual practice. This chapter has demonstrated how queer and homonormative approaches to cruising can flatten the experience into simple narratives of oppression and radical political action. The following one builds from this analysis, asking if it is possible to remember and preserve sexual pasts without ossifying them into an idealised cultural image.

Historical archives can and do function as identity machines […]

Valerie Rohy, *In the Queer Archive: Fun Home*, 2010

2. Archival Conjurations: Cruising Pasts and the Politics of Retrospection

This chapter explores how cruising cultures are preserved and remembered within queer culture. It begins by analysing two memory-oriented queer texts: *Beyond Shame* and *If Memory Serves.* Both books are haunted by a feeling of loss, by a sense that the vibrant sexual past has been wilfully forgotten in the wake of AIDS and the pivot towards homonormativity. Delving into these texts reveals how their attempts to repair a rift in cultural memory engender their own forms of forgetting. They concentrate on the needs of the present, selecting only memories that affirm an ideal image of gay sex and identity. The past is not understood as a dynamic shifting thing. Instead, these texts' constrictive nostalgia instrumentalises the past in the service of gay identitarian politics. The central aim of this chapter is to determine if it is possible to remember cruising cultures without falling into conservative nostalgia for the halcyon days of the sexual past.

Each of the artworks examined in this chapter can be classified as "archival art", a term Hal Foster used to describe artistic attempts "to make historical information, often lost or displaced, physically present" by working with "found image, object and text" (2004, p. 4). In keeping with the *eidolontological* approach, each case study contains feelings of unease, lack or crisis. The artists in question all exhibit frustration or dissatisfaction with archival silences and uneven processes of queer remembrance.

The first case study is Marc Martin's 2020 exhibition on cottaging, *Les Tasses*. The artist uses historical ephemera and artefacts to create a cruising archive in the gallery space. In

contradistinction to the texts examined in section one, Martin foregrounds the complexity and plurality of these liminal sexual spaces. Despite this, analysing the artist's archival art through the lens of *Agambenian* melancholia reveals the forms of masculinist idealisation that remain threaded through the work (Agamben, 1993). This leads to the analysis of the archival art of Prem Sahib, a UK artist who returns in Chapters 3 and 4. This chapter focuses on Sahib's creative examination of the cruising institution of the gay sauna. Like Martin, Sahib's work is undergirded by a feeling of melancholic loss as he senses that these spaces are slowly disappearing. But unlike the French artist, Sahib turns towards the uneasy, discomfiting feelings he experiences as a person of colour in these spaces. In doing so, the artist's creative process engenders a form of nostalgic reflection that deidealises cruising spaces as loci of queer ethicopolitical potential and laudatory egalitarianism.

Queers throughout time have grappled with a "desire for history", diving into archives and historical texts as a way of authenticating their experiences and establishing a sense of belonging in times of oppression and isolation (Chitty, 2020, p. 150). As the previous chapter shows, cruising practices have been shaped by disciplinary forces and the insistent probing of power/knowledge. The final sections of this chapter explore artists' uneasy relationship with the cruising archive and how they negotiate and respond to its gaps and silences.

It begins with William E. Jones' reuse of a covert police surveillance tape as a form of archival artivism. Despite the artist's noble intentions to combat archival silence, I argue that the appropriation of the footage as art reanimates the epistemological drive to expose and categorise queer bodies, flattening complex subjective experiences into a simplistic gay narrative of historical oppression in the process. In contrast to this – and with the support of the art of Danny Jauregui –

I suggest our forays into the cruising archive should embrace the queer spectrality and unknowability of the past (Freccero, 2006). The final section addresses the spectral absences in the cruising archive: queers of colour, women, and gender non-conforming people. Concentrating on artists who draw creative inspiration from these ghostly voids, it explores how hybrid hole histories can disturb the taken-for-granted contours of the past and present. In doing so, the chapter concludes that a queer "desire to feel historical" can be addressed through fiction, not just fact, as the virtual contains unbounded possibilities that the real does not (Nealon, 2001, p. 6).

2.1 Whom Does Memory Serve?

In *If Memory Serves,* Castiglia and Reed refer to a shame-laden reading of the sexual past as "unremembering" (2012, p. 10). In unremembering, the memory of pre-AIDS US sexual cultures is not erased outright. Instead, as seen with Wharton (2014) in the previous chapter, they are recollected as abject and anachronistic, as something that defines the limit of progressive, contemporary gay identity. Much "like Lot's wife", queers are told to never look "back, never to turn from the dubious vision of normativity-as-progress glimmering beyond a perpetually receding horizon" (Castiglia and Reed, 2012, p. 10). The authors take issue with this turn away from the past and the elision of the positive and community-orientated aspects of these sexual subcultures.

Like viral hauntology, Freccero's work on queer spectrality examines how past events can reverberate through time, irrupting in the present as a pressing command or "ethical imperative" (Dinshaw *et al.*, 2007, p. 184). In Castiglia and Reed's case, the ghostly voids in an unremembered past issue a call to action: they feel compelled to intervene and offer a way to repair this fissure in cultural memory. Their central thesis is that memory can be redemptive: it can dismantle the

narrative of culpability that blamed gay men for the pandemic. Advocating for "strategic remembering", the authors insist that privileging memories that affirm contemporary gay identity offers a way to transform the present and heal a community and past fractured by AIDS (2012, p. 10).

Many scholars have explored how retrospection and nostalgia can be instrumental in inspiring political action and idealism in the present (Hilderbrand 2006; Muñoz 2009; Shahani 2012). Despite this, Castiglia and Reed's theorisation of reparative memory is hindered by the same reductive exceptionalism the previous chapter explored with respect to queer theory and sex. In their text, strategic remembering is ethically pure and innately political: "an act of resistance, regardless of its content" (2012, p. 11). Yet, processes of repair are not outside the lines of power they interrogate and contest.

Although queer reparative critique is associated with Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick (2003), Carolyn Laubender traces its theoretical origins to the paediatric-focused literature of psychoanalyst Melanie Klein. Laubender highlights that, for Klein, "reparation names the child's phantasy not necessarily the object's need" (2019, p. 57). While enacting repair might flood the child with a sense of "ethical action", this righteous feeling is unconnected "with the status of the object as the (potentially unwilling) recipient of such assignations of injury and repair" (p. 53). Most critically, this presumption of ethical action obscures how reparative processes can reaffirm "circuits of violence" (p. 57). That is, attempts at repairing the past can also cause harm and yield their own forms of unremembering. This critique is true of *If Memory Serves*, as evidenced in the authors' criticism of *The Memorial to Homosexuals Persecuted Under Nazism* (2008). This monument sits at the outer bounds of the *Tiergarten,* a park in Berlin.

Designed by the artistic duo Michael Elmgreen and Ingar Dragset, the monument consists of a single concrete stele canted at an angle – a sly visual reference to the previously discussed Eisenman memorial a short distance away – with a small head-height opening on one side. At its unveiling, peering through this gap allowed a lone viewer to see the endlessly looping black-and-white video of two men kissing inside.[25] Although the structure was intended to memorialise the historical persecution of homosexuals, Haakenson highlights how the monument's collapsing of the "visible and knowable" with the "secretive and hidden" also raises questions on "the contemporary acceptance of homosexuality" (2010, p. 146). Likewise, Getsy notes how the monument forces a viewer to assume a position of "guarded intimacy" in a public space, a relational strategy that forges a bodily allegory for "the complicated ways in which private lives become the targets of public homophobia and persecution" (2019a, p. 192). The immediate vandalism of the structure in 2008 and again in 2019 gives credence to these points, as well as the ones made in the previous chapter, on queerness's abject position within a heterosexist public realm (Greenberger, 2019).

Despite this nuanced interweaving of historical and contemporary queer visibility, Elmgreen and Dragset's monument was criticised for alluding to the practice of cruising. Journalist Alice Schwarzer described the monument as a "homage to toilet sex" and "a ghetto of clichés of male homosexuality" (Evans, 2014, p. 84). Castiglia and Reed (2012) also believed it was a poor choice. They insisted that idealising "the stealth homosexual, who cruises parks and back alleys undetected, is to valorize an image of the queer as loner or as victim, as in flight from or trapped

[25] Given the original video concentrated solely on men, it was agreed that the recording would be updated biannually with different "interpretations of same-sex kissing scenes" (Girßmann, 2015, p. 60).

by a stigmatized identity" (p. 87). Their description of the cruiser painted an image of a shameful anachronism: a shadowy figure limned in the dim light of the closet. In framing the men in the film "as hidden, isolated, and subject to a peeping gaze" (p. 89), the monument seemed to reify the privatisation of gay sexuality; it represented "a pulling back from spatial visibility that paralleled calls for the de-generational unremembering of a diseased lifestyle" (pp. 90-91). In the authors' eyes, the monument squandered an opportunity to create an unmistakably gay *lieux de mémoire*: a structure that spoke to and represented "an identity constructed in the present in relation to the past" (p. 91).[26]

Castiglia and Reed would have undoubtedly been critical of the forms of homonormative rhetoric explored in the previous chapter. Nevertheless, the authors' focus on ideality politics sees them dismissing a past of snatched intimacies and shadowy haunts. From an *eidolontological* perspective, this spectral history clashes with the gay ideals they believe are needed in the present, namely the productive attributes of agency, visibility, and community.[27] It is perhaps more accurate to describe Castiglia and Reed's ideality politics as "identification politics", given that their focus constricts cultural memory around a historically contingent, ideal form of gay identity (Dean, 2009, p. 21).

Halberstam refers to Jean Luc-Nancy's *The Inoperative Community* (1991) to highlight

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[26] French historian Pierre Nora described a *lieu de mémoire* as "any significant entity, whether material or nonmaterial in nature", that becomes "a symbolic element of the memorial heritage of any community" (Nora and Kritzman, 1996, p. xvii).

[27] Both Phelan (2010) and Joseph (2002) provide potent critiques of the uncritical valorisation of community, noting that it tends to cultivate an exclusionary identity grounded in capitalist consumption rather than shared political aspirations.

how “quests for community are always nostalgic attempts to return to some fantasized moment of union and unity” (Halberstam, 2005a, p. 154). This is what we see in Castiglia and Reed’s work; there is a sense that unremembering has rendered an essential aspect of queer community “moribund and redundant” (Halberstam, 2005a, p. 154). It is, of course, vital that the memories of queer subcultures are preserved. Yet Halberstam highlights that memory can operate as “a disciplinary mechanism” (2011, p. 15); it can select specific accounts and histories while tidying up unruly or complicated ones. As seen in Castiglia and Reed’s text, post-crisis interventions in the sexual past can be conservative rather than preservative. They can engender their own forms of “suspect memorialisation” (2011, p. 15) and “unremembering” (Castiglia and Reed, 2012, p. 10). This is also the case for Moore’s (2004) *Beyond Shame,* the anti-homonormative polemic introduced in the previous chapter.

Moore wants to foster pride for a time when gay men were “the creative vanguard of American life”, a time when their sexual exploits were so creative that he sees them as constituting “art” (2004, p. 78). The author has noble intentions of redeeming the 1970s sexual subcultures once cast as the “abattoirs of the epidemic” (Sullivan, 2014, p. 45). However, Moore’s reparative idealisation of New York sex clubs hinges on the assumption “that radical sex means or leads to radical politics” (Bersani, 1987, p. 205). The book’s sexual ideality politics also requires the selective memorialisation and idealisation of specific gay spaces and masculinities.

Moore’s reparative attention only extends to “the enclosed, controlled environments of private clubs, discos, and bathhouses” (2004, p. 16). Tactical cruising spaces like piers, parks, or tearooms are immediately dismissed as “too public to fit into the category of art or theatre” (p. 16). Halberstam writes that queer scholars and writers often “select from historical archives only the

narratives that please" (2011, p. 148). In Moore's case, discarding outdoor cruising spaces as too "diffused" (2004, p. 45) allows him to gloss over the ontological blurriness of traditional cruising spaces – how they can be populated by people who do not identify as gay. It is only cis gay-centred, masculinist sex venues that deserve to be untethered from shame and given redemptive histories as spaces of social transformation. This homosexist focus – that is, his privileging of "gayness over other identity features" (Joseph, 2002, p. xvii) – is most apparent in his disavowal of the epidemiological term 'men who have sex with men':

> *[...] gay*, a politically charged word denoting community, has been recast in the clinical demographic of "men who have sex with men." This new definition was created in response to the increasing racial and economic diversity of gay men contracting AIDS and the levels of homophobia in some communities of color. "Men who have sex with men" are shamed, isolated individuals far more likely to remain closeted and comfortably invisible than *gay* men.
> (Moore, 2004, p. 150, emphasis in original)

For Moore, the term MSM embodies regressive closeted invisibility and the previously outlined racially charged concept of 'the Down Low'. In Moore's view, the use of this epidemiological term risks eroding gay history, collective memory, and identity. "We know the history of AIDS", he insists, "and it is our history" (p. 189).[28] Nevertheless, as Michael Rothberg states, "Memories are not owned by groups – nor are groups 'owned' by memories" (2009, p. 5). Moore's claims of ownership promulgate a feeling of loss and scarcity: collective memory is understood as rigid and

[28] Moore's belief that history can be owned leads to a revisionist account of the AIDS pandemic. The original diagnostic criteria for the disease were entirely based around men, something that Gran Fury tried to address with their poster *Women Don't Get AIDS, They Just Die from It* (1991). The underdiagnosis of women meant many went without access to clinical trials, disability benefits and Medicare (Lowery, 2022, p. 247). This disparity in care was made evident by a medical study from 1990 that discovered "the average woman survived 27.4 *weeks* after being diagnosed with AIDS, while the average white male lived 39 *months* from the diagnosis" (p. 250, emphasis in original).

"competitive" rather than "multidirectional" and open to "negotiation, cross-referencing and borrowing" (p. 3). This focus on categorical boundaries within identity and history is also the work of idealisation: Moore purifies these sexual practices of their "instabilities" and "crossings" (Amin, 2022, p. 106) so he can forge a masculinist phantasy centred on "radical, isolationist" gay spaces (Moore, 2004, p. 78).

This linkage between abjection, purification and idealisation is readily apparent in Moore's argument that the feminisation of queer culture equates to its desexualisation. He baulks at the popularity of drag, stating that in "fifty years' time we will look back at drag and camp as the minstrel shows of gay culture – amusing but ultimately sinister and degrading, an easy way for straight culture to avoid the realities of our sexuality" (2004, p. 120). In his writing on white gay masculinity, Halberstam notes that shame operates as "a gendered form of sexual abjection: it belongs to the feminine, and when men find themselves 'flooded' with shame, chances are they are being feminized in some way and against their will" (2005b, p. 226). Gay shame, in this case, is grounded in the ignominy of being emasculated and denied one's expected patriarchal dividend. It is clear that Moore's attempt to repair gay culture's position as "a community of shame" (2004, p. xxi) is a conservative attempt to restore gay cultural memory into an "uncastrated, muscular, whole" (Halberstam, 2005b, p. 228).

Avery Gordon explains that the ghost carries a feeling of "unfulfilled possibility"; it is "a reckoning with that which we have lost, but never had" (2008, p. 183). This section explores how *If Memory Serves* and *Beyond Shame* are both haunted by the loss of queer sexual cultures in the wake of the AIDS crisis. This feeling of loss generates a potent command to preserve and memorialise queer culture. But these texts expose the weakness of reparative memory projects:

they can be motivated by a conservative attempt to restore a 'lost' past, selecting memories and narratives that bolster an affirmative phantasy of community while effacing those that do not. By turning to the work of artists Marc Martin and Prem Sahib, the following section examines if it is possible to preserve cruising memories without flattening them into idealised, golden images of gay sexual egalitarianism and communion.

2.2 Nostalgic/Melancholic Conservation

2.2.1 Phantasmatic Ideality in Marc Martin's *Les Tasses*

Marc Martin is a French photographer and video artist whose work on non-normative sexualities strives to challenge an "extremely inhibited" contemporary sexual culture (Martin, 2021, para. 1). For the artist, the rise of puritanical sex negativity means that "staging non-hegemonic sexualities is a strong political act" (para. 4). Here, we see how the artist's creative approach to documenting and imagining non-normative sexuality is, in part, a reaction to what he perceives as a culture of "harsh sexual regression" (para. 4). This chapter examines Marc Martin's exhibition *Les Tasses (De Urinoirs/On Cottaging),* staged in Brussels in 2020. *Les Tasses* is an archival art exhibition focused entirely on the shadowy den of queer desire: the public toilet.[29] In keeping with this research project's *eidolontological* approach, Martin's exhibition is animated by feelings of frustration and disquiet. The artist describes the works as combating sanitised approaches to queer

[29] The popularity of public urinals as spaces for clandestine same-sex contact has been well documented in the sexual histories of Europe and North America (Maynard, 1994; Chauncey, 1995; Herzog, 2011; Weeks, 2017). In the cities of modernity, it offered men from lower socioeconomic backgrounds a pocket of private space in which to carve out a moment of same-sex intimacy (Maynard, 1994; Chauncey, 1995). In the UK, "cruisy" toilets are termed "cottages" in local gay slang, American queer argot, however, favours "tearoom" while "beats" and "boxes" are used in Australia and South Africa respectively (Ashford, 2007, p. 507).

history that offer only “polished representations of the past” (Martin and LaVallée, 2020, p. 36).

João Florêncio notes that much of Martin’s work:

> […] is marked by a certain dark romanticism— a longing for a pre-AIDS era of gay cruising and experimentation in often derelict public spaces, as well as an attempt to re-enact them in the space of fantasy by chasing, filming and photographing locations and men that have not succumbed to the clean-up of gay culture that happened during the 1990s. (2020, p. 50)

Although Martin’s work is guided by nostalgia for the sexual past, his exploration of toilet cruising, unlike Moore's account of sex clubs, does not rhapsodise the spaces’ utopic qualities. His exhibition underscores their heterotopic nature: how giving yourself over to these nebulous spaces transformed you into a “liminal persona” or “threshold person” (Turner, 1969, p. 95). Victor Turner wrote that threshold people “are betwixt and between the positions assigned and arrayed by law, custom, convention and the ceremonial” (p. 95). This is evident within the public toilet as “societal conventions and divisions collapsed at the stall door” (Martin and LaVallée, 2020, p. 19). The exhibition text notes that, in the cruising space, “the young met the elderly, gays met straights”, and, during World War II, “the occupied met the occupiers” (p. 19). This is not the idealised sexual ethics and levelling of social categories explored in the previous chapter. It is a temporary heterotopic suspension of social boundaries and categories.

On entering Martin’s exhibition, you meet a set of texts giving an in-depth history of these amenities. The museological-style displays lend the exhibition an air of scholarly officiousness as Martin carefully lays out the “historical, documented truth” of spaces that existed “on the fringes of approved memory” (2020, p. 5). Moving from these introductory texts into the ground floor proper brings you to artefacts and ephemera salvaged from destroyed and abandoned public toilets.

An antique pissoir sits in the centre of the gallery space, and you are free to scribble your own *latrinalia* on its walls in chalk. Near the stairs to the upper level, a pair of graffitied doors stand facing one another. The first was rescued from the men's bathroom at the University of Lille, the second from a Berlin pissoir. Each of these doors has decades upon decades of sexual inscriptions palimpsesting their surfaces.

Martin does not shy away from the strange duality of the public toilet as a site of pleasure and danger. He notes how, during the occupation in the Second World War, public urinals "were key places to make arrests, with plainclothes agents serving as bait" (p. 24). The hybridity of these spaces, how they embodied both freedom and restriction, is evident in a piece titled *Glauque [Glaucous],* which consists of a series of tiles salvaged from a Berlin public toilet built in 1902 and closed in the 1990s. Martin rankles at queer attempts to foreground only a "gratifying heritage", and the arrangement of the tiles in this piece – "the almost full frame" with "almost straight lines" – speaks of the need to face and preserve the reality of "an imperfect past" (p. 38). The title refers to the hue of the tiles: "the colour of straitjackets and suspended freedom" (p. 38). It also resonates with the Greek myth of Glaucus, a fisherman who gained immortality but whose apotheosis into a merman-like-deity restricted him to living in the sea for eternity (Miller, 2019). Therefore, Martin's piece engages with the complex histories of cruising spaces and how they embodied restriction, freedom, fear, and pleasure all at once.

Tactical and strategic cruising spaces can engender what Roach refers to as "claustrophilia", the sense that:

> […] it is gratifying, even liberating, to feel in control of one's confines, no matter how oppressive that entrapment may be, no matter how illusory such control is. Within that

> finite space, one can likewise dream up fantasies, scenarios, and worlds unimaginable—or more often than not, unrealizable—outside of it.
> (2021, p. 179)

This is the same duality that Scott Tucker identified in the gay ghetto as an urban zone that served "both as detention camp and a liberated zone" (1982, p. 29). This idea of finding freedom within confinement tends to clash with an idealised view of gay liberation as a mythic movement from oppressive confinement to bold agency. After all, as Bauman highlights, liberation implies being "set free from some kind of fetters that obstruct or thwart the movement" (2013, p. 16). Once we are free, we can move and act unimpeded.

Jagose states that what is considered politically queer is bound to "efficacious actions or exercises of intentionalist agency" (2012, p. 204). However, Jagose points to Kathleen Stewart's writing about agency not as an expression of one's sovereign will but as something "frustrated and unstable", something that is unproductive and "attracted to the potential in things" (2007, p. 86). Martin's cruisers are not the "heroic, self-authoring subjects that stand for resistance, world-making, or ethical reinvention" (Jagose, 2012, p. 204). Nor are they powerless victims of an oppressive past, forced to engage in dark fumbling at the fringes of society. His cruisers complicate this narrow perspective on freedom and (in)action, exposing the subjective reality of agency, how it can be "strange, twisted […] passive or exhausted" (Stewart, 2007, p. 86). While Martin's work is undoubtedly dominated by nostalgia for these liminal spaces, his lingering mournful attention feels different to the nostalgia evident in Moore's text.

In *The Future of Nostalgia*, Svetlana Boym makes a distinction between restorative and reflective nostalgia. Whereas reflective nostalgia thrives in loss and yearning, restorative nostalgia

"attempts a transhistorical reconstruction of the lost home" by turning towards discourses of "truth and tradition" (2008, p. xviii). The central issue with restorative nostalgia is that the past is no longer "a duration but a perfect snapshot" (p. 49). This is redolent of Walter Benjamin's description of historicism as the work of historians who wish "to relive an era", an approach that ultimately results in acedia as they fruitlessly grasp onto a brief "historical image" (1989, p. 257). Moore's communion with the sexual past can be understood as a nostalgic act of restorative historicism as he crafts a – wholly unreal – phantasy image of a radical sexual utopia, one that coheres around a masculinist gay ideal.

Although Martin's work is undoubtedly laced with nostalgia for these abandoned spaces, he displays none of the historical blindness or "myth-making" that comes with restorative nostalgia (Boym, 2008, p. 41). By contrast, *Les Tasses* is an example of reflective nostalgia as it "lingers on ruins", "longing", and "the imperfect process of remembrance" (p. 41). Martin is not offering you the definitive truth of these spaces; he foregrounds the multi-directionality (Rothberg, 2009) of the memories that cling to their remains.

Whereas the lower level of the exhibition immerses us in tactile encounters with the historical space of the public toilet, moving upstairs brings us to Martin's imagined cruising spaces. Here, we see the transformation of a heterotopic space into a utopic one as archival ephemera and the detritus of loss are used to fuel Martin's "artistic vision" (Martin and LaVallée, 2020, p. 5). In these images, the bathroom tiles gleam resplendently as men openly cruise one another, seemingly unscathed by disciplinary power. The transition between the ground floor and the upper one – heterotopia to utopia, "deprivation to vision" – is a rich example of queer "melancholic ideality" (Castiglia and Reed, 2012, pp. 181–182). Unlike Freudian melancholia – where "the grieving

subject" staves off a loss by internalising "residues of the lost object" (Min, 2003, p. 232) – Giorgio Agamben saw melancholia as allowing "loss and idealism" to operate in tandem (Castiglia and Reed, 2012, p. 179). In *Stanzas*, Agamben (1993) introduced the medieval phenomenon of "the Noonday Demon", a condition afflicting cloistered monks (Castiglia and Reed, 2012, p. 179). Here, the melancholic turns away from the present and "plunges into exaggerated praise of distant and absent monasteries", evoking all the "places where he could be healthy and happy" among "pleasant communities of brothers" (Agamben, 1993, p. 4). In this case, melancholy revolves around a phantasmatic ideal rather than a lost object since "the beloved, being ideal, has never been possessed and therefore cannot be lost" (Castiglia and Reed, 2012, p. 181). As Castiglia and Reed suggest, these "pleasant communities" — grounded as they are in "idealism and loss, invention and nostalgia"— readily align with "a phantasmatic ideal of sexual subculture" (p. 182). Referring back to Moore's (2004) book, we can see the contours of melancholic ideality within the author's fascination for the lost pre-AIDS sex club cultures of New York City.[30]

Originally hailing from Iowa, Moore did not reach the city until a point in the 1980s when much of its legendary sexual cultures seemed to be "in decline and what remained was joyless" (Moore, 2004, pp. xxii–xiii). Believing vital portions of the gay past were "being lost or wilfully

[30] While New York City has a long and rich cruising history (Chauncey, 1995; Turner, 2003), the 1970s was a particularly fertile period for the public sex cultures of the city. Men cruised the collapsing piers and empty warehouses of the New York Waterfront (Anderson, 2019; Weinberg, 2019), casual intimacies sparked in backrooms and bathhouses (Bérubé, 2003), and spaces like *The Mineshaft* (Brodsky, 1993; Tattelman, 2005) catered to a burgeoning sadism and masochism (S&M) scene. However, in the 1980s and 1990s, many of these spaces closed, both due to the AIDS pandemic (Engel and Lyle, 2017) and the urban redevelopment of the city (Warner, 2000; Ferguson, 2018). The dimming of a once vibrant public sex culture led Douglas Crimp to remark that, in addition to the loss of life, what many men lost through AIDS was "a culture of sexual possibility" (1989, p. 11). Wayne Hoffman described this cultural reduction as a "sexual devolution:" a feeling among young gay men that the pandemic triggered a "narrowing of sexual freedoms, a clamping down on sexual expression, a withering of sexual worlds" (1996, p. 340).

abandoned" (p. xxii), Moore's text aimed to reanimate the creative spirit of New York's gay subcultures and push back against their unremembering. Jose Esteban Muñoz points out that New York's 'lost' sexual cultures "never completely ceased to be" (2009, p. 33). They persisted – albeit in muted, less tangible forms – through the crisis years and continue to inspire and inform queer culture today.

This narrative of loss and cultural eradication is a potent one. It exerts a hauntological force that issues a cultural imperative to preserve "its memory, its ghosts, and the ritualized performances of transmitting its vision of utopia across generational divides" (p. 34). Moore's melancholic attachment to 1970s gay sexual culture is undeniable; he states that "as a gay man who missed those years [he refuses] to abandon their memory" (Moore, 2004, p. xxv). Likewise, Martin's art is grounded in the loss of a space he describes as one of the "founding moments of [his] emancipation" (Martin and LaVallée, 2020, p. 5). He recounts how his youthful explorations in a night-time toilet were harshly curtailed by its destruction with "pickaxes and shovels the very next day" (p. 5). The loss of this space created a productive lack in the artist, an "emptiness" that spawned "an entire aesthetic" (p. 5). In both cases, we see how draping cruising spaces and practices "in the funereal garb of loss" have functioned to preserve and sustain their memory in the face of closure and obsoletion (Castiglia and Reed, 2012, p. 182). While it is inspiring to think of memory not as "an archive of loss" but as "a seedbed of inventive idealization", attempts to preserve the past can have conservative outcomes (p. 191). In Martin's exhibition, the ground floor offers a nuanced, multi-directional account of cruising in public toilets, and the upper level features images that constitute the artist's melancholic phantasy of these lost spaces. However, as you examine the photographs and the short film staged by the artist, it becomes apparent that

masculine, white men populate all twelve artworks.

Tim Dean writes that "[a]n ideal image (whether of homosexuality or any other category) is nothing but an image ripe for identification – something in which one wishes to recognize him- or herself" (2009, p. 20). Melancholic ideality can be its own form of suspect memorialisation, its own form of forgetting, as we select out the images and memories that resonate with our aspirations and points of identification. This is illustrated both in the artworks on the upper floor of Martin's exhibition and in Moore's idealisation of hypermasculine sex clubs. Therefore, although memory is a powerful tool for preserving the sexual past in the face of cultural amnesia, we need to be wary of how these memories are exploited to serve our needs, desires, and aspirations in the present.[31] Uncritical nostalgia for a mythic past can leave us blind to how we shore up and conserve longstanding hegemonies and hierarchies concerning gender and race. As I will explore through the work of artist Prem Sahib, preservation and critique can work in tandem to create deidealising perspectives on queer cruising cultures that do not fall into myopic nostalgia for a lost sexual past.

2.2.2 Deidealisation in the Art of Prem Sahib

British artist Prem Sahib grew up in Southall, "a mostly Asian neighborhood on the outskirts of London" (Kadist, 2023). Of Indian and Polish heritage, Sahib's experiences of marginalisation informed an artistic practice that dwells on issues of queerness, sexuality and the exclusion of

[31] The universally panned film *Stonewall* (2015), ostensibly a historical account of the 1969 riots, is an example of this. On its release, the film was criticised for white-washing history as it "supplanted the critical role lesbians and queer/trans people of colour played in starting the riot" by focusing "on a fictional white, gay male lead" (Keegan, 2016, p. 50). Responding to the backlash, the director Roland Emmerich stated: "As a director you have to put yourself in your movies, and I'm white and gay" (Keating, 2015). Emmerich centred his own identificatory needs over historical accuracy to create a white male phantasy of heroic, intentionalist political action.

minorities. Sahib's work is of interest for this research project because several of the artist's exhibitions focus on the spaces and practices of public sex. *Night Flies* (2013) and *Side On* (2015) – two exhibitions which will be explored in depth in Chapter 4 – are replete with spare and abstract works that artfully allude to cruising. This chapter examines Sahib's three-part exhibition series, *Descent* (2019-2020). Like Martin's *Les Tasses*, these exhibitions problematise how gay sex clubs are preserved and memorialised.

As part of *Descent*, Sahib created a facsimile of a sex club only a mile from where the installation was staged in Southard Reid Gallery. In his art book *That Fire Over There,* Sahib includes correspondence from fellow artist Milovan Farronato in which they discuss the work. Farronato refers to a night he visited a sex club with Sahib, recalling how the man at the entrance cast his eyes over him – sporting "high heels, a touch or more of makeup" – before barking a harsh "not welcome. Men only!" (2023, p. 5). With some coaxing, the pair convinced the gatekeeper to admit them. On crossing the threshold into the "gloomy, labyrinthine" (p. 5) space, they were greeted by a discomfiting scene: a man, who had misplaced his clothes, stood screaming in underwear and a shirt. Considering this experience, Farronato queries Sahib's desire "to preserve a melancholic, even romantic memory" of these exclusionary spaces that are "closing little by little" (p. 6).

In his response, Sahib admits that he has "a sentimental attachment" to these clubs as, like Martin, they represent "a rite of passage" for him (p. 18). However, Sahib is creatively drawn to the spaces of collective and public sex because of the contradictions that structure them:

> In many of these places freedoms are played out within boundaries – be it binaries, uniforms, codes and tribal alliances that help draw parameters of comfort or alienation. The

> veneration of certain 'types' reflects a deeply ingrained economy of desire that insidiously maintains a particular version of what constitutes a man. But I have equally witnessed expressions of identity, defiance and community that aren't given space in the world above these stinky basements, where public, private and secret selves converge – albeit for those who are granted access.
> (p. 18)

For Freud, the melancholic cannot relinquish their hold on their "libidinal object because of residual ambivalences toward that object" (Castiglia and Reed, 2012, p. 59). Sahib's attachment to these spaces is undoubtedly melancholic. After all, these "are places [he] sometimes wants to forget, but [he] clearly can't seem to leave behind" (2023, p. 17). Even so, Sahib's melancholia does not spawn a phantasmatic ideal or "a simple celebration of the past" (Castiglia and Reed, 2012, p. 59). Instead, by turning towards these ambivalences, Sahib taps into the critical, deidealising dimensions of melancholia to explore the "contradictions of community and self as well as the hegemonic "constructions of gender, sexuality and race" that abound in these spaces (Sahib, 2023, p. 18). These are not equitable "Whitmanesque democracies" of easy belonging (Altman, 1982, p. 79); they come with exclusions and can trigger complicated, contradictory feelings of freedom and constriction.

Figure 2 Beneficiary (2020) by Prem Sahib

[Plaster, socks, trainers, LED light, MDF, timber, dimensions variable]

Sahib explored the imbrication of race and gender with queer space in the third exhibition stage – *Descent III. Man Dog* (2020) – with the piece *Beneficiary* (2020). The sculpture features eight white legs behind a partition, a visual reference to "view-blocking screens that demarcate 'dark rooms' for sexual activity in gay clubs" (McLean, 2020). With their starkly matching socks and trainers, the legs leave us unsure if these appendages belong to multiple bodies or a single human-arachnid entity. The title, *Beneficiary*, answers this question – it relates to a woven spider web:

> […] just as a web is a structure designed by the spider for the spider. I wondered whether this beneficial form, that is integral to its survival, might also be a trap for more than just

> its prey? Could those intricate, near invisible lines that are spun with its body at the core also be what hold it in place and affirm its centrality and comfort?
> (Sahib, 2023, p. 59)

In the context of these sex clubs, Sahib's sculpture opens the question of how these spaces work to centre and privilege white male bodies. This question has its genesis in an earlier archival art exhibition of Sahib's.

In 2016, Sahib stumbled upon a set of lockers from the recently closed London sauna *Chariots Shoreditch* in a car park "with a note entreating passers-by to 'please help yourself'" (Anderson, 2021, p. 66). Sahib recovered twelve of these lockers and "temporarily reterritorialized" (Loiseau, 2020) them in the *Kunstverein* in Hamburg as part of his solo show *Balconies* (2017). In addition to these found objects, Sahib created a series of sculptures that explored how commercial sex venues often adorn themselves with imagery denoting Greco-Roman antiquity. George Chauncey asserts that gay men in the twentieth century were able to assert "a collective identity in the present" by forging a connection with homosexuality in the ancient past (1995, p. 286). John Addington Symonds's (1873) *Studies of the Greek Poets*, which configures ancient Greece as a "long-lost queer homeland", is one such example (Castiglia and Reed 2012, p. 108). However, as Scott Bravmann notes, the queer fiction that Greece is a transhistorical point of origin for contemporary gay identity tends to shore up whiteness as an "unmarked category" (1997, p. 67).

This chimes with Sara Ahmed's writing on whiteness in *Queer Phenomenology* (2006). Ahmed states that "the world extends the form of some bodies more than others, and such bodies in turn feel at home in this world" (p. 129). The academic argues that we inherit a world that is

"orientated 'around' whiteness", yet this orientation is entirely "invisible for those who inhabit it" (p. 133). This "institutionalization" of whiteness can make "non-white bodies uncomfortable and feel exposed, visible, and different when they take up this space" (p. 160). Sahib explains that whiteness permeates everything so this feeling of "disorientation", of being "transported to a dead-end, or a cul-de-sac", becomes the "texture of the world" (2023, pp. 39–40).

Figure 3 Helix (2017) by Prem Sahib

[plaster, chromed steel, 82 x 67 x 15 cm]

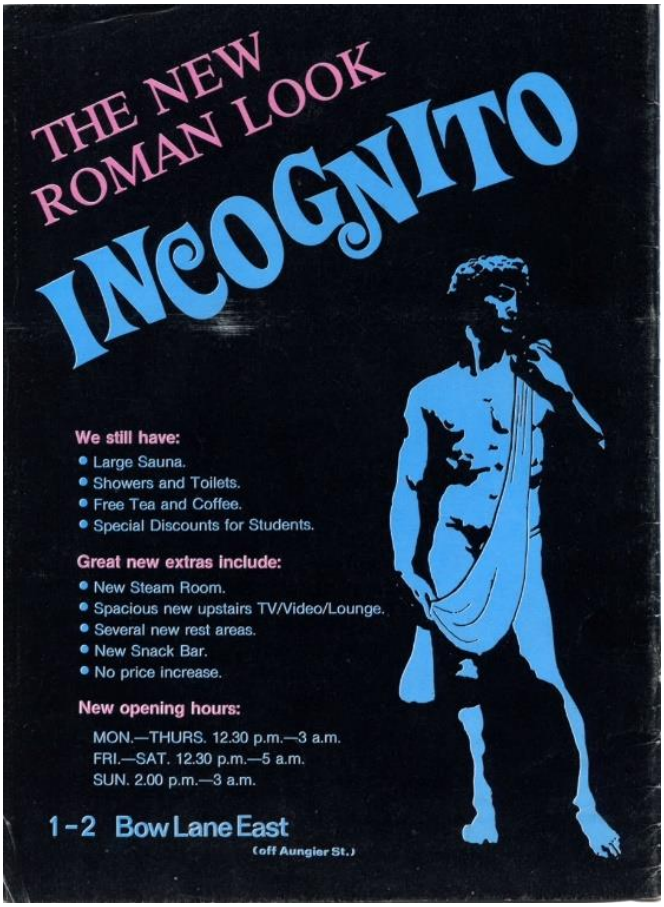

Figure 4 Poster for Incognito, Issue 1 of OUT magazine (Irish Queer Archive, MS 45,995 /5 1984 - 1985)

Through their incorporation of Greco-Roman iconography, many gay saunas create queer spaces that are orientated around whiteness. Fiona Anderson's (2021) analysis of Sahib's work zeros in on the racial dynamics that undergird this queer historical fiction. She notes that Sahib is not hunting for "traces of the lives of queer people of colour in Chariots' recent past" (p. 78). Instead, by putting whiteness itself on display, he exposes and loosens its hold. This is evidenced in one of the sculptures from *Balconies,* a piece called *Helix*: "a plaster cast depicting an Olympic athlete receiving an olive wreath from Nike" (p. 78). In an interview with Sahib, Anderson highlights how the artist's "process of recasting" the plaster relief from the sauna contests the "pure origin myth" of Greco-Roman gay heritage (Anderson, Sahib and Holman, 2021). Sahib also

explains that his decision to re-pin the sculpture back to the wall "with a gap" was a deliberate gesture to prise whiteness away from the structure and institution that housed and hid it for so long (Anderson, Sahib and Holman, 2021). By subverting the iconicity of the image, Sahib was able to expose and attenuate the invisible force this imagery exerts as a "homing device" for whiteness (Ahmed, 2006, p. 9).

Sahib, like Martin, is aware of the dualities and contradictions that structure commercial sex spaces. The artist wants his work to embody these shifting perspectives, exposing how a space "explicitly designed for escaping social constraints or for escaping the self" can also be "like a trap" (Carey-Kent, 2020, p. 3). This dichotomy is evident in *Descent III. Man dog,* where a series of "pet beds" – "somewhere between baskets you might leave your possessions or laundry in and a space that your dog might sleep" (p. 5) – were placed next to *Beneficiary*. The combination of materials – fur and shirt fabric – and the contradictory associations of domesticity, care, and constraint speak to "the contrasts of finding comfort or being alienated" (p. 5) in these spaces. Sahib's visual language, the narratives he finds in everyday materials – he sees in "the patterns in men's shirting" how the lines "are like bars, suggesting containers which structure identities" (p. 5) – embodies both the multidirectional memories that cling to these subcultural environments and their complicated relationship with masculinity. Sahib does not try to resolve these ambivalences by crafting phantasmatic ideal images; instead, he exposes and disrupts mythic origin narratives and recurrent hegemonies. His practice engages reflective nostalgia to productively marry preservation, care, and critique. This is the creative work of deidealisation: Sahib cares for the past "without attempting to fix it", he embraces "bad attachments" and allows himself "to be haunted" by contradictions and ambivalences rather than dismissing or ignoring them (Love, 2009, p. 34).

This section has examined creative examples of restorative and reflective nostalgia that dwell on archival fragments and ephemera associated with cruising cultures. It highlights how attempts to preserve the past can privilege the ideals and hegemonies of the present, freezing the past into a snapshot rather than treating it as mutable and open to interpretation. However, Sahib's approach to the sexual past demonstrates melancholia's critical and deidealising dimensions**.** Next, by turning my attention to the gaps and ghosts in the cruising archive, I will explore artistic forays into the past that highlight tensions between knowledge, evidence, and exposure.

Each artist is inspired by a sense of lack within the cruising archive. It begins with William E. Jones's appropriation of the Mansfield police footage, introduced in the previous chapter. It demonstrates how the artist's reparative reframing of a probative document into a gay historical one repeats the original violence perpetrated against the men in the film. By introducing a video piece by artist Danny Jauregui inspired by Laud Humphrey's (1975) study of tearooms, it proposes an alternative approach to the cruising archive. One that is more invested in unknowability and queer spectrality than tangible, identitarian evidence. Finally, it brings its focus to artists – Danny Jauregui, Cindy Baker and Lyónn Wolf-Haugh – that plumb the productive potential inherent in archival lack. These hole histories employ "critical fabulation" to imagine queer lives beyond the paucity of archival silence (Hartman, 2008, p. 11).

2.3 Art and Archival Absences

2.3.1 William E. Jones' Archival Artivism

In August 1962, Mansfield local police conducted a sting to capture men cruising a public bathroom below the town's Central Park (Gaynor, 1962). An officer with a film camera was secreted behind a door with a two-way mirror, and from this position, the tearoom was recorded for three weeks (Mckee, 1964). The resultant footage was used to arrest 38 men and identify a further 30 "sex deviates" (Jones, 2008, p. 7). Some of those arrested were committed to Lima State Hospital as psychopaths before being transferred onward to an Ohio prison (p. 42).[32]

The Mansfield operation has all the bearings of disciplinary power: men's bodies were monitored, recorded, and punished for deviations from the norms of heterosexual propriety. However, what is interesting about this particular police sting is how the 1700 feet of recorded film was subsequently appropriated for other uses (Lvovsky, 2015, p. 301). The footage was initially turned into a fourteen-minute instructional film for law enforcement officers entitled *Camera Surveillance* (Kee, 2016, p. 695). The audio narration overlaying the film reiterated the same panic-inducing association between same-sex desire and paedophilia seen in the previous chapter, warning the viewer that the toilet cruiser they saw copulating on screen would turn "to a child when he is frustrated or unable to make contact with his own kind" (Jones, 2008, p. 7).

Later, artist William E. Jones managed to secure this footage, appropriating it as a found object for display at the 2008 Whitney Biennial, The Warhol Museum and the Los Angeles

[32] Jones points out that records only exist for men who were imprisoned immediately or transferred from the state mental hospital; there are no records for men who were deemed too perverse to be moved onward to prison. As patients, men were subjected to a barrage of "psych meds and electroshock" therapy in a bid to manage their deviant nature (2008, p. 34, 42).

Filmforum (Feaster, 2008b; Baron, 2010).[33] However, Jones' reuse of the police footage raised ethical issues that could not be ignored. In Los Angeles, two audience members argued that displaying the film in public "was illegal, or at least unethical, since the men in the footage might still be alive" (Baron, 2010, p. 52). Likewise, a visitor to the Warhol Museum wrote Jones, imploring him to destroy the film as its value as a historical artefact could not be more important "than the dignity these men lose every time the film is viewed" (Biber and Dalton, 2009, p. 263). In response to these critiques, Jones contended that displaying the footage "in the extratextual context of a museum" transmuted the film into a work of art and reclaimed it "as a part of queer history" (Baron, 2013, pp. 51–52).[34] In Jones' view, "failing to bring these materials to light continues their suppression" and ensures "embarrassing matters" like public sex "remain buried and forgotten" (Jones, 2008, p. 43).

In *An Archive of Feelings,* Ann Cvetkovich explores the queer impulse to gather fragments of the past. She believes this drive is fuelled by a desire to prove "how meaningful and palpable these alternative life worlds" were for queer people (Cvetkovich, 2003, p. 166). Thus, we see how Jones' work can be framed as archival artivism: a reparative act that redeems a blighted, repressed past in the name of queer history. But while cruising is fleeting by nature, it nonetheless has

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[33] Jones located the *Camera Surveillance* footage from the filmmaker Bret Wood. Wood had in turn secured the footage from the former Mansfield Chief of Police. The film, which showed the faces of the arrested men and their sex acts, had been sitting in the Chief of Police's garage for years. When Wood enquired about the footage, "he simply handed it to him" (Fassi, 2009).

[34] Interestingly, in Ohio, a law against the dissemination of intimate images – commonly referred to as revenge porn – was introduced in 2019. However, the code specifies that if private sexual images are repurposed as "an artistic or expressive work" then no crime has been committed (Section 2917.211 - Ohio Revised Code | Ohio Laws, 2019). This is presumably because art, like sex, is a "special case" within culture as the creative process somehow precludes the artist from harbouring any "intent to harm the person in the image" (Sontag, 1969, p. 46; *Section 2917.211 - Ohio Revised Code | Ohio Laws*, 2019).

generated “a voluminous archive” (Dean, 2009, p. 181). The brevity of encounters is precisely why we see so much evidence of cruising cultures in prose, poetry and visual art as people sought “to make permanent and less transitory” these brief, revelatory moments of intimacy and reciprocity (Turner, 2003, p. 109).

From this perspective, we can also view Jones as engaging what Foucault called “the speaker’s benefit” (1978, p. 6). His “hidden from history” narrative casts queer history as “a repressed archive” and him in the role of excavator of “truth” (Halberstam, 2011, p. 148). Jones is from a town only an hour from Mansfield and was born the same year as the arrests. The capture of these men was never spoken about, and no physical trace of the restroom remains as the outer structure was razed and the underground ones inhumed (Jones 2008). Therefore, for Jones, the film is a probative document that evidences the queerness literally and figuratively, buried just “beneath the surface of his own Midwestern reality” (Feaster, 2008a, p. 39).

Jones only made two minor changes to the original footage. Firstly, he removed the homophobic voiceover to make it a silent film. Secondly, he took the final reel, which showed the police officers setting up the surveillance operation, and moved it to the beginning (Biber and Dalton, 2009, p. 247). During *Tearoom*’s introductory segment, the recording officer pans the camera around the toilet, lingering for a moment on a hole in the outer wall of a cubicle abutting the urinals. On completing its survey of the space, the camera returns – closer this time – to the hole. An officer’s finger – wedding band visible on his hand – moves in slowly from right of field, inching closer to the hole’s edge before plunging in to the knuckle. Aside from the obvious – presumably unintended – erotic implications, this gesture underscores “the narrowing field of view” of surveillance footage; its insistent “attempts to look for something rather than looking at

something" (Guerin, 2015, p. 81).[35]

In her research on the ethical appropriation of archival audio-visuals, Jaimie Baron writes that, when dealing with perpetrator images, as is the case with *Tearoom*, it is critical that "the original gaze" is deconstructed (Baron, 2020, p. 127). If not, "the appropriation may become complicit with its ethically compromised source material and participate in further dehumanizing the recorded subjects" (Baron, 2020, p. 127). By ensuring that viewers "constantly and problematically occupy the place of the policeman" (Guerin, 2015, p. 94), Jones affirms the idea "that surveillance is probative" that if we continue to closely watch these men's bodies and sexual interactions, some "truth will spill out of the screen" (Biber and Dalton, 2009, pp. 262–263).

The kind of "vulgar empiricism" the footage encourages is apparent in viewers' reactions to the piece (Rao, 2020, p. 20). One reviewer described it as "interminable minutes of anonymous, mechanical, and utterly joyless acts" (Chang, 2008, p. 17). Another pronounced it as "mesmerizing" and "heart-breaking" but claimed there was "no real intimacy" on screen (Knight, 2008, p. 17). Skot Armstrong, writing for the art magazine *Artillery*, defined the sexual encounters "as joyless and perfunctory as animals mating on a nature special" (2008, p. 45). Other reviewers used similar language, labelling the footage as "unerotic" (Camper, 2008) or "unsatisfying" (Lange, 2008). In another instance, during an interview, a reporter told the artist they were most

[35] Relatedly, artist Prem Sahib links surveillance methods to historiographical ones in *Cul-de-Sac* (2019), a video piece that features drone footage of Sahib's homeplace. As the camera floats above the street, the viewer hears "fragments of sleep-talking and drunken arguments" punctuated by snatches "of Sahib's late father playing the flute", the net effect being one "of plurality, of living as and among many people simultaneously" (Thorne, 2020). Sahib points out a drone's position within "surveillance structures" and how his piece uses the melange of overlapping voices to highlight how "master narratives" gain credibility, "what histories are spoken about", and "what gets lost in the recording process" (Anderson, Sahib and Holman, 2021).

disturbed by – not the duplicity of the police or the casual destruction of countless lives – but "the look of utter detachment and lack of emotion on the men's faces" (Feaster, 2008b).

As Biber and Dalton note, "film flattens, it flickers and distracts"; all the "passions, arousals" and "electrified touches" that happened in that subterranean space are ablated once pressed onto film (2009, p. 250). Hidden camera footage cannot account for subjective experience. It is impossible to know what these men felt based on this artefact of scopic surveillance. However, the fact that viewers' responses are centred on an apparent lack of intimacy and emotion indicates a clangorous discordance between what was expected and what was observed. Like the undercover officer with the camera, viewers were looking "for something rather than looking at something" (Guerin, 2015, p. 81). The *eidolontological* dissonance apparent in these responses is arguably generated by a mythic, historical image of clandestine pre-liberatory gay love. After all, gay politics has tended to focus its energies around "the rights of the romantic couple" and launched its defences against homophobia in terms of "love and biology" (Ward, 2015, p. 199). In the case of *Tearoom*, the men on screen morph into bad historical objects as they fail to perform their historical abjection as expected.

As his focus is on exposure and archival visibility, for the artist, the footage itself – what he terms "the truest documentary of public sex before the gay liberation movement" (Feaster, 2008b) – is the object that is positioned as in need of our reparative attention. Not the men who were unwittingly filmed behind a two-way mirror, now forced to appear "under summons" before audiences in gallery spaces and cinemas (Biber and Dalton, 2009, p. 258). The footage is fetishised into something beyond an archival document, becoming "a stand-in for the past that brings the mystified experience of the thing itself" (LaCapra, 2018, p. 92, n17). The romanticisation of the

archive as a space of repair fuels Jones's "fantasy that a document used to send gay men to jail can be 'redeemed' and given new meaning as redemptive queer history" (Baron, 2013, p. 44). However, as an artwork, *Tearoom* bolsters the epistemological drive of *Scientia Sexualis*, reiterating the violence perpetrated against these men in the process.

While Jones did attempt to contact any men who remained alive, he nonetheless arrogated the right to publicly display a document that destroyed lives. These were intimate, brittle moments of furtive eye contact, trembling hands, and fraught, miraculous intimacy. Moments meant to disappear without a trace, persisting only in fragmenting memory – the pressure of a calloused hand on your neck, a stranger's shirt tails gathered tight in a fist, the flash of a parting bashful smile. Moments belonging only to cautious bodies pressed together underground in relief from the world above.

Now, these men are rendered into silent celluloid ghosts, doomed to repeat a prelapsarian moment forever. Jones's work can now be freely viewed on one of the internet's largest porn websites. At the time of writing, the video, uploaded by user Stroker606, has been viewed 261,230 times and is classified with the helpful tags of "Vintage", "Handjob", and "Amateur Blowjobs". There is no real difference between how Jones and Stroker606 have appropriated this footage. In both cases, these men have been instrumentalised and exposed against their will, either in the service of gay history, art, or onanistic pleasure.

2.3.2 Embracing Unknowability

Jones's approach to the archive was predicated on capturing tangible evidence of a clandestine public sex culture, something which ultimately saw him succumb to the epistemological impulse

to pull it apart and put it on display. The tension between preserving cruising cultures and exposing them to the probing effects of power/knowledge can also be seen in artist Danny Jauregui's *Watchqueen* (2021). The work is inspired by Laud Humphrey's study of tearooms, discussed in the previous chapter. The video installation depicts "sweeping fly-over shots of imaginary archaeological sites" overlayed with voiceovers of the "first-person observation narratives written by Humphreys that detail the positions and moves made by the men he observed" (Jauregui, 2021).

Figure 5 Watchqueen (2021) by Danny Jauregui
[multi-channel video installation]

Film theorist Laura Marks describes "haptic visuality" as a form of "visual erotics" that "allows the thing seen to maintain its unknowability" (2002, p. 18). It forces the viewer to relinquish "their own mastery" of the image (p. 20). Like other ethnographic studies, Humphreys's research attempted to gain epistemological mastery over cruising practices by recording and deciphering deviant behaviours. By pairing Humphreys's words with images lingering on the surface traces of these cruising spaces, Jauregui disrupts the power of the

historical/anthropological/disciplinary evidentiary document to forge an alternative narrative grounded in illegibility. These archaeological tearooms are governed by "a lost code legible only to those in the subculture" (Jauregui, 2021). *Watchqueen* engages with this historical space in a similar way to haptic visuality. It returns to these clandestine cultures their opacity and sense of mystery without ever falling into romantic or restorative nostalgia. This approach to unknowability resonates with Carla Freccero's queer approach to historiography.

In *Queer/Early/Modern*, Freccero draws on Derrida's hauntology to engage "a mode of historicity" she terms "queer spectrality" (2006, p. 70). Freccero contrasts this form of historiography to "a necrological model, which foregrounds the idea of burial" (p. 70). Referring to Michel de Certeau's *The Writing of History* – a text that underscores how historians seek to calm "the dead who still haunt the present" by interring and quieting them in "scriptural tombs" (Certeau, 1988, p. 2) – Freccero cautions against "colonial" forms of historicisation which appropriate and exert mastery over the past in the service of the present (2006, p. 71). Freccero demonstrates these twin historical impulses to appropriate and inhume by turning to the discourses surrounding the rape and murder of Brandon Teena.[36] Here, competing interpretative accounts delimited Brandon to "the annals of lesbian history or the fledgling library of the transsexual movement" (p. 72). Freccero quotes the following passage from C. Jacob Hale:

> We do not know which trajectory—or which multiple trajectories that appear inconsistent with each other by our lights—this young murder victim would have followed. All were foreclosed by murderers' blades and bullets. In a necrophagic feeding frenzy, the living have sliced this corpse into at least five different pieces: cross-dresser, transvestite,

[36] Brandon Teena was a young trans man who was brutally murdered in a small town in Nebraska in 1993. Brandon's friend Lisa Lambert, and Lisa's friend Philip DeVine were also "shot to death, execution style" (Halberstam, 2005a, p. 23).

> transgender, transsexual, and butch lesbian. The living likewise bury any aspects of the embodied self this youth constructed that do not fit their own constructions. In so doing, the living refuse to acknowledge that this person was a border-zone dweller: someone whose embodied self-existed in a netherworld constituted by the margins of multiple overlapping identity categories. Perhaps Brandon or Teena—or the same person by another chosen name—would have stayed in the borderlands; perhaps she or he would have sought and found a more solid categorical location and language with which to construct and speak that self. We simply do not know.
> (Hale, 1998, p. 318)

As a border-dweller, Brandon remains beyond categorisation. Attempts to entomb Brandon within the purifying confines of a bounded, tangible identity are ways to lay "to rest troubling uncertainties" (Freccero, 2006, p. 73). This idea of epistemological ossification and necrological burial is also apparent in Halberstam's discussion of the art book project *Ken. To Be Destroyed* (Davidmann, 2014).

The work centres on the trove of letters and documents artist Sara Davidmann inherited from her mother, which were contained in envelopes inscribed with "Ken. To be destroyed" (Szucs, 2017, p. 40). These documents tell the story of the artist's aunt and uncle, Ken and Hazel, who were dealing with the revelation of Ken's transgender identity in 1958. During their marriage, Ken presented "as male outside of the home and as a woman inside" (p. 40). Davidmann used the found material to create a series of works using "digital, analogue and painting processes" to explore Ken's female identity (2014, p. 77). Halberstam points out how a project such as Davidmann's can be recuperative but also destructive:

> […] when we retrieve the lost biography of a trans* woman, we simultaneously unmake the story of his wife and possibly we settle too quickly on the meaning of Ken/K's cross-identification. […] The danger in all attempts to figure out these emotional economies of survival lies in the impulse to balance the books to make everything add up. But some

> accounts are not so easy to settle, and in fact, in trying to settle them, we may pay too high a price for coherence.
> (Halberstam 2017, p. 75–76)

Halberstam asks if, in our attempts to redeem historical queers, we are losing or destroying something in the process. What "ghostly, mobile subjectivity" (Freccero, 2006, p. 73) do we bury in our attempt to find closure, sustenance or identity?

Returning to Jones' *Tearoom*, reviewer Michael Sisinski wrote that, although the footage undoubtedly ruined lives, Jones' appropriation is redemptive as it allows the men:

> […] to come back to life, to be safe and even beautiful in a future where they, at least, are no longer under siege. Jones's Tearoom is a loving preservation of *a kind of gay heaven*. These angels wear Van Heusen, have beer bellies and hornrims, and never have to be afraid again.
> (2007, emphasis added)

In his writing on the murder of Brandon Teena, Halberstam highlights how remembering Teena "constitutes an act of mourning for a life unlived, a potential unrealised, and an identity unformed" (2005a, p. 47). Likewise, the men in *Tearoom* – Sicinski's gay seraphim – become synonymous with an inchoate or stunted gay identity. But entombing these men within the category of the closeted gay man is simply a way to bury "troubling uncertainties" associated with non-identitarian same-sex contact (Freccero, 2006, p. 73). In *Feeling Backwards*, Love states that "we tend to see ourselves as reaching back toward isolated figures in the queer past in order to rescue or save them" (2009, p. 8). Nevertheless, these figures may "turn their backs" (p. 43) on our attempts to redeem their trauma in the name of art, history, and gay identity. Sicinski assumes these men would welcome the gay heaven he describes, but they may well have decisively rejected it.

This section has explored the value of decentring "what we already know" (Oliver, 2001, p. 2) about the past so we can leave space for "the open-ended and undecidable" (Shildrick, 2020, p. 177). This is a deidealising approach to queer history: it does not try to manipulate or bury the spectres of the past but meets them with a "hospitality without reserve" that is grounded in respect for their unknowability (Derrida, 1994, p. 82).

2.3.3 Hole Histories and Archival *Brujería*

In *Foundlings*, Christopher Nealon notes that pre-stonewall writing reveals "an overwhelming desire to feel historical, to convert the harrowing privacy of the inversion model into some more encompassing narrative of collective life" (2001, p. 8). Likewise, in the nineteenth century, Christopher Chitty describes a similar hunt for historical origins, as the discovery of same-sex interactions in "the timeless sexual cultures of traditional peoples" were used as proof of homosexuality's "legitimacy, naturalness and universality" (2020, p. 150).

This turn to traceable origins as a way of authenticating identity is also apparent in "the myth of the 'eternal homosexual'": the political argument that gay people deserve equality and freedom from persecution due to their presence "throughout history, in all societies and all periods" (D'Emilio, 2007, pp. 250–251). Much like with the strategic essentialism of 'Born This Way' and the romanticism of 'Love is Love', the 'eternal homosexual' was initially useful in advancing gay politics but, in time, it confined the gay movement "as surely as the most homophobic medical theories" (p. 251). As Nayan Shah argues, "a recovered past cannot secure or fix an identity for eternity", and we need to be mindful not to "trap ourselves in the need of a history to sanction our existence"; what matters is that queer people exist right now, "on that alone we demand

acknowledgement and acceptance" (1998, pp. 148–149).

Rather than rooting for traces of usable pasts in the historical archive, it might be better to indulge what Foucault called the vice of curiosity. For Foucault, historical curiosity "evokes the care one takes of what exists and *what might exist*" (1997, p. 325, emphasis added). Bringing curiosity to the archive offers a way to engage with its inherent spectrality. After all, as artist Lyónn Wolf-Haugh argues: "Looking into archives is like looking into dry cracks, aggravating holes, frustrated orifices, volatile perforations, omissions and splits all knocking about in the void […] It's all about looking at what isn't there" (2022, p. 34). In terms of the cruising archive, narratives and records tend to concentrate on gay male practices and spaces. However, some artists take a different approach to the cruising past by focussing on archival absences, employing a queer spectral method to commune with the ghostly presences that haunt the fissures in the historical record.

In queer theory, negativity is traditionally linked to the psychoanalytically informed theories of Leo Bersani and Lee Edelman. However, other disciplines – conceptual art and particle physics – offer a different perspective on lack that points to plenitude instead of absolute negativity. In *Hole Theory,* artist William Pope. L explores the "voodoo of nothingness" (2002, p. 79) of the hole as a productive "lack" that spans "economic and cultural and political boundaries" (p. 84). Claiming "lack is where it's at" (p. 84), Pope. L writes:

> Hole Theory is guided /By blindness.
> Blind folk cannot see /Yet they have the courage
> To move around in the world/ Bumping into things,
> Narrowly missing things, /Trying to get things done
> In the face of what might seem, /To a sighted person,
> An obvious life-limiting lack…/I'll say it again differently:

> Hole Theory does not belong/ To those who can see.
> It belongs to those who can imagine.
> (Pope. L, 2002, pp. 85–86)

Here, Pope. L's description of blindness resonates with Daphne Brooks's approach to darkness as "an interpretative strategy, a structure of reading the world through a dark lens and from a particular dark position" (Brooks, 2006, p. 109).

Failing to locate evidence of your identity in the past might be a frustrating or destabilising experience. Love states that "Queer history has been an education in absence" (2009, p. 50). Looking into this past can be like staring into "a dark night" (Bartlett, 1993, p. 216). Yet this experience of lack has been training in archival curiosity: queers have had to approach history in terms of lack, looking at it from a "dark position" (Brooks, 2006, p. 109). Instead of focusing on the documented and the tangible, holes and absences become opportunities for the speculative and the spectral.

The quantum particle-influenced theories of Karen Barad offer another rich perspective on the vacuum, not as a site of gnawing negativity, but as a "scene of wild activities" (Cao and Schweber, 1993, p. 39). As Barad explains, the "quantum principle of ontological indeterminacy" means that the void "is an endless exploration of all possible couplings of virtual particles" (Barad, 2015, p. 394, 396). Much like "the double ontology of ghosts" (Muñoz 2009, p. 46), the vacuum is a space of spectral "non/existences that teeter on the edge of the infinitely fine blade between being and nonbeing" (Barad, 2015, p. 396). From this perspective, we can understand the void as "flush with yearning" and "an extravagant inexhaustible exploration of virtuality" (p. 396). Therefore, it is worth approaching "the abyss", as Halberstam does, not as "a space of vacancy and failed promise" but as a rich "emptiness brimming with precarious lives" (2018, sec. 3). For it is

from this seething site of Promethean “dynamic change” and “nothingness” that all “queer and trans* life” emerges (sec. 3).

Thus, we see how a crackling vein of potentiality runs through the empty spaces of the queer archive. The power inherent to hole histories can be seen in the work of Saidiya Hartman, a writer of black histories who grapples “with the power and authority of the archive and the limits it sets on what can be known” (2019, p. xv). In her book *Wayward Lives, Beautiful Experiments*, Hartman explores how young black women in the early twentieth century attempted “to create autonomous and beautiful lives” for themselves by living “as if they were free” (2019, p. xv). In tracing these lives, Hartman found only “trial transcripts, reports by vice investigators, social workers and parole officers, sociological surveys, and prison case files: nothing that records the women’s own voices, their hopes or satisfactions” (Beil, 2022). Hartman responded to these gaps and silences by using “critical fabulation”, and the speculative “capacities of the subjunctive”, to create hybrid historical narratives (Hartman, 2008, p. 11). Haunting, as we have already seen, draws our attention to “the structuring role of absence” (Shaw, 2018, p. 7). For Hartman, the unsung beauty of these women’s lives emerges from archival silence as a palpable force that summons her to draft their histories into being. These vibrant life stories spring from the virtuality of the void, “from the nowhere of the ghetto and the nowhere of utopia” (Hartman, 2019, p. xv).

Hartman’s hybrid histories honour an ethic of “being-with-specters” (Derrida, 1994, p. xviii): she does not ventriloquise these archival shades, puppetting them to suit her own epistemological needs in the present. Instead, she had to “listen intently, read between the lines, attend to the disorder and mess of the archive and […] honor silence” (Hartman, 2019, p. 34). Hartman uses archival holes “to crack the veneer of historical fact”, adding new stories to the

record as a reminder "of all the other stories not yet told" (Beil, 2022). In concentrating on the myriad experiences that populate historical voids, Hartman offers a potent critique of archival processes that determine who is "endowed with the gravity and authority of historical actor" (Hartman, 2019, p. xv). This productive form of critical fabulation also structures the cruising-orientated archival artwork of Cindy Baker, Danny Jauregui, and Emma Wolf-Haugh.

Artist Cindy Baker's *The History of the Queer Crop Code: Symbology in the Settlement Era* looks to agrarian histories to discover "Farmer Faggots" and "Buckwheat Bulldykes" hidden in the past (2010, p. 37). By painstakingly trawling "church or census records" and comparing them "with the seasonal records of customers at grain and feed stores", Baker describes how queer farmers used a "crop code" – not unlike the "hanky code" – to signal their queerness to other like-minded people (p. 37–38). The crop code implies that the land itself could be read for queerness, with certain crops designating "sexual role preferences, relationship interests, and fetishes" (Kumbier, 2014, p. 41).

Towards the end of the essay, Baker reveals her work on queer rural history to be a fabulation:

> The work uses real historical research and photos to imagine the stories of people who do not have recorded histories and to raise awareness of the contemporary people whose voices and histories are going unheard and unrecorded. Because there are no queer rural communities, there are no queer rural histories […] We will need to start paying attention to real queer farmers now if we want to hold on to their histories […] This is not to say that this account is not real; just because I made it up does not mean that it did not happen, or that it WILL not happen […] An imagined history serves to assert our right to freedom not only now, but then as well. Queer revisionism dares mainstream society to claim that we never existed, making conspicuous our absence from those records and making space for queer history.
> (Baker, 2010, p. 48)

Like Hartman, Baker exploits the speculative and the subjunctive to create a hybrid history of queer rural life. Her artwork is not simply a way of closing a hole in queer history. Instead, it is "designed to motivate action in the present and the future", encouraging us to document "contemporary rural queer life" and "to attend to signs of queerness that we may not be able to fully explain" (Kumbier, 2014, p. 44). We see a similar hauntological form of critical fabulation in the archival art of Danny Jauregui.

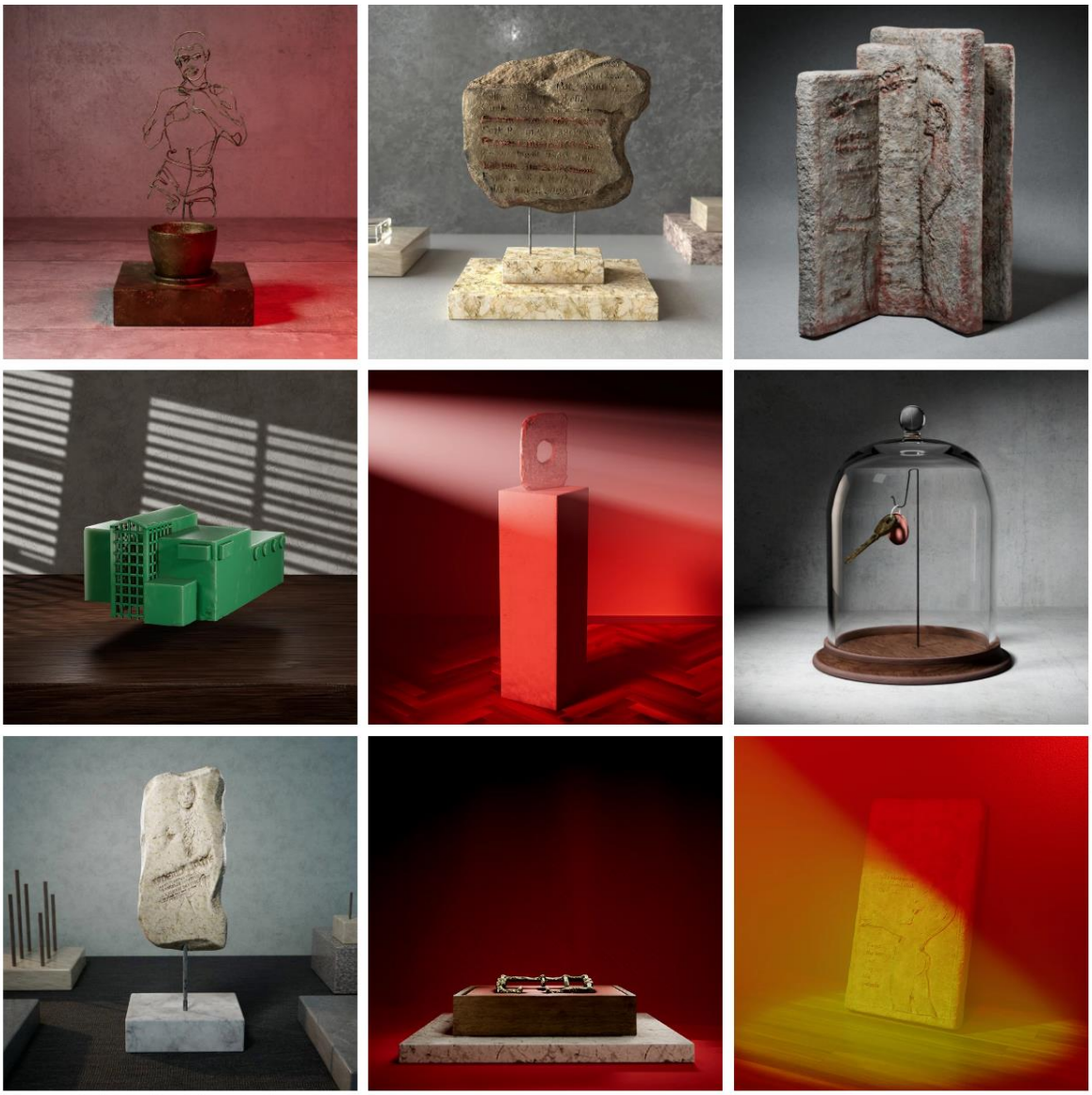

Figure 6 Nunca Cerramos (2021-2023) by Danny Jauregui

[Imaginary queer artifacts created using CGI 3D modeling software]

In 2022, Jauregui gave a talk hosted by the Los Angeles Municipal Art Gallery on his "imaginary artefacts" that were constructed using digital software ordinarily used for movies and video games (*Artist Talk with Danny Jauregui*, 2022). Titled *Nunca Cerramos,* the series features virtual "objects, relics, talismans" related to gay spaces from the past (*Artist Talk with Danny Jauregui*, 2022). These virtual objects are inspired by archival material Jauregui located in ONE National Gay and Lesbian Archives and Bob Damron's Address Book.[37]

Perusing these fabulated artefacts, we see an antique bathhouse key protected by a cloche and a glory hole specimen on a museum pedestal shot through with rays of light.[38] In other instances, advertisements from gay venues are rendered into archaeological tablets and fragments. While the patina of time and their frozen virtuality lend these works a melancholic air, Jauregui is not focused on draping these artefacts "in the funereal garb of loss" (Castiglia and Reed, 2012, p.

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[37] In America, Bob Damron's infamous gay directory, simply entitled *Address Book,* circulated from the 1960s to the 1980s. The guide started including "cruisy areas" from the 1972 edition onwards (Espinoza, 2019, pp. 80–83).

[38] In 2018, a glory hole was acquired by the Western Australian Museum. Neil Buckley, a gay activist, rescued the artefact from a public toilet in Perth before it was demolished in 1997 (Feltscheer, 2018). However, Western Australia's Shadow Culture and the Arts Minister Tony Krsticevic argued that:

> [w]hile it is appropriate for the WA Museum to chronicle the rich and proud LGBTI community as a significant element in the State's history, such an object is too tacky for display at what will be such a great new venue […] I'm not sure it is a suitable exhibit to be seen by school-children who will flock to the new WA Museum when it is completed.
> (de Kruijff, 2018)

The insistence on maintaining a pristine, heterosexual public sphere lingers in Krsticevic's distaste for an artefact that documents queer people's creative efforts to negotiate extreme structural and societal homophobia. The museum's CEO, Alec Coles, gently dismissed the minister's concerns, as did many responses in the media. Writing for an Australian pop culture website, Mitch Feltscheer insisted that the "sex hole is art" and "an important part of a community's complex history" (Feltscheer, 2018).

182). Instead, by exploiting museological and archaeological iconography, Jauregui gifts marginalised queer cultures the same level of permanency, archival credibility, and institutional attention that has graced the histories of white, heterosexual cultures.

In an arresting image from *Nunca Cerramos*, we see a small Jade sculpture floating above its pedestal, apparently buoyed by its power and potentiality. Jauregui explains that the sculpture pays tribute to *Arena*, a "predominantly Latinx queer club" that he frequented in the 90s (*Artist Talk with Danny Jauregui*, 2022). With *Hollywood Y Baños*, Jauregui takes advertisements from ONE archive and translates them into Spanish, fabricating a new historical document that exposes and contests the unmarked whiteness of the queer archive.

Like Hartman's methodology, Jauregui's creative practice indulges in a critique of the archive. He asks:

> […] what happens when a culture is forced to be invisible and not leave a trace? How do those people get remembered? How do their rituals, way of life, and customs survive? In *Nunca Cerramos*, I create a parafiction out of archival materials – ephemera from the bars, bathhouses, and meeting places that are now nearly erased. I take this ephemera out of the stultifying confines of official archives and instead give them new life. In this work, I am conjuring the gay ghosts that are trapped in the archive, pleading with them to haunt us so that we will never be able to forget that they once existed.
> (Jauregui, 2022)

Here, Jauregui calls on hidden ghosts in the archive, performing "a form of *brujería*" to preserve their memory and give them agency in the present (*Artist Talk with Danny Jauregui*, 2022). He feels compelled by a hauntological imperative to respond to the absent Latinx queer lives haunting these archives.

Artist Lyónn Wolf-Haugh also turns to critical fabulation to create from the dark position of lack. In *Sex in Public*, Wolf-Haugh uses textual collage to play with elements of the gay male cruising canon: Joe Orton's diaries, David Wojnarowicz's blistering memoir and Samuel Delany's *Time Square Red, Time Square Blue*.

> I passed a grassy patch full of dykes lounging in the sun. There was no way that they couldn't see the orgy from where they were sitting. Then it occurred to me that they were also probably cruising. Across from them was another path into the woods with even more femmes, butches and transmen coming and going.
> (Wolf-Haugh, 2022, p. 17)

Wolf-Haugh's performance reworks these texts to create fragments featuring queer people that, historically, have been absent from cruising narratives.

Sex in Public was part of an exhibition entitled *Miraculous Thirst, How to Get Off in Days of Deprivation* at the Galway Arts Centre in 2018. In conversation with the curator Iarlaith Ní Fheorais, Wolf-Haugh was asked if their use of "gay men's literature in the performance" was "an intentional reclamation of queer history from cis gay men" (Ní Fheroais, Wolf-Haugh and Walshe, 2018). The artist explained that:

> [i]t took me some time to unravel the implications of these appropriating actions for myself. I understand them more and more as a performative questioning of identity, ownership and spatial politics in relation to history. I don't so much propose to reclaim history – or the future – from gay men; I propose that I am already there and perform an alternate narrative of visibility.
> (Ní Fheroais, Wolf-Haugh and Walshe, 2018)

We are not witnessing the reparative impulse to reclaim or heal a fractured history. Instead, Wolf-Haugh engages the indeterminacy of the void and queer spectrality to bring an alternative cruising

history into being.

Wolf-Haugh's response to archival paucity is to turn to "queer utopian memory": they offer us an image of queer life "that both was and never was, that has been lost and is still to come" (Muñoz, 2009, pp. 37–38). Diving into the potentiality that lives in lack, their work engages a form of melancholic ideality that is expansive rather than constrictive. In all cases, these hybrid hole histories respond to the needs of the present and future without essentialising, instrumentalising or ossifying the queer past.

2.4 Synthesis

In the face of the hauntological impact of AIDS and the revisionist historicism engendered by respectability politics, it can be tempting to preserve and protect the sexual past. This chapter demonstrates that reparative memory projects can efface historical narratives and subjectivities that do not tally with present-day knowledge, ideals, and identities.

Studying creative responses to 'lost' cruising cultures exposes how melancholic attempts to preserve these spaces and practices can freeze the past into a golden ideal. This approach to cruising histories ignores sociopolitical contextualities and mires queer politics in acedia as racial and gendered power structures are conserved through the uncritical idealisation of public sex cultures. Prem Sahib's artwork demonstrates that any deidealising potential inherent to melancholia and nostalgia is contingent on marrying their preservative capacities with reflective critique.

Looking at attempts to repair rifts in the sexual past, this chapter offers a nuanced

perspective to queer historiography, one that encourages an appreciation of the past as "something living" and inscrutable rather than fixed and knowable (Horkheimer, Adorno and Noeri, 2002, p. 25). As Mark Turner states, there is political power in embracing "a less, rather than more, certain world, one that opens up a space for interpretation that considers the familiar and the unfamiliar in ways we don't always expect" (2003, p. 46). This is particularly salient for historical engagements with cruising cultures as there is a risk of reiterating the epistemological and disciplinary violence wrought by doctors, scientists, and the police in laying these practices bare. For that reason, this chapter has looked to artists that engage "forms of memory that relate more to spectrality than to hard evidence, to lost genealogies than to inheritance, to erasure than to inscription" (Halberstam, 2011, p. 15).

Adopting a queer spectral method ensures that our knowledge, expectations, and needs in the present do not warp our understanding of the sexual past. Opening ourselves to being haunted by history also ensures that we give "voice to the hard-to-hear" and make "visible that which was previously ignored" (Shaw, 2018, p. 8). As John Howard states, if we only "speak of a gay history", "consult gay sources", and "query gay individuals", then we "perpetuate gayness as a category" (1999, p. 6). Hauntology looks beyond the boundaries of identity, allowing us "[t]o look for the queer" as it is "variously conceived and embodied, in the past" (p. 6). Although historical narratives relating to public sex – in art, literature, and archives – chiefly document a cis-gay male perspective, turning towards the holes in the cruising archive allows us to plumb the productive dimensions of lack, creating hybrid histories that speak to the limits of documenting the past while giving voice to the spectral presences that haunt the fissures in the historical record.

[…] we continue to be haunted by the original trauma of aids. We cycle through passionate

debates about the moral and behavioural risks of HIV transmission and queer sex that recapitulate the original gay men's health crisis.

Octavio R. González, *Raw: Prep, Pedagogy and the Politics of Barebacking*, 2019

3. Sex in a Re-Crisis: Viral Hauntology and the Neoliberal Subject

This chapter explores representations of cruising that interpret the practice through a lens of HIV prevention, public health, and addiction. It focuses on two case studies: John Walter's art exhibition *Alien Sex Club,* initially staged in London in 2015, and the previously introduced self-help book by Matthew Todd, *Straight Jacket,* first published in 2016. These artefacts reflect a transitory period in the sociosexual landscape of the UK. In 2016, the PROUD study published its findings on the effectiveness of oral pre-exposure prophylaxis medication, known as PrEP, in preventing HIV infections (McCormack *et al.*, 2016). Likewise, the PARTNER1 and PARTNER2 studies, published in 2016 and 2018, respectively, unambiguously demonstrated that people on effective HIV antiretroviral treatment cannot transmit HIV (Rodger *et al.*, 2016, 2018). *Alien Sex Club* and *Straight Jacket* entered public consumption at a point when viral epistemologies were in a state of flux as new information and technologies shifted how people discussed and related to sex and HIV.

The author and artist were forced to make slight interventions to their works in response to these biomedical developments. Todd offered an addendum on the effectiveness of PrEP in the afterword to the 2018 edition of his book. Likewise, John Walter added an audio recording explaining the significance of the PARTNER study results at the entrance of the 2018 exhibition of *Alien Sex Club* in London (Gordon, 2018). This scant supplementary information clashes discordantly with the fearful tone of these works and their urgent insistence that gay male sexual culture was, at that point, in the midst of a worrying crisis.

Adopting an *eidolontological* perspective, the chapter examines the viral hauntologies that animate these works. The spectre of the AIDS crisis is purposefully resurrected to goad people into addressing the risk posed by anonymous, promiscuous sex. In invoking the spectre of abjection that haunts queer sex, these works unwittingly bolster Gayle Rubin's notion of "the domino theory of sexual peril" (1984, p. 282). Sex becomes a negative force that must be monitored and controlled lest it spiral out of control and wreak havoc on self and society. The cruiser emerges from these works as a cautionary figure embodying disease and death.

Unlike in Chapter 1, where the abject figure of the public pervert was pitted against a phantom public representing the heterosexual family and the child, here, the cruiser poses a risk to the population's health. Standing for risk and irresponsibility, the cruiser is the foil against which a new ideal subjective formation is birthed: the biopolitically docile gay neoliberal subject. By exploring the processes of abjection and medicalisation at work within these case studies, this chapter highlights how the sexual past is summoned to encourage *responsibilising* attitudes to HIV prevention and promiscuity. It also concentrates on how sex is *perilised* as an addictive practice, one that is capable of divesting subjects of their sovereign will, trapping them in addictive blasts of pleasure-inducing neurotransmitters.[39] These addiction narratives resurrect hauntologies that extend before the AIDS crisis. Casting sex as a dangerous agentic force requiring social and medical control revives the structures of homosexual pathologisation and control that sprang into being in the late nineteenth century. In contrast to previous chapters' deidealising approach, this

[39] This term is inspired by Gayle Rubin's *Domino Theory of Sexual Peril* from *Thinking Sex* (1984). *Perilising* perspectives are the inverse of idealising ones as they encompass feelings of doom and disaster, rather than hope and utopianism.

one *deperilises* queer promiscuous sex by interrogating its association with illness, addiction and doom.

3.1 Viral Hauntology and Sexual Peril Politics

In their paper on viral hauntology, Møller and Ledin (2021) explain how Derrida's use of the term encapsulates the end of and movement between historical periods. Hauntology accounts for how the past – seemingly over and done with and behind us – continues to influence the present. With the introduction of effective anti-retroviral treatments, the experience of HIV/AIDS in the post-crisis period moved from an affective state crisis to one of "chronic well-being" (2021, p. 150). Despite this shift in the experience of HIV, the authors note how the ghostly echoes of the crisis years continue to "drag" on contemporary viral epistemologies and sexual politics (p. 148).

The term temporal drag comes from Elizabeth Freeman's text *Time Binds,* where it connotes "retrogression, delay, and the pull of the past on the present" (2010, p. 62). For Freeman, it describes how queer identities are "constituted and haunted" by antecedent identity formations (p. 93). Temporal drag encourages us to adopt a different orientation towards time, embracing not the smooth teleologies of progress or ageing "but geologic time" (p. 85). Shifting our focus from chronologies to geologies allows us to sift through "fossilised icons and sedimented layers of meaning" within culture (p. 85). This corresponds to viral hauntology, which describes how older "affective sedimentations" and panic iconography can resurface to "reinstall modes of relationality based on fear of HIV" (Møller and Ledin, 2021, p. 153, 148).

Dion Kagan refers to the return to the panic and moralism of the early years of the pandemic as a "re-crisis" (2018, p. 133). The author's examination of contemporary discourses on 'risky'

practices, such as barebacking and chemsex, demonstrates how the ghost of HIV/AIDS can be summoned to discipline and regulate sexual behaviour. Re-instigating a moralistic divide between good and bad sexual subjects bolsters biopolitical governmentality, what Foucault termed "the government of the self by oneself" (1997a, p. 88). Whereas before authorities worked to inculcate "disciplinary norms of health into the social body", in the contemporary neoliberal context, "health is now deemed to be a goal actively and freely embraced by autonomous subjects" (Race, 2009, p. 15). With biopower, health is not just the absence of illness; it encompasses all the efforts subjects take to optimise "the vital forces and potentialities of the living body" (Rose, 2007, p. 23). As Tom Roach explains:

> [i]n contrast to a negative form of freedom predicated on "thou shalt not," which found its logical conclusion in *public spectacles of death*, biopower encourages an art of living: Thou shalt live a good life as devised by state-informed expert knowledge; thou shalt do what is best for you, which conveniently coincides with what is best for biopolitical administration. (2012, pp. 77–78)

The idea of the good life compels neoliberal subjects to make choices that enhance their well-being and human capital. This ethic of self-management ultimately benefits the state as the responsibility for the care of citizens is shifted, in part, to individuals and familial units.

Much like disciplinary power operated through "public spectacles of death", the idea of the spectacle remains key to empowering subjects to engage in the art of good living (2012, p. 77). Cautionary tales and bad examples guide neoliberal subjects to exercise their "regulated autonomy" within the domain of health (Rose, 2007, p. 162). Kane Race refers to this as "exemplary power" as subjects are encouraged to engage in "regimes of self-administration" through the spectacle of the "bad example" (2009, p. 70). The imbrication of viral hauntology with

exemplary power is evident in the early public discussions of PrEP.

In 2012, a study demonstrated that, when taken correctly, PrEP reduced the risk of contracting HIV by 92%-99% (Anderson *et al.*, 2012). This led the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) to approve the medicine in the United States in the same year. Its introduction in the UK was delayed until a local study – known as the PROUD study – delivered its results in 2016 (McCormack *et al.*, 2016). Despite PrEP's demonstrable efficacy in preventing HIV infections, by 2017, the medicine was only available to the public in Scotland. NHS England refused to commission the medicine nationally, insisting that this responsibility lay with local authorities.

The National AIDS Trust raised two successful court cases against NHS England in an attempt to speed up and expand PrEP provision (Nagington and Sandset, 2020). However, instead of commissioning the medicine, NHS England insisted that further questions needed to be addressed through *another* clinical trial. A British Medical Journal article noted that there was no clinical basis for this study. It was merely "a tool for power" to "strategically ration healthcare […] and shift the boundary between individual responsibilities and state responsibilities for public health and HIV prevention" (Nagington and Sandset, 2020, p. 176). In short, the protracted resistance to a national PrEP scheme worked to cast the medicine as "a localised, lifestyle drug" rather than a potent HIV prevention strategy (Ledin, 2022, p. 23).

This emphasis on personal responsibility was echoed in media discussions in the UK. Here, the biomedical narrative shifted from it "being a 'wonder drug' that benefited the health of the general population, to a 'promiscuity pill' that threatened the lives of the most vulnerable" (Mowlabocus, 2020, p. 1343). This hedonistic framing reflected discussions in the United States

where gay journalist David Duran coined the term "Truvada whore" to connote how the pill gave users "an excuse to continue to be irresponsible" (2012). As Race points out, casting PrEP usage as "irresponsible" shifted the focus from the issue of viral transmission to "the moral danger attributed to gay sexual pleasure in general" (2017, p. 100). This manner of sexual moralising echoes early responses to the AIDS pandemic as a *contrapasso* link was established between the promiscuity of the 1970s sexual revolution and the emergence of the disease in the 1980s. Therefore, the figure of the PrEP whore contains the abject spectre of the "polluting, promiscuous hedonist faggot" from the early years of the pandemic (Kagan, 2018, p. 21). In contrast to Chapter 1, where the spectacle of queer promiscuity confirmed the boundaries of heteronormative propriety, here it was deployed to police the behaviour of good neoliberal sexual subjects. Octavio González explains that HIV "panic icons", like the PrEP whore or the barebacker, are spectacular, abject figures that responsibilise a seronegative audience "to continue protecting themselves from HIV" (2019, p. 51).[40]

This chapter approaches its case studies as re-crises that deploy the cruiser as an abject panic icon signifying disease, death and addiction. In fomenting feelings of fear, distrust and anxiety, they summon the spectre of the AIDS crisis to constrict subjecthood around a neoliberal ideal of total self-mastery. Therefore, in contradistinction to the hopeful utopianism of sexual ideality politics, seen in Chapter 1, here we see a turn to *sexual peril politics*. Sex is transmuted into a socially corrosive, disinhibitory force that needs continuous monitoring and careful control. Before delving into a detailed analysis of these sex-negative re-crises, it is necessary to give some

[40] In the context of HIV, seronegativity means a person does not have circulating antibodies for the HIV virus.

background on the chapter's case studies.

3.2 The Case Studies

3.2.1 Alien Sex Club

John Walter was compelled to create *Alien Sex Club* as a response to a reported rise in HIV diagnoses among men who have sex with men (MSM) in the UK in 2012 (Aghaizu *et al.*, 2013).[41] A doctoral scholar at the University of Westminster, Walter's project aimed to educate audiences on the issue of HIV and "help reduce rates of transmission" by recontextualising biomedical discourses in a ludic format (2016, p. 26). Although the report that inspired the exhibition noted that HIV prevalence was at its highest "in the most deprived areas in England", the role that health inequities, government funding, drug company pricing and public health measures play in viral transmission was ignored (Aghaizu *et al.*, 2013, p. 24). Instead, the exhibition focused entirely on behavioural modification, an individuating approach to disease prevention that reflected the neoliberalisation of public health.

A key aim of the artist's research was to address what he perceived as the "crisis of representation surrounding HIV" within the art world (Walter, 2016, p. 25). In Walter's view, contemporary art relating to HIV relied on the same visual tactics as the early years of the pandemic, and there was a distinct failure to adapt the visual language of HIV to reflect

[41] The report in question showed men who had sex with men (MSM) "accounted for 3,250 (51%) of new diagnoses in 2012, the highest ever reported" (Aghaizu et al., 2013, p. 9). However, it is important to note that the authors stressed that these increases were "difficult to interpret in isolation" and could be attributed to increased HIV testing among gay men in addition to "ongoing high rates of transmission" (p. 9). Despite this, Walter utilised the study to establish and explore a causal link between cruising and HIV transmission.

developments in how the virus is managed, understood and transmitted. In an interview on his exhibition, Walter cryptically alluded to "certain people in London who look at cruising and HIV nostalgically", people who turn back, reverently and irrelevantly, to Felix González-Torres's post-minimalist aesthetic (Walter, 2015b).

González-Torres was a Cuban American artist whose minimalist pieces in the 1980s and 1990s offered a quietly devastating perspective on the AIDS pandemic. As seen in Chapter 1, artists – like Mapplethorpe and Wojnarowicz, who boldly embraced queer themes within their work – were drawn into the conservative culture war that railed against the public funding and display of 'deviant' art. González-Torres's ambiguous art, namely his "representation of bodies without bodies" – a pile of sweets, a billboard of an empty bed, two wall clocks mounted side by side on a gallery wall – avoided the issue of censorship and conservative opprobrium given there was "no direct political positioning" on display, no obvious signs that he was contributing to the ongoing debates over sexual identity and AIDS (Lorenz, 2014b, p. 136, 2015, p. 153).[42]

Walter vehemently eschewed the formal approach of González-Torres, branding it an ineffective artistic strategy for approaching contemporary gay culture and HIV. As it prioritised an affective register over an informational one, in the artist's eyes, similar post-minimalist approaches lacked the necessary didacticism to speak about HIV//AIDS.[43] The bulk of his opprobrium was

[42] Josh Takano Chamber terms this veiling of a queer political message within a seemingly harmless minimal aesthetic a "viral strategy" as "the spectator's body becomes the carrier of contagion, contracting González-Torres's ideological virus through the art encounter, and carrying this virus out into the world" (Chambers-Letson, 2009, pp. 562–563).

[43] The term post-minimalism comes from art critic Robert Pincus-Witten, who described "a reaction against the values of Minimalism" in the work of Eva Hesse (Pincus-Witten, 1977; Chilvers and Glaves-Smith, 2009, p. 1564). Post-minimalist artists tended to reject minimalism's "exclusion of reference to the body" as well as its "implicit masculinity" (Singsen, 2011).

levelled at an artist introduced in the previous chapter, Prem Sahib. Like González-Torres, Sahib has been praised for imbuing the formalism of 1960s minimalist sculpture with a sense of embodied "intimacy and personal narrative" (Stout, 2015, p. 67). Walter viewed Sahib's work as being dominated by a dangerous "nostalgia for the art and culture of the 1980s and 1990s", in particular, a backward fawning desire "for cruising in a time before Grindr and the Internet" (2016, p. 73). Although he admitted Sahib's deft deployment of disembodied embodiment marked him as a master of "González-Torres's technique for inducing melancholic responses in audiences", he was disturbed that Sahib had prioritised pleasure over danger in his examination of cruising, claiming the artist allowed "viewers to live vicariously without the dirt, risk or predation of the bathhouse" (p. 73). Walter concluded that, unlike González-Torres, Sahib's art is "non-didactic and morally ambivalent" (p. 73). By educating audiences on "the contemporary reality of HIV", Walter aimed to rectify this worrying moral inertia within post-crisis visual culture (p. 235).

Walter collaborated with HIV specialist Dr Alison Rodger on *Alien Sex Club*, which was funded, in part, by the Wellcome Trust and the Terrence Higgins Trust.[44] A vocal proponent of a maximalist aesthetic, the artist designed a cacophonous and colourful cruise maze dense with paintings, video pieces and sculptures to educate audiences on the realities of sexual health and gay sex. The following section explores how, despite the veneer of biomedical fact and borrowed institutional/medical authority, the exhibition resurrected regressive panic iconography and outdated epidemiological discourses in its attempt to foment a re-crisis relating to queer

[44] Dr Rodger was the lead author of the PARTNER1 and PARTNER2 studies which unambiguously demonstrated that people on effective HIV antiretroviral treatment cannot transmit the HIV (Rodger *et al.*, 2016, 2018).

promiscuity.

3.2.2 Straight Jacket

Matthew Todd's *Straight Jacket* originated as a ten-page feature entitled *How to be Gay and Happy* in Attitude Magazine in 2010. The book's first edition, published in 2016, retained this title, although it was updated to *Overcoming Society's Legacy of Gay Shame* in the 2018 version. Sporting glowing testimonials from celebrity figures such as Elton John and John Grant, the book is a self-help style text that outlines the changes gay men need to make in their behaviour to lead happy, productive, good lives.

Like *Alien Sex Club, Straight Jacket* was driven by a sense of urgency, by the belief that the LGBT community was "rock bottoming" (Todd, 2018, p. 288). There is a lapsarian implication to the phrase, a connotation of a fall from grace or a descent into depravity. For the author, gay culture's continued investment in sex is evidence of this spiralling crisis: "To ask whether there is a problem is to state that not only does the emperor have no clothes on, but to acknowledge that he's off his head in the darkroom, not knowing who he's getting fucked by" (p. 28). Here, anonymous sex and drug use become synonymous with dangerous and unreasonable self-abnegation.

By urging readers to abandon promiscuity, immature behaviour and narcissistic pursuits, the author crafted an ideal form of contemporary gay identity that mirrors the cultural figure of *The New Gay Man*. The New Gay Man evolved as a redemptive trope to purge gay identity of all the elements associated with the AIDS era: "promiscuity, hedonism, feminisation, isolation, narcissism, contagion and death" (Kagan, 2018, p. 60). Initially a media archetype, this

"marketable, palatable image" of Anglo-American homosexuality crafted an "ideal gay male citizenship" that enforced the normalising, assimilative bent of homonormative respectability politics (p. 85). Although the book's title was chosen to signify "the damage done to us by growing up strapped inside a cultural straitjacket", ironically, the author cultivated a new set of normalising constraints "that leaves no room to grow outside its narrow confines" (Todd, 2018, p. 11).

Todd's critique of gay culture is reflective of what Wendy Brown calls a "wounded attachment" (2020). The book hinged on the belief that gay men are united by a shared psychic "wound" of childhood shame (Todd, 2018, p. 27). This formative trauma is blamed for a host of maladaptive coping strategies: camp behaviour and sensibilities, diva worship, gay slang and promiscuous sexual behaviour.[45] All these things – which are often considered to be elements of gay culture – are presented as proof of this damaging psychological wound. Todd attributed the careers of queer fashion designers such as Tom Ford, Christian Dior, John Galliano and Dries van Noten to a shared experience of trauma. Living through a gay childhood spurred all these creatives to find a way to "escape from unacceptability" (2018, p. 135). Likewise, Todd insisted that gay men are drawn to female pop stars because their music's "overblown and childish themes of rejection, loneliness and empowerment" echo their own traumatic experiences (p. 137). Even the historical investment in the film *The Wizard of Oz* is because it "is a tale of codependency portrayed by one of the most famous codependents of all time" (p. 139). In this manner, readers were counselled to turn their critical gaze inwards and hunt for the signs and symptoms of their psychic

[45] The longstanding gay nomenclature of queen, bear, twink, bottom and top is heralded as symptomatic of a dangerous form of objectification and lack of self-worth. Todd insists that "If we wish to have serious, loving, tender relationships we have to treat others and ourselves as meaningful, vulnerable, valuable, human beings. Not as twinks or tops or bottoms or cock" (p. 312).

wound.

This form of self-help literature tends to reinforce the terms of neoliberal governmentality. William Davies explains that contemporary neoliberal rationalities are supported by the idea of the empowering expert who offers us "toolkits and advice on how to navigate and act upon a constantly changing and unpredictable environment" (2016, p. 29). In a similar vein, Nikolas Rose's *Inventing Our Selves* traces the role psychology has played in developing "pedagogies of self-fulfilment" that allow one to "realize one's potential, gain happiness, and exercise one's autonomy" (2007, p. 17). However, the happiness that Todd promised, in keeping with the prevailing logics of neoliberalism, can only be achieved through alterations to the self. Therefore, although the book aimed to help gay men battle the effects of this psychic wound, it falls foul of what Halberstam describes in Chapter 2 as a white gay male politics of shame. That is, rather than "taking apart the social processes that project shame onto queer subjects in the first place", the book focused on altering the behaviour and culture of gay men (Halberstam, 2005b, p. 224).

The following section examines how *Straight Jacket,* like *Alien Sex Club,* works to create a sexual re-crisis. It draws on the panic and fear of the AIDS crisis years to encourage gay men to self-regulate their 'extreme' sexual behaviour. Nevertheless, in presenting sex as something dangerous and in need of control, *Straight Jacket'*s sexual peril politics reaffirms neoliberal homonormativity and governmentality. To demonstrate their position as paragons of re-crises, I examine how these case studies tap into the veins of anxiety sedimented within cultural memory, thereby engendering fresh fear of HIV, anxiety about the future, and distrust of the other and the self.

3.3 An Anatomy of a Re-Crisis

3.3.1 Prescribing Fear

Walter's exhibition used the "spatial device" of a "cruise maze" to embed paintings, sculptures, videos and live performances relating to HIV risk (2016, p. 340). A close reading of some of these works reveals the re-crisis mentality of the artist. In the painting *Sex Clubs in Perspective* (2015), Walter incorporated viral capsids directly into the schematic of a sex club. The title implies that the viewer is witnessing the hidden 'truth' of these spaces as sites of viral transmission. In doing so, Walter invoked the longstanding "spatial metaphor of the cesspool" (Kagan 2018, p. 37), which originated in cholera outbreaks in the nineteenth century.

As Kagan notes, sexual spaces like tearooms and bathhouses were metaphorically bound to the cesspool in the crisis years because it was believed they fostered "perverse sexualities and transmissible disease" (2018, p. 37). Another painting, *Icarus in Vauxhall* (2015), reanimated this spatial metaphor by depicting the eponymous winged figure, mouth agape in horror, plunging to his death. According to *The Dictionary of Subjects and Symbols in Art*, Icarus's sorry flight was regularly deployed by Renaissance moralists as an allegory on the virtues of temperance (Hall, 2018, p. 159). Icarus's descent is superimposed over another sex club schematic, a clear statement that these spaces are the home of fallen figures.

"Sex panics", Castiglia and Reed state, "rest on a pedagogical structure that uses guilt about a past" to guide subjects on appropriate behaviour in the present (2012, p. 44). By drawing on imagery loaded with connotations of disease and depravity, the tacit implication for viewers is that cruising spaces are zones of HIV transmission. Indeed, Walter assumed a causal link between HIV

transmission and cruising spaces. He believed physical ones like bathhouses and digital spaces like *Grindr* were zones of HIV risk because they facilitated a "culture of meeting strangers for sex" (2016, p. 25). *Straight Jacket* reiterated this sentiment, claiming – without supporting evidence – that "the normalisation of extreme sex culture" and the continued existence of gay saunas had a causal relationship with "worryingly high levels of sexually transmitted infections, including HIV" (2018, p. 315). However, Frank, in her in-depth review of the literature on collective sex venues, stresses that although studies have often conceptualised them as risk-laden spaces, close examination reveals the myriad ways in which participants care for themselves and others through the implementation of safe sex and "risk reduction practices" (2019, p. 7). For example, studies have shown that people who visit cruising spaces are tested for HIV at vastly higher rates than the general population (Daskalakis *et al.*, 2009; Gama *et al.*, 2017).

Alien Sex Club and *Straight Jacket*'s re-pathologisation of anonymous, cruisy sex mirrors the moralising discourses associated with the second wave of the epidemic. This was a period in the mid-1990s when HIV infection numbers started to rise once again (Blotcher, 1996). At the time, activist and writer Alison Redick critiqued the assumption that the increase in diagnoses was somehow related to the persistence of cruisy sex. They insisted that there was "absolutely no logical correlation between public sex and unsafe sex: in fact, unsafe sex is more likely to occur between individuals who know and trust each other than between strangers" (1996, p. 98). This point has been affirmed by epidemiological studies, which show that "gay men are more likely to have unprotected anal sex with regular partners than with casual partners" (Joffe, 2002, p. 160). This is chiefly because negotiating safe sex can be more straightforward with a stranger as "romantic engagement" can complicate perceptions of an intimate partner as connoting risk (Adam

et al., 2005, p. 243).

Therefore, despite its contemporary focus and biomedical framing, *Alien Sex Club* is riddled with older discourses relating to HIV risk. In another instance, the artist links improvements in antiretroviral treatments (ART) for HIV to the rise in diagnoses, reasoning that "men may no longer fear AIDS" as a result of these advances (2016, p. 39). The belief that the availability of effective HIV treatment leads seronegative individuals to neglect safe sex is known as the "AIDS optimism hypothesis" (Adam *et al.*, 2005). While the theory might seem like a logical explanation for growing infections, epidemiological studies repeatedly found it to be inadequate in explaining increases in unprotected sex (Elford, Bolding and Sherr, 2002; Williamson and Hart, 2004).

Race explains that following the introduction of protease inhibitors, one theory for the recorded increase in condomless sex was that "the threat of aids had declined in visibility, [therefore] the task for educators was to provide a sort of fear-supplementation'' (2009, p. 111). From this perspective, the artist's choice of imagery and biomedical information appears to centre on reanimating the prophylactic power of fear.[46] This attempt to cultivate a re-crisis is apparent in his decision to populate the exhibition with the familiar panic icons of HIV transmission: the barebacker, the bug chaser and the gift giver.[47]

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[46] In an interview on *Alien Sex Club,* Walter insisted that modern antiretroviral treatment gave "a lot of younger Gays a sense of entitlement that's distorted" (Walter, 2015b). While he did not explain what exactly these young queers erroneously believed they had an entitlement to, it is possible that he believed they had arrogated the right to sex without fear.

[47] A gift giver is an "HIV positive person looking to infect someone who is not infected with the virus" (Walter, 2016, p. 22).

Walter readily admitted he was aware of "the controversial or disputed nature" of bug chasing and gift giving, but he believed they were important to use as "[he] found the language and mythology of seroconversion rich in imagery and ideas" (2016, p. 197). Walter deployed these sensationalised figures, not because they reflect the contemporary reality of HIV transmission but because they intensify the processes of abjection that structure his work. As Kagan explains, re-crises and sex panics, in general, spectacularise particular "sexual types and subcultures as monstrous", so good sexual citizenship can be defined in opposition to these bad examples (2018, p. 116). This is reminiscent of the abject fantasy of the predatory homosexual deviant introduced in Chapter 1, who shored up the integrity of a heterosexist public realm. Here, fear of HIV is invoked to protect a phantasised public that embodies seronegativity rather than heteronormativity.

Indeed, the artist's fearmongering approach to the preservation of seronegativity was built on the abjection of those living with HIV. Seropositive individuals were largely featured in *Alien Sex Club* as monstrous panic icons of viral transmission. In the painting, *This is the Initiation of the Bug Chaser,* a man is branded with the symbol denoting his status as a bug chaser. The seropositive individual, the gift giver, is dehumanised into a grotesque hybrid between man and virus, his head an HIV capsid replete with glycoprotein protuberances.

In 1986, American Journalist William F. Buckley Jr. wrote in the *New York Times* that "everyone detected with AIDS should be tattooed in the upper forearm, to protect common-needle users, and on the buttocks, to prevent the victimization of other homosexuals" (1986). Sally Munt, drawing on Erving Goffman's work on stigma, points out that in Ancient Greece, stigmata "referred to the signs burnt upon the body to denote a morally polluted person" (2017, p. 23). The ritualised stigmatisation of the bug chaser in Walter's painting harks back to these discourses on

HIV, visibility and public shaming. In the painting, the tattoos are placed over the bugchaser's eyes, indelibly maiming him so his seropositivity can be continuously read from the body.

In *Madness and Civilization,* Foucault explains that, although the figure of the leper disappeared from the cultural imaginary towards the end of the Middle Ages, the structures of exclusion attached to this panic icon persisted in subsequent eras. Instead, "the role of the leper was to be played by the poor and by the vagrant, by prisoners and by the 'alienated'" (2001, p. 6). In her reading of Foucault's text, Lynn Huffer explains how the treatment of the mad during the Age of Reason was "a ghostly reactivation of the medieval figure of the leper" (2010, p. 53). The early medicalisation of madness drew on "an ancient imaginary of good and evil", thereby converting insanity into "a moral disorder in need of purification" (p. 146). Huffer highlights how "'abnormal' sexual subjectivities" also fell into this category of moral depravity and unreason (p. 49). It was only through the work of activists and theorists that the perverse figure of the queer was extricated "from the dustbin of madness" (p. 1). Jonathan Smilges notes that these attempts to give an account of oneself, to narrativise one's queerness beyond the categories of perversion and unreason, have "long been rooted in the desire to extricate homosexuality from disability" (2022, p. 17). In short, being able to speak – to wrest back the authority to give voice to one's inner world and one's desires – has been a way to untether homosexuality from medicalisation and pathology. Foucault undoubtedly demonstrated how the "incitement to talk about sex" is key to the discursive machinations of sexuality. Nonetheless, aligning certain people and minority groups with unreason remains a way to silence and remove them from discourses about their experiences and lives.

In the above painting, for example, the disfiguring protuberances of the HIV-positive figure undoubtedly recall the figure of the leper. It is a monstrous association that unwittingly dredges up

the disempowering category of unreason. When the artist collated viewer responses to the exhibition, one audience member remarked on the show's tendency to cast people living with HIV as monstrous figures of viral transmission. They explained that they were:

> […] not sure he always stays on the right side of respect for the lived experience of the kind of people he is making part of his theatre (me for instance). There is a danger of lampooning those who are actually victims, making them seem buffoons for making mistakes in a difficult world.
> (Walter, 2016, p. 287)

Walter did not address this person's concerns within his PhD text. Instead, he insisted that he intervened in the "hierarchy around the subject of HIV" – which he states is "dominated by HIV positive people" – and helpfully expanded "the definition of who is included in talking about HIV" (2016, p. 268, 269).[48] Within the exhibition, seropositivity is only featured in lapsarian or monstrous terms. People living with HIV have no voice; they exist purely as fearful figures of unreason against which a rational audience can judge and regulate their sexual behaviour. As I will explore in the final section of this chapter, this fearmongering opposition between unhealthy unreason and healthy rationality plays a key role in re-pathologising cruising as addiction. As a figure of unreason, the sex addict is not the author of their own experiences. They are guided only by the mindless forward thrust of their compulsions.

Like *Alien Sex Club*, *Straight Jacket* attempted to generate a healthy dose of fear by re-

[48] Aside from being patently untrue, given the historically grim treatment of HIV/AIDS in the UK press (Watney, 1987) and the vast quantity of clinical and epidemiological data published on the matter, this works to create a divide between seropositive and seronegative individuals.

forging the connection between queer sex and death. In the opening chapter – grimly titled *Gay Men Don't Get Old* – Todd referenced the death of TV presenter Kristian Digby, who died in 2010 "after experimenting with autoasphyxiation" (2018, p. 17), a practice Todd stated is "more addictive than cocaine" (p. 18). Todd connected this death to the suicides of fashion designer Alexander McQueen and Kevin McGee, who was the partner of a prominent British comedian. While Todd noted that these deaths are "part of a pattern that affects straight people too", they seemed particularly prevalent among LGBT people, as does a penchant for "extreme sexual behaviour" (p. 19). *Straight Jacket* used these deaths to tacitly direct readers on how to lead a happy "good life" (Ahmed, 2010, p. 32).[49]

See, for example, Todd's description of the death of pop icon George Michael, included in the afterword to the second edition of the book:

> It wasn't announced until March that George had died of 'natural causes' with fatty liver disease, dilated cardiomyopathy and myocarditis listed as the cause of death. The public seemed to breathe a sigh of relief that it wasn't officially drugs. But this is to overlook what really killed him […] it is clear that George Michael died because of long term addiction and the emotional pain and erratic behaviour that is part and parcel of it. As painful as it is to face it, his multiple car crashes his time in a jail and the less-written-about occasion when he threw himself out of a moving vehicle on the motorway were all part of a tragically familiar downward spiral […] Not to acknowledge how this incredible man was *brought down* does him and all of us a huge disservice.
> (p. 339, emphasis added)

I quote this section at length because it illustrates two important points. Firstly, the author rewrote

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[49] In *The Promise of Happiness*, Sara Ahmed explains that happiness is based on futurity; it speaks to something that "is not yet present" (2010, p. 27). However, the arrival of happiness is contingent on "if we do the right thing" in the present (p. 29). To live a happy life, we need to live "in the right way, by doing the right things, over and over again" (p. 36). Therefore, orienting ourselves towards future happiness requires a degree of self-monitoring and restraint: the good life depends on "the regulation of desire" (p. 37).

Michael's life into a concatenation of failures, slip-ups and tragedies. He selected what he considers the shameful ignominies of Michael's life to ensure that he embodies both a cautionary tale of rock bottoming and the tragedy of the Icarus myth. Secondly, despite evidence to the contrary, the author decided the terms of Michael's demise. By emphasising that the star's death was the inevitable outcome of a downward spiralling life, the author created a *bad death* out of a natural one.

Jan Grue states that "the meaning of death depends upon what we take to be a good life, a worthy life, a valuable life. A good death and a good life are closely connected" (2022, p. 2). Whereas necropolitics – associated with the work of Achille Mbembé (2003) – is related to the power exerted directly by the state to snuff out life, *thanatopolitics* describes "the production of deaths that are good and meaningful" (Grue, 2022, p. 8). *Straight-Jacket* activated the exemplary power inherent within its necrology of bad deaths: they are cautionary tales against which the reader is meant to plot an abstemious life of measured pleasures and careful self-observation.

Both case studies are attempts to reckon with an ostensible decrease in fear of HIV. They exploit the haunted aspects of queer sex by drawing on the affective vernacular and iconography of historical sex panics. In doing so, these texts reinvigorate the association of queer sex with death, unreason and deviancy. As I explore in the next section, the regulatory power these artefacts engage operates not only through spectral pasts but also *spectral futures*.

3.3.2 Risking Futurity

Sadeq Rahimi writes that hauntology is not just connected to a past that is now lost and behind us; it can also have a utopic dimension. We can be haunted by "a nullified possible future"; by what

was promised to come "but whose condition of arrival has been foreclosed" (2021, p. 6). Here, the ghost irrupts into the present as "an advocate of the promised future" (p. 6). Think, for example, of the hauntological effect New York City sex club culture had on Patrick Moore in Chapter 2. Moore was haunted by the phantasmatic image of a possible future that "might have transformed America" had it not been denied by the arrival of AIDS (2004, p. 4).

A similar unrealised future haunts *Straight Jacket*: the good gay life. This hopeful spectral future hovers on the horizon, its arrival forestalled by gay men's failure to reckon with their deep-seated trauma. Rahul Rao explains that:

> [t]o retain its hegemony, neoliberal reason must tell a story about why the good life that it promises is not yet here […] It is the promise of futurity—the suggestion that the good life is just around the corner, there to be had if only we were to make the requisite sacrifices in the present—that helps neoliberalism to smooth out its inherent contradictions, retaining its appeal even as it fails most people.
> (2020, p. 151)

Straight Jacket tells us that this good life – filled with safety and happiness – can only be achieved through self-sacrifice and self-avowal. The role that socioeconomic inequities play in unhappiness is roundly ignored.

Berlant explains that "[a] relation of cruel optimism exists when something you desire is actually an obstacle to your flourishing. It might involve food, or a kind of love; it might be a fantasy of the good life, or a political project" (2011, p. 1). Optimism about these things is not innately cruel, but it can become so if "the object that draws your attachment actively impedes the aim that brought you to it initially" (p. 1). The shame-free, good life that *Straight Jacket* promises is a cruelly optimistic phantasy because the source of shame (cisheteronormativity and

queerphobia) is never interrogated and dispelled; it is merely shifted onto bad gay behaviours. A shame-free future is impossible if the moralism and abjection at the heart of gay shame are not interrogated and challenged.

We see here again what Foucault described as "Christian techniques of the self": there is a centripetal hunt inwards for hidden truths and traumas (1978, p. 90). Foucault notes that salvation religions, like Christianity, blend reality and truth-oriented asceticism. "Reality-oriented asceticism" requires a "costly transformation of the self" for the subject to move from one plane to the next (2023, p. 95). However, in Christian faiths, this shift into the higher heavenly plane was tied to a set of "truth obligations"; namely the sacrament of confession (p. 96). Foucault made a distinction between Christian techniques, whose target is "detachment from the world and the renunciation of the self", and pagan approaches, which attempted to build "a relation of possession and of sovereignty" so subjects were better equipped to face existence (p. 71).

Despite its self-help framing, *Straight Jacket* is more reflective of Christian asceticism, given access to the good life is contingent on rooting out and confessing the problems and trauma hidden within your psyche and behaviour. It is only by admitting and addressing "what's going on inside you" that you can hope to "live to your full potential" (Todd, 2018, p. 234). *Straight Jacket* illustrates how hope can be an even more potent tool for regulatory biopower than fear, as future happiness is yours only if you make the necessary ascetic changes to yourself.

Turning to *Alien Sex Club,* a different kind of spectral future is at the fore of the exhibition: an admonitory future bound to the nebulous category of risk. Historian Allan Brandt writes that "in the postwar era", an appreciation of "the limits of the germ theory to address systemic chronic

disease led to a new recognition of environmental and behavioural forces as determinants of disease" (1997, p. 59). Tim Dean expands on this point, stating that "the emergence of modern epidemiology" allowed health to be conceptualised "as a calculus of risk" (2009, p. 61). Health was maintained by the:

> […] stringent regulation of diet and exercise, as well as by avoidance of the risks associated with smoking, alcohol, illegal drugs, and sexual promiscuity. Rather than sources of pleasure, the latter were redefined as sources of danger, and the new emphasis on behavioral determinants of disease reinforced a sense that the pursuit of health was the individual's moral responsibility.
> (Dean, 2009, p. 61)

Thus, we see how epidemiology supported the shift towards neoliberal governmentality as the "moral agenda of discipline" was replaced with the "more efficient amoral focus on the correlates of risk" (Race, 2009, p. 17).

In his book *Risk Society,* Ulrich Beck writes that "risks have something unreal about them. In a fundamental sense they are both real and unreal" (1992, p. 34). There is something of the double ontology of the ghost here, although, unlike the spectre which embodies the past in the present, risks are grounded "in the future"; we must "become active today in order to prevent, alleviate or take precautions against the problems and crises of tomorrow" (1992, p. 34). This is reflected in how things like "elevated blood pressure and cholesterol levels" are now perceived as "protodisease states" in and of themselves (Rosenberg, 1997, p. 43).

Tim Dean points out that long before the advent of AIDS, "homosexuality was understood as a doomed identity, a protodisease state that would lead inevitably to misery and death" (2009, p. 68). This is something that Vito Russo explored in *The Celluloid Closet* (1981), an analysis of

the representation of homosexuality in film up until the early 1980s. Russo demonstrated how homosexual characters were often portrayed as doomed figures "falling victim to their own inherently villainous sexuality" (1981, p. 136)**.** The text includes a necrology of homosexual onscreen deaths: every death, bar one, is by suicide or murder. Associating homosexual lives and relationships with misery and violence situated the problem of homosexuality, not with societal rejection/abjection but within the disordered and unnatural homosexual psyche itself. *Straight Jacket*'s necrology of bad gay deaths does something similar, as certain practices – sex work, promiscuity and 'extreme' sex – are presented as protodisease states that carry the risk of death.[50] Aside from reinforcing sexual peril politics, siting the problem within the person also enhances the regulatory powers of biopolitical governmentality.

Alien Sex Club also breathes life into this connection between gay sex and doom. Within the exhibition, the cruiser and other individuals the artist judges as taking sexual risks are marked – often literally – with the ill omen of future of illness. This is most apparent in Walter's use of tarot cards within the exhibition, tarot being a method used to divine the future. Instead of the usual suits of swords or wands, we see the new suits of the "Giftgivers, Bugchasers, Barebackers and Serosorters" (Walter, 2016, p. 197). The implication is that one's future serostatus will be divined by one's predilection for 'risky' behaviours.

Another example is the 3D-printed sculptural work Semen Demon (2015). Its title is an

[50] *Straight Jacket* holds particular contempt for adult film performers, stating that while they might appear to be "the ultimate jackpot winners of our community […] in reality they aren't very good at staying alive" (p. 23). The author insists, without evidence, that huge numbers of US porn stars die from suicide or drug-related deaths because they are 'addicted' to surface and vanity. He states that "where people's worth is measured by pec size, deep unhappiness often follows" (p. 24). Here, we see how the author draws on the Narcissus myth to flatten sex workers' lives and deaths into a *thanatopolitical* exemplar that cautions queers to prioritise depth and introspection over surface and carnality.

appropriated screen name of someone the artist once cruised online. The rhyming pseudonym was likely useful for intimating the user's personality and desires. Semen Demon consists of a disembodied blue head. Its eyes are deep hollows, and its mouth gapes suggestively. Its drawn skeletal features recall the graphic images of patients suffering from AIDS wasting syndrome.

Art critic Douglas Crimp wrote about a 1988 exhibition in the Museum of Modern Art in New York, which featured people with AIDS (PWA). The work was praised for facing down the grim reality of AIDS, for being "unsentimental, honest, and committed" in its depiction of the illness (2002, p. 117). But, the critic pointed out that the images merely confirmed what was already known by the public: that these individuals were "ravaged, disfigured and debilitated by the syndrome" and they were doomed to an "inevitable death" (2002, p. 118). As pitiable figures of living death, the men in the photos were another "ghostly reactivation of the medieval figure of the leper" (Huffer, 2010, p. 53). *Alien Sex Club* incorporated this physiognomy of illness and doom into the *Semen Demon* sculpture.

The artist explained that they purposefully worked to imbue it with a "skull-like quality" in the hopes of creating "an ominous figure that draws on the physiognomy of the monster in the film *Predator*" (2016, p. 196). Note the artist's use of "ominous" and "monster"; both words bear allusions to a portent or warning within their etymological roots.[51] As in *Straight Jacket,* promiscuity in *Alien Sex Club* is a protodisease state. Each non-normative sexual encounter – be it anonymous, group, public or drug-fuelled – is a risk-laden event brimming with aleatory disaster.

[51] Susan Stryker explains that the word "Monster is derived from the Latin noun *monstrum*, divine portent, itself formed on the root of the verb *monere*, to warn" (Stryker, 1994, p. 247).

This section, and the one before it, explored how re-crisis discourses draw on the hauntological dimensions of the past and the future. They prioritise fear over fact, resurrecting panic-laden iconography and discourses to discipline and regulate the behaviour of queer sexual subjects. At the same time, the spectral futures at play within these works – the good life on the horizon, the (fore)shadow cast by risk – also *responsibilise* sexual subjects. Queers are encouraged to cultivate "a particular orientation to the future and a certain ethic of existence: forwardlooking, calculative, prudent, aspirational" (Race, 2009, p. 61). As the following section investigates, this individuating and centripetal focus cultivates a distrust of the other and the self.

3.3.3 Fomenting Distrust

In *Straight Jacket,* the author interviewed a man, Jason, who is passionate about cruising: "He talks about sex in toilets with the enthusiasm of someone who runs a vintage car club" (2018, p. 205). When questioned about his preference for cottaging, given the availability of casual sex on *Grindr*, Jason gave an interesting response:

> One of the things I really like is control. I'm really good at this. I know what I'm doing, That is an enormous part of the thrill for me. None of it is about the risk of getting caught. This is a space where we are operating in a completely different way and I know how it works.
> (p. 205)

Here, Jason's description of feeling in control resonates with the sociological concept of edgework. Stephen Lyng developed the term to describe how people experience acts of "voluntary risk-taking" as "negotiating the boundary between chaos and order" (1990, p. 855). To develop a sense of control at this border zone, edge workers – for example, extreme sports enthusiasts like base jumpers and free climbers – develop "specific aptitudes", in particular, "a special form of mental

toughness" (1990, p. 858).

Through an autoethnographic account of the practice, Jacob W. Richardson recently explored cruising as a form of edgework. Cruisers use their "subjective experiences" to develop "the skills and knowledge necessary for them to manage risk" within the cruising space (2024, p. 100). While public sex encounters might appear extreme and "uncontrollable" to the uninitiated, for an experienced cruiser, there can be reward and self-affirmation in controlling the situation and emerging unharmed (2024, p. 103). For example, Jason was clear that his cruising history has not been unblighted by negative encounters. He described a situation where a much older man ignored cruising etiquette and forced Jason's hand onto his genitals. Jason insisted the man "didn't get much power over [him]. He just tricked [him] into letting him do something kinda gross" (Todd, 2018, p. 206). Here, we see how Jason negotiated the edge between safety and harm by maintaining a sense of control in a negative situation.

Straight Jacket's author sees within Jason's account an unwillingness to face up to his trauma. His refusal to narrativise his cruising experiences in terms of shame is psychologised as a defensive attempt at minimisation:

> Minimization happens because to connect with the reality of *what really happened* – and what you really felt – is too painful. Jason has spent a lot of time intellectualizing what he does and was keen to tell me how happy and emotionally well rounded he is.
> (2018, p. 206, emphasis added)

Foucault explained that a critical feature of Christianity's truth-oriented asceticism was the cultivation of a sense of distrust "towards ourselves" (2023, p. 98). We need to hunt for a true reality, "a reality which is hidden and buried in the depth of our heart, in the secret of our

conscience, in the scarcely perceptible movements of our thought" (2023, p. 98). *Straight Jacket* draws heavily on the 12-step program, commonly associated with the alcoholics anonymous (AA) group. Within AA, the addict must admit their powerlessness in the face of their dependency by confessing a "moment of hitting bottom", a definitive experience that "paves the way for a life based on new principles" (Palm, 2021, p. 113). Again, this is a blend of reality and truth-oriented asceticism: confronting your rock-bottom moment and confessing your powerlessness in the face of your addiction allows you to progress into a new reality of your own making. Jason's shame-free account is discounted out of hand as untrustworthy because he positions himself as having control over his cruising. Much like with Michael's death, it is the author who holds the authority to dig deeper for the truth and trauma hiding within his sexual behaviour. Just like the queers that have come before, Jason's non-normative desires see him silenced and condemned to the "dustbin of" unreason (Huffer, 2010, p. 1).

Whereas *Straight Jacket* works to engender distrust of the shame-free promiscuous subject, *Alien Sex Club* focuses on cultivating fear and distrust of the other. As seen with the earlier paintings – and in contradistinction to existing epidemiological information – Walter forged a definitive link between anonymous sex and HIV risk. This is evident in the artist's insistence that cities provide the "optimum environment" for HIV transmission purely because a bigger population increases the number of "strangers available for men to meet for sex" (2016, p. 33). Aside from its specious reasoning, this focus on cruising grounds as sites of anonymous encounters accords sexual spaces the power to compel visitors into unprotected encounters.

Chapter 1 explored how queer theoretical perspectives on cruising can inaccurately romanticise sexual spaces as autonomous zones of resistance and ethicopolitical potential. A

similar fetishisation of space is evident in *Alien Sex Club*, although it aligns with a politics of peril rather than one of queer sexual ideality. A sauna, a city park and a hookup app all allow anonymous sex, but cruisers remain agentic and relational subjects within these spaces. This constrictive focus on sex as a negative social force reflects Race's analysis of exemplary power. Race explains that exemplary power works by taking specific cultural "practices out of their concrete and relational contexts and blasting them into the abstract space of public address" (2009, p. 162). Cruising can appear dangerous when it is removed from its subcultural context and pitted against (hetero)normative intimacies. But, spectacularising cruising as an extreme practice tends to obviate the "relational contexts" and "embodied ethics" elaborated within these encounters (2009, p. 162). That is, anonymous, promiscuous and collective sex all retain the potentiality for intersubjective communication and care. By collapsing cruisers into a singular risk category, *Alien Sex Club* implies cruisers cannot be trusted to, or are incapable of, negotiating safe sex practices together. *Straight Jacket* took a similarly infantilising approach to gay hookup culture, insisting that "Going to a stranger's house or letting them into your home is inherently dangerous" (p. 210). Here, the author indicates that gay men as a collective cannot be trusted to negotiate and mitigate their exposure to risk and danger.

As previously discussed, neoliberalism privileges rational self-management, both for the good of the subject and the population. Yet, the re-crisis discourses explored in this chapter downregulate the agency of sexual subjects and obscure the lines of relationality and care connecting them. By fomenting distrust of the self and the other, these case studies adopt an anti-relational approach to sexual sociability. The cruiser is an embodiment of the "sinthomosexual" described by Lee Edelman in *No Future*: they are mindless, instinctual and "moved only by the

death drive's compulsion" (2004, p. 101). Isolated and at risk, these cruisers exist in a proto-disease state, perpetually at risk of falling further out of control. As the following section explores, these case studies reinforce their perilous perspective by drawing on essentialising, pseudo-scientific neurochemistry. Promiscuous sex is presented as commandeering the reward pathways in the brain, trapping cruisers in spirals of pleasure that divest them of their sovereignty as rational neoliberal subjects.

3.4 Cruising and Addiction

3.4.1 Neuroessentialist Sex Negativity

Whereas the previous section examined how *Alien Sex Club* and *Straight Jacket* create a sexual re-crisis by tapping into hauntological feelings of fear and distrust, here I explore how they medicalise cruising through a sex addiction framework. Dean argues that, in the context of subcultural or extreme sexual practices, addiction often feels like the only valid explanation for "what from a rationalist perspective appears as the inexplicable abdication of self-interest" (2015, p. 235). After all, neoliberal regulatory biopolitics accords value to the rational sexual subject who makes 'good', healthy decisions for themselves. In *Alien Sex Club*, this connection between self-care, sex and (un)reason is foregrounded through the exhibition's recurrent use – and juxtaposition of – the maze and the labyrinth.

The artist explained that their use of these twin spaces was intended to speak to ideas of agency and self-care:

> A maze is a multi-pronged path that encourages getting lost whilst a labyrinth is a single path that is designed for meditation […] I returned to the idea that if the cruise maze was

> an inherently risk-prone space then perhaps the labyrinth was a kind of spatial prophylactic – a sort of architectural version of Pre-Exposure Prophylaxis. This distinction between the maze and labyrinth becomes a leitmotif of the installation.
> (2016, p. 209)

Here, the maze represents the risky and irrational activity of purposefully getting lost, a sentiment reflected in the artist's description of cruising as a "dangerous casting off of self" (2016, p. 129). The labyrinth, by comparison, is associated with a neoliberal ethos of self-care and rationality: one cannot stray from the path or recklessly abandon oneself within its walls. What is of particular interest, though, is how the artist utilises neurochemistry to forge a distinction between good sex – grounded in unadulterated rationality – and addictive bad sex.

Alien Sex Club features a painting entitled *He is Suffering Because He Has Burned Out the Dopamine Receptors in His Brain* (2013-2014). In it, a disembodied head, pictured with a dense maze for a brain, cries in open-mouthed anguish as tears spurt onto the pages of what could be a diary, a fitting inclusion given that Walter admitted the work originated from "a personal account about an addiction to masturbation" (2016, p. 186). Likewise, in *He is Trapped in an Adrenalin Maze* (2013-2014), the maze is presented as locking the cruiser in a biochemical thrall. Like *Alien Sex Club*, *Straight Jacket* used neurotransmitters to forge a link between 'extreme' sex and addiction. The author explained that:

> [w]hen the drug molecules get into your brain, they cause the release of dopamine, endorphins, serotonin and other chemicals that stimulate the parts of the brain linked to reward, pleasure, memory and relaxation. Dopamine is what gives you the feeling of a high, so it follows that the more dopamine your brain produces the better you feel.
> (p. 114)

The author pointed to neuroimaging studies that show "the brain on cocaine and the brain when

sexually aroused are virtually indistinguishable" as proof of the corrupting power of sex. The text warns the reader that: "The more your brain becomes used to the dopamine release, the more sex – or the more intense sex – you'll need in order to get the same thrill" (pp. 200–201). The book also likens *Grindr* to a "drug" and a "poison" (p. 216), one that will necessitate some readers to attend "a Sex and Love Addicts meeting" (p. 313).

It is worth pointing out that similar dopaminergic data is used to tout the benefits of immersing oneself in cold water. A *Telegraph* article referenced the work of a group of "Czech researchers [who] found that cold water plunging can increase blood concentration of dopamine by 250 per cent" (Delaney, 2024). However, there is no moral panic around public access to frigid lakes and glaciers, nor are there angry hit pieces targeting cold water peddler Wim Hof. Sex, it would seem, remains a "'special case' in our culture" (Sontag, 1969, p. 46). Much like the leper persisted as a ghostly presence within culture long after its disappearance, ideas of pathology and deviancy hover just beneath the surface of queer sex, exerting a temporal drag on the present.

*Straight Jacket'*s sexual addiction model is influenced by psychologist Patrick Carnes's book *Out of the Shadows* (2001). As Prause and Williams note, although Carnes's text was entirely unsupported by any scientific material, it nonetheless played an influential role in the medicalisation of sex addiction as a type of "sickness"; this follows the exact "same social process [that] has occurred previously with other notable sexual 'disorders', such as masturbation and homosexuality" (2020, p. 6). This is undoubtedly the case with *Straight Jacket,* as anything that deviates beyond the bounds of heteronormative propriety seems ripe for medicalisation. The book warns the reader to self-monitor for signs that their sexual activity might be spiralling into a potentially unmanageable addiction. This includes "catching sexually transmitted infections",

engaging in “anti-social or illegal behaviour”, such as cruising, and “wasting excessive amounts of time” pursuing sex (p. 201).

There is a defensive quality to the book’s attempt to rebrand potentially morally unacceptable things – STIs, promiscuity, cruising – as being symptomatic of addiction. This mirrors the book’s generalised approach to ‘bad’ gay behaviours; they are essentialised as the psychological by-products of deep-seated shame. The author insists that “at its root this isn’t our fault. Those of us struggling did not ask for this” (p. 218). As Bersani notes, “while the socially inflicted shame argument gets gays off the hook ethically, it also radically deprives us of agency in our behavior” (2008, p. 34). This defensive embrace of powerlessness is also reflected in how the case studies jointly draw on neurochemical data.

Prause and Williams point out that the use of brain scans to explain “sexual behaviours represents a classic error of biological reductionism”; human experience and action are, in reality, a complicated interplay of different factors (2020, p. 12). This focus on neurotransmitters as a biological explanation for complex behaviours is termed “neuroessentialism” (Racine *et al.*, 2015, p. 182). In neuroessentialism, brain markers offer “a tautologically explanatory or diagnostic force” for sex addiction (Sedgwick, 1994, p. 131). With *neuroessentialist sex negativity*, agency is wrested from the sexual subject; they are powerless in the face of the dopaminergic storm raging within their brain.

Recall, from Chapter 1, the role biological essentialism played in gay politics. It operated as a defensive strategy to ensure the heterosexual public understood queers could not help their desires, so they were unworthy of hate or discrimination. A biological model of addiction operates

similarly. It shifts "the onus of responsibility from the individual", destigmatising addiction as an illness rather than an issue of willpower (Racine *et al.*, 2015, p. 179). In *Alien Sex Club* and *Straight Jacket,* the dopamine-inducing element – transgressive sex – is a disinhibiting force; it causes "people with 'good intentions' to engage in 'bad behaviour'" (Race, 2009, p. 174). In casting cruisy sex as an addictive, disinhibitory practice, both case studies infantilise queer people as hapless victims of their desires. This turn towards neuroessentialist sex negativity rehashes the same medicalising perspectives that delimited homosexuality to the categories of madness, illness and unreason.

Alien Sex Club contains a video piece entitled *Courtship Disorder* (2015). In it, different characters dressed in garish outfits cruise a public toilet and a sex club. As the characters talk to the camera or share eye contact, their viral loads and CD4 counts fluctuate on screen.[52] Towards the end of the video, one of the sex club characters anxiously twirls a large viral capsid in his hands as he wonders aloud if enough time has elapsed since he had unprotected sex for HIV to show in a test. Appearing overwrought, he states to the camera that he "can't keep going like this" and that he needs to "wipe the slate screen" (*Courtship Disorder*, 2015). The palpable anxiety of the man further establishes the cruiser as a figure trapped and endangered by their compulsions.

[52] Tim Dean, referring to Linda William's concept of "maximum visibility" from porn studies, notes that the AIDS pandemic meant that queer people were "confronted with an invisible agent" that was "known to be transmitted sexually" (Dean, 2009, p. 112). Dean highlights how porn responded by developing "strategies for making appear on screen something that cannot be seen" as "rendering something visible represents the first step toward controlling it" (Dean, 2009, p. 111, 112). Walter's visualisation of viral loads and CD4 counts represents this quest for "maximum visibility" as an invisible virus is rendered legible, knowable, and controllable. His stigmatisation of the different figures within the exhibition – the barebacker, bugchaser, giftgiver and serosorter – is also a matter of legibility; it is a way to see inside the "previously unreachable zones of corporeal intimacy" to read someone's serostatus (Dean, 2009, p. 112).

The video's title is also telling choice: courtship disorder is a paraphilic term describing a range of non-normative sexual behaviours from "voyeurism, exhibitionism, toucheurism or frotteurism, and the preferential rape pattern" (Freund, 1990, p. 195). Although Walter was aware that the antiquated term was "controversial", he judged it to be a useful concept "to address cruising amongst gay men as a form of courtship disorder" (2015a). Therefore, the title is not an ironic reference or a queer reworking of this pathological term; it represents the artist's reinvestment in an antiquated medical model of deviancy. Just like early sexological research associated the homosexual with "retardation," "decadence" and "degeneration", *Alien Sex Club* does the same for the cruiser (Hoad, 2018, p. 78). They embody a social pathology, a failure to cathect an appropriately (homo)normative form of relating. This return to a pathological model of homosexual deviance, when paired with neuroessentialist sex negativity, has a worrying endpoint: medical intervention.

In his book *Screen Love* (2021), Tom Roach references an article published by gay psychiatrist Jack Turban for the online publication *Vox.* Turban's article covered the supposed dangers the hookup app *Grindr* posed to user's mental health. The psychiatrist utilised the same neuroessentialist framing as this chapter's case studies:

> Neuroscientists have shown that orgasm causes activation of pleasure areas of the brain like the ventral tegmental area while deactivating areas involved with self-control. And these patterns of activation in men are strikingly similar to what researchers see in the brain of individuals using heroin or cocaine. So when a neutral action (clicking on Grindr) is paired with a pleasurable response in the brain (orgasm), humans learn to do that action over and over again.
> (Turban, 2018, sec. 2)

The psychiatrist likened the app to an addictive "slot machine" that caused men to chase sex to the

detriment of forming "lasting relationships" (2018, sec. 2, 4). The final chapter of this PhD will delve into technophobic panic discourses relating to digital cruising platforms and their impact on 'authentic' forms of intimacy. For now, though, I am focused on the app's apparent warping of agentic action.

For example, the psychiatrist describes speaking to a man who blamed the app for his inability to "maintain a monogamous relationship because he is constantly cheating" (2018, sec. 4). The app is the agentic element, one that renders gay men powerless in the face of their desires. Problematising *Grindr* usage in terms of neuroessentialist sex negativity – with dopamine bursts altering men's relationships and lifepaths – allows the psychiatrist to suggest pharmacological interventions such as "Naltrexone, a drug commonly used for other compulsive behaviors" as well as "hormonal implants that turn off testosterone signalling", thereby attenuating problematic "sexual cravings" (Turban, 2018, p. 5). As Roach notes, these chemical interventions are eerily reminiscent of "psychiatric tactics like aversive conditioning, which sought to weaken homosexual desire by means of electric shock, nausea-inducing drugs, and waterboarding" (2021, p. 114). The *Vox* article approaches queer desire as something that is "inherently excessive and in need of social control or psychiatric surveillance" (Roach, 2021, p. 113).

By associating queer sexuality and pleasure with biological addiction, the chapter's case studies reforge a medicalised view of non-normative desire. In her critical race theory text, Patricia White notes that historically, white people embodied "pure will", while black people were the antithesis of this; they had no will of their own (1991, p. 219). This concept of "antiwill" helped justify the "partializing standards of humanity" and oppressions that were imposed on black people (1991, p. 219). Parsing White's work, Lauren Berlant describes antiwill as denoting a "collective

identity deemed so instinctive and appetitive that it is defined by its compulsions" (2007, pp. 758, n12). This description matches the historical pathologisation of homosexuality as an issue of unruly, lecherous appetites. Patriarchal-informed medical epistemologies viewed homosexuality as an issue of antiwill, one that could be managed through techniques like chemical castration.

Therefore, the case studies' focus on sex as an agentic force, combined with their infantilisation of the cruiser as a victim of insatiable dopaminergic appetites, resurrects the spectre of the medicalised queer. A figure who needs to submit to medical authority to deliver them back to reason and 'normal' pleasures. While this section has untangled the hauntological threads that are woven through the pathologisation of cruising as addiction, the following one attempts to *deperilise* cruisy sex by questioning the cultural obsession with absolute intentionality and uncorrupted expressions of will.

3.4.2 Deperilising Promiscuous Sex

Chapter 1 introduced Foucault's belief that pleasure – unlike desire, which was already part of medicine and psychoanalysis – could be a "rallying point for the counterattack against the deployment of sexuality" (1978, p. 157) Unfortunately, as seen in this chapter, "[n]ormative models of reward pathways" have since folded bodies and pleasures into diagnostic regimes and "expert knowledge" (Race, 2009, p. xi). A neuroessentialist focus on dopaminergic reward processes positions sexual pleasure as contaminating one's ability to act and make decisions for oneself. However, in the essay *Epidemics of the Will*, Sedgwick observes how this narrow attention on intentionality tends to create an anxious hunt for an impossible "space of pure voluntarity" (1994, p. 132). We are counselled to bring (hyper)-awareness to our actions to diagnose any

debasements of our will. Sedgwick underscores how concerns around adulterations of 'natural' expression of voluntarity echo the historical treatment of homosexuality:

> […] the old antisodomitic opposition between something called nature and that which is *contra naturam* blended with a treacherous apparent seamlessness into a new opposition between substances that are natural (e.g., "food") and those that are artificial (e.g., "drugs"); and hence into the characteristic twentieth-century way of distinguishing desires themselves between those considered natural, called "needs," and those considered artificial, called "addictions."
> (p. 134)

I have previously demonstrated how the abject exists within the psyche as a shadowy spectre that "haunts the subject as its inner constitutive boundary" (McClintock, 2013, p. 71). The abject assures the subject of their "perpetual danger" and the need to confirm boundaries and order (Kristeva, 1982, p. 9). This is the role the homosexual played in culture; their deviancy reaffirmed the boundaries of the heterosexual order. Something similar is happening with the natural/unnatural dichotomy in the realm of addiction. Sedgwick explains that the concept of the "compulsion" exists as "a counterstructure" within the notion of "free will" (1994, p. 132). This is an abject relation: compulsion is continuously "ejected from it" to affirm free will's purity and "ethical value" (1994, p. 132). Much like with the relationship between heterosexuality and homosexuality – where the repeated repudiation of queerness formed the borders of a stable, heterosexual identity – the abject relation between will and compulsion forges a concretised, ideal form of pure intentionality.

This notion of unadulterated will is apparent in *Straight Jacket*'s thorough table of addictions. The list features substances like sugar and caffeine, but it also contains processes such as exercise, sex, doing well at work and using the internet (p. 119). Sedgwick notes that once

exercise can be addictive, then virtually "nothing couldn't be" (1994, p. 131).

> Addiction, under this definition, resides only in the *structure* of a will that is always somehow insufficiently free, a choice whose voluntarity is insufficiently pure […] As each assertion of *will* has made voluntarity itself appear problematical in a new area, the assertion of will itself has come to appear addictive.
> (p. 131, emphasis in original)

Straight Jacket states that "[a]nything that can *change our feelings* and *give us the illusion that we are in control* can become addictive" (p. 119, emphasis added). This reflects Sedgwick's above point: anything that can corrupt 'natural' will – be it a feeling, a substance, an experience – is problematised as addictive. As sex "affects our mood", then, according to *Straight Jacket*, it always carries the risk of spiralling into addiction (p. 120).

Chapter 1 demonstrated how queer approaches to public sex have often idealised the practice as inherently political, ethical or revolutionary. Cruising emerges as a potent world-building practice, one that is synonymous with a future-oriented, "intentionalist agency" (Jagose, 2012, p. 204). Remember, for example, how John Rechy read a bold "radical statement" within the snatched nighttime fumblings of men in dark parks and city streets (1989, p. 299). In a similar vein, Patrick Moore's hero worship of Minecraft patrons positions them as working towards "the true sexual revolution" (2004, p. 4). This, of course, is the inverse of what has been explored in this chapter. Where these authors see a pure expression of queer political will within cruising, these case studies associate cruisers with antiwill and addiction. To deidealise and *deperilise* queer sex and untether it from the burden of utopic/dystopic futurity, we need to deconstruct this impossible binary between pure will/antiwill.

Sex, Race, points out, is not always a matter of strict intentionality. It can "often take place

in a subintentional zone" (2009, p. 166). Likewise, Berlant explains that things like eating and sex can be acts "of interruptive agency" (2007, p. 759). These expressions of "lateral agency" can be simple forms of replenishment that do not trace a path to the good life (p. 779). They are grounded, not in the future, but in the present; they generate a "feeling of well-being that spreads out for a moment" (pp. 779–780). *Alien Sex Club* interprets cruisy sex as self-abnegation, as a "dangerous casting off of self" (2016, p. 129). Likewise, *Straight Jacket* views hookup culture and promiscuity as an expression of trauma and compulsive appetites. Berlant's concept of lateral agency extends intentionality beyond "self-negation or self-extension" to encompass also "self-suspension" (2007, p. 779). This moves us beyond the binary of pure will/antiwill and the teleologies of the good life, allowing us to consider ways of being that are aligned with "maintenance, not making" and "sentience, without full intentionality" (Berlant, 2011, p. 100).

Sexual peril politics and sexual ideality politics can both cultivate a cruelly optimistic relation to sex. Theoretical texts that read ethicopolitical potential within queer intimacies tend to place sex on a pedestal; it cannot fulfil the outsized utopic yearnings attached to it. Conversely, sexual peril politics takes a pessimistic approach to sex, exaggerating its corrosive effects on 'natural' biology, behaviour, will and relationships. However, this *perilising* perspective ignores how pleasures and casual intimacies can help people subsist within the doldrums of late-stage capitalism.

Berlant explains that sex can be a "ballast against wearing out" precisely because it offers "small vacations from the will itself" (2007, p. 778). Under neoliberal capitalism, so much of one's life is spent making decisions and balancing obligations "to be reliable", to be intentional, to be good, to be healthy (Berlant, 2011, p. 116). Sex, including casual and promiscuous sex, can offer

a loose form of intentionality, one that frees us from the constraints associated with being a neoliberal subject in a capitalist system. As Jordy Rosenberg writes "there is no production without […] the moments in which we constitute and reconstitute ourselves" (2014, sec. 8). Those moments of drifting sideways into subintentionality are the ones that "capitalism steals from us for its profit, and it is where we steal ourselves back from it as well" (2014, sec. 8). Thus, we see that viewing promiscuous, cruisy sex solely as a "biopolitical event" or an addictive practice, obscures the fact that it is "a phenomenological act" that can feel sustaining and important for people (Berlant, 2011, p. 115).

3.5 Synthesis

Haunting is a particularly apt metaphor for understanding the cultural impact of HIV/AIDS because, as Wendy Brown explains, ghosts can be manipulated; they can "be conjured and exorcised" to shape the present (2001, p. 151). This is precisely what this chapter has explored: *Alien Sex Club* and *Straight Jacket* resurrect the fear and anxiety of the crisis years to responsibilise queer sexual subjects. 'Risky' sex is the antithesis of a neoliberal rationality of self-management, and the cruiser is the perfect panic icon to regulate behaviour through exemplary power. Yet, in tapping into the haunted dimensions of queer sex, the case studies continue the "frenzied epic of displacement in the discourse on sexuality" (Bersani, 1987, p. 220).

The sexual politics explored in this chapter is predicated on Rubin's "domino theory of sexual peril" (1984, p. 282). Sex is a disinhibitory, agentic force that needs to be managed and curtailed. But the danger posed to our agency as subjects lies in sexual peril politics itself. Its

embrace of a neuroessentialist framework of addiction re-pathologises non-normative sex as something that necessitates medical intervention. This process of medicalisation silences sexual subjects who do not comply with neoliberal and homonormative proscriptions on intimate behaviour. As figures of unreason, it is up to psychiatrists and other 'experts' to narrate cruisers' pleasures and practices as pathology.

This chapter demonstrates that reanimating fears and anxieties relating to 'excessive' queer desire awakens the many ghosts that haunt sex. These spectres carry into the present the forms of social exclusion and abjection that defined their earlier existence. The doomed AIDS sufferer, the mad pervert, and the medicalised deviant exert a hauntological force on the present; they bring with them associations of irresponsibility, unreason and antiwill. Therefore, it is sexual peril politics, not sex itself, that risks spiralling out of control, dredging up moralising and exclusionary frameworks that continue to demonise queer intimacies and pleasure.

However, by deconstructing the will/antiwill binary imposed by neuroessentialist sex negativity, this chapter neutralises perilous accounts of sex as an addictive practice. This *deperilisation* of sex unfetters cruising from associations of doom, illness and death. Most critically, in contesting these paternalising medical and deviancy-oriented frameworks, *deperilising* cruising gives agency *back* to queer subjects. This deconstructive approach to pure intentionality is repeated in the following chapter, where discourses on public sex, the closet and agency will be used to interrogate the reification of queer visibility into a monolithic political ideal and imperative.

Life offers a sequence of closets […] And maybe it's not breaking out but incorporating the closet that's most useful, in terms of creative potential.

Jim Hodges, 2021

4. (Il)Legibly Queer: Deidealising Visibility/Deperilising the Closet

Rosemary Hennessy describes visibility as a "struggle term" within gay/queer politics: "for some simply a matter of display, for others the effect of discourses or of complex social conditions" (2017, p. 11). This chapter explores how the spectre of closeted abjection continues to shape debates and concerns relating to queer visibility in the public realm. Its first case study is artist Dries Verhoeven's interactive installation *Wanna Play? (Love in a Time of Grindr)* which was staged in a public square in Berlin in 2014.[53] As before, Verhoeven's work grew out of a feeling of crisis: the artist was adamant that the app constituted a dangerous regression into the pre-liberatory darkness of the closet.

The chapter *deperilises* the artist's association of the virtual realm with regressive forms of invisibility by demonstrating how cruising cultures hybridise the ostensibly solid binaries of the public/private and the real/virtual. It explores how secrecy and silence are more than markers of closeted impotence or shame; they can offer space to move and flex within the discursive bounds of sexuality. The chapter also problematises the concretisation of queer publicity into a monolithic political cure-all. It deidealises queer visibility's position as a vital reparative tool by highlighting how it can snare queer people in discourses of confession and exposure, opening them to the

[53] Available since 2009, *Grindr* is a mobile application that utilises locative GPS technology to connect queer people – mainly men – based on their proximity to one another (Gudelunas, 2012). *Grindr* proved a significant development in queer "peer identification" as the app compressed the variables of space and time, allowing one to survey, in a matter of seconds, a radius of users spanning thousands of metres (Miles, 2020, pp. 210–211). The app has proven immensely popular: within 5 years of its launch it boasted some 5 million active users across 192 different countries (*Grindr*, 2014).

machinations of neoliberal biopower, as well as disciplinary surveillance, in the process.

The chapter's second case study returns to artist John Walter, introduced in the previous chapter. Although his focus was on the art world, Walter, like Verhoeven, issued warnings on a crisis of queer visibility. He believed that the abstraction and codification of queer themes within post-minimalist art constituted a "straight acting" aesthetic that heralded a conservative retreat into illegibility and political impotence (2016, p. 69). By drawing on the concept of opacity, the chapter offers a *deperilising* perspective on closeted passivity and silence. It demonstrates how the practices of queer artists and cruisers involve (in)visibility and (il)legibility: they employ visual tactics that make queerness legible to those within its epistemological sphere while closing out those that would wish to grasp, categorise, and know it. In doing so, it highlights the creative potential of the closet space, how it has protected queerness and allowed it to flourish within constriction, silence and darkness.

Although the spectre of closeted abjection can make cruising look like a shadowy practice, I argue that it cultivates a productively queer way of seeing. The night visibility of cruising – much like the archival hole histories in Chapter 2 – is invested in spectrality: it reads queer presence out of absence and potentiality out of the barest traces. To attend to the hauntological impact and nuances of the closet space, I first examine how the personal act of coming out developed into a gay political strategy, which placed a misguided emphasis on the power of reparative visibility.

4.1 The Snare of Reparative Visibility

The process of acknowledging one's homosexuality, both to oneself and to those with similar

desires, is commonly referred to as coming out of the closet. John D'Emilio explains that coming out could be a fraught and lonely path to tread in the United States before World War II. Cultural prohibitions against homosexuality meant there was little information or points of identification for those coming to terms with their sexuality. Individuals who managed to connect with an "inchoate subculture of lesbians and homosexuals" had to reckon with the dominant belief that their sexuality was "an aberration, a flaw, or a personal failing" (1983, p. 22).[54]

A shift in understanding came with the U.S. gay liberation movement in the 1960s. As explored in Chapter 1, state-mandated homophobia and disciplinary surveillance worked to exclude homosexuality from the public realm (Allyn, 1996; McGhee, 2004). Gay liberationists began to push against the oppression of homosexual desire by advocating for "a kind of right-to-privacy-in-public: a zone of immunity from state regulation, surveillance, and harassment" (Duggan, 2002, p. 181).[55] No longer a personal endeavour, this publicised demand for freedom from persecution transformed coming out into a political act. D'Emilio states that it:

> […] symbolized the shedding of the self-hatred that gay men and women internalized, and consequently it promised an immediate improvement in one's life. To come out of the "closet" quintessentially expressed the fusion of the personal and the political that the radicalism of the late 1960s exalted. Coming out also posed as the key strategy for building a movement.
> (1983, p. 235)

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[54] As Samuel Delany notes in *The Motion of Light on Water,* while there was "a gay bar society" in the 1950s, its patrons were viewed as solitary asexual outcasts "reduced to passionate but unrequited friendships with impossible love objects" (1989, p. 174).

[55] It is important to stress that, in the United States the 1986 *Bowers v Hardwick* ruling allowed the state to criminalize sodomy in private residences. This was not reversed until *Lawrence v. Texas* in 2003 (Munt, 2017, p. 48). Therefore, the private realm was not a discrete zone of invisibility and protection for queers; it could be rendered public through the intervention of law enforcement and the courts.

Here, the academic underscores the sociohistorical context of coming out: in the face of abjection and oppression, it cut through the "fragmenting darkness" of a heterosexist world, revealing a "politically enabling whole" in the process (Muñoz, 2009, p. 64).

While coming out was important for overcoming an isolationist model of homosexuality, D'Emilio notes that the closet was woven into a simplistic progress narrative, one that led to the specious belief that if every single person were to come out, then "gay oppression would end" (2007, p. 250). Visibility was positioned as a reparative force capable of combatting homophobic oppression as well as a marker of political progress; it was proof positive "of equality fulfilled" (Stanley, 2021, p. 85). Overinvestment in representational politics led, in the 1990s, to calls for the forcible outing of people against their will as "the need for collective visibility" overruled any "right of privacy" (Johansson, Percy and Percy, 1994, p. 3).

Michelangelo Singorile's *Queer in America* is a book-length treatise on the closet that defends the outing of closeted public figures. The text contains a "Queer Manifesto" that opens with the forceful assertion that "[t]here is no right to the closet" (1993, p. 363).[56] The author tells his readers that they must free themselves:

> […] and all others who are locked in the closet […] Badger everyone you know who is closeted – your friends, your family members, your coworkers – to come out. Put pressure on those in power whom you know to be queer. Send them letters. Call them on the phone. Fax them. Confront them in the streets […] Tell them they that they have to face the truth. And *tell the truth yourself* […] Remember that all those in the closet, blinded by their own trauma, hurt themselves and all other queers. The invisibility they perpetuate harms us more than any of their good deeds might benefit.

[56] Eva Pendleton notes that Singorile's text "demonizes public sex" as an immature developmental stage in the progressive movement towards an appropriately out gay political identity (1996, p. 381). Cruising, and even club culture, was something to be "outgrown" and abandoned once you developed into an asexual kind of "queer consciousness" (p. 381).

(Signorile, 1993, p. 364, emphasis added)

Here, we see how the logic of reparative visibility positions coming out as a resource that people *owe* to the movement. Only through a totalising form of *hypervisibility* can dominant culture be assured that "we are just like you" (T., 2020, p. 78).

Signorile's writing also reveals the Foucauldian dimensions of the closet, how it is largely considered a personal "problem of truth" (Foucault, 1978, p. 56). Nicholas de Villiers writes that, within culture, we understand coming out as "the quintessential gesture of acknowledging who one is" (2012, p. 1). Anna T. also stresses the subjectivising and confessional dimensions of coming out, highlighting how it implies "an undoing of the opacity that shrouds the Self" (2020, p. 39). This manner of truth-oriented asceticism is evident in the above passage from Signorile. Here, the writer configures the 'out' self "as transparent, truthful, honest" whereas the closeted self remains shrouded and "opaque"; they need "to come clean, to confess, to be(come) understandable" (T., 2020, p. 39). However, in leaving behind the opacity of the closet and rendering oneself legible through the "truth-producing discourse" of coming out, one must enter the confines of "a predetermined identity" (Roach, 2012, p. 22). Whereas before, the indeterminacy of the closet space offered you respite from the stereotypes that cling to queer identity, once out, you can become "a convenient screen onto which straight people can project all the fantasies they routinely entertain about [queer] people" (Halperin, 2000, p. 30). Therefore, rather than being an easy transition from constriction to freedom, coming out can deliver you into a different kind of discursive constraint.

For Signorile, a refusal to come out is "a lack of truthfulness-to-oneself and a crippling complicity with homophobia" (de Villiers, 2012, p. 2). Yet this myopic focus on personal action

and collective visibility roundly ignores the "institutionalized ways in which homophobia and heterosexism are reproduced" (D'Emilio, 2007, p. 250).[57] As in the previous chapter, with the neoliberalisation of public health, queers are responsibilised for addressing phobic attitudes through their presence in the public sphere. For the queer subject, the only way to achieve happiness and overcome homophobia is to forge an "authentic relationship with the self" (Lovelock, 2019, p. 558). This focus on "authenticity and self-realization" reflects the individuating dynamics of neoliberalism (p. 556). As Michael Lovelock states:

> [a]uthenticity is central to neoliberal governance because it encapsulates the self-sufficient, self-monitoring subject necessitated by neoliberal rationalities, one who looks inwards to the emotional contours of the self for security, contentment and success, rather than to external or collective forces.
> (p. 557)

Therefore, the *reparative hypervisibility politics* that Signorile champions etiolates the gay political imaginary around a neoliberal-infused, assimilative form of publicity that closes off the possibility of a broader interrogation of heteronormativity. This confining political approach is animated by a hauntological relationship to the spatiotemporal construct of the closet: it is a space that signifies the ignominies of a past marked by impotence, isolation and invisibility.

In *States of Injury*, Wendy Brown (2020) deploys the term "wounded attachment" to account for political identities formed from an experience of historical injury. The relationship to this historical wound is a hauntological one: the political movement becomes absorbed in a

[57] Several scholars have critiqued this emphasis on the personal within queer political action. Lauren Berlant writes that we need to be wary of demands that "the project of queerness" must "start 'inside' of the subject and spread out from there" (2013, p. 74). It is a sentiment shared by Halberstam, who cautions against embracing queer politics that are predicated on "adjustments to the self […] without a concomitant attention to social, political, and economic relations" (2005b, p. 224).

"ghostly battle with the past" as they repeatedly resurrect the spectre of their "vanquished enemy" to affirm their freedom in the present (p. 8). Much like with abjection, in defining its idea of freedom "against a particular image of unfreedom," the political identity "sustains that image" (p. 8). This constant investment in a formative historical injury makes it harder to see "new dangers to freedom" (p. 8).

Brown gives the example of women's experiences under patriarchy: how the historical delimitation of women to "domestic and psychic interiors" exerts a hauntological force in feminist politics (p. 42). A wounded attachment to the unfreedoms of the past gives the act of "breaking silence" – through consciousness-raising and "feminist truth-telling" – a particular political weight (2020, p. 42). She warns, however, that following the "compulsion to put everything about women into discourse" carries the risk of getting "ensnared in the folds of our own discourses" (1996, p. 192). Even though speaking the 'truth' of our lives is "intended as a practice of freedom", it can "chain us to our injurious histories" and "instigate the further regulation of those lives, all the while depoliticizing their conditions" (p. 186). In the case of gay politics, a wounded attachment to the shame of the closet births the kind of reparative hypervisibility politics evident in Signorile's writing. It is a politics that brings its focus to bear, not on structural oppression and inequities, but on closeted individuals, which it seeks "to punish and reproach" for not embracing a public, out identity (Brown, 2020, p. 71). Concentrating on self-reflection and personal confession elides the "regulatory potential" that comes with becoming legible to regimes of power/knowledge and governmentality (Brown, 1996, p. 187).

Prescribing collective visibility as a personal and political panacea ignores how visibility can be "a trap" (Phelan, 2003, p. 6). Peggy Phelan notes that entering into legibility can summon

"surveillance and the law" while activating "voyeurism, fetishism, the colonialist/imperial appetite for possession" (Phelan, 2003, p. 6). For example, Rosemary Hennessey argues in *Profit and Pleasure* that the forms of gay visibility promoted under neoliberalism tend to be focused on "money, not liberation" as the insistent expansion of capital is constantly probing for "new and potentially lucrative markets" (2017, p. 112). Likewise, the editors of *Trap Door,* a text on trans visibility, note that trans representation is often configured as "a teaching tool" that connects to a "notion of a shared humanity" (Tourmaline *et al.*, 2017, p. xvi)**.** But, for trans people, unprecedented cultural visibility has coincided with "markedly increased instances of physical violence", particularly for trans women of colour (pp. xv-xvi). Although *Time Magazine* (Steinmetz, 2014) described a "Transgender Tipping Point" in media representation in 2014, each year following "has counted record numbers of murdered trans women of color in the United States" (Stanley, 2021, p. 85). Therefore, increased visibility does not mean increased safety or political power. Especially for those, "namely Black, Brown, Indigenous, disabled, trans/queer, and/or houseless—who can never exist out of sight" in the first place (p. 78). From this perspective, we can see how – in ignoring the complexities of gender, race and class – reparative hypervisibility politics revolves around a universalised white cis-gay male subject.

The closet space is a potent hauntological construct that carries anxieties about invisibility and political impotence. This wounded attachment to closeted abjection can reify and idealise visibility into an unerringly productive tool. While this section has deidealised visibility, showing how "it is not for everyone, and not for all times or situations", the following one works to divorce the secrecy of contemporary cruising practices from assumptions of closet recidivism (T., 2020, p. 78).

4.2 Unpacking the Digital Closet

4.2.1 Case Study: Dries Verhoeven's *Wanna Play? (Love in a Time of Grindr)*

In 2014, Dutch artist Dries Verhoeven installed a glass-fronted shipping container in a busy public square in Kreuzberg, Berlin. The container was converted into a living space with a bed, toilet, shower and cooking facilities. His interactive work *Wanna Play? (Love in a Time of Grindr)* was to involve him living in full public view in this sparse space for ten days. Verhoeven's living quarters and movements – bowel and otherwise, even his toilet was on display – were not the only thing viewable to the public as the entire back wall of the installation glowed and shifted with text and images from the artist's dating apps. The *Grindr* app was used most prominently in Verhoeven's project as the artist wanted "to give the public a peek behind the scenes" of online cruising culture (2014b, p. 1). Part art performance, part "social experiment", Verhoeven took to *Grindr* in his glass-walled enclosure and attempted to convince nearby men to visit his "home" to satisfy his "nonsexual needs": "I will play chess with them, have breakfast, make pancakes, trim nails, we'll shave one another or read to one another from our favourite books" (Verhoeven, 2014c). This focus on stereotypically 'intimate' activities stemmed from the artist's concern that the app was stymying gay men's ability to form 'real' relationships.

The installation's titillating exposure of a 'hidden' subculture recapitulated the power dynamics associated with the metaphor of the glass closet. Sedgwick, in *Epistemology of the Closet*, uses the concept of the "glass closet" to explain the relationship dominant culture has with the "open secret" of homosexuality (1990, p. 164). Far from being an invisible presence, homosexuality is repeatedly invoked as a figure of speculation and abjection. It exists within a glass closet: "a contradictory space marked by concealment and display" (Snorton, 2014, p. 5).

Just like with exemplary power in the previous chapter, the installation lifted *Grindr* interactions out of their "relational contexts" and forced "them into the abstract space of public address" (Race, 2009, p. 162). Like a zoological exhibit, queer intimacies were displayed as "pale imitations or ugly corruptions" of the "real" connections associated with heteronormative romantic love (McGlotten, 2013, p. 7).

In his essay on the work, the artist insisted that "something has gone wrong when gays trust each other enough to admit their desire to have a fist up their butts but can no longer dare to invite one another to dinner" (2014a, p. 4). Intimacy, of course, can be present or absent in either of these acts, yet Verhoeven presumed that only one of these encounters had the potential for meaningful connection.[58] Resurrecting the spectre of the insatiable queer deviant, Verhoeven believed the app divested gay men of their status as agentic subjects leading them to abandon their "more vulnerable longings" in favour of "forbidden, prurient" pleasures (2014a, p. 1). As with the neuroessentialist sex-negative case studies in the previous chapter, the artist crafted a *perilising* narrative of a *Grindr*-induced courtship disorder. However, another concern was also at the fore of the artist's mind: that *Grindr* constituted a return to the closet. This perspective grew in strength as controversy sparked around the installation.

Only five days into what was intended to be a fifteen-day interactive experiment, Verhoeven was forced to halt the project as groups from the local gay scene gathered outside the work in angry protest. Although *Grindr* profile names had been removed, private chat messages were blown up to fill the back wall of the container, as were user images shown in negative. Users

[58] This privileging of normative forms of intimacy is redolent of the hierarchy elucidated by Gayle Rubin in Chapter 1 where only sexual acts cleaving to the ideal of the monogamous, married heterosexual couple are afforded "emotional nuance" (1984, p. 282)

communicating with the artist were unaware that their messages were displayed in a public square.

Verhoeven later admitted that the photos displayed were "not optimally disguised" as some users were recognised by friends passing the installation, and the negativised images could be easily converted back to positives using Photoshop (2014b, p. 2). Given these weak protections, the identity of one of the unknowing participants was compromised on the second day of the project. Having initiated contact with the individual through *Grindr*, Verhoeven did not redact identifiable personal information from their chat nor inform the user that their messages were on public display. On their arrival at the square, the incensed individual promptly "stormed into [his] residence and started striking [him]" (Verhoeven, 2014b, p. 1). An *Artnet* piece quotes from the individual's enraged Facebook post lambasting Verhoeven: "How can you ethically project conversations that are considered private to the other person when they have no knowledge of what you are doing?... Grindr is not exactly a 'safe space', but it is a space for us to communicate our desires and needs. In this digital world, it's one of the few safe spaces we have. [Verhoeven] is violating that" (Cascone, 2014). *Grindr* banned Verhoeven from the platform and, in an online statement, admonished his use of the app to lure "users under false pretences", labelling it a form of entrapment (Zing, 2014).[59]

The artist expressed regret for the upset he had caused but largely rejected the charge that he had infringed on privacy, arguing instead that the *Grindr* app was free to download, so the same information displayed in the square was viewable for anyone with a mobile phone (Verhoeven,

[59] It is ironic that a sexual practice deeply shaped by disciplinary power has been mediated through a technology that was "originally designed to survey, track and monitor individuals on behalf of the State" (Mowlabocus, 2016a, p. 206). It is important to note that *Grindr* has been exploited by police forces to entrap men in countries where homosexuality is criminalised. For example, Andrés Jacque describes how *Grindr* displayed an alert for users in Egypt, warning them that police were possibly exploiting the app to arrest them (2017, p. 10).

2014b). Here, the supposition was that the content within the app was publicly available and, therefore, shareable. The artist likened himself to a "documentary maker" who filmed people in a "public space without informing them and later blurs their faces" (2014b, p. 2).[60]

In the wake of the termination of the installation, the artist released a short essay reflecting on the project. Dismissing the critiques of the protesters, Verhoeven insisted that the backlash was not about "protecting privacy"; instead, it was symptomatic of devolution into closeted invisibility (2014b, p. 2). He lamented "that 30 years after the call for the visibility of the homosexual community, there was now a protest for its invisibility" (p. 2).

> Weren't our bars also a way to make ourselves visible for a long time in the heteronormative world? Since the '80s, the so-called Gay Village had carved out a public space for being different, creating awareness amongst our heterosexual neighbours. Was it a setback in gay liberation, that we were now once again satisfying our sexual urges in invisibility?
> (2014a, p. 3, emphasis added)

Firstly, it is important to clarify that, historically, queer venues have not been bastions of queerness extending a reparative olive branch to mainstream society. Instead, they often deployed strategic forms of (in)visibility to protect themselves and their patrons. In her book, *Wide Open Town*, Nan Alamilla Boyd describes how, in San Francisco, gay bar owners "used spatial defences to create an environment safe from the intrusion of outsiders" (2003, p. 126). Defences included using a back entrance rather than a front, "covering windows and darkening the bar so patrons could see

[60] The artist's desire to expose the digital cruising space to the wider public echoes the actions of heterosexual journalist Nico Hines. Hines downloaded the app at the 2016 Rio Olympics and penned an article for the *Daily Beast* on the athletes he arranged dates with (Rodriguez, 2016). Aside from the duplicity of Hines' methods in collating the information for this homophobic, "pseudo-ethnographic" article, his decision to publicise data like profile stats, the Olympians' competitive sport, and nationalities meant some of the men were identifiable, potentially endangering those from regions where LGBT people faced discrimination or arrest (Rodriguez, 2016).

newcomers quicker than they could be seen," and "hiring a door-person or "hostess" to watch and regulate the entrance" (pp. 126–127). Commercial sex venues have also engaged in these kinds of protective measures, something that is evident in the work of artist Dean Sameshima, who has documented active commercial cruising spaces since the late 1990s. Oliver Klaassen notes that the artist's photographs of Los Angeles sex clubs focused exclusively on the "facades of commercial cruising locations"; they never disclose what might be happening inside these premises (Klaassen, 2020). In emphasising "the architectural masks" worn by commercial cruising spaces, Sameshima documents a "self-defensive act of camouflaging" as venues responded to increased scrutiny and inspection in the wake of the AIDS pandemic (Walkowiak, 2006, p. 12). Embracing "a nondescriptive architecture" was a strategic approach that allowed "these businesses to remain unseen and unknown to those who might endanger them, their patrons, and their communities" (p. 12).[61] Thus, we see how Verhoeven's reparative approach to visibility glosses over the complex histories of spatial restriction and queer suppression.

Secondly, the kind of spatial visibility that Verhoeven describes in the above passage has been for the benefit of queer people, not heteronormative society. As Hoffman states, in the face of historical oppression and legislative privatisation:

> Public displays of sexuality - whether sex clubs, pornography, activist demonstrations, or other forms - challenge the enforcement of gay invisibility and public spheres […] they help queer people envision a sexual world outside the restrictive boundaries of homophobia, puritanism, violence, and disease. The public sexual culture not only makes queer reality visible, it makes a more fantastic queer world thinkable.

[61] In 1988, city ordinances on "sexual entertainment clubs" were revised to forbid such venues from "being within 500 feet of churches, schools or residential neighborhoods" (Richardson, 1993). These regulations brought about the closure of many of the establishments documented by Sameshima. His photographs attest to the unfairness of the restrictions given the buildings were purposefully "designed to be unremarkable from the outside" (Campbell, 2020, p. 112).

(Hoffman, 1996, p. 350)

Conversely, for Verhoeven, queer visibility exists purely for the enrichment of a heterosexist public. Masking one's queerness in the digital realm denies the public a vital reparative resource and constitutes a dangerous regression into a "new closet" (Verhoeven, 2014a, p. 2).

Just like the introduction of PrEP resurrected affective states associated with the AIDS crisis years, the arrival of locative cruising technologies summoned the hauntological construct of the closet. Guy Davidson notes that in the 1970s:

> […] liberationist rhetoric tended to represent the ghetto as liberation's other, opposing the darkened interiors of bars, discos and bath houses - implicitly or explicitly identified as *an extension of the closet* - to the promise of visibility and militancy carried in gay liberation's investment in 'the streets'.
> (2001, p. 2, emphasis added)

The movement into privatised virtuality that *Grindr* seemed to entail revived these concerns around a retreat into invisibility. In his paper on *Grindr,* Roderic Crooks wrote that the app released "users of any need to visually or physically project any outward sign of gayness or same-sex attraction", thereby negating the work of gay liberation as "Grindr lets its users be here and be queer, but it does not require that anyone get used to it" (Crooks, 2013, p. 16). This was a sentiment shared by Verhoeven: he described the app as comparable to "the parking lot as a meeting point for miserable married men who hadn't yet accepted their inclinations" (2014a, p. 3).

For the artist, *Grindr* usage was a crisis in visibility and political identity. To retreat into virtuality is to regress into the pre-liberatory past, shunning the hard-won right to visibility secured by gay liberation. Yet, this approach to queer history constitutes what Roderick Ferguson refers to as a "single-issue" perspective of gay liberation (2018, p. 9). The struggle for inclusive visibility

within the public realm becomes the whole "point of gay liberation", eliding the sociohistorical context and coalitional dimensions of liberatory politics in the process (p. 11). From an *eidolontological* perspective, Verhoeven's liberatory phantasy forges a "living-up-to-them dynamic" in the present, one that chastises queers for failing to honour the publicising goals of gay liberation (Dean, 2009, p. 23). With visibility cast in such idealising terms, invisibility becomes something dangerously abject, something to be compulsively expelled from 'out and proud' gay identity. The following sections *deperilise* this fearmongering approach to virtuality, exploring how it is not an anachronistic retreat into privatised invisibility and shameful secrecy but a space that offers succour within the regulatory bounds of sexuality.

4.2.2 Shameful Secrecy: Deperilising the Clandestine

Sara Ahmed writes that although a feeling of exposure accompanies shame, "it also involves an attempt to hide" (2013, p. 103). The shamed wish "to destroy the eyes of the world"; they long to be invisible (Erikson, 1993, p. 227). In the case of *Wanna Play*, the artist assumed that a retreat into the invisibility of the digital cruising space was a sign of sexual shame. *Grindr* is populated by "a generation of gay men that were once again keeping their lust a secret in public", seemingly "ashamed in front of [their] heterosexual friends and family of [their] new way of meeting" (2014a, p. 3). Through a logic of reparative hypervisibility politics, any obfuscation of one's sexuality is a ghostly invocation of the closet space.

Writing about the category of woman, Denise Riley writes "that it's not possible to live twenty-four hours a day soaked in the immediate awareness of one's sex. Gendered self-consciousness has, mercifully. a flickering nature" (Riley, 1988, p. 96). To assume the category in totality, to "lead a life soaked in the passionate consciousness of one's gender at every single

moment", can only lead to claustrophobic feelings of constraint (Riley, 1988, p. 6). A similar dynamic is evident in Verhoeven's hypervisibility politics: once out, you remain committed to your sexuality at every single moment and in every single setting; anything less is a sign of regression and shame. But embracing sexual secrecy can have a strategic value, as Ken Plummer explains:

> Personally and socially, secrets can perform functions: secrecy may create necessary social boundaries and personal autonomy. They may help build identities, protect us from the dangers and regulate intimacies by creating a distance that is sometimes necessary. They may indeed be vital to a sense of our own powerfulness: to tell all, for all to be known, can render people extremely vulnerable.
> (1975, p. 56)

Plummer points out that secrecy can be protective and productive, creating a sheltered space within regulatory discourses. The queerly productive potentialities of secrecy and categorical refusal are evident in the antecedent cruising technologies of *Minitel* and the cybercottage.

Introduced in France in the 1980s, *Minitel* was a "state-run videotext network" intended as a replacement for telephone directories (Nagy, 2021, p. 57). *Minitel messageries* or chatlines allowed strangers to interact through typed on-screen messages. Before initiating an exchange, users were required to create a pseudonym to introduce themselves to their potential interlocutors (Livia, 2002, p. 206). With users cloaked by their pseudonym – and unfettered from the personalising ties of landline numbers and residential postal addresses – *Minitel* created a potent space of anonymity that unintentionally mirrored aspects of "offline" cruising spaces (Shield, 2019, p. 39). As Mattias Duyves records, gay people quickly realised the host of "opportunities the little machine offered for the making of personal and anonymous contacts", be it the changing of a "sexual partner, the financing of services such as a gay radio station", or "help for AIDS

sufferers" (1993, p. 194). Interest in and demand for these erotic chatlines, known as *Minitel Rose,* were undoubtedly crucial in driving the popularity of the service. By the mid-1990s, there were 9 million French-owned *Minitel* devices with 25 million users (Chrisafis, 2012).

What is interesting about the gay use of *Minitel*, beyond the initial act of clever appropriation, was the codified nature of the language used in the chatlines. As Anna Livia describes in her analysis of queer pseudonymous *Minitel* text, seeing these coded messages purely as a recapitulation of the closet – a "conservative impulse" to control one's public visibility – fails to account for the affective dynamics of concealment (2002, p. 204). As all users could view *pseudos* on Minitel, obscuring their messages through codes meant gay men were able to "recreate a sense of secrecy, privacy and dangerous pleasure"; what Livia terms embracing "the jouissance of disguise" (2002, p. 204).

Relatedly, in her book on secrecy, Sisella Bok digs into the word's etymology, highlighting its derivation from *secernere*, "to sift apart, to separate as with a sieve" (1989, p. 6). So, while secrecy denotes something to be hidden, it also speaks to "discernment" (p. 6). There is a feeling of collectivity to being within the epistemological sphere of a secret, of being included within its bounds. Understanding the meaning of the triangle of fabric wedged into the jean pocket ahead of you on the street, recognising the stray slang word thrown into a casual conversation and reading the cryptic pseudo on the *Minitel* terminal, all compel the decoder "to enter a world in which the desire for gay male sex predominates" (Livia, 2002, p. 215). As Livia states, "the pleasure and power of deception, of leading coded lives, should not be underestimated" (2002, p. 204). This mirrors writer Garth Greenwell's assertion that "cruising offers an experience that might look like privation but feels like luxury, a hidden richness, a secret world" (2016, para. 6). The revelation

of finding that "hidden significance in a public place" is a moment "not of exclusion but election" (para. 3). Recognising and decoding the marks of a cruiser – be they textual or embodied – opens up a parallel virtual space that bristles with the erotic tension and potential of a hidden "world of others" (Warner, 2000, p. 179). An ephemeral queer world that straddles the real and the virtual, a world made up of "entrances, exits, unsystematized lines of acquaintance, projected horizons" and "incommensurate geographies" (Berlant and Warner, 1998, p. 558).

Returning to contemporary digital cruising spaces, Tom Roach theorises apps like *Grindr* are "an adjacent room" rather than a closet (2021, p. 111). Given that contemporary "'out' politics has rendered same-sex desire so blindingly visible and thoroughly individualized, becoming 'invisible' in profile creation can be understood as a (re-) enactment of the anxious anonymity of the closet as well as a form of voluntary self-dissolution" (p. 178). This manner of heterotopic suspension is also evident in the online cruising space known as the cybercottage.

Cybercottages were web-based forums that facilitated brief sexual connections, mostly in public toilets. The inherent "invisibility and instability" of these digital spaces placed them in tension with mainstream gay culture (Mowlabocus, 2008, p. 421). The cybercottage observed by Mowlabocus, *Uni_cock*, was established in 2002 and "maintained by students and staff at Midchester University" in the United Kingdom (2008, p. 424).[62] Unlike Gaydar.com, the most popular website at the time, cybercottages like *Uni_cock* did not require participants to identify as gay. If anything, there was a notable "ethos of non-identification" (p. 427). As Mowlabocus notes, Midchester University was considered a "gay friendly institution" and the town itself had "several

[62] This is a fictional name used by the author to disguise the real location of the University (Mowlabocus, 2016a, p. 121).

gay bars and a number of gay or gay-friendly clubs and club-nights" (p. 429). The fact that cybercottage users were rejecting their "membership to a legitimate gay identity" seemed to point to the invocation of "older 'pre-liberation' forms of homosexuality" (p. 430). Rather than being "the domain of closeted homosexuals", he viewed it as "a site of nostalgized performance and play, where gay men explore 'older' articulations of male-male desire, outside of the confines of a sanitized commercial gay scene" (p. 419). While the author overlays a temporal logic on the cybercottage, it is not so much a regression into the closet as a strategic step into the indeterminacy and imperceptibility offered by "an adjacent" room (Roach, 2021, p. 111).

Given that heterosexual-identified men also used the cybercottage, Mowlabocus mused that it may have been "more of a prison than a playground" for men who lacked any other outlet for their same-sex desires (2016a, p. 132). However, Snorton's writing on the Down Low (DL) offers a nuanced perspective on how people find degrees of freedom within constriction. The author notes that the metaphor of the glass closet "shares with its syntactical cousin the glass ceiling a sense of immobility": they both "speak to the way stereotypes fix people where they stand" (2014, p. 16). The materiality of glass offers a way of thinking differently about the closet, given that glass "is both brittle—breaking readily—and malleable—having a capacity for adaptive change" (2014, p. 16). While the DL is "stabilized by biopower and sutured together by institutional and social modes of regulation", glass closets "are not spaces in which their inhabitants lack the capacity to act" (2014, p. 34). Subjects might act "in strategically incomprehensible ways" – for example, by claiming a heterosexual identity while having sex with men – but this action in itself indicates "the limits of racialsexual knowledge" (2014, p. 34). That is, while the DL might look like a new iteration of the closet, it can be a space of resistance, one that refuses to comply with "sexual identifications" and "a biopolitical will-to-know" (Snorton,

2014, p. 25).

The newer map-based cruising site *Sniffies* can be considered a remediation of the cybercottage. Remediation is a process where the "technologies, texts or socialities" that make up earlier media forms are "recombined into new material and semiotic assemblages" (McGlotten, 2013, p. 130). *Grindr*, for example, "draws on and reworks earlier real-time interactive technologies" – like *Minitel* chatlines or cybercottage forums – to create an app that allows men to connect and locate one another through their mobile phones (McGlotten, 2013, p. 130).

Sniffies was launched in 2018 by US architect Blake Gallagher and uses a geolocating map to provide an augmented experience of public space (Parham, 2024). It foregrounds anonymity and ephemerality: a user does not need to create an account or upload a picture to access a map populated by sex parties, cruising grounds and one-off encounters. *Grindr* is a mixed usage space: some users are (publicly) searching for a partner or friends rather than sex. This means that it can engender "respectable promiscuity" (Ahlm, 2017) as users publicly "distance themselves from nonnormative sexual desires and practices" through their profiles (Kindig, 2024, p. 50). Conversely, the anonymity and secrecy *Sniffies* offers create a greater degree of freedom to express and explore one's sexuality. For example, *Sniffies*' creative director noted that they had seen a "290 percent increase of straight-identifying users in 2023" (Parham, 2024, para. 7). Like the cybercottage or the DL, *Sniffies* is an adjacent room that enables movement and exploration within the discursive bounds of sexuality. While this is not the hopeful "freedom to make the world" associated with queer liberatory politics, it is still an important kind of freedom, a "freedom from" that offers reprieve or adventure (Brown, 1996, p. 197).

In an interview with Jean Le Bitoux in 1978, Foucault states that it is:

> […] important for there to be places like baths where, without being imprisoned or pinned in your own identity, in your legal status, your past, your name, your face, and so on, you can meet the people who are there, and who are for you—as you are for them—nothing more than bodies, with whom the most unexpected combinations and fabrications of pleasure are possible.
> (Foucault, Morar and Smith, 2011, pp. 399–400)

In Chapter 1, I introduced Foucault's concept of homosexual askesis, the idea that gay sexual subcultures could create "a manner of being that is still improbable" (Foucault 1997, 137). Foucault was not talking about political power or bold intentionalist action. Instead, he was highlighting how sexual spaces and collective practices could offer ways to "strategically refuse the regulatory system of sexuality" (Jagose, 2012, p. 188). Relatedly, in *The History of Sexuality,* Foucault compares discourses to silences:

> Discourse transmits and produces power; it reinforces it, but also undermines and exposes it, renders it fragile and makes it possible to thwart it. In like manner, silence and secrecy are a shelter for power, anchoring its prohibitions; but they also loosen its hold and provide for relatively obscure areas of tolerance.
> (1978, p. 101)

Glossing Foucault's passage, Brown explains that while silence "signifies a relation to regulatory discourses", it also creates a "niche for the practice of freedom within those discourses" (Brown, 1996, p. 188). To practice "freedom inside a regulatory discourse" is to find the "empty spaces of that discourse" (Brown, 1996, p. 188). For out gay politics, the refusal to confess the truth of one's sexuality can only be a sign of political immaturity and shame. Yet the zones of heterotopic suspension evident in the cruising spaces explored in this section tap into the lacunae within the *dispositif* of sexuality. Within these empty spaces, new ways of relating and being flare in and out of being. Thus, we see how secrecy is not a perilous return to the shame and impotence of the closet space. Secrecy can be a generative force, offering protection, pleasure, and a break from the

demands of sexual identity. The following section continues its *deperilising* approach by interrogating Verhoeven's denigration of the virtual realm as an invisible private sphere.

4.2.3 Spatial Privatisation: Deperilising the Virtual

While Verhoeven argued that *Grindr* was a public space – particularly when justifying exposing personal messages to onlookers in a city square – his description of a relapse into invisibility was predicated on constructing *Grindr* as a discrete private realm. It was a spatialised perspective still espoused by the artist in 2018 where, in an interview, he compared men's use of *Grindr* to the cowardly action of "hiding behind a lamppost" (Verhoeven, 2018, p. 51). He also blamed the app for gay venue closures, insisting it had supplanted "gay bars, parties and cruising areas" (2014a, p. 1).[63] Within the bars he visited, Verhoeven was horrified to see men checking their *Grindr* messages, presumably instead of initiating contact in person. In the artist's view, queer sexuality was being privatised and sequestered into a virtual realm, something that constituted a worrying erosion of queer "public activity" (Warner, 2000, p. 172).

Although it pre-dates the rise of location-based cruising apps, Dean's *Unlimited Intimacy* criticised online cruising for accelerating the "privatization of public life" given queer sex could be arranged from, and take place in, domestic residences (2009, p. 192). The concern was that given queers were no longer reliant on public sex institutions, the shift towards the home would reinforce neoliberal homonormativity by pushing queer sex "publics out of sight", forcing people

[63] The belief that digital cruising erodes 'real' gay spaces was a common concern in the early to mid-2010s. News articles cited *Grindr* as responsible for the closure of gay bars, the decrease in popularity of live music scenes and the disruption of the "unique and delicate social ecology" of queer holiday destinations like Fire Island Pines in Long Island (Rogers, 2012; Norman, 2015; Zuel, 2015). Yet, as Renninger notes, articles blaming the app for the closure of gay venues ignored processes of neoliberal expansion and urban gentrification while concomitantly assuming patrons attended bars "solely for sex" (2018, p. 9).

"play it 'straight' and keep [their] kinky business at home" (Miles, 2020, p. 212). However, these *perilising* perspectives are propped up by rigid, binarised understandings of the public/private and the real/virtual.

The public and private are not concretised concepts; they are shifting, contextual terms. Allison Cavanagh, in her work on ethics in online research, stipulates that the:

> […] public and private are far from monolithic definitions to guide action. Rather all such definitions are locally produced and are therefore relative to the individual communal structures within which they are rendered meaningful [...] Only an engagement with the frameworks of meaning and relevance of the individual communities as revealed through the forms and rituals of interaction can yield an understanding of these issues.
> (Cavanagh, 1999, p. 14)

This conceptualisation of privacy as localised, contextual and communally constructed chimes with Michael Warner's writing on counterpublics. Sexual counterpublics, like *Grindr*, elaborate "shared worlds and critical languages but also new privacies, new individuals, new bodies, new intimacies, and new citizenships" (2005, p. 62). While Verhoeven was correct in stating that *Grindr* is public insofar as it is freely available for download by anyone, he ignored its counterpublic status: how users create the digital space together, a space in which counterpublic privacy is collectively constructed and respected.[64]

Verhoeven seemed blind to the fact that the protest outside the installation was proof that *Grindr* did not restrict queer public life to a separate private sphere. Kane Race's work highlights

[64] The counterpublic privacies of cruising cultures are evident in singer George Michael's description of his clandestine sexual encounters while closeted. In an interview with *Attitude Magazine*, Michael explained that he was able to keep his cruising activities out of the media because most of the men he met were also closeted. In sharing this mutual secret, they were able to cultivate a form of counterpublic privacy that was, in Michael's terms, "pretty water tight" (Adam, 2004).

the potential for this manner of counterpublic overflow. He points out that the popularity of social media means users can "use the screencap function to capture intimate exchanges" and circulate them on social media platforms (2017, p. 179). This can be "for various illustrative and demonstrative purposes, including on pages devoted to matters of concern such as HIV prevention" (p. 179). Therefore, while the chat function of *Grindr* might frame it as a private space, "the multimodal nature of digital culture" opens the potential for "frame overflowing" through the circulation of counterpublic information and culture (2017, p. 179). In this manner, we see how, from being a discrete private realm, virtual cruising spaces hybridise queer public and private life.

Contrary to theorists like Bauman (2013), who administer warnings on the dissolution of the public and private, Sheller and Uller contend that these concepts are neither oppositional nor absolute; in fact, "public and private life have always been mobile, situational, flickering and fragmented" (2003, p. 114). While technological developments have exposed the situational mobility of the public and private, queer people have always been intimately aware of the instability of these terms as, before the decriminalisation of homosexuality, the privacy of the home did not guarantee protection from the police or the publicised interventions of the law. Public sex cultures have been marked by a "perverse dynamic" as the cruiser vacillated between and collapsed the boundaries of the public and private realms (Bell and Valentine, 1995, p. 279). Therefore, all cruising cultures, be they online or offline, are neither public nor private but a "mixing of these two spheres" (Miles, 2020, p. 215). The same is true of Verhoeven's binarised approach to the real/virtual: virtual cruising practices also hybridise these ostensibly oppositional terms.

In *Gaydar Culture*, Mowlabocus insists that gay subculture is "both digitally and physically

manifested, and that these multiple manifestations occur simultaneously and shape one another continuously" (Mowlabocus, 2016a, p. 15). Ben Light's research on *Squirt.org* highlights how users collaborate on cruising ground listings and arrange encounters in commercial venues or outdoor areas.[65] In this respect, "new technologies go along with users to the physical locations of ick" rather than replacing them (Light, 2014, p. 11). Likewise, Brett Bumgarner's ethnographic study of *Grindr* demonstrated that mobile locative apps have a "symbiotic interaction" with queer commercial venues as they allow "for the layering of both digital and physical social contexts" (Bumgarner, 2013). In this respect, *Grindr* can be regarded as hybridising users' experience of space as it collapses the opposition between "digital and physical realities" (Miles, 2020, p. 205). *Grindr* usage does not dissociate a user from their surroundings by transporting their attention into a parallel digital realm: the app hybridises their experience of space, blurring the divide between physical/digital and heteronormative/queer worlds. As Jeremy Atherton Lin writes in *Gay Bar:* "The blippy alert of an incoming Grindr message in a straight pub punches between worlds. A territory is not conquered, but complicated — revealed to be permeable" (2021, p. 33).

Shaka McGlotten's Deleuzian description of the virtual notes that it is "not opposed to the real"; instead, it is something with "immanence, capacity and potentiality […] something waiting or pressing, something sensed, something dreamed or remembered" (McGlotten, 2013, p. 8). Prem Sahib's piece *Your Disco Needs You* (2013) artfully embodies this queer virtuality and the experience of scrying for an inchoate world of queer desire. Consisting of a faint, glittering

[65] *Squirt.org* was launched in 1999 as an online space for sex, cruising, friendship and fun (*Squirt.org/About*, 2021). *Squirt* is a cruising community of sorts, consisting of participatory content such as detailed listings and ratings of cruising locations from around the world, as well as user content such as erotic stories or videos (*Squirt.org/About*, 2021).

landscape digitally printed on a tile, Sahib describes the work as originating from the memory of "standing in front of a urinal looking at a tiled white wall and seeing a reflection" of a park that was a cruising ground behind him (Sahib, 2013, p. 33). The virtual world cast into being by this reflection was a moment of "visual initiation" for the artist as the image shimmered with queer opportunity (McLean, 2014, para. 4).

Figure 7 Your Disco Needs You XIV (2013) by Prem Sahib
[Printed ceramic tile, 17 x 20 cm]

Art writer Francesco Dama, remarking on the materiality of Sahib's work, noted that "the sudden shimmer of the tile has the same intensity of the eye contact that precedes a casual encounter" (2015, para. 5). Anthropologist Victor Buchli was similarly fascinated by how the piece, through glances of light in the gallery space and the movement of the viewer, glinted resplendently. In his essay on Sahib's use of tiles, Buchli refers to Patricia Cox Miller's (2012)

study of the material turn in ancient Christian cultures, in particular how shining objects were seen as accommodating "two bounded realms at once: heaven and earth; the divine and the base" (Buchli, 2013, p. 10). The "unstable and promiscuous" vacillation of shine allows for "movement between those realms simultaneously", with this act of transcendence bringing "new unforeseen elements into the expanding field" (p. 10). There are echoes here also of Elisa Steinbock's writing on the relation between the shimmer and trans ontologies. For Steinbock, the "flickering form" of the shimmer "pinpoints how it breaks with binary and dialectical thinking" (2019, p. 9). Therefore, Sahib's reflective image speaks to the hybridised nature of cruising, where the visceral tug of the visual encounter opens up a transient space that layers and collapses multiple realms: the virtual and the physical, the queer and the heterosexual, the public and private, fantasy and reality. Although digital forms of cruising no longer rely solely on tangible spaces for queer connection, they hybridise space in the same way as traditional practices by providing queer people with the means to carve out private moments for "loose, ephemeral connections" as they negotiate "spaces that are otherwise coded as heterosexual" (Mowlabocus, 2016a, pp. 209–210).

This section, and the previous one, have untethered Verhoeven's association of virtuality, secrecy and (in)visibility with regression, political immaturity and shame. Digital cruising cultures, like *Grindr* and *Sniffies*, are not a return to pre-liberatory invisibility, nor do they erode queer public life; they are simply "tools that help encounters and exchanges to happen" (Koch and Miles, 2020, p. 14). The second half of this chapter delves deeper into the visuality of cruising, exploring how it engages a form of tactical (il)legibility known as opacity.

4.3 Beyond Silence=Dearth

4.3.1 Case Study: 'Straight Acting' Art and Queer Silence

The previous chapter introduced John Walter's discomfort with the "crisis of representation" in the art world: how queer visual artists seemed to be aping González-Torres's post-minimalist aesthetic (2016, p. 271). While Prem Sahib bore the bulk of Walter's criticism, another UK artist was also in his firing sights: Nicolas Deshayes. Born in France but based in London, Deshayes's abstract art draws on industrial methods to produce works that juxtapose "aesthetic referents" for human corporeality with the sterility of "public interior architecture" (Archey, 2014, p. 460). For example, *Public World 1* and *2* (2009) are stainless steel wall sculptures with vinyl stickers affixed to the metal surface to convey sluices of urine in a communal trough (Sherwin, 2011). Walter had a heated response to the disembodied queer subtext within the piece:

> Deshayes copies the *straight-acting strategy* of González-Torres. He codifies gay subjects within presentable minimal drag. Whereas González-Torres was using formal means to deliver difficult subject matter Deshayes is doing the reverse. His interest in cruising functions as a narrative hook upon which a series of formal games can be played.
> (Walter, 2016, p. 69, emphasis added)

Just like Verhoeven configured the digital cruising space as embracing an anachronistic form of invisibility, Walter baulked at post-minimalist art's obscuring of queer themes through its privileging of abstraction, codification, and ambiguity. These spare formal strategies – where queerness speaks through an affective register rather than a didactic one – are also apparent in the work of Prem Sahib.

Figure 8 Taken by Your Equivocal Stance I (2015) by Prem Sahib

[Puffer jackets, hoodies, glass, steel, jesmonite, paint,185 x 88.5 x 69.5 cm]

Figure 9 Side On (2015) exhibition by Prem Sahib

[Institute of Contemporary Arts, London, 24 September - 15 November 2015]

As seen in Chapter 2, Sahib's minimalist artwork delves into the complexities and nuances of queer subcultural spaces. Two of Sahib's exhibitions, *Night Flies* (2013) and *Side On* (2015) are replete with spare and abstract works that artfully allude to the practice of cruising. Glistening bathroom-tiled monoliths make up the *Watchqueen* series, their title – a reference to the men who would stand guard at the entrance of tearooms – lends a figurative dimension to their hulking forms. This manner of disembodied embodiment persists throughout *Side On.* We see sheets of aluminium seemingly flecked with glistening beads of condensation or sweat, each fluid trace having been painstakingly affixed to the surface by Sahib. Each panel of transfixed droplets stand in for absent bodies heaving together in the collective abandon of sex or dance (Frankel, 2015).

These spectral presences/absences are also apparent in Sahib's piece *Tuesday* (2015), where talcum powder footprints are fixed under floor tiles. These ghostly traces of past bodily movements are witnessed only by a broad tiled sculpture standing to one side.

Both exhibitions contain vitrines of empty hoodies and Puffa jackets compressed under glass into a singular, intimate plane, their phantom limbs transfixed into disembodied embraces. Atop each frame rests an egg, an inclusion that brings a haptic tactility to the work while also underscoring the brittleness of these isolated moments frozen under glass (Sahib, 2015b).[66] Here, Sahib captures the affective dimensions of cruising, the feeling of "crushed intimacy" described by John Rechy in *City of Night* (1973, p. 59).[67] Yet, the immobility of these works also speaks to the impossible task of capturing an innately ephemeral moment. Walter offhandedly dismissed Sahib's vitrines as "cheap coats from UNIQLO" that rehash "Duchamp's Large Glass" but with a desultory, gay twist (2016, p. 74). For Walter, 'straight-acting art' that refuses to speak clearly and didactically on queer issues is indicative of a "conservative turn within the art world" and a regressive retreat into political passivity (p. 76).

From an *eidolontological* perspective, this sense of unease – even crisis – arises from a failure to live up to an ideal centred around intentionalist speech and action. Recall, in the previous chapter, how Smilges views self-authorising speech as a cornerstone of gay identity: speaking for oneself offered a way to extricate "homosexuality from disability" (2022, p. 17). In a similar vein,

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[66] In an interview with *i-D Magazine*, Sahib also connected this inclusion to the series of egg attacks that had recently occurred outside gay bars in London. He noted that there was a strange tension in those violent encounters given that they were undeniably assaults, but the projectile itself was soft (Sahib, 2015a).

[67] "Unexpectedly at night you may come upon scenes of crushed intimacy along the dark twisting lanes. In the eery mottled light of a distant lamp, a shadow lies on his stomach on the grass-patched ground, another straddles him: ignoring the danger of detection in the last moments of exiled excitement" (Rechy, 1973, p. 59).

the Silence=Death AIDS activism posters of the late 1980s positioned speech as integral to addressing the deadly impact of "communal silence" and "passivity" in a time of crisis (Finkelstein, 2018, p. 46). Queer politics tends to accord a particular weight to the act of breaking from silences, be they the silences of the closet or the ones imposed by history or medical and state authorities. Like Verhoeven in the previous section, the representational crisis that Walter outlined was animated by the hauntological pull of the closet space and the attendant associations of impotence and silence. Despite this, as explored in the previous case study, silence does not equate to inaction and constraint. Indeed, "What was once marked as passivity and weakness might be reclaimed as tactical and resilient" (Smilges, 2022, p. 100).

The historical persecution of queer people demonstrates that oppression has frequently consisted of "knowing rather than refusing to know about the sexuality of gay people" (de Villiers, 2012, p. 3). Homophobic sex panics, media frenzies, and medical/anthropological studies have all sought to expose and know queer sexuality, affirming a sense of "epistemological mastery" over it in the process (Lvovsky, 2015, p. 23). Given this fraught history as an object of power/knowledge, "the suppression of homosexuality" has offered tactical resistance to "a *scientia sexualis* that turns sexuality into an object of paranoiac knowledge" (de Villiers, 2012, p. 18).

In their essay on conceptualising gender variance through minimal sculpture, artist Gordon Hall writes on the subtle power of "silence and blankness" in art, most notably its bold disavowal of the "imperative to answer", to make one's gender and sexuality entirely legible to a viewer (2013, p. 51). David Getsy, reiterating Hall's point, explains that abstraction in art can:

> […] delay the visual consumption of the immediately recognizable or readily legible. In figurative art, whenever a human body is represented, we rush to classify it—and taxonomies of race, age, ability, gender, class, and appeal are all brought to bear on that image of a person […] For queer folks, such scrutiny is an agonistic daily experience, and

> many grew up having to conceal or camouflage their mannerisms, their furtive looks, their comportments, and themselves in order to blend into the presumed normal.
> (2019b, p. 67)

Thus, we see how queer abstraction operates as a visual tactic that resists both "the cultural marking of the human body" (p. 67) and the "evidentiary logic of heterosexuality" (Muñoz, 2009, p. 81). It also provides a useful way of untangling both the closet and the clandestine movements of cruising from assumptions of shame-laced invisibility.

Anna T. describes tactics like "the closet" or "the veil" as offering ways of existing and subsisting within power structures (2020, p. 109). They remove "one's image from the potential of being looked at", disrupting a probing gaze that seeks "transparency" and "categorisation" (p. 109). To return to Sahib's vitrine pieces above, these hoodies can be read as a subtle rebuttal of the probative forms of surveillance that expose and categorise. Although frozen and fixed under a specular surface, they maintain their illegibility. The silence of these forms signals not passivity but an act of "resistance" and "self-care" (p. 18). In the following section, I continue to disentangle queer silence and (in)visibility from *perilising* associations of political quietism and regression by exploring cruising through the lens of opacity.

4.3.2 Embracing (Il)legibility: Towards Opacity

Although much of the discomfort with cruising cultures, both past and present, relates to their apparent embrace of invisibility, these tactical/strategic practices – the gaze, slang, the handkerchief, the *Grindr* profile – all render queer people legible to one another in spaces that are often coded as heterosexual. Therefore, we should understand cruising not as closeted invisibility but as tactical opacity. "Queer opacity", as de Villiers describes it, rejects the demand to be legible and "transparent to a gaze that seeks a clear, responsible identity" (2015, para. 16). Relatedly, in

Poetics of Relation, Édouard Glissant utilised the term opacity to describe how native people rendered themselves opaque to their colonisers through their creoles. He insists that maintaining one's illegibility is a matter of liberty, and we must "clamour for the right to opacity for everyone" (1997, p. 194). Thus, we can understand the opacity of cruising as "a defence against understanding" and resistance to "objectification and subjection" (Lorenz, 2014a, p. 17, 18).

Opacity also chimes with James C. Scott's writing in *Seeing Like a State* on the connection between legibility and governmentality. Legibility is a "central problem of statecraft" as those in power require "a detailed map" of the population to be governed (1998, p. 2). To see like a state is to narrow one's vision: it requires the flattening out of complex realities into synoptically assimilable categories and metrics. As Scott notes, this manner of "Legibility is a condition of manipulation" as it provides the necessary information for a host of interventions ranging from public health initiatives to disciplinary control. Therefore, "Illegibility", being left unread, "has been and remains a reliable resource for political autonomy" (p. 54).

Scott gives an example of how authorities in the U.S. introduced "community policing" as part of their efforts to oversee urban communities:

> The purpose of community policing is to create a cadre of local police who are intimately familiar with the physical layout of the community and especially the local population, whose assistance is now judged vital to effective police work. Its aim is to turn officials who had come to be seen as outsiders into insiders.
> (p. 369)

This strategy of turning police officers into subcultural insiders is evident in the policing of cruising. The Florida Legislative Committee's Purple Pamphlet, introduced in Chapter 1, was deployed as an educational resource for the police so they could understand the hidden world of the homosexual. Likewise, a 1961 *Life Magazine* article on homosexual life in America described

the Los Angeles police force's creation of an instructive pamphlet entitled "Some Characteristics of the Homosexual" to aid them in their arrests (Welch and Havemann, 1964, p. 72). At a national level, *The Handbook of Vice Control* (Pace, 1971) was also used by vice squads to educate themselves on homosexual slang and clandestine cruising codes such as foot-tapping in public bathrooms (Lvovsky, 2015, p. 224). This surge in the collation and dissemination of knowledge about cruising and homosexual culture allowed police decoys to become adept at reading and speaking the language of covert queerness.[68] This issue of legibility has continued into the present with the academic hunt for 'gay face'.

In 2008, two researchers from Tufts University Massachusetts published a study where participants were asked to rapidly review 90 faces and assign a "probable sexual orientation" based on the subjects' facial features (Rule and Ambady, 2008; Bering, 2009). All the study participants were recorded as scoring "above chance" on this task of reading people's faces for queerness (Bering, 2009). Nearly ten years later, Stanford researcher Michal Kosinski published a similar, phrenologically-minded study (Wang and Kosinski, 2017). Kosinski claimed to have crafted an algorithm that could predict a user's sexual orientation from profile pictures uploaded on dating apps and social media (Wang and Kosinski, 2017; Resnick, 2018).[69] The research was roundly

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[68] Lvovsky writes that "Plainclothes decoys emulated the speech and fashions of gay men trying to elicit sexual advances in bars and cruising sites" (2015, p. 7). Paul Welch's 1961 Life Magazine article *Homosexuality in America* records, with photos, how the Los Angeles police department deployed officers clad in "tight pants, sneakers, sweaters or jackets" to comb the streets and bars for homosexuals (1964, p. 72). Likewise, in Britain, a case report from 1982 details that a plainclothes officer was wearing "a tight T-shirt and tight jeans with a rip across one buttock" when he engaged the accused, with a smile, on the street opposite a gay bar (Moran, 2002, p. 145).

[69] Kosinski's AI program was able to identify "a gay man 81 per cent of the time and a gay woman 71 per cent of the time" whereas humans when asked to do the same task were correct "54 to 61 per cent of the time" (Resnick, 2018). Kosinksi is also known for co-authoring the paper "that found that people's Facebook "likes" could be used to predict personal characteristics", an academic finding that would "reportedly inspire the conservative data firm Cambridge

criticised both by members of the LGBTQ+ community – who pointed out the dangers it posed to queer people in countries where homosexuality remains heavily persecuted – and other academics who labelled it a regressive form of "physiognomy, the long-defunct pseudoscience of attributing personality traits to physical characteristics" (Resnick, 2018, para. 6).

The hunt for 'gay face' recalls Foucault's description of the 19th-century homosexual whose alterity was "written immodestly on his face and body because it was the secret that always gave itself away" (1978, p. 43). Lee Edelman describes how this forges an epistemological dynamic he terms "homographesis" as the homosexual is transmuted into a body of knowledge that "always demands to be read" (1994, p. 10). Writing on this worrying trend in academia, artist Zach Blas writes that the:

> […] claim has been put upon my head by high school bullies, strangers, passers-by, college jocks, and now, experimental psychology units. A couple of seconds, they read your head as a type of face, and then you're known. All those sexual acts and styles of living become merely biological defects crystallized into a face […] there is something inescapable about such an identification; there is the insinuation it starts at birth. That most visible, readable, and expressive feature – a head – is given one face […] Fag face captures me into an identity that is not my own, a grid that legislates me. How do I escape this face?
> (Blas, 2022, p. 63)

Here, Blas rankles at the biological essentialism of gay face and how it sustains the *homographetic* impulse to read the queer body. He connects this invasive form of legibility with Deleuze and Guattari's "theory of the face as a location of continuous recognition-control that one must attempt to escape" (2013, sec. 3). Within this "politics of the face," Blas sees a liberatory "drive to

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Analytica" (Resnick, 2018). Although Kosinski claims his research is to "highlight the dangers" associated with online data, it is interesting that the academic agreed to be flown to meet the Russian prime minister, and his cabinet members, to relay his research findings (Lewis, 2018).

overcome processes of reading, measuring, and calculating the face", transforming it "into something not-yet-knowable or not-yet-understandable, something absolutely strange" (sec. 3). This "theory of the face" was the inspiration for his work *Fag Face Mask* (sec. 3).

Figure 10 Fag Face Mask (2013) by Zach Blas

Fag Face Mask is an amorphous pink mask that amalgamates "the biometric data" of a series of different queer men (Blas, 2013, sec. 1). As the artist states:

> […] the *Fag Face Mask* refuses the scientific determinism of sexual orientation and opposingly invests in an opacity that conceals against such readability and signals an irreducibly othered presence. The mask is not a denial of sexuality nor a return to the closet; rather, it is a collective and autonomous self-determination of sexuality, a styling and imprinting of the face that evades identificatory regulation […] *Facial Weaponization Suite* invests in illegibility, against standardization and state-based forms of inclusion and exclusion, and fights for the desire to escape into something else beyond legal recognition and identification.

(2013, sec. 5)

In many ways, Blas's work answers Stanley's question in *Atmospheres of Violence*: "How can we be seen without being known, and how can we be known without being hunted?". The mask is not a simple "practice of going stealth"; instead, it realises the true meaning that Glissant gave opacity: as "a method of solidarity without being grasped" (p. 88). The wearer gains the power of assuming a "collective presence" while evading the probing, classifying gaze of surveillance technologies (Blas, 2016, p. 158).

Like Blas's *Fag Face Mask*, cruising is a queer tactical technology grounded in "informatic opacity": it obscures sexuality to those that would seek to discipline or control it while leaving it legible to those who desire queerly (p. 158). While it might cling to the shadows, its investment in "queer darkness" is itself "a refusal to cohere, to become legible" (p. 129). The following section delves deeper into this notion of queer darkness by focusing on how cruising practices are invested in reading for lambent traces and inchoate potentialities.

4.3.3 Embracing Traces: Towards Night Visibility

Disciplinary forces and the insistent probing of power/knowledge have long shaped cruising cultures. This complicated relationship with disciplinary force and visibility has meant that queerness has often been "transmitted covertly", evaporating "at the touch of those who would eliminate queer possibility" as "leaving too much of a trace" could leave queer subjects "open for attack" (Muñoz, 1996, p. 6). Queerness has existed as ephemera: snatched "innuendo, gossip, fleeting moments, and performances" intended only for "those within its epistemological sphere" (p. 6). Queer ephemera, Muñoz explains, is what remains in "the wake of performance" (2009, p. 71). Focusing on "a hermeneutics of residue" allows us to understand how these traces disrupt the

binary between absence and presence (p. 71).

Muñoz's description of queer ephemera is similar to Derrida's account of the spectre as "a trace that marks the present with its absence in advance" (Derrida and Stiegler, 2002, p. 117). Derrida explained the strange bodily tension associated with the spectre by referring to how a photograph can both evoke and deprive tactility:

> The desire to touch, the tactile effect or affect, is violently summoned by its very frustration, summoned to come back [*appelé à revenir*], like a ghost [*un revenant*], in the places haunted by its absence. In the series of more or less equivalent words that accurately designate haunting, spectre, as distinct from ghost [revenant], speaks of the spectacle. The spectre is first and foremost something visible. It is of the visible, but of the invisible visible, it is the visibility of a body which is not present in flesh and blood. It resists the intuition to which it presents itself, it is not tangible […] *It is a night visibility*.
> (p. 115, emphasis added)

Derrida's night visibility encapsulates a body that is both tangible and intangible, visible and invisible. Relatedly, in the *Queer Art of Failure*, Jack Halberstam proposes the notion of "queer darkness" (2011, p. 98), referring to Daphne Brooks's writing on how darkness can be "an interpretative strategy, a structure of reading the world through a dark lens and from a particular and dark position" (2006, p. 109). The night vision proposed by Derrida involves scrying for something that is both visible/invisible and present/absent. Conversely, the night vision outlined by Halberstam is borne out of privation as restrictions on sociality forced queer people to view the world from a "dark position" (Halberstam, 2011, p. 98).

Both these forms of night visuality are artfully embodied by Prem Sahib in his focus on queer ephemera. We see powdery footprints fixed under floor tiles, flecks of sweat caught on metal panels and empty jackets frozen between panes of glass. All works that focus on the remains of queer desire, each one charged with the spectral, erotic tension of absent bodies. Chapter 2

explored how scholars and artists alike have responded to archival darkness by dousing for the queer potentialities living within the bristling virtuality of the void. We see something similar here with cruising; it offers a way of seeing darkly and reading against the grain of apparent nothingness.

Artists Thomas Eggerer and Jochen Klein touch on this notion of queer traces in their 1994 essay on the English Garden in Munich. Here, they described how the southern portion of the park operated as a cruising ground:

> The homosexuals deviate from the prescribed utilization of the park. They do not use the garden flora for contemplative leisure-time activities or relaxation. The search for potential contacts makes it necessary to develop separate networks of paths. These paths, or better: traces, reflect by virtue of their fleeting existence the unstructured and undefinable aspect of this different level of the garden. In this sense, the official topography is accompanied by an unofficial, "non-visible" one.
> (2017, p. 16)

Conceptual artist Tom Burr described similar bodily traces in his writing on The Ramble – a notorious cruising area in Central Park in New York – in 1992. He recounted how The Ramble was crisscrossed with pathways from the birdwatchers and cruisers that traversed its terrain. As with the English Garden in Munich, the cruisers' movements etched "desire lines" in the landscape (2015, p. 20). A palimpsested, parallel queer map to the "striated space" of the official parkways (West-Pavlov, 2009, p. 234).[70] These diverging pathways can be understood as ephemera: the remains of desiring queer bodies "left hanging in the air like a rumour" (Muñoz, 2009, p. 65).

[70] John Paul Ricco describes cruising as an "ungrounded movement that traces its own unbounded space" (2002, p. 9). It is a nomadic, itinerant action that cleaves to Deleuze's conception of movement through "smooth space" where, unlike the "striated space" of "pre-formed routes", individuals must engage in a "tactile, haptic" negotiation of terrain (West-Pavlov, 2009, p. 182).

These physical traces convey an immanent virtuality, suggesting past and future activities.

Cruising cultures creatively incorporate the dark visuality of the closet space. Although borne out of oppression and a questing melancholic desire, this chthonic visual tactic nonetheless gave queer people a way to expose the breaches in the heteronormative fabric of the world and spot the hopeful glimmers of queer potentiality lying just beneath the surface. There are shades of the reverse discourse here, as queer people took the terms of their privation and pathologised (in)visibility and redeployed them in support of desire and connection. From this perspective, we can understand cruising not purely as a symptom or product of closeted abjection but as tactical queer technology of communication and escape.

4.4 Synthesis

This chapter has explored how the hauntological construct of the closet space shapes perspectives on visibility, identity, and political passivity. The spectre of closeted abjection interprets efforts to cloak and obscure queerness as a worrying retreat into the impotence of the pre-liberatory past. Contrary to the concerns raised in this chapter, digital cruising spaces do not accelerate homonormative privatisation by siphoning queerness into a closed-off, private realm. Instead, these spaces hybridise the ostensibly solid binaries of the real/virtual and the public/private. Furthermore, their entanglement with social media means these sexual counterpublics are always overflowing beyond their original contexts.

The chapter stresses that visibility "is not one thing, nor is it necessarily and always good" (Phelan, 2010, p. 6). Becoming legible within epistemological regimes of power/knowledge can bring regulation and exploitation. In the case of Dries Verhoeven's installation, by uncritically positioning visibility as an imperative and a duty, the artist failed to account for how queer people,

particularly racialised and gender non-conforming ones, can be subject to violence and regulation within public space and discourse. Furthermore, in arguing that visibility is politically reparative, the artist shored up neoliberal ideals of authenticity and transparency while misrepresenting queer people as the architects of their own oppression.

The chapter takes a *deperilising* approach to the issues of secrecy and virtuality, untethering them from their association with shame and closeted passivity. Secrecy, silence and invisibility can be queerly productive. They can offer pleasure and protection while making space for ways of being that do not tally with the dominant regimes of sexual identity. There can be "real power in remaining unmarked" in circumventing epistemologies and technologies that seek to expose, categorise and know queerness (Phelan, 2003, p. 6).

Halberstam writes that "[u]nder certain circumstances failing, losing, forgetting, unmaking, undoing, unbecoming, not knowing may in fact offer more creative, more cooperative, more surprising ways of being in the world" (2011, pp. 2–3). The anonymity and secrecy inherent to cruising spaces might appear like a failure in the context of a liberatory call for queer publicity. However, the epistemological darkness that cruising cultures engender is not a reductive return to the closet. Instead, these sexual subcultures' investment in (in)visibility – be it a nighttime park or a blank *Grindr* profile photo – can forge creative ways of seeing, being and relating. The following chapter continues its focus on contemporary digital cruising technologies by exploring case studies that position them as a death knell for 'authentic' forms of queer sociality.

We love to complain that the virtual world of the internet, computers, and cell phones has destroyed our humanity. Too many of our accounts of sex and romantic relationships today are built around a longing for a past when people supposedly had more authentic connections with one another.

Jonathan Weinberg, *Pier Groups: Art and Sex Along the New York Waterfront*, 2019

5. Virtually Dead: Cruising and the Technological Object

In *Screen Love*, Tom Roach states that "[t]he dominant narratives of pre- and post-Internet gay culture tend to emphasize the radical break, even the fall from grace, that the Internet set in motion" (2021, p. 45). The turn towards the virtual realm is cast in *perilising* terms:

> […] it reduces cruising to a joyless, consumerist search akin to shopping; it reduces sex to a transactional exchange; it contributes to the commodification and consequent depoliticization of LGBTQ culture at large; it exacerbates racism, misogyny, gender-normativity, and body-shaming; it desensitizes users both to the humanness of others—their story, their feelings, their plight—and the broader sociopolitical context in which LGBTQ lives continue to be endangered.
> (p. 45)

The academic pinpoints that, at its core, this is an individuating morality tale, one that chastises queers for failing to sustain "physical spaces and communal practices" (p. 45). As seen in previous chapters, the impact wider social factors have on queer (counter)publics – such as "neoliberal privatization schemes" and "homonormative assimilationist LGBTQ campaigns" – are ignored in favour of a focus on personal actions and responsibilities (2021, p. 46).

This chapter explores how this technophobic blame narrative ensures that queer sex remains haunted by lost pasts and curtailed futures. By examining contemporary anxieties regarding the digital turn, it interrogates idealising and *perilising* accounts of the demise of authentic and traditional forms of sexual sociability. Adopting an *eidolontological* approach, it looks to art-related case studies animated by feelings of loss and crisis.

It begins with a 2019 *Cottweiler* fashion show dedicated to "the lost art of cruising" (Blanks, 2019, para. 1). Here, the rise of networked connectivity associated with digital cruising is positioned as eroding 'real' forms of relating. The technological object morphs into an alienating object, triggering a melancholic investment in the phantasmatic ideal of a more authentic, unmediated past. The chapter highlights how nostalgia-laden technophobia instigates a temporal divide that idealises traditional cruising practices while obscuring the continuities between the past and present.

Drawing on the work of artist Stuart Sandford and with support from Dries Verhoeven's *Wanna Play*, the chapter turns to concerns regarding the enmeshment of market forces with the realm of the sexual. The nature of online cruising means that users must promote and present themselves accordingly within the sexual marketplace. The depersonalising and objectifying dimensions of the interface are frequently heralded as dangerously dehumanising and instrumentalising. Rather than a progress narrative, we see a *narrative of decline*: mediated intimacies are merely market transactions compared to the 'true' forms of contact associated with traditional cruising. The chapter interrogates these *perilising* perspectives, demonstrating how all cruising practices – online and offline – require a degree of self-subtraction and interobjectivity. By drawing on Michel Callon's work on market transactions, it *deperilises* anxious accounts that position digital cruisers as dehumanised commodities.

The final section compares a painting from Dean Sameshima's *Numbers* series to the *Sniffies* cruising map. By underscoring how contemporary digital cultures remediate the bristling potentiality and loose connectivity that run through all cruising practices, it *deperilises* the technological object's position as an alienating force in queer culture. It concludes by explicating

how cultural anxiety around the digital turn feeds into the machinations of sexuality as contemporary queer sex becomes laden with a host of conflictual meanings relating to intimacy, tradition, and futurity.

5.1 The Alienating Object

5.1.1 Case Study: Mourning 'Real' Connection

In 2019, the fashion label *Cottweiler* unveiled its Autumn/Winter collection to a rapt audience lining a makeshift catwalk in the basement of an East London car park (White, 2019). As they slinked down the dimly lit runway, models passed between two porcelain pissoirs; their lustrous surfaces – seemingly marked by neglect and the ravages of time – were overrun with dank moss and ivy. The design duo making up the label – Ben Cottrell and Matthew Dainty – described their collection as mourning "the lost art of cruising" (Blanks, 2019, para. 1). Journalist Michael Love seemed to agree with Dainty's view on the status of contemporary cruising cultures, stating that the practice of seeking "chance sexual encounters in public" had waned in recent years with the rise in popularity of the hookup app *Grindr* (2019, para. 2). However, at the end of his review of the Cottweiler show, Love threw the veracity of this neat narrative of cultural obsolescence into question by adding his attestation that cruising, for him at least, was "*still* a thing" (2019, para. 4, emphasis in original). Love admitted that he still frequented the very spaces mourned by the Cottweiler duo, explaining he preferred them for casual sex given his antipathy to the masculine posturing he saw as dominating the "horrid apps" (2019, para. 4).[71]

[71] A cursory search of news articles relating to public sex reveals that what Love says is indeed true. In July 2021, for example, newspapers in Ireland reported on an undercover Garda surveillance operation that resulted in the arrest of five men for lewd behaviour while they cruised a department store bathroom in Dublin (Phelan, 2021; Tuite, 2021).

Art critic Drew Zeiba notes that in New York, following the lifting of COVID restrictions, cruising spaces underwent "a veritable homorevitalization", with new gay clubs opening and historic cruising spots – like The Ramble and Penn Station's bathrooms – being "anecdotally busier than in their pre-pandemic peaks" (2022, para. 2). Likewise, Charles Teyssou, one of the curators of the 2018 exhibition *Cruising Pavilion* in Venice, Italy, when asked should viewers "mourn or celebrate 'Grindr urbanism' in lieu of risky, and sexy, old-school practices", rejected this false dichotomy and advised instead that we should be sensitive to how "contemporary forms of cruising can go hand in hand with older versions" (Pasquier, 2018, para. 10).[72] Therefore, as explored in the previous chapter, the rise of the internet and locative technologies have not eroded older cruising practices; rather, they have augmented and remediated them.

In an interview discussing the show's restaging at Seoul Fashion Week, Dainty explained that they were inspired by "how things were before we had apps", a point "when you could meet people and we could talk to people" (Eun-byel, 2019, para. 7).[73] For Dainty, there is an unambiguous divide between an 'analogue' past – seen as a site of authentic queer communion – and a socially sterile, technologically mediated present. From this perspective, we can see how

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Likewise, in May 2021, following reports of cruising activity from an undercover deputy, police in Maryland raided an adult bookstore, leading to the arrest of nine people (Baska, 2021).

[72] Cruising Pavilion was a curatorial project staged across three locations – Venice, Stockholm and New York – that sought to highlight the ways in which "contemporary and historic cruising practices have shaped modern cities and the queer experiences in them" (Pasquier, 2018, para. 1).

[73] This focus on 'real' contact rather than mediated communication is ironic, given how cruising cultures developed around non-verbal communication. In the 1960s, in the US, the use of police decoys meant the practice had to become even more codified and secretive. Lvovsky writes that "veteran cruisers in public bathrooms stopped speaking to strangers altogether", relying instead "on subtle movement of the eyes" or jingling the change in their pockets (2015, p. 215). This shift in cruising culture is evidenced in the choice of title for Edward Delph's (1978) book *The Silent Community: Public Homosexual Encounters*.

Dainty's collection revolves around a melancholic ideality, a phantasy of cruising culture that was "lost, but never had" (Gordon, 2008, p. 183). As explored in Chapter 2, this feeling of loss issues a potent command to mourn and preserve a dying practice. Dainty's melancholic approach creates a phantasmatic ideal of unmediated sexual sociality; the past is populated by "pleasant communities of brothers" who did not need phones or the internet to hook up (Agamben, 1993, p. 4). This mournful approach to 'true' cruising is not a contemporary phenomenon. Look, for example, at the following entry from George Marshall's 1964 booklet, *The Beginner's Guide to Cruising.* Although the handbook adopts a tongue-in-cheek approach in its advice, its final pages take on a more sombre tone:

> I have a sneaking suspicion that cruising is a waning, declining art; that the growing recognition of the gay way of life, brought about by irreversible economic, political and social factors, make the getting together of a cruiser and a gay more and more simple, superficial, banal. The lack of time which is so typical of modern days, the levelling out and the standardization process, which are the results of both the capitalist and the socialist systems, certainly do not encourage cruising.
> (Marshall, 1964, pp. 64–65)

Noelle Stout explains that "nostalgia and melancholy for 'authentic' love and intimacy" can "represent anxieties about broader socioeconomic changes" (2014, p. 12). This is the case for Marshall: he believes that true cruising experiences were withering away in the face of the demands of modern life. Likewise, for the *Cottweiler* designers, the technological shift associated with locative cruising apps is an *eidolontological* sticking point; it triggers "anxiety about the vanishing past" and the desire to preserve an idealised vision of it (Boym, 2008, p. 19). This image of an unmediated past becomes a hauntological construct against which the technologically informed present is found to be lacking.

Kane Race explains, "One of the formative ideas of modern social and political theory is

that the rise of the technical object can be held responsible for the demise of community" (2017, p. 152). The central conceit is that "industrial objects (whether technologies, objects or commodities) are said to have demolished any prospect of collective identity or authentic community, extracting people from their communal relations by creating dangerous fixations that only serve to alienate them" (2017, p. 152). The idea that technology downregulates the need to connect in person is central to Sherry Turkle's popular book *Alone Together* (2011). The *Cottweiler* designers, like Turkle, demonstrate a melancholic longing for what Kane Race terms "face-time": an intimate "realm of transparent contact and unmediated exchange where the self and its desires are plainly apparent, decipherable, and soluble" (2009, p. 92). In a world regarded as "abstract and abstracting", the human contact of face-time is believed to do the vital work "of relational maintenance and social repair" (p. 92). Networked connectivity is viewed as eroding or negating the need for this form of human contact. While queer sexual cultures tend to be focused more on "stranger sociability" rather than personalising forms of intimacy, similar concerns around the alienating technological object emerge in discussions of impersonal cruising encounters (Race, 2017, p. 152).

Mark Turner's *Backward Glances* (2003) draws on the works of Walt Whitman and David Hockey to explore a history of urban cruising in the Western cities of modernity. Turner notes that there is an emotional complexity to cruising that extends beyond the illicit thrill of sex in public space. Instead, cruising encounters hinge on "the moment of visual exchange" where two strangers are connected by a discrete "act of mutual recognition" amid the anonymity of the bustling city

(Turner, 2003, p. 9).[74] Turner argued that movement into the virtual realm removed the opportunity for a revelatory form of impersonal connection:

> […] what gets lost in the cybercruising of the twentieth century, among other things, is real contact. Cruising, as idealists like Whitman imagined it, enabled connections between two people that seemed to exist apart from or in resistance to isolating tendencies of modernity. Today, the cruiser seems to me to be in danger of being as alienated as everyone else – isolated behind a computer screen, alone in a room or in the collective (communal?) isolation of an internet café, chatting.
> (2003, p. 177)

Here, Turner's concern is that the rise of the technological object – the internet – erodes a unique form of contact centred around chance encounters. What is lost is the significance of that fracturing moment where a returned glance on the street meant "a sudden radical alternative might be realized for the everyday man in the street" (2003, p. 177). It is important to clarify that Turner's critique is a pre-*Grindr*/*Sniffies* view of digital cruising culture. It could be the case that the academic would take a different line, given how these apps hybridise physical and virtual space.

The belief that the technological object results in the loss of a more authentic and meaningful way of relating remains common in discussions of cruising. The writer Garth Greenwell describes traditional cruising as "poetry" while *Grindr* usage is "prose stripped to function" (2016, para. 8). For the writer, cruising physical spaces is more "sensually and ethically" valuable than doing so in the digital realm. Greenwell, like Turner, believes a sense of aleatory

[74] Henning Bech, in his book *When Men Meet*, also focuses on this visual connection, noting that the very essence of cruising is how "gazes and movements" combine into a form of queer contact (1997, p. 106). A sexual encounter is not necessarily the chief aim of cruising as the practice holds other rewards in terms of affirmation, shared connection and excitement. In Andrew Holleran's 1978 novel *Dancer from the Dance,* the author's use of synecdoche in describing the force of the cruising gaze underscores the erotic visuality of the practice: "And then out of the evening would materialize a pair of eyes that would lock with Malone's eyes with the intensity of two men who have reduced one another to immobility as wrestlers" (2019, p. 106).

possibility is absent in online cruising spaces. It is the "circulation of bodies in physical space [that] allows for a greater possibility of being surprised by desire, of having an unexpected response to the presence of another" (para. 8). By comparison, the *Grindr* grid collapses bodies into a series of images and filtered preferences, a process that loses the nuances of bodily presence while simultaneously ensuring a user is able "to determine too much" about a potential partner (para. 8).

In *The Poetics of Cruising,* Jack Parlett notes that the comparative banality of a disembodied digital interface makes it "easy to see why the relative unsophistication of 'analogue' cruising becomes its own kind of nostalgic fetish in the face of the digital" (2022, pp. 10–11). While a loss of "sensory immediacy" is something to be lamented, there is a need to "interrogate where a critique of the present ends and a nostalgia for an imagined past begins" (2022, pp. 207–208). Kane Race issues a similar warning, stating that we must bring awareness to how "modern objects mediate sociability and give rise to new relations if we want to offer something other than nostalgic complaint" (Race, 2015, p. 507). By examining different *perilising* critiques of digital cruising cultures, this chapter demonstrates how nostalgic and idealising investments in unmediated forms of sexual sociality fail to recognise the continuities between the past and the present. The following section continues this focus on the technological object as the bane of traditional cruising intimacies by turning to the contemporary version of Marshall's pamphlet: Leo Herrera's *(analogue) Cruising* (2024).

5.1.2 Traditional Community and Cruel Games

Writer and Filmmaker Leo Herrera is known for his multimedia work, *The Fathers Project* (2018), a blend of historical fact and speculative fantasy that imagined a world untouched by AIDS.

Presented as a "special report" on the "American queer colonies", the film unfurls an alternate historical trajectory, one where the "1980s were a golden era for the gay population" (Fathers, 2018). Insulated from loss and tragedy, the eponymous queer "fathers" – Robert Mapplethorpe, Keith Haring, Halston, Vito Russo – live on, allowing queer culture to remain a productive "incubator of innovation" (Lowder, 2017). Herrera's written work is similarly invested in cultural memory and inheritance. In 2024, he published the short text *(analogue) Cruising,* a definitive how-to manual on traditional cruising practices in physical spaces. Each chapter takes a cruising ground – the street, the bar, the darkroom, etc. – with the author offering helpful advice on negotiating encounters within these spaces.

Herrera is careful not to mythologise cruising grounds and establishments as easy democracies of egalitarian pleasure, nor does he blame people for using apps for sex. Instead, he points out the value of virtual spaces, how they support people "with disabilities, anxiety and autism", "break stigma around HIV statuses", and disseminate valuable public health information relating to outbreaks like Mpox (p. 76).[75]

Despite the nuances of his text, Herrera crafts an idealised image of traditional cruising spaces as authentic sites of queer communion. These are "community spaces that include friends, dancing, maybe even a meal. At their best, they can feel like a family reunion" (p. 75). Allan Bérubé's history of gay bathhouses confirms that these could indeed be highly social spaces that offered people a sense of connection and community. Some hosted parties on major holidays and other lonely times of the year for members rejected by their families (2003, p. 40). For many men,

[75] Andrew Shield's book on immigrants' use of *Grindr* also highlights how the platform is useful for "socio-sexual networking" with migrants forging "logistical contacts who could help them with practical matters like finding housing or jobs" or "practicing the local language" (2019, p. 136).

this security and sociality represented "a major success in a century-long political struggle to overcome isolation and develop a sense of community and pride in their sexuality" (p. 34). However, as previous chapters have demonstrated, some people attend these spaces to experience heterotopic suspension rather than an identitarian sense of belonging. For example, in their art book project *Petit Mort*, artist Carlos Motta recalls a conversation he had with writer Edmund White on his experiences of cruising New York City:

> […] he said that after leaving a cruising spot in the West Village or Times Square, for example, the building could have burned down behind him and he wouldn't have turned around to see if anyone survived. He would go cruise, have sex in that space, but the minute he left he would no longer belong or feel responsible.
> (2011, p. 10)

Here, we see the polysemic nature of cruising spaces and how they are threaded through with diverse and contradictory meanings. While some might see them as an extension of a gay/queer world, others, like White, experience them as "an adjacent room" rather than a defined community space (Roach, 2021, p. 111).

Herrera's text ends with the contemporary account of a visit to a "speakeasy disco darkroom" in "the offices of a non-profit" in San Francisco, where hundreds of scantily clad men cavorted into the night (2024, p. 77). For the writer, the scene was like "a 70s photograph" that offered incontrovertible proof of the inherent "timelessness" of analogue cruising (p. 77). Just like with restorative nostalgia in Chapter 2, the past is not "a duration but a perfect snapshot" (Boym, 2008, p. 49). It is an idealised image to be honoured and lived up to, one that exists outside of history as a timeless tradition so it can be "purified of any compromising relation to normativity" (Amin, 2016a, p. 107).

Herrera's focus on an inheritable communitarian-oriented sexual practice reflects

Raymond Williams's account of selective tradition. Williams explains that tradition "is always more than inert historicized segment"; it is "an intentionally selective version of a shaping past and a pre-shaped present, which is then powerfully operative in the process of social and cultural definition and identification" (1977, p. 115). Selective tradition offers "a version of the past which is intended to connect with and ratify the present", offering us a feeling of "*continuity"* (Williams, 1977, p. 116, emphasis in original). In Herrera's case, he positions physical cruising spaces as a continuation of 1970s sexual liberationism and a tradition of copacetic communion:

> Analog cruising spaces are based on agreement: we are all here for the same reason, and following the same rules of consent. They are not democratic, and certainly not utopian, but they exist outside of algorithmic conflict and surveillance. I've never seen a political or racist argument break out in a cruising space.
> (Herrera, 2024, pp. 75–76)

Conversely, the writer describes digital cruising, in totalising terms, as being "in disagreement with itself" (p. 76). He attests that his brief foray into the virtual sphere was a confronting experience: "never in my years of cruising had strangers virtue-signaled their politics so loudly. 'No racists. No Zionists. No Republicans. No Liberals. No Trans. No, No, No…'" (p. 74).

Race explains that, in the context of an app like *Grindr*, the profile pages and chat functions give "cruising a textual and digital materiality" that is novel compared to cruising in physical spaces (2015, p. 503). This textual dimension allows users to make exclusionary statements on their profile, such as ''no femmes, no fats, no Asians,'' or ''whites to the front of the line'' (Ahlm, 2017, p. 373). *Grindr* has taken action to tackle this issue, but many users still report discrimination and sexual racism within the digital space (Clifton, 2020).

While "racism, classism, effemephobia, gender- and body-normativity" are all evident in online cruising spaces, this is by no means an isolated or new phenomenon (Roach, 2021, p. 56).

As Chapter 2 demonstrated with the work of Prem Sahib, the sense of easy homecoming that Herrera describes as being indexical of physical cruising is often centred on cis-white gay masculinity. Likewise, in his text on the infamous historical cruising ground of the New York piers, Jonathan Weinberg points out that the social hierarchies associated with the internet also held sway here, such that "finding sexual partners along the waterfront was prone to be highly competitive and often frustrating" (2019, p. 16). Indeed, "in the 1970s, anonymous sex was often experienced and described as dehumanizing, in much the same way that cybersex is denounced now" (p. 17). Therefore, it is important to remember that all cruising spaces have evolved "within our society, not outside of it"; they are not "extra social" zones that are immune from the dynamics of race and gender (Delany, 1999, p. 194).

Although Herrera stresses that traditional cruising spaces are not utopian democracies, he nonetheless establishes them as sites of easy cohabitation across lines of difference. The imbrication of politics in digital cruising is seen as oppositional to the companionable, 'homeyness' of physical spaces. But the heterotopic suspension of racial and political differences within a cruising space is not evidence of a unified community working towards shared "purposes or goals to be achieved" (Joseph, 2002, p. 10). As Shane Phelan states, "community is not a thing or a place" but "a process by which we build commonality and difference" (2010, p. 137). In selectively concentrating on a tradition of copacetic communion, Herrera collapses the queer complexity of cruising spaces into simplistic "lifestyle enclave[s]" (Madsen *et al.*, 1985, p. 82). Whereas community champions "the interdependence of public and private life", a lifestyle enclave involves "only a segment of each individual, for they concern only private life, especially leisure and consumption" (Madsen *et al.*, 1985, p. 82). Thus, we see how a nostalgic investment in traditional cruising cultures obscures the continuities between the past and present while

replacing “complex realities with simplistic ones” (Schulman, 2012, p. 36). The sexual subcultures of the 1970s exert a hauntological force: they are the idealised image against which contemporary sexual subcultures are valued and judged.

(analogue) Cruising also instigates a divide between natural and unnatural forms of relating. A traditional cruising space is steeped in endogenous pheromones, while digital ones gamify sex into a “dopamine slot machine” (2024, p. 75). Like in Chapter 3, this neuroessentialist framing allows the author to cast app usage as addictive; it is something the writer claims is comparable to “a coke problem” (p. 75). Once again, the app becomes the agentic element that places users in helpless thrall to “the Pavlovian bells of [their] phones” (p. 77).

The notion of “gamified eroticism” was explored by Evangelos Tziallas (2015) in the context of hookup apps. A virtual interface like *Grindr* ostensibly turns sex into a game where “one earns rewards and badges and climbs up an imaginary hierarchy toward some self-directed and self-actualized goal” (2015, pp. 766–767). In Tziallas’s view, this cruising game forges a cruelly optimistic relation, as the constant feeling that one is “always on the verge of winning” sustains people’s investment in the app (p. 766). Yet, this same sense of potentiality also imbues traditional cruising spaces. As John Walter states, moving through the bathhouse or cruising ground involves “constantly circulating the space through walking, pacing and wandering” as if, through movement, “one might incant a lover” (2016, p. 172). Likewise, in an interview with sociologist Richard Tewksbury, a cruiser recounted the ‘game’ of public sex, which could last up to two hours:

> You see somebody, you walk by, they'll take off and you follow them from one end to the other, chasing each other. If you give up and turn around, then they'll start chasing after you. That will happen as much as seven or ten times; it's a two-way game, until the connection is made.

(Tewksbury, 1996, p. 15)

Thus, we see that, while cruising has always been gamified in some sense, it is the technological object that brings in associations of the "artificial, inauthentic, alienating and untrue" (Race, 2009, p. 30). Digital cruisers become "cultural dopes" divested of their agency in slavish thrall to their mediated desires (Hall, 1981, p. 232).

This section has explored how the rise of digital cruising cultures triggers an anxious nostalgia for an unmediated sexual past. But technophobia in the realm of queer sex ultimately continues the "frenzied epic of displacement in the discourse on sexuality" (Bersani, 1987, p. 220). It foments a *perilising* approach to contemporary queer sexual sociability by casting the technological object as culpable for the loss of tradition, community and 'true' forms of relating. This idealisation of physical cruising and the concomitant perilisation of digital practices fails to identify the continuities between the past and present. The following section continues its focus on the deleterious technological object by examining anxieties relating to the commodification of self and the instrumentalisation of others when cruising online.

5.2 The Commodifying Object

5.2.1 Case Study: Market-Mediated Intimacies

In 2007, British artist Stuart Sandford started his ongoing photographic and film series, *Anonymous Landscapes*, to record the "urban and rural public spaces" where men meet for sex (Sandford, 2007). In 2008, an image from the series was commissioned as public art for display on a billboard in Sheffield. The use of a billboard, combined with the image's distinct lack of figuration, draws immediate comparisons to the work of Cuban American artist Félix González-Torres, most notably *Untitled (billboard of an empty bed)* (1991). Displayed on the streets of New York City, the

billboard featured an empty bed with white sheets; the tousled pillows and wrinkled bedding carried the undeniable impressions of recently absent bodies. The artist's placement of the intimate space of the bedroom in the public sphere, combined with the "just left" spectrality of the image, was intended to arrest the viewer with a melancholic feeling of loss, making the work an affecting synecdoche for the devastation of the ongoing AIDS epidemic (O'Reilly, 2009).

Figure 11Untitled (Italy) (2008) by Stuart Sandford
[Colour photograph, dimensions variable]

This same feeling of melancholic absence lingers in Sandford's work. The artist explained that the public image was meant to signify the dissolution of these spaces "In the age of Grindr and hook-

up apps" (Sandford, 2007).[76] This mournful view was readily taken up by critic Lukasz M. Maciejewski:

> Stuart's Venice beach, a place where one could once get a blow-job, suntan and sunstroke at the same time is now abandoned. There's no one left there. And I don't mean the actual absence of men on the billboard. The institution of public sex-place is withering. The queers of today have joyfully deserted spots like this, instead choosing dating websites, naively trusting they are now civilized […] Most gay men now prefer to select and to be selected. They publicise themselves and their cocks like in some sort of advert […] Men voluntarily put themselves into groups of membership users like they have become products in the local ASDA. I'm sure Stuart is utterly happy showing you a billboard that sells nothing. Just nostalgia. At least that's what comes for free. His work is just like looking back in time. Like re-visiting the house you were born in all those years ago. It looks the same but there's something different. Something is lost.
> (Maciejewski, 2008)

According to Maciejewski, the halcyon days of public sex are no more as in embracing the expediency of internet-mediated connection – and the associated commodification of self that goes with – gay men starved physical spaces of the human presence that animated their existence, leading them to wither and die. The previous chapter highlighted how this crisis in cruising culture is inaccurate: newer technologies – such as *Squirt.org* and *Sniffies* – have augmented these spaces, allowing people to share information on changes, threats or opportunities within these cruising grounds. However, the idea that the internet has tarnished queer sociality with the logic of the marketplace is a cultural sticking point, one that is also evident in Dries Verhoeven's approach to *Grindr*.

Race notes that online cruising cultures are notable in how they allow "users to stage their

[76] Comparisons could also be made here to the kind of spectral traces explored with Prem Sahib's work in the previous chapter. From this perspective, the billboard can also illicit a feeling of productive possibility as the viewer populates the empty space with past meetings and projected fantasies.

online presence to their own advantage" (2017, p. 54). On profiles, users "market themselves […] within the sexual marketplace to get what they want (or what they can)" (p. 54). In his pre-installation essay, Verhoeven described *Grindr* as warping a human desire for contact into a vapid form of market-led, sexual networking predicated on shallow competitive individualism and the cultivation of a pornified-self embodied by a curated "collection of selfies" (Verhoeven, 2014a, p. 1).

> For an international artist, my profile was in fact pretty infantile and not very original […] I felt like a teenager who needs the approval of his classmates and so conforms to their rules and their jargon. In less than half a year my texts had been reduced to simple headlines like "Hey there" and "Whats up?", my photos did not show the man that I was, but rather a bad imitation of the typical torso photos. Dries Verhoeven meets Justin Timberlake meets Jeff Stryker. Anyone who uses the app more than a week will know this tendency. It's virtually impossible not to present yourself as a carefree "no strings attached guy" once you discover that you rouse much more interest with that than with a more complex version of yourself.
> (2014a, p. 2)

Here, we see Verhoeven's discomfort with the processes of "self-subtraction and self-marketing" that go into profile creation (Roach, 2021, p. 121). While the artist viewed this as a contemporary phenomenon, it is important to note that self-image and depersonalisation are key features of cruising cultures, both past and present.

Architect Andrés Jacque spent two years at *Grindr* headquarters in the United States researching his multimedia installation *Intimate Strangers* (2016). He offers a decidedly less perilous perspective on the forms of "self-edition" associated with online cruising platforms (Jacque, 2016a, p. 1). He argues that "self-profiling", rather than being to "nurture your vanity", is now an "act of urbanity, like watering the plants in your window or not littering in the street" (2016, p. 1). Likewise, Jack Parlett notes that critiques of 'selling oneself' online tend to ignore

how “cruising has long been a visual culture where image and self-image play a constitutive role” (2022, p. 10).

Self-subtraction is also not a new phenomenon in the context of cruising cultures. Bersani pointed out that when cruising, we tend to “leave our selves behind” as we shed “much of the personality that individuates [us] psychologically (2009, p. 60).

> Cruising can be an apprenticeship in impersonal intimacy. Like the sociability described by Georg Simmel, the anonymity and the multiplicity of sexual partners involve a certain self-subtraction, a diminishing of our subjectivity—or, in other terms, a suspension of the psychological, social, and professional interests that constitute a person’s individuality. (p. 69)

Therefore, while the privileging of surface over depth has always been a prominent feature of cruising cultures, the imbrication of the technological object with queer sexual sociability casts a *perilising* pall over these interactions.

Verhoeven’s essay culminates with a grim vision of a world where – warped by technological tools that force “them to present themselves as carefree porno stars”– gay men become hooked on “sexual affirmation” and are “no longer capable of intimacy” (2014a, p. 3). Within this dystopia, the gay world morphs “from a community into a supermarket”, with men reduced to “reciprocal competitors and consumers of their sexual potential” (2014a, p. 3). In Verhoeven’s grim fantasy of a technological dystopia, the potential for *Grindr* to broker intimate connections is entirely negated by how the platform ostensibly forces users to commodify themselves through their photos and profile information. He states, for example, that the men on the app have only a passing interest in sex and are more interested in maintaining their “Grindr market value” (2014a, p. 2). As Bachmann notes, this unwavering belief that men are helplessly controlled by market forces positions users as adjusting their virtual presentation “according to the

logic of supply and demand" (2015, p. 96). Stripped of all agency and rendered into commodity puppets, queers are unable to break free from this emotionally stunted digital space. The artist describes it as comparable to "a darkroom" in which men tragically veil "their desire for love" (Verhoeven, 2014a, p. 4).

In her essay *Feminism's Apocalyptic Futures*, Robyn Wiegman differentiates between political approaches that are grounded in a "past lost" – i.e. melancholia – and those that are motivated "by a fear about the failure of the future" (2000, p. 807). Whereas a melancholic attachment to the past positions "the present as the scene of the past's failure, the apocalyptic, on the other hand, is attached to the time that has not yet been lived, which writes the present as the failure of the future" (p. 807). For the melancholic, this leads to "lament and enclosure, to a strategy of conservation" (p. 807). In contrast, "the apocalyptic heralds violence and judgement, the spectacular end of all things" (p. 807). In Verhoeven's case, the technological turn – and the narcissistic and vapid preoccupation with surface that it seems to bring – is the basis for a narrative of decline that heralds the death of love. It is a perspective that mirrors Zygmunt Bauman's writings in *Liquid Love.* Here, Bauman blamed the rise of internet dating for liquifying traditional forms of relating:

> Unlike old-fashioned relationships (not to mention 'committed' relationships, let alone long-term commitments), they seem to be made to the measure of a liquid modern life setting where 'romantic possibilities' (and not only 'romantic' ones) are supposed and hoped to come and go with ever greater speed and in never thinning crowds, stampeding each other off the stage and out-shouting each other with promises 'to be more satisfying and fulfilling'. Unlike 'real relationships', 'virtual relationships' are easy to enter and to exit. They look smart and clean, feel easy to use and user-friendly, when compared with the heavy, slow-moving, inert messy 'real stuff.
> (2013, p. xi)

Bauman sees this pivot towards easy, safe, depthless connection as comparable to the commodification of intimacy given users "can always return to the marketplace for another bout of shopping" where they peruse for a partner as if thumbing through "a mail order catalogue" (2013, p. 65).[77] This is the same logic that Larry Kramer took to queer promiscuity in the 1990s. Kramer believed that gay male promiscuity created a "childish and unhealthy barrier to authentic adult identity and culture" as "having so much sex made finding love impossible" (Gove, 2000, p. 90). Likewise, Verhoeven's technological dystopia hinges on the enduring belief that promiscuous queer desire throws 'true' intimacy and love into scarcity.

Chapter 3 demonstrated how we can be haunted by "a nullified possible future" by what was promised to come "but whose condition of arrival has been foreclosed" (Rahimi, 2021, p. 6). The emergence of digital connectivity foments a feeling of crisis; there is a sense that mediated intimacies are a barrier to achieving a happy, good gay life. However, as Lauren Berlant states, although some intimacies will "rarely register as anything but residue", unbound as they are from the institution of the monogamous couple, this does not mean they are inferior to conventional modes of intimate relationality (1998, p. 283). In Verhoeven's case, a technophobic approach to virtual intimacies ultimately fortifies a hetero/homonormative hierarchy that privileges "properly familiar monogamous sexual arrangements" (Gove, 2000, p. 16). Unlike the previous section, where tradition and the unmediated past exerted a hauntological force, here, it is the spectral future of a good gay life that guides critiques of the technologically mediated present. The following section adopts a *deperilising* approach to the online sexual marketplace by delving further into

[77] Data shows that online dating is not in fact, "liquefying ideals like romantic love, monogamy or a commitment to longer-term relationship" (Hobbs, Owen and Gerber, 2017, p. 281). The hunt for personal connection is merely mediated, with users employing "the technology as a means to pursue meaningful partnerships" (p. 281).

anxieties relating to commodification and objectification.

5.2.2 Becoming a Commodity

Queer sexual identities and spaces have long been connected with the machinations of capitalism and commodity culture. Michael Warner points out that the gay movement lacked the kind of "nonmarket forms of association" that have traditionally supported other social movements: "churches, kinship", and traditional forms of residence (Warner, 1993, p. xvii). Instead, "the institutions of culture building" were largely "market-mediated: bars, discos, special services, newspapers, magazines, phone lines, resorts" and "urban commercial districts" (Warner, 1993, pp. xvi-xvii). Furthermore, as John d'Emilio explicates in *Capitalism and Gay Identity,* far from stymying the formation of political identity, "it has been the historical development of capitalism – more specifically, its free-labour system – that has allowed large numbers of men and women in the late twentieth century to call themselves gay, to see themselves as part of a community of similar men and women, and to organize politically on the basis of that identity" (D'Emilio, 2007, p. 251).

With hookup apps, this enmeshment with capital is even more pronounced as these for-profit enterprises treat user data as a saleable commodity. As Zeiba highlights, *Grindr* has "sold location data that was detailed enough to infer things like romantic encounters between specific users based on their device's proximity to one another, as well as identify clues to people's identities such as their workplaces and home addresses based on their patterns, habits, and routines" (2022, para. 3). While this manner of *dataveillance* is concerning, the focus in this section is on how digital cruising impacts users' views of themselves and others, namely how the

virtual realm turns them "into commodities" (Race, 2017, p. 151).

Although it pre-dates the rise of location-based apps, Tim Dean's *Unlimited Intimacy* casts online cruising as a "degraded form" of the real thing (2009, p. 176). The ability to filter according to one's interests removes the aimless, "purposiveness without purpose" quality of traditional cruising (p. 210). John Lindell's architectural analysis of sex clubs noted that purposeless drifting was an essential aspect of cruising as it "facilitates passing to a nameless, 'let's see what happens' frame of mind" (Lindell, 1996, p. 75). In this manner, the space is similar to "the supermarket or shopping mall; one browses, in search of something vaguely determined" (Lindell, 1996, p. 75). In the case of online cruising, the constrictive focus on a pre-determined desire destroys what Dean deems exemplary about the practice: its "distinctive ethic of openness to alterity" (p. 176). Whereas cruising is about "opening oneself to the world", digital cruising "insulates the self from alterity by centripetally narrowing the attention often to crotch level" (pp. 210-211). However, McGlotten offers a rebuttal to Dean's perilising approach to online browsing:

> Browsing is an embodied, durational practice that belongs to an alternative logic of consumption that emphasizes the pleasure of looking rather than the pleasure of having or getting. People go online not knowing what they want […] Browsing invites the serendipitous or chance event. "I don't know what I want or what I'm looking for, but maybe I'll know it if I see it." […] Browsing is something you do to enjoy being in the flow of desire rather than trying to satiate it. It is oriented toward possibilities.
> (McGlotten, 2013, p. 135)

Here, we see the same "purposiveness without purpose" that Dean saw as a central part of traditional cruising (2009, p. 210). While some users might log in with a clear sense of what they want from the virtual space, others approach it with the exact openness that Dean sees as sorely lacking in online-mediated encounters.

Dean's critique of online cruising is inspired by Samuel Delany's writing on contact in *Times Square Red, Times Square Blue*. Here, Delany describes cruising as "an indispensable component of urban gay life, in that metropolitan existence constantly propels city dwellers into contact with strangers" (1999, p. 177). This form of stranger sociality is vital for "interclass contact" (p. 111) and the cultivation of "a relaxed and friendly sexual atmosphere in a democratic metropolis" (p. 127). Delany distinguishes between opportunistic forms of contact and a more constricting form of relating: networking.

> Networking tends to be professional and motive-driven. Contact tends to be more broadly social and appears random. Networking crosses class lines only in the most vigilant manner. Contact regularly crosses class lines in those public spaces in which interclass encounters are at their most frequent. Networking is heavily dependent on institutions to promote the necessary propinquity (gyms, parties, twelve-step programs, conferences, reading groups, singing groups, social gatherings, workshops, tourist groups, and classes), where those with the requisite social skills can maneuver.
> (p. 129)

Glossing Delany's work, Dean points out that networking "occurs within a single social stratification", whereas contact "tends to destabilize class hierarchies" (Dean, 2009, p. 187). For Dean, cruising online reduces the "contact sport of cruising to a practice of networking. Instead of an opportunity for conversation with strangers, cruising becomes a way to avoid it" (p. 194). It is "sex with strangers without contact […] tantamount to treating a stranger as a blow-up doll or a mail-order sex toy—an approach that betokens a purely instrumental approach to the other, rather than the openness to others that cruising at its best represents" (p. 194).

We see similar charges of commodification and instrumentalisation in *Straight Jacket.* Here, Matthew Todd bemoans the "extreme objectification" apparent in the gay community (2018, p. 152). Men are reduced to "Primark people: no longer brothers, or even friends, just holes and

human dildoes; throwaway people having throwaway relationships" (p. 152). Despite this crisis-tinged framing, the shopping analogy – as seen with Lindell above – is commonly used with cruising cultures. In the 1970s, researchers of a gay bathhouse noted that sex in the space was comparable to how "neighborhood shopping centers provide easy shopping" (Weinberg and Williams, 1975, p. 134). Likewise, Neil Bartlett describes the historical experience of cruising city streets as being "like window shopping" (Bartlett, 1993, p. 153). More recently, in *The Gay Science*, Race uses Michel Callon's writing on market transactions to interpret anonymous cruising encounters.

Market transactions engender impersonal social interactions: "Once the transaction has been concluded the agents are quits: they extract themselves from anonymity momentarily, slipping back into it immediately afterwards" (Callon, 1998, p. 3). The sense of estrangement that this market dynamic works through requires impersonal "framing devices […] to disentangle the agents in question from other networks and relations" (Race, 2017, p. 152). Race insists that impersonal framing devices have always been an integral part of queer sexual culture. Cruising grounds like bathhouses or tearooms operate as depersonalising "market devices" (Race, 2017, p. 153). For example. research on gay bathhouses in the 1970s noted that "depersonalization and objectification" were a crucial part of sex within these spaces (Weinberg and Williams, 1975, p. 134). From this perspective, we can understand anonymous cruisy sex as mutually "interobjective" interactions rather than callously instrumentalising ones (Goldberg, 2020, p. 263).[78] However, the temporal divide the technological object creates – between an unmediated past and a networked

[78] David Wojnarowicz described the interobjective quality of cruising encounters in an interview with the photographer Nan Goldin. He explained that the anonymity of cruising allowed him to project a "created biography", a "sum total of desires", onto the men he met in warehouses, parks and subways (1994, p. 157).

present – foments anxiety around online connections. This is evident in Verhoeven's assertion that *Grindr* forced him to become " a superficial illustration of [himself]" that acted out hollow "porno fantasies" with the men he met online (2014a, p. 3).

Callon's approach to market transactions offers a useful way of untethering digital cruising from this doom-laden crisis discourse. While framing devices ensure the impersonality of both parties during the encounter, the market device can be subject to "overflowing" beyond the bounds of the anonymous transaction (1998, p. 18). Race uses this notion of overflowing to draw attention to how cruising encounters, although framed "as nonstrings or commitment free" can be subject to overflow (Race, 2017, p. 152). As Roach notes, when logging into a virtual cruising space, "[e]ach user brings to the apps the historical weight of personhood—unique histories and experiences, subjective worldviews, and varying degrees of social privilege—and each user must negotiate all of this in profile setup and communicative exchange" (2021, p. 21). Personhood and embodied histories do not dissolve into an asocial realm in anonymous sex. Instead, they can catalyse moments of overflow, transmuting an impersonal connection into something else: a lover, a friend or a casual 'fuck-buddy'. Therefore, while cruisers might act like commodities, this impersonal relationship is not inherently dehumanising as it can lead to new intersubjective connections.

Chapter 1 highlighted Patricia Stuelke's (2021) critique of Delany's descriptions of interclass contact with poor and homeless men. Although these interclass connections are presented in reparative terms, social inequities are never questioned, and it is unclear how this contact benefits the person of lower social standing. Greg Goldberg isolates a similar issue in Dean's text. He points to a passage in *Unlimited Intimacy* where Dean visits My Place, a "down-

at-heel, working-class" cruising bar in San Francisco (Dean, 2009 p. 198).

> My Place was not filled with pretty boys, perfect gym bodies, or "attitude." Much of the institution's seedy charm lay in its resolute unpretentiousness and its patrons' friendliness toward strangers; it was a space of interclass contact where men of all races and body types (including the disabled) exchanged conversation and pleasure with minimum interference. After evenings at My Place, I regularly would jot character sketches of the guys whom I had met and their fascinating stories, inspired by a sense that this bar constituted an ideal site for informally gathering oral histories. My most extensive interactions with nonwhite men, with disabled men, and with men who have been HIV positive for decades occurred in that bar.
> (p. 201)

Goldberg points out that the passage is supposed to demonstrate "an openness to socially different others, that is, across axes of race, class, and 'body type'"(2020, p. 257). However, the academic wonders if Dean's "contact with these others would persist were they not so 'fascinating'" (p. 257). Dean's pursuit of connection across lines of difference can also be regarded as "motive-driven and instrumentalizing", thereby dismantling the ethical hierarchy he imposes between traditional and digital cruising practices (p. 258).

One of the central critiques of online cruising is that it revolves around "a pre-calculative sexual subject who is presumed to know what they want in advance; whose preferences and interests are imagined to precede their worldly engagement with others" (Race, 2017, p. 177).[79] Race warns that the ability to filter and search specific terms reduces "the chances of having to engage with unlikely sexual and social others in the course of realising one's sexual interests"

[79] McGlotten's point on aimless browsing shows that online cruisers are not all "pre-calculative sexual subjects" (Race, 2017, p. 177). Indeed, as French writer and cruising aficionado Guillaume Dustan wrote in *Stronger than Me,* when cruising on the *Minitel,* he "would find [himself] having sex with guys [he] would have never otherwise done" (Dustan, 2021, p. 317).

(2017, p. 177). This leads Race to wonder if the digital turn would have stopped him from encountering "the butch dykes or drag queens or girly boys that turn out to have played such a significant role in [his] sexual formation and sociopolitical outlook" (p. 176). Likewise, in (*analogue) Cruising,* Herra counsels readers to "[e]xperiment and try new archetypes", explaining that it was in a bathhouse that he discovered he was "a chubby chaser" (2024, p. 16). The writer was surprised by his desire, adding that if they had interacted in a bar, "it would probably not have occurred to us to go home together" (p. 16). The focus here is on the aleatory power of physical cruising and how it opens up unexpected avenues for desire. Yet, as with Dean and Delany's writing above, this attraction always flows against the hierarchies and hegemonies of gender, normative embodiment and race. As Goldberg states, the idea that we "come to see these others as desirable when surprised by unanticipated pleasures" assumes that "these groups are deprived of attention that they may very well have little interest in courting" (2020, p. 265). Here, we see how the queer ideal of "erotic egalitarianism" influences the politics of desire (Hekma, 2008). Engaging in contact with sexual others beyond the 'charmed circle' of cis white masculinity is accorded an ethical value and a virtuousness that is suspect.

This section has explored *perilising* perspectives that cast online cruising as objectifying "meet markets" (Goldberg, 2020, p. 253). Crisis discourses and narratives of decline, like Verhoeven's, pit the digital sexual marketplace against more 'natural' forms of relating, shoring up hetero/homonormative accounts of intimacies and neoliberal happiness scripts in the process. Conversely, academic discourses on virtual cruising can install an ethical hierarchy between traditional and contemporary practices. In both cases, the divide between the unmediated past and the technological present obscures how cruisy sex has always featured interobjectivity, self-marketing and depersonalisation. As the following section explores, while the technological object

is an anxious *eidolontological* focal point for a host of discourses relating to intersubjective communion, the rise of locative-based cruising gives users access to pleasurable potentialities that are both novel and familiar.

5.3 The Potentiality Object

5.3.1 Case Study: Dean Sameshima's *Numbers*

Dean Sameshima, introduced briefly in the previous chapter, is an artist whose work is steeped in reflective nostalgia. His Purple Pamphlet series – the Florida Legislative Committee text introduced in Chapter 1 – was exhibited in Peres Projects in Berlin in 2007. The work contains the blue and red penned annotations of JJ Belanger, a member of the Mattachine Society from the early 1950s (ONE National Gay & Lesbian Archives, 2011). Each blown-up image contains Bellanger's corrections and commentary with certain sexological definitions underlined as "archaic" or corrected to common gay parlance. The title of a 2016 exhibition in GAVLAK gallery in Los Angeles, *647(D)*, is a reference to the Southern California penal code, which was used to arrest men for "alleged lewd conduct" (GAVLAK, 2016, para. 3). The exhibition contains a series of five black-and-white paintings of the artist's arrest record under section 647(d). Likewise, Sameshima's *City Men* paintings record the artist's performative practice of visiting sex cinemas in Berlin on the birthdays of figures from gay culture. The paintings feature the admission stubs for the porn theatre along with the date attached to the iconic figure: "John Rechy, Renaud Camus, John Giorno, and Fred Halsted" (2016, para. 5). Thus, we see how Sameshima's work lingers over, and reworks, the ephemera of the past to create painterly memorials.

Figure 12 Cop Head 69 (2006) by Dean Sameshima
[Acrylic and silk-screen ink on canvas, 193 x 152 cm]

This section focuses on Sameshima's ongoing *Numbers* series, first exhibited in Peres

Projects in 2007. In an interview on the paintings, Sameshima explained that they are based on "connect the dots pages in 70's/80's Drummer magazines" (Sameshima, 2011). These allowed readers to follow the numbers to get a final pornographic image. The original erotic dots were designed by John Klamik, who created works under several names: "Buckshot, Shawn, and Sean" (Campbell, 2020, p. 108). In recreating these works through silk-screening, Sameshima removed the wry statement that Klamik attached to his drawings: "Warning! When completed this will be a sexually explicit drawing. If you will be offended by the content, do not connect the dots" (Campbell, 2020, p. 116). The title and content of the series is also a nod to the canonical cruising novel *Numbers* by John Rechy (1967). The book follows the protagonist, Johnny Rio, an ex-hustler who returns to Los Angeles after a three-year absence. Rechy described the central metaphor of the text as one of "death" and mortality as Rio, anxious about ageing, proves his desirability by pursuing thirty sexual conquests – each one a number – over ten days (Castillo and Rechy, 1995, p. 119).[80]

Andy Campbell points out how Sameshima's erotic dot works speak to the pleasures associated with promiscuous desire:

> Because the connect-the-dot designs are left unconnected, they function as spaces for imaginative and wild projection. Sameshima's numbered dots thus facilitate different kinds of embodiment—collapsing numbers as both numerical signs and counted tricks (à la Rechy's Numbers). This allows the dots to become more than what they are: they are hundreds of men, schematically seen from above, populating the cruising grounds of Griffith Park (the ones used by Sameshima, Rechy, and the fictive Johnny Rio). Or they are an evocative and complicated map of social relations (former and future lovers) […]

[80] Ben Nichols notes that in reducing people "to anonymous numbers or body parts", Rechy challenges readers to question "that reduction is self-evidently problematic" (2016, p. 411). This chimes with Verhoeven's anxiety concerning self-subtraction in the digital cruising space, as seen in the previous section.

> The numbers on this field of erotic possibility are always becoming, and bristling with potential.
> (2020, p. 120)

Here, Campbell isolates the heady feeling of "belonging to a sexual world, in which one's sexuality finds an answering resonance not just in one other, but in a world of others" (Warner, 2000, p. 179). The loose and expansive connectivity of the paintings – where each dot is a potential sexual connection – speaks to a horizon of possibility and an inchoate feeling of abundance. As Charles Shively, publisher of the Boston Gay Newspaper Fag Rag, wrote: "We live loosely; we know nothing lasts because there will always be something more" (1993, pp. 7–8). This focus on a horizon of possibility is redolent of Munoz's conceptualisation of queer utopia, where queerness is "based on an economy of desire and desiring", but "this desire is always directed at that thing that is not yet here, objects and moments that burn with anticipation and promise" (Muñoz, 2009, p. 26). Whereas Tzallias views this feeling of potentiality as indexical to a cruelly optimistic relation to sex, here, we see how these feelings of abundance and budding possibility can inspire movement, connections, and becomings.

Figure 13 Sniffies map

From a contemporary perspective, Sameshima's join the dot pieces resemble the *Sniffies* map. *Sniffies*, as discussed in the previous chapter, is a map-based technology that allows individuals to view sex parties, cruising areas and individual hookup opportunities near them. The artist's work helps us consider how digital spaces like *Sniffies* overlay terrestrial space with a feeling of abundance. Each circle on the cruising map, like the painting's dots, embody a host of sexual others. Although the following quote relates to *Grindr*, the app's locative function, like *Sniffies*, imbues space with a feeling of bristling potentiality. In a study on digital cruising, a 23-year-old interview respondent described the pleasures offered by the app:

> Just the fact of knowing…that you have three guys, four guys within a radius of 500 meters, a distance you can easily walk, will perhaps make you tell yourself, well, I might do a one-night stand right now, more than if they were two kilometers away. The distance, the proximity enables the arousal. Proximity, if there is some feeling, it may work. It arouses, *it creates desire*.
> (Licoppe, Rivière and Morel, 2016, p. 2546, emphasis added)

In this description of the stimulatory power of proximity, we can see how digital cruising cultures rework both the connection to space and the sense of erotic potentiality that fuelled traditional cruising practices.

McGlotten – who has spent a significant portion of their life "dwelling in the queer space of the screen" – describes how virtual spaces continue to put them "in motion, to infold new beginnings as much as repetition. That feeling of potentiality is oriented toward a 'not yet', a moreness that remains as much invitation as endless deferral" (McGlotten, 2013, pp. 61–62). This orientation towards the "not yet" is, again, suggestive of Muñoz's statement on queer utopia. Although the premeditated nature of the *Sniffies* map might lack some of the impulsivity of cruising the street, a device that connects you to a world of sexual others can also burn with "anticipation and promise", catalysing new experiences, overflows and becomings (2009, p. 26).

In comparing Sameshima's painting to the *Sniffies* map, we see how the technological object has not destroyed the structures of feelings associated with traditional cruising cultures. Instead, digital cruising spaces have reworked these potent feelings of potentiality and abundance by hybridising the virtual and physical realms. The following section continues the focus on Sameshima's *Numbers* series to explore how queer sex is overburdened with deep truths and expansive meanings. To do so, it begins by introducing Samuel Delany's writing on a performance art piece by Allan Kaprow in 1960.

5.3.2 Movement Towards a Whole

In his autobiographical work, *The Motion of Light on Water,* Samuel Delany describes witnessing

a performance piece – *Eighteen Happenings in Six Parts* – by US artist Allan Kaprow in a New York studio apartment in 1960 (1989, p. 110). Delany explains how the performance space was divided into six small chambers "by temporarily erected polyethene walls on unpainted wooden frames" (p. 111). The makeshift divisions meant he could only make "out the ghost of what was happening" in the chambers beside and across from him (p. 112). In the writer's section, the performance seemed to consist of "a small mechanical windup toy [set] to chatter and click around the floor", but the noises and movements from the other spaces gave a sense of "the work's unseen totality" (p. 112). Delany was disappointed by the performance. He expected the happenings would overlap to make "a rich, interconnected tapestry of occurrences and associations" (p. 114). However, the Kaprow performance embodied an unseen totality that provided the author with a useful analogy for the sexual subcultures of the 1950s and '60s.

Delany recounts his nerve-wracking experience of attending St Mark's Baths in New York City for the first time. On encountering a room of "maybe a hundred twenty-five" heaving naked bodies, he was seized by "a kind of heart-thudding astonishment, very close to fear" (p. 173). He experienced this vertiginous feeling before, when cruising the trucks, a space on Christopher Street near the piers where haulage drivers would leave their vehicles unlocked after unburdening them of their cargo. The tactical opportunity afforded by the dark and empty spaces was readily seized upon with "hundreds and hundreds of men having sex in the dark" (Escoffier, 2017, p. 103). One night, Delany was walking towards the trucks when he saw a group of policemen abruptly charge across the street, "blowing their whistles" (1989, p. 173). What shocked Delany was not the raid but the "sheer number of men" who fled from the vans; he estimated "as many as two hundred" erupted from the trucks into the night (p. 173). He states that:

> What the exodus from the trucks made graphically clear, what the orgy at the baths pictured with frightening range and reality, was a fact that flew in the face of that whole fifties image […] Whether male, female, working or middle class, the first direct sense of political power comes from the apprehension of massed bodies […] what this experience said was that there was a population—not of individual homosexuals, some of whom now and then encountered, or that those encounters could be human and fulfilling in their way—not of hundreds, not of thousands, but rather of millions of gay men, and that history had, actively and already, created for us whole galleries of institutions, good and bad, to accommodate our sex. Institutions such as subway johns or the trucks, while they accommodated sex, cut it, visibly, up into tiny portions. It was like Eighteen Happenings in Six Parts. No one ever got to see its whole.
> (p. 174)

Here, Delany notes how the fragmentary nature of cruising cultures – although necessary to protect them from disciplinary power – made it more difficult to see a queer totality and locate a "politically enabling whole" (Muñoz, 2009, p. 64).

In *Cruising Utopia,* Muñoz contextualises the passage from Delany's text in terms of moral panics relating to queer sexuality. He saw it as indicating the:

> […] need to map our repression, our fragmentation, and our alienation— the ways in which the state does not permit us to say "the whole" of our masses. It is also important to practice a criticism that enables us to cut through the institutional and legislative barriers that outlaw contact relations and obscure glimpses of the whole. These glimpses and moments of contact have a decidedly utopian function that permits us to imagine and potentially make a queer world.
> (2009, p. 55)

For Muñoz, it is vital to cut "through fragmenting darkness" to maintain contact with a politically vital queer totality (p. 64). However, from a contemporary standpoint, witnessing a host of sexual others when logging into the *Grindr* grid or the *Sniffies* map is not a revelatory encounter with a political whole, nor should it have to be.

Firstly, as Nishant Shahani points out, Muñoz's focus on a political whole ignores "how

Delany perversely eroticizes (and politicizes) the cutting up of collectivities" (2013, p. 548). As this chapter and the previous ones have demonstrated, there is pleasure and power in embracing opacity, self-subtraction and fragmentation. Secondly, the value that Delany and Muñoz accord to moving towards an understandable whole is a matter of socio-historical context. In Delany's case, the apprehension of a queer totality worked against an isolationist model of homosexuality. With Muñoz, Shahani notes that his "investment in the optimism of future wholeness" can be understood in terms of his aims to counter the social negativity of queer "antirelationality" (Shahani, 2013, p. 549). Recall, as well, how Jagose warnings on queer theory's tendency to cling to the "political potential of subcultural sexual practices" (2012, p. 188). In the face of the historical and contemporary denigration of queer sexual cultures, there is a desire for "our pleasure to do something, to be put to work" and to "be meaning-making" (Varghese, 2019, p. 1). Yet, this hunt for wholeness, for a greater meaning within queer sex, feeds into the machinations of sexuality.

Previous chapters have demonstrated how the *dispositif* of sexuality involves a centripetal turn inwards towards some essential inner truth. But, as this chapter's focus on the digital turn demonstrates, the lines of power associated with sexual discourses can also spin centrifugally outwards. Sex contains not only hidden personal truths but expansive meanings relating to intimacy, tradition and political power. Dean Sameshima's *Numbers* painting offers a way to think beyond the queer quest for wholeness and the search for wider cultural meaning. In the painting, each dot is a sexual subject, and each line is a connection between two individuals. If you completed the entire series, you would be left with a synecdochal image: the finished work is a sex act; it remains a union between two sexual subjects. While these promiscuous contacts might bristle with queer potentiality and be subject to connective overflows, in the painting, sex does not signify a greater social or political meaning. The painting embodies the autotelic dimensions of

sex: its focus is on the pleasure one takes in engaging with another body and the potentialities and overflows nascent to that connection. Thus, we see how Sameshima's painting allows us to think beyond the hauntological dimensions of queer sex, unburdening it from the pasts and futures it is forced to carry.

5.4 Synthesis

This chapter explores the impact of the digital turn on discourses relating to cruising cultures. The rise of the technological object sparks anxious concerns relating to the demise of tradition, community and authentic sexual sociability. A narrative of decline emerges that blames digital cruisers for decimating the institutions of public sex with "[their] typing fingers" (Roach, 2021, p. 46). Aside from being inaccurate, this mournful approach to the 'dying art' of cruising forges a phantasmatic relationship with the sexual past. Traditional cruising is flattened into an ideal image embodying ethical contact and a copacetic community. This phantasmatic ideal is a hauntological construct that clashes discordantly with contemporary digital practices, which emerge as addictive, alienating and guided by market forces.

This chapter deidealises the unmediated past as a site of authentic sociality and *deperilises* apocalyptic accounts of a socially bankrupt cruising present. In doing so, it highlights how technophobic perspectives can amplify neuroessentialist discourses on sex addiction and shore up homo/heteronormative conceptions of intimacy. In adopting a *deperilising* approach to the technological object, the chapter stresses the continuities between analogue and virtual cruising cultures. After all, as Roach states, the outcome of analogue and virtual cruising is "generally the same: connection, hooking up" (2021, p. 126). Cruising apps have not destroyed the sense of chance and opportunity inherent to traditional practices; they have remediated it. The virtual realm

can brim with the same bristling queer potentiality experienced in a physical space, like a nighttime park or a dim bathhouse corridor.

The digital affordances offered by cruising apps – the ability to promote oneself and filter according to one's desires – generate depersonalising sexual marketplaces. As this chapter demonstrates, in contrast to *perilising* discourses on the death of authentic relating, this impersonal sociability has always been a feature of cruising culture. All cruising spaces, virtual or physical, are market devices that frame encounters as anonymous. While these interactions might be interobjective, this does not mean they are uniquely dehumanising or ethically valuable. These connections can be subject to overflows and can enable new experiences and becomings.

Discourses on sexuality often focus on its subjectivising dimensions, namely its connection to ideas of truth and self-management. This chapter demonstrates how anxious discourses that critique the imbrication of technology with cruising cultures allow the *dispositif* of sexuality to spin centrifugally outwards. Online sex is overburdened with significance and meaning; it heralds the death of intimacy, tradition and queer futurity. However, by *deperilising* digital cruising, this chapter releases queer sex from the hauntological demands issued by idealised pasts and hopeful futures.

6. Conclusion

By examining cruising-related artworks from the past fifteen years, *Haunted Sex* explicated how contemporary cruising discourses are influenced by spectral pasts and forestalled futures. Following on from the work of Annamarie Jagose (2012) and Kadji Amin (2017), it explored how the historical abjection of queer sex exerts a hauntological gravity on the present. Queer sex is subject to a discursive frenzy: it is simultaneously denigrated as something dangerous in need of

control and aggrandised as virtuous, politically generative or radical. These processes of *perilisation* and idealisation overburden queer sex with agency and meaning, trapping it within a moral hierarchy in the process. This research project worked to deidealise and *deperilise* cruising discourses, thereby freeing queer sex from the theoretical bind of a *Rubinesque* value system.

Amin explains that adopting a deidealising approach means viewing "queer possibility as inextricable from relations of power, queer deviance as intertwined with normativity" and acknowledging how "complicity is sometimes necessary for survival" (2017, p. 10). Therefore, instead of looking at how queer sex operates in bold resistance to social power, this PhD concentrated on the queer impurities – the *eidolontological* sticking points – within contemporary discourses on cruisy sex. Each chapter explored elements of cruising cultures that elicited discomfort and unease: forgetting and unknowability over memorialisation and probative documentation, compulsion and subsistence over intentionalist action, opacity over visibility, interobjectivity and depersonalisation over 'authentic' forms of relating.

Chapter 1 began with an analysis of the *abjectifying* dimensions of historical and contemporary sex panics relating to cruising. It demonstrated how the abjection of queer sexuality operates as a socially productive force, one that affirms the borders of a heterosexist public realm, heteronormative propriety and gay homonormative identity. By examining the progress narratives evident in Skylar Baker Jordan's Pride article and Matthew Todd's *Straight Jacket,* the chapter highlighted how homonormativity views cruising as an embarrassing anachronism signifying the ignominies of an oppressive past. Queer sex is delimited to the private realms of one's personal life or the domestic sphere, a rhetorical position that bolsters the normalising and privatising demands of neoliberal respectability politics.

The second portion of Chapter 1 focused on queer theory's relationship to sex as an object of reparative interest. It illustrated how the historical abjection of queer sexuality inspires a reactive impulse to exceptionalise non-normative sexual practices as more ethical, politically generative or radical than normative ones. Where homonormative discourses position cruisy sex as a relic of the past, queer sexual ideality politics places it in the future. Dwelling in a speculative realm of ethicopolitical possibility – where the focus is exclusively on the *possibility* of a queerer, better world – non-normative sex is insulated from denigratory discourses that view it as destructive or immoral. But the defensive idealisation of queer sex tends to obscure any "impurities" that might sully its association with bold intentionality, novelty and ethicopolitical generativity (Amin, 2017, p. 175). By exploring *perilising* and idealising perspectives on cruisy sex, the chapter outlines how these conflictual homonormative/queer discourses continue the investment in "the agency of sex" (Foucault, 1978, p. 157). Exceptionalising queer sex as a positive or negative force places it outside of the historical present, flattening it into a monolithic force capable of realising dystopia or utopia.

The chapter concluded by introducing the PhD project's *eidolontological* mode of analysis. This approach offered a novel way of investigating how cultural ideals relating to sex – homonormative, queer, neoliberal – are informed by anxieties about the past and hopes for a better future. It represents a valuable addition to queer sexuality and memory studies scholarship, one that frees non-normative sex from processes of *perilisation* and idealisation. While I believe this critical approach will continue to offer a valuable way of analysing queer culture's relationship to sex, I also see the usefulness of this form of cultural critique outside of sexuality studies. In the context of my current sociohistorical situation, I believe that an analysis of the rise of ethnonationalism in the Republic of Ireland would benefit from examining how discourses relating to the past are used to cultivate an ethnically pure, heterosexist ideal of what constitutes a 'true'

Irish identity.

Chapter 2 examined how cruising pasts are preserved and remembered. It began by exploring the queer reparative memory texts *If Memory Serves* and *Beyond Shame*, two books animated by melancholia in the wake of the AIDS crisis. There was a potent sense that a vital part of queer culture was being erased with the pivot towards homonormative unremembering. This discourse of a lost sexual past issued a ghostly imperative to preserve and memorialise these seemingly defunct cruising cultures. However, this desire to heal a wound in queer cultural memory had conservative outcomes. The texts in question adopted a selective approach to memory, constricting their reparative focus around affirmative, phantasmatic ideal images of identitarian and masculinist sexual communities. This restorative nostalgia and melancholic ideality did not treat the queer past as something living. Instead, the texts dealt with frozen, ideal images of a masculinist identitarian community.

In its *eidolontological* analysis of archival cruising artworks, the chapter's second section compared the work of Marc Martin to that of Prem Sahib. In their reflective approach to preserving the remains of past cruising cultures, both artists exhibited a disquiet with selective memorialisation processes. Martin's exhibition *Les Tasses* offered a potent critique of sanitising, homonormative approaches to the sexual past. His archival artworks foregrounded the multidirectionality of memory and the inherent liminality of the public toilet as a cruising ground; these could be spaces of freedom and restriction permeated with excitement and fear. However, in examining the artist's creative reimagining of these spaces, the chapter revealed how melancholic ideality can forge images that are "ripe for identification" (Dean, 2009, p. 20). That is, Martin's creative phantasies cohered around a familiar ideal image of white, masculine gay sexuality.

Conversely, Sahib's reflective nostalgia embraced his ambivalent feelings about exclusionary sex clubs. While his art undoubtedly sought to preserve these disappearing sexual spaces, the artist deidealised them as zones of easy sexual communion across lines of difference. Instead, Sahib foregrounded how gay cruising clubs – in weaving a narrative of inheritance between Greco-Roman antiquity and homosexual identity through their architecture – created spaces centred around whiteness.

The final section of Chapter 2 explored artists who responded to the absence and darkness within the cruising archive, beginning with William E. Jones's found object piece, *Tearoom*. By foregrounding how the piece continued to function as a probative document of a hidden piece of gay history, the chapter isolated how forays into the cruising past can recreate the epistemological drive of *Scientia Sexualis* and the probing dynamics of surveillance. It explored the dangers of hunting through history for coherent identities that tally with our knowledge and needs in the present. This colonising approach to the past can obscure and inhume queer lives in our bid to lay "to rest troubling uncertainties" in the historical record (Freccero, 2006, p. 73). By contrasting the necrological approach of *Tearoom* to the queer spectrality apparent in Danny Jauregui's *Watchqueen,* the chapter demonstrated the value of embracing unknowability over hard evidence in our attempts to preserve the cruising past.

Finally, the chapter turned to artists who embraced critical fabulation in their response to archival darkness and lack. Drawing on the work of Cindy Baker, Danny Jauregui and Lyónn Wolf-Haugh, it showed how the archival void can crackle with the potentiality of unseen queer lives. Whereas *Tearoom* exposed the tension between preserving cruising cultures and exposing them to the insistent demands of power/knowledge, the queer spectrality of these archival hole histories

offered us a utopic image of queer life "that both was and never was, that has been lost and is still to come" (Muñoz, 2009, pp. 37–38). The chapter concludes that, although hybrid hole history might run counter to the imperative to document and preserve the queer past, they nonetheless offer us a way to work through feelings of historical lack without ossifying it into something that reifies what we know in the present. In exploring the critical dimensions of melancholia and fabulation – how they address issues and absences within the canon and historical record – this chapter offered a new perspective on processes of queer remembrance and preservation by addressing how hegemonies and hierarchies can be conserved through cultural memory.

Chapter 3 explored the imbrication of cruising with contemporary discourses on sexual risk, health promotion and addiction. Its two case studies – *Alien Sex Club* and *Straight Jacket* – were reflective of a transitionary period in queer sexual culture as data on the effectivity of PrEP and antiretrovirals in the prevention and treatment of HIV instigated a shift in how sexual health was discussed and managed. In comparing its case studies, the chapter demonstrated the viral hauntologies at play within contemporary discourses on cruising. Both works exploited the hauntological dimensions of queer sex: they tapped into the "affective sedimentations" leftover from the AIDS crisis to foment re-crises concerning queer promiscuity (Møller and Ledin, 2021, p. 153). They deployed the *abjectifying* scare tactics of historical sex panics to cast the cruiser as a panic icon signifying disease, death and doom. Within these case studies, the abject figure of the cruiser was used to outline the borders of a new sexual subject: the biopolitically docile neoliberal actor who makes risk-averse sexual decisions for the good of themselves, the public and the state. The spectral future of the good gay life also proved to be a potent regulatory force for managing the behaviour of queer sexual subjects. Centripetal processes of self-assessment and self-avowal – which strive to lay bare and diagnose the traumas and problems within the psyche, behaviour and

culture of queer people – were presented as the sole route to a better, happier future.

The forms of sexual peril politics explored in Chapter 3 reinvigorated the fear and distrust associated with the early years of the AIDS pandemic to affirm both neoliberal governmentality and homonormativity. Yet, in binding cruisy sex to "the domino theory of sexual peril" (Rubin, 1984, p. 282) and a neuroessentialist form of sex negativity, these discourses resurrected older spectres haunting queer sexuality. The chapter exposed how the figures of the leper, the mad deviant and the pathological pervert all ghost through medicalised discourses on cruising as an addiction. Casting cruisers as hapless victims in the face of their neurochemical compulsions re-pathologised and silenced them as abject figures of unreason and antiwill. They were divested of the power to authorise their own actions and experiences; that responsibility was returned to medical and psychological experts.

The final section of the chapter introduced Sedgwick's work on addiction and the cultural obsession with an impossible "space of pure voluntarity" (1994, p. 132). The forms of sexual peril politics explored in the chapter positioned sex as a dangerous adulterant to one's sovereignty as a rational subject; it was always in danger of spiralling outwards into addiction. However, the chapter *deperilised* these discursive approaches to sex as a dangerous agentic force by deconstructing the binary between will/antiwill. Rather than being solely a matter of bold intentionality or dangerous compulsion, sex can involve "lateral" or "interruptive agency" (Berlant, 2007, p. 759, 779). By concentrating on the phenomenological dimensions of sex – how it can be grounded in subsistence in the present –, it unlinked queer sex from the future-oriented teleologies of the good life. Therefore, in tilting the focus away from the spectral pasts and futures haunting queer sex, the chapter disrupted the "frenzied epic of displacement in the discourse on

sexuality" (Bersani, 1987, p. 220).

In addressing cruising-as-addiction discourses through a Foucauldian lens, the chapter charted a path for further academic enquiry into other contemporary sex-negative discourses. For example, the anti-masturbatory NoFap communities associated with the manosphere (Hartmann, 2021). The forms of sex negativity evident in these groups – where bodily pleasure is connected to self-mastery and control (Garlick, 2014) – is centred on a Foucauldian technology of the self that is more representative of ancient forms of askesis than the Christian asceticism explored in this body of research.

Chapter 4 examined how the spectre of closeted abjection ghosts through contemporary discourses on visibility and secrecy. It began by exploring restrictive progress narratives that overlay the coming out process. No longer a personal act, political discourses on coming out accorded queer publicity the reparative power to combat homophobic oppression and forge a better world. In contradistinction to the discursive idealisation of queer visibility, the chapter pinpointed how visibility can operate as a trap that opens queer subjects to biopolitical regulation, capitalistic exploitation and violence. The chapter deidealised reparative visibility politics and *deperilised* the closet space's position as a hauntological spatiotemporal construct through an *eidolontological* analysis of its case studies.

The first case study was Dries Verhoeven's *Grindr*-focused artwork, which viewed app usage as closet recidivism and a dangerous retreat into shameful secrecy. By foregrounding the counterpublic nature of the virtual cruising ground and its associated hybridisation of the public/private and the real/virtual, the chapter *deperilised Grindr* as a retreat into a privatised, discrete realm. By drawing on antecedent digital cruising spaces – *Minitel* and the cybercottage –

the chapter highlighted the pleasure and safety that can come from being within the epistemological borders of a secret. It concluded that virtual cruising spaces are more like an adjacent room than a closet as they can provide subjects space to flex, move and become within constricting discourses of sexuality.

The chapter's second case study – John Walter's critique of 'straight-acting' queer art – exposed how concerns around queer invisibility, silence and passivity are connected to ideas of legibility. Queers have long been exposed to the probing effects of power/knowledge and the homographetic impulse to read, understand and categorise their bodies. By applying the concept of opacity to the work of Prem Sahib and Zach Blas, the chapter pinpointed how cruising functions as a technology of communication and escape. In embracing (in)visibility and (il)legibility, they offer us ways of "being seen without being known" and a respite from biopolitical regulatory regimes and power/knowledge (Stanley, 2021, p. 87). Like in Chapter 2, where I explored the value of archival voids and darkness, the chapter concludes by delving into the chthonic visuality of cruising cultures: how they have dwelled and thrived in epistemological darkness and night visibility.

Lastly. in problematising the threads of power/knowledge that innervate contemporary discourses on queer visibility and the closet, the chapter offers a new analytical approach to emerging discussions on 'queer-baiting'. This term originated as a way to describe approaches to the deployment of queerness in media representations and advertising, but it is increasingly used to critique celebrity figures who seem to court a queer audience without claiming a public LGBTQ+ identity (McDermott, 2021). Just like the forms of reparative hypervisibility politics explored in this body of research, queer-baiting discourses have forced several public figures out

of the closet against their will (Paul, 2023). This chapter's *deperilising* approach to the closet as a space of tactical opacity could offer a way to interpret and theorise contemporary queer-baiting discourses.

Chapter 5 examined how the rise of the technological object is an *eidolontological* sticking point in queer culture, one that generates a host of *perilising* discourses on the demise of tradition, intimacy and queer spaces. The first section introduced the *Cottweiler* fashion show, which mourned the lost art of cruising. Analysis of the case study demonstrated how a melancholic attachment to a phantasmatic, ideal image of an unmediated sexual past generated a narrative of decline which blamed virtual intimacies for the erosion of 'real' and authentic forms of relating. Although Leo Herrera's text *(analogue) Cruising* offered a more nuanced approach to apps like *Grindr*, the writer still created a similar narrative of decline in his assertion that digital cruising had destroyed the tradition of easy, copacetic communion associated with physical cruising spaces. In both these case studies, the cruising past is frozen into an ideal image against which the technological present is found to be sorely lacking. In casting the technological object as an alienating object, these discourses shored up associations of virtuality with the unnatural: online cruising was loaded with the language of addiction, neuroessentialism and the abject figure of the cultural dope.

The second section of the chapter used the work of artists Stuart Sandford and Dries Verhoeven, as well as the writing of Tim Dean, to demonstrate how nostalgia for traditional cruising practices can shore up normative conceptions of intimacy and a hierarchy of ethical sexual practices. By drawing on Leo Bersani and Michel Callon's writings on cruising and market transactions, the chapter *deperilised* the association of digital cruising with self-commodification

and depersonalisation. It attested that cruising has always been a matter of self-subtraction and interobjectivity, and while these encounters might be framed as impersonal, these interactions can be subject to interpersonal overflow.

Finally, the chapter pinpointed how anxious discourses on contemporary digital cruising cultures tend to mourn the aleatory nature of traditional practices. There is a sense that a culture of chance and opportunity has been lost in the pivot towards virtual modes of interaction. Yet, in comparing the art of Dean Sameshima to the *Sniffies* cruising map, the chapter showed how feelings of abundance and potentiality continue to permeate this digital space. Through a reading of Kathryn Bond Stockton's (2009) work on queer childhoods, Castiglia and Reed insist that memory can "enlarge the present" by enriching it with the feelings and pleasures of the past (2012, pp. 12–13). While this research project took a critical approach to theoretical perspectives that defensively marry sex to utopian ideality and the hopes of the good life, the closing section of Chapter 6 revealed how feelings of abundance and potentiality can, like memory, enrich the present. Muñoz states, "Straight time tells us that there is no future but the here and now of our everyday life" (2009, p. 22). But the inchoate feelings of abundance and opportunity that cruising cultures engender – although not inherently political or productive – offer us ways to "see and feel beyond the quagmire of the present" (p. 1). They are "forward-dawning" feelings that carry glimmers of futurity into the present to break open the stultifying "prison house" of "the here and now" (p. 1).

I have been careful to warn against totalising public sex into a transhistorical, culturally unified practice. However, a limitation of this project was its expansive, culture-level approach to cruising. Further research is undoubtedly required on the material dimensions of sociohistorically

specific cruising cultures. For example, Irish artist Eimear Walshe's performance videos – *The Land Question* (2020) and *Land Cruiser* (2022) – deploy public sex as a way of exploring the "legal and historical threads" that run through the current Irish housing crisis (Fite-Wassilak, 2023, para. 1). They constitute the contemporary issue of housing as "an intimacy problem", one that forces Irish people to ask, "Where the fuck am I supposed to have sex" (2023, para. 1). In an essay on the impact of rentier-capitalism on queer sociality, Tom Ward notes that in the UK and Ireland, the neoliberal financialisation of the housing market means that more queer people are "living with parents" or have to "house-share, often not with friends" (2022, p. 107). Likewise, McCann notes in *Park Cruising* that, in the context of Toronto's high rental and housing prices, the public park emerges as a viable alternative when "three people have to share a one bedroom plus condo where the second and third person's bedroom is an open space that would ordinarily be a den or a breakfast nook" (2023, p. 9). This contemporary form of "queer proletarianization" echoes historical accounts of public sex (Ward, 2022, p. 105). Historian George Chauncey notes that in the 1930s/40s in New York, the men who turned to public bathrooms for sex were "relatively poor" with "little access to other kinds of private space" (Chauncey, 1995, p. 198). Likewise, Steven Maynard's historical enquiry on the policing of public sex in early twentieth-century Toronto notes that "for both lower-middle-class and working-class men the presence of a landlady or […] a crowded working-class household meant that sex often had to be found outside the confines of the household, in the lanes and lavatories" (Maynard, 1994, p. 217). Therefore, further research is undoubtedly required into the socioeconomic dimensions of cruising cultures.

Finally, in *Cruising Utopia*, Muñoz wrote that he saw "an unlimited potentiality in actual queer sex" and argued that public sex cultures held the blueprints for "living sexual citizenship" (2009, p. 18, 35). However, the academic revised his sexual ideality politics in his contribution to

the collaborative art book project *Petite Mort: Recollections of a Queer Public* (2011). Devised as "an atlas of queer affection" by artist Carlos Motta and scholar Joshua Lubin-Levy, *Petite Mort* brought together an intergenerational group of over sixty contributors who submitted drawings from memory of their public sex experiences in New York City (Motta and Lubin-Levy, 2011, p. 7). *Petite Mort* also contained a series of short written pieces from twelve queer academics and writers – including John Paul Ricco, Kate Bornstein, and Jose Esteban Muñoz – who were asked to give a short response to the question Does Public Sex Matter?. In Muñoz's contribution, he admitted that his previous writing on public sex had been "too celebratory, too ecstatic" (2011, p. 155). He was unsure of the worth of casting "the bright light of publicity" on public sex, given it often emphasised an idealised image of a "liberated gay man" who boldly challenged hetero/homonormativity with each sexual act (p. 155). Instead, Muñoz insisted that:

> The time has come to understand public sex as an unshareable thing that queers manage to share. But the sharing needs to resist the impulse towards ecstatic celebration, romantic remembrance, and spectacle. Maybe it's enough to know public sex simply matters and to practice resisting the impulse to pull it apart and put it on display. Let us be content to share the fact of the unshareable.
> (p. 155)

In stating that it might be "enough to know public sex simply matters", Muñoz emphasises the importance of phenomenological experience and personal feeling in the domain of queer sex. This sentiment resonates with the findings of this research project.

Queer sexual subcultures have been interrogated and undermined through state-mandated homophobia, medical taxonomies, theories of deviance, and neoliberal-informed arguments on sexual excess. Understandably, the impact of these fraught histories and denigrating discourses generates an imperative to preserve and defend unfairly vilified sexual practices. However, queer

people have already spent far too long confessing and defending their desires. This PhD argues that there is a self-determining power in refusing to qualify them within a hierarchy of good and bad behaviours, in refusing to provide evidence of their generative value. It is enough to say that cruising matters because it feels like it matters. It can feel like a revelatory moment of rupture and relief, like an opening into a parallel realm that glitters with feeling, potentiality and desire. While we cannot fuck our way into a better future, sex can enrich the present and fracture the bounds of the here and now. Although not inherently political or radical, these coruscations of potentiality can feel vital. They can feel like hope itself.

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