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Queer nightlife and the potentiality of heterotopic space

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Abstract

Over the past decade an explicitly queer nightlife culture has established itself around the globe. Drawing on a mixture of academic theory, political activism, club hedonism and experimental art, these fervent sites have arisen in opposition to the broader assimilative trends that have come to define queer cultural life. In Naarm, a city renowned for its arts scene and progressive values, the queer nightlife ecology is both vibrant and volatile: it is defined as much by its radical political vision as its many failures to achieve it, and its disparate communities are often riven by conflict, disagreements, and harm. Despite nightlife's promise of liberation and transformation, utopic analyses fixated on the radical fail to account for these sites' complex relations to power. My research proposes *heterotopia* as a method for encapsulating this contradictory nature. Informed by interviews with nightlife creators, performance analysis, field observation, and participation as a performer, event producer, and DJ, I outline the varied political, social, and cultural visions that arise in the wake of Naarm's queer nightlife. I find that the spatial experiments of nightlife—and heterotopia—are unstable performative zones generative of different modes of being. The ideological contestations and discoveries that define these sites are not confined to the time-space of the event, but surge beyond their bounds: they alter the everyday world, the lives of nightlife participants, and redefine the domains of 'queerness' alongside its nightlife territories. This provides a further evidentiary basis for the contention that it is within heterotopic sites that our political and cultural models are tested in-micro.

Besides testing the established core principles of heterotopia, however, applying the heterotopic model to a community-culture that unfolds in real time allows a unique

interrogation of heterotopia's relational and performative qualities. This project finds that heterotopia, as a lens of ambivalence, is a fruitful method for capturing the complex reality of queer spaces. Further, it marks an original contribution to the field of heterotopic theory through its reliance on interview and co-performative witnessing. This method highlights that heterotopia must be understood in relation to other heterotopic sites, including those in the near or distant past, and not only through its relationship to the dominant or hegemonic culture it is situated in. It also provides a model for the exploration of heterotopias' impacts on the individuals that pass through them, mapping the affectual landscapes and intimate revolutions of everyday life that may result from heterotopic participation.

Declaration

(i) the thesis comprises only my original work towards the Doctor of Philosophy except where indicated in the preface;

(ii) due acknowledgement has been made in the text to all other material used; and

(iii) the thesis is fewer than the maximum word limit in length, exclusive of tables, maps, bibliographies and appendices

Regan Michael Lynch

Preface

Chapter Six, as it appears in this thesis, has partially benefited from the editorial feedback of Tavia Nyong'o, Chair and Professor of Theater & Performance Studies, Professor of American Studies, and Professor of African-American Studies at Yale University. This oversight was provided within his role as Consortium Editor of *The Drama Review*'s special issue on *PRESENCE*, for which a revised version of this chapter was accepted for publication. A revised portion of Chapter Five has also been accepted for publication at the *Contemporary Theatre Review*, with further editorial oversight from Professor Alyson Campbell.

Early findings from this research were presented at the 2019 International Federation for Theatre Research conference in Shanghai, and the 2018 'Queer Legacies, New Solidarities' conference hosted by Deakin Gender and Sexuality Studies, the Australian Women's and Gender Studies Association, and the Australian Queer Archives.

This research was completed with the support of an Australian Government Research Training Program Scholarship.

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Without the contributions of participants, this project would not exist: the interviewees, but also the stage performers, the promoters, the DJs, the thousands of patrons, the venue runners, the bar staff, and the security staff who comprise Naarm's nightlife. As this thesis itself is a testament to, my perspectives on art, community, gender, sexuality, race, friendship, love, and philosophy have all been irrevocably changed through the people I have met, danced with, or the creative work that I have seen in these spaces.

I would like to thank my partner Jesse, who has supported me throughout the entirety of producing this thesis, and on whose dining table half of it was written as we remained isolated throughout the lockdowns of 2020. I would also like to thank my parents, who have always sought to support me to find my own path in life: one which led me to the privilege of this incredible project.

Finally, I would like to dedicate this work to Bridget Erin Flack. Your boundless passion and generosity are sorely missed.

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Introduction

On a Thursday night in Naarm,[1] along Collingwood's Smith Street, the 86 tram line runs northward and southward through a busy district of bars and clubs. One of these bars, The 86—christened after the tram that pauses outside its front curtain—would often be filling up by ten o'clock, a congregation of people crowding the footpath and spilling out onto the street, lounging on tables collaged with comic book pages, waiting for performances to start. The pageantry of costume and the boldness of sexuality splayed across those tables in the form of superheroes was reflected in the crowd, whose own brightly-coloured collage is irreducible to a simple description. On one of these evenings, a red van pulled up outside the bar. An announcement inside drove everyone onto the footpath until the barricade of the smokers' area was overflowing with people wondering what was happening and where. The red van popped its boot to reveal two black speakers blasting Grace Jones' 'Pull Up to the Bumper,' and a performer in a one-piece suit holding light-up orange signalling batons. They climbed onto the roof of the van and, partly illuminated by the fluorescent light of the Coles supermarket behind them, danced. The crowd on the street screamed appreciatively while, balcony by balcony, curious residents appeared skywards to watch the spectacle happening below.

[1] I refer to Naarm by its First Nations name throughout this thesis, as opposed to the name it was given on colonisation: Melbourne. This is an increasingly common practice within queer nightlife, and will assist in situating this project in its political and historical context.

This performance, in contrast to the ways of living that more generally characterised the street, was a temporary reformulation of spatial and cultural relations. To begin with, the individuals that made up the crowd were dressed in ways that defied predominant gender norms, scrambling the ability of onlookers to neatly slot patrons into either side of a binary. Although an occasion for celebration here at this moment, these presentational transgressions can and often do result in violent consequences when demonstrated in other places or other times (even on the same street (Booker and Prytz 2021)). But this was not the only thing. A car, parallel parked on the street, was transformed into a portable stage, recalling momentarily the Mardi Gras tradition of floats or, even further, a deeply ironic reconstitution of the wagon-bound medieval religious pageant (Blasting 2000). This drew the bar's patrons outside and subsequently turned them into performers, as secondary spectators emerged above or drove by in vehicles. In many ways, for fifteen minutes or so, there was a new order of things (Foucault 2002). The relation between pedestrian and car, punter and road, citizen and residential development was momentarily reversed. Instead of nightlife patrons craning their necks carefully into the road to determine safe crossing, keeping a wary eye on vehicles, motorists looked back over their shoulder while attempting not to swerve into the gutter or oncoming traffic. Instead of local residents squinting up at cranes and scaffolding—each rising residential development symbolising rising rents and the ever-increasing precarity of the venues who live in their shadow—it was instead the building residents who were called out to consider the nightlife that animated the street.

Throughout this thesis, I investigate how and why queer[2] people in Naarm produce 'heterotopias' through the practices of nightlife and performance. Heterotopias, which I will define

[2] In using the term 'queer' to describe the subject of this thesis, I use a linguistic shorthand that does not do justice to the heterogenous subjectivities of nightlife, particularly the identities of First Nations people or those who come from outside an English-speaking or Western context. Rather than a representation of how nightlife's denizens universally identify, 'queer' situates this project within a field that attends those who are harmed by, or transgress, the violence of Western gender and sexual systems, and conduct their lives tangentially to hegemonic norms. I further explicate the ways queer is used within the context of this thesis throughout this preface, Chapter One, and Chapter Two.

in more detail in Chapter Two, are spaces that provide a glimpse of how it is to live otherwise: they are social, cultural, and discursive experiments generated live in space, taking forms that cannot be fully predetermined. Kevin Hetherington describes them as “spaces of alternate ordering” (1996, p. viii), as sites set-apart from everyday society where different rules, cultural values and practices temporarily take precedence. Although they are not utopias, they are material spaces where utopic ideas may be put to the test. They are, fundamentally, ‘other’ spaces, and may be associated with the feeling of being ‘somewhere else,’ of ‘stepping through the looking glass,’ of unease, of revelation, or of alterity. Through the contention that Naarm’s queer nightlife is generative of heterotopias, this thesis yields new insights to a rapidly proliferating field of queer nightlife scholarship, while providing an in-depth perspective on the animating personalities and productive spaces of Naarm’s thriving art culture. Beyond this, it documents a famously precarious ecology of shuttered businesses, fleeting enthusiasms, and transformational affect, a riotous and unstable construct that nevertheless is of profound value to many of its members. Heterotopia—much like nightlife’s denizens—does not emerge from the club (or this thesis) unchanged. My sustained engagement with these spaces has challenged and expanded heterotopia’s conceptual bounds, transforming my approach from the systematised analysis of siloed spaces and practices to also incorporate the relations between sites, or what Micah E. Salkind refers to as the “constellations of affiliated spaces” (2019, 12). It has positioned me as a witness to (and subject of) the onward affects that ripple and surge in the aftermath of heterotopic experience, as the party slips its bounds and incurs into the flow of everyday life.

As briefly demonstrated above, nightlife performance (and the performance of nightlife) can be a tool for the questioning and reformulation of behavioural and ideological norms, as well as the hierarchies of power that produce them. This is a practice of exceptional importance for people who suffer violence, discrimination, or exploitation due to their position[3] in a hierarchy of race, sexuality,

[3] The notion of a subject ‘position’ in a hierarchy of marginalisation was influentially coalesced by Kimberlé Crenshaw into her groundbreaking theorisation of intersectionality (Crenshaw 1989). This idea has been

gender, ability, citizenship, or any other category that demarcates groups of people (Salkind 2019). The centrifugal force of nightlife for queer people in particular is evident from the very inception of contemporary queer theory and cultural studies: Esther Newton's seminal publication *Mother Camp* charts the day-to-day lives, oral histories, and performance spaces of drag artists and homosexuals in 1960s America (Newton 1972); nearly two decades later in 1990, drag performance is used by Judith Butler in aid of developing their theory of performativity in *Gender Trouble*, widely accepted to be a founding text of what would become queer studies (Butler 2007; McCann and Monaghan 2020). In queerness' folk histories, it is nightlife that sets the stage for self-realisation, a coming-of-age tale told and re-told through decades of literature, film, and television.[4] Conversely, nightlife is the site of manifold collisions with State and homophobic violence, with some of the most historicised including the Stonewall Riots in New York City, the first Sydney Mardi Gras, the Tasty Nightclub Raid in Naarm, and the Pulse Nightclub shooting in Orlando (Meyer 2020; Muñoz 2009; Russell 2019; Stein 2019; Wotherspoon 2016).

Nightlife has held a strange fascination for me throughout my entire life.[5] Like many children I was preoccupied with fantasy worlds and escapism: devouring novels, writing stories, and roaming through the various outer-suburban terrains I was raised in pretending to be a warrior or a wizard. My upbringing was archetypically white Australian. Although both my father and mother grew up in difficult to devastating circumstances, they secured some upward mobility through their careers in the Defence Forces, policing, and the fossil fuel industry. This was a conservative environment where

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problematised by succeeding scholars; Jasbir Puar (2013), for instance, argues for a complicating analysis of (queer) assemblage. For present purposes, this hierarchical position is understood as unstable, contingent, and related to other systems beyond the identities that categorise types of people. See Chapter One for further discussion.

[4] Some prominent examples include *Dancer from the Dance* (Holleran 1978), *Edge of Seventeen* (Moreton 1998), and *POSE* (2018-21). The value of the queer dancefloor has also featured prominently in think-pieces, newspaper articles, and cultural criticism, particularly since their widespread closure due to the Covid-19 pandemic (Sun 2020).

[5] See the beginning of Chapter Eight for a more detailed description of nightlife's influence on me as a child, before I'd ever stepped foot in a venue.

I was rarely, if ever, exposed to alternative views and politics about gender, sexuality, and race. At both school and home I was shielded from knowledge regarding the potentialities of queerness, and about the facts of colonialism and our part in it. Before I ever knew I was queer, or what queerness was beyond being a faggot or a poofter or *so gay*, the glimpses I had of nightlife afforded me the same feelings of expansive curiosity and promises of self-actualisation that I felt while immersed in fantasy landscapes. When I was about eight years old, I was so inspired by the film *Coyote Ugly* that I would take the ripped CD of the soundtrack to my bedroom, stand on my bed, and dance to Blondie as if I were atop a bar earning tips. As I grew older I was increasingly attracted to club and punk music, and although I had next-to-no actual referent of what they meant or the scenes the music arose from, it was something that powerfully affected me.

In my teenage years and early-20s I pursued an education in the performing arts. I studied Drama in Meanjin[6] and became involved in student, community, and independent theatre productions. It was throughout this time I became more invested in theory, politics, and questioning the social mores I had taken for granted (yet still felt indescribably alienated from) my whole life. Accelerated by my experiences of domestic violence and sexual assault in these first years of adulthood, I felt myself distanced from other men, both gay and straight, and forged new solidarities and friendships with people different to myself who, despite my relative privilege, I nonetheless felt more connected to through shared experiences of oppression, trauma, and a desire for rebellion. I questioned my gender and began to experiment with wearing skirts, dresses, and makeup, both in my everyday life and in my performances. I became increasingly involved in the "low" forms of performance wherein I could express my marginal experiences and developing politics, such as comedy, burlesque, and cabaret. A turning point came when I was 23, after I was invited to a Beltane ritual-party by a self-identified witch that I had become friends with. The invite-only event was held at a house in the suburbs of Meanjin, and its attentiveness to immersive design, ritual speech, and

[6] The original Turrbal name of the land where Brisbane is located.

live music and performances decidedly turned my interest from the creation of queer theatre to the cultivation of queer community and political, artistic space. Soon after, in search of more spaces like this, I moved southwards to Naarm, and quickly became involved in its queer nightlife ecology first through burlesque performances, and eventually as a DJ and event producer.

Nightlife has been a privileged site of queer theorising, providing a crucial framework for the development of not only queer theory, but of queer subjectivities. Increasingly, too, since the turn of the century (and perhaps unsurprisingly considering these histories) the study of nightlife itself has become a pillar of queer endeavour. In a similar fashion to queer theory, 'nightlife studies' has emerged from a wide variety of disciplines that, despite its diffuse origins in aesthetics, affect, architecture, criminology, cultural studies, ethnography, geography, health, performance studies, queer studies, and race and ethnicity studies, has accrued the distinction, history, and idiosyncrasies of its own field. Alongside the broader academic shift toward the ontological (Barnwell 2020), researchers have turned their attention to the affective dimensions of nightlife and its world-making potentialities, with influential scholarship in the field including the work of José Esteban Muñoz (1999, 2009) and Elizabeth Buckland (2002). The breadth of queer nightlife subjects include, but are not at all limited to: Black ballroom culture in Detroit (Bailey 2013), the lesbian drag king scene in Sydney (Drysdale 2019), the burgeoning gay rave scene of 1990s New York (Buckland 2002), a memorialization of North American and London gay bars (Lin 2021), ethnomusicology and sonic affect (Garcia 2020), political and aesthetic qualities of gay Indian nightlife (Khubchandani 2020), the worldmaking aesthetics of club fashion (moore 2018), the history and affects of house music culture in Chicago (Salkind 2019), and a recent collection of essays on *Queer Nightlife* following a 2014 symposium of the same name in Illinois (Adeyemi, Khubchandani, and Rivera-Servera 2021).

In light of the well-documented and theorised assimilation of queer people—particularly white gay men—into neoliberalism (Castiglia and Reed 2011; Duggan 2003; Puar 2007; Schulman 2012; Warner 1999; Willet 2000), a thriving queer ecology that appears, at least at first, to be

devoted to the custodianship and evolution of radical thought presents an intriguing (potential) counterweight. For scholars, nightlife promises an oasis of affective and ideological overflow in the salted earth of normalisation: an answer, even, to Muñoz' call for a *doing towards* the then-and-there of queerness' ever-receding futurity (Muñoz 2009). Despite widespread capture of queer spaces by commercial interests, nightlife scholarship proposes that there is *something that remains* within the variegated sites of queer nightlife, some alluring affective thread that has survived still in the ordered chaos of dancefloors, raves, and dive-bar performances. Despite (or because of) this widespread interest, the clandestine locales of queerness emerge as spaces of ambivalence and contradiction, characterised variously as places of "foundational vitality… of creativity, diverse expressive cultures and counter-cultural transgression of established societal norms" (Hae 2012, 3), as well as "sites of alienation that are circumscribed by normative modes of exclusion" (Adeyemi, Khubchandani and Rivera-Servera 2021, 2). Even within the same night, one person can have highly contrasting and emotive experiences, moving between liberative potential and oppressive harms from one moment to the next.

This thesis proposes heterotopia as a spatial model that is capable of interpreting these jarring incongruities, yet otherwise follows in the wake of the methodological rhythms and flows that have loosely congregated in the form of a nightlife methodology.[7] Attentive to affect, post-human yet almost hyperbolically fixated on the minutiae of relations between people, ethical, intersectional, and emergent from an intimate embeddedness within the sites of study,[8] it is within the scholarship of nightlife that I have found avenues to understanding the experience of attending queer parties in Naarm. In broadly ethnographic terms, contemporary nightlife theory is developed through an 'insider' perspective, relying on the theorist's submersion within a culture to absorb

[7] Nightlife methodologies and the heterotopic spatial model will be explicated further in Chapters One and Two respectively.

[8] Each of these traits will (would it be a queer study otherwise?) be complicated in a multitude of ways throughout the thesis.

embodied and affective knowledges, to engage participants ethically, to avoid inadvertent transgression, and to speak more authoritatively of nightlife's subjectivities. In this vein, discussions contained within my own project have been founded on a series of thirteen long-form interviews with DJs, performers, promoters, and patrons of Naarm's nightlife spaces, conducted between January 2020 and September 2021. Further to this, I have drawn the ensuing analyses from attending events, stomping on dancefloors, and watching performances since August 2017 to the time of writing (November 2021). As my involvement deepened, I secured spots as both burlesque performer and DJ on event line-ups, and soon began producing a number of warehouse raves and club nights of my own in Brunswick, the CBD, and Collingwood.

An analysis of the constant becoming (and undoing) of the present provides a surplus of information to interpret, but it comes with its own challenges. During the course of this project, political movements such as MeToo and Black Lives Matter swept through nightlife spaces, unleashing their own ideological revolutions that altered the relations of power in queer venues and made explicit some of that which was suppressed. There were also political attacks from the public sphere, most notably the Australian same sex marriage survey of 2017, wherein the Government encouraged a renewed debate on queer rights that led to a surge in violence against queer people. Then, of course, the disasters: predictable events, such as developer buyouts of precious venues, caused their own unsettling displacements; much less predictably, the Covid-19 pandemic shuttered dancefloors for months on end, with no promise of their return for the better part of a year. The instability of lockdowns, restrictions, and other public health measures affected a strangely ambivalent transformation of nightlife's cultural and economic position. The effects of these events remain in flux, eliding neat conclusions.

The geographical terrain of the project primarily spans metropolitan Naarm, but retains necessary linkages between the local and other sites, be they interstate, international, historical, or virtual. The reliance on memory as resource positions participants, as well as myself, to

contextualise our observations of Naarm's queer nightlife within the framework of our own biographies, extending the interpretive frame of *why* these spaces *mean* the ways that they do to a variety of other sites, such as: arts festivals, Church, dance school, diasporic origin, gay clubs, rural bars, and sharehousing. Although this is not a historical study, its propositions are rooted in the contending histories that have preconditioned the spatial formations of the present. Naarm is first and foremost a colonial city founded on the displacement, dispossession, enslavement, internment, forced removal of children, incarceration, and massacre of First Nations people by colonists (Cowie and Graham 2021; Goudia 2015; IWGIA 2021). Although some of these practices have ceased, others have changed form or still continue today (Fowler and Ilanbey 2021; O'Brien 2021). First Nations people, especially First Nations women, are the most incarcerated population on Earth (Anthony 2017; IWGIA 2021), and remain disproportionately likely to 'die in custody' as a result of police violence during arrest, a lack of adequate medical assistance while they are detained, or because of their sheer overrepresentation as targets of policing (Anthony and Blagg 2021; Doherty and Bricknell 2021; Office of the Aboriginal and Torres Straight Islander Social Justice Commisioner 1996; Wahlquist 2016). The Government that presides over Naarm continues to destroy ancient and sacred First Nations sites, while also expanding the prison system and accelerating the militarisation of the police force (Bell 2020; Fitzroy Legal Service Inc., Human Rights Law Centre, and Victorian Aboriginal Legal Service 2021; Funnell 2019; Office of The Hon. Daniel Andrews Premier for Victoria 2021; Taylor 2021; Victoria Police 2014).

Naarm, like any other city, harbours its own queer histories of subjugation and transgression, ones that are inextricably bound with the violence of the colonial State and attempts to find relief from the strictures of heteronormativity it imposed (Baylis 2015). These histories have been outlined extensively in the work of the Australian Queer Archives, Graham Willet, Paul Fleckney, Emma Russell and others, encompassing the emergence of a Camp or homosexual culture, the Gay Liberation movement, AIDS activism, beats, police raids, the arrival of house music, and the burgeoning of Naarm rave from the derelict industrial districts left in the wake of 1980s recession

(Fleckney 2018; Phillips and Willet 2000; Russell 2019; Willet 2000). Within recent decades, Naarm has defined itself through subcultural movements and artistic revolutions, associated most closely with the underground, punk, art schools, graffiti, dive bars, and especially live music. It is seen (even if it is not always in actuality) as a progressive harbour for those who are marginalised elsewhere in the country, and a place where the political and cultural envelope can be pushed. As will be detailed throughout this thesis, it is these overlapping histories—and others—of State violence, repression, and regulation (as well as resistance to these forces) that have shaped the queer heterotopias of nightlife, and are integral to understanding the conflictual rifts, ambivalences, affective flares, and violent events that animate and fracture contemporary queer spaces.

Aside from its nightlife, queer performance in Naarm has received limited academic attention: the scope of this work has so far has focused on independent theatre companies, street activism, and durational public performance (Campbell 2018; French 2017; Strong 2020). This is a vastly different mode of presentation than the queer nightlife spaces that are the subject of this research—in these spaces, work is expressed for the community from which it emerges. These kinds of performance communities and the spatial practices that shape them provide an intimate and alternative view of queer performance spaces in Naarm that exist outside and beyond theatre and festival programming. Adeyemi, Khubchandani, and Rivera-Servera designate the territory of queer nightlife as "the variety of permanent, temporary, static, and mobile sites that queer people congregate in to get relief from the pressures of everyday life… nightclubs, bathhouses, and monthly parties, but also living rooms, street corners, and public parks" (Adeyemi, Khubchandani, and Rivera-Servera 2021, 3). Nightlife here extends beyond the gay bar or the commercial venue, to encapsulate improvised or temporary accommodations, backyard gatherings, public transport, the surrounding streets. This project, too, is attentive to the "capacious geographies" beyond the club (Adeyemi, Khubchandani, and Rivera-Servera 2021, 6), and the queer potentiality in sites and spaces not named as such. At the beginning of this project, I defined my research scope as *events held in bars, nightclubs, warehouses, or other venues appropriated for use by queer people to host an event*

explicitly advertised as queer, particularly *events that feature performers or performances as a central feature of the event*. The militant 'queerness' of this scope has since slipped: the queerness of Naarm events may be buried in their form rather than stuck to their marketed surface, leaving a queer ethos or trace to inform events that are otherwise focused on music, or forging space for intersectional collectivities and solidarities that surpass the definitional confines of queer. Stage performance within the club remains a central figure throughout, alongside an approach that considers nightlife itself as performance (Adeyemi, Khubchandani, and Rivera-Servera 2021, 3).

'Queer' is a contested concept riven by exclusions, assumptions, and deconstructions. Graham Willet describes its initial character in the 1990s "as the celebratory voice of diversity and as, variously, style and militancy, celebration and patricide, shorthand and high theory" (Willet 2000, 262). Despite its all-encompassing aims, the presumptive white subject of queer theory has been interrogated particularly by decolonial and race scholars. As Gloria Anzaldúa notes, queer is often "used as a false unifying umbrella which all 'queers' of all races, ethnicities and classes are shoved under. At times we need this umbrella to solidify our ranks against outsiders. But even when we seek shelter under it we must not forget that it homogenizes, erases our differences" (Anzaldúa 1991, 250). This homogenisation results in queer people with the most capital and privilege exerting their influence over political movements and organisations, with the demands of queer people seeking further justice for Indigenous peoples, refugees, or people of colour, for example, dismissed (Cohen 1997; Duggan 2003; McCann and Monaghan 2020; Puar 2007; Warner 1999). This has led to a divergence of queer signification between the taxonomical and the ideological, meaning someone may be queer in the sense they are not cisgendered or heterosexual, but they may not be *queer* in the sense they otherwise do not challenge hegemonic norms or oppressive systems.

Fiona Buckland, writing in the wake of field work in New York City's queer nightlife, reaffirms these inadequacies of queerness' terrain, writing that "…it is difficult to speak of 'queer culture' because it is anything but a monolithic unity… A representation of a singular monolithic culture

flattens out the differences between people and their experiences in order to discover its laws…" (Buckland 2002, 9). Queerness, as characterised here by Anzaldúa and Buckland, can thereby enact a kind of taxonomical violence, erasing cultural particularity and the complex relations between people in service of a philosophical idea that does not reflect the material conditions it interprets. 'Queer' is in fact inextricably bound with violence: not only with the queerphobic attacks alongside which it has appeared, but with the violence of an institution, the University, that has always been "implicated in the process of colonisation" (Baylis 2015, 9). As will be further detailed in Chapter One, Western academic research practices have historically harmed and mis-represented minority groups, leading to a well-founded suspicion of knowledge systems that have originated from that context, including queerness (Adjepong 2019; Baylis 2015). Alongside the manifold deconstructions, critiques, and developments of queer theory led by Indigenous scholars, then, is the excavation, cultivation, and rejuvenation of Indigenous sexual and gender histories, decentring the Western framework and often doing-away with the terminology of queer and queerness altogether (Hodge 2015).

Beside its descriptive or identitarian usages, queer also relates to a way of doing or seeing: a mode of relation to hegemonic norms and a certain obliqueness, or at least ambivalence, with dynamics of power (Ahmed 2006; Cohen 1997; McCann and Monaghan 2020). Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick's attraction to queerness lies in "the open mesh of possibilities, gaps, overlaps, dissonances and resonances, lapses and excesses of meaning" it gestures towards (1993, xxvii), as well as "the experimental linguistic, epistemological, representational, [and] political adventures" it occasions and to which it refers (1993, xxvii). In a similar manner, Jack Halberstam proposes that we "think about queerness as an outcome of strange temporalities, imaginative life schedules, and eccentric economic practices" (Halberstam 2005, 1). While approaching the 'queer' of Naarm's nightlife, it is with this expanded modality in mind. Although deviation from cisheteronormativity is an integral element, it may be the case that not all those who participate in queer nightlife identify as queer. The nightlife's relation to normativity, however—ambivalent, contradictory, and often

reifying (rather than subverting) the norms of everyday life—does position it *queerly*. Sara Ahmed writes:

> [It] is important to retain both meanings of the word queer… This means recalling what makes specific sexualities describable as queer in the first place: that is, that they are seen as odd, bent, twisted. In a way, if we return to the root of the word 'queer' (from the Greek for cross, oblique, adverse) we can see that the word itself 'twists,' with a twist that allows us to move between sexual and social registers, without flattening them or reducing them to a single line. Although this approach risks losing the specificity of queer as a commitment to a life of sexual deviation, it also sustains the significance of 'deviation' in what makes queer lives queer (Ahmed 2006, 161).

The queer of nightlife is that without a neat terrain, somewhere between proscription and provocation, entangled with gender and sexuality yet clinging, too, to an array of moments, behaviours, ideologies, and affects that escape the encapsulation of queerness as purely subject identity in relation to cisheteronormativity.

The ethics of working within queer communities continues in Chapter One ("Queer Performance and Nightlife Methodologies'). Reviewing prior literature on queer nightlife, autoethnographic practice, and the role of the institutional researcher within a disadvantaged community, I lay out the foundation of the performative nightlife methodology that informs this project. I critically position my role in the field—the academic field, but also the 'field' of field work, the nightlife sites that are the subject—while complicating the notion of positionality through assemblage. Although affect informs the entirety of this thesis, the discussion within this Chapter foregounds the development of affect's relationship to heterotopia as discussed especially within Chapter Five and Six. In Chapter Two ("On Space") I attend to the spatial and geographic legacies of

queer research, and bring the concept of heterotopia and queerness into a critical relation. Taken together, these methodological framing and literature review chapters bridge the distance between the affective sensitivities of contemporary queer nightlife theory, and the deconstructive spatial models of heterotopia, in service of interrogating them mutually and proposing their symbiotic suitability in the study of nightlife.

Chapter Three ("Expression Without Harm: Creating Safe Spaces in Dangerous Places") centres around some of the most visible practices, contentions, and debates of queer nightlife: namely, notions of safety for patrons, of representation through 'diverse' line-ups, or of 'creating' or 'holding space' for marginalised people—what is otherwise described as *doing the work*. Through reflection on queer nightlife's strategies of exclusion, protection, solidarity, and disidentification, I in part document the influence of intersectional cultural theory on the practices and worldviews of nightlife participants. Race, disability, and consent emerge as major focal points for interventions into alternative imaginings of what queer nightlife can and should be, the traffic-jam metaphor of intersectionality mirrored in the jarring engagements of participants with the urban environment or performance. Conversely, the labour of performers demonstrates a productive slipperiness that may elide proper categorisation in search of a broader solidarity between struggles, or to subvert cultural and racial power structures.

In Chapter Four ("The Outside Comes In, or, What Makes a Heterotopia Work?") I continue and complicate the work of Chapter Three, by shifting attention from how participants are shielded from nightlife's 'outside,' to the modes of hierarchy, oppression, and violence that are invited in, replicated, or even exaggerated in queer nightlife spaces, as well as those forces that evade a site's defences. This chapter begins to poke holes in the membrane between outside and inside that can at times feel so integral to the experience of nightlife, furthering the theory of heterotopic 'porosity' to chart these moments of importation that result in harm, violence, or offence. Rather than contend these examples point toward a failure of queer nightlife to create heterotopia, they are

instead the sketching of its edges. Harm and its errant onward impacts not only provide insights into the alternative normalities and fault-lines that structure heterotopic space, but are also performative events that are themselves generative of tangential ideals that take form in heterotopic relations.

In Chapter Five ("Discord, Disorientation, Disruption") I re-encounter heterotopia through its detonative, as opposed to its deconstructive, definition. Through the utilisation of affect, particularly disorientation, I explore how performers and promoters seek to sensorially un-foot participants through strategies of destabilisation, inciting fractures that leave patrons, perhaps, more receptive to profound ideological differences, or new ways of being. These spatial eruptions revolt against the notion of 'safe space' and critique the padding of experience as inherently linked to the desire for protection, or the wish to avoid confrontation, that is leveraged in the justification of gentrification. Although positioned aesthetically at the avant-garde or cutting-edge, I argue that it is in fact within these sites of deliberate affect, ideological fluidity, and destabilisation that the legacy of nightlife's forebears—namely the experimental cultures of disco, punk, and house music—can most clearly be seen.

In Chapter Six ("Back for Good: Cultural Memory and Heterotopic Virtuality") I continue heterotopia's theorisation through affect, tracing how memory is grappled with, constructed, and summoned into queer nightlife through dance, DJing, and performance. I contend that it is the live-ness of the past is key to why these sites feel different, and for marginalised people, they function as alternative archives for cultural history (while themselves generating an archive), and allow people who have suffered trauma due to the markers of their difference to build new relationships with this personal history by recontextualising it, and themselves, within a site of collectivity and affirmation. As Covid-19 shuttered venues, participant interviews and a wave of virtual parties through internet platforms made explicit how queer nightlife is founded already on this dialectic with the past, and

enabling a theorisation of the ways heterotopia relates not only with the 'outside world' of the present, but harnesses meaning through a network of virtualities.

Chapter Seven ("Blood, Sweat, and Leather: The Ritual Art of Artifice") interrogates the role of ritual and the spiritual in queer nightlife. I analyse the queer club, as well as heterotopic theory itself, in tandem as rites-of-passage, while unravelling performance encounters with rituality to propose that primal or pagan signifiers are leveraged to construct the affective nightlife mode of libidinous carnality. This troubles any neat conclusion on the ritual nature of queer sites, constructed (like ritual) as much through critique, campery, and irony as they are through belief. Understood performatively, these performances can be seen as a generative ideological force that links queer nightlife with deep human histories and near-preconscious human needs of behaviour. I find that the categorical disturbances of ritualisation reflect the performative force of heterotopic theory in constructing the relationship between researcher and subject, as well as the quotidian and the utopian.

In Chapter Eight ("The Inside Goes Out, or, What Happens After the Sun Comes Up?") I look to the future. In a reversal of the porosity as examined in Chapter Four, this chapter attends to the ways transformative and liberative alternatives, generated within queer nightlife, are not contained to the space-time of the event. The heterotopic event is rather understood not as a membranous organ, but an ideological and affective surge which cannot be wholly contained, spreading to the street or enervating transformational alterations, by increments, in the day-to-day lives of participants (in the nightlife's afterlife). I contend that heterotopia and its micro-revolutions can be glimpsed not only within the nightlife event, but also in the routine or mundane world that stands as its contrast and gives it meaning.

As a spatial practice heterotopia is bound by the material conditions of its present. As a result, however, it provides an opportunity to examine the totality of practices—such as licensing laws, developer lobbies, and photography briefs—that structure queer nightlife. Further to this, it's

associations with utopia and the everyday allow an interrogation into the philosophical motivations of space-creators, and the affectual methods of exactly how queer nightlife produces its feeling. In the now-canonical queer method of hyper-hybridisation and tangential relations, this thesis gathers differing academic and cultural legacies to better understand how queer people create heterotopic sites through nightlife and performance, and propose that it is in part through these sites that our difference, our queerness, is created. The contradictory nature of heterotopia is reflected within the following chapters, which at times propose competing viewpoints: for instance, that queer nightlife's heterotopic nature is defined by safety, but also oppression, but also danger, but also liberation. This labyrinthine structure flows between venues, performances, and events, in an attempt to capture the bewildering feel of nightlife. This mirrors how meaning is drawn together for participants from fragments of experience, gathered from meandering between differing sites over months and years. I find that heterotopia Is an effective method for de-romanticising queerness from a pre-supposed radical nature: a way to unravel the ambivalent and complex power relations that structure queer sites. Further, the application of heterotopia to a community of people within which I am embedded offers new ways of theorising heterotopia's intimate impacts on everyday life, as well as a theorisation of how heterotopic spaces are created in relation to other heterotopias.

1.

Queer Performance and Nightlife Methodologies

Before beginning this research project, I was confronted with the task of analysing the behaviours of myself and my community. Particularly within the context of spaces characterised by marginalised status, the potentially extractive or exploitative power dynamics—the risk of taking advantage of intimate trust—was daunting. In this chapter I review prior literature regarding the role of the researcher within an ethnographic setting, particularly how performance studies and intersectional politics has enabled a revolution in subjective, qualitative research methods. By surveying prior research within queer and nightlife contexts, I outline how researchers have developed an ethics for queer nightlife ethnography over past decades, and articulate how I have applied this method to this project. I conclude the chapter with a discussion on identity, intersectionality, and affect, in service of making explicit the interpretive frame through which I understand the interpersonal politics and power dynamics I analyse in the following chapters.

Performance studies has long been viewed as a discipline that is intimately intertwined with the field of ethnography. Influential scholars such as Erving Goffman, Richard Schechner, and Victor Turner contend that performance is a window into the values of a community and culture, and have used the critical framework of performance analysis to deeply consider identity, community-building, and ritual within society and everyday life (Goffman 1959; Schechner 1985; Turner 1979). In more recent decades, this understanding of performance as inherently central to sociality has led to an interrogation of ethnographic practice more broadly, with performance theorists championing a scholarship that works from experience outwards, and that prioritises contingent, embodied knowledges (Adjepong 2019; Berry 2013; Conquergood 2002; Denzin 2003). This trend of privileging

experiential ways of knowing has been influenced by interwoven developments in postcolonial theory, Indigenous research epistemologies, feminist theory, race theory, and queer theory (Collins 1986; Hodge 2015). Performance ethnographers have further proposed that performance studies in particular provides an optimal method through which to further the critical and ethical imperatives espoused by these fields (Conquergood 2002; Denzin 2003; Holman Jones, Adams, and Ellis 2013; Muñoz 1999).

Richard Schechner's *Theater & Anthropology* (1985) is one example of the bonding between these two fields of research, and how this can impact the founding methodology of a research project. Broadly, this work is an analysis of the intersections between ritual and performance, with Schechner understanding all performances as 'restored' or 'twice-behaved' behaviour that transport or transform participants, actors, and spectators. The entanglements between ritual and performance are many, and he draws on examples from Japan, India, and Native American performance traditions—as well as on his own theatrical practice—to demonstrate and describe these entanglements. In conclusion, he argues that

> [m]any prefer to see things stained by the consciousness that one is seeing. Thus the reality of the perceived event—as art, as life—is of both what is seen and the seeing of it. So much has this experience of seeing myself even as I see the event I am looking at become central, even obsessional, that I run back and forth from one side of the mirror to the other, looking first at art from the life side and then at life from the art side, always seeing myself from either side (Schechner 1985, 297).

His observation that, in both performance studies and social studies, all study of life and art is an inherently subjective and *reflexive* method that should be embraced, is indicative of the broader trend in ethnography within the latter half of the 20th century away from a 'scientific' or purely observational model. Schechner's work continues to influence understandings of queer nightlife,

most explicitly within Micah E. Salkind's study of queer of color house music culture in Chicago (Salkind 2019, 7).[9]

These methods, despite their professed progressive or pioneering nature, often work hand-in-hand with the exploitative forces of colonisation (Baylis 2015), and this influence remains threaded through the foundations of contemporary research practice. In his article on "Performative and Reflexive Anthropology," Victor Turner argues that students and academics should act out the lives of their ethnographic subjects: "One possibility may be to turn more interesting portions of ethnographies into playscripts, then to act them out in class, and finally to turn back to ethnographies armed with the understanding that comes from 'getting inside the skin' of members of other cultures" (1979, 81). Turner's language within this paper is exemplary of the framework subsequent academics have sought to deconstruct, a worldview that other-ises and exoticizes, removing culture from its context to turn it into an object such as a play or, more aptly, a taxidermic sculpture. This example is noteworthy, as both concepts it promotes—performativity and reflexivity—have become the cornerstones of modern ethnography and queer nightlife studies. Amina Adjepong writes that "[r]eflexivity addresses the assumptions that the researcher might take with them into the field, examines how their presence shaped the social setting, and consequently avoids producing a flawed sociology" (Adjepong 2019, 31). Contrasted with Turner's 1979 approach to reflexivity, as something that is gained through dressing up in other cultures as a costume and rehearsing their rites and traditions with improvised classroom objects, the definitional movement is remarkable. By today's ethnographic standards, Turner's mode of research is defined by its assumptive approach, its 'flawed sociology.' Still, despite reflexivity's[10] evolution, its legacy continues to be grappled with by contemporary researchers.

[9] More on this influence in Chapter Six.

[10] Performativity's contemporary usage, and its relevance to this thesis, will be developed within Chapter Two.

Unusual Intimacies

Reflexivity is one avenue to ethical research with queer or otherwise marginalised communities, especially those centred around performance. In this, the work of Dwight D. Conquergood has proven crucial. In his essay on the radical potential of performance studies, he outlines two forms of 'knowing': the first is empirical, distanced and observation-based, while the second is grounded in practice, community, and the body (Conquergood 2002). This second form of knowledge, he says, is "circulated within a performance community, but is ephemeral" (Conquergood 2002, 146)—or in other words, it can be best understood by those who embody that knowledge through practice as it is performed, or as it is passed between members of a given community. In the case of marginalised communities, this knowledge can be deliberately hidden from outside eyes, including those of researchers. Conquergood argues that

> [o]ppressed people everywhere must watch their backs, cover their tracks, suck up their feelings, and veil their meanings. The state of emergency under which many people live demands that we pay attention to messages that are coded and encrypted; to indirect, nonverbal, and extralinguistic modes of communication where subversive meanings and utopian yearnings can be sheltered and shielded from surveillance (2002, 148).

What this means is that if a researcher is to work with communities such as those found in Naarm's queer nightlife, and they wish to understand the different kinds of knowledge that circulate within those communities, then they must be a deeply involved member *of* those communities. Conquergood describes this role not as researcher, but as co-performative witness—as someone who works alongside and with rather than on and about (Conquergood 2002).

These methodological frameworks align performance researchers with a broader critique of traditional research methods, ethics and practice that can largely be grouped under the term 'autoethnography' (Holman Jones, Adams, and Ellis 2013). This form of scholarship is an important lens through which to think about this project: it not only addresses the broader ethical questions that underpin it, but articulates why an autoethnographically-informed approach can and has been crucial to the research of marginalised or oppressed communities. In their wide-sweeping anthology *Handbook of Autoethnography*, Stacy Holman Jones, Tony E. Adams, and Carolyn Ellis (2013) provide an overview of autoethnography, as well as the challenges, practices, theories, and perspectives that have arisen in autoethnographic studies across a variety of fields. In the anthology's introduction, autoethnography is defined at its most foundational level as "the use of personal experience to examine and/or critique cultural experience" (Holman Jones, Adams, and Ellis 2013, 22), as a form of critical reflexivity that draws on memory, anecdotes, and feeling to better understand various kinds of relationships or communities. Although, at a surface level, it may appear from this definition that any form of memoir could be deemed autoethnographic, Jones, Adams, and Ellis are quick to delineate the characteristics that separate the anecdotal from the academic. These are outlined as: "(1) purposefully commenting on/critiquing of culture and cultural practices, (2) making contributions to existing research, (3) embracing vulnerability with a purpose, and (4) creating a reciprocal relationship with audiences in order to compel a response" (2013, 22). I list these in full here not only to define the common stylistic elements of autoethnographic writing as identified by the *Handbook*'s editors, but to highlight the foundational precepts of autoethnographic research this project is founded on. Although many elements of this thesis, such as performance analysis or long-form interviews, are not traditionally autoethnographic, the position of interview participants and performances within my everyday (or every-nightlife) result in all methods requiring, or at least inviting, an element of critical reflexivity.

Leon Anderson and Bonnie Glass-Coffin state that autoethnography possesses "distinctive features… including the visibility of the researcher's self, strong reflexivity, relational engagement,

personal vulnerability, and open-ended rejection of finality and closure" (2013, 58). In this formulation, the knowledge produced by autoethnography emerges from a subjective position that highlights—rather than obfuscates—the prejudicing role of the researcher in their environment and their subsequent representation of it: an obfuscation that has historically led to the exploitation and harm of research subjects (Baylis 2015; Holman Jones, Adams, and Ellis 2013, 29). To account for the often-unspoken bias and positionality of the researcher, Anderson and Glass-Coffin suggest that "...researchers should subject themselves to the same level of scrutiny they direct toward the subjects of inquiry… that the agent of knowledge be placed along the same critical plane" (2013, 73-4). In researching communities, where a power imbalance usually marks the relationship between researcher and researched, this suggestion becomes an ethical consideration to minimise the risk of exploitation or harm throughout the entire research process, from conception to publication.

Carolyn Ellis (2007), in her essay on ethics in research, reflects on her past exploitations of friendship in a remote fisher folk community, and the discord her research sowed once it was disseminated. Although Ellis was not initially from this community, her long engagement and eventual role as confidante and friend—and subsequent invisibility of her researcher role—led to her being perceived as a member of the community. By her own admission, the use of what she learned while in this confused role, and the way she used it, was a betrayal of trust: it served her as an aspiring academic more than it did the community, and her writing revealed information about individuals that were neither sufficiently anonymised nor consulted about their depiction. Although her initial research could not be considered autoethnographic at the time, this later essay—as a looking back to and critique of her own role, emotions, and positionality within that research—constitutes what Anderson and Glass-Coffin call for: that the researcher be scrutinised alongside the researched.

In hindsight, Ellis now advocates for a relational ethics that "recognizes and values mutual respect, dignity, and connectedness between researcher and researched, and between researchers

and the communities in which they live and work" (2007, 4), arguing that "researcher and friendship roles should weave together, expand and deepen the other… the people you study are active participants at every step of the process. You research with them, rather than look into their lives from the outside as I thought I should do in Fisher Folk. In friendship as method… there is no leaving the field" (2007, 13). From a queer perspective, the ethically subversive potentiality of friendship comes as no surprise: it is a tenet queer positionality. Circulating around terms such as queer filiation, chosen family, or (after the title of the famous Foucault interview) 'friendship as a way of life' (Foucault 1996; Roach 2012), the social and political conditions of queer survival model an already-existing alternative ethic that long predates recent developments within ethnographic practice (Bailey 2013; Campbell 2018; Pearl 2013). In Tom Roach's surveyance of Foucault's works, they claim that friendship

> is an ethics of nonrecognition—I can't see myself in the other, I can't subsume the other into myself—which leaves the radical foreignness of both parties intact and unharmed. Such nonviolative relationality affords an opportunity to cultivate foreignness, to nurture unseen selves and unusual intimacies (2012, 114).

Evading the 'insider' or 'outsider' of ethnography, friendship takes form as an acknowledgement of the impossibility of total knowledge. Although Roach's claim to friendship as a radically democratising union that evades class interests in service of a transformative bond falls into the romanticised ideals of resistance afforded to broader queer theory (McCann and Monaghan 2020; Roach 2012), this notion of *unusual intimacy* has a methodological attraction in the context of queer ethnography. In it can be found: uncomfortability; tension; earned trust; an unexpected alliance; a clandestine potential. These are the modes of relation that characterise the nexus between queer

nightlife scholars and their ‘subjects,’ as they theorise their malleable navigations through night cultures and develop an ethical methodology tailored to the communities that constitute them.

Nightlife Ethics

Anderson and Glass-Coffin close their essay on positionality with an assertion that “the final feature of autoethnographic research that we wish to highlight is the open-endedness of this form of inquiry…. And if inquiry captures a point in time, it is with the awareness of a broad horizon stretching into the future” (2013, 78). Here autoethnography is conceptualised as a necessarily shifting form—more a process of relation between the researcher, their world, and their own selves than a fixed method. Peering at this horizon from the position of a queer researcher, I wonder if it is the same horizon described by José Esteban Muñoz, who posits not autoethnography but queerness as something that is always (yet never) arriving, as something we can only ever feel “as the warm illumination of a horizon imbued with potentiality” (2009, 1). Although not directly cited by Anderson and Glass-Coffin, I pivot between these texts to demonstrate just one of the conceptual relationships that allow queerness and autoethnography to be productively read and practiced together.

Stacy Holman Jones and Tony Adams describe queer theory as a field that “not only recognizes that identities are conditioned and constrained by operations of power, but also works, simultaneously and perpetually, to transgress, alter or call attention to these formative conditions and constraints” (2010, 208) To take this as a leaping-off point, queer theory already, then, shares a kinship with an autoethnographic mode of enquiry, which itself seeks to escape from the oppressive edict of ‘objectivity,’ forming a new method of research as it critiques the old. Muñoz summarises

this relationship as follows: "[t]he queer trend that I am identifying is in many ways an effort to reclaim the past and put it in direct relationship with the present. Autoethnography is not interested in searching for some lost and essential experience, because it understands the relationship that subjects have with their own pasts as complicated yet necessary fictions" (1999, 83). This work, published eleven years prior to Jones and Adams', may test their claim that queerness and autoethnography have "been held apart—by focus, by context, by discipline" (2010, 198), but it does reinforce their affinity: they both seek to upset dominant paradigms and are committed to privileging the lived, subjective experiences of marginalised peoples who have been long-silenced in the world of research and the world at large.

The contemporary study of queer nightlife, and the development of its emergent methods, are a continuance of these fields of thought. Some theorists explicitly use the term autoethnography (Baylis 2015), and others do not, yet align themselves with methods that, following the outlines provided above, fall within the scope of queer autoethnographic practice (Adeyemi, Khubchandani, and Rivera-Servera 2021; Bailey 2013; Drysdale 2019; Garcia 2020; Lin 2021; Salkind 2019). The array of methods deployed by these researchers further demonstrate the correlation between these fields, and have influenced my thinking and development of a queer nightlife methodology that is subjective, affective, and informed by a legacy of ethnographic as well as cultural studies critique.

Bailey (2013), in his study of Ballroom performance and cultures in Detroit, utilises his own experiences in Ballroom as a performer, as a Black queer person living in Detroit, and as an HIV/AIDS support worker to create a dynamic ethnographic analysis of the desires and influences that have created a distinct performance subculture. Combining both reflexivity and more traditional ethnographic practices such as interviewing and observation, Bailey outlines his methodology as "sometimes mobiliz[ing] my reflections on, my experiences with, and my participation in the community and join[ing] them with the detailed memories and experiences shared by my interlocutors in the Ballroom scene in particular and the larger Black LGBT community in general"

(2013, 21). Bailey, here, places himself into the research, as well as recognising that his voice is only one of many that constitute the Ballroom community. By stitching together these methods, he works toward a self-described ethical mode of research that contributes to his community as much, if not more, than he benefits from it as a researcher.

Further to this, Bailey calls on Conquergood's idea of the co-performative witness to structure this research. Writing on the subject within his own context, he interprets the role as a calling "to perform and lend one's own body and labour to the process involved in the cultural formation under study, particularly when it involves a struggle for social justice. Performance thereby becomes the vehicle for moving across seemingly disparate social locations and registers of knowledge" (Bailey 2013, 21-22). Within this study, Bailey does not only situate himself in relation to, but performs alongside and for, those who comprise his interview subjects. Identifying performance as a foundational practice in how these communities create meaning for themselves in the world, he views creating work with them as an ethical imperative to further the community, as well as a necessary way to properly understand it. D. Soyini Madison further elaborates on this role in *Critical Ethnography*, where she argues that "[c]operformance as dialogical performance means you not only do what subjects do, but you are intellectually and relationally invested in their symbol-making practices as you experience with them a range of yearnings and desires" (Madison and Soyini 2005, 168). Halberstam comments on this emerging academic trend back in *A Queer Time and Place*, writing that

> [f]or a new generation of queer theorists—a generation moving on from the split between densely theoretical queer theory in a psychoanalytic mode, on the one hand, and strictly ethnographic queer research, on the other—new queer cultural studies feeds off of and back into subcultural production. The academic might be the

> archivist, a coarchivist, a full-fledged participant in the subcultural scene that the scholar writes about (Halberstam 2005, 163).

Within these models, the researcher becomes almost indivisible from the community that they are researching, while maintaining a critical relation.

Fiona Buckland's (2002) writing about queer nightclub cultures in 90s New York City is another example of a scholarship that is informed by a fusion of queer theory with ethnographic practice. Within this work, Buckland uses traditional research methods such as field notes and interviews, but adjusts them to their queer purpose:

> I did not walk around the club looking for people to interview for several ethical reasons. A queer club is a "safe" space. How safe might one consider it to be if approached by a stranger with a notepad or tape recorder? What's more, people go to clubs for pleasure. How much fun can you have when this fully equipped stranger keeps interrupting with a plethora of questions? And finally, the issue of consent gets murky. Participants may have taken alcohol or drugs, or may be in a particular affective state. I wanted all participants to give consent knowingly and with time to consider what they were being asked to do…. Within the club, I did not mark myself as an outsider, which I felt walking around with recording equipment would have done. Of course, it also would have made it difficult to dance, separating me again into observer rather than a participant (Buckland 2002, 11-12).

What is apparent here is an understanding of the way these spaces operate, of what they mean to the people who go there, and an unwillingness to disrupt this environment. This instinct to dispense with the tools of surveillance could arguably be Buckland's acknowledgement that many

marginalised people, as Conquergood asserts (2002), feel the need to communicate in covert ways due to the threat of reprisal. Further to this is a privileging of affect: the importance of feeling, the knowledge of the body. By foregrounding the needs of patrons to feel their pleasure uninterrupted, and by the need to dance and participate rather than record, Buckland is situating herself within reflexive ethnographic practice. What is of most importance is not the documentation of others from the outside, but the experience of participants and the researcher from an insider perspective.

As a brief example of queer ethnographic practice that falls outside the ethical parameters outlined above, I would like to draw attention to an interview conducted and narrated by Samuel R. Delaney in his work *Times Square Red, Times Square Blue* (1999). Much like Buckland, this work incorporates ethnographic practice with reflections on a subculture of queer spaces within New York City. In this case, Delany is returning to the porn theatres (or the places they once were) around Central Park that, in the past, had served as places for primarily queer men, including Delany, to have sex. By returning to these places, Delany seeks to recover an alternative queer history that has been replaced by gentrification. Throughout the course of this research, he conducts interviews and photoshoots with people who run or work for venues, as well as people who spend a lot of time in the area such as street merchants or patrons.

One of these interviews takes place with a young sex worker who, during the interview, is approached by one of his friends, who is also a sex worker. The newly arrived friend is quickly 'collared' into the photoshoot, with the initial interview subject stating that his friend is so desperate for a heroin hit that he will do anything to get one. Delany goes onto explain that "[a]nything, here, meant sitting down to let himself be photographed too, for the fifteen dollars we offered him for his time and his signature on the model release. Then [he] was *gone*!" (Delany 1999, 12). This practice is in stark contrast to the one described by Buckland. Participants, she says, should give consent when they are not impacted by a heightened or particular affective state. As the photograph subject in *Times Square Red* is self-confessedly under a compulsion that has little to do with the research being

undertaken, capturing his image for publication would transgress the methodological boundaries of a critical and reflexive ethnography. Although this exchange may typify the relations that structure this space and Delany's presence within it as a participant, as a researcher this moment translates as opportunistic, exploitative. It is impossible to know whether the subject would have consented to model while free from this contingent physical and mental state, let alone to being identified permanently in print as a sex worker and an addict.

With the work of these researchers in mind, I conducted 13 interviews between 45-60 minutes in length. These took place between January of 2020 and September of 2021. Although many of the participants are friends or acquaintances, the process of informed consent—alongside conducting the interview in a separate time and place to nightlife spaces—created a more formal environment than we may typically interact in. Interviewees were informed they may retract any statement from the recording and the transcript. The data that informs this thesis is drawn from these formal interviews, as well as other nightlife matter that I consider in either the public or my own personal domain. This includes performances for a general audience, broad observations about a crowd or space, and public social media posts or marketing content. It also includes my own personal reflections. Information that I came to through my embeddedness in the community, that was told to me outside the bounds of the formal interview and does fall under the above domains, was discarded. This was done to avoid inadvertent exploitation of trust, and to obscure elements of a culture that benefits, in part, from remaining hidden. A further ethical underpinning of this project was returning the products of it back to the community: as such, I incorporated an option to donate to the Australian Queer Archives into the interviewee consent forms. Every participant chose to contribute their interview recordings and transcript to the archives at the conclusion of the research. As only a small sliver of these transcripts appear within the following thesis, these lengthy interviews that document a diversity of queer artists' experiences will be available for future queer researchers or queer community members to access.

Affect and Identity

Insider, reflexive, critical, and auto-ethnographical methods offer ethical pathways for research on marginal communities but, regardless of how 'inside' a culture one is, there remains the task of interpreting the thoughts and behaviours of other people. As discussed within the Preface, queer nightlife is not a homogenous culture: a single dancefloor will be comprised of people with differing sexualities, genders, races, ethnicities, abilities, and class backgrounds. Similar to ethnographic research before it, queer theory has come under sustained criticism—particularly during its early years—for its divorcement from material conditions and attraction to a 'pure' philosophical approach of resistance. As McCann and Monaghan write in *Queer Theory Now*, "this insistence upon an anti-foundational, anti-identity, anti-normativity ethos, may at its worst result in a tendency to reify a relatively closed-off universal queer subject" (2020, 179). In other words, the queer subject par excellence was assumed to be white, re-inscribing the ethnographic prejudices of an academy that theorised always from its own position, a continuance of "the white supremacist tendency… to fix and separate marginalised subjects" (Salkind 2019, 12).

One method for including material conditions and a heterogeneity of experience into queer analysis is through an intersectional framework. A way of thinking developed by Black feminists from the interlocking forms of discrimination they are subject to due to their race and gender (Collins 1986), 'intersectional' theory was coined by Kimberlé Crenshaw to explain how discrimination law effectively excluded Black women in America from pursuing class actions, as they were forced to pursue claims only on the basis of their gender, or of their race (1989). In any workplace where white women, or Black men, were not discriminated against in equal measure to Black women, this meant their case was undercut by evidence that gender, or race, were not universally discriminated against within that industry. Crenshaw's argument that "the intersectional experience is greater

than the sum of racism and sexism, any analysis that does not take intersectionality into account cannot sufficiently address the particular manner in which Black women are subordinated" is incredibly influential (1989, 140), and as is further discussed within Chapter Three, is a structuring force within queer nightlife spaces. The metaphorical imagery that Crenshaw uses for her analysis—a motor vehicle accident in a traffic intersection, and a pyramid of people arranged vertically atop one another in order of privilege within a basement—both offer models for interpreting the power relations, and the moments of conflict, that arise within a heterogeneous community. Perhaps most compellingly for the analysis of queer sites, the mass of bodies stacked within the basement calls to mind the many subterranean locales of parties and dancefloors, prompting a hierarchical examination of these spaces across many axes of difference.

That being said, an account of identities in terms of race, sexuality et al and how they manifest through spatial practice is not a sufficient interpretation of the ways queer nightlife works to create heterotopias. Beyond a critique founded within intersectional analysis, the data calls me to understand how identitarian formations are shaped by, but also extend into, their environment, and conversely how the environment extends into the self. Moving away from understanding the function of queer spaces as always in pursuit of a process of self-discovery and understanding in relation to sexuality and gender, what is required is a more finely-grained view that acknowledges the kaleidoscopic relations of power that pass through and shape a space such as a nightclub. These relationships between people and their negotiations with hegemonic power structures are as intimately tied to their sense of self as they are to their negotiation of material space, regulatory binds, conventions of behaviour, mind-altering substances, or the feelings that arise from moving in unison with a crowd, conducted by the DJ and assisted by the encapsulating construct of lighting, sound, set, effects, and performance. Writing on the popularisation of film in the 1930s, Walter Benjamin claims the new artistic form precipitated a mass "deepening of apperception" (Benjamin 1968, 232), transforming subjectivity itself through a restructuring of how we view and interpret the world. In considering nightlife communities, then, nightlife scholars are not only analysing the means

by which certain people create nightlife spaces and why: conversely, we are formulating an understanding of how nightlife creates a mode of being, a kind of *club subjectivity* intertwined with, but not collapsible to, more standard frameworks of intersectional identity.

Deleuze and Guatarri's (1987) concept of assemblage provides a potential critical model for thinking through these concerns, focused less on understanding the essence of individual things than on "design, layout, organisation, arrangement, and relations" (Puar 2013, 378). If these queer nightlife spaces can be understood as heterotopias, then I propose they can also be approached as "machinic assemblage[s]" (Roach 2012, 76): as sites wherein organic and inorganic matter, the social and the material, become so inextricably entangled that they cannot be totally understood as separate entities. On assemblages, Deleuze and Guatarri state that

> … in all things, there are lines of articulation or segmentarity, strata and territories; but also lines of flight, movements of deterritorialization and destratification. Comparative rates of flow on these lines produce phenomena of relative slowness and viscosity, or, on the contrary, of acceleration and rupture. All this, lines and measurable speeds, constitutes an assemblage (1987, 3-4).

Importantly, this approach allows a focus not only on the hierarchised distances from privilege of various static identity formulations—and a concomitant summary of the ways these formations may be resistant in a single direction (toward privilege) while oppressive in another direction (further down the 'pyramid' of disenfranchisement)—it allows a more finely tuned analysis akin to mapping the flow of turbulent ocean currents. Puar, who writes extensively on the productive analytic relation between models of intersectionality and assemblage, writes that "[q]ueerness as an assemblage moves away from excavation work, deprivileges a binary opposition between queer and not-queer subjects, and, instead of retaining queerness exclusively as dissenting, resistant, and alternative… it underscores contingency and complicity with dominant formations" (2007, 205). This

model is an apt one in the exploration of the many ways queer nightlife sites function in a complex relationship with forms of power.

As a queer analysis—but also an analysis of culture, space, technology, and art—the methods adopted for the present project must broaden beyond the dynamics between essentialised and identified politics, and into the contingent territories of affect. Nigel Thrift offers the following characterisation of affect:

> … *affect is understood as a form of thinking*, often indirect and non-reflective, it is true, but thinking all the same. And, similarly, all manner of the spaces which they generate must be thought of in the same way, as means of thinking and as thought in action. Affect is a different kind of intelligence about the world, but it is intelligence none-the-less (Thrift 2004, 60).

I foreground this definition as it elides the objective-subjective dichotomy that crudely delineates thought and sense. Instead, the maelstrom of inarticulate feelings, habits, reflexes, instincts, collegialities, and interfaces between the technologic and the biologic are considered equally as structuring forces and deliberate tools. Lisa Blackman claims that "[a]ffect is disclosed in atmospheres, fleeting fragments and traces, gut feelings and embodied reactions and in felt intensities and sensations. Affect is performed in practices and modulated within techniques, which exceed discrete bounded individuated human bodies" (2015, 26). This is by no means an unsystematic approach, despite its potential to elide the unequal power dynamics between people for another form of universalism similar to that critiqued in ethnography and early queer theory (Garcia 2020). Rather, it can disturb essentialised concepts of power that prescribe radicalism or oppression, normativity or subversion based on only an intersectional approach (Cvetkovich 2003; Puar 2013). If "…affect is more and more likely to be actively engineered with the result that it is becoming something more akin to the networks of pipes and cables that are of such importance in

providing the basic mechanics and root textures of urban life" (Thrift 2004, 58), then attentiveness to these modalities can further reveal how power hierarchies are created, maintained, or resisted (Roach 2012, 109).

Identity categories, assemblages, and affect are incorporated throughout this thesis, and throughout nightlife scholarship more broadly, as complementary methods. The impacts of race, gender, sexuality, ability, and other interlocking modes of intersectional analysis on the lives of participants and the structuring ideologies of nightlife spaces are prominent, but the insight this framework provides is blinkered. Without relying solely on a "queer politics that seems to ignore, in its analysis of the usefulness of traditionally named categories, the roles of identity and community as paths to survival" (Cohen 1997, 460), the methodological scope is broadened into an interrogation of—and attunement to—the subterranean and the synovial. Within participant interviews and my own reflective analyses on events and performances, the sensations, emotive riptides, virtualities, and affects of queer nightlife are centred alongside the subversively sexual or gendered. Following Puar, I consider "bodies [as] unstable assemblages that cannot be seamlessly disaggregated into identity formations" (2013, 378), an approach that is equally applicable to nightlife spaces themselves. As I evidence throughout this thesis, the queerness of queer nightlife cannot be 'read' divorced from its context. Queerness, despite its complexity, can be a blunt analytic instrument. Resisting a pure ideology of resistance, I follow these scholars and others into a hybridised analysis of identity, power, and its mutually constitutive interface with both material conditions and affect to develop a theory of nightlife space as queer heterotopia.

In this chapter I have provided an overview of the complex interplay between identity, affect, power, and research methods. Through surveying prior revolutions in theory borne of work from race, indigenous, feminist, and queer scholarship, I developed strategies for researching from within or alongside my own marginalised community, characterising my own research role as a co-performative witness. The increasing popularity of nightlife as a site for research of this kind

provided further insights into how queer scholars have navigated the ethical quandaries of data collection within these sites. Finally, I concluded the chapter with a discussion of assemblage and intersectionality: in particular, how this has influenced my own interpretive frame for deconstructing the identity politics of queer nightlife and performance.

2.

Heterotopia: The Interpretation of Space

When nightclub Hugs&Kisses closed in January of 2019, the community that had grown around it mourned. Alongside an outpouring of emotion as people summarised their experience with the club on social media, there were a series of raucous and sweat-drenched final parties, the last of which ran until 10 in the morning. This closing-down period—as well as the concomitant effort to memorialise it through documentaries, articles, podcasts, and even an art exhibition[11]—reinforced the value of a space that had become central to queer nightlife in Naarm. The club, which was "[n]estled in a labyrinth of laneways amongst a nest of scaffolding from encroaching developments" (Kanoniuk 2019), was widely regarded as a haven for the expression of queer and marginal being. No Vacancy gallery describes Hugs as "… an iconic underground queer club hidden down a laneway in the heart of Naarm's CBD, famed for its craziness, creativity, fashion, debauchery and of course, music… it thrived by unashamedly pushing boundaries and breeding self-expression to a thumping musical beat – a beacon of anything goes for those in the know or wanting to find out" (No Vacancy 2020). Female Wizard, who worked and DJ'd at the club almost from its inception until it shut, describes Hugs&Kisses in an interview with Red Bull as

> … almost always just the most incredibly, uplifting, incredible experience. I think that's why the club really meant so much to queer people and to me. That party in particular carried this energy, and it was really empowered by that space, and it was this energy of

[11] The photography exhibition by Nik Epifanidis was presented at No Vacancy gallery as part of Midsumma 2022. It captured portrait images of patrons on the final night of Hugs & Kisses operation (see Fig. 2), and promoted a documentary that was filmed on the final night but is yet to be released at the time of writing. For long-form interview podcasts related specifically to Hugs&Kisses, see interviews with Simona Castricum and Hugo Atkins (Atkins 2020; Castricum 2021).

> complete freedom and devotion to being there, dancing, hearing the music, taking part in something, some intangible thing that we were all in. It's like this energy you couldn't copy, you couldn't try and recreate it anywhere else (Female Wizard 2019).

Although these Hugs&Kisses experiences are characterised as lawless and one-of-a-kind (Female Wizard 2019; Weiner 2018)—as if a series of coincidences allowed this particular kind of queer-space to flourish—these qualities are always cited with reference to an array of tangible conditions that, in a number of practical ways, moulded the functioning of the space and the experiences within it. Far from being a product of chance, a fleeting expression of anarchic probability, on closer inspection can be seen a complex set of circumstances that contributed to a space that was made, rather than found.

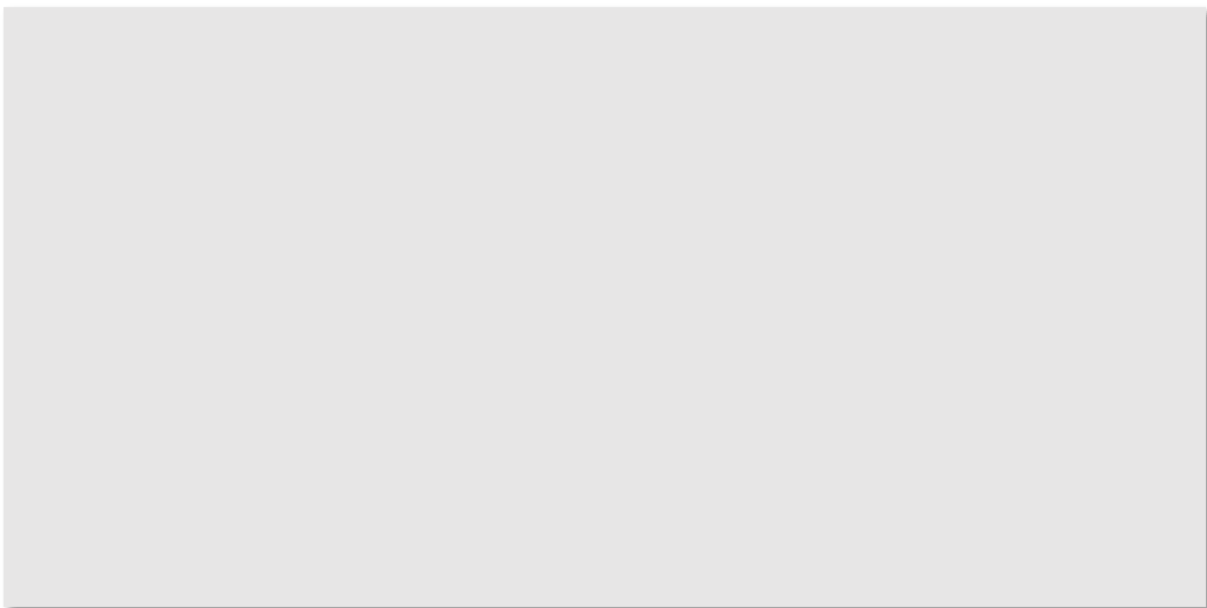

Figure 1. [Photograph of Female Wizard playing the final set at Hugs&Kisses]. 19 Jan 2019. Supplied by Alexander Powers.

Hugs&Kisses is just one example from a sprawling network of parties, nightclubs, and bars throughout the inner-city that have been repurposed—sometimes just for a few hours—for the creation of temporary queer-spaces that function as alternatives to the dominant space outside them: and, often, as alternatives to other queer-spaces. It is these spaces and events that comprise the focus of this thesis. Characterised as “spaces of alternate ordering” (Hetherington 19997, viii), the concept of ‘heterotopias’ provides an apt analytic framework with which to understand the complex spatial practices that actually work to produce queer nightlife spaces *as* alternative, as sites of difference to the day-to-day lives that people navigate beyond them. Within these venues (and in the places around them—the streets to and from, the homes where they get ready, the studios they work in) a creative community of promoters, performers, musicians, DJs, dancers, designers, and patrons co-create the precarious localities of Naarm’s queer nightlife.

Spatial analysis, and nightclubs and parties in particular, forms a kind of tenuous vertebrae through the queer academic imagination (Adeyemi, Khubchandani, and Rivera-Servera 2021; Bailey 2013; Buckland 2002; Butler 2007; Drysdale 2019; Garcia 2020; Khubchandani 2020; moore 2018; Newton 1972; Salkind 2019). Throughout this chapter I canvas the spatial theories that form the scaffold of this project, as well as outline the various ways that these have been adopted by queer theorists in order to conceptualise alternative ways of thinking spatially. Following a discussion of heterotopic theory, the legacies of queer geography, utopia, and the performative will be brought to bear on the contested notion of a specifically *queer* heterotopia, highlighting but also resolving some of the tensions between these spatial terminologies. I then outline my own adaptation of a ‘heterotopological’ method, drawing attention to the spatial elements I assess while collating data from queer nightlife spaces.

Although it may be impossible (and unethical) to methodically ‘map’ the marginal (Conquergood 2002), I will attempt to gesture—maybe more of a limp-wristed point—toward the chimeric, the detonative, the elusive, and the world-altering imaginative potentialities that have been documented and analysed by queer academics when marginalised people work with space. If,

as madison moore posits in their work on fabulousness, "[n]ightclubs are portals to another dimension. They are not necessarily safe spaces, nor are they utopian in nature, but they do offer a vision of life on the other side" (2018, 123), then this thesis acts as yet another doorway (besides those made of grimy brick) into these alternative planes. Stepping into Hugs&Kisses was one of my first encounters with a space that felt fundamentally *different* in Naarm, and so it seems an ideal place to start: through the alleyways to find the muted red light, your bag frisked by the stringent bouncer, your name checked off the members list, and up the winding stairs to a place that no longer exists.

Heterotopias: 'a secular magic'?

The term 'heterotopias' has had a sporadic and contested journey into the realm of academic thinking, simmering along relatively unheard-of for decades before becoming the topic of a wide-range of focused studies in architecture, cultural studies, postmodernism, and theatre studies throughout the 1990s and consistently onwards (Dehaene and Cauter 2008; Gandy 2012; Gennochio 1995; Hetherington 1997; Johnson 2013; Soja 1996; Tompkins 2014).[12] There are a couple of reasons for this abnormality of emergence. The first is to do with the theory's publication: although first mentioned in Foucault's *The Order of Things* in 1966 (Foucault 2002), heterotopias were not expanded upon until a lecture to architecture students at the College de France in 1967. These lecture notes—and that is all they are, notes—were only presented publicly and in full for the first time at an exhibition in Berlin in 1984, and in subsequent publications in both 1984 and 1986 (Johnson 2013, 791). These publications were done without further revisions from Foucault, leading

[12] This is with the notable exception of Samuel R. Delany's science fiction novel *Trouble on Triton: An Ambiguous Heterotopia* (1976). Delany's particularly queer approach to heterotopia will be addressed in more detail below.

to their broader dismissal among critics for some time (Foucault 1986; Gennochio 1995, 36; Soja 1996, 154).

This method of publication—the showcasing of author's notes—leads to another area of critique around heterotopic theory: namely, that the theory is simply not a good one. Soja summarises the lecture notes as "...frustratingly incomplete, inconsistent, incoherent. They seem narrowly focused on peculiar microgeographies, near-sited, deviant and deviously apolitical" (1996, 162). Tompkins' critique also focuses on the number and choice of examples (briefly) mentioned by Foucault, noting that the "many examples do suggest that the possibilities are almost endless, and frequently attempts to deploy the term serve only to render it so broad that it is emptied of its usefulness and complexity" (Tompkins 2014, 22). In the eyes of scholars, this appears to be a bastard theory: the seed of an idea gone rogue. Unrefined, the lecture notes have bred controversy and contradictions, leading to deviant readings, academic exile, divergent definitions, and an anarchic universality of applicability (Johnson 2013). Speaking in a style akin to "a sightseer's enchanted breathlessness" (Faubion 2008, 31), Foucault has sown a prophecy as vague and powerful as it is "famous and confusing" (Cenzatti 2008, 75): an orphan terminology that, left quietly, has been fostered after the fact by a line of theorists that have recognised its value, and rounded out the criticality that was originally lacking. As such, I will only spend a brief time summarising the most relevant elements of Foucault's notes (which have already been thoroughly summarised elsewhere, not least in the notes themselves (Foucault 1986; Johnson 2013; Soja 1996; Tompkins 2014)) before moving on to the far more detailed heterotopic theories that have followed in their wake.

Foucault's "Of Other Spaces" appears, at its heart, to be addressing a crisis of categorisation. In his introductory argument he outlines a need for new ways of thinking about space, stating that "[w]e are in the epoch of simultaneity: we are in the epoch of juxtaposition, the epoch of the near and far, of the side-by-side" (Foucault 1986, 1). Calling on the concept of 'the network,' he argues that—in contrast to the Western Middle Ages—we live inside a thoroughly heterogenous space, "inside a set of relations that delineates sites which are irreducible to one another" (Foucault 1986,

3). Many spaces can be characterised in this way, but for the purpose of these lecture notes Foucault is particularly interested in spaces "that have the curious property of being in relation with all other sites, but in such a way as to suspect, neutralise, or invent the set of relations that they happen to designate, mirror, or reflect" (1986, 3). He characterises these spaces as "counter-sites, a kind of effectively-enacted utopia" that exist within every culture (Foucault 1986, 3), and that "exist outside of all places, even though it may be possible to indicate their location in reality" (Foucault 1986, 3-4). Although he wishes to differentiate these spaces from utopias—which do not, according to Foucault, have a 'real' location—he still maintains their connection: thus he calls these sites 'heterotopias.'

Some of those aforementioned criticisms may be starting to make more sense: as Tompkins (2014) states, the examples Foucault uses to demonstrate his point do not nail down the concept much further. Throughout nine short pages he cites American motel rooms, boarding schools, boats, Brazilian farmhouses, brothels, cemeteries, cinemas, fairgrounds, festivals, gardens, honeymoon hotels, libraries, military academies, mirrors, museums, Polynesian villages, prisons, psychiatric hospitals, Puritan and Jesuit colonies, retirement homes and theatres as all being examples of heterotopias. In reference to these, he outlines six rough principles with which heterotopias can be categorised, the most relevant elements of which can be distilled to the following:

1. They exist in every human culture.
2. Their function can shift (or be rendered obsolete) over time as the society within which they are located changes.
3. They are "capable of juxtaposing in a single real place several spaces, several sites that are in themselves incompatible" (Foucault 1986, 6). Foucault cites theatres, cinemas, and gardens to illustrate this point: they are spaces where different sites and symbols are brought into simultaneous representation.
4. Their relationship with time is intrinsic to how they function, with Foucault stating that "[h]eterotopias function at their full capacity when [people] arrive at a sort of absolute break with their traditional time" (1986, 8). The examples he draws on here are on the one

hand places like libraries, where time seems to accumulate endlessly, and on the other hand places like festivals, which bracket a particular set of practices in a way that is highly transient.

5. They are not freely accessible like a public place, but rather have a way of opening and closing, of being semi-private, of being sealed off, or of requiring a certain insider-knowledge to gain full entry.
6. They "have a function in relation to all the space that remains" (Foucault 1986, 8).

These principles provide an intriguing step toward an alternative way of systematising spaces, but as mentioned prior, they are also highly inconsistent—in seeking a common theory that applies to all kinds of spaces in all kinds of cultures, Foucault's brief foray into defining heterotopias leaves the reader filled with a kaleidoscopic whirl of imagery, without analysis.

Subsequent scholars' analyses of heterotopia are as complex as they are perhaps generous to Foucault's original intention. Throughout "Of Other Spaces," Foucault's fixation on the Other forms a backbone to his examples, leaving unrecognised his central position as a white citizen of the colonial French State, as well as his privileged position within an academy that can function as an extension of it. Throughout the notes, he describes the "extraordinary" Jesuit colonies in South America and the "absolutely perfect" Puritan colonies of North America (Foucault 1986, 8). He goes on to enshrine the boat as a heterotopia par excellence, as it has been "a great instrument of economic development [as] it goes as far as the colonies in search of the most precious treasures they conceal in their gardens" (Foucault 1986, 9). And, in describing vacation villages, he characterises all of Polynesia as simply a place of "primitive and eternal nudity" (Foucault 1986, 7). His unbridled romanticisation of the colonial project alongside his clear fascination with what he describes as the 'Oriental' has permeated subsequent heterotopic analyses, many of which demonstrate a thematic preoccupation with the Other or the 'alternative,' inscribing them with powers that they may not, in actuality, possess (Gennochio 1995; Sohn 2008). The ways in which this

preoccupation is bound with the exploitative gaze of the ethnographic research institution while conducting urban, heterotopic research is articulated by Matthew Gandy:

> [T]he peasant figure of bourgeois art or literature can be supplanted by the gritty representation of proletarian sexuality in the modern metropolis for an elite audience. The juxtaposition of sexuality with the marginal spaces of the city reveals a tension between an imaginary locus of cultural authenticity and the ideological impetus of uncultivated nature or material decay as a catalyst for desire and corporeal transgression (2012, 739).

These prejudices can be seen in the work of Foucault and remain a danger for researchers working within the realm of the marginal: the potential to fall into a near-titillating exposé, a gonzo academia, that fetishises difference and assumes a pure authenticity in modes of being related more closely, in a colonialist framework, to the primitive.

For Gennochio (1995) and Sohn (2008), the answer to this heterotopic lens lies within another, less-cited mention of heterotopia from Foucault's writing. In this formulation, Foucault's description of heterotopia is not based on locate-able, physical spaces of Otherness: rather, it is summoned forth as the spectre of a deeply unsettling idea. Heterotopias, here, are that which explode the categories of knowledge with which we understand our world—they warp the foundation of language. According to Foucault, heterotopias "dessicate speech, stop words in their tracks, contest the very possibility of language at its sources; they dissolve our myths, sterilise the lyricism of sentences" (2002, xviii). By pointing to a dimension of heterotopia that is as literary as it is existentially terrifying, heterotopias here can be understood not just as a place of utopic play, but as a threat: to knowledge, to power, and to the reason that attempts to grasp it. Heidi Sohn views this as an antidote to the common application of Foucault's theories onto spaces where marginalised people gather, which for Sohn, are overlooked as the symptoms of "uneven development" (2008, 49) that they often are. Sohn argues that

> treating all spaces and human groups that deviate from the established order as potentially subversive, challenging and resistant formations, and hence reading into them all sorts of positive, utopian transformative powers endowed by their liminality, is to miss the essential point of Foucault's heterotopia: as an ambivalent formulation meant to destabilize discourse and language, as a rather obscure conception endowed with negativity, defying clarity, logic and order (Sohn 2008, 48).

It is tempting to ascribe all kinds of utopian traits to spaces of marginalisation, but to focus on *only* these is to deny heterotopic sites of their actual power, which is to detonate established ways of thinking without necessarily proposing a neat alternative. In this way, heterotopias can manifest in a disturbing clash of re-organised knowledge, symbols, practices, and representations that scramble space as much as they do *understandings of* space. It is important to note that as an ambivalent model, heterotopias are as capable of incorporating elements of the dominant as they are at providing a glimpse of utopian alternatives to it—and due to their chimeric nature, they are capable of executing these simultaneously. One need look no further than "Of Other Spaces" itself for an example.

So if heterotopias are as elusive as Gennochio claims, eliding discourse with "a discontinuous montage of obsessive assemblage" (1995, 43), how is it possible to effectively centre them as an object of analysis? Although it may be theoretically impossible to even sketch the outline of a heterotopia without marring its core instability—and thereby, with the action of categorisation, rendering it obsolete—Gennochio points toward the realm of the arts, particularly installations, as a form that can potentially manifest a heterotopic experience. In his description of a public installation in a subway station, he marvels at its ability to

> capture an unpredictable nexus of imagination, ideology and power. Embracing an emporium of knowledges in a weave of media, artistic

> forms, experiences, representations and practices, they are at once sites of displacement and contradiction. With a strangely secular magic they are thus able to inscribe instability into a given spatial order, and in turn generate the potential for shaking the very foundations of that order by temporarily effacing the accepted relationships which define and limit it (Gennochio 1995, 43).

As I will demonstrate throughout this thesis, these claims are as relevant (if not even more so) when applied to queer nightlife as they are to subversive public art installations. And although it may be difficult to approach a heterotopic site discursively, there is, as has been shown by other scholars, something to be gained in the attempt. Before I move onto a discussion of heterotopic method, however, I need to further outline the context within which my own deployment of heterotopia rests.

Queer spatialities, evasive geographies

Almost since its inception, there has been a fixation in queer theory, and the study of queer cultures, on the spatial (Browne, Lim, and Brown 2007; Knopp 2007; Newton 1972; Rubin 2011). Loosely affiliated across fields and necessarily interdisciplinary, these queer re-imaginings and documentations of space span the mapping of neighbourhoods, the localities of queer economies, the impact of zoning laws, the practice of anonymous public sex or 'cruising,' the ethnography and analysis of subcultural performance and dance spaces, trans-national and culture-specific queernesses, homonationalism, immigration, and glimpses of the virtual such as cultural memory and utopias (Bailey 2013; Berlant and Warner 1998; Browne, Lim, and Brown 2007; Buckland 2002; Campbell and Farrier 2016; Castiglia and Reed 2011; Delany 1999; Dolan 1993; Drysdale 2019;

Halberstam 2005; Keith and Pile 1993; Misgav and Johnston 2014; moore 2018; Muñoz 1999, 2009; Puar 2007; Warner 2002). Given the writhing complexity of heterotopic sites, all of these queer-mappings become entry points to understanding: much like Hetherington (1997, 41) incorporates a swathe of thinking on space into his framework of how heterotopia can function as a kind of overarching theory, so too do these queer spatialities inform and transform my own interpretation of heterotopias in Naarm's queer nightlife.

Rather than summarise all of these fields at this point, their influence will unfurl as they become relevant throughout the following chapters. For now, however, in the service of articulating my own queer heterotopic method, I would like to extrapolate on the two inter-related areas of queer spatial thinking that are most germane to the framing of the thesis: counterpublics and world-making.

Counterpublics

Naarm's queer nightlife communities could be said to be part of a counterpublic (or a constellation of overlapping counterpublics) as much as they could be said to be centred around heterotopic sites: importantly, however, these two claims are not reducible to one another, although they have a productive relation. For Warner, counterpublics are "a scene where a dominated group aspires to re-create itself as a public and in doing so finds itself in conflict not only with the dominant social group but with the norms that constitute the dominant culture as a public" (2002, 112). Comprised of "indefinite strangers" (Warner 2002, 120), a counterpublic is not necessarily a community: it is a vehicle for discourse, whose audience cannot be fully determined in advance. For instance, a performance to a venue's crowd of friends, friends-of-friends, queer Melbournites and their allies is not the same as when a video of that performance is uploaded to social media to be circulated, shared, and commented on by a theoretically indeterminate number of strangers. The discursive circulation of the video and commentary may function as part of a counterpublic that extends beyond the nightlife space or the community of people who attend it.

Heterotopic sites can function in relation to counterpublics in that they are yet another place to generate and partake in discourse alongside sites like print, social media, traditional media, reviews, art, in-person conversations, etc. As is evidenced by Hugs&Kisses, heterotopias may function as the discursive centre of a counterpublic that continues after an event is over and the venue closed (See Fig. 2). This thesis could be considered as part of the counterpublic that has evolved around Naarm's queer nightlife, but it is important to note that a theory of counterpublics is not the focus of this thesis. Even as I focus on heterotopic sites in particular, however, the counterpublics they are embroiled in are an integral source of information: documentation from events, statements of intent from organisers, poster art, marketing copy, comments sections, art exhibitions, retrospectives, and articles can all provide hints as to the experience of an event, or the way an experience was intended to be curated by the artists and organisers behind an event. As I demonstrate in Chapter 3, these various pieces of communication can be considered as *spatial practice*, in that they are sometimes deployed to pre-emptively craft the actual space of queer nightlife, thereby acting as a tool to generate heterotopias. Furthermore, this assemblage of discursive matter that Warner describes as a counterpublic, in the context of a heterotopic analysis, becomes *evidence of heterotopic porosity:*[13] in other words, a way to measure the impact heterotopic experience is having on the day-to-day lives of its creators. Although counterpublics are not the centre of my analysis, then, much of the data used throughout this thesis is pulled from the realm of discourse that could be designated as Naarm's queer nightlife counterpublics, in order to discuss the heterotopic sites that function as some of its nodes.

[13] The notion of heterotopic porosity is central to the theory of heterotopia. See below (Chapter 2, 4, and 8) for further detail.

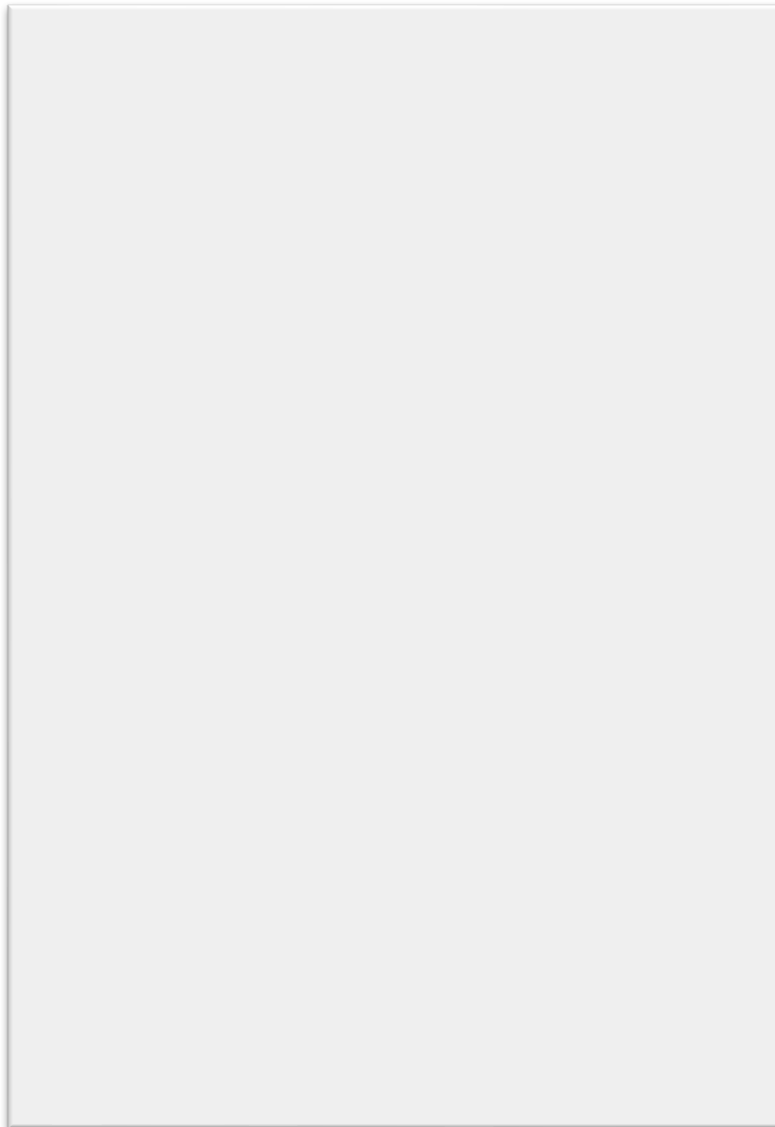

Figure 2. [Photograph of flyer taken from Love Hugs & Kisses Exhibition]. Exhibition by Nik Epifanidis. Presented by No Vacancy Gallery and Midsumma Festival. 22 Jan 2020. Supplied by Author.

World-making

Queer nightlife spaces and the labour that comprises them work to construct other worlds—at least, this is the recurrent theme in previous studies on the potential of queer nightlife (Bailey 2013; Buckland 2002; Drysdale 2019; moore 2018; Muñoz 1999). This loose academic consensus has its roots in the work of Berlant and Warner who, in their influential essay "Sex in Public," portray "[t]he queer world as a space of entrances, exits, unsystematised lines of acquaintance, projected

horizons, typifying examples, alternate routes, blockages, incommensurate geographies" (1998, 558). In his work on Ballroom culture, for example, Bailey "argue[s] that, for Ballroom members, performance is at once a means of altering their ways of being in the world and of creating an alternative world altogether" (2013, 19); in her work on queer club culture in New York City, too, Buckland sets out "to explore how improvised social dancing in queer clubs plays a role in queer world-making through its physicality and through its embodiment of experience, identity and community" (2002, 2). For moore, fabulousness is a queer aesthetic critique that "opens doors to brand-new dimensions, creating a separate space in the here and now" (2018, viii), with queer clubs functioning similarly as "portals" (2018, 123); for Drysdale, "… Sydney's drag king scene functions as a small world, albeit somewhat of a dramatic one, rather than a performance culture" (2018, 87). José Esteban Muñoz, publishing only a year after Berlant and Warner, provides perhaps the most detailed extrapolation of their idea, asserting that

> [t]he concept of worldmaking delineates the ways in which performances—both theatrical and everyday rituals—have the ability to establish alternative views of the world. These alternative vistas are more than simply views or perspectives; they are oppositional ideologies that function as critiques of oppressive regimes of 'truth' that subjugate minoritarian people. Oppositional counterpublics are enabled by visions, 'worldviews,' that reshape as they deconstruct reality. Such counterpublics are the aftermath of minoritarian performance (1999, 195-196).

The concept of 'world-making' occupies such a prominent position in the queer academic imaginary that one journal, *Qed: A Journal in GLBTQ Worldmaking*, centres Berlant and Warner's essay as their *raison d'être* (QED). Generated through queer embodiment—and located as much in discourse (through counterpublics) as they are in the material world—these otherworldly manifestations are

consistently reiterated as an outcome of queer cultural work, whether it be performance, club spaces, or fashion.

The theorists mentioned above have all found critical resonance with the concept of world-making in their fieldwork: focused, after Muñoz, on performances both theatrical and quotidian, world-making speaks to how marginalised people actually labour through spatialising practices, creativity, and community in order to produce an experience of 'somewhere else.' Without exception, these theorists have complexly outlined the interlinks between the 'outside' world and the 'inside' of queer nightlife, and pointed to various ways that the production of an 'other' space can fail, or ways that dominant ideals are replicated within these spaces, ensuring they cannot simply be designated as utopian. Within the context of these multifaceted analyses, then, it seems the term 'world-making' does not entirely account for the practices it seeks to encapsulate—no matter the criticality of its surrounding framework, it still threatens to oversimplify the spatial dynamic between dominant and marginal by discursively rendering them as distinct spaces, the latter of which borders on the fantastical in its ability to rupture spacetime by opening up portals, manifesting dimensions, and crafting other worlds. Returning to Berlant and Warner's original definition of a queer world—characterised as it is by ruptures, by things that cannot be mapped, by un-traversable terrain—we can see that the concept was never intended as a clear division: however, as an epistemological tool for analysis, heterotopia provides us with another potent framework for dissecting the messy reality of these alternative spaces and the ways they are entangled with their context. Throughout this thesis, then, I retain world-making in the sense it intimates that queers labour—they work—to produce heterotopias: an idea that can become lost in sites that are defined more widely by frivolity, and by the very fact that, to many, they appear entirely *un*productive. As a point of difference to the abovementioned theorists, though, I lean further away from casting these spaces as worlds in their own right, instead suggesting that it is within their complex relation to their context and other spaces that their function—and their

potential—can be seen.

Heterotopic potential, or the performativity of space

If, as in the case of queer nightlife and spaces like Hugs & Kisses, heterotopias are sites of concentrated and often un-compensated labour by marginalised people, it follows that they perhaps result in some kind of outcome specific to the needs or desires of those people. In his discussion of heterotopias, Hetherington argues that "the significance of such spaces is that they act as obligatory points of passage through which an alternate mode of social ordering is performed" (1997, 37). Almost like laboratories, he claims, "they can be taken as the sites in which new ways of experimenting with ordering society are tried out" (1997, 12), with each heterotopic site holding latent potential to spill out and influence the order of the surrounding world. Tompkins furthers this point in her work on heterotopias in theatre, where she finds that "heterotopias have the capacity to influence an audience's understanding of the relationship between the theatre and the world outside its walls, such that theatre can continue—and extend—its function of both shaping and contesting its cultural context" (2014, 27).

This sentiment extends beyond strictly heterotopic analyses: even when not mentioned specifically, heterotopic language finds its parallel in the reasoning of many nightlife creators and historians. In an appearance on the ABC, Sydney-based performer (and regular billing at *Honcho Disko*) Betty Grumble claims that "these spaces of liveness that can be created through art and party are these temporary communities that are political spaces as well. And what they do, which is a very ancient thing—they galvanize us as bodies that can go out stronger and softer in the world" (Sex Robots, Killer Robots: A Dangerous Q&A). In a similar vein, co-founder of the Discwoman booking agency Frankie Decaiza Hutchinson writes that "[t]he club is our little space… to make the rules to

break the rules and to create future renderings of a world we probably won't see but can attempt to have for a night" (2021, 58).[14] As a final example, Matthew Collin makes the observation that "Black and gay clubs have consistently served as breeding grounds for new developments in popular culture, laboratories where music, drugs and sex are interbed to create stylistic innovations that slowly filter through to straight, white society" (1997, 12). Within both heterotopic and queer nightlife theorisations, the site in question is understood as, firstly, relational, in that it enacts a critique or difference of the context in which it is situated. Secondly, to some degree or other, the site is approached as *effective*: through it, there is change. Although this may at first appear utopic, this method of understanding space has a broader critical foundation—most aptly through Judith Butler's theorisations of performativity.

Butler's theorisation has abounded in the arts and humanities since her 1990 publication of *Gender Trouble* (2007). In this early formulation of performativity, gender is cast as non-essential: or, as Butler puts it, "[t]here is no gender identity behind the expressions of gender; that identity is performatively constituted by the very 'expressions' that are said to be its results" (2007, 34). Butler argues that there is nothing that 'pre-exists' gender, no core being against which its performance is to be measured, meaning all expressions of gender gain their legitimacy and reality through their repetition, rather than through a reflection of any natural law. As demonstrated convincingly in the work of Nelson (1999), this notion of performativity has flourished in the field of human geography, despite it being an uncomfortable fit: in a 'pure' reading of Butler's early work, Nelson argues, the subject has no agency—they repeat norms, and if they do so imperfectly, this is only due to 'slippage' rather than critical resistance. The subject, furthermore, is removed from any accounting

[14] Hutchinson's essay, titled "Club Activism Is Crucial but Will Never Be Enough," assays the shifting relevance of club culture in the wake of the Covid-19 pandemic, and questions whether the 'fights' that were fought and alternative social worlds that were imagined, though important, will be needed within our new social and political context. Her anchorage of rave's utility to the particular socio-politico-cultural circumstances of its environment is reminiscent of Foucault's framing of heterotopia as having "a function in relation to all the space that remains" (1986, 8). This relational dynamic between heterotopia and its context is a foundation of heterotopic analyses, and is further explored at the end of this Chapter. See also Chapter Six for an interrogation of Covid-19's impact on queer nightlife (and, subsequently, its heterotopic evolutions).

of agency that arises from their historical-social-cultural context which, especially for human geographers, raises discrepancies when conducting fieldwork with real people, who do in many instances seem to be quite aware of the performative power that shapes their circumstance. As such, Nelson is critical of geographers who adopt "an undertheorised and often problematic notion of agency" (1999, 332), especially as those adoptions ignore the reality of political struggles and observed behaviour, as well as further theorisations of performativity by Butler herself.

In her preface to the 1999 edition of *Gender Trouble*, Butler explicitly works to bridge the discrepancy between performativity as pure theory and performativity as it plays out within people's lives, landing in a more ambiguous zone between material agency and discursive restraint. In contrast to the original text, she states that "[t]he iterability of performativity is a theory of agency, one that cannot disavow power as the condition of its own possibility. This text does not sufficiently explain performativity in terms of its social, psychic, corporeal and temporal dimensions" (1999, xxv). Perhaps more interestingly for the purposes of this project, she seeks to *emplace* the theory of performativity within its context, something that is missing from the 'pure' theory format in which it first emerged:

> There is one aspect of [*Gender Trouble*'s] production that is not always understood about the text: it was produced not merely from the academy, but from convergent social movements of which I have been a part, and within the context of a lesbian and gay community on the east coast of the United States in which I lived for fourteen years prior to writing this book. Despite the dislocation of the subject that the text performs, there is a person here: I went to many meetings, bars, and marches and saw many kinds of genders, understood myself to be at the crossroads of some of them, and encountered sexuality at several of its cultural edges (Butler 2007, vxii).

Butler, then, is part of a growing field of theorists—particularly spatial theorists—who have worked to reconceptualise or 're-signify' performativity to account for the conscious resistances of people against hegemony, as opposed to describing an un-locatable subject lacking agency (Butler 2007; Nelson 1999).

Far from an imperfect replication of hegemonic norms, a different understanding of performativity has emerged—one that can re-script bodies and space with alternative ways of being. Broadly, this performativity-plus-agency can be termed 'political performativity:' a kind of critical practice that "highlights the contingency of social-political conventions and the ways in which such norms can be transformed through reiterative counter-performances" (Glass and Rose-Redwood 2014, 13). As Butler states within her later editions, this 'agency' cannot be understood simply as a free-thinking liberal subject wilfully rewriting norms with the ease of playing a character: but rather, this agency is preconditioned by power dynamics and cannot be analysed apart from its socio-political context (2007). Nelson characterises this as the "partiality of knowledge" (1999, 348), an acknowledgement of the interlinked structuralist and hegemonic forces that shape the unconscious, and the manifold escapes and resistances that attempt to reshape these forces. Nelson situates human geography at the nexus of navigating the ideal of the Enlightenment-era sovereign man and the post-structuralist subject entirely shaped by the circumstance, as the abstractness of performativity theory clashes with the observable data of fieldwork and the situatedness of working with people and place (1999).

Performativity, in all its ambivalence, underpins contemporary heterotopic theory: when Hetherington argues that heterotopias are "obligatory points of passage through which an alternate mode of social ordering is performed" (1997, 37), it is a belief in political performativity that informs it; if gender and other social constructs are troubled through performativity, these theorists seem to ask, can not an alternative social model also be performatively created through spatial practice, through "rehears[ing] the possibilities of something else?" (Tompkins 2014, 3). At its heart, this is what constitutes the real stakes of heterotopic sites: the re-inscription, decryption, or detonation of

hegemonic norms through a complex assemblage of politically performative counter-practices that take aim not just at the constitution of gender, but at a whole host of received and enforced understandings, not least of space itself. In a spectral echo of the discourse on heterotopias, Gregson and Rose contend that "[p]erformed spaces are not discreet, bounded stages, but threatened, contaminated, stained, enriched by other spaces" (2014, 47). Butler, furthermore, claims her work on performativity was to open up possibilities for people who "live in the social world as what is 'impossible,' illegible, unrealisable, unreal, and illegitimate" (2007, viii). As an un-mappable space relationally intertwined with its context, heterotopias are placed well to further Butler's vision for performativity as an 'opening up' of possibilities for the culturally illegible, to interrogate the politically performative qualities of space, and to further theorise how it is that heterotopias effect change within their context.

'Glimpsing' Queerness: Utopia vs. Heterotopia

The term 'utopia,' from Sir Thomas More's 1518 fictional narrative of the same name, long-ago entered common parlance and is considered a central concept within the development of modern Western traditions (Marin 1984; Tompkins 2014). Regularly associated with an idea that is "based in fantasy" (Muñoz 2009, 2), a mountain of scholarship has sought to articulate the meaning of utopia and its applicability to philosophy, literature, and material sites (Jones 2013; Marin 1984; Muñoz 2009). The relationship between utopia and heterotopia is a deeply intertwined one. Some scholars, such as Angela Jones, go so far as to ascribe their differences to a purely nomenclatural arena, with no meaningful or practical alteration of utility between the use of one term or the other (Jones 2013). A crude interpretation of utopia and heterotopia may delineate between them by attaching futurity and fantasy to the former, and present-ness and reality to the latter. On closer inspection,

however, the ambivalence of utopia—in terms of both its temporality *and* supposed positivism—does trouble its definitional confines in relation to heterotopia. It is worth situating both terms within the context of this thesis, and articulating what this means for a specifically queer theory of heterotopia.

In recent decades, utopia has been increasingly adopted within the 'optimistic' or 'idealist' turn of queer theory, positioned oppositionally to the prevailing 'queer pessimism' of the late 20th century (Dolan 2001; Muñoz 2009). Built upon the work of Louis Marin, Ernst Bloch, and Sir Thomas More, Dolan and then Muñoz both locate utopia not as a real place, but as one that can be 'glimpsed' in the present, primarily through performances by marginalised people (Dolan 2001; Muñoz 2009). Muñoz' influential theory of queer utopia hinges on the concept of immanence. He argues that queerness can never arrive: that it is fixed, but to an ever-receding horizon beyond view (Muñoz 2009, 11). This means that queerness, at least in this idealised form, elides normativity and hegemony, and although this may mean it is never achieved it can be experienced momentarily in the present as "a utopian feeling" (2009, 2). This utopic vision of queerness is associated with futurity, with an analytic focus necessarily on the past and the present: it is here that the productive interrelations between utopia and heterotopia can be seen.

Muñoz writes that "[c]ertain performances of queer citizenship contain what I call an anticipatory illumination of a queer world, a sign of an actually existing queer reality, a kernel of political possibility within a stultifying heterosexual present" (49). Similarly to Muñoz, I interpret the sites of queer nightlife as potentially before-their-time, a foreshadowing of the social relations that may come to structure the future. However, despite Muñoz, Jill Dolan, and others grappling with the concrete mess of real space and real communities, I propose that their utopic frameworks privilege the glimpse over the panorama (Dolan 2001; Muñoz 2009). They inherently bind the trace of positive affect within queer spaces to their characterisation of an authentic and true site of queerness, de-emphasising the context from which these traces arise, riven as they are with contradiction and failure. Their utopic focus has been integral and transformative, reshaping queer

theory from psychoanalysis and the death drive towards a more hopeful affectual field (McCann and Monaghan 2020), but a continued focus on *only* the glimpse risks analytical blinders akin to peeping through a keyhole. Given the saturation of queerness as an identity, a philosophy, and a marketing tool, it is worth interrogating how it functions in the present. Perhaps queerness *is* already here, and its meaning—rather than being endlessly deferred—is shifting constantly as it is wrought through live contestations, such as those figured within heterotopic space. In order to account for the scale of this struggle queerness must be divorced from the idea that it is unassailably radical, a philosophy that almost precludes introspection among those who align with queerness. As opposed to an ongoing interrogation of queer's negotiations with normativity, this can invite a passive and pre-emptive self-congratulation on the inherently radical nature of a queer existence. A perceived immunity, even, to ever replicating hegemonic or oppressive forces.

Louis Marin writes that "utopia will never become a concept. It will always stay wrapped in fiction and fable-making" (1984, 8). In contrast to Muñoz' formulation of the ever-shifting chimeric utopia beyond view, for Marin the utopic is instead always fixed: a pure representation that "has little to do with the time of delaying or deferring, still less with an approaching, maturing time of the ideal" (1984, xxv). Indeed the only motion associated with Marin's conceptualisation of utopia is one of degeneration as it becomes "caught in a dominant system of ideas and values" (1984, 240), a notion re-iterated by Jill Dolan when she says that "something coercive lingers about the term. Utopias can be enforced at the expense of liberty, general consensus achieved by limiting choice. Fascism and utopia can skirt dangerously close to each other" (2001, 457). There is something sinister about utopia, particularly when its 'ideal' form is attempted to be recreated in reality. It is here that I situate heterotopia: not only as a site where utopic ideas are tested out, but as an experimental zone where ideas of what utopia looks like are actually generated in the first place. The messy materiality of these spaces includes the spectrum of forces that span the rebellious, the oppressive, the liberative, and the hegemonic. Through this thesis, I will investigate whether heterotopia can fulfil this potential to analyse the productive processes of difference in live time,

including the many ways that new or reinforced forms of domination can be produced alongside modes of being that attempt to escape them.

Angela Jones' early writing on queer heterotopias is demonstrative of the ambivalent relationship between the liberative and the dominant that is present within even the most well-meaning articulations of a political future (2009). In calling for a particular form of perfect 'queer heterotopia' in the future—a heterotopia where all hierarchies are melted down in the liberating forge of transgressive, primordial queer energy—Jones' definition of heterotopia within this paper is at odds with my own, nearing a total contradiction in terms. Within my own usage of utopia and heterotopia, Jones' vision is aligned more closely with utopia: a political fantasy ungrounded in the material. As it is understood within this thesis, there is no such thing as a perfect heterotopia. They are not, and will never be, ideal, nor are they associated purely with the radical or a deconstruction of hierarchy. Jones' writing is also instructive of the blind spots that can emerge when an analytical framework, be it queerness or heterotopia, is assumed by its very nature to be the antithesis of hegemonic thought. Jones contends that a dominant queer aesthetic of gender transgression, taking the form of drag art and a 'romanticised trans body,' has fixed queerness in place, stymieing the generation of alternative subjectivities through heterotopia and recreating the epistemic violence of hegemony (2009). To illustrate this argument, Jones points toward 'Bear' subculture as an ideal example of what queerness should be, a place where "hypermasculine gay men… have found a way to perform queerness that does not conform to society's expectations" (2009, 9). This is contrasted with drag art, which for Jones is "viewed as mere imitation by heteronormative society" and has a stunted transgressive potential due to its consumer appeal (Jones 2009, 11).

Despite Jones' rhetorical vision of queerness without hierarchy, their brief attachment of this vision to the material world reveals a conservative desire to police the boundaries of gender and corral queer sexualities back into the binary prescribed by heteronormative society. This is illustrative of the coercive force described by Dolan when utopic fantasy is templated onto the real

(2001). With a particular focus on the presentation of gay men, Jones views their feminine traits as disappointing, as it reinforces the stereotype of the feminine queer man (2009). Paradoxically, Jones contends that men performing masculinity, fraternity, and exclusive homosociality is a more subversive, and hence queerer, practice. This value system is near-parallel to the dictates of heteronormativity, where queer men are conditioned at a young age to curtail natural feminine flourishes and shun friendships with women, and to instead hide within the masculine homosocial. Jones' paper, despite its stated radical queer politic, is itself a vehicle for the hegemonic frameworks it calls for deconstructing, demonstrating the critical need to anchor discursive arguments for social space on the actual material condition of those spaces, rather than philosophical standpoints that assume an antinormative position.

My approach to a queer heterotopia is more closely aligned with that envisioned by Samuel Delany in his novel *Trouble on Triton* (1976, 1990). Within it, he depicts a future society marked by its open-ness to multiplicity, personal transformation, and expression, but in such a way that interrogates the inherently radical potential of these ideals. In a 1990 interview, Delany states that "a major definition of 'heterotopia' is its medical meaning. It's the removal of one part or organ from the body and affixing it to another plane in or on the body. That's called a heterotopia. A skin graft is a heterotopia. But so is a sex change" (1990, 319). C. Riley Snorton's analysis of Delany's deployment of heterotopia is crucial to my own definition and understanding. Drawing together *Trouble on Triton* and Delany's subsequent interview, Snorton proposes that "heterotopias are not necessarily liberatory spaces" (2014, 84). Even in a context, such as *Triton*, that fosters diversity of choice and being, Snorton contends that "transitions are always already imbued with hierarchies of social value" (2014, 88). Further, they propose that "*Triton*… implores us to consider how multiplicity and electivity are compatible with modes of domination, as it narrates the myriad ways commodification-cum-classification are valued techniques in the normativisation and management of identity" (Snorton 2014, 90). The concept of a society structured to allow transitioning gender with ease remains a progressive one, yet Delany's embrace of heterotopia's definitional ambiguity

leads him to situate this process within a society that remains marked by forms of hegemonic oppression.

Central to my thesis is that queer heterotopias encompass these contradictions. Their radical elements are not immune to transformation into, or capture by, a dominant and oppressive apparatus; their differences must always be understood relationally to their context, a context which changes over time as the tools of exploitation and oppression also shift. Tavia Nyong'o proposes that Samuel R. Delany's works of science fiction preconditioned the rise of queer theory, calling them "queer theory's dark precursor" (2019, 151). Although not using queer by name, Nyong'o argues that—much like a heterotopia, or like Muñoz' glimpse—Delany's visionary construction of radically alternative socialities acted as a pre-appearance of what was to come, one of many experimental sites wherein the seeds of queer theory may have germinated long before they sprouted in the academy. Delany's adoption of heterotopia, too, came long before its broader popularisation within the academy, as well as his cognizance of what heterotopia's ambiguity could mean for the situational relevance of liberative ideas around sexuality and gender when it comes to their ability to disrupt subjugative forces. It is within this lineage of thought that I approach the queerness of heterotopia, and thus the heterotopic nature of queer nightlife.

Heterotopology

When I entered Hugs & Kisses, I felt that it was a different space. But what actually produced this difference? David Murphy, promoter of *LEFAG*, describes

> look[ing] at the crowd and it feels actually so natural seeing people that are just so different from each other. And that's what I love most about queer spaces and Le Fag is you go to other parties, a lot of people dress the same—most commonly there's a lot of white

> straight men there—and seeing so many different expressions of gender here, so many different expressions of sexuality, body shapes, skin colours... it feels normal (No Vacancy 2020).

Within this description, Murphy calls upon a delineation of this particular space—the queer space—as different to heteronormative spaces. Most relevantly, however, this difference is experienced not only as a radical alterity, but also as a new-naturalness, or alternative-normal, that is crafted *against* other spaces that are dominated by, as he puts it, white straight men who all dress the same. In understanding Hugs & Kisses as a site of newly-imagined normalities—rather than simply chaotic oppositionalities—Murphy's observation resonates with an emergent heterotopic framework that approaches heterotopic sites as having their own kind of logic. Hetherington (1996) argues that "spaces of resistance are also spaces of alternative ordering; they have their own codes, rules and symbols and generate their own relations of power" (1997, 24). Cutting through the romanticisation of the Other prevalent in prior heterotopic theories, Hetherington posits that heterotopias generate their own complex systems of meaning, as opposed to only providing a space for the deconstruction or critique of the dominant. By identifying elements of these alternative systems, one can begin to understand the social ideals that form the foundation of heterotopic sites, and the processes with which they attempt to bring these ideals into reality.

In his lecture notes, Foucault imagines "a sort of systematic description… that would, in a given society, take as its object the study, analysis, description, and 'reading'... of these different spaces, of these other places" (1986, 4). He calls this description *heterotopology*. Given the brevity of his originary description, the work of developing a heterotopological method can be accredited to scholars such as Tompkins and Hetherington, who draw on range of theories, but especially the work of Louis Marin, to propose a replicable means of analysing heterotopic space (Hetherington 1997; Tompkins 2014). Much like them, however, I have also been required to sweep in a diverse array of theory to account for the specificities that arise when applying this framework into queer nightlife: this includes not just the work of the geographers, queer ethnographers, and philosophers

mentioned throughout this chapter, but also a re-interpretation of the theoretical genealogy that led to Hetherington and Tompkins' own innovations.

Gay McAuley's *Space in Performance*, cited by Tompkins in her own heterotopic work , provides a helpful blueprint for the analysis of space through ethnographic method: by focusing on the spatialities of performance beyond those conventionally analysed—including the realm of the rehearsal studio, the dressing rooms, and the location of the theatre in the city—McAuley unveils the critical impact of how theatre, as a specific spatial organisation, creates meaning through a complex weave of spaces, not *just* the performance space or the dramatic space summoned through performance (McAuley 1999; Tompkins 2014). Although her work does account for the abstract or virtual space created through representation, her analysis is scoped away from the role of things such as "performers' appearance, costume, makeup, hairstyle and facial expression" (McAuley 1999, 7), focusing only on performance elements that acquire meaning spatially. In this way, her analytical approach treats the performance event as existing within a closed-system, or its own small world: although its constitutive elements all have intimate relations with each other, there is no room to explore how these spatialities are utilised to reflect, comment on, or alter the spatial relations that structure the wider world, all of which can be done through organisations of the 'visual' such as costume and pose. As a method, then, her path-breaking approach to 'seeing' the multiple spatialities that can inveigle their way into a performance space has deeply impacted the questions I ask of nightlife sites, but her method of self-containing the analysis to the time-space of the site is constrictive to heterotopic analysis.

The queer nightclub, the queer nightlife event, is a proposal for an alternative world, and the questions I have developed with the help of these theorists are all aimed at decoding the unique spatial practices that I see as constitutive of their heterotopic nature. According to Lefebvre, spatial practice is the means by which ideology shapes and expresses itself in society (1991). He claims that "[t]he spatial practice of a society secretes that society's space; it propounds and presupposes it, in a dialectical interaction; it produces it slowly and surely as it masters and appropriates it. From the

analytic standpoint, the spatial practice of a society is revealed through deciphering of its space" (Lefebvre 1991, 33). Speaking specifically of neocapitalism, it is clear that, for Lefebvre, spatial practice is the insidious domination of space by power, whose guiding principles can be discerned through the close analysis of the relations that shape a given space, whose ideology is expressed *through* space (1991). But as performativity (theoretically) escapes its imperative to only and always imperfectly replicate hegemony, so too does 'spatial practice' elide the ideological trappings of the dominant, leaving it open to alternative appropriations. I propose that spatial practice can be seen as similar, in this way, to what I outline above as world-making. The appeal of spatial practice to heterotopic analysis, however, is that there is no implication of separation between sites: in fact it is, much like performativity, bound to the perpetuation of dominant hegemonies—a linkage critical to the incommensurable ambivalence of heterotopic sites. It is through spatial practice that heterotopias are created, and it is through the analysis of heterotopic sites that it is possible to articulate, provisionally, the alternative ideals that bring them into being.

For the purposes of my own heterotopological method, I conceptualise spatial practices as being composed of four indistinct categories: *embodied practices*, *material space*, *regulatory restraint* and *virtual space*. I depart here from Tompkins' method of glimpsing heterotopias through the lenses of the 'actual world,' the constructed space, and the abstract space of a production (2014, 27). Although an accounting for the dominant context, and an analysis of elements such as set and lighting, is relevant to a nightlife setting, there are very few instances in which nightlife seeks to produce a fictive or narrative world: it is fixed in the present, generated live through the interactions between patrons, performers, and the venue. I have found it analytically useful, however, to follow this method to designate particular spatial zones to better understand the multiple spatialities through which a heterotopia is constructed. Much as Tompkins, McAuley, and Lefebvre create and define their own spatial categories of analysis for theatre and neocapitalism respectively (Lefebvre 1991; McAuley 1999; Tompkins 2014), so too do I risk proliferating an

already-immense spatial taxonomy by proposing the following categories for approaching queer nightlife:

1. *Embodied Practices* The evocation of the Hugs & Kisses dancefloor by Murphy (quoted above) provides a glimpse of what I mean by 'embodied practices.' Throughout this thesis, this means actions people take that, consciously or not, shape the experience of a particular space. Just a few embodied practices that could be gleaned from the above quote are the ways patrons dress, which patrons show up, and the way that these patrons treat each other in close proximity. These practices, with a little more investigation, would potentially be revealed to exist and be allowed by a network of many others: the design and marketing style of the event (a collaboration between graphic artist and promoter to attract certain patrons and deter others), which patrons the bouncer decides to allow in and to reject, the way set designers have created installations or altered the space, what performances are presented and by who, the behaviour of door and bar staff, the DJs and musicians who have been booked, what music is being selected, and the way patrons interact with every single one of these elements and each other.
2. *Material Space* In describing Hugs & Kisses, it is always its location that is mentioned first: the way it is hidden past dumpsters, uneven stones, a criss-cross of alleys and marked by barely anything except a bouncer standing outside, a small rope, and a scattering of people either lining up or sitting on the ground smoking. Following the work of McAuley (1999), all of these elements and more can be considered to be constitutive of the central creative nexus of the stage/DJ booth/dancefloor—the dim lighting in the street, the step away from the main road, the narrow corridor and the steep staircase, the grimy toilets with broken locks, the chain mesh across the windows to the street, the out of tune upright piano crammed next to two of the cubicles, the asymmetrical geometry of the dancefloor, the tiny triangular room with glass windows beside the DJ booth, the curtained-off booths (as if in a train carriage) along one-side of the dancefloor, the mirror that stretched from

waist-height to ceiling along the back wall, the bedrooms where patrons got ready, the transport they took on the way there. All of these elements, crucially, shape what is possible (or impossible), and it is through the interaction of embodied practices and material space that they both, simultaneously, gain meaning.

3. Regulatory Restraint As material space shapes the possibilities of embodied practices, so too does regulatory restraint exude a powerful force over the spatial organisation of heterotopic spatial practices, both material and embodied. The relative hostility and suspicion levelled by Government figures against queer nightlife spaces ensures that the function of the regulatory on these spaces is apparent all the way from discussions in Parliament, to press releases, to news stories, to conversations that occur during the events themselves. Regulatory restraint forms not so much a barrier but a membrane that all practices, whether they respect it or transgress it, can be understood as working in relation to. Some examples of how regulatory restraint manifests in space includes the hours of the liquor licence, the type of licence provided (nightclub, RSL, sex-on-premises), the legal capacity of the venue, the requirement for and placement of safety exits, the requirement for security, the requirement for photo identification, noise pollution laws, laws allowing for different types of performance and where (is nudity allowed, are sex acts allowed), copyright laws for music, and construction codes governing standards for renovations. In one article on Hugs & Kisses, it is its unique regulatory situation that is cited as the condition of its existence:

> As a members-only club, the building had an antiquated 24-hour-liquor license. Hugo knew he had found something special. The building that he found is owned and operated by the Royal Antediluvian Order of Buffaloes, a men's club, but their top floor, which in the '50s had hosted wild

> soirees, sat empty for decades. He eventually negotiated a deal to open the top floor as a music venue (Weiner 2018).

This specific licensing arrangement allowed the club to employ only one security guard, allowed the club to escape legislation requiring surveillance on premises and, unlike other nightclubs, police officers were not permitted to simply enter the members-only premises, often leading to evenings where they would gather in the alleyway outside and watch patrons come and go, but be unable to proceed any further. Although enabled specifically *by* the law, it was the specific regulatory restraints that formed the bedrock of Hugs & Kisses as a site, and no doubt contributed to the often-cited 'lawless' nature of the embodied practices that took place within it. A strata of specific regulatory restraints allowed the transgression of others, and it is within through this relationship of practices that the particular character of this heterotopic site is generated.

4. Virtual Space Foucault characterises heterotopology "as a sort of simultaneously mythic and real contestation of the space in which we live" (1986, 4), irrevocably linking heterotopias not just to the observable spatial practices that constitute it, but to the more abstract imaginings that also structure human activity. Envisioning a method that works beyond the realm of the real, Foucault (and theorists after him) are challenged to deploy heterotopology in a way that accounts for spatial formulations that are, more or less, *virtual*: that incorporate the workings of imagination, affect, memory, historical narratives, utopianism, dystopianism, and performances of the fictional. The Lefebvrian notion of *representational spaces* as "...the space occupied by sensory phenomena, including products of the imagination such as projects and projections, symbols and utopias" provides an integral context for this category (1991, 12), as well as his further characterisation of representational spaces as having "their source in history—in the history of a people as well as in the history of each individual belonging to that people" (Lefebvre 1991, 41). I draw significantly on this definition to structure my understanding of how the virtual works within

queer nightlife, with some difference: Lefebvre characterises representational spaces as a kind of overlay on physical space, as a resistant practice that can disrupt the dominant ideology of neocapitalism with an alternative 'vision' provided by cultural knowledges, beliefs and historical context; within my own taxonomy, I do not see this virtual space so much as an overlay on dominant space as a foundational constitutive spatial practice of queer nightlife, one that is central to the alternative ideals that set these sites apart as heterotopias. The virtual space is called into being and deployed as spatial practice by organisers, patrons, performers, and DJs in various ways—sometimes explicitly—and it is the subsequent imaginings of the 'historical' past, the utopian future, of our cultural legacy as queer people, and our supposed connections to our queer 'ancestors' that are constructed within heterotopic space and that directly inform the embodied practices that constitute it and its sense of alternativeness to the dominant world that is its context.

Through these categories, it is possible to generate a substantial list of clues as to the practices that shape a site. But this list alone is not enough to complete a heterotopic analysis. Tompkins convincingly argues this point by drawing on Foucault's original claim that heterotopias "have a function in relation to all the space that remains" (Foucault 1986, 8), claiming that in order to discern meaning from a heterotopia it *must* be analysed against its context. Her claim that "a further principle of heterotopia, one that derives from their significance as representing through similitude, is that they only exist in relation, that is, they are established by their difference in a relationship between sites rather than their Otherness deriving from the site itself" is adopted wholesale into my own methodology (Tompkins 2014, 43), effectively meaning that in order to conduct a heterotopic analysis, the above categories of embodied practices, material space, regulatory restraint and virtual space must also be understood to shape the dominant sites surrounding heterotopias, and it is only through a comparison between these spatial practices that the function of particular heterotopias can begin to be understood.

The theory of heterotopia is as confounding as the sites it hopes to describe. Although other methods, such as performance studies and dramaturgical analysis, are relevant to the study of queer nightlife, I have chosen heterotopia as an overarching framework as its chaotic ambiguity already holds an affinity for the subjects of both queerness and nightlife. Further, its focus on alterity, hegemony, and the relationship between sites of difference and broader culture speak profoundly to the function of queer nightlife as a space to experience something other than the everyday, to potentially become somebody quite different to who you were before. In some ways heterotopias can be understood as spaces of alternative order, as complex but logical as the forces that structure the world at large, as curious specimens that can, with some effort, be simply decoded, analysed, and categorised. In other ways they are profoundly unsettling sites that unravel the foundation of knowledge that provides any sense of coherence and stability to the human mind, revealing all meaning to be contingent. I do not hope to resolve this tension throughout this thesis, but will rather draw simultaneously from each to codify, to analyse, to camouflage, and to disrupt. In various ways, these strategies will be exemplified throughout each remaining chapter.

In the above chapter, I have reviewed the rapidly proliferating field of heterotopic scholarship. This review revealed a sprawling, contradictory, and contested field born of the brevity and ambiguity of its founding text. Nevertheless, heterotopic scholarship continues to bear fruit for scholars interested in the politics of space, especially those spaces that exist in a contested or ambivalent relation to power structures. By bringing heterotopic theory in conversation with queer theory, I developed two of the founding principles for this thesis. firstly, I that heterotopia may offer a method for the analysis of the complex relations of queer sites; secondly, that heterotopia is performative, and it is through heterotopic experience that our notions of everyday life and utopia, and hence queerness, are created. I conclude with an outline of the spatial qualities I consider in the analysis of queer nightlife.

3.

Expression Without Harm: Creating 'Safe Spaces' in Dangerous Places

On the way home I decided to walk, initiating a solid ten minutes of being yelled at by men on the street. I wrote this in my field notes on the 22nd of December 2018, after I had left the Unicorns party at Rubix Warehouse in Brunswick. This party, held every six weeks or so throughout this year, is huge and colourful, with a focus on creating a sex-positive and celebratory space for queer people who do not fit within the narrow prescription of fit, white, cisgender gay maleness that dominated queer nightlife for so long. It wasn't a far walk from the venue, but it was a dark one—over the rubbish-strewn train tracks, up the bike-path that someone had lit-up with a string of fairy lights along the guard rail, and across to Sydney Road. I had just finished DJing, and in-line with the "Last Night Before Queer-Mas" theme I was wearing an iridescent silver short skirt with matching boots and spray-painted hair. A plastic dollar-store mistletoe hung on a ribbon around my neck. Predictably, the glitzy gender non-conforming outfit had attracted the gaze of those I walked past, eliciting verbal responses in the form of shouts across the street, mumbles in passing, and yells from car windows; only minutes before, the only way the outfit had been remarked upon was with warm compliments—if it was even perceived to be remarkable at all.

Within Chapter One, I noted Buckland's (1999) ethical concerns associated with conducting ethnographic research at queer nightlife events: how the act of taking notes, of holding a microphone, of asking people to participate while in a heightened affective environment might sabotage an experience that was meant to be sheltered from the prying, interrogative gaze that

characterises the scrutiny that marginalised people often receive by simply walking down the street. By reflecting on these observations and altering my behaviour accordingly, I realise I have already contributed to creating a 'safe space:' a kind of heterotopia that is co-created by a complex constellation of embodied practices conducted by promoters, performers, venue staff, and patrons. Throughout this Chapter I will outline some detailed examples of how promoters have altered spaces in order to create safety in comparison to the world outside the venue's walls. I will then discuss how performers leverage their representative power within already-established spaces to expand or interrogate this safety, 'making room' for those who may not be catered for, such as queer people of colour (Muñoz 1999). Useful to this analysis is a consideration not only of safety, but of its mirror, fear, especially as it functions as a technology of spatial and social organisation or "affective politics" (Ahmed 2014, 64). As has been argued by both Ahmed and Christina B. Hanhardt (2014; 2013), the feeling of safety is often predicated on tactical violences and exclusions: it functions, in this way, in a near-territorial manner, and queer nightlife is rife with examples of how these territories are carved out along identitarian dimensions. I find that the proliferation of queer nightlife spaces can, in part, be ascribed to accessibility and safety constraints, and within the tensions of these sites—particularly those that arise in moments of conflict—the ideological struggle through which heterotopia is performatively generated becomes visible.

This experience of surveillance and danger I experienced on my walk home is by no means unique. Delsi Cat, the organiser of Unicorns, describes a similar experience as she moves from the site of queer nightlife to elsewhere:

> It's actually really interesting. Like sometimes I'll go somewhere after Unicorns. Rarely, but sometimes I do, and I'll go in the outfit I'm wearing to Unicorns. And Unicorns, you know, I'm in a leotard or leotard G-string or whatever. And so safe. Like no one looks at my body in a way that feels predatory, no one would ever touch me inappropriately. And as soon as I go to another space, completely

> opposite. It's really weird, and jarring. 'Cause I think, 'cause I live so much of my life now in my Unicorn bubble, I sometimes do forget what the outside world can be like (Delsi Cat 2020).

The 'outside world' Delsi describes is not only the public street, but other venues that do not operate within the strata of spatial practices that define Unicorns. Reminiscing on a time before these kinds of events were widespread within Naarm, Alexander Powers offers this observation on attending straight venues as a queer person:

> Those days we'd go as a pack, it'd always be this full stressful thing to get past the security, 'cause you never know if they'll pick you out or what, or what they'll think of you, or they'd stare at you or you'd just have this, bleh. And you finally get past the security and we get on the dancefloor and we form a circle, like elbows out, you know like, like nobody, none of the people around us were allowed to so much as look at us, interact with us—we were *on* it. Not letting, not letting anyone in, you know. 'Cause we just felt like we had to really be that safe and that protective of ourselves (Powers 2020).

Being touched, being violated, being yelled at, being refused entry, being glanced at sideways, being made uncomfortable: these are all experiences that characterise movement through the world for those who live outside the remit of normativity (Adeyemi, Khubchandani, and Rivera-Servera 2021; Buckland 2002). As I will demonstrate throughout this chapter, it is the search for shelter from these experiences of queerphobic, racist, and sexual assault that constitutes some of the many conflicting ideological forces that shape the embodied practices of Naarm's queer heterotopias.

In his review of Foucault's heterotopia, Kevin Hetherington refers to a range of spatial terms—marginal space, paradoxical space, third space—as almost euphemistic of the overarching idea of what heterotopias can be (1997, 41). Sweeping in spaces incongruous, unknowable and

marginal, he argues that these various academic terms are “effects rather than definitions of such spaces” (Hetherington 1997, 41), offering up heterotopia as the terminological chimera that can loosely encapsulate and describe the array of cited spatial anomalies. As people grapple with heterotopic formulations, then—with sites where alternative rules and value systems preside in favour of those that govern the dominant world—a host of improvisatory descriptors arise to account, partially, for something that often exists beyond the ability to be grasped by language. Although many of these take the form of esoteric allusions, throughout participant interviews I found that a relatively explicit linguistic manifestation of Hetherington’s heterotopic effect could be found in the phrase ‘safe spaces.’ For the most part, participants who used the term ‘safe space’ were referring to sites where people with disabilities, or people who are neurodivergent, could gain access without obstacle. Alternatively, they could mean spaces where those in a cultural, sexual, or gender minority could gather—and most importantly flaunt—their minority culture without risk of reprisal or abuse. Much like heterotopia, then, I found that safe space, when used by participants, referred to a particular kind of spatial organisation that provides an alternative experience to the spatial practices that structured their day-to-day lives.

The Production of Safety

For Alexander Powers, intersectional[15] feminism hitting the mainstream in the 2010s changed everything. Within local queer nightlife, Alexander cites the work of *Cool Room*—a club-party collective—as leading the pack in creating spaces with an intersectional underpinning. More broadly throughout this time, night-time music events in Naarm began to cater to gender identities outside

[15] See Chapter One.

the binary, attempt to eliminate discrimination within programming and door policies, and reform audience attitudes regarding the often-casual sexual assault that occurs within venues. Before these changes, Alexander could not imagine a social world outside of the radical separatist queer one that she had co-created for herself, let alone partying alongside and DJing for a broader cis-heterosexual audience. Delsi Cat, too, reflects on the changing scene within the city, claiming that not only is there a growing number of "safer queer spaces" opening up over time in both Sydney and Naarm (Cat), but that more mainstream festivals are starting to adopt policies such as ensuring that there are not only cis-gendered white men on the line-up.[16] When asked in more detail about what it is, exactly, that makes a space safe, Delsi reveals a host of deep concerns that she considers when putting together an event:

> I want those spaces to also be doing the work to make those spaces safe for the attendees. You can't just chuck on a diverse line up and say this space is accessible and safe, everyone welcome. But not have the structures in place to make it safe for those people. And that's something I kind of am interested in, working towards supporting spaces to get to that point. Because it is frustrating to see and does concern me when spaces are trying to say hey this is a safe space, but they haven't done the work (Delsi Cat 2020).

These structures, for Delsi, need to be ingrained over time into the culture of an event, meaning that it is not enough to simply say a space is safe, or to book artists outside of white cisheterosexual norms. Alexander hints at this issue too, claiming that despite having the talent to back it up, she suspected that in her first years as a DJ some promoters may have been caught up in the zeitgeist of the new trans visibility that intersectional politics (and Laverne Cox's 'Trans Tipping Point' TIME

[16] Although framed within this discussion optimistically, there is a tension between the benefits of mainstream representation, and the capture or commercialisation of minority subjectivities and culture through gentrification. These tensions are drawn out in more detail in Chapter Six.

cover) had brought, making what Alexander characterised as an easy choice to book her for her trans-ness, as much as because of her skill as a DJ. She describes this as the "double-bind"[17] of representation: it is excellent that crowds and bookers are locking-in diverse line-ups—but it can leave those booked with a suspicion, whether or not it is founded, that they have jumped some kind of queue for a reason beyond their control, that they have been reduced to the surface of their identity for booking purposes, rather than being assessed on ability.

Delsi describes some "obvious" safety structures that promoters can put in place such as "gender-neutral toilets… accessible spaces for people with different access needs, for example wheelchair ramps, AUSLAN interpreters, quiet spaces for people who are neurodivergent… I would never have strobe lights, which can cause sensory issues for some people" (Delsi Cat 2020). These concerns are manifested directly in the choice of venue and the layout of the space for *Unicorns*—the venue is wheelchair accessible; the first space you enter on arrival is a dim, quiet room full of couches and ferns; although the warehouse can be crammed with bodies, there is always a directive to make room at the front for those in wheelchairs or those who need to more clearly see the AUSLAN interpreter on stage during speeches and performances; the idea of gender-segregated bathrooms even existing borders on the absurd. But safety is more than putting a sign on the toilet door: Delsi goes on to articulate how the values, ethos, and culture of a particular space and the community that inhabits it is integral to creating a safe space, and how this is only something that can be developed over time and with a great amount of work. At some point in the night, Delsi always jumps on the microphone to welcome people to the party—she tells everyone to practice *Consent! Consent! Consent!*, letting everyone know that there are people with lanyards that patrons can speak to if they feel unsafe or violated in any way. She tells me that should this happen (which is

[17] This term has an academic basis as far back as 1956, where it was proposed as a foundation for the operation of schizophrenia (Bateson et al. 1956). It has long since been popularised more broadly as meaning an 'impossible situation' or 'Catch-22,' with applications in feminism and queer studies specifically within the realm of gender performance and diversity representation (Fernandez, Burnett, and Gomez 2019; McNeal 1999).

rarely), she will take the identified person outside and talk to them about the values of the space. Further to this she considers the marketing, the social media messaging, her tone, the way she instructs security to behave, and the way her own behaviour communicates the underlying ethos of the space to patrons. Sevara Zaric, promoter of *Umami*, reinforces this self-appointed double role of promotion and safe space-making, stating that they always try to keep a level head while the event is running “in case anybody needs safety or help. ‘Cause I am the safety officer, in terms of that space when it’s happening” (Zaric 2020). Within this formulation of a queer heterotopia—the safe space—it is the promoter that occupies a central position as space-maker and culture-progenitor, moulding behaviour and the site it takes place within to enable an experience without the curtailing presence of fear (Ahmed 2014).

Another prominent example of how safety shapes Naarm’s queer nightlife is the *Fantastic Party* which, until it was sold to developers, took place at the Club 80 sex-on-premises venue in Collingwood. The party, which is described within their promotion as a “completely inclusive” occasion which is “about bringing everyone together for one beautiful, crazy night where we party as one” (Fantastic Party, *Email Correspondence* 28 Nov, 2019), has a focus on high-fashion fetishism and kink while curating a fusion of forms such as techno, Shibari rope bondage and other performance arts. This party stands out for the sheer amount of information they provide to patrons. Before the party begins, the promoters are already working to mould the spatial practices of the party through communication on social media, and via email to ticket holders (Fantastic Party, *Email*). This communication served not only to provide information like where to collect your ticket, the opening times, and the line-up, but detailed information regarding what to wear, the kind of behaviour that is expected (particularly in the darkrooms), how to practice enthusiastic consent, and a strict no-photography policy.

This emphasis on education may have been so prominent because, for the first time in Club 80’s decades-long history, the dark rooms were opened for all genders rather than being male-

exclusive. As can be seen below in *Fig. 1*, this safe space-making communication is serving three purposes:

1. To let those who have never participated in darkroom culture know the ins and outs of participation, and how not to insult or inadvertently harm others through their behaviour.
2. To let those who are deeply familiar with darkroom culture and its traditionally gay-male exclusivity know about the alternative social rules that will be governing the space—namely, that gender non-conforming people, trans people, and cis-gender women will have as much right over the cruising site as the gay men who have had exclusive access until this moment.
3. To educate cisgendered, heterosexual attendees who are attracted to the party for its kink elements about the malleability of gender-identity, and that it cannot be discerned (and should not be assumed) by what is read on the surface.

They advise patrons to "make sure you always play with consent, never interrupt people who are playing, always ask before touching, do take no for an answer and move on, and be mindful of play areas, people playing, and whips flying" (Fantastic Party, *Email*), and similar to *Unicorns Party*, they have nominated staff with lanyards who can be approached should patrons identify anyone who is breaching the alternative social rules that define this particular space. These rules, and the methods they use to communicate them to patrons, are parallel to the techniques that Delsi discusses when creating her own Unicorns safe space, and although the two parties are by no means identical, they share some similar aims in creating a site that allows for all gender and sexual identities to express themselves without fear of harm. In the case of *Fantastic Party*, this alternativeness is drawn not just from the juxtaposition with the world outside Club 80's walls, but also with other sex-on-premises parties, including at Club 80 itself.

ACTIVE CONSENT IN OUR DARKROOMS

Many darkrooms around the world exercise implied consent, but FANTASTIC's darkrooms are all about ACTIVE CONSENT. The same rules around consent apply in our darkrooms as the rest of our party.

ACTIVE consent means you need to ASK verbally for consent before touching someone.

WHY?

👉 FANTASTIC is a party for all genders and all sexualities
👉 FANTASTIC is all about partying as ONE. All sexualities and genders will be enjoying the spaces inside the darkrooms.
👉 Since all are welcome, you cannot make assumptions about another attendees' gender identity or sexuality.

Remember, consent must be given verbally - and consent that has been given may be revoked at any time.

REVOKING CONSENT

Just because you have consented at the beginning, does not mean that you can't revoke consent or change your mind while you're in the middle of something. In a dark room, there are many ways you can revoke consent in the moment;

👉 Verbally - "no thank you"
👉 Non Verbally - a common non verbal refusal is to tap the person on the hand or push their hand away to say "no more thank you"
👉 Walk away

If someone says no to you (or non verbally indicates to you that their consent is removed) you must stop immediately.

OUR PATRONS SAFETY IS PARAMOUNT

Figure 3. [Screenshot of email from Fantastic Party]. 28 Nov 2019. Taken by Author.

Much like Unicorns and its attention to space—where will people dance, where will people wind down, how will people find help—*Fantastic* has an eye for detail on how spaces should be utilised to provide a satisfying and safe experience for its patrons, an experience that was spread out across the height of four levels. An illustration of this was the design of the Shibari Garden (*Fig 2)*. As the structural centre-point, I was in and out of this room throughout the night. In general, I spent a lot of time meandering between the top darkroom floor, into the Shibari garden, down into the dance dungeon, and back to the garden again. Considering the claustrophobic sweatiness that pervades the labyrinthine structure, it became an essential point of alleviation for rising anxiety or feelings of being overwhelmed by the crowd, the intensity of the dancefloor, or the surging sexual energy. The Shibari Garden space, usually, is a cinema. At other events it projects gay pornography while dimly lit couches span around it in concentric rings: for Fantastic, this couch set up was pushed a little further back, and the screen was covered up. Instead, there was a

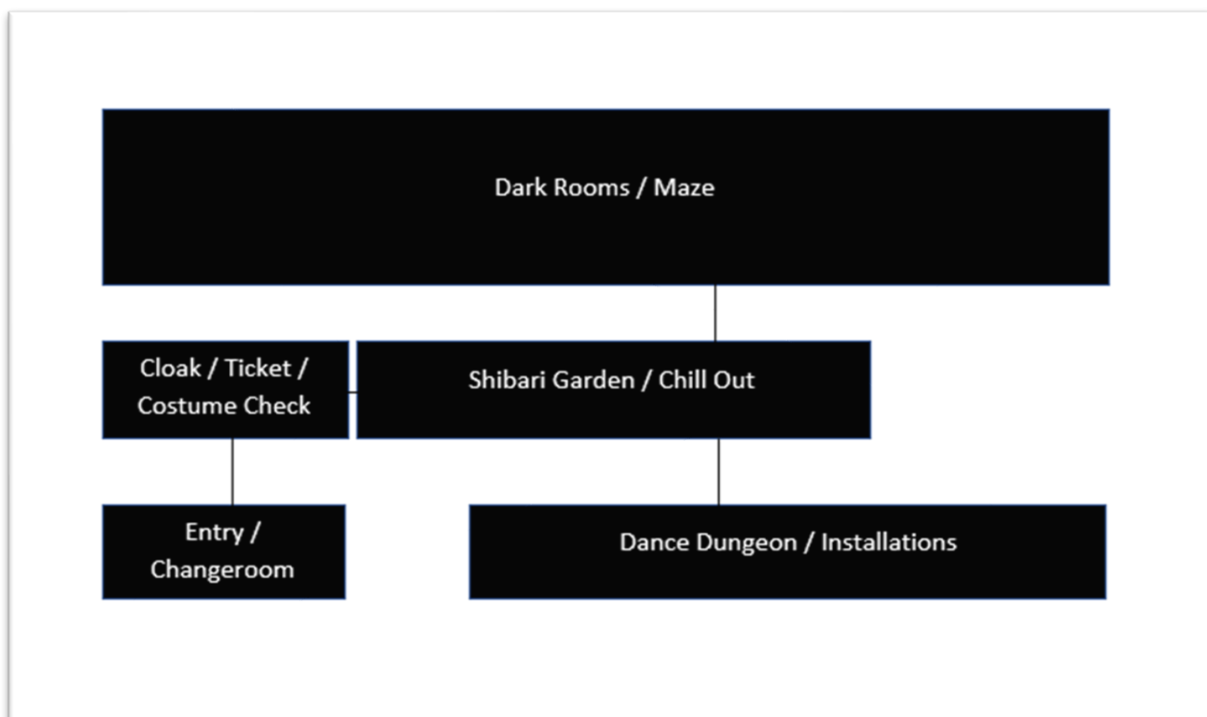

Figure 4. [Diagram of Fantastic Party lay-out at Club 80]. Created by Author.

cleared space with two structures erected—vertical metal poles, topped with horizontal bamboo poles—which were built for the purpose of tying and suspending people for a durational Shibari rope art-performance. This tying took place all throughout the night. When I needed a moment to cool down, I came to the garden and sat down on the floor, my back leaning against the legs of a friend. At one point I spent twenty to thirty minutes watching a tattooed man be tied in various positions on the floor, his hair pulled, spat on, and then eventually pulled up off the ground to be suspended upside-down from the bamboo pole. This elicited applause from the watching crowd, who were obscured in darkness. All the while a DJ played in a shadowed booth behind us, mostly slow techno and electro, a more laid-back version of the music that was being played downstairs. This area was a delicately curated space that allowed patrons to stay involved with the party from a safe distance, forming a base from which to briefly foray to the wilder zones up above in the maze and down below in the dungeon.

Both *Unicorns* and *Fantastic Party* privilege the safety of their patrons through communication, design, and logistical features, attempting to minimise or pre-empt triggers or events that may cause harm, fear, or trauma. Both events also envision a queerer world wherein the boundaries of gender-identity and sexuality are broken down, allowing those who do not fit the mould of heteronormativity (or as is evidenced by the altered cruising rules at Club 80, homonormativity) to express themselves, to expand out and take up space in a way they are not allowed to within their day-to-day lives. These alternative social rules are often explicitly communicated to patrons prior to the event, or through speaking directly to them at the event, and are supported by a range of structural measures to further eliminate the boundaries between people such as accessibility for those who are disabled, eliminating gender-segregated bathrooms, altering the lighting set-up, hiring interpreters, or educating security staff on how to speak and behave.

All of these embodied practices are world-making labour: they are material attempts to bring an alternative social world into a semblance of reality (Berlant and Warner 1998; Muñoz 1999).

To put it another way, they are attempts to allow patrons *the space* to glimpse, in the Muñozian sense, a future that does not coincide with a flinch of fear, but with an expansion of hope. Ahmed writes that

> [f]ear projects us from the present into a future. But the feeling of fear presses us into that future as an intense bodily experience in the present. One sweats, one's heart races, one's whole body becomes a space of unpleasant intensity, an impression that overwhelms us and pushes us back with the force of its negation, which may sometimes involve taking flight, and other times may involve paralysis. So the object that we fear is not simply before us, or in front of us, but impresses upon us in the present, as an anticipated pain in the future (2014, 65).

Fear, like the horizon, can be anticipatory, as much about a clear threat as it is the uneasy immanence of wondering what may be around the corner, of being uncertain if there is something in the eye-straining shadow just out of sight, perhaps real or perhaps a conjuring of the imagination. Drawing together this analysis of Ahmed's with heterotopic theory, I propose that the work of safe nightlife spaces is not purely the creation of a shelter for those who are more likely to be harmed, belittled, or assaulted in the day-to-day world. Rather, the labour of reducing fear and expanding safety is tied intrinsically to the political visions of each nightlife space. Fear can be temporally displacing and constraining, simultaneously causing a hyperfocus on the survival needs of the present, while narrowing considerations of the future to a range of possibilities circumscribed only by the potential for harm, and how to escape from it. Removing this pressure, even momentarily, can allow different visions of the future to germinate, a multiplication of possibility that is conducive to the generation of alternative ways of being that is characteristic of heterotopia.

Performing Identity and Unsettling Safety

Within the wide spectrum of safe space-making practices by promoters, it is only in recent years that racial inequalities within queer nightlife have become a central focus.[18] When compared to the paragraphs of marketing copy that are written on consent, on gender-identity, on sexuality and accessibility (and the practices that are put in place to facilitate those things) the gap becomes even more evident. Most of Naarm's queer nightlife events acknowledge that they take place on colonised land, and some, such as *Powertrip*, *Cool Room* and *LEFAG* (among others) offer free entry for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people (Cool Room 2020; LEFAG 2020; Powertrip 2019). (Cool Room 2020; LEFAG 2020). Beyond this, and prior to the time of interviewing participants in 2020, there were few examples of practices that explicitly and structurally protected those who are not white from abuse within queer nightlife spaces, and little that broadened the scope of participation to allow them greater access. Rather than being abandoned altogether, however, I found that in lieu of structural change or explicit communications from the promoter, this labour of safety is somewhat outsourced by promoters to the performers that they hire.

Despite Delsi Cat's claim that it can sometimes be an empty gesture, booking a diverse line-up of artists arose as an integral strategy that promoters used to create a safe space for patrons, especially when it comes to issues of race or ethnicity. Sevara Zaric, when discussing their programming strategy for *Umami*, explains that they "really wanted to focus on the ballroom aspect of it. You know, the 70s, 80s, safe space for queer black and Latinx trans women of colour, and gay men of colour as well. I started creating these runways and having these performers on because…

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[18] See Chapter Six for a more detailed discussion of how this has developed from an international perspective. For the purposes of this Chapter, the discussion remains on the experiences of performers and participants in Melbourne, primarily in the years between 2017 – 2019.

Naarm's lacking this aspect of this certain night and I wanted to put these people at the forefront" ((Zaric 2020)). Delsi Cat reinforces the importance of programming as well, saying that it is "about showcasing diverse representation within our community, 'cause I think it's so powerful to be able to see someone on stage who you feel like you can connect to or relate with" (Delsi Cat 2020). Returning to the idea of the 'double-bind' raised earlier by Alexander Powers, what surfaces in these and the ensuing conversations below is the unique ethical position that performers of colour are placed in when hired for their arts practice *and* racial identity. Kane Bonato, promoter for Genki Party—an event that centres around queer culture, drag, and pop music from various countries like Japan and Korea—goes into more detail about how he considers ethnicity within his programming decisions, explaining that

> …from the get go I was very conscious being, you know, Caucasian myself. Like you can't run a party that is broadly focused on Asian pop music, be it from Korea or Japan or Taiwan or whatever, and have none of that represented in the line-up. It's a bad look. Like you kind of like what you like and if you like J-Pop music there's not literally any problem with that, but you know, it's about celebrating that community. So I was very conscious of that with booking (Bonato 2020).

Performers are seen by promoters as critical to providing representation to differing facets of the community that attends their event, and in the case of events such as *Genki Party*, of ensuring that white promoters are not perceived to be white-washing or appropriating elements of other people's cultures that are featured at the event. Through booking people who are not white, then, promoters hope that patrons of colour will feel more connected, feel more celebrated, and feel safer than they do within their day-to-day lives.

This siloing of responsibility into racial categories threatens to teeter into the critique of identity politics offered by Liz Bondi, wherein they claim that "pre-given, essential identities define

and determine politics. Because differences between people appear as innate and unbreachable, according to its critics, identity politics militates against the development of broadly based oppositional movements" (1993, 86). There is some evidence of this conflict among participants as they seek to navigate the complex territory between celebrating and honouring particular cultural histories, and the potential for appropriation or exoticisation when representing them. Kane Bonato talks about how strange he finds it to book on the basis of race and gender, but that it is important to acknowledge how the world structurally disadvantages certain people, meaning it may take more effort to reflect their experiences and cultures on a line-up of programming (Bonato). When speaking to performers of colour, these principles of representation and experience become further complexified: as articulated within the examples below, the value of representation goes beyond people of particular cultural identities strictly performing elements of their own culture. Instead a differing ideal emerges, one wherein performers (and patrons) of colour—even if from differing cultural backgrounds—may have some common ground when it comes to the harms of white supremacy, meaning that a value can be gained from representation between marginalised identity cultures, and not only between people who share the same identitarian foundations. This necessarily exists in tension with ideas of appropriation or exploitation of culture, yet it is within the negotiation between these potential harms and solidarities that the 'essential' nature of identity is interrogated, and newer, more equitable models of social relation are imagined.

Sevara Zaric recounts watching a South Sudanese performer platform their culture within a party space—although the specifics of the performance are not something that Stev would copy, she still felt that as "somebody who doesn't really fit into a diaspora, to watch other people perform on stage who are not from my, not where I'm from… I've taken a huge inspiration from that. Not specifically what they're doing, but the idea of what they're doing" (Zaric 2020). Mike Nguyen describes a complementary motivation behind his performances, one that platforms a kind of power that can be drawn across identitarian lines:

> So for me, definitely my approach, when I just wanna perform something, it's to validate me and other people of colour, and especially Asian PoCs, because I feel like we're very unrepresented in Naarm, and in Australia as a whole. So I would consider like more than not my performances are quite, for a lack of a better word, they're strong, they're just strong performances, and performances that wake people up (Nguyen).

The stage, as described by Zaric and Nguyen, can be a site of both celebration and assertion, a place for shows of strength for queer people who are not catered for within a white supremacist society or within queer nightlife: a place to forge solidarity not only with people of the same cultural background, but between people who are similarly marginalised.

These ideas manifest directly into the performances that take place within queer spaces. On the 19th of July, 2019, Mike Nguyen performed as his drag-pseudonym Mulan at *Honcho Disko*. His performance slot began with the curtains opening on a giant golden fan, held splayed open vertically by an assistant, covering the entirety of Mike's body and almost spanning the height of the stage area. As this tableau was held, the opening notes of the song 'Reflection' from the Disney film *Mulan* played, then as the fan was snapped shut, the song rapidly switched to Nicki Minaj's 'Chun Li.' Mike wore a tight, traditional flower-print silk garment that had long flaps down the front and back, and two white hair buns high on his scalp. Dressed as the character Chun-Li from Street Fighter V, he performed a powerful, or what he would call strong, lip-sync to the rap verses of Nicki Minaj, verses that were written about an Asian video game character. Mike speaks about this performance at length, reflecting on the interplay between different cultures and the power of representation on the stage:

Figure 5. [Photograph of Mike Nguyen at Honcho Disko.] 19 July 2019. Taken by Henry Small. Personal Collection.

Figure 6. [Character Design art for Chun-Li, Street Fighter V.] CAPCOM U.S.A. Inc.. From Street Fighter Wiki Online Database, accessed June 12, 2020. ***https://streetfighter.fandom.com/wiki/Chun-Li#:~:text=Personality,often%20the%20voice%20of%20reason.***

> It’s this interesting dichotomy of me being a PoC and me trying to reclaim—like I know it’s Black music, I don’t own it, but I’m trying to like, also, reclaim culture for cultured people… Basically, the first thing I wanted to achieve through that, through using that song, was actually to reclaim the Asian culture that was presented in the song…. ‘Cause Chun-Li is traditionally an Asian character, part of an Asian video game… [B]ut also when I do urban or rap songs, I do feel empowered because it belongs to a marginalised group and when I use marginalised groups’ music or artwork… it sort of does empower me, it’s sort of like a reclamation as well, in a way. But I know, like I said before, it’s come from a Black artist, and I’m not Black myself, but in a way I still feel connected ‘cause I understand… I’m not gonna say we share the same level of discrimination… but at the end of the day we share similar stories of being discriminated against within our cultures. So that’s where I find that bridge and that connection (Nguyen).

The stage within queer nightlife spaces is not always a site of strictly adhered cultural boundaries, but rather a place to explore the ‘bridges’ and ‘connections’ between—and draw strength from—a variety of cultures, particularly those that are marginalised within the context of white supremacist norms. Nguyen’s description situates this process as empowering but also ambivalent: itself a negotiation of power, of histories of racial subjugation, and a process of questioning one’s own position in relation to it and the act of claiming aspects of another’s culture. The stage is a site for performers to flaunt elements of culture that are not celebrated in day-to-day life, as well as a place to reclaim elements of culture that are circulating within the mainstream, especially those that are dislocated from the bodies that generated that culture in the first place. Chun-Li, within this

performance, was brought out from her partial home within the rap verses of Nicki Minaj—not in a way that separated the constitutive elements of culture into ethnic categories, but that instead sought out the shared potential for empowerment that arose from their interaction.

This kind of activism is not always directed in a way that empowers certain audience members—rather, it can also be a direct critique *of* them, particularly when aimed at underlying or unquestioned notions that uphold white privilege within society (and by extension, within queer nightlife spaces). On the 22nd of February 2020, Sha-Gaze performed at *Honcho Disko*, choosing Cher's "Strong Enough" as a backing track. At the start of this routine, Sha-gaze was being held with both hands behind their back by an assailant in a ski mask. They wrestled with them lackadaisically while they looked out to the audience and lip-synced the lyrics "'Cause I'm strong enough/To live without you/Strong enough/And I quit crying/Long enough/Now I'm strong enough/To know/You gotta go" (Cher Lyrics, 1998). Soon they broke free, hitting back at their assailant and overpowering them while still continuing to lip-sync. Then, together with their assailant, they unfurled a banner that read "Fuck the Police." It was blue, and covered in bloody handprints.

Sha-gaze, through the voice of Cher, tells us that they do not require, nor want, the presence of a police force. The bloodied handprints along the banner clearly referenced a protest that had occurred only months before, shortly after Kumanjayi Walker was killed by a police officer in the community of Yuendumu: after Walker's death, community members gathered at the police station to protest the murder, covering it in blood-red handprints (Allam 2019). Sha-Gaze's imagery connected these two distant sites, the spectre of the protest supplementing their own commentary which followed: now in their own voice, rather than Cher's. Returning to the mic, they tell us that the previous year, they almost had both arms broken by police officers. They tell us *if communities feel they need the protection of police, so be it, but keep them away from black and brown bodies, we don't need or want you*. This elicits a cheer from the audience.

In Christina Hanhardt's work on Safe Spaces, she highlights how LGBT activism in America has often worked hand-in-hand to increase the powers of security and policing within queer neighbourhoods, in a bid to wipe out homophobic violence (2013). Demonstrably, this increased power fell on Black and brown people, and particularly Black, brown, queer, poor people who—although they may have been long-time inhabitants of the neighbourhood—were now targeted as undesirable by the forces of gentrification that sought to sanitise space for businesses and particularly white middle-class residents, both queer and otherwise.[19] Sha-gaze's performance was an almost perfect inversion of this gentrified politics of queer safety: instead of a white queer community appealing to the State for protection from people of differing class and ethnicity, a person of colour is appealing to the community for protection from the violence of the State. As far

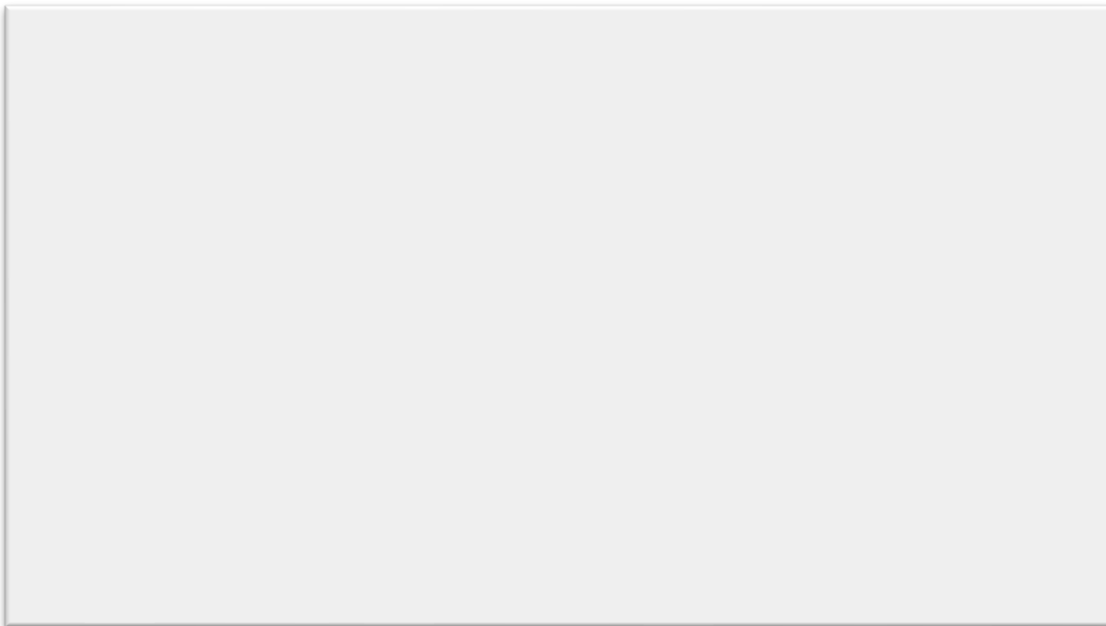

Figure 7. [Photograph of handprints on Yuendumu Police Station]. 13 Nov, 2019. Taken by Paul Marshall. From The Guardian, accessed June 13, 2020. ***https://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/2019/nov/13/yuendumu-police-shooting-justice-for-walker-rallies-widen-to-canberra-and-darwin***

[19] This is a process documented by others, including Sarah Schulman and Michael Warner (Schulman 2012; Warner 1999). Gentrification itself will become an increasingly central idea throughout this thesis as a force that infiltrates and, in many instances, seeks to eliminate heterotopic sites within the urban landscape. Conversely, heterotopias may be integral to resisting the processes of gentrification. See Chapter Four and Chapter Six for further explication.

as creating a safe space goes, this strategy did not seek to create a fear-free experience for the audience—rather it sought to unsettle an increasingly cosy relationship between white queerness and the State in service of a broader campaign for safety that extends beyond the site of performance and into the world at large. It also, parallel to Mike Nguyen's views on performance, brought varying "Black and brown bodies" into a generalised relation with white supremacy (Sha Gaze, *Honcho Disko* 2020), drawing linkages between the violence experienced by Sha Gaze, by Kumanjayi Walker, and by all other peoples who are targeted by the State due to their variation from whiteness in order to form a coalition between the oppressed.

To return to the original question of this discussion—namely, that of the power of representation and diversity on line-ups to reflect culture and create a safe space for people of colour—within these examples it is evident that this is only one element of how performers may work with identity within nightlife space. Beyond a purely validatory or celebratory mode, both Nguyen and Sha-Gaze negotiate with and fight for their position in the world and within queer nightlife, proposing alternative social relations that are attentive to power dynamics yet beyond racial inequalities, essentialised identity, or racial subjugation, without reducing these ideas to a neat utopia or empty verisimilitude. Within queer nightlife, even within self-described safe spaces, there will be those who do not feel comfortable or safe, and it is in these contexts that performers see their work as integral to creating that space for those who may not be catered for otherwise. Within Sha-Gaze's speech in particular lies the inherent question: when safety is provided, on what violence is that safety built? Beyond the realm of policing, it is worth applying this question to queer nightlife itself.

Territories of Safety

So far I have focused on the practices of performers and promoters as they work within their varying arenas of 'safety' to temporarily provide a glimpse of life without the harmful behaviours that characterise the dominant world of the day-to-day. The idea of what safety means, however—and whether it is possible to achieve it—is highly contested. Ahmed writes that "fear works to contain some bodies such that they take up less space. In this way, emotions work to align bodily space with social space… fear works to restrict some bodies through the movement or expansion of others" (2014, 69). The inversion of this analysis is that *safety* works to *release* some bodies through the *restriction* or *contraction* of others. As discussed above, this is a well-worn path of scholarship, but within the context of queer nightlife and its striving for safe space, it also offers insight into both the deliberate and contingent inhibitors on different sites when it comes to access and the affective mode of safety. This has a profound impact on what alternative modes of being may be generated or experienced, and who is allowed to be a part of this process. The choice of venue, its location within the city, its layout, what accessibilities it allows, and what facilities are financially affordable for marginalised promoters are all choices that, inevitably, welcome some people while pushing others away, making spaces safer while simultaneously making them more dangerous or inaccessible, depending on the patron. These considerations force promoters to compromise and to prioritise certain kinds of being over others, forging something that is characteristically heterotopian—a site forged from alternative ideals and the constraints and coincidences of reality.

Speaking of his *LEFAG* parties at Hugs & Kisses, David Murphy says "the venue itself definitely held a power and contributed to a lot of what we achieved and a lot of what we built upon from then. As a venue, because of the freedom that we had, you know it was tucked away, no security, we had a sense of—unlike any other club night—a sense of looking after each other, protecting" (Murphy 2020). For this space, a liberation from stringent security protocols, from surveillance, is what ensured a sense of safety, one that was bound in community and responsibility rather than a top-down approach of instruction and rules. This approach, however, and the venue it took place

within, presented its own problems in terms of accessibility for patrons, with Murphy reflecting on some of the primary conflicts of interest when it came to safety for party-attendees:

> [There was] not only the fight with the outside sort of world, but the fucking dramas and complexities of the issues within the queer scene as well, was like, major. So you know, the club was in a space that was pretty inaccessible, mostly for wheelchair users, but also, you know, it was dark, it was hot, it was mostly unsupervised… It's an enabling space, I guess, that some people didn't connect with, or didn't feel like it was for them…. But also, I don't know, you know we needed to be tucked away or we needed to hide away a little. We needed a space where… there's just too much going for it for us not to utilise the space to, you know, build strength and power, and have a place to heal as well (Murphy 2020).

Due to the constraints of what spaces are available, the needs of some are necessarily weighed against others. The liberation that queer people of colour and other marginalised people felt in the darkness where they could not be seen, in a little-known club with a unique licensing arrangement that ensured they were free from official surveillance, was within this context irreconcilable with the needs of those who may want to attend the event but have a variety of other access requirements. Hugs & Kisses was small, ill-kept and cheap, meaning it could be made accessible to people who were economically marginalised, offering low-price tickets for all and free tickets for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. It offered an experience for patrons that, Murphy intimates, may not be possible within the larger, more commercial spaces that—although they may be accommodated with wheelchair accessibility, high-visibility, or designated quiet areas—are also more expensive for patrons and promoters alike.

Unicorns at Rubix Warehouse, as mentioned earlier in this chapter, has an entirely different structure and location within the city—its accessibility, its size, its well-lit main room, its side rooms, its booths, and the ability to open early in the evening provide an experience welcoming to people of varying abilities. The tickets, as a result, are more expensive, though there are options to apply for free tickets (particularly for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people), to volunteer at the event for a ticket, or for patrons to 'Gift' a ticket to someone else. This is one of the most accessible and queer-friendly venues in the city, but its sheer size—able to fit 400 people—is an intimidating prospect for promoters catering to marginal demographics. When partly empty, the soaring ceilings can leave patrons feeling exposed and vulnerable, as opposed to the dark and hidden experience that Murphy describes at Hugs & Kisses. The venues, in this way, are not only integral in facilitating the alternative visions of promoters, but provide the constitutive foundation for those visions, necessarily shaping them in the process. Confronted with the limitations of financial risk, of the available architectural environments, and of particular licensing arrangements, promoters' embodied practices of space alteration (putting up signs, educating patrons, rigging lights, cordoning off quiet spaces) privileges the access of some over others. This has implications on exactly what kind of alterity is produced through the nightlife event, and who has access to the safety that allows them to participate in creating, and envisioning, another way of life.

A Safer World

Promoters and performers of queer nightlife events in Naarm pursue safety through various means, seeking ways to protect patrons from the abuse and discrimination they may experience in their daily lives. Far from focusing only on a queer critique, these spaces attempt to work in an intersectional way that recognises how "the constraints and privileges of class, race and gender might inform each

other" (Greer 2012, 13), as promoters and performers alike analyse the structure of the party space and alter it to welcome people who are disabled, people who are neurodivergent, First Nations people, people of colour, and people who are otherwise economically marginalised. As can be seen in the practices of promoters and performers, the heterotopias of queer nightlife, in large part, envision a world of less violence, of less structural barriers to access, and of a critical collaboration between the oppressed in order to achieve it. Despite this, the material constraints of finances and the built environment can often interfere with these visions, and as with all heterotopias, elements of dominant ideologies invariably weave their way in and through the practices of the people who constitute it. These problematising elements are as crucial to the analysis of heterotopia as glimpses of the liberatory or utopian. Having focused on the structures of safety, it is now time to focus in more detail on the obstacles, the failures, and the aspects of the dominant that structure just as equally the heterotopias of Naarm's queer nightlife spaces.

4.

The Outside Comes In, or, What Makes a Heterotopia Work?

Heterotopias are comprised of a constellation of forces beyond the utopian. Despite the best efforts of promoters and performers—or sometimes *because* of their efforts—harmful ideals from the dominant contextual world can be replicated or even enhanced within queer nightlife, forming lines of ideological continuity between the 'outside' and the 'inside' and reinforcing hierarchies of oppression. Further to this, the variety of complementary elements (patrons, performers, DJs, marketing, etc) that must work together to create a heterotopic site mean that disjunctures, ruptures, and clashes often occur between them, contributing to the messy, chaotic reality of heterotopic experience. These experiences manifest most potently within space, jamming patrons into moments of awkwardness, blockage, and confrontation as frequently as they do into experiences of empowerment and safety. Throughout this chapter I will expand upon a host of these harmful and uncomfortable occasions, analysing how promoters, performers, patrons, and Governing bodies can perpetuate and impose dominant ideals within queer space, and how the alterity of heterotopia is produced and made visible through these ruptures and conflicts. I will discuss one of my own performances as a case study, picking apart how it incorporated activism from the 'outside world' in order to counter and critique one of the harmful ideals that characterise queer nightlife. As forecast within Chapter One, it is within this Chapter I begin to more thoroughly break down the barrier delineating the inside and outside of nightlife space in an approach that understands heterotopias not as their own worlds with a clear internal logic, but as porous entities

that can be better understood as assemblages (Deleuze and Guattari 1987; Puar 2013; Stavrides 2007).

‘No One Is Here To See Girls’: Club Photography as Spatial Practice

In January of 2019, local club night *Poof Doof* made international news after a back-of-house document leaked into the public sphere of social media (Jackman 2019). The document in question was a brief that was supplied by the company to its club photographers, instructing them on exactly who to photograph, and who is subsequently worthy of becoming a ‘Power Poof’ (meaning their image will be superimposed over the *Poof Doof* branding and posted on social media). Within this photo brief there are instructions for the photographer to take photographs of “Boys. Poof Doof is a gay club for homos. No one is here to see girls. Ever” (Wade 2019), of “Boys with muscles. Big Ones. The kind of muscles that come about from spending at least 5 sessions a week at the gym” (Wade 2019), and of “Hot boys. If you want to lick their faces because they look so delicious, take a photo” (Wade 2019). The photographer is then instructed to not take photos of “Skinny boys,” of “Boys with bad skin,” or of “Messy boys” (Wade 2019).

Club photography is at face value a marketing exercise, providing patrons with content to post on their social media feeds to further promote a club night beyond traditional advertising. However, if these images are working as advertisements to attract patrons, then they are also a spatialising practice, as the choice of subject, the construction of the image, and which images are approved by management to post online all seek to promote a certain style and attract a particular demographic who may then, in turn, attend the night. In this way, club photography as advertisement works as a spatialising practice in shaping the demographic of the patrons—it helps

A GAY **POOF** CLUB FOR **DOOF** HOMOS

BRIEF FOR PHOTOGRAPHER

Photos are only to be taken of:

- Boys. Poof Doof is a gay club for homos. No one is here to see girls. Ever.
- Boys with Muscles. Big ones. The kind of muscles that come about from spending at least 5 sessions a week at the gym.
- Hot Boys. If you want to lick their faces because they look so delicious, take a photo.
- Drag Queens. But ONLY the BEST. And never more than 3 – 4. And once they've had their photo taken once, that's it. Forever. (Exception: Fag Drag and Poof Doof Family Members.)

Photos are NOT to be taken of:

- Skinny boys in burgundy tshirts and chinos. They are a dime a dozen. There is nothing interesting nor cool about them.
- Boys with Bad Skin.
- Messy Boys. Anyone who looks like they've poked down a 10-pack, is OUT.
- Indi boys. They are not Power Poof worthy unless they are BREATHTAKINGLY good looking or epically stylish.
- Any boys that have previously had Power Poof photos. Repetition is unimaginative and boring.

Number of photos to be submitted: 50

Submit to: Hockers, Levi, Dynon and Susie.

Deadline: 6pm on Mondays.

Please note:

- You must be at the club from 12am – 3am, every week, without fail.
- It is your responsibility to ensure you have the correct equipment and backups in case of equipment failure.
- Your primary focus is Power Poof focus. Your secondary focus is venue shots.
- All photos taken at Poof Doof are the property of Poof Doof. Absolutely no photos are to be distributed to any other individual or business without written consent from Poof Doof Management.
- The decision regarding which photos get turned into Power Poof photos is made by Poof Doof Management only.

Figure 8. [Photograph of photography brief provided to Poof Doof staff]. 16 Jan 2019. Photo uncredited. From DIY Rainbow Facebook Page, accessed 20 June, 2020. https://www.facebook.com/DIYrainbow/posts/1439049626225255

to determine who shows up. To understand this through a heterotopic lens, it is possible to 'read' the type of demographic the promoters are attempting to summon into the space through the practice of photography—through capturing their desired patrons within the lens—and compare it to the dominant demographic breakdown of the contextual world. Who are the promoters attempting to attract, and who are they attempting to repel? What alternative social world do they envision? The remarkable thing about this document is how explicitly this strategy is laid out, creating a heterotopic site wherein homosexual masculinity is constructed and reinforced, displacing heterosexual masculinity to the extreme degree of eliminating the presence of women altogether, but also bisexual, trans, and gender non-conforming subjectivities. This is not so much a continuance of outside ideals but an exaggeration of them, revealing a hyper-misogyny that is fostered within the club space. Continuous with the dominant world, masculinity is pedestalled as a site of unrivalled privilege, as well as attractiveness, able-bodiedness, respectability, and a strict adherence to masculine gender roles as desirable traits that are actively propagated, with all outliers rejected.

After receiving negative press coverage of this photographer brief (Jackman 2019; Wade 2019), *Poof Doof* released a public apology and published a revised photographer brief on their Facebook page (Poof Doof 2019). The three-page long document included new instructions as well as a reparative sample of images to counteract the alternative ideals they were now perceived to be aligned with. Within their updated brief, they say that they are "looking for photos that represent the full spectrum of [their] crowd—every age, shape, size, colour, culture, gender, state of dress (or undress!), the weird, the wonderful, the creative, the crazy and beyond" (Poof Doof 2019). Within their opening statements, they outline the fact that they do not do "standard club photography" and rather take 'Power Poof' photos of "individuals (and sometimes groups) having the best time, living their best life" (Poof Doof 2019). Their justification for this photography style is to filter out a usually "unflattering" background (Poof Doof 2019), or to edit out people who are incidentally caught within the photograph. A little further down, however, they also state that

Figure 9. [Partial screenshot of Poof Doof press release]. 22 Jan 2019. Images by Poof Doof. From Poof Doof Facebook page, accessed 22 June, 2020.

"the photos should be shot from the hips up so they can be framed and branded" (Poof Doof 2019). Although these new techniques are present within the broader practice of club photography, the publication of this photo brief and its sheer explicitness provides an ideal case study to analyse the practice as a whole, particularly as it works within queer nightlife spaces.

Here, as in the previous photo brief, we can see a continuity between the dominant world and the ideals created within *Poof Doof*'s heterotopia, as well as a correction in the aberrant ideals that drew negative publicity to it in the first place. The continuities reflect the aims and promises of neoliberal capitalism, packaging and re-selling them back to queer people and inferring that those promises are realisable by attending this event. Within these images we have individuals cropped out from their community, the power of the individual valorised through the category of the 'Power Poof,' and a promise of living your best life attainable for anyone (who can afford the entry fee). In order to sell this ideal and associate it with the nightlife space, queer people are captured, framed, and branded in order to be disseminated into the public sphere, a process aided by the subjects themselves as they re-share their moment of elevation from the norms of their day-to-day lives. Fiona Buckland reflects on how these broader norms often infuse club spaces:

> [t]hat the utopian solutions of entertainment and of a club may also be the promises of capitalism hints at what may be an unpalatable truth for some. At its core, entertainment, including club, may be reactionary and normative unless otherwise consciously kicked against… Informants who enjoyed going to larger, more expressive clubs with their designer bodies and dress, were not apolitical, but seemed to articulate their politics through describing clubs as spaces of self-actualization and realization: be all that you can be, rather than destabilize normativity or make allegiances with other queers, people of color, and women (Buckland 2002, 89).

Although *Poof Doof*, in its revised form, situates itself within the allegiances between queers and attempts to extend these allegiances to other marginalised groups, many of the ideals of neoliberal capitalism continue to play out there—much as they do in the outside world—by proposing an individualist, capitalistic, and atomised alternative community site that is dominated by the spectre of the brand.

The heterotopic space that *Poof Doof* creates through the practice of photography, in this instance, is one not all that different than the space outside, except that the ruling class of capitalists happen to be queer-dominant. After Lisa Duggan's work in the *Twilight of Equality* (2003), this could be described as a homonormative space—or in an updating of terms, although it may sound like a contradiction within itself, a queer-normative heterotopic space. In one sense it shifts itself from a homosexual vs. heterosexual point of view to a form of identity envisioned by queer politics: but in cutting out the messy background of photos, in avoiding group shots with all their elements of unpredictability, and by allowing free entry not to those who are most disadvantaged but to those who know the right people, it is a 'queer' politic rooted in the ideologies of gentrification and class hierarchy. Although an alternative arrangement of the social hierarchy is proposed, with queer people centred and elevated, an alternative economic system is not. There is no substantive

challenge or alternative to the structures of exploitation that form the basis of our contemporary social life. The new photography brief articulates an updated image of queerness only to align it with the base expectations of the community at large. Even though these images may represent, and attract, a crowd more varied than muscular cisgender men, these collectivities appear to have carved out their place in resistance to, rather than facilitated by, the spatialising practices of the event. Their lackadaisical inclusion remains contingent on their profitability, and the benefit their presence poses to the brand image that is pasted above the heads of every patron in their photograph.

Nu-Minstrelsy

Even as some performers, such as Mulan and Sha Gaze, work to create safer spaces within Naarm's queer nightlife, other performers can import harmful traditions and propagate them further from the stage. At *Honcho Disko*, in May of 2019, a performer began their act with the sound technician cueing an original disco track. As the performer became visible on-stage, my friend and I gripped each other's shoulders and stood with our mouths open at the image that greeted us: the performer wore a black latex mask that fully encapsulated their head, fitting to their face and leaving only their eyes and lips visible; atop the mask was a feminine wig, and below that the exposed lips were big, red, and overdrawn. As the performer danced seductively to the disco song, the overwhelming impression was one of minstrelsy, like a golliwog doll had come to life and was prancing around the stage. The grouping of these symbolic cues with the choice of music harks back to a long, international performative tradition that still continues in subtler and more insidious forms throughout popular media (Abate 2019; Cole 2012). Whereas the literature on contemporary popular culture points to the comedic heft that performers glean from appropriating minstrel techniques within their performances—such as malapropisms, grotesquery, buffoonery, particular

exaggerated features—and how this functions on the historical denigration of Black people, this performance seemed to reach toward other available caricatures of Blackness, particularly Black femininity, in order to bolster the appeal of the performer to their audience, such as an extroverted sensuality and exaggerated sensual features.

As demonstrated by Abate in their work on popular sitcoms (2019), the symbolism of minstrelsy is still a powerful current through performance cultures, providing an often-subconscious resource for performers to draw upon and for audiences to make meaning from. This meaning is enhanced by, even contingent on, taking place within a colonised country such as Australia, reinforcing Cole's observation that "[t]he colonial experience is certainly central to any consideration of the global economy of blackface, as the form both travelled and found fertile soil throughout the circuits of empire" (2012, 225). In a night otherwise characterised by performances that re-imagined the body, space, the public, and the relationship of different forms of marginalisation with them, this performance caused a violent rupture that I felt within my tensing muscles, in the too-hard grip of my friend as we held each other wondering why people were cheering, if they did not see what we saw, or if they were just playing along with the social conventions of the space. This performance reinforced the extractive relation of white supremacy embodied by the act of minstrelsy, and was a stark demonstration of how the legacy of empire still does structure Naarm's queer nightlife heterotopias, and that it can co-exist—even on the same evening—with performances that work to dismantle this influence.

Same stage, but a different performer on a different night: in April of 2018, the host of *Honcho Disko* reproduced several racist tropes throughout their performance. On entry, they first drew the audience's attention to the wig they had chosen—a rainbow-dyed hive of blonde dreadlocks. They spoke about these at length, discussing with fascination their adoration of the hairstyle. Shortly after this, they attempted to announce the next performer who happened to be Black: she made a joke out of bungling the performer's name, eventually giving up while claiming they were 'too much of a white-girl' to be able to pronounce something like that. To remedy the

situation someone else took to the stage, took the microphone, and brusquely introduced the performer in the host's place. Following this, the host returned wearing a *Thor* outfit—after the Marvel character—and wondered at length why more people were not excited about the films in an extended monologue of affected African-American Vernacular English (AAVE). These moments were emblematic of several strategies of racial violence: how white supremacy erases the radical politics of Black style (including hairstyles) and incorporates it in a decontextualised fashion; how identities outside white Eurocentric norms are punished by mispronouncing and publicly shaming traditionally non-white names; how selectively adopting AAVE in a way that caricaturises Blackness is done for comedic effect in a way not dissimilar to minstrelsy (Abate 2019; Cole 2012; Smokoski 2016). As above, I highlight these to interrogate how heterotopias incorporate oppressive dynamics from the day-to-day world, and to question what role this ambivalent porosity holds in the generation of alternative ways of being.

The performance at hand raises a combination of issues, but looking to the literature, it is Smokoski's work on "Voicing The Other" and the appropriation of AAVE that most concisely summarises its overall method of operation (2016). Analysing the use of AAVE on social media by people who are not Black, Smokoski argues that

> This outgroup use of AAVE does not require nor reflect any true proficiency with the variety, but instead is often used to exaggerate the social distance between the stylizers using it on social media and the marginalized people for whom AAVE is a genuine mode of communication. Through double indexicality, nonspeakers of AAVE use features of it to annex certain positive qualities associated with Black or hip hop culture—toughness, coolness, an anti-establishment stance—for themselves, while reproducing negative stereotypes of the people generally thought to speak AAVE (2016, iv).

Smokoski describes this as a kind of "covert racism" (2016, 1) that can benefit the mocker by re-contextualising the dialect as "humorous because of the comic mismatch between the speaker's… background and the perceived lack of education that would result in the kind of… speech they are temporarily using" (Smokoski 2016, 2). This entire performance interwove elements of Blackness that bolstered the host's aesthetic appearance or linguistic performance, while simultaneously asserting their distance from Blackness through name mispronunciations and telling the audience they are white. The blonde dreadlocks, here, dyed rainbow, become a central figuration of this dynamic: colour—of the skin, of the dye—combines with the styling of the hair into locks to draw Black history and white queer appropriation of it into the room, reminding each of us in attendance of those structures of power, revealing them, but only to re-enact and reinforce them.

In this case, there is a discrepancy between the anti-racist aims of the site, exemplified in its broader programming, and the practices that still facilitate moments of racial violence such as this within it. By this measure it was a rupture in the heterotopic alterity envisioned by *Honcho Disko*, but it is also instructive of a central conflict in queer nightlife heterotopias: namely as to how open, or how *porous*, they should be to all who wish to participate. As a community event that erects very few barriers to participation for prospective performers, *Honcho Disko* platforms a host of up-and-comers, performers with little formal training, and provides a site for community members to grow their skills without the need for a large capital investment. This is a programming model that increases the ability to participate for marginalised folks, particularly for people who have not been able to pursue avenues of specialised education or for people whose artistic practice is grounded in anti-institutional forms such as burlesque, cabaret, drag, and experimental modes of contemporary performance. On the one hand, this means that the space frequently platforms voices from outside the mainstream (as was demonstrated throughout Chapter 3), allowing these performers paid opportunities to develop their skills in front of an audience and to articulate alternative and complex subjectivities that are not allowed such space within day-to-day life. On the other hand, this low

barrier to access means that, even as it amplifies marginal voices, the program may platform those who import violent practices.

The violence that occurred within these examples is continuous with the harm enacted against Black people in the dominant world every day, yet the conflictual crossover and interaction between these performances and other performers on the program give an insight into the alterity that partially drives this site, even as it competes against suppressive ideological forces. On its surface, *Honcho Disko*'s programming policy is aimed at platforming the marginal rather than re-enacting violence against them. The policy envisages, even if it does not always deliver, a social system that operates on good faith, that nurtures the talent of women, queer people, and people of colour, and a community that gathers regularly to celebrate them. What happens after these moments is also revealing: during and following the above performance, there was a palpable feeling of tension among the audience, as if a kind of transgression had taken place. Community members spoke about these performances for months ensuing, yet this deconstruction was not universal: some cheered at the time, while some stood in shocked silence or walked out, to discuss it later. Much like the program, a neat conclusion cannot be drawn from the reactions of the audience, but what *is* clear is how even these reactions are informed by patrons' ideological frameworks, the providing of applause or the withdrawing of vocal support evidence of a schism between competing visions for what this space should be, and what kinds of practices it should allow.

The Ideology of Applause

The power of audience attention, as apparent in moments of rapturous applause as it is in moments of distracted chatter or meandering off mid-performance, is itself a reservoir of latent audience attitudes. These may be due to a mismatch between the affective mode of the audience and what is occurring in the space, or it may, such as in response to the moments of racism above, be indicative of a deeper ideological force. In his work on ballroom in Detroit, Marlon Bailey observes that "[b]all

events rely on a performance relationship between the commentator, the audience, the runway performers, and the DJ. I delineate and refer to this relationship as the performance system" (2013, 26). All of these elements are in some form or another common throughout many queer nightlife spaces. As I have so far demonstrated, by paying close attention to the relationship between these elements (among others), it is possible to infer the potential social alterities that are generated through spatial practice. This is not a straight-forward process, however, as not all elements of the performance system work in unison. The word 'system' itself implies a cohesion of parts well beyond how they function within queer nightlife spaces. In service, then, of cataloguing the ways these sites cause ruptures, blockages, and confrontation through micro-strategies of resistance, I continue the framing work begun in Chapter One to approach heterotopic sites as assemblages rather than systems. Puar states that in the use of assemblage theory

> reclaiming the nonexceptional is only partially the point, for assemblages allow for complicities of privilege and the production of new normativities even as they cannot anticipate moments of resistance, resistance that is not primarily characterised by oppositional stances, but includes frictional forces, discomfiting encounters, and spurts of unsynchronised delinquency (2013, 222).

Moving to assemblage allows a de-romanticisation, or de-radicalisation, of queerness. It also turns attention to objects and forces within a site that may function beyond the power relations of identity: this may include material objects, affect, sensation. In turning to anecdotes from participants—and myself—that further detail the friction that can arise between a single site's constitutive elements, I seek to further complicate a straightforward conclusion as to what a particular heterotopia envisions. This shifts the analytic focus to how the practices that characterise a site are allowed, dis-allowed, and generated through a performative process born of conflict and

negotiation between its parts, rather than only imposed through the visions of a particular person, such as a promoter or performer (though these are, of course, integral).

Returning from *Honcho Disko*, we now go back to *Poof Doof* on Chapel Street. Kane Bonato shares an anecdote about developing a performance for one space, and then transporting it without adaptation into another:

> Anyway, so we put that show together and we did it initially in Sydney for a *Honcho Disko*, which was wild and great, and then we did it together again at the B.East[20] maybe six months later, which is our like resident, kinda home gig. And then maybe another year later we did it at *Poof Doof*. Very randomly got booked for *Poof Doof* which is very different to our normal scene. And it was like, it just went down so badly, 'cause I feel like people just weren't engaged with what we were doing… We were on at 2AM and everyone was drunk or on drugs and they just didn't have the attention span to follow the loose narrative to get the most out of the show… But it's really interesting because the two times we'd done it previously was by far the best show that we've ever done, it's so funny and it's stupid and great, and we were like, well we need something that will kill and we know that one's great, and it was just like, you could see people in the crowd when they would occasionally look to the stage just being like, what? What is this? (Bonato 2020).

If an effective performance arises from a confluence of factors—the spatial and temporal window it takes place in, the audience that attends, the promoters, performers and DJs that shape the space

[20] A burger restaurant, bar, and music venue located in Brunswick East.

through embodied practice—so too can these parts work to sabotage the effectiveness of each other, resulting in something that may not be a failure but is, at the least, ambivalent. Bonato mentions the time of their performance at *Poof Doof*, 2AM, as a major contributing factor to its confused reception. From the perspective of the audience, the performance in this case may be an unwelcome rupture to hours of uninterrupted sociality, the music coming to a stop, the dancefloor coming to a stand-still, and all attention needing to be focused on the stage. Bonato implies that the later into the evening it is, and the deeper the audience have fallen into the flow of the evening, the more disinterested in a performative diversion the audience may be.

There are so many examples of this type of awkwardness occurring within nightlife, it almost feels too obvious to point them out. What this suggests is that the model itself is prone to conflict, miscommunication, or alternative visions for what the site should be, leading to ideological tangents, kaleidoscopic potentialities, or the far more mundane feeling of being stuck in a kind of creative-spatial traffic jam (in other words, being *bored*). At *Fantastic Party*, as described in Chapter Three, the basement dance dungeon held further performances in addition to the Shibari Rope demonstrations on the centre floor. The performance I saw most prominently occurred between DJs changing over, and it took place on a raised platform in the centre of the dancefloor, meaning the audience watched in the round. As the performance started, I was right up the front against the DJ booth, meaning the performance took place some distance behind me: in order to see, I stood up on a small, unstable platform to get a better view. I was not alone in this idea, and about five or six people clambered up onto my tiny platform, each managing to stay upright only by clinging to each other's sweaty, half-naked (or more than half-naked) bodies, the platform bucking and shifting beneath us. The performance was to a dark dance track and consisting of four people doing a rigidly choreographed routine. The dance moves were simple, and I could almost discern the dancers counting in their heads as they went through the motions, rather than their movements being dictated by any sense of spontaneity. The dance had two leads, who each had a subordinate dancer who they 'dominated' by manoeuvring them into sexual positions, and who at other times would

follow the actions of their two leads. The attitude of the lead dancers was enthusiastic, while the subs seemed to follow the choreography with absolutely no interest, deadpan faces, and lackadaisical movements just behind the beat. The overall effect of this performance felt divergent from its intention, or at least the intention of the space it took place in: its content reflected the practices of the party—fetish, sex, negotiated consent, debauchery—but its presentation felt laboured. This overly-presentational nature and lack of whimsy took the sexiness out of it, despite the simulated sex acts, and left the audience in a crowded room watching a lengthy dance routine that did not reflect the complexity of sexual negotiations which thrived in the space around it, and which it in fact interrupted, forcing us to stop and clamber for precarious positions to even catch a glimpse.

This sense of interruption and disinterest—forged from a combination of factors—is similar to that narrated by Bonato during his performance at *Poof Doof*, in what he saw reflected back at him through audience attitude. Although each of these instances is unique, together they demonstrate how different elements within a space, such as audience, DJ, and performer, can easily become opposing elements simply due to the architecture of the space, how busy it is, sightlines, or how fluently the performance is transitioned into from the loose sociality of the dancefloor. Although some of these instances may be grounded within the material, logistical, or affectual as people are forced to shift their attention, they can as equally be caused by a political or cultural clash of beliefs. Mike Nguyen aka Mulan outlines one of his own performances as such:

> … there's one particular party, let's just say it's a party that's catered towards bears, and I did a performance there, one of my favourite performances too, one that I haven't actually, I didn't mention before… but this performance where I sing, I lip-sync to, *Reflection* by Mulan. And then I bust out into a Zebra Katz song. This really fun like dancey beat, has a bit of a vogue beat too, and I did it there but… it was just such a shit, such a terrible experience. Just 'cause the crowd

> is not there for it, they didn't care, they just, they want… the general bear community do not care about creative performances, they just want a campy queen, your run-of-the-mill drag queen. Which is also fine as well: camp, there is space for camp and I'm here for it, but *they* just weren't there for *me* (Nguyen 2020).

For this performance Nguyen intimates that he was perhaps a little too sincere, with his choice of cultural touchstones (Mulan, Zebra Katz, vogue) not catering comfortably enough to the predominantly white norms of the space. The withholding of interest, applause, or attention is a tool used by audience members in an ideological fashion, and is as much a spatial practice and constitutive of heterotopia in a nightlife setting as any other element.

On the 2nd of August 2018, at *Honcho Disko*, I contributed to this pushback against a performance as an audience member, feeling a palpable disconnect between my own expectations of what the space should achieve and the ideals that were being proposed by the artists. The DJs for the evening were The Dollar Bin Darlings, guests from Sydney, who provided a DJ style akin to roller disco: sweet slow beats, vinyl records, and occasional announcements over the top of them into a microphone attached to the DJ equipment. Shortly after I arrived it became apparent they were either unfamiliar with how the space usually functioned—a result of them living elsewhere—or they knew and had decided to change it for the night. As they MC'd from behind the DJ booth, a confusion emerged within the audience as to who was hosting the event, which had also programmed a host to fulfill this function. In addition to this, they continued to play music long after they had been signalled to stop so that performances could begin, even after the host of the night came out onto the stage and pointedly waited behind the microphone. The host had to talk over the top of the music and tell them to turn it off. This caused a tension within the space, and the record—which had just begun playing—being abruptly switched off contributed to the sense that something had ruptured, that the elements of the evening were working against each other. At the time, I felt

that the host and the DJs were competing for performance time, with the DJs feeling entitled to take space and time from the host and stage performers for themselves.

This was the context for what happened next: at one point in the night, the DJs lowered the music to speak directly to the crowd, asking who in the venue was queer. To this they received a hearty cheer and some hands going into the air. Following this, they asked who in the venue was an ally, who was here because they love queers, and there was another—smaller—cheer. They then asked all the queer people in the venue to give a round of applause to the allies for coming, after which there was a silence, except for one person who began to clap, and then quickly stopped. I took myself by surprise by immediately shouting *NO!* at them after this last request, a violent refusal that came out by instinct and before even consciously thinking about it. This was all the more startling for me as with most performers, regardless of their intention or quality, the general mode of reception is support. To have such a visceral and instant rejection of a performative proposal stood out as a potent conflict, marking yet another opposition that was occurring as the DJs played over the top of the host, the host interrupted the DJs, and the audience (myself) shouted back in refusal at the DJs requests, while all other audience members simply refused by not participating in them at all. Much like Nguyen's performance on New Years Day, these clashes can be traced back to the alternative ideals that are envisioned for the space by its constitutive elements. Although myself and The Dollar Bin Darlings both envision *Honcho Disko* as a site to practice particular social relations, I contest that my reaction, as well as the silence of the audience in response to their request, was a rejection of *their version* of these relations. By asking queer people to thank their straight counterparts for attending a queer cultural space, the alternative hierarchies of *Honcho Disko* become thrown into question. The request to applaud infers that coming to a queer space is a brave or strange thing for a straight person to do, and this act of allyship should be praised. This is at odds with one of the beliefs that motivates queer nightlife sites such as *Honcho Disko*—that queer culture is worthy of elevation, and is special, and meaningful, and unique. Under this rubric, it would follow that the open-ness of the space to queer and non-people alike is rather doing straight people a favour, as they are able to

enjoy these cultural outputs without restriction. For those who hold this belief, applauding someone for being in attendance is absurd, and borders on an insult. This ideological crossroads manifested itself in my own, pre-conscious shout of *NO!*, interesting evidence, too, that the alternative ideals proposed by *Honcho Disko* made their way deep into my body, able to be acted on instinctively and without premeditation.

Sexualised Sites, Pedagogies of Consent

After Hugs & Kisses closed, *LEFAG* (which was born there)[21] was forced to find other spaces to hold their events. One of the first of these excursions was to a nearby venue in Carlton, then called *Yours & Mine*. At one point in the evening, a friend passed me on the stairs, stopping me to (incredulously) claim that one of the security guards had told him to put his shirt back on, something he found absurd because, firstly, that would never have occurred at Hugs & Kisses, and secondly, because by this point there were within our direct eyeline at least a dozen other people who were also sweaty and bare-chested. My friend tells me he responded to the guard by asking *Do you know where you are?* and then walking away with his shirt still tucked into his pants, a surprising assertion of ownership over the space considering it was directed to one of the club's own employees by someone who had never been there before. This confrontation is emblematic of the contestation that occurs between ideological forces within heterotopic space—in this case, an external party with pre-determined values (shaped in part by the particular legal-spatial conditions of another site) importing them to another venue, a venue with more surveillance, with more access by law

[21] The closure of Hugs & Kisses is discussed within Chapter Two, and the club discussed in further detail in Chapter Seven. *LEFAG* is a hardstyle-rave club night that prioritises trans, Black, Indigenous, and queer artists.

enforcement, and with an overall straighter patronage. Despite the party remaining under the same name and brand, the shifting site necessarily altered the overt lawlessness of sexual display that was allowed at its previous home of Hugs & Kisses, while also, interestingly, altering the norms of its new space as well—despite the protestations of security, no one was ejected from the venue, and semi-nudity prevailed as the night wore on.

Given that many queer people are differentiated from social norms through their sexuality, sex and enactments of desire are a foundational component to many queer nightlife sites. As this example demonstrates, however, how sexuality is performed and how it is received within specific contexts differs from site to site, expanding and contracting within the legal-spatial-social confines of particular parties or venues, transgressing social convention as patrons take advantage of the experimentalism of heterotopia. For the purpose of this discussion, though, I am drawn to the replication of hegemonic sexual norms within queer space, as well as moments when miscommunication or a mis-fit occurs between the practices of a site and the various ideological forces that constitute it.

Fantastic Party at Club 80 consisted of three levels: two of these—the Shibari Garden and the dance basement—I have already discussed here and in the previous chapter, but I now want to head upstairs to the cruising[22] floor, the labyrinth. Much like the cinema-cum-Shibari Garden, this place was re-wired from its usual function, opening out its entry rules to ensure it was an all-gender space instead of male-exclusive. This was the first time the maze had functioned in this way, and given Club 80 was bought by developers and subsequently closed, the only time it will ever happen. The new inclusivity around gender may have accounted for the heavy emphasis on dark-room protocol and behaviour within the event's communications (Fantastic Party, *Email Correspondence*

[22] Cruising is a tradition associated particularly with gay men, and as such is considered an integral part of gay history and contemporary culture by many gay men (Lynch 2017; Thrasher 2016). This gendered aspect, or perception, of the practice does holdover today in the legal exemptions to the discrimination act held by some gay venues in Melbourne, allowing them to exclude people on the basis of their gender.

28 Nov, 2019), yet despite this, there were moments of slippage between the embodied practices endorsed by the party promoters and the behaviour of patrons. Firstly, attendees were instructed that the dark rooms are “not a space to hang out, chat, or socialise—we have plenty of other places for that scattered all around the venue” (Fantastic Party, *Email Correspondence* 28 Nov, 2019); dark rooms, traditionally, can be rather stern places, as people cruise slowly about for the possibility a sexual encounter. To put it lightly, this mode of socialising was not adhered to and the space was imbricated with a party atmosphere, flowing up the staircase and bypassing the boundary of behaviour delineated by the promoters and tradition. This was not to the detriment of the sexual activity happening throughout. Groups of people chatted, some danced in the DJ booth or climbed up, clinging to the metal bars in front of the DJ and swinging one-armed from them. Other people smiled, waving at friends and catching up within the shadows before, without hesitation, continuing to cruise in a convivial manner. From anecdotal opinions on the night and from my own observation, the fracturing of behavioural norms inscribed a new kind of loose-ness in the social relations that occurred within this particular space, as opposed to the performance of emotion-blunted masculine lust that is more commonly associated with it.

There were, however, moments of tension that arose from this rapid induction of new people into the culture of the space. At one point within the maze, someone was filming their friend being tied up in rope, incidentally capturing someone else in a sex act behind them. The darkroom is an almost sacrosanct no-photo location, yet despite the multiple avenues of pre-event communication from the promoters, the large ‘No Photography’ signs throughout the venue, and the person conducting the filming being accompanied by a circle of friends who were familiar with the protocols of the space—despite all their best efforts to shape the embodied practice of the patrons within—this was an example of a radical break from those designated norms. The rules of the space were broken, resulting in a heated exchange as the person who was incidentally filmed, expressing shock and embarrassment, leapt over aggressively, clearly holding themselves back from a more physical reaction as they rebuked the person filming. The person holding the phone

immediately deleted the footage and apologised, embarrassed. They had unknowingly committed an egregious social mis-step.

Within the cruising space of the party there were multiple resistances—deliberate or not—against the heterotopic vision proposed by the promoters: instead of a site wherein women and gender non-conforming people were inducted wholesale into the embodied practices of cruising at Club 80, a more ambivalent relationship emerged where the presence of different kinds of people shifted what these practices looked like for the evening, introducing a levity and sociality that was not endorsed by the promoters. Simultaneously, and perhaps predictably as the scope of engagement was enhanced, new attendees' unfamiliarity with the social rules that underpinned the space resulted in at least one instance of unintentional violence or confrontation between them and more seasoned patrons. In transmitting the social practices that structure the heterotopic site to newcomers, a 'top-down' approach of instruction and direct-address is not always sufficient, and may be supplemented by a lateral instruction by patrons as they clue in those who act beyond the realms of acceptability—though what acceptability means, as demonstrated by the shifting inclusivity and rules of the event, is contingent and malleable.

On the 17th of August 2019, *Barba Party* at Sub Club in the CBD provided another hyper-sexualised site, albeit a far less formalised one than the explicit rule structure that was outlined for *Fantastic Party* a few months later. The demographic of this party is predominantly cis-gender gay men—though not exclusively—and a riotous masculine energy usually pervades the party as mostly-nude or entirely nude men in harnesses, jockstraps, and gym-fit bodies dance until after dawn. The party is often sold out or close-to, and for the early hours of this event (early being between 11pm and 2am) it was difficult to avoid people pushing past in the close quarters. This busy-ness contributed to the bustle of bodies, but specifically for a party like this, the early hours seemed to be spent predominantly looking for sexual partners. Although this continued throughout the party, it felt more prevalent earlier on as people walked, circling, through the crowd looking from face to face, and with an abrasive regularity forcing me to make room where there was none so they could

slide past, sometimes with a hand also sliding over my stomach or cupping my crotch. Whenever this happened, I decided whether to ask the person to stop doing it, but on this night I chose not to, probably because the severity of the touching was low, fleeting, and not repeated. I gritted my teeth and bore it until the hours passed and the men who were looking for sex had found it and left, or settled into dancing and leaving me alone.

Within recent years, and in light of the #MeToo movement that exploded onto social media from America, there has been a chorus of self-reflexive social commentary on the blurred boundaries of consent at gay bars (Kornhaber 2019; Levine 2019). I believe a comparison between *Fantastic Party* and *Barba Party* here resonates with the broader dialectic that exists within these commentaries between the complex legacy of cruising codes—both in public and in sex-on-premises venues—and the socialisation that occurs within queer bars and clubs. Perhaps exemplified by Hal Fischer's exhibition on *Gay Semiotics* (1977), which can be viewed digitally on its self-titled website, queer men have access to an advanced, non-verbal vocabulary of consent that can allow for sexual negotiations to occur anonymously, with people being able to deduce the desires of someone—and act on them—more or less on sight. This culture translated well into sex on premises venues, a culture that (like at *Fantastic Party*) continues in Naarm, and often stresses both physical and verbal languages of consent as well as incorporating older visual semiotics of cruising. These practices, developed to hypothetically allow queer men to identity each other covertly to protect themselves, is not at all applicable to the sexual explorations that occur at most gay clubs: rather, the history of gay sexual culture provides a backdrop for crowds of men who have no in-depth knowledge of queer cruising practices to try their best to emulate them in an unstructured environment and without any explicit instruction or example. Compared to sex on premises sites, queer clubs provide little—if any—consent education to their patrons (Levine 2019). Within these informal, casual environments, this can be seen primarily as a failure in pedagogy, as many of these parties capitalise on their hyper-sexualised nature through their promotional messaging to sell tickets, promising queer people a night of libidinous exploration and pleasure and sometimes even providing dark rooms (specific

spaces for sex), yet providing none of the structures that can be found within sex on premises venues.

More broadly, the issue of sexual assault within queer spaces can be seen as a practice that reinforces power dynamics and structures of oppression, one wherein gay men's bodies, and the spaces they inhabit, are in themselves always hyper-sexualised, a view that is held in no small part by gay men themselves. As is pointed out within Braun et al's study on sexual coercion among gay men in Aotearoa/New Zealand, "sexual coercion among gay men has been seen as virtually oxymoronic. Dominant discourses of masculinity and male sexuality not only portray men as in control and relatively invulnerable, but also render the possibility that sex could be unwanted for men as an almost unthinkable proposition" (Braun et al. 2009, 337). Anecdotally—and representing a gap in the little literature there is on the topic of assault between queer populations and in queer spaces—trans and gender non-conforming people are also placed under greater scrutiny, exoticisation and fetishisation within gay spaces. Beyond this, too, I have witnessed all manner of casual assaults occur between gay men and cisgender women as each party may feel that it is impossible to commit an assault without the possibility of mutual desire, as if the lack of desiring sex as the end product of an assault renders the assault itself meaningless. Although the extent of these occurrences has not been measured, from my own limited observation I can provisionally contend that these relations are prominent features within many queer spaces, and it is these relations—and my own experiences on the receiving end of all manner of assaults, both casual and severe—that I developed a performative response.

Another Coming Out: #MeToo & Medusa

In 2018 I was asked to fly to Sydney and host *Honcho Disko*'s relatively new monthly Saturday party at the Imperial Hotel, wherein I would do a total of three performances—one upstairs over dinner to promote the party in the basement, and two more during the party itself. This would be followed by hosting *Honcho Disko* again back in Naarm on the following Thursday, where I would do another two performances. The casual nature of assault within queer spaces was on my mind: I was feeling, particularly at this moment, a rage. #MeToo had been circulating online and within our industries for some time, and with it all manner of skeletons were coming out of the closet as survivors aired their stories of assault and abuse. In this context it was difficult not to focus on all the instances of assault that occurred whenever I attended queer clubs, and the more severe sexual assault that I had suffered years before. Like many, I was frustrated at being too afraid to express my experience to anyone—even my close friends and partners—and especially in a queer context I felt frustrated at how under-represented my experience was, an under-representation I felt I was, ironically, contributing to by not speaking about it. Unable, as yet, to put my experience into words, I felt more capable of putting it into the heightened symbolism of performance, and given the supportive audience that usually attends *Honcho Disko*, this felt like the ideal space to share my experience, while simultaneously combatting the latent belief that queer men cannot be victims of sexual assault. This is an ideology that, as demonstrated above, can and does lead to their actual assault within nightlife spaces and elsewhere.

For the performance I decided to take the form of Medusa, mythic history's figure par excellence for gaining some form of agency and power after being assaulted by a man in a position of power. I was dressed in transparent, flowing garments and a matching iridescent headpiece of snakes, both in an older style that resonated with the era of the song I chose to perform to: Nina Simone's *I Put a Spell On You*. Although the out-dated glamourous style of the garments was a nod to the camp drag culture of the space, I also wanted to elude any classic drag tropes that may have

Figure 10. [Photograph of author performing at Honcho Disko Sydney]. 4 Sept 2018. Photograph by Lexi LaFortune. Published on Honcho Disko's Facebook Page. ***https://www.facebook.com/HONCHODISKO/photos/a.899892820196330/899896216862657***

caused a comedic effect—and although I deliberately sought to centre my own experience as a gay man, I wanted to draw parallels to (and solidarity from) how my experience is also shared in some way by others: further, I wanted to acknowledge the activist history of Black women who the #MeToo movement originated from (Burke 2021; Clarke-Vivier and Stearns 2019; Rhode 2019; Williams, Singh, and Mezey 2019). This informed my decision to dress as a woman, as well as my decision to have the voice of Nina Simone soundtrack the performance. Simultaneously to these concerns, I did not want to claim ownership over these representations in any way—even as I paid homage to them—and so I left my male-coded flat and hairy chest exposed, and I did not lip-sync to the song, allowing it to stand on its own within the space as I performed, a separate yet entwined entity that resonated with my performance but that I did not seek to emulate or parody.

I did not speak or lip-sync, but rather began the performance with slow, graceful choreography that took advantage of the sweeping garments, a fusion of style somewhere between contemporary dance, vintage cabaret flair, and burlesque. As the song progressed and I began to, teasingly, remove my clothing, my movements became more jagged, my expression less graceful and more distressed, as if the gaze of the audience was now coercing me to continue my routine, to reveal my body. Eventually, as the song grew in intensity, the routine became a pained subversion of a burlesque number as I unwillingly strip teased, clothing bunched tight in each fist in a vibrating, simmering anger, my back to the audience, until the shift was lowered to reveal the phrase #MeToo scrawled in red paint across my back. I dropped the shift as the crescendo of the song was reached, turning my body stance into a more powerful one, my arms uplifted, flaunting the phrase triumphantly to the audience until there was silence.

Looking back to this routine now, I can see how I clothed myself in symbols, as armour, to give myself strength to not only come out as a survivor of sexual assault, but to also make a performative intervention into the culture that served as my coming out's platform, critiquing the prevalence of assault that pervaded it. I shrouded myself in figures of agency and rage, and within my choice of song, positioned myself as the one with power in the space, wielding the ability to put a spell on anyone who harmed me or others, my crown of snakes able to turn anyone into stone. Personally, it was only after I had conducted this performance that I felt able to discuss my long-kept secret of assault to people within my day-to-day life, proving to myself the power that nightlife performance can have not just for the audience that experiences it, but for the performers themselves who practice it as a rite of passage to achieve a kind of personal liberation, critiquing the structures that have (and continue to) harm them while simultaneously freeing themselves from them, for a moment, through the performative act of critique.[23] In experiencing the continuation

[23] This performance, although situated in this Chapter due to its relation to sexual assault in queer nightlife, has linkages and correlations with other performances throughout the thesis. Returning to Chapter Three, this performance is of-a-type with those narrated by Mulan and Sha-Gaze: a performative intervention *into* the space, carving out a kind of safety that may not be there previously. In relation to queer performance's

between the dominant ideology of the outside world and the inside within the practices of assault that pervaded queer spaces, I reached out to another, alternative, outside ideology—that inspiring the #MeToo activist movement—and interpreted it to my own ends to subvert a culture that can propagate harm. In this way, the lines of influence between the sites of queer nightlife and the outside can not only reflect the importation of the dominant but also a translation of alternative modes of resistance to the local context. This is yet another example of the *active generation* of alterity through competing practices and ideologies within nightlife, leading to the conflicted and ambivalent nature of heterotopia.

Regulation, Restriction, and Control of Heterotopic Space

Finally, I would like to take a step back to a broader, city-wide perspective. I have so far focused on how the embodied practices of patrons, performers, DJs, and promoters import external ideologies, many of them harmful, into the heterotopic sites of nightlife. But it would be remiss of me not to spend some time focusing on the scaffolding of licensing laws and government regulations that form the very structure that nightlife either operates within, or (illegally) operates without, a structure that Governments manipulate readily to execute their own vision of what a city should be, and which is the target of a huge amount of lobbying from vested business interests who seek more control over the urban landscape, as well as activism from artists and club owners who seek the same. From this perspective, it is easier to see how the flow of capital directly impacts the ecology of nightlife within the city, and to articulate far more clearly the battlefront between the replication of

cathartic function when it comes to traumatic events, see Chapter Six. For an analysis of queer nightlife performance as ritual and rite-of-passage, see Chapter Seven.

hegemonic capital business interests and sites of local creative and community expression. This final section can be understood as a (small) account of (some of the ways that) one of the most powerful and defining dominant forces of our contemporary era—gentrification—can shape the experience of heterotopia and safety within sites of queer nightlife.

The impact of gentrification—the act of more affluent demographics displacing more marginalised ones—is well documented on nightlife around the world, particularly in major cities such as New York City, London, Berlin, and Sydney (Brause, Kaiser, and Moynihan 2019; Hae 2012; Misa 2020; Race 2016). In particular, this is perceived as a clash between "luxury flat developers and nightclub owners" (Nunn 2019), cultivating "a culture of vexatious complaints by residents against longstanding venues, supported by Government agencies" (McPhee 2019). More broadly, this is found to erase manifestations of local community in favour of the replicating imprint of international capital, often taking the form of apartment blocks (Schulman 2012). Within this structure, lobby groups of inner-city apartment dwelling residents and the developers that build their housing exert greater and greater influence over local Government, swaying zoning and licensing laws into their favour to sabotage the more marginal sections of nightlife economies, and to ultimately takeover and demolish subcultural music institutions without resistance. Under the influence of developers and law enforcement, Government takes the view that nightlife offers little cultural or community benefit, and it becomes viewed purely as a cauldron of violence that spills out onto the streets, endangering residents and lowering the commercial appeal of the surrounding apartments (Cranston 2016; Nunn 2019; Race 2016). Within this worldview, assessments of venues are made with the evaluation of potential economic value to the city versus the public violence the venue may generate. This discourse played out most notoriously in the local context over the past six years of Sydney's lockout laws, which decimated the nightlife economy and resulted in a net loss of 176 licensed venues within the inner-city area (Taylor 2018). Although these broader issues of gentrification and nightlife are the subject of a range of scholarly and journalistic work (Hae 2012; Hughes and Weedon-Newstead 2018; Race 2016), for the purposes of this chapter I am interested

specifically in how these broader structural forces impact the embodied practices and experiences of people who attend queer nightlife events. As I will demonstrate with the following examples, the most powerful of international forces can find their way into personal interactions in the local context, leading to disruptive consequences for queer spaces.

Delsi,[24] discussing her regular *Unicorns* party in Sydney, notes the effect of the lockout laws on the patrons of her party. Designed to shut down venues within the inner-city business area of the city to curb incidences of assault—particularly in Kings Cross—a notable displacement of harmful experiences occurred from these inner-city areas to others as patrons followed the geography of which venues remained open (Hughes and Weedon-Newstead 2018; Race 2016). Most notably, this displacement effect brought the masculinised violence of the inner city into direct conflict with the renowned queer-friendly hub and queer residents of Sydney's inner-west (Hughes and Weedon-Newstead 2018; Race 2016). Delsi observes that

> since the lockout heaps of other warehouse parties have opened up around the space, and when they get shut down during the night that crowd can hear our music and they come over and they try and get in, or they steal stuff from out the front, or harass people, or there's been some not great instances at the petrol station down the road from our venue where a lot of our patrons will be all dressed up in Unicorns outfits and have an unsafe experience. And that didn't happen prior to the lockout laws. Like it's definitely made the inner-west a lot less safe (Delsi Cat 2020).

These experiences resonate with anecdotes throughout Hughes and Weedson-Newstead's (2018) study on the displacement effect, as residents of the inner-west note not just the increase in

[24] Promoter and producer of *Unicorns*, a queer event focused on accessibility and sex-positivity for queer people that feel excluded from gay bars and clubs.

assaults, but an overall affective feeling of danger, forcing them to take backstreets, to hide from passers-by, or to experience a range of harassment and threatening behaviour that they had not previously. Beyond what can be measured in the State's strictly-limited definition of 'alcohol-fuelled assaults,' participants describe a "vibe" that had become malevolent to the community who primarily lived and attended venues in this location prior to the abrupt law change (Hughes and Weedon-Newstead 2018, 392). They reported that the streets became much less safe for marginalised people, whereas queer venues took on a straighter marketing angle to cater to their new patronages. Meanwhile, in the inner-city area that had been shut down by the laws, residential rents and land values rose (Cranston 2016).

Back in Naarm, I experienced something altogether different when entering the *Hugs & Kisses* club for the first time since it had officially changed ownership to a developer. The change was immediate. The nightclub began enforcing a strict limit on how many people could be in the cobbled laneway outside smoking, while also conducting thorough (illegally thorough) searches of everyone who entered. When I entered for the first time since the venue was auctioned, the door person took my bag, un-zipped every single compartment, and reached deep into the corners of every pocket, lifting each item I had in there out for inspection. Buckland notes that, in New York City, this kind of behaviour by staff was more so a performance for State powers that could shut venues down rather than necessarily an actual instinct to over-police patrons, observing from her conversations with staff that "security people were aware that they were under close surveillance by the police department, especially at clubs for people of colour. They had to be seen as thorough by a tough audience" (2002, 51-52). These performances of regulating where patrons could stand, and performances of toughness against patrons, were in direct response to increasing complaints from nearby residents, as well as a greater scrutiny from police officers whose presence had been growing in the lead up to and after the building's auction.

Gentrification here is experienced as a series of escalating occasions of violent coercion towards those who are deemed no longer welcome within the specified realm of profit-oriented

space. Within these examples, the profit-making imperatives of capital can be seen to be covertly informing the embodied practices of nearby residents, venue staff, police, and passers-by on the street, essentially forging them into agents of gentrification. This is evident in the ways they, with remarkable consistency, target undesirable populations—mainly queer people, people of colour, First Nations people or members of a subcultural community—in order to manipulate them into ever more restrictive confines of behaviour, and for those who do not fit within those specified confines, punish them through methods such as assault, over-surveillance, or by contravening their rights until they are forced to leave, thereby freeing up the site for the uninterrupted generation of profit for private landholders and investors (Hae 2012). As can be seen in each of these examples, these experiences of violence and control happen concurrently with the shift of capital interests to the area, demonstrating how the power of displacement is utilised as one of gentrification's frontline tools, as well as some of the specific methods by which this displacement is achieved (Delany 1999; Hae 2012; Schulman 2012).

At the heart of these issues there is an issue of Governance that intimately impacts the day-to-day experiences of queer nightlife patrons in the spaces in which they gather, hinting at a gross miscalculation of what constitutes as violence, and what constitutes as value. On the one hand, there is an institutional hyper-awareness of a very public, very masculinised violence that can occur within entertainment precincts that is coded by policy-makers and law enforcement as related only to its proximity with alcohol and the venues that dispense it, rather than, perhaps more appropriately, its proximity with masculinity itself (Race 2016). This discursive correlation leads to gaping blind spots within regulatory policy, such as a lack of curiosity by Government or law enforcement as to why nightlife spaces of a more community-oriented nature are not as characterised by violence, despite high levels of intoxication also being a feature of these spaces. There is no interest by Governing bodies as to why the landscape of public violence is not uniform across demographics, and certainly no interest in understanding the core motivators for violence within entertainment precincts. As demonstrated within Chapter 3, nightlife spaces for marginalised

people can be, in many respects, the only space where they feel free to express themselves among their community without the risk of violence and reprisal from the dominant world. In failing to protect and proliferate these spaces—and in adopting city-wide policies that grant greater powers to residents and developers to displace nightlife patrons—city Governments are actively *stripping safety away* from oppressed city populations, while *simultaneously* exposing them to increased occasions of violence such as those described above. This is the odd irony of licensing regulation within Australia's urban cities: regulation that purportedly vows to stop violence, but that only increases the burden of violence against some of the most disenfranchised of the cities' residents.

Alongside this narrow interpretation of violence there is, on the other hand, an unbalanced perception of value that prioritises economic benefit to the city over cultural and social benefit to the city's inhabitants. Within this equation, if a venue's economic output does not outweigh the economic influence of nearby landowners and developers, increased regulation will be brought into force that reduces the number and operating hours of venues within a high-development area, along with the increased police presence and surveillance that accompanies this regulation. Within this value system, people's right to gather and build communities is weighed equally (or often unequally) against the right of developers to turn a profit from the surrounding landscape. It is this imperative that explains how Governments and developers promote the attraction of nightlife as a key focus of tourism and marketing campaigns, while simultaneously trying to eradicate (or simply refusing to protect) its rogue elements: as Hae observes within their study of New York City, "underground/alternative nightlife venues that have developed alternative philosophies of communities and subcultures have been marginalised, and profit-driven, upscale/corporate forms of nightlife have prevailed" (2012, 5). This force is a present and violent threat to queer nightlife in a local context: through a systemic misevaluation by regulating bodies, the safety that is envisioned as core to queer heterotopic spaces is dismantled as patrons are exposed to the harms of displacement, with the end-result being, often, the total destruction of the sites that hold these heterotopic formulations altogether, or their transformation into generalised, gentrified sites of

profit-generation that do not serve the local community-building motives that originally characterised them. From the perspective of heterotopias, both of these outcomes more or less amount to the same thing.

Heterotopic Porosity

Despite the discursive short-hand of 'inside' and 'outside' that allows me to delineate easily between the day-to-day social world and alternative heterotopic sites, what I have sought to achieve with this analysis so far is a development of a core theory of heterotopia that will continue to be extrapolated throughout this thesis, especially within the 'mirror' chapter to this one—Chapter Eight, The Inside Goes Out. In short, although easily graspable terms of inclusion and exclusion let us focus on the relationship between heterotopia and the world that is its context, they do not, alone, describe the porosity that exists between the two (Stavrides 2007). As I have shown throughout this chapter, all manner of ideologies, norms, revolutionary or hegemonic practices inveigle their way into heterotopic space, couched most often within the bodies of the patrons, performers, DJs, and promoters who co-create them. These norms are, in a performative way, repeated and replicated, sometimes despite the space in question's direct imperative to break down these norms through spatial practice, through their own kind of revolutionary performativity. This performative effect on space can equally be applied to the regulatory framework that so strictly controls what kind of heterotopias are permissible and the ways in which people can behave within them, but especially around them—in the ways security staff, nearby residents, politicians, law enforcement, developers, and passers-by embody and perpetuate the gentrifying (and displacing) forces of capital. It is the constitutive effect of norms that provide heterotopias with their heterotopic character, delineating them from the perfect utopic ideal. As I have demonstrated, this leads to an almost-constant

battleground of contested norms versus alternative-norms, and countless experiences of conflict, dismay, awkwardness, shock, offense, horror, boredom, dismissal, and rage. Rather than point to these instances as occasions of failure, I contend that these experiences of friction provide occasion for important insights into the fault-lines of heterotopic space, and hence the disparateness between the alternative ideals that are in the midst of co-creation, and the hegemonic norms they seek to re-arrange into new modes of relation. These spaces are far from utopic, but it is through these moments of disjuncture that a sliver of the utopic impulse that propels them can be sensed.

5.

Discord, Disorientation, Disruption

On the Halloween weekend of 2018, I attended a queer techno and performance party in the centre of Naarm. The promoters had manipulated the layout of the club to conform with the other-worldly theme of the night. Firstly, the entrance to this venue is usually through a nondescript back alley entrance. When we approached it, however, the whole area was cordoned off with red and white tape, the alley filled with fog, a figure covered entirely in a plastic suit and gas mask emerging from the fog with a loudspeaker. They said, *This area has been quarantined. Turn back and enter from the street.* Once we walked around to the front entrance on King Street (a strange experience in itself—I've become used to entering buildings from back alleys and semi-concealed doorways), we had our names checked off and walked directly into a small labyrinth constructed from metal fencing, hanging plastic sheets, lights, and smoke. Trying to navigate our way through this maze, we encountered the performer Callan, who was roving around screaming and crying in a costume created, it seemed, entirely from Macdonald's food wrapping. Although I had been to this venue several times before, it was noticeable how entering from an alternate direction—and the obscuring elements of barricades and smoke—cast their pall over me for several hours. I entered rooms I was familiar with but somehow perceived them to be entirely new, unable to situate them within my knowledge of the building. It was as if entering from a different perspective made every area alien. In the upstairs room was a large stage that was used for performances. The music there was a little quieter, making it easier to talk. Downstairs, in the basement, was a bar with padded seating booths and techno booming all night. Many people did not realise that there even was a downstairs dancefloor for some time, adding to the general sense of disorientation.

Heterotopia provides a site to confront societal norms and re-imagine alternative ones, but it also offers the opportunity to deconstruct, destroy, and discombobulate—a method through which to not only counter harmful ideas with restorative ones, but to undermine the framework of knowledge that provides the basis of that confrontation in the first place. Within this formulation, disorientation becomes a pivotal experiential marker of heterotopic spaces: of sites that can often become decidedly weird, and decidedly queer, in ways that go beyond just their permissiveness of alternative sexual and gender expressions. This function speaks to the earliest imaginings of heterotopia by Foucault, where he states that "heterotopias are disturbing, probably because they secretly undermine language, because they make it impossible to name this and that, because they shatter or tangle common names, because they destroy 'syntax' in advance, and not only the syntax with which we construct sentences but also that less apparent syntax which causes words and things… to 'hold together'" (2002, xviii). Throughout this chapter I will demonstrate how Naarm nightlife practitioners work in a deeply phenomenological way to detonate the way things are 'held together,' and how their methods are rooted in a queer—in all meanings of the word—ideology of critique. I will focus on several roles within the nightlife space: the performer, the DJ, and the promoter (a role that often encompasses curation, creative direction, and production), each of which are represented by the following subsections. Within this analysis, I seek to better explicate the relationship between the sensorial and political as it manifests within these heterotopic spaces, and to further understand, as a result, the phenomenological workings that potentially underpin all heterotopic sites.

Sara Ahmed's work in *Queer Phenomenology* guides this chapter, alongside the spatial theory that informs my framing of heterotopias. Within her conclusion on disorientation, Ahmed's words resonate with Foucault's own when she writes that "[t]o make things queer is certainly to disturb the order of things" (Ahmed 2006, 161)—a resonance which I take as my departure point for interpreting the events and interviews I discuss below. Within this framing, the re-ordering of spatial perception, or the perturbation of what is 'given,' is aligned with a queer mode of being in the body

that extends beyond its relationship to sexuality and gender, instead bringing into question its relationship with all things. For Ahmed, "[m]oments of disorientation are vital. They are bodily experiences that throw the world up, or throw the body from its ground. Disorientation as a bodily feeling can be unsettling, and it can shatter one's sense of confidence in the ground or one's belief that the ground on which we reside can support the actions that make a life feel livable" (2006, 157). The unsettled nature of nightlife space, exemplified in this labyrinthine confusion, is a recurrent theme throughout queer events in Naarm. I discuss below nightclub performances by Fox Pflueger, Themme Fatale, and Nefertiti LaNegra, alongside extracts from interviews I conducted with each performer reflecting on their process. These reveal a deeply phenomenological approach to the club-performance space: particularly, the manipulation of affect in service of disorienting patrons. This momentary vulnerability, or destabilisation, provides the performers with an opportunity to re-assemble relations, to *slip under the guard* of the audience and deposit something altogether new. Approaching a heterotopic analysis through the lens of Ahmed's phenomenology, I highlight the ways in which these tactics of sensorial overload take advantage of nightlife's malleability to crack normative expectations of behaviour (Ahmed 2006).

Disorientation is an inherently spatial—and potentially queer—disturbance that can have political ramifications (Ahmed 2006), leading some people to experience disorientation more readily in a world that has not been built for their frame of experience, and for some to embrace their deviation. Fintan Walsh, tracing the disorienting affects of queer Irish theatre productions, writes that disorientation "might… supply the preconditions for new forms of intimacy, sociality, solidarity and belonging to emerge" (2016, 324). As a strictly ambivalent perturbation of space and affect toward political ends, disorientation holds heterotopic potential for marginalised people seeking to infiltrate the everyday, the routine. It parallels, too, the power of distraction and shock in the work of Walter Benjamin (1968), or the potential for 'astonishment' in the writing of José Esteban Muñoz "[to] help one surpass the limitations of an alienating presentness and allow one to see a different time and place" (2009, 5).

Disorientation and other jarring affects are used as tools by performance practitioners to introduce audiences to alien ideologies. To return to Ahmed, disorientation

> can be a bodily feeling of losing one's place, and an effect of the loss of a place: it can be a violent feeling, and a feeling that is affected by violence, or shaped by violence directed toward the body. Disorientation involves failed orientations: bodies inhabit spaces that do not extend their shape, or use objects that do not extend their reach. At this moment of failure, such objects "point" somewhere else or they make what is "here" become strange (2006, 160).

This characterisation of disorientation raises avenues of enquiry that I follow: for instance, the architecture of party spaces, their odd locations in the city, and the embodied practices that can construct the experience of patrons—as demonstrated at the Halloween party described above—have otherwise been theorised by madison moore as methods to separate participants from the "outside" world, to provide a sense of entering another dimension (moore 2018, 123). However, looking at the entry-ways into other local venues such as Hugs & Kisses, Geddes Lane, Sub Club (and others)—the winding stairwells, darknesses, hair-point turns, the lack of signage or direction—alongside the deliberately obtuse locales of illegal events, it could be contended that radical event spaces deliberately propagate the sensation of disorientation. After all, when we become lost we reach out for whatever is near, despite its unfamiliarity, in search of something to use as an anchor: a chance, maybe, for something entirely new to insert itself, a new mode of operation, a re-orientation, that can replace what came before. I suggest that this movement—between disorientation and re-orientation—is a deliberate affective and phenomenological tool that is foundational to how contemporary club performers replace dominant ways of knowing with alternative ones.

Subversion and Performance

On a Thursday night in January of 2019, Fox Pflueger opened their *Honcho Disko* show with a leather routine. Dressed head to toe in the material, and theatrically male signifying in their mannerisms and costume, they began to strip until they were left with nothing but their leather trousers. They reached in and pulled out a strap-on dildo, moulded in such a way as to be a semi-realistic model of a penis, and began masturbating with it at the audience. Everyone cheered wildly at the end of the performance, only for Fox to grab the microphone and tell everyone to stop cheering, and to boo. *Yes*, they tell us, *you may want to applaud, but if someone else had just pulled out their cock on stage without warning and began masturbating in front of you it would be an assault*. Everyone booed accordingly. As an audience member, the switch from being enrolled as voyeur, spectator, and cheer-squad to being positioned suddenly as the object of performance and of critique constituted an abrupt and uncomfortable shift. Fox's performance called us to interpret it in disparate and contradicting ways. What I felt up until the moment of interruption, as an audience member, was that this was a performer that I knew, in a space that often held explicit performances, conducting a drag king-esque routine with a comically fake penis. The desire to applaud came not only from the convention of a performance space, but also the conventions of queer performance, where gendered and sexual display—especially in the heightened form of drag—calls for a celebration and affirmation, an embrace by the audience of subversive performance or the performer's own expression of gender and sexual identity.

Given the norms of the space, then, applause and cheering were safe and expected reactions from audience members. When Fox called for us to boo instead, they stepped us sideways into a quasi-fictional space where we were, retroactively, asked to imagine them as a predatory flasher, foisting their sexuality on us without our consent, despite (at least in my case) feeling very

much that the performance was consensual. Splitting my perception of the performance, I was confronted with the possibility that this sexualised comedic queer performance could be sexual assault, and brought into a disjuncture where I was forced to interrogate exactly what the difference is between a consensual sexual display and one that is harmful within a queer nightlife context. Furthermore, in this moment of trying to fit together the twin realities of the performance—the rubber dildo with the imagined, unwanted 'real' penis of flesh—I was led to question: consensual for who? Does my readiness to see this performance and enjoy it in this context speak for everyone? Could I, by cheering a performance of this nature, be complicit in the potential harms it produces? By breaking the convention of the call-and-response that was occurring and interrogating it directly, Fox knocked expectation sideways, confusing and disorienting the audience and intervening within the practices that constituted the space in a highly contradictory way.

Reflecting on their performance style, Fox tells me: "I don't like to conform to the space that I'm in, but rather subvert it, and really focus on subverting it. Because if I'm conforming to the space then there's nothing radical about what I'm doing, and I'm becoming a piece of décor on the wall" (Pflueger 2020). To demonstrate, they recall a performance for the party *Powertrip*, which was held at Sub Club—a basement rave club in the centre of the city—on the 9th of November 2019. For this event, the organisers and artists were raising money to provide water for First Nations people who no longer had access to running water as a result of the corruption and mismanagement of the Murray Darling Basin throughout New South Wales, exacerbated by factors such as drought and widespread bushfires. For this performance, which took place at 2AM, Fox was dressed as a mermaid. The club music stopped, and they were dragged about the space and lifted atop a speaker stack by assistants, where they spoke about the political purpose of the evening and where the ticket sales were going: they then read out a poem about water. Describing the crowd reaction to this performance, Fox says that "people are like, 'what the fuck?... Like what am I doing? What is this? What am I listening to? What's happening here?'" (Pflueger 2020). The venue that held this party—as a place patrons go regularly, regardless of what event is on—attracted a host of attendees

who would have no idea what the party was, what its ethos was or who was programmed; they may never have attended an evening that schedules queer club performance. Within Fox's retelling of the evening, it is possible to see how this manifests in the confusion and disorientation of the audience, who are confronted suddenly with the unfamiliar and in turn, with the need to reflect on the context of their participation. Fox views this moment of abrupt confusion as one that is full of political potential. They tell me that when you, as an audience member, see

> something you're not expecting, you have to think differently about what you're seeing. You have to think about the world in a completely different way based off what you've seen here. Like, if you can shock someone in a performance—not necessarily by offending them or being really grotesque or any of those sorts of things—if you can shock them just by doing something absurd it makes them think differently, and I think that's a really necessary thing for breaking out of the kinds of paradigms that keep us quite trapped and under the thumb of patriarchy and capitalism (Pflueger 2020).

Following this logic, the presentation of the surreal and the unexpected within the malleable spatial and social environment of a nightlife site could allow the opportunity to break down given models of understanding. Rather than 'shocking' in the more conventional sense of the word, Fox alludes to an explicitly phenomenological shock of defamiliarisation that re-arranges performative and spatial elements into something unrecognisable, forcing audience members to recalibrate—to re-orient—their relationship with the space and, subsequently, the knowledge that structures their day-to-day lives (Benjamin 1968).

This approach to nightlife is common throughout Naarm's culture, with queer performers often taking the physical structure of a given venue as a challenge to subversion and originality,

experimenting with new approaches that re-imagine the formation of the space and how the performer interacts with their audience or the public. Another example of this is a performance by Themme Fatale that took place at *Honcho Disko* on the 16th of May 2019. Opening the night of performance, we were ushered outside The 86 bar and onto the footpath along Smith Street, where a white ute was parked in the road with bright blue lights all around the tray, up-lighting the performer who stood in the centre. From this improvised, public, mobile stage they held up a series of boards with writing on them that communicated the difficulty of living with chronic illness. After cycling through these boards they tossed them to the side, stripped off their clothes, stapled tape to their flesh with a staple gun, laid down onto a bed of nails, and had another performer smash a concrete brick with a hammer on their stomach. After this, they leapt off the back of the truck onto the crowd that was packed in the few metres between curb and bar door, and crowd-surfed their way overhead and through the front curtains, into the venue.

During this performance, a tram pulled up behind the truck, the carriage sitting almost within arms-reach of the performer who stood topless, excepting some nipple tassels. Within the tram a bright, fluorescent-lit cavalcade of commuters came face to face with the assorted crowd of queer party-goers on the footpath, our eye-lines exactly parallel. Between these two crowds was the performance, and the commuters stared upwards in abject surprise, horror, as the half-naked performer danced and had the concrete block smashed over their body. This direct confrontation between two entirely different affective worlds—the quotidian traversal of public transport (most likely from a day at work) and the feathered, glamourous, punky carnival of queer revelry—added a stark contrast as well as a level of surprising comedy to the performance. Throughout the time that the tram was halted as an imposing backdrop, it was impossible not to stare at the crowd within the tram, well-lit as they were, their own reaction to the performance becoming part and parcel of the performance itself, seeing through their facial expressions how radical and strange they found the goings-on they were witness to, and hence gaining a renewed appreciation for it ourselves. For the time of this performance we, too, became performers, cheering and whooping at the spectacle

display, defiantly claiming the public space and supporting the queer, chronically ill, trans body that was taking it over by performing from the back of their ute. Themme Fatale reversed the position of the stage, taking it from the deep recesses of the bar, facing outward to the street, to the open-air of the road, facing the bar: in so doing, they re-oriented us toward an unwitting audience and notably dis-oriented and disrupted the day-to-day commuters on public transport. The evidence of this disruption came not ten minutes later as police officers arrived at the venue for a lengthy conversation with the venue owner, leading many of us to conclude that someone from the tram had been so confronted or confused by what they had witnessed that they had called on the State to rectify the temporary transgression into the public realm.

Another example of this dis-orientation/re-orientation dynamic came with Nefertiti LaNegra's performance at *GayTimes Festival* in 2018. The festival took place at an out-of-season ski ground in the mountains a couple of hours' drive out of Naarm, with Nefertiti's performance occurring in an improvised club space in an upstairs room. This space was open from around 10PM until 6AM or 7AM, and at some point in the middle of that, Nefertiti LaNegra emerged from the stage, walked straight out into the crowd and took up a position on a central dance podium. Surrounded by a sea of queer people they sang a live cover of Donna Summer's "Last Dance." The feeling of this performance disoriented the crowd in a different way to Fox's described above: Nefertiti's entrance broke through the established convention of the dancefloor space and the quotidian social and dancing performances that were taking place there, abruptly broadening and elevating what was possible. Shifting our focus from the minutiae of our own bodies' movements, interacting with friends, eye-ing strangers and navigating a crowded space, we all turned to look upward and move and heave around a central point. Glancing between the performer and the crowd I could see opposite—full of familiar and loved faces—I saw wrought on their features the same surprise and wonderment that I felt myself as this perplexingly beautiful and unexpected event occurred.

Nefertiti LaNegra, speaking on their approach to space, parties, and performance, articulates a desire to dis-organise the site of performance to better enable an organic relationship to build between performer and audience, and between audience members. Comparing their performances

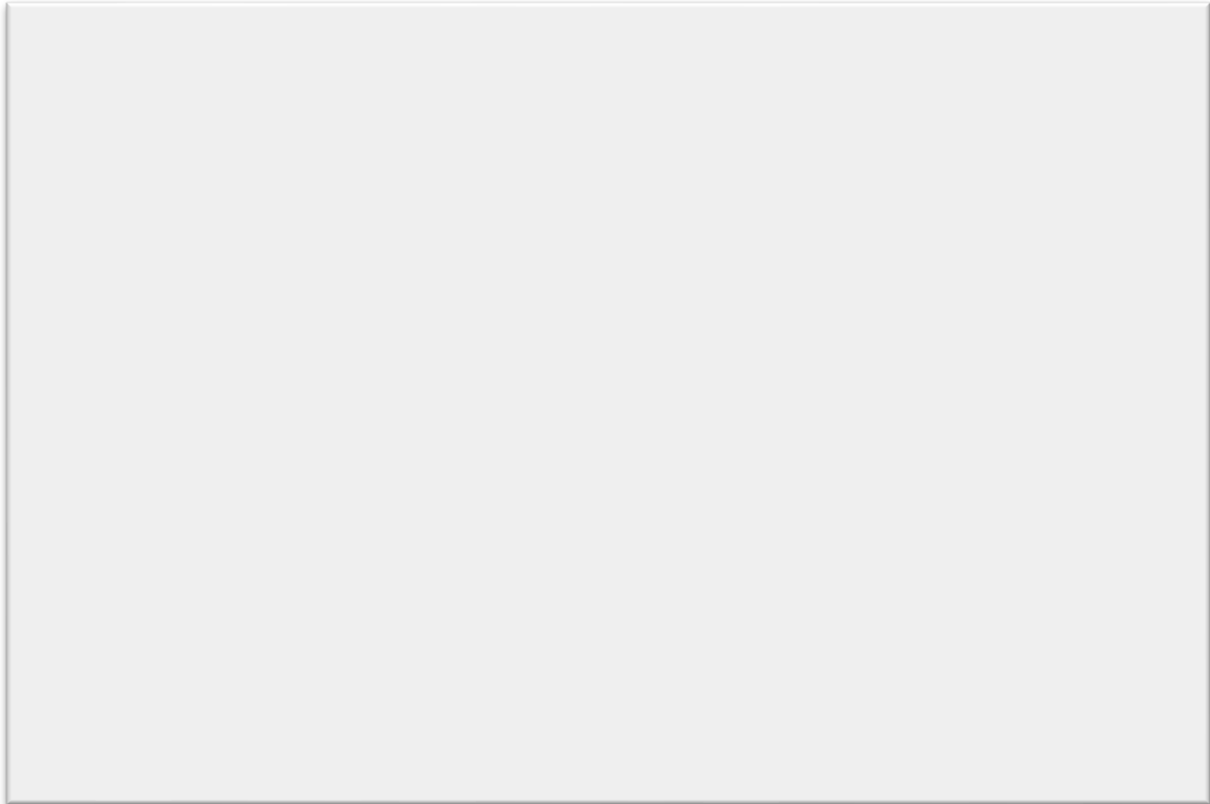

Figure 11. [Photograph of Nefertiti LaNegra performing at GayTimes]. 16 Feb 2018. Photo by Jackson Grant. From Nefertiti LaNegra Facebook Page, accessed 1 Oct, 2020. ***https://www.facebook.com/NefertitiLaNegra/photos/a.810353736031287/810355632697764***

in more traditional theatre configurations with those that are dominant within club settings, they express their discomfort when a performance requires them to pretend the audience does not exist:

> I really hate the fourth wall, I think the fourth wall's trash, and so, like I've always been really clear, I've always wanted to be in the middle of my audience. Like, I want my audience to be around me, I'm not

> trying to, like, disassociate from the people in front of me, I'm like, I wanna see them and connect with them. And so that to me is also really important, which is why the screaming and responding and snapping always means something to me. Because I'm like, I'm seeing you and I hope you're seeing me and we're in this together… That to me is the ideal place. That's where I want to be. I want to be in the middle, I want everyone around me (Nefertiti LaNegra 2020).

Nefertiti LaNegra's focus on spatiality is a central concern throughout: how it can impact on the affective potential of a performance, and hence on themselves as a performer. As another example, Nefertiti outlines the differences between a performance season at the Naarm Cabaret Festival versus the more informal performance practice of the club space at *GayTimes*. Due to the space limitations and the number of audience members, their request for the audience to be positioned 'in-the-round' at the Cabaret Festival was overridden by festival protocol, placing the performance in what was essentially a proscenium arch format, with the audience seated in rows and facing them, with an aisle down the middle. This enormously impacted Nefertiti's performance, as they describe the audience audibly participating through claps and whoops only at the sanctioned appreciation slot at the end of each song, and otherwise sitting passively in their rows of chairs watching the performance. After one audience member stood up in the aisle and started filming and dancing, other audience members expressed embarrassment to Nefertiti at the end of the show, reinforcing how powerfully the norms of space circumscribe narrow boundaries of audience behaviour through shame and embarrassment, even second hand. Comparing this experience to the structure of the *GayTimes* performance, LaNegra states that:

> I think that's more the beauty, or one of the things I really like about a club performance, is—why do you have to fight for their attention? Because people have been dancing and they're sweaty,

> and all they wanna do is hear the next song. So you've gotta give them something that's gonna rev them up, or at least is interesting enough that they're like, I will sit here and watch this and this is great. They also give their feedback really transparently, they scream and they snap and they're in it, or they sing along, right? And so it's like, great, you're in it with me, and because of that, you know, if permitted, you can go into the middle of the dancefloor, and people will part ways for you and they'll dance with you and respond to you and smile with you, and it really creates a lovely environment in a way that like, formal theatre structures don't innately create those spaces (LaNegra 2020).

Nefertiti points to the norms that structure more traditional theatre spaces as well as club spaces. Within the theatre format, their desires for a looser, more informal relation with their audience were quite literally overturned by the protocols of the space itself, as seating plans and layouts came into force to dictate what could and could not be achieved within that setting. The strict binds of this space, Nefertiti felt, diminished the capacity for the audience to engage more expressively with the performance, and nullified some of the joyous bonds that could form between performer and audience.

Nefertiti's vision of what a performance can be is, essentially, one without obligation, where a performer can enter and command the format of the room as they wish. Within this approach, performer and audience engage in an open conversation wherein it is the performer's prerogative to grab attention, to disrupt, to disturb or to entertain to a sufficient degree to compensate audience members for the time they would otherwise be dancing or socialising in. This, for Nefertiti, creates an environment that allows audience members to provide feedback in an almost brutally transparent fashion, as people may not pay attention, or wander off, walk out for a smoke, or not

respond vocally. To put it another way, the contract of behaviour between audience and performer in nightlife spaces seems far more lax—though, as I have previously demonstrated, not at all free from its own alternative set of norms of behaviour. This comparative lax-ness is evidenced by the photo of Nefertiti performing in the *GayTimes* club space, above, where alongside a host of audience members smiling, engaged, or even reaching toward the performer, are people who are having conversations separate from the performance, who are looking aside, who seem lost in thought, or who have their backs to the performer. This nightlife model not only allows audience members to disengage or leave the room more easily than they would if sitting in static aisle seats but, according to Nefertiti, it also means that, as a performer, you can move through the crowd, the crowd can move and dance with you.

Although this performance was disruptive in the sense that it disoriented the use of the space it took place in—turning the audience in on itself, turning an innocuous podium in the centre into a diva pedestal—it did not elicit feelings of confusion, as Fox Pflueger's leather routine did, or anger, as Themme Fatale's performance may have done to the by-passer who called the police. Instead, it re-oriented us toward the performer, and toward each other as we shared in the unexpected with a mix of strangers and friends, laterally broadening out our awareness of the space, our relationship with it, and each other. In some way or another, each of these performances sought to take the social and performance conventions of the space, as well as the space itself, and make them the target of performance: Fox Pflueger interrupted the call-and-response convention of queer nightlife to dismantle accepted norms around sex-acts and performance; Themme Fatale brought their audience face-to-face with an unwitting public audience to, in the space-between, enact a show of power over their chronic illness; Nefertiti LaNegra broke into a festival club space to gather the loose ends of sociality spread throughout and bring them together into a brief, queer moment of communality. Although their methods were different, each performer used "the often vitalising charge of disorientation" toward a political project (Walsh 2016, 314): a nightclub-corollary to the assertion that "queerness works not just as a subjective desire, but as spatialising force" (Walsh

2016, 322). Through performance, they re-sculpted the normative grooves of behaviour that inscribed audience and space to momentarily provide an alternative proposal for how bodies can relate to each other in nightlife venues.

Interruption as Form

I will now turn my focus to the sonic. Sound, it almost goes without saying, is perhaps the most prominent aspect of these spaces—it is certainly the most overpowering—forming an aural landscape for patrons to move through and to, and communicating a whole host of specific ideals that tie particular sites to certain subcultures or practices. One example of an artist that consciously works to upset norms surrounding nightlife sound is Alexander Powers, and in particular their DJ sets at *LEFAG* and *Powertrip* as Female Wizard. These sets, often taking place well into the night somewhere between 4 and 7 in the morning (or later), are characterised by a raucous experimentalism that challenges audiences to dance to rhythms they may have never heard before, blending three or four tracks simultaneously to create a hypnotic tapestry of sounds that evolve and rupture over the hours.[25] Discussing her approach to DJing, Powers states that

> Interruption is my form, you know, disruption, interruption, like… I want people to question their interaction with the club, whether consciously or not, I want people to have to re-organise and re-understand where they're, how they're placing their body inside that space. And what type of behaviour that they're giving to that space

[25] A recorded example is available here

> and what expectations they're taking of me, the promoter, or of the venue (Powers 2020).

Once again, the possibilities for un-learning paradigms and the foundational habits of identity are tied to the creative and spatial practice of nightlife space. Citing a desire, specifically, for people to re-orient how they are positioned within the world around them, Powers curates and manipulates sound in such a way as to short-circuit dancers' comprehension, cracking something open, allowing something else to enter.

This relationship between audience expectation and sound curation is integral to her approach to club spaces—and beyond that, how her musical decisions are related to their cultural context, as well as the aural history of electronic music:

> It would be politically and socially irresponsible of me to just be an uplifting house music DJ. Like I really feel that. Because what I try to do is like, disrupt people, interrupt people, just blow something up in people's minds or in people's bodies, I just wanna change people's expectations, you know. And it's like, I'm not from America, I'm not like, I haven't been a part of house music for like twenty years, I'm not Black, like I don't… What am I really doing if I'm just playing happy house music, you know? I'm just giving people what they know, and I can't do that, that's wrong for me because I have the ability to fuck with that. That's really important... That's what drives what I do (Powers 2020).

Powers avoids the commoditised or familiar within their DJ sets in order to unsettle their audiences and push them in new and unexpected directions. Although they point specifically to house music—

and their own separation from its Black American cultural origins[26]—as emblematic of the commoditised, decontextualised familiar that would be a kind of social and political betrayal of what she can offer to dancers, it is imperative to note that her approach to space and sound curation (if not the specific arrangement of sounds themselves) are grounded within that same lineage.

Tim Lawrence (2011), writing on the early years of disco, describes an affective melting pot that sought to dissolve social and mental barriers through a particular combination of sonic and lighting technologies, as well as curation and mixing techniques pioneered by the new figure of the DJ. Long before 'disco' became a marketing term for a particular kind of commoditised sound, it was used to refer to a spatial formulation—one that incorporated the liberatory scope of 1960s social justice movements with technological innovations—to practice an alternative mode for people to relate to each other. Crucially, this was a genre-less experience. The selected sounds by DJs were less important than the ethos and technique with which they selected them, creatively extended them, or fused them to create new sounds that had never been heard by their audiences before. It was this approach to sound and the modes of relation allowed by the spatial practices of discotheques that 'disco' referred to, not an arrangement of recognisable sounds organised in a particular way. That would come later. Lawrence, referring to the early 1970s, argues that "[t]he introduction of sonic contrast and difference helped generate a sense of unpredictability and expectation on the dance floor, and the juxtaposition of different styles enabled dancers to experience existence as complex and open rather than singular and closed. In other words, DJs were generating a soundtrack that encouraged dancers to be multiple, fluid and queer" (2011, 237).

This approach would find its continuance within the innovations of house culture in Chicago throughout the late 70s and 80s: a culture which followed a mirror trajectory to disco. Prior to becoming a recognisable (and commoditised) genre, 'house' referred to a space, not a sound: this space was The Warehouse, a party venue run by DJ Frankie Knuckles, who cut his dancefloor teeth

[26] For a further discussion of the evolving history of house music, see Chapter Six.

within New York's discotheques in the years prior to moving to Chicago (Lawrence 2011; Salkind 2019). Similarly to disco, house was characterised by an experimental approach to sonic technology, spatial practice and sound manipulation, incorporating electronic experiments from Europe with local innovations in punk, post-punk, disco, RnB, freestyle, and a host of other Black and Latinx American music genres in order to create an affective soundscape that called on cultural history while also presenting dancers with something strange, radical and unfamiliar. Salkind (2019), based on his oral history of house music pioneers in Chicago, emphasises the importance of the unfamiliar within the political project of these spaces. Alongside the call-and-response culture that popular or cult music can evince within audiences, he posits that a notion called

> participatory discrepancy can and should be used to account for the ways that electronic dance music communities, particularly those presided over by DJs, experience the disjunctures and dissonances that DJs pry open between expected familiarity and improvisatory novelty… dancers might also feel the ghost of a deferred, or perhaps impossible, pleasure; one related specifically to not knowing what is being played (Salkind 2019, 50).

It is within this philosophical legacy of sound that Powers firmly situates herself in, despite disavowing the particular sound arrangement of house that has coalesced into a recognisable genre form. Within these accounts of disco and house, a relatively consistent understanding of how DJs can utilise sound to crack open dissonances within space and within social formulations emerges, an understanding that has been learned, embodied, and passed on, pushed forward by different technologies and arrangements of sound but still, at heart, an almost identical vision for what nightlife spaces can do.

This legacy is not so much a particular sound, then, but a disruptive and innovative philosophy of space, one that is anarchistic and progressive, one that incorporates a very specific

style of sonic manipulation to achieve its realisation. Within Powers' sets, this philosophy is taken to, perhaps, an extreme, one which centres wholly on the idea of participatory discrepancy, removing some of the more overt aural nods to cultural history and presenting something designed to summon, in its entirety, the spectral pleasure of not knowing described by Salkind: the potential impossibility of enjoying the unfamiliar. Similarly to the stage performers described earlier within this chapter, this style of performance is deliberately aimed at dismantling the nightlife space—a style that appears to be foundational to the purpose of many of these sites within Naarm, at least within a queer context.

Dangerous Spaces

So far within this thesis I have laid out multiple examples of sites that aim to hold ground for those who are discriminated against within their day-to-day lives, providing a moment of respite from a hostile world. But not every queer space is a safe space—and not every queer space sets out to be. Even within sites or performances that replicate harmful norms, it is often the stated intent of the promoters, at the very least, to achieve this sensation of safety, even if this does not manifest in actuality. There is, however, an alternative (or perhaps more appropriately, an alternative to the alternative) approach to queer spatial practice that forms a powerful ideological current through the ecology of Naarm's queer nightlife sites: an approach that deliberately destabilises comforting or protective structures in order to better practice radical alternatives to the present. This has already been demonstrated somewhat with the approach of queer performances in party spaces—but, as I will show, these methods of destabilisation extend to other embodied practices that shape the space, and are grounded in a specifically queer, anti-capitalist ethos that cultivates moments of

danger, or discomfort, in order to detonate the often unquestioned, foundational paradigms that structure our day-to-day lives.

Rather than being a strictly forward-looking or contemporary approach to spatial practice, these methods have their roots in a decades-long legacy founded within the earliest conceptions of other music subcultures such as disco, punk, and house music (Lawrence 2011; Muñoz 2018; Salkind 2019). Despite the differing contexts of each of the thinkers and practitioners drawn on within this analysis—Chappell, Hetherington, Munoz, Powers, Salkind—and the varying terminology within use, there is a common interpretation of the potentialities of social space that binds them together. Whether referring to these potentialities under the auspices of brave spaces, heterotopias, house, the punk rock commons, or rave, there appears to be a powerful consensus on the ability for discordant, disruptive, and senselessly wild spaces to performatively transform their constituents, either fortifying their resilience for similar conditions within their day-to-day lives, or illuminating alternative models for existence.

David Murphy, creator and promoter for the *LEFAG* parties, speaks to some of the reasoning behind moving away from a particular kind of model of safety, and its associated aesthetic:

> I really wanted LEFAG to be *tough*, though. I wanted it to be seen as tough. I wanted people to know that queer people have endured a lot, have experienced, you know, each one of us had to go through some sort of identity process, which is traumatising in itself, in ways. I wanted people, the outside world, the straight world to know, that we weren't cute, and like, rainbows and butterflies. I wanted them to know that we experience violence, we experience abuse, we experience, you know, no opportunities. And I wanted the grittiness to be seen (Murphy 2020).

Reacting against the cute—perhaps even the infantile—image that queer aesthetics can promote, Murphy's approach to creating party spaces marks a deviation from many of those I have described so far. Rather than present an event that smooths over the traumas of queer personhood, providing a harm-proof experience, he articulates a desire to create a space where traumatised people can practice an alternative—where they can reclaim agency from their experiences.

Alexander Powers, the resident DJ of *LEFAG* under their alias Female Wizard, expands on this approach further, stating that

> Dave, from *LEFAG*, he set up *LEFAG* to be like, what the fuck? Like, you're queer, you've grown up queer, you've made it to this age, like you're not some like, little marshmallow that's about to get stepped on, you're a fucking tough fucking bitch. He just was like, queers need to remember that they're fucking tough again, and that they can go to a dark, dirty, sweaty, gross nightclub and have the best time ever and just, fucking look after themselves because they're not fucking toddlers. You know? And I think interrupting the rhetoric of safe spaces and this presupposed necessity of it is so important and so needed (Powers 2020).

Rather than proposing a space that entirely lacks regulation or security, this reaction against the spatial approach of 'safe spaces' appears to arise from a desire for greater self-determination. Within this approach, wholesale protection of audiences from the vagaries of underground events comes across as a somewhat condescending model that underestimates the ability of patrons to manage their own experiences and surroundings, removing the opportunity for audiences to learn to adapt to difficult situations. According to Powers and Murphy, removing the possibility for chance, chaos, and the harm that they potentially bring from party environments completely does a disservice, firstly, to queer audiences by also limiting the detonative and liberatory scope of party

environments through over-regulation, and secondly to queer people as a whole by promoting a conception of queerness as fragile, infantile, and in need of protection.

This alternative method for the creation of queer nightlife space manifests in varying ways, but most relevantly in the work of Alexander Powers herself, both within the space she co-creates with her party series *Powertrip*, as well as in her musical and political approach to curating sound through DJing. Returning to their *Watertrip* party at Sub Club on the 9th of November 2019—the same evening described above by Fox Pflueger's mermaid routine—provides a further example of how this method creates unpredictable yet potent moments within the party space. At the beginning of the night, there was an extended DJ set of ambient music, samples, and noise. The audience at this stage were few—maybe twelve to twenty people—and due to the early hour and lack of rhythm to move to, people hovered in a loose crowd halfway up the dancefloor, or congregated in small groups to talk to each other holding drinks. During this soundscape there were two performances out within the traditionally dancefloor-space of the club, and the first of these, notably, caused a palpable disturbance within the norms of the space, as well as in the norms of queer nightlife sites more generally. During this performance, two dancers moved out into the floor in front of the DJ booth wearing matching white shirts, black pants, and boots. Beneath their feet—a feature of the club usually invisible beneath a crowd of dancers—was a disintegrating grid of tape that glowed ultraviolet under the club lights. As the performers began, many of the crowd sat around them in a ring on the floor, something unimaginable at any other night I had attended at this venue, which is usually packed with people dancing to techno or other variations of rave music, where sitting on the floor would immediately expose you to being trampled.

As the performers began their slow, deliberate contemporary dance routine, moving in asymmetrical yet similar movements, a few young men entered the club space. It was clear by their behaviour they were not aware that a performance was happening—accustomed, no doubt, to the high energy rave that characterises this space usually. They spoke loudly and gathered by the

performers, seemingly oblivious to the crowd of people in formation watching them, and tried to dance with varying degrees of irony to the ambient soundscape. They hovered for a long time right in front of the DJ booth, meaning they formed a backdrop to the performance, and began playing with the set dressing that had been set up to decorate the booth: they picked up herbs, and the candle that had been set there; they set some of the herbs on fire, and then they lit a cigarette on the candle and started smoking. When they turned their attention to the performers, it seemed they didn't perceive them to be performers at all, and the young men began to mirror the performers' abstract movement, playing a kind of call-and-response game with them, the sincere and the satirical. It was impossible to watch the original performance without watching this second, improvised one. Soon their cigarette forced a confrontation with a security staff member, and they quickly put it out, and later an audience member eventually approached them and asked them to move out of the way.

This encounter emblematised the disruptive clash between the imported practices of queer nightlife and the norms of its location: a dance club that does not cater specifically to a queer audience. Watching, I realised how in this instance the choice of venue and style of performance had been applied similarly to a street performance or protest, wherein an uncertain and almost-public audience may have little knowledge of the etiquette of performance—let alone queer underground performance—beyond this incidental encounter with it. As Fox Pflueger would note when describing their performance later on this same evening, it is possibly within this confrontation of the unknown that new paradigms can insert themselves. Although these unwitting audience members undermined, in some ways, the performance that took place, in other ways it was an ideal illustration of the heterotopic experiment envisioned by *Powertrip*'s promoters: one wherein queer people are not necessarily protected from disruption and chaos, where disparate elements can and do awkwardly jut together. The queer audience was exposed to an alternative performance reception characterised not by affirmation, support, and respect, but more so irreverence, satire, mockery, and (ironically, given it was the explicitly queer audience enforcing norms rather than

those that ‘intruded’ into the performance) a total subversion of how to behave during a performance. By moving the queer audience to a more heteronormative space, and by forging an encounter between these disparate entities, the promoters may have facilitated an experience that was more unexpected, and perhaps less ‘safe’ than the affirmative and intersectional approaches detailed in Chapter 3. Through confrontation, however, a novel mode of relation emerged that spurred participants into new ways of interacting with each other.

Powertrip, over time, would seek out ever more frontier spaces to stage their rave interventions, leading to increasingly radical, yet also dangerous, possibilities for their attendees. This drive to find alternative sites that sit outside the ecology of licensed venues stemmed, in large part, from a desire to imagine a social model that exists outside the confines of capitalism, and the hierarchy of exploitation that is necessary to its survival. Alexander Powers articulates a frustration with the current model of party promotion, wherein promoters will labour for free, or very often at a loss, to throw an event wherein all profit flows upward to, predominantly, landlords. Within this model, marginalised people forfeit what little capital and energy for labour they have to generate capital for the dominant class, a model where “everyone kind of gets paid except for the person who kind of conceptualises the entire night” (Powers 2020). Stating that they want to stop “making money for landlords and well just, just being part of the system, being part of that entire economy” (Powers 2020), Powers recalls a party they threw in collaboration with another event, *Anterograde*, where they attempted to bring this vision into a reality, this time in a vacant warehouse in Brunswick. Located in a difficult-to-find spot whose location was divulged immediately prior to the event beginning, Powers describes the scene as one that has radical differences to the regulated club environments wherein most queer nightlife events take place—“you’ve got all these people in this room, and there’s no law, there’s no accountability, there’s no security guards… anyone who’s there is helping out and like, even if they’re not, they’re the ones making the party, you know. People don’t really understand, I don’t think, when they go to raves, but it’s like, a team effort, everyone’s involved” (Powers 2020). Bridget Chappell, one of the creators behind *Anterograde*,

expands on this point while writing for web publication *Disclaimer* months after this event was held. Musing on the relations that hold a party space such as this together, they state that

> Raves don't allow for Spectators. They construct an imaginary where agency, participation and solidarity is necessary and inevitable, rendering the Spectacle if not obsolete then marginal. Ergo, the important thing is collectively coming together to do something illegal. Perhaps some of the power of a rave is that, unlike a street demonstration, many ravers don't take the act as overtly political. The invitation to depart from sanctioned nights out in legal venues is also a covert invitation away from chaste demonstration culture and its narrow range of acceptable direct actions, police liaisons, and awkward chants (Chappell 2020).

What both of these creators envision through the creation of these spaces are experiences for patrons that de-prioritise an aestheticized and commoditised party culture that divests participants of their collective responsibilities to each other, outsourcing them to a regulatory and capitalist structure that, subsequently, harnesses the affective energies generated by the heterotopic space in order to generate profit for dominant groups. What they propose, instead, is an experiment in communality that attempts, at least, to practice something altogether different, an experience where patrons have no choice but to be a foundational co-creator in what can be, a site with no option for observation, only participation.

These ideas, and the practices that follow—finding dis-used sites with little to no overheads so all money donated can go toward First Nations peoples; a place without security, without licensing, and without law enforcement—lead to uncomfortable and violent confrontations: growing pains, maybe, for a new way of being. As an example, Powers relates the following:

> But then what happened was a bunch of young boys came quite early and, like, I don't know what was going on with them, like I've heard a few things but it doesn't even matter, they were going 'round like punching people, punching out our attendees. And it brings up so many complications 'cause like… it starts so many necessary conversations and it's like, to quote my friend Bridget Chappell, clubs have a monopoly on this idea of safe space, you know? So like, you know we've gotta interrogate this need for safe space, and what it means when, 'cause we all talk about abolish prisons and all this stuff, but then you have people going around actually punching people like, are these people part of your community? Do you count them? What's safe for them? What's safe for these young boys that probably have more right to this space because they had hung out there or graffitied there previous to us coming in and kind of playing our gentrifying dance music? (Powers 2020).

Here it is possible to see, firstly, the inherent contradictions, disruptions and hypocrisies that characterise heterotopic space. Although the party promoters are attempting to bring into reality a temporary dimension free from the confines of capitalist exploitation, within this incident, Powers acknowledges that in doing so they are not only *not* able to fully escape these relations of power, but are in some ways its agents. Instead of these young men being described as invaders into a queer utopia, it is instead the promoters and attendees who are cast as the intruders, gentrifying the site with their temporary nightlife economy of artists and displacing—much as they themselves have also been displaced through venue closures and over-regulation—its current inhabitants. As I have demonstrated throughout Chapter Four, it is exactly this kind of disturbing ambivalence that characterises heterotopias within Naarm's queer nightlife communities. Further, as has been posited

by Gennochio (1995) and Sohn (2008), this ever-conflictual evasiveness of disjointed ways of knowing and understanding is a perhaps inescapable foundation to any heterotopic formulation.[27]

Secondly, despite these similarities, it is also crucial to note how greatly the vision for this site differs from other nightlife sites within the city, especially because it has been created, in part, due to a perceived lack within those spaces. This occasion of violence that Powers describes can, rather than being construed as a failure, actually be considered to exemplify the event's overall aim, removing the binds that have partly capture queerness and exploit it for profit within the city's venues, while offering a chance for participants to self-create an alternative, with all the dangers that ensue. Thirdly, this attempt at co-creation is cited as the foundational purpose for the event—as a way to practice management strategies for a societal model that has abolished the prison-system; as an opportunity for participants to unlearn an enculturated instinct to call on State violence to resolve interpersonal conflict. As Chappell of *Anterograde* writes, "like a strike or a riot, a rave has the potential to grow beyond its immediate conditions and illuminate (however temporarily) both the total banality of life under capitalism, and what remains of the potential for an emancipated creative life. In other words, the possibility of leaving this paradigm" (Chappell 2020). If heterotopias, "like laboratories…. can be taken as the sites in which new ways of experimenting with ordering society are tried out" (Hetherington 1997, 12), this approach is perhaps the most explicit example of heterotopic spatial practice cited so far throughout this thesis, with the promoters conceptualising the event within near-parallel terms.

Although the influence of theory on Chappell and Powers should not be underestimated, as was discussed earlier in this Chapter, nightlife method has its roots in an embodied cultural history outside of the academy that spans continents as well as music subcultures. Writing about his experiences dancing on Chicago's contemporary dancefloors to house music, Micah Salkind settles on the spatial nomenclature of "brave rather than safe spaces, to explain how they have helped me

[27] See Chapter Two for a detailed discussion of these concepts.

to live in, and move through, discord" (2019, 225). Characterising brave spaces as those that "set the stage for a type of bodily and mental training that far exceeded their confines" (Salkind 2019, 237), Salkind foregrounds disturbance as a profound pedagogical force within queer of colour underground communities, providing participants with a lower-stakes environment within which to practice alternative ways of relating with each other. Although playful, these party-constructs can also be understood to be training patrons' imagination and resilience, potentially allowing a savvier navigation—or re-negotiation—of their day-to-day relationships with complex social systems. Muñoz, too, notes the potentiality of music communities within his essay, published posthumously, on punk: "[t]he wildness of punk and its commons is that annihilative force, that refusal of cohesion and insistence on scatteredness, partiality, and the impossible act of not only living but also striving that are accomplished in an uncommon commons" (2018, 658). In another nod to the pedagogical, he argues that punk is "about getting used to the aleatory and wild nature of life, the ways in which we find and make sense out of so much senselessness" (Muñoz 2018, 658).

If disorientation, according to Ahmed, "can be a violent feeling" (2006, 160)—one that can warp the familiar and orient us toward "somewhere else" (2006, 160)—then it may be that it is within sites that inculcate a febrile chaos and, at some level, hold the potential for violence (whether it be phenomenological, sensorial or physical) that the greatest potential for the unravelling of given paradigms can be found. Although this seems in tension with—even vociferously opposed to—the ideals of safety and protection from harm espoused by performers and promoters so far throughout this thesis, this opposition should not come as a surprise. On the contrary, it can be considered another manifestation of the ideological agitation within 'queerness' itself, which perceives identity to be either a foundational force of the self, or something to be deconstructed in its entirety. The perturbation of structure, or knowledge, and the instability that ensues in the form of danger and violence, can be considered inherent to queer endeavour and to heterotopia. Taking Lefebvre's contention that "([s]ocial) space is a (social) product" (1991, 26), it follows that these ideological

conflicts within queer communities would writ themselves large through the disparate bounds of different queer nightlife sites.

Continuous with Hetherington (1997) and Foucault's (2002) characterisations of heterotopias as, respectively, experimental laboratories of social systems as well as detonative, annihilative machines, the examples throughout this Chapter have illustrates the labour of practitioners to unravel the ideology that structures their patrons' day-to-day lives. Interestingly, I found that this disruptive approach to space is itself a cultural form, along with the less abstracted—and hence more visible—forms of performance and music that act as its vehicles, re-iterating how the heterotopic method is received through participation and gains meaning in reference not only to the dominant social context, but in reference to previous heterotopic models. Heterotopias, aside from being a purely relational alternative space, themselves have their own histories: they are evolutionary constructs of ideology and spatial practice related as much to past (and future) heterotopic formations, or in response to (or yearning for) these bygone (or yet to be) sites. This relationality, as demonstrated by the friction between promoters of safety and promoters of disorientation, is as often a product of differential development *between* contemporary heterotopic spaces, as it is in response to the dominant ideology that structures their context.

6.

Back For Good: Cultural Memory and Heterotopic Virtuality

As Covid-19 shuttered venues, what began as an exploration of a thriving scene shifted into an altogether different mode: a live documentation of crisis as queer participants grappled with nightlife's sudden disappearance. I was thus prompted to follow queer nightlife into unstable terrain, conducting interviews remotely through glitchy wi-fi connections and attending events, through Zoom, from home. As an array of scholarship has proposed, the temporality of queerness is perhaps already out of joint, stymieing neoliberal notions of progress and complicating the position of before and after (Castiglia and Reed 2011; Cvetkovich 2003; Drysdale 2019; Foucault 1986; Freeman 2010; Halberstam 2005; Love 2007; moore 2018; Muñoz 2009; Nyong'o 2019). In this chapter I follow the prompts of these theorists in theorising pre- and post- of pandemic time—the shift from presence to absence—not as discrete entities, but rather as mutually constitutive modes. Despite the evident differences occasioned by the onset of pandemic life, I argue that the ensuing community focus on cultural memory, collective pleasure, trauma, and the virtual highlighted the ways in which queer nightlife already operated across these arenas, both complexifying and reifying the stakes of return to the city's venues. Approached heterotopically, the destabilizing temporalities of queer nightlife can be seen as a cultivated element of its appeal, and integral to its operation as a cultural site for marginalised people.

Cultural Memory I: What Did We Forget?

Nefertiti LaNegra, despite many years of listening to or engaging with house music, tells me that they did not learn anything about its historical context—and how it related so personally to their own—until they moved from America and started attending queer clubs in Naarm. Throughout the years prior, they felt a resonance with the music as they encountered it first in High School, and then again in College for a house-dance class, and then again in a different form in commercial gay clubs in Washington D.C. Throughout these engagements, however, it lacked context, with Nefertiti telling me that "the Black queer history part of it isn't really discussed" (LaNegra 2020). When they moved to Naarm and started attending queer nightlife spaces, this changed: the people they met during club excursions—DJs and dancers intimately involved with the production of nightlife throughout the city—provided them with pieces of crucial information:

> The minute I come to Naarm, Naarm is all about some house music, and I love it because of the club spaces, and it sort of all of a sudden re-engaged me. It's impacted my everyday life 'cause one: house is something I've found myself listening to all the time, like when I work out, when I'm in my house. And two: it's just become this other point that's sort of like a proud moment for me as a Black queer man. That it's like, oh this, this music to some degree is my birthright. It's like, you're a part of this community, and this community made it, so you totally have a right to be a part of it (LaNegra 2020).

Delivered through the unassuming medium of casual conversation, LaNegra's new acquaintances of the dancefloor filled what had been, until then, a lack that they did not fully understand. Despite an attraction to house music from adolescence, and their repeated movement through gay club spaces within the country of house's origin, they had not occasioned across this integral knowledge to their sense of self. Their use of the term birthright, laden as it is with the force of cultural legacy, reveals the profound importance of encountering this historical framework that finally explained the way

they already felt about queer clubs. Within this sensation of an unknown cultural wound, and the subsequent joy and relief of its suturing, a key element of nightlife's appeal can then be discerned: the recuperation of memory.

Nefertiti's description of their shifting relationship to house reveals a culture that has been dislocated from its origins, the socio-political context of its emergence obscured. However, this personal re-discovery of house's Blackness and queerness, although founded within an interaction with nightlife, may not only be a product of changing place, but also a reflection of political developments over time. Coinciding with Nefertiti's relocation between continents, a tectonic shift was reverberating through nightlife scenes internationally. In short, criticisms of electronic dance music's appropriation by "white extractive capitalism" (Brown 2019), and the concomitant erasure of the artform's history and importance in relation to race, began to gain traction (Brown 2019; Collin 2021; Ghany 2016; Grant 2020; Wei 2020). Questions surrounding the supremacy of white people in art forms, such as house and techno, that were pioneered by Black and Latinx artists were successfully pushed into wider circulation, the consequences of which are still evolving. The ripple effect of these discussions is perhaps best emblematized by the wave of nightlife collectives around the globe—from Naarm, to Tbilisi, to New York City, to Warszawa—that have sought to leverage club spaces "as direct social or political interventions to empower specific marginalized groups" (Collin 2021, 45). In Naarm this has taken root in a prolific number of events that prioritise, or exclusively book, marginalized artists, and the increasingly mainstream acceptance (or re-membrance) that nightlife, and club music, is a radical culture with intrinsic ties to race, especially Blackness.

Fiona Buckland, in her work on New York City's gay dance scene of the 1990s, concludes that the embodied memory passed between bodies on the dancefloor resists capture by the homogenizing forces of gentrification due to the ephemerality of its form (2002, 21). The history of club culture is, however, if a history of resistance, also a history of its capture and re-sale as

commodity. The displacing effects of gentrification do penetrate into realms of the abstract, not only forcing the closure of buildings and eviction of dwellers, but also cleaving symbols and actions from meaning, serving the double purpose of allowing culture to be appropriated for profit, while removing its political context to facilitate more compliant communities (Schulman 2012). The universalizing narrative of dance music—that it brings all kinds of people together as equal through feeling or the power of rhythm—is used as a casus belli for white capitalists to takeover the culture and remake it in their image: a neater, far more accessible message than the convoluted ancestral lines that also link techno, house, and other forms of electronic music production to the horrors of the trans-Atlantic slave trade and the cultural forms that were harboured therein (Brown 2019; Jiménez 2021, 28).

Returning to house music and its rise to global dominance throughout the 1980s, the erasure of its origins can be ascribed to the cathexis of race, queerness, and place from which it emerged. Developed by artists and communities burdened with the compounding threats of systemic racism, state violence, queer-phobia, and an exploding HIV/AIDS pandemic, the predominance of white, wealthy artists trafficking in this form, lifting sounds and samples from its progenitors, is testament to the abstractive power of gentrification and its uneven burdens on different populations (Wei 2020). Further, the severance of this history from the present, leading to a global ubiquity of white artists within dance music throughout the 1990s and into the 2000s, can be understood as preconditioned by a mass of trauma and loss of life that allowed the pillaging of these cultures to occur without the strength of resistance that is being mounted today. The violence that is necessary for the extraction of profit through whitewashing and gentrification, in this light, can also be seen as a continuance of older forms of exploitative economy and culture, elevating the position and power of privileged white capitalists through the dislocation of labour from racially oppressed classes such as Black, Latin, and Indigenous peoples, alongside the systemic application of harm (Brown 2019). Even when house music is presented within a gay or queer context, as Nefertiti

describes, its origins may be buried, further attesting to the interlinked specificity of the artform's legacy within both racial and queer histories.

HIV/AIDS scholarship offers a multitude of perspectives on the concept of a queer generational cleavage. In particular, the rise of a new gay conservatism throughout the 1990s provides a perspective on how, even within queer spaces, house music's memory may be gentrified and appropriated by white queer capitalists (Castiglia and Reed 2011; Duggan 2003; Schulman 2012; Warner 1997, 1999). Throughout this time, in tandem with the whitening of dance music, a cadre of gay American moralists were calling for the repression of expansive sexual cultures, denouncing queerness as unnatural deviancy, and re-orienting the broader gay movement toward goals such as assimilation, home ownership, marriage, military service, and monogamy (Castiglia and Reed 2011; Warner 1997, 1999). Concomitantly, emboldened politicians targeted venues that facilitated promiscuity and alternative sexual formations, leading to a swathe of closures across the United States and particularly in New York City (Castiglia and Reed 2011; Delany 1999; Warner 1999).

Castiglia and Reed have named this process "de-generation" (2011, 9), a coordinated campaign of "temporal isolation" designed to erase the potentialities envisioned by the past in service of curtailing the imaginaries of the next queer generation (2011, 9). Within their argument, the loss of progressive voices to AIDS meant little resistance could be offered to the neoconservative wave that succeeded them. Warner, too, diagnoses this phenomenon as a kind of "social amnesia" (1997, 15), proposing that "since the most painfully instructed generation has been decimated by death, the queer culture of the present faces more than the usual shortfall in memory" (1999, 52). They argue, in short, that the segregation of the past and present has been driven by a homophobic conservatism, capitalizing on the HIV/AIDS crisis to reinforce the limits of morality.

This facet of reasoning, though sound, is somewhat (but not totally) problematised by its application to the Australian context, where HIV/AIDS activists gained a far more sympathetic ear from Government (Willet 2000). In successfully convincing authorities that a gay problem required a

gay solution, the collectives prevented a crackdown on queer spaces and sex practices: instead, sex-on-premises venues, bars, and dance parties became informational hubs for health communication, as activists worked with Government to develop and disperse a range of subculturally-specific materials such as leaflets, posters, condoms, and lubricant (Willet 2000, 178). Through education and behaviour-change alone, these campaigns brought the rate of local transmission under control by the early 1990s (Willet 2000), and although there were certainly media outlets and moralists calling for venue closures or even a total segregation of gay people from public utilities and employment, these voices were quickly consigned to the fringe as Governments rebuffed the possibility of a punitive response (Wotherspoon 2016). Despite the widespread death, panic, and trauma, in the long, trailing tail of HIV/AIDS the varied network of Australian nightlife remained largely intact: their centrality to culture and health had been vindicated, and the links between activist collectives and the general Australian gay population were stronger than ever (Willet 2000). Nevertheless, as the 1990s progressed, parallel forces to those witnessed in America began to shape queer populations in a new image. The transformed sexual practices of gay Australian youth following the arrival of HIV/AIDS did lead to a generational suspicion of their elders, disrupting a previously common practice of gay 'aunties' mentoring newly 'out' youths (Drinnan 1991). With the survival of a queer infrastructure, however, the proposition that contemporary queer nightlife is recuperating the memories of a pre-HIV/AIDS history is evocative, but incomplete.

By 1999, Naarm's Midsumma festival was composed of 113 stalls, 82 of which were commercial and political operations vying for a slice of the queer market (Willet 2000, 217). Meanwhile organizations such as Sydney Gay and Lesbian Mardi Gras have become increasingly reliant on corporate sponsorship to operate, often forging partnerships with companies who profit off harming queer people: Qantas, the Australian Government's collaborator in the forced deportation of refugees—many of whom fled their countries due to their sexuality—remains as one of these sponsors (Dawson 2017; MardiGras 2021; Wiedersehn 2018). Gilead, the company that famously price-gouged antiretroviral medication for the treatment of HIV, has also featured as a

partner (Harilou and Parissis 2020; Turner 2019). Sydney, in a few decades, traversed the distance from pioneering a world-renowned HIV/AIDS activism to funding their parades with the spoils of queer suffering. The ideological transformation of this community has been rapid and profound, or as Sarah Schulman words it, "[s]omething had been erased. Some truth had been forgotten and replaced" (2012, 11). Far beyond the homophobic responses to HIV/AIDS that sought to curtail sexual deviancy, resulting in de-generation, I follow Sarah Schulman in characterizing the insidious network of forces behind this shift, behind this process of political amnesia, as gentrification (Schulman 2012).

Gentrification, much like heterotopia, is a feeling: but of displacement. It is of this as-yet unnamed affect that Schulman asks "[w]hat is this thing that homogenizes complexity, difference, dynamic dialogic action for change and replaces it with sameness? With a kind of institutionalization of culture? With a lack of demand on the powers that be? With containment?" (2012, 14). Gentrification appeals to the question of memory at hand, as it spans the continuum of practices that domesticates the most privileged of queer people with the promise of wealth, while regulating, buying out, demolishing, and redeveloping the more under-resourced nightclubs, bars, and saunas that could potentially awaken a collective political consciousness. The corporatization of queer culture and organizations can thus be seen as simply another flank of what Lisa Duggan terms "a reinvention of Western imperialism" (2003, 35), a strategy of tactical isolation that convinces select populations to redistribute wealth upwards. This can be done through methods such as payment, as is provided by corporate sponsors, or through coercive propaganda, such as the moralist crusades of the gay right. Despite the success of Australian HIV/AIDS activists in conserving queer sites and integrating queer knowledge into public health, the gentrificatory forces that position violent multinational corporations as allies, and that centre white creators as the arbiters of taste in artforms such as house music, were still largely successful in transforming the local culture and ideology after the values of commercialisation and white supremacy: that is, until the cultural and political reckoning of recent years began to wreak its own forms of nightlife transformation.

Cultural Memory II: How Do We Remember?

Queer nightlife is, at least at times, a form of oppositional archive that ferments beneath the sanitising influence of gentrification. Ann Cvetkovich argues that “in the absence of institutionalised documentation or in opposition to official histories, memory becomes a valuable historical resource, and ephemeral and personal collections of objects stand alongside the documents of the dominant culture in order to offer alternative modes of knowledge” (2003, 8). Despite the successes of gentrification in its neutralisation of particular kinds of queer spaces and cultures, the histories and experiences that were feared dead within the 1990s continue to evade total control, providing glimpses for marginalised people of another way-of-being. Cvetkovich’s work on lesbian publics—beyond her insights on trauma, which will be expanded upon below—reiterate the performative power of the past, which can potentially forge new forms of culture founded on memory (2003). She proposes that the categories of the past and present, what’s ‘in your head’ and what is real, are fundamentally unstable, particularly for marginalised people who are far more likely to have experienced trauma. This temporal porosity is found to be a creative resource for queer public cultures (Cvetkovich 2003).

Memory need not be of the individual’s own to erupt unexpectedly into the real. Quoting an anonymous source’s narration of public sex, Castiglia and Reed provide us with the following tableau: “…when someone stuck poppers under my nose for the first time, I felt like I was actually transported back to the Seventies. I felt like I was feeling what ‘they’ must have felt… I felt like I had tapped into some eternal, carnal, homoerotic and brotherly stream of consciousness” (2011, 41). Unlike a more traditional archive, this access to a feeling of another time and place, one that is

organised by alternative social relations, can be far more direct and disturbing. Nightlife's form as a relatively unstructured, interactive experimental space for collective movement perhaps privileges this form of memorialization, one that may occur without words, or may be stepped into through the excesses of the senses. When Sarah Thornton wrote of British raves as an "archival dance culture" (1996, 69), queerness—or any kind of community other than white straight demographics—was far from her mind: but her observation that nightclubs and raves also function as living archives reinforces why they remain so central to queer people.

The embodied nature of this memorial process, passed through word-of-mouth, but also engaged with through spinning discs, dancing, and interfacing with the technology of DJ equipment, sound recordings, and speaker systems, is critical to nightlife's character and how it is experienced by artists, patrons, and community members. LaNegra goes on to say that

> if anyone has ever seen me at a club or at a party they will tell you that I dance like my life depends on it. And I love it because I just love the music, and in particular I love gospel house… I love it, and so I think these spaces are really important because I get to dance and I get to sort of show appreciation for this music, and in particular, when gospel house happens, there becomes this moment where it becomes like this full circle thing, where all of a sudden it's like, not only about me being Black, not only about me being queer, it's also this sort of Christian lineage that I clearly have been raised in, sort of coming back, and circling back in sort of musical form, and dance form that I deeply love (LaNegra 2020).

The site of the queer party can be vital for distinctly pleasurable modes of memorialization, accessing both a history and pleasure that is often withheld from marginalized people. This recalls Freeman's concept of 'erotohistoriography' as a method through which queer people engage with,

and also manipulate, memory. Evading the strict accuracy of a historical project, erotohistoriography summons the past into the present in a Frankensteinian fashion, crafting a fusion of the personal, cultural and the archival to serve the needs of the summoner. Freeman proposes that

> [as] a mode of reparative criticism, erotohistoriography honours the way queer social practices, especially those involving enjoyable bodily sensations, produce forms of time consciousness—even historical consciousness—that can intervene into the material damage done in the name of development, civilisation, and so on. Within these terms, we might imagine ourselves haunted by bliss and not just by trauma; residues of positive affect (idylls, utopias, memories of touch) might be available for queer counter- (or para-) historiographies (2010, 120).

The body, in this instance, is a tool through which to echo past materialities in the present, retracing the carved-out grooves of bygone bodily manifestations in order to experience the spectral remnants of bliss, pleasure, and communality that are left behind.

Although abstract—operating as much within the realms of myth as they do history—cultural memories and the living archive they arise from within queer nightlife spaces can be crucial resources in the creation of alterity, and thus heterotopia. Castiglia and Reed contend that

> [m]emories enable more than survival; they are imaginative ways to disrupt and transform conditions that make survival necessary. Like utopias, memories craft a world that stands as a counterreality to the lacking or painful present, creating narratives of 'the past' so as to challenge the inevitability of dominant constructions of 'reality.' The space-off and time-out of memory afford a critical distance from which to evaluate present conditions that lead to alienation and

> yearning as we picture alternatives that challenge the inevitability of those conditions and imagine other social arrangements that transform the 'reality' into a more liveable (relation to) time and place (2011, 12).

This construction of how memory can function as a tool to re-imagine the present is profoundly heterotopic, and explains how memory works within queer nightlife spaces as a creative spatial practice. Much like heterotopia, 'memory' here is cast as imaginative, tinted with utopia but grounded in the immediate restraints of a present that is lacking. It exists within a temporal and spatial anomaly that provides a playground through which to realize alternatives to the current social reality are possible, and a means to (partially) bridge the difference between that current reality and the envisioned ways of relation. The power of memory as a constructive force in the creation of space and political vision can be glimpsed in the abovementioned history of nightlife, as its origins as a culture of the marginal and oppressed were erased and then revived, a testament to the ambivalent and heterotopic role of the past in the ideological composition of contemporary queer nightlife sites.

Old Ghosts, New Tricks

> When I look back on my life, it's not that I don't want to see things exactly as they happened. It's just that I prefer to remember them in an artistic way. And truthfully the lie of it all is much more honest because I invented it. Clinical psychology tells us arguably that trauma is the ultimate killer. Memories are not recycled like atoms

> and particles in quantum physics, they can be lost forever. It's sort of like my past is an unfinished painting, and as the artist of that painting, I must fill in all the ugly holes and make it beautiful again. It's not that I've been dishonest, it's just that I loathe reality (Lady Gaga 2011).

Cerulean, a drag artist, recounts their performance of February 28 2020 at Honcho Disko, a weekly Thursday night of queer performance in Naarm's inner-north. Beginning with a lip-sync to the above monologue by Lady Gaga, featured within the music video for "Marry the Night," they embark on an 8-minute performance art piece that attempts to turn tragedy and trauma into beauty, before burying themselves in a grave (Cerulean 2021). Emblematized by this performance, throughout their interview an ambivalence around the role of the club in processing trauma emerged: they first expressed pessimism at the possibility of transforming trauma into something at all positive, and through their performance, suggested that this effort is futile or even harmful. Despite this, the drawn-out months of pandemic life have also elucidated the remedial function, for them, of queer nightlife, with the erstwhile sociality and movement of the dancefloor and stage a method of coping with the difficulties of day-to-day life (Cerulean 2021).

In approaching the absence of queer nightlife, in mapping the shape of its ambiguous loss, it is necessary to step beyond the sensation of pleasure it is primarily associated with. In this regard, I follow Ann Cvetkovich in the consideration of "trauma cultures" (2003, 10), and the complex and creative publics they can build outside of standard 'healing' outlets such as private therapy or public testimony. Cvetkovich problematizes the pathologization and categorical basis of trauma, refuting that a standard diagnosis can grapple with its unrepresentability. She contends that "trauma discourse is important precisely because it challenges distinctions between the mental and physical, the psychic and the social, and the internal and external as locations or sources of pain" (Cvetkovich 2003, 18), positing trauma instead as a cultural outcome, as individuals struggle with the

"consequences of a historical event" (Cvetkovich 2003, 18). Even the most private of traumas, such as sexual violence, are public when considered as an outcome of the ideological decisions and structural forces that may have facilitated their occurrence, the apparent intimacy of the act obscuring its repetition at scale. By being attentive to other modes of trauma culture that escape accepted 'tropes' of how to deal, Cvetkovich finds a specifically queer public constituted by the partial taming of trauma's unpredictability (2003).

Within interviews of nightlife creatives, the ever-threatening liveness of the archive writhes across a multitude of ancillary zones, resulting not only in the erotohistoriographic bliss of ancestral connection. Rather, through performance, dancers, DJs and artists recontextualize the affective potential of trauma, in service of a catharsis that may be achieved through an embodied collaborative, and community-based practice. Buckland, writing specifically on improvised social dancing in nightclubs, refers to these potentialities as "a theatrical environment of memory" (2002, 20), noting how patrons, in particular, would use the dance moves of loved ones who had passed, incorporating their movements into choreography to result in a series of performative gestural echoes that can estimate a sense of their presence. This strategy can be located beyond the mass of the dancefloor, also guiding the selections and performance of the DJ, thereby infusing the entire space with the reverberations of memory.

Eris Drew, a DJ and producer from Chicago who has performed several times in Naarm, provides an insight into the intersection between trauma and her creative practice during an interview with Resident Advisor. Within this interview, she describes one festival that she played "in Mexico, in a cenote, which is an ancient sinkhole" (Drew 2018). While playing, she says, she "started pulling record after record that this guy Elliot had given me in the early '90s" (Drew 2018). This period of her life was defined partying and discovery, as well as the internal violence of repressing her queerness. Her friend, too, was simultaneously inspiring and toxic, gifting her some of her most beautiful records while continuing to play a significant role her gender suppression. These records, in

the decades since, were too tender to touch. Despite their beauty they became "the soundtrack to our pain" (Drew 2018), a reminder of the death of friends and the confines of the closet.

Returning to the party in Mexico, she tells Resident Advisor about how she started pulling these records, spinning them in a kind of autonomic state before realizing what she was doing, some of them played for the first time ever. She cried while playing. Reflecting on this moment, she says that

> I processed it with [my friend] for hours afterwards... We both felt that the process of being who we are in the world, and forming communities with people like us, who like this music, is healing us. The records are saying, 'You've done so much, you've overcome this trauma, you've transformed this music that used to mean something you couldn't even face, and now you're making people dance to it, you're feeling love and beauty through it.' It was a big letting go, like the records wanted me to have a catharsis. I cried my eyes out during that set, I kept playing, and ever since then I know what that is, and I've started talking about it. I see DJing as a form of collage. You take existing cultural elements and by combining them you transform them into something that has new meaning, it has you in it. That's what's happening here, people are collaging these existing cultural artefacts and creating something really radiant and new with it, and exploring their identities through it (Drew 2018).

The records themselves become laden with the trauma of their origin. This history, when the record is played, is imported into the performance space, along with a riotous affective riptide. Importantly, however, this history is recontextualized and transformed through the act of its summoning, as the bodies of dancers appropriate the music to their own ends. Eris suggests that this process acts as a

kind of cleansing, a catharsis, where records form a conduit between the past site and the present, where it is able to be exorcised by the power of queer communal movement. This echoes Salkind's observation that record selections are "palimpsests of memory-rich potential that DJs wield with immense power" (Salkind 2019, 156).

Sevara Zaric, the founder of Naarm club night Umami, also speaks at length about her musical tastes as a DJ and as a dancer. She tells me that her selections reflect her history—as well as her family's history—allowing her to explore them within the party space:

> I was born in Bosnia, in Sarajevo the main city, which has a huge Muslim diaspora. I was born to, in a gypsy camp actually, Sinti is the right word I think. And, we moved away from there with father's family for two years, in Serbia, and then we moved down here during the war in, that was happening with the NATO bombings down there. It was a huge thing, that's why my family decided just to flee. My Mum took her sisters with her, my Dad took one brother with him as well, and we came to Australia (Zaric 2020).

She describes learning English in Primary school, and as she grew older and attended family weddings and gatherings, realizing that she had an ear for music. As she reached high school and then eventually clubbing age, she sought to follow the sounds of her family's history and seek them out within the nightlife spaces of Naarm:

> So, [I] came into high school and I came into my queerness as well, that was an integral part of why I play the way I play[...] I think for all of us it's an integral part, it's a huge part of my identity[...]. After I turned eighteen I started exploring clubs, 'cause I was, I always loved dance music, especially, like, anything to do with ethnic drums, or like rhumba, or, because our Romani family being so disenfranchised—

> being not a well-documented group of people—they were always listening to Latinx music or Arabic music, just anything with a really 6/6 drum beat pattern. And I was always, I began to realize I loved going into spaces where I could just dance, you know. Especially queer spaces[...] that I came to realize later on (Zaric 2020).

These accounts from Drew and Zaric demonstrate a selective criterion for club music beyond the bounds of what would be fun for the audience (although they are also, importantly, that). For both DJs, the songs they choose, the rhythms and instrumentation within those songs, and the means by which they first heard those kinds of sounds are all integral to their selection. Although this method is a far-cry from Freeman's erotohistoriography—in that it draws on traumatic histories as well as those that can be construed as pleasurable—it does follow a similar trajectory in encountering these objects in the present in hybridized form, using the body and temporally conductive objects as tools to intervene in both past and present, mutually reconstructing them in the process.

Cultural memory may be a means through which certain queer nightlife spaces gain a heterotopic character, but the role of memory is not consigned purely to mining it for liberative potential. Within these accounts, the curators of the club space are not just drawing on past constructions of sexual liberation, but also deeply personal historiographies of trauma such as transphobia, drug abuse, genocide, civil war, and immigration. Within the wordless abstraction of sound selection and manipulation, these practices resonate with Cvetkovich's observation of queer trauma cultures, and her claim that "trauma puts pressure on conventional forms of documentation, representation, and commemoration, giving rise to new genres of expression, such as testimony, and new forms of monuments, rituals, and performances that can call into being collective witnesses and publics" (2003, 7). By illuminating the productive forces of trauma and eliding a lens of victimisation, these clamouring affects of the past-present invite a further glimpse of the experimental workings of heterotopic memory, which extends beyond the retrieval of political

alternatives. In ways not predicted by their agents, they also provide a zone wherein people can salvage their relation with traumatic histories.

This trauma-work acts contrapuntally to Castiglia and Reed's proposal for the working of cultural memory (2011), a time-space they characterized as containing antidotes to elements of the present that are painful or lacking. Even while queer nightlife rummages through historical subcultural formulations for positive contrasts to contemporary social norms—hence providing the experience of alterity that defines heterotopia—its creatives simultaneously summon forth complex sites of trauma specific to their individual experience (in this case, through the selection of music) in order to transform their associated affects. These sites' contingent presence within a new (pleasurable) context, conducted by the communal experiment of the dancefloor, provides alternative avenues for queers to incorporate the alienating elements of their pasts into an ever-emergent identity informed by the collective ethos of queer nightlife

Although this process experimentalism may appear largely 'internal,' untranslatable to the audience, I propose these operations are actually foundational to the alterity of queer nightlife. The memorial associations with sound described by Eris Drew and Sevara Zaric may originate within their own minds, in a totally abstract relation to the space itself, but these virtual dimensions do tangibly impact on the composition of the queer nightlife site, first through the music that these DJs select, and secondly in their concomitant reactions to those selections, which may not be consciously registered but contribute to the flow of feelings that characterize queer nightlife when it functions in its full capacity. In providing a space wherein artists and patrons can work with the malleable expanses of trauma, these sites offer a differing mode of relation, of self-relation, than is generally accessed within their broader social context. To put it another way, one of the heterotopic elements that underpins these sites is the potential for marginalized people to transform the negative affects of memory into re-oriented aspects of their identity, in a collaborative and often unspoken process fuelled by the momentary joys of collective hegemonic escape.

Heterotopia's Virtualities, or Queerness in Abstract

If asked directly, a patron is not likely to identify the realms of cultural memory and trauma as justification for their ongoing visits to a queer party site: however, within the commonly cited emotional registers of joy, ecstasy, transformation, and confrontation associated with nightlife, there lies the possibility that these affects are experienced, but not parsed, approximately translated at points of overflow into more clearly defined arenas of feeling. To better interrogate these immaterial convergences, I turn to Brian Massumi's work on the virtual and affect (2002). He provides a precis of his approach to affect by defining it as

> this two-sidedness, the simultaneous participation of the virtual in the actual and the actual in the virtual, as one arises from and returns to the other. Affect is this two-sideness as seen from the side of the actual thing, as couched in its perceptions and cognitions. Affect is the virtual as point of view[...]. Affects are virtual synesthetic perspectives anchored in (functionally limited by) the actually existing, particular things that embody them. The autonomy of affect is its participation in the virtual. Its autonomy is its openness (Massumi 2002, 35).

Affect here is conceptualized as both transcendent of and limited by a material body. The 'actual,' within its array of interactions with the extra-material forces that flow through matter, things, and bodies, receives affect as an incomplete sense or feeling of the incorporeal. Much like a part of the body may refer pain to somewhere only related to its source by a network—or, as Massumi

contends above, as the brain may join multiple senses together to form a synesthetic response between traditionally un-related sensory inputs—affects are the partial capture, and attempted translation, of happenings that take place beyond the spectrum of our ability to interpret them. This renders these affects into emotions or sensations that may be confounding, their origin not easily determined. Considering this within the framework of heterotopia, I return to the term's original medical definition prior to Foucault's adoption. Heterotopia, within this field, is an organ or tissue that is somewhere it does not belong: it refers to matter out of place (Foucault 1986). Affects, Massumi intimates, also have an element of roguishness about them, manifesting as displaced responses to forces that move between what we perceive as the actual and the virtual.

Due to their nature, the influence of these elements—how they create particular experiences for the patrons and artists of the space—is largely a matter of speculation. However, the arrival of the pandemic, and the subsequent closure of venues across the country, led to a explication of how nightlife already operated within the virtual terrain, while reinforcing the gulf between the material platforms of the club and the virtual memorials of Zoom parties, think pieces and artworks that attempted to replace it. In VICE, comedian Navin Noronha writes of their first, and only, queer party catered towards larger men. Reflecting on that evening at ARQ in Sydney, they claim that "[t]he whole fallout of the pandemic in 2020 killed parties and events worldwide. But for queer people, the parties were the only place we find solace, if not absolute acceptance" (Noronha 2020). Dejan Jotanovic, writing in Assemble Papers, furthered this explication of the incompatible relationship between queer nightlife spaces and the societal needs of a pandemic:

> For many queers, like myself, an extended Naarm lockdown has us dreaming of sweat and bass; spaces completely antithetical to the shared and collective health of our time. These spaces now feel not only more distant but also more dangerous; vectors for disease and state-sanctioned surveillance. Can you imagine rubbing up against

> stranger skin? Can you imagine a room steamed with dance? I can barely imagine being outside past eight, or maybe nine (Jotanovic 2020).

These examples of retrospective yearning continue to arise the longer the pandemic ensues. Matto Lucas, a photographer who has documented queer party life in Naarm for the past decade, writes in the companion text to his online art exhibition for Darebin Arts:

> Real art, the avant-garde, no longer exists in the galleries, it is on the dance floor, it is in the club, it happens at 3am, in the bewitching hour, as activations amongst the dancing bodies on the dance floor, or on the runway or makeshift stages. Real art is happening at Naarm's queer parties and events. Art that is alive, and inclusive and subversive and vibrant and transient – and I have been lucky enough to experience and witness and document it (Lucas 2020).

Through lockdown remembrance, detailing as it does the toll of sudden divorce from the community and creative spaces of queer nightlife, patrons and artists are reckoning with the relationship between their queerness and their lone bodies, with their isolation as opposed to a febrile collectivity. The tactility of the descriptions traces the losses of nightlife and provide an insight into the affectual relations through which nightlife spaces give meaning to patrons.

The sense of these missed experiences is partially evoked through the clustered, vibrant mass of Lucas' collage, the compression of its form a coda for the blur of queer bodies you might push through to find a spot from which to cheer on a performer. Jotanovic latches his memorial hook into the sheen of sweat across bodies, the vibration of bass, and the sliding of half-dressed strangers up against each other's steamy skin, longing for proximity and tactility while we are required by law to maintain distance. In this movement from the physical club site to the platform of

web publications, a reflected shift in concern re-oriented discourse back to the materiality of the body.

Benjamin Riley, within a piece looking back on the final Mardi Gras parties that occurred right as the first cases of Covid-19 were being detected in Australia, summarizes the complexity of this relationship neatly:

> There are, of course, many ways to be queer, to do queer, but it is challenging for queerness to live wholly at the level of the abstract. How then now can I find that feeling, those moments, those spaces, when it might still be months, years even, until their possibility returns in all that messy, bodily queerness? In other words, what does it mean to say that I'm queer, sitting alone in my house during Covid? (Riley 2020).

Queerness, Riley seems to contend, without the physical presence allowed by spaces and venues, is lived distantly: in an imagined relationship impossible to actualize within the solitary confines of the home. His queerness is revealed to be potentially contingent, not actually embedded within a stable identity but located instead in a particular way of feeling, in a relation with others in certain spaces. To rephrase his core anxiety within the terms of this analysis, he asks: can queerness be virtual? The operations of memory and trauma as constitutive affects of queer nightlife suggest that it always has been. As the materiality of queer event changes form, however, and even changes tense, situated mostly in the retrospective, the terrains of its virtual ancillaries also shift.

The ensuing months were frantic with digital experimentation in live-streamed interactive events, as promoters and performers attempted to transplant the experience of queer nightlife into software. The first I attended, Club Quarantina, was hosted through two platforms, Zoom and Mixlr.

Figure 12. [Collage image of queer club performers from Melbourne]. 2 Dec 2020. Collage art and photography by Matto Lucas. From Darebin Arts, accessed 2 Dec, 2020. ***https://www.darebinarts.com.au/exhibiting-culture-online/curator-two/art-work-4/***

Through Zoom, the visuals of the webcams of all attendees and performers were displayed within a grid, while through Mixlr the DJs broadcast their sets, via which all attendees would be simultaneously tuned in. I found this format did exert an unexpected pull of sadness and relief, far more so than watching a unidirectional-streamed event, as a performer broadcasted out to audience's homes and devices without direct feedback between the performer and patrons. On the difference between performing to a 'live' Zoom call and broadcasting a pre-recorded performance, Cerulean says that

> it actually feels really good[...] you may not see people's faces, but you know, it was really cool to see people live in the chat. People were like woo, yeah, it was really, it was really fun, and you can see these things kinda come up in the side of your eye, you're seeing a kind of give and take response. It's still there, it's different. But you still have that live element that it's happening now (Cerulean 2021).

This sense of liveness was an experience I felt, too. In Club Quarantina, as I danced in front of the screen in my partner's loungeroom and could see and respond to the dancing of others, I felt myself entering a parallel, if not identical, sense of spatial awareness as I would while dancing in a venue, knowing that I was dancing not just for myself but also being potentially watched by others. This critical difference—the fact my dancing was in some way performative—evoked a hint of the feeling of being within a club or party, and as I moved my body in the small gap beside the dining table, memories and feelings of prior events and people surfaced, viscerally connecting me with the club and party spaces I had attended in the past.

This feeling was made all the more explicit by a performance by Fagstaff Gardens, who performed a lip-sync rendition of "Want You Back For Good," a cover by the band Take That. Through this performance, which took place in their bathroom and bedroom, they performed to their web-camera as all of the attendees watched through Zoom. The camera back-tracked through

the house as they walked towards it lip-syncing to the lyrics “whatever I said, whatever I did, I didn’t mean it, I just want you back for good” (Take That 1994). While doing this, they used the technical benefits of the platform to change their background, green-screen style, super-imposing themselves over images of queer nightlife spaces such as Poof Doof, Wet on Wellington and GayTimes Festival, their posture yearning and wistful, reaching out towards the camera and, by proxy, these bygone sites. Although comical, seeing other patrons who I would otherwise be seeing in person also watching this performance gave the event an undercurrent of grief, and I watched as one participant fought back tears on their portion of the Zoom camera screen. This performance provides an example, along with the experience of dance described above, as to how online nightlife spaces and ‘actual’ club venues can potentially share some operative modes. Drysdale, in her observation of Sydney’s drag king scene, writes that

> The values of contemporary scenes are transplanted through political temporalities in which forms of recognition create a sense of bounded cultural and social space. Here, the connection between the pursuit of interests in the present and the historical trajectory from which those practices derive instils a sense of collective affective purpose[...] [A]lliances and differences pivot on the imagined space of the scene against a meaningful historical backdrop (Drysdale 2019, 11).

Although the pandemic may have truncated the timeline of historical reference to a few short months, Fagstaff Garden’s layering of virtual spaces onto our screens positions itself similarly to the ways in which DJs introduce a bygone time-space, such as house music’s 1980s Chicago, into the memorial flows of the party site. The chasm of the unknown opened up by pandemic uncertainty places these most recent venues into the realm of the bygone, too, with Fagstaff Gardens using them quite literally as historical backdrop to facilitate a collective, memorial response.

There are material differences between the online party and one that takes place within a venue, yet both gain meaning through their engagement with virtual domains. Massumi writes that

> [s]ince the virtual is unlivable even as it happens, it can be thought of as a form of superlinear abstraction that does not obey the law of the excluded middle, that is organized differently but is inseparable from the concrete activity and expressivity of the body. The body is as immediately abstract as it is concrete; its activity and expressivity extend, as on their underside, into an incorporeal, yet perfectly real, dimension of pressing potential (2002, 31).

This passage applies to the ways queer nightlife patrons and artists experience the party space in a multitude of ways that extend beyond the immediate sensations of the body, and beyond the confines of the present. The movement of the party site from a bricks and mortar venue and into the realm of the digital enabled the visualization of how virtualities such as cultural memory lend meaning to queer nightlife sites, crowding them as effectively as corporeal bodies do the dancefloor, an amalgamation of murmuring spectres. It is possible that the charged emotive atmosphere of queer nightlife itself is the catalogue of the affective surplus brought about by the clamouring kaleidoscope of virtualities that, despite being comprised of myriad individual experiences, memories, histories, and interpretations, are somehow experienced as collective within the brief temporal zone of heterotopia.

Glitch Time

In March of 2020, a Brisbane-based queer party named Shandy hosted their own livestream of DJs and performances from a local venue in Queensland. Their set-up, reminiscent of a tele-thon, was a garishly decorated stage with advanced production showing a rolling, custom designed footer that ran text or held the current performer's name. The night, despite watching it from my partner's couch, was programmed similarly to a regular evening, with DJ sets interspersed with live performers aiming their performances toward the audience (or in this case, camera). This felt comfortingly familiar up until the third performance, which was a pre-recorded and edited film created by performer Poly Lez Slut. This film was pieced together from phone footage and clips from what appeared to be a family home (family members and all), where they isolated from the pandemic. The video began with the performer dancing in the middle of an empty nightclub with a bright pink wig, filmed unsteadily on a phone camera, emulating the kind of informal footage that is uploaded to social media throughout a night out. The video then cut to Poly Lez Slut in the same outfit, except now they were transported to the middle of the day, dancing to cheesy trance music throughout the rooms of a house. They danced in the kitchen as their family moved awkwardly about them, cleaning up the floor; they danced in their family loungeroom, shimmying their long way across the room as their family watched TV and did not pay mind to the performer, as if they were from another dimension. Poly Lez Slut kept dancing closer and closer to the camera, until they stopped and said *I think that's it, we've got the shot*.

The remainder of the film-performance devolved into a kind of meta-visual dialogue between the two worlds of the performance, the home of pandemic isolation and the club, with an extended sequence showing the performer trying to make themselves throw up into a nightclub toilet. This scene eventually is overlaid on a shot of their family member sitting at a dining table at home (as seen in Fig 11), with the performer—doubled, now, between both overlaid screens—

Figure 13. [Still from film that aired as part of Shandy party]. 28 Mar 2020. Film by Poly Lez Slut aka Sarah Stafford. From Shandy Facebook page, accessed 9 Nov, 2020. [***https://www.facebook.com/415099109262605/videos/500147810870536***](https://www.facebook.com/415099109262605/videos/500147810870536)

dancing beside her on a stuttered, uneven, repeating loop. This disorienting re-organization of the presentational format, and the editing techniques used within it, were emblematic of the "asynchrony, anachronism, anastrophe, belatedness, compression, delay, ellipsis, flashback, hysteron-proteron, pause, prolepsis, repetition, reversal, surprise" (Freeman 2010, xxii) that Elizabeth Freeman focuses on as textual moments of queer temporality within film. By making the virtual nature of the performance both the source of creative material and point of interrogation, Poly Lez Slut rebuffed the otherwise widespread attempts at forging affective continuity between queer nightlife as it had been, and how it stood now in the shadow of pandemic life. Instead, we experienced a formal overthrow of how performance could be presented within these contexts.

The long minutes of repetitive beats, the abject pleasure in self-inducing vomit, and the alienating layered realities of familial mundanity with a hyper-charged but deteriorating way of being that had been displaced from the nightlife of its origin, sought to replicate the perturbed disruptions we were experiencing within lockdown isolation. This expanded into alternate nightlife

virtualities particular to the material circumstances of digital broadcast events in lockdown, embodying the psychic distortions of time and identity, and aberrant relations of tactility and proximity, that have been occasioned by pandemic circumstance. Massumi writes that

> [t]he body is as immediately virtual as it is actual. The virtual, the pressing crowd of incipiencies and tendencies, is a realm of potential. In potential is where futurity combines, unmediated, with pastness[...] The virtual is a lived paradox where what are normally opposites coexist, coalesce, and connect; where what cannot be experienced cannot but be felt—albeit reduced and contained (2002, 30).

Moving between the actual and virtual sites of queer nightlife, the above performances and accounts demonstrate how the abstract zones of memory and trauma are a constitutive feature of how queer nightlife sites are created. As identified by Massumi, the raw potentiality of these spaces provides a playground where past, future and present are spliced together, spawning a plethora of fleeting virtualities that are registered through bodies as affect (2002). In the case of queer nightlife, these extraneous dimensions could be said to act as the synovial fluid between things: individual bodies; the body and the physical site; the subject and the queer ancestral past; this site and other heterotopic sites; the heterotopia and the dominant world it defines itself against. They provide the means for participants to melt down and reforge their relationships with trauma and memory—both personal and collective—salvaging, in tandem with a temporary community, an altered sense of personhood, newly situated within a context productive of new ways-of-being.

This chapter explored the function of memory within queer nightlife. Through interviews with patrons and performers regarding the history of club music, as well as their own intimate relationship with particular sounds, memory emerged as a vital part of the alterity nightlife offers for marginalised people. When our connection to nightlife was severed by the pandemic, these

heterotopic operations with the past created avenues for queer people to make meaning for community members in isolation, drawing on similar methods of memorialisation and nostalgia to forge connection between people even through Zoom calls, or writing articles. The move to the internet sphere allowed a theorisation of how the memory functions as a virtual terrain, and the affinities that exist between physical nightlife and nightlife as it was re-created through internet reminiscence. While heterotopic theory, following utopian theory, often focuses on the glimpses of futurity that can be found within these alternative formulations, this Chapter reinforces that heterotopian alterity can be derived as much from its relation with what has already happened, or through the active construction of meaning-making from the past for the present.

7.

Blood, Sweat, and Leather: The Ritual Art of Artifice

On the 3rd of August 2019, I was standing amongst the *Honcho Disko* crowd in the basement of The Imperial Hotel, Sydney, waiting to begin DJing. The host, Marlena Dali, swept out onto the stage to introduce the performers and hype up the crowd. As they did so, they expressed gratitude that we could all gather to celebrate each other and our bodies, and characterised the gathering explicitly as a *queer ritual*. This characterisation of queer nightlife is common, with a number of research participants, performers, as well as scholars all delving into, or at least noting, the spiritual parallels between the party space and happenings that are more traditionally understood as ritualistic (Bailey 2013; Goulding and Shankar 2011; Grumble 2020; Lawrence 2011; Nefertiti LaNegra 2020; Nguyen 2020; Pflueger 2020; Powers 2020; Redfield and Thouin-Savard 2017; Salkind 2019; Tallaj 2018; Zaric 2020). Throughout this chapter I demonstrate that ritual and spirituality play a defining role in shaping Naarm's queer nightlife heterotopias, blurring the bounds of authenticity, satire, irreverence, and gravitas to create new forms of ritualisation outside the bounds of institutional religious practices. I argue that this collapse of categorical adherence, inherent to ritualisation, reflects the ambivalent disturbances within heterotopic theory, preconditioning a paired analysis that troubles the philosophical biases that attempt to solidify behaviour into a neat framework. Understood performatively, I conclude that both ritualisation and heterotopia (like queerness) move beyond the concept of the real and the copy, revealing the contingency of belief and, concomitantly, the potential for emancipation and transformation that can come through the destabilisation of hegemonic norms, such as those learned within institutional or national religions.

An Alternative Church

Queerness, alongside many other categories of doing and being, has long been targeted as a moral wrong by religious adherents (Mak and Tsang 2008; Taylor and Snowdon 2014; Willet 2000; Wotherspoon 2016). Although religiosity is not a guarantee of prejudicial views, fundamentalist beliefs have been shown to correlate with hostile attitudes against queer people (Fulton, Gorsuch, and Maynard 1999), a notion re-affirmed repeatedly through modern history and up until the present day as lobbyists and politicians continue anti-queer attacks, with religious rhetoric as their hammer (Karp 2017, 2022; Willet 2000; Wotherspoon 2016). Christian fundamentalism has played a foundational role in the construction of the 'nuclear family' and the categorisation of right and wrong behaviour (Taylor and Snowdon 2014). These ideas are weaponised especially to inhibit the development of progressivism, social liberation, or the mixing of socioeconomic classes, with "drinking, dancing, theatre, sexuality, gambling, and even reading… under repeated attack in Australia" by Christian Churches (Wotherspoon 2016, 14). Prejudicial laws against homosexuality and other forms of deviancy are predicated on ecclesiastical law, and continue to serve as the justification for methods of persecution from powerful figures against populations they see as sinful (Wotherspoon 2016).

It is within this context that queer nightlife is framed not only as a shelter from persecution, but as a substitute for the community support structures, moral lodestones, and emancipatory moments of transcendence traditionally offered by religion (Redfield and Thouin-Savard 2017; Salkind 2019). Within his work on the queerness of disco, Tim Lawrence argues that the conceptualisation of the nightclub as an all-hours, darkened, isolated space was designed "to further the dancer's distance from the everyday and enable entry into an alternative experience of both time and space, as well as to encourage the body to form a connected alliance with sound" (2011,

239). Building upon this work in relation to house music spaces, Salkind describes the club as "integrating carefully curated sound, lights, and other ritual elements like incense to create a world unmoored from the space/time of hetero-patriarchal white supremacy" (2019, 56), a place where "patrons made ritual performances out of self-fashioning and ecstatic communion with their DJ" (2019, 62). Within this approach the DJ is understood as a preacher. Others reach for more ancient metaphors while attempting to capture the function of the party space, describing the music selector as a "technoshaman" (Redfield and Thouin-Savard 2017, 58; Takahashi 2004) who "guides individuals through a psychological journey of what some have described as healing, identity transformation, and spiritual growth" (Takahashi 2004, 2).

Although the term 'technoshaman' arose from the rave tradition—a musically purist space where people congregate to listen to DJs and to dance until they enter a trance-like state—this interpretation of the DJs role does bleed over into other forms of nightlife where the DJ is a central, but not the only, creative facilitator within the space. DJ Eris Drew, who has played at several events in Naarm (such as *Powertrip*), describes her role almost exclusively in spiritual terms:

> … ecstatic healing traditions exist all over the world, and when everything is working right, rave is an ecstatic ritual. It was eye-opening to describe my sound as ecstatic, then read anthropological material and find out that's the fucking word they use. It was like, 'Gender variant people were often the shamans? And these people often had goddess visions, and that's why they were chosen?' I started seeing so many parallels. I learned what each shamanistic technique cross-culturally was. They're all present in rave (Drew 2018).

The aforementioned observations on the spiritual aspects of queer party space were a theme during participant interviews—and, much like Eris above, participants framed their understanding of their

own experiences within these terms. Both Mike Nguyen and Nefertiti LaNegra described their religious backgrounds and how these experiences informed their subsequent queer nightlife practice. Prior to becoming involved in the queer community, Nguyen articulates being in the closet and finding a sense of morality, connection, and community through his work as a worship-leader at a Church. Through the course of this work, he performed as a dancer and singer at contemporary concerts and outreach programs to evangelise to young people, at venues as expansive as the Rod Laver Arena. In capturing how these events were presented, Nguyen describes their high production value, with "electric guitars, flashing lights… a full club show" (Nguyen 2020). Regardless of whether club design has influenced contemporary ritual practice, or whether ritual practice has influenced club design, Nguyen frames these experiences as integral in preparing him to perform to queer club audiences. In a different yet comparable experience, LaNegra links their childhood experience of Church and performing gospel not only to their ability to sing, but also to their distaste for the fourth wall: the Church, they articulate, has no fourth wall, and it is this call-and-response format that they model their contemporary club performances after (Nefertiti LaNegra 2020).

Despite the casting of nightlife by moralists as inherently sinful and antithetical to religious mores (Willet 2000; Wotherspoon 2016), the data gathered throughout this project suggests that queer parties are, by no means, secular spaces: instead, it could be better said that they simply do not have a unified theological standpoint, and are motivated by a multitudinous mass of beliefs, superstitions, or spiritual critiques. When asked about what they perceive the role of the DJ to be, Powers draws a comparison to the work of Eris Drew, explaining that "we see what we're doing as the potentiality to serve higher purposes… I think that's what we do, and we also do that in queerness" (Powers 2020). Much like Marlena Dali at *Honcho Disko*, a direct connection is drawn between the experience of queerness and a spiritual experience. Despite the elusiveness of these beliefs—in that they often are not named categorically as part of any particular religious system—there does appear to be centrifugal movement between participants' approach to queerness and what they perceive as some kind of deeper human purpose, as they are both explored within

nightlife. Betty Grumble, a Sydney-based performer who often performs at local clubs, is another example of this approach, as she expresses a desire to profoundly impact her nightlife audiences:

> … even if we're confronting the darkest of things… queers are amazing at relishing almost in a shamanic way in pain and darkness, maybe relish is the wrong word, but confronting pain and darkness, in a way that can still resonate joy and make people feel connected in their divine difference. Like for me… this is a space that's constantly asking of us to keep on unfurling, open our hearts and, and be okay in the mess. Like, yeah. I hope that's what people get from those spaces… A sense of solidarity, a sense of, and a sense of possibility (Grumble 2020).

From these brief examples, key anthropological and spiritual framings such as shamanism, ecstasy, ritual, and 'higher purpose' are bound up with the queerness of nightlife, and are key to the way creative practitioners such as performers and DJs frame their own function within queer nightclubs and parties. Due to this theoretical and practical linkage, it is worth providing a brief review of the relevant literature on ritual, performance, and spiritual club spaces. This will further demonstrate, firstly, how thoroughly these concepts have penetrated Naarm's nightlife spaces, and secondly, it will form the foundation for understanding how nightlife practitioners work with these ideas in their creation of heterotopia.

In approaching ritual within this context, I found Stephenson (2015) and Bell's (1992) work on ritualisation to be a useful framing, particularly in the case of nightlife spaces where the 'ritual' under consideration is less cohesive as an expression of a particular established religious system. Stephenson notes that "[r]ather than speak of ritual, per se, which connotes a stable, fixed thing, some theorists employ the notion of ritualization. In ethology, ritualization refers to a process of stylization and formalization in which instrumental behaviour becomes symbolic and

communicative” (2015, 74). By focusing on ritualisation, less energy must be diverted toward fitting the chosen event within a categorical system that spans a vast array of human activity, in a genre so broad as to be applicable to much of our day-to-day behaviour: it also allows for a more secular viewpoint, or at least one that considers the potential for varying beliefs between participants. On the differentiation between ‘ritual’ and ‘ritualisation,’ Catherine Bell frames an approach that is helpful for queer nightlife sites. They write that

> [v]iewed as practice, ritualisation involves the very drawing, in and through an activity itself, of a privileged distinction between ways of acting, specifically between those acts being performed and those being contrasted, mimed, or implicated somehow. That is, intrinsic to ritualisation are strategies for differentiating itself—to various degrees in various ways—from other ways of acting within any particular culture (Bell 1992, 90).

In this sense, ritualised activities gain their sense of ritual from the intentional elevation of certain actions to the realm of the symbolic, and the ways in which they purposely differentiate themselves from the day-to-day world. This can account for any variety of forms, from “the exact repetition of a centuries-old tradition or deliberately radical innovation and improvisation, as in certain forms of liturgical experimentation or performance art” (Bell 1992, 91).

Applying ritualisation to queer nightlife is not without precedent. Marlon Bailey, in his writing on Ballroom culture in Detroit, states that “I am not suggesting that the ball itself is a ritual; instead, I argue that there are particular aspects of the ball that are, indeed, ritualized” (2013, 144). Even within secular formations, or spaces where a multitude of spiritual beliefs form the interpretive lens through which participants translate events, the significance of quotidian actions can assume the weight of deeper purpose. It is partly through ritualisation that nightlife gatherings attract the esoteric associations displayed by participants above—and, much like any other material that

animates the nightlife space, it forms a rich vein to be exploited by creative practitioners for both critiquing and facilitating cathartic experiences. In each of these functions, both ritualised sites and heterotopias move in tandem to create an alternative space from the everyday that can exaggerate norms as well as deconstruct them. Examples of how these deconstructions occur are detailed below.

Heterotopia and Ritual

Although the parallels between heterotopic space and ritual sites are perhaps implicit—given Foucault's original listing of sites includes locations such as cemeteries, festivals, and religious colonies (Foucault 1986)—there are few explicit explorations into how they function in unison. This means any review must be gleaned from inferences and conceptual echoes as much as direct analysis. Hetherington touches on both ritual and heterotopia in his discussion of freemasonry, stating that

> [i]n speaking of masonic lodges as heterotopia I aim to show that these sites were used for activities whose alternative character derives not so much from the fact that at the time they were seen as somewhat mysterious and possibly seditious, but rather that masonic lodges were spaces of exclusion in which a supposedly virtuous elect could live out their ideals of a utopian society, promoting at the same time the seemingly contradictory ideals of equality, fraternity, selectivity and hierarchy. Such a model, utopian in idea and heterotopic in practice, made the masonic lodge both an

> enlightened, rational and discursive space as well as one associated with an interest in arcane and secret knowledge built up through an invented tradition that sought to link freemasons with the world of the ancients, most notably with the builders of Solomon's Temple (1997, 76).

The heterotopic ideal that Hetherington identifies in this space is, characteristically, contradictory, and most relevantly for this project it simultaneously gains meaning through forward-thinking utopianism and an arcane connection with history. In an explicit linking of ritualisation and the construction of heterotopias, he contends that "the spatiality of new forms of sociability, the lodges, were orderings of heterogeneity through a ritualized engagement with ambivalence" (Hetherington 1997, 77).

This lineage of ritual and heterotopic space, from Solomon's Temple to freemasonry, unexpectedly reaches into Naarm's queer nightlife spaces. As noted within Chapter Two, the nightclub *Hugs & Kisses*, formally *The Buffalo Club*, was owned by, and leased from, the Royal Antediluvian Order of the Buffaloes. A secret society from the U.K. founded by a comedian and an artist in the 1820s (Royal Antedeluvian Order of Buffaloes n.d.), the RAOB began as a satirical reconstitution of the freemason societies that had formed centuries earlier, inheriting much of their arcane and abstract rituals of initiation, as well as their ideals of comradeship (Atkins 2020; Hetherington 1997). *Hugs & Kisses* founder, Hugo Atkins, speaks at length about the discovery of their tucked-away headquarters on Sutherland Street in Naarm's CBD in 2010, as he combed the city grid by grid searching for a venue in which to start a new nightclub (Atkins 2020). Discovering the venue through assisting one of its members to cross the street and following him inside, he describes walking "into a dimly-lit, heavily tiled entry, to a foyer of a masonic, you know, man's club… And it's got, you've got large mahogany wall pieces with gold embroidered letters—not embroidered, embossed—letters, with all these different names and weird words… there's pictures

of buffaloes everywhere. I've walked into, essentially, another planet" (Atkins 2020). He asks one of the members about the venue, and they take him for a brief tour upstairs, to a large, dis-used space that was once host to the RAOB's 'Grand Balls.' There, Hugo spots the licensing plaque, which reads that the space has a 24-hour Full Club Licence—one of the few remaining in the city. When he asks about using the venue for events, the member tells him that to do that, he must be inducted as a member.

Hugo returns next Wednesday, as requested, dressed in as old-fashioned a manner as he could muster from his wardrobe and borrowing from family members. When he arrives, he describes what he can of a largely secretive induction ritual:

> They lock me up outside the secret room, and they give me six ciders. Six cans of cider. I'm not allowed in, until those cans are empty. So I have to drink… So I neck six mercury dry ciders, and then um, and I'm blindfolded the whole time. So I've lost vision for 45 minutes at this stage. I don't know if anyone's been blindfolded and drunk six beers in a row, but you have no sensory… you don't know where the fuck you are. And the thing is, the floor ceases to exist, you're in a completely different environment. Finally, they knock on the tiles, on the door. I'm in the little hallway outside the door. And then I hear, *Has the master finished his drinks?* And l said *Drinks are empty sir*. *You may enter*. They take me into this room, I'm walking, I literally feel like I'm walking on clouds. I'm still blindfolded, I have no idea what's going on. Then it starts. *Bring in the goat. Get the paddles ready*. *Burn the wax*. All these things they start chanting at me, throwing me off, these like hazing, hazing… It's ritual… (Atkins 2020).

The day after his initiation, now a newly-minted member, he returned to discuss leasing the space upstairs to turn it into a club. The mood of this entire process is jovial and wry, as if being let in on a joke. Drawing a direct line between the originary freemasons and the RAOB, Atkins characterises it as a spin-off: “you might be a Freemason for like 30 years and you’ll get one medal, one or two medals. In the Buffaloes, in the time you’re in the Buffaloes, by the time you become a Grand Primo, you might have 350 medals, you get an entire apron. The whole thing’s a piss-take… It’s this ancient joke” (Ibid). This story exemplary of the ambivalent, yet central, relationship that queer nightlife heterotopias, perhaps all heterotopias, have with ritual. Satire, critique, and commentary of ritual itself is a running theme throughout each of the examples of this chapter: yet much like Atkins’ initiation described above, the knowing, comedic nature of these ritual recontextualisations do not appear to detract from their foundational necessity as constitutive of the alternative ways of being that define heterotopic space.

In describing the RAOB temple as “another planet” (Atkins 2020), Atkins echoes theory on both ritual and club spaces that characterise them variously as other dimensions or self-enclosed, temporary spaces completely separated from the everyday (Goulding and Shankar 2011; moore 2018; Turner 1979). Within his highly influential work on ritual, Victor Turner creates a dichotomous relationship between *communitas*—the fleeting yet radical communitarian spirit than can arise from ritual spaces—and structure, the social order that dominates the everyday. The binarity of this conceptual framework is made explicit repeatedly throughout his work, as he contends that “[c]ommunitas is of the now; structure is rooted in the past and extends into the future” (Turner 1969, 113), further setting up the polarity as “the spontaneous, immediate, concrete nature of communitas, as opposed to the norm-governed, institutionalised, abstract nature of social structure” (Turner 1969, 127). In a telling combination of metaphors, he proposes yet another opposition, claiming that “[s]pontaneous communitas is nature in dialogue with structure, married to it as a woman is married to a man. Together they make up the stream of life, the one affluent supplying power , the other alluvial fertility” (Turner 1969, 140). Taking Turner’s earlier contention

Figure 14. [Photograph of dancefloor within Hugs & Kisses]. 18 Jan 2019. Taken and supplied by Author..

that liminal spaces, such as those where communitas reigns, can be likened "to death, to being in the womb, to invisibility, to darkness, to bisexuality, to the wilderness" (1969, 95), a near-exemplary binary relationship between heteronormativity and a queer, feminised Other is apparent. These take the form of, on the one hand, institutional structure, and on the other, the bisexual wilderness of communitas, the latter of which rules over alternative (yet temporary) spaces and governs itself by alternative laws.

The characterisation of these strange, ephemeral sites—chaos-ridden, unerringly queer, unknowable, radical—is provocative, and a tempting model through which to interpret the contemporary manifestation of queer nightlife spaces that are the focus of this thesis. The influence of this notion, as well as its clear demarcation between the ritual site and the everyday, is evident in the work of Goulding and Shankar, who write that "in clubbing we observe a duality where bodies are transformed from the everyday to the sensational through dress, dance, and stimulants. However, this transformation only lasts as long as the ritual process. At its culmination participants return to the familiar realm of the profane" (2011, 1449). Within their study on club cultures, which argues that they are, essentially, 'neo-tribal' phenomena wherein select members are inducted and then propagate the ritual form, Goulding and Shankar draw on Turner to highlight the Otherness of these sites, while simultaneously asserting their isolation from the day-to-day lives of the participants: and, by proxy, the lives of those who live in the contextual society surrounding the site. Goulding and Shankar contend that, for clubbers, "there is an emphasis on the sacralisation of time or 'living for the weekend'—a sense of separation and clear distinction between the working week and the clubbing weekend that offers a sense of release and an alternative way of being" (2011, 1444). This 'alternative way of being,' something also central to the concept of heterotopia, is cordoned off from the (it is assumed) banal or difficult lives of club-goers, who seek a temporary escape. As I have demonstrated extensively throughout this thesis, separation of inside and outside does not hold up to scrutiny, but it also perhaps contributes to the dismissal of party spaces as purely sites of extraneous abandon, indulgence, or self-destruction. This critique is best summarised

by Turner himself, where he proposes that, for those who fall victim to its allure, “the ecstasy of spontaneous communitas is seen as *the* end of human endeavour” (1969, 139). If these sites are seen as totally separate places of ephemerality and temptation, it becomes an easy trap to dismiss them as lacking function or meaning to the everyday world.

Although ritual and spirituality are prominent practices within the formation of queer nightlife sites, prior ritual theorising appears, for the most part, ambivalent in its relevance to a heterotopic reading. On the one hand, there is an influential conceptualisation that it is the alternative-ness of these spaces from the everyday that holds their fundamental, liberative value for participants; on the other hand, the ephemerality or separate-ness of these spaces can be over-emphasised, producing a near-exoticising bubble around the ritualised social practices in question, nullifying any reaching effects of these sites into the lives of participants or into the spatial practice of the world at large. Goulding and Shankar, for instance, conclude that although clubbing participants experience “an intense community spirit, a feeling of togetherness, and solidarity” (2011, 1447), that this is based on the “temporary destruction of existing social structure” (2011, 1447). This erases, I contend, the ways that these sites are not only sites of abandon, destruction or, as Turner would put it, anti-structure (1969), but are heterotopic spaces with a deliberate and considered *alternative* structure, one that incorporates and often exaggerates elements of the day-to-day social structure that participants experience. The ambivalence of these communitarian affects is described by Sarah Thornton, who argues that the pre-selection of crowds, and who is thus ‘in’ on the knowledge of where parties take place, “is arguably the precondition for that oft-celebrated experience of social harmony, the thrill of belonging afforded by clubs. In other words, although some clubbers complain about the gatekeeping practices which assemble, construct and limit the crowd, these practices are undoubtedly a problematic part of their appeal” (1996, 24). This observation brings us far closer to Hetherington’s own regarding ritualised heterotopic sites: returning to his thinking on the freemason lodges, he characterises them as “…spaces of exclusion in which a supposedly virtuous elect could live out their ideals of a utopian society, promoting at the

same time the seemingly contradictory ideals of equality, fraternity, selectivity and hierarchy" (1997, 76). Rather than interpreting these sites only as primal, foreign entities that are totally cleaved from the (implicitly masculine, heteronormative) structures of civilised society, a heterotopic approach to the ritualised elements of these sites allows a consideration of the ways ritual acts are used as spatial practice, the alternative ways of being that they propose, and the personal (and lasting?) transformations they perhaps enact for participants.

Much like heterotopia, the theory on ritual, in its totality, is a theory of multitudes and ambivalence: a conceptual category that as much delineates sites of oppressive operations of power and the replication of hegemony, as it does spaces of primordial chaos, transformation, and abandon (Stephenson 2015, 64). Returning to Foucault's original treatise on 'Other Spaces,' the influence of ritual theory on his thinking could be inferred: heterotopias, he postulates, rely on ceremonies of opening and closing; they often require insider-knowledge to gain entry; they are time and space-bound, in that they are temporary, yet often experienced as a sort of alternative dimension that operates under fundamentally different spatio-temporal laws (Foucault 1986). Ritual, too, is sometimes shaded with heterotopic traits, considered as

> a special cultural space where life can be imagined, staged, watched, practiced, done right, and then, hopefully, recollected in daily life—but always with the understanding of a gap or distance between ritual and ordinary life. Ritual is in part a model for action, but even more profoundly ritual discloses and enacts the experience of distance and tension between what is and what is hoped for, between the real and the unattainable, actuality and possibility (Stephenson 2015, 26).

Bringing these two contradictory concepts into concert is not so much a complexification, but a required dis-entanglement of the ways these theories overlap, not only within academic texts, but

within the embodied queer nightlife sites of Naarm. By analysing how ritual manifests within these heterotopic formulations, I will question these influential theorisations of ritual as separate, ideal rehearsals or messy, yet still separate, primal sites where people lose themselves in an ocean of pure sensation and communitarian affect. Despite the perhaps fundamental differences between them, the cross-pollination of these ideas become clear throughout the workings of Naarm's queer nightlife practitioners.

Sacrificial Offerings, Rites-of-Passage

On the 4th of November 2019, (P)ANIC—the alternative persona of Sevara Zaric—presented a hybrid performance-art piece and DJ set at *Barba*'s Halloween party. Before she started playing, two dancers took over the playing space in front of the DJ booth, setting the stage for her to emerge from behind the booth wearing a long, flowing white headpiece, a matching outfit, and large golden hoop hearings. She danced with a tambourine before, with a gesture, instructing the crowd to part. She moved, dancing, through the split crowd to a platform in the centre of the room, before dancing back towards the stage. When there, she kneeled and wailed, loudly enough to be heard over the music, and held a large knife up in the air. At this point, my friend beside me was gripping my shoulder so hard as to be almost painful, anticipating what, they knew, was about to happen. Drawing the knife back towards herself, (P)ANIC ran the knife across her forehead. Then she hung her head, staring at the ground, the dancers on either side still moving, holding attention, before she looked back up. It was not immediately clear if she had cut herself or mimed the action, until she stood up and moved toward the DJ booth. As she placed her hands on the CDJs and started mixing tracks—shrieking, heaving techno—together, rivulets of blood streamed down her face. By the end

of her set it had caked into neatly drawn rivers between her eyes, forking past the creases of her nostrils and over her mouth and chin.

Discussing this performance in hindsight, Zaric narrates her inspiration as rooted within her Romani-Sinti heritage, mirroring a traditional rite of passage through which community members would pass:

> We believe that every 25 years, almost like puberty, you're a whole different person… Not even just physically, but also mentally as well, and, even just inside, everything changes, like your skin regenerates, it's just you're a whole different new person, it's almost like a rebirth. So there was an old ritual they used to do back in the day where these, all these Elders would dance around the fire and you would have people who were revered within the community of Romani and Sinti camps, they would slice their forehead and wail really loudly to expel the demons of the inner body. 'Cause we can cleanse our outer body, by taking showers and, you know, taking care of our skin and whatever, but it's harder to cleanse the inner body if you're not adept to knowing your spiritual self (Zaric).

earing her 25th birthday, Zaric felt this was an appropriate time—and the site of queer nightlife the appropriate place—to conduct her own version of this ritual. Within their research on Dominican Voodoo's presence within the New York club scene, Angelina Tallaj contends that older distinctions between theatre and ritual, such as those proposed by Richard Schechner and Victor Turner, are broken down within the nightclub space (2018, 98). She argues that

N

Figure 15. [Photograph of ANIC performing at Barba Party]. 4 Nov 2019. Taken and supplied by Phil Soliman.

> [t]he 'contexts' that both Schechner and Turner used to distinguish ritual from theatre (efficacy versus entertainment; symbolic time versus the present; active audience participation or passive viewing; performers possessed or conscious of what they are doing; criticism discouraged or encouraged) are all complicated by the ceremonies I observed… any clear distinction between Turner's conceptions of structure and anti-structure collapses (Tallaj 2018, 98).

She describes a scene that is heavily commercialised, bound up inseparably with the nightclub industry and transformed from the hidden, private, or community-oriented altars that were traditionally used prior to the form's export to, and open practice within, the United States. Drawing a neat conclusion as to whether this compromises its traditional ritual function, however, is complicated: Tallaj notes that "many young club goers have developed ways of dancing to the music where gestures associated with spirit possession are becoming part of the dance, blurring the lines between mimesis and 'true' possession" (2018, 98-99). On the one hand, she re-iterates that some Dominican Voodoo practitioners believe some of those 'possessed' are doing so inauthentically, in order to gain attention and free alcohol (Tallaj 2018, 105). On the other, she argues that the line between the authentic and the inauthentic is arbitrary, and the increased scope for participation is allowing young people access to the traditions of their heritage within a new context, observing that "[y]oung transnational Dominicans are not corrupting traditions, but reinventing them through acts of communal dancing, singing, drinking, and trancing together" (Tallaj 2018, 99).

The nightlife space is characterised by Tallaj as "a space where possibilities and choices are multiplied, but where violent collisions might also occur" (2018, 102). Approaching this finding with an understanding of heterotopia—an ambivalent site where alternative modes of being can be tried out—it is possible to see how nightlife's experimental function extends into a variety of social relations beyond queerness, into zones such as spirituality and religion as well. Strict boundaries

between the quotidian and the extraordinary, the profane and the sacred, entertainment and introspection, and performer and priestess dissolve. The creative capacity of heterotopic space can allow, in this case, an investigation into a performer such as Zaric's own relationship with an ancestral rite, explicitly forging meaning within a new context that incorporates her queerness, the queer nightlife community of which she is a part, her artistic practice as a DJ, and her Romani-Sinti diasporic identity. Much as Tallaj contends (2018), it is unclear whether these re-formulations constitute a perversion or an adaptation of the ritual practice in question, nor is it my place nor purpose to do so within this analysis. Rather, in the lineage of heterotopic theory, it is more pertinent to ask if, and how, these performances propose an alternative model of social relations to the contextual day-to-day society that surrounds them, if that proposal is enacting a form of critique or commentary, and how this leaks out into the quotidian spaces with which they are linked.

In its affective capacity as an act that inspired fear and horror, evidenced by the tight grip of a fellow patron on my shoulder as we watched the performance, Zaric already set out to re-imagine the relations that stereotypically template the performer-patron obligation within nightlife. Moving beyond purely light-hearted or sexually escapist entertainment, beyond even entertainment deliberately designed to shock its audience, Zaric upset these relations by centring not the audience's reaction or requirements, but her own desire for transformation through a rite of purification, and her own desire to use the platform to explore her own histories. As she later described: "I had two other performers with me who were also queer and Muslim as well… Having them onstage was really cathartic 'cause I… they really helped me centre myself, and they helped me come back into who I was as a person" (Zaric 2020). The fact that the audience did not have the full context required to understand this rite was unimportant to Zaric. This alternative hierarchy, one that prioritised the catharsis of Zaric through an adapted ritual passed down by a historically subjugated people, intervened heterotopically into the nightlife space, temporarily structuring relations around the demands of a Romani-Sinti ritual as opposed to the joyous, the camp, the quirky, or the accessibly weird modes that dominate queer nightlife performance.

Before I conclude the analysis of this performance, I would like to discuss another—one of my own—in service of demonstrating how both performances stretch into, and are influenced by, the day-to-day desires of the performers. As I have discovered through my own practice, the creation of heterotopic sites for marginalised people can be experienced as a sacrificial labour by spatial practitioners, one that is critiqued thematically through the construct of ritualised performance on the stage. On the 19th of October 2017, my first time ever hosting *Honcho Disko*, I performed a kink burlesque routine. Dressed in leather, PVC, latex, high Doc Marten boots, and a papier-mâché bull skull with large, red-gem encrusted horns, I stripped off to the track *Nothing* by Drenge. The lyrics "Drive me 'round the yard until I'm brittle / Clip my ear and slap me 'round a little / 'Til you're bored / Or something / But please don't stop 'til I'm reduced to nothing" (Drenge 2013) informed the visual image of a cow being systematically yet willingly—sadomasochistically—slaughtered. I stripped off my clothes, ripped out the long strip of leather that was my tongue, and whipped myself with it. As the final refrain "Peel off my skin / The flesh from my bones / I'll be for you / Forever Alone" repeated (Drenge 2013), I tore apart my final latex layer to end up standing in a small red and black PVC jockstrap, a leather harness, and the bull mask.

The inspiration for this performance was multi-layered, some elements of which are more relevant to this analysis than others. However, even the extraneous dimensions are exemplary of how the autobiographical fuses with the spectacular and the critical within nightlife practice, and in some cases such as this, draws on a well of mythological or ritual significance to interpret experience and differentiate it from the everyday. Years prior, staying on an ex-boyfriend's farm in rural Queensland, we would wake up each morning to wrangle a sweet young calf to be fed by hand, as it was not being taken care of by its mother. This calf, which had been named, and which we met each morning, was being tenderly hand-raised to be slaughtered. Many months later, I was considering the state of both my personal and creative endeavours. I had been broken up with, after having felt I had given a lot of myself to maintain the relationship. Similarly, I was considering breaking up with the performing arts, after producing a series of performance seasons that left me broke and feeling

that I was pouring myself out into the world with nothing filling me back up again. Simply, at that time, I felt a strong identification with that calf, as if I had been strung along and betrayed. It was then I moved to Naarm with no plan for what to do with my life, and quickly found myself attending queer nightlife events such as *Honcho Disko*. There, and at events like it—situated within a thriving community of people focused around supporting queer performance—I realised that perhaps it was the offering up of the performance that was the point. Was it financially viable? No. Would it lead to a career? Hardly. The cost of creating costumes and the labour of conception and rehearsal far outweighed the cash payment that could be provided by queer promoters, usually cash-strapped themselves. But still, something of vital importance was taking place, with performers giving of themselves to provide something integral to their community.

Despite the professed centralisation of the self within her performance, Zaric makes clear that the impacts of queer nightlife reach beyond the boundaries of the performance itself. Diametrically opposed to Goulding and Shankar's proposal of a strict separation between the working week and the weekend (2011), Zaric goes into some detail regarding the potent relationship between her everyday life and the nightlife site:

> But I still, you know, do this ritual now, but I will prepare by taking the week off and just really thinking about what I wanna do with that performance. But also just reclusing for a little bit and just recharging socially as much as I can. Leading up to the days I would meditate a lot as well, clear my head, tell myself to get on that stage and express expressive feelings that you have, and just put it into those 2 CDJs every single angry, passionate, violent, temperamental, moody, and the mixer and just leave it on the stage (Zaric).

For myself, too, I found this to be true, with a great amount of effort expended both before and after the act of performance to prepare and recover from the intense affectivities of engaging an

Figure 16. [Photograph of author performing at Honcho Disko]. 19 Oct 2017. Photo by Gavin Dwyer. From Facebook, accessed 19 Oct, 2017.
https://www.facebook.com/photo.php?fbid=10159470801535427&set=t.562923877&type=3

audience. Although abstract, it was this feeling of offering yourself up to your audience that was the subject of my own performance, as my thinking shifted from pursuing a self-sustaining acting career, to a community-oriented practice wherein I pooled time, labour, and resources to make an offering to the queer nightlife space whenever I had the means to do so. In a dedication to that young calf I helped hand-raise for slaughter, I took its form. Through it, and through the performance, I expressed a whole host of conflicting emotions about my own life and the art of performance: about how I felt simultaneously exploited by the industry and in my past relationships, and yet how I also offered myself up, in an act of subordination, to be exploited. By becoming the sacrificial cow and flaying myself for the crowd of *Honcho Disko*, I wished to shed these past modes of being and move towards a new way of relation with myself and with my community. It was within the ancient practice of pagan animal sacrifice that I found a metaphor for these new ways of relating, as I observed that what we as queer performers could give to our community was as necessary as appeasing the gods or a bountiful harvest, even if it came at a personal cost.

Placing both performances together, I propose that queer nightlife heterotopias, much like rituals, often require offerings to be made. Although the creation of these sites is a collaborative effort between promoters, DJs and other creatives and staff members, the nature of the performer's role allows them to render explicit their function within the space through metaphor. Whether it is their naked flesh, pushing their body to extremes, letting their blood, emptying their bank account for costume pieces, or taking the week off work to centre their state of mind, performers give parts of themselves and their lives over to the labour of co-creating the nightlife site. In the case of some performances, such as my own and Zaric's, a meta-commentary on this labour of performance is made through the construction of the performance act itself as a ritual sacrifice. But a giving-over is not the only action that structures the temporary relation between performer and audiences within these examples. For both performances, besides financial compensation, a transformative effect is identified by Zaric and myself that may point towards what makes these performances 'worth it' for practitioners beyond what they contribute to nightlife spaces. Although they each drew from

divergent traditions, there are commonalities that bind the two. Firstly, both Zaric and myself felt a need to purge ourselves of negative emotions such as betrayal, anger, frustration, or violence through the outlet of ritualised performance. This idea of the ritual gathering as a necessary affective outlet is persistent in the literature, whether it be Goulding and Shankar's contention that raves are the emotional counterpoint to the drudgery of the working week (2011), or the characterisation of the centuries-old tradition of Carnival as a "'safety valve' mechanism that… is an arena or stage for the negotiation of identity, memory, beliefs, and values as well as political, economic, and sacred power" (Stephenson 2015, 49). In this way, the nightlife stage may provide a site for a shedding of the burdens of a marginalised existence for performers.

Secondly, and complementarily, both performances were approached as rites-of-passage. For Zaric, this was related to the soul's passage through time, marked by the nearing of a 25-year cycle after which one becomes a whole different person that requires an inner-cleansing through the letting of blood. For myself, the performance enacted a letting go of past relationships, and the ways I previously related to my community and the performing arts through my practice. The thematics of transformation within these performances is a distillation of the forces that are broadly ascribed to queer nightlife space. Queer clubs, like rituals, have long been perceived as transcendental rites-of-passage, as necessary and liberative for queer people as coming-out or their first sexual encounter (Di Mattia 2018; Sun 2020). Michael Sun, in their autobiographical retrospective and critique of dancefloors in queer film, writes that they "saw characters transformed—by sex, yes, but equally by dance. If there was one thing all of these films shared, it was their conflation of dance and discovery. Characters kissed under neon lights. On the dancefloor, they shed their grievances and became different selves" (2020). In their review of the political potential of the dancefloor in the film *BPM*, as scenes shift seamlessly between activism and dancing, Di Mattia asserts that "while movement grounds them in the very real physical experience of their bodies, it also allows them to transcend it. Dancing takes on a spiritual, ritualistic quality, temporarily taking them out of this world and into another one" (2018). As early as 1978, Andrew Holleran's *Dancer from the Dance* characterises the

transformative power of the gay discotheque: “They were the most romantic creatures of the city in that room. If their days were spent in banks and office buildings, no matter: Their true lives began when they walked through this door—and were baptised into a deeper faith, as if brought to life by miraculous immersion. They lived only for the night” (Holleran 1978, 36-37). These cultural assertations of the power of queer space informed the metaphorical weight of both performances, but they also reveal a telling confluence between the functional roles of queer nightlife sites, ritual, and heterotopias.

Within his work on heterotopias, Hetherington contends that “they act as obligatory points of passage through which an alternate mode of social ordering is performed” (1997, 37). Influenced by anthropological work on rite-of-passage rituals (Hetherington 1997, 32), it is this perceived transformational value that unites common queer conceptions of the role of nightlife space, and theoretical assertions as to the political potential of heterotopia. Di Mattia describes *BPM* as “bodies, blood, and beats erected on a porous boundary between the personal and the political” (2018), drawing together the minutiae of bodily movement in the club to the macro revolutions of political change. So, too, were the thematics of the performances (and the contexts in which they took place) emblematic of how queer nightlife heterotopias may act as personal stages for individual rites-of-passage, but that they also may, as is theorised by Hetherington (1997), act as experimental zones for social and political alternatives. As Zaric and myself sought to emerge into a new mode of relation with ourselves and our community, we both navigated and self-reflexively commented on the ritualised aspects of the queer nightlife site. Moving porously from the autobiographical to the theoretical, in the spirit of the queer dancefloor, these performed rites-of-passage mirror Hetherington’s central characterisation of heterotopias: that they, too, must be shepherded through points of convergence (1997). For Hetherington, the status quo is to new modes of social ordering as the initiate is to the initiated, with the site of heterotopia acting as the necessary rite-of-passage ritual through which they must pass. As these performances demonstrate, however, the role of

heterotopic actors are blurred: the participants are also the initiators, co-creating and contesting an alternative order, simultaneously transforming while being transformed.

Scenes of Worship

On the 17th of January, 2019, Fox Pflueger, also known as their pseudonym Lesbian Moon Lobster, took to the stage for their second performance of the evening at *Honcho Disko*. When the curtains opened for their act they revealed, at first, only a large, transparent plastic surface on the ground that took up the space of the entire stage. It then began to grow larger as Bananarama's "Venus" played, the familiar lyrics "Goddess on the mountain top / Burning like a silver flame / The summit of beauty and love / And Venus was her name" blaring over the speakers (Bananarama 1986). As the plastic form took shape, it became clear that it was a giant inflatable clam. It opened, and Fox's bejewelled legs shot into the air from the middle and began to dance, as if they were emerging from the water of a synchronised swimming team. Fox stood and rose, then, out of the clam, and moved towards the microphone, where they invited any trans people to come up out of the audience and onto the stage. As they moved through the crowd and more of them took up space on the stage, they took Fox's place in the centre of the giant clam, becoming the focus of the performance as Fox moved to the side of stage. Fox decreed that the audience *worship them* until the clam was full of people dancing, with the audience bowing, their arms rising and falling while they cheered.

Within this performance, Pflueger re-organised the spatiality of audience, performer, and who exactly is 'pedestalled' and who is not by centring trans people as icons of cheerful praise, while de-centring themselves, the performer, as the usual object of praise within the nightlife space. On this level, the incorporation of spiritual themes such as goddess worship, articulated through the

raising up of hands and arms and bowing, were quite overt. Instead of the priorities and unthinking allowances of cis-gendered people, we were asked not only to focus on the joy and celebration of trans people, but to subjugate ourselves before them. By literally side-stepping the spotlight and turning it toward the collective of the nightlife community, Pflueger also turned our attention from the exceptionalisation of the spectacular individual—the performer—to incorporate and share the affective validation they receive in the form of cheers, whoops, and applause.

On the surface, this performance was already working heterotopically to practice an alternative to the quotidian within space: however, a more attentive interrogation of what is occurring, informed by a discussion with Pflueger, reveals other modes of operation as well. Discussing the rationale behind their performance persona, Lesbian Moon Lobster, Pflueger states that "every act that I've done as the lobster, I see it as in reverence to the spirit, or the ancient kind of energy of lobsters. And lobsters and crustaceans have featured predominantly in lots of different motifs of spirituality and the tarot and astrology… I like the performance art space for that because people can get whatever they need or want out of it" (Pflueger). Crucially, Pflueger does not feel the need for the audience to be clued in on the exact significance of the ritual occurrence: much like Zaric, the performance act, although shared within the nightlife space, is also a deeply personal act in service of a spiritual exploration. Further to that, though, they encourage audience members to widely interpret the absurdity of the act as entertainment, explaining that "people can look at that and go 'oh it's just silly and absurd,' but for me it was part of my practice and process as a spiritual person to perform as the lobster" (Pflueger). This allows their performances to function as both spectacle and, perhaps unknown to the observers, as worship to an archetypal animal spirit. Beyond the already-explicit ways this performance was working to re-organise space, it also, in a subtler sense, contributed to the co-construction of nightlife sites as places where queer people can interrogate and express their own forms of spirituality through performance.

This oscillation between satire and sincerity is characteristic of the way spirituality is expressed within these sites—it is arguably characteristic of many queer endeavours. This approach was writ across the programming of *Honcho Disko*'s 2018 Christmas-themed party, held on the 20th of December. Opening with a drag performer sensually lip-syncing to the voice of Nigella Lawson and smearing batter over themselves, the night romped through an act that mocked parents who were afraid of the influence of rap music on their kids, to baby dolls being thrown through the crowd, to a rousing rendition of *La Vie En Rose*, accompanied by a live pianist. After this, a nativity scene was created. Three performers dressed as the three wise men came out carrying bottles of amyl nitrite as if they were sacred gifts. A performer dressed as an enslaved donkey was tied up in the corner, and a heavily pregnant performer, costumed as Mary, began dancing, riding the donkey, and pashing the three wise men. She eventually gave dramatic birth to another performer, playing the role of Baby Jesus, who did an extended performance while putting on a wig, and then attaching wigs all over their body. As the nativity scene descended into chaos (the wise men huffing amyl, one of them smoking a vape), Mary came forward and started lip-syncing to an Ariana Grande Christmas song "Santa Tell Me." This led to a healthy portion of the crowd singing along and getting up on stage, dancing back at the crowd that remained on the dancefloor, collapsing performer and audience into a collegial mass of movement.

Throughout this evening, an ambivalent relationship with the family-centred Christian values associated with Christmas time became a focus of parody, as well as a sincere reclamation. As the host of the evening iterated that this was a time of year to be not only with biological family, but with your chosen family, it became clear that this satirical flip of the traditional Christmas mass was a perhaps necessary salve for the many local queer people who were estranged from their family, or who could not be their full selves during this time as they attended family gatherings or Church services. Although this critique created a distinct distance from these sites, the overall thrust of the performances also served to reproduce the primary affective intentions associated with them, those being a sense of home, community, connection, stability, joy, and family. Entering the space with an

already-existing scepticism toward Christmas and Christianity (a commonality shared by many queer people), the sleight of hand that led to these symbols being mocked and simultaneously promoted and replaced with a warped, queerer rendition slipped under my guard. As the crowd swarmed the stage, moving and singing in unison, I found myself surprised by the sentimentality of the moment. The space created by these performances was certainly alternative in relation to the dominant Christian thematics that were structuring the dominant social context at the time, yet contradictorily, in a perhaps characteristically heterotopian fashion, they also worked to import and repackage these values for consumption, in service of similar aims. The difference being that the 'family' that was proposed as the centrifugal point of this moment on the Christian ritual calendar was one that disparaged cooking meals, that mocked reproduction and tossed baby dolls around the room as a jovial sport, and was formed of a crowd of friends and strangers un-related by blood who, rather than being allied by a shared sense of religion or spirituality, were mutually constituted by a sense of celebratory deviancy that was generated through ritualised action.

Re-writing Rituals: A Return to Performativity

In Chapter Two, I contended that it is from the concept of political performativity—of the ability for iterative counter-performances to re-script and encode alternative norms—that the proposed transformational potential of heterotopia draws its theoretical heft. In a comparable tracing of academic lineage between disciplines, Amy Hollywood reviews the work of Butler and Derrida to propose how their development of performativity theory was predicated on prior work on rituals (2002). Making explicit the ritualistic language that is threaded throughout performativity theories, Hollywood compellingly links their underlying effects, noting that "like other formations generative

of subjectivity, ritual is productive of the subject and marks the possibility of that subject's resistance to the very norms and rituals through which it is constituted" (2002, 114): or, in other words, that "social realities are constituted by ritual action" (2002, 108). Rather than necessarily reflecting a prior state of being, it is through the symbolic ritualised act, much like it is through the performance of gender, that cultural norms (and alternative norms) are created or re-iterated with a difference. The veracity of this line of thinking that travels from ritual, to performativity, to heterotopia is tenuous and thus open to critique: however, the ways in which gender identity and ritual are centralised within the performances detailed above provide fruitful ground for, at the least, interrogating how these academic linkages are quite literally performed. Although there is no centralised theological viewpoint that unifies the alternative orders envisioned by Naarm's queer nightlife practitioners, what does bring many of them together is the belief that these sites are ripe for spiritual exploration, and that they are influenced by, or are correlative to, ritual practices. The satirical flips and recontextualisations present within the performances, and the self-reflexivity throughout participant interviews, demonstrates a cognizant approach to these deliberately ritualistic presentations, complicating traditional dualisms of ritual theory such as spectacle and utility, spirituality and secularity, structure and anti-structure, transformation and transportation (Bell 1992; Schechner 1985; Tallaj 2018; Turner 1969). The collapse of these dualisms has implications for the theory of heterotopia that is being developed throughout this thesis, and is key as to what role ritual is playing within the queer nightlife sites that are its subject.

Within their critique of the epistemological underpinnings of ritual theory, Catherine Bell contends that the Western ideological schism between thought and action has structured theorists' interpretation of ritual acts (1992). Arguing that "it is quite common for scholars to see ritual as resolving the conflict between thought and action, particularly in the guise of belief systems in conflict with the real world" (Bell 1992, 36), they propose that "[t]he notion that ritual resolves a fundamental social contradiction can be seen as a type of myth legitimating the whole apparatus of ritual studies" (Bell 1992, 37). Through this lens, rituals are interpreted as sites that temporarily

integrate the conflicting worlds of the abstract cosmos and the bodily practices of the everyday, allowing participants to structure action through the symbolic system of meaning that constitutes a spiritual or ideological ideal. In this way, ritual becomes the theoretical solution to a problem of the Western theorist's making, not necessarily a problem of the participants': that being, a need to resolve a cultural and academic tradition of splitting the mind and the body. Considering ritual within this model—as forming the theoretical triadic point between the cosmos and the Earth, belief and behaviour, thought and action—it becomes even clearer how the epistemological framework of ritual, as well as its assumptions, have influenced the structure of heterotopic thinking. Heterotopia, like ritual, is proposed as a triadic point between two opposed spatial concepts: utopia and the everyday. These fall neatly into the thought-action dualisms critiqued by Bell (1992), with utopia standing in as an ideal and abstract belief or vision within the mind, and the everyday functioning as its opposite, the movement of the body. Heterotopia, it is proposed, is the integration of these two separate 'spaces' within one ambivalent site, allowing action to be dictated by an envisioned alternative ideal, and bringing forth the space of the mind, briefly, into the world of the everyday.

Bell's challenge to theory (1992), as well as further explicit developments within thinking on ritual performativity (Hollywood 2002), provide an avenue out of this epistemological deadlock without compromising the utility of the heterotopic model that has been the basis of this project thus far. Bell argues that focusing on the role of acts within ritualised sites

> illuminates a critical circularity to the body's interaction with this environment: generating it, it is moulded by it in turn. By virtue of the circularity, space and time are redefined through the physical movements of bodies projecting organizing schemes on the space-time environment on the one hand while reabsorbing these schemes as the nature of reality on the other. In this process such schemes become socially instinctive automatisms of the body and implicit

> strategies for shifting the power relationship among symbols (1992, 99).

Although not drawing explicitly on the language of performativity theory to make these assertions, the 'critical circularity' that shapes reality through an embodied enactment of, or resistance to, ideological schemas *that are generated within the moment of their enactment* can be understood within this framework. Following in the wake of these theorists, it can be argued that the ritual (and heterotopic) act is not resolving a prior contradiction between an ideal and lived reality, leading practitioners to attempt to bridge this gap by creating an in-between space of ritual (or heterotopia). Instead, much like Bell and Hollywood contend for ritual, it is also possible that it is the heterotopic space itself that is constitutive of these contradictions. Rather than emblematising a clear-cut utopic vision brought down into the messy dimension of the quotidian, heterotopias may be sites where alternative norms are simultaneously performed and conceptualised within the moment of performance, hence highlighting, yet also creating, the experience of schism between the everyday and another form of being.

As Bell, Butler, and Hollywood all suggest, these divergences may not be conscious, conceptualised within the mind then translated into action in a deliberate attempt to re-write hegemonic norms (Bell 1992; Butler 2007; Hollywood 2002). Instead, participants may be simply replicating, with a difference, the norms that they ascribe to the nightlife site: norms that are overwhelmingly linked to notions of transformation, permissibility, experimentation, and transgression. Although, as has been demonstrated throughout many of the examples within this thesis, counter-performances of gender, sexuality, and other identitarian and political arenas are often consciously working against dominant norms, it is worth considering how shifting norms of behaviour may not be conscious for many participants, as well as how the queer nightlife space itself is dictated by alternative norms that encourage and reward exactly these kinds of counter-performances. Heterotopia may not so much be a window into the prior vision of its co-creators as

much as it is the birthplace for their alternative ideals in the first place, summoned into being through an embodied experimentation that elides a neat division between conceptualisation and practice.

Bell argues that it is the Western theoretical framework of ritual that is predisposed to create the dualistic contradiction of mind and body that it observes, because of the assumptions it is based within (1992, 36). In other words, in a performative fashion, it creates its own reality: sets up a problem that may not necessarily exist, so as to offer a solution. Similarly, the thematics and performances of ritual within queer nightlife sites may not so much be evidence of these spaces' ritualistic parallels, as much as they are the most visible manifestation of this parallel being created. Patrons and performers, as has been demonstrated extensively throughout this chapter, come to nightlife sites with pre-existing notions as to the sites' spiritual qualities: and through performance, they produce the ritualistic potentiality of queer nightlife. This differentiation of the nightlife site as a place for a particular form of irreverent, critical, pagan and/or queer spirituality is a key alternative ideal that marks these spaces as heterotopic—as functioning under different rules than their dominant context. However, the method through which this differentiation occurs, performative ritualisation, is also revealing of the machinery of heterotopic theory itself. Rather than marking the site of fusion between two distinct spatial entities, utopia and the quotidian, heterotopia can instead be approached as generative of what these conceptual categories look and feel like for the participants, performers, and researchers (like myself) that performatively co-create them with each engagement.

The theory of ritualisation has much more in common with the performative potential of heterotopia than it does interpretations of ritual that strictly demarcate the realms of the everyday and the sacred. Bell argues that "[t]he specific strategies of ritualisation come together in the production of a ritualised social body, a body with the ability to deploy in the wider social context the schemes internalised in the ritualised environment" (1992, 107). Throughout this chapter, I have

argued that ritualisation and heterotopia can work together in the creation of schismatic dichotomies between outside and inside, the sacred and the profane, the ideal and the lived, the utopic and the quotidian. By analysing the performances of queer nightlife creators, as well as examining the process through which I created one of my own ritualised performances, I came to understand heterotopia itself as a 'rite-of-passage' for new modes-of-being, a function that perhaps lay at the heart of queer nightlife's transformational quality.

By marking off a particular site as a privileged cultural space of communication through ritualised action, new ideologies of how the world can be, and how we can relate to each other, are co-created, practiced, and embodied, and special attention is paid to these worldviews due to the symbolically powerful nature of the actions that take place within these sites. Both Bell and Hetherington contend that these alternative spaces of either ritual or heterotopia are absorbed, in a way, into the body (Bell 1992; Hetherington 1997). After these alternative experiences, participants do now simply return to the replication of hegemony in their day-to-day existence: they leave, and are changed. It is this potential for change that I turn to within my final chapter.

8.

The Inside Goes Out, or, What Happens After the Sun Comes Up?

Within his autobiographical analysis of gay bars, Jeremy Atherton-Lin writes that “[g]ay is an identity of longing, and there is a wistfulness to beholding it in the form of a building, like how the sight of a theatre stirs the imagination” (2021, 13). Reading this, I was reminded of walking past The Beat Megaclub in Brisbane’s Fortitude Valley when I was around 13 years old. At this time, the inner-city was still a strange and alien place to me, and I followed my Dad around the sun-blasted city blocks until we walked up Warner Street, and onto the corner of Ann. There, he pointed out the garish yet formidable façade of the building, telling me offhandedly that it is *where poofters go*, before turning away. Knowing nothing of queer life up until this point, this was the first time I remember seeing it, in some way, manifest, and in the pre-conscious murk of puberty, denial and ignorance, I took his slur personally without understanding why, and as we turned the street corner my eyes followed the building in my peripheries, my head turned to my shoulder, staring for as long as I could without giving my profound interest away.

In hindsight, the affective response of both my Dad and I was an encounter with the way heterotopic spaces ‘leak’ outwards, and my first experience, specifically, of the powerful influence queer nightlife spaces can exert on their spatial, cultural, and social surroundings. Stavros Stavrides, influenced by the work of Kevin Hetherington, states that

> [h]eterotopias can be taken to concretize paradigmatic experiences of otherness, defined by the porous and contested perimeter that

> separates normality from deviance. Because this perimeter is full of combining/separating thresholds, heterotopias are not simply places of the other, or the deviant as opposed to normal, but places in which otherness proliferates, spilling over into the neighbouring areas of "sameness." Heterotopias thus mark an osmosis between situated identities and experiences that can effectively destroy those strict taxonomies that ensure social reproduction. Through their osmotic boundaries, heterotopias diffuse a virus of change (Stavrides 2006, 178).

Within this interpretation, Stavrides proposes that heterotopias are incubatory spaces of Otherness, and that this alterity is not confined to the heterotopic site. By their very nature as threshold-bridging entities, they are primed for the breaking down of categories both within their loose confines and moving outwards into the everyday world.

Within this chapter, I focus once again on the membrane between heterotopia's 'inside' and its 'outside.' Supported by interviews with nightlife performers, performance analysis, and the work of prior scholars on the impact of nightlife, I find that heterotopia impacts and transforms the dominant world that is its context. It does this through intermediary forms, but I focus especially on the participants themselves as the vehicles for these changes, evidenced within their altered affectual relationship with heterotopic spaces and their everyday world. I conclude with the proposition that heterotopic space is not only found within the time-space of the heterotopic event, but extends outwards into the lives of the people that have passed through it: it takes form in the everyday through the altered behaviours, ideologies, and beliefs that arise in the wake of heterotopic experience.

Moral Panic: The Policing of Porosity

Although it is porosity that provides heterotopic sites with their broader potential, is it also this mode of operation, described by Stavrides as a virus of change, that ensures they are also seen as a threat by those invested in the status quo. As was discussed within Chapter Six, queer nightlife spaces have had a close relationship with ideas of virality. Even before the HIV/AIDS epidemic, however, underground queer bars, parties, or cruising zones were feared due to a more abstract threat of contamination: a fear that the sexually-liberated behaviour at these sites would spread outwards, polluting the moral foundation of society (Bristow 2007; Lin 2021, 28-30; Scherer 2021; Wotherspoon 2016). This sense of moral judgment still dominates popular discussion and Government policy within Australia, couched implicitly in terms that instil dread of queer replication—that queer people, especially transgender or gender non-conforming people, will propagate more of themselves, or that the acceptance of queer sex will lead to a wider spread of other acts such as paedophilia and bestiality (Barber 2019; Chonody et al. 2020, 61). In recent years, this framing of the virality of queerness has been and continues to be weaponised against targets such as the Safe Schools Program, gender confirmation laws, marriage rights, and sexual content on the internet, as a slew of religious lobbyists, companies, politicians, journalists, and their allies wage a crusade against any sites (both physical and digital) where a queer consciousness may take form.[28] Although virality has been reclaimed from purely negative usages, such as Jih-Fei Cheng's essay on the infectious power of queer gesture (2021), the threat of a queerness that, left to its own devices,

[28] For more information on campaigns against the Safe Schools program and transgender communities, please see Garcia and Badge's (2021) report on transgender coverage in Australian media, Lewis' (2021) article on Mark Latham's introduction of The Education Legislation Amendment 2020 (Parental Freedoms) Bill into the NSW Parliament, and Tomazin and Cook (2017). For a comprehensive account of the No Campaign against equalising marriage law, see *Going Postal: More Than 'Yes' or 'No'* (2018) edited by Quinn Eades and Vivienne Son, Palin's (2017) coverage of the No Campaign's advertisements, and Chonody et al.'s research on the negative impacts of the No Campaign on LGBTQIA+ people (2020). For reportage and analysis surrounding the attacks against sexualised spaces online, see Badge (2021) and Liu (2020).

proliferates continues to be leveraged by lawmakers into widespread compliance for a cascade of assaults on privacy and censorship rights (Liu 2020).

Politicians and commentators stoking moral panic are a relentless feature of contemporary life: Michael Warner describes it as “a way to tap the vast power of sexual shame, disgust, and moralism for partisan ends” (1999, 14). Rather than a sincere interest in the wellbeing of people, campaigns are designed instead to create an irrational fear to attract political capital, viewers, or in the social media age, followers. A clear demonstration of how this impacts queer nightlife sites is the targeting of *Unicorns* founder and promoter Delsi Cat in 2017. Marijke Rancie, a fervent Mormon who featured prominently within the No Campaign and runs an influential Facebook page, posted images of Delsi where she appeared scantily clad in party attire (Delsi Cat 2019; Schneiders and Tomazin 2018). Noting her work with a range of queer youth organisations, Rancie characterised Delsi’s involvement in nightlife as a corrupting force on Australian children and, by extension, Australian society. After Delsi sued her for defamation, Rancie was represented by a Christian law firm that models their conduct after the dictates of the Bible (OUTinPerth 2019), turning the suit into an exemplary instance of the cultural battlelines that were being inflamed by the conservative Government at the time. Returning to the idea of virality, although it creates a compelling metaphor, it does not do justice to the complexity of how heterotopia functions. Nightlife heterotopias are not hosts in which ideas either replicate themselves or adapt for ultimate transmissibility, but are rather contested sites riven by conflict and ambivalence. Alternative concepts of how-to-be are not dictated from a pulpit to be mindlessly received, but are performatively created through a process that can often be combative and uncomfortable, as likely to generate oppositions as it is to clone. They do, however, hold some kind of exciting and potentially exponentialising force, something that no doubt attracts this fear of conservatives, as well as the unequivocable pull of these sites to queer people.

Unexpected Routes

As is perhaps clear from this discussion already, the way these spaces are transmitted more broadly through culture are often characterised by ambivalence, disgust, bigotry, and non-linear flowlines. When I was 17, I was barely aware of my own queerness or queer culture beyond the few glimpses I had seen through the warped lenses of reality TV and pornography. Outside of discreetly joining some gay sex chat rooms, I was not at all connected to any virtual or actual communities that discussed queer histories or human rights, nor was I presented with examples of what a gay life could look like, beyond the fear that had been instilled in me of contracting HIV. It was within this context that any connection to a community outside of my own feelings of alienation took on profound importance, providing a crack of sunlight on which I fixated all kinds of strange fantasies of liberation. When I met another student—a closeted boy from a religious family—who moonlighted on weekends as a go-go dancer at the local gay nightclub (in Darwin), I was equal parts perplexed, fascinated, and impressed. To me he seemed an emissary from another world. When I ruminated on this other life, both perverse and alluring as it seemed, I found myself listening to the rising pop star Kesha's track 'Take it Off.' Despite having had next-to-no exposure to nightlife, let alone queer performance, the lyrics and the slamming, distorted headiness of this song called me in that same unexplainable, ethereal way as had The Beat Megaclub and the discovery of my new friend's night-time activities. As naive as I was, it was still hard to miss the various nods to queer nightlife scattered throughout: "There's a place downtown / Where the freaks all come around / It's a hole in the wall / It's a dirty free-for-all… There's a place I know / If you're looking for a show / Where they go hardcore / And there's glitter on the floor" (Kesha 2010c). I would listen to this, and imagine my friend dancing, and imagine the inside of the Beat Megaclub, gathering each tiny shred of queerness that had crossed my path into a fantastical collage of my potential future.

Returning to this song eleven years later, it is clear I did not fully grasp the implications of how it arose from sites of queer nightlife, through the lens of a young pansexual woman and amplified by the platform of the music industry. Kesha's early interviews reveal a strange attraction, and an exploitative fascination, with utilising drag performers as muses and backup dancers. Despite using harmful language, she discusses how her experiences as a patron at queer events influenced her music and understanding of her own sexuality: "I have a song I wrote the other night called 'Take It Off' about when I went to a drag show, and how really turned on I was by these transvestite men taking clothes off. I was like, what does that even make me?" (Kesha 2009). In another interview, she goes on to elaborate a complex interplay of desire and shame that is evinced by the spectacle of gender-defiant queer nightlife, stating that

> [f]reaks are what make everything mildly more interesting in life but with trannies, they make me want to be a better woman. I see these men who have way better bodies than I do, more beautiful faces, better complexions, beautiful makeup, and they're more fun than any person I've met in my life. They make me feel like I'm not a very good woman (Kesha 2010b).

Despite the stigmatising language that reflects how these artists are caricatured, exoticised, and made ripe for commercial exploitation, Kesha and her music remains in a compellingly ambivalent posture in relationship to these party-performers. Far from dismissing them as mere spectacle or amusement, Kesha describes drag club performances as a confrontation with, and a shattering of, gender and sexual norms that she had, until that moment, not questioned. Kesha points explicitly to the way drag performance reveals *all* gendered attributes as performance, leading her to feel a deep insecurity about manifestations of her own gender (Kesha 2010a). Meanwhile, the amorphous blend of feminine and masculine traits opened the doorway to exploring her own queer sexuality (Kesha 2010a). Even within this problematic framework, the transformative affects of specific queer

nightlife performances are translated into broader culture and disseminated outwards from the physical space of its happening; even when so far removed from their original source, the pull of these performances were still formative, as far away as Darwin, within my internal renderings of what a queer life could be.

While reviewing footage from a 1982 street party in the Castro, Jeremy Atherton Lin posits that the extravagant performances of Sylvester spread outwards from the bounded space of the stage, bar, or club, destabilising the norms of dress and behaviour of the surrounds. Described variously as an "otherworldly leak," a "trickle effect," or "slippages" (2021, 141), Lin credits these performances with the effeminate cracks he glimpses in the otherwise-uniform, refined masculinity of gay men milling about in public space. A backwards glance at the founding mythologies of queer history provides ample evidence as to the enduring power of this sentiment on the queer imagination, no better encapsulated by the riot and ensuing demonstrations that surged outwards from the Stonewall Inn in 1969, or in the activist rallying cry that would be popularised years later: 'Out of the bars and into the streets!' (Grigg, O'Callaghan, and Cunningham 2021; Lin 2021). Closer to home, this phrase is central to the origin story of Sydney's first Gay and Lesbian Mardi Gras in 1978, which first began as an anniversary march and street party commemorating the Stonewall Inn riots, which turned into a night of brutal arrests. This night, and the protests that followed, continue to be commemorated themselves through yearly Mardi Gras celebrations over four decades later (Grigg, O'Callaghan, and Cunningham 2021).

One of the primary developments of heterotopic theory by Hetherington (1997) and Tompkins (2014) is their framing of it as an experimental zone wherein utopic or alternative ideals are rehearsed, performatively rendering new models for social relation that then, perhaps, may spread outwards to influence the social norms of the broader context (Hetherington 1997; Tompkins 2014). Hetherington describes this succinctly as "a glimpse… before the fact" (1997, 143), ascribing to these sites a potentially futuristic, or even prophetic, quality. In his central argument, heterotopia

is almost characterised as a method of social, rather than genetic, evolution, housing the real sites wherein cultural mutations are born and, in some instances, flourish, eventually becoming in some way a dominant way of thinking or being. This movement from the instigations of a fringe experimental zone to its spillage out to the social context it defines itself against is a key trait of heterotopic space, and is central to how they are perceived as simultaneously sites of existential moral threat or transformative, radical liberation. The ways in which queer nightlife spaces leak out from beyond their walls are multitudinous and unpredictable, reaching out to their surrounding city blocks, carving out channels for political activism through urban space, and refracting through global media to unleash errant affects on unsuspecting audiences. For the remainder of this chapter, I will focus on further key examples of how this heterotopic trickle effect has impacted participants, and public space, within a local context.

Out of the Bar (and to the Post Box)

The Australian Marriage Law Postal Survey of 2017 was a powerful current through Australia's queer communities, and concurrently through Naarm's queer nightlife spaces. Despite the Australian Parliament's ability to change law by a simple vote of sitting Members, the conservative Liberal National Party caved into pressure from the religious right-wing faction within its ranks. In an effort to relieve popular public pressure to equalise marriage law while not alienating queerphobic constituents, donors and members, the Government decided to send out a letter to every single Australian in the country with a Yes or No question: "Should the law be changed to allow same-sex couples to marry?" (Australian Bureau of Statistics 2017). This resolved the schism within Government by allowing them to not take any position on the matter: however, by outsourcing the

decision to the public, the Government encouraged prejudice and queerphobic attacks by raising the profile of these positions as an equally valid counterpoint to those who were asking not to be discriminated against or harmed. Predictably, vindicating bigotry had profound consequences. Sitting Government Members used their time in Parliament to promote hate speech, while religious organisations and neo-Nazis alike took to the televisions and the streets to express their disgust at queer people's existence (Badge 2018; Sainty and Taylor 2017). It was found that "[v]erbal and physical assaults against LGBT people doubled in the aftermath of the survey, accompanied by a dramatic increase in stress, anxiety and depression within the community" (Badge 2018), with a study concluding that, perhaps unsurprisingly, this Government-instigated frenzy of violence led to detrimental mental health impacts for queer Australians (Verelli et al. 2019).

Every element of this political exercise felt personal and tumultuous. When I was hanging laundry in the backyard in Brunswick and, looking up, saw a gargantuan *NO* written across the sky—jettisoned from the back of a plane—it felt like a finger pointed directly down towards me. Inherent in this *NO* was an absolute refusal: not only to acknowledge our right to marry, but our right to even exist. That a letter would be sent out to every citizen posing a question that would not affect the vast majority of them was angering and alienating, causing a range of personal responses from refusing to participate in the whole humiliating charade, to realising that the Survey had become a proxy battle on queerness as a whole. The way the discourse on marriage bulldozes nuance and the intricacies of feeling of the individual was articulated, somewhat presciently in Australia's case, by Warner when he wrote "[o]ne only has to pop the question—for or against gay marriage?—to find oneself at once irrelevant to a process that is no longer a debate, blinded by the urgent temporality of the headline, and suckered into a phony plebiscite" (1999, 84). Personal feelings on marriage aside, it was clear that the religious right were leveraging this cause as a method to further incite harm against queer people, seeking licence from the voting public that this position was the popular one. When the vote result was returned in favour of passing the law by a large majority, I had taken a five-minute break from a job at a tech start-up, and was sitting outside on Collins Street, the only

person from my office who was even aware that the vote results were being returned that day. Reading the news, I started crying with relief, and spent the rest of the day sneaking glances at my phone, seeing queers beginning to gather all over the city to celebrate. Despite it being a Wednesday afternoon, by close of business a gargantuan street party had taken over Lygon Street outside Trades Hall.

As with other queer crises, sites of queer nightlife enabled opportunities to take those moments of alienation—alone at the clothesline looking up, sitting on Collins Street crying—and recontextualise them into a broader community of action. On the 28th of September 2017, I was going through my Instagram stories when I noticed friends at *Honcho Disko* posting unexpected footage: what looked like a crowd of queers standing or walking outside The 86, with fleeting glimpses of performers Dandrogyny and Betty Grumble performing in the street. Following these brief virtual encounters, and after seeing several posts attesting to the necessary catharsis of this performance the next day, I got the sense that something profound had taken place. Dandrogyny, reflecting on this performance years later, tells me that "it was during the plebiscite, the yes-no bullshit that the Government kind of brought into being. And I had collected my vote from the mail at home, and I was like, I need to do this thing but I don't even wanna open it, I just want to ignore it, out of sight out of mind" (Newell). One of their instinctual reactions, like my own, was a refusal to participate—however, given the platform of performance at *Honcho Disko*, their co-performer Betty Grumble and themselves came to an alternative conclusion, deciding that "the power of participating in a way that's very public and very, kind of, grotesquely and rightfully political, and charged, is what needs to happen" (Newell). Grumble describes the performance, from conceptualisation to activation, as follows:

> We were in the living room like what are we gonna do…. then *that* [the Postal Survey] was happening which is such an act of violence by the Government. And we were trying to think of ways to

> acknowledge it without re-traumatising the room, and how you handle that. Because people felt lots of different ways about even the act of doing the vote, and I guess we leant into our shared mischievous fairy clown energy… Like, we'll just go do it with everyone, because no one has to do that action alone, and that's how we get through these moments. The community comes together and it's not just your hand extending the letter, it's all of our big limb together (Grumble 2020).

Much like Warner articulates the strategy of isolation and privatisation as a conservative strategy to make people more vulnerable to the effects of shame (1999, 13), Betty Grumble and Dandrogyny identified the postal survey as another right-wing divide and conquer tactic, and sought to pierce through it with an improvised riot of public communitarian affect.

Recounting the event, Betty Grumble paints a picture of the bar-crowd spilling outwards to form a loose cavalcade across the street, buttressing Dandrogyny's fortitude while posting their envelope and, by proxy, shifting their own relationship with the act. She says

> I remember jumping down off the stage, and I was meant to lead the crowd out with a megaphone, and we stopped the traffic, and walked everyone across the street. And then I remember Dan kind of kicking the letter box, or kicking the mailbox, looking resplendent and glittering and tulle and fluoro, and then we, yeah, just hootered and hollered. And turning something that is quite grim and sad into a celebratory thing, like oh yeah you want us to have to post on our, are we sub-human or not? Great. We'll just turn it into a party. Yeah. The defiance of that (Grumble 2020).

This performance is another in a long line of examples—a tradition, really—of queer spaces of nightlife transporting the social alternatives from within the physical space of the venue outwards, leveraging these ties into an action that functions as both direct political engagement and recuperative therapy for the insistent violence visited against queer people from the broader public sphere. Returning to the developing theory of heterotopia as a real, experimental social zone that leaks outwards to influence the relations of its context, this performance is an explicit embodiment of the model. Grumble's analogy of lone, individual hands fusing together to form a big limb, refracting an attempt to belittle and destroy a community back to the Government that unleashed it, is an apt one. The unique bonds forged within these spaces, Grumble intimates, can reach out far beyond their confines, enacting change within the world not only at the level of Governance, but on a deeply personal level that allows those of us who are victim to oppression to recognise we are not alone.

The methods of this outwards movement from the site of queer nightlife are manifold: Instagram stories and posts; Facebook status updates; photography; recounting of the event between peers; physically, as the materiality of the crowd takes up the street; politically, as letters are posted; affectually, as associated queers cannibalise the violence of the Survey with joyous celebration; discursively, as the originary event is captured through oral history interviews and analysed in projects such as this thesis; and finally, even further to those who interact with any of these methods, receiving the performance second-hand and taking it to places unknown from there.[29] These methods are general, but are made more effective or urgent, perhaps, by the yearning many marginalised people feel for another way of being, and the connection they feel when they glimpse it. Applying the heterotopic model as it stands, this example reinforces that these sites can be considered heterotopic, in the sense that the alternative social relations that mark their difference do in fact reach beyond the temporal and physical boundary of the heterotopia itself to

[29] For more on how culture 'spreads,' especially within the context of virality and queerness, see Campbell and Grindt's *Viral Dramaturgies* (2018).

influence its surroundings. It also provides some weight to Hetherington's characterisation of these sites as evolutionary engines of culture (1997): where resistance, capitulation, and response to overarching norms are experimentally developed, tested out, and if successful may lead to a broader socio-cultural shift.

'I Found Myself': Transformed Identity in Heterotopia's Wake

Measuring the full impact of particular heterotopic sites on their cultural context would be, most likely, not possible. However, on the micro scale, a glimpse of their influence can be seen writ large in the transformational testimonies of individual participants, whose personal worlds have been irrevocably changed through their engagement with queer nightlife spaces. Some of this is evidenced by the immediate power of affectual response. When John Pants, the organiser of *Honcho Disko*, saw the abovementioned performance of Dandrogyny and Betty Grumble, he described it as "a major scene… one of those moments where music—like art and community and all of that just all combines, and then you get a little emotional and you know, it kind of, makes you understand that there's importance as well as fun in what we're doing" (Pants 2020). Quinn Eades, writing in a retrospective on the Postal Survey a year later, recounts watching Betty Grumble perform at Howler in Brunswick. After Grumble left the stage, Eades describes the feeling of dancing as "medicinal… I find myself wishing I could spend the next six weeks in this pulsating room full of queer and trans folk, and that November the 15th could come and go with us barely noticing" (2018, 57). Despite the insular characterisation of the nightlife space in this account—a throbbing cocoon where a kind of healing can take place—the very fact of its recounting in digital and print form demonstrates how even the affect of community insularity reaches out to encompass external witnesses.

Each of the above momentary experiences of difference are highly personal, internal realisations of difference, but they are also, crucially, experiences that are forged in relation with other people within certain formulations of space. Despite the perhaps esoteric nature of these alternative relations, as well as the difficulty in articulating the meaning of these experiences to others, there is a clear transformational element evidenced by these accounts and those I will be further exploring below. Compelling, embodied, and life-altering, the impact of heterotopic spaces on participants' self-identification and day-to-day behaviour is testament to their ability to shift cultural possibilities beyond the limits of their boundaries.

Warner writes that "[t]o seek out queer culture, to interact with it and learn from it, is a kind of public activity. It is a way of transforming oneself, and at the same time helping to elaborate a commonly accessible world" (Warner 1999, 71). As discussed within the previous chapter, it can be difficult to disentangle observations such as these from the actuality that they performatively constitute, creating an alternative norm of what these spaces *should* offer participants, and providing a measure against which people feel they succeed or fail at being queer within these spaces. Concurrently, the process Warner observes and the process by which this perception of queer sites becomes normalised is profoundly heterotopic, articulating and forging new ways of relating in contrast to day-to-day life. This simultaneously transformative and political quality is articulated frequently by participants, despite the varying contexts in which they experienced it. David Murphy talks of going to hardcore raves in Queensland as a teenager, saying that "I started discovering my mind, my identity, different types of people, sexuality, definitely it opened up a door" (Murphy 2020). Dandrogyny talks about a year they spent in Sydney, after securing a job as a dancer at the Opera House. Gravitating around a venue called Tokyo Sing Song, they credit the performer and host Matt Format with providing a glimpse of what they could be themselves, stating that "I feel like their energy and their open-ness and their invitation by being themselves was a real invite to everyone else to come, arrive, and be and explore" (Dandrogyny 2021). Kane Bonato, speaking of a party called Pandora's Box in the Naarm CBD, describes a parallel process of

exploration, explaining that "as I would go, each time I would get a little bit more dressed up, and then by the end I was kind of doing full drag… And I kind of fell in love with that environment" (Bonato 2020).

Within participant accounts, there is an embedded narrative of increased permissiveness, and even total transformation (or realisation) of identity, as the alternative norms of the nightlife site allowed them to un-learn the behavioural strictures under which they lived their day-to-day lives. These alternative norms, although beginning with explorations at the nightlife site, were almost always identified as having impacts outside the opening and closing hours of the event. Sevara Zaric puts it succinctly when she says "the club space doesn't stay within those, you know, 9PM to 5AM hours during the weekend. It leaves, it lives with us for the weekday as well" (Zaric 2020). The relationship between the club and the everyday is linked here in a heterotopic way, as the experiences of the nightlife site are carried, then, outwards, changing the individual and subsequently unleashing the alternative sphere of the heterotopia onto its surrounds. Zaric says that "when I first started going to clubs, the club was a safe space for me to dress more extravagantly… Now I've taken that out of it as well. Where I dress a bit more extra in the daytime, I've taken that risk of, you know, of putting something on where people might give me a glare and I just don't care" (Zaric 2020). The glare—the absolutely familiar response to queerness on the street—is a symptom of this clash between societal norms and the vision of queer nightlife behaviours moving out from their sanctioned locales.

Mike Nguyen describes being in the closet, attending nights such as *Honcho Disko*, learning about makeup and drag, and eventually turning to performing himself. He credits this process with assisting in his exploration of gender within his day-to-day life:

> It was twenty-three years of, you know, hiding any form of femininity, or like any feminine traits I had... I was always aware and on watch and on guard, ensuring that no one ever caught me out. I

> loved pop music, I loved being fierce and all that, but I was never able to really showcase that 'til I came out. So I guess I just want to reconcile that through my life and show that you don't have to be one certain way. I wanna be who I am, for me, and not anyone else. So I think the idea of connecting that masculine and feminine side to me in terms of performing really did trickle into my personal life, because I had to start accepting and loving myself, who I really was (Nguyen 2020).

Describing himself more as a gender-fuck artist than a drag artist, the queer nightlife space provided, for him, a necessary site to unearth the suppressed aspects of his identity in a fashion that allowed them to be celebrated rather than scorned. This form of expression and its concomitant confidence was then brought into his daily life. This feeling is mirrored in the interviews of other participants. Delsi Cat says that "Unicorns, for me, like, I feel more confident in who I am, and walk out of the space feeling uplifted for weeks after" (2020). Dandrogyny, after experiencing the queer nightlife space and subsequently experimenting with gender-expression, says that "it wasn't until then that I really found myself, the first time I left the house in heels. And that was really magnetic and amazing, it was like a drug of its own really. It was really quite fantastic" (2021). The moment of puncture is marked not only with confidence, then, but euphoria: the 'world' of the heterotopic site, a site that allows for the excavation of a suppressed (or previously unimagined) self, slips through its membranous exterior in any number of forms, heralded by riots of affect experienced as elation, self-assurance, or as confusion or scorn directed at the rogue mode-of-being from others.

Weird Alice, a performer and event curator from Canada who spent some years working on events in Naarm, articulates how queer nightlife sites enable them to forge a more positive image of themselves, as well as gain a deeper understanding of others:

> …doing these things has helped me be more comfortable in myself, and I think it's because I'm not trying to like, squish myself in spots where I have to adapt negatively, to survive. 'Cause I do that all the time, I'm just literally existing to survive… Doing these things in these spaces that are a lot more welcoming takes a lot of stress off, but also gives me more room to like, gets me out of my own head so I can meet other people and learn more about other people's experiences (Weird Alice 2020).

The spatial framing of these experiences is difficult to overlook. The day-to-day world, within this description, is a claustrophobic place, forcing Weird Alice into a smaller and smaller range of movement wherein they must direct all their effort toward adapting in ways that feel wrong, counter-intuitive, or harmful—ways that shut them off from a genuine and honest connection to others. Conversely, the nightlife site is expansive: it allows Weird Alice to be liberated from the internal, anxious deliberation that is required, second-to-second, in conforming constantly to behavioural norms, instead allowing a more open space for learning about others, allowing others to learn about them, and to learn about themselves.

These temporary experiences can have lasting impacts on the performers, patrons, DJs and promoters who co-create queer nightlife sites. Delsi Cat tells me that "I've had so many lovely letters, or face-to-face convos or emails from people telling me how Unicorns has impacted their life in an ongoing way" (2020). More specifically, she gives second-hand accounts of patrons being able to access an alternative community, or gaining an embodied, expressive language for the way they felt, up until that point, in a way that could not be externalised:

> I've had lots of stories from like trans-femme people saying [*Unicorns* was] the first time they dressed in the gender that they actually were, or felt accepted in that or felt sexy in that, or felt celebrated. So many

> people have told me they met their partner or their friends through the space. Like, I feel like, yeah. It is such a powerful thing to feel a sense of belonging. And community (Delsi Cat 2020).

John Pants, from *Honcho Disko*, speaks of a similar phenomenon, telling me that “I get a message online or something and someone’ll be like, *Honcho* was where I first started coming out, it’s where I first started realising I was queer… and they say thanks because that kind of really showed them that they could be who they wanted to be” (Pants 2020). The notion of heterotopia as a necessary passageway for alternative modes of sociality is realised concretely within these stories of self-affirmation and unfurling. As is evidenced by these accounts, people who engage with queer nightlife spaces may experience them not as a temporally and spatially isolated other-world that they step into and out of, but rather as thresholds to another way of being. Hetherington proposes that this transformative potential is characteristic of all heterotopias (1997), and interestingly it is the alternative value-systems that queer nightlife sites build themselves around such as safety, liberation, transformation, community, cultural identity, gender/sexual expression, and critical deconstruction—systems that have been analysed throughout the preceding chapters—which become the formative frameworks that participants carry into their daily lives.

The World-making Power of Mundanity

When I look at the ways my own life has been transformed through interaction with these sites, it seems both exhilaratingly life-changing and, in a way, tediously obvious. It is through queer nightlife events I met my long-term partner and most of my closest friends; it is through them I have access to a community and support system that has assisted me during all manner of crises completely

unrelated to the original sites of nightlife. It is interaction with these spaces that led me to consider applying for a PhD program, and through my years-long engagement, my role has shifted from stage performer, to DJ, to musician, to producing and promoting my own queer nightlife events. Within my day-to-day life, it has shifted the imaginative inner world by which I set my priorities and dream of a particular kind of future, leading me to pursue new creative interests, fashion aesthetics, or educate myself about the dance, music and cultural histories of these spaces, allowing me to navigate and co-create them from a more informed position.

Rita Felski, in her analysis of theoretical constructions of the everyday, provides a critical framing for the delineation between the quotidian and the novel that is useful for analysing how these everyday developments are related to the queer nightlife spaces that instigated them. For Felski, "[t]he distinctiveness of the everyday lies in its lack of distinction and differentiation; it is the air one breathes, the taken-for-granted backdrop, the commonsensical basis of all human activities" (2000, 80). Within her critique, she lays out how tradition and habit are often unfairly cast as anachronistic drags on the lightning-pace of capitalist growth and innovation, tarring those who are thought to be tied most closely to the demands of nature and basic survival—her prime example being women and the working class—as unthinking drones, more primitive beings unable to share in the full enlightenment of the self-determining individual (Felski 2000). The small rituals of daily life may be imbued with ideology, she says, but this does not inherently mean their repetition is compliance: it cannot be expected of anyone to problematise the taken-for-granted nature of every thing they encounter, or to unpick the underpinnings of their existence at every single moment (Felski 2000). The everyday, rather than being a specific activity, is typified as an affective zone wherein all manner of things—primarily those things we encounter regularly—are placed, able to be dealt with almost without conscious thought, in a near-somnambulist state.

When I say the transformations within my day-to-day life are tediously obvious, it is with this notion of mundanity in mind. To be influenced by your peers, to grow community bonds and to

set your priorities by what will contribute to and gain you standing within that community are everyday experiences, and predictable outcomes of engaging extensively with a culture: from a spatial perspective, however, it is through these overly familiar forces that the alternative ways-of-being that characterise a heterotopia are carried out to influence the day-to-day world. Although the everyday may be defined by a state of "casual inattentiveness" (Felski 2000, 90), it is also ascribed with the power of shaping the essence of our identity. Felski's language brims with the actualising potential of performativity, claiming that "we become who we are through acts of repetition" (2000, 84), that "our identity is formed out of a distinctive blend of behavioural and emotional patterns, repeated over time" (2000, 92), and that "habits form the very basis of who we are" (2000, 95). In this sense Felski, influenced by Butler, reinforces the theory that it is the near-invisible foundation of our habitual, repetitive day-to-day lives that constitute who we are: and, conversely, that it is the elements of this we interrogate and alter that become equally as constitutive.

David Murphy, reflecting on Hugs & Kisses closing, speaks of exporting the ways-of-being with other people he learned there to other sites:

> Well I learnt, everything that I learnt from Hugs and Kisses and *LEFAG*, I'm trying to do, spread out in… I still think it's really important to take up space, even if they are sort of dud spaces compared to Hugs and Kisses. And I still think it's important to keep that energy around, 'cause it isn't just the venue that contributes to it, it's the connections that we make (Murphy 2020).

The affective mode of the site can be—or at least, attempted to be—moved outward from the material heterotopic space that facilitated it, to be partially propagated in other locations and maintained through relationships with other people. Within this post-heterotopic relation, Murphy describes "being there for the bad times, being there for the hard talks, giving advice about how to navigate through this world and this industry… What I'm trying to keep, is where I feel the spirit still

is, you know. Where the spirit of it all still is, which can never be physical space" (Murphy 2020). Instilled with a glimpse of another mode of being in the world, and convinced of its necessity and importance, it is within these bonds between people that heterotopic formulations begin to influence their surrounds. Long after a queer nightlife site has been closed, the alternatives that took form there are not only maintained, but tested against the resistant hegemonic barriers of the day-to-day. Behavioural and identitarian changes—perhaps only recognisable in hindsight—unleash a kind of quotidian drift, as the aftereffects of the heterotopic experience begin to influence the actions of participants in its wake.

As discussed throughout this thesis, notions of transformation, liberation, and community are broadly ascribed to queer nightlife sites in both academia and popular culture (Di Mattia 2018; Jennex 2020; Sun 2020). Interpreting these sites through a heterotopic model, however, offers another avenue to understanding not only how they impact participants' day-to-day lives, but how the ideologies of specific heterotopic spaces proliferate and mutate beyond the bounded transformation of the individual. Marlon Bailey documents many such everyday effects of queer nightlife, particularly in the alternative kinship structure of houses, and the care and creative labour of what he calls *housework* that holds them together (2013, 80). He writes that "an actual home—a building—is not the locus of Ballroom kinship. Instead, because the house is social and not necessarily physical, the housework exists within the social relations of the members and emphasises the activity of creating kin without relying on a fixed space" (Bailey 2013, 99). Although this analysis is grounded in the socio-cultural context of Black queer communities in Detroit, I note this example as a prominent and convincing argument for the more abstract relations—forged, crucially, with the nightlife site as their nexus—that expand beyond these places, as the work of alternative world-building continues throughout day-to-day life.

Craig Jennex's archival work on queer club spaces of the 70s and 80s in Canada is another example of scholarship that links the alternative social relations of the dance space to the broadened

political imaginaries of its participants (Jennex 2020). Relying on documentation of meeting minutes, testimony, and news articles, Jennex points to the generative political force unleashed by The Turret nightclub, resulting in stable employment for queers prior to anti-discrimination laws, increased engagement with other queer community groups, contentious organising meetings surrounding the management of the space, and a gay street bashing patrol led by the club's own resident DJ. Based on this research, he proposes that

> [a]t the Turret, individuals were moved by the music, and the effect of this did not end when the music stopped. Feelings permeated bodies and enlivened individuals long after they left the dance floor. Disco's hold on dancers after we leave the dance floor is not just physical but also something more capacious. To attain feelings of belonging, collectivity, and agency—even for a brief moment—can be transformative, perhaps particularly for marginalized individuals: it changes us and our relationship to the world in which we live (Jennex 2020, 424).

Jennex explicitly ties the heterogenous formation of the queer nightclub space to a politically performative process that can generate a glimpse of a more attractive societal structure, one that is carried outwards within our bodies and the virtual utopian imaginary of different futures (Jennex 2020; Muñoz 2009). Although this interpretation is not ascribed to all queer spaces, especially those that exclude people based on race or class, Jennex links the demands of contemporary queer movements such as Black Lives Matter Toronto to this spatial legacy. In halting the Toronto Pride Parade of 2016 to, among other things, draw attention to the lack of party stages and spaces for queer Black people, Indigenous people, and people of colour, BLM-TO sought to intervene in the commercialisation and homogenisation of queer experience. The urgency of the action re-centred these sites not as places for temporary escape and celebration, but as spaces that "[enable] a

diverse notion of queer political organising and [create] an affective state that [carries] over into other forms of political activity" (Jennex 2020, 424). The party, in other words, is not a diversion from concrete political action, but essential to the fracturing of a stunted political imagination.

The stories throughout this chapter demonstrate a cohesive penetration of the queer nightlife space into the everyday lives of its co-creators and patrons, and subsequently into the surrounding social fabric. Within participant accounts of spilling out from the bar in protest, to stepping out the front door, to walking down the street, to forging mutual aid and mentoring networks, the transformative ripple effects of queer nightlife space can be clearly identified in the shifting norms of day-to-day behaviour, and the overall ideological frames through which participants interpret their world. Additionally, understanding these sites *as* heterotopic imbues them with the slippery ambivalence that avoids the binarity implicit within scholarship such as Jennex's (2020), which prioritises a focus on the transformative and expansive potential of some spaces—those which increase access across intersectional lines, and that bolster the agency of the most oppressed—over the insular, exclusionary practices of other spaces that prioritise or even enhance hierarchisation between modes of being such as race, class, gender, and ability.

Heterotopia is not inherently aligned with the struggle for social justice: in this way, it highlights the stakes that lie beneath the perpetual battle over queer spaces, such as protests that block Pride and Mardi Gras parades. All heterotopic spaces—even those that exclude and harm—hold the latent potential for what is otherwise referred to in a more positive light as 'transformation': they are all generative of an amorphous, temporary social structure at odds with the everyday that can lead to profound changes within participants' lives. Moving away, then, from an approach that places a higher transformative value on sites that are more heterogenous, equitable, and radical, heterotopia provides a language to understand how *all* sites that briefly warp social relations unleash rogue affects through individuals and into the broader culture. These impacts may be less obvious within those sites that cleave closer to overarching norms, which may

account for the comparatively negligible scholarly focus on these spaces as opposed to those which offer a more striking difference to the dominant social structure (a focus that has been, at least in part, replicated within this thesis). Nevertheless, it is likely that even those queer nightlife spaces that exaggerate certain modes of domination are working as heterotopically, and hence transformatively, as those that upset oppressive systems.

The contestation that characterises the inclusionary struggles around queer party spaces is not only related to access and safety for those who are often denied it. As experimental laboratories of culture (Hetherington 1997), the eternal conflict surrounding these heterotopic sites is perhaps linked to their simultaneously destabilising and reproductive ability, an implicit recognition of their at times unnerving capacity to catalyse change, regardless of the ideological form it takes. With this in mind, protests, callouts, and campaigns from both queer communities and queer-phobic oppressors are more than mere territorial disputes over urban space. Rather they are attempts to broaden, or curtail, the potentiality of the political. This process may not be linear, with the complexity and messiness of heterotopia leading just as often to outrage, trauma, triggers, raids, and lawsuits as it does to solidarity, cohesion, community, and ideological replication, but it is precisely within the moment of these oppositions that the alternative values of heterotopia are rendered. Heterotopias may not make people after their own image, yet the tide of their lasting influence is obvious within the everyday lives of those who engage with them. Despite their innate unpredictability, the 'leak' of alternative social values into dominant culture designates heterotopias as sites that will always be central to moral panics over society's future, as it is within them that potential models for futurity take form and are tested in micro. In heterotopia's wake, the imaginative realm of the cultural and political is expanded: a sensational alteration of the ordinary whose force cannot be sustained beyond its specific time and place, but that may—meekly, protrusively, fragmentarily—incur into daily life, as participants leverage opportunities to flip their glimpse of something else into a less contingent reality.

Conclusion

Queer nightlife in Naarm has been transformed, in many ways, since the years in which I conducted these interviews and attended the events described in this thesis. The events that have continued have changed location and form, while a new generation of event promoters create their own alternative spaces. At the outset of the project, I was attracted to the wave of parties and events centred around an explicitly queer ethos—over time, however, this queerness has moved away from the frontline of party advertisements, and become embedded within the methodological underpinnings of promoting an event. It is now common for events to be held with entirely queer line-ups, yet not to be promoted as a queer event. Concomitantly, artists who were once booked exclusively within the relatively distinct queer events scene are now booked to play for 'straight' audiences, while audiences themselves are increasingly mixed. This is replicated on even larger scale, as artists from the queer underground secure ever-greater recognition within touring and festival circuits, with festivals integrating queer artists or even creating specifically queer activations and spaces within their festival in partnership with queer underground promoters. Further, it is now far more common for spaces to be approached with much more than queerness in mind, with promoters considering multiple forms of marginalisation to program their event, to potentially forge solidarities between different kinds of people and creative forms.

All of this in itself harks back to the membranous nature of heterotopic space, and the flows of influence that move between cultural conversation in the mainstream and the alterities generated with heterotopia. Within this thesis I have charted *some* of these flows and how they take form in, and are evidenced by, the spaces of Naarm's queer nightlife. This has served as a partial documentation of a scene marked by ephemerality and instability, but also as a model for interrogating the many hypocrisies, contradictions, and crises that arise from queer nightlife's common pursuit of the liberative, radical, and transformative. Heterotopia is not the only model for

interpreting the ambivalence of queerness and of nightlife, yet I have demonstrated its alchemical potential through bringing it into conversation with a variety of theoretical models throughout this thesis, namely affect, assemblage, memory, performativity, ritualisation, and the everyday. Building on the work of prior theorists of heterotopia, and the important work of queer theorists in envisioning a queer utopia, I have made an argument for heterotopia to be considered as a tool for understanding how queer people create political space, and unpicking the difficult realities they encounter when doing so. Further, I propose that heterotopia offers the means for a systematic analysis of how marginalised communities and underground art spaces interact with the mainstream, with other competing alternative sites, and the intimate changes these spaces make to the inner worlds of the people who engage with them. Perhaps most importantly to the theory of heterotopia, I contend that the conscious creation of alternative space is only one part of heterotopic construction: rather, it is through the performative co-creation of heterotopic space that participants forge their ideas of what utopia and the everyday mean, a process that cannot be fully predicted in advance by promoters, performers, or DJs. In this way, heterotopia is not so much the failed pursuit of utopia, weighed down by the trappings of the everyday, but is rather an experimental construct that can generate new ideas of alterity, and thus also the mundane.

This process is integral to the survival of queer and other marginalised people, and offers one explanation as to why heterotopic sites such as nightlife have been a core part of politicised queer existence for well over a century. Afforded glimpses of being beyond the strictures that bind in everyday life, it follows that those who are oppressed or who do not belong are attracted to spaces where alternatives to this existence are created. What this research demonstrates is that this attraction is not escapism: rather, heterotopias may be a necessary part of any political project that aims to alter the status quo, in whatever form they take. As the heterotopias of nightlife surge unpredictably into mainstream life, reflected potently in the wave of scholarship attentive to these sites all over the globe, there remains ample ground for the examination of nightlife's function and importance. My hope, or maybe my utopic glimpse afforded to me by heterotopic experience, is that

the work I have done throughout this thesis contributes to a de-stigmatisation of nightlife spaces, a stigma that leads too often to a suite of policy measures designed to suppress or destroy nightlife. Once their complex cultural, political, and social functions are rendered explicit, this suppression is revealed as not only viciously bigoted, but as an important part of a broader political project designed to quash sites of political galvanisation that may foster solidarity within and across oppressed classes.

An understanding of heterotopia gives us the means to articulate the radical potential of queer nightlife space, while remaining attentive to the less-than-liberative aspects of behaviour and spatial practice that also, ambiguously, constitute it. Beyond this, the developments to heterotopic theory that I have proposed throughout this thesis are applicable to fields and spaces unrelated to queerness or nightlife, and join a critical mass of scholarship that has developed the original sketch provided by Foucault into a complex and unique model tailored to interpreting the sensational complexity of contemporary life.

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