Shifting Forms: Queer Placemaking Amidst Neoliberalism In New York City Through Art

Colin J. Donnelly
Dartmouth College, cjdonnelly01@gmail.com

Follow this and additional works at: https://digitalcommons.dartmouth.edu/geography_senior_theses

Part of the American Art and Architecture Commons, Art Practice Commons, Contemporary Art Commons, Human Geography Commons, Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender Studies Commons, Nonprofit Studies Commons, Queer Studies Commons, Social Justice Commons, Theory and Criticism Commons, and the Urban Studies and Planning Commons

Recommended Citation
https://digitalcommons.dartmouth.edu/geography_senior_theses/9

This Thesis (Undergraduate) is brought to you for free and open access by the Geography at Dartmouth Digital Commons. It has been accepted for inclusion in Geography Undergraduate Senior Theses by an authorized administrator of Dartmouth Digital Commons. For more information, please contact dartmouthdigitalcommons@groups.dartmouth.edu.
Shifting Forms:

Queer Placemaking Amidst Neoliberalism

In New York City Through Art

Colin Donnelly
Dartmouth College
Class of 2024

Senior Honors Thesis
Department of Geography
Acknowledgements

To Dr. Erin Collins for advising this project when I had only taken one geography class (which was hers), and sharing excitement in this marriage of queer geographies and art.

✦

To my mother Christie for the willingness to talk me off a ledge on our phone calls to and from the library... and the unconditional love from which that is born.

✦

To my brother Justin for never letting me settle and understanding me on the deepest level.

✦

To my aunt Jeanne and my grandma Pat cheering me on from a state over (perhaps I can make a trip to Maine now that I am finished).

✦

To Neely, Amelia, Alisa, and everyone at the Hood Museum of Art who share a love for art and exploring its impact.

✦

To my close friends who believed in this project enough to ask the hard questions and to stop hanging out with me so I could finish.

✦

To all of the lovely people I had the privilege of connecting with throughout the course of this project.
Table of Contents

Preface ........................................... 3
Introduction ..................................... 7
Part 1: Sites of Presentation ................. 15
  Chapter 1: Nonprofits as Intimate Semi-Publics 16
  Chapter 2: Situating the Whitney .......... 42
Part 2: Modes of Presentation ............... 71
  Chapter 3: Mobilizations of Memory ...... 72
Conclusion .................................... 106
References .................................... 113
Preface

Artist AA Bronson remembers living close to the St. Vincent’s Hospital in New York City’s West Village during the height of the AIDS epidemic 1980s and 90s, calling it the “hospital where everybody went when they got sick.”1 Recalling the first time visiting St. Vincent’s to see his friend Robert, “all the beds were completely full... squeezed in any corner they could find.”2 The fact that “the medical system had no idea how to deal with AIDS” was palpable for Bronson as he moved through St. Vincent’s.3 Yet, he introduced this anecdote to me not to just illustrate the heaviness of being “geographically in the middle of the AIDS outbreak,” but to also describe the way the community came together for each other.4 The waiting room on the floor with all of the AIDS patients had been converted into a banquet halls, visitors bringing in their own food and hanging out there as they waited for updates on their loved ones.5 Bronson explained that this was because the hospital’s food services refused to come to that floor, leaving the local community to step up (not unlike the way activists had to outside the hospital given the neglect by the US government).6 Bronson choked up as he painted this picture for me: “No one would go to that floor... no one would change sheets or clear [the] floors.”7 Recalling that we had started the conversation talking about how the art community manifested geographically in New York, Bronson emphasized that West Village was a neighborhood of artists.8 As we continued to talk about his own art interventions, we fell onto *Invocations of Queer Spirits*, which involved him and Peter Hobbs going to six different locations from 2008 to 2010 to hold intimate ceremonies to call on queer people who have passed on (Bronson & Hobbs, 2011). The invocation at Fire Island—which Bronson found an extension of New York

---

1 Bronson, Personal Interview with Author, March 12, 2024.
2 Bronson.
3 Bronson.
4 Bronson.
5 Bronson.
6 Bronson.
7 Bronson.
8 Bronson.
queer life given its proximity to the city—left the most profound impact on Bronson, taking place in the island’s cruising area known as the Meat Rack. Not only does the Meat Rack hold a history of unbridled gay sexuality, but it also holds a history of loss, the location a common place for queer people to scatter the ashes of their loved ones lost to AIDS. Bronson’s description of this simultaneous cruising site and funeral site caused him to choke up again, his tears illustrating how witnesses like Bronson carry these emotional histories with them.

Bronson emphasized the presence of these spirits of the dead, a feeling that is “impossible to describe, but [present] if you are listening.”

As someone from a small town in New Hampshire who has grown up entirely in the 21st century, many of the heavy stories from those like Bronson are far from any experiences I have had myself. In terms of queer culture, dating and hookup apps (e.g. Tinder and Grindr) along with medication like PREP have streamlined queer hookup culture, and social media as well as apps like Resident Advisor and DICE (at least in New York) have streamlined queer nightlife. It simultaneously feels too easy and like too much, these two sentiments combining in such a way that is indicative of the neoliberalization of queerness in major cities like New York. Sarah Schulman starts her book *The Gentrification of the Mind* by outlining the various interactions she has had with young people as someone who was rooted in queer creative spheres in lower Manhattan during the height of the AIDS epidemic, each illustrating the lack of urgency of young queer people given the option of LGBT professionalism and respectability. While Schulman’s analysis reads overly cynical—even pompous—at times, one anecdote stuck out to me as someone conducting my own interviews:

---

9 Bronson, *Personal Interview with Author*, March 12, 2024.
10 Bronson.
11 Bronson.
12 Bronson.
“Another young man, similarly likeable and attractive, asked if he could come over and interview me. When he came to my apartment, I was surprised by the tenor of the interview. There was no urgency. He didn’t have—as I expected he would—theories or ideas or passions that he wanted to talk over. I had hoped that he would bring new ideas into my life, but instead he wanted them from me. He didn’t have something that he needed to know. He just wanted me to give him the interview. Recite my stories. I realized that he was looking for something to care about. He was looking for a book” (Schulman, 2012: 9).

This young man is simultaneously a reflection of myself and an encapsulation of what instigated me enough to dive into this project. In many moments, the alienation born from a highly professionalized environment like Dartmouth College as well as broader neoliberal monotony living in the United States today has also left me looking for “something to care about” in a world with plenty of atrocities. Therefore, this looking to queer mentors for new ideas feels familiar. Yet, on the flip side, this project felt deeply personal, having identified with art (like many others) as a primary mode for queer expression. The intimate and conversational nature of my interviews prevented me from such a rigid hunt for material. Rather, it allowed me to work through some of my own ideas on the art world and how it relates to my own queerness.

This project is the culmination of my coursework and mentorship within the Geography Department at Dartmouth College, my internship at the Hood Museum of Art, and my time working at the LGBTQ+ advocacy nonprofit Live Out Loud. The first gave me the ability to conceptualize the “shifting forms” (hence this project’s title) of New York City and its art scene through the critical frameworks of gentrification and neoliberal urbanism. The second instilled in me a deeper understanding of art and its impact, allowing me to hone in it as a mode to exploring the aforementioned changes in New York City and its queer community. Additionally, working in a museum not only taught me the ability of analyzing art in depth, but it also gave me an inside look at the museum as one of the primary institutions in the art world. The third exposed me to the
experiences of queer New Yorkers through conversations with my coworkers, engagement with queer youth through the organization’s educational programming, and the opportunity to live in the city for a summer. All of these experiences left me with questions about how queer people related to New York City through art. Even though I did not witness histories firsthand like Bronson, I still felt something not too far off from what he described in relation to the spiritual realm. I wanted to figure out how New York got to where it is today, and to explore that through queer art, making site-specific art the perfect marriage of art and place.

In a lot of ways, my positionality as a white gay man coming from an institution like Dartmouth was reflected in the artists I interviewed. Most were highly educated and white, able to more easily infiltrate the institutional art world I sought to understand. Yet, rooting myself in LGBTQ+ nonprofit work at Live Out Loud—where I had the privilege of working with a diverse array of queer New Yorkers—shows the importance of that period of time in understanding the city. Arthur Aviles and Charles Rice-Gonzalez at BAAD!, Richard Morales at The Center, and Raul Rivera at Live Out Loud (my former coworker who helped a lot with outreach) illustrate the reality of queer people of color upholding community-based art in the nonprofit world. I felt drawn to such a project because of that extended time in New York, and highlighting queer people of color in both the nonprofit world and the art world is essential in accurately portraying this landscape. Frederick Weston’s art and relationship with Visual AIDS (discussed in Chapter 3), for example, are emblematic of these essential interventions of queer artists of color, the inclusion of his art and oral histories as a Black man who had lived with AIDS long-term proving central to my project.

By no means is this project complete, as it focuses a lot on the current art institutional landscape (e.g. museums and nonprofits) rather than digging into more everyday creative expressions of queerness in New York. Yet, given my interest in reckoning with the gentrification of New York City amidst rampant neoliberalism, a deeper analysis of these institutions that are able to survive such shifts is a necessary first step.
Introduction

Outlining This Project

My centering research question is as follows: how can queer people produce space for themselves within New York City amidst the dominant neoliberal frameworks? I also ask three sub-questions. How have heteronormative and homonormative frameworks in the art world upheld New York City’s neoliberal project? How can queer people relate to and amplify radical New York’s queer histories through art? How do nonqueer audiences react to radical queer art interventions in New York?

This project’s first part unpacks the nonprofit and the museum as sites of presentation for queer art. Chapter 1 develops why I consider the nonprofit to be an intimate semi-public (defined later in this introduction) and why that makes for a more accessible display of queer art, using the Bronx Academy of Arts and Dance (BAAD!) and the Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual & Transgender Community Center (commonly referred to as The Center) as case studies. Chapter 2 analyzes the Whitney Museum of American Art and how it factors into New York neoliberalism both through the works it funds as well as its placement in the Meatpacking District, a neighborhood wrought with gentrification. I consider the Whitney to have a neoliberal flattening effect on the art it displays and the related histories they touch upon. This project’s second part looks at individual interventions by artists as modes of presentation, illustrating the various ways these artworks engage with the personal histories of the artist as well as broader histories situated in the urban and queer history. Chapter 3 outlines how these different modes of presentation are “mobilizations of memory” through the work of Frederick Weston, Sharon Hayes, and REPOhistory.

Key Analytics
On one hand, this project centers queer phenomenological reading of Lefebvrian social space, a connection explored in depth by geographer Dr. Eden Kinkaid. In *The Production of Space*, Henri Lefebvre said the following: “(Social) space is not a thing among other things, nor a product among other products: rather, it subsumes things produced, and encompasses their interrelationships in their coexistence and simultaneity—their (relative) order and/or (relative) disorder” (Lefebvre, 1991: 73). He continued to outline the social and political role of space that is bolstered by its “illusion of transparency,” an outward appearance of neutrality preventing people from understanding the ways hegemonic space operates. Lefebvre points to artistic intervention as a primary potentiality for resisting hegemonic space: “[social space] contains potentialities—of works and of reappropriation—existing to begin with in the artistic sphere but responding above all to the demands of a body ‘transported’ outside itself in space, a body which by putting up resistance inaugurates the project of a different space (either the space of a counter-culture, or a counter-space in the sense of an initially utopian alternative to actually existing ‘real’ space)” (Lefebvre, 1991: 349). Eden Kinkaid connects Lefebvre’s *Production* to queer phenomenology, highlighting his emphasis on the misconception of neutral “abstract space” connects to the “limitation of some bodies and enablement of others” within such environments (Kinkaid, 2020: 181). Kinkaid looks to Lefebvre’s potentialities for resistance as a way through which “minority subjects” can form new nonnormative spaces: “If spatial practice reinforces the meanings of space through the repetition of norms, it must also be able to disrupt these meanings by failing to reproduce these norms” (Kinkaid, 2020: 182).

Kinkaid highlights two queer phenomenologists of interest for this project: Sara Ahmed and José Esteban Muñoz. Sara Ahmed’s concept of “disorientation” sheds light on how queer people can navigate Lefebvrian social space. Ahmed ties one’s orientation—how they relate to the objects around them—to the production of space: “Orientations shape not only how we inhabit space, but how we apprehend this world of shared inhabitance, as well as ‘who’ or ‘what’ we direct our energy and attention toward. A queer
phenomenology, perhaps, might start by redirecting our attention toward different objects, those that are ‘less proximate’ or even those that deviate or are deviant” (Ahmed, 2006: 3). Taking this into account, disorientation proves essential queering space, “disturbing the order of things” and also drawing others into such disorientation through the feeling of being “out of place” (Ahmed, 2006: 161). Ahmed points to quotidian movements through hegemonic space by marginalized bodies (e.g. Black people in predominantly white spaces) as moments of disorientation. This is important given Ahmed’s emphasis on the fact that disorientation cannot be viewed as an “obligation or a responsibility for those who identify as queer” (Ahmed, 2020: 349). Kinkaid further develops this importance of disorientation while still protecting those marginalized individuals that carry it out: “While Ahmed does not glorify disorientation or deviation in recognition of the psychosocial harm that “being out of line” can foster, she does make it clear that, in challenging normative spaces and ways of being, we may have to tread paths not yet taken” (Kinkaid, 2020: 182). José Esteban Muñoz expands on such interventions in the presence through the lens of queer futurity, his adoption of utopian hermeneutics in his seminal work Cruising Utopia a form of disorientation itself given its “rejection of the here and now, the ontologically static” (Muñoz, 2019: 26). Muñoz situates a variety of queer artistic interventions in the idea of “queerness as horizon” to combat “the ossifying effects of neoliberal ideology and the degradation of politics brought about by representations of queerness in contemporary popular culture” (Muñoz, 2019: 29). His analysis serves as a reminder of the normative force of homonormativity popularized by Lisa Duggan, a neoliberal manifestation of gay politics “that does not contest dominant heteronormative assumptions and institutions but upholds and sustains them while promising the possibility of a demobilized gay constituency and a privatized, depoliticized gay culture anchored in domesticity and consumption” (Duggan, 2002: 179). Given Ahmed’s disorientation primarily focuses on embodiment, Muñoz recenters the importance of radical queer art practice in shaping nonnormative space and their futures, in turn reemphasizing Lefebvrian’s own interest in the role of art in producing social space.
This brings me beyond queer phenomenology to the second major analytic of my project: “contagion.” Coined by Renate Lorenz in their book *Queer Art: A Freak Theory* as a way to conceptualize the relationship between queer art and its audience, “the mode of contagion seeks to entangle the viewer as a participant in denormalizing practices” (Lorenz, 2014: 17). In this way, contagion goes beyond representation and reception, drawing people into a “radical queer politics” that “requires us not only to propose images and living strategies for alternative sexualities and genders, but also to promote all kinds of economic, political, epistemological, and cultural experiments that seek to produce difference and equality at the same time” (Lorenz, 2014: 17). Lorenz chooses to illustrate contagion through contemporary art that they consider different modes of drag, which they define as “a set of artistic methods that produce a distance to norms and subjection deeply challenges the foundations of epistemology, conceptions of the self, theories of the body as well as art theory” (Lorenz, 2014: 35). Contagion allows Lorenz to develop their broader “freak theory of contemporary art,” of which two aspects are of importance to my project: “freak heterotopology (making use of the productivity of space)” and “freak heterochrony (appropriating the productivity of time)” (Lorenz, 2014). In both cases, Lorenz draws on Foucault to illustrate the spatial and temporal interventions formed through radical queer art. Lorenz problematizes Foucault’s heterotopia, as Foucault “reaffirms the relation of norm and deviation, which is here spatially established, instead of stressing the capacity of heterotopia to shift this relation or even reverse it” (Lorenz, 2014: 170). Grounding their theory in the idea of a freak show and connecting it to queer art, Lorenz points to such a heterotopia as having potential for the formation of new ideals because of its “other” status and distance from “excluding norms” (Lorenz, 2014: 170). I find Lorenz’s connection of Foucault to Elspeth Probyn’s notion of “outside belongings” to provide a clearer picture of the space formed by radical queer art practice, “[Probyn] representing heterotopia as a kind of outside-place that gives a place to desire and which is indeed ‘inhabited,’ but cannot be possessed and appropriated” (Lorenz, 2014: 44). Combined with their interpretation of a Foucauldian heterochrony—“a time that is not independent of the power relations that
structure our understanding of time... but that nonetheless establishes its own rules that intervene in the dominant temporality”—Lorenz’s mode of contagion through the lens of freak theory helps flesh out the important role of art in queer placemaking in a neoliberal context (Lorenz, 2014: 171). Their close reading of art—including a piece by Sharon Hayes that is explored in this project through my own interview with the artist—helps ground all of this theory in something tangible and place-based, allowing me to engage with art historical literature and art criticism in a geographical manner.

A third fundamental framework to my project uses Avery Gordon’s exploration of “haunting” and Ann Cvetkovich’s “archive of feelings” to illustrate how queer histories linger today. Gordon describes haunting as “a very particular way of knowing what has happened or is happening. Being haunted draws us affectively, sometimes against our will and always a bit magically, into the structure of feeling of a reality we come to experience, not as cold knowledge, but as a transformative recognition” (Gordon, 2008: 8). The way in which haunting is transmitted and received is what Gordon calls a “sense,” which I found to inform the feeling I had moving through a hyper-gentrified neighborhood like the Meatpacking District (explored in Chapter 2) that once held a variety of radical queer mileus (Gordon, 2008). In reckoning with the survival of gay and lesbian histories their neglect and erasure, Ann Cvetkovich calls for “a radical archive of emotion in order to document intimacy, sexuality, love, and activism”—in short, an “archive of feelings” (Cvetkovich, 2003: 241). Through such an archive of feeling, “gay and lesbian cultures often leave ephemeral and unusual traces” (Cvetkovich, 2003: 8). Both haunting and trauma are considered affective experiences, and both Gordon and Cvetkovich draw on Raymond Williams’s “structures of feelings” to develop this thought. (Cvetkovich, 2003: 17; Gordon, 2008: 18). Daniella E. Sanader beautifully synthesizes haunting and the intersection of trauma and history through the analysis of AA Bronson and Peter Hobbs’s *Queer Invocations* (mentioned in the preface) using queer art to demonstrate “the productiveness of ‘haunting’ as a metaphor for articulating how affects of trauma
and history saturate space” (Sanader, 2015). This theoretically grounded approach to site-specific art proves central to this project.

Finally, I adopt a “both-and” approach that allows me to find the glimmers of light in the current institutional art world—particularly the nonprofit sphere—while still maintaining the necessity for more radical grassroots interventions outside of the state. Juan Herrera uses such a framework in his book Cartographic Memory, which focuses on how Chicano activism throughout the 1960s shaped the Latinx neighborhood of Fruitvale in Oakland, California (Herrera, 2022). He problematizes the way in which nonprofit work is written off as part of the nonprofit industrial complex through his visualization of the neighborhood as an archive of social movements: “Throughout my fieldwork, I saw how care enveloped the historical and present-day work of a number of actors, including nonprofit workers, state public health nurses, and immigration attorneys” (Herrera, 2022: 26). Inspired by this “diverse constellation of people and agencies that genuinely cared for the well-being of the community and its residents,” Herrera says the following: “Instead of completely discrediting the efficacy of one approach over another, I believe it is important to see their simultaneity and co-implication” (Herrera, 2022: 26). While still acknowledging the effects of the nonprofit industrial complex—especially the domino effect of professionalization among grassroots organizations caught in its web (see Ruth Wilson Gilmore’s “In the Shadow of the Shadow State”)—Herrera’s “both-and” approach allows me to conceptualize the nonprofit as an intimate semi-public. Neither fully public nor private, intimate semi-publics like BAAD! and The Center (outlined in Chapter 1) remain accessible in their engagement with local communities, also being mostly free and open to the public.

Methodology

This project builds on eight semi-structured interviews, all of which are grounded by my own participant observation in New York City as a queer man. Each of interview lasted around 1 hour. I choose to
take notes by hand rather than record the interviews to maintain an organic feel and to stay true to the imperfect histories we were exploring together. Half of the interviews were with members of the queer nonprofit world, emblematic of my experiences working at Live Out Loud—an LGBTQ+ advocacy group—in the summer of 2022. Three of these interviews were with those specifically involved with art and cultural programming at their respective organizations, and the fourth was a coworker from Live Out Loud with experience in the city’s ballroom scene. The other half of the interviews were with queer artists having with roots in New York City. Each having spent different amounts of time in the city, living in different places, and engaging with different spheres of queer art and activism, these artists’ perspectives allowed me to explore the histories they were a part of and how their art is an expression of those. Of course, these histories overlap in unique ways, such as AA Bronson witnessing the gay cruising and queer art at the piers on Hudson River in the early 1970s years before Judy Glantzman had step foot in Pier 34, yet Bronson not moving back to the city until after their demolition. Yet, the personal nature of art allowed me to learn something different about New York through each of their interventions.

In addition to interviews, participant observation maintained an essential role in understanding how changes in the city were reflected in the art world. I primarily explored nonprofit spaces and museums, but I also consider the streets of New York through which I walked to have helped me think about where site-specific queer art situates itself in the current urban landscape. This aspect of my project responds to one aspect of Jen Jack Gieseking’s *A Queer New York*: “the inability of LGBT people, especially lesbians and queers, to claim fixed, long-term urban spaces like neighborhoods and bars even while they imagine them as central to queer life” (Gieseking, 2020: 3). While Gieseking uses this to help theorize their idea of more diffuse networks of queer people she calls *constellations*, I seek to analyze the long-term urban spaces that queer people have been able to maintain. I do this in one way through my analytic of Lefebvrian production of space, which refutes the idea that urban space needs to be physical, Juan Herrera also pointing to space as an “archive” of social movements
This connects to the long-lasting spatial impact that I find queer art is able to have. Yet, simultaneously, I sought to explore the rare queer physical strongholds (e.g. The LGBT Community Center in the West Village) through my participant observation. Two of my interviews focused on queer art nonprofits in the city—Bronx Academy of Arts and Dance (BAAD!) and The Center—took place in their brick-and-mortar headquarters. These in-person interviews allowed me to situate the conversations about each respective organization in the spaces themselves, combining their knowledge with my own affect of being in the building.

A third aspect of my methodology is the art archival work and subsequent close readings of those artworks. Not only do entire museums, galleries, and nonprofits function as archives for all of these artworks, but each work of art is its own archive through the capturing of a given moment in history. Given my focus on site-specific art, each piece has a direct connection to a physical locale in New York. Yet, the close reading of artworks proves necessary to this project given the focus on the affective. In the field of geography that focuses on sweeping phenomenon that affect entire populations of people, in-depth analyses of art illustrate how individuals relate to these changes, asserting the perspectives of those affected by them. This individualism avoids being self-indulgent because artists often speak on collective experiences through their immersion within queer communities in the city and their witness to the changes they experience alongside the urban, sometimes even documenting them. Through the exploration of the personal ways in which people relate to the world around them through art, a deeper understanding of urban phenomena can be had.
Part 1: Sites of Presentation
Chapter 1: Nonprofits as Intimate Semi-Publics

Bronx Academy of Arts and Dance (BAAD!)

Deep in the Bronx—after getting off at nearly the last stop on the 6 train—I made it to the Bronx Academy of Arts and Dance in Westchester Square. Inhabiting a chapel on the grounds of St. Peter’s Episcopal Church, the space felt unlike any queer space I had been to in the city. Perhaps it was the wrought iron fence surrounding the facility or the neighboring graveyard, but BAAD! felt like a fortress, especially tucked away beside the above-ground subway tracks (Figure 1). I came to realize the grandiose Gothic architecture aligned well with BAAD! (particularly its accompanying exclamation point) and its charismatic founders Arthur Aviles and Charles Rice-Gonzalez.

It was only when you approached the front door of the facility that the overt queerness of BAAD! began to appear, as if it could barely be contained by the bright red door (Figure 2). White fairy lights surrounded signage promoting the organization’s prior and upcoming events. This programming was mostly comprised dance and arts programming focused on queer people of color, whether it be an “OUT LIKE THAT” pamphlet with a man in a showy outfit vogueing or a “BLACK BODY AMNESIA” poster depicting jaamil olawale kosoko in a gown and vibrant eye makeup. I waited for Aviles and Rice-Gonzalez in the BAAD! Library, which was chalkful of books that reflect how expansive the mission of the organization can be. Blacktino Queer Performance and Queer Ricans: Cultures and Sexualities in the Diaspora (with features from both Aviles and Rice-Gonzalez) sat on the same shelf as Gray’s Anatomy and The Body: Photographs of the Human Form. A pair of African drums rest beside stacks of children’s books, and a spinner rack is filled with postcards promoting the Arthur Aviles Typical Theater in English, Spanish, and Bengali. Aviles and Rice-Gonzalez came down as I

---

13 This description of BAAD!’s facilities is from my own participant observation.
Figure 1: Photos outside of BAAD! in Westchester Square, Bronx, NY (2474 Westchester Ave), March 15, 2024, shot on my phone.

Figure 2: The front door of BAAD! March 15, 2024, shot on my phone.
was flipping through a book titled *Bubble*, documenting the dance film by Aviles in which performer Elizabeth Marrero wandered the city with a large bubble and a delicate white minidress. I was met with immediate warmth from the two founders, who seemed excited to show me the facility that I was already taking in.

As Aviles described it, the building was a “children’s chapel turned black box theater,” a fitting history given his youth dance program Arthur Aviles Typical Theater Academy (named after his own dance company) that offers a “little bit of everything for the kids,” ranging from ballet and hip-hop. The first place they took me to was back to the front door, where an altar stood honoring the variety of people who helped make BAAD! happen, something I overlooked on my way in. They pointed out a photo of their landlord Joade—sometimes referred to lovingly as “the Mother Joade”—who ended up being central in the relocation of BAAD! in 2013. In 1998, the two founders lucked out finding their first space: the Banknote Building in Hunts Point. The building had been purchased by Walter Cahn and Max Blauner in 1985 for $8.3 million (including renovations), but it wasn’t until 1998 when the Point Community Development Corporation reached out to Blauner to see if he would be willing to lease space to artists (Siegal, 2000). Given that Aviles’s dance company was based across the street, he was a natural point of contact to lease a space in the Banknote Building (Siegal, 2000). It wasn’t until he met Rice-Gonzalez though that the idea for BAAD! felt tangible, Aviles calling him a “really smart dude” that gave him the feeling “we can do this!”

In 2008, the Banknote Building was purchased by Taconic Investment Partners and Denham Wolf Real Estate Services for $32 million, both companies putting another $40 million into renovations (Cortese, 2008). While Rice-Gonzalez held out some hope given Denham Wolf’s history of working with artists, he had also heard of Taconic reputation, a billion-dollar company oft-referred to as the “Taconic titans.” BAAD! went to

---

14 Aviles and Rice-Gonzalez, Personal Interview with Author, March 15, 2024.
15 Aviles, Personal Email to Author, May 15, 2024.
16 Aviles and Rice-Gonzalez.
17 Aviles and Rice Gonzalez.
Taconic because they wanted to stay in the Banknote Building, yet they were only offered a year lease at double the rent. On top of it all, when BAAD! wanted to leave early to find a more secure building to call home, Taconic wanted them to pay the remainder of their lease (a year and a half) upfront. As Rice-Gonzalez put it, “everyone was involved and scratching their heads” whether it be politicians or their landlord Jodie. He cherished those like Jodie who went to bat for BAAD!, laughing as he thought back to Jodie “wearing a collar and everything” when she had to deal with real estate developers and legal officials. Jodie bore witness to what Rice-Gonzalez seemed to find one of the most preposterous moments in the whole situation: Taconic told her to let BAAD! stay with her and that any money they pay in rent should go to Taconic. Needless to say, Aviles and Rice-Gonzalez moved out of the Banknote building. While the relationship with Taconic was fraught, it was one of their partners that secured BAAD! the chapel at St. Peter’s (Gonzalez, 2020). Arthur worded this switch well: “We did not have the power, but we didn’t die.”

The tensions inherent to a space surviving without power speak to the bind of queer-focused nonprofit organizations (especially those run by and for people of color), having to adopt neoliberal frameworks to maintain a brick-and-mortar facility and accompanying resources. These benefits are illustrated in BAAD!’s vision statement on their website: “for women, people of color, and the LGBTQ+ community to have a physical space in the Bronx to experience and/or create dance, theater, visual art, written work, and performance that is empowering to them, free from the prejudices of society” (Bronx Academy of Arts and Dance, “MISSION/VALUES”). Along the same vein, the website also uncovers the moves necessary for this vision: “In 2007, the team decided to transform from a volunteer led organization to a sustainable arts organization. Their first strategic move was to add nonprofit, corporate and arts professionals to its working board of "friends and volunteers" and raise salaries for Charles and Arthur (Bronx Academy of Arts and Dance, “HISTORY”).

---

18 Aviles and Rice-Gonzalez, Personal Interview with Author, March 15, 2024.
19 Aviles and Rice-Gonzalez.
20 Aviles and Rice-Gonzalez.
Urvashi Vaid’s insights as to where the queer nonprofit fits into the broader institutionalization of LGBT activism help inform the challenges born by an organization like BAAD!: “The organized infrastructure has done the unsexy work, day in and day out, of building support in state capitols to get LGBT people to the point where, as of this date, nineteen states have some form of anti-discrimination law. This infrastructure, which includes LGBT community centers, HIV/AIDS organizations, youth groups or the Gay/Straight Alliances, campus LGBT programs offices, statewide LGBT advocacy organizations, is a vital resource for future activism and to sustaining the pressure in fallow times. On the other hand, the institutionalization of social movements always carries a downside— a bureaucratization, the professionalization of activism, a more conservative politics than street action affords, even a shrinking of leadership as ordinary folks just let others do the work and become checkbook activists” (Vaid, 2012). Such a perspective problematizes the current nonprofit world’s subsumption into the neoliberal fold, yet actually being in these nonprofit spaces like BAAD! and The Center (explored later in this chapter) felt more connected to their respective local communities than institutional structures. For this reason, I consider these nonprofits intimate semi-publics and adopt a “both-and” approach to nonprofits that considers their benefits in addition to supporting of more radical grassroots initiatives (as well as the maintenance of a critical lens concerning the state).

BAAD! made the pivot from the Banknote Building to St. Peter’s in 2013 with grace and resilience, Rice-Gonzalez swiftly writing up a grant for a TransVisionaries Performance series. This initiative was fitting given this transitional period, as the festival took place in local restaurants and cafe in the South Bronx rather than in BAAD!’s own space. By transcending the walls of BAAD! and creating pop-up queer spaces in local venues, TransVisionaries could expand beyond their regular clientele, whether it be those sitting in and watching the performances or those coming in to pick up takeout. Aviles and Rice-Gonzalez recalled a moment in which

---

21 Aviles and Rice-Gonzalez, Personal Interview with Author, March 15, 2024.
an old Latino couple asked during the intermission of one show at a small Mexican restaurant: “Is it over?”

When they were told no, the couple ordered a round of drinks to stick around. Through live queer performance (whether musicians, dancers, or poets), TransVisionaries offers a glimpse at BAAD!’s queer artistic interventions as contagion, average Bronxites going to their favorite restaurants or cafes and being exposed to performances perhaps unlike anything they have seen before.

Contagion appears in other manifestations of Aviles and Rice-Gonzalez’s art practice, their 2015 project with A Gentle Act of Men in Hunts Point with Nicolás Dumit Estévez (part of his broader project Performing the Bronx) standing out the most to me (Estévez & Aviles, 2015). Dressed in flowing white and off-white garments by Bronx designer Lorenzo Walker II (who also took photos of the performance alongside Rice-Gonzalez), Aviles and Estévez romped around Hunts Point in an improvisational performance that emphasized their connection (Figure 3). They covered a whole block in the neighborhood, starting on Manida St, turning left on Lafayette Avenue, then Hunts Point Avenue, then Garrison Avenue until they finally made it back to Manida Street (Figure 4) (Estévez & Aviles, 2015). Throughout, strangers offered a variety of reactions to the two: “Beautiful!” “¿Eso es una boda?[Is that a wedding?]” “Faggots” (Estévez & Aviles, 2015). According to Aviles and Rice-Gonzalez, the last expletive is due to the smattering of auto-body shops on the block the two men were dancing through, which they find to be hotspots of the rampant machismo in the neighborhood.

Yet, Rice-Gonzalez—who helped document the art piece—gave an anecdote that reflects not only their positive outlook on this project’s impact but also the place of BAAD! in the South Bronx more broadly. Passing one of the auto-body shops, Rice-Gonzalez overheard something along the lines of one man saying “What the fuck is that faggot shit,” but the man next to him waved off the comment and said, “Oh, that’s just Arthur.”

---

22 Aviles and Rice-Gonzalez, Personal Interview with Author, March 15, 2024.
23 Aviles and Rice-Gonzalez.
24 Aviles and Rice-Gonzalez.
25 Aviles and Rice-Gonzalez.
Figure 3: Arthur Aviles and Nicolás Dumit Estévez, *A Gentle Act of Men in Hunts Point*, September 26, 2015.

Photos by Charles Rice-Gonzalez and Lorenzo Walker II. Courtesy of BAAD!

Figure 4: Route taken by Arthur Aviles and Nicolás Dumit Estévez for *A Gentle Act of Men in Hunts Point* (2015). Screenshot from Google Maps.
Rice-Gonzalez notices that sentiment throughout the parts of the Bronx that BAAD! has a footprint, the organization normalizing the presence of overt queerness. This acceptance—sometimes even embrace—of BAAD! in the Bronx has a lot to do with its dedication to the locals. *A Gentle Act of Men in Hunts Point* ended at BAAD! supporter and close friend Cynthia Phillips’s house, where she was sick and receiving at-home care (Figure 5).26 Passing away a month later, the project’s accompanying book published by BAAD! was dedicated to her: “Mrs. Philips was many things to many people including a nurse a mother a friend and a neighbor. She was a great inspiration to the people who loved her and who she loved. Our great times on Manida St. will be missed but our memory of her will last forever!” (Estévez & Aviles, 2015). Both co-founders grew up in the borough and find its strong sense of community to be inextricably linked to BAAD!’s mission, much of which centers around staying in the Bronx.27 Multiple times throughout our interview, Aviles described the “heavy” and “tough” feeling of these parts of the Bronx, especially as a queer person: people often “‘flee’ rather than ‘be.’”28

Recentering radical queer art practice as contagion, such a landscape illustrates the *exposure therapy* born from a performance like *A Gentle Act of Men in Hunts Point*, combatting the heteronormativity ingrained in Hunts Point and the city more broadly. Rice-Gonzalez and Walker took photos of even the most minute audience reactions (Figure 6), showing their commitment to disrupting the status quo. Through being “out of place,” Aviles and Estévez functioned as embodied Ahmedian disorientations, challenging “heterosexuality as a compulsory orientation” (Ahmed, 2006: 161). Ahmed points to heterosexuality as a “mechanism for the reproduction of culture, or even of the ‘attributes’ that are assumed to pass along a family line, such as whiteness” (Ahmed, 2006: 161). Therefore, this spatial intervention was countercultural, and the established presence of BAAD! in the neighborhood demonstrates that these shifts linger long after the performance is over.

---

26 Aviles and Rice-Gonzalez, Personal Interview with Author, March 15, 2024.
27 Aviles and Rice-Gonzalez.
28 Aviles and Rice-Gonzalez.
Figure 5: Arthur Aviles and Nicolás Dumit Estévez, *A Gentle Act of Men in Hunts Point*, Cynthia Phillips’s home, September 26, 2015. Photos by Charles Rice-Gonzalez and Lorenzo Walker II. Courtesy of BAAD!

Figure 6: Arthur Aviles and Nicolás Dumit Estévez, *A Gentle Act of Men in Hunts Point*, September 26, 2015. Photos by Charles Rice-Gonzalez and Lorenzo Walker II. Courtesy of BAAD!
Such disorientation fits in well with how Aviles and Rice-Gonzalez conceptualized BAAD!’s impact during my time there. The origins of the title “Out Like That” for their yearly performing arts festival capture the nature of BAAD!’s interventions and the art they tend to amplify: unabashedly queer. When a dancer that Aviles and Rice-Gonzalez approached for the first iteration of the festival declined by saying “I’m out but not like that,” the two co-founders said to themselves, “Well, we are!” They found a title like Out Like That to not only reflect the pride the organization carries in their identities, but also expansive enough to respect the wide variety of queer expressions, as if answering the question “Out like what?” Yet, even amidst a wide-ranging LGBTQ+ community, Aviles always made sure to center queer women and people of color given their exclusion from many mainstream queer spaces, most BAAD! programming listing their constituents as “women, people of color, and LGBTQ+ communities.” By amplifying these marginalized identities through their art practice, BAAD! gives these people visibility that grants them increased comfort and pride as they navigate their local communities. At their current location in Parkchester Square, they embrace the strong Latin American and Bangladeshi communities in the area by incorporating these cultures into their programming, the latter something they hadn’t encountered as much at their former location in Hunts Point. Aviles touched on this in a New York Times article: “We begin from the stage. We’re not asking Bangladeshis to come to us if we don’t engage their culture. If we’re in the area, the engagement has to go beyond just ourselves and our own” (Gonzalez, 2014). Casey Clark at The Point Community Development Cooperation (CDC)—the organization that advocated for BAAD! to move into the Banknote Building at its inception—pointed out the significant presence of BAAD! at its original locale: “They made Hunts Point a cultural district” (Hirsch, 2013). There are simply fewer queer-focused organizations—or even arts organizations—in the borough, making the capacity for BAAD!’s impact much greater. Aviles gave a story of a young artist from the area who was shocked when his

29 Aviles and Rice-Gonzalez, Personal Interview with Author, March 15, 2024.
30 Aviles and Rice-Gonzalez.
31 Aviles and Rice-Gonzalez.
class was going to his neighborhood for an art field trip, completely unaware of the existence of BAAD!32 Given his experience as a playwright, this artist is now in talks with BAAD! to put on his own show.33 As Aviles puts it, many of BAAD! initiatives are not planned effort, but rather about “who we are where we are” through “having this thing [BAAD!] in a place its unusual to have it.”34 Through this established footprint in the neighborhood, the organization as a whole functions similarly to its direct artistic interventions like A Gentle Act of Men in Hunts Point: its positive impact is a form of contagion that expands outward into the Bronx, then greater New York and beyond. Through the maintenance of a brick-and-mortar space and its accompanying resources, Rice-Gonzalez equated himself and Aviles to old art parents, saying playfully in a rickety old person voice “They’ll have the opportunities we never had.”35

The Center

Situated in the West Village right by the Meatpacking District and Chelsea, The Center (short for the Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual & Transgender Community Center) is quite literally at the geographical center of New York City’s queer historical hub. The same queer history that makes the West Village one of the most well-known “gayborhoods” in the world has also left me somewhat lost every time I have visited it. While the sense of this history is generally palpable, it has always simultaneously felt masked and drowned out. Done-up brownstones and luxury boutiques—while oftentimes peppered with pride flags and LGBTQ signage—distract me from any radical queer presence that may remain in the neighborhood, to the point where I am convinced it is minute (I know I am not alone in this thought). Yet, even amidst a sleek $9 million renovation from 2012 to 2015 that simultaneously modernized and sterilized much of the building, The Center’s still felt like a trove of

32 Aviles and Rice-Gonzalez, Personal Interview with Author, March 15, 2024.
33 Aviles and Rice-Gonzalez.
34 Aviles and Rice-Gonzalez.
35 Aviles and Rice-Gonzalez.
queer histories (Dunlap, 2014). My first glimpse at this was when I entered a large empty room to meet Richard Morales, the manager of cultural programs at The Center. Around us were openings in the white walls that revealed artworks ingrained in the wall varying in size, material, and style. In a mural by Barbara Sandler, Russian ballet dancer turned queer historical figure Vaslav Nijinsky stands opposite a muscular figure with a wolf head clutching a sacred heart (Figure 7). In George Whitman’s *Adam and Eve*, Joan of Arc—holding a fire extinguisher stands opposite a muscley nude St. Sebastian pulling a bloodied arrow out of his torso (Figure 8). Morales revealed that Room 101 in which we were sitting was the meeting room that ACT UP (among as well as other activist groups) had met in throughout the 80s and 90s, the group still having meetings there today. Old footage of ACT UP meetings from collectives like Testing The Limits shows these artworks unobstructed by white walls and display lights in the more eclectic former space, feeling more natural amidst the strident activists (Figures 9 and 10). With the dispersal of the artworks came a neutralization of the space, fitting in with both the neoliberalization the West Village and the nonprofit sphere. Yet, even taking this into account, the mere existence of these original site-specific pieces throughout The Center in a space open and accessible to the public felt different than if I were to enter a museum, these pieces imbued with legacies of activism rooted in place. All of the works in Room 101 were created for The Center Show in 1989, which brought in 50 artists for site-specific installations in honor of the 20th anniversary of Stonewall. As I explore later in the chapter, the works in Room 101 are only a fraction of the pieces woven throughout The Center today.

Gran Fury’s *RIOT* mural (Figure 11)—one of the more prominent works in The Center’s former space—was lost, a recreation permanently installed on the second floor in 2019 for the 50th anniversary of Stonewall (Figure 12) (ABC7 New York, 2019; Sanchez, 2019). Yet, Richard Morales happened to have a t-shirt on with the piece on it, which to me is emblematic of the nonprofit staff carrying the more radical histories of

---

36 This description of The Center’s facilities is from my own participant observation.
37 Courtesy of the ACT UP Oral History Project


Figure 10: Still from Continuation of Community Forum on How Do We Find a Cure? With George Whitman’s *Adam and Eve* (1989) in the back. Footage shot by James Wentzy (NYPL Tape #0071-1). Courtesy of the ACT UP Oral History Project.
**Figure 11:** Still from Meeting before Albany Action with Gran Fury’s *RIOT* (1988) in the back. Probably March 26, 1990. Footage shot by Testing the Limits (NYPL Tape #1766). Courtesy of the ACT UP Oral History Project.

**Figure 12:** Recreation of Gran Fury’s *RIOT* mural on the second floor of The Center, New York, NY. Courtesy of ABC7 News New York.
these organizations. After all, people often end up being archives of an area’s history more than the physical city itself, especially in a city like New York in which real estate developers can so drastically change a neighborhood. On gentrification in the Village, Morales points to erasure at its core. He reminisced on the special way in which The Center related to the nearby Christopher Street and the piers on the West Side, saying The Center offered “camaraderie” as he cycled from there, down Christopher Street, to the piers, and back. In the queer community, such witnesses are even more essential given the vast loss of knowledge due to AIDS. Morales mentioned the recent closing of the gay bar The Hangar as one of the many ways the neighborhood’s fiery queer origins continue to be snuffed, especially given its role as a favorite spot for local queer people of color in the area. Sarah Schulman’s definition of gentrification—a “concrete replacement process”—in *The Gentrification of the Mind* informs Morales’s perspective: “Physically it is an urban phenomena: the removal of communities of diverse classes, ethnicities, races, sexualities, languages, and points of view from the central neighborhoods of cities, and their replacement by more homogenized groups. With this comes the destruction of culture and relationship, and this destruction has profound consequences for the future lives of cities” (Schulman, 2012: 14).

Such erasure motivates those like Morales—who saw firsthand the vibrant community like The Hangar could foster—to want to fight harder for the creation and maintenance of authentic queer spaces. For The Center’s first in-person Open House following the pandemic in 2022, Morales decided to put on a block party: “I want to put queerness in people’s faces.” Also in conjunction with celebrating Juneteenth, the event offered the prime opportunity to create space for Black queer joy in the neighborhood. Of course, putting on such an event takes patience, having to collaborate with local community boards and the NYPD.

---

38 Morales, Personal Interview with Author, March 20, 2024.
39 Morales.
40 Morales.
41 Morales.
42 Morales.
were flagged as “taking away from local restaurants,” Morales questioned what local restaurants given all you can get are “$30 cocktails” and “Chef’s Table sushi spots”: “But all the restaurants that were affordable are closed!”

Regardless of these formalities in an affluent neighborhood like the West Village, Morales was able to make this a yearly event. Given the whitewashing of the West Village, Ahmed informs how such an event functions as disorientation through its centering of Black and brown New Yorkers: “The presence of bodies of color in white spaces as disorienting: the proximity of such bodies out of place can work to make things seem ‘out of line,’ and can hence even work to ‘queer’ space; people “blink’ and do ‘double turns’ when they encounter such bodies” (Ahmed, 2006: 161). Through collaboration with creative collectives like Dick Appointment that emphasize overt expressions of queer sexuality, these events offer the ability to funnel The Center’s resources into creating spaces for contagion through queer art. Relatedly, Morales also cited the West Side Cultural Network as a major accomplishment of his in connecting The Center to other institutions (e.g. parks, museums, and performance centers) on the west side of Manhattan, including the Whitney, the Shed, and the High Line. These organizations not only come together for the West Side Fest each year but also have lasting relationships with The Center, the Whitney offering art educators and the Shed coming by for choir rehearsals. This illustrates how a nonprofit can engage with bigger art institutions, reaping their benefits while still maintaining space relatively more accessible and closer to the community.

Yet, while The Center has found success in such ventures, Morales mentioned reckoning with the imperfect history of the organization, particularly when it came to marginalized queer identities. He said how, in his role, he has had many conversations with visitors “based on bruised histories,” where they aired out

43 Morales, Personal Interview with Author, March 20, 2024.
44 Morales.
45 Morales.
46 Morales.
47 Morales.
48 Morales.
“grudges given The Center’s history.” In particular, Morales emphasized the historic exclusion of queer and trans people of color—especially women and femmes—in such an organization, mirroring trends in gay and lesbian activism that have existed since before Stonewall. I find this gay isolationism to culminate in the widely circulated “A Gay Manifesto” by Carl Whittman in 1971, in which he encouraged gay rights activists to avoid coalitions with other movements (Hanhardt, 2013). He claimed alliances with Black and Chicano liberation are “tenuous” given the “uptightness and supermaculinity” of Black liberationists and “the traditional pattern of Mexicans beating up ‘queens.’” (Hanhardt, 2013: 87-8). Yet, these same gay activists indicting minority groups for the violence against trans women (commonly referred to as “queens”) excluded them from organizing, the Gay Activists Alliance (GAA) supposedly afraid of stalwart trans activist Sylvia Rivera and “street people” according to its founder Arthur Bell (Strub, 2018: 89). This discrimination within gay activism carried into the AIDS era and beyond, as the New York chapter of ACT UP (the one that regularly met in The Center) lost significant steam due to conflict over what was about AIDS and what wasn’t after members wanted to broaden the organizations scope to address structural racism and misogyny (among other issues; Brier, 2018: 102).

I interpret the physical space of The Center as an archive of these histories, therefore staff members like Morales has an important role in framing and expanding upon such histories through displays and exhibitions. During my visit, the oral history project On Selfhood: Young Lesbians within the Margins was up, offering a glimpse at the stories of 35 young lesbians and their relationships to the following themes: “Identity and The Self;” “Love, Sex, Desire;” “Friendship and Community;” and “Transness and Gender.” Dispersed throughout works of various forms—including photography, paintings, collages, and digital art—were QR codes that allowed visitors to listen to oral histories from some of the artists themselves as well as other lesbians aged 18 to 25. Olivia Newsome—the creator of the project who has experience working in archives and libraries at Barnard

---

49 Morales, Personal Interview with Author, March 20, 2024.
50 Morales.
51 This analysis of On Selfhood is from my own participant observation at The Center, March, 20, 2024.
and Columbia—sought to amplify the perspectives of multiply marginalized people, especially as a Black lesbian woman with disability herself (On Selfhood: Young Lesbians Within the Margins, “About”). A collage titled Collective Access (2021-2022) by Jinx offers a cacophony of imagery related to queer and disability activism: “COLLECTIVE LIBERATION” and “RECOGNIZING WHoleness” are plastered on top of handicapped signage and nude queer figures among other things (Figure 13). On the same wall, a QR code opens up a SoundCloud audio snippet from Maia (she/her), who talks about hyperfemininity being an expression of queerness and how that opened her up to her own queer femme identity through such depictions in the media (e.g. Sharpay Evans in High School Musical). On another floor, a photo titled Gay Agenda (2023) by Nina shows a bunch of queer women of color at the club dancing on each other, the image blurred and dynamic (Figure 14). This wall has a QR code that contains a audio snippet from Amanda (they/she) in which she talks about how grateful she is that her immediate lesbian community is filled with a lot of black or partially black lesbians, and how that took a lot of intentional work given how she felt in many white-dominated mainstream lesbian spaces. These few works—the exhibition spanning the second through fourth floors—demonstrate how On Selfhood shatters what the term “lesbian” means, a mainstream rigid label that is historically associated with cisgender white women. This breakdown of such gender and racial norms creates more room for a true lesbian community.

On one hand, On Selfhood supplements the existing works in The Center, incorporating histories into the space that had not been centered before. A lot of the works from The Center Show (1989) by prominent queer male artists focused on their own sexual experiences, many of these pieces depicting a fair share of penises and anal sex.52 Most notorious for this is the Keith Haring mural in the second-floor bathroom titled Once Upon a Time (Figure 15), for which Haring referenced the pre-AIDS gay liberation era by making his iconic figures climb upon exaggerated phaluses or

52 This analysis of The Center’s space is from my own participant observation at The Center, March, 20, 2024.
Figure 13: Jinx, Collective Action, 2021-2022, Mixed media collage. Social media: @hey.jinx. Courtesy of On Selfhood: Young Lesbians Within the Margins website.

Figure 14: Nina, Gay Agenda, 2023. Digital photograph. Social media: @niblorf. Photo of wall, accompanying labels, and QR codes taken on my phone at The Center, New York, NY.

morph into penises themselves (among other salacious acts) (The Center, “The Keith Haring Bathroom”). Martin Wong’s piece in one of the building’s stairwells cuts to the chase and depicts a large phallus made of bricks, a common motif of his in his works illustrative of his roots in the Lower East Side (Figure 16) (Solomon, 2021). In the same stairwell is a room covered in a collage by Arch Connelly, in which snippets of nude boys from pornography are interspersed with jewels among other ephemera (Figure 17). While it is important to acknowledge the value of bringing the works of important queer artists under one roof (free and open to the public), the gay male experience has always drowned out other perspectives within the LGBTQ+ community. This makes the juxtaposition of an exhibition like *On Selfhood*

Figure 17: Arch Connelly, *Room*, 1989. Paper, collage, jewels. Stairwell of The Center, New York, NY. Photo taken on my phone.
essential in grounding The Center’s more historic artworks in the current queer landscape. This doesn’t mean that the permanent installations at The Center are not rooted in their own radical histories. Rather, an active effort on the part of someone like Morales to represent the full spectrum of what queerness can be makes the space much fuller. In this way, On Selfhood not only disorients the heteronormative visitors at The Center, but—more importantly given the organization’s clientele—it disorients the homonormative visitors. More specifically, On Selfhood disrupts The Center’s dominant legacy of gay white men as well as its neoliberal institutional structures.

Yet, not all of the permanent site-specific works at The Center are male-centric, and I found On Selfhood to complement some of these installations. A 2009 permanent installation in one of the gender-neutral bathrooms by fierce pussy displays a class photo of children with the words “Are you a boy or a girl?” on top of a collage of their 1991 List posters (Figure 18). Each poster inserts a multifaceted lesbian identity within the sentence “I AM A _______ AND PROUD!” such as “mannish muffediver amazon feminist queer lesbian” or “lezzie butch pervert girlfriend bulldagger sister dyke.” fierce pussy’s explosion of lesbianism feels ahead of its time given the variety of everyday experiences illustrated in On Selfhood, and both projects take on a sense of pride that affirms the queering of a mainstream “LGBT” label. Circling back to pieces from The Center Show, Thomas Lanigan Schmidt decorated one of the windows in one of the stairwells and surrounding walls with gold and silver paint for If Gold... (1989), sprinkling small stars and hearts throughout and displaying the words “IF GOLD WERE RATS” (Figure 19). Also displayed is Schmidt’s manifesto of sorts titled “Mother Stonewall and the Golden Rats,” which tells the story of how Stonewall came about and the pride he derived from being queer “street rat” in this community built out of necessity: “WE WERE STREET RATS. Puerto Rican, Black, Northern and Southern Whites. ‘Debby the Dyke’ and a Chinese queen named JADE EAST. The sons and daughters of postal workers, welfare mothers, cab drivers, mechanics and NURSES Aids (just to name a few)” (Figure 20). Similarly to how many of the artists in On Selfhood highlighted marginalized identities and their
**Figure 18:** fierce pussy, *Bathroom Project at the LGBT Community Center*, 2009. Photo taken on my phone.

**Figure 19:** Thomas Lanigan Schmidt, *If Gold...*, 1989. Mixed media. Photo taken on my phone.
varying intersections, Schmidt’s manifesto unifies the outcasts that made Stonewall happen under the label “street rats,” its installation in *If Gold...* serving as reminder of this community’s presence while also accentuating the story’s exuberant beauty (even amidst struggle) through jewel embellishments and gold paint.

All of these aforementioned pieces were installed at different conjunctures and within different contexts, and the conversations between them under one roof feels core to The Center.
Going back to my conversation with Richard Morales, he cited “alternative” sites of presentation as an important aspect of the current queer artistic landscape in New York City.\(^{53}\) Having grown up in Brooklyn, he considered multi-use venues like Three Dollar Bill and Elsewhere to fall into this category, both sites having major footholds in queer nightlife while also incorporating art, whether it be drag shows, musical performances, or local vendors selling their own creations (e.g. prints and jewelry).\(^{54}\) I find The Center—perhaps given its simultaneous role as a service center—to be an alternative site of presentation in a way that is less commercial than these nightlife venues. Having a space like The Center that is *free and open to the public* with queer history ingrained in its walls through a site-specific exhibition like The Center Show in 1989 underscores what alternative sites of presentation are alternative to: museums and galleries. Galavanting through The Center’s stairwells and bathrooms and having no restrictions in terms of touching the works or taking photos of them (though my awe kept me respectful of them) felt freeing given that most other times I have consumed art, I have felt the eyes of museum guards or other visitors burning a hole in the back of my head. I found such a setting to be the most natural for works from the likes of Haring and Wong, who had strong ties to street art and downtown Manhattan that run the risk of being lost through cooptation and the institutionalization of the art world. Not only did these artists cement themselves in the space through these installations, but so did the innumerable activists that organized there. The Center is an intimate semi-public in a different way than BAAD! is. While community members do gather in the space, I think that it is more about The Center’s rich queer history and how it interacts with its visitors that makes it an intimate space, the space operating as a living archive.

---

\(^{53}\) Morales, Personal Interview with Author, March 20, 2024.

\(^{54}\) Morales.
Chapter 2: Situating the Whitney

What Came Before...

At the very start of our conversation, AA Bronson encouraged me to explore the early period of gay liberation post-Stonewall, the moment in New York he was “most fond” of. He actually had only been in the city for short periods during that era, not moving to the city until 1986 as part of artist collective General Idea. But, he dove into a story of a “midnight tour of gay art in Manhattan” that he went on in the early 1970s—unable to recall exactly when but falling on ‘73 at the latest”—hosted by friend and artist Ray Johnson. Jimmy De Sana—visiting from Chicago—also accompanied them as they trekked to Manhattan’s west side. Bronson described the reputation of anything west of Eighth Ave. as dangerous, saying how they had to walk in the middle of the street, as people hid in doorways with large boards to knock people out with and take their money. Once they made it to the West Side Highway, they could kill time before the “real tour” either at gay bars like The Spike or The Eagle or between them. Bronson noted how—even given the bars were not far from each other on Eleventh Ave.—people would hang out on the streets between them, often having sex in cars. Yet, things picked up even further when Bronson crawled under a chainlink fence to enter the piers: “an enormous, enormous space.” Johnson had organized it so the tour took place during a new moon, the warehouse pitch black and filled with “shapes moving in the dark.” Bronson could see the building tower two to three stories above him as well a large cut from the building through “layers of stuff” that allowed one to see both “sky and water.” He pointed out that this cut was an art piece by Gordon Matta-Clark, which

55 Bronson, Personal Interview with Author, March 12, 2024.
56 Bronson.
57 Bronson.
58 Bronson.
59 Bronson.
60 Bronson.
61 Bronson.
was ironic given “he was straight but it formed the center of this massive cruising area.” While Johnson took them around to see varying artworks (many by queer artists), much of the night’s activities—the space filling up with “hundreds of guys”—did not get going until after 1 AM. As Bronson put it, “gay life at that time started at midnight and went till dawn... the city was taken over by gay men in that period.” He found the culmination of the tour to be when the sun rose while they were on the pier’s back platform, illuminating the naked men laid out by the Hudson River. According to Bronson, on the wall beside them was a Black Panther mural by a Black artist that he could not recall off the top of his head, though emphasizing that photos of the platform existed for me to find later.

As I continued to explore this queer history of the piers, I stumbled across almost the same retelling of Ray Johnson’s tour by AA Bronson in Johnathan Weinberg’s Pier Groups (Weinberg, 2019: 19, 22). Here, I learned that the murals Bronson was talking about were the murals by Tava (a.k.a. Gustav von Will) at Pier 46 painted in 1979, depicting two huge nude black men holding their erect penises (Figure 2.1) (Weinberg, 2019: 19). Additionally, Bronson seems to have referenced Gordon Matta-Clark’s Day’s End, the 1975 project where he cut large-scale incisions into Pier 52 (Figure 2.2). Not only do the dates of these works not completely match up, but neither do the locations. Of course, Bronson could have gone to multiple piers, and the piers already had gaping holes in the ceilings not unlike Matta-Clark’s piece that perhaps he could have introduced as broader context (Weinberg, 2019: 19). Yet, Weinberg—also noticing Bronson’s mix-up of the Tava murals in his interview with him—considers this all to be a compression of various visits to Manhattan’s West Side into “one dramatic initiation story,” drawing on a quote of his from another interview: “‘It was so amazing, other than that everything muddles into a big jumble of public sex, I guess.’” (Weinberg, 2019: 22). This speaks to the disorienting nature of such a radical queer presence, the piers functioning as a “freak heterotopia” (as Renate Lorenz put it) being physically outside of the mainstream city (as derelict structures) and normatively outside of

---

62 Bronson, Personal Interview with Author, March 12, 2024.
the mainstream city (as sites of gay cruising and radical art interventions), the two mutually constitutive and producing a unique affect in witnesses like Bronson (Lorenz, 2014). Such an impact explains why Bronson
recalled queer men still flocking to the remnant underpinnings of the piers, safe from the cops as they laid naked in the sun: “[the city] had to get really extreme to drive the queers out.”

Weinberg explored the other queer milieus that flocked to the piers until their demolition in the mid-1980s and the rise in shifts toward neoliberalism that were taking over West Side Manhattan. He spent extra time on Pier 34 where a group of artists (starting with David Wojnarowicz and Mike Bidlo) transformed the terminal into a makeshift studio and gallery (Weinberg, 2019). I had the privilege of talking with Judy Glantzman—a participant in the Pier 34 Project and friend of Wojnarowicz—over the phone on two different occasions, shedding light on what made this scene special. Glantzman’s anecdote parallels that of AA Bronson: after climbing the fence and crawling through a “little hole,” she was met by figures lurking on the stairs in the dark. Once her eyes adjusted, she realized they were trash bags, an installation by David Finn at the pier’s entryway (Figure 2.3).

Glantzman found beauty throughout the physical space of the piers—whether it be the ozark stairs or the grass seeded throughout by Wojnarowicz and Bidlo (Figure 2.4)—as well as the art that came to fill its walls. While Glantzman focused on its beauty, another Pier 34 artist Paolo Buggiani juxtaposed the space’s “exhilarating freedom of expression” with its decay: “Inside the buildings, fires set by vandals and the strains brought on by the elements created a greasy paste of ash. Filing cabinets reeked of putrid mold, and hundreds of charred logbooks rotted in pools of muddy water. The empty black corridors and devastated rooms evoked catastrophe, especially when juxtaposed with the verdant lawn carpeting a large living room” (Sterzing & Weinberg, 2016: 27). Regardless of the space itself, Glantzman focused on the organic way in which artists could connect in a space like Pier 34. She first heard of the space after bumping into Luis Frangiella, who said to her, “If you want to grab some paint, go down to the pier!” She ended up going with artist duo Liz and Val, taping

---

63 Bronson, Personal Interview with Author, March 12, 2024.
64 Glantzman, Personal Interview with Author, March 27, 2024.
65 Glantzman.
66 Glantzman.
**Figure 2.3:** Andreas Sterzing, *David Finn, Sculpture, Pier 34*, 1983. From “Something Possible Everywhere: Pier 34 NYC, 1983–84” (2016). Courtesy of Hunter College Art Galleries. © Andreas Sterzing

**Figure 2.4:** Andreas Sterzing, *David Wojnarowicz and Mike Bidlo (mural by Luis Frangella)*, 1983. Courtesy of Hal Bromm Gallery.
a huge brush to a broomstick (Figure 2.5) to make her own piece: “It was exhilarating.”\footnote{Glantzman, Personal Interview with Author, March 27, 2024.} While Glantzman acknowledged she was “lucky to be included” given not everyone had the opportunity to, she also doubled down on the inclusivity of the space: “All the stars aligned; it isn’t anybody’s energy; its everybody’s energy.”\footnote{Glantzman.} The space functioned as a shared space in a variety of ways, often littered with art materials as well as what Glantzman considered “artifacts of different times” such as “David’s [Wojnarowicz] and Kiki’s [Smith] Rorschach tests.”\footnote{Glantzman.} Fellow pier-goer Jane Bauman pointed out how a shared space could become problematic: “Some well-documented weird stuff happened: the dumped dead body, artists painting over other people’s work with macho posturing, and the like” (Sterzing & Weinberg, 2016: 23). Yet, Bauman ultimately found that “the transformation of that broken down place / palace was magical and so speaks to the power of art and artists” (Sterzing & Weinberg, 2016: 23). Bidlo and Wojnarowicz released an official statement on the Pier 34 project that outlined the objective of a communitarian art show that stands in contrast—even opposition—to the commercial art world: “People shared supplies, energy, thoughts. Given the surfaces to work with—crumbling walls of plaster, earth floors, metal walkways and hundreds of window panes—the work came out in rampages of raw energy” (Sterzing & Weinberg, 2016: 21). These anti-institutional sentiments were not only reflected in Wojnarowicz’s own art, but also anonymous installations at Pier 34 of Andy Warhol in a casket or a separate figure representing the hanging of an art critic (Weinberg, 2019). Additionally, the building’s overt queer aesthetic (much centering around queer male artist’s depictions of phalluses and nude male bodies) became increasingly political as the AIDS crisis emerged in the early 80s, sculptor Rob Jones referencing this impeding death directly through his life-size figures “shrouded” in latex (Figure 2.6) (Sterzing & Weinberg, 2016: 47). Put simply by Glantzman: “[it was] like Mad Max or something... the future looked grim.”\footnote{Glantzman.} Pier 34 not only
**Figure 2.5:** Andreas Sterzing, *Judy Glantzman, Pier 34*, 1983. From “Something Possible Everywhere: Pier 34 NYC, 1983–84” (2016). Courtesy of Hunter College Art Galleries. © Andreas Sterzing

**Figure 2.6:** Andreas Sterzing, *Rob Jones Sculpture Shroud at the Pier*, 1983. Courtesy of Hyperallergic, the artist, and Hunter College Art Galleries
functions as a heterotopia, but also captures a “freak heterochronia” through its alternative relations to time, essential for survival in a city becoming increasingly unfit for queer people.

Finally, zooming out from these queer artist spheres allows for an expansion of what the piers on the Hudson River were for queer New Yorkers, particularly queer people of color. The Christopher Street piers (most notably Pier 45) had been a gathering place for queer people of color, especially low-income and homeless people given its accessibility. Activists Marsha P. Johnson and Sylvia Rivera (Figure 2.7)—both known for their involvement in the Stonewall riots—rooted their activism there through their founding of Street Transvestites Action Revolutionaries (STAR) (Munuera, 2020). As homeless trans women of color themselves, they sought to remediate the poverty and discrimination experienced by homeless queer youth in the city (Rothberg, n.d.). They created their first STAR House in the trailer of an abandoned truck parked at the piers, which functioned as a homeless shelter. Yet, it ended abruptly when the truck was reclaimed by its owner, driving off filled with belongings and one person still asleep (supposedly waking up days later in California) (Munuera, 2020). The second iteration of STAR House moved to an abandoned building in the Lower East Side at 213 East Second Street (paying a mob member a small amount of rent), which Johnson and Rivera renovated through party fundraisers among other endeavors (Munuera, 2020). Yet, the owners acted out of malfeasance, and STAR was evicted after only a year (Munuera, 2020; Strub, 2018). Regardless of a consistent physical presence, Johnson and Rivera left a lasting legacy in the neighborhood. Malcolm Rio connects the ephemerality of spaces formed by Black queer people to another relevant subculture at the piers: the ballroom community. Born from New York drag in the early 1970s, Rio summarizes ballroom as “queer people of color (QPOCs) who compete or “walk” in ways that emulate the archetypal traits of a gender, sex, or social class that is not theirs—or battle through a dance known as voguing” (Rio, 2020: 122). Each person in the ballroom community is a member of a “house,” and these houses compete against one another at balls that take place in apartments, conference halls, or even the streets (Rio, 2020). Rio points out how both “the venues that host balls and the apartment

complexes in which houses converge” usually “lack any formal history and/or an enduring spatial presence” (Rio, 2020: 128). Yet, many of the queer people of color who flocked to the piers like Johnson and Rivera to survive (through both shelter and community) were part of the ballroom scene, the public space an easy spot for gathering and vogueing. Similar to what Bronson mentioned about queer people sunbathing on the underpinnings of the piers well into the 90s, members of the ballroom community continued to gather along the Hudson River after the piers were torn down, which can be seen in films like *Paris is Burning* (1991) (Figure 2.8). Jose Xtravaganza—father of the House of Xtravaganza—recalls how his discovery of “voguing and the houses” at the West Side piers at “like, 16 or 17 years old” helped him both come out and find the House of Xtravaganza (Criales-Unzueta, 2023). Queer scholar and advocate Michael Roberson points out how the piers
integrated themselves into the culture: “In the early ’90s, young Black and Latinx gay men on the pier began to emulate trans women voguing, so the “Butch Queen Voguing like a Femme Queen” category was created for them” (Criales-Unzueta, 2023). The way poor queer people of color were able to make the piers into a space that worked for them—whether as a home, a hustle, a haven, or all of the above—paints a full picture of what the piers could be for queer New Yorkers.

... Still Remains

Fast forward to 2024, artist Kiyan Williams monumentalizes an iconic photograph of Johnson holding a sign saying “POWER TO THE PEOPLE” (Figure 2.9) with an aluminum statue titled Statue of Freedom (Marsha P. Johnson), featured on the Whitney Museum’s sixth-floor balcony for this year’s Biennial (Figure 2.10).⁷¹ The statue faces Williams’s other piece Ruins of Empire II or The Earth Swallows the Master’s House

---

⁷¹ The analysis of the 2024 Whitney Biennial is from my own participant observation, March 22, 2024.
Figure 2.9: Diana Davies, “Marsha P. Johnson pickets Bellevue Hospital to protest treatment of street people and gays,” c. 1968 - 1975. Courtesy of the New York Public Library Digital Collections.

Figure 2.10: Kiyan Williams, Statue of Freedom (Marsha P. Johnson), 2024. Aluminum. The Whitney Museum of Art, New York, NY. Photo taken on my phone.
(2024), a replica of the White House portico made of almost 6,000 pounds of earth and steel (Figure 2.11; Small, 2024). Sinking into the ground and topped off with an upside-down American flag, the piece reads as a pretty clear indictment of the American government, especially potent given recent state attacks on queer and trans lives (e.g. “Don’t Say Gay” laws and limitations on gender-affirming care; Narea & Cineas, 2023). In an interview with the New York Times, Williams also points their choice of earth as medium for the piece: “Decomposition as decolonization” (Small, 2024). Yet, it is not clear in this interview what exactly this installation at the Whitney is decolonizing. At its core, the tie of the earthen edifice to the land it is built on connects to Indigenous rights to the land (Manhattan residing on Lenape land). Yet, given the prevalence of calls for “decolonizing the museum,” Williams’s piece also calls for a reflection on the specific site in which it is displayed.

On the balcony of Williams’s installation, one can not only see up Gavensport Street into the Meatpacking District, but also the Hudson River, a location that Marsha P. Johnson has unseverable ties to. Seeing her father and Neptune in the waters, she would strip her clothes and throw them in the river as an offering, walking naked afterward down Christopher Street (Tourmaline, 2019). Yet, the river is also where her body was found in July of 1992, a death hastily ruled a suicide by law enforcement (Amore, 2023). Sylvia Rivera moved back to the piers after Johnson’s death, her home at Pier 45 facing the river its own memorial to Johnson given the shrine Rivera dedicated to her (Figure 2.12; Munuera, 2020). In a video interview by Randy Wicker in 1992, Rivera illustrated how it felt to lose Johnson: “She’s with me in spirit and she gives me a lot of hope... every time I look at that damn river and I sit there meditating on the river, she gives me—I actually feel her spirit telling me ‘you’ve gotta keep fighting girl because it’s not time for you to cross River Jordan’ and we were supposed to cross it together!” (Tourmaline, “Randy Wicker Interviews Sylvia Rivera on the Pier”). Rivera’s home (along with a dozen other shelters housing more than thirty people) was destroyed in 1996 by the Hudson River Park Conservancy to develop the park now ubiquitous with Manhattan’s West Side (Munuera, 2020).
Figure 2.11: Kiyan Williams, *Ruins of Empire II or The Earth Swallows the Master’s House*, 2024. Earth, steel, and binder. The Whitney Museum of Art, New York, NY. Photo taken on my phone.

Figure 2.12: Photo of Sylvia Rivera in her home at Pier 45, 1996. Courtesy of Valerie Shaff a and e-flux.
Iván López Munuera considers this moment of erasure as the clashing of two different forms of urbanism: “For Rivera and her community, the piers were a place where bodies and a riverfront architecture turned permeable by the accumulative effect of decay, wall-cutting, makeshift additions, and material abandonees were entangled as interconnected components of a single medium constituted by material porousness. The second form of urbanism, promoted by the Hudson River Park Conservancy, was exemplary of the growth of the petrochemical industry that since the 1940s established an oil-based territoriality: encapsulated humans placed in distant and segregated suburban, car driven, and family-block-based milieus” (Munuera, 2020). Munuera considers the piers “lands of contagion” given their permeability to “otherness: to the otherness of other human bodies; to the otherness of an environment and its decaying architecture; to the otherness of saliva, blood, and semen” (Munuera, 2020). This context roots the state motivations to clear out Manhattan’s West Side—which Rivera called “a sweep, like we’re trash”—in the intersecting pathologization of queer people, homeless people, and the AIDS crisis that disproportionately impacted these communities (Munuera, 2020).

Yet, Kiyan Williams’s art on Marsha P. Johnson was actually one of two pieces dedicated to her on display at the 2024 Biennial. Artist, filmmaker, and writer Tourmaline has a video Pollinator (2022) displayed prominently on the fifth floor the moment you get off the elevator (Figure 2.13). Just over five minutes, the video weaves together personal material—whether a home video of her late father singing “The Cisco Kid” by War or a clip of the artist herself wandering garnered in flowers—and archival footage from Marsha P. Johnson’s funeral procession and celebration of life.72 Quoted in the work’s label, Tourmaline explains the title is an ode to Johnson, who often was adorned with flowers herself “as a pollinator for more expansive renderings of self and beauty in the world.”73 Tourmaline’s personal connection to Johnson—as a trans woman herself—dates back to her Tumblr days, where she began her own blog “The Spirit Was...” in which she uploaded a fusion of her

72 Information derived from exhibition label and participant observation at 2024 Whitney Biennial, March, 22, 2024.
73 Ibid.
writing and archival material on queer activism, focusing especially on Marsha P. Johnson and Sylvia Rivera. In fact, I cite Tourmaline earlier in this chapter because her Vimeo features Randy Wicker’s interview with Sylvia Rivera. Yet, what does it mean for this archival material to be put up at the Whitney Biennial, one of the most prestigious exhibitions in American art? More broadly, what does it mean for these trans women of color who were alienated by both the city and the gay white men that dominated their activist circles (e.g. the Gay Activists Alliance) to be represented in such a space today? (Rivera, 2002)

I adopt Avery Gordon’s “haunting” from her book *Ghostly Matters* to help understand how queer histories are not completely lost to mechanisms of erasure like gentrification (Gordon, 2008). This chapter explores the highly controlled manner in which institutions display queer histories, resulting in what I call a
flattening effect given the subsumption of these stories into the city’s neoliberal project (which is intertwined with the mainstream art world). Gregory Bourassa roots the idea of neoliberal multiculturalism in what he calls “productive inclusion,” defined as “a number of mechanisms that operate by absorbing, coopting, channelling, extracting, and appropriating that which has previously been deemed abject and outside—even antagonistic to—the logics of capital, and enlisting it within the circuits of capitalist accumulation” (Bourassa, 2021: 3).

Jonathan Alexander and Jacqueline Rhodes tie the word “flattening” to such conceptions of multiculturalism, these efforts to make things “legible, identifiable, and thus acceptable” resulting in the “taming” of the “other” (Alexander & Rhodes, 2014: 431). I use the Whitney as a case study into this phenomenon through both the museum’s physical location in the Meatpacking District (having moved there from the Upper East Side in 2015) and the museum’s support of particular artistic interventions.

**The Neoliberal Construction of the Meatpacking District**

The Meatpacking District has its own website. When you click the tab “GET TO KNOW US,” you are met by a “MEET MEETPACKING” header, which introduces the neighborhood as a cosmopolitan entity of its own: “The Meatpacking District is a neighborhood like no other: a fusion of grit and glam, where old New York meets the frenetic pace of the 21st Century” (Meatpacking District, “Meet Meatpacking”). If you toggle to the “MEATPACKING BID” tab, you realize that this streamlined “Meatpacking District”—packaged and branded not unlike the meat in the neighborhood’s original factories—is a product of the Meatpacking District Management Association, a business improvement district (BID), representing the variety of retail establishments and business interests in the neighborhood (Meatpacking District, “The Business Improvement District”). Yet, these details do not matter in practice, as its sleek black-and-white “MEATPACKING DISTRICT” branding—plastered throughout plazas and storefronts in the area—has become ubiquitous with
the neighborhood itself.74 Put simply, the business improvement district is the Meatpacking District. Further down, an entire tab dedicated to “LGBTQ+ History” with a thumbnail of Sylvia Rivera (Figure 2.14) contains a cursory overview of the queer footprint in the area (Meatpacking District, “LGBTQ+ History”). It touches on long-gone historic nightclubs (citing the Mineshaft and the Zodiac among others), the cruising and radical art presence at the Christopher Street piers (citing David Wojnarowicz and Gordon Matta-Clark), and the now-defunct Florent diner (Meatpacking District, “LGBTQ+ History”). Ironically, the website directly cites Florent as “a victim of the neighborhood’s rising real estate pressures” (Meatpacking District, “LGBTQ+ History”). Yet, what about not only the wide variety of queer establishments that were victims of such “real estate pressures,” but also the innumerable queer people displaced by gentrification in the neighborhood? This neoliberal marketing strategy on the part of the Meatpacking District BID envelops these histories of gentrification in an attempt to neutralize critique through vague, depoliticized references to displacement as if it were natural but regrettable.

Entering this project of neoliberal modernity in 2015 after relocating from the Upper East Side, the Whitney’s sleek building (Figure 2.15) resides between the High Line and Hudson River Park, two major developments that fundamentally changed Manhattan’s West Side (“The Building”). The High Line—first built between 1929 and 1934 as an above-ground train line—ended up abandoned and overgrown (Figure 2.16) when train use decreased due to the prevalence of trucking (The High Line, “History”). Not only did the train tracks become home to an eclectic blend of plant life (home to more than seventy-five species), but it also became a cruising area for local queer people, a hub for artists, and a place to stay for the homeless (Patrick, 2014: 927). Yet, in 1991, a five-block section of the railway in West Village south of Gansevoort Street was torn down for residential developments. (Patrick, 2014: 927). Opening up space beneath the High Line was so profitable that the group Chelsea Property Owners—declaring the derelict High Line to be a public safety concern—pushed

74 Discovered through participant observation walking through the Meatpacking District.
Figure 2.14: LGBTQ+ HISTORY tab with Sylvia Rivera as the thumbnail on the Meatpacking District BID website (meatpacking-district.com).

Figure 2.15: The exterior of the Whitney Museum, designed by architect Renzo Piano. Courtesy of the Whitney.
for the railway’s demolition (Patrick, 2014: 927). While Giuliani signed a demolition order in 2001, two gay men Joshua David and Robert Hammond already were plotting ways to preserve and repurpose the High Line, the two founding the nonprofit Friends of the High Line (FoHL) which ended up making the High Line into the park it is today (Patrick, 2014: 927). Not only is the High Line the most staffed park per acre in New York City, but it also has the most operating costs per square foot. Darren J. Patrick points out that the redevelopment on the part of FoHL is an example of both gay and green gentrification. The former can be seen through FoHL’s attachment to promoting the High Line as a gay project. Describing the High Line as “totally gay” in a New York Times interview, Robert Hammond roots the project’s inception in the gay man’s penchant for the bohemian: “I believe gays have an ability to see beauty in places other people might find repellent or unattractive. It was easier for gays to see potential in the High Line. They were more willing to support a crazy dream. It goes
back to Richard Florida and his concept of the creative class, this theory that gays are vital to neighborhoods because they see something special in them that real estate agents may not” (Piepenburg, 2012). Patrick problematizes Hammond’s invocation of Richard Florida given his disregard for those displaced in the city under the guise of “creativity,” pointing to Hammond’s own pro-gentrification agenda. Jamie Peck further underscores how Richard Florida and his 2002 book The Rise of the Creative Class reinforce long-standing “‘neoliberal’ development agendas, framed around interurban competition, gentrification, middle-class consumption and place-marketing” (Peck, 2005: 740). Patrick highlights FoHL’s team of “pro-development experts, neoliberal consultants, powerful figures in real estate development, and a bevy of celebrities to aid in crafting their redevelopment strategy” (Patrick, 2014: 928). The most obvious appeal of the project being increased green space, Patrick succinctly summarizes the intersecting neoliberal appeals of the High Line in the following way: “FoHL self-consciously emphasized an approach which fused metropolitan sexuality with urban pastoralism in order to naturalize a hitherto unimaginable transformation of both the High Line itself, and the character and economics of the surrounding neighborhood” (Patrick, 2014: 925). The south end of the High Line plops city-goers right next to the Whitney, making the museum a key part of this neoliberal ecosystem.\footnote{Discovered through participant observation walking through the Meatpacking District.}

Hudson River Park—the Whitney’s other neighbor—capped off a series of developments on Manhattan’s West Side, including the demolition of the original elevated West Side Highway (sparked by an accident in 1973 where a dump truck carrying asphalt caused it to collapse) and the construction of its nonelevated replacement. As discussed earlier, the subsequent tearing down of the West Side piers in the mid-1980s took away a central locale for queer people to gather and oftentimes live. While queer people continued to sunbathe and vouge along the Hudson, the specifics Hudson River Park Act of 1998—which formally called for the development of a park spanning four miles of the waterfront (from Battery Park to Fifty-Ninth Street) and the establishment of the Hudson River Park Trust—complicated the freedom of this
space. The act declares the park “will enhance the ability of New Yorkers to enjoy the Hudson river, one of the state’s great natural resources; protect the Hudson river, including its role as an aquatic habitat; promote the health, safety and welfare of the people of the state; increase the quality of life in the adjoining community and the state as a whole; help alleviate the blighted, unhealthy, unsanitary and dangerous conditions that characterize much of the area; and boost tourism and stimulate the economy” (Hudson River Park Act). Mitigating “blighted, unhealthy, unsanitary and dangerous conditions” to “increase the quality life” of those in the area echoes the “quality of life” policies of Mayor Giuliani at the time, which encouraged prosecution for low-level crimes in alignment with his tough-on-crime policy (all emerging in the mid-90s before the park’s inception; Hanhardt, 2013). The changes to Manhattan’s West Side caused a significant amount of public discourse, the area becoming a major area of contestation. The nonprofit FIERCE (Fabulous Independent Educated Radicals for Community Empowerment) starting a “Save Our Space” campaign in 2000 to shine light on the discrimination of young queer people of color by the Piers and in the West Village, much of this a result of Giuliani’s quality-of-life policies (Walker, 2011: 112). Yet, two years later in 2002, an anticrime rally titled “Take Back Our Streets”—supported by community board members, local business owners, and block associations among other groups—took place in the Village that sought for more of a crackdown on misconduct in the area (Hanhardt, 2013). Most of the chaos could be attributed to the displacement of young queer people when Pier 45 was closed for renovation in 2001, forcing them further inland on Christopher Street (Walker, 2011). Complaints continued amongst all parties involved even after the reopening of the piers in 2003, amplified by the establishment of a 1 AM curfew in the newly renovated space (Walker, 2011: 113). Similarly to when the pier was closed, this curfew drove young queer people deeper into the West Village. FIERCE advocated for a 4 AM curfew, as it would not only avoid unreasonable policing of people hanging out at the pier, but these people would also leave in smaller groups, appeasing locals frustrated with the noise (Walker, 2011: 113). Not only was this demand not met, but locals pushed for earlier curfews of 10 PM and even 9 PM. Additionally, the shift
from Mayor Giuliani to Mayor Bloomberg saw a neoliberal masking of the race and class-based discrimination amidst such neighborhood complaints through language of “neutrality,” referring to queer youth of color in a situation like this as a “nuisance” (Andersson, 2015). A 2006 article from The Village Voice exploring the conflict at the piers features an insightful and succinct statement from a 19-year-old Bronx resident who called the pier his “heaven:” “Let it be a white gay person and the residents won’t be up in arms like this. It’s prejudice” (Lombardi, 2006).

A conversation with my former coworker Raul Rivera, Educational Program Manager at LGBTQ+ youth advocacy nonprofit Live Out Loud, shed light on the meaning of the piers for queer people of color through his own experiences growing up in the Bronx (where he remains today) and finding ballroom. Having grown up in a culture where “being feminine was bad, he remembered the awakening he had at thirteen or fourteen years old when he first saw queer men voguing at the Christopher Street piers: “to see the full opposite... men dancing feminine... embracing femininity... broke all norms I had known.”76 He had tried dance at Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater, but seeing the informal and unabashed way they danced at the piers tapped into a queer joy deep within him.77 Having been severely bullied in middle school, Rivera began to look to ballroom as an escape. He admired his classmate Tyhierry—“she was a dancer... she was beautiful”—so he took on the ballroom name Tyhierry Blahnik Mizrahi (eventually joining the House of Mizrahi).78 Tyhierry Mizrahi ended up being an alter-ego of sorts: “Instead of being Raul, I had the freedom to be whoever I wanted.” That alter-ego had traits that Rivera had not had the power to embrace before, including “being confident, flamboyant, a little shady, grounded in yourself and strong in yourself, being courageous, being a leader.”79 Additionally, he underscored the cathartic nature of ballroom’s creative aspects when it came to

76 Rivera, Personal Interview with Author, March 11, 2024.
77 Rivera.
78 Rivera.
79 Rivera.
processing life’s hardships: “you are unleashing so much energy that was directed at you in an artistic way that therapy ... medical support can’t do.”80 Rivera pointed to the expansive community that Tyhierry Mizrahi has given him throughout the city even as Raul Rivera. Not only did he bump into a bunch of his ballroom friends at Christopher Street, but also at the supermarket among other everyday locales.81 Yet, Rivera points to the city’s effort “to erase the ballroom community visually” through developments in downtown Manhattan, particularly in the West Village which was once a hub. Rivera no longer finds as many people he knows Christopher Street, sparking fears in him for the city’s queer youth given what the area once meant for him: “Christopher Street is such a sacred ground; its the coming out story for millions of people.”82 Both ballroom and the accompanying community he found in the West Village made him more comfortable to come out to his mother when he was younger, much of his fear replaced with happiness given the positive queer expression he had been exposed to.83 Yet, even while working closely with kids through his nonprofit work at Live Out Loud, Rivera could not think of where kids went anymore for this community.84 For this reason, he has become a huge proponent for the incorporation of ballroom into queer youth programming at the nonprofits he has been a part of (e.g. vogueing and kiking).85 Considering the gentrification in proximity to Christopher Street to have gone further into flat-out “erasure,” Rivera keeps the spirit of ballroom alive through such community-based interventions.86

David Harvey illustrates how The Whitney is a part of the broader neoliberal project that snuffs radical queer presence on Manhattan’s West Side. Harvey considers one’s “right to the city”—which he defines as “a [collective] right to change ourselves by changing the city”—to be threatened by a widespread urbanization rooted in capitalist class-based discrimination (Harvey, 2008: 23). He describes violence inherent to such

---

80 Rivera, Personal Interview with Author, March 11, 2024.
81 Rivera.
82 Rivera.
83 Rivera.
84 Rivera.
85 Rivera.
86 Rivera.
development: “Surplus absorption through urban transformation has an even darker aspect. It has entailed repeated bouts of urban restructuring through ‘creative destruction’, which nearly always has a class dimension since it is the poor, the underprivileged and those marginalized from political power that suffer first and foremost from this process. Violence is required to build the new urban world on the wreckage of the old” (Harvey, 2008: 33). Circling back to criticisms of Richard Florida’s “creative class,” Jamie Peck shows how art factor into Florida’s gentrification under the guise of creativity. The presence of an institution like the Whitney ends up being one step in a large-scale “creative” urban planning strategy (like one might see from a business improvement district like the Meatpacking District’s): “Repackaging urban cultural artifacts [like an art museum] as competitive assets, they value them (literally) not for their own sake, but in terms of their (supposed) economic utility” (Peck, 2005: 764). While the well-resourced Whitney is able to support a significant amount of talented creatives and disseminate their work to a large audience (resulting in many positive impacts), such an institution maintains the neoliberal frameworks that end up hurting some of the communities it claims to serve (e.g. queer people and people of color), something that is oftentimes reflected in the initiatives they choose to fund.

The Flattening of Queer Histories

While part of Manhattan in which the Whitney resides contains a multitude of radical queer histories—many of which are rooted in art as outlined at the beginning of this chapter (e.g. Pier 34)—the museum’s institutional restraints as part of the city’s neoliberal fabric make any attempt at engaging with these histories a form of flattening. Something I find David Hammons’s Day’s End (2014-21; Figure 2.17)—the Whitney’s permanent site-specific installation in collaboration with Hudson River Park—to be emblematic of this flattening. Hammons’s piece is solely comprised of a metal frame of the exact dimensions of the former Pier 52, which featured the 1975 Gordon Matta-Clark piece (Figure 2.18) by the same name that AA Bronson cited
**Figure 2.17:** David Hammons, *Day’s End*, 2014-21. Courtesy of the Whitney Museum of Art.

**Figure 2.18:** Gordon Matta-Clark, *Day’s End*, 1975. Courtesy of ArtReview. © Estate of Gordon Matta-Clark, Artists Rights Society (ARS), N.Y.
in his recollection of the piers. As Bronson illustrated, the warehouse (among others on the Hudson River) had been a cruising area and haven for years before Matta-Clark’s *Day’s End* (Weinberg, 2019). Matta-Clark’s had a negative perception of those who congregated at Pier 52, as he considered them “menacing characters” and a “sadomasochistic fringe” amidst “the teeming s&m renaissance that cruises the abandoned waterfront” (Moffitt, 2021). He used this characterization of those at the piers as justification for his project: “In the midst of this state of affairs it would seem within the rights of an artist or any other person for that matter to enter such a premises with a desire to improve the property, to transform the structure in the midst of its ugly criminal state into a place of interest, fascination and value” (Weinberg, 2019: 3). In this way, Matta-Clark—a straight white artist who Weinberg considers to incorporate “hypermasculine exhibitionism” into his practice—territorialized Pier 52, citing his “crew of henchmen boarding and barb-wiring up all the alternative entrances except for the front door” for making *Day’s End*, the artist putting his own lock and bolt on the front door (Weinberg, 2019: 3-4). Yet, the space returned to its original state, artists such as Frank Hallam, Shelley Seccombe, and Arch Brown capturing the nude men gathering under Matta-Clark’s gaping holes (Figure 2.19). Ironically, none of these artists even knew that the openings were an art installation, pointing to the quotidian nature artists approached the piers that mirror the gays cruising (Weinberg, 2019).

Given all this context, Hammons’s skeleton of the former Pier 52 provides a cursory history of the building at most. Much of this has to do with the enigmatic nature of Hammons as an artist, who has provided very little information on his intention behind the piece and who proposed the project by sending the Whitney a sketch of the sculpture with the plain caption “GORDON MATTA-CLARK MONUMENT PIER 52” (Moffitt, 2021). Yet, how much of a monument of Matta-Clark could Hammons’ piece be given its lack of Matta-Clark’s “anarchitecture,” the steel posts offering no nod to the excisions in Pier 52’s facade that exemplified Matta-Clark’s unruly art practice. The 373-foot-long, 50-foot-tall piece—plopped perfectly in the Hudson River alongside the park—loses such jagged histories, clearly put into place by cranes and industrial
construction equipment (Greenberger, 2019). Of course, this only could be possible through four years of fundraising—$17 million to be exact—and extensive negotiations on the part of the Whitney with the city, the state, the Hudson River Park Trust, and the Army Corps of Engineers among other groups (Tomkins, 2019). The bureaucratic hurdles for Hammons’ piece stand in stark contrast to Matta-Clark’s illegal operation, the attempted opening party for his *Day’s End* having been shut down by the police and resulting in charges being pressed on Matta-Clark (Weinberg, 2019). Both the nature of Hammons’s *Day’s End* and what it took to make it happen feel indicative of the impossibility for a Pier 52 and a Gordon Matta-Clark today, it looking more like a construction site for another high-profile development like Little Island or Pier 17 is being built (when disappointingly all $18 million went into a skeleton).
Based on Matta-Clark’s homophobic statements and the limited information available from Hammons himself, it feels safe to say that Hammons’ Day’s End is not a queer work of art. Yet, the Whitney has forced the piece into the neighborhood’s queer history, including it as part of their Queer History Walks in the Meatpacking District and in a seven-minute long video with queer artists, historians, and activists in which they talk about the significance of the piers. In the video, artist and filmmaker Elegance Bratton considers the evocation of the original Pier 52 to directly provoke people, begging them to question what the skeletal structure is and jump-starting an exploration into the Pier’s queer history (“Queer Histories of the Piers | David Hammons: Day’s End”). Stefanie Rivera emphasized “That’s the building. That’s what I remember. And that’s going to bring a lot of feelings for a lot of people who got to be here and experience it” (“Queer Histories of the Piers | David Hammons: Day’s End”: 00:19-28). Perhaps this ascribing of these people’s own connections to the history of Pier 52 gives Hammons’s Day’s End some significance for the queer community, yet there is still something wrong with the piece’s neutrality. Seeing Hammons’s Day’s End after looking at a photo like Seccombe’s of the nude men basking underneath Matta-Clark’s piece feels eerie given the loss of so many queer people to AIDS after that period of unbridled sexuality, speaking to how these pasts present themselves through haunting (Gordon, 2008). If Gordon Matta-Clark’s Day’s End flattened (at least for a moment) a derelict space overrun with S&M-crazed delinquents, Hammons’ Day’s End flattened both the history of that same derelict space and Matta-Clark’s carvings, the skeleton of the building wiped clean of the danger of either of those spatial interventions. It is as if everything a museum like the Whitney touches is neutralized, subsumed into the neoliberal agenda in which the institutional art world fits right in. Art historian Jonathan Weinberg—from whom much of this project’s research on the piers is derived—offered the most self-aware comment in the aforementioned video from the Whitney, pointing to the “massive gentrification which the Whitney is a part of” that pushed out these earlier forms of queer community ("Queer Histories of the Piers | David Hammons: Day’s End": 6:03-10). Yet, the inclusion of such a nod to the Whitney’s role in the area’s gentrification operates as a
move to innocence on the part of the institution, as if forcing a social justice guise onto artwork absolves them of their complicity.

**Traps, Doors, and Trap Doors**

Tourmaline—in this case formally known as Reina Gossett—edited a book titled *Trap Door* that explores the current landscape of simultaneously heightened trans representation and trans violence. The book’s framework of traps, doors, and trap doors connects to how mainstream institutions like the Whitney (with a large amount of resources tied to a web of powerful stakeholders) engage with marginalized voices (her focus specifically on trans): “In today’s complex cultural landscape, trans people are offered many ‘doors’—entrances to visibility, to resources, to recognition, and to understanding. Yet, as so many of the essays collected here, these doors are almost always also “traps”—accommodating trans bodies, histories, and culture only insofar as they can be forced to hew to hegemonic modalities. This isn’t a new story; various kinds of ‘outsider art’ have historically been called upon by an art market or academic cadre that utilize them to advance dominant narratives before pushing them back out” (Gossett et al., 2017: xxii). Defined as “clever contraptions that are not entrances or exits but secret passageways that take you someplace else, often someplace as yet unknown,” trap doors offer a mode of presentation that resists exploitation by normative forces (Gossett et al., 2017: xxii). Placing emphasis on these “known unknowns,” I find that the sense born from the haunting of (not-so) past queer histories functions as a strong guiding force in authentic queer interventions in the current context. Situating her conception of haunting in a postmodern context, Gordon asks the question: “How do we reckon with what modern history has rendered ghostly?” (Gordon, 2008: 18). Given the disproportionate impact of what has been rendered ghostly—in other words rendered invisible (not quite erased)—on queer people necessitates the amplification of their affective experiences as they move through spaces like the Whitney or the Meatpacking District more broadly.
Part 2: Modes of Presentation
Chapter 3: Mobilizations of Memory

What is the “Mobilization of Memory?”

Visual AIDS has a book series titled “Duets,” in which they pair two queer cultural figures (whether artists, authors, or activists) to engage in dialogue on their works and issues relating to HIV and AIDS. In one of the essays in the book on artist Frederick Weston and writer Samuel L. Delany, the term “mobilization of memory” is used to describe the work of Visual AIDS (Nyong’o, 2021). Having talked with the organization’s current executive director Kyle Croft, such a description makes sense given Visual AIDS’s core commitment to allowing anyone to join the archive as long as they identified as an artist and were HIV positive. Through such openness, the organization could highlight the voices of those most directly affected by the disease, creating a roster of artists that Croft finds to stand in direct opposition to the “exclusion” and “scarcity” of the mainstream art market.  

In a highly professionalized art world (“If you want to be an artist, you get an MFA”), Croft finds such exclusions are “couched on terms of judgment and tastes” when in fact they operate along lines of gender, race, and class. Visual AIDS, in contrast, is more accessible through being “embedded in the community” and its “ethos of ‘anyone can join.’”

Sarah Schulman’s unpacking of the cultural losses to AIDS in The Gentrification of the Mind helps contextualize Croft’s comments on the role of an organization like Visual AIDS: “The artful AIDS dead, of course, included some very successful and high-earning celebrity artists like Keith Haring and Robert Mapplethorpe. But the vast majority were rank-and-file artists who didn’t live long enough to become known, or to quit, or to become teachers or heads of institutions. They didn’t live long enough to influence” (Schulman, 2012: 84). Additionally, CDC statistics still point to queer Black men being the most impacted by HIV (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2023). Schulman provides further nuance to those infected with HIV:

---

87 Croft, Personal Interview with Author, April 4, 2024.
88 Croft.
“While, of course, AIDS devastated a wealthy subculture of gay white males, many of the gay men who died of AIDS in my neighborhood were either from the neighborhood originally, and/or were risk-taking individuals living in oppositional subcultures, creating new ideas about sexuality, art, and social justice. They often paid a high financial price for being out of the closet and community-oriented, and for pioneering new art ideas” (Schulman, 2012: 38). Additionally, she spends an entire chapter of the book—titled “Realizing They’re Gone”—talking about not only the artists and writers who have faded into obscurity who died themselves, but also the reverberating effects in those creators’ spheres (Schulman, 2012). Schulman’s elaborate anecdotal evidence highlights the importance of the “mobilization of memory” in relation to the AIDS crisis. For an organization like Visual AIDS, this includes the both the circulation of the existing art from those who passed away and the amplification of perspectives of both HIV/AIDS survivors and those who knew these artists of the past. In fact, such initiatives deny such artists from being “of the past.” Displayed on the Guggenheim in 2015 by Kay Rosen for Visual AIDS’s “Day With(out) Art”—an annual protest and collaboration to honor the losses of the art community to AIDS—were the words “AIDS ON GOING GOING ON,” (Figure 3.1) which Kyle Croft also titled the conclusion to his Masters Thesis on Visual AIDS’s Day With(out) Art (Croft, 2020). The mobilization of memory remains a key way for queer artists to point out that such traumatic histories are ongoing, New York offering a primary landscape for this exploration given its vast queer history.

This chapter highlights three unique ways in which artists mobilize queer memory. The work of Frederick Weston offers a glimpse at the artist as archivist, his perspective as both an AIDS survivor and a witness of the city’s rapid gentrification reflected in the ephemera he collected and incorporated into his work. Sharon Hayes—while still having lived amidst radical artist communities in New York in the early to mid-90s—touches on earlier collective queer memories that are not her own. By “respeaking” these moments in queer history, she became a vessel for inserting them into her current context both through embodied performance and audio installations in galleries. Finally, artist collectives REPOhistory, General Idea, and fierce pussy produce art that

takes on a life of its own, their interventions mobilized through dispersal and circulation throughout the city (e.g. street signs, buildings, subway cars). Given the dramatic changes that New York City has undergone, the mobilization of memory functions as disorienting as per Ahmed, as many of these narratives have become “invisible” through mechanisms of erasure like gentrification or—even simpler—forgotten.

Frederick Weston: The Artist as Archive

Frederick Weston (1946-2020) moved from Detroit to New York in 1971, yet by no means was he comfortable: “I think when I grew up in Detroit, and even my experience in my college education in upstate Michigan, I thought I was prepared for racism when I came to New York, and I found out that it was more racism, and sexism, that I could possibly handle. And it was really like, it took me a while. You know, I had to learn to live here in New York a while before I came to love and appreciate it.” (Weston, 2016). His first job at
the Tinderbox—“a gay clothing store on Amsterdam and Seventy-Second Street”—left him on the “periphery” of a lively gay scene of fashion designers and models (one of the owners was famous model at the time Clay Johns; Weston & Delany, 2021: 36-7). It was not until a few years later when he moved into the Esquire Hotel—an SRO in Times Square—that he was able to make the city’s underground queer culture his own. He frequented the Trix and got a feel for how these scenes in Times Square moved: “Brilliant people in high positions used to come to Trix Bar. Trix was kind of the place that you needed to go! You needed to hang out there or at least go there to say you’ve been there. There was a whole choreography to it. You come in, and you sit by the bartender that you’re most familiar with. You make conversation, and the drinks only cost five dollars. You can sit on the drink and it looks good. The more people at the bar, the better it looks—that’s how they make the money. And there were all these activities, like the pinball machine, the jukebox, the pool table, and all of that. So you sit down with an open packet of cigarettes next to you. The next chair is like an invitation to someone to offer you a cigarette or a drink” (Weston & Delany, 2021: 42). Such a description points to Weston’s observant nature and attention to detail, which would end up reflected in his art practice. Kathy Hogan—the owner of Trix—commissioned Weston for $300 to decorate the bar, which he ended up covering in wallpaper he made with a copying machine. The wallpaper followed a unique gradient; starting as stripes in the front of the bar, the wallpaper slowly became formal portraits, then bar-goers, then porn stars by the time it reached the back of the bar. Not only did the wallpaper reflect the atmosphere of the bar—more formal at the front where you walk in to more intimate at the back—but it also allowed patrons to look for photos of themselves on the walls. In this way, the wallpaper was Trix itself through its plastering on the walls and its representations of the visitors.

When Trix closed and the owner opened Stella’s at the top of Times Square on Forty-Seventh Street in 1996, Weston was hired to do coat-check concession. Weston described this gig as a prime example of the constant hustling he did in Times Square: “I was always hustling, figuring out how to be of use. How can I be of use, so that somebody will help me get what it is that I need? Sometimes that’s just recognition and appreciation,
but sometimes it’s dinner and a place to eat. *So the coatroom was a way of me being part of the bar.* It gave me a reason to go to the bar every night. I did my performances as a coat-check girl and wore crazy outfits. I like the idea of helping people with their coats, and so that was part of the performance. The coat check was only a dollar, but I could usually get more because of my performance” (Weston & Delany, 2021: 47). Weston started taking Polaroids of those whose coats he checked as a part of this hustle, selling them the one they liked and keeping the other. With the discarded Polaroids, he covered the wall of the coatroom (Figure 3.2), similar to the composition of the wallpaper at Trix. Yet, the photos only made up a small portion of the items that Weston compiled, his apartment filled with binders and binders of collected items, named by category and organized alphabetically. His “Stella’s” binder contains everything from photographs of the different outfits he wore working coat-check to a program from the bar’s Academy Awards party. He described his entry into this archival work as follows: “I started in the 1960s, with invitations for fashion shows and making flyers for my college fraternity. We’d need a flyer but there would be no money. So what was available? The copy machine. I started reading about Ray Johnson and others who were doing copy art and mail art, sending things, making letters. And I was always collecting stuff, saving stuff. I started making binders in college. If I’d be interested in a subject, I’d make a file I was interested in a lot of things, so the file became a binder. I actually have tons and tons and tons of books, too. I love my books. I become attached to stuff that I’ve invested my time and energy in. It gets to be like part of my identity. Really, it’s almost like the things that I own are me. They explain who I am” (Weston & Delany, 2021: 59) This last note of Weston identifying with these collected items illustrates how those binders are an extension of himself. It is fitting, then, how Bruce Benderson recalls how Weston was able to do without handing out tickets to customers, “memorizing the link between customer and wrap, never making a mistake no matter how crowded it was” (Benderson, 2021: 76).

Himself the archive through which he sourced the materials for his art, Weston’s works allowed him to not only insert himself into spaces like Trix and Stella’s through collages on the walls, but also into gallery spaces
as he gained more recognition through the support of organizations like Visual AIDS. Kyle Croft found Frederick Weston to be a major “success story” of the organization, which dedicates a significant amount of resources to presenting artists who might not have been noticed otherwise “in more of a commercial art context” with the ultimate goal of them gaining capital and resources.\(^8\) This culminated in his representation by the gallery Gordon Robichaux near Union Square, which put on his first solo exhibition in 2019 titled “Happening” as well as a forty-year retrospective with Ortuzar Projects in 2020 (for which he passed away before

\(^8\) Croft, Personal Interview with Author, April 4, 2024.
its display; Gordon Robichaux, “Frederick Weston (Estate”). Yet, I find his site-specific exhibition “Blue Bedroom Blues” in the Ace Hotel to provide the most direct intersection of Weston’s personal histories and his place-based art practice. Weston lived in the hotel starting in the 1990s when it was the Breslin—a run-down SRO—and its conversion to the Ace Hotel pushed him into a one-bedroom Chelsea apartment through a buyout deal (Vadukul, 2020). The Breslin was one of many SROs that Weston lived in, having bounced around other spots in Midtown including the Esquire and the Senton (Vadukul, 2020). Weston described life in the SROs as follows: “Single room occupancy—people live in New York like they live nowhere else. They may have a room. The room might—if you’re lucky, you have a sink in the room and a bed in the room and a refrigerator in the room, but it might not be any cooking. You might not be able to cook in the room, and you may not have a toilet in the room. You know, you may have to go down the hall and share a toilet, you know. So, I found a single room occupancy that had an enclosed closet that was big enough to go in and lay down and shut the door and take a nap. And it had its own bathroom with a sink and a tub and a commode. And it was—it was on the second floor, so it had really high ceilings. It was in an old ancient hotel. [laughs] It was probably on the historical registry for being a flophouse. It had to have been a flophouse back in the tin pan alley days” (Weston, 2016). Even if it meant offering his welfare check for a room to stay or having to work as a concessionaire at an all-night porn theater (among his other slew of hustles), Weston made a living for himself by rooting himself in Times Square (Weston, 2016).

Therefore, the site of the current Ace Hotel interacts directly with both Weston’s personal history of survival as well as the neighborhood’s dramatic changes, the shift from the Breslin to the Ace Hotel a much later and minute example of the “Disneyfication” of Times Square accelerated by the Giuliani Administration. Such a term encapsulates the hyper-commodified and tourist-oriented transformation of Times Square (a flagship Disney Store opening in 1997), but also the fact that the Walt Disney Company played a major role in supporting the neighborhood’s development, requiring the removal of porn stores as a condition of its
involvement (Warner, 1999). The title of an article from the New York Times encapsulate the reaction of those in power well: “Disney Wished Upon Times Sq. And Rescued a Stalled Dream” (Bagli & Kennedy, 1998). Such an article makes sense given the New York Times Company’s key role in the Times Square Business Improvement District, also having supported Giuliani’s stringent zoning laws seven different times in the press (Warner, 1999). Samuel R. Delany—whom which Visual AIDS paired with Weston to have a conversation for the “Duets” series—talks about such changes in Times Square Red, Times Square Blue (1999), which combines his personal experiences in the porn theaters (the same ones Weston worked and frequented) with a theoretical breakdown of the importance of cross-class contact in such scenes, drawing heavily on Jane Jacob’s The Death and Life of Great American Cities (1961; Delany, 1999). Such a valuation of cross-contact rooted in place carries into Weston’s work, his binders of ephemera born from such moments of contact.

So what collected items did Weston insert into his “Blue Bedroom Blues” exhibition at the Ace Hotel given this context? The center of the gallery space (Figure 3.3) featured a bed that doubles as a bench for visitors to rest on, Weston doing much of his work in bed (Deters, 2020). Yet, it is the bathroom that inspired Weston the most, the installation featuring a variety of collages from his Blue Bathroom Blues series (1999) (Figure 3.4). The series was Weston’s first venture into art about his experience with HIV/AIDS. “It took a long time after I was diagnosed for HIV/AIDS to come in my writing and art. I think I backed up into it by writing about choices, the choices I was making. I started off by writing about a color in a room, and a feeling. In that way, I started writing about blue. Blue bathroom blues, blue bedroom ballads—blue, blue, and beyond. Then the products and the medicine got into it that way. The general idea of Blue Bathroom Blues was that everybody goes to the bathroom, everybody knows what the color blue is, and everybody chooses the things they have in their bathroom. The bathroom is the most intimate place. Potty training is a big deal—it’s the first thing you have control over. Most of the time you’re in the bathroom alone, and you’re often naked. It’s the place that you spend a lot of time when you’re sick. It’s all about elimination, letting something go—it’s really Freudian. I
Figure 3.3: Frederick Weston, *Blue Bedroom Blues*, Jan. 6–Feb. 6, 2020. Courtesy of Gordon Robichaux.

Figure 3.4: Frederick Weston, *Blue Bedroom Blues*, Jan. 6–Feb. 6, 2020. Courtesy of Gordon Robichaux.
think at some point going to the bathroom is a pleasure” (Weston & Delany, 2021: 61; 64). The collages were created to accompany his poetry that touches on the same topics of what the bathroom means for someone living with AIDS, a site of pain and discomfort yet also home to a variety of products and treatments to alleviate such symptoms of disease. In one collage (Figure 3.5), the logos for both the common over-the-counter allergy medication Claritin and HIV treatment Norvir stand out amidst clippings of crystal clear water as well as medication directives like “MEDICATION SHOULD BE TAKEN WITH PLENTY OF WATER.” Another one of the collages (Figure 3.6) similarly features blue water, blue sky, and various blue patterns spliced by portions of medication labels, but a quote by Cristina Saralegui stand out saying “There is a great lack of understanding that no one is invincible from AIDS.” Weston’s monochromatic collages draw the viewer in with ocean waves and clear skies to be met by such provocations, giving them a glimpse into his reality of extended time in the bathroom self-medicating for survival. As bedroom and as bathroom, *Blue Bedroom Blues* evokes the deeply private feeling of the home, yet the sense is that Weston certainly wanted you to enter this world. He said about the series: “...my idea was to make my art as extremely personal and intimate as possible. Things I should be ashamed of and I’m putting them in your face. I’m painting them blue and I’m putting them in your face. I’m telling you about all my bathroom situations. I’m telling you about all my funky bedroom situations” (Weston, 2016). Someone without AIDS—or perhaps another chronic illness—may feel a stark contrast between the serene blue imagery and the matter-of-fact pharmaceutical information. Yet, this duality is what makes the bathroom a sacred space for Weston, one of the collages not featured in the exhibition showing his own bathroom (Figure 3.7). A shrine of candles, bathroom products, medications, and photos of Christ with a backdrop of Polaroids in a similar way he decorated the coatroom at Stella’s, both Weston’s own bathroom and the exhibition he created at his former SRO at the illustrate how he imbues space with his spirit through his archival material.
**Figure 3.5:** Frederick Weston, *Blue Bathroom Blues*, 1999. Mixed media collage, 11 × 8.5 inches. Courtesy of Gordon Robichaux.

**Figure 3.6:** Frederick Weston, *Blue Bathroom Blues*, 1999. Mixed media collage, 11 × 8.5 inches. Courtesy of Gordon Robichaux
Figure 3.7: Frederick Weston, Blue Bathroom Blues, 1999. Mixed media collage, 8 × 6 inches. Courtesy of Visual AIDS.

Weston’s “collecting” bordered on obsessive hoarding. He proudly acknowledged his membership to Clutters Anonymous, which he describes as “a fellowship of men and women who share their experience with cluttering and hoarding and trying to not make it be a detriment to their lives, and to come out of that situation and to recognize it is a disease” (Weston, 2016). Attending meetings a couple of times each week, Weston developed a deep sense of kinship with these people: “They’re an amazing group of incredible people who you’d not expect but most of us share the shame of having too much stuff and other people’s opinions about us that we have too much stuff. Or may not be the best homemakers and housekeepers as we might be. And again it’s
about stuff. I think Americans just have so much stuff” (Weston, 2016). His connection with Clutters Anonymous points to his valuation of this tendency of his, one that lends itself well to documenting the dramatic changes he witnessed in his own life and in New York City more broadly. Especially given his passing in 2020, the existence of the various reconfigurations of Weston’s materials offers insight into how previous iterations of New York remain today, the city itself an archive.

**Sharon Hayes: “Respeaking” and Embodiment of Histories**

Sharon Hayes offers the inverse of Weston’s art practice, venturing **out** into the city herself and embodying a queer historical archive through her performance art rather than bringing **in** various ephemera to construct one’s own personal queer archive. In our conversation about her site-specific art in New York City, Sharon Hayes placed extra emphasis on the following statement: “Performance is **live**!” While it may seem this goes without saying, Hayes’ reminder is important given the art world that she rose to prominence in, dominated by quiet and stagnant gallery spaces. The two pieces we focused on—*Everything Else Has Failed! Don’t You Think It’s Time For Love?* (2007) and *I March In The Parade Of Liberty But As Long As I Love You I’m Not Free* (2007/8)—were both performances turned sound installations, so questions arise surrounding what aspects of these artworks are truly “live.” Hayes moved to New York in 1991 and immersed herself in the downtown dance and theater scene: “The first work that I made I showed at the WOW Café, the legendary East Village theater run collectively by lesbians” (Hayes & Bryan-Wilson, 2018: 24). The network of experimental performance spaces like WOW Café combined with the urgency of creators amidst governmental neglect in the wake of the Reagan era fostered a tight-knit downtown theater community. Hayes found the small, intimate performances—”there was a kind of humbleness in going to these small spaces and watching these people who you could almost reach out and touch”—to be both deeply vulnerable and political (Hayes & Bryan-Wilson, 2018: 24).

---

90 Hayes, Personal Interview with Author, April 15, 2024.
The performativity of AIDS activism—"organizing meetings, lectures, readings, protests, political funerals"—heavily influenced her first moments engaging with art in New York. The only engagement with filmmaking that Hayes recalled were through her friends’ interventions and a video workshop with DIVA TV in 1996 or 1997 (Hayes & Bryan-Wilson, 2018). Yet, leaving theatrical work helped her realize three important factors she wanted her art practice to encompass: “performance as a speech act; the relationship of the event to what I started calling the ‘not-event’, which was its document; and the relationship between what I had known to be performers and audiences, but what I started calling instead speakers and listeners” (Hayes & Bryan-Wilson, 2018: 26). These three aspects end up illustrated in much of Hayes’ work going forward, yet I find them to especially inform how she move through New York in Everything Else Has Failed! and I March In The Parade Of Liberty, bringing queer histories into the streets and capturing those resultant dynamics in sound to be installed in a gallery space.

For Everything Else Has Failed! Don’t You Think It’s Time For Love? (2007) Hayes begins saying: “My dear love, my sweet lover, I’m shaking a bit. I’m not sure exactly how to begin. To give you a picture of where I am: I’m standing on the street on the corner of Sixth Avenue and Fifty-First Street. I’m holding a microphone and it’s plugged into a small amplifier. It’s Wednesday, September 19th” (Hayes, 2007). For the initial performance aspect of the piece, Hayes stood on the sidewalk (Figure 3.8) in front of the UBS building in Midtown during lunch hour every day for a full work week (Monday through Friday) and recited a “love address” to an anonymous lover overseas fighting the war in Iraq.  

This political context was central to the piece as many people she knew at the time were “having major life breakdowns because of the atmosphere in war.”  

Having been involved in various political circles in the city herself, she felt burdened by a “political depression that felt collective.”  

---

91 Hayes, Personal Interview with Author, April 15, 2024.
92 Hayes.
93 Hayes.
it had no effect, the war raging on to when she had to do this work in 2007 for Art in General’s exhibition in the lobby of UBS.\(^94\) She recalls “certain dilemmas arose immediately” when meeting with the curator: “how do you address a site as inculcated as that one?”\(^95\) Midtown being a hyper-corporate part of the city (especially that part of Sixth Avenue), Hayes felt limited by the “very very specific set of publics.”\(^96\) For one, Hayes describes them as a “really heteronormative population, or at least presenting so to get their jobs.”\(^97\) Secondly, the gallery space was

---

\(^94\) Hayes, Personal Interview with Author, April 15, 2024.
\(^95\) Hayes.
\(^96\) Hayes.
\(^97\) Hayes.
relatively separated from the public, with “funny flats” attempting to offer a glimpse into the gallery to no avail. Therefore, Hayes “butched [her]self up a little so the address of love wouldn’t be enveloped heteronormative” and performed the piece outside during lunch hour, a busy time in the corporate world of Midtown, Manhattan. In this “performance as speech act,” Hayes’ longing for the war to be over and to be with her lover functions as a convergence of her public-facing politics and her private-facing love life, blurring the line between these spheres given her compounding emotions. She directly references passerbys to engage them in this tension:

“I’m standing on the street and people are passing in front of me and behind me, and I look at them and I find traces of you. Like that guy walking with his eyes cast down. Like I’ve seen you do when you’re struggling to find the precise way to tell me something about your life. Or this one who passes and his gaze holds mine like yours did when we first passed each other fourteen months ago. Or that guy with one lip that’s slightly redder than the other, though his is his bottom lip and yours your top, and this one who just tucked something into his pocket, like I’ve seen you do countless times before, with those little scraps of paper you use to write down important thoughts, or to remember newspaper headlines you don’t want to forget. I passed one last week that made me think of you:

“Recruited at Seventeen; Dead at Eighteen” I know this might be hard for you to hear: situated where you are without daily news and when the horror that’s happening around you that it seems quite small that one 18 year old boy decided to be a model soldier and then was struck down in a war that he convinced his mother to let him fight in but its on my mind, my love, along with thoughts of you and the last time we saw each other. You were swinging your arms widely and you were bounding joyfully down the street... you could’ve been eighteen” (Hayes, 2007).

98 Hayes, Personal Interview with Author, April 15, 2024.
99 Hayes.
In this way, speech becomes the primary mode through which Hayes provokes those around her, forming a “speaker/listener” dynamic that operates as a queering of Midtown through an Ahmedian disorientation: “to make things queer is certainly to disturb the order of things” (Ahmed, 2006: 161). Important to acknowledge is that Hayes—beyond her butch-leaning appearance—makes clear that the relationship in this love address is a queer one:

“At a point in every person’s life, one has to look deeply into the mirror of one’s soul and decide one’s unique truth in the world, not the way one wants it or the way one hopes it, but the way it is. And so my truth is that I am a gay American. This is an intensely personal decision; one not typically meant for the public domain, but we shall not and cannot let it pass. I march in the parade of freedom, but as long as I love you I am not free. We must speak with the humility that is appropriate to our limited vision, but we must speak” (Hayes, 2007).

Hayes points out how this performance to an “imagined ‘you’” intentionally plays with the “blur” between a singular and plural “you,” this engagement of the audience a form of contagion in which they question whether they are a part of Hayes’s moment of queer intimacy.

This contagion heightens Hayes’ nonnormative engagement with space in a neighborhood that is perhaps the most emblematic of New York neoliberalism, home to the city’s global financial and commercial hubs. Hayes pointed out the hyperregulation of public space in a major city like New York and how that impacted her work. While love addresses feel public, the space in front of UBS was in fact private, a security guard approaching Hayes once and she had to explain how she had a permit among other approval.

---

100 Hayes, Personal Interview with Author, April 15, 2024.
101 Hayes.
The excerpt above also directly references the title of Hayes’ following love address project (and a song by Bob Dylan): *I March In The Parade Of Liberty But As Long As I Love You I’m Not Free* (2007-8). Unlike *Everthing Else Has Failed*, this subsequent work involved a mobile component in which Hayes marched from the New Museum (Bowery and Prince Street) to a prominent site for public protest in the city (Figure 3.9). These locales included Union Square, Tompkins Square in the East Village, Confucius Square in Chinatown, and Christopher Street Park (Hayes, “I March”). Hayes maintained the same narrative of a woman yearning for her lover amidst the ongoing Iraq War, yet also chose to incorporate a wider range of moments in queer history. This is apparent from the start, in which she points out that World AIDS Day had just taken place.

“My dear lover, I’m taking to the streets to speak to you because there doesn’t seem to be any other way to get through. so that you have a picture of where I am, I am standing on the street at the corner of Grand St. and Bowery. I am speaking into a megaphone. Today is Saturday, December 8th. Last Saturday was World AIDS Day” (Hayes, 2007-8).

Given Hayes’s movement through the streets of New York—an American city hit especially hard by AIDS which resulted in notable activism—this small note of the recurring day of awareness simultaneously harkens to the height of the AIDS epidemic in the city while emphasizing that the pandemic is ongoing. Additionally, her pining was inspired directly by Oscar Wilde’s letters to Lord Alfred Douglas, and she also inserts slogans from gay liberation protests.

“How many times do I have to tell you? You’ve lighted a fire in me my love, and I’m being burned up. If you long for me, I long for you. I’m waiting for the war to end. Come out against war and oppression! I love you. I love you entirely. I love you so much I can’t sleep. A dream is a dream, reality is real, open the door to the way we
Figure 3.9: Sharon Hayes, *I March In The Parade Of Liberty But As Long As I Love You I’m Not Free*, 2007/8.

Courtesy of Sharon Hayes.

feel! The news is grave, love is so easily wounded. Out of the closets and onto the streets! We will not hide our love away; we will not be silent. ACT UP! FIGHT BACK! I’m beginning to think we speak in different tongues. Surely you know that desire is cruel. I feel certain I’m going mad again... nothing is real but you. I’m a stranger in my own country. I feel as though a part of me has been lost like a limb in battle. What do we want? When do we want it? I feel like I could talk to you for a very long time, like I could stand here on the streets for hours and hours, for days
and days, for longer even. And the hope that some mere phrase, some single word, some broken echo of love might reach you and find its way to bounce back to me. How many times can I say this to you?” (Hayes, 2007-8).

Hayes points to I March In The Parade Of Liberty being a response to her own disillusionment with politics at the moment, especially amidst “a population in New York that had almost given up on political protest.” This resignation caused her to explore earlier moments of political activity: “As a queer person who came out in the early to mid 90s, I couldn’t even account for my feelings on gay power... but I did have feelings.” Hayes was drawn to early gay liberation protests because they were part of a moment when solidarity among movements (e.g. black power, women’s liberation, Vietnamese liberation) were tactically utilized. While she was not directly a part of those protests, she used what she calls “respeaking” of past protest chants to bring these histories into her present (Hayes & Bryan-Wilson, 2018). Renate Lorenz considers Hayes’ technique a “transtemporal moment of embodiment and recontextualization of the spoken text,” Hayes herself saying in an email to Lorenz: “The work utilizes performative strategies to filter a spoken text through a process of interpretation (a sort of oral to oral translation) that is necessarily informed by the historical gap that exists between two moments of enunciation: the original and the re-spoken or re-presented” (Lorenz, 2014: 146). Lorenz calls the work I March In The Parade Of Liberty a form of “abstract drag” as listeners “hear a voice that is, however, not (only) the voice of the one speaking, but (also) the voice of another person who they possibly do not know or at any rate do not see but who is nevertheless absent and whose other bodily features, voice, emotionality, and authorization by an institution are not present” (Lorenz, 2014: 146). In my conversation with Hayes, she highlighted one line in I March that captured the power of respeaking in engaging the speaker and the listener: “You refuse to answer my phone calls, my letters, and my messages but I know that the ears are the only

102 Hayes, Personal Interview with Author, April 15, 2024.
103 Hayes.
104 Hayes.
orifice that can’t be closed, and so I will speak to you from every street corner if I must.” Hayes found the centrality of repetition to amplify her words, stopping “every two blocks or so” to read the love address. As a “performed loop not a technological loop,” Hayes found the repetitions to “produce a kind of affect that expand[ed] the desperation and one-sidedness” of her professions, “interacting with the temporal conditions of the city.” She finds this “material sincerity”—the labor of walking through the streets holding “itself hold[ing] desire”—to “materialize a kind of commitment.” Additionally, the mode of marching bridged Hayes’ own experience of protest (1990s feminist and AIDS activism as well as anti-Iraq) to the legacy of queer protest that came before her through both the physical action and the locations in New York she moved through. Hayes also articulated how a march could also be interpreted as a search, connecting to the narrative of Hayes’ lost lover as well as a broader sense of loss for radical activism in the city.

*I March In The Parade Of Liberty,* as Hayes puts it, “use[d] site as a platform on which to blanket this text.” She described to me how “site performs as a scene,” differentiating in those scenes the “audience” versus the “public.” Hayes considered the audience to be those who knew she was an artist, even following along as she performed *I March In The Parade Of Liberty.* The public, as she described, “just took me as I seemed to be: a person with a bullhorn.” This public, Hayes found, took more liberty to shout things at her, her repetitions of “I love you” often evoking an “I love you too.” Yet, beyond site as “neighborhood and place,” Hayes also saw site as “norms and habits,” saying: “In all of those works, I’m very aware who lingers nonnormatively in that location. A preacher, someone who people identify having mental health problems, an unhoused person... I become aware of other people who are unwanted.” She points out “the attention economies of a given site”

---

105 Hayes, Personal Interview with Author, April 15, 2024.
106 Hayes.
107 Hayes.
108 Hayes.
109 Hayes.
110 Hayes.
111 Hayes.
and “who is a part of that economy.” Hayes also found this “street culture,” as she called it, to be even more heightened at night, those performances eliciting a lot more energy from passerbys.  

Yet, the performance element of Hayes’ work is only one aspect or her art practice. She finds the conversion of such performances into gallery installations to be central to her craft, through which she ultimately produces a document she calls the “non-event” (Hayes & Bryan-Wilson, 2018). Both the installations for Everything Else Has Failed! Don’t You Think It’s Time For Love? and I March In The Parade Of Liberty But As Long As I Love You I’m Not Free are comprised of large PA speakers and accompanying prints. The installation for Everything Else Has Failed has five spray-paint prints of different colors (Figure 3.10)—reminiscent of activist wheat pastings—and five accompanying PA speakers facing them (Figure 3.11). The installation for I March In The Parade Of Liberty features one print (Figure 3.12)—listing performance dates and to “assemble” at Prince and Bowery (the location of the New Museum)—and one PA speaker (Figure 3.13). Hayes finds the “non-event”—this document in the gallery that serves to “readdress” a primary audience—to “explain just enough of what happened.” She found audio installations to best capture the performances, the recordings capturing “the instability of [her] voice” and “the way you could hear the outside audience.” She finds the non-event to be more about her in “audio form” than “embodied form.” Yet, she does emphasize that the PA speakers not only stand in for the speakers in front of the UBS headquarters or her megaphone, but also for human bodies, the tripods elevating the speakers enough to be human-size. Finding video to “make no sense” for the documentation of such a project, Hayes’ installation emphasize her valuation of “performance as speech,” allowing her respeaking to interact with museum and gallery-goers.

112 Hayes, Personal Interview with Author, April 15, 2024.
113 Hayes.
114 Hayes.
115 Hayes.
116 Hayes.
117 Hayes.
118 Hayes.

Figure 3.11: Sharon Hayes, *Everything Else Has Failed! Don’t You Think It’s Time For Love*, 2007. Sound installation, spray paint on paper. 5 PA speakers, 5 playback devices, 5 framed works on paper. 20 x 24 in (each print). Museum of Modern Art, New York, NY. Courtesy of Sharon Hayes.
Figure 3.12: Sharon Hayes, *I March In The Parade Of Liberty But As Long As I Love You I’m Not Free*, 2007/8.


Figure 3.13: Sharon Hayes, *I March In The Parade Of Liberty But As Long As I Love You I’m Not Free*, 2007/8.

The New Museum, New York, NY. Courtesy of Sharon Hayes.
The Artist Collective and Street Signs as Dispersal

Rather than conveying queer histories through Hayes’s mode of performance and embodiment, REPOhistory brought these contexts to the forefront through a ubiquitous aspect of the urban landscape: street signs. Their *Queer Spaces* project (1994) organized by Storefront for Art and Architecture, the group designed nine different street signs with lesser known site-specific queer histories dispersed throughout lower Manhattan (Figure 3.14). As pink triangles, the signs stood out as overtly queer from a distance, designating the surrounding space as a queer site of interest (Figure 3.15). The decisions on where to place signs were ahead of their time, including at the piers to shine light on the site of Marsha P. Johnson’s untimely death (occurring just two years prior) or at the former location of 1970s lesbian club Bonnie and Clyde’s (a popular spot in the West Village for Black lesbians and activists; NYC LGBT Historic Sites Project, “Pompier Restaurant / Tenth of Always / Bonnie & Clyde.”). Even Julius’s bar—which now has an official commemorative bronze plaque as a registered historical site—was receiving little attention at the time compared to Stonewall around the corner, Julius’s patrons running out to thank REPOhistory while installing it (Hertz et al., 1997: 366). Yet, because of the signaling of these lesser-known locales as queer through signage, there were more reactions than just praise. The sign for Bonnie and Clyde’s (Figure 3.15) mysteriously disappeared “right away,” which members of REPOhistory blamed on firemen at the active firehouse across the street (Hertz et al., 1997: 366). Such reactions made members installing the sign at the former Everard Baths (c. 1915-1985; 28 W. 28th Street) wary of the “suspicious” glances of owners of a nearby lunchonette, yet they found out that he actually missed the Everard and the gay clientele that supported his business (Hertz et al., 1997: 366). In this way, REPOhistory’s *Queer Space* signs touch on queer archives of feeling in two ways: through display of the information on the signs (born from concrete archival work that REPOhistory conducted) and through the provocation of New Yorkers who remember these locations. The former offers the
Figure 3.14: REPOhistory Queer Spaces (1994) flyer. Courtesy of Gregory Sholette.

Figure 3.15: REPOhistory Queer Spaces, 1994. Christopher and West Sts., New York, NY. Courtesy of Gregory Sholette.
initial act of disorientation through the conjuring of specific nonnormative place-based histories. The subsequent affective experiences of those who view the sign varied greatly, a blend of contagion and haunting. For example, in removing the sign across the street from their firehouse (while not confirmed), the firemen could have been provoked by the specific history of Bonnie and Clyde’s or the pink triangle alone, either way the sign having enough of an impact for their removal. The display of such a sign offered an important intervention given the continued dwindling of lesbian bars, amplifying a distinct queerness associated with women of color who have even less fewer to gather than white lesbians (Gieseking, 2020). When it comes to haunting, the Everard Baths sign allowed the owner of the luncheonette to feel again what his block was like when the baths were there, him then keeping that legacy alive by retelling it to REPOhistory members installing the sign.

Such a historically-based spatial intervention illustrates the nature of REPOhistory’s art practice. I had the privilege of talking to Betti-Sue Hertz, Todd Ayoung, and Lisa Maya Knauer over Zoom about Queer Spaces and the collective more broadly. Ayoung did not consider REPOhistory to have a specific trajectory, the group operating as a study group (if anything) in its early stages.119 Reading plenty of queer theory, Ayoung began to get “fed up” with the inability to conjure up applications of the things he read: “queer theory back then was very anarchist and too individual-based.”120 In addition to these theoretical frameworks in which REPOhistory functioned, Knauer highlighted the other artist/activist groups they brushed shoulders with at the time (e.g. Group Material, antigentrification collectives). Amidst these contexts, Knauer pointed out REPOhistory’s initial difficulty in figuring out how they would engage with public space, at first leaning towards ephemeral guerilla art interventions (perhaps more aligned with their leftist activist milieu).121 Yet, one of the group’s early members Tom Klem felt they should do something more permanent.122

---

119 Hertz, Ayoung, and Knauer, Personal Interview with Author, May 9, 2024.
120 Hertz, Ayoung, and Knauer.
121 Hertz, Ayoung, and Knauer.
122 Hertz, Ayoung, and Knauer.
Project (Figure 3.16)—the group’s first project—was sponsored by the Lower Manhattan Cultural Council as part of a larger city wide public art project commenting on celebrations of the Columbus Quincentennial that year (Thompson, 2017). Through weeks of collaboration with the New York Department of Transportation to obtain permits for six months (which were extended for an additional six months), REPOhistory was able to display thirty-five signs that “repurposed” history (hence the group’s name) through the problematization of colonial and industrial histories rooted in the Financial District. One sign featured a ladder and a noose (Figure 3.17) in reference to the Leisler’s Rebellion— a 1689 coup in which the working class (led by merchant Captain James Leisler) overthrew the colonial government in New York—because the elites could not find a carpenter willing to craft a ladder for Leisler’s execution (Duncombe, 1992). Under this history on the back of the sign, REPOhistory asked: “How many histories does this site hold? Whose history is remembered?” (Duncombe, 1992). Such a question speaks to their view of space as an archive of the histories that came before, their intervention combatting the differential nature of a Lefebvrian production of (white colonial) hegemonic space that leaves marginalized voices unheard (e.g. the working class, people of color, Indigenous people, and women). Through their developed connections with city officials, REPOhistory had the legitimacy to pervade a variety of institutions in the city, whether it be through free maps provides at the World Trade Center’s visitors information booth or through guided walking tours for students led by members of the collective (Figure 3.18). The latter tours allowed REPOhistory’s impact to go beyond the signs, the members cementing these nonnormative histories through bonds forged by this direct engagement with their audiences.

Hertz points out how the Lower Manhattan Sign Project (1992) paved the way for Queer Spaces (1994) a couple of years later, all of the project’s signs displayed on posts controlled by the New York Department of Transportation. Yet, Knauer highlights key differences in the project that made the project special. One,

---

123 Hertz, Ayoung, and Knauer, Personal Interview with Author, May 9, 2024.

Figure 3.16: REPOhistory, Letter to educators for *Lower Manhattan Sign Project* walking tours, 1992. Courtesy of Gregory Sholette.
having created fewer signs (nine versus thirty-five) made it a much more collaborative and intimate process for the members of REPOhistory. Unlike the Lower Manhattan Sign Project—in which each sign was individually authored and had its own unique aesthetic—Knauer felt that each sign reflected the collective as a whole, born from their queer archival work (including at the Lesbian Herstory Archives in Park Slope, Brooklyn) and the unifying criteria of finding places that were lesser-known. ¹²₄ This latter criteria felt especially important given the projects restriction to the more-historicized lower Manhattan due to its collaboration with Storefront. Through “broadening” and “legitimizing the kinds of places that were queers spaces,” Knauer highlighted the collective’s active effort of “not falling into flattening.”¹²⁵ Yet, it is the queer kinship born from collaboration on such a project that took Queer Spaces beyond a simple retelling of these radical histories, imbuing each sign with this sense of the collective.

This overtly queer nature of the project was essential given that the year of Queer Spaces (1994) was also when Rudy Giuliani was elected mayor, ushering in his era of systemic erasure through urban development and quality of life policies (touched upon at other points earlier in this project) that would make it difficult for such an intervention again (Sholette, 2011). Prior to this, REPOhistory had built rapport with Mayor David Dinkins—who rewarded REPOhistory an honorary scroll from the City and pronounced the day the Lower Manhattan Sign Project opened “REPOhistory Day” (June 27, 1992)—and head of the Department of Transportation Frank J. Addeo. Unfortunately, REPOhistory immediately faced challenges under Giuliani’s administration, their subsequent project—a collaboration with New York Lawyers for the Public Interest (NYLPI) titled Civil Disturbances that highlighted monumental legal precedents jumpstarted by marginalized New Yorkers—denied by the NYCDOT even amidst their history of having received installation permits in the past. (Sholette, 2011). While this ultimately was lifted and the group installed their signs in 1998, Giuliani’s New

¹²₄ Hertz, Ayoung, and Knauer, Personal Interview with Author, May 9, 2024.
¹²₅ Hertz, Ayoung, and Knauer.
York continued to trouble the collective, such as when a luxury hotel (the Millenium Premier) opened up next to one of the *Civil Disturbances* signs (designed by William Menking) focused on the illegal demolition of hotels in Times Square and they removed the sign, threatening legal persuasions to NYLPI if it was reinstalled (Sholette, 2011). As REPOhistory member Gregory Sholette puts it: “Giuliani’s ‘Quality of Life’ campaign seemed bent on systematically erasing traces of the New York REPOhistory struggled to remember, as if eliminating an invisible legion of ghosts was as essential to neoliberal reforms as was balancing municipal budgets, or providing tax breaks to wealthy landlords and corporations.” Sholette’s illustration of the power of the Giuliani administration makes Gordon’s question important at this historical conjuncture: “How do we reckon with what modern history has rendered ghostly?”

Regardless of the challenges that arose under Giuliani, Hertz seemed fond of this moment for artistic interventions, temporally situating *Queer Spaces* (among their other projects of that time) at a “unique moment for art making, thinking about public space, [and] homelessness” in the 1990s. For example, many artist activist groups had similar commitments to interventions in public space. A couple years before *Queer Spaces*, the lesbian art collective fierce pussy had a similar interest in utilizing the power of the street sign through their 1992 project *Renaming the Streets* (Figure 3.19), a guerilla intervention where they installed their own street names (made from stencils and spray paint) above the official ones along the Gay Pride Parade route: “Christopher Street became Tomboy Turnpike, Hudson Street became Audre Lorde Lane, Sheridan Square became fierce pussy Plaza, Bleecker Street became Martina Navratilova Court, Fifth Avenue became Joan Nestle Boulevard, and 10th street became Kitty Tsui Avenue.” Additionally, Hertz pointed out that this active period for REPOhistory took place before 9/11 and “the corporitization of space” under Mayor Bloomberg, two moments post-Giuliani that radically shifted New York towards the city we know today, one that only has room for
Hudson Yards and multi-million dollar art installations. In what Knauer called the “Blade Runner-ization of New York City,” such grassroots artist collectives like REPOhistory have become harder to come by. Knauer points out how much of this can be attributed to the increased precarity of being a New Yorker given how inaccessible and expensive it has become. Working on the board of a nonprofit herself, she finds it difficult to ask “young people wanting to do community-based art interventions” to volunteer. Hertz recalled Knauer’s daughter crawling under the table during their meetings, pointing to the reality of having to juggle a volunteer-based art collective like REPOhistory with other needs. Yet, Todd Ayoung still told me how he still finds an intervention like REPOhistory’s necessary in the current context, highlighting current discourse around “queering the state.” Ayoung specifically pointed out a conversation between queer historians Samuel Clowes Huneke and Hugh Ryan for the Boston Review, which Huneke discusses his idea of a “queer democracy,” which draws on queer theory and centers a “communitarian sense of relationship as its basis, as a way of thinking about political structures that best express our obligations to each other” (Huneke & Ryan, 2024). Huneke’s theory builds upon a 1994 article by Lisa Duggan that coined this “queering of the state” in a call for queer theorists to engage more with politics given within the surge in moralist right-wing attacks on the LGBT community (Duggan, 1994). Given both a heightened neoliberal flattening in New York through seemingly endless gentrification and a political context not too different from which Duggan was writing, perhaps a queer

---

126Hertz, Ayoung, and Knauer, Personal Interview with Author, May 9, 2024.
engagement with the state by artists could introduce some urgency to the highly institutional nature of the art world. Applying the analytic as was implemented for nonprofits in Chapter 1, a “both-and” approach ends up being the most productive answer to Ayoung’s concerns. At a time where it feels that any placement of a mural or a statue is a shoddy attempt by real estate developers to up property values, is it possible for an intervention like REPOhistory’s today? Rather than leaving such an engagement to the city’s dominant art institutions, perhaps artists and activists should consider the power of the collective to engage the state again.

Modes of Presentation Constructing an Archive of Feelings

A short return to Ann Cvetkovich’s An Archive of Feelings helps unify the various modes of presentation introduced in this chapter as mobilizations of memory. Cvetkovich points to the necessity of engaging with this histories: “Lesbian and gay history demands a radical archive of emotion in order to document intimacy, sexuality, love, and activism—all areas of experience that are difficult to chronicle through the materials of a traditional archive” (Cvetkovich, 2003: 241). Through his collecting of ephemera based on his experiences living as a Black man with AIDS through the “Disneyfication” of Times Square, Frederick Weston was able to reconfigure his personal archive through his collages in a way that engages the present in these feelings. Sharon Hayes directly enveloped everyday New Yorkers on the street in her “love addresses,” drawing them into the histories of activism and the built environment of the city that inspired this affective experience. Through the utilization of city resources and the power of the collective, REPOhistory subverted both historical norms rooted in sites throughout New York while also creating a network within the collective for queer kinship and critical education. Such artists engaging with their own memories as well as collective memories connects to Cvetkovich’s analysis of trauma, a fundamental aspect of each of these artists’ practice given the widespread loss and pain experienced by queer people in New York: “The history of trauma often depends on the evidence of memory, not just because of the absence of other forms of evidence but because of the need to address traumatic
experience through witness and retelling” (Cvetkovich, 2003: 241-2) Given the power of feeling for such an engagement, art functions as a necessary tool for queer people to amplify their histories.
Conclusion

On Looking Back

For their map-fold book *Call a Wrecking Ball to Make a Window* (2012), Shana Agid superimposed their own experience of being queer in New York City over David Wojnarowicz’s through both mapping and storytelling (Figure C.1). Through Wojnarowicz’s journals and other documents recording his movements through the city, Agid outlined the routes he took throughout Manhattan and put them with their own (Figure C.2). The accompanying stories on the side of the map feature a narrative of Wojnarowicz’s times in Manhattan intermittently disrupted by Agid’s own times, in one moment illustrating Wojnarowicz’s times at the pier and the next illustrating Agid’s early queer moment of kissing their sixth-grade crush (Figure C.3). In this way, Agid collapses the various differences between Wojnarowicz and theirself (e.g. age and time inhabiting the city) that functions as an ode to the figure as well as a reckoning with his death and the vast changes in New York’s landscape. In an interview with Visual AIDS, Agid admitted to the nostalgia embedded in such a project given her affinity with the subject of Wojnarowicz, yet they also problematized this nostalgia, which they find “to knock down all the extenuating circumstances, the complications and tenuous relationships and all the carefully put-together alliances [of a historical moment]; all of those things that make what people can accomplish together (or not) real, and reduces it to just triumph or defeat [when in reality] this stuff was so nuanced and so important in its nuance.” *Call a Wrecking Ball* is currently in the Hood Museum of Art’s collection, and I had the privilege of looking at it in a class with my now-thesis advisor Dr. Erin Collins in the one of the first geography classes I had ever taken. Agid’s delicate approach to overlaying histories left me with a sense of the complicated, traumatic pasts for queer people in New York. Now understanding the significance of a figure like David Wojnarowicz in touching on artistic and political queer histories, this project allowed for me to revisit Agid’s book with newfound clarity. Its complicated relationship to nostalgia mirrors my own approach to queer
Figure C.1: Shana Agid, *Call a Wrecking Ball to Make a Window*, 2012. Artist’s book; letterpress on Thai mulberry paper with letterpress-printed envelope. Photo taken on my phone. Courtesy of the Hood Museum of Art.
Going downriver past the aging piers, the Circle Line Cruise boats crossed to the Jersey side of the river so passengers wouldn’t see his drawings on the warehouse walls from their seats. Giant pterodactyl heads and giant men having giant sex.

What I would tell him if I could is that I was so small when he began making the 3x13 mile frame of this long, thin, towering island full of holes and dark spaces his own. I want to tell him about Angie Vineyard, who I’d loved since we met in the sixth grade.

About how years later, after a very long night that was ending only as the sun came up through the pinholes in the blinds at my parents’ house, she said, come here. And patted a spot on my bed across from her.

How he’d been making a new world, where a girl could kiss another girl twice, in the very early morning, and never forget the feel of it.

**Figure C.2:** Shana Agid, *Call a Wrecking Ball to Make a Window*, 2012. Photo taken on my phone. Courtesy of the Hood Museum of Art.

**Figure C.3:** Shana Agid, *Call a Wrecking Ball to Make a Window*, 2012. Photo taken on my phone. Courtesy of the Hood Museum of Art.
histories in New York, as by no means do I seek to romanticize the past. Born out of survival, the piers were a refuge as both escape from homophobia and transphobia as well as their literal shelter for homeless queer people. Artists had no option but to operate out of urgency given the spread of AIDS that was killing them and their friends, and witnesses of this death like those included in this project also create from this deep-seeded trauma. Both BAAD! and The Center were founded amidst this context, speaking to the necessity for queer spaces in the late 20th century. While it does spend a lot of time looking at the radical ways in which queer people made space for themselves amidst innumerable obstacles, this project attempts to avoid the glossing over of these violent histories, criticizing institutions like the Whitney for what I have characterized as a neoliberal flattening of radical queer art.

Under the guise of improving the “quality of life” for New Yorkers, the city erased these enclaves for queer people were erased and left no viable alternative. Such urban development seems to be nonstop given the city’s current state, therefore I found that a search for the good within continually institutionalized queer space (especially given the city’s dwindling public space) made for the most productive analytic of queer placemaking in New York City. Through such an approach, I was able to engage with the nonprofit sphere with an open mind. In considering them *intimate semi-publies*, I found relevant queer artistic interventions that felt more accessible than a museum given these spaces’ community-centeredness. It is here that Herrera’s “both-and” approach came to be central, as the complete casting away of the nonprofit would leave even fewer resources for queer people today. Circling back to what Jen Jack Gieseking (in relation to her idea of *constellations*) or Malcom Rio (in relation to ballroom culture) said about the challenges for queer people of color in maintaining space, this project seeks to assert the non-white queer presence in long-standing brick-and-mortar queer spaces to expand beyond the notion of Black and brown queer space as ephemeral (Rio, 2020; Gieseking, 2020). Especially given an organization like BAAD! that was dedicated to queer people of color in its inception—maintaining a foothold in the Bronx after its pivot amidst rising rent costs—hope still remains for
queer people of color maintaining physical space in an everchanging city. Additionally, particularly when looking at an organization like The Center with whiter and more homonormative histories, existing structures can be subverted through radical art interventions (e.g. On Selfhood: Young Lesbians within the Margins).

**On Looking Forward**

Circling back to Muñoz’s utopian hermeneutics in considering “queerness as horizon” and putting it in conversation with Tourmaline’s “trap door” phenomenon outlined at the end of Chapter 2, queer futurity ends up being essential in rounding out this project’s focus on pasts rooted in the present. A “trap door” being something of a fantastical phenomenon (at least I have never encountered a trap door) yet also quite tangible given its reference to the ubiquitous object of a door, I find Tourmaline’s “clever contraptions that are not entrances or exits but secret passageways that take you someplace else, often someplace as yet unknown” to function well as a spatial phenomenon (Gossett et al., 2017: xxii). Given the variety of art that Muñoz uses to illustrate “queerness as utopia”—much of it performance art which is inherently site-specific (especially given his analysis of the stage as a site)—I find art to be the most obvious manifestation of Tourmaline’s “trap door,” something she certainly has an affinity for as an artist herself. Muñoz spends an entire chapter of *Cruising Utopia* developing a utopian queer aesthetic realm that “can potentially function like a great refusal because art manifest[s] itself in such a way that that the political imagination can spark new ways of perceiving and acting on a reality that itself is potentially changeable” (Muñoz, 2019: 135). In this way, art can be a radical agent of change through its subversion of a normative politic, a mode for the creation of “trap doors” in its ability to imagine a different world.

This project also functions as a survey of the how the rise of neoliberalism in New York City led to the current state of the art world through the analysis of *sites of presentation*. Looking at nonprofits as *intimate semi-publics*, the predominance of museums and galleries as dominant sites of presentation is troubled. Through
their accessibility and community-centered orientation, these spaces have something that the museum as an institution does not have at its core. Yet, given the “both-and” approach I take towards art-focused nonprofit spaces, what is the compliment in this “both-and” that fills in where nonprofits miss? Closing out with who I started this project with, AA Bronson considers zines to be the closest thing to maintaining a radical queer art presence in New York, a city in which he finds the “radical queer presence” to have “gone way down in the past 15 years” (Bronson lives in Berlin, Germany now). Many considering Bronson to be the “Grandfather of Zines”—having been director of Printed Matter (New York-based nonprofit distributor of artists’ books) and founding the annual NY Art Book Fair in 2005 and the LA Art Book Fair in 2013—his perspective on the importance of this medium is rooted in experience (Morley, 2019; “How It All Began”). While the expansive history of zines could be its own project, they have origins in the 1960s as an alternative means for artists to present their artwork, making them a made of presentation that replaces the need for a concrete site of presentation (Corley, 2023).

Yet, beyond just searching for the radical grassroots interventions that fulfill Herrera’s “both-and,” a return to this project’s primary analytics of disorientation and contagion illustrates the lingering effects of quotidian queer artistic expression and how that connects to Muñoz’s queerness as horizon. I spend plenty of time illustrating the impact of radical queer art as “disorienting” in how it exposes normative subjects to something “out of place” that they have less knowledge of or experience with (Ahmed, 2006). The framework of contagion emphasizes the otherness of these interventions, subverting space and time in the Foucauldian sense through the production of heterotopias and heterochronies (Lorenz, 2014). Simultaneously, this captures the all-consuming nature that art can have, contagious in how it draws its audience in, a lot like the aforementioned “trap door.” Yet, Ahmed also emphasizes the quotidian movement of nonnormative bodies in space as disorientation (Ahmed, 2006). This brings me back to something that inspired me to start this project: the queer

---

127 Bronson, Personal Interview with Author, March 12, 2024.
affinity for the creative. By having to live in a world built in opposition to them, queer people (and any 
marginalized group for that matter) often develop nonnormative ways of thinking to cope with what goes on 
around them. This inherently requires creativity, as the intersecting hegemonic systems of homophobia, 
transphobia, racism, and misogyny (among others) pervade all aspects of our lives (especially in the United 
States). In this way, art is survival for marginalized groups. What I find to be the most powerful thing about art is 
its ability to amplify difference through beauty. Thinking of the old couple who stayed to watch the 
BAAD!-sponsored performance by trans artists at a Mexican restaurant in the Bronx or the luncheonette owners 
reminiscing about Bonnie and Clyde’s when REPOhistory put up the commemorative sign, beauty is what fuels 
these intervention’s contagion. Put simply, beauty is contagious. The affective experience born from such 
beautiful moments disrupts the ontologically static as Muñoz calls for, maintaining an orientation toward queer 
futurity.
References


Aviles, Arthur. “Personal Email to Author,” May 15, 2024.


Bronson, AA. Personal Interview with Author, March 12, 2024.


———. Personal Interview with Author, April 4, 2024.


https://books.google.com/books?id=h2LdDwAAQBAJ.


Glantzman, Judy. Personal Interview with Author, March 27, 2024.


Gordon Robichaux. “Frederick Weston (Estate).” Accessed May 2, 2024.


———. Personal Interview with Author, April 15, 2024.


Hertz, Betti-Sue, Todd Ayoung, and Lisa Maya Knauer. Personal Interview with Author, May 9, 2024.


https://www.bostonreview.net/articles/queering-the-state/.


https://doi.org/10.14361/transcript.9783839416853.


Morales, Richard. Personal Interview with Author, March 20, 2024.


*Queer Histories of the Piers | David Hammons: Day’s End.* YouTube, 2021. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tS990SCeQIE.


Rivera, Raul. Personal Interview with Author, March 11, 2024.


Sholette, Gregory. “History That Disturbs the Present.” In *Dark Matter: Art and Politics in the Age of*


Vadukul, Alex. “Frederick Weston, Outsider Artist Who Was Finally Let In, Dies at 73.” The New York Times,


