Copyright

by

Shaka Paul McGlotten

2005
The Dissertation Committee for Shaka Paul McGlotten certifies that this is the approved version of the following dissertation:

Queerspaces and Sexpublics: Desire, Death, and Transfiguration

Committee:

_____________________________
Kathleen Stewart, Supervisor

_____________________________
Edmund T. Gordon

_____________________________
John Hartigan

_____________________________
Neville Hoad

_____________________________
Katya Gibel Azoulay
Queerspaces and Sexpublics: Desire, Death, and Transfiguration

by

Shaka Paul McGlotten, B.A.; M.A.

Dissertation

Presented to the Faculty of the Graduate School of

the University of Texas at Austin

in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements

for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

The University of Texas at Austin

May 2005
For

those I have loved and lost and loved

the wild ones

the lost ones

and the dangerous bordercrossers
Queerspaces and Sexpublics: Desire, Death, and Transfiguration

Publication No.___________

Shaka Paul McGlotten, Ph.D.
The University of Texas at Austin, 2005

Supervisor: Kathleen Stewart

The dissertation brings together queer theory, oral histories, poetics, and autoethnography to track queerspaces and sexpublics indirectly and from multiple angles through stories about sex, race, spaces, publics, addictions, fantasies, and violence. Queerspaces and sexpublics emerge as real, virtual, and affective sites and circulations that accrete and produce same-sex desires and practices. Based on five years of ethnographic research conducted among queer men in Austin, Texas and via the Internet,
Queerspaces and Sexpublics argues that fears about the HIV/AIDS pandemic, Texas anti-sodomy laws, and urban redevelopment efforts which hoped to refigure Austin as a high technology center, a “Silicon Valley of the Southwest,” pressured queerspaces out of public spaces and into commercial and/or virtual private spaces.

Insofar as the project looks to the ways virtual worlds impact and are impacted by same-sex identifications, institutions, practices, and politics, it makes a case for the cultural importance and ethnographic use of the Internet. Queerspaces and Sexpublics looks in particular to the ways virtual queerspaces are linked to the spread of HIV/AIDS and other STDs, to the complex ways race articulates with desire in chatrooms and personal ads, and to the ways online queerspaces reflect broader processes of the commodification of queer lives and cultures.

In addition to archiving real and virtual spaces, the dissertation also tackles an altogether more ephemeral archive: an archive of feelings. Queerspaces and Sexpublics thus brings ethnographic practice into dialogue with contemporary feminist and queer theories that trace the ways passionate feelings trouble the lines of public and private cultures and the taxonomic divisions—of sex, class, and race, among others—these lines enable. The dissertation therefore attends to the intimate feelings of love, loss, mourning, melancholia, desire, and death that constitute and emanate from queerspaces and sexpublics and that circulate in ways that are simultaneously public, private, and intimate. The value of such an effort is not determined by its ability to fix intimate feelings of desire in particular times or places. Instead, the value of Queerspaces and Sexpublics lies in its willingness to dwell in the question of desire itself, in desire’s unstable and mysterious intensity.
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Introduction: Reading and Writing “Queer”</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter One: An Anthropologist’s Risky Wanderings</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter Two: A Brief and Improper History of Queerspaces and Sexpublics in Austin</td>
<td>36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter Three: Virtual Intimacies</td>
<td>69</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter Four: The Hard Work of Mourning</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter Five: I Wonder if You</td>
<td>132</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conclusion</td>
<td>180</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Works Cited</td>
<td>184</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vita</td>
<td>196</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Introduction: Weak Theories, Reading and Writing Queer

One is on the lookout for symptoms of deeper, sociological facts, one suspects many hidden and mysterious ethnographic phenomena behind the commonplace aspect of things. Perhaps that queer-looking intelligent native is a renowned sorcerer (Malinowski 1922: 51).

This dissertation articulates a critical and creative praxis whose methods, theories, and objects are each in their own way, “queer.” My use of “queer,” however, does not represent a valorization of sexual identities or politics. Instead, I use queer to describe sexual spaces, publics, affects, and practices. Above all, I use queer as a conceptual tool designed to open rather than close off investigations of the horizons and limits of social experience.1

In “Paranoid Reading and Reparative Reading; or, You’re so Paranoid, You Probably Think This Introduction is about You,” Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick (1997), with signature grace, traces the increasingly structural taken-for-grantedness of paranoia as a mode of critical reading and knowing. While recognizing the importance of “methodological suspicion,” she suggests that queer projects can work to “show how the reservoir of practices exceeds the theorizations of a consensual hermeneutic of suspicion” (Sedgwick 1997: 3).

Paranoid readings, Sedgwick argues, represent only one epistemological and narrative mode among others. Always already on the defensive, expecting the worst, paranoia (like melancholy) seeps in and through the past, present, and future. Following

---

1 While “queer theory” is often understood as being “just about sex,” I believe the opposite is true. Most “queer theory” queers established theories, it reads them against the grain, in odd or unusual ways; Judith Butler’s (1990, 1993) work, for instance, isn’t about sexual practices, but about queering philosophical traditions that naturalize the sex/gender binary.
Sedgwick, I believe the danger in paranoid readings lie in their “seeming faith in exposure” as the privileged critical model for truth-telling and truth-making (Sedgwick 1997: 17, my italics).

The paranoid consensus in much contemporary cultural theory reinforces the “infertile edge” between doing, and the meaning of doing (Sarah Williams 1993: 70). Overdetermined by structuration and programming, meanings or intentions are always suspect; and it is the critic’s hopeless task to expose the social construction of everything, from violent horrors to his own feelings of abjection. For Sedgwick, however, there already exists alternative critical models they embody and offer, models for queer readings that Sedgwick calls “reparative.” Reparative readings distinguish themselves not only because they do not follow standardized academic trends, but because ethics, care, and love motivate and shape their critical projects.

For me, Sedgwick’s essay, and much of her recent work, can be situated within a broader genealogy of “risky” political, poetic, and passionate work, including Donna Haraway's (1991) theorizations of cyborg and situated knowledges, the late Gloria Anzaldua’s (1999) stories about the mestiza traveling in and crossing over borderlands, and the work by feminists of color and others who have engaged in ongoing critiques of theories and practices that continue to reproduce the subjective, emotive, and affective as irrational (Lorde 1982, 1984a, 1984b; Moraga 1983; Trinh 1989). But I do not want to say that these works have simply resisted, challenged or exposed the phallogenocentrism that is as pervasive in intellectual practices as in the broader culture, because I think their continued importance for intellectual and political work rests not so much in their “strong theories” of womanism, racism, patriarchy, or homophobia (hooks 1994, 1995), but in the
ways that the best of these works’ speculative character and focus on affect have opened spaces for alternative epistemologies that include feelings of empathy and passion; this is a far step from being a cultural relativist.

Within anthropology, paranoid theories might be situated within the “reflexive” turn of the 1980s and 90s, wherein anthropologists acknowledged the problem of the postmodern and responded, not so much by creating more subjective or personal projects, but largely by marking their own privileged positions of power, and the larger context in which anthropology functioned, alongside psychology and sociology, to mark and spatialize colonial and, later, postcolonial or subaltern subjects (Clifford 1986; Fox 1991; Geertz 1973).

In a debate with the Marxist historical anthropologists Mintz and Price, Taussig (1989) offers an early example of the reflexive mode of truth-telling as exposure, one inspired by the semiotician Roland Barthes. In his critique of Mintz and Price, Taussig says, “our thought is exposed to itself as a process of escalating self-criticism in which self-consciousness finally establishes itself in the realm of the concrete phenomena that initiated our inquiry” (Taussig 1989:7). For whom and for what this necessary, even essential, disclosure? In many instances, and perhaps especially within the academy, I would suggest that this abject self-sacrifice is paradoxically the very function and effect of the desire for legitimating authority. In this way, then, the reflexive move is not undermined by admissions of slipperiness, or through bad faith confessions of subjectivity and unfortunate exclusions; the text’s authority is in fact reinforced. It is particular and not universal, but in its particularity, as for instance in the representative figure, its truth-value is unquestionable. So what are we left with? An identity politics
haunted by the fact that “representation” isn’t the same thing as “recognition”? or essentialism? or a confession of guilt or doubt that does not and can absolve responsibility for ethical action? At one point, I would have asked of this mode of criticism, “so, where does this leave real bodies?” Read: “where does this leave the Other?” But increasingly, as my research in and on queerspaces, sex, and intimacy in Austin progressed, I began to dwell less on trying to locate the abstracted body of the Other, a move which only reproduces essentialist notions that bodies are more real than things like cognition or affect, than on trying to produce a work that looked at experience more holistically, in its embodied, cognitive, and affective registers. Contrasted with most paranoid readings, this latter effort to produce holistic renderings of experiences, including importantly my own experiences, is a mode of scholarly production that shares with aesthetics an attention to the synaesthetic, to the ways experiences are always a mixing of the embodied, intellectual, and spiritual senses.

Sedgwick’s perspective resonates strongly with me insofar as my critical methods theories, and practices have increasingly become what my friend Neville Hoad calls “ill disciplined.” Briefly, this means that while I am trained in strong theoretical models of race, gender and sexuality, I have increasingly come to recognize the importance and value of “weak theory.” My growing discomfort with standard and structural academic models—with paranoid reading, that is—and greater appreciation for weak theory, is reflected in the production of this dissertation. Weak theory has allowed me to focus less on trying to get at the truth or on trying to structurally map standard academic theories onto my project. Above all, my swerving away from strong toward weak theory has emerged from the process and content of my ethnography.
I have learned that ethnographic work is demanding not because it so often resists structuration, but because listening, especially to stories of trauma, loss or unrequited desire, is tremendously difficult. Being responsible to those who have shared their memories, desires, and fears has meant acknowledging not only the feelings various ethnographic and/or aesthetic projects generated in me--the reflexive move: It made me feel bad for them, or lucky that I wasn’t as fucked up as them--but also that to do justice to intense feelings of desire and mourning that others transmitted to me meant getting comfortable that the truth is multivalent and ambivalent, like all good stories. Simply described, this has meant a shift in my intellectual work away from a critical gaze that tries to expose the hidden or secret meanings and toward a type of reading and making concerned with doing and feeling: What does it mean, or what does it do and how does it feel? The works that make up this dissertation will gesture, I hope, more toward the latter, toward a speculative tracing of everyday effects and affects.

Overview of Chapters:

In differing ways, each of the chapters grapples with both queerspaces and sexpublics. Queerspaces are spaces that accrete same sex-desires and practices, as well as the regulatory and managerial gazes of the law and public opinion. Queerspaces are publics mediated by sex (Berlant and Warner 2000). Queerspaces and sexpublics are not always easily localizable, that is, they are not always physical spaces. Throughout the dissertation, my discussions of queerspaces and sexpublics trace the ways they are, often simultaneously, material, virtual, and affective. But there’s another bleed as well, namely the ways themes of desire, death, and transfiguration also constitute and emanate from queerspaces and sexpublics.
In Chapter One, I situate the dissertation in a broader genealogy of intellectual work about sex, sexuality, anthropology, and the public sphere. I bring together discussions by gay and lesbian anthropologists about the silences within the discipline about sex, subjectivity, and fieldwork with other works that map out cartographies of desire. This literature review marks the ways queerspaces and sexpublics circulate in ways that are simultaneously public, private, and intimate. This chapter establishes desire and sex as fields in themselves, fields with which I grapple in the chapters that follow.

Chapter Two elaborates the notion of queerspace and situates it within Austin’s particular history as a city famous for its public sex scene and the subsequent and recent disappearance of queerspaces from Austin’s public sphere. Rather than offer a linear narrative about the beginning and end of queerspaces and sexpublics in Austin, the chapter moves in and out of various historical and intimate registers and draws on both newspaper archives and the memories of public cruisers. Hence, it is not an exhaustive archaeology of local queerspaces and sexpublics, but a “brief and improper history.” The chapter argues that a combination of moral scapegoating, fears about HIV/AIDS, and economic development efforts pressured local queerspaces in Austin out of public view (a process reflected and repeated throughout the United States during the 1990s). In particular, Chapter Two juxtaposes the arrest of more than 200 Austin men in a year long series of stings and the concurrent public debates about queer sex in public places, with the stories of local gay men that figure local queer sex publics in nostalgic and even utopic terms. Contrary to the claims of a local newspaper editorial, the chapter argues that the crackdown on sex in public had less to do with cracking down on illegal behavior that threatened the public health, than with trying to manage what constituted the appropriate
use of public spaces. Finally, the chapter notes a few of the ways HIV/AIDS impacted local queerspaces, and drawing on the responses of men who lost friends and lovers to the virus, tries to expand what might count as activism in response to the epidemic.

At the same time that queerspaces were disappeared from public view, they reemerge in cyberspace. Virtual queerspaces, I argue in Chapter Three, provide new contexts for the expression of queer desires and new ways to contact and interact with other queers, whether through websites, personal ads, pornography, or increasingly and most dramatically, through real time chat technologies such as Instant messaging and spaces like gay.com. At the same time that online queer publics offered a kind of freedom from the legal trouble and moral shame that increasingly accreted to queerspaces and sexpublics in the public sphere, online queerspaces also reproduced many of the problems of everyday queer life worlds. But virtual queerspaces aren’t “just virtual.” Indeed, throughout the chapter, I suggest that virtual, real, and intimate lives bleed into one another. “Virtual Intimacies” looks to the ways virtual queerspaces have been part of the process of commodification of queer life worlds, to the complex ways race and racism articulate with desire in chatrooms and personal ads, and to the ways virtual queerspaces have effected a transformation in intimacy itself. This latter process begs the question of whether intimacy itself isn’t a bit virtual.

Chapter Four represents an example of virtual ethnography insofar as all of the research was conducted via cyberspace. The chapter engages in close reading of various discourses surrounding the 2000 murder of J.R. Warren, a young gay black man in West Virginia, by two young white men. In the chapter, I draw on close readings of Rene Girard and Michael Taussig to think about the ways violence, secrecy, and publicity work
together in the war of discourses that try to lay claim to J.R. Warren’s defaced body. I look to the ways the murder entered into public discourse as a means to advance the case for increased hate crimes legislation. My reading, however, suggests the framing of the case in terms of hate obscures a more subtle reading of the case in terms of passions gone awry and the work of mourning Warren’s murder engendered.

In the last chapter, “I wonder if you,” I offer intimate speculations and scenes from my wanderings in queerspaces and sexpublics. This is the chapter is the most sexually explicit, and it marks some of the risks I encountered in my time in the fields of sex and desire. Indeed, in this chapter, desire runs amok in stories about sex, drugs, and of mourning transfigured into melancholia. Culled from my own experiences and the experiences of others, Chapter Five incorporates a variety of stylistic voices. Academic writing, poetry, memoir, and storytelling all come together in provocative tales from queerspaces of feeling, those inner states that bleed into and between intimate relationships and public worlds. The chapter works as a record of emerging and transfiguring consciousness.
Chapter One:
An Anthropologist’s Risky Wanderings

“Erfahrung,” Miriam Hansen reminds us in her “Foreword” to Negt and Kluge’s (1993) Public Sphere and Experience, a work that engages and elaborates Habermas’ influential work on the emergence of the modern bourgeois public sphere, is a German term for “experience” that has no English or American equivalent (1993: xvi). As Hansen notes, erfahrung does not contain the empiricist connotation that connects “experience” to “expert” and “experiment” (Hansen 1993: ibid.). Rather, as used by many members of the Frankfurt School and especially by Walter Benjamin, the German root “fahren,” means “to ride or travel.” Cruising and wandering: “fahren” moves, it “conveys a sense of mobility, of journeying, wandering, or cruising, implying both a temporal dimension, that is duration, habit, repetition and return, and a degree of risk to the experiencing subject (which is also present, though submerged, in the Latin root perir that links “experience with ‘peril’ and ‘perish’)” (Hansen 1993: xvi-xvii). While my professionalization as an anthropologist encourages me to stake claims on my expertise and to offer my work as an experiment that yielded tangible results, in my studies of queerspaces and sexpublics in Austin, I found myself identifying more with the latter notions of experiences as a kind of risky cruising.

For this anthropologist, cruising and wandering in queerspaces and sexpublics has been risky business insofar as it opened me up, as a “native,” to the both the pleasures (sex, love, intimacy) and the risks (the law, disease, heartbreak, melancholy) experienced by my “tribes.” Of course, using terms like “native” or “tribes” might seem dangerous for contemporary anthropologists who are rightfully wary of reinscribing categories from
anthropology’s colonial history. However, I use these terms ironically to highlight my own ambivalent relationship with the discipline. After studying and interpolating anthropology for nearly a decade, I am acutely aware of the degree to which my own identifications as black, interracial, and queer, are deeply embedded in and produced by anthropological epistemologies.

In the first part of this chapter, I review critiques from within anthropology, largely made by gay and lesbian scholars, about the disciplinary silences within anthropology surrounding sex and subjectivity. As I discuss in more detail below, anthropologists seem largely unwilling to discuss, in particular, the role sexual subjectivity plays, whether at home or in the office, in the classroom or in the field, in producing anthropological knowledges. In the second part of the chapter, I review an interdisciplinary body of literatures that describe landscapes of same-sex desire, landscapes I call “queerspaces” and “sexpublics.”

**Sex is Messy**

“Sex is natural, sex is fun, not everybody does it, but everybody should,” sings George Michael in his famous song, “I Want Your Sex.” Like Bill Clinton, whose famous bad faith statement, “I did not have sexual relations with that woman” and equally bad faith legalese, “It depends on what your meaning of ‘is’ is,” George got into a lot of trouble because of sex. A notoriously difficult to term to fix, “sex” is at once at the center of the ongoing culture wars and a floating signifier whose meaning is highly contingent on speaker, context, and the vagaries of style. Among high school girls, who share a peculiar affinity with Bill Clinton in this regard, fellatio isn’t sex, nor is anal intercourse. Sex isn’t just sex; it’s fucking; it’s loosing one’s virginity.
In the stories that make up this dissertation, sex is likewise messy, slippery, and highly contingent on context. Within the social sciences generally, sex is often opposed to gender in a way that naturalizes sex as being about essential biological differences between men and women. In the binary pair sex/gender, gender becomes the socially sanctioned and interpolated qualities “masculine” and “feminine” that are mapped onto male and female bodies, respectively. While social constructionist discourses rightly recognize the essential arbitrariness of this mapping—to say that gender is socially constructed is both mantra and cliché—the same discourses, and those who enunciate them, are troubled by suggestions that “sex,” in the sense of absolute biological differences between men and women, is equally socially constructed. Along with various practices of drag, Trans and intersexed folk trouble the false pairing and opposition of sex/gender.  

However, my goal here is not to engage in detail this particular debate. Instead, I am trying to offer a sketch of how “sex” is used in the stories that I tell in the dissertation. First, then, some broad strokes: Sex is Body; Sex is Law; Sex is Big Business; Sex is Family; Sex is Productive Confusion (or, Confused Production?). Sometimes the above characterizations come into greater focus as social and physical intercourse, identifications, institutions, material and corporeal affects, and emergent possibilities. At other times, because of or in spite of my efforts to mark a particular use or meaning of sex, sex nonetheless often remains a big, sloppy mess.

---

Anthropology, Sex, and Silence

Famous for giving us insight/insite into our own sex lives by displaying those of others, anthropologists peddling the things they see through keyholes prefigure more contemporary vulgar voyeurisms like reality TV (Mercer and Julien 1988 in Kulick 1995). Sex has never been taboo within what Rudi Bleys (1996) calls the “ethnographic imagination.” Indeed, classic ethnographic accounts of kinship, marriage, rites of passage, and taboo that make up disciplinary anthropology’s claims to knowledge are, one way or another, largely concerned with “sex.” Yet, while sex can be understood to be one of the foundations of anthropological knowledge, few recent works from within the discipline use sex as either primary method of research or focus of analysis as many, largely gay and lesbian, anthropologists have pointed out. Observing sexual practices in the context of marriage, kinship, rites of passage, etc. to produce cultural knowledge is thus distinct from using sex itself as mode of knowing.

In Taboo (Kulick and Willson, eds. 1995) and Out in the Field (Lewin and Leap, eds. 1996), anthropologists confront the silences surrounding erotic subjectivity at home and in the field. Both anthologies’ are framed by the posthumous publication of Malinowski’s secret diaries, the reflexive turn of the 1980s, and the ongoing influence of feminist, native, and more slowly, gay and lesbian perspectives.

In Taboo, editors Kulick and Willson argue that a persistent silence surrounds the topic of the anthropologist’s sex, in which sex is understood to include both sexual subjectivity and sexual practices. This silence has functioned to keep the topic off limits for women and sexual minorities. For these groups, Kulick and Willson point out, the
overlaps between sexual identity and professional and political praxis are profound and to speak about such issues continues to involve great risks to one’s scholarly reputation and career (1995: 4). But, more importantly, Kulick and Willson argue that the discipline’s silence about sex functions to reaffirm the anthropologist as an abstract and universal figure. Usually straight, white, and male, this figure is what Donna Haraway (1997) calls a “modest witness,” someone just in it for the facts.

The silences surrounding erotic subjectivity in the field highlight a curious tension: while most anthropologists talk and gossip about sexual experiences in the field, very few are willing to write about them (Kulick and Willson 1995: xii). In their introductory comments, Kulick and Willson mark their surprise when gay men and straight women who responded most enthusiastically to their call for submissions for the anthology. Importantly, this response contradicted assumptions that women are particularly unwilling to talk about erotic subjectivity in the field. But while women and gay men may have responded well, straight men did not. It was, in fact, straight men that called on them most often to justify their desire to produce the collection (Kulick and Willson 1995: xiii). And, for a brief time, assumptions that the work must be unethical even prompted the call for papers to be temporarily blocked by the Anthropology Newsletter (Kulick and Willson 1995: xiv).

Kulick and Willson mark the enthusiastic response to the call for submissions from some anthropologists and the concomitant controversy about the place of discussions of sexual subjectivity in anthropological accounts among the successes of Taboo. They also mark the anthology’s weaknesses. In particular, they acknowledge the absence of informant perspectives. They further acknowledge that even their self-
reflexive criticism of this lack seems less “‘about’ concern for informants as it is ‘about’ unease with the embarrassing issues of hierarchy, boundaries, ethics, anthropological appropriation and exploitation that surface rapidly as soon as we begin talking about desire, erotic subjectivity, and sexual violence in the field” (Kulick and Willson 1995: xv). Thus, while Kulick in particular suggests that a reflexive analysis of erotic subjectivity can function as a source of insight, an insight that can moreover be made to perform work in the service of anthropological knowledge, he does not suggest that anthropologists rush out to have sex with their informants.

Elsewhere in the anthology, both Blackwood (1995) and Bolton (1995) note some of the ways their erotic subjectivities influenced their experiences of fieldwork. In “Falling in Love with an-Other Lesbian,” Evelyn Blackwood describes how, hoping to facilitate the successful completion of her research, she at first chose to conceal her identity as a lesbian by telling her hosts she was married. During the course of her time in the field, however, she eventually came out to her closest informant after falling in love with a woman who, though their identities as “lesbians” rarely coincided, represented an escape from the alienation of fieldwork. This experience of sexual subjectivity helped, she says, to “challenge the distance between ‘us’ and ‘them’” (Blackwood 1995: 52).

As for Blackwood, Ralph Bolton’s sexual identity plays a key role in his experience of the field. Bolton’s work takes up the call of activist anthropology by focusing on a pro-sex approaches to AIDS activism that includes protecting the communities, institutions, and spaces that sex between men have engendered. In his work on bathhouses, for example, he tried to protect the baths as institutions with the real and imagined potential to empower gay communities against those who attempted to
characterize the baths solely as zones of risk (Bolton 1995: 150-51). As a gay man in an age of crisis, his native ethnography challenges what Michael Warner (1999) calls a “politics of sexual shame” by simultaneously invoking and challenging the limits of thinking about sex, ethnography and ethics. For Bolton, then, one of the benefits from “participation-based” research includes acknowledgement of the fact that the data he gathers in bed after sex is richer than that obtained in formal interview sessions (Bolton 1995: 148-49).³

As Bolton elaborates, sex can provide a range of data that can be an important means to participatory research. Addressing ethical questions about his work, he makes clear that, first, he never engaged in sex to collect data and second, he never had unprotected anal sex. Like Bolton, I did not have sex to get data, but I did draw on my own and others’ romantic, intimate, and sexual experiences and found them to be among the richest sources for my research.

For anthropologists generally, there are four principles when addressing the ethics of the power-laden relationship between researcher and informant:

1) Freedom from coercion
2) Protection from physical or psychological harm
3) The risk-beneficence principle
4) Respect for the persons and informed consent.

I grappled with these same principles while conducting my ethnographic research in real and virtual queerspaces and sexpublics in Austin. But what I want to highlight

³ Beds are a very specific, maybe even vanilla, location for sex and in the context of my dissertation I look at a much broader range of spaces. What I hope to highlight here is the degree to which notions of what constitutes ethical research can function to reproduce a chilling effect on sex-based research. The issue of protecting the privacy of informants is confounded when doing this type of research given the privileged relation of sex to subjectivity in the “modern West.” Relatedly, the type of “informant” imputed by these principles is a liberal, Western one, one whose subjective agency is assumed apriori.
now is the degree to which Bolton’s approach challenges many long-standing and new conventions about sexual propriety and ethnographic fieldwork insofar as he recognizes sex itself as an important resource for anthropological research.

Again, like Bolton, the range of contacts, encounters, and intimacies I’ve experienced in queerspaces and sexpublics in Austin make me reluctant to call some of the people with whom I spoke “informants” (Bolton 1995: 151). Moreover, even as I recognize that my own research invites, at least, speculation, if not outright hostility, I also believe, following Bolton, that “the protection of participants in research depends much more on the integrity, intentions, and intelligence of the investigators and on their primary allegiance to the well-being of the population being studied than on formal bureaucratic instruments (Bolton 1995: 156).” It is important to note, then, that our work on sexual cultures orients itself toward protecting the affective and institutional sites for sexual counterpublics. By contrast, state control over gay men’s sexuality is only reproduced when research is conducted by hired, unsympathetic outsiders (Bolton points to the example of private investigators paid by the state to look into bathhouses).

The essays in Out in the Field (Lewin and Leap 1996) are also concerned with challenging silences around sex, but in this instance they focus on the specific challenges faced by gays and lesbians doing fieldwork. Although gays and lesbians share many of the experiences of negotiating loneliness and alienation in the field, they face the additional difficulties of ex/dis/closure, of whether to be out at home or in the field. At home, gay and lesbians must grapple with anthropology’s colonial history that includes

---

4 Whatever my feelings regarding the intentions of the researcher, however, I did complete required ethics training and my project did go through the formal institutional review required for work involving human subjects.
homo-hunting in other societies that distorted the place and valence of same-sex and trans-gender erotics and affective identifications (Weston 1998: 5-13; see also Bleys 1996). Gays and lesbians must also grapple with the discipline’s slow start in incorporating the theoretical contributions of queer theory in discussions of professional standards and methodological approaches. Within institutional anthropology, queer theories, perspectives, and projects are often viewed with suspicion, perhaps because sex is viewed, incorrectly, as not having much to do with the “real world” or the current focus in much anthropological literature on neoliberalism and globalization. In deciding whether to do research on one’s own, gay and lesbian anthropologists share some of the dilemmas of hybrids and natives, whose personal investments raise doubts about their authenticity as objective representatives; they are more likely to appear as ethnographers than be taken as real ones (Weston 1998: 198-199; Lewin and Leap 1996: 14-17).

Kulick and Willson’s arguments about the silences surrounding sex and their relationship to anthropological praxis coincide with those of Lewin and Leap, and also with two other anthropologists, Esther Newton (2000) and Kath Weston (1998). In Margaret Mead Made Me Gay, a collection of the groundbreaking anthropologist’s essays, Newton writes, “as hard as we anthropologists have tried, in politics or religion, to see past our own cultural noses, when looking ‘down there’ we have shown the same ignorance and done the same name-calling as most other Westerners. We too are members of a society tied up in knots over everyone’s ‘sex life,’ in which many people

---

5 In her famous “Thinking Sex” essay, Gayle Rubin says, “To some, sexuality may seem to be an unimportant topic, a frivolous diversion from the more critical problems of poverty, war, disease, racism, famine, or nuclear annihilation. But it is precisely at times such as these, when we live with the possibility of unthinkable destruction, that people are likely to become dangerously crazy about sexuality” (1993: 3-4). For important work which brings together discussions of sexuality and globalization and/or transnationalism, see Eng 2001: Gopinath 1997; Hoad 1999; and Povinelli and Chauncey 1999.
would literally rather let *others* die—they assume it will be others—than have certain sex words in public” (Newton 2000: 229).

*In Long Slow Burn: Sexuality and Social Science,* Kath Weston similarly takes the social sciences to task for their representations of homosexuality. She frames her case by discussing Goldenweiser’s 1929 review of anthropological literature on sexuality. She points out that homosexuality appears “midway through his account, in the guise of yet ‘another *sub rosa* aspect of sex” (Weston 1998: 147). Weston argues that modern anthropology has similarly treated homosexuality—veiled, alluded to, and/or judged—while only rarely addressing it directly. Moreover, those scholars who are doing lesbian and gay studies in anthropology often produce what she calls an “ethnocartography, looking for evidence of same-sex sexuality and gendered ambiguity in ‘other’ societies” (Weston 1998: 149).

Although the anthropological works I discuss above have attempted to make sex both at home and in the field more central, my perception is that these texts, with few exceptions, in their admittedly fraught efforts to somehow represent sex, while also trying to preserve an air of disciplinary propriety and rigor, fail to impart the messiness and stickiness, the risks and pleasures of sex. They are, in short, at pains to avoid the pornographic. Even Esther Newton’s and Kath Weston’s arguments for anthropologists to take erotic subjectivity into account seem to keep sex abstracted. In “My Best Informant’s Dress,” for example, Newton describes the erotic components of a relationship with Kay, an elderly woman in Cherry Grove, where Newton researched her groundbreaking study on gay and lesbian community formation. She describes falling in love with Kay over the two summers of her research. But although they flirted with the
idea of making love, Kay’s physical disabilities prevented them from becoming lovers. Newton writes, “Two summers after I met Kay the fieldwork project was cresting, and although it was tacitly settled that her physical pain and chronic illness precluded sex and we would not actually become lovers, our daily visits were affectionate and full of erotic by-play” (Newton 2000: 253). While I think Newton’s discussion of the intimate relationship she shared with Kay is important in the ways it speaks to the possibilities for erotic affect beyond or without sex, across age, and status, my own project tries to keep sex more central. In the dissertation, I interrupt traditional anthropological narratives by explicitly staking claims on the explicit, by advancing ethnopornetics, an anthropornology. In this work, I engage in reflexive, hardcore participant observation to produce, vulgarizing Clifford Geertz (1973), thick sex description.

Of course, even as sex, in its messy material and discursive incarnations, has been at the core of my projects over the last five or so years, I also have a responsibility to keep some of what I learned on the DL, or Down Low, to keep it quiet, to keep the public secret of sex, well, secret. My own reluctance to expose the truths of public sex means that I am careful about naming places, people, or practices that might put individuals or institutions (even of park sex) in danger of further harassment or disappearance. This approach was inspired by the work of third wave feminists, gays, lesbians, and other others, who fought for respectful and empathic attitudes toward “deviance” and “perversion” in the porn wars of the 1980s (Hollibaugh 2000; Rubin 1993). While anthropologists seem reluctant to discuss the sex practices and identities of their subjects or of themselves, other scholars and cultural workers, many of them women, of color, and queer, have been consistently braver (Lorde 1984a, 1984b; Moraga and Anzaldúa 1981).
Siting Landscapes of Desire: History, Identities, and the Law

Foucault’s (1978) History of Sexuality Vol. 1 (henceforth cited as HS) is among the most foundational texts for anti-essentialist critiques that challenge the “fictitious unity” of sexuality, and, in particular, the fraught connections between acts and identities. And although even queer scholars such as classicist David Halperin (1993) and historian Carolyn Dinshaw (1999) fault HS for its historical claims, both still find his model effective in showing the production of “technologies of sex” through which “sexuality” emerged as a category that required state, legal, and social surveillance, administration, management, and policing in and through the diverse, and often competing, discourses of religion, law, and medicine. For Halperin, Foucault’s HS represents an early and important, if hasty, effort to denaturalize sexuality. Halperin, who has elsewhere engaged the importance of Foucault as a political thinker, thus claims that more historical work needs to be done “to demonstrate that sexuality is indeed as he claimed, a uniquely modern production” (Halperin 1993: 417). For Halperin, sexual desire in antiquity belonged properly to public not to private or intimate spheres. In the context of public life, he argues, it was gender deviance that marked inappropriate sexual behavior, not sexual object choice, much less a sexual “identity.” Halperin in this way therefore supports Foucault’s still persuasive arguments that sexuality is a modern phenomenon, if only insofar as it is only in the modern period that sexuality becomes seen as autonomous and privileged domain of life, existing in an intimate sphere of life apart from other forms.

---

6 See also de Lauretis (1987).
7 See his Saint Foucault: Towards a Gay Hagiography (1995), which challenges many scholarly assumptions about Foucault’s activist engagements.
8 Ann Laura Stoler (1995) agrees with Foucault’s basic notion of sexuality as a modern production and situates HS in the context of the production of race as a modern category. Her text argues that the “race idea” is central to understanding HS and that scholars of Foucault as well as of race and colonialism/imperialism have consistently overlooked and undertheorized these links.
of public social life. Dinshaw, by contrast, seems to risk a little more in her studies of homosociality in the medieval era in the sense that she extends the history of sexuality into the Middle Ages. She argues that scholars can in fact recognize a correspondence to modern notions of sexual identities in the sexual and affective lives of some groups in the Middle Ages, who “were thought to be visibly marked, known at least to others if not to themselves, grouped with others by the same kind, and defined by sexual desire” (Dinshaw 1999: 195).

Both Halperin and Dinshaw, while expanding notions of what might counts of a good history of sexuality, still value Foucault’s challenge of the “repressive hypothesis,” the idea that modern society is sexually repressed. In HS, Foucault looks at the ways discourses of sexuality proliferated throughout the 18th Century and concludes that “[w]hat is peculiar to modern societies, in fact, is not that they consigned sex to a shadow existence, but that they dedicated themselves to speaking of it ad infinitum, while exploiting it as the secret” (Foucault 1978: 35). The truth of “sex” is contested and negotiated within the public sphere; sex goes public, along with the truths that interpolate subjects.⁹

These truths of sex, to which we often appeal as the transcendental access code to our innermost, most authentic identities, are, importantly, multiple: “Our epoch has initiated sexual heterogeneities” (Foucault 1978: 37). This not only means that competing official discourses produced different sexualities through classificatory systems that functioned to “implant” the perverse and normal within particular bodies and populations,

---

⁹ See, for instance, John D’Emilio and Estelle B. Freedman’s Intimate Matters (1988), especially part III, where they discuss the paradoxical ways moral crusaders and censors in the United States, while arguing that the proper place of sexual intimacy was within the context of marriage, paradoxically helped to proliferate discourses of sexuality in the public sphere,
but also that resistance to, and transformative appropriation of, these discourses conditioned the possibilities of emergence for new sexual subjectivities, those that, for instance, cultivated themselves through strategic evasion of, as well as tactical engagement with, power’s grasp and gaze.

As Foucault outlines his theory of power (power is everywhere) he importantly observes that while a juridico-discursive apparatus dominates (as in the policing of taboo or transgressive sex) technologies of sex do not always impact bodies, pleasures, and politics though overt uses of force; for Foucault, the effects of power are so insidious because power actively works to mask itself and its effects: “The new methods of power are not ensured by right but by technique, not by punishment but by control, methods that are employed on all levels and in forms that go beyond the state and its apparatus” (Foucault 1978: 89)

This observation opens up possible modes of reading of diverse cultural forces, up to and including, but not limited to, the state. Though sex and sexuality work in a fundamental relation to the law, Foucault calls for “an analytics of power that no longer takes law as a model and a code” (Foucault 1978: 90). His work sets the stage for other works (such as Dinshaw’s creative reading of Pulp Fiction) to consider, among other things, the ideological techniques and strategies consciously and unconsciously deployed in the mass-mediated public sphere, to ask questions about the relation between mass culture and the formation, denial, and reification of sexual subjectivities and the sexualization of citizenship and national belonging.10

---

10 Berlant and Warner (2000) draw Habermas and Foucault together and argue that “[b]oth identify the conditions in which sexuality seems like a property of subjectivity rather than a publicly or counterpublicly accessible culture” (323). Berlant and Warner do such a good job showing how the models of Foucault and
Queerspaces and Sexpublics

Bathhouses, parks, churches, public toilets, mollyhouses, schools, bars, YMCAs, cafeterias, arcades, or the mall. Strictly speaking, any space can become a “queer space.” All it takes is queer folk or even just queer looks.

Literatures on queerspaces began to emerge in the 1990s. A transdisciplinary body of literature that spans architectural, art historical, cultural geographic, anthropological, and activist approaches, among others, these works are vital for historicizing, siting, and detailing landscapes of same-sex sexual desire. Broadly, this body of scholarship traces the historical emergence of queer identities in relation to sexual praxis, modernity and colonial encounters. These scholars also show the symbolic and material entanglements that face public cultures organized around sex. Further, they emphasize the ways spaces structure material and psychic life. And finally, they offer critiques of the heteronormative, legal, and market-driven policing of sexual identities and practices.

Habermas can be thought together that I include the entirety of their discussion: “This transformation in the cultural forms of intimacy is related both to the history of the modern public sphere and to the modern discourse of sexuality as a fundamental human capacity. In *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere*, Habermas shows that the institutions and forms of domestic intimacy made private people private, members of the public sphere of private society rather than the market or the state. Intimacy grounded abstract, disembodied citizens in a sense of universal humanity. In *The History of Sexuality*, Foucault describes the personalization of sex from the other direction: the confessional and expert discourses of civil society continually posit an inner personal essence, equating this true personhood with sex and surrounding that sex with dramas of secrecy and disclosure. There is an instructive convergence here in two thinkers who otherwise seem to be describing different planets. Habermas overlooks the administrative and normalizing dimensions of privatized sex in sciences of social knowledge because he is interested in the norm of a critical relation between state and civil society. Foucault overlooks the critical culture that might enable transformation of sex and other private relations; he wants to show that modern epistemologies of sexual personhood, far from bring sexual publics into being, are techniques of isolation; they identify persons as normal and perverse, for the purpose of medicalizing or otherwise administering them as individuals. Yet both Habermas and Foucault point to the way a hegemonic public has founded itself by a privatization of sex and the sexualization of private personhood” (Berlant and Warner 2000: 323).
Most of these works don’t call the spaces where men met and still meet each other for sex and more “queerspaces.” Even Betsky’s architectural treatise calls the stage, mad King Ludwig’s Neuschwanstein, and bathhouses “Queer”-“space”-“Spaces.” Berlant and Warner use the term “Sex Public,” and they’re talking about a conversation with their straight friend in the car asking about where to find dildos, and a scene in a sex club that involves vomiting instead of sex. For me, both phrases “Queer Space” and “Sex Public” collide and collapse into themselves and each other: queerspaces and sexpublics, queerspacesexpublics, queersexpublicspaces, queerpublicsexspaces, etc. Every queerspace is a sexpublic, and in contemporary U.S. culture and elsewhere, every public discourse about the problems of sex somewhere includes the “queer.”

While Carolyn Dinshaw and David Halperin try to extend and elaborate on Foucault’s claims, other scholars have added richness to the particular emergence of queer publics in the modern era. As the essays in Queer Sites (Higgs, ed. 1999) demonstrate, queer spaces saturate the modern city. The essays in the anthology explore same-sex sexual praxis and the development of self-conscious homo subcultures in seven of the world’s most recognizable modern urban areas: Paris, Moscow, Amsterdam, London, Lisbon, Rio, and San Francisco. The volume deploys historiographic methods that, drawing on Levi-Strauss’ bricolage, also function as kind of “reconstructive ethnography” (Higgs 1999: 5) to trace the conjoined development of modern urban sites

---

11 By using “homo” as a noun here, I draw attention to the slippage between homosexual and homosocial. See Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick (1985) for a discussion on the ways the homosocial is predicated on the suppression of homosexuality. While some of the populations of men who sought out sex with men in the early modern era can be understood in relation to modern notions of “homosexual identity,” I want to keep in tension the profoundly homosocial nature of public, private, and intimate relationships between men regardless of sexual identification.

12 Though I do not discuss his work here, George Chauncey’s (1994) study of gay men in New York City is an excellent introduction to the ways gay men saturated modern cities.
and “gay” identities by examining newspapers, personal narratives, and legal documents. The works posits that “gay” identity, the sense of community or, more accurately, counterpublic formations, are closely tied to the ways men appropriated intimate, private, public, and institutional spaces to engage in same-sex sex and identification; and the sense of collectivity that is produced in part by the state’s regulatory gaze and police enforcement of the compulsive norms of public opinion.

Taken together, the essays in *Queer Sites* demonstrate that most of the sites where men met were public, and this exposed them in a form of bad publicity—in the blinding overexposures of moral shame and legal trouble—but at the same time provided them with an escape from the organizing panopticons of interior, private spaces. The pressures of moral shame, legal and familial surveillance brought men to the semi-private niches of public spaces, spaces like parks, toilets, and the backrooms of bars and, in the modern era, bookstores. It was paradoxically only in these public spaces that men could maintain their private anonymity, their private personhood, and insulated intimate lives.

The queering of spaces, putting space to inappropriate use, seduces not only the bodies of men and boys, but the Law as well. The increasing bad publicity that accompanied the greater public visibility of queer bodies and sites multiplied relations to the Law, effected in part through the too visible presencing of masks—in the rouged cheeks or the affected effeminate gait of the sodomite of the third sex (Trumbach 1999).\textsuperscript{13}

The proliferation of queer sites is realized in entrapment, blackmail, and intimidation; in a Church that negotiated its own providing of safe queer spaces with the demands of an

\textsuperscript{13} Rudolph Trumbach’s discussion on the ways the appearance of effeminate males in London shaped the creation of a three-pronged gender system of men, women, and sodomites contributes to understandings of some of the links between homosexuality and notions of gender and sexual deviance.
Inquisition for which passive sodomy warranted even greater punishment than active penetration (the shifting relations of gender threatened the Church’s procreative prowess and homosocial landscapes) (Higgs 1999); in debates over prostitution that made homosexuality, along with masturbation, visible as a threatening alternative to the “natural” urges drawing men to female prostitution (Hekna 1999); and the transformation of the urban landscape that expanded cruising to the space of capital, of the arcades (Sibalis 1999).

The cyclical waves of repression of queers had to do with moral panics and legislation, but were also “fears driven by economic change” (Bech 1997 as cited in Higgs 1999: 6). Circulating in the anxious traumas of modernity (where queers complicate things with their furtive grasping, groping, gayzing), the homosexual operates as a scapegoat, as a surrogate figure for evil because of his nefarious ability to be both invisible and present-in-passing. In the encounters with nervous and involuntary witnesses, queerspaces produce and trouble distinctions between public and private, and invest in new spatial configurations, special f/x that through a relation to capital conjure semi-private partial publics.

Betsky’s (1997) elegant essay specifically locates the emergence of queer space in the urban middle class of the 19th Century, though it can be traced back further to those middles and inbetweens, “a class of merchants, tradespeople, and clerks who were neither owners nor workers, but the makers of an in-between space (Betsky 1997: 8). Defined by technologies of abstraction (of labor and publicity), this is the class that performed the phantasmagoric disconnect, retreating to interiors that were sites for the collection and performative display of interior landscapes. This retreat was, as Betsky says, the ob-
scene, or other side, of the stage of the city where men were transforming the planners’
grids into scenes of desire (Betsky 1997).

As both Betsky and the contributors to Stud (Sanders 1996) demonstrate,
architecture plays a central role in articulating queer spaces. Betsky argues that gays and
lesbians have been at the forefront of architectural innovation: from the seclusions of
countryside estates to the fantasy spectacle of Ludwig’s Neuschwanstein; from the
discipline of ships to the decadence of pleasure dens; from the dressing of interiors to
window displays of bodies; from the aqueous suspensions of the baths, to the hauntings
of closets and mirrors. Ultimately what all this queer space shows is the degree to which
“architecture behaves as one of the subjectivating norms that constitute gender
performativity” thereby shaping our experience of the social and conditioning the forms
and zones in which desires can manifest (Sanders 1996: 13).

The governmentality/governability of queer spaces, historically preoccupied with
legislating identities and/or practices in earlier periods in Europe, shifts its tactics when
faced with queers who tactically defend and reinvent their spaces\textsuperscript{14} and who, in the
process, dis-locate heternormativity from its silent closet in a fictive intimate sphere.
Instead, attempts to govern queer space now resort to the construction and maintenance
of legal distinctions between public and private and the physical transformation of public
space to prevent inappropriate private uses. Whether seen through the lenses of
anthropology, architecture, history, or cultural geography (with concomitant views and
focuses on colonialism, modernity, capital, desire, fantasy, and death), queerspaces
maintain a fundamental relationship to public sex, or alternatively, to making-sex-public.

\textsuperscript{14} See the works in Mapping Desire (Bell and Valentine 1996) and Queers in Space (Ingram, Bouthillette &
Retter 1997)
The essays in *Gay Space/Public Sex* (Leap 1999) thus converge at the intersections of many of the concerns expressed thus far. The anthology, which incorporates ethnography as well as literary, psychoanalytic, and sociological approaches, details the ways queers focus the regulatory gaze of the police and the courts. Queer space and public sex in particular help to call into question what counts as public or private, and more importantly, who gets the right to have either.

Until the Supreme Court’s *Lawrence and Garner vs. State of Texas* decision during summer of 2003, *Bowers vs. Hardwick* (1986) established the federal precedent for gay sex in private and public spaces. As numerous scholars have noted, *Bowers vs. Hardwick* reveals the fundamental fallacies of the public/private split while simultaneously highlighting the dilemmas of queer citizenship (Bedfellows 1996). Hardwick, arrested in his bedroom with his lover for practicing sodomy, argued that his right to privacy afforded him protection from Georgia’s anti-sodomy statute. In 1986, the Supreme Court, however, ruled that though “such a right to privacy certainly holds in instances of (heterosexual) marriage, family, and procreation” it does not extend to a right of sexual privacy right for queers (Leap 1999: 9)

In July of 2003, I celebrated the overturning of the Bowers decision with other gays, lesbians, and allies in Austin’s at Republic Square Park at corner of fourth and Colorado Streets. I had followed the case since I had first heard about it, and watched, with no small surprise, the Supreme Court take up the case. But to me, the celebration seemed more than a little muted, and my disquiet only intensified as I closely read the Lawrence decision later in the evening.
After seventeen years in which the Bowers ruling controlled state and federal cases relating to privacy and other protections for gays and lesbians, the Lawrence decision strikes me as incredibly limited. Essentially, Lawrence overturns Bowers’ central holding—that privacy protections do not extend to queers. Thus, what the ruling does is allow gays and lesbians those same rights to privacy as, say, unmarried straight couples. But as Court’s majority opinion notes, “the case does not involve minors, those who might be injured or coerced, those who might not easily refuse consent, or public conduct or prostitution. It does involve two adults who, with full and mutual consent, engaged in sexual practices common to a homosexual lifestyle.”

For the religious right, the Lawrence decision opens up the possibility of gay marriage, a possibility successfully exploited by President Bush during his reelection bid, during which he promised to push for a Constitutional Amendment that would define marriage as only the union between a man and a woman. While the Christian right fearfully watches gay marriage bans being challenged in New York and California, I feel more than a little cheated—although I now have the “right” to queer intimacies in my home, I also feel pressured to keep them there.

**Sex in Public**

The sex of queer subjects has always already been public in the forms of laws that explicitly prohibit same-sex sex and in decisions like Bowers in which the Supreme Court explicitly stated that homosexual sodomy is a public not a private concern. Though the decision was not based on the specific circumstances surrounding the AIDS epidemic, in which the decision might have appealed more directly to concerns of public health, it nevertheless had severe consequences for the production of safe-sex education materials:
the selective enforcement of anti-sodomy statutes only for homosexual citizens paradoxically made even state-directed efforts to limit risk and contagion by definition illegal (Colter 1996).

One of the things examining public sex does is put into tension our assumption that sexual privacy is, in fact, private, in addition to demonstrating that what counts as public sex often maintains its own borders of privacy: in the visual field, gazes are forbidden access; in the material field, certain bodies are prohibited from accessing space. In terms of defining the contours of public sex, Leap describes the differences between public and private in terms of visuality. In his account, “public identifies a location which appears to be ‘open,’ ‘accessible,’ and ‘unrestricted,’ while private suggests a location which seems more ‘sheltered,’ ‘secluded,’ or (using Sisela Bok’s wording), ‘being protected from unwanted access by others’” (Leap 1999: 9; see also Warner 1999).

Work on public sexual cultures contributes to the dismantling or unpacking of the public/private binary. Moreover, such work directly challenges the zoning of gay male culture in the ostensibly objective terms of risk as well as the valued terms of objective good, penetrative, heterosexual, sex (Colter 1996). The work of Leap, like the work of Warner (1999) and Dangerous Bedfellows (1996) and Samuel Delany (1999) interrogate the sex-negative motives and effects of New York zoning laws, and like Califia’s (2000) valorization of public sex, is situated in opposition to the sex-panicked efforts of straights and queers alike to eliminate public sex. They moreover point to the ways notions of risk are closely tied to homophobic fantasies about the space of disease as always already linked to the bodies of degenerate others and the spaces they inhabit. Those who support efforts to end (gay) public sex generally rest their arguments on the assumption that
public sex, whether it takes place in toilets, bathhouses, or parks, inherently constitutes and increases “risk.” However such perspectives contradict research that suggests that some public sex venues (providing them, ensuring their existence) such as bathhouses are ideal sites to disseminate safe sex information and that eliminating such venues can actually be seen to increase risk in that the men who might otherwise be reached by AIDS and other STD prevention efforts will still engage in same-sex sex but in environments in which information and, more importantly, condoms are unavailable. The perspectives of those who wish to curb public sex also rarely confront the conceptual challenge posed by the fact that many of the men who participate in public same-sex sex are not, by their own or any other definition, “gay.” Finally, ongoing attempts to regulate public sexuality perform a curious erasure on histories of the queer sites, histories that have much to tell about erotic and affective identifications, modernity, and the historical emergence of counterpublic cultures.  

In his landmark and still controversial “Tearoom Trades” (1999 [1970]) Laud Humphreys examines the silent and often impersonal sexual encounters of tearooms, observing that most of the men who engage in same-sex sex in public toilets are not homosexual (Humphreys 1999 [1970]: 32-33). In fact, 54% of his research subjects were married at the time he interviewed them (Humphreys 1999 [1970]: 35). For Humphreys, these sexual encounters in public restrooms or highway rest stops are impersonal because they are silent and because there is little emotional or even physical contact: a blowjob through a gloryhole localizes desire and rarely ends with a hug. And yet, the curious

15 Efforts to police gay sexuality have also come from gays themselves. Michelangelo Signorile, Gabriel Rotello, and Andrew Sullivan, in particular, have advocated the mainstreaming of queer sexual behaviors. Their efforts can be situated within broader politics of gay assimilation, in which representations of gay lifestyles increasingly circulate within mass media, while political efforts work to curtail gay civil rights.
anonymity provided by public sex cannot be disassociated from the desire to protect
(private, intimate) family relationships (Humphreys 1999 [1970]: 35). Slipping the noose
of categorical identities that inhabiting a bar or political organization would require,
anonymous and impersonal sex curiously becomes a way of protecting “moral histories”
(Humphreys 1999 [1970]: 44).

Other sites, though they may also be most commonly saturated by looks,
whispers, and silence, cannot be reduced to notions of the anonymous or impersonal.
Spaces such as bathhouses, for instance, function as arenas for desire and display while
also facilitating intimate forms of male-bonding; even traditional institutional baths in
ethnic communities could not keep the homoerotic separate from the homosocial
(Tattleman 1999; see also Betsky 1997: 35-39). Which is not to say that intimacy cannot
be experienced in other more anonymous sites: there are after all the forms of intimacy
engendered through psychic investment in a place, and the unpredictable disruptions of
the codes and etiquettes of “impersonal” sex (Delany 1999). Again, one of the ways
queer space troubles the public is by creating intimacies where they do not ostensibly
belong. These improper intimacies moreover threaten notions of private personhood,
individualism, and other notions central to modern ideologies of governance, even going
so far to question the production of maintenance of the category “the human.” Men
fucking in a bathhouse or in warehouses at the piers—becoming animal, becoming desire,
becoming dick, ass, cum—is so far removed from liberal notions of subjectivity as to
mark and make an entirely different, posthumanist world (Deleuze and Guattari 1987;
Haraway 1997; and Warner 1999)
Rather than censure or erase queer identities, practices, and institutions by closing down sites determined to be an apriori risk to the health of the (phantasmatic) public, what is necessary is to consider the “sexual landscapes” that structure erotic activities (Leap 1999: 116). This means, importantly, that we consider the way issues such as memory and nostalgia, the erotic possibilities of particular sites, the effects of drugs and alcohol, and the roles of social and monetary capital, impact the “risk” of same-sex praxis (Leap 1999: 116, 128; Clatts 1999: 153).

One question that emerges from discussions of public sex has to do with the degree to which discourses on risk and value actually address the fear of contagious threat to public health, or whether these discourses register anxiety about the borders of identity. William Leap, in the introduction to Public Sex/ Gay Space opens with the question: “How important to gay men’s lives is the pursuit of male-centered sexual pleasure” (Leap 1999: 1). A more interesting question (and one that certainly does not go unexamined in the work on queerness, space, and desire here and elsewhere) that opens discussions on the queer inflections present in all masculinities might be “how important to men’s lives is the pursuit of male-centered pleasure?” This distinction emphasizes the homosocial circuits of pleasure, desire, and identification that flow among and between men regardless of sexual orientation.

When I began my research on the history of public sex in Austin I thought that I would find valorized visions and remembrances of halcyon days of sex in public, when men fucked within/out identities, shame, and disease. Early on, I learned this was never the case. There were no glory days. During the course of the research, I struggled to come to terms with the ways queerspaces and sexpublics were neither liberating nor politically
empowering. This meant that I could not only critique the views of those whose views I found to be sex-negative, but that I had to seriously consider the way public sexual cultures conflict with the ostensibly politically progressive imperative to be out. I also had to interrogate the ways both politically progressive and less than progressive views each produce their own fagisms—the hegemonic interpellation to Be Queer in increasingly circumscribed ways, hailing . . . are you top, bottom, versatile, pig, sub, daddy, slave, masculine, queeny?

I also struggled with the fact that my discussions are limited to men sex between men. This is not, of course, to imply that lesbians don’t have sex. Indeed, both Austin’s nascent but lively drag king scene as well as graffiti in one men’s restroom on the UT campus, which read, “The women upstairs are doing it too” suggests that research into women’s’ relationship to public sexual culture is warranted. The historical accounts I have discussed suggest that the absence of literatures on women’s’ public sexual cultures can be understood in part by the historical restrictions placed on women, the systematic ways patriarchal power denied free access to the public sphere; those women who did enter it tended to be marginal—female prostitutes, for instance, seemed often to share queerspaces with men (Higgs 1999; Betsky 1997). It may also simply have to do with differences, for whatever reasons, between male and lesbian sexuality. Regardless, it is clear public sexual cultures are definitely gendered and women, whether gay or straight, therefore continue to face the reality that free movement in and out of the home, or out on the streets entails quantitatively and qualitatively different experiences of physical and psychological harassment as well as violent threat (Thomas 1996: 64). This is not to say
that women do not or should not participate in public sexual cultures (Thomas 1996; Califia 2000). The history of Lover’s Lanes would attest otherwise.

Also absent from my discussion in this chapter, as well as many of the authors I’ve discussed, are analyses of queerspaces in explicitly racialized terms (see chapters three and four in the dissertation), although in terms of public sex, many (Humphreys 1999 [1970]) have noted the racial heterogeneity among participants in public sex, while at the same time recognizing a history of exclusion from specific institutions such as bars and baths (Tattleman 1999).

What my account in the chapters that follow focuses on most intensely is the queerest space of all, the ones that haunt me the most, the queerspaces of death and the void (Taussig 1987; Betsky 1997), the spaces inhabited by past, present, and future Persons With AIDS (PWAS). This is the space that my own hungry memories probe; the keenly felt absence of the boys and men I never knew, who loved and fucked with/in/out identities or shame, boys who I might know today, who have instead left me with all the hard work of mourning, a project that overwhelmed me to the point that I slipped into melancholy, mourning without end. But the void is the queerest space not only because it negates so terribly and absolutely, but also because it continues to bring things to life. As I outline in the chapters that follow, my risky wanderings in queerspaces nearly killed me, but they also transformed me.
Chapter Two:  
A Brief and Improper History of Queerspaces and Sexpublics in Austin  

The Public Secret of Public Sex  

In the summer of 2003, a neighbor’s son took me to what he called the “forest,” a space of land between 9 1/2 St. and 10th St. I’d lived on 9 1/2 St. for almost four years at that point, but I’d never been down to the end of my street to investigate this wooded area. We walked down the overgrown path and he pointed out the stony remnants of the old confederate resthome (I had wondered why a nearby street was named Confederate, but had never bothered to investigate). What’s important about this story is that this area, often used by neighborhood kids, complete with a fort and fire pit, was hidden from me, in spite of the fact that it was right under my nose. It was a hidden place, but also a public secret, known to many, but secret to me. Hidden Place. Public Secret. This story of finding a hidden place right under my nose resonates with my experiences in many queerspaces in Austin—they were right under my nose, but it took other people to draw my attention to them.

As a teenager, I had enjoyed reading graffiti on the bathroom walls of the Ft. Lewis bowling alley in Tacoma, Washington. More than ten years later, I found myself doing the same thing in bathroom stalls at the University of Texas in Austin. As before, these ephemeral traces of desire had the power to excite me: “cocksucker ready for you—leave date and time” and “meet here for hot action, M-W-F, Spring 1985” and “frat jocks and hot cocks @ Pease Park—walk, don’t drive.”

My investigation of material queerspaces in Austin began in bathroom stalls as an archival, rather than ethnographic project. I wanted to produce a record of these sites of desire. I wanted to archive the traces of lost, spent desire. I wanted to say, “Look, can you
believe this happened here, right under our noses?” But then I realized I was the only one in the dark about this stuff. A woman I know recently recounted how she remembers rows of cars parked in and around Pease Park. Even as a child, she says, “I thought there were an awful lot of men making eyes, sitting in their cars, and walking off into the underbrush together.”

When I describe my project to long-term Austinites, everyone, male and female, gay and straight and undecided, has a story like this to tell. Recently, I ran into a woman from yoga class: I answer her question, “What are you getting your Ph.D. in, and what is it about?” the way I normally do, “Cultural Anthropology—no, I don’t dig for bones or work with monkeys—and it’s about the history of gay spaces here in Austin, especially public spaces where men used to meet for sex and other things.”

“Oh,” she says, “like Pease Park? I know about that because it came up in the news some years back.”

The sex, and the efforts to police it, that happened in Pease Park and other public spaces in and around Austin—Zilker Park, Mt. Bonnell, Bull Creek Park, and Hippie Hollow—were public knowledge to everyone but me. For me, it wasn’t just that it was a secret that men did these things in these specific places, but that these things—sex, blowjobs, backrubs, dates, etc.—happened at all. By the time I’d learned about sex in public places, I was twenty-four years old, and I’d been “out” for six years. Perhaps my lack of knowledge about public sex can be attributed to the fact that I came out in college at a small private liberal arts school in a town of ten thousand in the sleepy cornfields of Iowa. Looking back, I wonder if public sex happened there too; though if it did, I was completely oblivious to it.
But I meant to begin here with a story that would unfold into a carefully worded, yet simple, description of “queerspace.” A queerspace is a space in which men meet for sex; it is often a public space; and although they are often in public spaces, the sex that happens there is rarely just “out in the open.” Rather, sex acts take place in secluded, semi-private even locations that, while often literally right under people’s noses, require one to be attuned to their possibility. Perhaps most importantly, queerspaces are not only “queer” because “queer” (gay or bisexual) people go to them, but because self-identified straight men go there too.

What makes a particular space into a queerspace is in part the fact that one doesn’t have to claim any particular sexual identity in order to have sex there. These days, being without an identity in a public space is very queer, it’s odd or unusual or against the grain.

Saying a queerspace is a space that is odd or unusual is a tautology of course, and it doesn’t do much for fixing a definition of a queerspace. So what makes a space queer if not the identities of those who frequent it? To complicate matters further, I would suggest that it doesn’t even take queer (or homo, if you prefer) sex to make a particular space into a queerspace. While queerspaces have a fundamental relation to public sex, to making sex public, sexual acts themselves do not make a place queer any more than do the presence of any sexual identities or acts. Even if one broadens considerations of acts to include, following Samuel Delany (1999), a range of social intercourse that includes but isn’t limited to sex acts—talk, companionship, contact, etc—one doesn’t get much closer to a concrete definition of a queerspace.
In fact as long as one focuses only on who goes to queerspaces and what happens there, there’s going to be trouble. This focus excludes reading queerspaces in terms of the effects and affects they generate, the range of social possibilities and intimate feelings that inhere in and through queerspaces; it would exclude reading queerspaces as spaces of desire write large, of death, transfiguration, and as spaces, whose most noteworthy feature may be that they are always already pregnant with possibilities.

But before I go further into queerspaces as spaces full of possibilities, it may be useful to settle on some kind of definition of queerspaces in material terms, in terms of the basics, however uncomfortable that makes me. In basic material terms, then, queerspaces are spaces in which men meet for sex and other things; they are spaces situated at the threshold of public, private and intimate social spheres; they are spaces that make men queer, and they are spaces made queer by men.

Aaron Betsky (1997) says of queerspaces in his book *Queer Space*, that they are spaces that show the ways gay men were at the forefront of architectural innovation (closets, ostentatious or baroque interiors, window dressings). But they were also spaces between other spaces, or even spaces of betweeness, a space of threshold, which is like a mirror of society, yet arranged differently. Foucault’s definition of “Heterotopias” might, for now, work as a definition for queerspaces; heterotopias are

real and effective spaces which are outlined in the very institutions of society, but which constitute a sort of counter-arrangement of effectively realized utopia, in which all the real arrangements that can be found within society are at one and the same time represented, challenged and overturned: a sort of place that lies outside all places and yet is actually localizable (Foucault in Betsky 1997: 193).

Queerspaces, then, are heterotopias, not utopias. Utopias are prone to fascistic imposition of unity, a unity based on singularity of thought and/or affect; utopias are
dangerously perfect spaces where differences are necessarily effaced. (This is not to say, however, that dreams of utopias aren’t important). Heterotopias, on the other hand, are spaces of difference. They are the same yet different from the larger society, spaces that embrace, and indeed produce, difference, difference from the same, difference from itself.

**A Public Sex Paradise**

In the 1980s and throughout much of the 1990s Austin was a city famous for its cruising and public sex scenes. Even after the emergence of HIV/AIDS in cities like Los Angeles, New York, and San Francisco, Austin was one of the easiest places to cruise and to get laid (Saylor 1992: 122). The men I spoke with about public sex in Austin cast the sexual history of the city in utopic terms; there was a proliferation of queerspaces for public sex. One day, I drive around with friends and they point out some of the places these spaces used to exist.

Shawn: There used to be a wonderful gay bar called Dirty Sally’s over on 29th and Rio Grande, and there was another bar called Chain Drive, and they would have things like weenie roasts on Sunday. People would have been out on the lake all day, sobering up from partying all night, then they’d go to the beer bust at 5 at Dirty Sally’s and everyone’d have a beer and free hot dogs. Then you could go out dancing and get up and go to work puking sick the next morning. People would to go back and forth between Pleasureland and Charlie’s and cruise along the way and do whatever it was they were gonna do.

James: There used to be another porn store down by Veggie Heaven

Shane: Yeah, that used to be REALLY cruisy. I remember that when I first moved to Austin in ’84. I mean, basically if you lived near campus you went to Charlie’s and then there was a great bar called the Boathouse, affectionately named the ButtHutt or the DickDock, and that was the best bar ever, but you would walk to Charlie’s and if you didn’t get a date at Charlie’s, you’d walk to the video store. And no one ever did anything to stop it. You’d just look around and there’d be everyone from college boys to skankin’ homos . . .
From the stories I was told, queerspaces seemed to be everywhere, they seemed saturate Austin’s social landscape. Importantly, these spaces not only provided access to sex or sexual materials but to contacts and encounters across lines of difference: straight, bisexual, queer, and skankin’ homos; young, old, and middle aged; black, white, and brown men all went to these spaces. A description from the online cruising site www.squirt.org of Hippie Hollow, Texas’ only clothing-optional public place, captures the sense of freedom (and excess) of queerspaces during the 80s and early 90s: “... gay boy fuck heaven... brick shithouse black men posing over cliffs with erect 9 inch boners... 15 year old boys in exhibitionist fuck fests.” At the time, anything was possible.

**Cinema West**

I drive north on Congress toward the Texas state capitol building that stands directly in line with the phallic edifice of the University of Texas Tower. I notice that the building once occupied by the Cinema West porn theater at Live Oak and Congress still stands empty, although now, instead of the “For Lease” that went up in 2001, someone has thought to put clever phrases on the marquee, phrases like, “New York-1200 miles.” (From the opposite direction, driving south, the marquee reads, “Mexico-243 miles). Since 1977, the theater had shown both straight and gay films and had a reputation for public sex, prostitution, hustling, drugs, and general sleaziness. If I had been driving the same route only half a decade earlier, I might have dropped in for some hard-core ethnographic experience. But by the time I arrived in Austin in September 1999, Cinema West had been closed for a year, and I was told that the hustlers had moved far south, far north, or they had gotten online.
The rezoning laws for adult oriented businesses passed in 1986 made it illegal for these business to operate within 1000 feet of a school, church, public park, playground or other adult business. Exempted from the rezoning requirements through a grandfather clause, Cinema West had barely managed to stay in business for the two years after the wave of police stings in 1996 during which more than 200 men were arrested at various public sex spaces in and around Austin, arrests I discuss in more detail later in this chapter. Finally, in 1998, after years of intense pressure from city officials, police stings, harassment by moralists such as Mark Weaver, speculation by real estate developers, and the efforts of some South Congress residents, Cinema West was forced to close in 1998 after twenty-one years of showing straight and gay pornographic films. Area residents described the theater as a blemish on the gateway to the capitol—the diverse and eclectic stores selling antiques, New Danish Modern furniture, and upscale vintage clothing that line the east and west sides of South Congress (Shah 1998a).

Although some city officials and local business owners proposed to convert Cinema West into a mainstream theater or public library, these plans never materialized, and instead the theater sat empty for almost a year until 1999 when it was leased and extensively renovated into a “cool space” by the Internet and networking company Future Protocol (Shah 1998b). But, like many other well-funded Austin high-technology

16 This process of rezoning was reflected elsewhere in the U.S. during the 1990s, perhaps most famously in New York City’s Times Square. See Dangerous Bedfellows (1996) and Delany (1999).

17 Mark Weaver is a local minister and anti-porn and anti-gay moral crusader who, through the 1980s, sought to clean up sex in public places, including the video arcades and Pease Park (at Pease, he took pictures of men engaged in sex acts and videotaped their license plates). After he was arrested in 1991 for criminal trespassing at an AIDS Services of Austin (ASA) meeting, he took a sabbatical from the public spotlight. In 1998, however, he returned to protest proposed zoning ordinances for gay bathhouses like Midtowne Spa. And according to a November 2004 Austin American-Statesman article, Weaver has returned to the video arcades, where, he complains, men are still cruising for sex (Coppola 2004).
endeavors in the late 90s and the new millennium, the company went bankrupt before any employees moved in, another casualty of the e-economic bubble bust.

Cinema West’s owner later relocated to the very south edge of Austin off South Interstate 35, where he opened the XXX Megaplex, a veritable pornocopia of straight, gay, bisexual, transgender, amateur, fetish videos, sexual “educational models,” lubricants, video cleaners, and other miscellaneous sexual bric-a-brac.\(^{18}\) Meanwhile, the building that once housed Cinema West, a symptomatic site for debates about sex in public spaces during the 80s and 90s, has sat empty since February of 2001.

The story of the Cinema West porn theater and its disappearance highlights an ironic convergence of forces that worked to develop and represent Austin as a culturally savvy and diverse home for new technologies, as a Silicon Valley of the Southwest. Indeed, in a much-cited 2001 study, researchers Gary Gates and Richard Florida found that “the leading indicator of a metropolitan area’s high-technology success is a large gay population” The study found that large numbers of gays reflected a city’s acceptance of “difference, uniqueness and oddity and eccentricity” and that such an acceptance creates a climate of diversity that raises a city’s chances for high tech success (Caitlin 2001).

The local *Austin American-Statesmen* reported on Florida’s work on the links between technology and gays (Bishop 2000; Bishop and Lisheron 2002), and in an apparently unrelated article, described the happy lives of gays in Austin in a surprisingly lengthy way (Barnes and Massey 2001). The article, based on a survey of 1,265 gays and

---

\(^{18}\) In Texas, dildos are called “educational models.” Dildos are considered “obscene devices” under Texas Penal Code Chapter 43, which addresses public indecency, in Subchapter B, which defines obscenity. “‘Obscene device means a device including a dildo or artificial vagina, designed or marketed as useful primarily for the stimulation of human genital organs.’ Wholesale promotion or possession of obscene devices with intent to promote can be prosecuted as a felony offense. So, heads up, when you go to the XXX Megaplex or other Austin adult business, don’t ask for the “dildos.” The Texas Penal Code is available online at www.capitol.state.tx.us/statutes/petoc.html
lesbians conducted in 2000 and follow-up interviews, seems to paint a picture of Austin as diverse and tolerant home for gays and lesbians. Importantly, the article opens with the quote, “We’re just normal people.” And the rest of the article, which features comments by successful and monogamously coupled lesbians and gays, simply reemphasizes this sense of normality. The only mention of sex comes from one member of a Hispanic couple, who says, “Sex is such a small part of life. Companionship is more important. Today, being gay is not controversial. It’s almost boring. I mean, we work eight hours a day, sleep eight hours a day. We don’t have much time to concentrate on being gay.”

In Austin, declarations of tolerance, diversity, and the normality of lesbians and gays tense with the realities of disappeared queerspaces. In Austin and other cities during the 80s and 90s, the production of “sex panics” and the erasure of queerspaces were intimately tied to development efforts. Even as Austin was being groomed to be the Silicon Valley of the Southwest, police stings and zoning laws removed queerspaces from the public sphere, thereby aiming to secure the city’s presentation of cleanliness to venture capital and to the influx of high-tech workers. Cinema West is an example of a disappeared queerspace—a space that used to exist, but which exists now only in memory. Other spaces were also disappeared, but most, like the public parks or the toilets at the University of Texas, were simply disciplined.

**Disciplining Queerspaces, Policing Public Sex**

“I mean, you wouldn’t punish people for eating pork if they’re not kosher.”
--Robert

---

19 As Allan Berube (2001) notes, “a sex panic is a moral crusade that leads to crackdowns on sexual outsiders.” Berube also outlines some of the ways urban redevelopment in New York City’s Times Square coincided with and was part of a sex panic. Note: this source is no longer available.
Robert, a gay Asian American high-technology millionaire, who had enjoyed using spaces for public sex in Austin, talks to me about the policing of public sex in Austin. His comment highlights the ways sexual outsiderness is part of the insides of gay culture. An inside that has been increasingly pushed to the margins by the heteronormative production of certain kinds of sex (married, procreative, vanilla) as good sex, but also by gays themselves, who feel that promiscuity and/or casual and/or anonymous sex leads to trouble. In Austin during the 1980s, moral crusaders like Mark Weaver worked to discipline spaces used for sex, and in the 1990s they were joined by gay AIDS activists like Jose Orta, in efforts to close down the arcades, the bathhouses, and other spaces used for public sex. Their efforts had little success. The police had better luck.

In 1996, undercover police stings resulted in the arrests of more than two hundred men at various public parks used for public sex. Queerspaces of public sex and the surges of intimate affect that made sex a public matter had gone too public, and attracted the ire of neighbors, of innocent, nervous, and involuntary witnesses.20

In The Austin American-Statesman coverage of the police stings and in its editorial “Pease Park is for All,” queerspaces find themselves lacking freedom, multiplicities, and they are wrenched out of their excessive and sometimes utopic imaginings and practices and locked firmly into the discursive limits set by notions of disease, criminality, safety, corruption, and contagion, notions that can be collapsed under the heading of “risk.”21

20 For a history of American nervousness, see Lutz (1991).
21 See N. Shah (2001) for a discussion of the ways notions of contagion intersect with race and urbanity.
Taken together, the Statesman articles and editorial represent some of the discourses commonly deployed against the intimate contacts that take place in queerspaces. The representation of these cases becomes a case study in the risk management of the public sphere, and indexes a perspective shared by the political left and the right, straights and many gays: sexuality is private and belongs inside of doors. Rated the 2nd best Austin scandal of 1996 by the Austin Chronicle, the various articles emphasize that the arrests were prompted by neighbor complaints, as well as the sense that things had simply gone too far.

County Sheriff Terry Keel says of the sex sting at Hippie Hollow, “We need to understand that there are limits to tolerance – even in Austin. This has crossed the line. It’s going to stop” (Wright 1996: 1). Not only do the representations of the stings ensure the connection between public sexuality and crime, but they also link public sex to ideas about “the community,” and the way this abstract body of citizens and neighbors is denied access to these spaces because sex is happening in them; public sex, in fact, ruins spaces for the mass subject: “They use the park to the exclusion of the people of Austin” (Moscoso 1996: 10, my emphasis) or, better, “Nobody wants to see people having sex, and certainly nobody wants their children seeing it” (Mavromatis 1996, my emphasis)

“They” = those people having public sex, the sex public of men. The people of Austin aren’t = They, the people of Austin is everyone, the “nobody.” Nobody, or rather, everyone, quoted in the articles agree that public sex between men is a threat to the public (of neighbors) health, there remains no clear articulation as to what exactly the threat is . . . though children and AIDS are invoked in a series of letters to the editors of the Statesman, it is ultimately a different kind of innocence that gets circulated in opposition
to public sex, namely the public innocence of the neighbors, of everyone and nobody, founded on their ability to keep their (secrets of) sex at home.

Curiously, while the press notes that all of the (abstract) “people” arrested during the first two stings at Bull Creek and Hippie Hollow were men, it is only the narrative surrounding the June arrests in Pease Park that raises the abject specter of the homo.22 The arrests begin to generate a scandal because some gay men caught in the sting complained to openly gay State Representative Glenn Maxey about police entrapment. Maxey then spoke to police on their behalf, and the police dropped some of the charges, recognizing that legal procedures had not been followed in some of the cases. Importantly, when the homo speaks in this case, claiming entrapment, claiming targeting, the police insist that they were not in fact targeting gay men, but only the criminal behavior manifested in public sex. Sgt. Maddox is quoted as saying, “We are not targeting any group or segment of the society. We targeted persons committing certain acts in the park. We didn’t arrest them for homosexual conduct” (Obregon et al. 1996: 1)

In this move, the law effectively casts a veil over the effects of the stings, namely to discourage sex between men in public spaces. It is necessary to note that while the men weren’t arrested from homosexual conduct, they could have been. Homosexual sodomy at the time remained illegal in Texas. But, in a queer way, the claim that homosexuals were not targeted is also true: after all, many of the men who engage in sex with other men in public spaces do not identify as homosexual, gay, queer, or whatever. To say this, however, is to misapprehend the actual goal of these stings, which is not targeting gays, but rather, queerspaces, spaces in which queer sex manifests, regardless of sexual

22 For a discussion of the abject specter of the homo, see Diana Fuss (1991: 3).
identification. The most important effect of these crackdowns lies in the ways they reduce
the possibilities of contact across lines of difference, across categorical identification of
straight, bi, gay, whatever, in the messy space of queerspace. The curious effort by police
to uncouple the crimes of public sex from homosexual identity and practice distracts from
the ongoing scapegoating and illegality of same-sex sexual practices, the transformation
if not outright destruction of queerspaces, and it masks the degree to which this erasure
also works to shore up heteronormative habits and habitus by pushing queers out of
public spaces, and, indeed, the public at large.

Apparently prompted by the queer cries of entrapment and the efforts of Rep.
Maxey to investigate these claims in the June 19th article, the Statesman’s June 22nd
editorial headline reads, “Pease Park Is For All.” By conjuring a phantasmatic public
sphere, the editorial reinforces the view that public sex in Pease ruined it for everyone.
And most importantly, the editorial, like the official stance of the police, strategically
misrecognizes the explicit target of the sting; the editorial claims the target of the stings
was criminal behavior, not queers or queer sex practices.

I want to get (down and dirty, instead of down and low) on this text and to do this
I drop the whole editorial in order to better facilitate another type of queerspace: a
reading between the lines . . . 23

“Pease Park is For All”

Despite protests from some in the gay community, the recent arrests for lewdness
and indecent exposure in Austin's Pease Park were not about homosexuality but
criminality.

23 I am inspired here by Avital Ronnel’s Crack Wars (1992).
Public sex in a city park is a crime, and it doesn't matter whether that sex is heterosexual or homosexual. All city residents have a right to expect their parks to be free of crime, and that includes the crimes of lewdness and indecent exposure.

State Rep. Glen Maxey argues that the stigma of homosexuality forces gays into inappropriate behavior such as sex acts in public restrooms or public parks. He said he deplores police sweeps of known gay hangouts.

Homosexuality, however, does not excuse public sex in a city park.

Pease Park has long been known as a gay cruising area. But cruising is one thing and public sex on the park grounds is another. The first is not a crime, the latter is.

The park is not solely a gay cruising area, and it shouldn't be allowed to become that through community indifference. People visit the park for many different activities, and the city should insist it remain acceptable to all.

If the park were the favored site for female prostitutes or drug users to ply their trades, the police should be just as diligent about arresting those who break the law there.

Maxey said he sympathizes with nearby residents who object to the very public acts of lewdness that occur in and around the park. Then he should understand why the police conduct periodic undercover operations there -- they have to if Pease Park is to remain a pleasant place for all Austin.

The problem isn't that the police conduct undercover operations to arrest those engaging in lewd public behavior in the park; the problem is that they have to. Austin's parks should remain safe and acceptable for everyone, not havens for criminal conduct.

At the outset, the editors constrain the debate to an opposition between two terms:

“homosexuality is not the same as criminality.”

This opposition is nonetheless a pairing that invokes the historical conflation of same-sex sex with crime: sodomy figured as a crime against the state and medicine and other natural orders of things. The opposition covers over the fact that many of the men involved in the arrests likely do not identify as homosexual or gay. Moreover, the opposition between criminality and homosexuality, the claim that homosexuality is not
the same as criminality is, at the time, patently false. In 1996, homosexual oral and anal sex is illegal, whether in public or private, in Texas.\textsuperscript{24} The charges of public lewdness and indecent exposure the men received are Class A and Class B Misdemeanors, respectively, and are punishable by up to a year in jail, a $4000 fine, or both.

“All city residents” marks the first appearance of the phantom public sphere, a public sphere that exiles those who refuse retreats into private abstraction, or whose excessive positivity makes such abstractions impossible (Warner 1993). “All city residents . . .” is a theme that runs throughout the text. The public, represented by an “everyone else,” who might really be a “nobody,” implicitly excludes those arrested, or those who would participate in public sex (How many of the men arrested were, in fact, neighbors?). It presumes that all citizens expect to be free from the crimes of public lewdness and indecent exposure. The editorial begins from a position that supports the “politics of sexual shame” (Warner 1999) that envelops sex in public. A politics of sexual shame relies on the articulation of certain types of sex as good sex, while others are made improper or inappropriate. This politics relies on a public shaming of those who would participate in such types of sexual activity. This shaming is made explicit by the law, but also by moral crusaders like Mark Weaver, who photographed and filmed men having sex in Pease Park as well as videotaping their license plate numbers and threatening to out them.

\textsuperscript{24} In 2000, a Texas appeals court struck down the state’s anti-sodomy law by overturning the conviction of two Houston men arrested while having sex in the privacy of their bedroom. Another appeals court reinstated the sodomy statute, which, again, addresses only homosexual sex, in 2001. Lawrence vs. Texas made its way to the U.S. Supreme Court and in 2003, the court overturned their prior 1986 \textit{Bowers vs. Hardwick} decision, which had effectively ruled that privacy rights do not extend to homosexuals, thereby making Texas’ sodomy law unconstitutional.
When the editorial states, “State Rep. Glen Maxey argues that the stigma of homosexuality forces gays into inappropriate behavior such as sex acts in public restrooms or public parks. He said he deplores police sweeps of known gay hangouts,” the editorial staff misrepresents Rep. Maxey’s position. In a July 8th letter to the editor, Maxey, points out that he never made the argument that links homosexuality and inappropriate behavior in public. In fact, in the original June 19th article, Maxey is at pains to emphasize that he and “the overwhelming majority of gay and lesbian Austinites deplore public sex” (Obregon et al. 1996). Like other nobodies, everybodies, and good citizens, Maxey believes sex should remain confined to the space of the intimate private sphere.

Yet, building on their false claim about Maxey’s position, the editors go on to say, “Homosexuality, however, does not excuse public sex in a city park.” If we are to follow the editors’ logic, drawing on their misrepresentation of Maxey, this statement might translate into the following: though homosexuality is a stigmatized identity that, by virtue of being stigmatized, produces bad or inappropriate behavioral effects, this problem of stigmatization does not, in the end, excuse these effects. This is another sleight-of-hand: sure, stigmas against homosex produce effects that can to some degree be understood through notions of internalized homophobia. But the editorial’s goal is not about looking at the workings of homophobia, but rather about creating the impression that there are dirty and dangerous spaces and that these nasty things are getting cleaned up to the benefit of neighbors and everyone else. Perhaps the straight, married, and queer men frequent these places because of homophobia, and not internalized homophobia, the stigma that makes one do bad things, but the homophobia that happens at home, that
makes it difficult for a straight or married man to say he’d like to get it on with another man. Isn’t heteronormativity’s first defense the cultivation of the closet? Most men, I would, suggest participate in this public inappropriateness out of a desire to protect their privacy (Humphreys 1999[1970])

The editorial multiplies this misrecognition, simultaneously relinking homosexuality and criminality, when they claim, “Pease Park has long been known as a gay cruising area. But cruising is one thing and public sex on the park grounds is another. The first is not a crime, the latter is.” If the park has been known as queerspace for so long, why the need for a crackdown now? Is it simply, as the police say, a matter of things getting out of hand? The whole point of cruising is, of course, sex. Cruising can even be understood as a kind of sex. Queer looks touch; they are sex. How else would the police manage to entrap men without even speaking? The police defend themselves from claims of entrapment by saying that “providing someone with an opportunity to break the law is not entrapment because they can refuse” (Obregon et al. 1996: 1).

So, while the park has a history, this history can be erased through the mass aversion of the community, poised at the entry portal of the queerspace, putting up signs as reminders: “Memory is the Amnesia You Like” (Berlant and Warner 2000: 313). The community, the people, the “all” opposed to those who cruise who have sex in the space can effect a transformation that would dissipate the gayze viscosity, air heavy with desiring looks. The editorial advocates the education of desire through denial and forgetting. The editors don’t just want the end of the criminal behaviors categorized as public lewdness and indecent exposure, they want the end of cruising, the behaviors that
lead to sex. They want the queerspace of Pease Park to be reclaimed by neighbors and families.

“If the park were the favored site for female prostitutes or drug users to ply their trades, the police should be just as diligent about arresting those who break the law there.” Here it is, the analogy that undermines and confirms their initial opposition of homosex and criminality: they decouple homosex from crime only to relink it again . . . Cruisers get firmly ejected from the public, back into their queerspaces, spaces they have long-shared with other criminal and pathologized subjects: the prostitute and the addict.

By claiming that the “the problem” isn’t undercover operations, but the need for them, the editors shift attention away from the strange mimetic character of police entrapment, in which undercover police officers walk around in short shorts, grab their crotches in public restrooms, and act out the fantasies of public cruisers, toward the behaviors themselves. Who are the agent actors here? The police, the cruisers, or the bulges in short shorts, the queer looks that make promises but deliver handcuffs? While the editors say the problem has to do with the criminal behaviors that take place in the queerspace of Pease Park, they ignore the ways that the police actively encourage and produce the very crimes they are meant to curb. They ignore the ways public sex in parks very rarely occurs in transparent view of the public; and they ignore the ways it is often police undercover operations and media scrutiny that produce public sex as a public problem at all.

Finally, “Austin's parks should remain safe and acceptable for everyone, not havens for criminal conduct.” Read: look, you queers need to go home, or to your bars, and take your sex with you! And the same goes for you husbands and fathers! Get back to
your straight sex, your wives, and girlfriends; deal with the fact that anonymous blowjobs
from anonymous men aren’t a right, but a privilege; use a personal ad or the net!

Queerspaces get bad publicity because of their association with sex, with the ways
they transgress the ostensibly stable divides between public, private, and intimate sexual
life. Some people liked it better when queerspaces were secret. Robert, for instance, notes
the charms of secret societies and says,

It was definitely a secret coming out. I was certainly didn’t have any interest in
meeting other gay people, or joining the community, or carrying signs. I think all
that secretness fetishized being gay and later made public sex that much more
interesting because it was secret and wrong. And I actually worry about the
future, for when a time may come when it’s no longer necessary to be secretly
gay. We may lose something special . . . we’ll notice something is missing. But
the libido is terribly creative so I imagine that postEmancipation, they’ll come up
with something else to fetishize.

The tension between the desire to be out and proud and the desire for secret
pleasures is one of the charges released in discourses around public sex. Queerspaces
clearly have a problem with going too public. Media accounts and the law, in their efforts
to suppress public sex, must necessarily produce public sex as a category for public
consumption and contemplation. But the bad publicity, the blinding overexposures of
shame, instantiated when the media and the Law make sex-in-public public, is echoed by
some of my informants, who point out that the problem of sex in public also has to do
with queer excesses: “we drew too much attention to ourselves . . . dirty queers leaving
condoms lying around . . . we just got too bold having sex right out in the open on the
rocks at Hippie Hollow . . .”

Whether queer excesses or police or media scrutiny functioned to make queer sex
a public problem, the results of the stings were both dramatic and highly temporal. Men
were arrested, fined, and jailed. The roads adjacent to the park were made into park property and therefore subject to curfew. Signs were posted warning parkgoers and cruisers alike that undercover police occasionally patrol the area. Underbrush was cleared to afford fewer private refuges in the public of the park.

Pease Park and other public parks were disciplined. But unlike Cinema West, they were not entirely disappeared. Indeed, public parks remain “havens for criminal conduct.” During the day or at night after the bars have closed, it is still possible to wander in these spaces, to cruise and to seek out and find sex in public. The stings transformed these spaces, however, making them less amenable to the free and utopic kinds of encounters that once characterized them. It is still possible to have sex in Pease, then, but it also feels less safe, more subject to scrutiny and irruption of legal trouble and moral shame.

**Utopic Queertimes**

Explicit policing and media scapegoating of queerspaces are not the only way queerspaces were transformed. HIV/AIDS also played a role in this process. During the 1980s, HIV/AIDS was frequently cited as a reason to close down sexual sites such as bathhouses and to police other sites in public places. But HIV/AIDS worked to transfigure spaces in other ways as well. The virus opened up spaces of fear and mourning in people that made sex seem scary and dangerous.

While it is almost impossible to imagine it today, there was a time before HIV/AIDS. When beginning my research, I spent a lot of time imagining these spaces, even putting myself into them. My fantastic transportation to queertimes (a pervert’s form of time travel) was animated by a question, the question of “what if?”—What if
things were different, what if I had been there, what if folks could have known sooner?

“What if?” opens a troubled space, nonetheless rich with speculations.

In my queerspace of fantasy, in my queertime travelogue, I loved and fucked boys and men I never knew, beautiful, talented, intelligent, and sexy people who were both open and serious about love and sex without being beholden to the chains of identity that seem to mark and even overdetermine queer identities, sex and politics after the emergence of the HIV/AIDS epidemic and the mainstreaming of the gay and lesbian movement (Vaid 1995). While historians of sexuality debate timelines for the production of modern gay identities, for me, I think of the queertime before AIDS in the context of the politics of sexual liberation in which folks were not required to claim any particular sexual identity, regardless of their sexual practices. Before HIV/AIDS, the possibilities for a queer politics of sexual liberation were truly radical—folks could love and fuck without identities or shame. The horizons of social experience seemed wide open to experimentation, exploration, and the play of desire.

Of course, this is all in my head. Watch yer head, I remind myself; dreams of freedom are more imaginative, fantastic, and filled with speculative possibilities than reality ever was. As I have already discussed, sexual practices have been subject to public scrutiny and/or policed for most, if not all, of recorded history, whether or not they were linked to particular sexual subjectivities. But what I’m calling a utopic queertime isn’t really about reality—it is instead about my dreams and fantasies and about how folks who lived during the era before AIDS recount and remember the range of sexual, social, political, and affective possibilities that inhered during that era. Thus, when speaking with men and women in Austin who lived, loved and fucked in utopic queertimes, I
haven’t focused on the truth of their stories, but rather what the stories tell about feelings of possibility and open-endedness that had just begun to emerge during the era of sexual liberation. As a friend and neighbor reminds me, “the past is remembrance, not presence,” whether or not the past haunts us.

Of course, for Foucauldians, and I count myself among them, the notion of sexual liberation is itself suspect. Drawing on Foucault’s critique of the “repressive hypothesis”—the idea of Victorian sexual repression—a politics of sexual liberation seems naïve at best, and, at worst, prone to a sexual fascism that makes being out, having transgressive sex, etc. into a queer cultural imperative. For Foucault, the repressive hypothesis is undermined by the proliferation of discourses on sex during the Victorian period. Sex circulated as a kind of public secret, as a problem that required management, and, increasingly, as practices that became linked to particular people, among them, the homosexual, the child, and the inmate. The policing and concomitant controversies surrounding public sex in Austin highlight the dilemma that encompasses thinking about sexual liberation. In Austin, various spaces are subject to ongoing disciplining, and while this has resulted in the disappearing of some spaces, and the constraining of others, this hasn’t resulted in the broader erasure of desire from the public spaces of parks or other sites used for public sex. Would liberation mean the easing of restrictions on these sites? Or would it be something broader, something that, say, actively encourages the public expression of sexuality? It might be argued that the Lawrence vs. Texas decision in 2003 was a step toward sexual liberation insofar as it overturned Texas’s sodomy law and set

---

25 Foucault (1978) and Taussig (1999). In Defacement, Taussig describes the public secret “as knowing what not to know” and as “that which is known, but cannot be articulated” (Taussig 1999: 2, 5, emphasis in original).
precedent for overturning similar laws around the country. But the decision only allows for the private expression of same-sex sexuality; it is in fact careful not to extend sexual rights beyond the bedroom. Would real sexual liberation involve the free and unmanaged expression of sex in any sphere of life?

If sex is not repressed, then, is it even possible to speak of a politics of sexual liberation? From what would sexual agents be liberated other than the very notion that they are repressed? Many of these questions have since become moot, as HIV/AIDS instantiated a devastating literalization of queertime as having a before, and an after. Regardless of the truth of my fantasies of utopic queertimes, or the existence or viability of a politics of sexual liberation, I believe there is both ethical and political efficacy in trying to reimagine times before the lines between and across identities were as clear cut as they appear today. In utopic queertimes, it was still possible to learn how to Become rather than Be oneself, for searching, wandering, cruising in and out of identifications, pleasures and publics, asking, as in the title of a famous 1897 image by self-exiled French painter Paul Gauguin titled Where Do We Come From? What Are We? Where Are We Going?26

Just the facts, ma’am

“To articulate the past historically does not mean to recognize it ‘the way it really was’ (Ranke). It means to seize hold of a memory as it flashes up at a moment of danger” (Benjamin 1968: 255).

26 Gauguin is, of course, a troubled figure to cite here. His self-exile in Tahiti shows one way imperialist fantasies mark out elsewhere, the space of the Other, as sites for sexual possibility and liberation. At the same time that Gauguin brought these imperialist fantasies to his queerspace paradise in Tahiti, he also introduced venereal disease to the Tahitians. My thanks to Neville Hoad for helping me to situate Gauguin in postcolonial historical framework.
My tribes are in danger. My dreams of queertimes before HIV/AIDS and the stories I’ve been told reflect a longing-toward-the-past, a nostalgia tinged with feelings of melancholic loss. These memories and stories are so affected by sadness, fear, and anger because the past is still in the present, or rather, following Benjamin on Ranke in the quote above, the past keeps surging up in moments of danger. My tribes are in danger, and I’ve put myself in danger.

First, some general “facts.”27 Just the facts, ma’am. Between 850,000 and 950,000 Americans are infected with HIV. Of these, nearly twenty five percent, or between 180,000 and 280,000 do not know they are infected. About 40,000 Americans are infected with HIV annually. This rate has remained level for a decade, after an initial drop-off during the late eighties and nineties, and after the introduction of the drug “cocktail” combos in 1996. Men who have sex with men are still the highest risk group, and the group with the highest number of infections. Hispanics, Blacks and women represent a disproportionate number of new infections. Blacks now account for nearly 30 percent of infections, but only 12 percent of the general population.

Texas is fourth in the nation with nearly sixty thousand reported infections. Travis County, where Austin is located, echoes these national trends. Infections are on the rise among youth and minorities, especially women of color.

Most alarming for me has been the unwillingness of young gay men to believe themselves vulnerable to the epidemic. 77% of young gay men infected with HIV don’t know they have it. One young man, whom I first met in San Antonio more than six years ago, seroconverted while working as an escort in Austin. I spoke with him about my own

27 All data references in this section come from the Centers for Disease Control. One can access this data at http://www.cdc.gov/hiv/pubs/facts.htm.
experiences with HIV, not my own serostatus, which was negative, but about how people I knew with HIV dealt with it. At the time, I wanted to be helpful. But I was also being hypocritical given my own lapses in safe sex and my own often unconscious and irrational fears about infection. More than that, I gave advice without the slightest notion of how I’d handle the disease if I had it.

The facts tell only a part of the story of HIV/AIDS, whether at the local, national or international level. And while the facts are important insofar as they demonstrate the scope of the ongoing pandemic, facts don’t tell about the memories or feelings or experiences of those infected. They don’t, indeed they can’t, tell the whole story.  

I was increasingly forced to grapple with HIV/AIDS in my life and in my research. While I wanted to mark my longing for lost sites of sexual desire, the continued existence of these spaces made this effort seem important than marking out other sites, the sites of longing and loss that came with the impact of HIV/AIDS. After years of trying to avoid the virus, by having safe sex but also by denying it access to my inner life through an avoidance of films or literatures dealing with the virus, a relationship with a positive man and the effects HIV/AIDS had on my informants lives and their views on public sex increasingly occupied my attention.

In some ways, the impact of HIV/AIDS intensified my nostalgia for a time I never knew. This sentiment was also echoed by many of the men I spoke with, who recall coming of age in an era in which one feared whether or not one could get laid, not whether or not getting laid could kill you.

---

28 In Infectious Rhythm, Barbara Browning writes, “Statistics are figures, complicated images to be read deeply, not flatly. That is, all epidemiological hypotheses are based on a series of questionable assumptions of categoric identities and behaviors” (1998: 10).
The effect of HIV/AIDS on queerspaces in Austin is a roundabout one. While the unlikely bedfellows of AIDS activist Jose Orta and moral crusader Mark Weaver cited HIV as a reason to shut down the bathhouses and to police sites where men had sex, there was no widespread effort to shut down sexual sites because of the virus, unlike major urban areas such as New York, Los Angeles, and Chicago. At the same time, HIV eventually did impact Austin and when it did, it had a chilling effect on previously vital sexual sites. As Steven Saylor writes,

I felt it like a chill in the air. I felt it in the bars, in the arcades, at Barton Springs, at Hippie Hollow. I heard it in the voices of my friends down at Liberty Books, the legit gay bookshop. The college boys were more furtive and distanced. The clientele at the arcades suddenly seemed sadder, older, depressed, and rather bewildered (Saylor 1992: 124).

“In ’84”

Many gay men I spoke with in Austin noted how AIDS seemed to take a while to catch up to Austin. Still, knowing about AIDS didn’t necessarily change people’s behavior.

Shawn: In 84’ this town hadn’t really been affected . . . I mean, I knew about AIDS since I was a freshman in high school in 1980 and I still had unsafe sex . . . But down here, it was just really not prevalent here

Shaka: Was there a point when AIDS did more become prevalent?

Shawn: Yeah, starting around 1988 and then it really started getting bad anywhere from 90-92, and then in ’93 I was going to like three funerals a week. I mean, it was just terrible, just terrible . . . It was weird . . . but it was great too. I mean, we had rubber fairies—we’d go around to the bars and give rubbers to everybody.

Shawn’s stories show the ways that the effects of HIV/AIDS at the local level involved both intense feelings of grief and creative transformations of that grief. While Shawn’s “rubber fairies” participated in what many activist scholars would define as
activist outreach, it is important to note that this was not simply a matter of turning grief into anger. Indeed, the range of affective responses generated in folks was transformed into a range of actions—from direct political interventions like lobbying for more research monies for research, treatment and testing to humorous but nonetheless important interventions like dressing up as fairies and handing out condoms at gay bars.

Another gay man, Brett, who is in his forties and works in the gift industry, and who cared for a long term partner as he died from AIDS, also helped me think through and expand notions what might count as activism in the context of the epidemic.

Shaka: Did you ever get involved in any AIDS activism?

Brett: Well, Frank died in 1989. And I marched in every AIDS walk for the next 7 years. These were the pledge marches, so I helped raise money. This was a good thing that came from Frank’s death. I would never have marched otherwise. I also participated in the City Grill lunches where you paid $50 for a table. People would show up and talk to each other, people who would never talk to each other. These were all people who took part in his caretaking.

S: How long did that caretaking go on?

Brett: It didn’t go on long. He was mostly healthy until the last few months. He started having blood transfusions. In my industry, there’s an organization called Gift for Life that’s the Gift Industry’s response to AIDS. I give $500 a year. That’s also something that Fred’s death brought about. He himself wasn’t in the gift industry or into giving money. And maybe this doesn’t count as activism, but I also participated in a support group for people whose friends had died of AIDS.

S: Did you find that therapy useful?

B: Sure, it was a way to vent.

S: And share experiences?

B: And to realize, “you think you have it bad.” There was one lady whose husband had died of AIDS and she had two kids. I thought to myself, “You know Brett, get a life.”
In the end, though, most of the straights dropped out of the group and ended up mostly made up of gay men who had lost lovers, friends . . .

I also did Dining for Life—that’s where you’d go to a restaurant that participated in this program—they’d give money to AIDS organizations. First it was on World AIDS, but now I think it’s just Dining for Life day. I would try to round up as many people as I could. I ended up doing breakfast, lunch, and dinner on the day of the event at different participating restaurants. I also had a lot of sex. And I think that’s good. I think that’s part of activism too.

S: How do you see having sex as part of activism?

B: In that it promotes and encourages homosexual orientation. And I even had a couple of relationships—it wasn’t all anonymous.

S: Did you ever have relationships with anyone else who was positive?

B: Yeah, two of them. There is a long pause in conversation.

B: Did I tell you a guy I used to trick with committed suicide? He jumped off a garage. It freaked me out because I didn’t know what his status was. Coroner’s office just listed the cause of death as suicide.

S: No . . .

B: After Frank died . . . he wasn’t comfortable that he was dying of AIDS. And certainly, his 80-year-old parents weren’t comfortable with the fact that their 50-year-old son was dying. After he died a woman who was doing an article on Barton Springs swimmers contacted me and she asked me a lot of questions about Frank because he’d been a regular there. She asked me “how long was Frank sick before he died,” and I said to her like I said to you yesterday, that I didn’t really remember, that some of the details are vague. And after she left, I freaked out, so I called this woman back and said, “You can’t print that Frank died of AIDS.” And she responded by saying, “well, he did die of AIDS.” “Yeah he did,” I told her, but I didn’t want her to write about it, I didn’t want his parents to know that the story came from me. She never wrote the article.

There was another situation with a glass artist who was sick whose circle I used to run in. I had gone to visit our mutual friends and told them when they asked that he wasn’t doing so well. Well, they called friends in Austin and told them that Phillip was dying of AIDS. The next time Phillip saw me in the grocery store, he stood in the aisle and shouted, “My sexuality and my health are none of your business! And don’t ever talk to anyone about my health!” All along, I was standing there telling him he was right, that I had been in the wrong. And he was totally right. I was totally at fault. His disease had progressed so far—normally,
he would have asked me outside to talk about it quietly. This is man who, later on, when they found him wandering around Pease Park at 3 am, they didn’t take him to the hospital but to the police station . . . he was like a leprechaun, so slight, agile, and strong.

In many ways, the importance of the virus is for me less rooted in its dimensions as a threat to public health that necessitated the closing of sexual sites, but in the ways it literally and figuratively got under people’s skin, the ways it opened up affective queerspaces: the agony of watching someone you love die, the fears of being exposed, the space of mourning those you’ve loved and lost, even those you never knew. Certainly this was the case for me. My proximity to the virus increased and the space of mourning grew, threatening to overwhelm me as it morphed into melancholia. This process is something that I find very difficult to write about. I still fear the virus in this way, that if I open myself up to these feelings again, if I write about them, I might die all over again.

**HIV/AIDS: Practice, Politics, and Affect**

The fact that our militancy may be a means of dangerous denial in no way suggests that activism is unwarranted. There is no question but that we must fight the unspeakable violence we incur from the society in which we find ourselves. But if we understand that violence is able to reap its horrible rewards through the very psychic mechanisms that make us part of this society, then we may also be able to recognize—along with our rage—our terror, our guilt, and our profound sadness. Militancy, of course, then, but mourning too: mourning and militancy (Crimp 1989: 18).

AIDS scholar and activist Douglas Crimp addresses his “Mourning and Militancy” essay not to an academic audience but to fellow activists who, he argues, are curiously silent about the personal effects/affects generated by the deaths of friends and lovers from AIDS. And, like Leo Bersani (1988), Crimp’s essay undermines distinctions between critical theory and political practice. Crimp uses psychoanalytic theory as
political practice—to revise Freudian and neoFreudian theories of desire in the context of gay men living during the AIDS epidemic. Moreover, he wants to understand and undermine the opposition between activism and mourning that is implicit in Freud’s essay on mourning and melancholia and explicit in the views of gay activists like Larry Kramer.29

For many activists, the response to the AIDS epidemic was to turn grief into anger, a move in which “mourning becomes militancy” (Crimp 1989: 9). Crimp complicates this call by speaking to the range of affective responses to AIDS, to mourning and to melancholia. And he importantly warns against a moralism that doesn’t take into account the “anger, rage, and outrage, anxiety, fear, and terror, shame and guilt, sadness and despair . . . deadening numbness or constant depression” (Crimp 1989: 16) which might include a kind of political paralysis. This moralism, he says, “den[ies] the extent of the violence we have all endured; even more importantly, it is to deny a fundamental fact of psychic life: violence is also self-inflicted” (Crimp 1989: 16).

The hard work of mourning goes on and on to include not only mourning for the dead, but for the not-yet dead, for the living, and for those living with specters of death. The hard work of mourning goes on and on in the bodies of the infected, their friends, the folks whose sero-status is unknown, and in those survivors who may experience guilt about not dying.30 In fact, it may not be mourning that characterizes the affective lives of folks during the queertimes of endless finitudes imposed by AIDS, but melancholia: “The occasions giving rise to melancholia for the most part extend beyond the clear case of a

29 Activism is hardly a concept much less a word in Freud’s essay. Nonetheless, it may be possible to think of Freud’s positing of mourning as a healthy form of grief as marking the necessity of working through, or acting to change, melancholia.
loss by death, and include all those situations of being wounded, hurt, neglected, our of favor, or disappointed, which can . . . reinforce and already existing ambivalence” (Freud in Crimp 1989: 12). Though Crimp refuses to characterize this ambivalence as Freud does, that is, as pathological, he does want his fellow activists to recognize the internal self-abasements and the way they are extended not only to the present—the dangers of promiscuity—but to the past as well, a retroactive abjection of queer psyches, bodies, spaces, histories, and ideals. This is the perspective that conflates living the (gay) life with death.

Writing against the assertion that activists have a death wish, Crimp suggests instead that activists “do not acknowledge the death drive” (16). In the end, Crimp wants us to recognize that misery cannot come purely from the psychic or the social, but rather, following Jacqueline Rose, as “something that appears as the effect of the dichotomy itself” (Rose in Crimp 1989: 16). “By making all violence external, we fail to confront ourselves, to acknowledge our ambivalence, to comprehend that our misery is also self-inflicted” (Crimp 1989: 17). Rage can be seen to emerge here as a function of disavowal that masks the ambivalences of the melancholic realities generated in the lives of folks during the age of AIDS. On practical, political, and personal levels, the recognition of ambivalence means grappling with difficult issues of testing and treatment, but the recognition and expression of these ambivalences also means opening up the possibilities for communication and of developing creative personal and communal responses to the grief, terror, and anxiety of living through AIDS.

***
Recently, I talk with a young man and former lover, about AIDS activisms. I tell him how I participated in sex ed workshops, demonstrations, how I stood up and talked at the capitol with a queer people of color student group I’d helped to found to protest the Texas Department of Public Health’s defunding of HIV/AIDS services especially for gay men. But I didn’t valorize these experiences. Rather I talked about how this work wore me down, indeed, how loving someone who was HIV-positive and doing this work broke me. How for a long time, I lacked the energy to take care of myself. He didn’t seem to hear me. Instead, he said, “If I’d been 20 years old in the 80s and 90s, I totally would have fought those battles. Now it just doesn’t seem as urgent. Now there’s not as much to fight for.”

I’m dumbfounded and angry. I say, “I think you’re romanticizing that whole movement. And I also think you’re dead wrong to say there’s nothing left to fight for. Forty million people are infected worldwide and it’s only getting worse. In the U.S., Hispanics, blacks, and women of color in particular, make up a disproportionate number of infections. The question isn’t whether there’s anything left to fight for, the question is why aren’t you doing the fighting? Where are ACT UP and Queer Nation now? Are you saying this because as a young gay white man with financial resources you don’t know anyone with the virus, who died from it? Do you say this because you don’t know any brown or black people who are affected? Maybe you don’t think there’s anything left to fight for because you’re fighting to find a boyfriend, you’re fighting to be happy, like a selfish child.” Angry, I’m usually inarticulate, but these facts and figures roll off of my tongue as if they had been rehearsed. I’m surprised at myself. And a little ashamed for my attack.
We go ahead and eat dinner and we don’t see each other again for weeks, maybe months. Now, I wonder whether I was talking to him, or to my own lost 20 year old in denial self, the one that avoided films or books or anything on AIDS like, well, like the plague. That night, like so many other nights, I cry—for my broken self, for my wild and lost tribes, for his innocence, and its inevitable loss.
Chapter Three: Virtual Intimacies: Love, Addiction, and Identity @ the Matrix

While queerspaces in the public sphere came under increasing pressure and were targeted for policing and/or erasure, virtual queerspaces came to supplement and even supplant real world queerspaces. The queerspace of the screen provided new ways for queers to connect to one another and to broader communities. In a time when mass media representations of LGBTQ people were both rare and frequently problematic, virtual spaces offered a range of representations of queer folks and their desires at websites devoted to health resources, community guides, and, of course, pornography. For queers and everyone else, cyberspace had perhaps become a modern agora (Shapiro 1995; Travers 1999; Turkle 1995).

As with the queerspaces located in the public sphere, virtual queerspaces can be characterized as threshold spaces, but not as thresholds that necessarily lead somewhere, but rather thresholds that perpetuate states of inbetweenness. While the previous chapter focuses on the policing of queerspaces and sex publics, this chapter focuses more specifically on the promises and limits of intimacy effected through the queerspace of the screen. The virtual has offered a safe haven for the construction of new queerspaces—queer publics mediated by the space of the screen—and Second, and virtual queerspaces have proliferated the venues for sexpublics. But virtual queerspaces and sexpublics have also conditioned the emergence for the transformation of intimacy.

Both real and virtual queerspaces are spaces of possibilities. People use virtual technologies because they offer the promise of something new or different or better.

31 Portions of this chapter originally appeared, in different form, in the August 2, 2002 issue of the Texas Triangle.
(Haraway 1997: 41). Real and virtual queerspaces hold the utopian promise of free play in the field of sex and desire: freedom from the chains of categorical identities, freedom from all constraint and all failure (except the constraints and failures that come with the meaty territory, the matrix, of desire and sex). In scenes of public sex or in online hot chat, anonymity, in particular, created the sense that “anything goes.” One could be anyone, express any desire, perform any fantasy. But the promise goes both ways and I therefore attend as well to the promise of things going bad. In both real and virtual worlds, everyday dystopias crashed utopic fantasies of freedom hard, without ever disappearing desire or the potentially generative moments and possibilities immanent in queerspaces and sexpublics—people unwittingly talked to spambots in chatrooms, people rejected one another because they weren’t the “right type,” people lied about who they were, and people increasingly desired deeper senses of connection than those afforded them at public parks or through cybersex, people got bored with the everydayness of virtual technologies.

In thinking about virtual technologies of instant communication, then, there’s an alienation that goes along with the promise. This alienation has to do with the discomfort of dwelling in the virtual, in the ambivalent bleed between the virtual and the actual. The same may be true of intimacy itself.

**Virtual Intimacies**

Concepts of the virtual in itself are important only to the extent to which they contribute to a pragmatic understanding of emergence, to the extent to which they enable triggerings of change (induce the new). It is the edge of the virtual, where it leaks into the actual, that counts. For the seeping edge is where potential, actually, is found (Massumi 2002: 43).
These are stories from the grid, from the matrix, about people who are connected and trying to connect. Virtual intimacies are intimacies mediated by technologies, by screens in particular, but as the texts below show, these intimacies are no less actual or real for the fact that they take place in virtual contexts; indeed, if anything, the virtual proliferates the emergence of concrete events, while at the same time calling into question the reality of intimacy itself. Virtual intimacies always start somewhere: at home or at work or even at public terminals, at a school or a bar or a coffeeshop, somewhere, there’s flesh and blood, fingers tapping away at keys, eyes scanning personal profiles on the surface of web pages, people hooking up. The events and affective impacts effected through the space of the screen blur the lines between virtual and real, as well as public and private divides.

Dwelling in the ambivalent phrase “virtual intimacies,” this chapter tackles two kinds of virtual intimacies. There are, first, the kinds of intimacy effected through virtual technologies: people connect with one another by means of digital virtualities, often across great spatial distances, and people use these virtual contexts to connect in face-to-face encounters, in dates or sexual rendezvous. Digital virtualities have, in short, actual, and materially significant, effects. Searching for love or identity in the matrix produces profoundly felt responses that register on the level of the intimate, as that which is perceived as inmost to oneself or to one’s relationships, and they facilitate and/or complicate new or existing relationships to oneself and to others. Second, but not unrelatingly, I suggest that intimacies are themselves marked by virtuality, by being in a tense relationship to the real or the concrete. In this chapter, I use ethnographic examples to explore the intersections of these two kinds of virtual intimacies, in the ways the
relationships we have with people seem to be real, to be about particular things (sex, companionship, etc.) when maybe those are just narratives covering over other things (fear of abandonment, clinging, attachment, narcissism).32

On a broad level, thinking about the virtual helps us to ask what’s real (Shields 2003). What’s real when it comes to intimacy? Is it the intense feelings, the longing that comes even when people are together, or worse, after the end of things, after abandonment or estrangement? The narratives attached to intimacy gone wrong aim to provide some kind of grounding for the floating ambivalence that endings generate. “He’s afraid of commitment,” “I drank too much,” “There was just this emotional disconnect,” “I thought she was someone else,” “It was addictive and codependent.” These narratives try to get us out of our ambivalence, the ambivalent fears that things were never as they seemed; that what seemed so real was in fact unreal, virtual, projected.

Of course, what we experience when we dwell in the virtuality of intimacy isn’t just fantasy gone right or wrong, but the discomfort of actually not knowing. This ambivalence is the actual thing, the thing that leads us to seek succor from a story that makes sense.

---

32Virtuality, like narrative, is real enough on its own terms; both adhere to an and/or logic. Virtuality, narrative, and narratives about the virtual are true and/or fiction. For examples of and/or logic of coupling, see Azoulay (1997:1-2), Hall (1992: 29) and Troillout (1995). My use of the “virtual” is inspired by an intellectual genealogy that includes Bergson, Spinoza, Deleuze and Gauttari, and, most recently, Brian Massumi (2002), in which the virtual is opposed not to the real, but to the concrete. In The Virtual, Rob Shields (2003) provides a concise outlining of some of these notions, and I have relied heavily on his gloss. He says of the virtual in these thinkers’ works, “The virtual is ideal but not abstract, real but not actual. It is ideally real, like a memory. Of more significance is the weaving together of these ontological categories in our representations of reality, of the past and of the future. Virtual elements are embedded in everyday activities and the language we use. Ritual, miracles, understandings of risk and fate all involve slippage between categories as the virtual is actualized, the probably takes place—as our fears and dreams ‘come true’” (Shields 2003: 43).
In her introduction to the anthology *Intimacy*, Lauren Berlant says, “to intimate is to communicate with the sparest of signs and gestures” (Berlant 2000:1). Intimacy is felt, talked about; discourses about intimacy proliferate in therapeutic contexts, from the analyst’s office, to Jerry Springer. But is it a thing, is it actually concrete? Surely, these spare signs and gestures exist in relation to the probable (there’s still a relationship because there are signs of intimacy) and the actual (an intimate gesture is an event that might lead to other events, to lovemaking or argument). Berlant goes on to say that “at its root, intimacy has the quality of eloquence and brevity” (ibid). Communicating with the barest of signs is like having a secret language, a language whose secrecy runs so deep that neither oneself nor the other with whom one communicates briefly, sparingly can be fully literate in it.

With a whisper, with a touch, something gets passed on in these intimate communications. Do we know what this thing is? Isn’t it the case that the sparest sign paradoxically communicates not a single thing, like “you know what I mean” or “I love you,” but instead indexes a whole range of past intimations—“you know what I mean because we’ve intimated this before.” Intimacy is a sign of past and future connection, of things just barely communicated. Intimacy is itself virtual, indexing as it does memories of past intimation and the desire for its continuance, its future actualization: a wink, rolled eyes, a stuck out tongue, the brush of fingers across a nipple, hands clasped under sheets even when the bodies face opposite directions.

The virtuality of intimacy reveals the degree to which our intimacies are terribly fragile and delicate things. The fragility and delicacy is best revealed when intimacy gets taken for granted or when its lost; it appears when things come apart, when one can see
the frayed edges, the broken threads of the intimations that used to tie people together. At the end of things, the virtual, the always-still-becoming of the relationship’s intimacy, becomes something else, it becomes actually over.

When I think about virtual intimacies within the context of my experiences in Austin, I remember how real the things that happened through screens felt and how screens helped things to happen. Indeed, my earliest experiences with queerspaces and sex publics in Austin were mediated by the space of the screen. At the website cruisingforsex.com, I learned that Austin was a hotbed for public cruising, and I relied heavily on this online archive for mapping out my own forays into various public sex scenes. I learned early on that when it came to queer desire and sex, the space of the screen offered a virtual entrée into real and actual worlds. In the virtual, people projected, typed, and desired and things came back to them: They found out about a performance event, they went over to someone’s house came, someone came to theirs, they had sex, they got drugs, they talked to strangers about coming out.

I had intimate relations, that is, talk and sex, through virtual queerspaces. And they affected my intimate relations; indeed, they troubled them. Though I used the queerspace of the screen to hook up, I also cultivated an intimacy with the screen itself. My ghost bled into the space of the screen. Looking at myself from the outside, or after I’d been wandering in the virtual, my eyes look glazed, distant. Moments before they were bright, hungry, searching in an effort to find my desires mirrored and reflected back to me from some elsewhere.

The virtual thus had concretely real effects when it came to my everyday experiences of intimacies. But the inverse is also true; as real and virtual life bled into
one another, I couldn’t help but feel as if my intimacies weren’t themselves a bit virtual. I think about various intimate scenes—the lovemaking, the “talks,” the fights, the tragic endings and how those too are virtual, playing out, as they do, on the internal screens of my mind’s eye, in memories and dreams.  

**Virtual Equality**

As a result of the sex panics of the 90s, political scapegoating, and consumer-centric acceptance, queers, and especially those who are really “queer” – the high femme butch dykes, trannies of all sorts, flamboyant faeries and radical bisexuals – have been increasingly pushed out of the public sphere and into virtual space. And while the net has facilitated social and political networking, it also contributes to the depoliticization of the gay and lesbian movement. The net may offer alternative spaces for contact and encounter, but this doesn’t mean it provides social or political recognition and redress. Former National Gay and Lesbian Task Force Director Urvashi Vaid’s perspective on the state of mainstream gay and lesbian movement is also appropriate to many online queerspaces: mainstream acceptance and capitalist success alone amount only to a “virtual equality” (Vaid 1995). The promise of freedom and safety in the net certainly doesn’t offer freedom from desire or from capital. Visiting gay sites online, sites like gay.com or planetout.com, it often seems that virtual queer life is all about sex and shopping. Indeed, at gay websites, where one can scan for clothes or porn to buy, price

---

33 See Shields (2003), esp. Chapter 2. See also Antze and Lambek (1996) for a discussion of trauma and memory.
gay cruises, and look at personal profiles, sex and shopping work in some kind of equivalence: sex and dating are equally figured as commodities.\textsuperscript{34}

\textbf{Everybody’s Doing It}

Virtual space has become an important cultural space for the projection and archiving of our fantasies. And over the last half-decade, our ventures into virtual space have generated headlines of articles or studies with titles like:

Brave new world of Internet sex helps housewives cope with their suburban shells; or

Online predators: Are your kids safe?; or Computer access leads to risky sex; or

Internet web site leads to toilet sex, a Fox News Undercover!

From the early days of the net, when folks used email listserves, Bulletin Board Services (BBS), Multi-User Domains (MUDS) and MUDS-Object-Oriented (MOOS) to connect and interact, to the current explosion of real time chat and video conferencing, queers have been particularly drawn toward and adept at using new technologies. A dotcom millionaire and technophile, Robert, an Asian American in his forties, gives his perspective on the relationship between queers and new technologies:

Technologies that facilitate identity and technologies that facilitate parity appeal to queer people. Anonymity facilitates trying on a new identity, and then parity, again, is almost like a side effect of this because if you can be anonymous you can be a little more free or equal. I don’t know what gay people have done intentionally to influence technology or if they’re just consumers of it. Every so often you’ll here about something like this gay programmer--what he did was reprogram the end of a game that’s supposed to work so when you do everything right you get the girl and you get to kiss. And what he did was make it so you do everything right and you get the guy and you get to kiss. I can’t think of other ways gays are influencing technology . . . there has been lots of stuff written about [the role-playing game] MYST, whether the character is male or female, but this is sufficiently ambiguous. But some feminist theories have argued that she’s a

\textsuperscript{34} My thanks to Jason Pine for suggesting the link between the consumerization of online queer life and the relation to shopping for products and/or sex as a product. For other discussions about gays and lesbians and capitalism, see D’Emilio (1993) and Hennessey (2000).
dyke. And then you have adventure games where you have straight guys picking female characters. You have to wonder, are they internalizing this at all?

The closest thing I can think of in terms of gays influencing technology is web stuff. They’re not making anything new, just using technology that was made for other purposes. But maybe someone will come up with real gaydar.

The space of the screen has offered safe spaces for the creative exploration and production of identities, communities, and pleasures. In a utopic sense, then, queerspaces of the screen are spaces of possibilities; they are alternative spaces of contact and encounter. We can learn about ourselves and explore our fantasies within the safety of our home or office. We can even become other people, people of other genders, sexes, or races. Maybe we can even learn to love ourselves. These are the utopic promises that emerged with the net, promises that were never fully realized, but which attracted me and many others to seek out the realization of our desires in the ether of cyberspace.

Surfing the net and chatting in text and video chat rooms, I enjoyed constructing alternative personas, pretending to be younger or older than I really was, or engaging other people’s fantasies in cyberchat. I played younger brothers, older brothers. I typed out scenes of seduction, lovemaking, and raunch. I sometimes wondered if I didn’t have another career in writing pulp porn as years of writing had trained me to think and type quickly.

What imbued these contacts and encounters with the aura of the utopic had to do with the feeling that I was not alone. In the Web, I found my own desires reflected back to me through the space of the screen. And more than that, I found that, unlike print or video pornography, there were people on the other side, people talking back to me. I
made contact and I felt like I’d found a community, before community started to sound like a dirty word, marked by liberal delusion and desperation for togetherness.

**Interactivity**

Unlike technologies of film and television, chat rooms are situated within the history of interactive communications media such as the telegraph and phone, technologies that make it possible to “reach out and touch someone,” but also to be touched back (Kittler 1990; Postman 1985). At the same time, chat rooms intersect with another of the major reasons people use the web: porn.\(^{35}\)

Joseph, a white graduate student in his late 20s describes his use of video chatrooms as part of an evolving relationship to screen cultures. While he initially used the web for primarily for pornography and then for text-based chat, he eventually found that the interactivity of video chat rooms appealed to him the most.

> I use video chat, it’s interactive porn. It’s like after a while, it just wasn’t satisfying to have these cyber [role-playing] chats. Maybe I just graduated or evolved to using other kinds of porn things. I ended up getting pretty good at using free sites; and there were some pay sites I used too, if the content was unique. I also got into downloading these porn clips—someone turned me on to the fact that the filesharing networks weren’t just good for getting free music, but free porn too. I did that at different kinds of webgroups, like yahoo, too. I mean the plus side of all this is that I wasn’t renting porn twice a week anymore. Instead, I could stay at home, and spend a lot less money.

Q: Is there something about video chat porn that’s different?

A: Well, in some ways I think maybe you feel more connected to the person on the other end, because you’re not just chatting with them, you can see them at the same time that they can see you. But most of the time, these days anyway, I don’t really know how connected I feel, even when I’m doing video chat. Sometimes I can’t tell whether it’s just narcissistic, whether I’m looking at myself getting off for these other people, whether these other people even interest me. I wonder,

---

\(^{35}\) While it is difficult to find precise figures, many web industry experts estimate that nearly half of the bandwidth of the Internet is used for pornography.
why not just masturbate, you know, in front of a mirror. But I like the idea that I might be able to excite someone else. I like the feeling of being wanted.

Q: Is it just video or do you—

A:--some of the video chat I do doesn’t have sound, but other times it does, and I like that a lot more. I like to be able to hear someone getting off. Other times, I’ll let someone call me, which is the same but it just makes it so you have one more thing to do. Then it’s really kind of one handed or no handed typing. I can imagine how this looks from the outside—here’s this guy jerking off on his bed, staring at a screen, while juggling a cell phone . . . [laughs]. But is it really any different from someone getting of to “just porn” in their living room? I think these new technologies have definitely made porn more interesting in some ways. I mean, in video chat you know there’s someone there actually interacting with you—you type or you see them or you chat on the phone. People might even do things you ask them to do, you know, show off different parts of your body or play with toys, stuff like that. But I get irritated when people do that too much to me.

The Bleed

My initial encounters with chat rooms seemed to highlight elements of play and fantasy; virtual space was initially characterized as an anarchist’s utopia, without the ideological baggage and political economic hegemony that characterizes life in today’s “global village.” Yet my research and personal forays into porn sites, web groups, and chatrooms such as those at gay.com was also marked by the increasing intrusion of what gets called real life. There was less a sense of the Internet as some kind of Temporary Autonomous Zone and more a sense of increasing corporate colonization. Free sites

---

36 The notion of Temporary Autonomous Zones was coined by Hakim Bey (1985, 1991). His work has been important for many Net theorists, and others, who desire to create zones of freedom free from control of the State and from the logic of the spectacle. He writes, “The TAZ is an encampment of guerilla ontologists: strike and run away. Keep moving the entire tribe, even if it's only data in the Web. The TAZ must be capable of defense; but both the ‘strike’ and the ‘defense’ should, if possible, evade the violence of the State, which is no longer a meaningful violence. The strike is made at structures of control, essentially at ideas; the defense is ‘invisibility,’ a martial art, and ‘invulnerability’--an "occult" art within the martial arts. The ‘nomadic war machine’ conquers without being noticed and moves on before the map can be adjusted. As to the future--Only the autonomous can plan autonomy, organize for it, create it. It's a bootstrap operation. The first step is somewhat akin to satori --the realization that the TAZ begins with a simple act of realization” (Bey 1985, 1991).
became pay sites, and chatrooms that used to be a way to connect became ways to shop and participate in lifestyle choices.  

Over time, I discovered in my own life and in the stories people told me that there are no clear lines between virtual and real life. Virtual and real life bleed into one another, but so do public, private and intimate lives. At home or in the office, virtual technologies allow us to project ourselves beyond the limits of those spaces; our intimate or private or public lives float into the ether, they move into one another, they collide, they interpenetrate. The anarchic utopic potential of the net bleeds into corporatization, commodity fetishism plays on the desire for freedom. Virtual wanderings lead to actual events and actual events are repeated in virtual contexts. In Austin, I was often struck by how events in bars, relationships, or even previous chats are recounted both face-to-face and, in a feedback loop of infinite regression, in chat rooms as well. “Did you see X with Y at the bar last night? Can you believe it? X and Z only just broke up.” What’s intimate gets publicly circulated, and this public circulation can become an event that intensifies or troubles intimate interiors, private lives.

Pedro, a self-identified cyber-Chicano, who was usually online whenever I was, tells the following story about the bleed between real and virtual life:

---

37 Like the image of the drug dealer who gives out the first hit for free and then gets people hooked, many online sites such as gay.com, outinaustin.com, or men4sexnow.com began as free sites. As usage increased, however, many parts of these sites required some kind of payment. At gay.com, for instance, which was once entirely free, new membership fees were required to view adult photos and then later to view any full-size photos.

38 In different context and with different aims, both Brian Massumi (2002) and Rayna Rapp (2000) offer examples of “the bleed.” Massumi’s discussion centers on Ronald Reagan’s image and body, of the way Reagan’s speech and performance of various events bled into his everyday reality. For Rapp, her own firsthand experiences with amniocentesis and the loss of a child inspired her to delve more deeply into research into on reproductive technologies, their effects on women, and to develop a feminist methodology that looked at amniocentesis “against a larger social background” (Rapp 2005: 5).
One time I went with a guy to a bar. I’d been worried about going because my ex went there sometimes, and I didn’t want to see him. I told this guy that, but he said not to worry. Well, sure enough, we go there and not ten minutes after we arrive, there’s my ex along with his new fuckbuddy. I drank a few drinks fast, then bolted out of there. On the car ride to my friend’s place, I asked him if he’d known my ex was gonna be there. He said no. But later on, I found out from my ex that’d he and this guy I went to the bar with had both been online, and that my ex had been seeing if anyone wanted to go to this bar. So I stopped hanging out with this guy, figured he was a total pathological liar, which was a pattern for me anyway.

When Pedro elaborated on his story, he told me that one of the reasons he’d started using the Internet was in an effort to make better judgments about potential romantic and sexual partners. He said he’d had a (pre-Internet) pattern of getting into relationships with people he felt were liars. Yet, rather than offering and escape from this pattern, his use of chatrooms, at least in this story, seem to indicate the pattern’s repetition, albeit in a virtual context.

**Hold, Please**

Just as our projections and fantasies in the Real World can lead to pain, confusion and disappointment, so too can our virtual lives cause us to come crashing back into our everyday dystopias of alienation, sadness, and fear. Some studies, not to mention common sense, suggest that being online for long periods can also be profoundly alienating, especially when the fantasies don’t live up to reality. The fantasies whose realizations are sought out in the matrix rarely live up to our expectations.

The screens of the virtual can help to make new contacts, but they can also keep things alive, things like love and relationships, or the desire for them. In the posthumously published *Email Trouble*, Paige Baty (1999) details her search for love for email and the heartbreak that came with it:
Solitude and love and the womb. I saw them all come together at that time. I withdrew into myself: I caved in. I sank. I made the world over as myself and my personas. I made a body of a matrix not of flesh and blood but silicon and circuit. The world became the dream, instead of the cave. I needed to get out in the light and see it was all a shadow-play, but the matrix was comforting, even as it suffocated me. I curled up in a fetal position and wrote myself away, gave myself away to invisible correspondents (Baty 1999: 108).

Baty’s stories of love and loss at the matrix inspired much of my own thinking about the intimate effects and affects that go along with wandering in cyberspace. In the following story, Peter, a bisexual man in his early 20s recounts the ways the looking-glass of the screen only intensified his longings for connection with lost loves.

I had this one boyfriend for a couple of years. Then we were on and off again for a while. Finally, I figured I was gonna need some time and space to really accept that the relationship was over. So I stopped calling him on the phone, but, after a while, I’d go online first thing in the morning or throughout the day or whenever I was feeling lonely to try and find him. I had to download chat software, try to remember his screen names. At the time, I didn’t really chat with anyone else online, it was just his profile I’d look for—I mean, he was the only person on my chat list. I think I was using those things, chatrooms, to try and talk about the relationship, to work through its ending with him. It made me feel connected to him still.

But talking to him through instant messenger probably wasn’t a good idea, I mean it actually seemed more complicated than a phone call, you know, where [the phone call] would be, “hey, how are you doing? Feeling bad today here, whatever.” The Instant Message chats fucked me up though cuz he’d talk about people he was seeing or fucking. I mean, we had longer conversations, but it always ended up fucking me up.

Years later, I asked another ex—my next ex—to take me off his Instant Messenger buddy list. I’d been looking for him for a while, and then one day he was there, and it just totally freaked me out. We had this totally fucked up conversation, and I asked him to remove me from his buddy list. Wasn’t that I didn’t want to be his friend anymore, at least I don’t think so. It was more like I just didn’t even want to be reminded of him. I’d tried to talk to him once through it, but it wasn’t even him, it was his new boyfriend. And I asked something stupid, like “are you okay,” cuz he’d gotten with this guy just a few days after he left me, and then he moved like 1500 miles away. Turns out it wasn’t even him that time, but his boyfriend who’d been logged into his account. When he talked
with me, he started by telling me that. I mean the whole thing was just so fucked up. So I stopped trying to find him online in Instant Message Chat.

But I’d still go to these websites where he had profiles up. One of them, outinaustin.com, was set up so that you could see who’d looked at your profile. I kept a profile there basically just to see if he’d looked me up. It was the same as with my last boyfriend—every time I’d look him up I freaked out, even after I waited five months or so, the results were the same. I’d think, “oh, I feel a lot better about this now, so I’ll just take a peek and see where he’s at,” you know, wondering and hoping, he and this guy would have broken up by now. And I’d look up his profile and see things like “monogamously coupled” and I’d freak out all over again. I’m probably just a jealous person, but in a way, I think it was like I was thinking, “he’ll be single now and come back to me.” I’d look up his profile, he’d still be with this guy, and I’d have to go through all the feelings of the breakup over and over again. Every time, it just totally freaked me out for days—more like weeks—to read his profile – like where it said monogamously coupled. I don’t know why it affected me so much. The reactions were totally physical. My hands would shake, my heart would race, I’d start crying and just generally freaking out.

What’s weird about it was that it was like a way to hold on to the relationship after it had ended. I mean. for a while it had been phone calls, or trying to meet in person. Hopefully now I’ve learned my lesson, though I just got a letter from my last ex, and it was the same. I was so angry to hear he was still with this guy, and I was terrified that he’d be coming back to town. He wanted to know if I wanted to see him. I don’t know. I wonder if I should have written him back. I did, and I told him he could contact me by email, but I bet even that was a mistake. Probably best for me to just not do anything, and let it work itself out. I’m still angry and jealous, and my experience has taught me that I can’t really have a decent relationship or friendship or whatever with my exes until they’re not with anyone or a lot of time has passed.

Q: How did you get over that longing to connect with your former lovers?

A: I didn’t. I still long for them, for renewal, for closure, whatever. I’m usually focused on the most recent one though. I guess I’ve just learned to live with it better. For now anyway. I do wonder though if I hadn’t kept reopening the pain of the relationship by looking up my lovers online and stuff, if it wouldn’t have been easier for me.

**So Far, So Close (too far, too close)**

In Peter’s story, virtual technologies helped him to hold on to past relationships.

Although he wanted to believe that queerspace of the screen would help him feel
connected to his lost lovers, they in fact only led to an intensification of his longing to connect, feeling distant rather than closer, as well as to the pain of loss. In the first instance, he thought that if he could use chat technologies rather than phone calls or in-person encounters, that he could feel both connected and safe. In both cases, he did manage to connect to his former lovers, but rather than providing a therapeutic safe space to work through the pain of their breakups, his efforts only reopened the pain, pain that registered on deep emotional and physical levels. Although he doesn’t use the term “addiction,” there is an element of compulsion in Peter’s actions. He does the same things—looking up his lovers’ profiles or trying to communicate with them—but expects different results. While virtual technologies helped him to reach out and touch someone, he wasn’t always prepared for what happened to him when they reached out and touched back.

Toxic telecommunicative touches don’t always help us feel connected, they don't always ease the pain of separation or of distance, and in fact, they can produce dis-ease. Maybe the contact, the communication has gone bad, maybe it was bad to begin with. Maybe contact opens up grief or longing.

**Close Encounters**

For others, the Web in general and chatrooms in particular were resources for information and advice, though again, in the following story from Travis, a student and aspiring actor, the desire to connect in terms of love and sex also emerges.

I’d use the net to find out health stuff—you know, stuff about STDs especially. I’d get a rash or something after tricking with someone, freak out and then get online to see if my symptoms matched up with stuff. But I also used it to try and get relationship advice. I’d go to gayhealth.com for both of these things. They have a space where you can ask doctors questions and then you can check to see if
they’ve responded. There’s also stuff at gay.com and outinaustin.com where they
have someone do relationship advice. Apparently, a lot of other people do this
too, cuz once I had a series of conversations in gay.com with this guy who was
having relationship problems. He’d already been to all these other sites for advice.
His boyfriend hadn’t wanted to have sex with him for a while, and he was trying
to figure out why and what to do and all that. I was pretty straightforward with
him and told him that his boyfriend was already seeing someone else or was
trying to. I mean, I asked if they talked about it, but talk can only say so much.
They’d talked, and the guy was like, “my boyfriend says he still loves me, but he
doesn’t know why he doesn’t want to have sex anymore, and I believe him, blah,
blah, blah.” For me that’s just not reality, though. If they couldn’t talk about it in a
way that clarified things . . . I guess I thought neither of them were being honest
with themselves or others.

But whatever, I felt really sorry for him, cuz I’d been on both sides of that
situation before and it sucks. And I think it’s natural to ask for help in those kinds
of situations, even though you eventually have to make some kind of personal
decision. In a way, I guess it’s nice that you have spaces like gay.com and these
other things to try and reach out. I mean, it’s not like you have a lot of role models
or models period for having healthy gay relationships. These days I don’t go
online to try and find these answers, I just read a lot of self-help books. But what
do I know, I mean, every relationship I’ve had has ended!

No Escape

Even as I defend chat environments as spaces of contact and encounter, like the
Real World, they also reflect all of the social problems that affect our everyday lives:
classism, racism, and ageism, for instance. These -isms are compounded and transformed
given the anonymity of the net. On sites such as gay.com and in the all-male chat rooms I
tended to frequent, I was alarmed by the persistent misogyny, a sentiment expressed in
both chat rooms and in real life —“women are fine as fag hags, but who needs ’em,
really?” As one who considers himself a feminist, such sentiments contributed to
crashing my utopic and naïve hopes for contact and encounter in the matrix. This is not to
reduce net encounters in good or bad, utopic or dystopic, registers, but to think of them
dialectically, as often simultaneously good and/or bad, utopic and/or dystopic.\textsuperscript{39} Perhaps what’s important here is less trying to figure out how the net in general or chatrooms in particular figure into binary discourses of good or bad ideology, power, etc, but in marking the ways net and chatrooms impact everyday life, the way the contacts and encounter that happen in queerspaces have force. Thinking about impact on an everyday level doesn’t exclude reading statements like this or the racist chat I narrate below in ideological or political economic terms, but what it does do is challenge us to think about ways of talking about them without reducing them to structural absolutes that end up making banal points like, there’s sexism or racism and these are bad things. What was interesting about these kinds of issues is the ways they leaked in, the ways the surged, as well as the ways they provided some often unconscious backdrop to what was going on in the chatrooms. There was still play at work, playing at saying things you couldn’t say in public or with your lesbian friends.

That said, throughout my research in chat rooms and gay life in Austin, I was particularly interested in how race articulates in virtual spaces. Like the misogyny I describe above, racism proliferates in virtual spaces in general, and manifests often in chatrooms as well. I typically found that bringing race and/or culture up invited nearly instantaneous “flaming,” caustic text-based remarks. Once while describing my research, one flamer told me, “I hope you’re not receiving any federal monies for this shit” (Do student loans count?) For most chatusers race isn’t worthy of discussion in public chatrooms. For them cyberspace is raceless, color blind, and even politically progressive. I don’t want to diminish the importance of cyberspace as an increasingly important tool

\textsuperscript{39} My thinking about the dialectical aspects of online life and encounters, and they ways these encounters have impact on an everyday level, have been inspired by many conversations with Kathleen Stewart.
for mobilizing political action; from the WTO insurrection to antiwar protests, the
Internet functioned both as an educational and networking tool. However, I would also
insist that in chatrooms, as in so many other contexts, race and racial politics are
consistently subsumed within other debates, which can be as ironic and absurd as
discussing what kinds of cars are more or less “gay.”

The reluctance to deal with race in screen-mediated counterpublics like gay.com
diminishes the foundational importance of race to structures of desire. The importance of
race to desire in virtual space is clearly evident in the degree to which chatters almost
always note both their own race and the race they desire in potential partners: “23 y/o
SGWFPM (single gay white fit professional male) seeks same for conversation or more.”
But the violence of comments like this don’t simply work on the level of discourse, or
rather, the distinctions between discursive violences, those “words that wound,” and
actual violences, bleed into one another.40

More than two years into my real and virtual queerspaces and sex publics, the
then-editor of the Texas Triangle, Texas’ only statewide gay weekly, asked me to write
an article describing my research on chatrooms, race, and sex.41 In the article, I described
the shift away from the utopic possibilities of the net toward the often-alienating
everyday experiences of Being-online. In the early days computer users found that these
spaces offered a kind of freedom from the chains of identity--they could project their own
fantasies and reshape themselves in the image of the Other. Both Turkle (1995) and Stone
(1995) attend to the specific ways gender performativity works in online spaces. For both
scholars, however, the freedom from identity is not exactly cause for celebration. From

40 See Matsuda (1993) and Butler (1997)
41 The Texas Triangle has recently morphed into a new paper, TXT.
cyber-rape to cyber-therapy, the effects of Being-online are multiple, dense, and fraught. In racial terms, the ability of some, usually white, cyber libertarians or anarchists, to produce avatars (online representations of the self) of any gender or race may lead them to emphasize the freedoms and possibilities of the net, but at the same time this problematic performativity only rarely recognizes the histories of race and racial violence experienced in the everyday by blacks and other people of color.⁴²

For a fat white boy in Kansas, the MUDs might allow him to become a black female psychiatrist in his online personas, but this does not mean he shares the “situated knowledges” of said black female psychiatrist.⁴³ Yet, for many cyber-libertarians, race in the net, like the promiscuous mixings across gender, race, and sexual identification that happen in the real, offer chances for knowing and becoming the other. This perspective is echoed in mass cultures in the U.S. and elsewhere that see the importance of race ebbing away as everyone is Becoming the ideal multicultural/racial subject.⁴⁴ This is the progressive eugenic vision of mixing—everyone brown, multiculti, and culturally amnesiac. Wade’s (1994) observations on processes of blanquimiento in Brazil are also apropos to some of the ways cyberlibertarians see race working in cyberspace: “The double construction of the past as both 1) an era of blackness and indianness leading towards a whiter present and future, and 2) a time of general democratic mixing, setting the stage for a contemporary state of mixedness, at once subordinates blacks and denies that subordination” (Wade 1994: 72).

---

⁴³ For a starting point for looking at “situated knowledges,” see Haraway (1991).
⁴⁴ On the ways race and immigration figure in U.S. national imaginings, see especially Berlant (1997), chapter 5 and Haraway (1997), chapter 6.
My efforts within the virtual to articulate the relationships between racism and cyberspace have often fallen on deaf or unconcerned ears. Again, for most chatters in gay.com, chatrooms are about finding sex, relationships, and increasingly, nice things to buy, from underwear to pornographic videos. The article for the Texas Triangle was for me an opportunity to work in the mode of a public intellectual whose research had much to say to online communities in Austin about sex, identity, addiction, and HIV/AIDS. But the reception wasn’t quite what I had expected. Although I spoke repeatedly to my editor friend and constantly scanned the letters section for a response, none of the readers of the magazine felt the article important enough to engage. But perhaps that is an overstatement. Because while no letters were written to the editor, in the two years since its publication, I have met men and women who recognize me or my name from the article. Most recently, in the gay section of Hippie Hollow, a young man asked me my name and when I told him responded, “Did you write that article in the Triangle last year? It was great. I even saved it.”

But as flattering as such comments have been, my own perspective on the essay is marked not only by the racist violence I narrate and reproduce in the text, but also by the very simple and seemingly innocuous disclaimer at the beginning of my text: “This article contains descriptive and provocative sexual language. If you feel this may offend you, please turn the page.” I must note, first, that in my four years of living in Austin and reading the Triangle, this is the only time I have ever seen such disclaimer. I asked my friend about this when I received the final edited draft, and he told me that it had not been his decision but rather that of the publisher, who felt that the text was somewhat “inflammatory.” Upon reflection, the disclaimer raises a number of question, foremost
among them is, In a magazine that features half-naked men, ads for bathhouses and escorts, why does my article require a disclaimer? But more importantly, I wonder whether it was the sexually provocative language or the ways the language was so thoroughly shaped by race and racism.

The stories by two young black men are particularly instructive. One, then the coordinator for a local gay men’s group, the Austin Men’s Project, noted the importance of race in almost every encounter he’s had at gay.com. Mostly, he says, “People won’t even talk to me, but when they do, race always comes up. The last time this happened [just the day prior] I just looked at it like a game. This dude was really into me and I just played with him, turning his questions around back at him, making things up. That whole excitement that comes through in things like ‘I’ve never been with a black guy before’ is just ridiculous.” For another young gay black man, an activist and former university student, online racism had more profound effects. Like the encounters of other blacks, he’d not only been solicited and/or denied sex based on his race, but he’d also been actively attacked through online chat encounters. One day, hurt and crying, he told me about the kind of traumatic impact such words had on his own self-esteem as black and gay.

But what really crashed my dreams for virtual intimacy was a racist chat encounter I experienced myself in the Austin chat room at gay.com. While I’d spoken to people of color during the course of my research who’d experienced extreme racism in chatrooms, I had never encountered it myself. Most folks, pale-faced and otherwise, told me that when someone they weren’t into asked for sex, they would simply say something along the lines of “sorry, not what I’m looking for tonight.”
I first encountered explicit racism when I changed my profile and marked “Black/African-American” as well as “Mixed/multi/other.” In the past, gay.com profiles only offered the possibility of picking one racial category, and I had either left the category blank or selected “Mixed/multi/other.” The same day I changed my profile, I received a private message from someone (I’ve changed his name, even though he’s isn’t innocent) and engaged in the following chat encounter. The exchange highlighted not only the very peculiar manifestation of online racism, but also the ways his linguistic violence produced an equally violent response in me. I lashed out with my own violent, even racist, language. And, like him, I somehow collapsed sex and violence. My hands shook as I typed and wondered if this was solely a fantasy for him, or something that some “niggers” like me would be into:

<nigger> nigger you want to suck some dick

> why do you think you can use the word nigger?

<nigger> well that’s what you are

> and you? r u a cracker or a nigger?

<nigger> neither

<nigger> i'm anglo

<nigger> well you are a half breed aren't you

> what does that mean to you? is it the same as redneck or honky or white trash?

<nigger> i just want you to suck my dick

---

45 My choice in leaving this field blank or in marking “Mixed” invites a discussion I do not engage here, namely the ways my own ability to pass affected the kinds of contacts and encounters I had in virtual spaces. At the least, it marks my own awareness of how much race structured these virtual queerspaces. But it also calls into question my own politicized identifications as black, interracial and queer. After all, if black comes first in the above list, why did I not mark that as my primary racial category in my gay.com profile?
> i want you to fuck off

<strongarms> i want you to suck my dick

<strongarms> you're my slave

> see my plantation fantasy usually goes like this . . .

> i fuck the white boy until he comes without touching his dick

<strongarms> all niggers should be gassed

> after sucking your dick?

<strongarms> yeah

> you sound like goebbels

<strongarms> you want to suck my dick boy

> depends. do you have a small pink little white boy dick. or are u nigger hung?

<strongarms> i'd like to shove it down your throat

> what do you do?

<strongarms> i wanna fuck you

<strongarms> that’s what i want to do

<strongarms> you interested in being my nigger or not

> no. u interested in getting the cum fucked out of you?

<strongarms> how big is your dick

> big

<strongarms> how big

<strongarms> do you bottom

> not for racist fuckers:)

<strongarms> fuck you.. i hate NIGGERS
* strongarms left private chat.

In rereading and reproducing this text, I still feel and know that power is working on me, power is working through me, power is working me over. Still. As I emphasized in the original article, understanding virtual counterpublics like those that have formed in gay.com requires attending to the ways real and virtual lives bleed into one another. While I have discussed racist violences in online spaces, these also happen in the everyday. I wonder what might have happened had strongarms not offended me so quickly. Maybe I would have hooked up with him, maybe I would have sucked his dick, maybe I would have been looking up at his face wondering why it seemed so contorted by desire and disgust, maybe he would have said, “Suck my dick nigger.” What might have happened differently? Instead of getting another beer with my shaking hands after I chatted with him, maybe I would have met him, got on my knees, bit down, hard. Maybe I would have kicked him in throat. Maybe I would have asked him to leave, before a black “killing rage” took hold of me (hooks 1995). Maybe I still want to use my own power to work him over.

The Hook Up, Real Time

The utopic hype of the Internet is fading as the real world infiltrates cyberspace. For men who have sex with men, cybersex has gone way beyond innocent playful fantasies or explorations of identity. For many men who have sex with men, cybersex is a prelude to Real Time sex. Virtual cultures in general, and net-facilitated sex in particular, are an increasing concern for health and community activists. Disease clusters have been traced to online chatrooms and health records show a rise in syphilis and HIV rates among men who have sex with men.
In one case from 1999, six San Francisco men who had hooked up through AOL chatrooms and then tested positive for syphilis set off a wave of media attention. Initially, the internet service provider AOL, citing privacy concerns, refused to release information about its clients to health officials, and, fearing the media attention that came anyway, also refused to run banner ads to identify the men in these chatrooms about their risk for exposure (Gaither 2000; Nieves 1999; Wright 1999). AOL instead asked gay online service Planet Out to work with health officials to identify and contact sex partners who had been exposed as well as publish information about the outbreak on the Planet Out website (www.planetout.com). Public health advocates are thus still trying to catch up, whether by encouraging gay websites to run more safe sex information, paying for online safe-sex advertising, setting up safe sex websites, or by discreetly sending health workers into chatrooms to discuss safe sex. In 2004, a San Francisco Health Department website, Inspot.org, provided gay men with a new way to tell partners of possible infection: via stylish email cards with messages like “You're too hot to be out of action”; “It's not what you brought to the party, it's what you left with”; “I got screwed while screwing; you might have, too”; “Going through my address book and you're on my list” and, “Heads up” (Curtis 2004).

These efforts are becoming increasingly important as the backlash against safe sex has found a home in cyberspace. Barebacking sites are common, and it seems to be emerging as a new trend not only among those too young to have experienced the traumatic impacts of AIDS and among those old enough to know better, but those for whom safe sex has become increasingly tiresome as well.
And while I don’t want to join the sex police—I believe in honest communication and informed consent—I also don’t want to bear witness to, or worse, find myself a part of another wave of HIV/AIDS infections and deaths. With new statistics showing that 77% of young gay men who have HIV don’t know it, the fetishization of barebacking promises little but immediate pleasure and long-range mourning.

Get Me Off or Get Me Outta this Place

I was first introduced to barebacking during the summer I wrote my Master’s report. I visited one site, Bareback City, daily, compulsively checking to see how many hits my HIV positive friend’s profile had received. Nearly every time I visited, the site’s server became too busy to support all of the traffic. I would be redirected to an image with a condomless dick in an ass with text that read, “sorry, our server cannot support the volume of traffic, perhaps you would like to check out our videos?” I started promising myself that I would give this up, but something about it haunted me and I continued to return to the site for months.

I also visited another site, Xtreme Sex, one of the earliest and most popular sites. Xtreme sex specifically addressed people identified as “bug-chasers,” uninfected people who sought out infected partners, and “gift-givers,” infected people looking to give the “gift” of the virus. One day I tried to visit the site, but the site was gone, and instead a message appeared: “after three years, and thousands of ads, Xtreme sex is closed.” In my mind, I link this dead site, this particular dead link, to other dead links, to the social networks, relationships, and lovers that disintegrated with the spread of HIV/AIDS.46

46 Some websites address themselves to people who wish to infect or be infected. Barebackjack.com addresses itself to people who wish to make informed decisions about the risks and pleasures condomless sex. A mission statement accessed in July of 2001 reads, “We feel it is the right AND the obligation of all
Distraction and Addiction

Given the American preoccupation with sex, and our obsessive-compulsive preoccupation with obsessive-compulsive disorders, it’s not surprising that cybersex has not only raised the ire of conservatives, but also continues to preoccupy pop psychology. Are you addicted? You can take the quiz yourself at www.cybersexualaddiction.com.

I didn’t do so well, but I’m also skeptical of most efforts to produce “normal” sexualities; nonetheless, I want to believe that “good” or “healthy” sexual behavior is free from guilt and shame, or fear that you may be hurting yourself or others. At the same time, my own experiences in virtual spaces, looking for porn or trying to connect, did bleed into something I can now recognize as addiction. And I wasn’t the only one to feel that way.

Many chatusers frequently used the term to describe their own relationship to virtual technologies. John, a self-employed graphic designer who works from home was explicit in describing his online wanderings as addictive.

I found a lot of this stuff really addictive. I’d work on a project for a couple of hours and then I’d get bored and so I’d look for a distraction. Since I do my [design] work on a computer, it was easy to log into gay.com or look for porn. Before I knew it, I’d be downloading a dozen porn movies from some site or I’d be chatting in gay.com, even arranging for a hookup.

I always thought it’d be nice to just have the program up and running and if someone interesting wanted to chat with me, great, then I’d chat for a bit and get gay men to make educated decisions about their sexual practices, and to enjoy the freedom that making educated choices allows them.” For a range of scholarly discourses on barebacking, see Carballo-Dieguez 2001; Crossley 2002; Davis 2002; Drescher 2002; Gauthier and Forsyth 1999; Halkitis et al 2003; Halkitis and Parsons 2004; Ridge 2004; Sheon and Crosby 2004; Shernoff 2005; Sowadsky 1999; and Suarez and Miller 2001.

47 I recognize that my text walks a fine line here. I want, on the one hand, to critique normative discourses which figure sexual behavior in relation to some “statistically imagined norm” (Berlant and Warner 2000: 321). On the other hand, I want to mark the importance in my own narrative and the narratives of the men with whom I spoke of the feeling (cognitive and affective) of being overly attached, of being addicted, of dwelling in, at, or beyond the periphery not just of a statistically imagined norm, but of one’s own limits.
back to work, but I always ended up giving this distraction my full attention. I’d scroll through every person’s profile, read their profile page, and all that. I wasted a lot of time doing that.

Q: Did you ever think you had a problem or try and get help or anything?

A: Well, I did take this quiz about cyber sex addiction. And I did start thinking, “you know, maybe this is a problem, because I can’t seem to work at the computer and stay focused on what I need to do.” I had a friend who was a sex addict, but he was into public sex stuff; he didn’t even have a computer. He got into trouble for it even, with citations and what not, but I don’t think he was ever arrested. Anyway, he started going to these sex addicts meetings that are structured like AA [Alcoholics Anonymous] and that seemed to work for him. I borrowed this book from him about sex and love addiction and that gave me some perspective. You know, I really saw myself in it. But I was resistant to going to any kind of meetings. I mean that would be admitting I had a real problem, and I didn’t think it was that bad yet. But it was interesting to think of this thing that had started out being a kind of distraction as being connected to other stuff.

Q: Like what?

A: Well, stuff like . . . maybe I was online or looking for distraction because I was really looking for something else, something deeper, like sex, I guess, but also stuff like attention, affection . . . or love.

Q: What about now?

A: Well, at one point, I installed all this software to block stuff, and that usually works, but then sometimes, you know, I’ll disable it all. Makes me more conscious of what’s going on anyway. I still use the computer for porn. And sometimes, I’m like, “oh, this isn’t a problem at all” and I’ll go without going to these sites or even thinking about them for a few weeks. And then other times, I’ll find myself spending a few consecutive days downloading porn and chatting or whatever. Then the cycle happens all over again. I mean, I’m totally aware there’s a compulsive aspect to what’s going on . . . to how I relate to this stuff and that it can affect, that it does affect, my work habits. I dunno, maybe I just need to get a boyfriend. That’s probably what I’m looking for. For me it’s hard, because I’m not super gay—I don’t go to bars or do gay pride or anything like that. I don’t have a lot of gay friends. Maybe this is just my way of participating in gay culture.

For John, porn and chatrooms help him to feel a part of gay culture. But his feeling that he is addicted to these things also mark a degree of distance between himself
and other gay men; the Internet allows him to connect virtually but not actually (“maybe I should just get a boyfriend.”)

A year or so after the article in the Triangle is published, I get a call from a guy who does a syndicated gay and lesbian radio program. He wants to talk about the addictive qualities of being online. Even though I’ve written about addiction and that increasingly I found myself and many men I talked with similarly identified with the addictive qualities of being online, I am reluctant to give this guy what he wants. I’m pretty sure I’m in denial, but instead of talking about how fucked up chatrooms are, or how disease clusters have been traced to them, I talk about the ways chatrooms help create feelings of community, something which I no longer really believed. He doesn’t call back, and the program never airs.

Indeed, I strongly identified with John’s sentiments. After a breakup, I sometimes joked with my ex, perhaps inappropriately, “the computer made us break up.” Chats in gay.com, video chatrooms, and my compulsive visits to barebacking sites had provided the evidence for my meandering gazes, my untrustworthy love, and my desire for extra-relationship sex. Hurt and sullen one day, my lover said, “I read that thing from the boy from Belgium, who said, ‘what about your ex?’ I don’t appreciate being called your ex.”

Somehow having an actual relationship, a face-to-face, skin-to-skin feeling of intimately relating wasn’t enough. I looked to the matrix to give me more. Though more of what is difficult to say—more attention, more sex, more stimulation? Whether trying to supplement or intensify my relationship with virtual intimacy had to do with lack or excess hardly matters anymore: my desires produced effects, they changed things.
Now, part of me wants to return to simpler times, when all I had to do to get off was spit and fantasize, when all I did to meet people was take a walk down the street or go to a coffeeshop. In a strange way, being on-line, at least my being-on-line, means giving something up. Getting online to get off, I sacrifice a sense of proximity and touch: his hand across the back of my neck, his love.
Chapter Four: The Hard Work of Mourning

Sometime in 2000, I get an email about a murder in West Virginia. Since Mathew Shepard’s mediatized martyrdom, I’d been tracking various hate crimes cases, paying particular attention to those cases that didn’t receive the same level of attention, cases in which the victim was often of color as well as queer. This murder was such a case, except this time, the media was making a big deal of it. I decided to practice a kind of virtual ethnography. I don’t go to West Virginia, but I intensify my scanning. I spend days online, reading everything I can about the case on every website that mentions it. I print out reams of documents and like a detective I try to figure this thing out.

In this chapter, then, I engage in a resolute over-reading and rigorous interpretation of the competing narratives surrounding the July 3, 2000 murder of Arthur “J.R.” Warren. Though I am literally explicit in my reading, I do not so much look for the truth of the case as I attempt to convey the operations of a violently defaced body within a field of competing discourses. These discourses orient the murder in relation to juridical questions of what categories of identity should be included in hate crimes laws. I argue that the organizing of the case exclusively in terms of hate obscures a more complex reading of the murder as an effort to prevent a breakdown in distinction among bodies, identities, and, ultimately, desires.

Although I offer part of my argument as a straightforward read that more or less conforms to traditional models of academic writing, the essay also represents an ongoing engagement with Burroughs’ technique of literary collage, the cutup. An experiment in

---

48 My method of looking at a range of competing discourses that attempt to lay claim to and fix J.R. Warren’s violently defaced body within the context of legal definitions of “hate crimes,” is inspired by the work of Michel Foucault, in particular by *I Pierre, Riviere* (1982).
hypermodernity, my work thus embodies that which it is intended to characterize and enacts its own defacements on critical approaches as well as the subject at hand.\footnote{49} The violences at issue here then are not limited to the crime or its misrepresentation but includes a queer performativity that is both self-consciously and necessarily excessive.

My efforts here draw heavily on two texts, Michael Taussig’s (1999) \textit{Defacement} and Rene Girard’s (1977) \textit{Violence and the Sacred}. In \textit{Defacement}, Taussig uses surrealist strategies to look at the ways acts of defacement mark sacredness—the defaced object is sacred, but its sacredness is also indexed by its defacement. An act of defacement is part of a labor of the negative, a kind of work, which, while productive, is also about taking things apart. A labor of the negative is productive because its effects generate affects—outrage, indignation, despair. An act of defacement makes a thing’s whose sacredness may have been forgotten sacred again.

I link Taussig’s discussion of to Rene Girard’s structuralist account of violence. In Girard’s text, violence inevitably generates a sacrificial crisis, a crisis which creates more violence as well the need for its resolution. In Girard, sacrifice paradoxically figures as a necessary preventative \textit{against} a violence which would destroy a community or culture. Ritualized violence is meant to prevent breakdown in a culture’s arrangement of distinctions, of categories, and of difference. Ritualized violence is a mimetic violence directed not at the real cause or object or event that generated the sacrificial crisis, but at a surrogate or substitute figure. Directed at sacrificial surrogates, ritual violence is meant to prevent patterns of revenge and retaliation. The sacrificial surrogate becomes a sacred

\footnote{49} John Armitage, evaluating the work of Paul Virilio, suggests that Virilio’s moves beyond the postmodern, becoming hypermodern in its catastrophic perception of technology. Hypermodernism might also be defined as “cultural logic of contemporary militarism” (Armitage 2000). In my use, hypermodernism is linked to Foucault’s articulation of a war of discourses.
figure in this process. The sacrificial surrogate is made “sacred only because he is to be killed” (Girard 1977: 1). Part of a community, but marginal, the surrogate is a stand-in who helps to resolve violence from taking the community apart. Ritualized violence diverts nearby menace to far away objects (Girard 1977: 19).

My reading of the events in West Virginia, then, borrow heavily from close readings of both Taussig and Girard. In my retelling of the event, I think about the ways the defacement of a young gay black man stands in for or doubles other kinds of defacements, especially the threat of defacement that rumors of sexual involvement between the killers and the victim pose for the killers’ identities as straight and white men, but also the defacements that manifest through media spectacularization. On a broader level, this rumor threatens to deface the categorical distinctions between straight and gay, black, and white.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Confession by Jared Wilson</th>
<th>Confession by David Parker</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I came over to David Parker’s father’s house on View Ave., Grant Town, W.V., to help him paint. Jason Shoemaker had also come over to help, on July 3, 2000. Sometime after 11 p.m. J.R. Warren came over to the house; David blew up over the story going around that David was having a sexual relationship with J.R. David started pounding J.R. until he knocked him to the ground, then J.R. tried to get up. David knocked J.R. down and started to repeatedly kick him in the side and the face, with his boots with metal toes. David wanted me to help beat J.R.; I kicked him a couple of times; J.R. looked up and David kicked him in the face. David thought he died then, he got his car out of the garage and threw him in the trunk. He then drove to the pull off by the bridge by the power plant. David then took J.R. out of the trunk of the car and threw him on the ground. He, David, then drove over top of him then back over top of him again. He then drove us back to the house. David threatened to beat me if I said a word. He drove back to View Ave. where we cleaned up the blood. David dug a hole to hide the evidence that didn’t burn up in the fire he built. Signed, Jared Wilson, July 4, 2000</td>
<td>Last night J.R. Warren came up to the house sometime around 11 p.m. I was upset with him, I beat him up really bad. J.R. has been making advances at me, and J.R.’s been telling people that he has been having a sexual relationship with me. I took him outside and placed him the trunk of my Camaro and took him down by the power plant. I dumped him out of the trunk and ran over him several times. I took it [the car] back to the garage and parked it. I took the air cleaner off so it wouldn’t get hot. We then went in the house and cleaned up the blood, then took the rags outside and burned them. I dug a hole and put the rest of it in and covered it up by the back porch. Signed, David Parker, July 4, 2000</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

103
Following is a narrative compiled from press reports of the case, which though I have rendered it as a factual progression of events, remained at the time an emergent narrative of *allegations*. This and all subsequent quotations come from the online sites of CNN, The Human Rights Campaign, Datalounge.com, The Gay and Lesbian Alliance Against Defamation, and newspaper websites of *The Washington Post*, *The West Virginia Gazette*, and *The Dominion Post* and others.\(^5^1\)

On the eve of Independence Day, 2000, in Grant Town, West Virginia, a former coal town, 26 year old black gay Arthur “J.R.” Warren returns to a house his friends are painting to give them Xanax. David Parker and Jared Wilson, both seventeen, who, with fifteen year-old Jason Shoemaker, are drinking beer and painting the house owned by Parker’s father. Parker, Wilson, and Shoemaker crush the pills and inhale them. Warren confronts David Parker and Jared Wilson about $20 that was missing from his wallet. Earlier that day, J.R. had argued with David Parker about a rumor that they were sexually involved. The confrontation about the $20 goes sour and David Parker attacks Warren, repeatedly punching and kicking him with steel toed boots. Jared Wilson also hits and kicks him. J.R. looks up and Parker kicks him in the face. Thinking he has killed him, Parker puts J.R. in the trunk of his Camaro and, with Wilson and Shoemaker in the car, drives to a gravel road near the old power plant. Along the way, J.R. crawls out of the trunk and begs to be taken home. Parker throws him out of the car and runs him over four times.


\(^5^1\) In this chapter, in order to maintain the flow of my narrative, I break with the citation style used elsewhere in the dissertation. Instead of in-text citations for direct quotes from newspaper articles or press releases, I place these references in footnotes. Also, reference information for [www.datalounge.com](http://www.datalounge.com) and the Dominion Post newspaper are no longer available. In referencing these sources, I use “Datalounge” and “Dominion Post.”
times to make the murder appear as a hit-and-run. The boys return to the house, clean up
the blood, burn and bury their bloody clothes. The next day, Jason Shoemaker confesses
to his mother and Parker and Wilson are arrested at a Fourth of July Celebration. God
Bless the U.S.A.

A War of Discourses

The battlefield is the place where social intercourse breaks off, where political
rapprochement fails, making way for the inoculation of terror. The panoply of acts of
war thus always tend to be organised at a distance, or rather, to organise distances.
Orders, in fact speech of any kind, are transmitted by long-range instruments which, in
any case, are often inaudible among combatants’ screams, the clash of arms, and,
later, the various explosions of detonations. (Virilio 1994: 6)

A violent hate crime can act like a virus, quickly spreading feelings of terror and
loathing across an entire community. Apart from their psychological impacts, violent hate
crimes can increase tides of retaliation and counter-retaliation. Therefore, criminal acts
motivated by bias may carry far more weight than other types of criminal acts.
-U.S. Justice Department (Publication No. 6147)

The case attracts national media attention in large part due to calls made to the
Gay and Lesbian Alliance Against Defamation (GLAAD) by a member of the West
Virginia Lesbian and Gay Coalition who was angered by the Marion County Sheriff’s
Department refusal to consider Warren’s sexual orientation as playing a role in the
murder. In the July 7th 2000 Dominion Post, Sheriff Ron Watkins says, “We have no
indication that it was a hate crime.” Two days later, on the CNN website, he is quoted as
saying “In none of the statements that I received, no one that I’ve talked to thereafter has
ever indicated to me that [the murder’s] cause was sexuality or the color of his skin. Until
I receive that evidence, I can’t very well say it was a hate crime.”52 The speech of the
police is a refusal; they refuse to speculate publicly about the murder even as they say
that they don’t think it classifies as a hate crime. Their speech discloses nothing and

---

52 Franken (2000).
everything. It is a speech that demands speculation and more. The speech becomes the foundation for a rallying cry, a battlecry, a cry that demands to be heard, but which is also rendered as a spectacle that invites distraction. This distraction, engendered and proliferated via media technology, becomes a conviction phrased as both appeal and demand to the Law.

Word of the crime quickly spreads through national media outlets such as CNN, the *New York Times*, and the *Washington Post*, in large part due to the involvement of a cast of characters that include the Human Rights Campaign (HRC), the nation’s largest gay and lesbian lobbying group, and the National Association for the advancement of Colored People (NAACP), as well as the FBI.

The narratives circulate the case as motivated by questions of sexual and racial bias and the murder thus comes to be situated within ongoing state and federal debates about hate crimes legislation, specifically the addition of sexual orientation, gender, and disability in local and federal hate crimes statutes. For advocates of increased hate crimes legislation, Warren’s death magnifies an accumulated series of brutal crimes; the early coverage of the event repeatedly conjure the specters of slain Wyoming student Matthew Shepard and James Byrd, a black man who was dragged to his death in Jasper, Texas.53

Of course, the case for hate crimes cannot be understood outside of the broader context of struggle for queer civil rights that includes demands for legal recognition of same-sex domestic partnerships and marriage, as well as still-ongoing legislative efforts to prevent employment and housing discrimination. Although there are a number of vocal opponents to these efforts (some would argue that gays and lesbians should not receive

53 While these two cases are perhaps the most famous, they are but two in much longer list, a list that has only multiplied since this text was first conceived.
“special protections,” other express more simply “god hates fags”), politicians from the so-called left as well as the right remain extremely ambivalent on these issues. President Clinton, for instance, signed an executive order prohibiting employment and housing discrimination at the federal level; yet he also signed into law The Defense of Marriage Act (1996), which like many other laws enacted at the state level, define marriage as “between one man and one woman.” Now in his second term, President Bush continues to press for a Constitutional Amendment banning gay marriage, while simultaneously calling for “respect” for all Americans.

While I agree with many of the current efforts to extend basic civil rights to gays and lesbians, I argue that in the case of Warren’s murder the intense struggle waged around political and legal definitions of “hate crimes” and the adamant conviction that Warren’s sexuality motivated the crime divert attention from the specifics of the case. Although the media portrayals of the event, and HRC’s very vocal involvement in particular, correctly identify the objects at issue—race, gender, sexuality, and class—they strategically misrecognize their interrelations by insisting that Parker and Wilson killed Warren because they hated him for being gay. Homophobia is absolutely at work in this case, however I would also insist that it is not so much the boys’ homophobia as it is their fear of homophobia that sets the stage for the crime. Warren is murdered not because he is black and/or gay but because he threatens to expose Parker and Wilson to the force of an annihilating gaze that would perceive them as queer. And in the end, the war of discourses waged over Warren’s defaced body operates with the murder to reinstitute the
workings of a public secrecy necessary to maintain Parker and Wilson’s ability to pass as
straight.\footnote{In \textit{Defacement}, Michael Taussig describes the public secret “as knowing what not to know” and as “that which is known, but cannot be articulated” (1999: 2, 5). I link Taussig’s notion of the public secret to passing in order to keep in tension the conceptual, historical, and material interconnections between queer sexualities and racial difference. See, for example, Somerville (2000). In discussions of race, “passing” generally refers to light-skinned blacks who are taken as if they are white. Linked together, these two concepts might provide a model that understands the public secrecy in terms of the unspoken realities of race-mixing and which, given that history of race-mixing, understands passing as having to do not only with blacks who pass as white, but the way many whites, unaware of the mixings in their own genealogies, pass for white. In the context of my discussions here, the passing of public secrets also has to do with the way people who engage in same-sex sexual praxis, by keeping knowledges of contact and encounter silent and unarticulated, pass as straight.}

**Passing the Public Secret**

“in my eyes like a flash bulb, spilled adolescent jissom”
(Burroughs 1988: 25).

“Truth is not a matter of exposure which destroys the secret, but a revelation which does justice to it”
(Benjamin in Taussig 1999: 2).

The threat of passing induces fantastic speculation and can incite irrational violence, a violence meant to make reason by securing the borders of categorical distinction: white, gay, black. Part of what happens in grant town is thus a response to the threat to Parker’s and Wilson’s passing that J.R. poses. Yet the threat is pregnant (or perhaps more accurately impregnating) and is directed not only at the two adolescent boys, but at the community at large. Passing belongs to the publicly held secret that J.R.’s dissemination of the rumor threatens to articulate, and thereby violate: the dis-integrity of white masculine identity. “Around these parts, it’s like you don’t ask and you don’t tell. J.R. was black and homosexual. \textbf{Need I say more?}”\footnote{Reeves (2000).}

Parker and Wilson’s passing is maintained through the not-quite-always-silent operations of the public secret that masks the transgressions of everyday life, the
everyday transgression of taboo that happens when black and white boys have long-standing sexual relations. The descriptive recognition of Warren’s tragic, transgressive identity—gentle, talkative, learning disabled, malformed, lonely, a preemie, arriving three months early at 2 pounds 6 ounces and with just three fingers on his left hand, he looked and acted years younger than his 26 years, at about 5 foot 10 and 125 pounds, J.R. was slight with a babyface, big brown eyes and a touch of hair above his top lip, the right side of his caramel-colored face was black and contorted, his lips were cracked and puffy, his suit draped gently over his frail, broken body, a love of music and a voracious appetite for chit-chat—produces speech, speculation, and spectacularization and at the same time facilitates Parker and Wilson’s misrecognition. The rumor of sexual involvement among the boys threatens this monumental fantasy of misrecognition: the idea that the boys were normal and even “quiet.” “Many in this tight-knit community know the boys only in passing. They were called ‘quiet.’”

But the exposure of the rumor, a revelation which might do justice to identity, is thwarted and not just through Warren’s murder, but also through the media’s exposure of a dramatic new hate crime. What then is to be made of this maintained secret (a secret which makes the boys monsters, or superheroes, by maintaining their secret identities) in

---

56 My description of Warren is a composite culled from press reports about the case.
57 Frankel (2000).
58 Here I use William S. Burroughs method of the cut up, a method of assemblage.
light of the overexposure represented by the media? The murder materializes an excess of dis(word)play. The progression of display as it develops in the media coverage and press releases by the HRC and the NAACP: the murder, the open coffin, the funeral, the hard work of mourning, the investigation, the legal classification of hate . . . in the end, what is heard most clearly is framed as a question with an answer always already firmly in place.

Q: What motive led to this crime?

A: Hate. “What else could it be?”

offered as statement of fact. I would however offer that hate in this case is insufficient as a motive, a more convincing motive might be articulated as a fear of revelation. Even as it is reported that Parker and Wilson were sexually involved with Warren, it is never revealed that they are gay. On the contrary, Parker’s sister insists, “My brother is not a homosexual.” I cannot myself claim to offer such a revelation. After all, if they were gay, how could they have committed this crime? “What else could it be?” This revelation is a sacred impossibility, a public secret here maintained, no one ever says they are straight either: the crime committed out of a fear of homophobia. “If it’s not hate, what is it?” a tearful Brenda Warren told CNN. ‘I just want someone to tell me what it is.’

Of course part of what is at stake is the fear of contagion, the spread of abjection represented by Warren’s shamelessness. This abjection, if transmitted, would break down all distinctions: everyone on their knees or facedown or prone. Warren’s abject shamelessness sacrifices the public secret that is known, but which cannot be articulated, a public secret which in this case takes the form of an awareness that what one does is not equivalent with who one is, or in other words, that one’s behavior is not coterminous with

59 Dominion Post, July 14.
60 Franken (2000).
one’s identity. In fact identity is key to the public secret of Warren’s murder. The rallying
cries which circulate Warren’s identity as

Gay Black

Black gay
gay black

black and homosexual

black faggot

in the service of a legal battle to expand current definitions of hate crimes at the same
time manage the categorical distinctions between the murderers, the witness, and the
victim. It is ultimately the murderers’ known and even spoken, but never articulated
identities, the original sacrificial object, which survives, covered from sight, speculation,
and spectacularization. “Around these parts, it’s like you don’t ask and you don’t tell.”

Instead we have a progression of what can or is said, of what, legally at least, can
be made public. Ironically, once Parker and Wilson’s exposures—as “white”
“juveniles”—arrives at the category “adult” and their case can be made officially public,
the national media, the HRC, the NAACP and the FBI have all lost interest. The hate
crime disappeared. 61

Sacreface

If the masked face prone to blushing presences the public secret (that endlessly
talked about secret, the secret of sex), what does Warren’s bruised and “black” face
presence? His defacement presences sacredness, his fragility countered to Parker’s
muscular frame and steel toed boots, the absolute negation that comes as a consequence

61 Violence maintains a curious relation to appearance and disappearance, absence and presence. See, for
example, Diana Taylor’s (1997) discussion of “disappearances” in Argentina.
of a too explicit presencing, his shamelessness . . . J.R. is rendered sacred by virtue of the
virtue made of his death. The space of death and the hard work of making death matter
by the NAACP and the HRC spectacularly centralize his abject defacement and thereby
transform his abjected body necessarily and simultaneously into a site both sacred and
defaced. His broken body, the trace of violence, materializes in much of the reporting; the
manner of his murder; his bruised and bloody face in the casket. 62 “So they could see
what they had done to his son.” 63 “It was pretty hideous. It took its toll on a lot of people.
There was a lot of screaming and crying.” 64 His display is not limited to the verbal
reconstruction of his own reconstruction (or lack thereof) but also importantly includes
the display of his identity. Charged with an excess of energy, his body becomes a site
around which rallying cries can issue forth, a terrible sight/site in a field of battle.
“Because of his size and birth defect, it’s likely Warren could put up little resistance,
especially against Parker, whom neighbors describe as large and muscular.” 65

Yet the focus on his violent defacement—“his caramel-colored face was black
and contorted” 66—diverts our attention from the true sacrificial object. Warren is in fact a
surrogate victim, he is substituted for the sacrificial object condensed as public secret: the
everyday transgression of sexual taboos, the transgression of everyday life, of say, a

62 Displaying J.R.’s body in an open casket of course echoes the famous case of Emmett Till, the thirteen
year old black boy murdered in Mississippi in 1955, a murder whose circulation through news media (along
with kids getting hosed down and attacked by dogs) helped, according to some scholars, mobilize white
support for the Civil Rights Movement.
63 Dominion Post, July 11.
64 Ibid.
65 Quittner (2000).
66 Reeves (2000).
black man giving blow jobs to white boyz. “It’s not like he was a stranger to them.”  

“There was no indication anyone hated a particular group, especially gays.”

Jason Shoemaker’s confessional revelation that Warren was in fact murdered reinstates the sacrificial crisis the death was meant to avert. As a consequence violence orients its baleful attention toward Parker and Wilson, who must themselves be sacrificed in turn. And yet their sacrifice (among them, a rite of passage from “juvenile” to “adult”) is absolutely contingent on the discovery of their crime as a crime.  Marion County Sheriff Ron Watkins offers his own confession as a prayer: “Right from the start, I had asked God for someone to come forward and help us. Because of the circumstances surrounding this crime, it would have been a tough one to solve and might have dragged on for quite a while.”  However, lacking Shoemaker’s confession, the case would never have been pursued, it would have remained a hit-and-run, an unfortunate coincidence that Grant Town’s resident “black faggot son-of-a-bitch” got run over. “But I never dreamed at that time it would turn out this way and become a homicide instead of a fatality.”

Warren’s appropriate character as surrogate victim (to be sacrificed in lieu of the public secret that sex is happening, that sex bleeds from the intimate and private into the public) becomes inappropriate only when the technologically mediated phantasmagoria of the crime transports—in a circuitry of taboo—him from his proper space in the margins of the community into the position of sacred, defaced symbol in a war against hatred. His murder might have produced a collective sigh of relief (release) as sanctioned violence

---

67 Finn “A Town” (2000).
68 Reeves (2000).
69 Dominion Post, July 5.
70 Roddy (2000).
71 Ibid.
against a sacred monster. “Before this happened, most people didn’t care if you were gay as long as you didn’t talk about it.” 72 “Now we’ve taken to locking our doors.” 73 His sacrifice was to function as preventative medicine, as an action designed to prevent a breakdown in distinction that would incite violence in the form of homophobic speculation about Parker and Wilson’s sexual identities. This preventive medicine was a defensive measure of negation, which produced anonymity (killing Warren, staying straight) as the first and last defense against violence. The proliferating discourses’ myopic attention on hate keep the real sacred monster in the closet. Even as they reveal absolutely the surrogate victim, the discourses also function to obscure the identity of the real sacrificial victim: the secure border that protects an always already corrupted, infiltrated, penetrated masculinity. The maintenance of Parker and Wilson’s legitimacy as masculine subjects required Warren’s sacrifice, and in the end—abetted by the distraction engendered by the media attention—they succeed: they are never called out.

Mimitech

“It’s not only as if disfiguring the copy acts on what it is a copy of, but that associated with this, the defaced copy emits a charge which seems--how else can we say this?--to enter the body of the observer and to extend to physically overflow, and therewith create an effusion of proliferating defacements” (Taussig 1999: 25).

Warren’s body is a reservoir of negation, which if not put to an end/put in his place, would release a sympathetic magic capable of producing a double dose of his own negation. Sympathetic magic or spermatological voodoo “that flows everywhere and impregnates on contact” (Girard 1977: 258). Defacement of the copy brings the copy to life even in death. By speaking/signifying not only his but the other boys’ desires, J.R.

72 Reeves (2000)
73 Ibid.
threatens to produce a copy of his own negation, his inappropriateness. An impossible question of whether J.R.’s race and/or homosexuality might be mirrored/mapped onto Parker and Wilson; nevertheless, these attributes produce a sort of negated copy, an inverted copy wherein the attributes are both point of departure and foundation for Wilson and Parker’s whiteness, straightness. The labor of the negative here: the absolute negation represented by the murder, which necessarily negates those transgressive qualities that might find themselves elsewhere mirrored.

**Mourning is Hard Work**\(^{74}\)

The murder represents the hard work of death-work: Parker and Wilson demonstrate the hard work/abject positivity at dismemberment: the extreme measures taken to negate the negation represented by Warren’s body. Their attempts to dis-member Warren’s body are intimately tied to their efforts to re-member masculine distinction. But Warren’s body is not the only document of expired energy. There is also the display made of the work of mourning in the presentation of the open coffin and in two vigils, the first held in nearby Fairmont and the second in view of the capitol in Washington D.C. These scenes are intended as signs of support for Warren’s family and for efforts to expand existing hate crimes legislation. Yet even as the work of mourning involves an expression of grieving—“there was a lot of screaming and crying,”\(^{75}\) “tears from strangers”—it must also include a rhetoric addressed to “hate.” Warren’s mother in sight of the U.S. Capitol: ‘‘Hate kills,’ said Brenda Warren, raising her voice. ‘The injustice

---

\(^{74}\) For another example of the hard work of mourning, see Derrida (2001).

\(^{75}\) Dominion Post, July 11.
that my son suffered, no one—no one—should ever have to bear that . . .. If nothing else, I just want to say please, please, let it be the last time.”76

Hate cannot however remain external, belonging to someone else out there. It gets up close and personal. And though I’m unsure whether hatred played a direct role in J.R.’s murder, I know it when eye see it. Much of the drama of the vigil held in Fairmont comes from the arrival of Fred Phelps, a disbarred lawyer from Topeka, KS, minister of the Westboro Baptist Church, infamous for its “picketing ministry.” Among other things, this ministry finds Phelps and his family at the funerals of gays with signs that read, “God Hates Fags,” “AIDS Cures Fags,” “Matthew Shepard in Hell.” With arrival of Phelps we can say that hate crimes discourse perversely produces a hate that resonates with the fear of those who argue that expanded hate crimes legislation will result in a form of discrimination against straight white men. “Every time they kill a young fag, the homosexual groups try to make a cause celebre out of it.”77

Of course no one likes hate: some mourners take to shouting down Phelps, while others, who have come to expect Phelps’ arrival, unfurl large wings that block the Phelps klan from view. Even the West Virginia Gov. Cecil Underwood, who earlier in the year introduced and signed into law a ban against gay marriage that includes a prohibition on recognizing gay and lesbian marriages from other states, condemns the anti-gay protesters by calling on state residents late Monday to be supportive of Warren’s family:

76 Phuong and Reeves (2000).
77 Finn “Town Looks” (2000).
“The people of West Virginia have no tolerance for hate or venomous speech, particularly as we mourn the loss of this young life. Our prayers go out to Mr. Warren’s family and friends.”

78 Datalounge.com
A chat from gay.com’s West Virginia chat room on 12/4/00.

After I complete the above text, I want to talk to people about it, so I go to a West Virginia chatroom at gay.com. There, I find people who knew J.R. and others who are willing to weigh in on the case. An example of virtual ethnography, the dialogue highlights both my own ambivalences about the crime—was it a hate crime, should the boys have been tried as adults, what penalty should they receive—and the diverse responses it produced in the queer community, ambivalences which groups such as the HRC effectively erased in their charged commentary. The dialogue was also profoundly emotional and I found myself near tears at its conclusion. I am deeply thankful for the immediate and considered response I received from the participants. While the difficulties posed by presentation made me wonder to what degree I should include it in this chapter, the issues addressed, both in the content and by nature of its taking place in cyberspace, led me to believe that I should present as much of it as possible. I performed only minor editing to correct spelling and I sometimes combined lines to facilitate an easier reading. Speakers are in bold type, and I have also kept most of the interruptions created by people joining the room, which created an effect I can only characterize as interruptions of desire that present a counterpoint to a conversation marked by death. My chat handle is wsb23 (I handle I’ve had for nearly six years—WSB stands for William S. Burroughs and the 23 refers to a number that is subject of much conspiracy theory speculation). After I enter the room, my voice is marked by “>.”And one last note, “LOL” is chat short hand for “laugh at loud.”

* Please say hello to wsb23: mailto: wsb23@gay.com austin, tx student will trade pics for info/views on fairmont murder from earlier this year

<Matt in DC> fairmont Murder?? what’s that
* Please say hello to *rick: Charleston hotel, bored, horny, pvt ok.
> there was a brutal murder on 4th of july earlier this year

<Matt in DC> of?

> young black gay man

<BoBear7279> a gay man

<*rick> yes wsb

<Matt in DC> Oh

<*rick> in fairmont

<Matt in DC> Okay

<BoBear7279> i was from fairmont i knew him

<Matt in DC> Damn!!

<Matt in DC> Really?

> i’ve been working on a paper for a course on violence

<Matt in DC> ummm

> really disturbing stuff.

<*rick> there’s been lots of stuff in papers here on it

> what’s your take on it bobear?

<BoBear7279> wsb: just look up newspaper articles they give all the details

> bobear do you think it was a hate crime?

* Please say hello to Wade--Elkins: pvt ok.

<*rick> it was a hate crime, but it is not a hate crime in WV, unfortunately

<Matt in DC> wasn’t a hate crime

<Matt in DC> weren’t the two friends?
<BoBear7279> i’m not sure how i feel about it

<Matt in DC> one wanted a relationship the other didn’t?

<BoBear7279> i knew JR and he was very “open” if you get my drift

<wv__guy :)> u guys believe what u read in the papers?

> what about a crime of passion?

<BoBear7279> some people especially them str8 [straight] rednecks in fairmont don’t take to kindly to that

<BoBear7279> i doubt it

<Matt in DC> Yikes!!

<*rick> i think it was a hate crime

<Matt in DC> why rick?

<*rick> it was based on one telling rumors about the other having sex with the victim

<wv__guy :)> u can see the movie...it will be just about as accurate

> seems like they killed him b/c they were sooo afraid of being seen as gay

<BoBear7279> could be true

<Matt in DC> hummm

<Matt in DC> that constitute a hate crime?

<BoBear7279> but no one knows the truth of that

<*rick> and telling about him having sex with the perps

<BoBear7279> and i could see that happening

<BoBear7279> if it were true

<*rick> it is a hate crime: killing someone because of orientation
> no one knows the truth about the sex, but what the authorities and others say and don’t
say is pretty revealing

<*rick*> but it is not a hate crime in WV to kill someone because he is gay

<Matt in DC> after you’ve had sex with them?

<BoBear7279> he could have hit on them just as bad as he hit on everyone else

<BoBear7279> but that is no reason to kill someone especially like that

<*rick*> very brutal

<Matt in DC> well, i’m glad it wasn’t race related, bad enough that sex was the motive

<Wade—Elkins> It was a hate crime committed out of fear of exposure

* Please say hello to horni-1: 6’- 160 lbs- 7” cut- hairy- pvt. ok - Logan.

* Please say hello to Chadsome: bi athletic discreet college.

> i agree with wade!

> matt: sex was the motive, but not in such a direct way

<Wade—Elkins> In small communities, it is taboo to be queer

<Matt in DC> I see

<GigoloDownBelow> Bullshit...I’ve been out for years in Elkins

<Matt in DC> but didn’t the two have a relationship, sexual at some point?

<Wade—Elkins> If the black man had not threatened to expose their sexual

relationship, he probably would be alive today

<Matt in DC> you think Wade?

<Wade—Elkins> yes

<*rick*> I don’t agree

<Matt in DC> hummm
> it may be true that it is taboo to be queer in small towns, but is it taboo to do queer sex

OR TO TALK ABOUT IT?

* Please say hello to Morgantown Cutie: 19.m.morgantown....WVU student.

<Wade--Elkins> Why don’t you agree?

<GigoloDownBelow> it’s not dangerous to be out in small communities...it’s just which neighborhoods you hang out in

* Please say hello to hottieNhgtn21: MU student 21 6’1 175 br bl tan cute.

<Matt in DC> I’m in a large city and I’m still in the closet

<*rick> Because the evidence isn’t real clear that he threatened to expose

> i mean how big is the town the lived in (grant town or fairmont?)

<*rick> hey hottieNhuntn21

<Wade--Elkins> I believe the white boy had a girlfriend, so how would it look to his peers (remember these are high school students) to be having sex with a man

<BoBear7279> grant town is smaller than fairmont

<BoBear7279> it’s a where everybody knows your name neighborhood

* Please say hello to Hung N Ashland: 5’9” 185lbs bl/bl goatee nice ass and legs.

* Please say hello to college^21.

<Matt in DC> good point Wade

<BoBear7279> yes but that is speculation

<*rick> that motivated it

> rick: the kids confessed and in their confessions they say they got real mad . . .

<Matt in DC> who knows the real story?
<*rick> yeah we’ll never know

> . . . about a rumor that was going around.

<BoBear7279> rumors

<Wade--Elkins> I have met several young men in this very chatroom from Elkins who kept their sexuality under wraps while in this town

<BoBear7279> exactly

<Clks Rape me> Anyone in Clarksburg area tonight wanting to plow a bottom real good message me

<BoBear7279> we don’t know the truth

> well i have the confessions . . .

<*rick> but the prosecutor thinks it was based on his being gay and their

FEAR of exposure

<Matt in DC> I hope they don’t get the death penalty

<*rick> not the threat of it

<*rick> we don’t have the death penalty

<Matt in DC> THAT’S GOOD!!

> exposure to what?

> and in terms of punishment, aren’t we punishing them for internalized homophobia

<Wade--Elkins> I don’t think of them as “killers” who would kill again. Society is safe from them, but they need to be punished in some way

> the same homophobia EVERYONE is supposed to internalize

<Matt in DC> NOT THE DEATH PEN

<*rick> oh I disagree completely
<*rick*> they are sociopaths who have proven that they will kill or injure when threatened

<Matt in DC> uuummm

> on punishment: i don’t think they should get the death penalty

<Matt in DC> I disagree with you rick

<*rick*> well they won’t: this isn’t Texas :)

<Matt in DC> they are not sociopaths

<Wade--Elkins> We all would do something desperate if faced with it

> it’s interesting that they already were tried as adults

* Please say hello to patrickmartial

<*rick*> they will be tried as adults; that’s been decided

<*rick*> hey patrickmartial

> no, if they were here in texas, jubya wouldn’t know WHAT to do.

<Wade--Elkins> These weren’t little boys who didn’t know what they were doing at the time of the crime

<Matt in DC> well, killing them solves nothing

> no, they weren’t little boys

<Wade--Elkins> They methodically killed then covered up the killing

> but in a moment of anger . . . you kick someone down

<Wade--Elkins> Too this extreme???

<*rick*> but premeditation can be one second

> afraid you killed them, you take them to disguise your crime

* Please say hello to mike--: charleston, 5’10, 160, masc, athletic, runner.
that’s the law

i think like a lot of murders this is something that got out of hand

* Please say hello to 21: 21/6’1/175/brown/hazel/str8 acting.

that’s true wsb

best conversation i’ve had bout this topic!

most murders are heat of passion

hey 21

yes, that is why I don’t think they would kill again

rick: so is it a hate crime or a crime of passion?

* Please say hello to WVTOP4U

well i’m using the legal term, “hate crime”

same here

and in WV it is not a “hate crime” to kill someone because of their orientation

the state legislature had legislation to add homosexuality, and didn’t

but it is murder nonetheless and there are punishments for such

but I think the fact pattern fits the classic definition of a “hate crime” in a state that has it

yeah

rick: right, but did the boys kill him bc of his orientation or theirs?

but in WV you get extra time if the person you injured/murdered was a basketball official for God’s sakes

lol


<*rick> the evidence is conflicting wsb

<Matt in DC> LOL

<Matt in DC> LOL@rick

<*rick> the victim was afro american

<*rick> it’s true!

<Wade--Elkins> Remember, this state closes for the first day of Deer Season

<Matt in DC> Damn!!

<Matt in DC> LOL

<*rick> so if he was killed because of race it WAS a hate crime

> rick: i agree. which is why i think the way natl. orgs got involved and then dropped out

is lame

<Matt in DC> Get outer here!!

<college^21> buckhannon anyone?

> fbi was gonna investigate the race-angle but decided not to <Wade--Elkins> Where did you hear that they dropped out?

<*rick> ur right

<*rick> and at the same time attorneys were saying, correctly, to the defendants:

“don’t say you killed him because he was black, say you did it because he was gay”

* Please say hello to wvbear54: Morgantown looking for r/t in the morning

  pvt me http://facelink.com/0--.

<Matt in DC> helloWVTOP4U

> rick: but what does that do for their case?

* Please say hello to GreenBudz: Wheeling r/t.
they won’t get extended sentences for killing him be he’s black?

it avoids the additional charge of violation of WV hate crime statute and “lessens their exposure” to a greater sentence

(off the present topic, but I had a gay friend who was murdered and the murderer got one year in prison for it...he had only killed a faggot!

not unless the jury finds he was killed because of race

but naacp only issued ONE press release about this. they didn’t seem so interested in the case as a hate crime

right

because the focus was on his homosexuality not his race

There may be more going on behind the scenes that isn’t being reported that ‘s what i’m trying to figure out wade or at least conjecture about

Please say hello to WvUniversity: 21, 165lbs, white/blk, med built, hot and lookin for ...in morgantown.

bc the reporting goes one direction after a certain point:

You may have to wait until the trial to get your information

it’s a mess, no doubt

it’s all about hate crimes

and then still may not know

Please say hello to E--@WVU: 20y/o,203#,6’6,brn/brn,semi-tan.

but for me, the fact that these kids all knew one another for years . . .

yeah

suddenly they hate him bc he’s black or gay?
<*rick*> but wade and others are right: the threat of exposure is a real motivating factor

> what’s supercreepy is that this would have stayed a hit and run

<Wade--Elkins> no.....he was a friend who was giving sexual favors....ok...unless exposed

> had the witness not told his mom

<*rick*> these are white kids who might be exposed for having sex with a BLACK MAN

> yup.

<Matt in DC> Why do I feel Like I am on Court TV???

> gay court tv: for the best drama!

<Matt in DC> LOL

* Please say hello to qweer.

<Wade--Elkins> I may be wrong, but I have the impression that the black man wasn’t very intelligent either

<*rick*> that’s a fact

> wade: apparently he had a learning disability

<*rick*> yeah

<Wade--Elkins> So there are three strikes against him in the white community....black, gay and dumb.

<*rick*> pretty much

> wade: but it seemed like the talk about his learning disability was to call for inclusion as a protected category, along with sex orientation, in hate crimes law

<Wade--Elkins> on one wants to say they are friends with a retarded guy

* Please say hello to hot_in_s_wv.
<*rick> or a retarded gay black guy

<*rick> hey hot

<hot_in_s_wv> hey

<*rick> sexual orientation is not a category in our statute

<Wade--Elkins> well, it didn’t protect him that night

> neither is disability, at least at the federal level

<Wade--Elkins> laws look good on paper, but paper doesn’t necessarily stop a crime

<*rick> right, or else we’d have no murders

<patrickmartial> killing is still a crime no matter what!!!!!!!!!!!

<GreenBudz> I SAY, AN EYE FOR AN EYE!!!!!!!!!!

<Wade--Elkins> There was another gay crime in our state, near Morgantown I believe, in which a guy was killed because he was gay

<Wade--Elkins> That happened either this past summer or the previous one

<*rick> yeah

<Wade--Elkins> It disappeared from the media

<*rick> and a major one in Charleston a couple years ago, a malicious wounding not a murder

<Wade--Elkins> The Morgantown man was killed and he and his car were pushed down a steep embankment

<Wade--Elkins> Of course when these gay deaths happen, their friends and family all say that their son wasn’t gay....but others in the community know otherwise

<andy-parkersburg> rick...there was actually a gay killing couple of years ago in charleston...
<*rick> yeah forgot about that

> wasn’t there also a murder just a few weeks after the fairmont one <andy-parkersburg> prudence.....

<Wade--Elkins> maybe that is the one in Morgantown

* Please say hello to horny sucker huntington.

<Wade--Elkins> I thought there was one other this summer

* Please say hello to Ashland guy: Need cock.

<*rick> hey horny sucker

<horny sucker huntington> hi rick

> wade: i think that one was covered . . . they guy whose last name was gay

<horny sucker huntington> who me?

<*rick> yeah

<*rick> u

* Please say hello to Mitch5

* Please say hello to wvu25: athletic biwm gradstudent, iso similar, pvt cool.

<Wade--Elkins> Well WSB23, hope you enjoyed the thoughts we shared

> ok guys gotta go. super cool talking to you. rick, wade, if you want to

  write me or get promised pics email me

<Wade--Elkins> I’ve sent you two articles

> thx wade

<Wade--Elkins> you can check through the back issues of the papers that they came from for more info

> by the way are you a prof or student?
<Wade–Elkins> a public school teacher

> kudos. and god bless!

<Wade–Elkins> A gay man was killed needlessly, that is why I am interested

> bye guys

Afterwords

Now, nearly five years after the murder and after I first write about it, the speculations and spectacularizations of the case first calcified into facts, then they faded.

Parker and Wilson were both tried as adults and both plead guilty. Parker gets a life sentence with mercy, which means he’ll be eligible for parole when he’s thirty three years old.79 Wilson gets twenty years and will be eligible for parole when he turns twenty seven.80 Neither Parker nor Wilson are charged with a hate crime. Federal law would have permitted an investigation by the FBI and possible charges only if racial bias had played a role in the crime. West Virginia did not and does not include sexual orientation in its hate crimes laws. J.R.’s family sued the killers and then created a college fund for minority students at West Virginia University.81 I still cry when I think about the case. And I bet J.R.’s family and the families of the killers do too. The hard work of mourning goes on.

79 Smith (2001)
80 Messina (2001)
Chapter Five: I Wonder if You

He

We: Speculations and Scenes

I

In the previous chapter, I get intimate with someone else’s void, their literal voiding. In this chapter, I offer intimate portraits of my own voids, my intense longings, my feelings of lack and loss. These are the traces of the risks and pleasures I learned with my tribe. This chapter is also the most sexually explicit and warrants a repetition of the advisory warning prefacing my work in the Texas Triangle: “This chapter contains descriptive and provocative sexual material and images of drug use. If you feel this may offend you, please move on to the conclusion or reread another chapter.”

The chapter is made up of notes, fragments, and poems from my time working and playing in the field of desire. It dwells in the queerspace of desire: desire without beginning or end, desire without satisfaction. It dwells in the affective spaces that open up when desire runs amok, when mourning turns into melancholia, habits become addictions. This is the heart of the dissertation is: the fragments of a lover’s discourse, the snapshots of a breaking and broken down heart. During the period of time in which these texts are composed, I literally develop a heart condition. My heart begins to beat irregularly, it races, and doctors put me on medications and talk to me about surgery. No doctor ever cured desire though.

There are precedents, of course, for kinds of writing I offer here. Within the context of anthropology, early ethnographic writings, with their sensationalist focus on the queer habits and sex lives of the natives, provide one way of reading this chapter (}
Bleys 1996; Pratt 1992). The more contemporary projects by the late Eric Michaels (1997) and Derek Jarman (1992, 1994, 1997), both of whom offer autobiographical texts on their living and dying with AIDS, also provide points of reference for the journal-like qualities that weave throughout this chapter. In this regard, my text likewise blurs some of the distinctions between scholarship, narrative, and memoir. Eve Sedgwick (2000) has pursued a similar course in her “Dialogue on Love,” which brings together personal and poetic reflections on breast cancer, love, and sex. Ann Cvetkovich’s (2003) recent *Archive of Feelings*, which brings together studies of trauma and lesbian sexuality with oral histories of lesbians involved in ACT UP/New York, similarly marks the some of the ways affect can figure in creative scholarship and ethnographic accounts. Finally, Amber Holligbaugh’s (2000) *My Dangerous Desires*, provides an example of engaged feminist work that grapples with questions of sex and love, porn, and the desire for homecoming.

In regards to the perhaps more dangerous emphasis on the scatalogical and on the excessive, precedents can be found in the poetry of Arthur Rimbaud (1966) and Paul Verlaine (1979), in the fiction of Samuel Delany (1994, 1995), and in George Bataille’s (1989) philosophies of excess. Finally, the fragmentation of the text is inspired by first and foremost by William S. Burroughs cut-up technique, but also by Walter Benajmin’s (1999) *Arcades Project*, Roland Barthes’ (1978) *A Lover’s Discourse* and Paige Baty’s (1999) *Email Trouble* (Benjamin and Baty both commit suicide though. I don’t want to be that fragmented.)

As an anthropologist, this chapter is the most professionally risky for me. It may be bold or edgy. It may represent an extreme, even hardcore, example of self-reflexivity. But I don’t want this to be a coming out story, an anthropologist’s shocking confessions
of sex and drugs in the field. (Though many anthropologists have these stories too.)

Rather I would like the reader to think about the ways this text might work to complicate what counts as anthropological labor and writing. It’s important to note, then, that I’m not just positioning myself here in a self-reflexive exercise—“black, interracial, queer, activist, performer, scholar, with some power, without some power, etc.”—I’m exposing myself. I do not do this in an effort to shock, though, of course, I recognize that as one possible way this text might be received. Imagine it instead as an offering from someone who stands naked before you. At the same time, it’s important to point out that these are stories, and that these stories are composites not just of my own texts, but of some of the stories that were told to me. They are autoethnographic and ficto-critical. Honesty and self-reflexivity do manifest, but so do ephemeral feelings, fantasies, poetics, and dreams.

This chapter is about the queerspace of desire as a space of speculation on desire. Its refrain, “I wonder if you” marks the speculative ambivalence of desire. I invite you into my wonderings/wanderings, but I also wonder if you don’t also already share in them. These stories could have been (could have been) his, hers . . . Maybe they could have been told by you or yours. I wonder if you . . .

**The Anthropologist as Object of desire, or Self-objectification, or Equal opportunity objectification**

My first real mentor told me that it was impossible for one to objectify oneself. At the time, I believe we were talking about Sartre’s (1964) chapter in *Being and Nothingness*, “On Concrete Relations with Others” and Fanon’s (1967) discussions of his objectification and interpellation as a “BLACK MAN” in *Black Skin, White Masks*.
I never really agreed with that idea—that it was impossible for one to objectify oneself. After all, in Sartre’s account the other doesn’t even have to be present for one to fear the potentially annihilating gaze. One is always aware that one could, at any moment, be espied by the gaze of the other, one’s Beingness reduced to nothingness. For Fanon, once he has been interpellated as a BLACK MAN, there’s no going back. The child’s frightened cry, “Look Mama, a Negro!” fucks him up for good. For both, then, the process of objectification is generated through eternal forces and through inner reflections on those forces; they see themselves, they only are in fact themselves, when seen through the other’s eyes. Even the hypothetical, still unseen, unpresent other can turn them abject.

For my part, my interest is less philosophical than practical. “Who am I without the mirror of the other’s eyes?” It’s a practical matter, because without you (the other), I’m nothing.

Living the pink house with an asphalt lawn at the intersection of the heroin trade (“junky alley”) in Eugene, Oregon, I wonder with a friend, “What is Beingness without Being-toward-or-for-Others?” I also begin to foment the dissertation project, still years off, as a project in anthropornology, a narcissistic exposure that would nonetheless also function as a form of labor: “I’ll do some porn and then I’ll write my Ph.D. about that.” The idea was simple, its execution less so, and its reception always very tepid, in and outside the academy.

The point being, that I exist only by self-objectification. I heard the hail, I took the call, and in my heart, my black heart beating, rests the bluest eyes, the fairest skin, a gaping wound.
So who is the other? And what about this other always already in me? The confederate captain whose plantation home is now a bed and breakfast? The freed slaves worried they would be killed by Union troops and who almost were? The man who emigrated from Jamaica with an unlikely Irish last name? A family reunion of the ghosts of my ancestors would probably be a bloody affair, as bloody as my heart, as bloody and messy as this text.

Of course, as an anthropologist still grasping some of the dreams of humanism, I am discouraged to think about others in this way, that is, as objects. Anthropologists have for some time called for the discipline to study up, study local, and even sometimes for an anthropology of anthropology itself. But no one’s ever made a serious effort to put anthropologists themselves in the spotlight, in the exhibits for lay people to gawk at (this is understandable of course. Who’d want to be Sarah Bartmann?). As anthropologists, we are still the one’s framing the gazes and I doubt very much that any number of disciplinary “interventions” or analyses of anthropology’s ongoing colonial history, its ongoing inappropriate expropriations, are really going to shine new light on us. I’m offering a different kind of gift: myself, on display, exposed, if not true.

I belong here. I know I exist when you see me. Which is the same fallacy that haunts identity politics of recognition—recognition, your seeing me, does not itself empower me or all the other Others to act; it only means we have been grasped by power’s gaze.

The violences of objectification cut both ways of course, and honestly, sometimes I have wanted to cut that bluest eye, fairest skin out of my heart by fucking up white boys. I had almost forgotten about that, but in offering myself up for desiring gazes, I
wanted to see the abjection in the blush of desire in fair cheeks, fair cocks. More than just see, I wanted to smell the stink of desire in musky underarms and asses.

How many anthropologists would confess to wanting to fuck the other up, regardless of how many might admit that some of their actions just might have fucked the other up. Following Girard (1977), I made myself into a sacrificial surrogate, my sex obscuring the real sacrificial objects:

white boys I loved
so bad.

My passion for passion in this text is as muddy as my desire for justice. There’s no ethics here, no care of the self, no care for the other.

**

On the web, one can find sites that instruct young anorexics and bulimics on how to hide their eating disorders from their friends and parents. Studies reprinted in various media show how men have also become obsessive about the appearance and care of their own bodies, subscribing to ideologies of body fascism, and mistaking plastic surgery for a care of the self. Around campus, I note that while all the young women wear tight fitting and revealing clothes, all the young men were baggy clothes that hide the shape of their bodies. Smoking cigarettes with a gay friend, I complain about the baggy clothes and remark, “I’m for equal opportunity exploitation.”

**Sex Show**

SEX SHOW: Calling all freaks, queerz, goths, vampires, kingz, queenz, butches, femmes, genderbenderz and straightiez (go-go dances, bondage babes, date auction,
kidding booth, sexy skits, lap dance, shocking performances, Freaky Willy, Vag and Nip Art)—Benefit for Safe Space and Jack Hov.

In November of 2002, I helped my friends put on a sex show. I had known some of the Austin drag kings for a while, and when Jack Hov and her girlfriend asked my boyfriend and I to help raise money for Jack Hov’s film project, we agreed.

While I clearly remember the short timetable in which my boyfriend helped make set materials and I helped to block out some of the “shocking performances,” I can’t really remember the performance itself. I go-go danced, lap danced, and strutted around the stage in drag lip-synching to Madonna songs as Jack Hov’s wayward wife in the flimsy narrative arc. Later I was in bondage skits wearing only a bubble wrap jock strap, bound and dominated by men and women, butches and femmes. I was auctioned off, along with my boyfriend, for a dinner date.

The experience was intense, hurried, and now, more than two years later, difficult to reconstruct. We raised money. Some of it went to Safe Space, a local women’s shelter, and some of it went to fund Jack Hov’s film. As far as I know, the movie never got made. And I haven’t really heard from the kings since.

For a while I resented their silence. But like most breakups, time has mellowed out some of my anger. Now I can write and put myself back in that time, but what I can’t do is measure the effects of our work. What were the impacts of this event that night and beyond? People got drunk, they laughed, they cheered, and they ordered lap dances. I remember it, in part anyway, and others probably do too. But did it change people’s minds, open them up, make them wonder, lead to hookups, divorces? I don’t know. The night is a blur for me, so are the days after. And now I struggle to give the sex show any
meaning at all. Maybe it shows how cool I am, how willing I am to put my body on the line for someone else’s art. Maybe it shows my own narcissism as I sought out attention from strangers. Maybe, since my memories are so fuzzy, it fits into narratives of drug and alcohol abuse. Maybe it’s a story about relationships lost, since my boyfriend and I broke up and since I don’t hang out with the drag king troupe anymore. Maybe it’s a story of a lost queer home. In the end, I don’t know what the show meant or what it did. Maybe all I do know has to do with the way the sex show indexes the hard work of desire, of putting on a show, of making money, of making people want, of the hard work of remembering the hard work of desire.

**The Blue Prince**

Before I ever really got to know him, I dreamt of him. Holding C.R. in the summer of 2005, watching *The Two Towers*, I’m reminded of holding someone else like this. I remember a dream. I remember the dream of the Blue Prince ascending the staircase to my small one bedroom apartment on High Street in Grinnell, Iowa. I never see the Blue Prince’s face, but I know who it is; it’s Ar--. Ascending my staircase in the dream, he was surrounded by an electric blue aura, a light that diffused itself throughout the dream, a charged color that I’ve only seen two other times: once, when A.S., Ar-- and I took ecstasy together, and the second time, when I split a Viagra with D-- in San Antonio. Bob Dole might say it’s okay, but few drugs have ever been as hallucinogenic as that Viagra—blue sparks like lasers everywhere.

The blue is blue in my dream like melancholy, not lasers. Blue like the melancholy blues, like the colors that come with the feeling of dozing off to the sounds of Billie Holiday in wan October sunlight.
A.S., Ar--and I kissed and danced the night we took ecstasy. We went to Red Light House (so named because of the eternally burning red light hanging above the front porch). The three of us danced in the living on the hard wood floors. Other people came and went, to dance, to take bong hits from the four-foot bong named Chums, and to get drinks from the kitchen. Ar-- and I went into J.G.’s dark bedroom and kissed passionately until our heat cooled from the awareness of another presence with a us in the room, a presence that announced itself with little more than a shift in the shadows, just enough to feel like we had lost our secret garden of desire. We left and joined A.S. who complained about having been left alone. Eventually we go back to A.S.’s room, take off our clothes, touch and caress one another before we fall asleep on the floor. Ar-- lay between the two of us.

A few days later, Ar-- surprises me by coming to the door of my apartment. I ask him to come in. We don’t speak; he just rests with me on the couch, where I hold him like a child or a lover. Chill dusk in spring. When he leaves, he kisses and then hugs me so hard I almost fall over backwards. Watching him walk down the stairs away from me, I remember the dream of the Blue Prince. Something clicks. And from then on, the two transfigure into one in my mind.

In 1999, I get a call from K.M., a friend who also shared part of that night on ecstasy (She said that night, “I think I burned myself with a cigarette, but even that felt good.”) She tells me Ar-- killed himself. No one knew he was flunking out of grad school (he studied mathematics). Friends had seen him in the weeks before and they were worried. He seemed down, depressed even. Then he’d disappeared, only to briefly
reappear, before disappearing for good. His father found him in the barn three days after he’d hung himself.

Though this becomes more frequent as the years go on, at the time this only the second time in my life when I am reduced to sudden, hysterical tears. My neighbor whistles when she enters the house and comforts me when she finds me knees up, sobbing, slumped against the wall in the hallway. I accept her offer of a drink and go to her house, where she tells me about the years of taking care of her best friend as he died from cancer in the small studio behind her house.

Days later, I stand in a professor’s office trying to explain why I couldn’t read Freud’s “Mourning and Melancholy” for her Trauma Culture class. I’m in my own trauma; I’m trying to explain how my eyes and heart weep, how I feel, how I might not be able to present readings, how I might not come to class for awhile. She tells me to take it easy, to be gentle with myself. Three years go by before I read Freud’s essay. Melancholy, I learn from Freud, is a pathological form of mourning in which grief extends backwards and forward into (queer) time. I make a promise to others and myself after the death of Ar--that I will not kill myself over graduate school, that I WILL have a life outside of school, and that I will not take school too seriously, as I had in the past. Little did I know that I would break my promise.

Shortly after Ar--’s death, I began hunting. In the 1997 song “Hunter,” Bjork sings, “If travel is searching, and home’s what’s been found, then I’m going hunting.” I started hunting for revenants and monsters that I could hold and protect and comfort the way I had held Ar-- that cold afternoon as dusk settled in, before he left into the dark, walked down my stairs, hung himself.
I took care of myself, thinking I was keeping my promise, by smoking more pot, by drinking more, and taking up cigarettes again. I developed obsessive crushes on new friends. I had no idea that deferring my grief would put me back where I’d started that night my neighbor found me slumped against the wall. I had no idea that this deferment, transference and projection would end up giving me the melancholy blues.

At one point A.S. asks me to contribute a poem about Ar-- for a collection of his friends’ remembrances. I want to, and I start my story about the Blue Prince, my dream, holding him, but I never finish it. Haunted by her loss as much as by my own, I stop correspondence with her. Years go by before we see each other again, and when we do, in the summer of 2002, we don’t talk about Ar-- at all. Then in February of 2003, me and the J--the second serious boyfriend stay with her in D.C. where I am to present at a conference. A snowstorm strands us there for a week. The first night I’m there, I cry bitterly. J--the second brings a cool towel to lie over my back. I’m not sure whom I’m crying for.

“Now Whitey stands with the noose around his neck, pelvis tilted forward, cock almost hard, pupils pinpointed. The platform falls and he hangs there ejaculating and a blaze of light flashes out of his eyes . . .
“A Flasher! A Flasher! The clients throw up their arms and wiggle their hips ecstatically, bathing in the flash, pushing each other aside, wallowing about in heaps” (Burroughs 1981:181).

Rememory, Dreaming

With time so out of joint
my rememory chip is
acting up again, acting out again.
I don’t know if this has already happened.
I don’t know if it’s about to happen.
Maybe I dreamed it.
But my dreams are
muffled by, clouded by
the three joints
I smoked
last nite.

In the two years
we were together
I don’t
ever remember
dreaming of You.
Forgetting can be dangerous bizness.
But amnesia is the memory I like

**Natatorium, Dreaming, Swimming for His Life**

For two years, he dreams of driving, flying, and often running toward or away from queerspaces. Sometimes they are hidden in the slate architecture of military bases, at other times in the nooks and crannies of universities or sports stadiums where parking is hard to come by; he always has trouble finding them. But once he goes in, it’s no problem to identify whether it is or isn’t a queerspace. It always is, because he’s there. And because there are other men and boys, getting ready to cruise or in the process of fucking in backrooms, behind bleachers, in public toilets, on tables in the middle of locker rooms.

Often, though, he goes into spaces that seem empty at first, but in which he senses there are hidden, subterranean rooms. There’s always a hidden door to a secret space, a wet space: “Natatorium” the door in his dream reads. He looks up the word online the next day, it’s Latin and means indoor swimming pools. In the natatorium, he swims around, looking for more hidden exits and entrances.

Increasingly, though, the bad dreams come to dominate. He’s terrified by the scene of a boy getting gangbanged. In his dreams, he jumps into pools to cool off his rising rage and despair, and cuts his hands—someone has strewn broken glass across the
bottom of the pool. These wet, hidden queerspaces become more and more dangerous. He keeps dreaming that he’s trying to lead his tribe across the river to the other side. The details change but the general story is the same: he keeps losing members of his tribe; he can’t save them; he can’t save himself, there is something dangerous in the waters below them or they’re being attacked by black helicopters or spaceships from above; he can’t get to the other side no matter how fast or hard he swims, no matter how many start out with him, no matter how furiously they fight; bloody, beaten, he drowns or gets eaten by the monster. He can’t cross the aqueous threshold; he’s stuck in the space of the threshold.

Cracker Kraken

Our love, our ambivalent cannibalism. I could just eat you up. Eating you up means eating myself up over you. Kraken: A sea monster in Norwegian legend. I remember the Kraken because Harry Hamlin as Perseus kills it with the paralyzing gaze of Medusa’s decapitated head to save the beautiful virgin Andromeda in the film Clash of the Titans.

Then, looking for “cracker” in the dictionary, wondering if American Heritage College Edition will have what I want, my hands and eyes are drawn to

hardcore
dead
galactic
commitment
communism

along the way
until I find cracker,
4. Offensive. A poor white person of the rural esp. southeastern United States. 5. One that cracks . . . you aren’t from the southeast, but from a West Texas town made ghostly after the oil wells dried up.

crack (krák) . . . 7. Informal. to have a mental or physical breakdown: cracked under the pressure.

Something cracked is something broken. For a while I would say our relationship broke me. I still think that’s true. No amount of effort on my part to put you, the cracker, the white trash, my first real boylove, under or behind me, could save me. Deep in the sea, the cracken was always ready to surge: a monstrous neediness ready to eat my virgin, a need that could swallow the world. A need that I could no longer identify as yours or mine. In the midst of things, our codependence, I write a line, “your need could swallow the world.” I reflect on the line for a few days, then I scratch it out, so that it reads, “my need could swallow the world.”

I Wonder if You

I wonder if you think about me as I watch the Dark Crystal behind-the-scenes special features on DVD. Watching behind-the-scenes special features on DVD becomes an obsession. I drink three cocktails and smoke three cigarettes and try to understand how a thing gets made. I wait for you to call and think about reading Barthes’ A Lover’s Discourse and taking a nap. There is no reason to expect you to call, but I wait anyway.

3. Waiting is an enchantment: I have received orders not to move. Waiting for a telephone call is thereby woven out of tiny unavowable interdictions to infinity: I forbid myself to leave the room, to go to the toilet, even to telephone (to keep the line from being busy); I suffer torments if someone else telephones me (for the same reason); I madden myself by the thought that at a certain (imminent) hour I shall have to leave, thereby running the risk of missing the healing call, the return of the Mother. All these diversions which solicit me are so many wasted moments for waiting, so many impurities of anxiety. For the anxiety of waiting, in its pure state, requires that I be sitting in a chair within reach of the telephone, without doing anything.
4. The being I am waiting for is not real . . . waiting is a delirium . . . the telephone again: each time it rings, I snatch up the receiver . . . I lash out furiously . . . I imagine I recognize the voice I once loved: I am an amputee who still feels pain in his missing leg (Barthes 1978: 38-39)

Now, four cocktails, four cigarettes. I wonder if I should have ever answered the call (of love, of desire) in the first place.

“Please Hold, and I’ll Transfer You”

S-- at I ♥ Video says, “I always say that however long the relationship was, it takes twice as long to get over it.” Fuck, I think, I can’t wait four years! So when you don’t call, I take his call. His, him, he, henceforth, “you.”

Missing you and waiting for yer call, yer body that I’m already attached to, to show up. I don’t want to be too greedy, especially with time still working against me: we have maybe two months until you leave. But it feels so good hurts so bad hurts so good to want you, to kiss yer neck, to anticipate more.

I’m ashamed and greedy; I drank yesterday instead of breathing

instead of working
writing
instead just wanting you.

Of course, I’ve been here before, not with you, but with him and all the others, so I know I had better practice de-tachment: if I’m too greedy and grasp too hard, you, like him, will slip through my fingers, the way everything solid melts into air.

05.03.02

I got that feeling in my gut today, the one where the ground feels like it’s dropping out. But now I can’t remember when or what first did it to me (or who, was it he, him, his?) . . .

Did the feeling come from
thinking about you and other boys?
thinking about you and your kid you had with that crazy twin?
thinking about you and your kink, the kinks I imagine?
maybe it was
thinking about your porn collection, at 22, and the guy you get them from?
I wonder if you
  watch these early 80s bareback tapes late at night or in the middle of the day.
I wonder if you
  will watch them with me, whether we’ll have sex while we’re watching
    like I did with him.

I have been thinking about the next two weeks. That’s how long I have before I go back
to Toronto to hang with the neo-nazi turned anti-racist social worker. Two weeks is how
long we have before “we” changes from Shaka and B-- to Shaka and K--. I wonder how
I’ll handle it. I already imagine K-- asking in his gentle therapeutic tones, “how are you
handling this?”

**Bong hits since 8:30 a.m.**

  coffee,
  half a pastry,
  smoothie w/banana and frozen strawberries that J-- bought a long
time ago & soy protein,
  1 crispy taco w/meat, lettuce & guacamole,
  1 crispy taco w/beans and lettuce,
  1 herbal tonic
  1.5 hours with J-- (I hold him at one point while he cries, after I
    say to his unspoken word, “I miss you.” Strangely, I don’t cry even
    though I know that I still have yet more tears to shed)
  1.5 hours with N-- (I watch what he’s edited so far of *Descendants
    of Freedom*. We don’t talk about the sex we had once, or about
    doing it again.)
  1.5 hours with W.B. (She cornrows my hair as we watch cartoons
    like Thundercats, Dragon Ball Z, Pokemon, Jackie Chan
    Adventures)
  1 beer, 2 cigs with W.B.
  1.5 beers, bong hits, talk, and KAZI 88.7 FM w/D.R.

And

  B--
talking to A-- in Seattle, me wondering which A--, the one who had the hots for him, the one who bought his ticket to go up there to drop off the cat, or the other one, his old friend, the other A-- in Seattle, his future roomie, the one who stuck his tongue ring into B--’s urethra.

And

B--, who left the bed last night at around 3 a.m. after answering a call from Ja-- who wanted to do a K deal before some kidz headed back to San Antonio. And B--, who asked as he was leaving, finally sober enough I suppose after I’d been checking in on him, giving him kisses, not wanting to spend too much time alone with Ad-- . . . who when he left, when he was sober enough I guess, asked, sensing perhaps the wrongness of leaving a boyfriend in bed to go home and do a ketamine deal at 3 am, who asked “How bad is this?” His leaving? I told him, “‘7’ on a ‘10’ point scale.” More than pissed this a.m., I call J-- at 9 a.m., tell myself in the car that I won’t do anything stupid, that I won’t fool around with him . . . But I do end up holding him while he cries. I don’t cry, but then I’ve shed a lot of tears lately. I tell him, because he can’t form the words, “I miss you, too.” And what am I doing? feeling? wanting more—but I’ve had bong hits, coffee, cigs, what’s left? More sex with B--? Can it get anymore hardcore, this sex? Another opportunity to take out my aggression and affection out on him . . . let him apologize with his desire, his ass . . . Is this me being afraid of being alone? I keep thinking about calling J--, Ad--, whoever can answer the call of my desire, whoever will give me the sex, the attention, the affection I need in the short term, so that I don’t have to be alone . . .

But I have to ask: is

this

desire?
You, B--, call and your parents are coming up for graduation tomorrow. I’ve been waiting for all your calls today. Pathetic.

I want to ask if you’ll stay over
I ask if you want company
You say
you’re gonna clean up
and call me back again
and I’m
getting
hungry
and all I want
to be doing
right now
is to be
fucking you
on all fours
on your carpet
so that we can keep the sheets clean for your parents.

“Today I felt a major wave . . .”

In the section on “Jealousy” in his A Lover’s Discourse, Barthes’ commentary on Goethe’s Werther and other texts on and about love, Barthes quotes from Freud’s letters:

“’When I love, I am very exclusive,’ Freud says (whom we shall take here for the paragon of normality). To be jealous is to conform. To reject jealousy (‘to be perfect’) is therefore to transgress a law” (Barthes 1978: 145).

I used to think I was perfect, or at least without jealousy. Indeed, this is what I told my last two lovers early in the relationship. But my effort to project (protect?) myself as perfect was really a demand on my beloved others: I say I am not jealous. I therefore expect you not to be jealous. I’ve told you up front, right, that I am not monogamous. I will cheat on you. I promise to tell you, so it won’t be cheating. But this lie never
actualized into a truth. I cheated and didn’t say anything. Why would I? My punishing you was a drama internal to me, and I never did want to share my shame and guilt.

I find the following passage, which like Benjamin’s (1999) commentaries in The Arcades Project, is a point at which Barthes seems to be speaking of himself.

Importantly, this possibly self-reflexive text is bracketed by parentheses, as if it is an afterthought, or underthought:

(Inverted conformism: one is no longer jealous, on condemns exclusivity, one lives with several lovers, etc.—though consider what is actually the case here: suppose I were forcing myself not be jealous any longer, because I was ashamed to be jealous? Jealousy is ugly, is bourgeois: it is an unworthy fuss, a zeal—and it is zeal which I reject) (Barthes 1978: 145-146).

**Just called you**

Just called you to ask if you have some time to talk because I’m worried, and I’ve been thinking about us, and us as boyfriends about my egotism: “I think I might be too egotistical to take second or third place to ketamine, to your goals, to your leaving ”

Even as I still want to make the most of our time

Even as I enjoy watching you dance

Even as I enjoy or love

the ways we fuck.

Maybe this is my problem . . . maybe you think . . .

I wonder if you . . .

but I don’t know what you think and after the endorphins, the partying, the lovely but short nights of sleep I have some questions, some concerns about how able I am to deal with this . . . situation.

But what is it that I want to say to you? I don’t really know. I’m working on that right now. Am I willing to let go, to not grasp, to let you give what you can when you
can. Or do I need more, will I need more of you? More attention. More romance. More love. Do I have to be first . . . I think I remember telling you about my past experiences with relationships—when I decided they were over, they were over. I was a little callous, or maybe just self-interested. I knew how to protect myself. And it seems to me that this is what you probably do as well. Who or what is first in your life right now? Ketamine, getting out, starting anew? Do you know what kind of man you want to be with? Do you know how rare we are . . . two sorta but not too butch versatile boys who don’t quite “fit” into any one scene, who can move in and out of social groups?

Maybe some of my vain questions, my concerns, have to do with my own retro-projections, imagining myself at your age (which I hate to say or do, because despite some similarities, we’ve had different lives, you’ve had experiences I haven’t had, like having a kid at 18 with the crazy one of the twins, but I can’t help but think that I wouldn’t want to date me . . . probably. But at 22, I was also ready and desperately looking for a relationship, after the strange years at Grinnell, and a series of defensive moves on my part that made it so that I never really connected with the boys I dated, never really loved them, never really missed them.

I already care for you. And I’ve had enough heartbreak in the last year. I don’t want to be heartbroken again.

I want to say that I’d be able to look at the cup as half full, that I can embrace what we have and the time we have without grasping, by detaching. I want to say that you can have the space you need and that you can call me when you want to hang and that you can set the limits of what we have and what we might become . . . but I honestly don’t know if I can give up that much control. I think about the things that I’ve come to
recognize about myself . . . about my loneliness, my need for attention . . . and I want to say that I can manage this, that I can live my life, you can live yours, and that we can enjoy the time we spend together . . . but the “more,” the “want,” the wanting more has come to saturate me, the way J-- saturated me, continues to saturate me . . . What is it that we’re doing? What do we have? What do we want? And what do you want? Can I do this? Why this resistance to letting go? Why this insistence on knowing what I can’t, what I refuse, to give up?

05.20.02

Woke up anxious again. Convinced I dreamed of you again. Trying to calm myself after dreams of running naked on the street, of having a social worker I trust ask me when I bought the last vial . . . about to get online to research this drug again . . . still don’t know if I can do this. All depends on whether you want me . . . whether you can only be with me after you’ve snorted IT up your nose.

From http://www.health.org/nongovpubs/ketamine/

What Is Ketamine?
Ketamine, or ketamine hydrochloride, is a non-barbiturate, rapid-acting disassociative anesthetic used on both animals and humans; it also has been used in human medicine for pediatric burn cases and dentistry, and in experimental psychotherapy. It is being abused by an increasing number of young people as a “club drug,” and is often distributed at “raves” and parties.

What Are Some of Its Street Names?
Some street names for ketamine are: K, Ket, Special K, Vitamin K, Vit K, Kit Kat, Keller, Kelly’s day, Green, Blind squid, Cat valium, Purple, Special la coke, Super acid, and Super C. Slang for experiences related to ketamine or effects of ketamine include, “k-hole,” “K-land,” “baby food,” and “God.”

How Is It Being Abused?
Ketamine is a liquid and the most potent ways of using it are by injecting it intramuscularly or intravenously. There is the risk of losing motor control before
injection is completed. Ketamine also can be made into a tablet, or a powder by evaporating the liquid and reducing it to a fine white powder that can be smoked or snorted. Because of its appearance, Ketamine is often mistaken for cocaine or crystal methamphetamine. Some reports indicate it is sometimes sold as MDMA (Ecstasy) and mixed with other drugs such as ephedrine and caffeine. “Cafeteria use” -- the use of a number of hallucinogenic and sedative/hypnotic club drugs such as MDMA, GHB, LSD, and illegally used prescription drugs -- is reported almost everywhere in the U.S.

What Are Ketamine’s Effects?
Ketamine produces a dissociative state in a user. Effects can range from rapture to paranoia to boredom. The user feels its hallucinogenic effects and experiences impaired perception. Ketamine commonly elicits an out-of-body or near-death experience; it can render the user comatose.

Ketamine is similar molecularly to phencyclidine (PCP--or “Angel Dust”) and thus creates similar effects including numbness, loss of coordination, sense of invulnerability, muscle rigidity, aggressive/violent behavior, slurred or blocked speech, exaggerated sense of strength, and a blank stare. There is depression of respiratory function but not of the central nervous system, and cardiovascular function is maintained. Since ketamine is an anesthetic, it stops the user from feeling pain, which could lead the user to inadvertently cause injury to himself/herself. Ketamine may relieve tension and anxiety, is purported to be a sexual stimulant, and intensifies colors and sounds.

The effects of a ketamine ‘high’ usually last an hour but they can last for 4-6 hours, and 24-48 hours are generally required before the user will feel completely “normal” again. Effects of chronic use of ketamine may take from several months to two years to wear off completely. Low doses (25-100mg) produce psychedelic effects quickly. Large doses can produce vomiting and convulsions and may lead to oxygen starvation to the brain and muscles; one gram can cause death. Flashbacks may even occur one year after use. Long-term effects include tolerance and possible physical and/or psychological dependence.

And from http://www.thegooddrugsguide.com/ketamine/effects.htm

At low doses, K is a mild if weird stimulant. At medium to high doses, it becomes a very powerful paralyzing psychedelic. It effects are like a combination of cocaine, cannabis, opium, Nitrous Oxide, and alcohol.

When Ketamine separates or dissociates the mind from the body, the brain is freed from the usual business of reacting to sensations from the body. Perception increases to fill the gap vacated by the senses and gives rise to Ketamine’s more mind-expanding effects.

Onset:
The K effect is very rapid. In 10-20 minutes you may find yourself hardly able to move and, at higher doses, even approaching out-of-body and near-death experiences.
Peak:
At the height of the experience, you may experience dazzling insights, hallucinate and even feel yourself communicating with forces, entities and elements you were never conscious of before.
Users often fall into a deep trance state. Their eyes may move sightlessly from side and side, and their bodies may assume bizarre postures.
Try to tell someone about it and you’re likely to mumble monosyllabic and nonsensical inanities.
Some people find it a life-changing and even spiritual experience. Others find it a lonely and unemotional experience. Whatever you make of it - it’s intense.

Comedown:
A Ketamine trip usually only lasts between 45 and 90 minutes, regardless of dosage. The experience can be much shorter if you have high tolerance.
The effects wear off very rapidly
After effects:
If you’ve ever had an operation under anesthetic, you’ll recognize that lousy post-operative feeling after a strong Ketamine trip. There are few other after-effects other than this general drowsiness.
You might feel wiped out, a bit achy, and not ready for anything too loud or too complicated. Sometimes you may feel rather disorientated or even a bit shell-shocked, as Ketamine is a extreme experience at higher doses. Many people feel energized after a Ketamine experience and have a strong urge to move around, dance or stretch.
Long term, some users can be so overcome by what they regard as the superior reality of Ketamine-land that they can retreat from the real world into the K-world. We’re not kidding.

Setting:
At high doses, because its effect is essentially an internal and introspective experience, external stimuli like loud music or TV are not particularly satisfying, nor conducive to a good trip.
This is not the case at low level doses, when it acts more like a stimulant.

In the brain:
Ketamine’s effects on the brain are well documented. It mainly binds to and blocks glutamate receptors (also as N-P receptors) all over the brain. Glutamate is an excitatory neurotransmitter. It turns on cell activity and is part of the computer-like on / off mechanism that underlies brain activity.
Ketamine blocks glutamate activity, giving rise to either entire cell bank shutdown in some brain areas or changes in the way cell clusters integrate or interpret incoming data in others. Overall, the result is the much famed K-Hole effect: certain brain parts go into temporary hibernation, mainly the senses and
physical sensations, while others - imagination, and other unnamed perceptions from the depths of the mind - are amplified.

Some emerging research suggests that heavy and prolonged Ketamine use can cause brain damage, in the form of ‘Olney’s lesions’ or ‘vacuoles.’ However these vacuoles were found on rats injected with Ketamine and experiments on monkeys have failed to produce similar results. This is probably one reason why the Federal Drugs Administration (FDA) in the US has not removed medicinal Ketamine from the marketplace.

I wonder if you

I wonder if you know these things about this drug. You probably do, after all you’re probably the biggest dealer of K to the gay community here, and you wouldn’t sell a product you were unfamiliar with, would you? But you probably also know that having unprotected anal sex can lead to HIV infection. Don’t you? I mean, I know.

Staying, dancing, rolling, fucking

He tells me this story. It’s so much like my own story, I start to write it in the first person. Then, worrying if the narrative “I” risks too much, even for me, I change the pronouns, defensively covering my ass from getting fucked by “serious” scholars who might protest that I have gotten too close to my research. But I also compromise. I fictionalize parts of the story, using fragments of my own experiences as well as fantasy to elaborate on things that were unsaid, on things that may or may not have happened. I project and transfer his drama to my drama, changing his jealousy, love triangles, and sex scenes to my own situation that is sketched out in elsewhere in this chapter, his lovers to my “J--,” my “B--.” And, most importantly, I change the story from “I” to “he.”

He decides not to go to New York, even though K-- sent him a ticket. Instead he chooses to stay here with you, and your situation. Of course, he wonders what things would have been like if he had gone to New York, if he had been there for this last week.
Would there have been as many tears? Would he have experienced the intimacy he feels he is desperate for right now, desperate for and missing in his relationship—if it can even be accurately called that—with B--, the intimacy with J-- he misses desperately? He wonders if he would have been able to recover, recreate, reinhabit, whatever, instead of playing scenes from yesterday over in his mind. But he can’t imagine things would have been any easier in New York. He would have still cried, maybe even more with K--’s laid-back attitude. And that therapeutic presence might not set a great precedent for what might have would have could have happened with K-- It’s hard to be both lover and a therapist.

But he wanted to tell you about what happened the other night when he went to the Sasha and John Digweed concert at the Austin Music hall, his Ecstasy roll, and what happened with B-- and R--, the boy B-- invited over. He wants to reconstruct this evening, his feelings, his observations, his experience, his pleasures, his anxieties. He thought that he needed to tell this story, to get it down somehow, on the night of the event. His brain, of course, was still a little melted, still processing the events and encounters. He tried thinking about this last night. He turned off the TV and really tried to think about it, work through it, prepare to write it all down or tell it to you. But he couldn’t get very far. He could think about his initial pangs of jealousy when he saw how interested this boy was in B-- and how interested B-- was . . . then he got to other images . . . of the three of them in bed, of smiles and hard ons, sucking, and fucking.

He showed up at the Austin Music Hall around quarter till ten. He’d had dinner with his friend R.K., then he went home, had a drink. At the Austin Music Hall, there was a long line and security instructed the queue as they waited to have IDs ready and to
remove any of the following items, which were not permitted at the rave because they were all considered to be drug paraphernalia: glow sticks, pacifiers, face masks, any kind of light (flashing or otherwise), candy jewelry. Cigarettes and cigarette lighters were permissible. He complained people right behind him in line. This one girl looked really familiar and he said so. They remembered that they had met almost a month ago at the same place while he was on one of his first dates with B--. They went to see the Chemical Brothers. They bitched about the requirements, and the crack house law that set the precedent for controlling drug paraphernalia like glow sticks.

They got inside and before long ran into B-- and Th--. B-- already seemed f*cked up, his eyes distant and glassy, a little confused and anxious. B-- was distant in a way he’d become very sensitive to, even as he’d also anticipate it. In fact, he’d steeled himself to B--’s distance in advance and he isn’t surprised when B-- gives him a cursory peck on the cheek. He wonders at how strange this feels, to be the one kept at a distance rather than the one keeping distance. He couldn’t help but notice how much more unasked for affection B-- showed toward others, toward B--’s beautiful friend El--, and toward Th--. He feels uncomfortable asking B-- about the rolls, whether B-- had found enough for him also to do one. He’d been unsure the day before and hadn’t really told B-- whether he wanted to do one or not. He’d been nervous about doing it because he has been on such an emotional rollercoaster—he was afraid of what might happen. Nonetheless, by Thursday he’d decided to do it, that the Ecstasy could be therapeutic, and emotionally useful.

After B-- gave out some rolls, forgetting to give him one. B-- disappeared for one of several times. Later he rubbed the red powder off the tip of B--’s nose and said
something like, “Have you been off snorting strawberry ketamine . . .”—and later on, after they go to the bathroom and B-- goes into a stall while he pisses at a urinal, he says as they’re leaving (he probably disliked this), “B--, you don’t have to hide using ketamine from me.” B-- responded by saying he had to go to the bathroom and did some while he was in there.

The roll hits him, he starts to feel amped, he buys some water, dances. It’s funny because he can’t remember anything that specific about the music. Sasha and John Digweed are huge DJs and he certainly remembers enjoying the beats, the lights, and, for the most part, the energy. He got his groove on.

Early on, he notices a boy, wide-eyed, grinning at B--. He can see the interest and desire; they are transparent. As are the flattering effects on B--, who also seems enchanted, who throughout the night acts with more kindness toward R-- and his other friends Elena and Th-- than toward him, the so-called boyfriend. Other than the trip to the bathroom, they aren’t really alone. Maybe they dance together a little bit. B--’s not the only one making distance.

B-- asked him early on about R-- . . . “Like A-- R--?” he ask, shaking R--’s hand, giving him a hug. “Yeah,” R—says with almost complete disinterest. He says, “OK” to B--’s not quite spoken question. He says, “You want to bring R-- home. That’s cool with me.” B-- tells R--, dances with R--. At one point when he leaves to go to the bathroom or get water, he asks to see B-- and R-- kiss. He gives them a thumbs up. He tries to stay cool, not cramp anyone’s style, and to keep the pangs of jealousy under control, small. He tries to enjoy himself, but he hates the fact that R-- and B-- are more interested in
each other than in him. He remembers all the fights over threesomes he’d had with his ex, how jealous his ex had been. He thinks, “I wonder if this is what it felt like.”

The roll dissipates surprisingly quickly. He doesn’t know if that’s because the Ecstasy wasn’t any good or because of the food and booze and grass he’d had earlier. Or if it’s because of the pervasive, probably Ketamine-induced tiredness he’d been experiencing the last few weeks. But even though he started coming down just a couple of hours after coming up, he still danced, still tried to enjoy himself and the company of Th-- and K--. B-- stayed mostly absent, left a few times to snort K, left with R—too, and he pretends not to care.

When Sasha and Digweed finished their encore and the lights came up, he was drenched with sweat, his hair completely wet. He knows he probably looks jacked. They all leave. B-- had informed others of their intentions with R--, so the potential afterparty at B--’s place is cancelled and people head home. They walk El-- to Element, where B-- whispers an invitation for her to join them. She declines and stays at Element for the official afterparty and another roll.

He and B-- drive to B--’s place. B-- alternately praises and complains about the roll. B-- wanted to do another, and tried calling to get more, but couldn’t. He was finished, tired, ready to lay around, fool around, shower, and relax. They get home around 2:30. He lays on the couch while B-- runs around and snorts some K. B-- finally lies down on the floor. He picks out some music and tells B-- to come closer. He gives B-- a backrub and hopes there’s enough Ecstasy left in their systems to facilitate an open talk about their relationship. He asks B--, “So how do you feel about things between us? Things as boyfriends going OK for you?” “Yeah,” B-- says, “and for you?” He replies,
noncommittally, “It’s OK. Sometimes I wonder if it wouldn’t be better if we weren’t just lovers or of fuckbuddies . . . friends or something else . . . I feel like I need some scheduled cuddle time with you.” What he doesn’t say is that he feels like B-- is ignoring him and being distant. What he doesn’t say is that he can’t stand B--’s drug use. The conversation is ambivalent. He keeps rubbing B--, and B-- doesn’t return the affection.

They do some K. He hopes R-- won’t show up, that R-- will forget the directions. He phrases this hope as a question to B--, “I wonder if . . .” B-- concurs right before R-- shows up, very cute in a T-shirt and towel. R-- had changed out of his sweaty party clothes, and a T-shirt and towel were all R-- had left in the way of clothing. B-- was charmed and charming. They head for the bedroom. He’s still very sensitive about not wanting to cramp B-- and R--’s style, even though he’s feel encouraged by the kiss R-- gives him. He wonders if, despite the intensity of R--’s attraction to B--, if R-- doesn’t also want him, at least a little bit.

They give R-- a full body rub. He could go on doing this but B-- clearly wants to fuck. It’s so hard for him to remember how everything unfolded. There was probably a lot of kissing, touching and then sucking. He and B-- and both leave a couple times to piss and do more K, which probably doesn’t help reconstruction.

He wonders if it begins . . . with he and B-- and telling R-- we should put him in between them. Then he remembers rimming B--, B--’s ass in the air, while B-- blows R--. He fucks B--. R-- seems very into this, watching and feeling B-- pushed forward. They put a rubber on R--, have B-- sit on R--’ dick. They even try, and for a moment manage, to double fuck B--. For all of B--’s eagerness, however, B-- has a hard time staying hard. B-- attributes it to the E, but he thinks the K might have a lot more to do with it.
It’s hard to tell time, but goes on like this for a while. They change positions. They all take turns sucking each other. They lay in a circle and he sucks B--, B-- sucks R--, and R-- sucks him. He thinks, “this is hot shit.” B-- gestures at his cock and then to him. B-- wants to fuck him and he says something like, “Are you using sign language? If you want me to sit on your cock, you should tell me.” And then B-- does fuck him, pushes a little too hard, too fast and it hurts at first. He wonders if he should say something nasty.

They’re out of lube and condoms. He can’t keep track of time, but finally he looks at a clock and it’s around five a.m. They stop. No one’s actually managed to cum.

They try to get into the apartment complex’s hot tub, but the gate is locked and they don’t feel like hopping the fence, so they go back to B--’s apartment. B-- hops in the shower while he and R-- take a few bong hits. We join B-- in the shower. When he gets in the shower he thinks the water is way too hot, especially after the heat that Ecstasy generates. He worries for B--, that the water is way hotter than B-- usually likes it, and that B-- doesn’t notice. He turns the heat down so that they don’t all overheat and die. They bathe each other. It’s very intimate and tight in the shower. They dry off.

He does yoga while B-- and R-- get into bed. B--’s sandwiched in the middle. B-- falls asleep quickly, snores, but he can’t go to sleep. Neither can R--. He wonders what it would be like if he were with R-- on the other side of the bed. He wishes he were there. But he doesn’t get up. Instead, he just lies there and tries to concentrate on his breathing, touching B-- and R-- of them gently, trying not to disturb them and then he realizes R-- isn’t asleep. R-- rubs him back few times, R--’s eyes glint in the half life of early dawn.
As it starts getting lighter, he gets out of bed to take bong hits and watch a movie, *Final Fantasy: The Spirits Within*, an all CGI anime about the ghosts of a dead planet who’ve invaded the Earth, taken over. He’s a little anxious about B-- and R--, whether they’d start fooling around as soon as he was out of there. He goes to pee a couple of times, sorta checking in on the two them. Once he wants to get back into the bed, but it doesn’t look like there’s enough room, so he leaves, finishes the movie, takes more bong hits.

He waits. “Looks like perfect timing,” he says as he walks in to the sight of B-- on his back sucking R--’s cock and jerking his own. B-- invites him back into the bed, and they exchange hot threeway kisses. They continue where they left off. B-- wants to fuck R--, but as soon as B-- puts a condom on, his dick goes soft. It’s frustrating but it still feels good. He asks R-- if R-- still feels like getting fucked; B--’s the only one having hard on problems. He puts on a condom, and instructs R-- how to take it: “Squeeze, then release and push . . . take deep breaths.” R--’s on his stomach and it’s a little painful for him—R-- told them earlier he’d only been fucked once before and it had been uncomfortable, so he wants it to feel good.

Still no one cums and they keep going. It’s kinda nasty, but sexy nasty: sucking dicks that have been in asses, the taste and smell of strawberry WET lube in the air. Finally B-- get his hard on back and starts fucking R-- from behind without a condom. He doesn’t stop B--. They don’t have any rubbers left and last night he asked R-- about STDs and R-- said, “All clean” and B-- just got his negative results back last week. Still, he worries, even though he shrugs indifferently after B-- looked at him after R-- said
“clean.” He sucks and kisses R-- while R-- is getting fucked by B--. He also watches B--’s cock slide in and out of R--’s ass, watch his balls bounce.

R-- is the first to cum. He uses R--’s cum to jack off. It takes a little while, and a few of B--’s fingers up his ass, but finally he does it, he cums and it’s lovely.

They get some water, clean up, shower again. He and R-- smoke a cigarette and finally, at noon, R-- heads to work. B-- gives his number to R-- his number and he can’t help but wonder whether B-- will try to hook up with R-- again without him. His jealousy was blunted but his speculations continued . . . about the way B--’s affection worked (thinking, “he’s already bored with me . . .”)

After R-- leaves, they eat a little food, watch lame Friday daytime TV, take bong hits. He makes B-- cuddle on the couch. They both laugh at moments, shake their heads, say “Wow. That was really fucking hot.” Eventually, he’s tired and ready for a nap. He lies down for a couple of hours. While he’s asleep El-- comes over. And B-- wakes him up, surprisingly sweet and reassuring. B-- says “sweetie” or “babe,” kisses him, rubs his head against his chest. And then B-- describes his plans for the day . . . “gonna go up and visit Th--, maybe grab some food. He says, “That sounds nice. I’d like to join you.” But B--’s not having it, “Actually, I want some post-roll time. B-- and Th-- time.” “Oh, I see. Well, that’s fine,” he says, even as he think then and later, “What is this? Why don’t you want to hang with ME?” And he still doesn’t have any good answers. Maybe B-- needs to process with his best friends, not with a boy he’s known a month. Maybe like with other boys, B--’s intimidated by him. He wonders if B-- wants to avoid any more heavy conversations or talking anything about B--’s upset stomach and soft cock, the drug use, or anything substantial and honest.
And now, he’s kinda resigned to it again, to the distance. (Every word with the prefix “dis” relates to distance, “disease,” “disappointment,” etc.) Friday he goes home, watched the *Others*, went to see the new Star Wars movie again with Ke-- and Da--. And yesterday, he goes over to J--’s, talks, gets a backrub, and a (surprisingly guilt-free) fuck. Then he goes to Ke--’s, ate, drank, watched movies. He talks with B-- again, actually a decent conversation, and B-- tells him again how bizzy he’ll be in the next few days, implying they might not be able to see each other until Tuesday when he’ll help B-- move. And he resigns himself to it. This distance.

**After the art opening**

I called you again this morning, J--. I wanted to hear your voice. I wanted to hear you say that you wanted to see me. I wanted to tell you about last night . . . about how I felt, why I had to leave. It was nice to meet your friend D--. He seems cool . . . wow, how much more bland can I be? But sounding bland . . . is that what I want to do? No, I want to tell you how I freaked out maybe cuz I recognized that he looked like relationship material and that I haven’t found that and that I feel so alone with B-- that I’ve felt alone for a while with you even. I went home.

Driving, I thought I could keep this under control, I thought that I could control my feelings, the alcohol, the almost unfamiliar feeling of wanting to hurt myself, but I drove like a zombie; I couldn’t get home fast enough. I didn’t know if I could talk to folks. W-- was here, but I’ve cried on her shoulder so many times. But in the end, brushing my teeth, washing my face, the flowing water releases tears, and I ask her if her shoulder is available. I sob and sob and D-- comes down, he holds me too while I cry.
more. The tears aren’t enough for what I feel . . . is this gay drama or human drama?

Finally, I ask them to put me to bed.

I cry more, alone in my room, and finally I sleep only to wake up at 3 a.m. from troubled dreams. I wonder what you’re doing, where you’re at, what you and D--might be doing. I go and get online briefly, thinking I might luck out and find you there at gay.com or on aol. I look at your profile to see if you’ve changed it. I go to whatafag too and look at your profile there too. I don’t know how many times I’ve read “relationships are pure evil” this year on your whatafag.com profile, the profile you put up when we were still together. Probably more than is healthy. I don’t go into any chatrooms, just sit at my computer for a bit. Then I go back to bed, where I cry some more, cry until I fall asleep again and wake up to scary dreams. I feel worn out . . . but I call you. I think I might tell you these things . . . I want to tell you but I worry if I should. I don’t really know what I want or expect. I don’t want to cramp your style or make things difficult with whatever might be growing between you and David. But I also want to let you know where I’m at, what I’m feeling. Maybe I just want you to hold me while I cry . . . maybe I just want you to tell me that you love me and that everything will be OK. I want you to tell me that I’ll find love again and that our love will never die. I want you to tell me I’m beautiful and that I can be happy again . . . that this heartbreak won’t last forever. I wonder if you can do this for me.

I’m not grieving this. I’m trying to fix it. My unwillingness to grieve something dead leads me drifting into something else, something other than mourning, something sick, though I hate that word, “sick.”
Staying at Hotel Melancholia

One can easily get lost in the space of melancholy, a space in which scenes of loss and death play themselves out over and over again. In waking and dreaming life, melancholy tugs at your guts, it breaks your heart, you cry hot tears, your whole body burns with fear and desire. Fear that this is all there is, all there ever will be; this space of death is here to stay and haunt you till your lights get snuffed out. And desire: for healing, through quick fixes especially—booze, pot, pills, sex, antidepressants have to be tried along the way so that you don’t break the glass you are holding and use it to cut yourself or him. It’s better not to go that far, too far, by picking up the brick and throwing it him as he rides away in his car or on the back of that guy’s motorcycle. Already, in the space of melancholy, you don’t need to there now. Anger only gets you so far, has only gotten you so far: screaming rage at your “situations,” the depression, the helplessness that comes when you get left behind.

Left behind, you wander in the queerspace of loss, a space that is between things—your happy times drinking, drugging and fucking, or the time between knowing there is a problem and doing something about it. You can only cry rivers for so long before you start to drown. You, he . . . I mean, “I” was drowning from my tears about your and maybe my AIDS, your cancer, your leaving me.

Freud writes that melancholia is a pathological form of mourning, that mourning is a natural process of grieving, incorporating, and letting go of the lost object. Melancholia is making loss home, it’s dwelling in losing ad infinitum: I’ve always been a sore loser. Losing makes me sore.
In hindsight, I’d been trying to make reservations at Hotel Melancholia for a long time. Once I got in and found it painfully familiar, painfully homey, I decided to stay a while and take the melancholy cure. Full service is costly thought, working mind, body, and spirit over in melancholy blues doesn’t come cheap.

The high cost of melancholy living:

Legal and illegal drugs—High quality marijuana (‘‘dank’’) ($400/oz), to be administered as needed throughout the day; cocaine ($30/gram or $120/evening), to be taken one weekend night, once or twice a month; Effexor, antidepressant, 300, then 150 mg ($25 monthly copay); Toprol, for heart palpitations, 25 mg ($35 monthly copay); wine and/or beer (~$7.99–$20), to be taken after noon, as needed. For a two year stay, your total cost: $32,745.

Staying at Hotel Melancholia doesn’t come cheap or easy. You are required to follow a strict diet of excess (physical, affective, sexual). You have to work hard, you really do. Are you willing to put in the time, the effort? Do you have the willpower, the stamina, the endurance?

Mourning may be hard work, but melancholy, she’s the real bitch, a taskmaster demanding that you put in the 24 hour days, 7 days a week for 730 consecutive days. You even have to work at night—in your dreams, but also when you wake up from night sweats, cold terrors, to put dry towels or blankets under you. There are no holidays, no time off. Dwelling in the space of melancholy will make you sick and tired. (Burroughs says exposure is the only cure). You’ll lose touch with the outside world, you’ll have to lie to your friends and family . . . you’ll have to, if you’re serious about the work you’re doing.
You can leave anytime of course, but it’s best to stay the whole time. You’ll want to leave, often, but you get lost and can’t get out, the gates are barred, and when you think you find a way out, you find the path leads you back to where you started. You might think you’re ready to go, but when you end up back at the drug dealer, the liquor store, the bar, you realize you’re not ready yet. No, it’s best to stick around until you’re really ready, really, really, really ready. You’ll know when it’s time, when you’re ready: you’ll have gotten all you can get from the melancholy cure when, and only when, you’re sick and tired.

Sick and tired

SICK AND TIRED

Of Being-sick-and-tired. When Being-is-sick-and-tired of being-sick-and-tired, when Being is at the bottom or the other side of the abyss, broken, shattered, thrown, then you will be ready. You won’t Be You anymore, of course. Your Beingness will be really thrown; you’ll be fat, your hands will shake, you’ll throw up a lot, and you will be alone, Being-in-nothingness. Then you’re ready. Then you can go. Maybe you’ll be able to get up and walk out, but you might have to be carried too. There will be more work to do once you get out, though. You will get a little better, and then you have to build a house, a new dwelling place, living quarters as a home for the thing that starts to emerge in you, the something-other-than-you that got forged in the hothouse of desire, transmuted and purified in the melancholy hotel; this product of alchemical processes, mysterious and almost unrecognizable. You build your own home so this new thing can grow. You water it.
This morning I wondered if the art project about helmets is all about us. what was going on in my head the command WATCH YER HEAD heads think! like in the safe sex workshops I used to do wear a rubber don’t fuck this up don’t become a statistic poor black artist academic faggot wannabe wanna get knocked up wanna get the perverse pregnancy wanna get the seeds planted the gift of seeds the gift of death This anthropologist says to me once, both of us slumped in chairs in her office, sliding even further to get into an egalitarian slouch, putting our legs up on the arms of the chairs, lifting our shirts enough to rub our bellies, like pleasant little buddhas, but what she said wasn’t pleasant, what she said to me when I tell her about “us” and about our “situation.” I guess I always wanted us to be public and now I’m working to make my grief public. She says to me, “Be careful. a friend of mine, he wasn’t happy until he got infected. then he felt like he belonged.” this troubled me and got under my skin so that maybe every time
we had sex
I thought about it
and if not everytime
then enough

when I wondered about my oldskool suicidal ideations
wondering where they went
wondering if being with you took care of them
but not by getting rid of them
but by risking everything
making them real with
us

but fuck millennial logics
my queer apocalypses are of the every day sort
they are the everyday fear of death from this or that blowjob this unprotected sex I had
with B--, these bumps on my hand, the soreness in my throat
these weren’t new anxieties . . . I’ve had them many times, but never so consistently,
ever with so much cause
(the four or five times rubbers broke
while you were fucking me)

San Antonio

I drive from back to Austin from downtown San Antonio after an evening

hanging out in Southtown for First Friday in Contemporary Art Month. Returning to the

very homey feeling of the arts communities there feels so good.

Found M.C. right after I parked my car, and he co-opted me to help a new Blue

Star Board Member load up her Lexus SUV. This contemporary art month is an art on the

streets kind of thing, so rather than the usual gallery installations, artists have used spaces

around downtown and set up shop: Blue Star on Commerce, art at the Friedrich Building.

Saw S.L. and A.C. as we were driving away. S.L. had done an installation piece at an old

black hairdressing place—window dressing of a barbershop owned by a man who used to
do hair for the drag balls in San Antonio. An actress sat inside while he did her hair and

170
while a soundtrack played. S.L. said her movie credits were as an extra in the MASH opening sequence, and in a movie that was shot in 1972 but was just released last year.

We go down to Blue Star where I have a beer and look at the galleries. I run into a lot of people who know me and a lot who don’t; B--’s “Retired Superstar” T-shirt is very popular, as I seem to be . . . cute mexican punk named joey who I remember and who made eyes at me . . . went to mad hatters where I made eyes at the slim guy with muscley arms and long hair beer boy while a band I recognized played . . . he saw me looking . . . and then down the street to IV Design where there’s an old glory show and I see T-- and talk to Dragonfly and meet Jo-- and V-- and A-- and crazy C-- . . . we ride bikes to M.C’s, Jo-- and I were going to ride together but V-- staked her claim . . . we go to M.C’s, smoke joints, and do an ommm that C-- says gets fucked up because V-- is joining us . . . C-- is loud and abrasive but charming . . . “I’m a trim carpenter, I’m like a house nigger . . . not a field nigger . . . gonna say something facetious . . . I’m looking at you but I’m not trying to be . . . I know you got african american . . . i’m mexican . . . I’ll talk about everybody, make jokes about everybody” . . . I tire quickly after the two joints and the tecate . . . talk more with V-- than with C—(who I’m calling “Crazy C—now in my mind). M.C. seems to be on autopilot, ready for C-- to leave. I take off and drive back to the suffocating suburbs, do a little yoga, jerk off, and fall into shallow sleep, struggling to quiet violent images from the sequel to the anime film *Vampire Hunter D* in my head.
New personal ad?

Head line: Wanna read the communist manifesto together in sweaty sheets?

Mixed race, codependent, bodhisattva, artist, scholar looking for politically progressive handyman, mechanic, electrician, carpenter. White trash, black, mexican anarchist skater punks (piercings and/or dreadlocks a plus) encouraged to apply.

07.21.02

Typing at 8:30 in the morning, listening to Bach violin concertos. Went out and saw a drag king show last night. I was anxious because I found out J-- would be there and that he’d be there with D--, his new lover. Third time’s a charm, I thought. Because this time I didn’t freak out, I tried to stay positive, I tried to ride the wave of cosmic bliss. I had a good time and managed not to become overwhelmingly jealous. But after I found out that J-- and D-- would be there, I wondered whether I should go at all. My heart rate increased, my hands started shaking. I knew I couldn’t go like that, so I did some yoga, and then I spread out on the floor and did breathing exercises for about an hour. My mind was never exactly clear, but I tried to be better about letting things go, to recognize I have lost nothing. Friendship with J-- is still possible, and so is maintaining my mental, physical, and spiritual health. But it still hurts to think of him being intimate with someone else, or having a new boyfriend. My thinking alternates between the jealous (why doesn’t he want to be with me), the cynical (go ahead and try and find someone as
good as me, who will love you as much, who will be there for you as much as I was), the bitter (you just didn’t want to be with me enough), the hopeful (there is someone better for me out there) . . .

Shane and I came home and we listened a bit to Sade’s Lover’s Rock.

Have I let this overwhelm me? How is it that I haven’t stopped thinking these thoughts since we broke up? Is it because I love him that much, needed him that much, needed him to need me that much? Is it because I haven’t wanted to face and transform my own pain, and he offers me a way to externalize my own traumas, fears, insecurities, angers, frustrations?

I resisted being possessed by him, resented his desire to control me and my sex . . . and now I am possessed with the idea of him, turning over all the good things again and again in my mind, and only reluctantly remembering all of the negative things, the times when his face contorted in ugly rage or fear, the things he said that shocked me . . . He never felt like he deserved me; he was intimidated by me, and by the smallest things: dinner menus at Japanese restaurants and the question, “what do you do?” . . . and even as I think, and thought quite a bit, I deserve better—“he’s angry, unhappy, and transmits a lot of negative energy . . . sometimes felt like he was vampiric . . . didn’t have an intellectual connection.” Now all I want again is to be held by him, to know that he is mine, to possess him, and to be possessed by him . . . but I also understand that, fundamentally, I never had him. Knowing that he loved me, or loves me, doesn’t always help. It is solace, but it also highlights my loneliness even more starkly sometimes.

I wish I could find some way to express this more creatively, more constructively. I wish I had the answers, I wish I could follow a clearly marked out path of what to do,
what was best . . . but the answers are staring me in the face—I know the things that are
good for me, the things that are bad; I know what I need to do, and I don’t have any
excuses for not doing these things . . . nothing but the limits imposed by self-doubt, some
old and deep pain, and the feeling of never having been loved enough or in the right ways . . .

Last night, I was afraid of what would happen when I came home alone. But I was
still relaxed when I went to bed. I masturbated. And though I didn’t cry this time, and
even though I had a few moments in which I was at peace, I didn’t quite fall asleep; my
mind wandered over now familiar terrain—the possibilities of what might still happen,
the impossibility of anything lasting, the fear of being alone, the anger at J-- and myself
for allowing the situation to get so out of control, the question: *does everything happen
for a reason?* and a profound discomfort and almost ominous sense of the consequences
of this year, the lack of closure with J--, the constant search for solace, the deferring of
my struggles, the fear that I have been too risky with myself . . . with my sex and my
body.

I woke up and got out of bed at 4:20, got online and found someone, K--, who
wanted to cuddle. I went over, he seemed like a sweet young guy, just turned 18, house-
sitting (ironically enough) a block away from J--’s house. He put in a movie, *Dangerous
Beauty,* but it had barely started before we began making out. We sucked and played
around. I ask about his HIV status. He says he’s negative. He didn’t come, but I did. But
sleep still didn’t come to me, the solace was too incomplete, and I left after laying there
for perhaps an hour, went to Pronto for cigarettes and the *Times,* then had coffee and a
danish at Quack’s, where I ran into one of my former students, Br--, one I always thought
was cute. We talked for a bit, he’d been to Europe for a month and was now working a lot to pay off his credit card bills . . . he went he said after he had a little breakdown, a comment generated by my own confession about my experiences this summer.

Now I’m back at home, a little anxious about not having slept. I have, ridiculously, two dates today, and a lot of work to do, but what occupies my thoughts has to do with wanting to be wanted
(most of my work has to do with wanting)
wanting to write poetry instead of descriptions
wanting to puke
to cry
to laugh
to run naked through the streets
offering my desire up
but only to qualified applicants

**P.S., or Unheimlich, or Things He Said**

it’s uncanny
because the things
he said
you said
like
“like”
and yeah yeah yeah yeah yeaahhhhhhh

while we were fucking

we joked about plantation fantasies
which you said like he said you didn’t take seriously
how could you
blue blood from the carolinas
we could be cousins a few times removed

I called you part of my white devil entourage and you got pissed
on some level
even when
I was fucking the cum out of you listening to you say m m m yeahhh ohhh

175
I don’t know what time or space it is
it could be anytime, anywhere
queer time travel to a queer space
traveling without moving

I’m still here
doing it with him, with you, with me.
I wonder if he, they, we understand
the exchange of narcissistic injuries

fear and love and guilt and shit

wiping your ass, wiping my own
with your dick too big dick nice dick though too eager
always too rough
still lots
lost
to learn and I
don’t
begrudge you
that.

lover’s discourses can’t cover up my puking fits
the other nights, the ball of anxiety and dread and desire that well up in me when I think
of your red hair hazel eyes brown skin pale skin smooth hairy legs

edging closer to you on the mattress on your roof,
you just beginning.
Is this a desire for a my past, your past, a past I didn’t have, that didn’t have you in it,
couldn’t . . . but I imagine I could live there now . . . that I could even imagine leaving

Wasn’t this about an echo? Of Bego and J-- and you, you bastard class bastard with
20s and those eyes
and your legs above your head and your
hole future ahead of you.

The echo the ghost the trace of my “nervous breakdown” that I’m writing myself into
again like last year and last year before that this same time this same place, this
Necrotic space.
I wonder if this necrotic space is home.
Unhomely, like an abusive family.
I wonder if you

I wonder if you did this to all the other boys
when you said J--“ . . .” . . .
“I would still be with J-- if he hadn’t . . .”
or Jo--, “he’s a little too clingy”
is this what I’ve become
is this what you do?
I wonder if you do this to all the other boys . . .
love them, push them away, pull them closer
to prove their love for you
and then push them away when they demand the same of you
I wonder if you really do still love me
or if you ever did
love beyond need that is
I wonder if you
I wonder if you
I wonder if you
can imagine being with me
smart, sexy, funny, going places
or if that’s why you couldn’t imagine being with me
couldn’t believe in being with me
couldn’t believe we could be together
couldn’t believe I could love a jobless, carless, hiv positive, high school educated,
grumpy, wounded boy . . . what would it have taken to prove my love to you
what did I want you to do, how could you have proven your love to me
for real
more
step up to the plate
but I hate sports

I’m on the edge of anger again, wondering if it will help me, thinking of Rumi and ee cummings
now I wonder if you
are going to fuck h--
aka blazznahvok
if you’d already made arrangements and
maybe he’s on his way over now
so you can have that bareback
raw
sex you want so much
and can’t get from me, at least not guilt free
why then have we been fucking without condoms
for the last month or more
how come you changed your mind
how come you changed your mind
about that
or
about fuck buddies
do you know how much it hurts me to hear you say you want a fuckbuddy
cuz that’s the only way you can get yer kicks with pig bottoms ready do it raw or that
black dude john who was neg, but you said, “I’m not in love with him.”

As if I don’t have secrets, haven’t kept them
about coke
boys
in the park
in L.A.
beer and first time sex with A--.
the thoughts I have
the way I try to wrap my brain around this
can’t compare
to a single flutter
of your eyelashes

trying to cast spells
for you to want me
for me to forget you
for me to move on
for you to recognize what you could have
and what you’ve lost if you don’t grab back
hold on
and soon

we peeled back layers of each other
until we got to
old pain
deep pain
pain that made us
lash out
at each other
for not caring enough
not doing enough
when all both of us wanted
was to know that we were loved

(early morning dream of you
after hours of hot tears
a mound of earth
that mound was you, or parts of you
and I knew that there was something underneath
inside
and so I opened it up
peeled back the layers
each under a metal frame
and covered in earth
and pieces of you)

I wonder if you know that
my love for you is big
   (as the heart of texas:)
and your love for me
is like
   home

I wonder if he
I wonder if I
I wonder if we
can go home
again.
I wonder if.
Conclusion:
Let me try to be completely honest: I didn’t do this for you. I know, as an anthropologist, my job in the past would have been to give you, or, more generously, “us,” knowledge about “them.” This was never my intention. It was, in fact, expressly not my intention to give you knowledge about some Other THEM just so that you could know yourself better through their strangeness. No, my intentions began much more selfishly than that. I’m an epistemophilia, a knowledge junky, so I didn’t do this project for you or for them or for knowledge in general. I did it for me. My desire for knowledge was completely confused with knowledge of desire. For me, this dissertation was about rubbing up against archives, stories, and sites of desire in the service of desire itself.

This dissertation is an ethnography of desire made up of an eclectic range of texts and voices. It takes desire as something altogether more expansive that what is suggested when “sexuality” is added to and then repeated in the mantra of “gender, race, and class.” It takes desire as something that includes but isn’t limited to the discursive production of categories like sex and sexuality. It bites off more than it can chew. Queerspaces and sexpublics are the dissertation’s objects. These objects are both abstract and everyday, slippery and highly concrete. It tracks its objects indirectly and at multiple angles simultaneously through stories about sex, race, spaces, publics, addictions, fantasies, and violence.

In the various stories I tell in the dissertation, queerspaces emerge as sites simultaneously marked by desire, death, and transfiguration. Queerspaces draw people to them through the desire for intimacy, for belonging, and for sex. But these sites are also marked by death, by the deaths instantiated by HIV/AIDS and by the smaller but no less
important deaths represented by the ends of relationships or the end of an era of sexual freedom, however imaginary the relationships or experiences of freedom may have been to begin with. Queerspaces change; they disappear, they get transformed, they morph into other spaces, like the net. And wandering in queerspaces transfigures people. People find what they were looking for or they don’t. People have sex, they fall in and out of love, they grieve or drop into melancholy. In the dissertation, queerspaces end up being more than just sites out there in the world. They end up both virtual and intimate. In Austin, virtual queerspaces emerge as bright and new and shiny and promising alternatives to queerspaces in the public sphere, but people start to complain that virtual queerspaces are just more of the same, same distractions, same addictions, same problems. And intimate queerspaces—these are the spaces that open up in people when they go wandering. All three—real, virtual, and intimate queerspaces—bleed into one another, and surge in, out, and through public and private lives.

Taken as a whole, the dissertation suggests that desire and sex are fields onto themselves and that these fields continue to warrant scholarly interest and speculation. At the same time, scholarship on sex and desire faces both political and intellectual challenges. In the current political climate of the U.S., frank talk about sex is off-limits and many scholars are forced to frame their work in non-confrontational ways—as being about families or biology as opposed to the kinds of sexual practices people actually engage in, or want to. For the scholars who do take on sex, they face marginalization inside the academy as well, as the examples in Chapter One suggest. Talking about the kinds of sex people engage in, or worse, the kinds of sex scholars themselves engage in does not, in many circles, represent serious scholarship. But what’s more serious than
desire? In the stories that make up the dissertation, I have tried to approach desire from a variety of ways, from the academic to the deeply personal. In both registers, however, I emphasize sex in terms of the impacts it has and the affects it generates.

By now, I hope it is also clear that the dissertation is also not just “all about sex.” Indeed, in much of the dissertation, sex works in close proximity to death. In my ethnographic work in real and virtual queerspaces in Austin, sex and death bleed into one another in a number of ways. Most notably, in the memories of men in Austin who once enjoyed cruising for sex in public places, the pleasures of sex are tempered by the loss of many of those spaces, and most importantly, the losses they experienced as a result of the HIV/AIDS pandemic. In my discussion of virtual intimacies, sex is likewise linked to death, again through HIV, but also through the sense that online communication represented the death of “real” relationships. Addiction also figures in Chapter Three as a kind of death, the death of free will in the throes of compulsion. In Chapter Four, the virtual ethnography of J.R. Warren’s murder and the subsequent media discourse about the case also shows the degree to which sex and death interpenetrate one another. In this case, the rumors of sexual involvement between the victim and his killers are what in fact lead to Warren’s brutal murder. And finally, in the last chapter, “I wonder if You,” the desire for sex and intimacy is juxtaposed against the loss of those very things. The chapter provides an intimate record of how sex and death feed off and reproduce one another.

But just as the dissertation isn’t all about sex, it also cannot be said to be all about death, at least not if death is figured as an absolute ending. Death instead is a transformative force, it is something that changes things and opens up new possibilities.
All of the deaths in the dissertation end up being productive, productive of new desires, or of their transformation.

Still, I have this nagging feeling that things weren’t supposed to end this way. When I first went looking for spaces and publics, I thought that I would end up documenting queerspaces, those sites that accrete same-sex desires and sexual practices. I thought I would end up documenting sexpublics, those circulations of affects and feelings of belonging that literally and figuratively made queerspaces into sites that mattered. Sure, death would play a big part, but somehow looking over this dissertation I am surprised that what I ended up with looks more and more like a document about loss, about a resonant absence palpably felt as a presence. The intensity of this present absence of course begs another question and brings us back full circle into the mystery of desire itself: what to do with and about this loss except to desire something else?
Works Cited

Antze, Paul, and Michael Lambek

Anzaldúa, Gloria

Armitage, John

Azoulay, Katya Gibel

Bailey, Cameron

Barnes, Michael, and Sean Massey
2001 'Out' in Austin; With a City this Open, We Don't Need a Gay Ghetto. Austin American-Statesman, June 3: K1.

Barthes, Roland

Bataille, Georges

Baty, S. Paige
1999 Email Trouble: Love & Addiction @ the Matrix. Austin: University of Texas Press.

Bech, Henning

Bedfellow's, Dangerous, ed.

Bell, David, and Gill Valentine, eds.

Benjamin, Walter, and Hannah Arendt

Benjamin, Walter, and Rolf Tiedemann

Berlant, Lauren

Berlant, Lauren, and Michael Warner

Bersani, Leo

Berube, Allan

Betsky, Aaron

Bey, Hakim

Bishop, Bill

Bishop, Bill, and Mark Lisheron

Bjork

Blackwood, Evelyn

Bleys, Rudi

Bolton, Ralph

Burroughs, William S.

—

Butler, Judith

—
Caitlin, Bill
2001   Gay Index Measures High Tech Success. Electronic document, 
http://news.minnesota.publicradio.org/features/200106/05_catlinb_gayindex/, 
accessed July 3, 2004
Califia-Rice, Patrick
Carballo-Dieguez, Alex
Chauncey, George
World, 1890-1940: Basic Books.
Clatts, Michael C.
1999   Ethnographic Observations of Men Who Have Sex with Men in Public: 
Clifford, James, George E. Marcus, and School of American Research 
1986   Writing Culture: the Poetics and Politics of Ethnography. Berkeley: 
University of California Press.
Colter, Ephraim Glenn
1996   Discernibly Turgid: Safer Sex and Public Policy. In Policing Public Sex: 
Boston: South End Press.
Coppola, Sarah
2004   Activist Renews his Anti-Porn Crusade: Pastor Aims to Find Any Illegal 
Crimp, Douglas
Crossley, Michele
2002   The Perils of Health Promotion and the “Barebacking” Backlash. Health: 
An Interdisciplinary Journal for the Social Study of Health, Illness, & Medicine 
6(1):47-68.
Curtis, Christopher
2004   E-cards Alert Gay Sex Partners to STDS. Electronic document, 
2004.
Cvetkovich, Ann
D'Emilio, John
Routledge.
D'Emilio, John, and Estelle B. Freedman
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Author/Title</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Davis, Mark</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>De Lauretis, Teresa</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Delany, Samuel</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Delany, Samuel</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Deleuze, Gilles, and Felix Guattari</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Derrida, Jacques, Pascale-Anne Brault, and Michael Naas</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Dinhaw, Carolyn</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Drescher, Jack</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Editorial</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Eng, David</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Fanon, Frantz</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Finn, Scott</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Florida, Richard</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Florida, Richard, and Gary Gates</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2001</td>
<td>Technology and Tolerance: The Importance of Diversity to High-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Foucault, Michel, ed.


Fox, Richard G., ed.

Frankel, Todd C.

Franken, Bob

Freud, Sigmund

Fuss, Diana, ed.

Gaither, Chris

Gauthier, DeAnn, and Craig J. Forsyth

Geertz, Clifford

Girard, René

Gopinath, Gayatri

Halberstam, Judith

Halkitis, Perry, Kelly Green, and Leo Wilton

Hall, Stuart

Halperin, David M.

—

Hansen, Miriam

Haraway, Donna

—
1997 Modest-Witness@Second-Millennium.FemaleMan-Meets-OncoMouse : Feminism and Technoscience.

Hekma, Gert

Hennessy, Rosemary

Higgs, David

Higgs, David, ed.

Hoad, Neville

Hollibaugh, Amber

hooks, bell

—
Humphreys, Laud

Ingram, Gordon Brent, Anne-Marie Bouthillette, and Yolanda Retter, eds.

Jarman, Derek
—
—

Kittler, Friedrich A.

Kolko, Beth E., Lisa Nakamura, and Gilbert B. Rodman, eds.

Kulick, Don, and Margaret Willson, eds.

Leap, William

Leap, William L., ed.
1999 Public Sex/Gay Space. New York: Colombia University Press.

Lewin, Ellen, and William Leap

Lorde, Audre
—
—

Lutz, Tom

Malinowski, Bronislaw

Massumi, Brian


Pratt, Mary Louise 1992 Imperial Eyes: Travel Writing and Transculturalization. New York:
Routledge.
Press, Associated

Quittner, Jeremy

Rapp, Rayna

Reeves, Tracey A.

Ridge, Damien Thomas
2004 “It was an Incredible Thrill”: The Social Meanings and Dynamics of Younger Gay Men's Experiences of Barebacking in Melbourne. Sexualities 7(3):259-270.

Rimbaud, Arthur

Roddy, Dennis B.

Ronell, Avital
1992 Crack Wars: Literature, Addiction, Mania. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press.

Rubin, Gayle


Sanders, Joel, ed.

Sartre, Jean-Paul
1964 Being and Nothingness. New York: Philosophical Library.

Saylor, Steven

Sedgwick, Eve Kosofsky
1985 Between Men: English Literature and Male Homosocial Desire. New
York: Colombia University Press.

—

1997 Paranoid Reading and Reparative Reading; or, You're so Paranoid, You Probably Think This Introduction is about You. In Novel Gazing: Queer Readings in Fiction. E.K. Sedgwick, ed. Durham: Duke University Press.

—


Shah, Angela
1998a Library Possible at Theater; City Council Ready to Discuss Options. Austin American-Statesman, July 4: 3. Austin.

—


Shah, Nayan

Shapiro, Andrew L.

Sheon, Nicolas, and G. Michael Crosby

Shernoff, Michael

Shields, Rob

Sibalís, Michael

Smith, Vicki

Somerville, Siobhan

Stoler, Ann Laura

Stone, Allucquère Rosanne (Sandy)

—

1995 The War of Desire and Technology at the Close of the Mechanical Age.
Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press.

Suarez, Troy, and Jeffrey Miller  

Tattelman, Ira  

Taussig, Michael  

—  

—  

Taylor, Diana  

Thomas, Kendall  

Travers, Ann  

Trinh, Minh-ha  

Trouillot, Michel-Rolph  

Trumbach, Randolph  

Turkle, Sherry  

Vaid, Urvashi  

Verlaine, Paul, and Alistair Elliot  
1979 Femmes ; Hombres = Women ; Men. London: Anvil Press Poetry

Virilio, Paul  
Warner, Michael

—

Weston, Kath

Williams, Sarah

Wright, Kai

Wright, Scott W.
Vita

Shaka Paul McGlotten was born in Willingboro, New Jersey to Clifford Van McGlotten and Joan Ogilvie McGlotten. After completing his work at MacArthur High School in San Antonio, Texas, he attended Grinnell College from 1993-1997 where he received a degree of Bachelor of Arts in Studio Art with a concentration in Africana Studies. From 1998 to 1999, he worked in the contemporary arts community in San Antonio Texas. In the fall of 1999, he entered the graduate program in the Department of Anthropology at the University of Texas at Austin. He received his Masters of Arts in Anthropology in 2001.

Permanent Address: 1612 W. 9 1/2 St., Austin, Texas 78703

This dissertation was typed by the author