UNBOUND QUEER TIME IN LITERATURE, CINEMA, AND VIDEO GAMES

Edited by
Juan Francisco Belmonte Ávila
and Estíbaliz Encarnación-Pinedo

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Unbound Queer Time in Literature, Cinema, and Video Games investigates the potential of queer conceptions of time to unbind forms of understanding identities. In doing so, it recognizes the power of time to determine us but chooses to queer time and turn it into an ally of unbound forms of understanding identities.

Through the analysis of different media—literature, cinema, and video games—the chapters revolve around three key ideas: that there are inherently queer styles of using and dealing with time and temporality in culture; that the critical rediscovery of canonical texts and the analysis of largely ignored queer texts and authors allow for a better understanding of queer identities; and, finally, that normative conceptions of time can—and should—be challenged through critical tools that reconceptualize notions of the self around time.

This volume will be of interest to postgraduate students and researchers working close to areas such as queer and gender studies, media and cinema studies, cultural studies, literary theory, comparative literature, game studies, and art history.

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Because their temporalities are queerer than ours, this book is for Mía, Marcela, Willow, Buffy, and Ernesto.

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Introduction

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1 Queer Time Unbound

Juan Francisco Belmonte Ávila and Estíbaliz Encarnación-Pinedo

Time binds us. We are, desire, become, remember, and project ourselves in and through time. Time is not a line waiting for us to occupy or reign over it. Oftentimes, but even more so when left unscrutinized, it is a limiting actant, aligned with power to force individuals into very precise forms of being, guiding them to predetermined daily rhythms and forms of understanding themselves and others in time. Time is an ever-present and inevitable component of any representation of what is, was, and will be thought to be possible. Yet, just like time binds us, it can be unbound and untangled in return, bringing forth free critical thinking and facilitating other processes of becoming ungoverned by the strictures of normativity. As such, this volume recognizes the power of time to determine us, but it also chooses to queer time and make it an ally of untangled forms of understanding identities. In doing so, this volume acknowledges that, as Michel Foucault (1978) explained, history is made to look smooth and unequivocal, but it is also composed of abrupt interruptions and enforced silences in time that, following Elizabeth Freeman's example (2005), can and must be unearthed. This volume is also aware that the way time is represented, or the way representations vary in time, can be used to interpellate individuals into narrow, chrononormative forms of being (Freeman 2010), but it also seeks examples of identities projected through and in time that queer expectations to create freer forms of desiring that problematize linearity. The volume is aware that there are temporal rhythms that normatively lure, gentrify, and reterritorialize identities and bodies but also believes that this propulsion can be subverted (Jack Halberstam 2005) and transformed into a queer song of radical change that, as Esteban Muñoz (2009) claimed, calls people into action and invites them to desire other presents and futures. The common thesis of this volume is that time binds us but, more importantly, that time can also be scrutinized in search of examples where identities are untangled and time itself becomes a queer ally.

This volume identifies three core existing approaches to the study of time and temporality in queer studies which, rather than existing in isolation, are instead in constant dialogue. The first of these approaches is the questioning

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of history to better analyze and understand queer time and queer memory. As Foucault (1978) and David Halperin (2002) have pointed out, the history of sexuality and its attendant phenomena is less a smoothly parsed continuum than a series of abrupt jumps between often non-commensurable epistemic and behavioral regimes. In addition, Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick has claimed that any particular historical moment exhibits a "radical and irreducible incoherence" due to the "unrationalized coexistence" of different models of sex and gender (1990, 85–87). The study of queer history and queer time has recognized the fragmentariness and incongruity of the queer past, dotted by imposed normativizing silences, acts of individual and collective queer assertion, and forms of presence that are more intermittent and flickering than linear and continuous. The study of queer times yields isolated intensities and pregnant moments rather than well-rounded chronicles of rise, maturity, and decline (Freccero 2007a, 2007b). As Annamarie Jagose (2002) has pointed out, this is especially the case for lesbians, whose invisibility has been much more pronounced than that of male homosexuals or transsexuals. To a large extent, the recovery of queerness is the reading of erasures and the pursuit of fragmentary traces.

The discontinuities of queer history are enhanced by the fact that this history dwells on ephemeral, often intangible phenomena: on what Christopher Nealon (2001) and Ann Cvetkovich (2004) have called archives of feelings and affects. Jagose (2012) has more recently shown that queer history also reconstructs a bodily archive, a history of corporeal sensation that might also be termed "erotohistoriograhy" (Freeman 2005), like the one Jagose herself has produced on 20th-century attitudes towards orgasm. Feelings, affects, and sensations are scattered across an uneven record that crosses media and cultural hierarchies and include the normative arts—literature, film, and, in more recent times, digital media—popular artifacts and short-lived or obscure experimental cultural phenomena.

In addition to the study of the past to understand queer identities better, many queer studies scholars have focused on the queer everyday as well. Most work on queer life narratives has insisted on the fact that queer lives deviate from what Dana Luciano has called normative chronobiopolitics: "the sexual arrangement of the time of life" (2007, 9–10). Halberstam (2005, 5–8) has shown that the expected succession of life stages (with youth followed by a more stable "maturity," and subcultural filiation and rebellion yielding to accommodation and acquiescence) is not followed in most queer lives; among queer subjects, subcultural filiation and displacement from the norm may persist throughout a lifetime. Queer lives, in other words, do not follow heterosexual temporalities—a view, incidentally, that poses too stark a distinction between the norm and its others and may well be belied by the "queering" of "heterosexuality" in recent decades. Queer childhood has attracted considerable attention as a form of deviant temporality (Michael Moon 1998; Sedgwick 1991; Steven Bruhm and Natasha Hurley 2004, and Chris Holmlund 2005). Researchers have demonstrated that the linearity

associated with growing up, which for many children means moving headlong into reproductive adulthood, does not always hold for queer children, who, in Kathryn Bond Stockton's phrase, tend to "grow sideways" (2009) and follow alternative maturation paths.

Also ingrained in life narratives and in the quotidian experience of time is trauma, which thwarts the forward movement associated with development, causing blockage and compelling repetition. In queer subjects, trauma usually derives from various forms of homophobic and sexual violence. Cvetkovich's chapter, "The Everyday Life of Queer Trauma" (2004, 15–48), in *An Archive of Feelings*, has become a canonical study that emphasizes not only the destructive character of trauma but also its generative momentum: the way it also prompts political engagement and survival strategies with the capacity to redraw existing maps of sex and gender. Following Cvetkovich and Sedgwick, Alyson Hoy (2012) and Clementine Morrigan (2017) have explored the representation of trauma in contemporary autobiographical writing and criticism from a similar optic. Morrigan describes the "queer time travel of trauma" as a creative way of inhabiting a non-linear flexible time and a form of "mad, queer world-making" (2017, 51).

To scrutinize queer time in these forms and beyond, this volume studies it across three main different media forms: literature, cinema, and video games. Despite this diversity, the organizing force of the book is theme, not form. Thus, instead of structuring the book around the three media forms covered, which would have created one separate section for each medium, the three sections in this collection are arranged around three key ideas around queer time and temporalities. Doing so allows for greater depth in the exploration of the three central ideas this volume analyzes and prevents it from being a concatenation of three "Queer Time in (insert medium)." In choosing this thematic structure, the volume fosters lateral connections across media, as befits the trans-medial character of contemporary production which deviates from a mere succession of media-based interventions.

(Un)Formalizing Queer Times

The first of the central ideas structuring this project is that there is an inherently queer style—or rather a plurality of inherently queer styles—of using, representing, thinking about, and dealing with time and temporality in culture. This idea covers forms of filming, writing, narrating, coding, recording sound, using visual resources, designing, and casting that challenge existing notions of time and time-bound identities.

Judith Butler's (1990, 1993) claims on the performative nature of gender are tied, to an extent, to notions of temporality. Performativity involves repetition, projecting oneself in and through time, and the continuous rethinking and reframing of past identity-making actions that become actualized in the present. Repetition as a time-bound identity maker is also present in Henri Lefebvre's (2004) notion of *dressage*, which—similar to its origin in horse

handling—here stands for the actions and rhythms individuals are taught and forced to repeat and follow daily as part of their normative lives.

An element of repeated and, to an extent, oppressive ordinariness is also present in the connection Lauren Berlant (2011) establishes between queer trauma and time. For her, trauma installs itself in the everyday lives of traumatized individuals, affecting the time and spaces that constitute the ordinary until everything is trauma-colored. Potentially identity-affirming actions, such as those contributing on a daily basis towards home-making or self-care, become imbued with trauma. This creates a tension between the need for a sustained repetition of the actions needed to survive and the constant traumatic reverberations these actions create as they are performed. As a result, the everyday becomes a continuous reckoning with trauma in which the temporalities of a sustained life become one with the temporalities of trauma itself.

Viewed as a line where repetitions take place, time would hardly be a queer ally. It would be, instead, an actant where identities align normatively or, at best, a continuum where the struggles between oneself and the rhythms and repetitions imposed to and by others take place. Yet there are forms of representing and using time that defy this vision. Adapting and queering some of the notions defended by philosopher Ernst Bloch, Muñoz's *Cruising Utopia* invites us to see queer culture's capacity to imagine utopian *elsewheres* and future *elsewhens* where—and when—queer desire and identities can be fully expressed and experienced. Following Muñoz's vision, time is not only tied to a present that binds individuals to repetition, but it is also a future-and-hope-bound queer horizon. Muñoz traces this utopian queer impulse back to avant-garde artists of the 1960s but also finds more contemporary examples in creators such as Kevin McCarthy, My Barbarian, or Kalup Lindzy. Tavia Nyong'o identifies similarly utopian and future-oriented impulses in other cultural expressions such as disco (2008a), punk rock (2008b), and the music of the African diaspora (2007). In all of these examples, form, and not only content, is a facilitator for the imagining of queer spaces and times, for the representation of identities that resist homogenizing processes, and for the questioning of traditional forms of representation that are aligned with identity-reductive visions.

As part of these uses of form as an enabler of queer imagination and futurity, there are queer ways of formally thinking and utilizing time. Time can be represented as a discontinuous entanglement that problematizes linear—and reductive—fictional and social narratives. The constructed nature behind the temporalities of normative-identity-producing repetitions and performances can be formally exposed, inviting viewers/readers/players to question their own performed identities. Similarly, queerly different temporal realities can be captured formally without being streamlined into temporal conformity and while retaining their singularities.

Contexts that have traditionally failed to align themselves as queer allies, such as domestic spheres, where, following Berlant's thesis, trauma haunts

us, can also be queerly deconstructed, reformulated, and reformed. If, as Susan Fraiman (2017) explains, the domestic—as well as the actions that conform the domestic—can be disassociated from traditional and reductive notions of family and accumulation, these spaces and times—understood here as family/kin/ally-time as well as, more broadly, caring-time—can also be imagined, designed, and executed to safely and queerly house individuals. Following this idea, the repeated actions needed for home-making do not necessarily—or do not just—invoke trauma, as Berlant claims, but can also reaffirm individuals in their daily queer selves as well as the queer-connections that the quotidian can help establish. Repetition in and through time, then, does not need to be thought as binding and restrictive but as an enabler of diverse selves. As our first section will show, the ways time becomes entangled with more than one way of becoming, with more than one way of world-making, and with more than one way of expressing kinship have been captured formally. Experimenting with form can also act as a catalyst that brings new forms of relating to and imagining oneself along time into being.

The chapters included in the first section of this volume show that, by analyzing texts and authors that experiment with form, we can uncover many relations with time where time is not limiting and does not always bind us, but it is instead an ally of queer expression. Chapters 1 to 6 all deal with texts and authors that use time to queer the position of the reader/viewer/player and the worlds they render through the design choices made when creating these texts. These choices include the use of unreliable narrators and the questioning of unequivocal and lineal forms of understanding time, the subversion of the formal qualities of the medium resulting in unexpected representations of time, or the direct questioning of what watching/playing/reading means in relation to time through form. The central theme of this section, entitled "(Un)Formalizing Queer Times," is that form can queer time.

In Chapter 2, "In Perfect (A)Synchrony: Queer Style in *The Line of Beauty*," Jonas Kellermann builds on Henry James's stylistic asynchrony to examine the Jamesian resonances in Alan Holinghurst's *The Line of Beauty* (2004). Kellermann's analysis shows how the temporal synchrony of musical performance makes aesthetically manifest the protagonist's social asynchrony as a homosexual man living in Thatcherite London. Against the socio-political conservatism of the novel's setting, this chapter demonstrates Hollinghurst's musical poetics ultimately offer a poignant reconsideration of queer belonging through various forms of temporality, both aesthetic and social.

Christina Xan unearths a similar (hi)story of queer belonging, in this case through the exploration of the game *Gone Home* (2013), in Chapter 3— " 'I Am Where I Need to Be': Queer Homemaking in Fullbright's *Gone Home*." Faced with an empty house, the player interacts with objects to discover a story of queer homemaking that emerges from the home's loss of belonging. In Xan's analysis, the non-linear representations of journal entries and the plethora of object interaction possibilities create queer temporalities through loops and turns that end up providing a real sense of queer belonging.

An altered narrative temporality is also central to the exploration of the films *Tangerine* and *Moonlight* in Małgorzata Mączko's "Identity in the In-Between: Narrative Temporality and the Queer Experience in *Tangerine* and *Moonlight*" (Chapter 4). Following two stories of queer identity and experience, this chapter outlines how the film form can be used to display an alternative temporal experience and represent queer stories and individuals in their own terms. Ultimately, Mączko's analysis shows how queer characters of color in both films occupy spatial and temporal settings which they transform to meet their needs and affirm their identities.

Chapter 5, "Disruptions to the Linear and Individual Narrative of Psychic Distress in Mike Barnes's *The Lily Pond: A Memoir of Madness, Memory, Myth and Metamorphosis*," turns to life writing to analyze Barnes's account of his lifelong struggle with bipolar disorder. Through the Bakhtinian concept of the chronotope, Cristina Hurtado-Botella studies the challenges the memoir poses to conventional illness narratives of triumph and argues that Barnes's disruption of linearity and individuality build a life narrative in which the unmanageability and uncertainty of living with chronic psychic distress are embraced and invested with hope.

In Chapter 6, "Re-Temporalizing Trauma Through Gameplay in Gibson and Swanwick's 'Dogfight'," Amy H. Ahn examines two levels of temporality in the representation of trauma in the 1985 short cyberpunk story. Following the two main characters' individually traumatized relations to time, Ahn demonstrates how the gameplay included in the story allows queer responses to trauma which foster nonnormative temporalities and encourage alternative paths leading to meaning making strategies and coping mechanisms.

Chapter 7, "Disrupting Binaries and Linearities: Queer and Trans Temporalities in Imogen Binnie's *Nevada*," offers another break of normative temporality within hegemonic Western culture. In the final chapter of this section, Steph Berens shows how Binnie's *Nevada* (2013) opposes established temporal structures within the US-American road genre that include heteronormative and cisnormative temporalities. Breaking up the linear, teleological narrative of individual development (much like Hurtado-Botella does in Chapter 5), Berens shines a light on the possibilities to resist coercions which emanate from the refusal of dominant temporalities.

Unearthing Queer Times

The second section invites readers to, first, discover queer texts and authors that have been largely ignored and whose study allows for a better understanding of queer identities and, second, to revisit well-known texts in order to unearth hidden, queer elements which open up new interpretations and make new meanings possible. These acts of revisiting and subverting existing canonical histories, of destabilizing and expanding notions of identity by revealing forms of being and desiring that had not been accounted for, and of questioning singular forms of understanding history by presenting a

myriad of other histories all queer time and transform the telling of time into a potential non-(chrono)normative ally.

The chapters found in this second section—Chapters 8 to 12—echo some of the ideas and practices of authors who have revisited the past to re-read it queerly or, following Carolyn Dinshaw's (1998) idea, to *touch* it. In addition to Freeman, authors such as Louise Fradenburg and Carla Freccero (1996), Juan Antonio Suárez (1996), Berlant and Michael Warner (1998), Tison Pugh (2008), or Bonnie Ruberg (2022) have touched the past to uncover hidden truths, to give voice to historically silenced forms of desiring and being, and to challenge monolithic readings of time.

In *Premodern Sexualities*, Fradenburg and Freccero invited readers to challenge heteronormative, heterocentric, and prudish visions of the past by re-visiting Early Modern and Pre-Modern texts that offer an account of the past that points at the existence of many forms of understanding and expressing desire. Beyond the overly moralistic and virtue-oriented visions of the past that less critical, and more normatively sanctioned, historical accounts tend to depict, Fradenburg and Freccero managed to unearth a past filled with queer diversity. Pugh did something similar by re-reading Middle English literature in order to explore expressions of queerness that had been ignored and silenced by more canonical literary and historical accounts, while Suárez saw the connection between the radical potential of the 1980s AIDS activist movements and the understudied queer elements and queer potentialities of the 1960s experimental art to not only produce more thorough, and queer, analyses of artists such as Andy Warhol, Kenneth Anger, or Jack Smith but to also understand the present through its more nuanced and radical connections with its immediate past. More recently, Ruberg has managed to uncover a long-lost history of diverse sexual practices and varied forms of understanding and finding pleasure that had been hidden behind centuries of sex doll making and ownership, showing that a more complete understanding of the histories of sex and sexuality can lie dormant within the materiality of forgotten objects waiting to be scrutinized.

The value of the acts of revisiting the past carried out by these authors is very wide and far-reaching. They manage to rescue individuals and practices that had not only been silenced but that, in most cases, had not been thought to exist due to reductionistic visions of the past. Studying the past also allows us to understand how silencing processes work, which in turn fosters critical awareness towards similarly limiting contemporary practices. Additionally, by questioning and studying the past, we can turn it into a queer ally so that queer individuals do not only exist here and now or as part of a future-bound *elsewhen* but instead can see themselves as part of a more open vision of history that allows for more complex temporal connections and alliances. More complete understandings of the past allow for a more complete and prismatic vision of the present where individuals can see more, and from many more angles, and understand themselves as belonging to processes of identity formation and political participation that extend, multidirectionally

and polysemantically, beyond themselves and across wide expanses of time. The central theme of this section, entitled "Unearthing Queer Times," is that queer times can be unearthed by revisiting the past, an action which, oftentimes, creates potentially revolutionary versions that can be projected into the future.

In Chapter 8, "Queer Memory and the Brown Commons," Juan Antonio Suárez proposes an alternative paradigm for queer memory. While memory is usually conceptualized as a human activity carried out by singular subjects or homogeneous communities, he defends that memory processes are by now distributed, plural, and take place on a continuum—a "flatline," to use Mark Turner's term—where the human, the material, and the technological are intimately intertwined. How to do justice to such interconnectedness? To the plural, networked, distributed form of recall that has become dominant in our world? Suárez proposes a model that combines José E. Muñoz's notion of "the brown commons" with Gilles Deleuze's definition of system in *Difference and Repetition*. The "brown memory commons" helps to explain the forms of recall practiced in recent memory-inflected queer film and multimedia work—by Shu Lea Cheang, Wu Tsang, Jenni Olson, and Aimar Pérez Galí—and prompts us to rethink the politics of queer memory in a world of intricate hybridity and widespread posthuman interrelation.

Weisong Gao implements queer modes of reading to examine themes of time and memory in Milan Kundera's work in Chapter 9—"Time, Memory, and Queer Sensibility in Milan Kundera's *The Book of Laughter and Forgetting*." This chapter illuminates how Kundera challenges normative notions of national time and history by foregrounding the pivotal role of sensory experience, aesthetics, and personal memory in his characters' lives. In addition, Gao formulates the concept of Kundera's novel form as a queer genre which not only defies conventional literary categorization but nurtures a dynamic relationship between fiction, authorship, and history.

In Chapter 10, "A Faded Photograph: Ghosts, Specters, and Other Phantoms in Rebecca Makkai's *The Great Believers*," Ana Bessa Carvalho turns a retrospective look at the AIDS crisis through the analysis of Makkai's *The Great Believers* (2019). Meditating on the links between past and present, this chapter explores how the presence of photography in the novel preserves a memory that was meant to be erased and creates, alternatively, a queer (post)memory and timeline haunted by the presence of ghosts—those who have left us but whose spectral presence still shapes our lives.

Chapter 11, "'Be Three Now': Queering the Postwar Heterosexual Marriage in Ann Quin's *Three*," focuses on another novel, in this case Ann Quin's *Three* (1966), to read the sixties as a queer, destabilizing time where nevertheless rigid gender roles still prevailed. Seen through the lens of Halberstam's conception of queer failure, Laura de la Parra Fernández situates Quin's novel—especially its female characters—at the crossroads between the emerging liberated woman of the 1960s and the bourgeoise housewife of postwar Britain.

In the final chapter of this section, and with a similar revisionist impulse, David Matencio Durán looks back at classic picaresque literature and its connection to videogames in Chapter 12, "The Rogue as a Queer Agent in Video Games: The Picaresque Novel Legacy." In his analysis, Matencio Durán establishes the historical queer nature of the myth of the rogue and follows this influence in the representation of characters in video games such as *Baldur's Gate II* (2013), *Dragon Age: Origins* (2009), and *Fire Emblem: Three Houses* (2019). The study of the intermedia relations between picaresque literature and video games demonstrates how the traditional queer traits of the rogue have evolved and survived—and even gained prominence—with the passing of time.

Looking Queerly Ahead in Time and Back to Us

In *No Future: Queer Theory and the Death Drive*, Lee Edelman criticizes the fact that most communal practices are oriented towards a reproductive futurism where politics become tightly tied with myths of survival through heterosexual-centric family reproduction. While Edelman points at a vision of the future as a reproductive-oriented horizon that pushes individuals towards narrow forms of understanding themselves, what is yet to happen has been also frequently discussed as an ideal setting to imagine other forms of being and existing queerly. We have already mentioned the utopian and future-bound force that Muñoz and Nyong'o saw in various cultural expressions. However, in addition to the examples they studied, there are entire genres and cultural expressions that often, and fertilely, lay down the basis of worlds where—and when—queer individuals—as well as novel ways of being queer—can exist freed from the subjugating and normalizing forces of the present. Science fiction is a prime example of this.

Both canonical science fiction works, such as many of the texts penned by Octavia Butler, and more recent additions that have received wide critical and/or commercial attention, such as Tamsyn Muir's *The Locked Tomb* series (2019–present), Annalee Newitz's *The Terraformers* (2023), Adrian Tchaikovsky's novels, or Joshua Whitehead's edited collection *Love After the End* (2020), all introduce readers to social systems that have emerged after our society fell to ruins. Set in the—sometimes distant, sometimes close—future, these texts allow for the imagining of identities and social relations that have been freed from the limitations and social conventions of the present and where diverse forms of not only understanding but also embodying sex, gender, or sexuality have emerged. This, once again, transforms time into a potential queer ally that promises that queer identities that cannot *yet* fully be can be imagined to exist in a future-bound *then*.

Some of these texts, such as Newitz's and Tchaikovsky's, expand notions of what being human is by extending traits restrictively associated to humans to other species, making them not only human-like but in most cases more-than-human, where "more" means "more generous, more empathic, and

more humane." In creating beings that mean and become more than human and in their decentralizing acts of feeling beyond the human, these texts do more than promise temporal horizons where existing more queerly is possible. More importantly, texts that explore posthuman identities and settings allow for a better understanding of very current and very human processes of becoming and being. They bring a future that will never happen to any of us—first, because we will all be dead in the future and, more importantly, because those queer futures no longer look human—back to our present to explain our *now* more completely and more queerly through depictions of projected *thens* and fictional *nevers*. Inspired by authors such Donna Haraway (2016) and Sarah Ahmed (2006), we believe that the frequent explorations of the posthuman and the nonhuman in culture allow for a better understanding of our own identities and the world around us. This is because our identities are not just the product of the emotional, the political, the economic, or the corporeal; they also depend on objects, processes, systems, and beings that are profoundly non-human and that, in their non-humanness, define us weirdly, chaotically, and queerly. Glimpsing the weird and the different in us allows us to see ourselves and others more queerly. In this sense, depictions of the future are not just projections of what could happen but actually create contexts to exist more queerly. They also invite us to reflect on and question, queerly, our present by acting as valuable critical tools that merit further study.

Chapters found in this final section—Chapters 13 to 17—challenge normative conceptions of time by suggesting provocative critical tools used to reconceptualize notions of the self around time. This section challenges the way we look at media, encouraging us to queer the ways we conceptualize processes of cultural analysis, production, and consumption. While chapters found in the previous two section are also imbedded by a deep theoretical background, this section is more theoretical than interested in formal descriptions of texts and focuses less on recuperating lost queer authors and texts or on providing alternative queer interpretations of time in existing texts. Rather this section includes chapters which concentrate on the theoretical considerations that we need to take into account in order to unbind time to then bring forth new understandings of temporality. The central theme of this section, entitled "Unbinding Queer Time," is that novel forms of thinking about time can be proposed that, in turn, offer new ways of conceiving and producing non-chrononormative identities.

Such non-chrononormative identities are studied in Chapter 13, "*Genesis Noir* and Cosmological Time: How I Learned to Stop Worrying and Love the Big Bang," where Merlyn Seller explores queer/trans cosmological time in the third-person point-and-click adventure game *Genesis Noir* (2021). Set before, during, and after the Big Bang, the queer temporality of this game has players embody time itself through the character No Man. Seen through the critical lens of queer and trans theorists such as Steinbock, Barad, and

Freeman, Seller's chapter argues that the game's embrace of ephemerality and novelty, its denial of progress, and a phenomenal vastness of spacetime cultivate a child-like curiosity and feeling-out attachments to queer spacetimes where change is accepted.

In Chapter 14, "Posthuman Temporalities and Shared Timings: Kinship in the Work of Jim Jarmusch," Johanna Schmertz similarly looks at an audiovisual media in search of an aesthetic means for representing queer uses and experiences of time. Focusing on three films, *Only Lovers Left Alive* (2013), *Paterson* (2016), and the short film *French Water* (2021), Schmertz argues that Jarmusch's films entangle times and beings into intertextual kinship systems that echo Freeman's "shared timings" (2010). This chapter investigates, then, Jarmusch's slow cinema as an aesthetic practice which performs a kind of temporal drag in service of a personal philosophy that centers mobile, cross-temporal, and intersubjective forms of relationality.

The transformative potential of science fiction in relation to queer identities and subjectivities is central to Beatriz Hermida Ramos's analysis of El Mohtar and Gladstone's *This Is How You Lose the Time War* (2019) in Chapter 15—"All the Ages We've Shaped Together': Examining Queer Genealogies, Science Fiction and Non-Linear Storytelling Through El-Mohtar and Gladstone's *This Is How You Lose the Time War* (2019)." In the chapter, Hermida Ramos studies the time-traveling characters as they create opposing futures through a markedly non-linear and fragmented narrative which exposes the constrictive non-fracture history and literary tradition where queer modes of existing are denied.

In Chapter 16, "Unbound and Loving It!: Pleasure, Dressage, and Queer Rhythmic Resistance in Monáe's *Dirty Computer*," Jack Maginn examines Monáe's dystopian musical science fiction film *Dirty Computer* (2018) from a temporal perspective as it simultaneously figures and theorizes queer temporal resistance. Bringing together the theoretical insights of Henri Lefebvre, Elizabeth Freeman, and Monáe themself, Maginn's analysis reads the dystopia and hope in Monáe's film as an image of the unbound body and of the different spatiotemporalities which simultaneously reminds the audience of the real-world political struggle within the context of Trump's America.

Finally, in Chapter 17—"Imagining Neuroqueer Futures: Crip Time and Care-Ful Connections in *Night in the Woods*"—Lisanne Meinen explores the potential of videogames as a speculative medium to imagine neurodiversity-affirmative and disability justice-informed worlds. Focusing on the action-adventure game *Night in the Woods* (2017), Meinen employs Puig de la Bellacasa's notion of crip time as a way for players to make care-ful connections on the level of gameplay, storyline, and the ethico-political positioning of the game. In this light, the prominence of slowness and repetition in the game are studied as neuroqueer affects which offer an imperfect but imaginative exploration of what a just disability future might look like.

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Section I

(Un)Formalizing Queer Times

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2 In Perfect (a)Synchrony

Queer Style in *The Line of Beauty*

Jonas Kellermann

In Alan Hollinghurst's oeuvre, entanglements of time, aesthetics, and sexuality play pivotal roles. His narratives often oscillate between settings that range from pre–World War I to contemporary Britain and demonstrate how the political, legal, and cultural status of homosexuality has developed in the country throughout the decades. By contrast, many of Hollinghurst's predominantly male protagonists appear more invested in the aesthetic and sexual pleasures of life than in the drastically changing political landscapes surrounding them, often turning a deliberately blind eye to what is happening around them. They are "out of sync" with the signs of the times. These tense constellations of art, eros, and time share a deep-rooted fascination with the *fin de siècle* and late 19th-century aestheticism. Hollinghurst is generally considered "a novelist who is peculiarly *not* of his own era" and whose writing is more informed by " 'the homophile' fiction of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century" rather than by his own contemporaries (Mitchell 2016, 174; see also Johnson 2014). Looming large among these influences is Henry James, whom Hollinghurst follows closely "in his exquisitely contrived literary sensibility, his concern with the upper classes, the unmasking of desire's implication in webs of power and money, and the deployment of an ironic narrative mode" (Mathuray 2017, 3).

None of Hollinghurst's novels engages with James more overtly than *The Line of Beauty* (2004).[1] Set in 1980s London during the Thatcher administration, the novel tells the story of Nick Guest, a young Oxford graduate lodging in the Notting Hill townhouse of the wealthy family of Tory MP Gerald Fedden, whose son Toby is a former classmate (and secret crush) of the openly gay Nick. While Nick drifts across the mid-80s aimlessly propelled by desire, drugs, and growing concerns over the imminent HIV crisis, one of the few constants in his life is his fascination for Henry James, on whose famed literary style he is (rather unsuccessfully) trying to write a doctoral thesis. The narrative, which spans the years 1983 until 1987, conveys "the archetypically Jamesian experience of the 'trapped spectator'," gradually transforming Nick from a self-proclaimed connoisseur of Jamesian irony into its involuntarily ironic victim (Eastham 2006, 523–24).

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This chapter adds a layer of intermediality to the entanglements between Hollinghurst and James in *The Line of Beauty*. More specifically, I consider the queer potential of Hollinghurst's quasi-Jamesian style in exploring his use of music as an aesthetic manifestation of Nick's queer (a)synchrony. The theoretical foundation of my analysis is twofold. On the one hand it builds upon Carolyn Dinshaw's temporal conception of queerness as "forms of desirous, embodied being that are out of sync with the ordinarily linear measurements of everyday life, that engage heterogeneous temporalities or that precipitate out of time altogether" (2012, 4); on the other, it takes cues from Kevin Ohi's account of Henry James's queer style, in which he argues that the atemporal style of James's writing produces a beguiling effect of asynchrony and subverts the heteronormative and futurist framework of the novel form. The same beguiling effect is on display in Hollinghurst's use of musicality in *The Line of Beauty*, which opens up an intermedial and intermediary sphere to negotiate between queer relationality and anti-relationality. Constructing a narrative conscience which is "out of sync" with its environment, this "out-of-sync"-ness reveals a queer space of aesthetic self-affirmation for Nick—a space, however, ultimately irreconcilable with the socio-political conservatism of the novel's Thatcherite setting. To trace these temporal and medial entanglements—including their ekphrastic, ironic, and nostalgic affordances—this chapter uses queer style as a lens to read a specifically musical episode from the second section of *The Line of Beauty* and discusses in what ways the aesthetic (a)synchrony on display reflects upon lived queer experience more generally.

Styles of Time, Times of Style

Style has seen a surge of critical interest in recent years, reassessing its political potential but also its theoretical and practical elusiveness and its relation towards substance (Herrmann et al. 2019; Hartley 2016). This newly discovered ubiquity and polyphony of style has proven especially productive for queer literary studies:

> sexuality and its attendant forms of desire, love, relationality, and non-relationality (human and nonhuman both) can be considered . . . a series of still unfolding styles, consisting of counterintuitive reading, temporal disjuncture, the performative, narrative interruption and suspension, non-closure, negativity, ambivalence, affective intensity, color, texture, syntax, and tone that make up the queer literary domain.
>
> (Seitler 2019, 37)

This exploration of style subsequently broadens the theoretical discussion of queerness beyond "identitarian terms" (Seitler 2019, 43). While these terms have marked a foundation of queer activism, they have also been the object of debate since the rise of queer theory in the early nineties and its rejection

of the identitarian premises of gay and lesbian studies. Consequently, Seitler suggests, we may consider queer literary style not only in identitarian but also in aesthetic terms. Brian Glavey has similarly emphasised the connection between issues of identity and aesthetic form in his concept of queer ekphrasis, arguing that "ekphrasis offers the possibility to transfigure stigma into aesthetic value, privileging form . . . because it allows for the revaluation of the experience of being treated as an image or a copy" (2015, 7). If an attunement to aesthetic form, especially to literary representations of visual art, reveals the ways in which forms lend themselves to the lived experience of queer subjects, then the ephemeral form of music arguably offers even more insight into the temporal disjuncture of queer identity and desire. Kevin Ohi has identified such a fusion of form and queerness and thus of style and substance in Henry James, arguing that queerness becomes manifest less in James's contents or his much-speculated biography, but rather in his idiosyncratic style. Drawing from the Deleuzian notion of style as " 'the foreign language within language" (qtd. in Ohi 24), Ohi suggests that James enacts "a queer practice of representation that offers a way to frame the emergence of sexuality . . . not as a topic or content for a representation but as a 'treatment' or style" (2011, 15). This style is inherently defined by "belatedness and asynchronicity" as "erotic categories" which manifest in various narrative and stylistic devices like the blurring of literal and figurative registers, meta-level commentary, tropes such as syllepsis and zeugma, or free-indirect discourse (Ohi 2011, 31–32).

Ohi's reading of James's queer style as belated and asynchronous adds an important formal dimension to the discourse on temporality which became a focal point of queer theory and queer studies in the early 2000s (see Dinshaw et al. 2007). As "denizens of times out of joint" (Freeman 2010, 18), queer individuals are particularly prone to experiencing tensions between synchrony and asynchrony, of being etymologically "with time" and "without time" (Freeman 2016, 129). This tension singles out asynchrony as a "queer phenomenon—something felt on, with, or as a body, something experienced as a mode of erotic difference or even as a means to express or enact ways of being and connecting that have not yet arrived or never will" (Freeman 2007, 159). That these ways of being and connecting have not yet arrived is important as it points towards an open potentiality of change that may or may not be actualised eventually. If synchrony is "a matter of rhythm" (Freeman 2016, 129), then its counterpart, asynchrony, doesn't necessarily entail a complete lack thereof but rather suggests a different kind of rhythm altogether that does not abide with the conventional measurements of "keeping time." This emphasis on rhythm obviously speaks to the musical dimension in the discourse on (a)synchrony. Indeed, as I will show in the following, Nick's aesthetic attachment to music in *The Line of Beauty* grants him a queer relationality that both connects and disconnects him from his outside world.

In light of these remarks on being with and without time, it is tempting to dismiss Hollinghurst as an asynchronous writer whose nostalgic aesthetics

and affinity for the past remain points of contention among readers, critics, and scholars alike (Mathuray 2017, 4). Yet such dismissals undervalue his subtle but acute commentary on queer experience and sociality throughout 20th- and 21st-century Britain which skews much closer to the socio-political concerns of queer theory than critics accusing Hollinghurst of retrogressive nostalgia would concede (Mitchell 2016). Dinshaw rightly points out that the seemingly nostalgic "longing for another kind of time" (2012, 36) can still coincide with a critical awareness of temporal multiplicity both in the presentist *now* and the nostalgic *then*. Hollinghurst's stylistic debt to Henry James is a case in point. *The Line of Beauty* "offers not merely a stylistic homage to, but also a political remobilisation of, Jamesian aesthetic," to deliver "commentary on the personal cost of sexual liberty and the visibly changing perceptions of gay identity in public life" (James 2011, 494, 499). Queerness becomes an element of neither just form nor content—or style and substance—but of both; from the perspective of late 19th-century aestheticism, no art form facilitates this fusion more perfectly than music, as indicated by the opening epigraph from the preface to *The Picture of Dorian Gray*. In his introduction to James' *The Ivory Tower*, Hollinghurst himself notes "the inseparable coexistence of form and content" (2004, xvi) in the Master's works. In *The Line of Beauty*, Hollinghurst masters his personal fusion of style and substance, producing "sentences [that] are always aware of their own beauty, but [that] are not devoted exclusively to its achievement" (Macfarlane 2011, 175).

Hollinghurst's seemingly nostalgic return to James's style—and, as we shall see, Hollinghurst's narrative use of music—is thus best understood in terms of what Ashley Shelden calls "amorous time," a temporality closely entangled with but not equivalent to nostalgia. According to Shelden, amorous time assumes that "from the position of the present, one desires a better future based on an ideality that is supposed to have existed in the past" (2017, 94). However, the future once portended never came to be, leaving its promise unfilled and thereby necessitating the present return to the past. This emphasis on unfulfillment and disappointment of past promises in the present distinguishes amorous time from "unexamined nostalgia": "simple nostalgia constructs a fantasy to eliminate negativity; amorous time constructs a fantasy that foregrounds and thrives on the negative" (Shelden 2017, 96). It is the open acknowledgment of pain and negativity in the present that makes the temporal return to a past that still bore potential for future positivity not just nostalgic, but amorous. This paradoxical simultaneity of optimism and pessimism, of promises and their subsequent disappointments, becomes manifest in Hollinghurst's stylistic appropriation of James.[2] *The Line of Beauty*, I argue, does not just hark back to the "vagueness, shading into pointed difference" (Hollinghurst 2004, xiv) that constitutes the queerness of James' writing; it does so precisely in the poignant awareness that despite the political progression since James's lifetime, issues of queerness often can still only be addressed in equivocal and evasive terms.

Such hopes for moral progressiveness not just of individual characters but of society more generally lay at the heart of James's "operative irony," which seeks to imagine the promise of what *might* be rather than simply stating what currently *is* (James 1962, 222, emphases in the original). If operative irony presents a "utopian ideal of self-realization within the constricting framework of social values" (Ziegler 1983, 228), then the past hope of those social values someday becoming less constricting has remained unfilled, at least in the Thatcherite setting of *The Line of Beauty*.[3] In the conservative household of the Feddens, Nick's homosexuality is silently tolerated as long as it is not openly discussed and made otherwise explicit, turning him into a queer embodiment of his own notion of style that he seeks to explore in his PhD: "style that hides things and reveals things at the same time" (Hollinghurst 2015, 54; see also Hannah 2007, 89). Nick has to hide significant parts of himself in order to preserve (and thereby reveal) his state as a literal "guest" in the Feddens' luxurious Notting Hill townhouse.[4] In that regard it makes sense why Nick has developed such a strong attachment to classical music, as discussed subsequently: in his aestheticist love for musical, instrumental beauty, Nick gets to enact, albeit subliminally, the queerness that otherwise is being silenced by the Feddens and society at large.

Although homosexuality is much more thematically explicit in Hollinghurst than in James, the stylistic continuity between the two suggests an ongoing tension in finding means to express the topic discursively. These conflicting strains of defining and (dis)avowing queerness are reflected in the wider reception of Hollinghurst's writing, too. While Chris Smith, chairman of the 2004 Booker Prize, deliberately downplayed the topic of homosexuality in *The Line of Beauty*, stating that "the fact that it was a gay novel did not figure at all in the discussions," Hollinghurst's win also sparked headlines like "Booker Won By Gay Sex" and "Gay Book Wins" (Moss 2004; Mathuray 2017, 2). Ironically, then, by trying to make Hollinghurst's win *not* about the "gayness" of his novel, Smith achieved the opposite, drawing attention to the topic by disowning it. This friction between embracing and rejecting queerness is likewise evident in Nick's trajectory in *The Line of Beauty*, a trajectory defined in temporal terms by his struggle to find a sense of aesthetic synchrony in an environment of social asynchrony. Hollinghurst represents this struggle by narratively and stylistically conveying the sensuousness of classical music in one of the most aesthetically charged moments in the novel, employing asynchrony similarly to James as an erotic category. Paradoxically, though, as we will see, this narrative moment, which makes Nick's eroticised asynchrony so palpable, is informed on first glance by the opposite of asynchrony: synchrony.

Flowing Sounds, Flowing Words

Ranging from poetry to portraiture and architecture, literary and non-literary art forms alike mark integral elements of Hollinghurst's *mise en scènes* and

narrative structures. Pieces like the Roman mosaic in Charles Nantwich's cellar in *The Swimming-Pool Library*, Cecil Valance's poem "Two Acres" and the house that inspired it in *The Stranger's Child*, or the nude painting of David Sparsholt in *The Sparsholt Affair* run through their respective texts as common threads and offer a sense of intergenerational continuity. Music constitutes a more evanescent yet no less impactful dimension of this intermedial disposition and arguably stands at the centre of the aesthetic concerns in *The Line of Beauty*, despite the novel's related interests in visual arts like architecture, painting, and photography. As Andrew Eastham observes, "the primary medium of Nick's artistic experience throughout the novel is music" (2006, 520). In that sense, Nick expands upon Hollinghurst's first-person narrator in his debut novel *The Swimming-Pool Library* (1988), William Beckwith, who shares Nick's affinity for classical music and frequently attends the Royal Opera House with his grandfather, a patron of the theatre. Even though Nick graduated from Oxford in English literature, music sparks at least a similar if not even greater passion in him than his academic field of studies. The very first chapter ends with Nick attempting an impromptu sight-reading of a Mozart piece on the Feddens' piano, establishing music as "integral to a rich emotional life" (Shiller 2017, 111) for the protagonist early on:

> To Nick himself the faltering notes were like raindrops on a sandy path, and he was filled with a sense of what his evening could have been. The simple Andante became a vivid dialogue in is mind between optimism and recurrent pain; in fact it heightened both feelings to an unnecessary degree.
>
> (Hollinghurst 2015, 18)

This musical dialogue of optimism and pain encapsulates the oscillation between hope and disappointment of Shelden's amorous time and infuses later instances of intradiegetic music in the novel, too, as seen in the following.

The musical reverberations throughout the first of the novel's three sections, aptly titled "The Love-Chord," continue. Nick's affinity for music allows him to engage in repartees with Gerald over the aesthetic value of Richard Strauss, solidifying his status as the appreciated aesthete of the house while also sparking in Nick the self-conscious concern that "he would care too much," whereas for Gerald "it was only music" (Hollinghurst 2015, 96). Music also provides Nick with means to make sense of and aestheticise his relationship with Leo in the titular love chord that he imagines during his lover's absence:

> When he thought of Leo after not thinking of him for a minute or two he heard a big orchestral sound in his head. . . . It was high and low at once, an abysmal pizzicato, a pounce of the darkest brass, and above

> it a hair-raising sheen of string. It seemed to knock him down and fling him all in one unregistered gesture.
>
> (Hollinghurst 2015, 138)

At the end of "The Love-Chord," Leo himself plays Mozart on the Feddens' piano when the two men are alone in the house, surprising Nick with his technical expertise and creating a moment of unforeseen intimacy between them. Indeed, "the music seemed to know . . . the irresistible curve of hope, and its hollow inversion" (2015 174). Hollinghurst transposes the dynamic flux of Nick's desire first onto the rise and fall of the music and second onto the elegant flow of his syntax, which descends from a major key of hope into its minor inversion just a few words later. Years later, Nick remembers this moment after Leo's death from AIDS. The memory of Leo's impromptu performance brings back "the beautiful rawness of those days again, the life of instinct opening in front of him, . . . everything tingling with newness and risk" (2015, 415). Even later in the novel, a recording of Rachmaninov's *Symphonic Dances* takes Nick's mind back to his university days at Oxford as "regretful longing . . . unfolded for him like that endless tune on the alto sax" (Hollinghurst 2015, 454; see also Macfarlane 2011, 175). In all of these instances, music and its haunting echo give aesthetic shape to Shelden's amorous time and the retrospective return to a moment when hopes for the future had not been disappointed yet. If ekphrastic writing can make queer longing aesthetically manifest, then *The Line of Beauty* creates a correspondingly queer musical poetics to match it. These poetics not only encapsulate in words the non-verbal evanescence of music; in doing so, they also articulate that the reciprocal fulfilment of (queer) desire can be as ephemeral and intense as a fleeting piano note.

Significantly, these musical poetics derive almost exclusively from classical music. Noting formal discrepancies between literary representations of classical and non-classical music like jazz, Emily Petermann has observed "the relative emphasis on individuality in tone and performance style in jazz music in contrast to the desire for homogeneity in classical instrumentation" (2014, 14–15). Representations of classical music thus often focus on formal elements rather than on individual variations and interpretations, conceptualising music as "embodied in the written score and less in any individual performance, which attempts to a much greater extent to reproduce a single idealized 'original'" (Petermann 2014, 14–15). Yet Petermann also points out that this dichotomy between the universal formalism of classical music and the performative individuality of jazz is eventually subverted in postmodern texts. *The Line of Beauty* strategises this musical tension between a formal ideal and the individual realisation of that ideal as an aesthetic foil of Nick's queerness, and it does so nowhere more resoundingly than during the concert in the second section of the novel.

Nina Glaserova, an up-and-coming pianist from Czechoslovakia, has been invited to give a concert at the Feddens' house. As both musical connoisseur

and focaliser of the novel, Nick attempts to scrutinise the technical quality of her interpretations of Chopin, Schubert, and Beethoven while also appearing deeply impacted by the affective immediacy of the performance:

> [W]atching her own hands busying up and down the keyboard as if they were astonishing automata that she had wound up and set in motion, in perfect synchrony, to produce this silvery flow of sound. She made it seem a bit like an exercise, but you could tell, if you listened, that the piece was life itself, in its momentum and its evanescence. The modulations in it were like instants of dizziness.
>
> (Hollinghurst 2015, 238)

Unlike most of the other characters who only attend the concert for the social prestige that it symbolises, Nick *does* listen to the music and is completely swept away by the dizziness of its perfect synchrony. Indeed, listening to the performance becomes a physically rapturous experience for the protagonist, an experience conveyed by Hollinghurst in almost orgasmic terms that accentuate Nick's trembling and shattering sensations.

> [F]or Nick to listen to music, to great music, which was all necessity, and here in the house, where the floor trembled to the sudden resolve of the Allegro, and the piano shook on its locked brass wheels—well, it was a startling experience. He felt shaken and reassured all at once—the music expressed life and explained it and left you having to ask again.
>
> (Hollinghurst 2015, 239)

Yet the more Nick finds himself immersed in the music, the more he also disconnects himself from the social environment in which he is physically embedded. For the openly gay Nick, the music opens up a metaphysical platform from which to contemplate his social relations, especially the relation to his lover Wani, the son of a Lebanese entrepreneur, who's also in the audience and who, unlike Nick, is still "in the closet."

> He felt he floated into another place, beautiful, speculative, even dangerous, a place created and held open by the music, but separate from it. It had the mood of a troubling dream, where nothing could be known for certain or offer a solid foothold to memory after one had awoken. What really was his understanding with Wani? The pursuit of love seemed to need the cultivation of indifference. The deep connection between them was so secret that at times, it was hard to believe it existed.
>
> (Hollinghurst 2015, 240)

For Nick, the experience of perfect musical synchrony lays bare and makes manifest his social asynchronies, not only through his working-class

background and his passion for the fine arts, but particularly through his homosexuality. For a brief moment, he achieves social detachment through "total synaesthetic immersion" (Eastham 2006, 522) into the music. The "numbness of absence, the wistful solitude, the stifled climaxes of longing" (Hollinghurst 2015, 240) expressed by the pianist in a Beethoven sonata become reflections of the absences, solitude, and longing in Nick's personal life, capturing his feeling of social asynchrony in the musical synchrony of the live performance.

In addition to conveying the flow of Nick's desire by verbally imitating the musical flow of the intradiegetic performance, Hollinghurst also visualises that flow by having Nick notice Wani's profile in "the glossy double curve of the piano lid" (2015, 240). Nick temporarily ascends into "an abstract universe, but he does so through the image of his lover reflected in a piano lid—the shallow reflection is both a limitless gateway and a momentary narcissistic glimmer" (Eastham 2006, 522). This visual reference not only marks a variation of the novel's recurrent mirror imagery, which produces a paradoxical simultaneity of flatness and depth (Macfarlane 2011, 171). It also epitomises the "metaphorics of light" that structure Shelden's amorous time (2017, 98): in the piano's gleaming reflection of his lover, Nick sees their past encounters, present relationship, and possible future all fused into one anticipatory flicker, which also "came luminously through" (Hollinghurst 2015, 240) in the music. The piano, its shimmer and musical sound, become resonances of the utopian potentiality of queerness and its "anticipatory illumination" (Muñoz 2019, 15). This potentiality, I argue, departs from the more negative accounts of Nick's aestheticism and its "failures," within which other critics like Eastham have previously framed Nick's love of music. Notably, theories of musical emotion in the 19th century were equally informed by tensions between surfaces and depths (Spitzer 2020, 309). Hollinghurst thus draws from his entire intermedial arsenal to showcase how, as a queer aesthete living in 1980s London, Nick finds emotional depth in aesthetic surfaces and a moment of introspective pause in the fleeting temporality of music.

Hollinghurst's invocation of the affective impact that the music has on Nick echoes James's description of experience in "The Art of Fiction" as a state from which an author should be writing and which differs from mimetic representation:

> Experience is the atmosphere of the mind, not the events that the atmosphere might lead the mind to register. . . . Neither the mind itself nor an object in the world, experience transgresses the dichotomy between inside and out that would ground an analogy linking cognition and representation as simple mimetic processes.
>
> (Ohi 2011, 6)

James's idea of "experience," especially the atmosphere of the mind, captures Nick's intradiegetic experience during the concert and Hollinghurst's rendering of it. The various sensuous impressions that jolt Nick during the performance, from the audible of Nina's piano-playing to the visual of Wani's profile, fuse to have a profoundly dislocating effect on him, creating "an "atmosphere" that [his] mind can neither identify with nor objectify" (Ohi 2011, 10). Although the events that Nick's mind registers do not quite vanish, they neither constitute his experience altogether, as he enters "a place held open by the music, but separate from it" (Hollinghurst 2015, 241). Just like the image of Wani (Hollinghurst 2015, 241), music almost hypnotises Nick, transporting him into an ephemeral realm outside of time and space from where his actual social relations appear to him in a poignant new light and accentuate his ever-present struggle between belonging and not belonging. The fact that the novel is written in an elaborate free indirect style—another Jamesian hallmark (Ohi 2011, 60; Macfarlane 2011, 171–74; James 2011, 499)—with Nick as our only focaliser further makes the atmosphere of his mind and that internal struggle of belonging accessible to readers.

Considering that synchrony, as Freeman notes, "is key to establishing a sense of engroupment, to implanting the affects and movements that make a person feel connected to something larger than him- or herself" (2016, 133), Nick's aesthetic synchrony with music not only exposes his social asynchrony, his very lack of engroupment and connectedness as a homosexual aesthete living in the household of a Tory MP during the reign of Margaret Thatcher. Stylistically, Hollinghurst's quasi-Jamesian use of free indirect discourse also creates a complex sense of engroupment between Nick and the reader. Given our retrospective distance from the novel's time line, we as readers enjoy a critical awareness of the events in the plot that Nick, being in the moment, is crucially lacking. Nevertheless, Hollinghurst opens a gateway that lets us get as close as possible to Nick's aesthetic immersion without accidentally mistaking his immersion for our own. If synchrony and asynchrony are matters of rhythm, then the musical poetics in *The Line of Beauty* create a multi-layered symphony that encompasses all of Nick's rhythmic patterns, both the ones he is attuned to—his aestheticism—and the ones he is not—his socio-political environment.

Generative Beauty

In the academy, Nick's excessive aestheticism and his tension between aesthetic attachment and political detachment have traditionally been read as the character's greatest failure and the key to his fallout with the Feddens (see Eastham 2011, 8–9; Yebra 2022, 144–54). While Nick's aestheticism arguably does blind him to the reality of his environment the further he proceeds (Su 2014, 1102), these rather unfavourable estimations of his aestheticism also betray some futurist inclinations that the novel does not fully

corroborate. As Elahe Haschemi Yekani rightly points out, "Hollinghurst does not convey a coming-out story in which a protagonist claims a gay identity that rests on a conception of futurity" (2012, 221). Nick's aestheticism does not strive to build a cultural legacy for himself that will outlast his generation. If anything, Hollinghurst makes it bitingly clear that it does the opposite. Nick's doctoral thesis on style never goes anywhere, just like his ill-conceived film adaptation of James's *The Spoils of Poynton*, and the first issue of *Ogee*, his joint art magazine with Wani, also ends up being its last due to Wani's rapidly worsening health in the third section. Rather than catering to the future, Nick's aestheticism repudiates the future in favour of indulging in the present moment, which pushes him close to what Carolyn Dinshaw calls amateurism.

Regardless of his considerable aesthetic expertise, Nick's relationship to the arts, aside from his editorial involvement with *Ogee*, is largely unprofessional and does not abide with any normative, capitalist timelines, allowing him to excessively attach himself to the arts in a decidedly unproductive way that professionals cannot. This amateurish aloofness, significantly enabled by Wani's financial support, adds to Nick's queer detachment from the world. "Amateurism," Dinshaw writes, "is itself a bit queer, defined by attachment in a detached world," and rendering amateurs like Nick " 'belated' or 'underdeveloped' in relation not only to the profession but also to the reproductive family" (2012, 31). David Halperin similarly suggests that "[g]ay male culture's distinctive brand of erotic aestheticism . . . and its insistence on perfection in its erotico-aesthetic objects, tend to produce an absolute privileging of the beautiful" (2012, 231). Nick indeed privileges beauty and its presentist experience above everything else, even his own sense of self-preservation towards the future. He strives for aesthetic perfection not despite being an amateur, but *because* of it—because he takes "[his] own sweet time" (Dinshaw 2012, 15), rather than adhering to the relentlessly forward moving temporalities around him. Losing himself momentarily in the beauty of classical music during the concert is arguably symptomatic of that. Even when the normative temporalities of modern life catch up with Nick at the end, with the possibility of an HIV infection looming over his head, he refuses to abandon his queer stance and marvels at "the love of a world that was shockingly unconditional" and "the fact of a street corner at all that seemed, in the light of the moment, so beautiful" (Hollinghurst 2015, 501). While these lines may hint at Nick's continuous state of denial and ignorance (Macfarlane 2011, 184), they strike a more hopeful note to me. The most telling part of that passage is not the fact that it ends with the adjective "beautiful" but what comes before. Nick's aestheticism, particularly his affinity for music, never aimed for the future but for the light of the present moment, especially now that the finitude of life becomes painfully obvious to him. Just like the *now* is inherently "a transition, always divided between no longer and not yet" (Dinshaw 2012, 2), so too does *The Line of Beauty* construe

a queer temporality that is both amorously affiliated with the past and radically embedded in the present and uses aestheticism to gesture towards the *not yet* of the future.

Arguably, few art forms lend themselves better to this temporal complexity than the fleeting immediacy of music. Unlike, for example, painting—the art form that dominates Hollinghurst's most recent novel, *The Sparsholt Affair* (2017)—the performance of music does not produce a separate material object which can be owned, touched, and perceived on end after the production process. Musical performances may be recorded and made available for repeat access, which can also hold significant affective potential, as seen by Nick's yearnful reaction to the recording of Rachmaninov's *Symphonic Dances* towards the end of the novel. Yet the intense immaterial rapture that immerses Nick during the concert only results from the live(d) experience of "being in the moment." In such live performances, appearance and disappearance of aesthetic form coalesce, the sound of notes travelling throughout the room and eventually vanishing as soon as they have emerged. This evanescence makes the affective experience that music gives to marginalised amateurs like Nick all the more precious.

Paradoxically, then, it is in this presentist dimension that music and its affordances for aesthetic attachment propel *The Line of Beauty* past "a *sinthomosexual-style* rejection of sociality and futurity" (Mitchell 2016, 187, emphases in the original). The end of the novel may underline Nick's asynchronous lack of engroupment and sociality after being shunned by the Feddens. Yet this lack of engroupment also reinforces Nick's status as someone who has found his sense of self in the world and "the possibility of newness just around (as the cliché has it) the corner" (Roberts 2017, 119) by unconditionally devoting himself towards expressions of beauty, for better or worse. Aesthetic form becomes an anchor of self-attachment for Nick at a time when meaningful social attachments remain far and few between for him, and Hollinghurst's stylistic and narrative invoking of music translate that longing for attachment to the page. If "beauty, having a 'forward' and 'backward momentum' at once, invokes generative power" (Kim 2016, 184), then beauty, most of all the beauty of music, certainly invokes a self-generative power for Nick: the power to aesthetically affirm his queer identity against the oppressive backdrop of heteronormativity, even if that affirmation entails literally and figuratively falling out of time. Thus, despite being a catalyst of his downfall, Nick's aestheticism, as exemplified by the concert episode, also gives him a faint glimpse of that "new beautiful world in the post-AIDS era" (Kim 2016, 184) in which the novel was written, a queer future not marked by repressive reproduction. In that sense, Nick's aestheticism and its potentially fatal consequences may be the novel's grandest manifestation of Shelden's amorous time. Past the end of the narrative, Nick's test might still turn out positive and pave his way towards a likely death from HIV. Nonetheless, by leaving this final question unanswered, the future that was once foretold in Hollinghurst's retrospective novel remains doubtful yet open

rather than definitively foreclosed. The distant echoes of the love chord linger on in Nick's memory and the readers', tonally reminiscent of the lost past but also amorously gesturing towards the imminent *not yet*.

Conclusion: Beautiful (Un)Belonging

In the second section of the novel, entitled " 'To whom do you beautifully belong?'," Nick tells his colleagues at *Ogee* about a threesome he'd had recently and intersperses his report with several Henry James quotes about how his characters call each other beautiful, especially in moments of overt moral wickedness.

> "There's a marvellous bit in his play *The High Bid*, when a man says to the butler in a country house, 'I mean, to whom do you beautifully *belong*?' "
>
> (Hollinghurst 2015, 208–9, emphases in the original)

In the novel, Nick leaves the question unanswered, regarding both James's play and himself. How, then, may we as readers answer it in his stead? At the end, Nick definitely no longer belongs to the Feddens, if he ever did at all to begin with. He also does not appear to belong to his parents, his relationship with whom is presented as distant and emotionally strained over the years, especially after Nick's involvement in Gerald's scandals (Hollinghurst 2015, 472). His former lover passed away from AIDS, and his current one is just about to. Unsurprisingly, then, Nick never is seen to feel beholden to a larger gay community. On a more abstract note, as a consciousness defined by aestheticism and amorous temporality, Nick never fully belongs to any one singular moment in time. By the novel's open ending, however, Nick, as clichéd as it may sound, at least manages to belong to himself. Hollinghurst employs moments of intradiegetic music to create a stylistically beguiling atmosphere of simultaneous synchrony and asynchrony which embodies this very struggle of queer belonging—not despite of but *because of* the ephemeral nature of music and Nick's queer attachment to it. The love that still barely dared—or was not allowed to—speak its name in Thatcherite Britain finds a twofold equivalent both in the non-verbality of classical music and in the verbality of Hollinghurst's style. Thus, even though its protagonist belongs to no body, no place, and no time, *The Line of Beauty* magnifies Nick's love chord into a symphony of amorous time and turns the temporal predicament of not belonging into an (im)possible queer virtue, and, as this chapter has shown, it does so *beautifully*.

Notes

1 See, for example, Flannery (2005), Rivkin (2005), and Eastham (2006).
2 According to Robert Macfarlane, this paradoxically anticipatory notion of nostalgia infuses Hollinghurst's entire oeuvre: "The characteristic tense of all of

Hollinghurst's novels is the future perfect, the will-have-been. His main characters . . . love to cast their minds forwards to a point from which they will remember the ongoing present. They enjoy, too, the impossibility of return from that imagined future, the frisson of exclusion from a past that was once lived. As such, they remind us of the exquisite and implicitly erotic nature of nostalgia as frustrated desire" (2011, 174).

3 Eastham (2006) therefore reads Hollinghurst's novel as a transformation of James's operative irony into inoperative irony.

4 The poignantly ironic resonance of Nick's last name "Guest" as a social denominator has been widely recognized; see, for example, Eastham (2006, 523), Hannah (2007, 85–86), Haschemi Yekani (2012, 222), Macfarlane (2011, 170), Shiller (2017, 112), and Yeager (2013, 312).

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3 "I Am Where I Need to Be"

Queer Homemaking in Fulbright's *Gone Home*

Christina Xan

Introduction

Gone Home, a first-person exploration game released by indie house developer Fullbright in 2013, opens on a young woman named Katie who returns home from Europe to find out her family has disappeared and begins exploring her home in a search for answers. Though the player controls Katie, the game is truly interested in the younger daughter Sam, who, as the player pieces together at the end of the game, has been hiding her sexuality and recently fled the family to live with her girlfriend, Lonnie. What the player uncovers in the brief couple hours of gameplay is not simply the mystery of where Katie's family has gone but the mystery of where they have been. *Gone Home* is set up as a traditional survival horror; as merritt k (2017) says, "you're exploring an empty house on a dark and stormy night and nobody is around for some reason and you're just waiting for it to turn out that, surprise(!), everyone is dead" (146). Though the house is rife with locked doors, dark hallways, and mysterious noises, these are all red herrings; there are no physical ghosts roaming the halls of this old family home. The game is essentially a walking simulator, with the player controlling Katie from a first-person perspective as she interacts with objects around the house and attempts to solve the mystery of where her family has gone. The player must work through the game's limited perception—at any given time only knowing as much as Katie—and unique temporality—instead of the story being presented linearly, it is presented rhizomatically, where each room holds a memory or journal entry from a different point in time, typically unlocked by touching an object. The game itself, however, rarely makes its own connections, leaving the player to pick up the threads offered and stitch together the history of the home.

In *Gone Home*, the idea of coming home is immediately queered; although Katie is coming home to her family, since they moved house while she was away, this house is as unfamiliar to her as it is to the player. All that remains are objects that tell Katie that the dwelling she has become familiar with in her previous dwelling space did occur here recently. Thus, the remnants of the past are the only proof of a home in the present. This is the first glimpse

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of queer temporality and spatiality where the past is not just used to dictate what happened in the past but what is still actually occurring in/alongside the present. The game itself is linear—the player is always moving forward in time throughout the house, and there are no flashbacks where the player is fully transported to another moment. However, because some objects trigger memories that are forcefully played aurally, the past becomes a palimpsest, becoming written directly over the present. The origins of this temporal queerness stem from Katie and Sam's great uncle Oscar Masan, whom Sam and Lonnie believe haunts the house. Though the game never provides any actual proof that Oscar's ghost roams the halls, he does "haunt" this house. Though it is never revealed what ostracized him from the town, one day, Oscar sold his pharmacy for next to nothing and became a recluse from the public. What is made all but clear, however, is that Oscar sexually assaulted his nephew, Terry—the girls' father—when he was a child. Oscar was the first person who made dwelling problematic in the space, and it is this fracturing of dwelling that first creates the queer temporality and spatiality in the home. The home, then, is already shaped by queer domesticity; specifically, Oscar's abuse of Terry imbued a trauma within the home that kept a child from fully being a child and crafting their identity. This haunting that stems from this trauma is seen not through visions or disembodied voices as the girls believe but through the failure in the descended family to find home and identity in the very same space.

Gone Home was quick to enter the discourse after its release, initially due to it emerging at a time where walking simulators were under particular scrutiny. As Naomi Clark details in her *Queer Game Studies* (2017) contribution, "vocal critics, many of them consumer fans, have attacked . . . games with queer themes, such as the Fullbright Company's *Gone Home* (2013)—on the basis that they're 'not real games' or 'just very simple games'" (8). A fellow contributor to Clark, Katherine Cross (2017), supports this, asserting that *Gone Home* was specifically "criticized in many quarters by gamers who are convinced that its accolades are a form of affirmative action bestowed on the title simply because it tells the story of a lesbian couple" (181). However, this criticism reflects less on the game's quality as it does on those who are critiquing it. This anxiety reflects a larger issue with "traditional" gamers and a fear they hold against walking simulators in general due to their perceived lack of narrative. This patriarchal fear of non-traditional narrative is the core of Shira Chess' "The Queer Case of Video Games" (2016), where she argues that traditional narratives are inherently heteronormative. Narratives that in any way challenge these traditional ones, then, are automatically challenging heteronormativity. In other words, video games' strange narratives are inherently queer. Though video games have an innate queerness due to their othered or queer narratives, some video games, like walking simulators, are particularly queer due to the lack of or delay of the climax. Chess means this climax to literally be the high/turning point of a traditional narrative and to

figuratively represent an orgasmic height of pleasure. While traditional narratives rely on a central moment that releases pleasure, queer narratives delay this pleasure, forcing that feeling to emerge from the delay itself. In *Gone Home*, specifically, this delayed pleasure comes from the fact that the player as Katie cannot actually make changes in the home— "the player has arrived too late to help" (91). Further, when Katie finally finds the full journal Sam has left for her at the end of the game, the player does not get to see it in completion. Instead, since "the player is ultimately denied the climax both literally and figuratively," "the only remaining pleasure is in discovery" (91, 92).

This discovery's identity as queer has recently been pushed back on, however. In 2020, Bo Ruberg published "Straight Paths Through Queer Walking Simulators," where they asserted that, while the video game does present a queer narrative, the linear progression through the game is problematic. Quoting Soraya Murray, Ruberg emphasizes that "video game landscapes . . . can be understood as ideologies: 'spaces [that] naturalize a certain set of relations through a highly curated framing of the playable environment' " (634). In this line of thinking, a straight landscape could represent a straight ideology. While the spaces in the game are often read as queer due to the actions that occur within them, a major part of the queerness of these games, for Ruberg, are the temporalities: "gaming temporalities are many and varied, yet rarely do they map neatly to the progression of real-world time" (634). As they see it, *Gone Home* only presents a singular possibility, where there is a starting point (Katie arriving at the home) and an ending point (Katie finding Sam's diary). The game uses "gating," a typical method in games that keeps certain areas locked, but this shapes the direction for the players, pointing them in overall a singular direction, which Ruberg sees as being tied to the reason why speedrunners have become so obsessed with the game: "Speedrunning also straightens *Gone Home* by shifting attention away from the game's LGBTQ representational elements. As a practice, speedrunning reframes the game as an opportunity for players to master efficient movement rather than a queer story" (647). This "straight" temporality, for Ruberg, thus limits the queer space in games like and including *Gone Home*.

Ruberg does have an important point: the temporality in this game is often one that is moving forward mechanically. However, I see the linear direction as an intentional contrast that further illuminates the failure of place and queer dwelling. This chapter will be situated within the present discourse by exploring the queer domesticity present while also pushing back against this potential straightness by offering new ways to see queer aspects of the game. While limitations exist, the narratives, stories, and placemaking all emerge as queer methods that work hand in hand with the temporalities present to craft a realistic portrait of queer resistance and homemaking within a heteronormative society. In order to make this argument, I work with a framework at the intersections of queer theory, thing theory, domestic theory, and trauma theory, specifically looking at authors such as Susan Fraiman, Arjun

Appruadai, and Lauren Berlant, among others. Specifically, this chapter will argue that the ability to be or make home in this game is inherently queer, which leads to a queer temporality that one then must be able to navigate via interaction with object and archives in order to create authentic place. Sam Greenbriar, specifically, is the character the argument hinges on, as she is the one being most directly challenged by what home can be. In order to understand Sam's homemaking, this chapter focuses on three elements: the queer spatiality of the home itself; making routine through the ordering of objects; and creating archives through the use of journal entries, zines, and photographs. In the game, the player is forced to ask: does the friction of moving linearly through non-linear time create a temporality where going [away from] home holds the same possibility of placemaking as going [back to] home? In response, this chapter says yes and in turn offers a way to understand a unique creation of home and belonging that emerges through reckoning with one's everyday trauma.

Exploring Queer Spatiality

One of the first hallmarks of *Gone Home's* queerness becomes apparent in the labyrinthine shape of the home itself. Moving throughout the home appears direct at first; however, since the space itself is foreign and affectively haunted, the experience of the house is not linear. This is initially presented by the house not being fully accessible to the player. The player must find keys throughout the house in order to further explore different areas, and this gating makes it appear as if the house itself has its own agency, blocking off and holding onto the stories it has witnessed. It is not possible for the player to move throughout the house in a way that makes the most logical sense. For instance, one cannot go straight to the attic and discover Sam's journal. This strange movement in the house is the first inkling the player gets that there is a failure of home and that the boundaries or margins of home are shifted, making it only accessible by certain individuals. Further, by making the house foreign, the time spent in the house is also extended and bent in non-traditional or unexpected ways. What is prioritized is not the practical movement through physical space but the presentation of the history that has occurred in the space. Sercan Şergun (2017) touches on this collapse of spatiality and temporality in his discussion of the game, stating that "to explore the story of [Sam], players must discover the secret hiding places in the house that thematically coincide with [Sam's] hidden identity" (36). Essentially, Sam's personal history becomes intertwined with the spatiality of the home, and since stories and emotions define shape, it causes the temporality to queer as well. Though there is a beginning and end to the game, the stories themselves have been scattered, thus similarly scattering the movement through the space and its history.

As touched upon by Şengün, multiple passageways and secret compartments are revealed throughout the game, further queering the spatiality.

While the hidden passages are required to progress the story, the secret compartments in the walls simply supplement the story, with the game able to be completed without them. For example, the hidden room under the stairs will always be discovered, but the player may not discover the panels on random hallways in the house that trigger additional memories/journal entries. Thus, even though the game has only one ending, the house has become so twisted in its identity that it may hold onto its secrets permanently if the player is not cautious. Much like in reality, the complex layers of queer identity can remain hidden if not under a watchful, persistent eye. To fully access this queer spatiality, the player may have to replay the game, further queering time and blurring a clear beginning and end. As scholar Kevin Veale (2017) notes, "not everyone will find or recognise all of the clues to this storyline concealed within the house. The house itself is used as a character in order to portray the rest of Katie's family by how they use its spaces" (659–60). Veale emphasizes a vital point here: the house itself becomes a character. I assert this goes even beyond Veale's idea of portrayal; the house *interacts* with the other characters (and the player herself) and challenges them to make home within it—and to fail. In the context of the story, the spatial queering may cause queer temporality, but it is not caused *by* it. Instead, the house's role as character is created by the othered people in the game—the ones who failed at making home and imbued trauma within its very walls. Now, it is within this very failed space that the queer inhabitants must craft place anew.

One of the two primary hidden spaces is the unmapped passageway that connects the parents' bedroom to the library. This place serves as a relic of Oscar, with a collection of newspaper articles covering the walls. Other than the basement, which as a room already is an othered part of a house as little-to-no dwelling typically occurs there, this small hallway is where the player can discover secrets about the former owner. Even in a house only owned and dwelled in by him, he cannot put his identifying objects and archives within the main portions of the house and must hide them away. These queer places Oscar made then become some of the only places Sam and Lonnie can perform their queer relationship and Sam can find belonging. This conceit of already queered places being the only ones where those without place can find it continues throughout the game. For example, Sam and Lonnie take to the attic (like the basement, also an inherently othered portion of a house) and the second hidden location (the room under the stairs) with the goal of investigating Oscar's ghost and, in the process, find place and their love for each other. Though Oscar is the one who first eschews the ability to make home in the house and thus forces this trauma to pass onto future generations, Sam, being queer in her own sexuality, has a unique power to reclaim these spaces. Essentially, Sam is able to go to the root of the original queering, one used as trauma, and take her own trauma to [re]form it into place for her and Lonnie. Further, in these actions, Oscar is brought into the future, and the girls are brought into the past, which continues to collapse and queer time and which is essential to the reclaiming and reforming. The

queer time and queer home begin to work together, and Lonnie and Sam are able to explore a sense of home in each other in a house that could not offer Sam home traditionally.

Queer homes and searching for place within them is not a foreign concept; in fact, Susan Fraiman explores this in detail in her book *Extreme Domesticity* (2017), where she defines the multitude of ways that individuals create homes on the margins or in times of crisis, looking mainly at queer individuals, people of color, and those without traditional homes. For Fraiman, home is not simply about desire but necessity, a way to assert one's validity, presence, and identity. This necessity can either come from a figurative or actual being pushed out of a place; one way or another, there is a lack of ability to exist within the framework of that place. These places—which Fraiman asserts are "defined less by actions than by objects," versus space, which is "defined by operations and itineraries" (127)—create boundaries that only allow specific individuals to operate within. Thus, when individuals move through a house without being able to make their existence tangible or distinct in some way, the house begins to lose its ability to be a home or a place. While Fraiman is less interested in physical houses and more in other physical locations where people find home, it is also possible to use Fraiman's ideas of place and space to understand the kind of domestic desires for home and creation of home *within* the houses that fail. In *Gone Home*, before leaving the Greenbriar house, Sam finds ways to practice homemaking within it, which gives her the power to leave and create external places anew with Lonnie. Space becomes this nebulous area, defined by actions of those in power, that does not allow belonging, while place becomes the site of belonging when those in its boundaries are able to craft new routine while interacting with objects.

The queer spatiality of the house parallels the queer experience of Sam, but it only does so *because* of Sam's lack of belonging. The house's traditional structure has been challenged by Oscar, and the entire Greenbriar family inherited it and furthered the queering of the space. However, due to Sam's queer identity, she can use these spaces to learn about how to craft domestic safe places for her and those she loves in the future. The fact Katie is exploring Sam's past during the present while learning about how Sam is preparing for her future is what creates a queer time that challenges straight paths. Essentially, when one cannot successfully make home and navigate place in a structure with limiting literal and affective boundaries, time itself begins to be experienced differently as people have to experience past, present, and future all at once, and lines between past and present, specifically, are completely blurred. The creation of place, however, does not happen simply from existing within a queer place one previously made; there are actions that must be performed that allow this possibility. As Fraiman indicates, actions of domesticity can be brought into non-traditionally domestic spaces in order to craft belonging that actually can safely hold the individual(s) within it. Sam must find a way to reckon with the lack of place, and, as her journals

reveal, she has done so—crafting a new domestic everyday through a routine of curating objects and creating archives.

Creating a New Everyday

Due to Oscar, the Greenbriar's everyday experience in their home is rife with trauma and queerness. Terry, the patriarch of the family, uses writing to attempt to make sense of a past where he was abused by Oscar. He is a mostly failed author who writes about a time traveler who can stop major historic events, like the assassination of JFK. Since the affective, and in his case physical, trauma in the space compacted time, Terry ends up attempting to exert control over time in order for him to reckon with his trauma; in short, he wants to change the past. However, Terry fails and instead perpetuates the past's trauma by not embracing Sam's queer identity. To be clear, Terry does not sexually abuse Sam, but he does emotionally abuse her by not accepting her sexuality. This particular trauma is only furthered by the mother, Janice, who similarly sees Sam's identity as a phase. Terry and Janice are able to take the next step to making place for themselves, leaving on vacation to rekindle their relationship, just how Katie is able to leave for a trip to Europe to find herself. However, while her family can easily leave the house and attempt to create place in more traditional methods, Sam, as a queer girl in a queer space and as a teenager under her parents' care, cannot partake in this same journey. She cannot work through the kinks in the space because nearly all senses of home are removed from her reach due to the aforementioned initial fracturing of the place and the additional fracturing of not being accepted by her parents. She has a unique onus to make place within the confines of this house, and thus, she must learn how to navigate the house as space by performing her own housekeeping through a new everyday routine—ultimately transforming it into place.

Particularly, this everyday need to make place and home on the margins portrays a form of *crisis ordinary*, a term Lauren Berlant coins in her book *Cruel Optimism* (2011). As a person starts reckoning with the forced change of trauma and the finding of self in its light, they experience a new sense of ordinariness. Berlant claims that "the ordinary becomes a landfill for overwhelming and impending crises of life-building and expectation whose sheer volume so threatens what it has meant to 'have a life' that adjustment seems like an accomplishment" (3). Since this ordinary, everyday experience is one in which trauma is imbued, the reckoning with this trauma also becomes everyday. The need be in a constant state of upkeep parallels traditional domestic acts of keeping house—they both require routine to keep place dwellable. This inextricability between home, trauma, and time evokes Rita Felski, who echoes Berlant in her book *Doing Time* (2000) when she asserts that "the temporality of everyday life and its spatial anchoring are closely connected. Both repetition and home speak to an essential feature of everyday life: its familiarity" (89). Beyond this further assertion that the everyday is a form

of home, Felski specifically traces what happens when routine and everyday activity are interrupted and how that affects an individual's identity, specifically in relation to the collective history through which their persona evolves. She states that

> the temporality of everyday life . . . combines repetition and linearity, recurrence with forward movement. The everyday cannot be opposed to the realm of history, but is rather the very means by which history is actualized and made real.
>
> (84–85)

Thus, home is not just a space in which traditionally domestic work happens; it is any temporal space in which the ordinary, the everyday experience, is made sense of. Further, it is this making sense of the everyday that creates history—the same history one must reckon with. In this vein, then, Sam must be able to embrace her personal trauma and situate it within the collective history of the space, creating new routines in this space in order to learn methodologies to practice in her own queer future and placemaking.

In order to transform both inherited and individual trauma into her own crisis ordinary, Sam imbues identity into objects. In fact, in this game, objects are what hold the most weight, as it is only through the player's interaction with objects that the family's stories can be discovered. This house is riddled with items, containing, as Veale says, the seemingly random "detritus" of "every-day lives" (659). The player can interact with the vast majority of these—pick them up, turn them over, and even throw them. The agency the player does not have over the story itself or the space's linearity, she does have over the interaction with the space. This is limited to a degree; as Şengün notes, "this is a selective possession, as not every object can be interacted with, and not every kind of interaction is possible with every object" (39). However, this only highlights the importance of the distinct, individual identity of each object, objects that might suggest what the mom uses to pass her time or what the food the family likes to eat. To be clear, the objects unlinked to journals "tell" the players next to nothing—there is no text or information about the family. Thus, the player is making her own conclusions in reference to what empty pizza boxes and full tack boards represent. This places a unique agency on the player to perform interpretation. Of course, no object is completely void of meaning. Arjun Appadurai, a leading critic in thing theory, asserts that objects take on the collective and individual identities, stories, and personas of the world around them. Objects' identities are not only rooted in perception but can change over time; Appadurai specifically states in his article "The Thing Itself" (2006) that when a human being interacts with an object, it changes. This is foundational to his belief that "persons and things are not radically distinct categories" and are instead quite similar and thus capable of having a relationship (15). In this vein, the

objects in the game emerge as the holders of both collective individual identities within the dwelling space. Due to these inherent identities and relationships between objects and people, there becomes a symbiotic relationship in the using of ordering objects to create place.

Within the Greenbriar house, each object that the player and that the family interacts with holds the personal social identity of Oscar Masan and the Greenbriars. As Veale echoes, the "different areas have been personalized by different people living there" (659). For instance, in the room under the stairs, which Sam and Lonnie have redefined as the place in which they attempt to contact the dead, the player can find Oscar's name tag; this is one of the few objects in the game that actually belonged to Oscar and that he would have held and worn. A name tag is, of course, a way to identify; it is an object that is meant to make clear one's personhood. Here, however, the object changes meaning to be an item that the girls' attempt to use to contact his spirit. Its original meaning fails in addition to being given a new meaning. It now serves as a reminder both that no one truly knew Oscar and that what remains most clearly about his identity is how his very name haunts the home. Inherently, then, each object in this game represents something greater, and the game taps into this in its literal temporal connection to previous events with the journal entries. The objects, then, naturally emerge as a tool of navigating queer space and time for both the player and the family, and the game makes this evident to the player so it can then display how the characters begin to use objects to create their own individual sense of identity.

Late in the game, the player learns about Sam's parents not being accepting of her coming out. While Sam has always struggled to fit in, this cements a lack of home for her and initiates her unique crisis ordinary that differs from the one her parents struggle with. She then begins to practice curating objects and testing the waters of homemaking. For instance, in her darkroom, Sam can choose which photos to hang where, which to keep, and which to give away. She displaces and *replaces* this space through the arranging of photographs. This visual curating is complemented by an aural one with the mixtapes left throughout the house that are not only performances from Sam but in this case Lonnie as well. When the two cannot communicate publicly in their everyday lives, they select songs that hold their individual feelings, arrange and curate them in the tapes, and present these stories to one another as another queer form of storytelling. The pair are able to find stories that represent their feelings and then use them as tools for communication since this space does not provide them the tools for traditional communication. In being able to close doors and turn on stereos, they can communicate, and this ordering then creates the possibility of authentic identity and intimacy. This communication is a sign of agency as, though Katie is the one who finds the photos and tapes, they only make sense because of Sam; the object must be defined by their social identity in Sam's context. This parallels what Dimitrios

Pavlounis (2016) asserts in his work on the game when he says, "many of the objects in the game are of little value unto themselves but acquire significance only when contextualized through Sam's voice-overs" (583). Sam has been able to navigate this queer temporality with control and intuition and use it to curate her own place and temporality where the meanings of objects shift and can only be made sense of through her lens. Even after Sam has physically left the home, her arrangement of objects and stories has become so powerful that it lingers in the player's present.

Building off of this is the arguably even more impactful curating of the journal entries themselves. Though Sam is not physically presenting her journal to the player, she is the presence that is tying each entry to a document or object; her queer placemaking has created the curation Katie then experiences. This is further cemented by the fact that the first letter the player finds from Sam and reads linguistically is what is aurally played in the last scene of the game when the player finds the physical journal. Sam brings the player full circle and collapses the temporality in the game—the beginning becomes the end and vice versa. Further, Katie has not been the one actually hearing the journal entries—the player has—so it is as if Sam is talking directly to the player. This further emphasizes that she has chosen which stories to tell when and to which object each story should be connected. This allows her such a sense of belonging that she transcends the boundaries of physical place in the house *and* the boundaries of the game to commune with the player. Sam redefines the objects and curates her stories, performing the creation of place through queer temporality. Now that Sam has found what it means to create place and has left this house to find a new home, she has an agency and power and control that she never did earlier on. By being the driving force of the routine—through curating the aural journals by attaching them to objects—Sam creates home within the house that reflects her queer identity. While the queer temporality and spatiality in the house emerged from Oscar, Sam has been able to make it her own. Once Sam is successful in her curation and creation of everyday, she continues her agency—still using objects—by recording and cementing her and Lonnie's history.

Archiving and Recording Identity

Though objects all have the ability to be ordered and curated, the game additionally focuses on a specific kind of object that can be created and uniquely altered: written texts and archives. The purpose of using archives specifically for navigating trauma and creating place is explored by Ann Cvetkovich in her book *An Archive of Feelings* (2003), where she states,

> 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. It thus demands an unusual archive.
>
> (7)

When a trauma occurs, there is an expression of identity that must be navigated and recorded, often in strange or queer ways.

As already explored, Sam's queer identity has been obfuscated by her parents and the trauma in the house, and she has now learned how to make home, but she also uses this new power to make permanent changes before she leaves the Greenbriar house. Her archives span from traditional to not, appearing as journal entries, collage/zines, and photography. Sam's choice to record her life in journal entries, privating her life with Lonnie, shows she is partaking in archival work and specifically creating a historiography wherein her reality is a truth that cannot be forgotten or neglected. Due to the lack of home within the physical space Sam dwells in, even her simple daily feelings require a bearing of witness and proof of existence. In a house where she claims her parents "do not even respect" her enough to believe she could even be attracted to a woman, everything from her casual school interactions to her first kiss with Lonnie must be preserved alongside each other. Further, in this journal, Sam gets to determine the audience and for once becomes the agent in control of her own narrative, something she has not been allowed elsewhere. She has carved out belonging within the collapsed, queer spatiality of the home—but it is only temporary. Consequently, she learns to cultivate this archival work, cementing a sense of place that lingers even after its creators have moved on and thus furthering the house's queer temporality.

Together, Sam and Lonnie begin to explore a record of themselves through their making of zines and taking of photographs. Zines are a unique medium in themselves, a collage of quotes, images, and drawings that the girls use to perform feminist and queer resistance. This zine, specifically, harkens back to the riot grrrl movement, which began in the early 1990s and became one of the main hallmarks of third-wave feminism. The movement itself hosts a sense of collage and archive, being referred to by Nadine Monem (2007) in her book about the movement as a "DIY [do-it-yourself] historical analysis" (7). On the girls' zine cover, they make comments such as "revolution!" "kicking against the patriarchy," and "grrrl justice now." The woman on the cover comes from the in-game graphic novel *Women Outlaws*, and the back cover makes reference to Sam's creative story featuring the lesbian couple Captain Allegra and her First Mate. Essentially, the zines are an amalgamation of Sam and Lonnie's identities. They take a movement associated with embracing otherness and a form rooted in collage in order to not only assert their beliefs but to record their own identities by overlapping images that speak to them with their own creative stories and hand-drawn images. Furthering this use of images, Sam and Lonnie continue to record themselves through the photographs Sam takes. In Sam's darkroom, there are four developed

photographs hanging: one of Lonnie's uniform, a close up of one of the girls' eyes, the girls' hands with their S + L necklaces, and the girls' shadows on the pavement. Interestingly, while the girls are in all the photos, they are never really identifiable. The only image with a face is a close-up of an eye, and it is framed in a way that makes it impossible to identify whether it is Sam or Lonnie. The girls become so close that they almost become interchangeable; thus, they are not just recording everyday experience but recording the wholeness of the queer identity. This private performativity is explored in detail by Jordan Youngblood (2020), who sees photography in the game as a method of queer power. As he says, Sam's photos of Lonnie perform a "communal space of resistance" where "a documentation of acts, identities, and relationships heretofore seen as largely impossible" (158) can exist. Beyond this, the photos become not just an exploration of queer self but a permanent encapsulation of the essence of the girls' everyday performance. This is the final step in the creation of home—a confident assertion of self and authentic reflection of belonging.

Conclusion

As Pavlounis notes, "time in *Gone Home* is often layered and entangled, and making sense of the world requires players to conceive of time thematically and relationally" (582). In this game, navigating trauma or queer identity—both queer as othered and as sexually queer—in the domestic sphere provides a sense of time that is both collapsed and expanded. In this, the temporality of the everyday emerges as inherently circular because it requires a sense of repetition in order to be something capable of dwelling. One must be able to create and dwell within their own norm and selfhood. Specifically, the routine actions of one's own life creates a norm that functions as a dwelling space, and for one to access this belonging, their actions of homemaking must accurately reflect their identity. To not have repetition and to not have patterns is to not have a sense of home, and without a sense of home, there is nothing to root place and identity within. Though trauma necessitates this rooting, it is also the thing that causes the severing and first queers dwelling. When, post-trauma, a house fails to provide a sense of home, it only makes sense that its dwellers would have to eschew the traditional temporality and spatiality of space in order to seek out where they can place these new roots. These new [inter]actions not only redefine space but emerge as a queer domestic measure that allows queer individuals to navigate their trauma and have a greater chance of being comfortable in their own self. Each member of the family may all have different relationships with home, but Sam is the only one able to fracture the cycle of trauma due to the necessitation of homemaking on the margins rooted in her sexual queerness. Sam's decision to leave her family is not a sign of failure but success, and the player is able to leave the game with the belief Sam has indeed "gone [away from] home" in order to go *towards* home.

In the end—Fullbright's game asks: what does it mean to go home? For home to fail? For home to even be able to exist? In *Gone Home*, while the house stands, the home itself is gone, its boundaries eroded by the family that has lived within and refused its definition of place, for better or worse. If home is supposed to be a place of familiarity where the self can develop and grow, and this very place is what restrains queer individuals from doing so, one must queer domesticity and time right back, living on the margins and carving out their own place. This *is* ordinary, *is* everyday, and is the past continually existing in the present. It is only through putting hands directly inside of these mutating boundaries and performing homemaking through the ordering of spatial and temporal rituals that the othered individual can reckon with memory and trauma and create belonging. In the end, by holding these perceptions of domestic place and affective time together and looking at *Gone Home* through their lens, we see refracted in its light what it means to go home. When place does not allow queer individuals, they collapse time, imbue the affect of their memory into boundaries, order their stories with objects, and record themselves with archives. Through these actions, Sam presents a way of being able to craft storytelling and preserve history that more accurately represents queer identity. In the end, it is only through tracing and embracing the circular, spiraled structure of memory and desire that one can say, like Sam finally does in the final lines of the game, "I am where I need to be."

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4 Identity in the In-Between

Narrative Temporality and the Queer Experience in *Tangerine* and *Moonlight*

Małgorzata Mączko

As film narrative unfolds over time, "the spectator submits to a programed temporal form" (Bordwell 1985, 74) by following and encoding the overarching story from individual scenes. Although narrative temporality in cinema can be manipulated for complexity's sake, it often follows the typical, linear progression of events. This temporal regime—in life and on screen—can be constrictive for those whose experiences do not conform to it. The notion of queer temporality was developed to account for a non-cisheteronormative perception of time—one that, in an act of resistance, reconfigures and undermines its stereotypical, dominant understanding.

Queer cinema draws from the idea of queer time when it consciously strays away from classic modes of narration. Although *Tangerine* (2015, dir. Sean Baker) and *Moonlight* (2016, dir. Barry Jenkins) approach the issue of queer identity and experience in a drastically different manner, both films rely on an altered narrative temporality. They can be understood as a cinematic reflection of queer space and queer time. The characters' underprivileged social standing is mirrored in the spaces they occupy, frequently situated on the margins of the typical spatial order, while their lives unfold in the moments of uncertainty and instability. The films' queer protagonists of color, *Tangerine*'s Sin-Dee and *Moonlight*'s Chiron, may not have much in common, but they are both immediately recognized as the Other within their communities and are pushed to the margins. They are alienated and discriminated against by society and lack equal treatment and efficient protection at the state level. Trying to find alternative sites for self-realization, the characters exist in a state of in-betweenness: in a constant searching movement, or in the process of becoming. Ultimately, they are able to carve out a space and time for themselves within the stifling cisheteronormative spatiotemporal order. These three categories—of otherness, in-betweenness, and self-realization—lead my examination of how queer characters of color in *Tangerine* and *Moonlight* occupy spatial and temporal settings and transform them to suit their needs and to affirm their queer identities.

By applying the framework of queer temporality to the analysis of the two films, along with additional theoretical input from film and memory studies, this chapter traces how film form can reflect an alternative temporal

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experience and represent queer stories and individuals on their own terms. Such narratives have a special significance for the queer community, particularly in precarious sociopolitical eras such as our own.

Others on the Margins

Throughout his career, the director of *Tangerine*, Sean Baker, has focused on a recurring set of themes and motifs. Although often comedic in tone, his films usually center on the lives of those who function at the margins of American society, particularly due to their economic status. Baker is sympathetic to their struggle and questions the workings of a system that regularly fails the vulnerable. The world of his films is populated by outsiders, who do not conform to what the American society perceives as the norm. On the contrary, their identities are established in evident opposition to it. They choose to be different and to celebrate their otherness, even if it makes their lives more difficult to navigate.

The events of Baker's fifth feature film, *Tangerine*, unfold over the course of one day. Sin-Dee Rella (Kitana Kiki Rodriguez) is released from prison on Christmas Eve and meets up with her friend, Alexandra (Mya Taylor). When she finds out that her boyfriend and pimp, Chester, has been cheating on her with a "white fish"—a cisgender white woman—Sin-Dee sets out on a whirlwind search for the girl and her unfaithful partner. In the meantime, an Armenian taxi driver, Razmik (Karren Karagulian), learns that his favorite sex worker is "back on the block" and tries to catch up with her. The two storylines converge in an explosive confrontation between the characters. After peace is seemingly restored, Sin-Dee is subjected to a final act of violence. The last scene departs from the light-hearted mood of the rest of the film but serves as a reaffirmation of trans friendship and sisterhood.

As transgender sex workers of color, Sin-Dee and Alexandra experience multiple discrimination, as described by legal scholar, Kimberlé Crenshaw (1989). Their identity and occupation place them at odds with the majority of American white, conservative society and make them susceptible to racist and transphobic abuse. Their situation is best understood through the lens of intersectionality, because it renounces single-axis analysis to instead focus on the "multiply-burdened" (Crenshaw 1989, 140). This framework allows to account for "the numerous structural factors and institutional practices of racialized gender that delimit black and brown trans women's life chances" (Snorton 2017, ix). Figures show that trans women of color are particularly vulnerable to violence—each year, they make up most of the victims in the rising number of fatal attacks on trans and gender non-conforming individuals in the U.S. (Carlisle 2021). Baker's film predates the recent rise in anti-trans rhetoric and legislation in the U.S., which occurred during Donald Trump's presidency, along with the mainstreaming of racism and white extremism (Fording and Schram 2020). Despite the shift in federal policy under the Biden administration, the worrying trend continues at the state

level, with a record number of anti-trans laws still being introduced today (Jones and Navarro 2022).

Although *Tangerine's* plot is driven by a comedic pursuit of a cheating boyfriend, the film references everyday dangers faced by trans women of color and gives voice to the trans perspective. Writing on the figure of turbulence in visual art, Jack Halberstam explained the *transgender look* as "a mode of seeing and being seen that is not simply at odds with binary gender but that is part of a reorientation of the body in space and time"[1] (2005, 109). In *Tangerine*, queer characters exist outside of the typical temporal and spatial order. Their lives are marred by a sense of transience and liminality as they go through a period of uncertainty and unbelonging, trying to function in an environment hostile to any signs of queerness and otherness. As such, the narrative is structured in a way that reflects the trans experience and highlights the systemic oppression of the trans community in the United States.

Taylor and Rodriguez, who had no previous acting experience but have led lives similar to those of their characters, shared their own histories with Baker. They told him about the sex work scene in West Hollywood, about their own encounters with the police, and about a series of attacks on trans sex workers in the neighborhood. In an interview with Zack Etheart (2015), Baker admitted that while the story about "a woman scorned"—contributed by Rodriguez—became central to the plot, it was important for him to work other features of his actresses' experiences into the script as well. This collaboration imbues the film with a more authentic perspective of trans experience and introduces a *transgender gaze*—"a way of looking within the film that sees a trans man or trans woman as they see themselves" (Steinbock 2017, 400). *Tangerine* portrays a vibrant trans community, full of characters who are unapologetically themselves. Unlike many older films featuring trans characters, *Tangerine* "proclaims rather than hides the characters' transness" (Malone 2020, 67) but does so without focusing solely on their gender identity. The very first conversation between the two leads introduces them to the audience as trans women, when they discuss changes in Alexandra's body caused by estrogen. They swiftly move to other topics, as their transness is presented as a fact of life which, while obviously determining their daily experiences, is not central to the plot.

Similarly to *Tangerine*, Barry Jenkins's breakthrough film, *Moonlight*, also deals with themes of queer identity and belonging and is inspired by the first-hand experiences of a queer creator. Jenkins' film is an adaption of Tarell Alvin McCraney's semi-autobiographical script, *In Moonlight Black Boys Look Blue*, written in the early 2000s as a drama school project. Although it has been called a play in numerous publications, McCraney opposes this classification and is adamant that it was not meant to be staged (Allen 2016). The original text was never published, but the available descriptions of its content show an emphasis on visuality, simultaneity, and circularity of events. McCraney had been aware that the idea behind the script "would be better

served as a film than a play" (Allen 2016), so when Jenkins approached him with a plan to adapt it for the screen, he agreed. The director was drawn to the project because it reflected many of his own experiences of growing up in Miami's Liberty City in the 1980s and the 1990s (Zaman and Rapold 2016).

Jenkins decided to untangle McCraney's complex idea of simultaneous storytelling and split *Moonlight's* narrative into three acts, each dedicated to a different period in the protagonist's life. In doing so, he risked losing the essence of the original script—as Kara Keeling notes, when conventional time is forced upon queer stories, "many things escape, becoming invisible and/or unrecognizable within the film's stylistic and narrative framework" (2009, 575). Jenkins, nevertheless, managed to retain a sense of altered temporality by introducing ellipses and absences to an otherwise chronological script, which results in a "narrative development that relies less on logic and more on contingency, or chance" (Demory 2019, 94). *Moonlight* can then be understood as an example of applying the complex, intricate logic of memory to queer storytelling, which is evident in the narrative structure of the film. Jenkin's film recounts the alienation felt by a young queer man throughout his life and depicts how he comes to terms with his own identity, which has been the basis for his social othering.

The first segment of the film gives an insight into the main character's difficult upbringing. Chiron, nicknamed Little (played by Alex R. Hibbert), is introduced to the audience as he escapes a pack of bullies and finds shelter in an abandoned building littered with drug paraphernalia—a reminder of the raging crack epidemic that heavily impacted Black communities in the 1980s and the 1990s. He is found by Juan (Mahershala Ali), a local drug dealer, who takes pity on the boy and takes him under his wing. He provides him with shelter on the days when his mother, a nurse suffering from substance use disorder, is unable or unwilling to take care of him. Juan steps into the role of a father figure, which up to this point has been absent from Chiron's life. The second act takes place a few years later, when teenage Chiron (Ashton Sanders) no longer responds to his old nickname. Although he tries not to draw any attention to himself, he is still relentlessly bullied. In the meantime, his mother's addiction has become more severe, which irreparably damages their relationship. It is during his teenage years that Chiron begins to explore his identity, and gets a first taste of queer desire as he shares a kiss with his childhood friend, Kevin (Jharrel Jerome). Shortly after their moment of intimacy, a school bully, Tyrell, pressures Kevin into beating up his friend. When Chiron exacts a brutal revenge on Tyrell, he is arrested and ends up in a juvenile detention center. The man who emerges from these experiences in the final act of the film appears as an entirely different person to Little or Chiron. Time and circumstance have hardened him into Black (Trevante Rhodes), a "muscled up, gold grillz-wearing, tricked-out Oldsmobile Cutlass-driving, Atlanta hustler" (Wooden 2022, 17). Yet, a single meeting with Kevin (André Holland) proves that under the cold, guarded demeanor, Chiron is still just as emotionally vulnerable as he ever was.

Like *Tangerine*, Jenkins' film also deals with the complex issues of social disadvantages experienced by a person whose identity makes them susceptible to multiple discrimination. The very first scene of the film shows that Chiron's otherness makes him the scapegoat for his peers: he is mercilessly bullied, has homophobic slurs hurled at him, and is seen as weak and unbelonging. He is not only an outsider in his own community but also within the broader workings of the system. Chiron is born into poverty, at a time when Black communities were struggling with the violent effects of widespread drug use. Through no fault of his own, he had been given limited prospects for the future and had virtually no means to break out of the cycle of abuse. His circumstances shaped him, and *Moonlight* attempts to come to terms with the past while also tentatively working toward an alternative, possible future. The film's structure reads like a recollection, a series of interconnected memories, or a meditation on what constitutes one's identity over time. As the creators try to make sense of their own youth, the audience pieces together Chiron's history and fills in the gaps in the semi-autobiographical narrative. It is the untold moments of in-betweenness that shape him and eventually enable his true self to flourish.

In the In-Between: Liminality, Uncertainty, and the Work of Memory

Tangerine's spatiotemporal setting is used to further highlight the film's main tropes of marginalization and to introduce the notion of in-betweenness. The queer experience is shown to be volatile, subject to sudden changes, and marred by a constant uncertainty. Upon her release from prison, Sin-Dee experiences a period of instability and liminality as she tries to reenter her environment. She moves frantically through space, always in a rush. Rhythmic music accentuates her steps, highlighting the speed and the sense of passing time. Baker draws the audience further into the action with his camerawork. The film was shot entirely on iPhones, which gave it a distinct visual quality: the images are grainy, heavily saturated, focused, and often unsteady. Megan Malone argues that *Tangerine* offers "an expansion of visual grammars for depicting trans people" (2020, 74). It also exemplifies how visual tools can be used to reflect the narrative focus on the queer spatial and temporal experience. These stylistic choices in queer representation "encode and enact the bending of dominant form" (Freeman 2010, xix), undermining the cisheteronormative spatiotemporal order.

The fact that the film plays out on Christmas Eve should not be overlooked, as it pertains to an altered temporal order. It is a day of preparation for family gatherings and celebrations, during a period that is strongly linked with a sense of community and belonging. Christmas Eve is also marked by a feeling of liminality, falling between the regular and the festive period. *Tangerine* shows how the streets gradually empty as the day progresses, with people heading home to their families. In stark contrast to them, the characters

spend their Christmas Eve at Donut Time, where they learn about each other's betrayals and infidelities: Razmik's wife and mother-in-law find out about his extramarital dalliances with transgender sex workers, while Sin-Dee discovers that Chester cheated on her with Alexandra. Their time at the café is limited—the cashier constantly tries to get them to leave, and eventually calls the police—so the confrontation happens at breakneck speed. English and Armenian mix in the fast-paced exchange, and frantic camera movements and swift editing further highlight the tempo. This dramatic breakdown of a number of close relations happens on borrowed time, and the characters are acutely aware of it. In blatant opposition to its festive, normative connotations, for them Christmas Eve is just another day of struggle.

Marc Augé's concept of *non-places* is useful in examining how *Tangerine's* spatial setting further highlights the instability of the daily queer experience in the fast-changing modern world. In *Non-Places: Introduction to an Anthropology of Supermodernity*, Augé argues that we live in times of *supermodernity* characterized by a triple figure of excess—of time, space, and ego. The titular *non-places* are a distinct product and the fullest expression of our current moment. They are defined as:

> spaces in which neither identity, nor relations, nor history really make any sense; spaces in which solitude is experienced as an overburdening or emptying of individuality, in which only the movement of the fleeting images enables the observer to hypothesize the existence of a past and glimpse the possibility of a future.
>
> (1995, 87)

Examples of non-places given by Augé consist mostly of spaces connected with travelling and transit, such as motorways, airports, or hotel lobbies, but also feature spaces of commerce and recreation, with a sense of transience that accompanies them as their common denominator. These spaces usually come with a set of rules and regulations that their users are expected to adjust to, in what Augé calls, "solitary contractuality" (1995, 94). Crucially, non-places seem to strip individuals of their identity and agency to some extent, relegating them to existing solely in the role of a traveler, a guest, or a customer.

Tangerine's opening scene sets the tone for the rest of the film in which socially and economically disadvantaged characters are forced to function exclusively within spaces that are not designed to uphold social relations. When Sin-Dee and Alexandra meet at Donut Time, they share a single donut—they cannot afford to buy another one, but the small purchase gives them the comfort of being paying customers. Although a café is not a typical non-place, the scene is an early sign of the characters' underprivileged position. It also foreshadows the way they will counter the very nature of various non-places by introducing elements of social life into spaces that are

supposedly non-relational. Augé describes the feelings that accompany the act of slipping into the role of a customer as "the passive joys of identity-loss, and the more active pleasure of role-playing" (1995, 103). Sin-Dee and Alexandra do not get to fully partake in such an experience: although they sometimes try to keep up the appearance of being regular users of non-places, their identity, their social standing, and their transness—even when they are not explicitly addressed—remain evident to those around them and are read as otherness. In a deviation from many other film narratives, in which trans characters had to "disappear in order to remain viable" (Halberstam 2005, 78), *Tangerine* does not subdue its characters' identities, instead opting for their loud and open celebration. This stance is the product of two overlapping factors: a change in Hollywood's approach to telling trans stories, influenced by trans activists' long campaigns for inclusion and representation in film, and the trans actors' involvement in the creative process. Gust A. Yep, Fatima Zahrae Chrifi Alaoui, and Ryan M. Lescure point to the figure of transsubjectivity in their study of trans representation in *Tangerine*, explaining it as "modalities of feeling and sense-making that (re)center the lived experiences and perspectives of trans individuals in a cultural context of liminality and ongoing tension between cisnormativity and trans performativity" (2019, 155). Current American cultural production is partially determined by the drive toward inclusivity and diversity, which *Moonlight* benefits from as well. The adoption of transgender gaze or transsubjectivity can offer a path forward for trans representation on screen. Due to the inclusion of trans perspectives and experiences in the filmmaking process, *Tangerine*'s multidimensional, varied, and non-judgmental portrayal of the trans community still stands the test of time.

Throughout the film, Sin-Dee and Alexandra make their way across West Hollywood and stop at various non-places, inquiring about Chester and his partner's whereabouts. They, and many of the people they question, cannot afford a truly private space, so they adapt public places for their own needs. A cheap hotel room becomes a place of business and intimacy for several sex workers at once, in clear disregard of a sign at the entrance that reads "we refuse service to prostitutes"; a bus gives the characters a moment of respite during the frantic chase, while a bar bathroom enables a quiet moment of unexpected sisterhood. Halberstam notes that "queer uses of time and space develop, at least in part, in opposition to the institutions of family, heterosexuality, and reproduction" (2005, 1). This observation is key to understanding Razmik's situation. Like Sin-Dee and Alexandra, he is also immediately read as the Other, as his Armenian roots are betrayed by his accent. His status as an immigrant is not the only feature of his identity that sets him apart from most of American society. Although he projects a façade of heterosexuality and lives with his family, he is also shown to specifically seek out trans sex workers to perform oral sex on. His non-heteronormative desire is pushed into hiding and gets confined to spaces not designated as sites of intimacy,

such as back alleys or a car wash. It is also relegated to short, stolen moments during the day, without a sense of comfort or safety. When Razmik seeks pleasure instead of new clients, he breaks the bounds of *chrononormativity*, explained by Elizabeth Freeman as "the use of time to organize individual human bodies toward maximum productivity" (2010, 3). Indeed, it is in a queer space and time that his identity finds its fullest expression.

The precariousness of the queer experience in *Moonlight* hinges not on what the protagonist chooses to do but rather on how he is unwittingly shaped by his circumstances. Changes to Chiron's character happen largely off-screen, in the periods in-between the acts. His shifting identity and attempts to remake himself are signified by his changing name, although he never comes up with it on his own: his childhood nickname was given to him by his bullies, who were all stronger and larger than him; the name Chiron was chosen for him by his abusive mother. Kevin inspires his last nickname—he calls him Black during their meeting at the beach, which is a "moment of confusion—about internalized self-hatred and the affection of naming" (Als 2016) for Chiron. He takes the name with him into adulthood, when he remakes himself, and creates a colder, harder version of himself—in a way, Chiron tries to jinx the future and regain his agency with this new chosen name.

Although *Moonlight* presents a chronological development of events, the overarching structure of the film alters the typical, linear approach to narrative temporality, further highlighting the feeling of instability. Pamela Demory argues that three figures in particular, "the lack of cause—effect logic, the big gaps in time, and the repetition" (Demory 2019, 98), allow for an interpretation of *Moonlight* from the perspective of queer temporality. While I agree with her assessment, I believe that the film's analysis would benefit from a stronger focus on the work of memory. McCraney explained that his script's alternative temporality and circularity was "just [him] trying to figure out moments of [his] life" (Allen 2016). Jenkins crafted the film around these attempts to make sense of one's own past, with a strong emphasis on its identity-making power. As a result, *Moonlight*'s narrative structure reflects the complex workings of human memory, with its limitations and peculiarities. The three narrative figures mentioned by Demory can be understood as examples of both queer time and queer memory. There is an evident link between memory and narrative, particularly in autobiographical texts. Thus, reading *Moonlight* through the lens of memory can provide a clearer understanding of the purpose of using ellipses and repetition, without undermining its queerness.

Memory does not always conform to the cause–effect logic but is instead highly selective. We often recollect not cohesive stories but sensations—images, sounds, feelings. As an audiovisual medium, film is well positioned to relay these complexities. *Moonlight* is filled with unassuming scenes, whose impact relies more on the emotion they evoke rather than on the

information value they yield. McCraney and Jenkins structure the narrative around absences. There are events and experiences that are hidden in the gaps between particular scenes and between the acts, and the audience is faced with the challenge of filling them with meaning, in an attempt to gain a fuller understanding of who Chiron is. A more direct and linear narrative would fill in the gaps for them, explicitly addressing seemingly crucial events, such as Juan's death or Chiron's time in prison. Instead, Jenkins seems to be acutely aware of these omissions and their narrative purpose. In one scene from the script, he mentions "a joke or memory lost in the cut," proving that film form can be used to imitate the gaps in our recollection of unimportant details. What is more important for Jenkins are the visual cues and overall emotional impact of the scene—these are the elements that stay with Chiron over the years, and with the audience as well. The key to understanding *Moonlight* and Chiron's character is to recognize that "the rendering of memories potentially tells us more about the rememberer's present, his or her desire and denial, than about the actual past events" (Neumann 2008, 333). McCraney's and Jenkins' scripts are their own recollections of their past, and Chiron is not only a character whose history and identity are central to the narrative but also a vessel for the creators' experiences. Demory also notes that *Moonlight* "participates in the practice of queer history, for queer time is not just about narrative construction" (2019, 98). When adapted for the screen, McCraney's memories of the 1980s and the 1990s become an invaluable source of cultural memory about the lives of Black queer people within that period. Because Jenkins commits their combined memories to film, they participate in the project of queer history, highlighting the experiences of those faced with multiple discrimination. There are still very few films about the lives of queer people of color, and here, too, gaps remain, waiting to be filled with recollection and meaning.

Having grown up during those turbulent times, Chiron is the product of his past experiences, both the beautiful and the traumatic. The character of his mother is a representation of the latter. She is the only character who is played by the same actress in all three acts—she is a constant presence, a sign of the "stubborn lingering of pastness" (Freeman 2010, 8), and a reference point for all of Chiron's experiences. In the final act, she is in rehab, frayed from years of substance use, and finally tries to mend her relations with Chiron. Yet her younger self reappears in his nightmares—years later, he still remembers her anger and accusations. Demory calls this return "a shocking discontinuity that is all the more traumatic given the otherwise unified temporal coherence of each separate chapter" (2019, 99). It is not just the return that is traumatic, as the nightmare is merely a recollection of the original traumatic event, symbolic of all the abuse Chiron has suffered in his youth and which has shaped his outlook on life and his relationships with other people. The fact that he is still traumatized from being ostracized and abused in his own childhood home should not come as a surprise—it is in the

very nature of psychological trauma that the original traumatic event returns as a disruption to daily life, to "haunt" the survivor (see Caruth 1996). Chiron has never received the support necessary to process his past, and only the final scene of the film gives him an opening to start the process of healing. This understated ending shows a path forward, introduces an alternative space and time for queer desire, and "allows viewers to imagine different ways that Black men, Black people, can be with one another amid violence, pain, and trauma" (Bailey 2022, 64).

Alternative Sites of Self-Realization

The film characters in *Tangerine* and *Moonlight* face social exclusion that is rooted in multiple discrimination: they are marginalized because of their gender identity, race, occupation, and/or nationality. Yet they establish human connection and form small, even if temporary, communities of outcasts. Halberstam observes that

> perhaps such people could productively be called "queer subjects" in terms of the ways they live (deliberately, accidentally, or of necessity) during the hours when others sleep and in the spaces (physical, metaphysical, and economic) that others have abandoned, and in terms of the ways they might work in the domains that other people assign to privacy and family.
>
> (2005, 10)

The lives of queer characters of color are burdened with an overwhelming sense of uncertainty and instability. This state of flux, of in-betweenness, is not preferable; instead, the characters seek new spatial and temporal sites, which would grant them privacy and offer an affirmation of their identity.

Tangerine's final scene, which establishes an unlikely site for human connection, is undoubtedly its most shocking. Although Sin-Dee and Alexandra receive verbal abuse throughout the film, they are generally shown as capable of defending themselves physically, hardened by their life on the streets. It is only in the last sequence that they are faced with an attack they are unable to counter: Sin-Dee approaches a car, hoping to attract a potential client, but is abused instead—a group of men throw a cup of urine in her face, shouting transphobic and homophobic slurs, and ride off. It is in this moment of crisis and vulnerability that her friendship with Alexandra is reestablished after a short fallout. Alexandra immediately rushes to Sin-Dee's side and tries to assuage the damage. The women head to a nearby laundromat, where Sin-Dee undresses, and tosses her clothes and wig into the wash. Alexandra takes off her own wig, offering it to Sin-Dee in an ultimate act of support. As LaVelle Ridley notes, "hair is a central and politicized aspect of black women's daily experiences, and this gesture signals a fierce love and dedication to

sisterhood" (2019, 488). Despite the recent betrayal, Sin-Dee accepts Alexandra's gesture, which is of crucial importance in a moment such as this: when a vulnerable, marginalized person is stripped of her agency and needs reassurance. Shooting the scene was difficult for Taylor and Rodriguez—they asked for the set to be closed, with only the essential members of the film crew present. They managed to complete the scene in one take, and Baker admitted that witnessing their bravery on set that day made him emotional (see Jacobs 2015). In these final minutes of the film, the world seems to slow down, as the characters, along with the camera that follows them, finally settle. This, too, is a curious use of an unlikely space and time—in the middle of the night, an empty laundromat becomes the site of a deep emotional connection and safety.

The final moment between the two characters is not only an affirmation of unconditional sisterhood and solidarity but also of trans life. It is a stark reminder of the harsh realities of living as a trans sex worker of color, with the constant threat of transphobic violence looming ahead—this time the attack was vicious, but non-fatal. On any other day, the two women could be facing mortal danger. This awareness is one of the factors that shape their daily experiences, and it "creates a new emphasis on the here, the present, the now, and while the threat of no future hovers overhead like a storm cloud, the urgency of being also expands the potential of the moment" (Halberstam 2005, 2). The film portrays Sin-Dee and Alexandra as living fully and unapologetically, despite their difficult circumstances. As trans women of color, who live in a world that ostracizes and punishes them for their very existence, they may be unsure of what the future holds for them, or if there even is a future for them at all. They move through non-places, which exist strictly in the present and are not designed to uphold collective memory, nor individual identity. They, like many other trans and gender non-conforming people

> live, strive, labor, and love within the terms of a world whose regulatory regimes are guaranteed through a generalized, dispersed violence and reinforced via the persistent threat of physical violence directed at those such regulatory regimes do not work to valorize.
>
> (Keeling 2009, 579)

Tangerine's protagonists have to negotiate their own existence within this system, and yet they still try to create alternate possible futures for themselves. Sin-Dee Rella's chosen name is a play on Cinderella—a princess who rises from abuse and poverty, meets the love of her life, and is never mistreated again. Alexandra dreams of a singing career, and during her performance, she fully immerses herself in this vision, because it "provides a tiny reprieve, a moment for viewer and character alike to imagine otherly" (Ridley 2019, 487). The two characters must live with the knowledge that they may never grow old and that their names may join others on a long

list of victims of fatal transphobic and racist violence. They root themselves in the present and only hesitantly look to the future. This, along with the multiple discrimination and marginalization they experience, puts them in a peculiar position of in-betweenness. The fluidity of their situation is not a direct result of their identity as trans women but rather a product of existing in an apathetic system, which consciously pushes them to the margins. They fall through the cracks, not fitting within the restrictive bounds of a system that privileges people dissimilar to them. The way Sin-Dee and Alexandra, but also Razmik, use space and time undermines this order, as they navigate their lives in an uncaring world.

The queer use of space and the transformation of public places into sites of identity affirmation might be less evident in *Moonlight* than in *Tangerine*, but it is no less consistent. Instead of relying on adapting man-made non-places for his own needs, Chiron carves out a space for intimacy and identity exploration within natural sites. Two pivotal scenes happen at the edge of the ocean: in the first act, Juan teaches Little how to swim, while in the second, Chiron's chance meeting with Kevin takes place at the beach. Even the final scene of emotional closure between the two men is preceded by Black staring longingly at the dark waters, visible in the distance. In *Moonlight*, the ocean and its natural surroundings become a symbol of what Marlon M. Bailey calls *mutual recognition*—a way for Black men to "see, recognize, and connect with each other in moments of need, appreciation, and love, particularly under conditions of anti-Blackness and anti-queerness, regardless or perhaps even because of their sexuality" (2022, 60). The spatial organization of Chiron's world leaves little space for non-heteronormative forms of expression, so they are again relegated to unlikely spaces. But in doing so, they are also physically separated from sites of hurt: Chiron's identity and desire get to develop away from the harsh realities of living with an uncaring mother in a poverty-stricken, violent neighborhood. In *Moonlight*, the ocean becomes "a site of transformation and belonging" (Wooden 2022, 16), with water as a common symbol of rebirth and cleansing. It is also one of the only spaces that evokes a sense of comfort and safety. The apartment Chiron shares with his mother is not a home—the boy feels unwelcome there and can only find joy in solitude. The first time he feels accepted and cared for is at Juan's house, and he becomes a frequent guest there, despite the sense of guilt and unworthiness instilled in him by his mother. When he gets his own apartment in Atlanta, he creates a minimalist, impersonal space, so the only other space in the film that evokes a feeling of homeliness is Kevin's tiny apartment from the third act. In Jenkins' poetic script, the moment when Chiron and Kevin enter the apartment complex is accompanied by "The SOUND of window-mounted AC units. The SOUND of privacy"—of something that Chiron has rarely been granted in his search for human connection. The final scene of the film marks a potential new beginning, when intimacy is no longer connected with uncertainty and a threat of violence. This moment of closeness

between the two characters takes place in a closed-off, sparsely furnished space, littered with reminders of the life Kevin has led—the wall behind him and Chiron is covered in his son's drawings. *Moonlight* repeatedly highlights the passage of time: through its narrative structure, through the changing faces of the actors portraying Chiron and Kevin, and even through the visible technological and social progress that happens around them. As they look at each other in Kevin's apartment, they cannot escape their past; it is right there with them.

Although the intimate embrace between Chiron and Kevin gives the characters much-needed closure, the final image of the film points towards futurity. In the final seconds, we see Little, standing in front of the ocean in near darkness, slowly turning to look into the camera. His gaze, bearing sadness and resilience, is both a challenge and a promise. It seems to simultaneously reach into Chiron's past and into his possible future. Wooden sees the moment as a call "to make a different world and embody a different kind of life" (2022, 18). Having worked through trauma, there is a possibility to imagine a new alternative future, which up to this point has seemed unlikely.

Conclusion

Tangerine and *Moonlight* make for two very different viewing experiences but can be interpreted through the same lens of queer spatiality and temporality. The characters' lives unfold in the space and time of in-betweenness: they function between the private and the public and explore and express their identities in-between the rigid rules and requirements of a white cisheteronormative system. They are seen as Other, partially due to their queerness and partially due to their social and economic status, and face daily exclusion, discrimination, and abuse because of it. Yet they find alternative sites—physical and temporal—for self-realization. These two films are valuable examples of representing the experiences of queer people of color in contemporary cinema. They both have appeared at a time of uncertainty for the queer community, and as the world remains unsympathetic to their struggles, alternative spatiality and temporality will remain a crucial form in queer storytelling and narrative practices.

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1 Published as Judith Halberstam.

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5 Disruptions to the Linear and Individual Narrative of Psychic Distress in Mike Barnes's *The Lily Pond: A Memoir of Madness, Memory, Myth, and Metamorphosis*

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Introduction

This chapter explores the disruption of conventional narrative articulations of time in illness narratives. In the context of the postmodern milieu, which encouraged all types of dissident groups to reclaim their own voice, the ill also began to "recognize that more is involved in their experiences than the medical story can tell" (Frank 1995, 6). The determination to communicate the aspects of the illness experience that the medical gaze cannot capture led to an unprecedented proliferation of life narratives about illness. Since then, this life writing subgenre has awoken significant critical attention for the ways in which it fleshes out the human urge to "give coherence to the distinctive events and long-term course of suffering" (Kleinman [1988] 2020, 97).

The earliest studies of illness narratives were moved by a "didactic humanism" that valued the therapeutic and redemptive potential of the texts (Jurecic 2012, 14). However, critics realized that narrative cannot always be successfully mobilized to exert control over the illness experience, so they devised new approaches to acknowledge its unmanageable and destabilizing aspects. For instance, Ann Jurecic has proposed to engage with writing about illness through new practices such as "acknowledgment, care of the self, attention, recognition, and repair," which attend to the texts' "complex matters of concern" (2012, 16–17). Radically different is the work of Angela Woods (2011), which encourages the exploration of non-narrative means of making sense of suffering. Offering yet another alternative, Keir Waddington and Martin Willis have made a call to rethink illness narratives by means of the application of "more traditional literary methods—of close reading and textual analysis" (2013, iv).

Answering this call, this chapter offers a close reading of *The Lily Pond: A Memoir of Madness, Memory, Myth, and Metamorphosis* (2008), a life narrative in which American-Canadian author Mike Barnes weaves an account of his struggle with bipolar disorder that challenges the conventional triumphal storyline of illness narratives. The goal of this study is to illuminate

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how Barnes mobilizes the narrative articulation of autobiographical time in ways that destabilize the "linear, progressive, story framed with the context of biomedicine and the doctor-patient encounter" (Waddington and Willis 2013, iv), a story that fails to capture the many, and not always manageable, facets of his personal experience.

Mythical patterns lay the foundations of many illness narratives. Yet, as Anne Hunsaker Hawkins highlights in her timely study on the cultural myths deployed in the subgenre, myths have "the capacity to be enabling as well as disabling" (Hawkins 1993, 41). Along the same lines, and apropos to our study, Kathlyn Conway (2007) turns the spotlight on a pervasive tradition of illness narratives that draws on the cultural myth of triumph. Underpinning her work is the thesis that triumph narratives downplay the most painful and unmanageable dimensions of the illness experience. Therefore, in the spirit of "restitution narratives," which in Arthur Frank's well-known typology designate stories that present health "as the normal condition that people ought to have restored" (1995, 77), narratives of triumph convey the message "that illness is an opportunity for growth or transformation for which the author is grateful and that life is better than before the illness" (Conway 2007, 7).

This message is inscribed within ableist parameters of normality that exclude the experience of subjects that, because of long-term, chronic ill-health or disability, cannot fit normative expectations of recovering health. Hence, it participates in an "ableist culture" which, as disability studies scholars have underscored, "sustains and perpetuates itself via rhetoric" (Cherney 2011, np). Nonetheless, these scholars also sustain that rhetoric can be used to "craft awareness" and reform this culture (2011, np). A similar hopeful spirit moves Conway's analysis on how rhetorical features such as plot, narrative form, or ending can be mobilized unconventionally to "create a space in which the most devastating aspects of the experience of serious illness and dying can be articulated, reflected upon, and shared" (2007, 8–9).

Among other strategies, Conway relies on the disruption of the temporal progression of the narrative to destabilize these features. Exploring the uses of unconventional temporal articulations in life narratives, Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson contend that "the conscious diffraction of times of telling and the fragmentation of chronological sequence" can help inscribe the disconnection and incoherence that often characterize human experience (2010, 95). The experiences of the self can be particularly disruptive in the face of psychic suffering, when "consciousness is filled with wreckage, dispersion, obsessional repetition, or, inversely, characterized by stasis, aphony, catatonia" (Stone 2004, 17). Thus, it can be argued that an overemphasis on linear temporal progression corsets the narration of psychic distress, for "[s]uch being-states do not fit well with narrative's drive to organize and arrange experience . . . there would appear to be a disjunction between the content to be narrated and the possibilities inhering in conventional narrative forms" (Stone 2004, 17–18).

Against this backdrop, studies of illness narratives may opt to inspect alternative temporal articulations, as well as the role of place in the configuration of time. In this task, the Bakhtinian concept of the chronotope has proved to be useful. The chronotope designates a particular conception of time and space as they are presented internally in a text (through metaphor, for example) and externally, in the relation of the text to the social world (Bakhtin 1981, 84–85). According to Alison Torn, in the context of the narration of psychic distress, a chronotopic analysis can help to attend to the "complex, multi-dimensional nature of recovery" (2011, 130), for it reveals "not only the temporal complexities of the narrative structure, but also . . . the meaning of the embodied phenomenological dimension of lived experience" (130).

With the goal of elucidating Barnes's disruptions to the triumphal story of illness and the ableist temporal parameters in which it is inscribed, this chapter applies a chronotopic analysis to the four autobiographical essays that compose *The Lily Pond*. First, we explore how the first and third essays explore the experience of detention and blur the finish line suggested by narrative ending, respectively, to destabilize certain milestones associated to the linear therapeutic trajectory fostered in many illness narratives and contemporary mental healthcare strategies. Second, we show that the second and fourth essays articulate two different shared intimate chronotopes that spin around cyclic conceptions of time and open the relational scheme of the memoir beyond the medical encounter.

Destabilizing the Linear Therapeutic Trajectory

Illness, disability, and other forms of chronic distress can interrupt and even cancel the ability to meet the milestones that define normative trajectories according to prevailing notions of linear time. Consequently, the ill and disabled may experience appalling anxieties when their life paths are assessed according to criteria that set "expected adult milestones such as mastery over one's body, career, living independently, and establishing long-term relationships" (Gibson et al. 2009, 556). These normative criteria also underlie contemporary mental healthcare strategies, which presume a therapeutic path also marked by certain milestones and presupposes "an individual and linear life trajectory" (Fisher and Lees 2016, 600). In *The Lily Pond*, Barnes disrupts some of these tacit milestones and refuses to articulate a linear therapeutic trajectory. The first essay, "Two Rooms," revisits the notion that psychiatric treatment is the onset of the process towards wellbeing, while the third essay, "Leavetaking," disrupts the horizon line that brings closure to that process and returns the individual to ordinary life.

Chronotopes of Detention

The first essay in *The Lily Pond*, "Two Rooms," brings to the fore what Thomas G. Couser calls the double vulnerability of some disabled subjects.

Because of social or cultural, age-related, or physiological conditions, these individuals are "doubly vulnerable": impairment makes them susceptible to being actually harmed—abused and exploited—but they are also exposed to harm in a symbolic way through the misrepresentations of significant others who may choose to tell their stories (2004, x). In "Two Rooms," Barnes evokes the period from 1977 to 1979, when he was rendered oblivious to experience by the toxic ingestion of the drug Mellaril and the administration of electroconvulsive therapy (ECT). Still, the essay recounts not only the impairment caused by these psychiatric treatments but also how this impairment jeopardized his capacity to narrate his experience.

In the field of life writing, memory is understood not only as a source and authenticator but also as a "destabilizer of autobiographical acts" (Smith and Watson 2010, 22). This means that, because remembering is an active reinterpretation of the past and not a passive process of retrieval, memories are always provisional and open to revision. "Two Rooms" shows that in illness narratives, this destabilization is often exacerbated, for memory is often hindered by "gaps or interruptions caused by unconsciousness from disease, medication, or coma" (Conway 2007, 12). In order to reveal the potential frailty and precariousness of the autobiographical process, Barnes articulates two metaphorical timespaces, the "Mellaril room" and the "ECT room," which rely on the notion of physical enclosure to capture symbolically his altered sense of temporal progression.

The essay begins in the second of the chambers, the Mellaril room, as Barnes evokes his brittle memories from the fall of 1978, when he gradually overdosed on the neuroleptic drug Mellaril and suffered a progressive loss of consciousness. Dwelling in this room, he felt suspended in an "interval of half-life, shading down to non-life" (2008, 12),[1] a hiatus in which not only was experience put on hold, but existence was also fundamentally threatened. Thus, the Mellaril room is articulated as a symbolic space of enclosure that stands for Barnes's subjective perception of temporal stagnation when his life was "waning into coma" (14).

On the one hand, the deprivation of consciousness was literal—Barnes was being poisoned and his organism was failing. Nevertheless, the essay seems more engaged with the implications of this deprivation for his sense of agency. The endangerment of agency is captured by motionless figurations which highlight the inability of the subject who inhabits the Mellaril room to exert control over his circumstances. In this vein, Barnes imagines that his mother might have thought he had become a "soft statue" (14). Similarly, as he pictures Mellaril entering his blood, he envisions that

> [t]he fluid pooling between my cells was replacing me with one of those segmented dolls used for back pain commercials and carcrash experiments, whose bodies are a series of joined ovals threaded by elastic strings to make them movable.
>
> (13)

This suggestive comparison between Barnes's medicated self and a doll made movable by strings—with its overtones of nonagentive puppets—exposes how his dispossession of agency was not caused by psychic distress but by psychiatric intervention. This critical stance is already taken at the beginning of the essay when, wondering "[h]ow much of our lives happens while we are unconscious," Barnes explains that

> between the chambers housing zygote and corpse comes a succession of rooms in which decisions and actions will be taken that will gratify or thwart our every desire, and in which we will be wholly or partly absent . . . away from where our fates are being decided by forces and persons who do not need to know, much less consider, our wishes in order to have their way with us.
>
> (11)

This comparison with prenatal and posthumous bodies renders the individual barren of both consciousness and agency and raises a crucial ethical concern in the domain of mental health, namely service users' right to informed consent. According to the ethical guidelines for psychiatrists propounded by the General Assembly of the World Psychiatric Association, "[n]o procedure must be performed or treatment given against or independent of a patient's own will" (Eghigian 2010, 330). Nonetheless, this "principle of autonomy" that grants patients' right to exercise their individual freedom can be legitimately countered by the "harm principle," which justifies "intervention to prevent harm or to provide benefit" (Nelson 2003, 181). In this light, the symbolic detention inscribed through the Mellaril room draws attention to the vulnerability of psychiatric patients who can find themselves trapped in tautological loops that justify intervention on the grounds of harm prevention—even when the treatment exacerbates or causes it.

This criticism of the potential pitfalls of psychiatric treatment is further developed as the essay flashes back in time to enter the ECT room. Following Barnes's psychotic break in 1977, he was diagnosed with schizophrenia—a diagnosis that later changed to bipolar disorder—administered an endless list of psychiatric drugs, and eventually received ECT. Therefore, the administration of ECT is first inscribed within the chronotope of the mental hospital, in which temporality is regulated by the pace of the treatment dictated by the institution:

> I was to receive several series, each consisting of a number of individual treatments grouped closely together (Monday, Wednesday, Thursday, I seem to recall), with slightly longer pauses between one series and the next. Several treatments made up one series; several series made up the course.
>
> (19)

However, the progressive accumulation of treatment series that culminates in the success of the course was not aligned with Barnes's subjective experience.[2] Instead, he envisions an alternative temporal articulation more suited to acknowledge that "[i]n both rooms, Mellaril and ECT, I died and was reborn," with the addition that, in the latter, "death was instantaneous and repeated, many deaths" (23). This manifestation of death and rebirth provides the opportunity to re-imagine the ECT room as a threshold, a metaphorical timespace in which the self is fundamentally changed. In Bakhtinian theory, the threshold is "the chronotope of crisis and break in a life" and represents critical junctures at which decisions or events that change a life take place (Bakhtin 1981, 248). In this case, the ECT room presents Barnes's self to such a critical juncture that his life itself was endangered.

The description of a moment of crisis through the motive of rebirth is almost commonplace in illness narratives (Hawkins 1993). Hawkins argues that the myth of rebirth is built "on the belief that one can undergo a process of transformation so profound as to constitute a kind of death to the 'old self' and rebirth to a new and very different self" (1993, 33). But myths are not always enabling. Unlike many narratives which pose illness as a catalyst for a process of positive transformation, in this case the potential for self-transformation of the ECT room is disabling, since what emerged "on the other side was not only of someone I could not be sure was me, but of something I could not be sure was a person" (23).

This concern with the sameness of self arguably shows that Barnes's sense of personal identity not only lies on "[c]onsistency of consciousness" but also on the "sense of continuity between the actions and events of the past, and the experience of the present" (King 2000, 2). Accordingly, he redefines the curative powers of ECT as "therapeutic oblivion," emphasizing that instead of fulfilling the "expectation of renewed and continued life," it "shattered the continuity between past and present" (24). Moreover, wondering if what had been expelled from the ECT room "was a person," Barnes extends his criticism of the violation of agency to the violation of personhood. Given that any definition of personhood is linked to the attributes that determine what it is to be human, and therefore designs "which individuals have human rights and responsibilities" (Martin 2015, 577), the essay here returns to the topic of the rights of psychiatric service users.

Eventually, the endangerment of Barnes's rights as a user of psychiatric services is explored through the notion of abjection. The essay offers an etymology for "abjection" which, combining "absence" and "object," attempts to illuminate the imposition to be absent from one's life which the user may experience to become the object of psychiatric treatment:

> it seems often to be the case that to become, or to endure becoming, an object, you have to go away from your life, you have to vacate it of your will so that another will can occupy it. Abjection.
>
> (25)

This definition is consistent with the more iconic exploration of "abjection" accomplished by Julia Kristeva, who defines the abject as what is "radically excluded" and draws us "towards the place where meaning collapses" (1982, 2). This is aligned with the way in which Barnes envisions himself: as his personhood is retained in the ECT room, he felt expelled from it as the abject. Moreover, as an example of the abject, Kristeva refers to the materialities of death, which exist at the border of our condition as living beings and confront us with our own death and for this reason are rejected (1982, 3). This is in line with the lifeless figurations that Barnes envisions as inhibiting the Mellaril and ECT rooms, and with his identification with a "near-corpse" (31), which is "the utmost of abjection" (Kristeva 1982, 4). But even more, it could be argued that, given that death is the ultimate expression of the detention of experience, the discussion on Barnes's perceived sense of abjection depicts psychiatric treatment as the opposite of the onset of the process towards well-being, for it puts it on hold.

After the Forever After

The third essay in *The Lily Pond* follows Barnes's exploration of "*leave-taking*," a word that entitles the essay and which the author began hearing months before turning fifty and shortly before the launching of his fourth book (98). At first, he considered that the word might be related to the publication of the book, for the event felt charged with "a sense of finality, of something ending" (108). Yet, even though it appeared "to mark the end of one phase, the beginning of another," Barnes concedes that "what the phases were, I wasn't sure" (98). This feeling of impending closure fitted into the "cold tiredness" and "sense of utter depletion, of having reached the end" that he had been feeling for months (112). Still, Barnes did not identify with the suicidal overtones adverted by his psychotherapist, Dr. George; even if it could encompass "the frank goodbye" and "the operatic farewell," he realized that "leavetaking" was suggestive of much more:

> Taking leave: departure, permission, respite. . . . Take leave to—what did that mean? Venture to? Presume to? Take leave of—take leave of what? Of whom? Take leave of . . . one's senses. . . . Leave taking. Leave (the realm of) taking. Leave (off) taking. Leave (while (still)) taking.
> (110)

This wide range of possible meanings incite a movement towards the unknown, making it possible to re-signify "leavetaking" as an invitation to embrace uncertainty and transformation. Moreover, Barnes explains that this still-undefined invitation appeared to have the form of a journey, albeit an unconventional one: "[t]he image may be of travel . . . but the sense I get . . . is of looking for a place to stop" (19). Typically, in illness narratives that deploy the journey myth, the protagonist "ventures into the perilous

otherworld of illness and death and returns to the realm of the ordinary" (Hawkins 1993, 78). Nevertheless, by the time Barnes was hearing "leave-taking," he had been experiencing psychic distress for three decades, so the premise of going through illness to eventually recover normality made little sense in the context of a life with a chronic condition like his. In this way, the essay destabilizes the linear therapeutic trajectory usually imposed on users of psychiatric services, questioning recovery as its culmination, and looking instead for alternative ways "to stop."

The first of these alternatives is found in writing. Coinciding with the appearance of "leavetaking," Barnes experienced a writing block that led him to reevaluate his working rhythms. Knowing that his lack of inspiration was tied to his depressed mood, he realized that he always operated in "two speeds": when he could write, he felt "flat-out, overdrive;" but on blocks, he was "motionless" (106). Although at first reticent, Barnes eventually yielded at Dr. George's suggestion that he "tried a working rhythm that lay somewhere between fever pitch and paralysis" (106). Putting a halt to the writing habits developed around the illness, Barnes found a way towards transformation: he managed to write poems not only "out of a mood of wild euphoria" but also out "of mild depression" (107). Eventually, the poetry collection he published two years later agglutinating both types of poems precisely evoked

> the poignancy of "as if": rites enacted at the threshold of change. Change wished for, prayed for, courted, celebrated, endured, lamented. The possibility of change approaching, passing (almost!), receding.
>
> (106)

This destabilization of habits is also brought to a more intimate sphere. Barnes realized that despite being the family's caregiver, he lacked "the awareness and skills necessary for" taking care of himself (114). Helped by Dr. George's insights on mindfulness, he learnt the significance of "[d]e-routining life. Stopping, or at least slowing, things in their tracks long enough to ask the vital question: Does it need to be this way?" (115). This lesson on deceleration leads Barnes to eventually concede that the habits which had enabled him to withstand his worst crises were now preventing him from achieving a more meaningful worldview:

> the coping muscles had been exercised at the expense of the option of improvement; in bodybuilder parlance, maintenance was ripped while thriving atrophied . . . illness had claimed such a large seat at the table . . . that any other outlook was impoverished. . . . Armed as I was against inevitable illness, was I also against possible health?
>
> (116)

The paradox revealed here is aligned with the paradox that, according to Angela Woods, Akiko Hart and Helen Spandler, lies at the heart of the

dominant modality of storytelling in contemporary representations of experiences of madness, mental distress, and illness: the Recovery Narrative (2022, 224).[3] The authors explain that "the Recovery Narrative can effectively rob the speaker of agency even where it demands particular forms of agency (heroic self-determination) be asserted at the level of thematic content" (2022, 235). This happens, they continue, because the articulation of an emancipated, recovered self who presides over the experience and narrative of mental distress can veil experiences that remain unmanageable or formless. Hence, as the Recovery Narrative can ultimately "prevent self-understanding, authenticity and meaning-making" (Woods et al. 2022, 235), it could be argued that the mechanisms that Barnes had forged were restraining not only illness but also a richer outlook on life.

Eager to acknowledge the inefficacy of these mechanisms, Barnes tried taking new mood-regulating medication, which he had to discontinue because of its appalling side effects, and an omega-3 rich diet, which yielded modest but positive results. Still, it seems that the therapeutic remedy eventually embraced was the composition of the memoir. After a talk given at his alma mater about his life and career, Barnes decided to turn the lecture "into an autobiographical essay" that would lead him to "to embark on a discovery of *leavetaking*, of the word's possibilities" (132). In this way, although Barnes questions the horizon line of the linear therapeutic trajectory, as the essay comes full circle the question remains as to whether its final performative move takes the memoir closer to the tenets of the Recovery Narrative.

Woods, Hart, and Spandler argue that the Recovery Narrative functions as "evidence, testifying to an individual's experience of recovery as something which has already been achieved" and "as enactment, a way of materializing recovery in the shared moment of the present" (2022, 230–31). Concerning the fulfilment of these functions in "Leavetaking," even if the essay replaces the notion of recovery by transformation, it certainly testifies to Barnes's accomplished search for transformation while also materializing it. Notwithstanding, Barnes addresses the paradox at the heart of the Recovery Narrative through a further paradox. Hence, "Leavetaking" seems to declare that the ultimate destination of the journey towards transformation is the acknowledgment that no destination is final, either in illness or health—a conclusion self-reflexive enough about the pattern of the Recovery Narrative to disrupt it.

Weaving Shared Intimate Chronotopes

A further particularity of the "linear life trajectory" presupposed in mental healthcare strategies and reproduced in many illness narratives is the assumption that illness must be mastered individually (Fisher and Lees 2016, 600). Thus, the disruption of the aspiration to manage illness may be addressed through the rejection of this individualistic imperative. Indeed, the uncertain and uncontrollable vision of the future imposed by disability

can be effectively addressed by valuing present relationships with others, for this has been proved to encourage disabled people "to see themselves as active and evolving" in the present moment (608). This appreciation of relationality is commonplace in contemporary life writing studies, which for some time have contested "the notion that self-narration is the monologic utterance of a solitary, introspective subject that is knowable to itself" (Smith and Watson 2010, 218). In this vein, "Hunters in the Snow" and "The Lily Pond," the second and fourth essays in Barnes's memoir, articulate an autobiographical subject that is fundamentally relational and whose story emerges at the intersection with "the other's story" (Eakin 1999, 55). Yet, whereas the second essay, "Hunters in the Snow," brings forth the possible dissonances between these stories, the fourth one, "The Lily Pond," highlights their potential concurrence, exploring how "the fear of an uncertain future" can be alleviated when "the subject on the linear life trajectory towards individual success is substituted for one who is other-related" (Fisher and Lee 2016, 608).

Unacknowledged Singular Moments of Crisis

"Hunters in the Snow" opens with an acknowledgment: "[t]here is a story that I have never been able to write. . . . I would see its fragments vividly. . . . They carried that imperative charge: *Me*" (35). Moved by this charge, the memoir withdraws from the first essay's treatment rooms and dives into the remote memories of childhood in order to assemble that untold story of the self. The essay begins with the narration of the celebration of Barnes's fiftieth birthday in the Canadian holiday destination of French River and thereafter uses this event to broach Barnes's earliest recollections at the cottage that his parents built during his childhood at the same location. This cottage not only functions as a spatial point of reference that intertwines the temporally distant events narrated in the essay but also as testimony to the complex intertwinement of the stories of the self and the stories of others.

More specifically, the French River cottage functions as the symbol of a collective act of remembering which Barnes contests in his attempt to shape his unwritten story. Smith and Watson argue that remembering is not entirely a "privatized activity" but rather "a collective activity" which is carried out by "communities of memory—religious, racial, ethnic, gendered, familial" (2010, 25). In an act of autobiographical differentiation, Barnes deploys the figure of the cottage, which is the source of collective remembering of his familial community of memory, to "counter [his family's] assumption of a fully shared experience" (38). The family's collective act of remembering is defined in "Hunters in the Snow" through the "cottage myth," which Barnes described as the

> Canadian practice of making of the cottage an idyll, a place of such magical and benign loveliness that it has the power to erase, and then

> restore, the supposedly more complex and confused and strife-filled life in the main home in the city.
>
> (38)

This idealized image of the idyllic cottage relies on a cyclical articulation of time which the Bakhtinian chronotope of the idyll can help clarify. First, the idyll is defined by the articulation of a special relationship between time and space by which life events are inseparable from a concrete, familiar, and natural territory. Moreover, time in the idyll has a "cyclic rhythmicalness" which reflects that human life and the life of nature are conjoined and united in their rhythms (Bakhtin 1981, 225). This cyclical notion of time could be aligned with the vision of the French River cottage as a restoring entity that periodically purged the complexities of the family's urban life so that simplicity could be restored.

Nevertheless, unlike his parents and siblings, Barnes cannot recall the cottage as "the place of manageable perils, the kind that with fortitude you can overcome and feel comforted for having done so" (86), for his memories of the cottage are riddled with singular moments of crisis which have no place in the idyllic cottage myth. They are, on the other hand, the centerpiece of "Hunters in the Snow," the essay that Barnes weaves together using those memories of what exceeds the ordinary, predictable, and amendable and lies on the margins of familial recollections.

The thematic centrality of the unpredictable and unmanageable is paired with the rhetoric deployment of digression, a feature which assists in the articulation of those singular moments of crisis and helps in the destabilization of the cyclical pattern of the idyll. Embracing the unforeseen events that occurred during his fiftieth birthday, Barnes intimates his "greater faith in hazard and digression than in planned unfoldings" (64). Untrusting of "the main plan, the stated one," he contends that "there is little to be lost by deviations, some of which may throw up magic that the mainline buried" (64–65). Fittingly, the birthday is revealed as one of such mainlines from which the author repeatedly deviates to dislocate the cottage myth and locate his unwritten story.

In some cases, the essay's deviations are temporal digressions which move the narration back and forward, disrupting the articulation of a linear trajectory. Among these digressions, "the story of the woman who drowned herself" has special significance (60). On a summer morning, when young Barnes was going on a fishing trip with his siblings, one of their neighbors, Mrs. V., drowned herself in the lake. Barnes and his father managed to take the body out of the water and tried to reanimate her in vain. Grappling to elucidate the significance of this critical moment in his life, Barnes acknowledges that, when his father urged them to continue with the day as planned, he felt an inner restraint "not at the idea that life must go on, but at the insistence that it go on so promptly, without a decent pause" (60). On the

one hand, this feeling is then identified as the germ of his lifelong psychic distress: "The sorrow and aversion I have felt all my adult life at the human zeal to rush past events . . . acquired new intensity, if it did not actually begin, on this morning in August" (60). Significantly, far from situating the onset of his distress within the purview of the medical gaze, Barnes describes this traumatic first encounter with death as a fundamentally human reaction:

> I asked the questions that have not changed long before Hamlet voiced them, the same questions anyone would ask, in the same ways; staring across the chasm between everything and nothing, revolving the ancient and unanswerable mystery in my mind.
>
> (61)

On the other hand, the connection between psychic distress and the notion of rushing is further explored by means of contemplative and inventive digressions, a second type of deviation used to disrupt the progression of the narration. From the stories of the constellation of Orion to the characters in Ernest Hemingway's novels, these digressions spin around the "[h]unters of tale and fable" that paraded through Barnes's mind during the birthday, as he imagined his brother Greg, who kept moving quietly into and out of the forest, as a hunter coming out of the woods (50). "The natural end to all these hunter thoughts," Barnes concludes, "was Bruegel's great painting *Hunters in the Snow*" (53).

Featuring a bucolic snow-mantled landscape where some cottages lie next to a frozen lake, *Hunters in the Snow* resonates particularly with the landscape of the cottage myth and with Barnes's experience, for it helps him imagine how he may fit within the myth. Drawing attention to the hunters in the middle of the picture, who seem indisposed to find rest, and "move past the fire at the inn without a glance at it" (72), Barnes explains that he identifies with them because, like them,

> I was moving past the lights of settlement . . . and had moved, in an emotional sense . . . past the fire my family had lit for me in a clearing, because . . . I felt myself to be a hunter in the snow, I was driven on, I could not stop and take my comfort there.
>
> (72)

Only by means of this restless figure can Barnes inhabit the idyllic cottage chronotope. In addition, this "need for ceaseless motion, or perhaps more accurately, a sensation of always being in movement, in transition, unable to find rest or to feel at rest" is openly addressed as "[o]ne of the clearest and least ambiguous effects of . . . mental illness" (75). Yet, rather than abandoning his story, which has finally been told, to the hands of a medicalized discourse, Barnes recurs to Bruegel's work to reframe chronic psychic distress

as continuous with those dark emotions evoked by the death of Mrs. V. Thus, he claims that Bruegel's canvases "murmur of the portion of darkness that suffuses our everyday lives, a blackness that must be faced squarely since it cannot be lit or safely ignored" (71). That ever-present darkness, Barnes suggests, is what had been veiled in the family's cottage myth but is finally acknowledged in "Hunters in the Snow."

A Shared Chronotope of the Crazed

By the end of the third essay, Barnes had already anticipated that he had begun writing the first three essays that would later made up *The Lily Pond*. However, as the fourth essay begins, he notes that he was missing "a sense of the project receding, the almost physical sense of the finished writing taking a step away from me, an inch at first, then another, then a good firm stride" (142). Weaving the ending of life narratives can be an arduous and even paradoxical task since, as Dr. George notes, "[r]eal-life narratives were 'unfinalizable' [sic]" (143). This challenge is even greater in illness narratives, because when there is recurring or chronic illness, permanent damage, or anxiety and fear triggered by acute illness, "the narrator often wants to communicate that the end does not mean resolution" (Conway 2007, 120). "The Lily Pond," the fourth and final essay in Barnes's memoir, precisely answers this call to bring narrative closure while rejecting the imposition of resolution to the subject's lived experience.

This destabilization of the ending is accomplished as the essay weaves the story of Barnes's struggle to finish *The Lily Pond* into the story of Heather, his partner, who went through a period of depressed mood and was diagnosed with bipolar disorder by the same time. Inevitably, this intertwining of stories can arouse suspicion as regards the ethics of narrating the lives of others (Couser 2004). With this in view, Barnes contends that telling Heather's story "is impossible, both because it is hers and because it is still unfolding" (144). Nonetheless, and more importantly, it also brings to the fore that the autobiographical self is always entangled with others "whose stories are deeply implicated in the narrator's and through whom the narrator understands her or his own self-formation" (Smith and Watson 2010, 87).

Although he rejects to inscribe it within a medicalized language, Barnes ties the entanglement of his story and Heather's to their shared experience of psychic distress. Therefore, he notes that their ability "to speak in short hand, with intuitive understanding" since the beginning of their relationship lies in their shared "steeply swinging moods and strange mental states" (138). Accordingly, the external chronotope where their biographies unfold in the real world cannot be merely circumscribed by their life as a "bipolar couple," as Heather's doctor calls them (138). Instead, it is elucidated as a "close nourishing circle of the life [they] have built together," a "delicate web" where they can give and get support and understanding (151). Moreover, this mutual nurturing process exceeds the medical definition of

the therapeutic. This is suggested when Barnes underscores their need for "crazed ideas":

> At a certain depth of illness the mind is not helped by depictions of wholeness, which seem too far-fetched to be useful; what it can perhaps make use of and assimilate, and so gravitates toward, are images of fractured lucidity . . . [which are] congruent with the radically altered, fantastic world we are occupying.
>
> (152)

Here, the couple's shared world of psychic distress is acknowledged as a place where sanity cracks, so that comfort can only be brought by images that embrace that fracture. In addition, in a move that highlights the fundamental role of relationality in Barnes's self-narration, those images of fractured lucidity rely on Heather's controlling images of psychic distress, which spun around frogs. Hence, Barnes envisioned these images of frogs as "sketches of elucidation . . . animal analogies of her own soul's state" (153) that hopefully would provide her with "the comfort of the hybrid, the fecund, the transforming" (152). Moreover, he overheard Heather quoting from an Emily Dickinson poem in which the speaker, who is compared to a frog, engages in a breathless monologue in which it anxiously longs for an akin being. Thus, the frog becomes the couple's shared metaphor of the self in distress, and, like Bruegel's painting in "Hunters in the Snow," Dickinson's poem eventually becomes the setting for the lily pond chronotope, the metaphorical timespace that inscribes the couple's real-world "delicate web," where the frogs find a retreat.

Concerning the articulation of temporality in these chronotopes, the couple's delicate web is defined by their "unusual but sustaining ways of coping with their cycles of illness" (138). Indeed, Heather draws attention to the cyclical nature of their shared experience, noting that "[t]his is the way it's going to be. You, then me, then you. . . . The way it's always been. First one, then the other. Me, you, me. . . " (181). "The Lily Pond" reproduces this cyclical scheme through the alternation of passages dealing with Barnes's struggle to finish the memoir and sections on Heather's struggle to deal with psychic distress. But this emphasis on a cyclical temporality is also reminiscent of the idyll chronotope, and it evinces a desire to articulate a new chronotope which, like the timespace of the French River cottage, can inscribe the shared cyclical experience of a family in a limited and self-sufficient space, although one in which Barnes and Heather truly belong. As regards the lily pond chronotope, Barnes replaces the linear trajectory from illness to health through the embracement of a present moment of stillness:

> A frog sits on a lily pad near the middle of the pond. . . . What is cooking in the pond under this lid? . . . he is curious all the same, spurred on by the same restlessness that brought him, by a series of precisely

> delicate hops, from lily pad to lily pad, out to where he crouches now. Perils surround him. . . . But for now he is safe, warming his blood in the sun, absorbing a film of moisture through his skin. His lily pad, his platform, is a reprieve. All he really has in his favour is his protective colouring, his stillness, and, when all else fails, his jumping.
>
> (137)

In this allegorical rendition of his outlook on life, the frog's rejection to worry about the next leap stands for Barnes's dismissal of anticipatory anxieties. Equipped with a set of skills to navigate future perils, the frog and Barnes are eager to embrace change if necessary. Fisher and Lees explain that envisioning "a temporal orientation" which invests "future uncertainty with hopefulness" seems to help people with chronic conditions "to enjoy the present for what it is" (2016, 9). Accordingly, Barnes ultimately explains that "these ruminations of the amphibian" offer

> Hope in a larval state. . . . The frog has become the image we are chasing, in sickness and in health. Chasing toward . . . ? Mercy, I think. Forgiveness—of something, or of many things. Of ourselves, perhaps, most of all.
>
> (160)

Therefore, the lily pond chronotope destabilizes the linear, individual narrative of the search for health, offering instead a timespace where the unfolding of Barnes's and Heather's shared experience of psychic distress is approached with self-compassion and acceptance of both illness and health. Importantly, Barnes can only envision this new, emancipatory scenario for his metaphorical self-narration after engaging with Heather's intimate metaphors. This is aligned with Fisher and Lees' contention "that an engagement with the present which is relational and based on an openness to alterity can be a source of well-being while providing the space for emancipatory and transformational possibilities" (2016, 10).

As in a game of Russian dolls, the lily pond is articulated as a shared chronotope of the crazed that leads "The Lily Pond" towards a relational approach to the experience and narration of psychic distress. In this vein, it seems apt to claim that the final essay eventually casts new light on the ultimate purpose of *The Lily Pond*. Quoting her friend Alison Kafer, Ellen Samuels claims that "rather than bend disabled bodies and minds to meet the clock, crip time bends the clock to meet disabled bodies and minds" (2017, n.p.). Accordingly, beyond the denunciation of negligent psychiatric treatment, the exploration of other therapeutic venues, and the recognition of the complex origins of psychic distress, Barnes's memoir emerges as a gift to Heather which articulates a chronotope that bends the clock to meet the idiosyncratic experience of their bipolar minds, a metaphorical timespace

to which she can resort when lucidity fractures. Thus, the memoir ends by inviting her to embrace the unmanageability and uncertainty of living with chronic psychic distress and invest them with hope: "[c]ould it be over? This episode at least? I slap away the thought as tempting fate. Accept this night, this hour. It is surely enough" (188).

Notes

1 The year of publication of *The Lily Pond* will be omitted in subsequent quotations.
2 Alison Torn has also identified the disabling potential of the mental hospital chronotope in Mary Barnes's "madness narrative," where the chronotope involves a movement forward and the insistence "that she participates in the physical world," which is contrary to the paralysis defining Mary Barnes's chronotope of madness (2011, 138).
3 Although Woods, Hart and Spandler explain that their "focus is not on the specific accounts of individuals, but on the Recovery Narrative as genre" (2022, 223), their examination of the genre's form, functions, and effects is a valuable and replicable tool for the analysis of illness narratives.

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6 Re-Temporalizing Trauma Through Gameplay in Gibson and Swanwick's "Dogfight"

Amy H. Ahn

Introduction

In a paper titled "Trauma Time: The Queer Temporalities of the Traumatized Mind" (2017), Clementine Morrigan agrees with the now-established notion that the experience of trauma involves temporal disorientations and non-linearity. Not only is trauma a prime example of disordered time at work, however; as Morrigan argues, it can lead to the conditions for queered time. Thinking about trauma through the lens of queer temporality creates a framework that is productive, even if queer temporality scholarship oftentimes makes emphases that lack nuance when it comes to drawing a link between queerness and time—such as when it invalidates time altogether. Building on Ellen Samuels (2011) and Alison Kafer (2013)'s critiques of common theories of queer time, Morrigan writes that these theories oftentimes rely on universalizing models of nonheteronormative anti-time, which disregard the lived queer temporalities of "people with disabilities, queer or otherwise" and those of "the ill and suffering, marginalized and abjected" (Samuels 2011, 4–5). Including the study of the distinctly disturbed time of trauma subjects can give valuable insights on actual queer responses to exclusion, oppressive systems, and conditions of precarity, the very queerness of which is grounded in time. Morrigan calls such queer responses "creative," and they identify the autobiographical account of their own trauma as a kind of "time travel" (57). This time travel defies the anti-futurity principles of prevailing queer temporality scholarship while allowing Morrigan to wield an inventive agency against a violent world. This small but not insignificant agency comes in the form of the capacity to "[dream] of just futures" (57–58).

In line with the notion that trauma can lead to queer temporalities, this chapter investigates the queer time of trauma in contemporary postcapitalist and technocultural contexts, taking as its case study a short story written by William Gibson and Michael Swanwick, titled "Dogfight" (1986). This short story is centered on characters named Tiny Montgomery and Deke, who offer two different categories of understanding the queer temporalities of trauma victims. The story is told through the perspective of Deke, who has committed crimes of theft in his past and is now out on parole. In the opening

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scene, a destitute and hungry Deke travels across a futuristic America on an overnight bus. The bus stops at a fuel station, where, in one of the arcade rooms, Deke encounters a popular multiplayer WWI flight-combat simulator videogame called *Spads & Fokkers*. This video game creates one of the focal points of the story, serving as a central activity organizing the rest of the relatively straightforward plot: Deke becomes obsessed with the flight simulator game and finds a way to defeat the long-standing champion, Tiny Montgomery. The video game also forms a crucial linchpin of this chapter's argument, which is that the two characters of the story use the game as a tool with which to queer the already disturbed and "shattered" temporality (Ulman and Brothers 1993) of their respective traumas. Queering time in this context consists of a more active and operative re-temporalization that allows the traumatized characters to carve out a personalized time against the very crises of time that are at the heart of their traumas.

The close relationship between trauma and time has a long history within both academic discourse as well as in the cultural imaginary. Trauma theory as a major hermeneutic framework was developed in the nineties by Cathy Caruth, Shoshana Felman, Dori Laub, Geoffrey Hartman, and Dominick LaCapra. In this line of theorizing, trauma is figured as an intense moment of crisis that is incoherent as an experience. Influenced by deconstructionist ideas of the need to put focus on the aporias of representation, Caruth formed an explanation of trauma that became central to modern trauma theory: that the illegibility of trauma is, in itself, what grants the understanding of the nature of trauma (1996, 73–90). This unreadability is often expressed in terms of time, as trauma is described as having a "peculiar temporal structure" with an "inherent latency," which employs "belatedness" in the actualization and realization of its effects. Such a temporal structure strongly disorients the traumatized subject, and the confusion that follows in the aftermath of the traumatizing event is explained in terms of a detachment from both historical as well as personal time (Berlant 2011, 80). Even prior to the formal recognition of the theory, literary portrayals of trauma have long been describing the experience of trauma as being "unstuck in time" (Vonnegut 1969) and as "[the unraveling of] the unities of time and space" (O'Brien 1994). Time, according to these accounts, is fractured and put into disarray when trauma comes into effect.

The short story "Dogfight" offers some illuminating contexts that serve as focalizing lenses for the examination of trauma. These contexts are the following: the sociocultural changes that emerge in postmodernist America; the influences of a technoculture which brings new conceptions of subjectivity; and the theme of war, which intersects with the other two contexts, as well as with games, in ways that contribute significantly to the argument. The setting of the short story is, arguably, made up of these contexts, exaggerated by the story's cyberpunk veneer. In line with William Gibson's writing style and general philosophy on the craft, the story does not specify which wars have

taken place and why, but contextual clues such as the existence of a medal called the "Blue Max" (a WWI award given primarily to pilots) situate the fictional time in relation to real histories. The story's identifiable postwar culture of a consumerist ethos, technofetishism, and a heavy-handed police state forms significant parallels with Cold War milieus.

Postmodernism, technoculture, and war create the conditions for the impact and lasting effect of the characters' traumas. Each of Tiny and Deke's specific traumas will be discussed in more detail in later sections, but in a comprehensive sense, the historical framework formed by these contexts contains stressors that traumatize them by creating crises of time. If the diegetic world of "Dogfight" is modeled after our own history, the "changing configurations of media, social institutions, and the world associated with global capital, digital technoculture, and the . . . crisis of the political in American civil society" have produced new "lines of becoming" that are mapped onto time in changed ways (Crogan 2011, xv). Time and the experience of time, as Fredric Jameson puts it, end up resembling "schizophrenic" structures.[1] Time loses the authority and centrality it had in "high modernist thematics of time and temporality" and gains a postmodernist quality (1991, 16). The temporality of the technoculture of the postindustrial age becomes deeply fragmented, reduced to a "series of pure and unrelated presents" (26).

Both characters of the short story "Dogfight" experience this fragmentation of time, if in different ways. Tiny, as a previous wartime pilot who was a victim of—as well as committed—numerous unspeakable war violences, is "shell-shocked" in a more traditional sense. His experience aligns with the prognoses of trauma stemming from the 90s' school of trauma theory, based on the notion that the traumatizing event of the war has acted as a "whiplash" that displaces him from time. Deke, on the other hand, is the quintessential postmodern subject, who lacks the ability to "unify the past, present, and future of [his] own biographical experience or psychic life" (Jameson 1991, 27). As a former criminal who is on the peripheries of society, his trauma needs to be analyzed through a different kind of trauma theory, which takes into account "normative, quotidian aspects of trauma," of the kind that can be found "in the lives of many oppressed and disempowered persons" (Brown 2008, 18). This chapter looks to Lauren Berlant's alternative to the classic trauma model, which is a "model of suffering, whose etymological articulation of pain and patience draws its subject less as an effect of an act of violence and more as an effect of a general atmosphere of it" (2007a, 2007b, 338). In this theory, those living under neoliberal capitalism are repeatedly and continuously traumatized by its pressure to prosper, and the capitalist grand narrative of futurity is effaced within the gritty survival against everyday time.

Finally, the context of war also contains several valences in terms of how it contributes to the formation of trauma. On the one hand, Tiny's direct experiences of war have imprinted those past experiences of combat as traumatic

memories, causing his present to be peppered with symptoms of posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD). It is clear from descriptions like the following that Tiny is afflicted internally by memories of war: "[T]here was a hot glint of terror in Tiny's eyes that spoke of an eternity of fear and confinement. . . . The fear was death in the air, the confinement a locking away in metal, first of the aircraft, then of the [wheel]chair" (176). In this scene, he has just been defeated in the videogame by Deke, and the impact has taken him back in time, to a memory of terror felt in war combat. In addition to such primary trauma, the institution of the military complex itself has inflicted trauma by having aerial fighters like him take drugs that enhance their combat performance, despite that these drugs harm them with continued use:

> [G]runts hacked through the jungle with hype-pumps strapped above elbows to give them that extra death-dance fury in combat, a shot of liquid hell in a blue plastic vial. . . . Dosages like that ate you up. Ate you good and slow and constant, etching the brain surfaces, eroding away the brain cell membranes.
>
> (165–66)

While Tiny's present disability which prevents the use of his legs is a result of the direct effect of war, caused by being shot out of the sky in Bolivia during one of his missions (176), the other, more "invisible" ailments he suffers from are due to his forced intake of the wartime drug.

War plays a different role for Deke, though it is no less a factor in producing trauma. Deke's relationship to war can be analyzed through the critical frameworks of Paul Virilio (1991, 1994, 1999, 2005) and Roger Stahl (2009), who trace the history of modern warfare and draw connections between war and the postmodern conditions they cause or reflect. For the purposes of this analysis, Virilio's concept of "total war" is used to describe Deke's relation to war and history (1994). Total war implies that war can happen at any time, even in times of "peace," and this constant uncertainty stemming from the possibility of dissolution—in a world that can end at any moment—instills a "very real lived insecurity on the part of civilian populations" (James, 78). Deke could be said to be living in such an insecure time of total war, and the trauma gleaned from such ongoing uncertainty can again be expressed in terms of the impossibility of a clear vision of a future and the inability to be a subject within narratives of progress and development.

Roger Stahl offers another angle on the role of war in his monograph (2009), which traces the history of media in the 20th century and its function in "reposition[ing] the citizen subject in reference to war" (20). According to Stahl, following the development of new media technologies in the 1980s onward was the formation of the "virtual citizen-soldier." The virtual citizen-soldier uses interactive technologies such as war videogames to take part in a "symbolic immersion" in war (42), which "channels the civic urge through

fantasies of military participation" played out in "closed, constructed system[s]" (47). When Deke practices *Spads & Fokkers*, he becomes Stahl's virtual citizen-soldier who imagines himself in the scenes of war (Gibson and Swanwick 1986, 165). Stahl points out, however, that even the relative participatory agency of the virtual citizen-soldier is, in fact, a "mode of control" exercised by the military apparatus (42), and that the virtual play of war ends up being a "sophisticated means through which the military-entertainment complex 'plays the citizen'" (47). In this sense, Deke's attempt to carve for himself an alternate time of fantasy turns merely into his reinsertion into the real time of the political machine, which, in Stahl's figuration, "contains" and "modulates" him as a citizen subject and pre-forms his imagination and desires.

In such ways, the postmodernism, technoculture, and war of "Dogfight" can provide explanatory frameworks used to understand the traumas of the two characters, which are similar but also contain important differences. At the same time, the contextual forces at work also produce the means through which the characters can ultimately find ways of re-temporalizing their traumas. The methods of "queering time" are made possible through the nexus of the videogame in the story. For Tiny, the video game provides a means of coping with his trauma in a therapeutic capacity by offering him a temporal orientation that enables him to "rewrite" the present. For Deke, on the other hand, the video game ultimately gives a means of "coasting" in Berlant's term, or, enduring life in a half-engaged way that reduces its pressures (2007a, 779).

"Dogfight" points to the possibility of the re-temporalization of trauma, enacted through the specific technology of video games. The investigation of this re-temporalization reveals the therapeutic role of video games, and it adds to the discussion on the medium's role in the intersection with trauma theory and trauma studies, which Smethurst and Craps have argued needs more critical engagement (2015, 270–71). Looking at representations of trauma and gameplay in "Dogfight" gives glimpses of the distinct nature of contemporary trauma, whose complex structures of oppression and suffering are, as this chapter argues, countered in part by the queering function of video games.

The Re-Temporalization of Tiny Montgomery's Trauma

As described previously, Tiny Montgomery's trauma stems mainly from his experiences of war and his role in it as a military pilot. His trauma is more recognizably aligned with the prognoses that stem from the 90s' school of trauma theory. Tiny's relationship to time and the knowledge of his own positioning in the world are clearly troubled by the impact of a set of discernible events in the past, and he has been rendered into a subject of trauma, even if, on the outside, his disorientation is not always apparent.

For instance, at the beginning, Tiny does not typically exhibit signs closely associated with posttraumatic stress disorder, as defined in the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders, 5th edition* (DSM-V). The initial description of Tiny's very physical appearance deviates from the symptoms of PTSD. His features are described as "childlike" and soft, with a "suggestion of youth and even beauty in features" (153). Significantly, the character sidesteps a crucial descriptor of PTSD, listed as the "persistent avoidance of stimuli associated with the trauma" ("Trauma- and Stressor-Related Disorders" 2022). As a master-class player of the videogame central to the story, Tiny willingly has direct contact with a game that emulates WWI dogfights using graphical fighter planes, which shows that he makes little effort to circumvent stimuli that may trigger memories of his wartime piloting. The character plays this game almost obsessively, participating in tournaments and winning multiple titles. He is visually unbothered in his engagement with a medium that provides "internal or external cues that symbolize or resemble an aspect of the traumatic event" (Ibid.).

The short story does not reveal that the character is suffering from PTSD until the end, when his affliction is depicted in more direct terms. In the final round of matches he has with Deke, who eventually beats him in the game, the following lines describe the breakthrough of his memories of the past and the breakdown of his exterior calm: "Running. Just like he'd been on his every combat mission. High on exhilaration and hype, maybe, but running scared. . . . Tiny's composure was shot; his face was twisted and tormented" (176). "Breakthroughs" (or flashbacks) and "breakdowns" (or outbursts) are classic symptoms that are psychoanalytically classified as indications of trauma (Shatan 1985, 17). In the end, even the signs that seemingly point to Tiny's unperturbed front can be interpreted as being part of his trauma. The jarring clash between Tiny's soft appearance and his history as a war veteran evokes Sigmund Freud's observation that trauma must be understood as a "wound" that is inflicted "not upon the body but upon the mind" (Caruth 1996, 3). Freud might call Tiny's act of repeating the traumatic war events in gameplay as part of his "repetition compulsion." A repetition compulsion makes the psyche "constantly return to scenes of unpleasure because, by restaging the traumatic moment over and over again, it hope[s] belatedly to process . . . the trauma retroactively" (Luckhurst 2008, 9). Such a notion follows what Ruth Leys (2000) has called mimetic trauma, which is a vision of trauma as "the unprocessed fragment of the thing itself" (Luckhurst 9). In mimetic trauma, Tiny's PTSD indeed fragments time, and playing the video game is part of that dissociation. The video game in these terms is a symptom of trauma as it serves as an act of repetition compulsion and desperation, and it signals a lack of agency in the experience of trauma.

However, seen through the lens of Leys' notion of *anti*-mimetic trauma, Tiny's use of the videogame turns into an endeavor that acts as a response to trauma rather than simply a repetition of it as a part of its traumatic temporal

fragmentation [emphasis added]. The anti-mimetic theory of trauma emphasizes that "traumatic memory is always representational, available to memory, and therefore open to constant revision" (Luckhurst 2008, 13). Under this framework, the act of playing the video game becomes a reinvention of the memories of being a fighter pilot, rather than simply repeating them. In this mode of queering, playing the game identifies Tiny as acting upon a mechanism of coping, as the game provides a form of relief in the small rearticulations of his situation within the present moment.

At the center of this analysis is the previously mentioned wartime drug that has been injected into Tiny's veins during his aerial missions. The drug, called "hype," is, foremost, an indication of the fact that Tiny was directly traumatized by an oppressive system that sanctioned its use. The fact that Tiny was subjected to a wartime military program that has forced enlisted soldiers to impair their bodily functions in the name of patriotic service reveals that he is a victim of a human rights and health violation.

The effects of this drug can be explained as granting the user a tremendous boost in speed. In the case of wartime militants, the drug is useful in that it fixes their focus on the immediate combat and attunes their sensorium to it, resulting in "reflexes cranked to the max" (165). This fictional drug—which evokes the historical hallucinogenic drug usage surrounding the Vietnam War (Horowitz and Solomon 2010, 74)—is primarily a locus and agent of trauma for Tiny. It is linked to memories of a violent war, and it is also part of an invasive biochemical apparatus that has caused damage to his central nervous system. The drug is an exaggerated cyberpunk rendition of the Dexedrine pills that were taken by soldiers in historical Vietnam War contexts. Michael Herr, a Vietnam War veteran, has described Dexedrine as being stimulants that energize, keep depression at bay, and grant "speed" (1968, 22). The "speed" of the drug is part of the trauma that has warped Tiny's sense of human time and his passage through it. Paul Virilio, in his writings about the modern experience and predicament of living with "technologies of acceleration," argues that there is a correlation between the speed at which a subject moves through the world and their perception of that world. Virilio writes that technologies that make the movement through time and space faster end up leading to a "decline in existence" and a "crisis of dimensions and of representation" (1991, 37; 50). The technoscientific innovation of the drug "hype" is an example of such technologies of speed that attenuate presence. The wartime drug has shattered the very logic of time for Tiny, leading to the present-day "loss of immediate presence and a diminution of lived embodied experience" (James 2007, 45).

If the drug, in such ways, stands for the cause of Tiny's trauma, the video game he turns to can be argued as being a counter to it. When Tiny plays the game, he taps into a psychosomatic experience that is closely reminiscent of the drug-induced thrill of flight and combat. However, unlike the "speed" of the drug which shatters time and presence, the video game, for Tiny, can be

argued to have the opposite effect. Essentially, what Tiny finds in the videogame can be captured in Freud's principle of "binding," which describes a symbolic activity of reiteration that grounds the individual in a new cycle of temporal meaning-making, driven by self-preservation instincts (Cammell 2014, 11). The re-temporalization is not merely a repetition of trauma, but, rather, it becomes a remaking of history—or "historying" within a "(hi) story-play-space," in Adam Chapman's terms (2016).

The specific type of videogame that *Spads & Fokkers* can be classified as contributes to how the game allows Tiny to bind to time. *Spads & Fokkers* is played by controlling holographic fighter planes through an inductor mechanism that is attached behind the ear. This mechanism interfaces between the player's mental inputs and the movements of the graphics of the fighter aircrafts, which are modeled after WWI "spads" or "fokkers," or biplanes that were equipped with machine-gun-like firepower and often engaged other aircrafts in dogfights. The fact that this videogame uses dated aircrafts instead of modeling its flying units after the high-tech "jump jets" of Tiny's days of combat already indicates its role in the "slowing down" of Tiny's temporality.

Another key characteristic of the game that adds to this analysis is its status as a simulation of war and of history. A simulation, in Patrick Crogan's definition, is a "process by which a phenomenon is representatively modeled by another phenomenon," which involves a "selective reduction in the representative model of the complexity of elements composing the simulated phenomenon" (2011, xviii). In his work, Crogan traces the interplay between the "Cold War development of simulational technologies" (xiii), the entertainment complex, and war research. As simulations are used to map out war trajectories, simulation becomes a "system of vectors" that can reduce the real time of open possibilities into a mappable and diagrammable time of "logistical potential" (48–49). Even when simulations are taken from their war research contexts and turned into games, the same logic applies, in that game time, unlike real time, is organized in highly strategic and organized ways according to the objectives set out by the game's narrative parameters and rules. This "logistical transformation of spatiotemporal orientation in play" (61), or "logistical gametime" (85), renders historical games such as *Spads & Fokkers* into an experience of history on a vastly "minimized"—and therefore graspable—scale. The mode of mappable gametime offered by *Spads & Fokkers* stands in contrast to the shattering or effacement of time that the "speed" of the wartime drug has caused. Tiny is able to visualize the trajectory of time as one dictated by the relatively simplified and surmountable goals of the game, and he "repeat[s] history in order to develop . . . control over events" (85).

The queering function of the videogame is its capacity to have Tiny live on in a "new habitation of history" as he rewrites, re-presents, and essentially draws up a less guilt-ridden version of the past, achieved as he experiences flying without the allowances of the drug and the grips of war (Berlant 2011,

81). The clarity of gametime—which is dictated by the organization of events in anticipation of a future goal—lends Tiny a new visibility of time. This visibility allows him to carry out a form of binding, or an attachment to a new configuration of meaning-making, which leads to the possibility of regaining control by writing a new version of the trajectory of history. This focus on the reconstruction, rather than the repetition, of trauma illustrates Lauren Berlant's point that traumatized subjects, even in their suffering, find ways to cope, bind to the present, and stay "attached to life" (2011, 83).

The Re-Temporalization of Deke's Trauma

The story's second example of queer temporality follows an account of trauma that focuses more on the re-temporalization involved in "splitting," or, in Lauren Berlant's term, "coasting." According to Berlant, coasting relies less on a strengthened mode of time-keeping, of the kind that Tiny's binding to meaning implies. Instead, splitting or coasting resorts to a therapeutic "loosening" of orientations and commitments.

Compared to Tiny, the affective intensity of Deke's trauma is "lower" than that of PTSD's shattered time. The nature of his trauma can be explained in terms of Berlant's notion of the conversion from trauma to crisis within the contemporary everyday. Contrary to the "consensus that trauma detaches the subject from the historical present," Berlant contends that trauma is not necessarily a radical departure from what can be called the ordinary (2011, 80–81). In this ethos, crisis is not found in isolation from everything else but is ongoing in the ordinary present. Trauma is not an extreme proliferation of something new and insurmountable, but it is rather an "amplification" of pressures that are already "in the works" (2011, 10). In short, the contemporary environment is so full of already-existing stressors that trauma registers not as a momentous event but rather as a crisis managed within the present-oriented temporality of the everyday.

Deke manages his own crises in the everyday within the same techno-dystopian world that was capable of generating traumatizing horrors for Tiny. In such a world, Deke experiences his own "slow death." According to Berlant's definition, slow death

> prospers not in traumatic events, as discrete-time framed phenomena like military encounters and genocides can appear to do, but in temporally labile environments whose qualities and whose contours in time and space are often identified with the presentness of ordinariness itself. (2011, 100)

For Berlant, the socioeconomic pressures and technological affordances of the historical present create an environment that sets up the conditions for slow death. In terms of the effect this trauma has on Deke's temporality, this chapter extends the analogy of slowness in "slow death" and argues that

Deke's time is traumatized in a way that slows it down, stretching the present to become a postmodern "fragment" without end, with no attachments to the past or future. Unlike the traumatizing speed of Tiny's war, Deke's trauma is a slowed time of burnout and paralysis under the impossible demands of neoliberal capitalism, which leads to the dissolution of his identity as a subject.

The very opening paragraphs of "Dogfight" make it evident that Deke has a fragile and ephemeral existence. Deke finds himself stranded and ambivalent in his positionality in the world, unable to grasp the possibilities of his future (152). On the one hand, he faces a new life out of prison and a proverbial second chance, but these prospects are rendered into disorientation, and, in many ways, they seem impossible to fulfill under his current conditions of poverty and disconnect. In the cyberpunk world of "Dogfight," only people who are born into closed circuits of employment and opportunity can find footholds in stable means of sustenance. Thus, in the opening pages, Deke considers that his destination makes no difference. He embodies the precarious and uncertain temporal and spatial positionality of the "in-between," as a postmodern subject who is untethered from traditionally orienting infrastructures such as family, nation, and time. He imagines exploiting the loophole in the ticketing system of the overnight bus so he would never have to get off, being forever a passenger to nowhere until he is nothing more than some dusty remains swept off the platform (Ibid.). The "environment" in Berlant's analogy of slow death is figured here in forms of the material threats of starving and the winter weather, which reflect and extend the pervasive crises that are generated in Deke's dystopian America.

The fictional world where the neurological makeup of soldiers' brains is altered through the use of sanctioned drugs is also one that manipulates and curtails criminals' behavior through microchips. In Deke's case, a "brainlock" chip has been implanted in his brain to prevent him from entering Washington, D.C.—the site of his previous crimes of theft. At one point in the story, a pair of red laser points from a holographic display accidentally activates his brainlock, because the lights resemble aviation lights at the tip of the Washington Monument. The chip in his head is essentially a form of punishment and a permanent policer of behavior, and when it goes off, it causes excruciating pain. On seeing the lights, Deke screams, falls back, and thrashes on the floor with his head in his hands (157). The fact that Deke has a panic attack upon seeing a likeness of a monument historically raised to commemorate the first U.S. president further reinforces the sense of the character's ephemerality, showing a figure forcefully cut off from a fundamental symbol of belonging. The brainlock chip is, like Tiny's drug, a direct act of violence carried out by the unnamed governing body which authorizes such despotic systems of control.

In Deke's case, the brainlock is an agent that cuts him off from not only his past, but also from prospects of a future. Effectively, the microchip takes

a somewhat meaningful aspect of his past and forcibly erases it, replacing it with induced pain. This pain attached to the past is similar to the pain of Tiny's past, but it is also different; in Deke's case, the artificial regulation of memory aided by the technology of the brainlock renders his relationship to time especially unnatural. At the same time, the brainlock also severs a possible rendition of the future. Deke reveals, "the actual charge was *career* shoplifting" (158, emphasis added), which implies that he was in D.C. in order to find a job—and, thus, secure a future. As stated previously, having employment is critical for survival in the dystopian world of "Dogfight," which functions under just slightly more exaggerated logics of capitalism than can be found in the reader's world. Therefore, Deke's trauma is the trauma of his own slow dissipation in an impossible time, made impossible by capitalist time's grueling demands. The brainlock cuts him off from a past and future, which indicates a breakdown of temporality. He is rendered into what Jameson calls a postmodern subject, who is "unable to unify the past, present, and future of [one's] own biographical experience or psychic life" (1991, 27).

In "Dogfight," Deke's keen pursuit of playing and excelling in the game *Spads & Fokkers* can be interpreted as a small but not inconsequential response to this trauma. The main form of relief the game offers him is in its capacity to split away from life and its pressures. In this mode, the slowness of Deke's present is countered in how the game cuts into the slog of real life in the form of vitalizing interruptions. Patrick Crogan has written about the important interplay between play and life, and in his line of argument, he emphasizes that entertainment—which uses the French root of "entretenir," or to "hold in between"—serves the function of "interrupt[ing] the routine temporal ordering of existence" and "interfer[ing] with it in some fashion" (173). Deke's precarity of being "between nothing" is, when met with the possibility of gameplay, reconfigured into time that becomes tolerable due to the "temporary release" created when games "punctu[re]" into it. In the moments of "punctuation," games "play with" the boundaries and concerns of life's temporality (Ibid.).

The analysis of how the videogame plays the role of relief in the form of splicing into "everyday productive endeavor" (Ibid.) is further illustrated when looking at one additional defining characteristic of *Spads & Fokkers*. The fictional game central to "Dogfight" is distinct in that the game is not played on a screen. Rather, the 3D graphical fighter planes are flown directly in the environment the players are situated in. In the case of the matches between Tiny, Deke, and others, the planes conduct their aerial combat in the bar of *Jackman's* itself, using the spaces above a table and the ceiling areas as its arena. In this sense, the video game is played "in and among the spaces . . . of real life," where players "convert real life for a time into a space for play, suspending its normal character as milieu of the player's serious activities (Crogan 2011, 19). The fact that the graphics of the game

are transposed over the physical spaces inhabited by the players is an important aspect that supports the point that the game stands for a splitting of spatiotemporality.

The game's capacity to splice the virtual into the real can be expanded to include the analysis of videogames as a whole standing for the metaphor of splitting. The very logic of videogames depends on a version of splitting, in the form of split subjectivity. In the specific ontology involving the splicing of oneself onto an in-game avatar, the player gains purchase into the game while remaining firmly outside of it. The splitting is more conceptually and technologically justified in the medium of video games than it is in other activities that find escape into a fictional or diegetic world. In Marie-Laure Ryan's terms, the video game technology rationalizes an "ontological metalepsis," which describes the use of literalized entry points and exits in and out of a world—or, in this case, in and out of a mode of subjectivity (2006, 206–7). Gameplay enables a voluntary and logically more grounded form of doubling than is described in psychoanalytic accounts of a traumatized splitting between an "old peaceful ego" and a "parasitic double" (Freud 1955, 17:209). Video games provide a way to split oneself safely across both worlds and temporalities, which allows the player to vacillate between the demands of both reality and the game world and dilute the pressures of life in a method of crisis management.

This splitting across the real and virtual is a distinctly contemporary method of dealing with trauma. The experience of splitting belongs to the same affective register as does Berlant's notion of coasting. Coasting is defined as an "experience of self-abeyance" and a weary "counter-dissipation" against the pressures of working life and the fast pace of contemporary living, which, in its infusion of capitalist values, burdens the individual with the pressure of reproduction. According to Berlant, coasting implies the exercise of "lateral agency," which, unlike the decisive agency of the sovereign subject, is more of a gesture of "floating sideways." In an act of "self-suspension" that neither addresses life's crises directly nor disavows them, the subject chooses instead to find a small relief in taking a figurative vacation from the responsibilities of real life (2011, 116–17).

In the end, Deke, like Tiny but through an ontologically and affectively different method, uses the videogame to glean a form of relief from the pressures of life. Through metaleptic methods, gameplay allows Deke to exercise Berlant's coasting. Coasting can be argued as being a queered form of the slowness of Deke's trauma, working as a small half-gesture of survival exercised by a disempowered subject weighed down by an everyday trauma. In the lateral agency found in coasting, individuals keep living without expending too much energy towards meeting the demands of "living well." The split orientation of coasting lifts the traumatized out of themselves and offers them a dual vision that finds relief in the loosening of the commitment to the primary world.

Conclusion

The authors of the short story, William Gibson and Michael Swanwick, are both known for having expressed their views on the postmodern world's strange relationship to time. Gibson has spoken in an interview about the "unspeakable present," and Swanwick has maintained that "[w]e've overrun the future" (Smith 2014, 152; Swanwick 2000). Both authors seem to claim in different but related ways that science fiction plays a crucial role in telling about the human condition, not necessarily by predicting the future of the human, but by "seeing" the present when the present is unclear. "Dogfight" is an example of seeing the present through the lens of science fiction, and it allows the reader to learn about the human condition of trauma in contemporary reality.

In an article investigating the role of technology in the representation of disability in science fiction literature, Philip Steiner describes how technology affects the characters of "Dogfight." He ultimately gives the following less-than-optimistic verdict: "Each of them seeks to overcome their limits through technology and biotechnology. Yet . . . Gibson's technology functions as a temporal escape with a harsh timer" (2019, 21). While it is true that the technologies in "Dogfight" were used in many ways to cause trauma, I have argued that technology, as part of the toolkits of expression that we live with today, can also be used to queer the—oftentimes violent and impossible—temporalities of trauma. In line with Gibson's words that "[t]echnology is always neutral until it is put into practice" (Smith 2014, 122), this chapter has given a glimpse of how the videogame is, in the end, a media form that can be used in various ways. In the case of the fictional characters of "Dogfight," playing the video game is not just an extension of an all-consuming trauma or even a mere flight of fantasy. Echoing Morrigan (58), the video game in "Dogfight" also offers a way to reclaim time, illuminating the possibility of dreaming of just futures.

Note

1 Jameson cites Jacques Lacan's notion of linguistic schizophrenia here, comparing the predicament of the postmodernist culture of simulacra with Lacan's description of the breakdown in the signifying chain (*Ecrits*, Alan Sheridan 1977, 179–225).

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7 Disrupting Binaries and Linearities

Queer and Trans Temporalities in Imogen Binnie's *Nevada*

Steph Berens

Normative temporalities within hegemonic Western culture have permeated the structuring of life to the point that individuals who do not adhere to certain timelines usually experience these temporalities as extremely restrictive. Elizabeth Freeman (2007) defines temporality as "a mode of implantation through which institutional forces come to seem like somatic facts" (160) and notes that "we achieve comfort, power, even physical legibility to the extent that we internalize the given cultural tempos and time lines" (160–61). In other words, temporality is culturally constructed, while it seems to be natural, and institutionalized temporality benefits those in positions of power while marginalizing those who refuse—or are unable—to follow it. This marginalization often materializes through inhibition and both an affective and physical sense of being "kept in stasis," as Michelle Wright (2018) illustrates (290). In *Queer Phenomenology*, Sara Ahmed (2006) points out how visibly marginalized bodies are continually stopped/arrested when moving through spaces (139–40). Multiple influential scholars within trans studies, such as Sandy Stone ([1987] 1992), Dean Spade (2006), Julia Serano (2016), and Ruth Pearce (2018), have relayed how trans bodies moving through gender clinics and psychiatrists' offices are kept waiting for approval, being allowed to advance only if they engage in the narrative that champions "chronological progression from a 'terrible-present-in-the-wrong-body' to a 'better-future-in-the-right-body' " (Fisher et al. 2017, 2). The gatekeeping of life-saving health care is exacerbated by political rhetoric that, in the name of temporality, deems trans youth too young to make decisions about their own bodies, keeping them in stasis while the imposed inevitability of puberty moves on (Shook et al. 2022). Wright (2018) summarizes that marginalized subjects "are trapped in a space-time that grants passage forward only to the privileged" (294).

How, then, do marginalized subjects deal with being trapped, being stopped, waiting? Analyzing works of queer literature, Wright (2018) investigates how, for example, E.M. Forster's *Maurice* "reject[s] reproductive space-times" (297), how James Baldwin's *Giovanni's Room* manages to implement and at the same time subvert conventional narrative form, or how Audre

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Lorde's *Zami* muddles with the linearity of autobiography by constructing "a subjectivity that is always already polyvalent, layering a broad variety of temporal selves" (300–1). Following Wright, this chapter sets out to investigate a staple of trans literature, Imogen Binnie's 2013 novel *Nevada*, for its negotiations of temporality as a queer/transgender road narrative. I argue that *Nevada* opposes established temporal structures within the American road genre, heteronormative temporality, and cisnormative temporality, all three of which assume a binary between a negatively connoted starting point and a positively connoted point of arrival, which is bridged by a linear, teleological period of individual development. By breaking up this stable, clear-cut structure, *Nevada* illustrates possibilities to resist coercion emanating from dominant temporalities.

Nevada is often credited with being a turning point within the genre of trans literature and celebrated as one of the first narratives by a trans author that is written explicitly for trans readers and does not cater to a cisgender audience (Riedel 2022; Wark 2020). Published in 2013 by Topside Press, *Nevada*'s reception history up to its reprint in 2022 with Farrar, Straus and Giroux is rather fascinating. Journalist Harron Walker (2022) recollects how the novel "barely caused a blip on the broader literary world's radar" and was yet enthusiastically embraced by its small readership to the point of a "'cult of Maria Griffiths' forming" and the creation of a "discussion-based Facebook group called 'People Who Need to Talk About *Nevada* by Imogen Binnie.'" Author Casey Plett (2022) describes *Nevada*'s impact as "a shot of gasoline" for trans women, whether or not they were out and/or had transitioned, and Torrey Peters, author of the acclaimed novel *Detransition, Baby*, has spoken about the fundamental impact *Nevada* had on her own writing (Walker 2018). After the novel went out of print in 2017 following Topside's folding, "devotees continued to share their dog-eared copies and digital scans. Someone started a website called 'Have You Read Nevada?' with links to free PDFs of the text" (Walker 2022). Given the novel's history of near obscurity outside of transgender readerships, its reissue by a major publishing house becomes even more noteworthy.

Even though *Nevada* is often categorized as a road novel (Gallagher 2017; Rizer 2022; Upadhyaya 2023), the narrative depicts surprisingly little time on the road. The story follows Maria Griffiths, a white trans woman in her thirties, who mostly dissociates from her life in New York, her job at a bookstore, and her relationship with her girlfriend Steph. When Steph breaks up with her, Maria decides to leave New York and head out west in Steph's car with a glove box full of heroin. At a Wal-Mart in a small Nevada town, she meets James, whom she clocks as trans and tries to mentor, but James is reluctant to deconstruct his feelings about gender and, in the end, leaves Maria gambling in a casino, not before stealing her drugs. *Nevada* frustrates expectations of how road narratives are usually structured, how narratives about life in general, and trans life in particular, are usually structured, and

leaves the reader with an open ending. Literary critic Stephanie Burt (2022) articulates the novel's core through refusal: "*Nevada* is a book about leaving, about rejecting, about saying no: no to the standard Trans 101 narrative, . . . no to the expectations that books about trans people written for cis people usually meet." This chapter analyzes how temporality plays into these refusals.

Breaking Binaries and Sputtering Linearities on the Road

Within the American road genre, road trips often present linear movements from a negatively connoted past into a positively connoted future. This oppositional arrangement of past and future is connected to oppositional understandings of the home and the road. Mobility, then, appears as a movement from the home as a past site of restraint to the road as a future space of liberation (Brigham 2015, 6). Within white American culture, the space of the road stands for freedom, mobility, individuality, as a symbol for new beginnings as well as a desire for change (Pöhlmann 2018, 117–20). In contrast, the home usually signifies restraint, stagnation, and hegemonic culture (Brigham 2015, 6). The road becomes the site of total liberation from the restrictions of home, society, and the familiar (Brigham 2015, 6), as well as the site of potential subversions of hegemonic norms (Pöhlmann 2018, 121). The binary conceptualization of the home and the road often extends into the localization of the home in an urban space and the road in a rural space (Pöhlmann 2018, 120–21). While crowdedness, repression through hegemonic social structures, and stagnation characterize urban life, rural life promises simplicity, open spaces, and the freedom to move and evolve (Ireland 2003, 479; Pöhlmann 2018, 120). These trends can be observed in various well-known road narratives such as Jack Kerouac's *On the Road*, Clint Eastwood's *A Perfect World*, or Paul Auster's *Moon Palace*.

The binary oppositionality of past and future, home and road, and the linear travel from one to the other becomes problematic when considering the characters' positionality within the matrix of social identities. The generic disregard for the past, for example, often manifests in the omittance of information about a character's origin, family, or previous personal life. This implies that to experience a new future in the United States, it is necessary to forget the past (Ireland 2003, 482). Due to the normative imagination of "America" as essentially white and middle-class, however, this notion purposefully excludes racialized, immigrant, and poor groups while also erasing elements such as histories of trauma that may substantially impact an individual's or collective's future. This erasure also applies to the history of stolen Indigenous land on which road narratives take place. Ireland (2003) points out that westward movement replicates the historical movement of colonizers across the North American continent (475); consequently, road narratives are closely connected to nationalism and colonialism and therefore also to violence against Indigenous peoples and cultures.

While male protagonists on the road are mostly interested in their journey towards future independence and individuality (Ireland 2003, 476), scholars such as Deborah Paes de Barros (2004), Deborah Clarke (2004), Alexandra Ganser (2009), and Ann Brigham (2015) have shown that road narratives which center the experiences of cis women often challenge the way past, future, home, and road are traditionally represented, displaying more ambivalent understandings of space and temporality. Examples include Mona Simpson's *Anywhere But Here*, Barbara Kingsolver's *The Bean Trees*, Erika Lopez's *Flaming Iguanas*, Ridley Scott's *Thelma and Louise*, or Sara Taylor's *The Lauras*. *Nevada* ties into this tradition while paying special attention to Maria's positionality as a trans woman.

For one, Nevada complicates the binary between a static, ugly, repressive urban home and the beauty, mobility, and freedom of the road. Maria finds Brooklyn "gorgeous" (Binnie 2014, 11; 115) and enjoys living there and exploring all the things her borough has to offer (11). At the same time, she is aware of the negative impacts of gentrification and the role that she plays in it herself (12). She admires the beauty of the Williamsburg bridge (23) while also looking at Manhattan on one side and Brooklyn on the other and wondering "which is worse" (22). New York is quite the opposite of static for Maria, as she rides her bike through the city with enthusiasm without regard for danger:

> She rides over Williamsburg Bridge, which is never going to be boring, no matter how jaded she gets. You can see everything in Manhattan. Your legs hurt. There are always pedestrians in the way, and when you get to the bottom it's an opportunity to bust unsafely into traffic, cut between vans and cabs, almost get squashed to death, jump a curb and ride up Third Avenue.
>
> (12)

As rushed and erratic as Maria's bike rides are described, her movement is often interrupted, either because she gets tired (21), she is so deep in thought that she bumps into the back of cabs (78), or she gets lost (84). Maria's perception of her home is thus laced with co-existing beauty and contempt, and even though she is highly mobile in New York, her movement often seems chaotic, misdirected, and punctuated.

In contrast, Maria's journey out west appears much more static. Her trip up until her stop at a Wal-Mart in Nevada is not described at all. The reader only learns that traveling roughly two and a half thousand miles took her a month and mainly consisted of "hanging out in like small town parks and route 80 off-ramps and drinking truckstop coffee refills in the middle of the night" (Binnie 2014, 205). The only time Maria's road trip is depicted is when she drives to Reno with James (210). And even then, the focus lies on their conversation, with not much indicating they are moving unless they pull into truck stops and restaurant parking lots (219; 231). This sense of stasis can

be connected to the metaphorical meanings that Nevada as a geographical location conjures. Within the United States, the East is often characterized by its proximity to European culture and therefore to the restraint of the "Old World;" the West is seen as open, unoccupied (frontier-)land full of promise and opportunity (Ireland 2003, 475). In terms of temporality, the East represents the past, while the West holds the future (476). Accordingly, many road narratives portray a journey from east to west that ends in California, which is imagined as paradisiac destination (475–76). This geographical coding, of course, only makes sense when the body that moves through these spaces is presumed to be white. For the Indigenous Waší·šiw (Washoe), Numu (Northern Paiute), Nuwu (Southern Paiute), and Newe (Western Shoshone) people living in the area colonized as Nevada, the land holds past, present, and future all at once. Within the bounds of whiteness, however, the state of Nevada, as the westernmost point of the United States before reaching California, turns into a metaphorical space: it implies being in limbo, not quite having arrived yet, anticipation as to what comes next. While Maria initially plans to reach the West Coast (Binnie 2014, 133), the story ends in a casino on the outskirts of Reno, which is located just 10 miles short of the Californian border. Maria's physical and emotional time-space-location emphasizes the tension between her plans and her actions, hovering just at the cusp of arrival without any intention of providing resolution. By taking up the white-man-on-the-road's position but refusing to direct it towards its predestined, teleological end, this lack of resolution could be read as a satirization of "what kind of space white bodies occupy within an ongoing history of white settler colonialism, indigenous land theft, and environmental destruction that the finding-oneself-through-travel narrative requires" (Fink 2019, 12–13).

This end is, of course, not only configured geographically but also in terms of personal development. While conventional road novels usually represent the city as a site of developmental stagnation and situate the possibility for liberation and transformation on the road (Ireland 2003, 479; Pöhlmann 2018, 120; Seymour 2016, 3), *Nevada* questions the notion that development and transformation will happen at all. Maria's head seems to be spinning with revelations all the time (Binnie 2014, 67). When she crashes at her best friend Piranha's house after Steph breaks up with her, Piranha teases her about her constant processing: "It would blow my mind out of my head if you weren't bursting with revelations you wanted to tell me about" (87). While Maria is in New York, she comes to a whole array of important realizations, such as that she should break up with Steph (24), that she needs to figure out issues around her transness which are making her close herself off from the world (88), that she is experiencing a lot of emotions because she is over a week late for an estrogen shot (51), and, generally, that she hates her life and needs to change something about it (108). Despite these revelations, Maria's development seems stunted, which is emphasized by Steph's comment that Maria goes on an adventure every fall without her behavior changing much at all (118).

While Maria's physical movement on the road is barely perceptible, her personal development is not significantly advanced, either. Paradoxically, being on the road seems to emphasize her stagnation. Sitting in the Wal-Mart parking lot in a small Nevada town, Maria reflects on her previous journey: "So far this stupid little jaunt away from the center of the universe hasn't taught me anything about how to live a life post-transition" (Binnie 2014, 175). She also comments that this is probably not going to change in the future:

> It sure doesn't seem likely that I'm going to get to Oakland or San Francisco, or drive up to Portland, to Seattle or Olympia, and find somebody there who will sit me down and explain what I need to do to exist like a three-dimensional person.
>
> (175)

During her time on the road, Maria comes to the conclusion that her isolation and detachment from the world has been a pattern throughout her entire life that has kept her safe from harmful cisnormative social structures (205). This realization does not originate from the space of the road itself or from an enlightened person living in a queer mecca; instead, it comes from her friend Piranha back in New York. During a phone call, Piranha tells Maria,

> Hey stupid, did you ever stop to think that that pattern, that coping mechanism, was actually a brilliant strategy to stay alive? . . . The problem wasn't the coping mechanism, the problem is that the coping mechanism became a pattern of behavior.
>
> (206–7)

This demonstrates that liberation and personal transformation are not inherently elements of the road but might rather originate from the help of observant friends, which further negates the notion of personal transformation being an individualistic project rather than a communal one. In the end, still, Maria does not take any steps to put her realizations into practice.

Refusing Productivity and Responsibility

Maria's refusal of personal transformation ties into a refusal of heteronormative temporality, which is also fundamentally entangled with the temporalities of the road genre. Jack Halberstam (2005) describes how heterosexual temporality revolves around reproductive temporality, which is tied to notions of the normal and of white middle-class respectability (4). "Heterosexual" is thereby not understood literally but emerges as racist and classist heteronormativity. Reproductive temporality centers heterosexual reproduction and biological family structures on a timeline of life that is marked by birth, marriage, reproduction, and death (2) and dictates certain time frames in which

the achievement of marriage and reproduction are appropriate and desirable (5). Marriage and reproduction are relegated to the time of adulthood, which is reached by traversing "the dangerous and unruly period of adolescence" (4) in order to achieve maturation. This constructs youth and adulthood as opposite temporal spaces, which are connected through a one-way line of movement from youth into adulthood. Heterosexual temporality's focus on longevity and stability demonstrates that adulthood is equated with responsibility and permanence and that individuals who do not display these traits even though they may have reached adulthood in terms of their biological age are characterized as childish. Heterosexual temporality, thus, not only marginalizes individuals who refuse or are unable to center heterosexual marriage and reproduction in their life but also those who do not, or cannot, conform to middle-class ideals of whiteness. In opposition to heterosexual temporality, queer temporality then emerges as an avenue of refusal for not only queer people, but generally those who refuse the structuring of their life according to heterosexual temporality (Halberstam 2005, 2).

Against heterosexual temporality's pull towards the future, queer temporalities are oriented more towards the present (Halberstam 2005, 2). Linking queerness to the present, however, can also be problematic. Freeman (2007) illustrates how queers are often viewed as having neither a future nor a past (162–65), remaining unable to produce longevity and stability, and being trapped in a present that is imagined as impermanent and fleeting. Halberstam (2005) emphasizes that the "hopeful reinvention of conventional understandings of time" (3) through an intense focus on living life to the fullest in the present does not equally apply to Black and poor people, as "the premature deaths of poor people and people of color . . . is simply business as usual" (3–4). Finally, José Esteban Muñoz ([2009] 2019) argues against Lee Edelman's (2004) assertion that the future is the realm of the child, noting that "the future is only the stuff of some kids. Racialized kids, queer kids, are not the sovereign princes of futurity. . . . It is important not to hand over futurity to normative white reproductive futurity" (95). Understandings of queer temporality must therefore necessarily be examined through an intersectional lens. Halberstam's (2005) suggestion of a counternarrative to the supposedly inevitable maturation from the "unruly period of adolescence" (4) into the stable and responsible time of adulthood through a notion of "stretched-out adolescence" (153) thus only appears viable for white and class-privileged people.

Looking back to the architecture of road narratives, it becomes apparent that their structuring is fundamentally influenced by heterosexual temporality. The aforementioned disregard for the past and unapologetic drive towards the future within the American road genre is tied to the fact that protagonists in male road narratives are usually young (Ireland 2003, 477). Deborah Clarke (2004) writes that cis male road narratives often use the road trip as a means for self-discovery and coming into adulthood (123), and Jacqui Smyth (1999) posits that the road trip is "the quintessential fling before

manhood—the fling that, in fact, transports one into manhood" (115). This implies that the road trip as a symbol for a period of self-discovery is relegated to adolescence, while the return to normal society and the assumption of a position as a productive member is configured as the end of the process of maturation into adulthood. Similar to how queerness has been viewed—most notoriously by Freud ([1905] 1953)—as a temporary developmental stage on the road to heterosexual destiny, the male protagonist is only supposed to occupy the road temporarily.

Just as *Nevada* refutes the notion that the road is a space that inherently opens possibilities for personal transformation, the novel also questions the conventional expectation that development should primarily occur during adolescence and lead necessarily to responsibility and productivity. The fact that Maria is constantly "bursting with revelations" (Binnie 2014, 87) and seems to have an identity crisis every fall (118) suggests that personal development is not a one-time occurrence during adolescence but regularly happens throughout a person's life. Furthermore, despite her age and her self-awareness about her gender, Maria is not a responsible adult with a stable life—which is, in fact, her goal. Because she used to feel responsible for shielding the world from her transness and not disappointing her parents (98), she now makes the deliberate resolution to be more irresponsible (95). Marty Fink (2019) also reads Maria's irresponsibility as a refusal of capitalist productivity epitomized through her insomnia. He writes that

> capitalist expectations that prioritize workplace productivity—as preferable to the unpaid community support and care work Maria undertakes all night long online—constructs those who stay up late and sleep in as "irresponsible," which happens to be Maria's favorite state.
>
> (9)

and that her insomnia "opens up a possibility to undercut capitalism through rejecting the embodied norms it aims to maintain" (8). While Maria's insomnia works to undermine capitalist heterosexual temporality, it also has undeniable bodily consequences, as "the complex web of conflicting needs between ir/responsibility and sleep leave Maria feeling torn between 'solving her life' and feeling 'at rest'" (Fink 2019, 14). The fact that Maria's subversion of narrative linearity is at once facilitated by her whiteness while presenting a detriment to her body emphasizes the complexities of queer temporalities, showing how straying from hegemonic narratives often necessitates certain privileges that enable life outside of them to be existentially viable but may nevertheless come at the cost of one's substance.

Straying From the "Transgender Life Narrative"

Maria's rejection of temporal structures extends yet further towards cisnormative constructions of transgender identities and bodies, which are likewise

entangled in notions of linear temporality. Atalia Israeli-Nevo (2017) writes that transition is conventionally configured as "one moment of somatic change that allows the subject to move to the other side of the gap (without looking back)" (36), a notion that evokes depictions of the road trip as a linear movement enclosed by a clear departure and arrival, as well as heteronormative constructions of aging as a linear movement from adolescence into adulthood. The linear imagination of transition originated within the mid-20th century medical establishment, which began to favor granting gender-affirming health care to those trans individuals who they thought would best be able to pass as cis (Serano 2016, 119), meaning they would exhibit stereotypical gender expressions and be heterosexual (122). To access healthcare, trans people thus had to reproduce these protocols, whether they truly subscribed to them or not. In this context,

> Most trans women understood that they needed to show up for their psychotherapy appointments wearing dresses and makeup, expressing stereotypically feminine mannerisms, insisting that they had always felt like women trapped inside men's bodies, that they'd identified as female since they were small children, that they were attracted to men but currently avoided intimate relations because they did not see themselves as homosexual, and that they were repulsed by their own penises.
>
> (Serano 2016, 123–24)

Even today, some healthcare providers still evaluate trans people based on oppositional sexist stereotypes (119) and expect them to conform to cisnormative standards of gender expression after transition (124). Interestingly, trans autobiographies written in the 20th century often mirror the medical establishment's attitudes towards gender. Analyzing some of these texts, Sandy Stone ([1987] 1992) writes that the authors portray themselves as going "from being unambiguous men, albeit unhappy men, to unambiguous women. There is no territory between. Further, each constructs a specific narrative moment when their personal sexual identification changes from male to female" (156). Aren Aizura (2011) concludes that this view of transitioning implies the belief that the importance of transition does not lie in the easing of gender dysphoria for the trans individual but rather in their ability to pass as cisgender and not upset notions of binary gender (146).

Maria's transition is anything but a one-time event that signals a passage from "visibly trans" to "passing-as-cis." Her life is not clearly divided into time periods of pre- and post-transition, as she continues to work at the same bookstore and "there are people at her job who remember when she was supposed to be a boy" (Binnie 2014, 6). Furthermore, some elements about her relationship to her body remain the same even after transition, such as the fact that "she still flinches at best and dissociates completely at worst if somebody touches her below the waist, and she still has to shave every

morning" (7). Even though Maria is usually not read as trans (4), she is also still surprised sometimes when people call her "Miss":

> Who knows whether that part of being trans ever fades. Probably not. Or more specifically, probably not when you still have to shave, when your junk still gets in the way and makes your clothes fit wrong every morning. It probably doesn't go away until you are rich.
>
> (17)

Her point again illustrates the complex intertwinements of trans temporality with other social positionalities. Just as there is no clear separation between her pre- and post-transition life, the fact that she has to regularly give herself estrogen shots (Binnie 2014, 51) demonstrates that transition is more of a circular process that has to be actively maintained instead of a linear one with a definite destination.

Maria also rejects the cisnormative narrative around transition by overtly ridiculing it and explicitly pointing out why it is harmful. She mocks how the cis gaze is usually focused on transition as a media spectacle by ironically describing her own transition as such: "So she figured out that she was trans, told people she was changing her name, got on hormones, it was very difficult and rewarding and painful. Whatever. It was a Very Special Episode" (Binnie 2014, 5–6). She also makes fun of the requirements trans women are expected to comply with:

> I have only ever been attracted to men, I have never fetishized women's clothes or done anything remotely kinky, I have never been sexual with the junk I was born with. Pretty much you have to prove that you're totally normal and straight and not queer at all, so that if they let you transition you will be a normal het woman who doesn't freak anybody out.
>
> (41–42)

Her list echoes Serano's (2016) description while underscoring and ridiculing how excessively paranoid the cisgender majority is of non-normative sexualities and gender expressions.

Maria is acutely aware of how the cisnormative narrative has influenced her own relationship to her body and transition. She notes that "there is this dumb thing where trans women feel like we all have to prove that we're totally trans as fuck and there's no doubt in our minds that we're Really, Truly Trans" (Binnie 2014, 41) and explicitly ties this notion to the way that doctors and psychologists will deny access to treatment if this script is not followed. In contrast to what medical gatekeepers want to hear, Maria did not know she was trans until she was twenty, as she did not have the language to describe her feelings and only had access to harmful stereotypes

of trans people (42). She criticizes the implied conceptualization of identity as static:

> How do you transition but then continue to evolve as a person, post-transition, when it seems like the only way you got through your transition was to assert loudly, even just to yourself, that you knew who you were and you knew what you wanted and you trusted yourself?
>
> (223)

Maria concludes that this issue is at the core of her problems, as it was never the space of New York nor her age that hindered her personal development but rather that she had learned to "[swear] up and down forever that I knew exactly who I was and exactly what I needed and what I cared about" (223). She realizes that she must "stop feeling responsible, to everybody all the time, for presenting this consistent and static face" (224). Her reflections clearly indicate that neither geographical space, nor time, nor identity have stunted her development, but rather the very cisnormative structures that compel her towards transformation.

Because the normative narrative around transition situates the "old" gender in the past and the "new" gender in the future, while imagining a clearly defined, linear movement between the two, Israeli-Nevo (2017) argues that a deliberate focus on the present interferes with this conceptualization by taking time with transition and allowing, or even encouraging, indeterminacy, which forces the onlooker to engage with the fact that their understanding of binary gender models is flawed (38). In this sense, Israeli-Nevo writes that

> the fact that I can pass at the same time as a man, a woman, and something in-between, creates an excessive affective moment, in which the person in front of me is temporally delayed and pulled into the mindful present, forced to recognize his/her confusion.
>
> (39)

In addition, she emphasizes that intentionally taking time with transitioning is a privilege, as gendered indeterminacy can be dangerous, especially for racialized people (45). Furthermore, a lack of access to resources as well as unstable economic situations may force individuals to delay their transition (45). Yet, the concept of taking time with transition presents, as Israeli-Nevo concludes, a way to resist how linear cisnormative temporality marginalizes transgender individuals (48).

Nevada displays multiple instances of shifting attention from the future towards the present. In the beginning, Maria seems focused on the future by saving up for bottom surgery and hoping that sex will become more pleasurable for her afterwards: "Maybe one day, when my seven hundred dollars of savings become twenty thousand and I can afford bottom surgery, I'll be

able to get past the inevitable shutoff point and actually enjoy it. Can't wait" (Binnie 2014, 27). But later, she realizes her savings are so far from being sufficient for affording surgery that "she might as well enjoy blowing it" (116). Another example occurs when Maria delays her estrogen shot. At first, she seems to have simply forgotten about it (Binnie 2014, 51), but every time she reminds herself, she does not get to it immediately (89; 125; 131), and only on the morning that she leaves New York does she finally take time for the injection (132). On Maria's hormone delay, Israeli-Nevo (2017) posits that, because she takes time with her transition, "her body feels uncomfortable, and this feeling of discomfort allows her to be 'hung up' on being trans, to be introspective about her gender and her life" (42). While Israeli-Nevo interprets the delay as a productive catalyst for Maria's development, Maria herself views it from a more practical angle, noting that "not giving yourself your shot is like slamming your fingers in a car door over and over, or forcing yourself to drown a kitten every morning or something. Totally unproductive" (Binnie 2014, 131).

In a similar vein, the novel's narrative structure parodies the notion of an external cisgender gaze onto a transgender body. As Serano (2016) illustrates, the cisnormative narrative around transition is configured through a cis gaze on trans bodies that denies trans people's diverse experiences and replaces them with a harmful narrative which trans people have been forced to internalize and reproduce (123). Maria seems to reject this cis gaze by partially embodying the heterodiegetic narrator of the story and blending the external position of the narrator with her position as the internal focalizer. Just as a heterodiegetic narrator is located outside of the narrated world, the cis gaze is located outside of the worlds of trans experiences—and yet it influences those worlds by narrating them and not letting the trans inhabitants speak for themselves. A heterodiegetic narrator may also be viewed as more reliable by the reader—just as cisgender medical gatekeepers have long been seen as experts on trans identity.

Nevada calls this authoritative role of the heterodiegetic narrator into question by blurring the strict division that is usually present between a heterodiegetic narrator and an internal focalizer. Even though the internal focalization is variable, allowing the story to be narrated from Steph and James's perspective as well, this process of blurring the boundaries only occurs when Maria's perspective takes center stage. The enmeshment of narration and focalization is, for example, signaled when the narrator expresses themself exactly as flippantly as Maria speaks and thinks (Binnie 2014, 85), and when Maria uses the same language and tone in a blog post as the narrator does to describe her musings on gender (99–102). More prominently, however, is the omission of visual markers within the text that conventionally indicate a separation between narration and focalization. For example, in the first chapter of the novel, Maria's thoughts are italicized (Binnie 2014, 1) to emphasize that they are her thoughts, explicitly, and not the narrator's. However, in the

course of the novel, this distinction ceases to exist. The lack of italicization or even quotation marks for direct speech often has the reader stumbling over passages and wondering if they are reading the narrator's comments or Maria's thoughts; and questioning if Maria has suddenly become the narrator and then abandoned that role again without letting the reader know. See, for example, the following passage in the second chapter that omits both italicization and quotation marks: "But Maria is like, Dude, hi. Nobody ever reads me as trans any more. Old straight men hit on me when I'm at work and in all these years of transitioning I haven't even been able to save up for a decent pair of boots" (4). While the first sentence still invokes a separation of the narrator and Maria, the next two sentences present Maria's thoughts, but in the same mode as the narration is presented, thus blurring the lines between narrator and focalizer.

Besides the omission of visual markers that indicate a separation between narrator and focalizer, *Nevada* frequently uses second-person narration to not only break the barrier between the story level and the level of narrative transmission, but also the one between the level of narration and the extratextual level of communication, making it seem like the fictional narrator is directly addressing the reader. The interplay between the omission of visual markers and second-person narration is especially clear when the narrative describes how Maria monologues her morning routine. At first, the heterodiegetic narrator is clearly definable: "Because shaving and putting on a bunch of foundation every day are emotionally exhausting reminders of being trans, she gets a step removed from them by monologuing like she's explaining them to someone" (Binnie 2014, 30). In the next sentence, the second-person narration comes into focus: "Secret trick one is to boil water in a kettle on the stove while you get dressed and brush your teeth, then stop up the sink and make yourself a little boiling lake" (30). This continues until the end of the paragraph, when the internal focalization seems to turn into homodiegetic narration, eclipsing the presence of the heterodiegetic narrator: "You'll know it's time to replace the blade when your face is a gory mess every day after you shave and you keep thinking, you want blood moon magic but you only bleed a couple days a month? I bleed every day. From my face" (30). Of course, this last sentence could also be interpreted as simply the continuation of the second-person narration; however, the fact that this is unclear and invites multiple interpretations in the first place demonstrates that the boundaries of narration in *Nevada* are not always clear-cut.

To conclude, *Nevada* questions temporal conventions of the American road genre, such as linear movement between a negatively connoted home of the past to a positively connoted future on the road; the allocation of personal transformation to the space of the road and the time period of adolescence; and the overall notion that development is an inevitable, teleological process. Maria's life also negates constructions of heteronormative and cisnormative temporality, which display similar linear modes of structuring time to those

within the road genre, privileging irresponsibility and present-focused open-endedness over stability and productive futurity, as well as showing alternative, more circular, and ultimately more messy ways to embody and think about transitioning and transness. Finally, the novel's narrative structure questions literary conventions that center a reliable, heterodiegetic narrator and thus metaphorically rejects the notion that an outside cisgender authority speaks for a transgender protagonist. The 2013 back cover of *Nevada* displays a quote by performance poet Daphne Gottlieb, who says, "*Nevada* jackhammered the men-only genre of the great American road novel into bits, and gives us truth like scraped knuckles, exhilaration, and the terror of possibility." As Ahmed calls to pick up hammers to chip away at the oppressing structures that have in turn chipped away at marginalized people (2006, 22), perhaps *Nevada*'s jackhammering took this practice a step further, blasting open new possibilities and new paths for trans literature and thus earning its cult status nearly a decade later.

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Section II

Unearthing Queer Times

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8 Queer Memory and the Brown Commons

Juan Antonio Suárez

Queer Temporality, Queer Memory

Whatever else it is, queer *is* a way of being in time, in history, in memory. The confrontation with the past has been a central concern in the study of queer temporalities. Latent in queer critique from the beginning, it became central in the mid-2000s and remains so today. It is easy to attribute this critical declension to the way old and, especially, new media have made the past available at an unprecedented scale and degree of sensuous immersiveness. Digital networks in particular, thanks to their capabilities for practically unlimited storage and instant retrieval, made more of the past more immediately accessible than it had ever been when contact with it required physical displacement and the handling of archival materials, experiences that demanded considerable expense of time and means. Traces and images of former times, from personal photo archives to institutional repositories, are now immediately retrievable from our computers. And being readily at hand, they are also endlessly available for rewriting and recycling, since graphic design software and user-friendly editing tools allow for their easy manipulation and reconfiguration. It is in part this manipulability, which permits the scrambling of temporal lines and encourages endless historical revision, that makes the past a process and a problem rather than a given; a coordinate of experience that demands to be thought rather than taken for granted. In addition, queer backward glances may be encouraged by the uneven fate of sexual liberation half a century after its inception. The ideal of a forward-moving history of emancipation that fueled sexual liberation movements in the seventies and early eighties crashed, first, against the institutionalized homophobia unleashed by AIDS and, more recently, against the numerous efforts to revert hard-earned queer and minority rights even in countries that had pioneered their recognition. In the absence of an overarching historical project and of emancipatory guarantees that might signpost a lineal advance for queer minorities, creators, critics, and historians dip into the past for compensatory utopias and for clues to understanding and living in the present. Even stories of obstruction, hostility, aggression, and impossibility can

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help us to navigate a beleaguered present and suggest strategies of resistance and endurance.

Whether compensatory or prospective, the backward glance is not particular to queers alone. Pierre Nora has claimed that collective memory is all the more carefully cultivated by minorities whose past is either unrecognized or, at worst, forcibly erased by normative accounts (1989, 11). Queers in particular—read subalterns of all stripes—have been frequently wiped out from the record or consigned to it only as outlaws or aberrations. And they have had a conflictive relation to normative time. As Elisabeth Freeman writes, they have been typically described as "temporally backward, though paradoxically dislocated from any specific historical period," and perhaps because of their aslant rapport to time, they have "lacked history as a distinct people" (Freeman 2007, 162). But precisely the lack of an institutionalized past, Freeman continues, affords queers considerable latitude in reading its signs and encourages a backward glance unhindered by tradition or official constraint.

This lack of constraint comes through forcefully in the round table discussion Freeman herself curated for the "Queer Temporalities" special issue of *GLQ* in 2007 (Dinshaw et al. 2007). The exchange among the participants—Christopher Nealon, Roderick Ferguson, Annemarie Jagose, Caroline Dinshaw, Jack Halberstam, Nguyen Tan Hoang, and Carol Freccero, all of whom had recently published work or had curated film and video programs with a strong temporal inflection—had at the time the character of a state of the art and remains today an encapsulation of many of the main motifs in the study of queer temporalities, including queer approaches to the past. Common to the different interventions on the queer past—and to the work that they reference—is a deliberate avoidance of standard historical research. While the historicist approach carried out in other areas of the field was interested in the elucidation of the shifting paradigms of gender and sexuality across time, chronology, periodization, and empirical documentation, the work of the participants in the round table regarded the past instead as a reservoir of images and affects in dialogue with the present. In the fashion of Walter Benjamin's experimental historical method—cited in passing by Ferguson—the past purveys dialectal images that could be wrenched out of chronology in order to illuminate a queer now, or, as Dinshaw put it in *Getting Medieval*, in order "to extend resources for self or community building" (1999, x). The interest in the past was based on what Dinshaw named "a queer desire for history" (Dinshaw et al. 2007, 178) and Christopher Nealon described as a search for "sodality" and "belonging across time" (2001, 2). Repeated tropes for this search, both in the round table discussion itself and in the work of its participants, were "tactile" appropriation (Dinshaw 1999; Dinshaw et al. 2007), identification and affective contact (Nealon 2001; Dinshaw et al. 2007), spectrality (Freccero 2006), re-use (Nealon 2001), and embodiment, as in the practice of what Freeman called *erotohistoriography*—the use of

the body "as a tool to effect, figure or perform" the encounter with the past (2010, 95).

Clearly, this was not standard historical research. It was carried out, in fact, by literary and cultural critics, and was often questioned by historicists as impressionistic, speculative, and based on analogical thinking rather than on data mining (Traub 2013). The criticism was somewhat misguided because neither conventional empirical research nor the production of standard genealogies were the goals of these thinkers, who questioned, in different ways, that normative history was the only valid methodology to make sense of the past. Rather than clarify evolution, delineate timelines, or demarcate periods, their research yielded isolated intensities and pregnant moments in which the past became conversant with the present or illuminated it in different ways. Their tentative, piecemeal approach was appropriate to the discontinuous character of queer culture, which offers less a fully traceable record than an intermittent, fragmented archive of feelings and affects (Cvetkovich 2003; Nealon 2001); of ephemera (Muñoz 1996); or of the seemingly inconsequential, low-grade, cheap, mass produced, improvised, and coincidental—that is, the "tiny archives" (Halberstam 2008, 151) that might go unnoticed for those not attuned to the semiotics of sexual outlaws.

Joan Doan differentiated this work from that of historians by ascribing to it the rubric of memory studies, a well-established field that neither in its canonical instantiations (by Maurice Halbwachs or Pierre Nora, for example) nor in its more recent developments has broached the memory of sexual minorities but that has some similarities with queer un-historicism (Doan 2017, 114–15). Often defined against traditional history (Le Goff 1992; Tumblety 2013), memory studies is not interested in capturing the past but in exploring how it survives and is appropriated in the present. Memory connotes more casual, personalized, locally grounded forms of recollection, while "history" evokes totality—no matter how erased or bracketed—and completeness. In addition, "memory" may be individual or collective and therefore points at the permeation of the subjective imaginary by the collective archive. In fact, one of Halbwachs's distinctive contributions was to underline the structuring role of memory's social frameworks—the communal schemata without which no remembering is possible (1992, 52–53). Memory is less invested in the (dis)continuities and causal relations that are the object of history than in the selective and fragmentary activation of the past. And it is not focused on accuracy but in use. Since memory is never a mere retrieval of pre-existing content, it always entails reconstruction, interpretation, and mobilization in particular contexts and for given purposes, and consequently involves an ethics and a politics of reading.

"Use" makes memory acts heterogeneous and palimpsestic, subject to various temporalities: of the past, of the present that orients the backward glance, and of a lineage of previous recollections that may intervene between both and could exert their own gravitational pull as points of attraction and

repulsion. Unlike history, which is biased towards documented factuality, memory is embodied and involves corporeal recall. It is, Alison Landsberg claims, "a sensuous phenomenon experienced by the body and derives much of its power through affect" (2004, 9). It involves a bodily archive, traces of sensation and arousal. In its sensuous, affective registers, memory may have what Sedgwick (2003, 123–53) called a "reparative" function: it may be additive and curative, as Freeman hoped for her erotohistoriography. But it may also have a critical effect. It may undermine the presumed certainties of the present, revealing its contingency, and it may be an antidote against what Schulman called "the gentrification of the mind" (2012) and Giroux "the violence of organized forgetting" (2014).

While memory is most often understood as a mental, and therefore immaterial, image, memory studies claims that memory is also material, since concrete objects and locations act as place-holders for former experience—*lieux de memoire*, in Pierre Nora's classic term. In fact, memory is lost when its material pointers and anchors disappear. Memory is also mobile and transferable: against the proprietary concept of memory "owned" by the subjects or communities that have experienced a particular past, memory can be adopted against the grain of one's identity and history and may affect by proxy—a quality that has been explored in some of the most provocative contributions to the field. Marianne Hirsch has shown that traumatic memory travels across generations in what she calls post-memory—"distinguished from memory by generational distance and from history by deep personal connection" (1992, 9). The memory of the Holocaust, her main object of research, affects not only those who were direct recipients of its violence but also their descendants, who may have only experienced it only through family accounts and mementos. But it also prompts strong lateral identifications among those without family or ethnic connection to it. This is what Michael Rothberg has described as the "multidirectional" character of memory—its ability to reach across geographical and cultural divides and be woven into different collective imaginaries (2009, 7–12). Rothberg has studied in particular how "memory of the Nazi genocide and struggles for decolonization have persistently broken the frame of the nation-state" since the early postwar years (2009, 20). The development of the collective memory of the Holocaust unfolded in an intense dialogue with processes of decolonization and mobilization for civil rights, dialogues in which both sets of experiences served to map each other while understanding their distinctness (Rothberg 2009, 23). Cross-generational transmission and multi-directionality corroborate what Allison Landsberg called the "prosthetic character" of memory, which, "like an artificial limb" can be "worn on the body" and enter individual and collective ecologies of emotion and affect (2004, 20–21). This possibility rests on the ever present media feed; it supplies a constant stream of "privately felt public memories" that function as "transference spaces" (Landsberg 2004, 24, 21). They can be multiply cathected as locations of projection, identification, longing, and desire. The "hypertrophy of memory"

that Andreas Huyssen has detected in the present is always heavily mass mediated (2003, 3).

The portability of memory detaches the past from lineage, location, or identity and turns into a floating sign up for grabs. While this has raised concerns about its trivialization, overexposure, inauthenticity, and commodification, it also increases the opportunities for cross-cultural and cross-communal solidarity, for political alliances, and for the generalized scrambling of identity that is at the heart of queer being. Hence the "desire for history" that Dinshaw associated with queerness is not filial but multidirectional. It is not a desire for "direct" ancestors, which in the case of queers means those most recognizably like us, but for different forms of kinship underpinned by identification, a sense of shared marginality, and similar histories of suppression and resistance against it. Joan Nestle borrows the language of anti-colonial resistance to explain the origins of the Lesbian Herstory Archive in the 1970s as "an anti-colonizing project" based on a broad conception of lesbianism that encapsulated "all possibilities of queerness" and "all possibilities of deviations" (2022, 353). In the midst of the AIDS epidemic, Gran Fury appropriated the pink triangle, which had marked male homosexuals in nazi concentration camps, in order to underline the structural similarity between two stigmatized communities. Butch lesbian culture has long incorporated the marks of post-war working class masculinity and rebel youth. And camp aesthetics, to cite one more example, plunders the past in search of excessive styles and idiosyncratic corporealities. These cross-identifications are not based solely on sexual marginality but on a felt analogy in social positioning. In all these cases, looking backward involves, to borrow Elizabeth Freeman's words, discovering "affective narratives of human belonging where life forms, although porous to one another, do not seem exchangeable through a third term of equivalence, such as sexual identity" (2007, 164).

The Brown Memory Commons

Freeman's "porous life forms" are human entities, which subtend as well all other conceptualizations of memory we have just surveyed. In all these conceptions, memory is funneled through human bodies—whether individual or collective and communal—that act as agents of recollection and memory repositories. It seems, in the face of this theorizing, as if a body were needed as a receptacle for the past or as its activator—the surface on which prosthetic pasts, post-memories, and affective encounters can be recorded and made visible. Without a body to reduce events to some sort of delineation, some kind of plot, time offers only a scattering of incidental actualities. Hence, the body is memory's binding agent; it gathers dispersed facts into a continuity of sequence and purpose. And memory in turn binds the body's sensorial dispersion into an illusion of completeness and coherence across time. The underlying assumption then is that we remember because we have bodies that capture time's dispersive flow, and we have a body because we

remember—because we can conjure the temporal lifeline of the flesh we inhabit.

But what happens when bodies dissolve? Who or what remembers when it is no longer possible to limit the corporeal to the boundary of the skin? When memory, along with other forms of consciousness, ceases to be a prerogative of human bodies and is distributed across other supports? This is more and more the case in our post-human, trans-corporeal world. We, carbon-based soft machines, are now inextricably connected to silicon-based technological devices, and thinking and remembering constantly involve, in Andrew Hoskins and Anne Reading's words, "participation with inorganic structures" (2009, 7). Bodies are, to cite Paul B. Preciado, "telebodies"—immediately configured for transmission across digital devices and styled for "telepresence" via Snapchat or TikTok, for example (2022, 308–9). What configurations does memory take in this world? What remembers when thinking and remembering take place on a continuum of neural pathways and nervous impulses hooked to keyboards, screens, microprocessors, memory units, and modems? When lives are deposited in blogs, websites, and digital archives and are downloadable, re-combinable, and immediately editable? How to rethink memory when it is no longer a faculty of organic bodies? Technology remembers more and better than we do, as it is able to recombine vast data repositories into coherent textual streams. Generative AI programs recall and process what we may have never read, what we may not need to know any more. Software programs automatically search our personal image banks, collate our images into personal albums, and even add a soundtrack. Whose memories are these? Perhaps in time this is what we will end up remembering and our intimate past will be, if not irretrievable, at least decisively colored by these interventions from the outside. Except, when external technological mediation becomes so intricately woven into the fabric of our memories, everything is *outside*—or nothing is. We live, think, and recall along what Mark Fisher called "the flatline," where it is no longer possible to distinguish inside from outside, animate from inanimate, organic from inorganic, natural from artificial (Fisher 2018, 2). All these dualities are deeply embedded into each other, and the passage across them is a matter of scale and intensity, not of qualitative difference. On the flatline, agency is not exclusive to carbon corporeality, and thought and memory take place in extended innervated fields crossed by information and affect, fields where humans are a type of node in a mesh that also connects the animal, the vegetal, the technological, and the material.

Feminism and queer critique have incorporated into their conceptual repertoires these expanded understandings of corporeality, being, and consciousness. For material feminist Stacy Alaimo for example, bodies cannot be separated from their material contexts; we now inhabit the "trans-corporeal": "the time-space where human corporeality in all its material fleshiness is inseparable from nature or environment" (Alaimo 2008, 238). Bodies and material environment are inseparable not only because they are

mutually interconnected in elemental life processes, but also because the environment is an active, creative interlocutor in its own right. Drawing on expanded notions of writing and remembering, Vicky Kirby claims that "biology is as actively literate, numerate, and inventive as anything we may want to include in culture." Biological material, she continues, "writes, calculates, fabricates . . . invents, transforms, crafts, redistributes, incorporates, and bequeaths" (Kirby 2011, 83–84). Siding with Kirby's conception of a literate, writerly nature, Elisabeth Grosz (2011), Donna Haraway (2016), and Jack Halberstam (2020) have regarded, in their different ways, the natural world as a laboratory for the reinvention of human and transspecies corporeality, sexuality, and relationality; a source of antinormative models of being, non-hierarchical sexualities, and unprecedented political symbionts. The possibilities opened by the interlocution between culture and nature, the natural and the inorganic led José Muñoz to envision, in his late work, a "brown commons" made up of the human and non-human. Here "brown" is an inclusive rubric that encompasses experiences of subalternity and exposure; it "indexes a certain vulnerability to the violence of property, finance, and to capital's overarching mechanisms of domination" (Muñoz 2020, 3). The brown commons includes "feelings, sounds, buildings, neighborhoods, environments, and the nonhuman organic life that might circulate in such an environment alongside humans, and the inorganic presences that life is very often so attached to" (Muñoz 2020, 2–3). This is a queer ecology, a commonality of human and non-human collectivities under siege. They are joined by a shared experience of harm but also by a common cultivation of contraband knowledges, a capacity for joy, and strategies of resistance and endurance.

The brown commons is also a memory commons—a collective recall of communal vulnerability and subjection, but also of insurrectionary bursts and joyous escape routes. Human bodies and communities, of course, have their own memories, but so do objects and materials, the earth, companion species, and the vegetable mass. Architecture provides shelter but also placeholders for the past. There is a memory of place and the environment as much as a memory of the nerves, bones, skin, and the sensibility. Retroaction and the reshuffling of the marks of the past is constant and intertwined in this compound commons in which affect-laden backward glances and retrospective touches are not channeled exclusively through the human but also through distributed systems that implicate the natural and the material in all their facets. How do these trans-corporeal queer commons remember? What grammars of memory do justice to their interwoven complexity?

A possible model is Gilles Deleuze's description of systems in *Difference and Repetition* (1994 [1968]). Written at a time when Structuralism and cybernetics were still in vogue, it implicitly contests many of their tenets. Against the understanding of systems as homeostatic and tending towards stability and entropy, Deleuze's systems are open-ended and irregular, an idea inspired by highly dynamic biological and natural processes, such as the ones that Gilbert Simondon described under the rubric of individuation. Systems

are, for Deleuze, series of elements in interaction. The series that participate in a system are connected by what he calls "*a dark precursor*," an element that does not belong to any of them but puts them in touch and makes them resonate against each other ([1968] 1994, 116–17). The resonance itself is the system, which is not rule-driven—rules are postulated in an attempt to manage and explain its diversity—but a constant unfolding of difference against itself:

> Once communication between heterogeneous series is established, all sorts of consequences follow within the system. . . . Spatio-temporal dynamisms fill the system, expressing simultaneously the resonance of the coupled series and the amplitude of the forced movement which exceeds them.
>
> (118)

Only retroactively can the system be given a stable contour, or, in Deleuze's formulation, be read as a representation, often under the figures of identity or subjectivity. "The system is populated by subjects, both larval subjects and passive selves: passive selves because they are indistinguishable from the contemplation of couplings and resonances; larval subjects because they are the supports or the patients of the dynamisms" (118).

The brown memory commons is a Deleuzean system: a convergence of heterogeneous mnemonic series—fragments of past imaginaries—whose elements differ from each other internally (within each of the series) and resonate externally (across series). Dark precursors create promiscuous alliances and unpredictable linkages between the different series. Deleuze cites Sigmund Freud's notion of retroaction or delayed effect (*Nachträglichkeit*) as an example: the activation of an early memory (often infantile and pre-genital) by a later (post-puberal) experience ([1968] 1994, 124). Early memory and subsequent experience belong to different temporal series that are brought fortuitously in contact and resonate against each other through the dark precursor. But Deleuze crucially nuances Freud's formula. Rather than consider the series as successive—childhood an originating point and adulthood its derivation—he emphasizes their coexistence in the unconscious. The childhood memory that becomes reactivated—usually an unassimilated experience, a traumatic occurrence, or an undischarged excitation—is not previous and original, but simultaneous with its contemporary reactivation. It may not even be literally located in childhood but could be *any* experience of vulnerability that provokes a rifling through memory in search of handles on the present and aids to thought. The excessive, traumatic, or undischarged excitation is the dark precursor that triggers resonances across temporal series. But this resonance is not at the service of an individual subject or a distinct community for which memory is a form of property or a mark of identity. For Deleuze, resonance takes place in an *intersubjective* unconscious inserted in a queer ecology of remembrance. It is part of a trans-corporeal brown commons, collaborative, contagious, distributed, material, and reticulate.

Queer Grammars of Remembrance

Glimpses of this new grammar of memory can be seen in the work of non-mainstream queer creators belonging to a variety of collectives with no stakes in a traditional, orderly history or in institutionalized pasts (ethnic, migrant, diasporic, crip, immunocompromised, trans, neurodiverse . . .). These creators cultivate "minor," eccentric forms—multi-media and multi-generic work, non-chronological narrative modes, fragmentary texts, experimental styles—and take advantage of memory's mobility, instability, and multidirectionality to envision new forms of collectivity and being.

An example is Shu Lea Cheang's installation *3x3x6* (2019). Born in Taiwan but based in the US and Paris for most of her artistic career, Shu Lea Cheang has made conventional film and web art—she is a pioneer in the form—and installations. She became quite noted for *I.K.U.* (2001), a post-porn cyberpunk sci-fi feature film, and for her website *Brandon* (1998–99), the first web art project commissioned by the Guggenheim Museum, named after, and devoted to, Brandon Teena, a trans man raped and killed in Nebraska in the mid-nineties who was also the subject of the mainstream film *Boys Don't Cry* (dir. Kimberley Pierce 1999).

3x3x6 was part of the Taiwan Pavilion at the 2019 Venice Biennale. It was housed at the Palazzo dele Prigioni in Venice, a former jail that had held illustrious sexual offenders such as serial seducer Giacomo Casanova, who actually managed to break out. The show can be seen as a convergence of several memory series channeled through different technological and material supports. It was inspired by ten cases of imprisonment "due to gender and sexual non-conformity," as the official web site of Pavilion states, and sought to explore the visual regimes used to survey sexuality and enforce orthodoxy since modernity (Taiwan in Venice 2019). It combined projected video (some uploaded by anonymous users), an interactive website, a facial recognition system that captured and deformed visitors' faces and then projected them on a screen, and the palace itself, a gigantic *objet trouvé* that had considerable protagonism, since it was the trigger for the show. In a way, the show is the palace's expanded memory series: some are direct, as the memory of Casanova's brief tenancy, and others are prosthetic—the memories of other offenders who were never there, but are annexed to the memory of the building through video projection (de Sade, Foucault—who was occasionally investigated for his sexual activities—and other anonymous characters arrested for soliciting chem sex, cross-dressing, or for other non-normative sexual practices). There is in addition a technological memory series; as the show's curator Paul B. Preciado has pointed out, the installation reflects on the evolution from disciplinary confinement (the old-fashioned prison, with its thick walls, heavily barred windows, and cell division) to contemporary digital surveillance techniques, which are subtler but no less implacable (Vernissage TV 2019). This particular series emphasizes at once the progressively immaterial character of surveillance—visitors are inadvertently captured by hidden digital cameras as

they walk in—but also its spectacular potential, as the last room is occupied by the hardware that held the show together, presented as a work of art in its own right. The installation brings together a number of memory streams that resonate through structures of control and surveillance—the dark precursor through which they relate to each other. They emanate from the materiality of the building but range beyond it and are dispersed across a broad technological continuum. These memories are often speculative and hallucinatory. De Sade, Foucault, and Casanova are cast against ethnicity and gender: performance artist Liz Rosenfeld, for example, embodies De Sade, while Taiwanese dancer Enrico Way plays Casanova. It is a way to hack gender and race, Preciado pointed out, but also, one could add, to globalize sexual rebellion, too often affixed to white Western bodies. Some of the contemporary case studies are actually from Taiwan. The memory commons recreated here is not personalized or subjectivized, but collective, cross-genre, transmedia, transgenerational, cross-ethnic, and cross-genre. It is a memory system that does not belong to anyone or anywhere in particular, but is up for grabs as we retool and rethink our bodies and behaviors today.

Jenni Olson's *Joy of Life* (2005) is another outstanding example of distributed recollection and of an intersubjective, transcorporeal memory commons. A noted archivist, programmer, film critic, and filmmaker, Olson has authored volumes such as *The Queer Movie Poster Book* (2004) and *The Ultimate Guide to Lesbian and Gay Film and Video* (1996) and compilation films such as *Homo Promo*, *Afro Promo*, and *Bride of Trailer Camp*, among others—collections of gay and lesbian film previews. These titles were frequently screened at lesbian and gay film festivals through the 1990s and early 2000s. Olson has also directed a number of experimental shorts that have had relatively small circulation and several feature films. One of these is *The Joy of Life* (2005), a hybrid of erotic memoir, urban history, and essayistic reflection about sex, death, urban modernity, and architecture. An anonymous off-screen voice recounts several episodes of a lesbian erotic memoir. The sexual escapades, described in lush detail, are interspersed with reflections about sexuality, desire, attraction, and the raconteur's inability to commit to a single relationship. The second part of the film narrates the apparently unrelated story of the Golden Gate Bridge as a major magnet for suicides. It summarizes the history of the bridge's design and construction, the concerns of designers and the port authority about the safety features of the bridge, and the way in which the attempt to keep construction costs as low as possible resulted in the dangerously low barriers flanking the pedestrian walkway.

Eventually the story modulates into what turns out to be Olson's personal reminiscence about her friend Mark Finch: a critic, programmer, media activist, and festival organizer. Finch had been one of the creators of the London Gay and Lesbian Film Festival in 1988. After moving to San Francisco at the end of the decade, he would co-direct, with Olson, the San Francisco Lesbian and Gay Film Festival from 1992 to 1994 (Olson 2020). Often energetic and

creative, Finch was also severely afflicted by depression and ended up taking his own life by jumping from the bridge. A line connects the history of a landmark, corrupt city politics, cost-cutting at the expense of public safety, and the life of a particular individual dear to the filmmaker. A series about the past of a landmark is caught in the labyrinthine web of vested interests, power struggles, and capital flows that drive the life of institutions—another

Figure 8.1 Jenni Olson, *The Joy of Life* (2005).
Source: Courtesy of Jenni Olson.

Figure 8.2 Jenni Olson, *The Joy of Life* (2005).
Source: Courtesy of Jenni Olson.

series—and resonates with a biographical series that contains an archive of mental fragility, depression, and death.

Mark Finch's biographical series emanates from the circumstances of Olson's life, but the film does not identify them as such. The voice remains anonymous, and neither the reminiscences about him and his death nor the erotic memoir are marked as anyone's in particular. They are accounts into which spectators dip, much as one crosses a square or a landscape, to become immersed momentarily in its light and atmosphere. In fact, both memory series are void of faces and identifiable bodies. Voice-overs are matched to depopulated city views that seldom bank on San Francisco's picturesqueness and showcase instead ordinary alleys, sidewalks, buildings, walls, trees swaying in the breeze. Lacking explicit personal reference, the personal memory series float free and resonate with the others without appealing to an individual's idiosyncrasy or biography. They emanate from their setting: San Francisco as a fabled queer mecca and sexual haven but also as a place where one's best intentions are thwarted—a noir city with a sinister underbelly, as recorded, for example, in Dashiell Hammett's early novels and short stories of the 1920s and 1930s. Another effect of these free-floating memories is their dialectical imbrication: sex and death stand side by side, intricately connected. *The Joy of Life*, the title of the film, marks the imperative to take from time as much as possible in view of the precarity and vulnerability that haunts all being.

In Wu Tsang's film *Wildness* (2012), memory has a similar atmospheric quality. It is equally dispersed but also anchored in bodies and location. It makes ample use of first-person testimony; even the film's primary setting, a queer bar in Los Angeles, remembers and speaks. The bar's voice is in fact the film's narrator. Together the film's voices compose a choral memory that belongs, once again, to all and to no one in particular. The film has been brilliantly discussed by José Muñoz (2020, 134–40) as an example of the brown commons but not so much as a text about memory—what I am calling a brown memory commons. *Wildness* is a mixture of memory and documentary about a club night of the same name that Wu Tsang ran for several years at the Silver Platter, a Los Angeles queer bar that had been in operation since the early 1960s. The Silver Platter was traditionally frequented by working-class Latino gay men, drag queens, and trans women, many of them illegal immigrants, many escaping from unlivable situations in their places of origin. It hosted drag shows and Latino dances until Tsang stumbled upon it by chance and decided to hold a club night—"Wildness"—on a weekday when clientele seemed to flag. Starting as a dance night, it also ended up hosting alternative theater, performance, and concerts of experimental music, along with occasional evenings for Latino music in recognition of the roots of the place. "Wildness" brought into the Silver Platter younger queers from the worlds of alternative music, art, performance, and the creative professions—a very different demographic from the bar's regulars. In the film, the traditional clients speak of the wonderful merger of the two constituencies—arty

hipsterdom and working-class queers. The relation grows so close that Tsang jumps from club night host to community activist for a time and tries to set up a legal counsel office for the many immigrants in the orbit of the bar who needed to regularize their situation. Eventually, though, the bar closes due to a feud between its owners, two brothers who cannot agree on how to keep running the place.

The film is a postmortem of the eponymous club night and the Silver Platter. It is in many ways a conventional documentary with abundant talking heads filmed on site, factual footage, and props. Among these are the handbills and posters used to advertise theme parties, concerts, performances, and special events. The scattered materiality of printed paper recalls the material supports of memory, the way it is inscribed not only on the neural engrams but on a material continuum that exceeds and surrounds the body. Memory is further materialized in the fact that the venue itself remembers and forms its own series. A Spanish-speaking Latino voice winds its way through the film: the voice of the bar itself remembering the good and the bad times, the great nights and the acrimonious family dispute that led to its closing. Other series belong to the different customers, usually shown in their drag regalia, who tell a story—often subtly hinted—of forced migration due to poverty or persecution. The film offers a distributed act of recall, detoured through a sprawling body of uncertain limits: customers, drag performers, Tsang's own accounts, the bar itself, the mute paper trail, with its precise notation of dates and times. Other series converge here. Muñoz notes that Jennie Livingstone's documentary of ball culture in New York, *Paris Is Burning* (1990), resides very explicitly in the memory of *Wildness*, and so does, if more unconsciously, Latina activist Sylvia Rivera and the collective she co-founded, with Marsha P. Johnson, in the early seventies: STAR (Street Transvestite Action Revolutionaries). In addition, *Wildness* also captures a brief segment of Los Angeles urban history, with its changing neighborhoods, spreading gentrification, population shifts, and the constant struggle of minorities to find spaces for non-normative communities and pursuits. A further series is the deep historical wound that cuts through the migrant bodies: a memory of collective displacement and dispossession. Dire inequality and imperialism keep the south impoverished and make Los Angeles (the United States at large) a destination for migrants from the Global South. The film stages a memory that is psychic and material, individual and collective, and cuts across classes, ethnicities, and social worlds; it involves a variety of subjects and collectives without attaching to any in particular. Vulnerability and homelessness travel across these series, making them resonate and giving the film its particular coloration as a combination of nostalgia for the lapsed utopia of the bar and a sense of empowerment at the thought that what once was can be reconstructed elsewhere.

The memory of place features prominently in *3x3x6*, *The Joy of Life*, and *Wildness*. By contrast, my last example, *Touching Blues* (2021), a film by Catalan choreographer Aimar Pérez Galí, takes place in an abstract space: a

delimited blue square—its borders are constantly visible in the frame—captured from above in what seems a single static take. On this stage, five men perform a slow, meditative choreography during which their bodies come together in intricate figures of intimacy, care, and sensual connection. Other settings are evoked acoustically by several off-screen voices that reflect about the AIDS epidemic, death, and dance. They read fragments by art and dance theorists Estrella de Diego and André Lepacki and by US AIDS activist Jon Greenberg and letters, written by Pérez Galí, to dancers who died from AIDS-related illnesses during the iron years of the epidemic. A final letter is addressed to artist and performer Lorenza Böttner, another casualty of the epidemic whose work was being recovered while the film was in preproduction.

The film is part of a larger project that includes as well the choreography *The Touching Community* (2016), which is reprised in the film, and the volume *Lo Tocante* (2018), which gathers all the letters that Pérez-Galí wrote

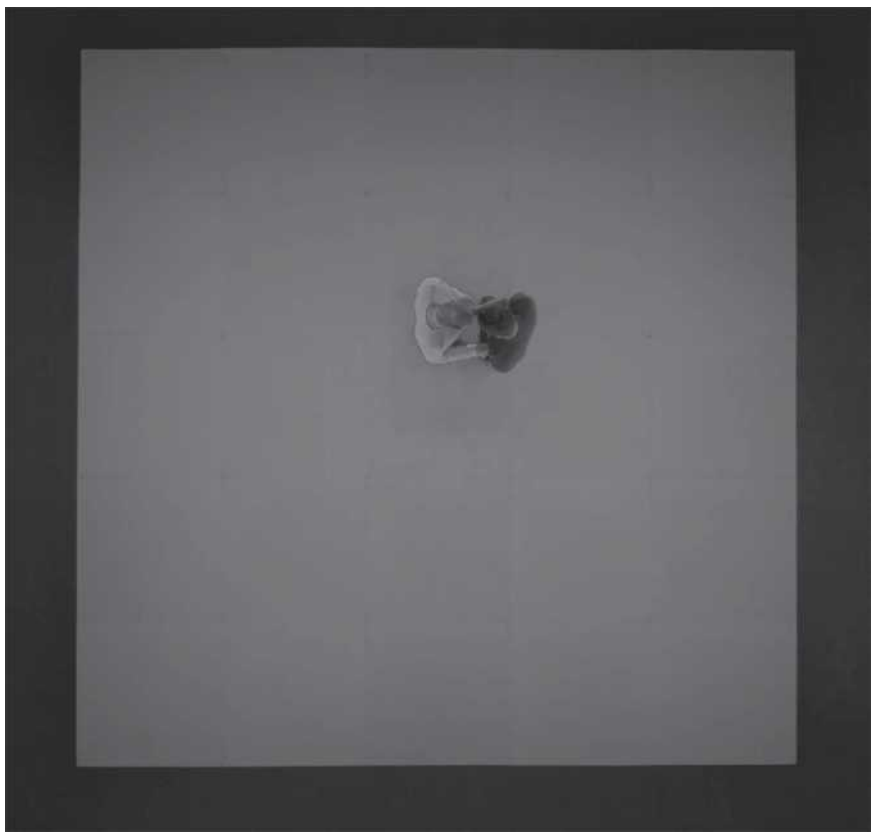

Figure 8.3 Aimar Pérez Galí, *Touching Blues* (2021).
Source: Image: Lluis Bullón. Courtesy of Aimar Pérez Galí.

to the absent dance community along with several commissioned essays and an interview with Uruguayan activist Diego Sempol. The project is an homage to a world that suffered disproportionately from the impact of the epidemic. While the dance and the letter-writing were initially inspired by Pérez Galís discovery of the work of the late John Bernd, a New York-based dancer known for candid autobiographical works, such as *Surviving Love and Death* (1986), the bulk of the letters are addressed to Spanish and Latin American dancers, a community that has been less documented than their North American and North European counterparts.

The film—the entire project in fact—is another example of the memory commons—an intersubjective, de-localized retrospection that exceeds singular selves and self-enclosed communities and stretches also across the material and non-human. The film is triggered by a memory trace—a photograph of John Bernd in a volume on dance—and by an absence: Pérez Galí's absence from a scene that began to unravel as he came into the world in 1982, when the epidemic was making its way across the world. His way to relive and homage this scene is by navigating its living memory through encounters, interviews, video calls, and emails with the survivors. The resulting letters capture this absent world. They are at once a biographical memory of his own search, which takes him all over Latin America, and a group memory of those who cannot write back, but whose lives still stir in Pérez Galí's writing. The film's title directly alludes to Derek Jarman's *Blue* (1993), made shortly before his death also from AIDS-related complications and consisting of a sound montage over a blue screen whose particular hue is replicated in *Touching Blues*'s dance space and lighting.

In addition to the memories of concrete dancers and of cinematic ancestors, there are other memories in the film. One is the memory of the virus: a non-human actor that was instrumentalized, during the time of its emergence, to differentiate between worthy or worthless bodies and identities and to criminalize unorthodox sexualities. The virus still marks today the difference between a prosperous north, where anti-retroviral treatments are relatively available and HIV infection may be lived as a chronic condition, and a Global South, where the epidemic retains crisis proportions. The virus is also a biological entity that proliferates and propagates by total recall—cloning itself inside host cells—and whose temporality exceeds human life cycles. As the film recalls, the strands of HIV alive in bodies today are the descendants of the viruses that infected "our dead sisters" in the 1980s, whose bodies still travel today in viral mutations.

And to add one more strand, there is the memory of touch. Ephemeral, light, but emotive and affectively charged, "touching" is how Pérez Galí approaches the past: "How can one touch the bodies that are no longer here?" wonders the off-screen voice at the start of the film. The film might be an answer to the question: by touching each other while dancing and, while doing so, keeping alive the memory of the departed. Touch is a figure for the overcoming of limits. It establishes, as the film points out, "a relation that

Figure 8.4 Aimar Pérez Galí, *Touching Blues* (2021).
Source: Image: Lluis Bullón. Courtesy of Aimar Pérez Galí.

exceeds one's being" and "opens the door to the other." It displaces the center of gravity outside one's body and time and allows for the attenuation of limits and for a heightened contact with the world. Touching calls up other memories from the history of contemporary dance and performance. In an essay in *Lo tocante*, Pérez Galí notes that Steve Paxton created Contact Improvisation in 1972, the year in which the United States government purportedly launched Project MK-NAOMI: the development of a highly infectious biological agent destined to curb population growth that later became known as the HIV virus (Pérez Galí 2018, 17–19). While HIV limited human contact, Contact Improvisation fostered it. It relied on touch, on bodies propped against each other, sharing their weight, and falling together, creating systems of balances and tensions that unfold without predetermined pattern. Contact Improvisation staged a form of queer solidarity and anticipated the care communities inspired by AIDS. The memory of Paxton's method is alive in Pérez Galí's choreography, which follows many of Paxton's principles. Also

alive in the film is Pepe Espalíu's *Carrying* (1992), a series of performances in which the artist, infected with HIV, was carried through several cities by a group of his friends as a way to make AIDS visible in Spanish society and to protest the silence of the art world in regard to the epidemic. *Touching Blues* merges these memory series: autobiographical, generational, cinematic, viral, and dance-centered. Touch, the contact that attenuates limits, lowers barriers, and ushers in the other, traverses these series and puts them in contact articulating a mnemonic tangle, a vibrant brown memory commons.

Donna Haraway ends *Staying with the Trouble* fabulating a future of symbionts resulting from interspecies genetic crossings who will learn from "stories, myths, performances, powers, and embodiments of entities not divided into categories recognizable to most conventional Western philosophy and politics" (2016, 161). I have tried to show in these pages that we may not need to wait until the generation of Camille 3—the mutant whose future Haraway speculates about—for these styles of learning and forms of recollection. Versions of these myths, stories, and embodiments are increasingly available now, for example, in the work I have discussed. Tangles, commons, networks of contagion and influence are becoming central tropes for memory in a world of radical mixture and hybrid interconnection. These new grammars of remembrance are especially apt for those who feel at odds with this world and its (mis)management of knowledges, histories, memories, and lives—for those new political subjects that Paul B. Preciado calls "dysphoric." Dysphoric subjects and communities seek to extricate themselves from capitalist, patriarchal, petro-centric, racist, colonial genealogies through practices of "inadequacy, dissidence, and disidentification" (Preciado 2022, 27). And they are no longer defined by the old binary segmentation of identity: they are not "a social class, a precise gender or sex, not exactly proletarians or women, not simply homosexual, black or trans" but a conjugation of differences "without falsely totalizing or unifying them under a presumed identity or ideology" (Preciado 2022, 536). Fluctuating, multidirectional, and cross-referential, what I have been calling the brown memory commons is just one form in which a backward look may be enlisted in the politics of dysphoria. The *dysphoria mundi* needs memory as a repository of the impossible that might come to pass; of failures that signaled the inability or unwillingness of the world to accommodate the desires of those who crashed; and of still vital knowledges and affects. This memory is no longer a form of property or a technique for buttressing and stabilizing identities, but a generator of untried relationality and difference. It is not cultivated out of a devotion to the past but as a resource to navigate an often oppressive present and as a discursive technology for a queer future.

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9 Time, Memory, and Queer Sensibility in Milan Kundera's *The Book of Laughter and Forgetting*

Weisong Gao

Milan Kundera explores time and memory in his influential novel *The Book of Laughter and Forgetting*. In the seemingly different yet thematically interconnected stories that make up the book, Kundera portrays various struggles, including the inability to remember or forget. These quandaries, albeit personal and speaking to the role of memory in the characters' worldviews, signal broader issues of concern to Kundera. In probably one of the most famous quotes from *The Book*, Kundera (1996, 4) writes: "The struggle of man against power is the struggle of memory against forgetting." To unpack this statement, one may say that for Kundera, forgetting is not simply memory loss, a problem stemming from the interiority of the psyche; rather, it represents a form of coerced memory erasure by power. This brings our attention to the material and historical conditions in which forceful forgetting operates as a regulating apparatus in a structure of uneven power. In this light, to examine memory in this novel means to go beyond its intrinsic connection to community building or the sentiment of nostalgia, to tease out the nuances of memory's complex involvement in subject formation and history-making underpinned by deferential power relations.

In this chapter, I think alongside Kundera about time and memory to reflect on the broader issues of temporality and belonging with which the novel engages. Time plays a crucial role in Kundera's reflections on both personal and national memory. To protect their agency over time and personal memories, Kundera's characters resort to aesthetics, predominantly their sensory experience, to regain and retain their subjectivity. His understanding of time carries a strong queer sensibility by elevating the importance of personal time and memory. In doing so, I draw attention to Kundera's particular queer novel form in which writing the self is also a project of writing history.

A queer reading of Kundera might appear far-fetched, considering that Kundera's treatment of bodies and sexuality has often been dismissed as misogynist. As Joan Smith (2013, 73) writes: "hostility is the common factor in all Kundera's writing about women." But while that reading is apt for exploring sexuality as a question of desire or patriarchal male dominance, one could also approach Kundera's portrayal of sex as rather a question of

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method, subjectivity, and survival. Kundera has used the concept of "boundary" to reflect on the role of sexuality in one's lived experience. In an interview with Philip Roth, Kundera is asked about the character Tamina's final death, and he suggests that there is a certain "imaginary dividing line beyond which things appear senseless and ridiculous. . . . Man lives in close proximity to this boundary, and can easily find himself on the other side."[1] Clearly, boundary separates common sense from the senseless, the rational from the ridiculous, and the queer from the norms, but as we can see in the novel, this boundary is ubiquitous, porous, and feeble, and it manifests most prominently in the region of sexuality. As I explore this fluid boundary across themes of time and memory and into the genre itself, I show that Kundera's queerness lies precisely in this proximity to the boundary. In this sense, I employ queerness as both an energy that is deeply subversive and a sensibility that opens space for teasing out the nuanced connections among time, sexuality, and subjectivity.

It should also be noted up front that *The Book of Laughter and Forgetting* was Kundera's first novel in exile.[2] Kundera's feuds with Czechoslovakia's Communist Party figure largely in the interpretation of his works, which often take place within a context of totalitarianism. As prominent as the critique of totalitarian regimes is in *The Book* and in scholarship on Kundera, too great a focus on this can overshadow Kundera's other important meditations on life and the world. Carlos Fuentes writes that, for Kundera himself, "the condemnation of totalitarianism doesn't deserve a novel" (1988, 166). Instead, he states that what Kundera finds interesting is the "similarity between totalitarianism and the immemorial and fascinating dream of a harmonious society where private life and public life form but one unity and all are united around one will and one faith" (Fuentes 1988, 166). Building on Fuentes, I investigate *The Book*'s key interventions in time, memory, and private life without limiting myself to concerns of totalitarianism.

Time, Body, Queer Senses

Of all the characters in *The Book*, Tamina is Kundera's most cherished protagonist. He writes in the novel: "[*The Book*] is a novel about Tamina, and whenever Tamina goes offstage, it is a novel for Tamina. She is its principal character and its principal audience, and all the other stories are variations on her own story and meet with her life as in a mirror" (Kundera 1996, 227). Tamina is a waitress living in an unnamed town in Western Europe. Her husband died shortly after they left Prague, and his sudden death leaves Tamina in a state of bereavement in which she finds her memory of their past simply fading away. Subsequently, she embarks on a quest to retain memories of her husband. After a failed attempt to retrieve personal diaries they had left with her mother-in-law in Prague, she goes with a random young man to an island of children where she is promised to be freed of the burden of memory. She

wants to fall "far back to a time when her husband did not exist, when he was neither in memory nor in desire, and thus when there was neither weight nor remorse" (Kundera 1996, 241). After enjoying a short-lived pleasure in being part of the world of children, Tamina becomes inescapably aware of herself as an outsider and the children begin to appear unduly evil and hostile. She tries to flee the island but eventually drowns in the water.

"Why is Tamina on the children's island? Why do I imagine her just there?" (Kundera 1996, 238). Inserting his authorial remarks while telling Tamina's story, Kundera reflects that it might have something to do with the day his father passed away, when "the air was filled with joyful songs sung by children's voices" (1996, 238). He recalls how Czechoslovakian President Husak's voice reached the children in unabashed ways: "Children! You are the future!" and "Children, never look back!" (Kundera 1996, 239). By saying that children are the future, the president situates the young generation in a site of temporal belonging and promises their ownership of the nation in its future. In this way, time is not simply a scientific fact, immune to manipulation for political agenda. Rather, time becomes an apparatus that the nation adopts to order the young people to march forward in unison, to only look ahead, move forward, grow up, and become mature. They are not allowed to look back; for the president, looking back means slowing down one's time, letting history speak, having memories consolidated, and entertaining alternative paths other than the collective becoming they are undergoing.

We can think of this as one aspect of national time, a way of organizing collective public life that changes how time is perceived, sensed, and felt in the sphere of the private life. Elizabeth Freeman (2010) lays bare the ways in which national time interferes with ordinary citizens' daily lives. She writes that nations actively seek to

> adjust the pace of living in the places and people they take on: to quicken up and/or synchronize some elements of everyday existence, while offering up other spaces and activities as leisurely, slow, sacred, cyclical, and so on and thereby repressing or effacing alternative strategies of organizing time.
>
> (2010, xii)

Kundera shows the nation as an exclusive community that seizes authorial power by establishing national time that works to govern private lives and memory through mobilizing affect and public feelings. Kundera interprets Husak's "Children, never look back!" as meaning that "we must never allow the future to be weighed down by memory. For children have no past, and that is the whole secret of the magical innocence of their smiles" (1996, 257). "Children are the future," whether we read it as an auspicious wish or a heartfelt promise, creates an illusion that the future will be as bright as childhood. And yet, the demand to "never look back" suggests that such a bright

future will arise only through the organized forgetting of personal histories and memory.

In demonstrating his resistance to the coercive erasure of personal time, Kundera queers the normative image of children into an unbridled, vicious, and ruthless infantocracy. In *The Art of the Novel*, Kundera reflects on how he came to such a story with Tamina perishing on the island of children; he writes, "That tale began as a dream that fascinated me; I dreamed it later in a half-waking state, and I broadened and deepened it as I wrote it. Its meaning? If you like: an oneiric image of an infantocratic future" (2003, 131). He critiques how the ideals of childhood have been "imposed upon all humanity" by making an association between children and death, whether it's his father's passing or Tamina's drowning (2003, 132). In this way, Kundera locates the power of national time in its ability to forge fantasies about the future, interpellate individuals into voluntary action, synchronize private life with public life, and disallow digressions. National time, for Kundera, practically victimizes ordinary lives by foreclosing alternative personhoods and life stories; it aims to be both disciplinary and singular.

National time organizes public life both on a regular basis and during crises; it is vastly volatile as it hinges on the nation's economic, diplomatic, and political contingencies. Jasbir Puar notes one such quality of national time when she argues that the concept of national political urgency is a form of temporality that "problematically resuscitates state of exception discourses" and "suggests a particular relationship to temporality and change" (2007, xvii). Subsequently, these state of exception discourses require a rewiring of national priorities that manifests in changing demands on private life. Within the nation, states of urgency, emergency, setback, stability, suspension, and the like, signify not only how changes in time are often felt through their historical materiality, but also how ordinary lives are contorted by the erratic nature of national time as they are constantly impelled to act accordingly.

In *The Book*, Kundera explores this working logic of national time in its own self-normalization and its exertion of power over individual lives in the story titled "Mama." In it, he shows how public feelings are mobilized to solicit predestined affective responses to political urgencies and to condemn those who seem out of tune. In this story, readers come to know Mama mainly through her son, Karel. He recalls the night in August when their country was invaded with tanks by a neighboring country, sparking terror among the public. The invasion was the top concern of their nation and its citizens. Mama, however, was angry at an unapologetic pharmacist who, because of the invasion, did not show up to pick her pears. Karel and his wife Marketa reproach her: "Everyone else is thinking about tanks, and you're thinking about pears" (Kundera 1996, 40).

The invasion evidently constitutes a political urgency, a variation in temporality. By having Mama resist the intrusion of such temporality by sticking to her own, Kundera criticizes political urgency's entitlement to supplant

individuals' temporalities: for Karel, Marketa, and the unapologetic pharmacist, Mama is supposed to forget about her pears when her country is invaded. Yet, even though Mama's gardening might seem trivial when juxtaposed with potential war, Kundera suggests that it has an urgency of its own: in Mama's time, August means that the pears in her garden are ripe, so the pharmacist must show up as planned to pick the pears before they rot. The condemnation Mama receives suggests that national urgency writes itself into history by forcing a collective forgetting of personal time. Only a fragment of the population's time counts, yet it counts for the entire history of the nation.

Mama's indifference makes her the target of scorn, and interestingly, it is her son and daughter-in-law who take on the role of self-appointed delegates for "everyone" in the nation. Indeed, potential war as a political urgency usually triggers certain affective responses from the public, such as feelings of insecurity, terror, and anxiety. These immediate responses are untrained and unmeditated, but what interests me most here are the particular ways these spontaneous reactions are normalized and consolidated as proper, while other responses are simultaneously dismissed as condemnable.[3] When everyone is thinking about tanks, it seems that the feeling and sharing of terror, worry, and denunciation are compulsory.

This obligation to express normative feelings can be described as an affective state of being, which William Mazzarella formulates as "presubjective without being presocial" (2009, 291). Mazzarella (2009) considers the interlocking relationship between affect and public cultures in his essay "Affect: What Is It Good for?" Sitting in the unique space between the social and the subject, affect offers a way to look into social life without being bounded by the necessity to foreground individual subjectivity. For Mazzarella, affect inscribes "on our nerve system and in our flesh before it appears in our consciousness" (2009, 292). This means that during catastrophes and political emergencies, these qualities of affect influence bodies and produce collective public feelings before any subjective rendering of divergent affective responses. Affect is felt, embodied, yet remains impersonal. This quality of affect allows us to understand that the materiality of events—the tanks, the ruins, the deaths—homogenizes and normalizes affective responses to them.

People's lives are collectively reorganized around an affective political event as it remeasures the pace of their time. For ordinary people, the immediacy of the event is crystallized in time and felt as a shock or a temporary suspension of subjective rejoinders, and these normative affective responses in turn validate the event as a political urgency. In this sense, Mama's indifference is not merely a personal matter; it is a willful decision to not participate in collective public feelings and a disavowal of the invasion as an adequate justification for giving up her personal time. Mama's character can easily be dismissed as eccentric, but her uncompromising position shows that affect has been mobilized to create public feelings that are normalizing and homogenizing the proper way to feel.

Interestingly, Mama's refusal to give up personal time is predicated on her vision. Karel laments that as Mama grows old, her vision has diminished, and she mistakes distant boundary stones for a pretty little village. He begins to realize that Mama's vision may have always been this way: she cares only about what she can see clearly. For Mama, a big pear tree is always in the foreground, but "somewhere in the distance a tank [is] no bigger than a ladybug, ready at any moment to fly away out of sight" (Kundera 1996, 41). Karel has an epiphany that it is Mama who is right, that "tanks are perishable, [and] pears are eternal" (Kundera 1996, 41). Kundera complicates the temporal notion of political urgency by situating it within the realm of the visual, where Mama is a viewing subject, and the tanks are objects to be perceived. Because the intruding tanks are visually unclear, Mama altogether refuses to acknowledge them and their representations of terror, domination, and devastation. Mama's poor vision resists the image's ability to mimetically convince her of its narrative and representations, disrupting—or rather, queering—the presupposed and normative relationship between the object of an intruding tank and its viewer, as well as between the object and its assumed representation: tanks can be ladybugs that fly away at any moment. In doing so, she defends herself against the agonizing obligation to participate in affective events at the expense of her own time, subjectivity, and pace of life. Mama's characterization shows that senses for Kundera have a particular queer potential for rethinking the relationship between ordinary lives and the public through the experience of time: they grant individual lives strong subjective valence in positioning themselves and maintaining subjectivity in confronting a nation's organized forgetting and affective regulation. Mama's subjectivity is guarded by her own senses.

Other characters in *The Book* also negotiate their memories through senses. Karel and Marketa are about to engage in a sexual relationship with a third character, Eva, when Mama casually mentions to Karel that Eva reminds her of her friend Nora. Nora has been in Karel's memory as a childhood fantasy, a sexual desire that Karel could never fulfill. As Kundera writes:

> The image of that naked body, standing up and seen from behind, had never been effaced from his memory. . . . He was close to the body, yet infinitely distant from it. Doubly distant. In space and in time. It rose very high above him and was separated from him by countless years. That double distance made the little four-year-old boy dizzy.
>
> (1996, 65–66)

In bed with Eva, Karel learns to manipulate his vision by half closing his eyes so that he can "see" the image of Nora from his childhood. Without clear vision, Eva becomes Nora, and this triggers the same affective response of dizziness for Karel. Unlike when he was a child, when the double distance of space and time denied any possibility for him to attempt to have sex with

Nora, now that dizziness prompts Karel to conquer the double distance that had once seemed to forever preclude the fulfillment of his desire:

> He has the impression that this leap onto her body was a leap across an immense period of time, the leap of a little boy hurling himself from childhood to adulthood and then in reverse, and once again from the little boy miserably gazing at the gigantic body of a woman to the man clasping that body and taming it. That movement, usually measuring fifteen centimeters at most, was as long as three decades.
>
> (Kundera 1996, 60)

With a small adjustment of his vision, Karel reignites an erotic desire from childhood, turning historical imaginings into visual and tactile sensations in the present. Karel's sex with Eva demonstrates to us how a memory from childhood can be sensorily renegotiated as part of one's subject formation. Senses, then, are productive tools that bring history, memory, and time into a dynamic relationship.

Kundera speaks to the debates on time, memory, and affect by opening up a critical terrain for us to think through senses. Senses offer a way to return to the body as a site of knowledge production. This is akin to the new materialist's resistance of the body-mind dualism by thinking about the body's potential for forming sociality, reworking the body's relationship with other forms of living and non-living things, and building new worlds. I would venture to argue that Kundera's foregrounding of the body as the focus is a queer move: resisting normative time's organized forgetting gives voice to the displaced and imagines alternative personhoods and forms of civilization.

Diasporic Memory

As I have argued so far, national time works by employing public feelings to rationalize the forgetting of personal time, history, and memory. National time is bound to the spatiality of the nation; it is within its boundaries that the nation can prioritize economic development, political agendas, national security, and stability to the extent that participation in national projects of this sort is enforced and personal quests are suspended or abandoned. This does not mean, however, that once an individual moves beyond the spatial contours of their nation they become the master of their own time. Diaspora has its own spatiality and temporality, especially for those who have been physically removed from the space of their nation yet remain deeply embroiled in its narratives of belonging, attachment, and national memories. The diasporic context thus offers an opportunity to investigate the complex and volatile nature of memory's relationship with time and subjectivity.

Tamina struggles with fading memories after her husband dies, and "time will heal" is only wishful thinking. At first, she thinks the only way for her to regain memories of their past is by returning to their native country and

retrieving the letters and diaries that contain events from their shared history. Tamina's struggle with her memories challenges the assumption that memories are always already part and parcel of one's negotiation of subject formation. Tamina is not the owner of her memory. Or to be more specific, joyful life experiences did not automatically translate into memories for her. Instead, she has to return to Prague to retrieve letters and diaries just to be able to remember her husband. Her desperation and helplessness in a way point to the capriciousness of memory as an object: one might not be in control of one's own memories.

Tamina's effort to regain her memories of the past by returning to her home country suggests that specific memories can be immobile and strongly associated with the time and space where they form. Susannah Radstone notes the need to attend to the "locatedness of memory" (2011, 114–15). She is speaking to theories of transnational memory, which map trajectories of memories across borders, an understanding of memory that stems from migration rather than from a specific location (Sundholm 2011). Radstone writes that such theories,

> with their focus on memory's high-speed (often digital) travel around the globe, risk eliding such memories from view, precisely because of their locatedness and immobility. They therefore risk producing a self-fulfilling theory by telling the story of only those memories that—for whatever reason—do move, or appear to move, between locations.
>
> (2011, 114–15)

Tamina's memories of her past and life with her husband are in this sense localized in their native country, and being away from that locality ensures that the memories will fade with time.

After a few failed attempts to retrieve the letters in Prague, however, Tamina realizes that it could be meaningless even if she finally obtained them. Kundera writes,

> Tamina realized that what gave her written memories their meaning and worth was that they were intended for her alone. As soon as they lost that quality, the intimate tie binding her to them would be cut, and she would be able to read them no longer with her own eyes but only with the eyes of readers perusing a document about some other person. . . . No, she would never be able to read her notes if they had been read by outsiders.
>
> (1996, 138)

Memories fade with time, but the running of time also exposes memories to contamination by curious gazes. For Tamina, diasporic memory is crucially intimate and private. This quality of Tamina's diasporic subjectivity is not one that allows for transnational solidarity; this is not a version of

transnational memory which can offer a way to identify with "distant others" who can be "part of the strong feelings of everyday life" (Levy and Sznaider 2002, 91). Indeed, Kundera imagines Tamina's diasporic life as encircled by an ever-rising wall where she "is a bit of lawn down at the bottom," upon which is growing a single rose, "the memory of her husband" (1996, 115). For Tamina, her life is unilaterally bounded by her troubling memories of her past in the nation of Bohemia, as her experiences of the new country are completely muted.

Even if memory appears to be external to Tamina's psyche, it does not constitute an entirely extrinsic object independent of her subjectivity. Tamina's situation, instead, demonstrates that memories are in a dynamic relation to diasporic subjectivity against the running of time, unexpected life events, the instability of geopolitical circumstances, affective attachment to the diasporic space, and even everyday practices that involve cultural and ideological exchanges. The complexity of Tamina's struggle with memory calls for an empathetic theorization of diasporic memories, one that takes into account contradictory personhoods, incoherent desires, fragmented or circular temporalities, and everchanging geopolitical dynamics among nations, all of which affectively impact those individuals whose memories are an intimate fusion of the personal and the national.

Instead of focusing on memory's role in forming collective global history, an empathetic method draws attention to subject formations from the margins, disjointed modes of living, and nonlinear life trajectories. By mapping out the differences of each diaspora, we may be able to detect crucial underlying mechanisms that produce exigencies of diasporic conditions as well as the diverse range of practices that diasporic subjects adopt to respond to these predicaments and to negotiate desires, intimacies, senses of belonging, and feelings of time. This empathetic mode is ultimately a queer mode because it emphasizes divergent temporalities and brings out lived experiences of those who are out of joint, out of tune, and thus cannot conform.

Queer Genre

The Book has a distinctive formal structure that appears to be a collection of standalone stories, but Kundera nevertheless claims it is "a novel in the form of variations" (1996, 65). The entire novel is not structured as a progressive course of events, nor is each part of the novel stylistically homogenous. Each story contains various types of texts, such as "the satire, the essay, the philosophic dialogue, the causerie and the literary diary" (Kleberg 1984, 57). Kundera daringly invites readers into his creative process by inserting authorial remarks, personal history, and critical commentary. For instance, as he narrates the story of Tamina, Kundera sometimes inserts his comments on the significance of this character; other times he compares his fictional character to his own biographical history. I see Kundera's *The Book of Laughter and*

Forgetting as sitting within a queer genre, one in which writing a personal history, writing stories, and writing a world all take place simultaneously.

The heterogeneity of variant novel forms demonstrates Kundera's resistance to the established and structuralist categorization of his work as a novel in the conventional sense. Kundera in *The Book* resists being simply labeled as a historical novel, a literature in exile, or national literature. In doing so, Kundera takes on a particular role and establishes a unique relation to his work in which, as Nina Pelikan Straus (1987) writes, he becomes a "critic-novelist" who witnesses as an outsider but simultaneously participates in the narrative of the world of the novel. Kundera is writing a world that is filled with vibrancy, liveliness, and challenges, and he is attaching his voice to document and validate his own experience as history. Queer genre, in this sense, points to a form of history-making through writing the self.

It is worth noting that simply having a mixture of genres or a type of genre that is uncategorizable in the current world of literary criticism does not necessarily constitute a queer genre. Queer genre requires attention to its particular historicity, yet it seeks to destabilize historicist appeals to teleological imperatives, modes of knowledge production that are predicated on major historical events, and ways of thinking that prioritize social ramifications and material embodiments of historical periods over individual lifeworlds. Kundera (2003, 37) states in *The Art of the Novel* that "Historiography writes the history of society, not of man. That is why the historical events my novels talk about are often forgotten by historiography."

Richard S. Esbenshade's (1995) argument on *The Book*'s creative genre as a hopeful way to write history precisely captures the novel form's queer capacity. Esbenshade writes:

> In the totalitarian experience of postwar East-Central Europe, the imperative of presenting national memory as biography or autobiography was all the stronger, since the "traditional" means of preservation—history books, journals, textbooks, national holidays, museums—were so obviously manipulated. Hence the central role of the writer as keeper of the records, custodian of memory, and truth-teller for the nation in the postwar period. Fiction and poetry rather than documentary history as such came to be seen as the guardians of the national heritage. Writers became popular heroes while official historians were reduced to the role of small-minded propagandists. In the face of official manipulation and distortion of history (forced forgetting), the writer's individual memory became the source for, and representation of, national history, its advantages and pitfalls.
>
> (1995, 74)

I quote in full Esbenshade's historicist analysis of *The Book*'s genre because not only does this political and historical contextualization help us understand

The Book's historical specificity; it also shows that Kundera's genre does something different: *The Book* is a strategic arrangement that foregrounds individual memory to preserve a counter-history in which the work's fictionality and criticality conglomerate to resist any interpretations that twist history as Kundera experienced and meant to record it. This author-witness role that Kundera assumes not only guards the work from interpretations that eschew the writer's authority and intention but also takes his work out of a time that characterizes, judges, defines, or forgets.

In this way, Kundera's queer genre has a particular relation to time, both historicist and timeless; it emerges because of its historical specificity yet bypasses time's power to erase. Queer genre's linkage to time offers an important intervention in thinking about queer time, historicism, and queer reading as a critical method. Queer studies' approach to history has been criticized for its "unhistoricism," for attempting to "undo" history by creating multiple temporalities that circumvent the significance of social conditions and material embodiments of particular historical periods or moments (Traub 2013). Traub argues this cannot shed light on history, that this methodology cannot produce accurate accounts of knowledge across various historical contexts. This concern from historicist thinking is predicated on the assumption that history proceeds teleologically, so the past can be periodized.

In order to justify official history, we have to assume that these historical happenings are recorded with adequate objectivity. We also have to assume that the happenings (political events, literary and art works, business trades, education, discourses, etc.) inevitably and simultaneously tell about and are told by their kind of time (uneventfulness, preparedness, urgency, crisis, chaos, recovery, etc.). If history is a recorded, highly selective metanarrative of certain shared ideologies and pursuit, what accounts for the many efforts to create an "accurate" account of a history that in fact overlook personal experiences of time and private memories? Kundera shows the troubling aspect of a singular temporality, often in the name of an "official account," that structures history around selective and biased events that uphold a desired political agenda. To write outside of this normative time, then, is the effort to write history "against the grain," as Walter Benjamin famously urges, an effort to trace a history of marginalized people that has been largely washed away by the formation of normative time and history (2020, 256).

Kundera's queer genre offers us a unique perspective in this debate of queer historicism because it is simultaneously "reading" and "doing" history. For example, when writing about Tamina's emotional turmoil after her husband died, Kundera says "I understand Tamina's self-reproaches. When Papa died, I did the same" (1996, 225). Kundera's insertion of his own autobiographical sketches on a fictional character that he imagines and builds creates an account that both invites and resists interpretation. For me, this is a critical move in thinking about time: personal memory is weighted as indisputable history, yet it is a history that is also empathetic and relatable. Kundera, in

fact, reflects on the role of empathy in writing and reading books as he critiques the notion of "graphomania," or "a mania for writing books" (1996, 127). Defying the common perception that publishing books advances the circulation of information and knowledge and enhances mutual communication, Kundera writes that graphomania worsens isolation: "Everyone surrounded by his own words as by a wall of mirrors, which allows no voice to filter through from outside" (1996, 128). For Kundera, self-expression produces a sense of isolation, an interesting contradiction that points to a need to rethink knowledge production through writing and its consequence on sociality. In what ways can writing steer away from "endless self-reflections" (Pifer 1992, 95) and return the novel to its original intention, as Kundera states, "to promote mutual understanding" (1996, 84)? Kundera's *The Book* showcases a queer genre that pushes for more empathetic modes of writing and reading. Kundera makes new worlds in *The Book* by not only producing the novel as an artifact of his own creativity, wisdom, and imagination but also by bridging himself as the author with the reader to produce shared knowledge of histories, ideas, and ways of living that transcend the fictional narrative.

To conclude, I propose queer genre as a particular mode of historical knowledge production. When Kundera (1996, 30) writes that no one cares about the future but want to be masters of the future "only for the power to change the past," he implies that a society's "will to knowledge" is highly historicist and selective, so much so that any study of marginalized people almost always seems to be an ahistorical project, not that marginalized groups do not have ontological histories of their own, but that the knowledge about them is purposefully or unintentionally excluded from historicist consciousness. Indeed, if anything, a marginalized people's history is often a history of repression, violence, and resistance, which repeats rather than moves on.[4] For Kundera, then, to write about history is not to give a nod to normative time nor to excavate what supposedly has been waiting in the temporal "past" to be known; rather, we should consider the process of producing historical knowledge as an empathetic one in which we make connections among those "no-longer-conscious" regardless of their temporal contexts, pushing what we have known towards the farthest, ever-stretching edge of the present, a performance that echoes what Stephen M. Barber and David L. Clark call a "persistent present" (qtd. in Halberstam 2005, 11), or what Walter Benjamin describes as "'history of the present,' a recognition that history is always and insistently re-presented to us" (qtd. in Eng 2010, 63). If current knowledge production about history is centripetal, a process where the undesired and marginalized are winnowed out and the desired and newly known are absorbed to consolidate our historicist consciousness, then Kundera's way of knowing is centrifugal, a process that returns to the body and its sensorium for knowing through feeling, a process that preserves each and every individual time and memory, and a process that embraces what

has been left behind to really bring about a project of a new world into the here and now.

Notes

1 See the interview title "The Most Original Book of the Season" between Philip Roth and Milan Kundera, which appeared in the *New York Times* in 1980.
2 In the days leading up to his exile, Kundera was strongly committed to Czechoslovakia's communist reforms during the Prague Spring in 1968. His reformist stand, however, was labeled "anti-Party," which subsequently led to his expulsion from the Communist Party and his exile in France.
3 Brian Massumi writes that political events happen quickly and are often unplanned, and so they strike us before "we can position ourselves, before we are able to step back and try to rationalize the experience" (2015, 114).
4 In writing about American Indian people, Jodi Byrd (2011, 6) argues that "indigenous peoples are located outside temporality and presence, even in the face of the very present and ongoing colonization of indigenous lands, resources, and lives." This logic resembles what David Eng (2010, 10) writes about race, that "ever since the Enlightenment, race has always appeared as disappearing."

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10 A Faded Photograph

Ghosts, Specters, and Other Phantoms in Rebecca Makkai's *The Great Believers*

Ana Bessa Carvalho

Introduction

Rebecca Makkai's *The Great Believers* (2018) reverts the chronological order of things and starts where everything usually ends: a funeral. The novel, which is one of the first narratives of the AIDS years, as it spans its early stages in the 1980s up to 2015, intertwines past and present in order "to convey the terrors and tragedies of the epidemic's early years as well as its course and its repercussions over the decades" while placing it "into historical perspective without distancing it or blunting its horrors" (Cunningham 2018). This historical perspective is achieved through its central character, Fiona, who appears both during the 1980s and in 2015 and works as the embodiment of the trauma that was inherited by those who witnessed the deaths of so many friends. Through the many ghosts that haunt the narrative, *The Great Believers* also offers a disruption of the sequential order of time, acknowledging the many ways the past is in the present. The narrative travels through time and space, placing side by side Chicago during the AIDS years and Paris during the Bataclan attacks, with Fiona working as a surrogate mother for her brother and their friends, who were dying of AIDS or who found themselves without support in the time of death due to family and governmental neglect. If in the 1980s Fiona was a makeshift mother, in 2015 she finds herself traveling to Paris in an attempt to reconnect with her estranged daughter and the granddaughter she never met, the former having grown up with a mother who was emotionally unavailable to take care of her own blood family due to the trauma that she carried from the AIDS years.

The Great Believers is not a solitary piece of writing when it comes to analyzing the personal and collective aftermath of the AIDS years: the theme has served as motivation to many other narratives, visual and written, such as Sarah Schulman's *Let the Record Show* (2021), which provides an account of AIDS activism that departs from a tradition of white male authorial voices, or Matthew Lopez's *The Inheritance* (2018), a play also habited by ghosts which haunt a female caretaker. TV shows such as *It's a Sin* (2021), which looks at how AIDS was lived in Britain, or *Pose* (2018–2021), which provides an intersectional approach to this theme by focusing on non-white

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and non-cisgender bodies, also look back at a particularly tragic time of history marked by governmental neglect while also suggesting, as *The Great Believers* does, that other forms of kinship were formed during this time—kinship built in response to a general sense of abandonment and prejudice by blood families and other institutions. Books such as *Funeral Diva* (2020) by Pamela Sneed also portray the role of caretakers in the lives of HIV-positive individuals, as well as the trauma that is inherited from these deaths, while focusing on the experience of black bodies—an issue also at the core of *My Government Means to Kill Me* (2022), by Rasheed Newson, a novel on AIDS activism in 1980s New York City. What distinguishes Makkai's narrative from these and other works, besides the greater emphasis on a much broader current discussion of the subject, is its emphasis on spectrality and its temporal expansion. The novel depicts not only the AIDS years but also what came after them—its victims and its survivors—as well as the ghostly legacy of both loss and resilience in the aftermath of a virus that is not gone, while emphasizing the role of a female caretaker. It also proposes that there is an afterlife for those who managed to survive death during the AIDS years, and for those who managed to have access to medicine.

Due to the high number of cultural objects that still want to look back at this particular time in gay history, it is clear that the AIDS years and their ghosts are still alive, haunting authors and readers, as well as survivors and the relatives of the dead alike. AIDS writing exists "between a possible and impossible mourning," and these narratives execute "a pressure to keep the wound open and unhealed until the scandal is resolved medically and politically" (Luckhurst 2008, 126). This chapter proposes a close reading of Makkai's novel and its take on spectrality and photography to analyze the echoes of the AIDS years and how those who saw their friends perish to the complications of the virus are still coming to terms with this legacy of loss. Moreover, while looking at how *The Great Believers* offers alternative ways of caring and mourning beyond the nuclear family, this chapter also looks at how family making, mourning, and death are closely intertwined.

Camera Obscura

Photography finds its way into *The Great Believers* through the photographs taken by Richard Campo, a friend of Fiona, who photographed men dying of AIDS complications before their demise. The character of Richard evokes the work of photographers such as Nan Goldin who, during the AIDS years, photographed her friends and lovers before they died, creating humanizing photographs that "mourn the loss of specific moments and the people that fill them; at the same time, they refuse that loss by capturing an image of those moments at the instant of their constant disappearance" (Ruddy 2009, 351). To Sontag, photographs "state the innocence, the vulnerability of lives heading towards their own destruction and this link between photography and death haunts all photos of people" (in Hirsch 1997, 5). Through its

photographs, which work as family photographs for Fiona, Richard, and their friends, *The Great Believers* depicts the close link between AIDS, family, and caring, while also challenging chronological ideas of family based on linearity, inheritance, genealogy, and sequence; it acknowledges, thus, that "[f]amily photography can operate at this junction between personal memory and social history, between public myth and personal unconscious" (Jo Spence and Patricia Holland in Hirsch 1997, 13–14). The concept of family photography is here expanded to encompass non-blood families in the shape of groups of friends that, during the AIDS years, worked in a horizontal structure to provide care to people with HIV/AIDS in replacement of, or alliance with, blood-related family members. In the foundational *Families We Choose: Lesbians, Gays, Kinship*, Kath Weston considers the many ways the AIDS years raised questions about family making, particularly at the time of death, as

> [t]he number of PWAs without homes, family, or resources has grown year by year. When people told relatives and friends they had AIDS, kin ties were reevaluated, constituted, or alienated in the act, defined by who (if anyone) stepped forward to offer love, care, and financial assistance for the protracted and expensive battles with opportunistic infections that accompany this disease.
>
> (1991, 186)

Later, Sara Ahmed would also address this by claiming that

> [t]he debate about whether queer relationships should be recognized by law acquires a crucial significance at times of loss. Queer histories tell us of inescapable injustices, for example, when gay or lesbian mourners are not recognized as mourners in hospitals, by families, in law courts.
>
> (2014, 155)

While addressing family making and trauma, it is relevant to recur to Marianne Hirsch's postmemory, that is to say, "that of a child of the survivor whose life is dominated by memories of what preceded his/her birth" (1992, 8). Although the author was not addressing the AIDS years, this understanding of transgenerational trauma serves to analyze how Fiona's daughter is affected by the AIDS years, even without having directly experienced them. Instead of circumscribing Hirsch's concept to familial structures, this chapter expands to encompass both blood families and communities plagued by the same traumatic event, showing how gay communities are still haunted by the specter of AIDS, albeit with rather different responses and results. Moreover, as Hirsch further notes, "post-memory should reflect back on memory, revealing [it] as equally constructed, equally mediated by the process of narration and imagination" (1992, 8–9), and this is exactly what Richard's

exhibition, as well as the novel itself, does: reframe the past and narrate it through text and photographs, with the latter acting as "the medium connecting memory and post-memory" (Hirsch 1992, 9), as they bring back the dead to Fiona but also to her daughter Claire, who attends the exhibition and who, without having met her uncle or his friends, is faced with a medium that "passes for incontrovertible proof that a given thing happened" (Sontag 2008, 5). The return to postmemory allows us to analyze how AIDS narratives are still haunting, engaging indirectly with the survivors of the AIDS years and those who witnessed death and decay firsthand, while also addressing the transgenerational trauma that makes Fiona incapable of connecting with her own daughter, someone who remains indirectly affected by the AIDS years and is aware that her birth was overshadowed by the death of a friend of Fiona. As Hirsch (2012) writes, "[m]emory signals an affective link to the past—a sense, precisely, of a material 'living connection'—and it is powerfully mediated by technologies like literature, photography, and testimony" (Hirsch 2012, 33). Both Makkai's narrative and Richard's photographs work with these technologies to turn back to the past and rescue it, as much as they can, ensuring "that queers survive through the ability to invent or seize pleasurable relations between bodies . . . across time" (Freeman 2005, 58). In the same way that Makkai juxtaposes the tragedy of the AIDS years and contemporary time marked by the uncertainty of terrorism by including the Bataclan attacks, photography also travels *through* and *against* time by bringing the past—and the dead—back to us. Those who were lost paradoxically keep on living in the photographic frame, as these specters of the past become both "a pseudo-presence and a token of absence" (Sontag 2008, 16).

When in Paris, Fiona and her daughter attend Richard's exhibition, where photographs taken during the 1980s are juxtaposed with recent ones. The exhibition is entitled *Strata*, a name that suggests photography's unique ability to bring back the past, layering it upon the present, much like the ghost which hovers between timelines, showing how "photographic images . . . now provide most of the knowledge people have about the look of the past and the reach of the present" (Sontag 2008, 4). Both Makkai's narrative and Richard's photographs disrupt timelines by evoking their dead loved ones and by allowing themselves to be haunted by their ghosts, the specter of AIDS, and the ever-present phantom of trauma. At the same time, the novel also establishes that the AIDS years are still to be recognized as part of American history[1] and that to turn our backs on our ghosts is dangerous and unfair to those who were forgotten by official memories;[2] instead, the queer historian must give in to "[t]he queer impulse to forge communities between the living and the dead" (Love 2007, 31). This impulse is at the center of Makkai's novel, as it proposes that a sense of community can only be achieved through an affective look at the past, at our dead loved ones, whose losses are the causes of a trauma that finds its way into other branches of the family tree of friends.

Looking Back

While looking at Orpheus and Eurydice, Heather Love (2007) writes that queer narratives are constantly worried about looking back at the past by performing an emotional rescue of the dead in a cross-temporal dialogue to what Love refers to as "feeling backwards." As we learn from Orpheus, to look backward is to also acknowledge the loss of our loved ones, condemning them to death by declaring them a part of the underworld. And yet, not to look back would be, as Love states, to also betray our dead. This doomed turning towards the past takes place in *The Great Believers* through Fiona: her desire to travel back in time and relive the deaths of her family of friends can only be enacted through the nostalgic act of looking at images of the ones departed, an act that is, at the same time, to accept that life has ended while also wanting to relieve death over and over again. If looking at the photographs of the ones she lost is a troublesome task for Fiona, as it brings back the memories of unachievable bodies and a fleeting past, not to look would mean to betray the memory of the long departed, something that lies at the core of projects that engage with queer temporalities. As Christopher Castiglia and Christopher Reed (2012) write, if earlier queer theory seemed to want to cut ties with the past, through unremembering and by creating safe representations of the AIDS years that were aimed at a mainstream audience, a second wave of theorists was interested in addressing the earlier trauma by turning back into the past "by temporal disorientation and 'queer time'" (2012, 146), towards negative feelings that work as "signs of a post-traumatic response to the first wave's own traumatized forgetting" (2012, 146); it is with this negative turn to the past that this article engages. Like ghosts, "[t]rauma causes an incomplete eradication: the traumatic experience hovers, not forgotten but not remembered, on the edge of consciousness" (Castiglia and Reed 2012, 10), a trauma that haunts those who survive, even finding its way into their offspring. This turn to the past is triggered by the presence of ghosts, symbols of "the anachronic intrusion of the past into the present" (Luckhurst 2008, 93). These ghosts "are the signals of atrocities, marking sites of untold violence, a traumatic past whose traces remain to attest to a lack of testimony . . . the sign of a *blockage* of story, a hurt that has not been honored by a memorializing narrative" (Luckhurst 2008, 93). This blockage is exactly what has prevented Fiona from moving forward, as the narrative itself shifts from past to present.

Through this engagement with the past, ghosts and photographs work as technologies to contest the triumphalist version of history, by disrupting time as a straight line in which the past stays in the past and never comes back to haunt the present. This view of history as a continuous line of progress is often sustained by narratives in which marriage is always perceived as the ultimate progress for queer individuals, inserting them in a heteronormative and chrononormative reproductive time. Narratives such as Makkai's contradict this as they "acknowledge and value the much more complex

experiences of setbacks, backlash, self-criticism, and sadness that are laminated in with the more public affects of pride, triumph, and success" (Liu 2020, 125), creating a history against "the chronopolitics of development" (Freeman 2005, 59) in which feelings such as "pride, safety, and happiness are in fact a result of the mainstream LGBTQ movement's troubling alliance with neoliberal capitalism" (Liu 2020, 4).

Perhaps it is also useful for our reading of *The Great Believers* to recall the concept of "testimonial object" and how photographs or personal belongings—such as books—are passed down to friends and family, bringing with them the past and its memories, dislocating time, as they

> carry memory traces from the past, to be sure, but they also embody the very process of its transmission. They testify to the historical contexts and the daily qualities of the past moments in which they were produced and, also, to the ways in which material objects carry memory traces from one generation to the next.
>
> (Hirsch 2012, 178)

Nothing is as permanent as a loss when portrayed in a photograph. As Makkai writes on Richard's need to constantly photograph his friends, "what had started as a strange quirk had become, in the past few months something essential. Yale would hear the camera click and think, 'He got *that*, at least.' Meaning: Whatever happens—in three years, in twenty—that moment will remain" (2018, 9). And it did, finding its way into Fiona's life when she thought she would no longer find the past again. In one of Richard's photographs that Fiona sees in Paris, there's a date stamp, dated from the early 1980s, when many were still unaware of HIV/AIDS. Nico, Fiona's brother who would also die of AIDS complications, is portrayed next to a man with a Kaposi sarcoma scar over his eyebrow. Fiona "tried to wipe the spot away, in case it was on the cellophane, but it didn't move" (Makkai 2018, 41), a gesture that attests to the spectral presence of AIDS, impossible to wipe away. The Kaposi spot works as an omen for what was to come, an indicator that, although those who bore these scars may have been oblivious to it, death was not only present but imminent for "all those sick men who didn't know they were sick, the spot that was still, that summer, only a rash" (Makkai 2018, 41). This gives way to an inverted timeline in which, with the knowledge of what a Kaposi sarcoma is, the reader understands that the men are infected with what at the time was a life-threatening virus. These marks on the body become, like the photographs, imprints of a certain time, nostalgic wounds that are evoked only when the past, which was before perceived as stable and secure, is uncovered in the present as lost and almost irretrievable, for "[n]ostalgia's primary meaning has to do with the irreversibility of time: something in the past is no longer accessible" (Huyssen 2006, 7). As Sontag writes "when we are nostalgic, we take pictures . . . photographs actively promote nostalgia. Photography is an elegiac art, a twilight art" (2008, 15).

The fact that, at the time, neither the subject nor the object knew that the people in the photographs would be disappearing soon makes these photographs—much like any photographs—objects of nostalgia, testimonial objects of a certain time that escaped us. Those who have disappeared and turned into ghosts become

> pregnant with unfulfilled possibility, with the something to be done that the wavering present is demanding. This something to be done is not a return to the past but a reckoning with its repression in the present, a reckoning with that which we have lost but never had.
>
> (Gordon 2008, 183)

While Gordon's ghost demands action, in the shape of a restorative act towards the past that will influence the present, Fiona's nostalgic recollection of the past is almost paralyzing, having affected her relationships with her own family. Fiona seems more willing to dwell in the past, losing herself in photographs of the dead, than to face her daughter and acknowledge how her trauma has affected their relationship. When thinking of Richard and the AIDS years, Fiona associates them "with Nico gone, with Nico's friends, who'd become her only friends, dying one by one and two by two and, if you looked away for a second, in great horrible clumps." And yet, besides the many deaths she endured, "it was a time she missed, a place she'd fly back to in a heartbeat" (Makkai 2018, 39), a feeling which crystallizes the overpowering effect of trauma on the mourner.

Back from the Dead

Some ghosts just refuse to stay dead: Julian, a friend of Fiona who was thought to be dead in the 1980s, appears in 2015 at Richard's house in Paris—as much a symbol of the spectral and ever present fear of AIDS, as a symbol of resistance and survival. Richard photographs Julian for his exhibition, as the man gains a fourth image of himself in 2015, next to the photographs taken in the 1980s, a line up which disrupts the logical order of time as "the first photo when everything was great" precedes "the second when Julian was freaking out because he knew he was sick" and "the third when he weighed like a hundred pounds" (Makkai 2018, 165). Inverting the expected sequence of HIV-positive men in the 1980s, Makkai juxtaposes these images that suggest decay and death with the one of Julian, alive and healthy.

Before leaving Chicago without telling his friends where he would go, as he did not want them to see his body going through the changes brought by HIV/AIDS, Julian stayed at Yale's house, where he left behind some dental floss. Every night, Yale would tear some dental floss and use it, using his own in the morning, as "a way of making Julian's last longer" and to make Julian's memory last longer too; "but it was also a way of reflecting back on his day" (Makkai 2018, 295), the dental floss a timeline to look back at both his

shorter and longer history. When Yale unravels the last strip of dental floss, it is as if Julian has vanished forever: "[o]ne night, he pulled Julian's dental floss and the last of the string came out, just long enough to use. He tried not to take it as a bad sign, but it felt like one" (Makkai 2018, 341). A single string of memory symbolically links Julian, Yale, and all the other men who died of AIDS complications, becoming an ephemeral testimonial object, one of the many threads that stretch into the past, linking HIV-positive men over time in a long legacy that unravels around the virus, stretching to encompass the dead and the living, as well as those who are left with the remaining objects. Though the image of the thread suggests lineage and continuity, as it comes to an end, the dental floss also suggests another concept of transgenerational inheritance, one in which traumas, objects, photographs, and even ghosts, are passed down from friend to friend.

Contradicting the dental floss, Julian is not fully gone, reappearing as "a zombie" (Makkai 2018, 356) that leaves Fiona—who thought him to be dead—in a state of shock, as the past comes back again, but in the shape of a body. Fiona realizes that, with Julian, the memories of a particular time also come to life, memories of "events she's believed herself, for years, to be the sole custodian of—when all along, those parties, those conversations, those jokes, had stayed alive in him as well" (Makkai 2018, 358). Julian, thought to be a ghost, is also a "zombie," having escaped what was certain death, living what he describes as his second life, a life after death. The metaphor of the ghost serves to articulate survivor's guilt and the inability to imagine a future for HIV+ individuals after the 1980s. Julian is, indeed, a ghost, trapped and suspended between a timeline that is chrononormative (ending with an expected premature death), but also queer, in the sense that he escaped what was expected to happen, as he received a lifeline that, unlike the dental floss, has not been severed prematurely. As Julian says, "[f]or a long time, I wondered if I was a ghost. A literal ghost. I thought I must have died and this was some kind of purgatory or heaven . . . but then I thought: If this is heaven, where are all my friends?" (Makkai 2018, 359). And yet, Julian defied death and expectation, surviving with the help of medicine and even getting married to another man. Much more than a casual mention, the fact that Julian is married, with Fiona noticing a wedding band on his finger, is a clear hint at how HIV+ individuals can, when they have the privilege of having access to medicine, imagine a future, albeit one that is, in this particular case, conceived through heteronormative futurity based on establishing a family and ensuring a genealogy within a chrononormative timeline. Although Halberstam writes that queer time, "even as it emerges from the AIDS crisis, is not about compression and annihilation; it is also about the potentiality of a life unscripted by the conventions of *family, inheritance and child rearing*" [emphasis added] (2005, 2), in *The Great Believers* this triad is not equated with annihilation but possibility, particularly for gay men who were perceived as unable to have a future due to premature death or an inability to sustain meaningful relationships. Weston (1991) writes that "the

nineteenth-century link between homosexuality and morbidity . . . seems to have found a twentieth-century counterpart in judgments that blame persons with AIDS for their own affliction" (1991, 184) while also claiming that "[l]esbian and gay parenting counters representations of homosexuality as sterile and narcissistic by courting life, establishing new family ties where critics expect to find only tragedy, isolation, and death" (1991, 184). This position centers family-making, either by blood or as structures beyond marriage and homonormativity, as an alternative to death, insecurity, and loneliness. Castiglia and Reed (2012) have similarly addressed the way that the AIDS years, rather than valued as an opportunity to strengthen a struggling community, were thought to be the direct result of recklessness, so much so that "[t]he sexual past was relentlessly reconfigured as a site of infectious irresponsibility rather than valued for generating and maintaining the systems of cultural communication and care that proved the best—often the only—response to disease, backlash, and death" (3). Queer time can then be unscripted of the conventions mentioned by Halberstam but, in turn, and as *The Great Believers* shows, it can also be scripted by them as the tropes of family, inheritance, and child-rearing are rearranged and even replaced by horizontal structures of caretaking and alternatives to marriage that encompass the myriad of possibilities for queer kinship beyond marriage.

The ghostly body of Julian makes Fiona reflect on how her life has only been defined by trauma and loss, directly contradicting her presumption of an unforeseeable future for her generation:

> [h]ow utterly strange that Julian could have a second life, a whole entire life, when Fiona had been living for the past thirty years in a deafening echo. She'd been tending the graveyard alone, oblivious to the fact that the world had moved on, that one of the graves had been empty this whole time.
>
> (Makkai 2018, 360)

That Julian is alive in 2015 means Fiona is no longer the sole survivor of her family of friends; friends whose collective memory is still preserved in Julian and Fiona, as well as in Richard's photographs. When at Richard's house, Fiona finds what she mistakes to be a photo album; after dropping the file, the past comes flying around her, and she realizes that the album is an archive of prayer cards and funeral bulletins of men who died of AIDS-related complications, an archive of loss of "so many of them, so impossibly many" (Makkai 2018, 184). This album of obituaries is indeed Fiona's family album, but unlike one composed of photographs of blood-related individuals, it disrupts the chronological aspect of the heteronormative family album, in which only members of the family can permeate its pages, and in which memories succeed in chronological order marking births, marriages, and other relevant events that rarely include death. In Fiona's album, only death exists, which reminds her, even decades after, of the AIDS years and

"the PTSD she'd carried with her from the 80s" (Makkai 2018, 168). Whenever someone went to her AIDS benefit store, people would mention the AIDS years as a faded memory and ask Fiona if she had seen *Philadelphia*:

> And how could she answer? They meant well, all of them. How could she explain that this city was a graveyard? That they were walking every day through streets where there had been a holocaust, a mass murder of neglect and antipathy, that when they stepped through a pocket of cold air, didn't they understand it was a ghost, it was a boy the world had spat out?
>
> (Makkai 2018, 184)

As Castiglia and Reed write, taking into account Huyssen's argument that only a certain part of memory is turned into an official discourse of history and achieves national consensus, the narratives that followed the AIDS years, often aimed at a mainstream audience, worked more towards amnesia than remembrance by providing a sanitized and acceptable version of history, one that does not challenge nor rewrites official discourses, a version of history that runs against the overload of personal memories. Perfectly encompassed in the shape of photographs—"Here, in her hand, a stack of ghosts" (Makkai 2018, 184)—for Fiona, these ghosts are reminders of her feelings of guilt over her inability to have saved them, as well as her own pain, loss, and mourning. The photographs also disrupt linear time, bringing back the past with an urgency to remember, for "haunting, ghostly apparition reminds us that the past and the present are neither discrete nor sequential. The borderline between then and now wavers, wobbles, and does not hold still" (Freccero 2007, 196). Moreover, "[h]aunting raises specters, and it alters the experience of being in time, the way we separate the past, the present, and the future. These specters or ghosts appear when the trouble they represent and symptomize is no longer being contained or repressed or blocked from view" (Gordon 2008, xvi), and given the current numbers of HIV infections in non-white and underprivileged queer men, along with the privatization of healthcare, AIDS is certainly not only a ghost of the past. Gay experience is still marked by HIV/AIDS, either in the shape of infection or through the contagious images of death that were mediated by film and literature that haunted gay men growing up right after the AIDS years. It is through objects such as *The Great Believers*, and characters such as Julian, that a new way of dealing with AIDS, one that is open about its many social and somatic consequences, can be created.

In Loop

Regardless of its many deaths, the end of *The Great Believers* has a celebratory tone, one that hints at the repairing that Fiona desperately wants to do with her daughter and granddaughter. Fiona attends Richard's exhibition,

accompanied by Claire, with whom Fiona has a heated exchange of words in which she is accused by Claire of having her childhood overshadowed by the death of Yale, who died the day after Claire was born. Claire, who has not experienced the AIDS years, nevertheless embodies Hirsch's postmemory, as her entire life is inscribed by the trauma of AIDS—her birth and Yale's death, for example, happen one day after the other. Claire, who experienced the AIDS years through her mother and through her neglect during her childhood, finds this troubled legacy again—when she is also a mother—through Richard's series of photographs. In this way, just as the audience of the exhibition becomes acquainted with a past they may not be familiar with, Claire and her daughter, through the family photography of Richard and Fiona, also discover a family of both blood-related people and friends they similarly belong to.

At the exhibition, Fiona watches a video of Charlie and Yale witnessing the demolition of a gay bar: after the demolition, the men rub the glitter they find on the club's ruins on their t-shirts and take it home with them. The ruins of the bar can be seen as both a place of destruction and of renewal, for the film is played in a loop, and as soon as the bar is destroyed, the film starts again, the building still intact, as if in a Mobius strip of renewal and destruction. Although the loop of the film could suggest a paralysis that condemns time and history to a repetitive circle, the ghosts in *The Great Believers* call for action in the present. Perhaps Richard's photographs can also be seen as ruins, places where death and survival co-exist, just like the photographs of Julian from the 1980s that are juxtaposed with the ones taken in 2015:

> There can be no image that is not about destruction and survival, and this is especially the case in the image of ruin. We might even say that the image of ruin tells us what is true of every image: that it bears witness to the enigmatic relation between death and survival, loss and life, destruction and preservation, mourning and memory. It also tells us, if it can tell us anything at all, that what dies, is lost, and mourned within the image—even as it survives, lives on, and struggles to exist—is the image itself.
>
> (Cadava 2001, 36)

The video ends and starts again, in a continuum that prevents the men from fully disappearing, in a ritual act of remembering: the loop is not a mere repetition—it creates intensity and reinforces the presence, as well as the absence, of these men, as "the traumatic memory persists in a half-life, rather like a ghost, a haunting absent presence of another time in our time" (Luckhurst 2008, 81), a type of time traveling provided by those watching the video in a collecting act of memorialization and remembrance. Nevertheless, and regardless of the subject theme of the book and its many deaths, Makkai's words hint at a future, if not for these men directly, for others like them:

"[t]hen the whole film looped again. There they all stood, the Bistro whole. Boys with hands in pockets, waiting for everything to begin" (Makkai 2018, 418), echoing the men marked by Kaposi lesions who were oblivious to what the wounds meant, which left them as the great believers of a future that would not come. The looped images of the bar being destroyed and rebuilt trigger Fiona's memory, which shifts between her need to be a mother to Claire and the inability to bring back the dead she also mothered in a way. *The Great Believers*, by juxtaposing two different timelines, addresses time as both crystalized in photographs, but also full of possibilities with the video in a loop, aiming at "a future apart from the reproductive imperative, optimism, and the promise of redemption. A backward future, perhaps" (Love 2007, 147).

In one of the photographs of the show, Fiona sees herself along with her dead friends. As she recollects that moment, she addresses the fact that Claire was not conceived yet and as such, remained untraumatized by Fiona's past. It is in this moment free from trauma that she expresses the desire to contradict the frozen time of the photograph and, acting as more than a mere viewer, intervene upon the past:

> [t]here she was herself, an arm around Terrence. . . . She never remembered being that pretty, that happy. Claire was just an egg in an ovary, one more thing Fiona hadn't ruined yet . . . she wanted to climb into the photo, to say, "Stop where you are." Wasn't that what the camera had done, at least? It had frozen them forever.
>
> (Makkai 2018, 415)

"What a burden. To be Horatio. To be the one with the memory" (Makkai 2018, 415), says Julian about *Hamlet*, although it is clear the Makkai is referring to Fiona, Julian, Richard's show, and an entire generation of individuals who lost their loved ones to AIDS, who, like Horatio, are also visited by ghosts. Fiona's heart is described as a "palimpsest . . . the way things could be written over but never erased" (Makkai 2018, 416), lines that echo the title of Richard's show, *Strata*, in which past and present are also overlapped and overwritten. According to Love, "[t]he effort to recapture the past is doomed from the start. To reconstruct the past, we build on ruins; to bring it to life, we chase after the fugitive dead" (2007, 21). Fiona chases after the dead through her attempt at surviving trauma by looking at the Bistro ruins and Richard's photographs, but the past is never reconfigured, except for ghosts, like Julian, who have a second chance at life. Besides the photographs, the ruins of the bar also evoke another space and time, given that "[t]he architectural ruin is an example of the indissoluble combination of spatial and temporal desires that trigger nostalgia. In the body of the ruin, the past is both present in its residues and yet no longer accessible, making the ruin an especially powerful trigger for nostalgia" (Huyssen 2006, 7).

When men start dying of AIDS, and when Yale is faced with the possibility of being infected, he wonders what will happen to the next generation of gay men:

> I keep thinking that maybe they'll start over, you know? The next generation of baby gays, when we're all gone. But maybe they won't, because they'll be starting from scratch. And they'll know what happened to us, and Pat Robertson will convince them it was our fault.
>
> (Makkai 2018, 268)

The next generation did not start over; gay experience is still deeply marked by AIDS, both as a ghostly presence and a reality, for "[h]aunting and the appearance of specters or ghosts is one way . . . we are notified that what's been concealed is very much alive and present" (Gordon 2008, xvi). The juxtaposition of the Bataclan attacks—to whom Fiona, her daughter, and granddaughter were witnesses—shows that, in 2015, it is not only AIDS but also the unpredictability of terrorist attacks that remains a threat. This generational reproduction of trauma proposes that each generation has its burdens and challenges, with crises that echo crises of the past, and with tragedies that also disrupt time by suspending it in the paralyzing effect of unexpected death. Through this notion of time traveling, Makkai suggests that trauma is never fully gone, although the differences between the AIDS crisis and the Bataclan attacks can also elicit some relevant conclusions: while the AIDS victims were ignored by mass media, terrorist attacks receive media coverage, as the former is still to be considered a collective trauma of American history and experience. In order to make peace with the past, while remembering the dead and the prejudice aimed at them, and also hinting at an alternative future, queer narratives must give in to the "willingness to live with ghosts and to remember the most painful, the most impossible stories" (Love 2007, 43). And what is queerer than a ghost?

Notes

1 "Among the historical disasters addressed by trauma theory (the Holocaust, the Vietnam War, 9/11), AIDS has rarely been taken up as one of the most significant cultural traumas of the late twentieth century, and the cultural aftershocks of reinvigorated assaults on gay lifeways has attracted even less attention as a site of trauma worth of study" (Castiglia and Reed 2012, 10).
2 "Official memories—in the form of films, education, museum exhibitions, holidays, news reporting, and political speeches—constitute a potent form of forgetting even as they purport to traffic in memory. The assault on gay memory following AIDS took precisely this form, offering "cleaned-up" versions of the past as substitutes for more challenging memories of social struggle. (Castiglia and Reed 2012, 2)

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11 "Be Three Now"

Queering the Postwar Heterosexual Marriage in Ann Quin's *Three*

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Introduction

Ann Quin's (1936–1973) legacy has long been neglected (Morley 1999, 127) until the recent issuing of new editions of her work by the British press And Other Stories in 2019, fostered by surging academic interest in her oeuvre.[2] Subsequent translations of the four novels published during her lifetime have followed, such as the first translation into Spanish of her first novel, *Berg*, published by Malastierras in 2020. Often linked to the *nouveau roman* and the New French Wave for sharing similar rhetorical devices,[3] Quin became a prominent figure in British experimental fiction in the 1960s. While her promising career was cut short by her early death by drowning, her work has often been classified under the same group of 1960s British experimentalists as Christine Brooke-Rose, Brigid Brophy, Anna Kavan, Eva Figes, B.S. Johnson, Alexander Trocchi, or Alan Burns (Jordan 2019, 38). Although they never organized or identified as a coherent group, these authors partake in their aesthetic and political response to the aftermath of World War II, much closer to previous Modernist writers than to their realist contemporaries (Jordan 2020, 5).[4] Out of synch with their time,[5] they forego realist conventions that try to recover "the good old days" before the war in terms of representation and instead dwell on what Julia Jordan has characterized as "belatedness," which is represented through "a seemingly natural retardation between the event and its apprehension" (2020, 5)—the inability to perceive an event when it occurs, coming back to it only afterward. This group of authors shares a preoccupation with the idea of a fracture in time before and after the war, and with the profoundly disconcerting events that derived from it: the Holocaust, atomic fear, and the atomization of geopolitics and society as they knew it. They express this defamiliarization with reality by deploying aesthetic strangeness, such as a lack of closure or linearity, elisions, and errors that may disorient the reader (Jordan 2019, 36).

Besides Quin's first novel *Berg* (1964), which was awarded the Harkness Fellowship and the D.H. Lawrence Fellowship at the University of New Mexico (Evenson 2001, viii), her work never obtained much critical or commercial success, partly due to its formal difficulty (Powell 2020, 258).

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As Lorraine Morley indicates, Quin aimed to "defy [convention] and exist outside of its boundaries" (1999, 130). Quin's relationship with British and American avant-garde visual artists and their shared interest in experimenting with form have been sufficiently documented (Hansen 2022, 54). Formally challenging, Quin's four published novels break with space and time conventions, which allows her texts to, in Jack Halberstam's words, "assess political and cultural change," and which may lead us to think about "both what has changed and what must change" (2005, 4). If mid-20th century realism, looking back to its Victorian predecessors, took some things for granted in terms of representation, Quin's experimentalism tries to go beyond these givens to understand how reality was changing (Jordan 2020, 15). For instance, in *Berg*, it is difficult for the protagonist to distinguish reality from dream; while *Passages* (1969), Quin's third novel, is written in cut-up fragments where the protagonists' voices and their diverse experiences of time and space are blurred. Jordan equates Quin's departure from realism with a literature of "possibility" in an ethical sense: "The ability to hold multiple 'what happened's at once while resisting the urge to resolve them, without turning that very resistance into an easy valorization or nihilism, . . . or, likewise, the multiply realized possibilities" (2020, 142–43). In *Three* (1966), the *impasse* between the postwar nuclear family and the impending sexual revolution is at stake, while its outcome remains unresolved. This is represented through a refusal of genre conventions: *Three* is an unsolved *whodunnit* set in what could seem, in the first pages, a middlebrow novel about a failed marriage written in an experimental form. As has been pointed out by scholars such as Ellen Berry (2016) or Bonnie Honig (2022), an aesthetic strategy of refusal may be productive in its failure to comply with the expected order, since this may give way to new configurations of understanding the subject and its relation to others.

This chapter aims to analyze Ann Quin's second novel, *Three* (1966), from the perspective of queer temporalities. In so doing, I will argue that the text maps the crossroad between the emerging, sexually liberated woman of the 1960s and the bourgeoise housewife of postwar Britain, locating both within the patriarchal realm yet shedding light on the possibility of dismantling hegemonic power relations through the establishment of new forms of kinship. By refusing a linear plot—in particular, the genre of the *whodunnit*—the novel subverts readers' expectations of closure and resolution, reconsidering issues of narrative authority. At the same time, compulsory heterosexuality precludes any actual liberation for either the middle-class housewife or the seemingly sexually liberated young woman, as it is enforced through violence. In this sense, I will discuss the failed postwar housewife role as portrayed in *Three* through Halberstam's conception of "queer failure" as something that "allows us to escape the punishing norms that discipline behavior and manage human development" (2011, 3). Finally, I will argue that the narrative disruption of the traditional, heterosexual marriage opens the possibility to

subvert the heterosexual logics of the postwar nuclear family, even if this possibility is hampered in the end.

Queering the Postwar British Home

Ann Quin's *Three* (1966) recounts the *ménage à trois* between Ruth and Leonard, a middle-class British marriage, and S, a young girl who moves in with the couple as a tenant in their holiday home by the sea. When the novel begins, S seems to have committed suicide by drowning. While Ruth suspects that the tenant had an affair with Leonard, the reader discovers that she may have had one with Ruth too. Thus, despite her absence, the marriage has been shaken, and their marital and material stability remain threatened by the violence occurring outside the home—houses are broken into, and a rowdy group of young men roams the town—which will be soon revealed to happen *inside* the home as well. According to Jack Halberstam, "[q]ueer uses of space and time develop, at least in part, in opposition to the institutions of family, heterosexuality, and reproduction. They also develop according to other logics of location, movement, and identification" (2005, 1). In this way, S's presence breaks with the linearity, security, and predictability of the heterosexual economy. The structure of the novel mirrors the aftermath of this break by intertwining a third-person narrative where dialogues are relayed in free indirect discourse with interspersed excerpts from S's journals, both written and audiotaped.[6] By trying to understand what happened to S, the couple is confronted with her interruption in their marriage. The tapes function as S's haunting presence even "when S is no longer physically present" (Guy 2022, 79). There, the couple will encounter not so much who S was but how S saw them, as well as fragmented memories from S's past. As Josh Powell argues, "*Three* can be described as a novel about reading, or more accurately failures of reading" (2020, 255). Indeed, both Ruth and Leonard fail to read S, as well as each other, but S's journals force them to reconsider their relationship with her and the future of their marriage.

After S's disappearance, the couple remains stuck looking for the traces of the past in an attempt to understand what led their tenant and lover, S, to kill herself—if that is what actually happened. On the contrary, what they find themselves figuring out is how S affected their lives in the few months she stayed with them. Consequently, Leonard and Ruth's search for answers mirrors the reader's, not only demanding to look beyond the surface of things but staging the failure of not being able to do so (Powell 2020, 13). At different points in the novel, we learn that a stabbed body is found, but it may or may not be hers; a suicide note is found in her pocket in a capsized boat. *Three* is thus a failed *whodunnit* whose ending suggests that everyone and no one did it at the same time. That is, S's demise cannot be pinpointed to a single person or event but rather to social structures such as the family,

compulsory heterosexuality, and the demands set on women in postwar Britain. According to Niamh Baker, in the postwar years, "[m]en still controlled the depiction of women," particularly through scientifically and institutionally sanctioned discourses: "psychologists, sociologists and anthropologists united with educationalists and child experts to define who a woman was and what she should be. . . . Women as wives, women as mothers, women as men's sexual outlet, were seen in relation to others rather than as autonomous beings" (1989, 20). As will be shown, both S's and Ruth's refusal to comply with the expectations of what a woman should be eventually proves fatal.

The narrative is further fragmented by the inclusion of S's journal entries which "ensures that although absent from the narrative, her voice, and in this her presence, dominates" (Williams 2013, 80). In fact, Quin allows S to have the last word in the narrative, as the novel ends with one of her journal excerpts. The question of whether S really drowned herself, or it was an accident, or she was murdered or she is still alive, looms in the air, provoking remorse in Ruth, but not so much in Leonard: "No one can be blamed Ruth we must understand that least of all ourselves. . . . You mean you don't really care Leon?" (Quin 2001, 1). Hence, after S disappears, Ruth and Leonard need to readjust their marriage, having lost an element that provided them with certain satisfaction in their home life against the binary postwar logic of the nuclear family, reproduction, and marriage. As Joshua Cohen suggests, drawing on Quin's Catholic upbringing, the textual construction of a relationship of three people instead of two clashes with binary logic, where S becomes a Trinity mystery of sorts that Ruth and Leonard, as well as the reader, must solve (2020, xii). After S goes missing and their marriage subsequently deteriorates, Ruth ambivalently wonders if she would feel different about Leonard if they had a child (Quin 2001, 124). S was not only Leonard's lover or the marriage's tenant, but she also fulfilled the role of surrogate daughter, and her absence paralyzes the couple. The text becomes a revision of the past intertwined by scenes in the present told in free indirect speech, where diaries, written and oral, juxtapose one another. Paradoxically, S brought the couple together by displacing them from heteronormative time into queer time, since the dialogues of the couple overlap "as if they have merged into each other after staying together too long," as Juliet Jacques points out (2016, 156).

According to Jack Halberstam, queer time stands in opposition to normative time, which is "ruled by a biological clock for women and by strict bourgeois rules of respectability and scheduling for married couples" (2005, 5). Heteronormative time is the time of reproduction, a "generational time" that connects "the family to the historical past of the nation" and "to the future of both familial and national stability" (Halberstam 2005, 5). After S disappears, Ruth and Leonard seem to go back again to heteronormative time, literally pursuing futurity to avoid becoming stagnant. Leonard asks

Ruth about missing her period (Quin 2001, 3) and he keeps track of every time they have sex, to which Ruth reacts as if horrified, even though she also tracks her temperature to know when she is ovulating:

> Top secret. Oh don't be silly you don't keep secrets ever there's a black mark here there well? Can't you guess? Dentist appointments—no surely not so many? Far more personal. Oh no Leon really why in heaven's name how horrid putting things like that down. No more than your temperature chart love same thing in a way. Not at all it's rather nasty what you do besides mine's purely for medical reasons. And mine?
>
> (2001, 42)

The couple, nearing their late thirties, tries to hide their dysfunction of not fitting into heteronormative time while tracking their chances at futurity. S, unlike Ruth, did not fully understand what these marks in Leonard's diary meant. In her audiotaped journal, she comments on seeing "[n]othing much apart from some little black crosses, which seem to be some kind of code" (2001, 65). S refused the time of reproduction; she had an abortion and afterward wrote about "the utter sense of relief of having [her] body back again" (2001, 73). The fact that she identifies Leonard's marks as a "code" implies not only that this is a convention of meaning but that new codes and forms of understanding reality and time can be made and unmade. Therefore, Quinn shows that S lived and existed in a queer time, destabilizing naturalized hegemonic values regarding gender and sexuality (Halberstam 2011, 8).

The relationship S establishes with both members of the couple is one mediated by pleasure, not by futurity and reproduction: "But there was pleasure. Not unshared" (Quin 2001, 122), as she notes in her audiotaped diary. As can be seen in all of the three character's accounts, S provided the childless couple with a different way of understanding and experiencing kinship, belonging, and futurity, even if their threesome may not exactly align with the ideals of the postwar British nation. Elizabeth Freeman (2010) has theorized what a queer genealogy might look like by deviating from a linear, institutional conception of history and identity. In *Three*, the failure to succeed in the model of the nuclear family, that is, to replicate the past into the future, allows us instead to explore a different genealogy built on pleasure, using "the body as a tool to effect, figure, or perform that encounter" (Freeman 2010, 95). The fact that this encounter roughly takes place in the sixties signals a time of change when "an unofficial counterculture and an established liberal politics coexisted" with conservative and capitalist ones (McLoughlin 2019, 3). Thus, the sixties can be read as a time when emerging and opposing discourses were able to coexist, if only temporarily. *Three* enacts this clash between transgressive and traditional values through the opposing figures of Ruth and S. By mapping these changes onto the changing sexual economy, the possibility of breaking binaries and imagining new

forms of living appear for both, even if these may appear hindered by male violence in the end.

From the start, Ruth embodies the failure of attempting to be the perfect postwar housewife: it seems that she cannot have children (Quin 2001, 66), she has had cosmetic surgery, and she does not feel very self-confident about her appearance (Quin 2001, 70). Ruth is thus trapped in the dichotomic postwar demands of being a nurturing caretaker while being attractive and sexually fulfilling (Baker 1989, 14). This investment in domesticity aimed to protect the private sphere from outside forces and, therefore, strengthen the nation. This gendered discourse was promoted to repair and foster the economy after the war by bringing women back into the home, creating more jobs for men, and advancing the welfare state with the support of women's homemaking and childrearing (Sinfield 1989, 204–5). However, in the seaside town where they stay during the holidays, violence constantly threatens the domestic space: their home has been broken into several times by outsiders who even beat Leonard down once (2001, 136–37), she often feels watched (2001, 55), and she spends a great part of her time cleaning the mess that the trespassers leave behind but also the ones that Leonard makes in the house when he spills his drinks (2001, 43). S as a child/lover brought Ruth a sense of safety in the domestic sphere. When Ruth discusses her distaste for the town, both for its insecurity—which shows her middle-class bias—and because she fears the sea—ironically, S's alleged place of death—she tells Leonard: "Thought it something I'd get over conquer in time with you Leon—with *the three of us* here together" (Quin 2001, 3; emphasis mine). S's presence not only provided Ruth with the experience of an existence outside of social norms but also with the possibility of imagining a different future, more promising altogether.

Despite fearing outside forces, Ruth's marriage had already been trespassed by S. However, after her disappearance, Ruth identifies herself as the trespasser in the couple: "But lately I have felt almost an intruder" (Quin 2001, 124). Ruth and Leonard's relationship after S brings them no pleasure and nothing to look forward to. They cannot go back to live in a heteronormative time now they have experienced something different. Ruth sees no future in her marriage besides tolerating one another, a perception that challenges her bourgeois view of domesticity as a safe haven: "I see him as from a cage. Then I think of them together. Yet there is nothing definite to go by. No substantial evidence as it were. At least everything here around has substance gives us security. A home we have built up together" (Quin 2001, 124). Now, this seemingly ideal home has become "a cage" from which she observes S and Leonard together through their diaries, and the lack of direction that the couple faces. The perceived security in the home, hence, has shown itself to be false, a façade. The discovery of S's affair with her husband unveils the impossibility of realizing heteronormative expectations and reveals the precariousness of material comfort in the face of affective disruption. Still,

Leonard expects Ruth to conform to homemaking and heterosexuality within the couple, given her class and gender.

Further, the lack of sexual connection between Ruth and Leon becomes evident after S's demise. Leonard does not satisfy Ruth and she eludes his approaches (Quin 2001, 15). When they do have sex, the encounters are described as violent, never leading to her reaching orgasm:

> Wish you'd keep still Ruth I can't do it properly ah that's better. Oh darling don't bite like that oh no Leon not now nooooooooh. He drew back, brush held against himself. They gazed at the purple flesh protruding from the water. You always have to get sexy in the bath Leon. Sorry. Well you must admit it's hardly the time or place. . . . I said I was sorry love.
>
> (44)

The refusal to have sex with her husband turns Ruth into an outcast, placing her on the margins of the logic of the family home, which has already been flouted in their relationship with S. Further, Ruth identifies sex with Leon as a kind of exploitation for his own pleasure that she "refuses" to undergo, and even regrets "not having [female] lovers before marriage" (Quin 2001, 124). As Halberstam points out, "gender failure often means being relieved of the pressure to measure up to patriarchal ideals, not succeeding at womanhood can offer unexpected pleasures" (2011, 4). S's trespassing subverts Ruth's ideas about her marriage and her sexual identity, prompting her to reconsider her gendered obligations by reading and listening to S's diaries.

Ruth's attraction for the girl, her deviation from "compulsory heterosexuality" (Rich 1980), is presented in murderous tones in Ruth's journal: "The time when we were on the bed together, her white neck, hadn't my fingers felt a strange tingling intention, as though they were someone else's hands, a murderer's hands grafted?" (Quin 2001, 125). The ambivalent feelings of sexual attraction and repulse, of motherly love and grief for S's absence—Ruth still lays the table for three people (Quin 2001, 48)—shed light on the couple's "continual return to S" (Williams 2013, 81). Reading S's diaries, Ruth is confronted with how she and her marriage were perceived, including the sexual violence that her husband regularly submits Ruth to. As Williams underlines, "S's reduction of Leonard and Ruth's lives mocks them" (2013, 105); the rendering reverses the power dynamics between them. Ruth tells Leonard after listening to S's audiotapes that she does not identify with S's theatrical rendering of the couple: "Funny how she observed us quite honestly I would have never recognised ourselves from her descriptions" (Quin 2001, 117). Yet Quin's depiction of the couple's interactions as banal, violent, and superficial unveils the theatricality of their relationship. In fact, Leonard and Ruth are only referred to by their initials in S's journals, becoming characters in her own narrative: R and L. Thus, Ruth not only becomes engaged with S's journals with Leonard to find out why—and if—the girl killed herself but

also begins to read them on her own, first to find more about S and Leonard's affair and then to reorient her recognition of herself and her marriage. Eventually, this disidentification from the norm leads Ruth to write a journal of her own, that is, to regain authorial control over her story. S's writing becomes, as it were, a legacy queering Ruth's future, providing an escape from the heterosexual matrix she is trapped in.

Gestures of Difference

According to Bonnie Honig, "[r]efusal is a mode of going on whose success *is* its failure to follow the rule" (2022, para. 2; italics in the original). In her essay "Grammars of Refusal," Honig, following Wittgenstein, theorizes what a grammar of refusal might be like, and how it might propel us to "imagine its radical beyond" (2022, para. 6). In other words, alternative forms of representation might give way to creating a different reality. In this sense, the narrative uncertainty found in *Three*, and the need to understand S and her possible death "are the destabilising core of this text, primarily coinciding in the problem of interpretation" (Williams 2013, 77).

However difficult, or precisely because S's writing is described as "difficult" (Quin 2001, 77) or "illegible" (Quin 2001, 51) by the couple, the failure of reading S rests on the couple's inability to understand her way of experiencing life. They end up declining any responsibility for what happened to S after they go through her journals and find "not a word not a clue" (2001, 116). This reaction speaks both about social fears of indeterminacy after the war (Hansen 2022, 66), which fostered postwar conformity, but also about the couple's inability to admit to each other what S has meant for them and how their marriage cannot go on as before. While S's writing does not elicit an ethical response from the couple regarding S's fate (Guy 2022, 84–85), S's refusal to fit in normative narratives gives way to new possibilities of living or imagining femininity beyond constraining postwar stereotypes and the neoliberal commodification of the heterosexual economy.

As Ellen Friedman and Miriam Fuchs assert, refusal to be constrained into narrative conventions of teleology, progression, and linearity entails a break with the political project behind those elements:

> Plot linearity that implies a story's purposeful forward movement; a single, authoritative storyteller; well-motivated characters interacting in recognizable social patterns; the crucial conflict deterring the protagonist from the ultimate goal; the movement to closure—all are parts of dominant fictional structure.
>
> (1989, 4)

Disrupting and deviating from these realist narrative expectations implies breaking away from the values that these conventions assert. As Cohen argues, Quin's experimental style attempts to "break out of the straitening of

both monogamy and realism" (2020, viii). Linearity is refused by inserting S's written and audiotaped journals throughout the third-person accounts of the present, and the narrative is further fragmented by offering different perspectives: S's journals, the third-person narrator, newspaper pieces, and Ruth's and Leonard's diaries. But it is also done by denying narrative closure. Likewise, this narrative refusal can be read hand in hand with Ruth's gradual refusal of compulsory heterosexuality. S is, as she acknowledges "[p]ursued by a compulsion to jeopardise such a bourgeois stronghold" (2001, 61). By symbolically and sexually breaking into their home, S lays bare how fragile heteronormative conventions are. As Jacques affirms, "[h]aving set up Ruth and Leonard as a 'normal couple,' Quin immediately destabilizes them" (2016, 156). Significantly, as Brian Evenson and Diana Howard point out, S arrived at Ruth and Leonard's home on April's Fools' Eve (2003, 61), which underscores Quin's mocking of the institution of heterosexual marriage as a firm and secure entity necessary for the reproduction of the nation. Quin's break with realist conventions mirrors S's "unreadability," signaling the existence of other ways of reproducing and living beyond the norm.

S queers Leonard and Ruth's marriage by sleeping with both of them, but she also indirectly teaches Ruth different ways and strategies to live as a woman. For instance, she tells Ruth that she masturbates, and the reader then sees Ruth doing it herself (Quin 2001, 13). Though Ruth then judges S when she recounts it to Leonard, she hides the fact that she now does it herself: "Yes she did she told me one afternoon even suggested I do it. And? What a thing" (Quin 2001, 45). In her absence, the more that she learns about her, the more that Ruth begins to embody her. She begins to wear S's clothes and perfume, fantasizing about herself-as-S in the mirror: "In front of the mirror she pulled her breasts up by holding several necklaces above her neck" (2001, 12). As Williams observes, this identification with S "anticipates the rape scene" (2013, 100n37) that will take place in the married couple. In other words, by transgressing her role of the postwar housewife and performing S, even if this is only in private, she will also be subjected to violence. Although when she is with Leonard she tries to convince him that "I'm happy of course of course I'm happy we're happy aren't we Leon" (Quin 2001, 126), once that S has happened in their lives, the couple cannot go back to how they were.

One of S's hobbies was miming, and it is implied that she wanted to become an actress (Quin 2001, 6). In these miming games, the three of them come together, role-play, and dramatize the stakes of their threesome. Leonard and S become especially involved in the game, as S recalls in her journals: "We write little scenarios, which R half-heartedly joins in. We improvise as we go along. My favorite one with the masks is just the three of us, two rejects one, or one rejects two, or all three reject each other, or equally accept" (Quin 2001, 66). Miming consists of silently imitating another person through observation, which S does, learning to interpret Ruth and Leonard

through their movements and gestures, and to hide her intentions as well. As S explains in her journal, miming provided her with a deeper understanding of others and helped her care less about what others thought of her (Quin 2001, 62). These masks, as Jennifer Hodgson explains, allow S to transgress boundaries in her relationships with Leonard and Ruth and to break social norms in an almost parodic way (2014, 14). The mime show is "both a reading and a performance" of the couple (Williams 2013, 92), a way of rehearsing new forms of relating to one another, laying bare that Ruth and Leonard's apparently conventional marriage is as much a performance as their improvisations. Yet in the miming play, there is a great chance that one of them, if not all, is rejected. These gestures then enhance both the possibility of new ways of relationality as well as the risk of failure, given that their relationship lacks references and stands outside the norm.

Though S's journals mostly reflect sexual encounters with Leonard, a different type of emotional and sensual intimacy seems to arise between S and Ruth: "A certain intimacy sprung up between us [R and S] that somehow never exists when L is around" (Quin 2001, 141). They spent days together, S taking care of Ruth when she would not get up from bed—she might have been ill or depressed—brushing her hair, and listening to her (Quin 2001, 112). A relationship develops between the two women, showing a different way of relating to one another and experiencing pleasure, one situated outside the male gaze and male pleasure. It is implied that Ruth and S also have sex, as depicted in S's journal:

> Never before. Not like this. No one has touched me ever
> never
> like this. Before. Like waves. The coming
> slowly. Dual roles
> realised. Yes yes
> yes
> Be a boy. If you like. Anything. Be
> Just be.
>
> (2001, 114)[7]

When Ruth finds this narration in the audiotapes, she listens to it obsessively (Quin 2001, 118), as though reveling in the memory of this new encounter, whether it really happened or not. Morley has defined the writing in *Three* as an "on-going exploration of sexual self-identity" (1999, 131), a becoming through form. S's writing, like Cixous's "*écriture feminine*" (1976)[8] provides shape to things that Ruth may not otherwise utter. According to Cixous, this type of writing provokes a break with the past, aims to leave rules and convention behind and "foresee the unforeseeable" (1976, 875). Indeed, the line "Be a boy" implies a "de-gender[ing] of femaleness" (Honig 2022, para. 7) that leads us to read S's writing as a "grammar of refusal" of

gender, social, and sexual norms, which are then spread to Ruth. Since dialogues are not laid out, it is difficult to distinguish who is speaking, but it is definitely not a heterosexual relationship, nor one defined by conventional gender or sexual standards. S's writing, like her miming, stands up against an "[e]xistence bound by habit. Hope. Theirs" (Quin 2001, 21), against the tyranny of postwar conformity. In her journal, she wonders "[h]ow to begin to find a shape—to begin to begin again—turning the inside out" (Quin 2001, 56). In searching for a means of expression outside of heteronormativity, S's diaries embody a different kind of experience of subjectivity and sexuality that women are not allowed to project. This writing, thus, entails "*the very possibility of change*" (Cixous 1976, 879; original emphasis). S's diaries engender the effect of returning Ruth to her body, following Cixous (1976, 880), writing her journal using the first person, and reclaiming bodily autonomy.

Whereas at the beginning of the novel there were only fact-based entries to be found in Ruth's journal, such as "March 31st S moved in" (Quin 2001, 2), an entry on November 1st, told from Ruth's perspective, displays a shift. The reader gets a first-person insight into her thoughts on their marriage and how she acknowledges that she would leave Leonard if it were not such a big effort to do so. S's look at Ruth through her poetic, sensory-based accounts deviates and illuminates Ruth's insight into her life, placing her outside of the "male gaze" (Mulvey 1975). Then, the third-person narrator recounts a marital rape scene, confirming Ruth's fear of violence in the home and her feeling of "see[ing] him as from a cage" (2001, 124). In fact, the rape takes place after Leonard reads S's narrated encounter between S and Ruth, as if he were trying to impose compulsory heterosexuality back on her and punish Ruth for her deviation.

After S's disappearance, Ruth begins to reject Leonard sexually and scorn him, thus questioning the legitimacy of their relationship. The novel, hence, enacts the shift from a postwar conception of love and marriage, where the project of the family and the project of the nation are closely aligned, to the more individualized conception of love that will begin to emerge during the 1960s. In this sense, the so-called sexual revolution of the 1960s—a deregulation, in economic terms, in the number of prospective sexual partners, either serialized or at the same time—did not necessarily bring women more freedom, for it ended up turning women into marketable objects of desire who self-surveil their own worth and safety (Illouz 2012, 43). The sixties, then, figure in the novel as the lost opportunity to perform a different way of living establishing kinship through pleasure. This can be seen in the resulting outcomes for both Ruth and S at the end of the novel, which proves that their ability to live freely and undefined by social norms, especially regarding bodily autonomy, has no future.

S is a foil to Ruth, the symbol of the sexually liberated girl emerging in 1960s Britain (O'Callaghan 2019, 117). Ruth's antagonism towards her continues in the aftermath of her disappearance, for she even admits that

she felt "a kind of relief when she was dead," as though she had almost wished for it to happen (Quin 2001, 125). S is thus described by Ruth to Leonard: "She was on a diet though she hardly needed to. Rather inclined on the plump side Leon you said so you remember. Only when I first knew her but she changed perhaps the op and everything your black dress fitted her. Had to for that party. Yes like skin. Far too short of course but she would have it" (Quin 2001, 2). S diets, drinks, dresses sexily, and appears to feel no shame about it, enacting the carefree and sexually liberated girl whose value, though, will eventually come to be defined by the sexual market. She reverses the social status of women that was defined by what Eva Illouz calls their "social fate: taking care of and loving others, and mothers, wives, and lovers" (2012, 8). S does not wish to be a mother or a homemaker, and she sleeps with people of both genders. In the 1960s, women became "sexual agents through the ideal of sexualized beauty" (Illouz 2012, 43), upon a promise of sexual freedom that is eventually deflated, since they turned into objects of consumption at the same time. As Denise Rose Hansen affirms, "S comes to represent everything Ruth is unable to locate in herself" (2022, 86), which leads her to question herself but also to resent her and criticize her in public.

Leonard does contribute to Ruth's judgment, for he adds that "she was let's admit a bit of an exhibitionist" because she swam in the lake quite often "with nothing on," something that Ruth regards with both admiration and envy: "Well one never knows who's watching frankly I don't know how she dared" (Quin 2001, 41). Though Leonard and Ruth enjoyed S's company, they both are extremely prejudiced and judgmental about her for not fitting into the postwar expectations for a woman. They even judge her more harshly when they gather from her journals that she had undergone an abortion and was suffering from mental health issues. But because Leonard and Ruth refuse to understand S's life experience, they both ignore her possible past suffering. Instead, Leonard justifies her suicide in Freudian terms: "In love with love Ruth I think plus a father complex" (Quin 2001, 116). On her part, Ruth recalls seeing S dancing with one of the rowdy men on the beach, as though trying to justify S's death as a result of her liberated sexuality. She comments, "I thought she looked obscene really the way her legs spread out." To this, Leonard replies that "they all do that don't they. . . . The primitive urge," implying that all women behave obscenely. Perhaps seeing S as belonging to a lower class, Ruth refuses to identify with her, at least in front of Leonard, so she replies that she "[c]an't see anything in it [herself]" (Quin 2001, 44). This demonstrates that Leonard sees all women as equally interchangeable and expendable for his pleasure regardless of which role they occupy—housewife or sexually liberated girl—while Quin negates this by contrasting these two very different women who nevertheless may suffer from very similar fates. In the end, both roles are defined insofar as they are fit for the pleasure and convenience of men and therefore rendered into objects to be consumed.

Consequently, whether it was inside or outside the marriage, bodily autonomy for women was fragile and ephemeral, a concern dismissed by men. However, as Clare O'Callaghan argues, social perception and convention still limited how women behaved sexually in the sixties (2019, 200). That is, sexual permissiveness did become laxer in the case of men, but a double standard still endured. Further, this apparent permissiveness did impact women negatively, especially if they had no contraception options, whose impact was decisive in granting women ownership over their sexuality (O'Callaghan 2019, 198). S still had the freedom to decide not to carry her pregnancy to term, but Ruth, within the confines of her marriage, is doomed to be tied to the logics of reproduction, regardless of her success. Yet Leonard can afford the double standard. Despite his evident affair with S and possibly other girls, Leonard reproaches Ruth for her involvement with the girl and the trespassing of the boundary of monogamy: "You joined in readily enough Ruth. What could I do remain a passive outsider to all your games then? You seem to enjoy them I rather thought. Well—well I'd hardly have thought you were aware whether I did or not" (Quin 2001, 6). The discovery of S and Ruth's encounter leads Leonard to read Ruth's written journal entry written in the first person, and subsequently to rape her (2001, 127–28), as though reasserting his authority over her own narrative authority. Ruth's refusal to comply with postwar expectations of femininity and heteronormativity is read as a failure that must be punished.

S's bodily autonomy is ever at risk. The last entry in S's journal might be read as a confirmation of S's suicide: "The boat is ready, as planned. And all that's necessary now is a note. I know nothing will change" (2001, 143). However, her last words, "I know nothing will change," also point out the never-ending, pervasive violence against women. Hers will be another female body found dead, just like the ones that appear every day in the newspaper. Therefore, nothing will change, or perhaps it will. While S mentions going to the lake often in her diary and pictures a body drifting out with the current (Quin 2001, 139), this reading is complicated by the fact that S runs into the house trespassers when rowing in the lake at night: "I recognised several of the men who had beaten up L. They played some game with knives on the sand and beckoned me over" (2001, 139). The scene of Ruth's rape by Leonard is followed by him calmly getting in bed and reading a newspaper where there is a piece of news about the finding of the "unclothed body of an unidentified young woman, with stab wounds in the back and abdomen" (2001, 131) close to the place where S's boat was found. Whether this is S's or another woman's body is not revealed, and it does not seem to matter, for, by juxtaposing these two scenes, the text illustrates that violence against women is everywhere, regardless of whether they conform to the role of submissive housewife or venture out in the world. Since we never find out whether the body belongs to her and only her coat is found in the "capsized boat" containing a "note in pocket—looks like suicide" (2001, 41), she might have just disappeared, willingly or not (Jordan 2020, 151–52). Without a body

to solve the mystery, S's journals remain as her only legacy to embody her experience and transmit the possibility of shaping a different future.

Conclusion

As I have argued, S's presence, both through her journals and her impact on Ruth and Leonard's marriage, queers the representation of temporality in *Three*, providing an escape from the logic of the postwar nuclear family. S's diaries offer glimpses into different ways of belonging and relating to each other, even if momentarily: "Have you tried it with three? Have you? Be three now" (Quin 2001, 142). S's presence in Leonard and Ruth's marriage took them out of the heteronormative time of reproduction and allowed for the creation of kinship through pleasure, a genealogy of queer time theorized by Elizabeth Freeman (2010). The threesome described in *Three* illustrates how seemingly contradictory discourses may take place at once, just as in the sixties the compulsory role of the perfect housewife began to coexist with the ideal of the sexually liberated woman. Yet this ideal became again endorsed through the male gaze and situated within a neoliberal economy of consumerism and reification of female bodies.

As shown in their homoerotic relationship, S and Ruth refuse, if only temporarily, the heterosexual economy. These instances appear brief and ambivalent but remain full of potential for change. S's journals do not only deviate from Ruth and Leonard's narrative expectations by presenting them with a mocking rendering of their lives but also by refusing to reveal what happened to S. Particularly, in the case of Ruth, S's journals help her reassess her attempts at fitting in suffocating demands for the postwar housewife, which encompass all sorts of care labor, from housework to being sexually attractive and submissive, and bring her back to the search for her own pleasure and the expression of her subjectivity.

However, heteronormative time is eventually restored through violence, through the disappearance and likely death of S and the marital rape of Ruth. As Halberstam argues, queer temporality can assess social changes and foster new ways to think about the future collectively. It is not only breaks with the past that are signaled, but "what must change" (Halberstam 2005, 4) is also brought to the fore. In this sense, even if the futures of S and Ruth seem uncertain, bleak, and lack closure, their attempts at escaping patriarchal oppression and engaging in different ways of relating to others may inspire different futures of knowing and feeling.

Notes

1 This research is part of the project "Cultural History of Gestures" (PID2022–141667NB-I00), funded by the Spanish Ministry of Science and Innovation (10.13039/501100011033).

2 See for instance the special issue dedicated to Quin in *Women: A Cultural Review* published in 2022 and edited by Nonia Williams. Williams' introductory article,

"(Re)turning from Ann Quin: An Introduction" is especially useful for situating the scholarly discussion on Quin's work.

3 See Adam Guy's *The* nouveau roman *and Writing in Britain After Modernism* (2019).

4 Julia Jordan reads these authors as late modernist rather than postmodern, drawing on their philosophical concerns with error and uncertainty (2020, 4).

5 See Andrew Radford and Hannah Van Hove's introduction to *British Experimental Women's Fiction, 1945–1975: Slipping Through the Labels* (2021), where they provide an overview to the reception and recent reexamination of British postwar experimental authors.

6 See Adam Guy (2022) for a discussion of *Three* in relation with the rise of the commercial tape recorder.

7 Nonia Williams reads S's "performative nature" of her poetic writing to the Black Mountain School of poetry, whom Ann Quin read and admired. These poets "sought to create poetic forms able to communicate direct experience and perception as closely as possible" (Williams 2013, 81n8).

8 By "feminine writing," Cixous does not mean writing only by women, but by subjects outside of the norm (1976, 878–80).

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12 The Rogue as a Queer Agent in Video Games

The Picaresque Novel Legacy

David Matencio Durán

Introduction

Regardless of their gender, rogues, as portrayed by the picaresque novel, have always lived outside social conventions during different historical periods. The Spanish picaresque novel of the 17th century portrays what would today be considered discriminated minorities and non-normative sexual relations, addressing queerness, as this chapter will show, in both its traditional and contemporary meanings, which coalesce together in time through video games. The queerness of rogues cannot just be found as part of a forgotten literary genre from the past. Rogues, together with what I call their queer traits, have survived the passing of time by being present in multiple media forms across the centuries. As examples of the survival of the queer rogues and their historical journey across centuries, genres, and media forms, this chapter will analyze three video games, *Baldur's Gate II: Enhanced Edition* (Beamdog 2013), *Dragon Age: Origins* (BioWare 2009), and *Fire Emblem: Three Houses* (Intelligent Systems 2019). This chapter understands every iteration of the rogue works as a queer temporal node: a knot that contains past, present, and future discourses at once. This node can be understood as the articulation of a cultural trend that grows through time from the Spanish picaresque, allowing us to access queer examples and discourses from the past contained in passages from different novels. Every representation of the rogue, regardless of when it exists, is in an ever-growing body of relations of past, present, and future rogues since it is an articulation of the literary myth of the rogue, which builds an ever-expanding network of rhizomatic relationships. In other words, every queer rogue borrows elements from their predecessors and adds new elements to the myth. Elements that, in turn, are all made available for and used in depictions of successive rogues. Additionally, this mythical and rhizomatic nature does not imply the necessity of explicit transtextual relationships between different texts, as it is part of an implicit hypertextual shared cultural encyclopedia that survives and grows through time.

To study the queer nature of the rogue myth, I will analyze the queerness of the literary rogue in picaresque novels, its transfer to the selected video games, and the similar ways both media forms—literature and video games—depict

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these characters. The analysis of the intermedia relations between the picaresque novels and video games allows us to see how traditional queer traits of the rogue have evolved and survived while gaining prominence with the passing of time. To achieve this, I will use a close reading of the literary and videoludic sources by looking at how rogues are portrayed as queer agents. After finding and analyzing their particularities, I will identify the queer traits rogues have always had. With this, I want to prove that the setting provided for and by rogues in their early literary conception is key to understanding the contemporary representations of the rogue as part of their temporal rhizomatic nature, which contains explicit and implicit queerness. Also, this analysis will be used to explain why rogues are—and have always been—an excellent vehicle to portray queer characters.

The criteria employed for the selection of novels used in this chapter is based on the presence of noticeable queer episodes and the importance of the novels within the field of picaresque text analysis. As a result, the novels selected for this analysis, all of them central to the picaresque canon, are the following ones: *Lazarillo de Tormes* (Anonymous 1554), *Guzmán de Alfarache* (Alemán 1599–1604), *El Guitón Onofre* (González 1604), *La Pícara Justina* (López de Úbeda 1605), *La Hija de Celestina* (Salas Barbadillo 1612), *El Buscón* (Quevedo 1626), *The English Rogue* (Head 1665), and *Moll Flanders* (Defoe 1722). Unlike authors such as Mireia Baldritch (2019), Florencio Sevilla (2001), Marcel Bataillon (1973), or Francisco Rico (1970), who analyze the social dimension of rogues without evaluating their queerness, I will consider that queerness as a key element of their characterization through time. This perspective in the study of picaresque literature, understood as a source of queer re-readings or as a genre where sexuality is important, has been studied by scholars such as Maximilian Novak (1974), Janine Montauban (2003), Susan Lanser (2001), Anne Cruz (2010), and Luigi Gussago (2016), who all suggest a revision of the past but are not interested in the evolution of the queer rogue in other media.

The chosen video games are paradigmatic examples featuring nuanced queer rogues. These games are symptomatic of a more general trend of queer representation through rogues found in video games. Since this analysis is focused on studying the figure of the rogue and its queerness, it will be different from papers such as Kristine Jørgensen's analysis (2003) of player agency in *Baldur's Gate II* or Joleen Blom's study (2021) of the characters of *Fire Emblem: Three Houses*. In the case of *Dragon Age: Origins*, even though there are similarities with Stephen Greer's (2013) and Kim Østby's (2017) queer analyses of the game, the focus on the rogue as a queer agent differentiates this chapter from their work, since I do not discuss one game exclusively but the temporal connection of the queer traits of rogues and their cross-media migration from literature to video games. The relationship between antagonistic characters and queerness in video games has been studied previously by Juan Francisco Belmonte (2017) and Meghan Adams (2018). In this case, this chapter features a similar approach to rogues.

Framing the Queerness of the Rogue

"Queer" has not always been used to describe individuals who defy social expectations because of their sexuality, gender, or sex. Before its current meaning, queer was used to define someone, or something, that was outside the norm. Both definitions have been used by authors such as Louise Fradenburg and Carla Freccero (1996), Lauren Berlant and Michael Warner (1998), Carolyn Dinshaw (1999), and Elizabeth Freeman (2010). The broader meaning is useful for the analysis of the early stages of the literary genre since most of the queerness of the rogue between the 17th and the 19th century was due to these characters' defiance of the expectations of what "proper" citizens were meant to be according to the dominant social groups. As Lauren Berlant and Michael Warner (1998, 558) explain, the current definition of queer started to be predominant after its meaning changed from defining every action or person outside the norm to eventually focusing on identity traits linked to gender, sex, and sexuality as current forms of dominant heteronormativity gained relevance.

The contemporary meaning of queer applies to numerous rogues we find in present picaresque fiction since they engage in queer relationships, but classic literary rogues are also queer in more than one way. As Dinshaw points out in relation to the Middle Ages (1999, 16), this does not mean that rogues were queer *avant la lettre* but that they expressed queerness in their own terms and contexts, enabling a natural connection between different forms of queerness through time. To understand why it is possible to find queer rogues in these novels, the concept of the rhizome (Deleuze and Guattari 1987, 7) is used as one of the foundations of this chapter. A rhizome can be considered a network whose nodes are continuously referring to each other across time. Within the rogue myth, every node is connected to the totality of nodes, organically altering our view of this myth's past, present, and future. The portrayal of a new rogue implies coming into contact with past rogues, actualizing the myth in the present and, also, enabling new possibilities for future representations. Therefore, the myth of the rogue works as a fertile compendium of past possible cultural references that, once articulated, works as an ever-expanding semiotic system of all-at-once connected nodes. In this way, this structure enables access to all sorts of traits and narrative episodes from the past that have been attributed to rogues in different situations, while also being connected to present interpretations and future yet-to-born instances of the myth. As Dinshaw points out (1999, 140), present and past fictions can promote, without knowing it, queer futures. The queerness of the rogue can be considered part of this rhizomatic structure, a whole group of nodes connected to every rogue that also links them to different discourses or queer episodes that populate different times and cultures outside picaresque literature.

Dinshaw's concept of *queer historical impulse*, which refers to an impulse to connect past, present, and future queer episodes with cultural phenomena

that has been left out of sexual categories (1999, 1), also allows us to study the queerness of rogues through time more effectively. This author explains (Dinshaw 1999, 18) that this impulse of *touching* the past from our present implies finding different moments in different media where queerness is manifested by different narrative strategies, defying traditional considerations and orthodox takes about the past found in those cultural expressions. Dinshaw follows the type of analyses contained in Fradenburg and Freccero's *Premodern Sexualities* (1996), where specific literary works or historical episodes are visited to unearth previously hidden queer practices. María Carrión (1996, 45) and José Piedra (1996, 23) revisit the myths of Don Juan and the Black Stud to unearth their queerness. Similarly, Tison Pugh (2008) re-reads medieval English literature to uncover past expressions of queerness. This chapter follows that same spirit, *touching* the myth of the rogue and its rhizomatic expression in literature and video games.

The first examples of rogues this chapter explores come from the 17th century, which not only marks a swift growth of the popularity of the picaresque novel, but it is also a century profoundly affected by religious unrest and political struggle, as Michel Foucault (1978, 116) points out. Despite the centrality of religion, Foucault (1978, 115) sees the 17th century as a period of more openness towards sex that caused, and was instigated by, more flexible approaches towards the portrayal of more liberal sexual practices in literature. In this period, new discourses portraying certain sexualities as indecent proliferated to create an opposition to the sacred concept of heterosexual procreation-focused sexuality that western culture spread based on Christianism (Foucault 1978, 3). However, as Foucault (1978, 23) indicates, this shift in the treatment of sexual intercourses caused the opposite effect: it amplified the reach of the narratives about sex.

The appearance of homosexual relationships within the picaresque novel may be an example of both the flexible approach to non-normative forms of sex at the beginning of the century and the proliferation of discourses exploring and criticizing non-normative sexual intercourses as the century progressed. These new discourses enabled the introduction of non-normative sexual episodes in the picaresque novel due to the lack of social prestige, following Rico's (1970, 104) analysis, that rogues had in that time as vile characters. Rogues, being outside social conventions and the law, enabled the introduction of practices that were not expected from people of higher social classes. Authors of picaresque texts offered an attractive view for the readers on the daily life of people who were out of two of the systems defined by Foucault (1978, 84, 110) that constrained the daily lives of normative people. Rogues were freed from the "deployment of alliance," a system which forced people to start a heterosexual family with constricted roles, and the "cycle of prohibition," which nullified the right to pleasure of people by imposing legal or moral restrictions. In fact, Novak (1974, 43–45) connects roguery to libertinism because of the lawless freedom they exhibit.

In literature, rogues could engage in free, extramarital sex. They could follow their instincts or even engage in relationships with different people from the upper classes, which served as both a form of class revenge and a sex-focused attempt at social climbing, making their acts enticing to the readers. As Gussago explains (2016, 126–27), rogues broke the social expectations of their social class in terms of sexuality. Consequently, they were not included in the repressive system of control, defined by Foucault (1978, 122), represented by the conventional family. Rogues operated outside of traditional legal, affective, and economic regimes, which was the perfect situation to use them as catalysts for queerness. Since rogues were already condemned, in Foucault's words (1978, 38), for being part of a minority or delinquents, they could perform any action of society's list of sins: from the sodomy methodically discussed by Dinshaw (1999, 55–99), to the cross-dressed bisexual intercourses that Mazo and Lorenzo analyze through the medieval figure of Eleanor Rykener (Mazo and Lorenzo 1996). Thus, we can see rogues being sapphic lesbians, as studied by Lanser (2001), sodomites in *El Buscón* (Quevedo 2016, 125), or cross-dressed rogues like Meriton (Head 2008, 152) or Moll (Defoe 2011, 179).

If, as Freeman suggests (2010, 7), queerness is shown by authors such as T.S. Eliot or Renée Vivien, to which I can add others such as Mateo Alemán or Francisco de Quevedo, as a sign of moral decay and queer depravity, it is important to notice that these renditions are produced from a position of power. Then, we can consider that picaresque novels were written from this perspective, meaning that these texts were written, at least on the surface, to entertain normative people by showing them the reprehensible actions of pariahs. Freeman argues that, in this type of traditional texts, queerness is perceived as a failure of the system (Freeman 2010, xvi). Following this idea, rogues, as failures, deserve erasure and are not expected to be successful, so they can embody whatever type of way of living that their societies consider immoral. As a result, authors occupy a position of power that is not only exerted through their satirical approach to the lower classes in this genre but also through their exoticist view on these roguish characters, which presents anything and everything connected to them as being unusual, hyperbolized, and prone to being ridiculed and misrepresented. Most authors belonged to the upper classes and, even if authors like Alemán or Head seem to add pseudo-autobiographical episodes from their own experiences to their texts, they wrote from the distance and safety that their lives as members of the higher classes granted them. As a result of these power dynamics, these authors reproduced a vision of queerness where this trait is used to criticize, misrepresent, and further marginalize those who are already marginalized.

Nevertheless, this approach to rogues, presented as individuals confronting the law and engaging in all sorts of non-normative sex, can be used also as a tool employed to challenge the status quo, defined by Foucault as a point of resistance (1978, 101). From Foucault's perspective, the mere existence of a text showing this kind of relationship is enough to create an opposing

discourse against the normative one. The counter-normative force of a text is even stronger when it works as a node of semantic connections through time, just like the ones established by each picaresque text, their rogues, and the rogue-like characters that came later. These texts created other forms of producing and reproducing sexual identities that did not follow existing norms.

As Freeman points out (2010, xxii), instances of queer time in literature can be found when the established temporal order of a text is interrupted to introduce an explicit or implicit queer episode. Two canonical picaresque novels, *Guzmán de Alfarache* and *El Guitón Onofre*, contain examples of Freeman's queer time. In *Guzmán*, a queer episode is found when the rogue leaves his master, the ambassador of France in Rome, with whom it was suggested that he had a romantic relationship (Alemán 2021, 63–64). The text introduces a brief departure from the usual style of narration of the novel. The novel abandons its non-sentimental approach and adopts an emotional one where the protagonist describes the love his, also male, master felt for him: "He and his servants were profoundly touched by my departure. He loved me and he was losing me because, without a doubt, I had been of service to his pleasure and needs" (Alemán 2021, 141).[1]

Something similar happens in *El Guitón Onofre* where, in the episode of departure of Onofre and don Diego, the sudden change in the text's non-romantic narration, the references to prostitution, and the use of certain adjectives may indicate a homosexual relationship between them:

> I lost that which was good in my life, my relief, and my shelter. I lost my sweetest half, which made us a perfect whole. And even though he usually told me off, we were like a prostitute and a pimp because lovers quarrel to improve their love.
>
> (González 1988, 230)[2]

These queer episodes are the result of a halt in the regular non-romantic narration, and they are isolated passages of queerness between completely unrelated events. In fact, these are the only explicit references to love from the rogues in these novels. The words used, such as "prostitute," "pimp," or the idea of lovers quarreling, are patent signs of the introduction of a queer narrative time within the text, opening a door to homosexual interpretations. Additionally, the pace of the text is broken to introduce these themes, since the narration changes its focus and narration style when these fragments appear. From the serious narration after leaving his job to the romantic segment in *Guzmán* and from the grave end of relationship between Diego and Onofre to the romantic narration using verbs like "love" or concepts as "lovers quarrels" in *Guitón*.

The queer sexual relationships within the picaresque genre are a consequence of the proliferation of discourses on sex and sexuality during the 17th century, especially those criticizing queer relationships. It also set the rogue as a queer agent with easy-to-identify queer features articulated throughout many of the picaresque novels that were published during this period.

Queer Particularities of the Rogue and Evolution of the Genre

The picaresque novel emerged as a distinctive narrative genre between the 16th and 17th century in Spain. The first picaresque novel is the anonymous *Lazarillo de Tormes* from 1554, which introduced a character that had most of the characteristics that rogues would have in future picaresque narratives. *Guzmán de Alfarache* (1599–1604) by Mateo Alemán, considered the main work of this genre, was translated into English as *The Spanish Rogue* by James Mabbe in 1622 with great success. The first female rogue was introduced in *La Pícara Justina* in 1605 by Francisco López de Úbeda, which was quickly followed by *La Hija de Celestina* by Alonso Jerónimo Salas Barbadillo in 1612. The huge success of Mabbe's translation of *Guzmán de Alfarache* and other novels such as *El Buscón*, sparked the publication of dozens of picaresque novels and reeditions of the Spanish ones in England as Alexander Parker indicates (1971, 156). This started a new trend of English picaresque narratives, where we can find the canonical *The English Rogue* (1665), by Richard Head. During this period, English narratives were influenced by the Spanish picaresque as well as by works with roguish characters such as those found in Miguel de Cervantes' *Exemplary Novels* (1613) 2018. After the Spanish influence in the English narratives, the rogue became an international literary myth used in different English novels throughout the 18th century such as *Moll Flanders* by Daniel Defoe (1722) and Tobias Smollett's picaresque novels, such as *Roderick Random* (1748). In the 19th century, rogues were also present in Charles Dickens's *Oliver Twist* (1837–1839) and William Thackeray's *The Luck of Barry Lyndon* (1844) in the United Kingdom before crossing the Atlantic Ocean and reaching the United States with Mark Twain's *Tom Sawyer* (1876) and *Huckleberry Finn* (1884). Later, in the 20th century we can track the rogue to a fantasy setting in works like J.R.R. Tolkien's *The Hobbit* (1936) or *Fafhrd and Grey Mouser*'s saga by Fritz Leiber (1939–1988). As Jon Peterson (2012, 120–27) points out, these works were a great inspiration for the development of *Dungeon and Dragons* and other tabletop role-playing games (TRPGs), transferring the rogue's characteristics to them; TRPGs themselves being an inspiration for many digital RPGs during the last decades of the 20th century, as Michael Tresca explains (2011, 36). During this evolution of picaresque, the queer picaresque traits, and others inherent to the literary rogue, became part of the rhizomatic mass of elements connecting past, present, and future rogues.

Social Determinism

Rogues, since their conception, have been a type of character whose origins limit their chances to thrive within their society. Ethnicity, social class, or gender are key to understanding why roguish characters are pushed towards crime to try to succeed in life. In the first examples of the rogue in the Spanish picaresque, such as in *La Pícara Justina* (López de Úbeda 2012, 334–35), the

condition of pariah that rogues have originate in their families and ancestors, who are often marginalized because of their ethnicity, religion, and and/or social class. Rogues tend to be raised by parents who are also criminals but, in the infrequent cases where the parents are not participating in felonious activities, there is something that never changes: rogues live in the crudest poverty most of their lives, as we see in *Guzmán* or *Guitón* (Alemán 2020, 162; González 1988, 80). Since they are not accepted in the communities inhabited by more normative citizens, rogues live with little food, with a very limited access to education, and surrounded by delinquents. During their childhood they learn to rob and scam, while seeing how prostitutes do their jobs. This mixture of extreme poverty and crime limits the expectations of the rogue, who sees delinquency as the only way to survive and prosper. At first, these criminal activities may make the rogues go through moral dilemmas, usually being forced by cruel masters, as can be seen in *El Guitón Onofre* (González 1988, 108), but, after some critical situations, rogues understand that a stiff morality is an obstacle in their lives. These lives, which are marked by extreme need, push them to develop a flexible morality that becomes a useful tool each time they face a decision or a difficult situation.

Non-Normative Sexuality

Rogues rarely take part in traditional romantic relationships. Due to their early influences and their surroundings, it is normal for them to have extra-marital sex or multiple lovers, or they may use sex to achieve economic stability. Seducing others and prostituting themselves are also common tools rogues employ from an early age. For rogues, as we see in *La Pícara Justina* and *Moll Flanders* (López de Úbeda 2012, 148–49; Defoe 2011, 50), this instrumentalization of their body is not problematic, since it is another tool used for survival.

This flexible approach to sex leads to moments in the narration, or queer episodes, where same-sex relationships happen. In *Guzmán*, a queer episode breaks the pace of the narration in a chapter where Guzman and his apprentice are plotting a scam. In this episode, Guzmán's apprentice takes off his master's clothes and sleeps with him (Alemán 2021, 242). This situation is explained as if it were a daily action that master and apprentice perform, leaving the nature of their relationship open to interpretation. Examples such as this one show that queerness is often conveyed ambiguously or vaguely hinted.

In *The English Rogue* there are multiple situations where this kind of relationships can be inferred. This can be seen in the "wicked practices" that Meriton's father, obsessed with seduction, carried as a student and that point at the character's past homosexual actions (Head 2002, 5). The novel, then, influenced by the social determinism often found in this genre, connects Meriton's actions and experiences with his father's past same-sex sexual acts. In one chapter, Meriton is kissed by a man during the episode

in which he cross-dresses in order to hide from the law and scam the kisser (Head 2002, 77).

Non-normative sexualities are often accompanied in these novels with pedophilia and even incest. An extreme example of extramarital non-normative sex, heterosexual in this case, can also be found in *The English Rogue*, where Meriton takes part in incestuous orgies (Head 2002, 29). Another example of non-normative sexual desire can be found in the episode of hinted homosexual pedophilia from *Lazarillo de Tormes* (Anonymous 2019, 111), in which Lazarillo implies that he is fleeing from the tutelage of a clergyman after being sexually abused by him.

Crossdressing, a common practice in picaresque, sometimes leads to homoerotic situations where characters engage, explicitly or implicitly, in queer touching and kissing. The many personas rogues adopt through cross-dressing allow them to express gender and sexuality identities fluidly, as we see in *Moll Flanders* (Defoe 2011, 179). These queer episodes combine the oppressive morality of the authors of these novels—interested in criticizing the queer acts their texts were depicting, with valuable glimpses of other forms of desiring that were out of the question in that time. Shortly after, these characteristics, with their queerness, were condensed in the myth of the rogue and allowed the use of rogues to represent queerness in different media and times.

The Modern Rogue as a Queer Agent in Video Games

The setting and context provided for roguish characters in their stories have enabled different iterations of the myth through different time periods until today. In recent years, rogues that answer to a modern definition of queer have proliferated. Focusing on the queer traits of videoludic rogues, we can see how these characters are again usually portrayed as occupying some sort of marginal position in their societies. They may belong to an oppressed ethnic group or to sexual minorities. In the digital RPG *Baldur's Gate II: Enhanced Edition* (2013), a remaster of BioWare's *Baldur's Gate II* (2000), we can find a series of companions defined by the class *thief*, which is the label used for rogues in this game. Every thief has roguish skills related to thievery and stealth such as pickpocketing, hiding in shadows, using light weapons—such as daggers—or lockpicking. They also benefit from stats related to dexterity, something appropriate for rogues. Even though all the thief characters of this game fit in the mold of the rogue, two of them, Haer'Dalis and Hexxat, are paradigmatic for our topic of discussion.

Haer'Dalis follows the traditional definition of queer by being a social pariah who is oppressed because of his race. He is a *tiefling*, the result of human-fiend crossbreeding. *Tieflings* are feared and suspected in the world of *Baldur's Gate II*, which causes them to be rejected continuously from most societies that shape the game's world. It clearly echoes the situation of ethnic discrimination found in traditional literary rogues. Due to this, he is aware of

his position as an oppressed individual and shows resentment towards other characters from the upper classes, like Nalia. Haer'Dalis is a *bard*, a subclass of the *thief*, who has been traveling with a troupe for quite some time as a playwright, a characteristic which is also common for the literary rogue, as we see in *El Buscón* (Quevedo 2016, 161–65). One of his key traits is his flexibility and openness. In his interactions with Yoshimo, another rogue, Haer'Dalis continuously shows a flexible approach towards different moral dilemmas in his dialogues. Additionally, he seems to be interested in open relationships, as shown in his dialogues with different characters. Haer'Dalis also acts flexibly according to his needs, since he has never had a comfortable life.

The second rogue is Hexxat, a lesbian vampire, who in addition to being the only lesbian party member in the game, is also a person of color. Hexxat is a thief who was raised by her aunts and whose job used to be stealing artifacts from tombs. In one of these adventures, she was turned into a vampire, a creature profoundly feared and despised, becoming an immediate outcast, even more than she was already as a regular thief. Her dark skin is a topic of interest for some of the characters, like Yoshimo or Haer'Dalis, who show that it is something unusual for them. Hexxat considers herself a victim of her vampirism but understands that she must kill to survive. Her evil deeds are unavoidable and are caused by her circumstances. This allows the game to develop a gray morality towards assassination and the different criminal acts across the different interactions she has with other characters, especially with Jan, another rogue. As a result, and because of her skills as a rogue, her sexual orientation, her skin color, and her vampirism, Hexxat is portrayed as a profoundly marginalized and queer—in the historical and contemporary sense of the word—individual.

As we can see, both characters of *Baldur's Gate II: Enhanced Edition* have the queer traits previously described and fit in both definitions of queer. These characters introduce queer narrative time, enabling narratives about oppression while also opening the door to the portrayal of the non-normative in the game. Similarly, these characters queerify time by using modified past picaresque references in the present that also influence how that past is perceived. *Baldur's Gate II* also influences games that came out later, such as BioWare's *Dragon Age: Origins* (2009).

In *Dragon Age: Origins* we can find two bisexual characters who are also *rogues*: Zevran and Leliana. Rogues in this game also have roguish skills related to lockpicking, hiding in shadows, and assassination techniques such as backstabbing or poison making. They benefit from stats called "cunning" and "dexterity" that enhance their performance as rogues: words that fit canonical definitions of some of the abilities of past rogues.

Zevran is an elf, an oppressed race in *Dragon Age*'s world. His father, a poor person pursued by debts, died before he was born. Zevran's mother then was forced to become a prostitute, just like Lazarillo's mother (Anonymous 2019, 14), which eventually caused her death soon after Zevran was born. Later, he was raised by the prostitutes of the brothel where his mother

died, and there he learnt about seduction, cunning schemes, and stealing. After his time in the brothel, he was taught to be a professional assassin and thief. Because of this, during the game he is shown to understand his own sexuality fluidly and consider the different actions of delinquents acceptable and reasonable. His queerness has been studied before by Belmonte (2013), who discusses the way video games often connect homosexuality and unlawful tendencies.

Leliana is another rogue with a specialization called *bard*, like Haer'Dalis. Her background is that of a noblewoman, but she lost her mother when she was a child, causing her to have a mixed past: that of a privileged lady and an orphaned outsider. Later, a character called Marjolaine taught her many roguish abilities and encouraged her to perform criminal actions. Fearing that her apprentice might be better than her, the master betrayed Leliana, causing her to end up in prison, tortured, and sexually abused. After this episode, she became highly religious, trying to escape from her master's teachings. During the game, Leliana might embrace once again her true nature as an adventurous rogue with the help of the player. If she does, Leliana and Zevran may share some words about their talents and criminal actions, showing that both acknowledge their jobs as rogues. In these dialogues, Leliana explains that while she does not enjoy some parts of her job, she also understands that some sacrifices must be done to survive, like Zevran or Hexxat. As a result, Leliana and Zevran fit in the traits pointed out previously and bring not only queer topics to the narrative of the game but, as in the previous game, establish a temporal connection towards a queer past, present, and future.

The same approach is observed in *Fire Emblem: Three Houses*' "Cindered Shadows" downloadable content, where we can find Yuri, a rogue who fits perfectly in the mold explained in this chapter. He is a bisexual *trickster* who is called "The Underground Lord" and the leader of a band of thieves and assassins belonging to the lower classes. Tricksters are the equivalent of rogues in the game, performing actions such as stealing and lockpicking.

Yuri was born from a prostitute and an unknown father in one of the poorest towns of his home country. After a series of events, he was adopted by a nobleman who abused him sexually and hired him as an assassin to kill a rival of his adopted family. He failed the task, and, after some other scandals, he ended up living in the underground slums. Yuri responds to the definition of queer because he is considered a low-class pariah and because of his sexual orientation. We learn that he is bisexual due to his paired endings and flirtatious interactions with female and male characters alike. He has learnt to use his body to fulfill his objectives, seducing noblemen and noblewomen without exception. The objective of his criminal actions is to give poor children a place to live in peace, even if it is by performing immoral actions. Like the previous rogues discussed in this chapter, Yuri accepts his contradictions, showing a practical approach toward morals in the different interactions that the player may have with him during the game.

The selected video games for this chapter recontextualize the characteristics of the literary rogue, developing further both a narrative temporal queerness and a queering of time that was already present in picaresque literature. Social determinism and non-normative sexuality, two key traits defining literary rogues as characters, are still made relevant in the transition of the myth to videogames. Their background and misfortunes, used to tackle questions on sexuality and social determinism, echo previous picaresque literary texts. Nonetheless, in these modern examples of the myth, their queerness is central for their characterization, and, unlike the literary rogue's queerness, it is not used to criticize their practices. It shows a reinterpretation of the past and the creation of a new path towards queer rogues and discourses that are not subject to censorship in contemporary and future articulations of the myth. At the same time, those who play queer rogues in video games will see past literary rogues and picaresque novels through the lens of someone who has already experienced their contemporary queerness, modifying their view on them. Therefore, they will queerify the past, inferring that some connections between different articulations of the myth are based on a queerness that already existed in the past.

Conclusion

Every shared queer trait between videoludic rogues and literary rogues is due to the constant evolution of the myth of the rogue and its particularities. The rogue became a magnificent recipient to reflect on the connection between processes of minority-making and oppression as well as the interactions between non-normative identities and oppressive norms. At the same time, this evolution works as a rhizomatic mass of semiotic links that connects past, present, and yet-to-be-created future rogues with queer narratives. The old queerness of rogues has been upgraded to a contemporary discourse that keeps circling around oppression and social determinism using current discourses and ideologies applied to them. Rogues are still characterized as pariahs and, because of that, they are useful to explore contexts of oppression and to portray different types of minorities. This chapter has unearthed the queerness in the past of the picaresque and the myth of the rogue, showing its influence in present day media. Even if what means to be a marginalized individual has changed with the passing of time, rogues have always been queer outsiders. Through them, we can explore narratives of oppression and queerness in time and through time.

Notes

1 Translated by me. Original text: "Él y sus criados quedaron enternecidos con el sentimiento de mi partida. Él porque me amaba y me perdía, que sin duda le hice falta para el regalo de su servicio."

2 Translated by me. Original text: "Perdí mi bien, perdí mi socorro y mi amparo, perdí mi compañía dulcísima, que lo era la nuestra, porque, aunque me solía reñir, éramos como la puta y el rufián; que riñas de enamorados son perficionar el amor."

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Section III

Unbinding Queer Time

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13 *Genesis Noir* and Cosmological Time

How I Learned to Stop Worrying and Love the Big Bang

Merlyn Seller

Let me start with two quotations on the infinity and unencompassability of nature, time, and space and on how insignificant humans are when placed in front of them:

> On the scale of worlds—to say nothing of stars or galaxies—humans are inconsequential, a thin film of life on an obscure and solitary lump of rock and metal.
>
> (Carl Sagan 1994, 11)

> What is the present? How can it be thought? What is presence? Ecological awareness forces us to think and feel at multiple scales, scales that disorient normative concepts such as "present," "life," "human," "nature," "thing," "thought," and "logic."
>
> (Timothy Morton 2016, 159)

How does love function and hold meaning in the face of aeons of time? How might curious play help us learn to feel at scales which can leave us cold but which we need to reckon with in order to feel our way in the universe? Carl Sagan and Timothy Morton point to a fundamental problem of relation in the everywhere and every-when of the inky-black universe: what matters, and how do we think it from within this ontological vertigo?

This chapter explores queer and trans deep time in *Genesis Noir* (Feral Cat Den 2021) (see Figure 13.1), an abstract third-person point-and-click adventure game about curiosity in and through the sense of touch where players take on the role of a cosmic detective in a non-binary love story. We are "time" personified, in a love triangle with femme-fatale "mass" (later revealed to be genderqueer) and masculine-coded jealous lover "causation," trying to save "mass" through theoretical-physics-inspired minigames. Framed as a film noir murder scene exploded in time and space, through small puzzle/adventure game loops we try to solve and avert the big bang that will eventually destroy mass: causation's smoking gun. But this framing changes, and we shift from solving puzzles to questioning "solutions" and dancing across the screen in the endgame's explosions of colour. The

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Figure 13.1 The spacescape in *Genesis Noir*.
Source: Screen grab by the author.

player-protagonist's initial yearning to preserve homogenous mass transforms into an embrace of contingency, fluid desire, and an underlying love for a genderqueer posthuman figure embodying "change" and "possibility" and "queerness" nature as "identity without essence" (David Halperin 1995, 62) in their mix of gender codes: multiple voice actors, androgynous facial features, wide hips and flat chest nakedly devoid of clear gender markers. This game is hard to describe, a mix of genres and an anthology of mechanics and scenes that swaps symbols and varies modes of interaction on our character's journey through a phantasmagoria of line art and jazz music, but in its erotic entanglements and their sheer scale and diversity, this game is a deeply queer "open mesh of possibilities" (Sedgwick 1992, 8).

In a dizzying permutation of Sedgwick's thesis on homosocial desire (1985), here we don't so much sublimate our detective time's queer love for saxophonist "causation" in rivalry over jazz-singer "mass" but find love in the big-bang bullet connecting us all, an embrace of chaotic queer desire and transition. In the game's words, love extends to all scales of existence, interrelation and change: "Embraced by we" (Feral Cat Den 2021).

Indeed, by embodying time and exploring space, we probe the conditions of relationality itself. We playfully click and drag and spin our way towards love for the ephemeral syncopated harmonies that unfold from big bang to heat death. This is a non-linear narrative of time that I argue holds interest for its queer magnitude of cosmic scale, that uses visual and haptic intimacies to relate us to more-than-human time and space. In exploring this I take as a starting premise Elizabeth Freeman's concept of "erotohistoriography,"

that we can and do engage with time bodily in ways which contest the idea of an objective relationship to history and offer the senses as a way of recalibrating our relation to time (2010, 2019). Playing as the personification of time, carrying artefacts in the palm of a fictive hand—and our own extended through the controller—on multiple levels this game forwards the idea that "contact with historical materials can be precipitated by particular bodily dispositions, and that these connections may elicit bodily responses, even pleasurable ones, that are themselves a form of understanding" (Freeman 2010). *Genesis Noir* asks us to reckon with the disorienting scales of ecological awareness that Sagan and Morton wrestle with: the imperative to consider the meaning of intimacy and ethical responsibility in the face of the vast scale of all things and all time.

In this chapter I first unpack the game's critical reception and general disciplinary contexts. Here the frustrated desires of players suggest this game's toylike "immaturity" questions interactivity, temporality and desire in play, contrasting with other ludic models of the universe and highlighting the queerness of its temporal dynamics in the context of queer temporality scholarship. In the main body, visual, mechanical and textual analysis then engages with cosmic scale and ludic possibility, establishing the game's problematics and excesses and defining what I term "queer possibility spacetime," followed by the game's framing of affective response, locating compassion in the face of more-than-human scale in its mobilisation of touch, and finally trans temporalities of the shimmer and the horizon of possibility bring these dynamics together in the context of the game's visuality to conclude the argument that curious contact can foster meaningful queer/trans connection to the more-than-human at all scales. Despite our initial gumshoe positioning, this videogame (and this chapter) commits to curiosity rather than to (re)solution. As Steinbock frames trans studies more broadly (2013, 116), the player-detective gropes towards unstable affinities, connections which are not fixed but which are nevertheless tangibly felt.

Troubled Reception: Seeing Stars

The game's mixed reception reveals its subversion of normative design values, mechanically and audiovisualhaptically, which we can situate and unpack in relation to chrononormativity and queer phenomenology which will provide a basis for subsequent analysis. It suggests an ungraspable text—a paradoxically boring phantasmagoria, both fluid and halting: "hyperactive flits from the cosmic to the prosaic" (Simon Parkin 2021); "nothing really given time to mature as a mechanic" (Stuart Gipp 2021); "an almost flippant approach to design" (Lewis Gordon 2021). All reviewers extoll its visual beauty and jazz-score exuberance, but this becomes a problematic kind of excess—captivating and stupefying, too much and too little. This is experienced as a game that might not be a game, that reads almost as pure perception without

meaningful interaction: "the most beautiful thing I've seen on a PC screen in ages . . . it's a better animated movie than a game" (Crowley 2021); "You don't do much overall. It's a softly playful game" (Hetfeld 2021).

Critical reactions here are not to a lack of interactivity but to an ambiguity and lack of development. What is felt through play is more sensory object than ludonarrative—a game concerned with seemingly everything, played through a profusion of low-level click and drag interactions: "Often there won't be a puzzle at all and you'll just be messing with the reality of the scene" (Watts 2021); "You make planets spin. You throw galactic debris. You make sweet, sweet music . . . like one of those installations at science museums, the ones where you turn a handle or stick your hand into something" (Hetfeld 2021). Indeed Gordon speaks to its restlessness, that "The game has little interest in dwelling" (2021), and Gipp echoes others in branding it infantile, its fleeting minigames lacking the space for mechanics to "mature" (2021). In this sense, it embodies what Kathryn Bond Stockton calls the queerness of childhood, the way we grow sideways rather than maturing linearly, chrononormatively (2009), which players enact in discrete iterations of playful probing without skill progression or narrative resolution.

We play with all orders of thing. Play spins out different frequency-matching activities to grow seeds or spot the Higgs boson, or it dabbles in the purely cosmetic mixing and matching of jazz chords and bacterial phenotypes, but it also literally spins representations of galaxies and solar cycles, plucks leaves and strikes matches. This game is in a sense strangely too frivolous to be seen as a "game," and indeed multiple critics positively and negatively refer to it as a toy: a framing Brendan Keogh would be quick to defend in the work of David Kanaga. Keogh powerfully argues games are corporeally felt "audio-visual-haptic media," that we do not experience games as code or transparent text but as sensation (2018). This game exemplifies the thesis by focusing player attention on a sensory engagement with the universe. Its queer non-binary love story, then, is articulated mechanically and sensorily as what Bo Ruberg sees as "trans" significance for game studies as "a force of disruption and creation" (2022, 205). If *Genesis Noir* has been critiqued as a work felt but not played, then we should expand "what counts as a game" (Ruberg and Shaw 2017, x).

Contexts and Intertexts: The Cosmic Microwave Background

In challenging conventions of interaction, *Genesis Noir* suggests a queer orientation to play. Placed in wider disciplinary contexts, we can appreciate the significance of its sensual articulation of time and space. Indeed, if game studies as a discipline prioritizes systems and narratives, and even queer game studies currently values story, mechanics and physical interface, there is still space for addressing the field's common disregard for the sensorial (Ruberg 2019, 83; Keogh 2018). This approach should be inclusive of, as I focus on here, sight and touch: Soraya Murray (2017) observing that game studies

marginalizes visuality, to say nothing of tactility (Keogh 2018; Sicart 2017). Bo Ruberg (2019) and Aubrey Anable's (2018) recent work points in this new direction as they turn to consider marginal affects and non-normative exploratory play.

What we see as central or peripheral in approaching space—both beyond our planet and within a game—is inflected by gender and desire. In *Queer Phenomenology* (2006), Sarah Ahmed uses an expanded sense of queer orientation and queer embodied perspectives, making the argument that perception and value are enabled and affected by our orientations: "The objects that we direct our attention toward reveal the direction we have taken in life. Other objects, and indeed spaces, are relegated to the background; they are only ever co-perceived" (32). Taking the example of Husserl's table, which Husserl ignores in preference for the objects it supports, Ahmed explores the idea that: "By bringing what is 'behind' to the front, we might queer phenomenology by creating a new angle" (2006, 4). If *Genesis Noir's* beauty and toy-like play are seen as trivial and aimless, we might productively allow these properties to reorient us. Adopting new angles allows us to discover new points of resonance by focusing on the surface of games that is often paradoxically relegated to the behind: the "video" of "video games."

Treating aesthetics seriously, we can situate *Genesis Noir's* textual and visual play with scale as work that resonates with mid-century modernism (see Figure 13.1)—focusing here on the visual and haptic rather than its jazz soundscape for concision's sake. Its playful mini-games resonate with Italo Calvino's tactile fictional play with physics in "Games without End" in *Cosmicomics* (1968) where child gods throw galaxies and chase each other recursively through the cosmos. In our game, as John Dolis notes of *Cosmicomics*, observation is problematized as matter and subject become messily entangled (1998). At the same time, the game's visual manifestation of this in pulsing, primitivist lines, seems to draw on the sensuousness of Synthetic Cubism and even Picasso's "light drawings" of 1949—ephemeral experiments with drawing using a light bulb and long-exposure photographs which convey the sense of drawing in every dimension of space and time (Baldassari 1997, 219).

Genesis Noir's play with physics and history also has ludic precedents in astro-physics simulators, like *Universe Sandbox* (Giant Army 2008) and *Spore* (Maxis 2008). While on Alenda Chang's first reading, these are faulty simulations, of Newtonian gravity in the former and Lamarckian evolution in the latter (2019, 80), they also constitute spaces in which we might decentre anthropocentric perspectives. Yet, as Alenda Y. Chang concedes, they often retain a problematic and hyperbolic will to mastery over infinity (102).

However, we might, with Christopher Patterson's *Open World Empire* (2020) in mind, make an erotic reading of such games and their legacy in *Genesis Noir* as spaces of ambivalent openness and pleasurable play with spacetime that can productively resist fixed meaning. For Patterson, following Sedgwick, scholarship's erotic engagement with games constitutes an optimistic and sensual converse of the paranoiac and critical (2020, 21) that might

enable us to appreciate the power of playful affects beyond the tropes that frame them. *Genesis Noir* may appear to embrace a hubristic remit, offering us the universe, but its partial and ephemeral encounters reject mastery. We develop no skills, we retain no resources and we learn to make peace with the transience of things. Sensual engagement, prioritized over the systemic, offers an erotics of curiosity and optimism where a smorgasbord of interactions encourage players to reach out and touch what we can't hold on to.

We thus begin to read against enlightenment and imperial logics by attending to pleasure in play as much as procedural rhetoric and ideological narratives, where "immature" and "toy-like" video games can enable Patterson's disobedience of normativities and afford new, meaningful ethical attachments (Patterson 2020, 7). *Genesis Noir* enacts this erotic turn as our detective protagonist switches from the tools of problem solving to dancing, building on rejections of mastery in game designs concerned with outer space and natural history.

Such recent sensual and experimental videogames concerning deep/cosmological time (the temporal scale of geology and astro-physics) have foregrounded both utopian freeplay across scale and being in games like *Everything* (O'Reilly 2017), and conversely, as I have argued elsewhere (Seller 2020), dark ecology that resists progress narratives like the powerfully obtuse alchemy of *Lichenia* (Molleindustria 2019). *Genesis Noir*, however, suggests a fleeting playful possibility space that is neither dystopian nor utopian, progressing from negativity to utopic embrace of scale and potential. We jigsaw together broken ceramics in one vignette only for their owner to be broken in the narrative, while in another moment we piece together the building blocks of lifelike lego while appreciating that life necessitates death in the *memento mori* of the gunslinger causation's image.

Indeed, *Genesis Noir*, is distinguishable not only in its use of ephemerality but the juxtaposition of these tiny loops with the sheer breadth of time they represent—the entirety of time—and it uses this non-normative rhythm and more-than-human range to broach queer temporality as theorized by Jack Halberstam and Freeman in their germinal texts *In a Queer Time and Place* (Halberstam 2005) and *Time Binds* (Freeman 2010). Respectively exploring the temporalities of queers and the queerness of time, they discuss resistance to "heteronormative time" and more extensive "chrononormativity" which names hegemonic attempts to synchronize bodies and either speed-up or slow-down time in uniform rhythms—from the directly heteronormative milestones of genealogical progress such as marriage/procreation to structural logics such as the restrictive linearity of sequential time. Against this, Halberstam explores "the potentiality of a life unscripted by the conventions of family, inheritance and child rearing" (2005, 1), and Freeman "the ways that non-sequential forms of time . . . can also fold subjects into structures of belonging and duration that may be invisible to the historicist eye . . . forging . . . history differently" (2010, xi). For Stockton this can involve attending to the way queer orientations and bindings to time can involve a rejection

of chrononormative maturation, expanding and iterating experience rather than building narrowly on a fixed ground (2009). Complementarily, José E. Muñoz sees queerness' temporality as an expansive orientation towards potential and the uncertain, rejecting fixed "being," defining it as "a doing for and toward the future" (2009, 1). By playing with loops and jumps of cosmological time, playing with player and character bodies whose potentials proliferate across minigames, *Genesis Noir* offers rich material for analysis if we look "behind" the normative standards by which it fails, and towards scale, relationality and curiosity.

Queer Possibility Spacetime

Narratively erupting 10^{-37} seconds after the Big Bang and ending beyond the heat death of the universe, we drag and drop symbols to collapse mass into black holes, plot cases on corkboards, and everything in between as we trace disasters from the terrestrial to the inter-galactic. *Genesis Noir* uses scale to disorient and force us to consider its affective implications. Some broad strokes of cosmology will help to establish the perspective this videogame leverages to approach intimacy, ethics and queerness that disrupts chrononormative anthropocentric time; problematics which the next two subsections will articulate responses to in the game's audiovisualhaptic aesthetics.

Deep Time is the perspective that nature has a history, one that defies human frames of reference (Martin Rudwick 2014, 221). First discovered geologically, deep time descends even deeper into cosmological time: time itself is at least 13.7billion years old, humans just 0.0002billion years. Cosmology deals in temporal scales of billions of years and spatial scales from the subatomic to intergalactic megaparsecs. As Barbara Sue Ryden notes, working with a vast and expanding universe requires an equivalent "stretch of the imagination" (2017, 1). Moreover, as Stephen Hawking (1988) argues, time is inextricable from space, itself inhumanly huge—the bit we can see is a million million million million miles wide, and the total universe is a thousand sextillion times this.

However, the vastness of the universe's possibility space also problematizes ethical relation. As Neil Manson's cosmic perspective argument (2012) outlines, this scale of time and space radically disrupts human scales of ethics—even anthropogenic mass-extinction is a trivial impact in relation to the statistical billions of other life-bearing planets. In the face of hundreds of millions of years of past and future evolution our actions seem insignificant, and even assuming Earth is unique or consequential appears very anthropocentric: "we are guilty of spatiotemporal parochialism if we think spatiotemporal proximity to the planet Earth in the early 21st century makes some lives and some ecosystems more important than others" (2012, 78). How do we foster care in the face of this cosmic perspective argument that nothing we can do maximizes happiness in terms larger than our partisan interest in the lives found within arm's reach?

Queerly, then, time is more than time, and potentially both a temporal and spatial near-infinity that Richard Feynman described as a "sum over histories" (2014), and Hawking via Bohr would call the "allowed orbits" (1988, 54–55) of all potential particle pathways in quantum mechanics. This is to say that in every atom there is a constrained space of radical indeterminacy, where electrons emitting photons move like planets around a star but unpredictably so. A photon's past and future are uncertain, movement through spacetime is a matter of possibly infinite diverging probabilities, but this magnitude of freedom and diversity magnifies the cosmic perspective argument. Across aeons and megaparsecs, possibilities and proliferations of life both expand the borders of relation and complicate its intimacy and value. This speaks to the level of popular science discourse that *Genesis Noir* trades in and offers as material and metaphor to the player. I write here in generalized simplifications, but the language of cosmology and theoretical physics is powerfully reminiscent of Katie Salen and Eric Zimmerman's description of games as the "space of possibility" (2004, 14), and as Cameron Kunzelman has recently argued, videogames are an arena for speculation with which we might (re)think the possible (2022).

Games afford multiple outcomes, branching and converging pathways, and movement through time, a system with variable outcomes as Jesper Juul (2003) has it. More granularly, video games, like reality, are spaces that allow for myriad unpredictable actions as the player moves. Every mouse twitch, mis-click, zigzag, speculative decision and player delay are as operative here as (if not more than) the restrictive field of what we conventionally view as ludic choice (such as dialogue options or winning strategies). If, for critics, *Genesis Noir* is a game of seemingly incidental fiddling, then it reminds us of the incidental nature of most gameplay. The vast variety of wandering pathways on the micro-scale often escape game studies' analysis, but Darshana Jayemanne encourages us to appreciate the performative multiplicities of play in the varied chronotypology of all games where different players may die at different points or be drawn towards different assets (2017, 268). We hug the geometry, meander in the open, backtrack and dilly-dally. A player, like a photon, may always get from A to B, but there exists a tantalising mess of interfering possibilities in between as we play across and before the screen. We forget the richness of play if we focus on the fictive plot or the win states game systems signal to the player, and these abstractions of games are a common reduction in game studies that ignores the visual and tactile fabric of play.

The player of *Genesis Noir* spends time dancing in the endgame, filling the space with rainbow colour using swoops of an analogue stick, having us focus on the scribbling chaos of "colouring-in." In another spacetime we fiddle with dials on a particle accelerator, finding fragments and frequencies of unclear meaning by fidgeting with machines and feeling our own back-and-forth way towards harmonious patterns. Early in a playthrough, players coalesce hydrogen into stars through the metaphor of planting seeds before

quickly jumping forward to a building mechanic sequence where we fit together phenotypes in a primordial swamp to create life, and so-on towards the end of time. Not only do chapters jump-cut forwards through time and collide multiple human lifetimes in sequences visually reminiscent of kaleidoscopes, but within these chapters are our unique wanderings, all of which trouble a simple linear narrative progression.

These micro- and macro-movements and possibilities have player and game dance together queerly even if a normative orientation towards overarching narratives and systems omits this as background to the focus of scholarly attention. Todd Harper et al., however, see the concept of the "space of possibility" as connecting games and Queerness' multiplicity and dynamicity (2018, 4), and this further resonates with Muñoz's concept of queer futurity—that queerness itself is always in the process of becoming, "a horizon imbued with potentiality" (2009, 1). Vast finitude then offers us freedoms, expressive potentials and dizzying perspectives on becoming and being.

The toy-like *Genesis Noir* might then be reconceived as a complexification of play rather than a reduction. Instead of building chrononormatively, play opens a vast possibility space: the disorienting and reorienting potentials of objects at all scales in the universe. If our values seem to lose meaning and consequence at ever larger scales, orienting towards the small audiovisual-haptic rhythms (Keogh 2018) of this game's spacetime might reveal the queer converse on the small scale. Fleshing out smaller scales here reveals the rich meaning that textures the smallest of relationships and queers the abstraction of the macro-scale. In turn, this troubles the utilitarian hetero-masculine assumptions of the cosmic perspective argument. The cosmic jazz of *Genesis Noir* fuses time and space into our protagonist's wandering through recursive allegorical, hypothetical and historical spaces in what I call a "queer possibility spacetime" for engaging with the vast finitude of being. Turning to themes of reciprocity and relation, I will argue that through intimate tactile interactions across scales the game offers a riposte to Manson and reorients us to queerly loving the universe.

Toying with Time

Genesis Noir has shown us through the scale of its queer possibility spacetime and its perceived toy-like nature, that everything is both trivial and meaningful and the player can be re-oriented to marginal elements of play. Turning to touch—fidgeting and dancing as modes of feeling—we can see that this game pushes beyond the starting conceit of a puzzle and so articulates an embodied mode of ethical relation that exceeds Manson's utilitarianism and pushes us towards the appreciation of intimacy and transformation.

Framed as a film noir caper, *Genesis Noir* explores cosmological deep time metaphorized in a series of vignetted times and scales. By pointing, clicking and dragging objects, we reassemble ceramics to grapple with death in Edo Japan, and we collapse matter into black holes to try to avert the entropic

diffusion of what astrophysics speculates to be the universe's inevitable heat death (David Macauley 2010, 203). Over the course of the game, players transition from reading time through their figurative role as chrononormative clock-maker in 1930s New York (where we begin play as a detective hocking black-market watches) to a non-normative body having lost an arm and literally dancing with the universe to our own tempo. Eventually we shed our last attempt to preserve the universe's mass by deploying black holes and make peace with the vast finitude of the universe by learning to let go of the impulse to solve the game's mysteries.

Genesis Noir wrestles with ethics, astrophysics, and the nihilism of the cosmic perspective argument that nothing we do is significant by splicing evocative textual fragments of theoretical physics with humorous figurative forms which evoke both an academic's blackboard and the chalk outline of a crime scene. In trying to save mass from cold, dark dispersal, we first attempt to "solve" entropy before learning to dance with the cosmic consequences we have been instrumental in precipitating during play. At the beginning of time, we are both gumshoe and gardener, exploring space by symbolically converting energy into matter. This is metaphorized as seeding and growing-with plants. Here we tend the birth and death of stars by dragging and dropping spirals symbolising clusters of hydrogen atoms into the fictive soil of space, spinning our cursor to wind forward time and grow plants representing the first celestial bodies like an immortal gardener. We help roots probe the soil by removing obstacles and spin the rising and setting sun to accelerate floral growth like a time-lapse film, cumulatively sprouting connections and dissolving barriers. We both investigate and interfere, partnering with a physical universe that does much the same thing—feeling, expanding and changing itself.

Carolyn Dinshaw has advocated for an understanding of anachronistic "touches" across time—the creation of new alignments of pasts and present (1999). Building on this, in *Genesis Noir*, groping and dancing across scalar levels, puts us in contact with an already strangely involved universe where we can't help but touch and be touched. As Karen Barad explores in her account of the queer indeterminacy of the quantum world, approaching physics returns us to touch again and again (2012, 208). Particles are continually coming into contact with each other and themselves, in ways and microscopic scales we can barely comprehend that blur the distinction between void and object. Touch, for our galactic investigator avatar, is an embodiment of curiosity—an openness to being entangled with Others; indeed, this entanglement compromises the sense of distinct self, as Barad argues. At the smallest of scales, electrons exchange virtual photons with themselves, and these interactions are infinite, making touch a core part of becoming and all touch a form of self-touching: "Matter is an enfolding, an involution" (Barad 2012, 213).

This intimate involvement speaks to the idea that "there is no *away*" or outside to the universe (Morton 2018, 153, original emphasis) as we proceed to interfere with it through the process of being part of it, queering the

observer position of player/spectator much as Barad sees quantum physics queering classical physics (2012, 209). This manifests as a queering of ludology's conventional idea of a puzzle or game (Juul 2003; Costikyan 2002)—the idea of a solution or goal is repeatedly deferred.

Mechanically and sensually, players rotate, press and shift objects in time through mouse or analogue stick, caressing abstractions of cosmic history. As Graeme Kirkpatrick argues, playing games is always akin to dancing with the hands (2011), and here we dance with dark ecology as Morton's own analogy has it: we begin like a film noir detective that imagines we inhabit an external position to the cosmos but then find ourselves inextricably involved in more-than-human things (2016, 9). Our cursor changes from investigative pointer to the body of the detective dancing with a cast of figures from Neolithic hunter to theoretical physicist, figures that return and eventually visually and audibly harmonize into a single queer figure of change. We are part of creation, and creation is queer.

Thus, we feel more than puzzle our way through multiple scales—poking, testing and more generally tuning. This is what I think the critic Malindy Hetfeld suggestively calls "softly playing" (2021). *Genesis Noir* here interrelates cosmic environmental ethics with the furtive, sensory intimacies of eroto-historiography—mounting a version of Sivinski and Ulatowski's (2019) critique of the cosmic perspective argument. They argue that seeing ethical relations to the nonhuman as meaningless merely excuses extractive ultra-rationalist relationships with the world but that it does so by focusing solely on the macro scale. When inverted, the CPA yields the opposite on the micro scale, where all beings are irreducibly both preciously unique and inextricably interrelated, revealing all actions to be both fleeting and infinitely consequential (Sivinski and Ulatowski 2019, 15). In both speeding up and slowing down time through frequent multi-scalar punctuation of vignettes and tactile mini-games, *Genesis Noir* gets us and to implement a relational ethics of care and what Freeman (2010) and Muñoz (2009) might call a refusal of closure through awareness of the intimate interconnections of life's diversity. Indeed, if seeing is doing, and every touching is also "being touched," we are always already involved in a universe where no relationship is stable or inconsequential.

In this process, players explore the playful effects of visuality as an active rather than passive relationship to a game. Seeing is meaningfully "doing," something crystallized when playing with particle accelerators in the game—we are reminded that observing a quantum event "changes" it. While our interactivity seems to be minimized, in actuality this game's ambiguous visual-haptic playfulness rejects the rationalized instrumentalism of both mastery and mechanicity and expands our sense of interaction both in video games and in a universe of which they are, of course, a part. Video game structure and ethics here map on to each other, advocating an intimate dance with the meaningfulness of the micro-scale in a queer possibility spacetime that affords no "outside" to withdraw to, no room for nihilism. Death is not

an ending, when understood at scale, but a change, and as Muñoz has it, queerness is an insistence on potential, that "dance, like energy, never disappears, it is simply transformed" (2009, 81).

Transing Cosmological Time

To conclude with this theme of transformation, *Genesis Noir* can be read as an articulation of trans temporalities that nuance our consideration of queer temporality's intimacies by combining the previous two subsections' discussion of disorienting scale and the audiovisualhaptic touching of time. We see this bodily appreciation of cosmic time shimmering with contingency and transformative potential in the lively line art of the game's animated visuality.

In the final act, we see the oppositional figures of our love triangle—dying jazz-singer and jealous gunslinger—fused into the genderqueer-coded rhythm of the universe in a polychromatic explosion, the fused figures themselves glowing white, the full spectrum of light. Like watercolour billowing unpredictably out of the inky black, the diagrammatic chalkboard space of play becomes the riotous phantasmagoria of a patterned rainbow, and at its centre we hold on to this luminous non-binary figure that flickers between different faces (see Figure 13.2). Vivacious animation, that skips frames and breaks silhouette, refuses reduction and fixity throughout in its plasmatic energy. This evokes Muñoz's horizon of queerness as a hopeful dynamic of becoming (2009). These scintillating frames have all the characters we have met pulse and dance in a single genderqueer figure. This shining animated palimpsest even more powerfully evokes Steinbock's applicable concept of the "shimmering image" (2019) from trans studies—emergent transformation figured as an oscillation in time where the moving image embodies dynamic gender. For Steinbock, as for Muñoz, gender, being and desire are processes, not rigid ontologies, and never foreclosed. Shimmering is dancing between present and future, the already understood and the as-yet ungraspable; it points to the paradoxical position of the trans body that is asked to both pass and reveal itself, a body that moves across and between. We must conform to the normative we are never admitted to, accused of both reinforcing norms and failing at them, However, this also involves a productive orientation towards the "impossible" (Eva Hayward 2012) like Muñoz's orientation towards utopia, a project of becoming something that is always in a state of becoming (Steinbock 2019). In *Genesis Noir*, flickering frames collide bodies whose multiple forms shimmer around their edges as multi-colour silhouettes that both visually trail and pre-empt the shining figure in the foreground. This metaphorizes what Freeman would call a counter-chrononormative potentiality (2010) in a scintillating orchestral and choral score that eventually flowers from the game's earlier tentative jazz harmonies and walking bass.

In this scintillating, vibrating queer possibility spacetime, we dance with the universe. What began as a fixed image of being—jazz singer, "mass" as an already dead *femme fatale*—becomes an appreciation of animated becoming.

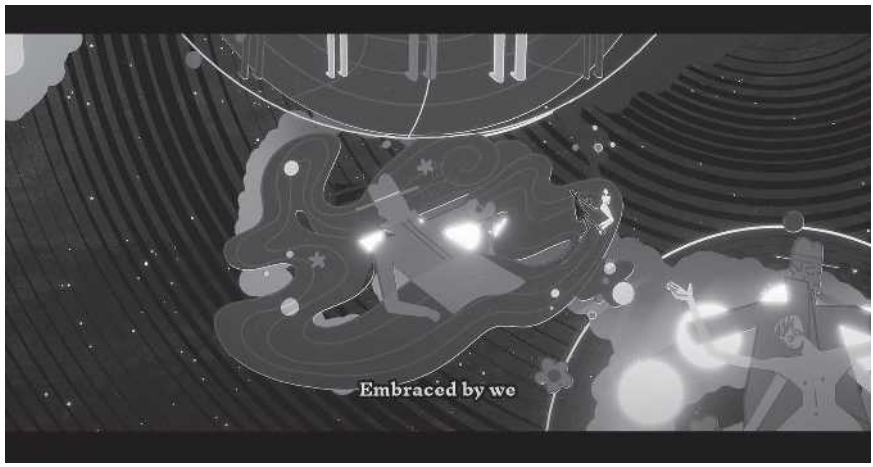

Figure 13.2 The diagrammatic chalkboard space of play.
Source: Screen grab by the author.

Here, the visual splendour and profusion of constantly "new" interactions noted in its reception are a manifestation of trans temporality—that our bodies and identities are processual and always becoming, never finished (Hayward 2012). In our micro-interactions, our soft toying with things, and even in realising that looking *is* interactive involvement in things, the player is framed not as a god but as messy interference. A mess of pathways on the micro-scale composed of every individual's prods, pokes and perambulations, we also see the openness of queer possibility spacetime in the intersection and overlap of timelines when mass's multiple gendered lives visually fuse in this concluding interactive music video. Here we have a manifestation of trans in mobile perspectives as "a capacity to transform one reality into another" (Stryker 2017, x) through the realisation that the massive is composed of the small and infinite wonder is found within the finite.

Articulated by explosively generative line-work and deeply ambiguous negative space, the interplay of white-gold with blue-black is repeatedly reconfigured and overlaid, smoothly switching from 2D to 3D (Figure 13.1). Forms of space here appear blended together by the ambiguity of minimalist cell-shaded geometry. Physics and transness dance with each other, as the sum of all pathways, where a particle is also a wavelength and a field of overlayed infinities. Stable being and distanced observation are problematized by getting us to re-orient ourselves repeatedly. Through looping temporal encounters of gardening stars, experimenting with particles and improvising jazz, we find both a queer phenomenology of disorientation and reorientation (Ahmed 2006, 4), and a transcorporeal movement (Alaimo 2010, 2), where bodies switch and spin around each other in indefinite orbits.

Genesis Noir has two endings dependent on a single choice, but even this is an attitudinal choice of feeling, not instrumental action. We either turn our backs on time's relationship to "mass" and despair at the seemingly ineffable cascade of death, or (as the more fleshed-out conclusion encourages) we embrace it in all its messiness and propensity for change. We choose whether to reach out. As the gameplay encourages us, though, we revel in touch. When dis/reorientation puts us into tactile contact with both the small and large scale, the affect of this relationship is "curiosity" rather than horror—an affect Steinbock explicitly links to haptic visuality and to trans experience (2013). Rather than remaining a paranoid and alienated investigator, we become a curious piece of the universe, toying with its indeterminacies and being toyed with by them, a trans desire to "come into perception differently" (Cáel Keegan 2018, 2).

Curiosity here is both an openness and an involvement, one which Steinbock frames as a groping tactile experience, the feeling of the trans body in/as movement (2013, 112). This Steinbock defines as "trans-curiosity," and *Genesis Noir* mobilizes this unsteady and unresolved groping towards ethical relation in a form sympathetic to Steinbock's suggested strategy "[to] use affective operations to mobilise curiosity, to commit to knowing new things, to refuse to settle, to accept the constraints of an unliveable narrative" (2013, 116). Curiosity, as a trans affect vested in the embrace of change and the horizon of possibility across bodies, is, in Steinbock's words a "groping" where the allure of the shimmering image is "affective, haptic contact" (2013, 110). It provides "a handgrip towards knowability" that suggests an alternative to both "mastery" and "floundering" (111). Curious contact allows us to feel at different temporal scales in this queer possibility space time.

Conclusion: Curious Times

Genesis Noir's reception revealed an anxiety with the queer temporal dimensions of this game and our more sensory than mechanical interaction with its world—its embrace of ephemerality and novelty, its denial of progress and a phenomenal vastness of spacetime. The focus of this queer story of love and loss on theoretical physics and natural history poses fundamental questions about how to form meaningful more-than-human attachments when confronted with the cosmic perspective argument. In turning latterly to the game's erotics of touch and then curious contact with the game's visuality, we can appreciate this game's queer and trans temporalities that find equal significance in the sub-atomic and the galactic.

As captured by the game's lyrical refrain "Embraced by we" (Feral Cat Den 2021), the player of *Genesis Noir* learns to cultivate a child-like curiosity, feeling out attachments to queer possibility spacetimes where we can touch and be touched and learn to be okay with change. Change isn't loss, just a series of ongoing involvements and reorientations, a dance with all scales and beings. There is no "outside" or "after" from which we can know

the universe. Rather than affectively shutting down as the cosmic perspective argument suggests we do, by touching together the micro and the macro, *Genesis Noir* shows that all life contains both vastness and finitude, but that does not preclude ethics: it necessitates reflecting on the inescapable significance of interrelation.

Following Keogh and Shaw, what counts as play might just be watching, hearing and touching, a child-like exploration of spacetime that, like the universe, iterates without progressing in a chrononormative sense. In so doing, I argue *Genesis Noir* offers a form of Freeman's eroto-historiography and Steinbock's trans-curiosity—a queer relation to possibility spacetime that is not rational and distant, but sensual and proximate, where time is close and tangled, and sight is shown to be meaningful interaction. *Genesis Noir* shows us how games can queerly inter-relate physics, detective fiction, toys and tactile dance to softly play in a cosmic becoming: not as a puzzle to solve but as a toy to feel curious with.

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14 Posthuman Temporalities and Shared Timings

Kinship in the Work of Jim Jarmusch

Johanna Schmertz

In "Wastrels of Time: Slow Cinema's Laboring Body, the Political Spectator and the Queer," Karl Schoonover suggests that the slow art film calls forth spectators who are "eager to clarify the value of wasted time and uneconomical temporalities" (2012, 65). Schoonover invokes Lee Edelman's critique of reproductive futurisms to suggest that some forms of living are "unfigurable" in mainstream cinematic language. These non-productive (and non-reproductive) forms of living may find expression in slow cinema, making any slow film relevant for the study of queer representation (Schoonover 2012, 65). "Slow cinema" was first identified by Michel Ciment in 2003 as a variety of art cinema that reacts against the fast-paced takes and quick edits that characterize dominant cinema. It cultivates a photographic, or painterly, style based on the long take, long shot, and fixed camera. It disrupts narrative continuity and decenters perspectives, allowing the spectator to linger on details of the everyday. Because of its slow pace and disruption of narrative continuity, "form and temporality are never less than emphatically present" in slow cinema (Flanagan 2008, n.p.).

The films of Jim Jarmusch have already been categorized as examples of slow cinema (Jarvis 2020). Jarmusch queers time and identity starting with his first feature film, whose very title *Permanent Vacation* (1980) problematizes the line between leisure and productivity. *Permanent Vacation*'s central character is Aloysius, shortened to Allie, a name that evokes the alleys that diverge and join the New York city streets he moves through. Allie drifts with no clear direction through city streets and random encounters with their inhabitants, stopping on occasion to dance in circles: a consummate "wastrel of time." This film also inaugurates Jarmusch's characteristic mode of telling a story through observation and detail rather than "action": it contains slow motion shots, long takes in which Allie often disappears from view, long lateral tracking shots of urban landscapes, and a repetitive soundtrack. Paying attention to details such as these, my piece shows how Jarmusch's slow cinema deconstructs time and space in ways that create queer, post-human modes of belonging, kinships based on what Elizabeth Freeman has called "shared timings" (2010, xi).

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In this chapter, hence, I argue that Jarmusch's version of slow cinema works in two key ways: 1) through intertextual references, dissolves and parallels that condense time and space and 2) through creating posthuman kinships that fuse organic and inorganic processes. I will focus primarily on two films made after Juan Antonio Suárez published his definitive work on Jarmusch, which ends with *Broken Flowers* (2005): *Paterson* (2016) and *Only Lovers Left Alive* (2013). I will close with a discussion of a somewhat self-parodic fashion short Jarmusch made in the very odd temporality of the COVID pandemic. Allie the wastrel of *Permanent Vacation* (1980) will be refigured throughout Jarmusch's work; his "protagonists" meander through their stories with undefined goals, their stories told through their encounters with musicians, artists, poets, and, most particularly, the intertextual webs through which they are all made kin. Through these processes, Jarmusch performs a kind of "temporal drag" (Freeman 2010, xxiii) that gathers relicts of the past to allow for queer possibilities that seek out new forms of relationality.

Paterson: Collages of Time

In a scene from Jim Jarmusch's film *Paterson* (2016), we see the title character seated, writing, at a bench in front of the Passaic waterfalls. Paterson is captured in medium shot, wearing his bus driver uniform, with the top of his pen visible at the bottom of the frame. The poem's title—"Another One"—appears across the frame as Paterson reads its words aloud in a nondiegetic voiceover, thereby indicating to the viewer that the time of the poem's reading/recitation is not the same as the time of the poem's writing. This image of Paterson writing is preceded by two stationary shots of the waterfall itself—solid, permanent, but a source of constant change and movement, difference in sameness.

In this series of shots, writing and water are metaphors for one another and metonymically joined due to Paterson's physical proximity with the waterfall, which apparently serves as a source of inspiration. Time seems to move back and forth between writing and water, a pattern reinforced throughout the film. The soundtrack that accompanies this scene, and most others in which Paterson's poetry is featured, consists of the reverberating gong notes of Eastern gamelan music. The music underscores the cyclical shape of the film's narrative structure, which presents seven days in the life of the title character, each day beginning with an overhead shot of Paterson in bed with his wife, waking up and checking his watch. The circularity of the narrative and sameness of Paterson's daily routines suggests that ends are beginnings. Paterson's life, like the poems he writes (and which his dog eats), exists in a kind of suspended temporality, one that mirrors Jarmusch's own creative process, which he describes as "waves of the same ocean that just keep coming" (Jarmusch 2014, n.p.).

As Paterson's voiceover continues, the shot dissolves into a closeup of Paterson in profile, now driving a bus. The beginning words of the poem are superimposed over the bus window to his left, filling out the right side of the frame one line at a time: "When you're a child/you learn/there are three dimensions:/height, width and depth." The shot of Paterson driving the bus overlaps with a shot of the passengers at the rear of the bus, and the words "like a shoebox" appear, still in the window at the front of the bus below the words "height, width, and depth." The image resolves on the passengers in the back, with a young woman center frame, sitting in profile. A new set of words begins to appear on the right side of the frame as Paterson's voiceover continues: "Then later, you hear/there's a fourth dimension." These words hang on the screen, waiting for Paterson to recite the next word: "Time."

In Paterson's poem and in Jarmusch's editing choices, time is depicted as a dimension that can expand, compress, and overlap, its folds liberating beings from the "shoebox" of a three-dimensional space. In his depiction of time, Jarmusch's aesthetic points toward the kinds of queer temporalities suggested in the work of José Esteban Muñoz (2009) and Elizabeth Freeman (2007, 2010). Freeman in particular is concerned with whether and how the concept of kinship can be reworked to provide the grounds for the emergence of queer futures. In "Queer Belongings: Kinship Theory and Queer Theory," she notes that queerness appears outside kinship structures that bind biological reproduction to social reproduction (2007). In refusing to reproduce and continue these structures, queer beings fail to abide by human constructs of time that would grant them the kinds of intelligibility and rights of existence that kinship structures are designed to confer. To oppose hetero/chrononormative ways of registering existence and experience, she uncovers a process she refers to as "temporal drag" (2010, xxiii). This concept explains that queer beings emerge along multiple temporalities, based in part on what forms of life each timeline allows. She performs ways of reading queerly that are both nostalgic and anticipatory, creating a kinship between texts and temporalities that permits the emergence of queer futures. These queer ways of reading are also ways of writing, as they performatively bring past texts into experiences of the present.

Similar to Freeman's enactment of "temporal drag," Jarmusch's filmmaking pulls together multiple timeframes, permitting ways of reading that suggest possibilities for a kind of subjectivity that connects and moves between various forms of embodiment. In the case of *Paterson*, this mobile subjectivity gets registered through superimpositions and dissolves that diffract any sort of unitary perspective while joining "inside" to "outside." After the word "time" appears onscreen in "Another One," the viewer's perspective is filtered and multiplied through a series of overlapping reflected images created by the mirrors in the bus and the windows. Shots are layered, moving over each other from different directions, as Paterson speaks of "time" expanding into more dimensions: "Then some say there can be five, six, seven." We see the young female passenger's fingers in her lap in closeup, as if we were sitting

next to her, overlapped with the image of a passenger behind her getting up from his seat to exit the bus. Images from the front of the bus and the back of the bus slide over a closer view of the young woman's hands, now holding up a black cellphone as she texts. The superimpositions proliferate, and we are shown the street outside the bus, along with its future bus passengers, as they merge with images of the bus's interior, creating abstract shapes. We have traveled Paterson's bus route with him. But we are also taken forward into future circuits of that route, and backward to the presumably anterior space of his writing, the space of the timeless, stationary, everchanging waterfall—no longer in the "shoebox" of Paterson's bus, but rather in a collage of spaces and temporalities.

Paterson's meditative space is interrupted by the sight of a woman and her twin girls crossing the street in front of his bus. With the sighting of the twins, the poem's meditation on time and the collage of images halts and Paterson is returned to everyday existence. A dissolve containing the circular top of a beerglass sets up a straight cut from Paterson's perspective to the watch on his wrist—a graphic match. In another shot taken from Paterson's perspective, one of the little girls looks back at Paterson through opaque sunglasses, blocking his observer's gaze. His voiceover continues as the lines of the poem appear onscreen right, timed to appear with his voice: "I knock off work/ have a beer/at the bar/I look down at the glass/and feel glad." As these lines appear, images of passengers boarding the bus from the outside dissolve into an image of the beer glass, a flat circle framed from above. The poem has ended, and along with it, the superimpositions that merged the front, back,

Figure 14.1 A bus passenger's hands overlap with the front of the bus and the bus stop outside in *Paterson*. Jarmusch, Jim, director. 2016. Amazon Studios/ Bleecker Street.

Source: Screen grab by the author.

interior and exterior of the bus. The scene continues with a series of straight cuts, returning the viewer to "normal" time, as the sounds of the bus and traffic gradually replace the reverberating gongs of the background music. We are returned to Paterson's perspective, alternating shots of Paterson's face with what he sees as he drives, until a long shot shows the bus driving over the bridge that crosses the waterfall, and the sounds of water overtake the sounds of the engine of the bus. The bus, its passengers, and its driver (played by actor Adam Driver, his name itself a meditation on origin and agency) enter the timeless waters of the Passaic Falls, presumably to return the next day to complete another circuit of repetition and difference.

Brian Jarvis (2020) notes that in slow cinema, the spectator is "given space to look at that which is typically overlooked and time in which to consider the experience of time itself" (393). One way in which Jarmusch provides "space" to look at "time itself" is through repetition: "Repetition and the repetition of repetition are integral to slow cinema . . . slow cinema encourages recognition of the extent to which the similar is not the same" (394). Repetition is present in Paterson's narrative structure and mise en scène. An example of this has already been suggested: Paterson has fleeting encounters with twins of varying races, ages and genders throughout the film, moments of difference enclosed within his routine of sameness. And when he returns home, he sees black and white circles appear on various surfaces in his home—walls, curtains, even cupcakes, all the daily creations of his wife Laura. Paterson unquestioningly accepts these additions to his home: "I love how all the circles are different," he says. Laura's proliferating circles are echoed in the film's editing through dissolves and superimpositions, but also in the ways various spaces are brought together through graphic matches and parallel images that create similarities, creating "shared timings" (Freeman 2010, xi). We see such shared timings when the watch face is matched with the circle of the top of the beer glass, or when the image of Paterson at the waterfall, writing the poem he recites in this scene, is echoed by the image of his female passenger texting while the words of his poem move across the frame.

Water Falls and Ghost Dogs: Intertextual Kinships

The poems in *Paterson* are written by Ron Padgett, in deliberate imitation of the poems of William Carlos Williams, whose epic poem "Paterson" inspired Jarmusch's film of the same name. Thus, both Williams and his poem are present in the film, living alongside the creations of Padgett and Jarmusch, creating a cross-temporal, intersubjective form of kinship. Jarmusch tells his film's origin story as follows:

> I was reading a lot of William Carlos Williams, and decided to take a day trip to Paterson . . . I saw the Passaic Falls, sat where Paterson in our film sits. I was starting to read the long poem "Paterson" again . . . the beginning is so beautiful. It describes the rock formation of the falls

> as being like a man, and starts with the metaphor of Paterson itself being a man.
>
> (Jarmusch 2016, 20)

The man "Paterson" represents the collective that is the city of Paterson, and both, according to Jarmusch's reading of Williams, are birthed through a kind of marriage of water and rock. This description of the film's origins rejects kinship structures based on human biology and exceptionalism. Rather than telling a story of origin and progress, Jarmusch situates himself and his work within what Jack Halberstam would call "a universe of multiple modes of being" (2011, 33), modes generated by, as he puts it, "waves of the same ocean that keeps coming" (Jarmusch 2014).

If Paterson—the city, the poem, and the man—may be said to emerge from the water of the Passaic Falls, water plays a similar role in Jarmusch's conception of the medium of film itself. Jarmusch articulates this idea in the only poem in *Paterson* that he wrote himself, "Water Falls." The poem is written and read aloud to Paterson by a young girl who writes in a "secret notebook" as she waits for her mother. Unlike the other poems written by Padgett/Paterson, the image of the waterfall itself does not appear in the film's portrayal of the poem. Rather, the waterfall is itself the matter of the poem, and it is not a noun so much as a complete sentence: "Two words," the girl informs Paterson. The title's emphasis is on what water does, rather than what the waterfall is, turning what would otherwise be thought of as an inanimate entity into an agent of change and transformation. In a static medium shot representing Paterson's point of view, the girl reads "Water falls/from the bright air/It falls like hair/falling across a young girl's shoulders/Water falls/making pools in the asphalt." The next words cut to Paterson's face: "Dirty mirrors with clouds and buildings inside." The shot returns to the little girl: "It falls on the roof of my house/It falls on my mother/and on my hair/Most people call it rain." With the closing line that connects the waterfall to the rain, she smiles at Paterson to get his appreciation of her trope.

While most of the poems in Paterson are edited with dissolves meant to join the temporalities of Paterson's workday with the time of his writing, "Water Falls" is edited more conventionally. The shot sequence follows a clear shot-reverse-shot pattern, the sound is diegetic, and the gamelan soundtrack that typically accompanies Paterson's poems is absent. But when the camera shows us Paterson's face, we hear, in the lines the girl speaks, a metaphor for film: a "dirty mirror" that contains the world in its frame, "with clouds and buildings inside." Water contains and sustains life, it falls on everyone, and its puddles offer that life back in images.

In creating a connection between the waterfall, the "dirty mirrors" created by rain, and film itself, the girl poet joins a kinship system that includes poet Williams and filmmaker Jarmusch, a kinship made possible through the merging of texts and intertexts. This scene replicates an exchange between two characters in Jarmusch's earlier film *Ghost Dog* (1999): an assassin who

lives by the way of the samurai and a young girl he encounters. Juan Antonio Suárez (2007) notes that Ghost Dog, the assassin, is composed of the sources he quotes from, as well as the prior movie characters he resembles, both inside and outside Jarmusch's own body of work. Ghost Dog's world unfolds as "a looped temporality where the past haunts the present and moving forward consists in bringing back the texts of the past" (Suárez 2007, 138). For example, after Ghost Dog passes on the Hakagure to Pearline (the girl), he is shot, and Pearline picks up his gun to shoot his killer, thereby taking on the code and identity of the samurai.

Suárez observes that the intertextuality of *Ghost Dog* operates as a "translation machine . . . where there are no original and target texts but momentary relay stations in a chain of connection that stretches indefinitely into the past and will continue into the future" (2007, 136). We see an example of this intertextual "translation machine" in *Paterson* as well. Paterson's dog eats his poems, and because he is anti-technology and uninterested in fame or legacy, Paterson has made no copies of them. In the final scene, he encounters a Japanese tourist at the same waterfall where he normally writes his poems. The tourist is reading a translation of the poem "Paterson." Its preface appears on the last page, as Japanese writing is read from the right toward the left. Ends, it is suggested, can be beginnings. At the close of the conversation, the tourist gives Paterson an empty notebook, which encourages Paterson to take up writing poetry again. The tourist's gift echoes the "secret notebook" of the young girl poet; thus, a notebook is a point of relay joining the past and futures of all who connect to it.

Posthuman Kinships: *Only Lovers Left Alive*

In his interviews, Jarmusch devalues the concept of originality and the hierarchical structures of authorship, saying that the act of creation is an act of translation into new contexts (Kapsaskis 2021, 786). He positions his films as intertexts built from other intertexts by explicitly pointing to literary references, notably actual books. The books that appear on Paterson's bookshelves are Jarmusch's own books. Paterson's wife is named Laura, a reference to the Laura of Petrarch, and Paterson has images of both in the lunchbox that forms an important part of his daily routine. Through these inter- and intra-textual references, Jarmusch both marks his presence as an auteur and creates stopping points—"relay stations," in Suárez's words—for new ways of seeing old stories.

Jarmusch's own books also appear in *Only Lovers Left Alive* (2013), the film that preceded *Paterson*. Like the characters in *Ghost Dog* and *Paterson*, Adam and Eve interact overtly with prior literary and cultural texts and are constituted by them. Adam and Eve are vampires, and Jarmusch presents them as archives of sorts; the past is literally present in them. Amelie Hastie notes that Adam and Eve are "embodiments of history, with the film as a kind of enactment of Walter Benjamin's experience of the Paris arcades, with

palimpsests abounding" (2014, 66). Eve lives surrounded by all the books she has read over her very long life, some of which appear later in *Paterson*, and she lives near Christopher Marlowe, who has survived through the ages as a fellow vampire. Adam and Eve talk of Shakespeare as someone they knew in his time, someone who has been misrepresented as the sole author of his plays; the historical record does not resemble the "hack" they once knew—Jarmusch has proclaimed himself an "anti-Stratfordian," asserting that "Shakespeare" is an assemblage of literary forces gathered under a singular name and assumed subjectivity (Jarmusch 2014).

Jarmusch's intertextual view of artistic creation parallels his world perspective, which decenters humans, and views all organic and inorganic phenomena as part of an interconnected ecosystem. In *Only Lovers Left Alive*, this perspective is articulated through the concept of quantum entanglement, or, in Adam's phrasing, "spooky action at a distance," where two bonded particles (he and Eve) act upon and influence each other no matter how separated they may be in space. The opening scene sets up the metaphor of quantum entanglement, in a series of shots that connect and collapse time and space. The first shot shows a black universe of stars rotating in a clockwise direction. The stars merge to become the grooves of a black record playing the song "Funnel of Love." The image of a "funnel of love" evoked by the song is followed by overhead shots of Adam and Eve rotating on their beds in the same direction as the record, connecting both characters to the same rhythm despite the fact that, as we learn later, they live on opposite ends of the globe, in cities that signal the end of the Anthropocene era in different ways—Adam in a post-industrial Detroit and Eve in an ancient and crumbling Tangiers. The soundtrack, the continuous circular motion from cut to cut, and the overhead shots collapse space into two dimensions, with the record's center being the fixed point around which the rest of the world revolves. The spinning universe that surrounds Adam and Eve pushes them beyond human constructs of time.

Speaking of the character of Ghost Dog and how he connects with nonhuman species, Jarmusch says "You can't evaluate things in a human-centric way when you think about nature and animals and plants—all things are part of one thing" (2000, 166). Ghost Dog's name suggests he is both an animal and a ghost, a creature who transcends species and time, occupying a non-normative, non-human temporality. Jarmusch's ecological mindset similarly informed his decision to take up and adapt the genre of the vampire film in *Only Lovers Left Alive*. He explains that vampires have "an overview of history, they see humans are becoming more and more fragile" (2014, n.p.). Adam and Eve are very aware of the limits of the lifespan of the human individual as well as the human species, as their lifespans extend before and after human timeframes. Conscious of the limitations that human exceptionalism poses to human survival, they embody versions of posthuman existence that fuse organic and inorganic processes. Adam lives in Detroit in a post-industrial landscape of decay and contemplates suicide. Calling the human species

"zombies," he sees the death of humanity in how it uses technology in ways that squander resources. He remarks to Eve that humans are currently in their oil wars and wonders how long it will take for their water wars to occur (not long, as it appears at the moment of this writing). His use of technology is both nostalgic and anticipatory, to use Freeman's terms—for example, he powers his home through a Tesla machine he has manufactured, a technology that, in theory, creates no waste and is self-generating. Eve, on the other hand, models the kind of intersubjectivity that Dana Luciano and Mel Chen advocate in their essay "Has the Queer Ever Been Human," holding out hope for some form of life that allows for "inhuman identifications" (2015, 200). She reassures Adam that they will still have a world to inhabit after the humans have died off, because as long as there is water, there will be life—it is unclear where their future blood supply will come from, as they steal from hospitals and other human blood supplies. She speaks to animals and plants as if they were speaking back to her, addressing them by their Latin names. Eve's use of technology is mostly anticipatory; she uses cellphones (Adam does not, and nor does Paterson) and she takes transatlantic overnight flights on an airline carrier named Lumière—perhaps a nod to cinema's ability to bring disparate times and spaces together.

Both Adam and Eve perform a kind of temporal drag in which they gather relicts of the past to make them "kin"; nothing is abandoned or discarded as "waste," and antique objects are lovingly returned to (Adam's musical instruments, Eve's books) or repurposed (wires and coils for Adam's generator). Adam and Eve enact an ecocritical posthumanist philosophy that makes what might otherwise be called "waste" part of a productive process. This philosophy is clearly shared by Jarmusch himself. Like both Paterson and Adam, Jarmusch famously does not like cellphones and is reluctant to abandon old technologies. Nikola Tesla has been mentioned by Jarmusch's characters before, notably in *Coffee and Cigarettes* (2003). For Jarmusch, as for Adam, this scientist represents a tragic example of how humans waste their natural resources:

> If we had followed Tesla, we'd have free energy all over the fucking planet. We would have an exchange of food sources based on an overview of the planet, where with wireless communication, the internet, we could find out: "Uh-oh, Africa needs wheat. . . . Surplus of wheat over here in Asia, start shipping it now." Immediate and free energy anywhere, imagine what a different world we would live in. [Tesla] envisioned cities draped with plants for oxygen, all the buildings covered in plants and ivy, birds in the air, electric vehicles, no emissions and hydrocarbons and all this shit we have.
>
> (2014, 4)

As we see from the previous passage, the "different world" humans might occupy is made up of posthuman kinships in which organic and inorganic

matter integrate, where cities and computer relays entangle with bioforms like wheat and birds. The worlding Jarmusch envisions suggests the kind of "intra-action" that Karen Barad suggests occurs between species and other recognized natural phenomena (Barad 2012, 33).

Karen Barad introduces the term "queer critters" to acknowledge the great variability in sexual and reproductive practices that crosses all forms of nature, but more specifically to denote species and phenomena that demonstrate the principle of quantum entanglement (2012, 32). Adam and Eve are "queer critters," their apparent heterosexuality notwithstanding. Quantumly entangled, their existence suggests both polar opposition and identity within that difference. Not only are they quantumly entangled, but they are "critters" made up of other critters. Jarmusch has noted that Adam and Eve are a kind of posthuman amalgamation of species. "They've got little animalistic things in them genetically, it happened in the crossover" (Jarmusch 2014). This idea was worked into the filmmaking process, as the wigs the actors wore were a mix of human hair, goat hair, and yak hair, and the sounds of their heartbeats came from a slowed-down wolf's heartbeat (Jarmusch 2014).

At the end of *Only Lovers Left Alive*, after Eve drinks the only drop of blood they have left, they contemplate going "15th century" and surviving by killing a young heterosexual couple embracing nearby. They reason that humans are killing their planet anyway, and that they will not kill but rather "turn" the couple, giving them a chance at life by transforming them to a new species. Eve asks Adam to explain "spooky action at a distance" (quantum entanglement) and his explanation seems to indicate that the two lovers, like they themselves, cannot ever be truly separated. More importantly, both "species" are mostly water, like the earth they all inhabit: 82 percent of human blood is water, 55–60 percent of the human body is water, and over 70 percent of earth's surface is water. Adam and Eve seem to be justifying their own survival by suggesting that water is itself a life force, an inhuman "critter" that decenters the human and makes other lifeforms of equal importance. Whether both couples live or die, or become entangled with other particles or "critters," water will facilitate their posthuman journey. Their future, whatever it might be, lies in adapting lifeforms and creating kinships across species. The last few shots are in slow motion with the camera slowly closing in on the faces of both couples, a kind of reverse echo of the universe's "Funnel of Love" in the opening shots.

French Water: Queer Circles

In 2021, amidst COVID pandemic lockdowns and restrictions, Jim Jarmusch made a nine-minute film, *French Water*, as a promotion for Yves St. Laurent's Spring/Summer 2021 clothing line. Given the importance Jarmusch's other films place on ecological sustainability, it seems odd that he would make a film about Paris fashion during a time when people rarely left their homes. But in other ways, this collaboration with the fashion house makes sense.

Yves St. Laurent's artistic director, Anthony Vaccarello, had previously collaborated with filmmakers Gaspar Noë and Wong Kar-Wei (Jarmusch and Vaccarello 2021, n.p.). The clothes in the film evoke fashion trends of earlier eras, performing a kind of temporal drag that the film heightens.

In this film, Jarmusch may be poking fun at the planned ephemerality of the fashion industry while granting it a place in his own collaborative view of artistic creation. *French Water* continues, even exaggerates, Jarmusch's prior emphasis on queer times. Characters disappear and reappear in different clothes, repeating each other's lines and continually losing track of each other in a big, spatially perplexing entertainment venue grounded by a rug made up of circles arranged in spiral patterns. In the closing shots, three of the characters (United States actors Chloë Sevigny, Indya Moore, and Julianne Moore, playing themselves) end up in one place near the exit doors and pull on COVID masks to exit the venue. Given the queer slowing down of pandemic time during which the film was made, this film is particularly appropriate for examining Jarmusch's slow cinema practices.

The film begins as a sort of elegy to a party that is over. The first shot is a callback to the spiraling universe that opens *Only Lovers Left Alive*. The camera moves slowly and laterally over a purple carpet with a graphic design composed of circles decreasing in size to form spirals—a funnel of sorts, and a metaphor for the collapsing of space and time. In the next shots, the camera moves over the white tablecloths of an abandoned dinner party. Empty of people, these shots evoke the tableaus of memento mori paintings, panning over champagne glasses, crumpled napkins, and trays of half-eaten black and white cookies. A pair of shoes appears on the carpet, belonging to the only apparent occupant of this space, a waiter who is holding a tray of glasses of water. In slow motion, accompanied by a soundtrack of a repeated sequence of ascending and descending notes, Julianne Moore and Chloë Sevigny enter a vast lobby area covered by the purple carpet and exit its glass doors. They reenter the exit doors in different clothing, to the bemusement of the waiter. They walk down a marble staircase remarking that they miss Charlotte (Gainsbourg), whom they say is in Paris. But somehow Gainsbourg is actually there at the party space, at least to the waiter's eyes; she appears and reappears in stop-motion photography style, eating cookies and drinking champagne and throwing both over her shoulder, wearing alternating black and white outfits.

Jarmusch took his inspiration from *La Ronde* (Max Ophuls 1950), in which each scene contains repeated elements from the last in a sort of comedy of errors, with the story carried from one character to another until the story comes full circle at the end (Jarmusch and Vaccarello 2021). In *French Water*, the characters keep losing each other and appearing in different places. After the cryptic appearance of Gainsbourg, Indya Moore (a trans, nonbinary performer whom Chloë and Julianne refer to as "they") approaches the waiter to ask if he has seen Julianne and Chloë. The waiter responds, "Do your friends change their clothes often?" Indya says that they

do, and the waiter offers Indya a glass of water. "It's from France," he says, "French water." Indya picks up a glass, takes a sip, and says, "I love water." This dialog sequence is absurd, delivered deadpan, and is repeated two more times over the course of the film by Julianne and Chloë, with minor changes. Julianne and Chloë somehow find each other but wonder where Indya has gone. Chloë says, "Damn Indya, always doing this. They said they'd be right back. Charlotte used to do this every time." Julianne says she misses Charlotte and asks "Where are we? Were we here before?" Eventually the three American friends find each other in the lobby with the circular carpet patterning and exit together, donning their masks and thanking the waiter for his "French Water." Charlotte exits the same lobby door later, unmasked, never having drunk the "French Water."

This film is circular not just in plot structure but in its editing patterns, borrowing overtly from both *Only Lovers Left Alive* and *Paterson*. This is most obvious in a scene where Charlotte takes off her shoes and spins clockwise in a circle, her clothes alternating between all-white and all-black. Shot from above, the image evokes the repeated shots of Paterson's watch and *Only Lovers Left Alive*'s spinning universe that turns into a record. Charlotte's

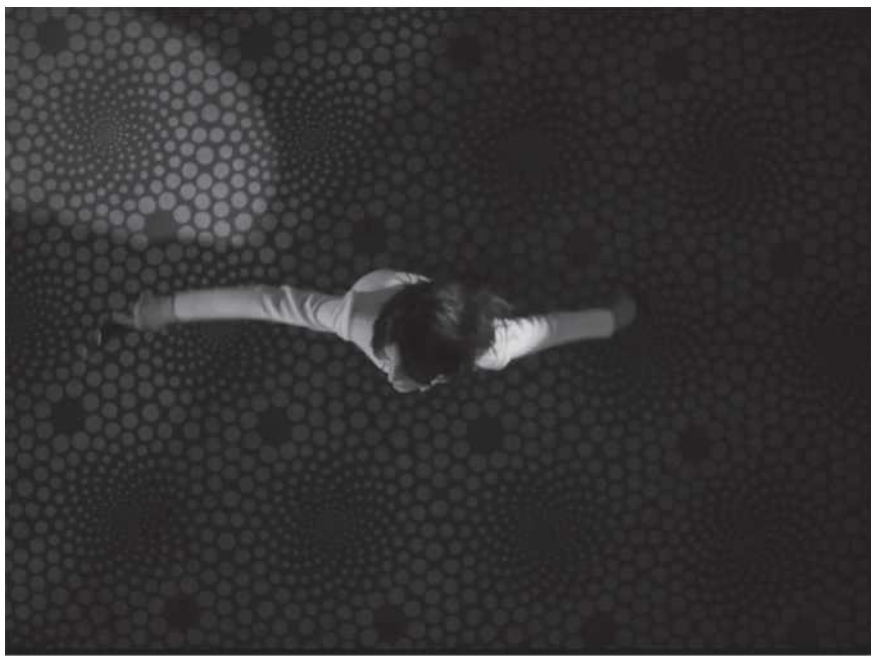

Figure 14.2 Charlotte Gainsbourg's arms echo the watch hands in *Paterson* and the spinning record of *Only Lovers Left Alive*. In *French Water*. Jarmusch, Jim, director. 2021. St. Laurent.

Source: Screen grab by the author.

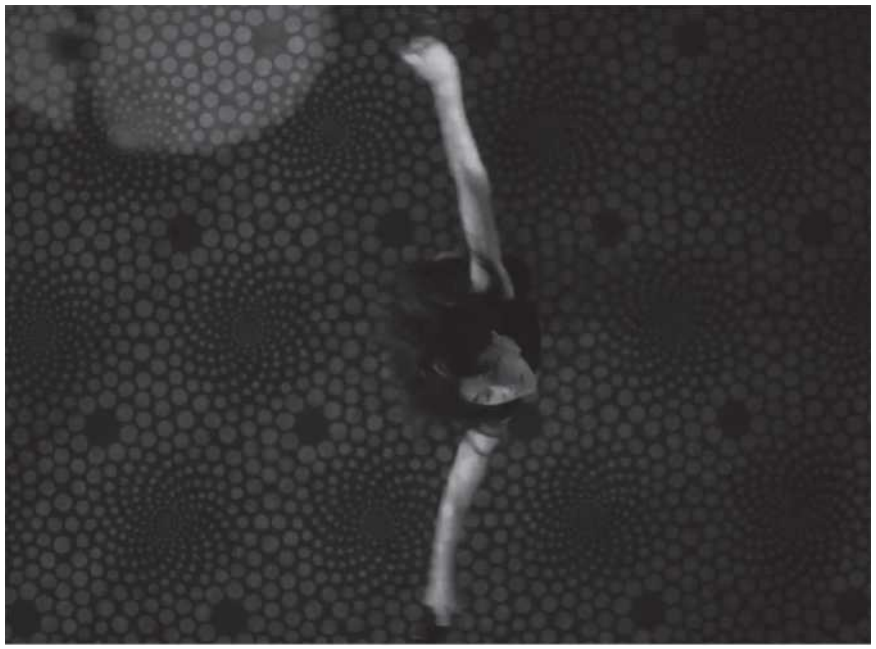

Figure 14.3 Now in black, Gainsbourg continues her clockwise rotation. *French Water.* Jarmusch, Jim, director. 2021. St. Laurent.

Source: Screen grab by the author.

arms, holding the shoes, act as the hands of the clock and the top of her head as the center point. As her rotations accelerate, the circles of the carpet layer over the image, the flashes of black and white creating a psychedelic, strobe light effect.

The unpredictability of Charlotte and Indya that Chloë and Julianne bemoan may be read as a queering of heteronormative structures and temporality. Indya is always late, like Charlotte. As a rule, Jarmusch's characters, most of them appearing "straight" on the surface, have no stake in productive timelines or reproductive futurisms. They serve as failures according to hetero- and chrono-normative models of subjectivity. Paterson is a "productive" member of society in that he transports people to their destinations, but he writes poems he will not publish. Laura continually refashions their home with circular patterns, but her "work" stays inside. The couple will not reproduce; they talk about the possibility of having children, but the sameness of their lives makes that seem unlikely; children appear only as the fleeting images of twins Paterson encounters. Vampire Adam is a musician, but he takes no credit for his compositions, and the only form of biological reproduction he and Eve have ever engaged in produces other vampires, not humans. The character of Don Johnson (Bill Murray) in *Broken Flowers*

(2005) is the only central character anywhere in Jarmusch's body of work who has had children, and it's not clear if he ever really did. Spinning across space and time, Charlotte in *French Water* joins a circle of wastrels that began with Allie in *Permanent Vacation*. She is a queer critter, a phenomenon that appears only in certain conjunctions of time and space and seemingly alters them both in the kind of process Barad refers to as spacetimemattering (2012, 22).

Conclusion

It is curious that the waiter in *French Water* emphasizes the French-ness of the water he serves. This emphasis may be an ironic commentary on the fact that Paris fashion is supposed to be better than any other. Also, France is a leading force in the bottled water market in a time when some bottled water comes from melting icebergs. Reduced to filling water glasses on a tray, "French" water has been commodified: it bears no resemblance to the grand waterfall that produces cities in *Paterson* or the lakes and oceans that produce organic lifeforms in *Only Lovers Left Alive*. Given the reference to pandemic time, "French" water may signify a diminished world water supply, echoing the pessimism of Adam and Eve. Charlotte (whom her friends refer to as "that French bitch") may represent the environmental destruction of late capitalism, since she drinks bottles of champagne and tosses food over her shoulder after the party is over. On the other hand, she may be the last remnants of that human party, occupying some temporality we don't yet know.

Elizabeth Freeman's concept of "temporal drag" helps make legible the lives of queer "wastrels of time" (2010), allowing structures of kinship to emerge outside of hetero-centric reproductive futurisms. Jarmusch's "slow cinema" similarly deconstructs time and space, pointing to shared timings that might otherwise be invisible. Shared timing occurs in *Only Lovers Left Alive* (2013), where vampires Adam and Eve exist as posthuman archives of the world they have inhabited: the past is literally present in their blood. Shared timing occurs in *Paterson* (2016) as well, where the title character's name and daily life connect the town he lives in (Paterson), to its history. As a bus driver, Paterson occupies a time that is as cyclical as it is linear, and he attempts to grasp its points of convergence in the poetry he writes. Finally, we see shared timings in *French Water* (2021). This fashion short emphasizes the ephemerality of human existence, with Charlotte Gainsborough haunting the spaces where Indya Moore, Chloë Sevigny, and Julianne Moore search for her.

Time is cyclical and, perhaps, reversible in Jarmusch's work. We follow this circular path at the narrative level through the days of the week that structure Paterson's life, and at the visual level through the spirals and funnels that connect time to space in *French Water* and *Only Lovers Left Alive*. We hear it in the repetitive cyclical musical soundtracks that accompany most of his films. We experience it through his "protagonists," who

defy hetero-chrononormative benchmarks of living, instead finding kinships among chance encounters and proliferating intertexts. Jarmusch's filmmaking encourages us to reject "straight" time and seek out more mobile, intersubjective kinship relations. In Jarmusch's enactments of temporal drag, human, nonhuman, and posthuman temporalities converge in shared timings and forms of kinship that fall outside straight linear timelines.

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15 "All the Ages We've Shaped Together"

Examining Queer Genealogies, Science Fiction and Non-Linear Storytelling Through El-Mohtar and Gladstone's *This Is How You Lose the Time War* (2019)

Beatriz Hermida Ramos[1]

Introduction

In 2019, the editorial house Simon and Schuster published *This Is How Lose the Time War*, a science fiction epistolary novella written by Amal El-Mohtar and Max Gladstone. Shortly after, the novella won the Hugo, the BSFA and the Nebula awards and was widely praised for its poetic prose and its representation of queer and sapphic identities in a futuristic setting.

El-Mohtar and Gladstone's work follows two characters, Red and Blue, who work for opposing organizations that attempt to change the course of history to best suit their corporate needs. It is in this intertwining of temporal possibilities that the two characters meet and eventually fall for one another through written correspondence, always keeping their letters and their relationship secret for fear of being discovered. However, Red is eventually exposed by her agency and is forced to poison her partner, Blue, through one of their letters. After Blue's death, Red is able to escape from her own agency and travel to the past to both destroy any physical remains of the letters and to immunize Blue's younger self against the poison. It is through these acts of protection and care that the novella establishes its circular structure, weaving form and content together.

While this text can be seen as radical in that it focuses on a sapphic romance between characters who time travel to create opposing futures, this chapter argues that the narrative form of the novella is equally subversive. The structure of the story, which consists of short letters and chapters that take place in different moments in time, relies on narrative fragmentation and non-linear storytelling to both represent and denounce the lack of a non-fractured history and literary tradition in which queer people can find themselves.[2] Therefore, this chapter is concerned with both the connections between science fiction and queerness, and the exploration of queer history

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(or lack thereof) through narrative devices such as temporal discontinuity and irregular structures.

This approach requires viewing literature as offering emancipatory possibilities in regard to hegemonic discourses, as well as having the potential to "unsettl[e] established models of knowledge and epistemological presumptions involved in the production of history" (Grosz 1994, 145). This analysis also focuses on the similitudes between queer storytelling and science fiction narratives, since both have the potential to destabilize what is deemed normal or even possible. Thus, this chapter is interested in exploring the transformative potential of storytelling as a literary and political practice in relation to queer identities and subjectivities while also arguing that speculative genres are fertile spaces for us to understand and contextualize queerness in hostile and cisheteronormative contexts.

In centering *This Is How You Lose the Time War* and its treatment of queerness through non-linear narrative choices, this chapter also poses the question of how/whether "temporal and sexual normativities, as well as temporal and sexual dissonance, are constitutively intertwined" (Traub 2013, 22). To do so, this chapter draws from scholarship on queer time to examine how "temporalities . . . are questions of being/becoming" (Barad et al. 2013, 17), as well as the ways in which the novella challenges the widespread notion that "the heteronormative life trajectory [i]s the only pathway to a life of fulfillment and happiness" (Wilkinson 2019, 5) through its narrative use of fragmented form and short letters.

It is in this context that I wish to examine El-Mohtar and Gladstone's work. The first part of the chapter explores storytelling as a space for creating and interrogating queer theory and queer lived experiences, while still focusing on the potential of science fiction, and speculative fiction as a whole, to question normative ways of understanding gender and sexuality.[3] The second part focuses on how the novella relies on non-linear narrative structures to destabilize chrono and heteronormativity, focusing on queer temporality to analyze the ways the novella constructs queer futures and genealogies.

(Speculative) Storytelling as a Transformative Space

In 2019, speculative author Carmen María Machado published *In the Dream House*, a memoir that draws from the Gothic tradition, queer theory and fairytale folklore to narrate Machado's history of domestic abuse while in a sapphic relationship. While the book does center Machado's experiences both as victim and survivor, it also often makes reference to the process of writing about and researching domestic and sexual violence between women. Machado insists on the difficulties of finding explicit documentation about queer abuse and queer lives, and she mentions Saidiya Hartman's work on "the violence of the archive" or "archival silence" (2008) to explain how queer experiences are deliberately, systematically, and even violently absent

from both our oral and written traditions. Through the text, Machado discusses the potential of stories to "pu[t] people in context" (2019, 50), to create a certain queer genealogy where the past, the present and the future—if is it possible to understand them as distinctly separate—are able to, and do, influence one another. When asking the question "what gets left behind?" (2019, 3) when marginalized communities face this narrative erasure, Machado offers the following answer: "[g]aps where people never see themselves or find information about themselves. Holes that make it impossible to give oneself a context" (2019, 3).

This idea of stories influencing the ways we are able to conceptualize our identities and conceive ourselves as belonging, as being part of, as connected to, is fortunately, not new. There is abundant scholarship that surrounds the potential of storytelling as a space for creating political theory (Hemmings 2011[4]; Haraway 2019) and as sites of social connection and redefinition (Le Guin 2018[5]). Storytelling, with its ability to link imagination and politics together, offers us a certain means of "'re-membering' silenced histories and thereby resisting oppression" (Bomans 2021, 163[6]), of creating bridges between different temporalities and identities, of filling absence with words. When we conceive stories as having "ethical, political, and social weight" (Le Guin 1989, 198–99), we are able to critically engage with the transformative and perhaps even healing potential of storytelling, and we see their role in "examining how knowledge is made, and how we come to know" (Rochelle 2005, 416)—which in turn allows us to question what kinds of knowledge are considered valuable.

In a context where LGBT+phobic violence is ubiquitous, stories offer us narrative possibilities to challenge (cishetero)normative expectations, and allow us to interrogate, question and reimagine what has been broken, what has not yet been put into words. For queer people, storytelling is in constant dialogue with ideas of violence and hope, as stories act as "part of strategies of resistance" (Bomans 2021, 165) against hegemonic systems of power. This is especially relevant when queerness is understood as "a horizon" (Muñoz 2019), and as "being about the self that is at odds with everything around it and has to invent and create and find a place to speak and to thrive and to live" (hooks 2014).[7] I am particularly interested in Muñoz's view of queerness as "essentially about the rejection of a here and now and an insistence on potentiality for another world" (Muñoz 2019, 10[8]) and how this emphasis on speculative potentiality allows us to understand stories as intimately connected with queer experiences, or even to view storytelling as a queer practice. It seems that, for those "destined for no future" (Puar 2007, 211), those who "have been marked as futureless or simply left out by dominant imaginaries" (Lothian 2019, 2), narrative spaces become sites of reimagination, connection and political contestation that are essential in the struggle for survival and self-definition. Again, this chapter operates under the assumption that "[t]he thought of a possible life is only an indulgence for those who already

know themselves to be possible. For those who are still looking to become possible, possibility is a necessity" (Butler 2004, 31), which allows us to consider storytelling as central to constructing queer genealogies, communities, and futures. Once again, this concern with narratives and possible futures should not be interpreted as a lack of preoccupation with past and present queer struggles—after all, as Chambers-Letson Nyong'o and Pellegrini point out, "Muñoz warned us against disappearing wholly into futurity since 'one cannot afford' to simply 'turn away from the present' " (2019, 17). Instead, narrating and imagining queer futures that are sustained on more than mere survival is a way of reconnecting with our queer heritage, a way of challenging the present.

Once narrative spaces have been established as offering possibilities to "figure, extend, and sustain queer kinship" (Bradway 2021, 714), and as sites for creating and negotiating queer theory,[9] this chapter will explore how these characteristics may be better understood or exemplified in the context of speculative narratives and science fiction. Science fiction, with its ability to destabilizing normative ways of being, becoming and relating, allows for a critical questioning of what is deemed "normal" in terms of gendered and sexual identities, as well as temporality. The genre, with ideas of "otherness and difference" at its very core (Kennon 2011, 145), "seem[s] to be ideally suited, as a narrative mode, to the construction of imaginative challenges to the smoothly oiled technologies of heteronormativity" (Hollinger 1999, 24). Again, it seems that the transformative potential of storytelling cannot be divorced from the conventions of science fiction, as it allows for "the act of queer world-making through speculative imagining" (Lothian 2019, 3). In fact, it is this very same quality that allows science fiction to let us glimpse at, or even to promise us, a space where we can "move beyond the inclusionary towards a radical re-writing of the assumption within the show of naturalness, endurance, and fixity, of our current understandings of sexuality and its relationship both to the sex/gender dyad and to socio-cultural institutions" (Gay Pearson 1999, 16). It appears, then, that speculative storytelling has the capacity to destabilize not only hegemonic narratives and identities, but what is considered normal, natural and "ideal."

There is something that might need clarifying when discussing queer possibilities and science fiction. The fact that speculative fiction, as a genre, has a certain capacity to subvert heteropatriarchal and cisnormative expectations does not necessarily mean that science fiction always represents queerness in a positive light, or that all speculative texts argue in favor of feminist and queer liberation, as "[t]he queer possibilities invoked [in speculative stories] are not always hopeful, desirable, or even livable" (Lothian 2019, 4). Rather, what this chapter highlights is that these genres, with their conventions and literary traditions, have a unique ability to highlight the political potentiality of storytelling, and that, precisely because of the speculative allowances of these genres when it comes to queerness and normality, they are in a unique

position to put queer people "in context," going back to Machado's expression. Again, this chapter emphasizes how these notions interact with queer identities and queer temporality in *This Is How You Lose the Time War*, a novel where the speculative element of time travel is deeply intertwined with the characters' perceptions of themselves as "deviant in [their] different ways" (El-Mohtar and Gladstone 2019, 64), as Other.

As such, this chapter works with two interconnected ideas in El-Mohtar and Gladstone's novella. First, it sees the negotiation of queer identities as a political and temporal process that is nevertheless entangled with ideas of belonging and remembering—as "the construction and reconstruction of subjects and identities has both a temporal and a spatial dimension" (Wolmark 2005, 161)—and, second, it acknowledges that "fluid and often unstable temporal landscapes of feminist SF create a symbolic space within which fixed notions of subjectivity and identity are challenged" (Wolmark 2005, 156)—which heavily implies that the revolutionary quality of speculative storytelling also serves to destabilize hegemonic and chrononormative accounts of queer genealogies, experiences and temporalities. It is precisely this joined conception of (speculative) storytelling, queerness and time, this preoccupation with how "temporal and sexual normativities, as well as temporal and sexual dissonance, are constitutively intertwined" (Traub 2013, 29), that is central to the analysis of identity and form.

Science and speculative stories that actively thematize non-linearity and new ways of understanding time—such as time travel narratives—seem to have "theoretical questions about storytelling, and by extension about the philosophy of temporality, history, and subjectivity" at their very core, as time is "represented in the form of literal devices and plots" (Wittenberg 2017, 150). I am particularly interested in how this speculative use of form to foreground potentially political issues of temporalit(ies) might be related to the idea of storytelling as a transformative and healing practice for queer communities. Halfway through the novella, there is a confession from the character Red to Blue where she declares that "[l]etters are structures, not events. Yours give me a place to live inside" (El-Mohtar and Gladstone 2019, 95). In this text, where our conceptions of the possible are deliberately altered with the use of the different timelines, the fragmented form and the epistolary format, readers are able to see stories as "hospitable" spaces of sorts.[10] Here El-Mohtar and Gladstone portray letters almost as sites of physical intimacy, as habitable spaces;[11] queer narratives become—or rather, reveal themselves as—solace against queerphobic violence and cisheteropatriarchal times and expectations.

Just one letter earlier, there is the following extract: "I can hide in words so long as I scatter them through my body; to read your letters is to gather flowers from within myself, pluck a blossom here, a fern there, arrange and rearrange them in ways to suit a sunny room" (El-Mohtar and Gladstone 2019, 90). When reading it next to the previous passage, it seems that, for queer people, it is not only possible to carry these stories with us, but we are

also able to live inside our (hi)stories, to house them inside of ourselves. In a novel such *This Is How You Lose the Time War*, which is characterized by the joined presence of poetic adjectivization and posthuman characters,[12] this idea of carrying our queer heritage and connections within ourselves becomes almost literal. Readers see both Red and Blue carrying each other's words inside their palms, on the back of their skulls, and we watch as these queer stories, these letters that unfold through time, are embedded in the body, become a part of it, melt within—we learn that Red "aches for the letters she keeps behind her eye" (2019, 115) and we see her "reread[ing] the letters she's carved into herself" (2019, 85). The choice of the verb "carving," as violent as it may sound, conveys a certain sense of irrevocability, a permanent marking that renders the connection between body and words visible, physical.

As well as highlighting the reconciliatory and healing possibilities of time travel narratives—and speculative narratives as a whole—these lines also center the role of the body in reconnecting with and re-narrating one's lived experiences through time. This use of the erotic in its most strict sense,[13] of the physical as a way to carry a queer legacy, echoes Freeman's notion of erotohistoriography (2005). It is precisely when the barriers between bodies and (hi)stories become porous that we see most clearly the "possibility of touching across time" or even "collapsing time through affective contact between marginalized people" (Dinshaw et al. 2007, 178); that is, we become aware that touch can be used to transform the temporal landscape, to redefine the possible. Here, we see once again the potential of stories to act as both sanctuaries and bridges across time. The speculative elements of the novel allow for a reconnection and reconciliation with the characters' own queerness, and they bring forward the possibilities of experiencing and inhabiting queer worlds and queer times.

Queer Temporalities and Non-Linear Storytelling

As has been anticipated, this chapter sees queer (temporal) studies as having a certain critical positioning, and as holding near the idea of queer liberation. Rather than seeing time as objective, unbreakable or linear, this field seems to ask the question of "what worlds are made and what pleasures found when time is not a relentless onslaught of future generations angled toward progress, degeneration, or some combination of the two" (Lothian 2019, 3). This description seems to, very openly, put notions of normality at the center of queer temporal studies, while highlighting how sexual and gender deviance is constructed as being in direct opposition to the needs of the capitalist system. It appears, then, that the hegemonic understanding of time is directly influenced by the rhythm and necessities of both late capitalism and postindustrial societies—needs that include heterosexual reproduction and the constant exploitation of the working class.

There is a certain complicity between the patriarchy and temporal normativity in that these exhausting rhythms and rigid paths seem to rely on

cisheteronormative partnerships and on a heteronormative "lifeline" (Ahmed 2006) or "life schedule" (Halberstam 2005) that dictates that "a life should encompass certain events that need to take place at a certain time and in a certain order" (Berggren et al. 2020, 4)—such as (cis)straight partnerships, marriage, homeownership and reproduction, among others.[14] To better situate these notions, one may also allude to Freeman's idea of "chrononormativity" as "the use of time to organize individual human bodies toward maximum productivity" (2010, 3), or Dana Luciano's notion of "chronobiopolitics," as "the normative temporal organizations of entire populations around capital, nation and the family" (Luciano 2007, quoted in Baraitser 2014, 1). Given this theoretical context, it is possible to claim that there is an established academic space from which to explore time as inherently connected to gendered and sexual identities—both to those that are considered "natural" and those that are described as "deviant"—a space that also allows for a reexamination of time as a site of possible resistance.

Here, I want to explore how these ideas and conceptions of temporality as political, as pliant and fluid, may interact with the time travel elements and the formal choices of El-Mohtar and Gladstone's text. I am also interested in how queerness and queer possibilities are interconnected with "the future [Red and Blue] seek to secure at each other's expense" (2019, 7) throughout the novella. From the very start of the novel, we are presented with a conception of history that is malleable, fragmented and non-linear, one that is broken and changed depending on the needs of both Blue's and Red's agencies, a history, or rather, histories, or rather, (hi)stories, that can be altered and mutilated depending on the economic gain they are able to offer. History serves those that can pay for it, and it is presented as anything but fixed, anything but natural. Histories can be made, cultivated, remade anew through small, calculated actions; strands of time can be braided together to reap the most profitable outcome. In Gladstone and El-Mohtar's text, time belongs to no one yet it is altered, bought and sold by everyone, chrononormativity taking a whole new meaning.

These ideas of temporal malleability and time as political, as something that can be manipulated and bought, are not only present in the argument of the novella, but they lay at the core of its narrative structure. The book is written following a circular structure, and the different timelines are so deeply intertwined that we cannot make a clear binary distinction between what has happened and what can happen, between past, present, and future. Because the "past/present/future concepts were/are already/always overlapping," it seems that queer stories "will not/cannot be linear" (Shelton and Melchior 2019, 2) and require, instead, "alternative chronotopes"[15] (Freeman 2010) and alternative ways of knowing and narrating. As has been mentioned, the novella is constructed through two- and sometimes three-page chapters and short snippets of letters between characters that are carved and constructed at the very core of different time-strands, letters both Red and

Blue are forced to destroy for fear of being discovered by their agencies. It is precisely this fragmentation that interests me, this practice of crafting (hi)stories as "threaded through one another in a nonlinear enfolding of spacetimemattering" (Barad 2013, 18),[16] of connecting speculative stories and histories through form.

There is a particular fragment that takes place at the beginning of the novella where Blue writes a letter to Red by slowly carving the log of a tree throughout many decades. The use of letters to connect and warp the different timelines is, arguably, already a way of queering time through story,[17] but here, the subversive potential of words is even clearer when we emphasize the symbology of the log—as the tree rings that feature Blue's words seems to suggest the possibility of embedding queer identities and stories upon history itself. Even though this chapter has questioned the idea of "nature" and what is natural in a novella such as this one, where the human and the mechanical are interlocked, and time can be seen as a commodity, one must also note the significance of writing queerness into nature when precisely queerness itself is seen as not merely deviant but inherently unnatural in the eyes of the status quo:

> Red ungloves and traces the lumber with her fingertips, log by log, ring by ring, feeling each one's age.
>
> She stops when she finds the letter.
>
> . . . The letter begins in the tree's heart. Rings, thicker here and thinner there, form symbols in an alphabet no one present knows but Red. The words are small, sometimes smudged, but still: ten years per line of text, and many lines. Mapping roots, depositing or draining nutrients year by year, the message must have taken a century to craft. Perhaps local legends tell of some fairy or frozen goddess in these woods, seen for an instant, then gone. Red wonders what expression she wore as she placed the needle.
>
> She memorizes the message. She feels it ridge by ridge, line by line, and performs a slow arithmetic of years.
>
> (El-Mohtar and Gladstone 2019, 33–34)

In this fragment, Red discovers yet another letter from Blue, one that has been carefully crafted through time, waiting to be discovered. These love confessions and letter exchanges are part of a sapphic relationship that cannot be seen, remembered or traced for the sake of safety—throughout the text, readers see Red erasing any physical proof of the letters, even if their identity as the person that does so is not revealed until the end of the novella. The knowing of each other, carrying each other's names and texts, even in memory, is seen as dangerous, and it is what ultimately results in the biggest conflict in the novel, with Red and Blue in immediate danger after their agencies decide their relationship is a threat to both organizations. Even though,

when discussing form and temporality, one must remember that "not all nonlinear chronological imaginings can be recuperated as queer" (Dinshaw et al. 2007, 187), the non-linear and circular formal elements of the novel are pivotal in the interrogation of queerness and identity.

Here one may think of the experience of being remembered as antithetical to survival, of being visible as antithetical to survival, and the ways in which these two notions are an inherent part of many people's lived queer experiences and relationships with time. The book does not only explore the impossibility of (safely) being seen and recognized while queer, but it also echoes the desire for a shared history and a shared future:

> I want to chase you, find you, I want to be eluded and teased and adored; I want to be defeated and victorious—I want you to cut me, sharpen me. I want to drink tea beside you in ten years or a thousand. Flowers grow far away on a planet they'll call Cephalus, and these flowers bloom once a century, when the living star and its black-hole binary enter conjunction. I want to fix you a bouquet of them, gathered across eight hundred thousand years, so you can draw our whole engagement in a single breath, *all the ages we've shaped together*.
>
> (El-Mohtar and Gladstone 2019, 129–30, my emphasis)

This love letter expresses a further desire for a shared, queer future, while acknowledging how Red and Blue's exchanges have influenced and changed different timelines. In this last line, "all the ages we've shaped together," it is possible to find once more the idea of a conceivable queer history, or at least one that is touched and moved by queerness—one that is rendered possible by the science fiction affordances of the novella. *This Is How You Lose the Time War* dives so deeply into allegory that readers are left to question where the literal ends and the metaphoric begins, whether the protagonist are fully human; it is a novel that refuses to explain itself to us, that chooses not to go into detail into how the different time-strands intertwine, into how the corporations Red and Blue work for came to be. *This Is How You Lose the Time War* is not a story about romantic love, queer or collective liberation or even a novel about the relation between power and history—even though those notions are very much central to the plot and to this analysis. Rather, this chapter thinks of it as a love letter to queer (im)possibilities of belonging, of remembering, an opportunity to see our stories told, to see how they defy a history and a canon that were not written by or for us. Perhaps, even, it can be understood as an unfulfilled promise of a queer genealogy.

Precisely because queer experiences are often embedded and connected to experiences of violence and grief, as they seem to be "mourning for a queerness and the forms of queer life that we have not yet known and are still yet to lose," to be "grieving those we have loved and lost" (Muñoz 2019, 14), the possibility of inscribing ourselves in history, of glimpsing, even, new

horizons, is absolutely vital. Again, the goal of understanding and situating queer identities in time through speculative storytelling is not to avoid this sense of loss but rather to be able to "see ourselves in context," to make sense of our collective experiences, to hold them close and to morph them into something new.

This last extract corresponds to the last letter between Red and Blue, where Red attempts to sacrifice herself for Blue and, in doing so, reconfigures the arch of history by literally "carving out space and time for their relationship" (Yuknavitch 2017, 262, 265[18]). It is precisely this sacrifice that results in Blue destroying all of the letters in an attempt to protect her partner, thus creating the circular structure of the novella:

> Love is what we have, against time and death, against all the powers ranged to crush us down. *You gave me so much—a history, a future*, a calm that lets me write these words though I'm breaking. I hope I've given you something in return—I think you would want me to know I have. And what we've done will stand, no matter how they weave the world against us. It's done now, and forever.
>
> (El-Mohtar and Gladstone 2019, 165, my emphasis)

Here Red discusses her love for Blue and the ways in which their letters have carved a common history for both of them. This segment is understood not as praising romantic love or elevating a certain "homonormative" (see Duggan 2002; Garwood 2016) or amatonormative (Brake 2012)[19] identity that reproduces the logics and rhythms that characterize "straight time" (Muñoz 2019, 47) and its preoccupation with respectability and assimilation. Rather, it is possible to view this fragment as offering new possibilities of being and narrating, of, once again, queering time. In the context of this novella, the use of letters, the formal fragmentation and the cyclicity serve to shed light over temporal possibilities thar disrupt chronormativity and chronobiopolitics, possibilities of having a queer, shared future.

Conclusion

This chapter has focused on queer time in the context of El-Mohtar and Gladstone's 2019 novella, *This Is How You Lose the Time War*. By centering the destabilizing potential of science fiction and time travel literature, this chapter has attempted to interrogate the connections between storytelling, speculative meaning-making and queer genealogies/possibilities.

This text has explored the ways in which the fragmented, circular and non-linear format of the novella can be understood as representing or signaling fractured accounts of queer genealogies. By connecting speculative storytelling and temporality through form, *This Is How You Lose the Time War* challenges chrononormative accounts of time while also allowing readers to

connect themselves to a past that has been violently and deliberately erased, fragmented and broken apart.

At the risk of being incredibly predictable or even clichéd, I want to very briefly allude to Sappho's famous verses about queer memory: "somebody will remember us/I say/even in another time" (2002, 297). Throughout the novella, readers see how the relationship between Red and Blue has to be hidden for fear of retaliation, yet El-Mohtar and Gladstone's book foregrounds and centers (new) queer possibilities of existing, being remembered and inscribing oneself in history. New ways of creating queer connections across time through words, of narrating community. By connecting queer identities with the science fiction elements of the novella, Gladstone and El-Mohtar not only make the connections between speculative narratives and queer futures explicit, but they also emphasize the political potential of these stories. In our current context, where anti-queer literary censorship and LGBT+phobic legislation becomes more and more common in the Anglophone world, it is urgent to remember the power of stories to connect us to our past and to build new futures.

This chapter is limited in both length and scope, but I hope that, even despite these gaps, I have been able to offer a comprehensive overview of the radical possibilities that this novella offers regarding identity and temporality, and the ways it illustrates the radical potentiality of science and speculative fiction. *This Is How You Lose the Time War* is a story about refuge, about queer possibilities and queer horizons, a promise of not necessarily a better time but new ones. A reminder that we have always been here; we have always existed. This contribution to the field of queer temporalities is a small one, but hopefully it serves to illustrate the value of analyzing science fiction through queer time, and it depicts this novella as deserving of more scholarly attention.

Notes

1 This research has been supported by a predoctoral fellowship co-funded by the Junta de Castilla y León and the European Social Fund (ORDEN EDU/1868/2022).

2 I do not mean to say that *This Is How You Lose the Time War* is unique in its inclusion of queerness—let us think of the work of Octavia Butler, Joanna Russ, Ursula K. Le Guin, Samuel Delany or of more contemporary authors such as Becky Chambers, Nghi Vo or N. K. Jemisin—nor to claim that El-Mohtar and Gladstone are pioneers for their use of time travel—here one may allude to Marge Pierce's seminal work *Woman on the Edge of Time* (1976). My argument is not that *This Is How You Lose the Time War* is a radical novel because it is the first of its kind but rather that it allows readers to think critically about queerness and queer time through its fragmented narrative structure.

3 There is a very robust tradition of science fiction, fantasy and speculative fiction scholarship that deals with the treatment and representation of queerness in these genres. See Russ (1995), Hollinger (1999), Melzer (2006), Gay Person (2008), Kennon (2011) and Lothian (2019). The latter text is of particular interest, as it focuses on queer time and queer futurity in the context of American science fiction.

4 Hemmings' 2011 book, *Why Stories Matter: The Political Grammar of Feminist Theory*, focuses on how storytelling shapes the perception, history and legacy of Western feminism.
5 This idea is not only explored in le Guin's essays but is also present at the very core of her fictional work.
6 The quote is referencing a literary talk by Thomas Glave. See Glave 2003 for further context.
7 This quote comes from a 2014 talk in which hooks participated alongside with other Black Feminist scholars and writers, such as Marci Blackman, Shola Lynch and Janet Mock. The talk took place in Eugene Lang College of Liberal Arts and was later uploaded online as a YouTube video through the university channel.
8 Cited from the foreword of *Cruising Utopia* (originally 2009), written by Joshua Chambers-Letson, Tavia Nyong'o and Ann Pellegrini for the tenth anniversary edition (2019). The quote, although from Muñoz, appears in the context of Lilly Wachowski's public coming out in 2018.
9 See Butler 2011, with a strong emphasis on page 182.
10 Ana María Manzanas Calvo and Jesús Benito's *Hospitality in American Literature and Culture: Spaces, Bodies, Borders* (2017) includes a discussion on narrative and linguistic hospitality.
11 Although it does not explore queerness, Barba Guerrero's 2021 work on Imani Perry's memoir highlights the healing potential of epistolary narratives while examining storytelling as a site of political denouncement.
12 For an exploration of the role of the "female cyborg" in *This Is How You Lose the Time War*, see Thomas 2022, 253–57.
13 This notion draws from Lorde's essay *Uses of the Erotic: The Erotic as Power* (2017, 22–30), originally given as a conference paper in 1978.
14 See Lee Edelman's 2004 book titled *No Future* for an exploration of the relationship between queerness, temporality, and reproduction.
15 "Queer chronotopes" have been described as "queer expressions of time and space in narrative" (Biswas 2020, 1) and destabilize and challenge ideas of straight-time and temporal linearity.
16 See again Shelton and Melchior 2019.
17 The novella presents and discusses letters as a kind of time travel, as a way of curving and re-shaping time. Following this idea, it is possible to argue that the use of present tense in the letters gives a sense of immediacy that breaks with linear conceptions of temporality.
18 Cited in Thomas 2022
19 Amatonormativity has been defined as a certain belief system that sees romantic attraction as not only natural, but as crucial for one's happiness and self-fulfillment. A lot of scholarship on amatonormativity deals with aromaticism and asexuality, as well as the ways in which romantic, usually monogamous, relationships are elevated over platonic attachments.

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16 Unbound and Loving It!

Pleasure, Dressage and Queer Rhythmic Resistance in Monáe's *Dirty Computer*

Jack Maginn

Introduction

The core aim of this chapter is to explore the possibility for queer temporal resistance contained within Janelle Monáe's *Dirty Computer* (Monáe et al. 2018). Bringing together the theoretical insights of Henri Lefebvre, Elizabeth Freeman and Monáe, I explore the queer theoretical value of rhythm.

Janelle Monáe, who identifies as non-binary and uses either they/them or she/her pronouns (Baska 2022; Jake Viswanath 2022), has developed into somewhat of a queer icon in the last decade or so through both their creative output and their public appearances. Monáe's steady mainstream musical output (as well as their appearance in several films) coupled with their open discussion of their experience of living as a queer person in America (Baska 2022) have made them debatably one of the more recognisable queer artists in America. Indeed, Monáe has had a top twenty and two top ten albums in the Billboard chart (Billboard n.d.) and became somewhat of an internet sensation with their "camp"-themed Met Gala outfit in 2019 (Daniel Boan 2019). Monáe's 2018 *Dirty Computer*, the work focused upon here, is a project that contains both a fourteen-track album and a short film that interweaves these tracks and their music videos in order to try to critique the queerphobic and white supremacist reality of the contemporary USA.

In order to contextualise my analysis of *Dirty Computer*, I will briefly outline some queer theoretical work relating to temporality. Since the beginning of the 21st century, queer theory had been grappling with how sexuality, time and power interrelate (Shannon Winnubst 2010, 138). Freeman's (2010, xii, 3–4, 7) *Time Binds* articulates an existent social order that links rhythmic control with sexual normativity. Freeman names her temporal order "chrononormativity" (ibid, xii)—a temporal order that upholds hetero- and homonormativity through the bolstering of chronological "discursive regimes" like reproduction, consummation and dominant linear history. Articulating this order gives tangible form to the nexus of queerness, time, politics and power in "The West," thus giving temporally minded queer theorists, activists and artists a fleshed-out construction of the present social order to push back against, to resist.

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Freeman offers nuanced ways to critique chrononormativity through the targeting of the discursive regimes that underwrite it. In this chapter, I take a step back in Freeman's argument and interrogate how *Dirty Computer*, as a piece of queer cinema, can resist the *binding* of "naked flesh" (Freeman 2010, 3)—the matter that comes to constitute the bodies of subjects in its pre-intelligible state—into "socially meaningful embodiment" through the control of rhythm that Freeman describes as a necessary condition for the upholding of the existent chrononormative order. Building on Freeman's aforementioned monograph, I look to further explore the role of rhythm with the regulation of sexuality. In order to do this, I turn to the idea of *dressage*, as it is defined by Henri Lefebvre (2004, 10, 20, 39), in order to flesh out how bodies are bound within this current chrononormative era.

Dressage is understood in this chapter as the conversion by power of the body and its "bundle of rhythms" (Lefebvre 2004, 20) into a normative, and therefore usable, unit. This conversion operates via the management of time and the concealment of varied and contradictory rhythms through the bending of that body to the will of power. To paraphrase Alla Ivanchikova (2006, 155) on Lefebvre, dressage is the inscription of normativity onto the body via the tool of rhythm. Populating binding (the conversion of matter into socially recognisable bodies) with dressage (the process of bending the body into the image of power) has two main advantages. Firstly, it helps me build upon the work of Freeman by focusing on the process of binding. Secondly, there is a certain affinity between dressage and chrononormativity. Sex is one of the central foci in both Lefebvre's conception of dressage, and resistance to it, whilst sexual normativity is intimately woven into Freeman's conceptualisation of a dominant social order (Ivanchikova 2006, 157–58; Lefebvre 2004, 39).

In sum, this chapter looks to explore the queer temporal potential of *Dirty Computer* by bringing this piece into contact with theorists who attend to rhythm as a tool of social control and a possible avenue for resistance. In order to do this, I will look to articulate a vision of queer rhythmic resistance that I will then discuss in relation to queer spatiotemporalities located within Monáe's work. Ultimately, I will argue that the very binding of the body that Freeman identifies as a foundational condition of the regulation of sexuality in society can be resisted through the creation of queer, pleasure-centred spatiotemporalities.

Expressing the queerness of films by demonstrating how they unsettle certain aspects of chrononormativity is by no means a tactic endemic to this inquiry. Indeed, works on films as varied as Jordan's feminist vampire flick *Byzantium* (Lau 2018), Lang's classic child murder film *M* (Samper-Vendrell 2017), Van Sant's school shooting film *Elephant* (Aydemir 2016), Lynch's ineffable *Mullholand Drive* (Justin Holliday 2019) and Strickland's indulgent lesbian BDSM tale *The Duke of Burgundy* (Church 2020) have looked to do this in one way or another.

Uses of chrononormativity as a target for filmic queer resistance/destabilisation tend to focus largely on the progressive (taken in the sense of asserting the necessity and normative value of the following of a given set of actions through time) nature of chrononormativity and how narratives can elide this general societal demand for progress. This is evidenced in readings such as Lau's, Church's, Samper-Vendrell's, Holliday's and Murat Aydemir's. Kimberly J. Lau (2018, 4) argues that "the especially recursive production of the vampire narrative" problematises chrononormativity's teleological nature whilst David Church's (2020, 12) reads *The Duke of Burgundy* as taking up the power BDSM has to suspend the compulsory "forward momentum" of chrononormativity. On top of these readings, Aydemir (2016, 45) comments on how *Elephant* uses a degree of ambiguity in order to avoid the trappings of a "realistic, causal and chrononormative plot" (Holliday (2019, 24–25) reads Lynch as doing something very similar in *Mullholand Drive*). Additionally, *M* is said by Samper-Vendrell (2017, 269) to display how contingent the common-sense functioning of chrononormative society is. Monáe's *Dirty Computer* opens up different angles through which to think the chrononormative, exploring as it does how the binding of the body can be challenged.

In order to make my argument, I will proceed in four steps. First, I will give some context on Monáe as an artist. Following this, I will give a brief outline of *Dirty Computer* as a piece of art. Next I will outline the theoretical core of this chapter. Finally, I will examine two sections of *Dirty Computer* in relation to the theoretical ideas I address in order to explore the queer rhythmic resistance of Monáe's work. This last step will, I believe, also add a layer of understanding and detail to the theory of this piece due to the clear and exaggerated way *Dirty Computer* presents Lefebvrian/Freemanian ideas.

Janelle Monáe and *Dirty Computer*

Janelle Monáe Robinson was born on December 1, 1985, in Kansas City into a working-class family. After performing in local choirs and theatre groups, Monáe earned a place at the American Musical and Dramatic Academy in New York. Monáe, however, soon dropped out, moving to Atlanta instead and co-founding the *Wondaland* artistic collective. In 2007 Monáe was signed by Bad Boy Records, a moment which kickstarted their career as a commercially viable musician (Biography.com n.d.).

Monáe has released albums or extended plays fairly consistently throughout their career beginning with their *Metropolis: Suite I (The Chase)* (2008), leading into *The ArchAndroid: Suites II and III* (2010) and *The Electric Lady: Suites IV and V* (2013) and then into *Dirty Computer* (2018) (Aleksandra Szaniawska 2019, 36). As well as creating music, Monáe has acted in a number of films, including *Moonlight* (Barry Jenkins 2016), *Hidden Figures* (Theodore Melfi 2016) and *Antebellum* (Gerard Bush 2020), as well as, of course, *Dirty Computer* (2018).

Monáe's *Dirty Computer* exemplifies a form of queer rhythmic resistance. This, it should be noted, is not the first piece to examine how issues of the body, movement and resistance relate in the work of Monáe. Szaniawksa (2019, 35, 41–48) looks to foreground "the role the body plays in enacting a vision of Black queer futurity" (ibid, 35) by exploring "resistance written within the body itself." Specifically, Szaniawska points out that several of Monáe's tracks from across their early corpus "directly reference movement as a resisting practice" (ibid, 43). There are, then, examples of Monáe using their work to explore bodily resistance before the release of *Dirty Computer*. Szaniawska's work is focused on characterising the creative output of Monáe generally as corporeally resistive in as far as it reconstitutes dominant social narratives in order to claim an erased and silenced form of African American presence and futurity. This differs somewhat from my own interest in Monáe's work which centres how it exemplifies queer spatiotemporalities as a means of queer bodily resistance.

Having introduced who Monáe is as an artist I want to summarise *Dirty Computer* (Monáe et al. 2018) as a film. In this section I will first describe the film's creation, plot and themes in general terms. After this I will offer substantive descriptions of two particular sections that will play a key role in my later textual analysis as well as the film's ending.

Dirty Computer is a short film that acts as a companion to Monáe's 2018 album of the same name. Building on the sci-fi themes of Monáe's previous music, *Dirty Computer* tells the story of a queer character, Jane#57821—played by Monáe—and her two lovers—one female coded, one male coded—in flashback from a near-future facility built to *clean* queers in order to create homogenous, normative bodies. This process of cleaning involves the deletion of each queer memory present within a subject. The main body of the film involves the audience being shown various memories of Jane's as they are being deleted. These memory sections of the film double as music videos for songs from the *Dirty Computer* album. As a film, *Dirty Computer* is certainly an expression of Monáe artistic vision as a black, queer artist—they are credited by IMDB (2018) as providing "ideas and vision" for the film—but the film is actually directed by Andrew Donoho, Lacey Duke and Alan Furguson and written by Chuck Lightening. It is, all round, a collaborative affair.

Despite having the feel of a unique piece of work, Monáe and co. make frequent use of American cultural touchstones in order to educate the audience in the kind of themes being explored within the film. As Tim Grierson (2018) notes, *Dirty Computer* is happy to draw upon tropes—such as mind wiping and introductory voiceover—and themes from canonical sci-fi, aping films like *Terminator, Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind, Star Wars, THX 1138, The Matrix* and *Total Recall*.

Dirty Computer skips between two main settings: a near-future institution designed to clean (delete) the queer memories of subjects and the inside of Jane's head, where said memories reside. The plot proceeds through the

cleaning of a number of these memories, interspliced with scenes from the institution. It transpires that one of the nurses administering Jane with "Nevermind"—the gas that makes one susceptible to the cleaning process—is a cleaned version of Jane's lover Zen (Tessa Thompson). Throughout the film it becomes increasingly apparent to both the in-film "cleaners" and the audience that Jane is not a reliable narrator of her own memories. This is because Jane's memories become increasingly stylised, improbable and cinematic as the film goes on, suggesting that there is a mixture of fantasy and dreaming bound up inside these memories. Another feature of these memory sequences is that they make constant references to the (then) contemporary USA. As such, at various points we see references to events such as Donald Trump's alleged links to China whilst president and the "free the nipple" campaign that sought to address the inequality between the genders in terms of the socially acceptable exposing of the body in public. Importantly for this inquiry, *Dirty Computer* frequently reinforces a distinction between unclean bodies that can dance and move freely and clean bodies that move mechanically and predictably in a way reminiscent of the workers in Fritz Lang's (1927) *Metropolis*. This distinction will be useful in distinguishing between unbound and bound bodies later in this piece and provides fertile ground for the exploring of rhythm in relation to normativity. The two memories of *Dirty Computer* I will focus on in my analysis will be the memories that form the music videos for "Crazy, Classic, Life" and "Django Jane." I will, here, summarise these two scenes.

The "Crazy, Classic, Life" scene comes very early in the film and thus is important given how it sets the tone of the piece and opens up the audience to the queer temporal issues addressed in the film. The scene opens with Jane and a friend driving in a convertible before being pulled over by an armed surveillance drone. Having been cleared after showing ID badges and retinas, Jane and their friend let another couple of friends out of the boot and proceed. From here it cuts to a lineup of largely queer-coded revellers at a party. Following an interspersing of an in-car dance involving Jane and her friends with scenes of various queers dancing at the party later in the day—we have a Bowie-esque queer, a high camp, fay queer, a couple varieties of punk-y queers—we are thrown into the main thrust of the scene with Jane and her friends posing in tableau with a number of other queers at the party before launching into song and dance. What proceeds is an orgiastic explosion of song, dance and queer expression that introduces us properly to Jane's two lovers—Ché, played by Jason Aarons, and the aforementioned Zen. However, this expression of queer joy and sexuality is interrupted by the militaristic force that controls the world of *Dirty Computer*. Jane and Zen escape whilst Ché is captured. The scene ends with a lineup of queers, many of whom are people of colour, on their knees with their hands tied in a moment that clearly references the mistreatment of people of colour by the police in contemporary America.

The "Django Jane" memory is dominated by direct addresses from Jane as she raps into the camera with a charming sense of bravado in a range of colourful suits. Within the "Django Jane" dream, Jane is flanked by a number of dancers. At times Jane's own dance fits into the timing of these dancers, much as it does in "Crazy, Classic, Life," with, for example, Jane and the dancers slowly shoulder swaying as the camera tilts and throwing their hands and bodies at the camera in order to confront the audience with confidence. This creates a collective temporality that oozes sapphic energy. At other times, however, the dancers perform a synchronised and mechanical dance with Jane moving freely centre shot. Here Jane seems to be presented as outside of the norm via the juxtaposition of her freedom of movement to regulated bodies that can be read as performing a pastiche of the kind of rhythmic control of bodies one sees in *Metropolis*.

Dressage: A Schema

The most common place use of the term *dressage* is in reference to the Olympic sport of dressage, a sport within which a rider controls a horse's movement to make it "dance" in a certain mode that scores well with judges. According to British Dressage (n.d.), dressage involves "learning to work with your horse and help him [*sic*.] achieve greater suppleness, flexibility and obedience; enhance his natural movements and ability and improve his athleticism." As will be shown, these themes of obedience, training and improvement run through Lefebre's understanding of the term.

In his *Rhythmanalysis: Space, Time and Everyday Life*, Lefebvre (2004, 38–45) sketches out both what he means by dressage and how it can be resisted. For Lefebvre, bodily gestures "cannot be attributed to *nature*" (ibid, 38) because "they change according to societies." The implication here is that the use of the body is tied to the fundamental conditions of a given society. Under this view, space is created for the questioning of exactly *how* society and its power relations condition the bodies of individuals. Dressage is Lefebvre's answer to this question.

At a base level, dressage is the process through which people are made to adhere to societal standards of gestures and manners through forced repetitions of cycles of action. As Ivanchikova (2006, 155) writes, Lefebvrian dressage involves converting the natural body into a social one via the imposing of repetitive, linear rhythms. Dressage hits to the very heart of people's regulating as it works through the shaping of patterns of "breathing, movements [and] sex" (Lefebvre 2004, 39).

The fundamental action of dressage on the body is "breaking in." Lefebvre refers to one's exposure to "the sciences of dressage" as "*being broken-in*" (ibid, 40). Breaking-in, here, is essentially the bending of the body into the image power would like to see and, importantly, reproduce. This aforementioned language of breaking-in evokes images of both violence—breaking being a violent act—and of animal training, breaking-in horses being a stage in

getting them used to being ridden. Indeed, Lefebvre actively draws comparison between human and animal dressage stating that "one does not *break-in* a horse like a dog, nor a carthorse like a racehorse, nor a guard dog like a hunting dog" (ibid., 40), implying that dressage will operate differently in different social contexts. Lefebvre argues that "in the course of their *being broken-in*, animals *work* . . . under the imperious direction of the breeder or the trainer, they produce their bodies, which are entered into social, which is to say human, practice. The bodies of *broken-in* animals have a use-value." Given that it is fair to assume that Lefebvre's discussion of animal training is being used as a metaphor for the regulation of human bodies, one sees that dressage is a process that involves the labour of not just the agent of dressage but also that of the recipient. In sum, the body works itself rhythmically into a normative existence under the supervision of normativity. This newly formed body now has a value to normativity in as far as one reproduces the other. Lefebvre essentially envisions dressage as the disciplinary action through which bodies emerge ready to repeat the rhythms of the social order; an order that produced them and that is maintained by the correct embodying of rhythm. *The social* produces the bodies that reproduce it.

Given all this focus on bodily control, is it fair to say that we, for Lefebvre, live in a preconditioned world without agency? Well, no. For one, dressage "does not exhaust the understanding of social rhythms" (ibid, 43)—it is a tool that elucidates some social conditions of the body and, like all intellectual apparatus, not a one stop shop for comprehending the universe. On a less theoretically generic level, dressage does not exert total, mechanical control over all the rhythms of the body. Lefebvre states that "we *contain* ourselves by concealing the diversity of our rhythms" (ibid, 10). Essentially, the creation of the bound body of dressage does not involve the annihilation of rhythms that do not conform to dominant social rhythms, but their hiding. The possibly disruptive potential of these non-normative rhythms, then, still exists. Indeed, Lefebvre explicitly identifies rhythm as the source of "disruptions and crises" (ibid, 44) on both the scale of the social order and the individual body. Rhythm, then, is both a mode of control and a form of resistance.

Lefebvre names the state of being rhythmically resistant "becoming irregular." Becoming irregular involves breaking out of the regular intervals of action and movement that constitute dominant rhythm and which are the tools of dressage and moving one's body in such a way as to open up alternative ways of being. Lefebvre essentially plays with the two meanings of *irregular* (irregular as something without consistent or predictable pattern and irregular as something outside of the norm or unusual) in order to project onto a body with a singular adjective the confluence of normativity and rhythm that lies at the heart of this understanding of dressage and the social world. *Irregular*, then, denotes bodies that do not adhere to both normative demands and rhythms.

Here I will take a moment to explore in what exact way becoming irregular can be said to be disruptive to the established social order. For Lefebvre,

becoming irregular can "produce a lacuna, a hole in time, to be filled in by an invention, a creation." In other words, taking oneself out of the demands of dominant rhythm creates an undisciplined temporal zone that can be filled with an alternative way of being or use of time embodied in some sort of action or creation.

What fills this gap, in Ivanchikova's (2006, 155–60) queer reading of Lefebvre, are "spaces and temporalities devoted to joy and sexual pleasure" (ibid, 158) that can harbour "non-normative" social relations. These are what I call *queer spatiotemporalities*. These aforementioned spatiotemporalities are examples of "*appropriated* time" (ibid, 158), of people refusing the domination of their time by dressage and fashioning "*differentiated*" temporalities that stand in contrast to normative temporality. In this piece I will argue that Monáe fashions such differentiated queer spatiotemporalities in *Dirty Computer*.

As previously mentioned, Ivanchikova's description of these pleasurable spatiotemporalities comes in what is essentially a queering of Lefebvre's work. Her work, then, forms a nice bridge between Lefebvre's theorising and Monáe's queer cinema. At this point, however, I have not explicitly identified what is actually queer about these spatiotemporalities, save the significant but not (in itself) sufficient condition of them being opposed to normativity. Here, then, I just want to take a moment to think about what is explicitly queer about Lefebvre.

First, Ivanchikova sees Lefebvre as anticipatory of Halberstam's association of normative and reproductive temporality. Lefebvre, for Ivanchikova, points out how the rhythms of the patriarchal family unit aid a capitalist economy by securing a workforce and maintaining certain schemes of production. If the heteropatriarchal family aids the capitalist status quo then queer sexuality, and by extension queer spatiotemporalities, become inherently antithetical to it. As will be shown, *Dirty Computer*, by depicting same-sex attraction as a force for pleasure and not economic production or social reproduction, figures sex and sexuality in a way antithetical to the operationalisation of sex under a capitalist reality underwritten by heteronormativity.

On top of Lefebvre's proto-queer understanding of the connection between reproduction and production, and by no means unrelated to it, Lefebvre's focus on bodily pleasure also possesses its own queerness. Ivanchikova reads Lefebvre as seeing the ultimate point of the appropriation of time as returning a focus to "the body's pleasure, [its] rejuvenation, its joy" (ibid, 168). Ivanchikova argues that attending to these *base* pleasures becomes queer in itself when one considers how "pleasure (sexual pleasure, bodily pleasure, unproductive joy)" (ibid, 157) is an excluded and hidden third in relation to the work/leisure dichotomy constructed and naturalised in a capitalist western society underwritten by heteronormativity.

Ivanchikova makes some compelling points here about how one can relate Lefebvre's framework to queer theory and also about the structural position

of queer resistance in a world of dressage. Ivanchikova's queering of Lefebvre's concept of resistance can be brought into contact with the work of Freeman (2010), a theorist who, as previously mentioned, productively ties the demands of capitalism and heteronormativity in their conceptualisation of a chrononormative temporal order. This step is necessary as without a thoroughly thought-out model of sexual normativity one cannot conceptualise resistance to normativising forces.

Freeman's "chrononormativity" (Freeman 2010, xii) is essentially a dominant, modern and ultimately heteronormative construction that presents a "vision of time as seamless, unified, and forward moving." Time, under chrononormativity, is naturalised and rationalised in as far as linearity is made to seem fundamentally natural. The time of chrononormativity is a time in which the efforts of "corporations and nation-states" (ibid, xii) to both regulate the temporality of people and the categories through which the world is apprehended has resulted in "what looks like a fully 'bound,' commodified postfeminist, postgay, postsocialist, postnational world in which we are told our problems are solved now that our market niche has been discovered" (ibid, xvi). Under chrononormativity, one's position within the global schema of capital is offered as a substitute for critical political projects that are implied to be null and void today. These projects are painted as thoroughly locatable in a past less enlightened than our (univocal) present. Chrononormativity, for Freeman, underwrites and is underwritten by the "discursive regimes" (ibid, xxii) of "history 'proper' . . . consummation, development, domesticity, family, foreplay, genealogy, identity, liberation, modernity, [and] the progress of movements." These progressive regimes sweep one up in a "linear progressive rush" (Atalia Israeli-Nevo 2017, 42) that comes to order the shuttling of one through the spatiotemporal realm. In other words, certain naturalised ideas about ways of living and understanding the world condition people to structure their lives in such a way as to follow dominant scripts that prop up the capitalist order.

Where Lefebvre clearly understood the connection between desire, pleasure, reproduction, production and rhythm, Freeman constructs a whole order that ties the normative rhythm of linearity to the heteronormative. In sum, Freeman articulates a social order receptive to queer issues that the queered Lefebvre can show us how to resist via the construction of queer spatiotemporalities. For Freeman (2010, 3–4) "naked flesh" becomes "socially meaningful embodiment" via the imposing of dominant rhythms by actors imbued with power. In essence, matter gets recognised as a body via its rhythm. It is this process that Freeman refers to as "binding." Freeman, however, leaves some room open regarding what this process looks like, as her work in *Time Binds* is far more invested in conceptualising the chrononormative and exemplifying a mode of more macro-resistance to it. It is this space of possibility within Freeman's work that I believe the idea of dressage can move into in a way productive for this piece and its aims. By bringing together Lefebvre and

Freeman, one ends up with both a more coherent temporal order—Freeman helping out queer Lefebvre—and a more thoroughly rhythmic understanding of the body—queer Lefebvre helping out Freeman.

Dressage is an obvious candidate to compliment Freeman's binding given, as previously mentioned, it describes in detail a process of bodily creation in the context of the social milieu. Dressage essentially describes what Freeman hints at. One can say, then, that binding is a thoroughly rhythmic process within which the body is bent to the demands of power via the work of the newly constructed individual and the repetition of given normative actions. The body is essentially bound through dressage. This newly formed body is useful to the current capitalist, chrononormative order but, importantly, never totally under control—it possesses the potential for rhythms and movements antithetical to the dominant order that are only ever concealed, not destroyed. It is Lefebvre's idea of hidden non-normative rhythms that opens up the space for resistance by leaving room for one's "becoming irregular," for one to step outside of the rhythms imposed on one's body.

Monáe's Queer Spatiotemporalities

Having discussed Lefebvre in relation to Freeman, I will now move on to exploring dressage and resistance in *Dirty Computer*. The oppressive regime that dominates in *Dirty Computer* (Monáe et al. 2018) performs quite an explicit and exaggerated form of dressage. As previously mentioned, the regime takes "dirty"—read queer—people into their facility, pumps them full of gas to knock them out and then deletes all their unacceptable memories in order to create a normative individual. Once people are cleaned, they demonstrate their conformity through their homogenised bodily movements. This is to say, they move slowly and robotically with minimal movement and speak in a way that sounds "programmed" and forced. In other words, these bodies very clearly embody a standardised, dominant rhythm. These clean bodies repeat actions over and over in a highly Lefebvrian fashion. Even more explicitly, one technology of control the regime employs is consciously forced repetition—Jane is asked to repeat certain phrases by a disembodied voice over a tannoy as part of the dressage required to pacify her body.

It is also worth noting that the cleaned bodies of former dirty computers are used to help clean further dirty computers. The work of the cleaners creates a product with a use value to the regime that stands in for normativity. In sum, the rhythmic nature of normativity coupled with the value of the clean body and the role of repetition in dressage make it very easy to read the regime of *Dirty Computer* as an agent of dressage that leads to the bound, conforming body. *Dirty Computer*, then, renders the process of dressage and the bound body of chrononormativity viscerally and practically apprehensible in a way that is very difficult, if not impossible, to do within the traditional form of political or social theory. Setting up such a visible and exaggerated target of resistance allows for the clear elucidation of modes and

moments of resistance that both explicate theories of resistance and act as a site of resistance in themselves.

The most grounded, and also the chronologically first, exemplification of a queer spatiotemporality in *Dirty Computer* is the "Crazy, Classic, Life" memory. As previously mentioned, the memory is dominated by a synchronised erotic dance carried out by Jane and her friends in matching biker dress. The dance is obviously erotic in as far as it depicts women moving seductively in relation to one another. For example, one move involves the dancers squatting and bouncing up and down as if being penetrated by a phallic object whilst sections of the dance take part on what appears to be a bed, a staging choice that is clearly meant to compliment the erotic dance present in this section of the film. This spatiotemporality, then, is characterised by the joy and sexual pleasure Ivanchikova reads as filling Lefebvrian lacunas in the social realm. It represents a briefly existent alternative way of being that is both within and without the realm of chrononormativity and that emerges from bodies moving irregularly. The queerness of this spatiotemporality is made additionally apparent by the accompanying shots of the aforementioned pantheon of queers present in the memory as well as the interspersal of shots from a lesbian—or at least queer—coded nuptial ceremony overseen by Zen. This ceremony, interestingly, is obviously meant to represent a queering of the chrononormative discursive regime of marriage.

Very early on within the scene, Jane and co.'s dance moves to the literal centre of the shot, with them becoming located in the middle of a kind of informal amphitheatre. The dancers provide a focal point that grabs the attention of the audience due to their centrality within the frame and the contrast between their kineticism and the staidness of the rest of the queer figures in shot. All of this contributes to a feeling that the dance itself is forming a local queer spatiotemporality. It can be said that the relationality of the dancers and their shared sequence of movements creates a *differentiated* temporality that fundamentally constitutes an alternative way of being by unveiling some of the hidden temporalities—the queer dancing gestures of the women that figure a time of joy and non-productive sapphic energy—that Lefebvre believes hide under the regulation of normativity. The dance is exactly what the cleaning oppressive order wants to eradicate—it both allows for and demonstrates the possibility of queer alternatives and pleasure. The scene is queer both in its depiction of the eroticism between women and its embracing of pleasure as an alternative mode of being with a capitalist, chrononormative system. In sum, "Crazy, Classic, Life" renders literal the resistive potential of queer relationality and pleasure as they emerge through the embracing of non-normative, irregular temporality.

The "Crazy, Classic, Life" section exemplifies in a simultaneously grounded but exaggerated way what queer rhythmic resistance can look like—in this sense it provides a tonally appropriate corollary to the scenes from inside the cleaning institution which creates an exaggerated site of dressage. This memory, then, provides an accessible model of queer resistance through the

creation of a queer spatiotemporality within the narrative. What it does not, however, demonstrate is the moment of "becoming irregular," the moment in which binding is rejected and the chrononormative body is decomposed. We have the queer spatiotemporality but not what made it possible.

The moment of "becoming irregular" is, however, presented in pastiche within the "Django Jane" memory. As an exemplification of a queer spatiotemporality, "Django Jane" centres the affirmation of female, African American experience and success. This is symbolised in one section where "Jane sits upon a throne while donning a tailored suit and kufi hat reminiscent of the Nation of Islam's masculine visual aesthetics, as well as the sartorial stylings of pioneering female rapper Dana 'Queen Latifah' Owens" (Meina Yates-Richard 2021, 46). The throne—especially when complimented by Monae's co-option of "brag rap" for feminist ends—is clearly meant to symbolise the celebration of the achievement of African American women. On top of this, the sartorial choices function as an insertion of the feminine into a masculinised African American aesthetic.

"Django Jane," like all the memories/spatiotemporalities in *Dirty Computer*, features dance and therefore necessarily centres the role of rhythm in creating social meaning and ways of being. Perhaps the most striking moment involves Jane sitting at the head of a table rapping animatedly with eyes fixed straight down the camera, exerting a female gaze, whilst other dancers sit in symmetrical lines down each side of the table lifting and moving their cups in time in a highly mechanical fashion. One can read these symmetrical dancers as essentially exaggerated stand-ins for normative rhythms and bound bodies as they somewhat resemble the cleaned bodies from the institution sections of the film. Mimicking the mechanical movement of clean bodies, the dancers seem to mock efforts to clean them by impersonating the time of dressage. These robotic movements transported outside the context of a place populated by cleaned bodies serve not to just highlight further how normativity is embodied in temporality, but also allow Jane's confrontational movement and expression to appear as a moment of becoming irregular, of stepping outside of normative rhythm. In this instant, Monáe acts out a moment of unbinding. Within the memory, then, one can see Jane and her dancers, whom one is to assume possess the same kind of sapphic relationship and energy as in the earlier "Crazy, Classic, Life" memory, acting out the process of stepping out of sync with normativity, of creating a queer spatiotemporality. This is, of course, not the creation of the queer spatiotemporality itself—the audience is already observing a queer spatiotemporality in the form of the dance, but a performance of the moment in question. It is resistance through the choreographing of a dance that flaunts the moment of inception of queer resistance itself, namely, becoming irregular. *Dirty Computer*, here, renders visible the moment of "becoming irregular," of unbinding, through an ironic performance of normativity that is even more exaggerated than the simplistic rendering of dressage in the cleaning sections of the film.

In these two aforementioned memories we have seen both how queer relationality and movement can resist normative temporality and binding and what the moment of becoming irregular can look like. In this sense, *Dirty Computer* is a thoroughly (queer) Lefebvrian film. It does need to be remembered, however, that these memories mean nothing when not placed in reference to the film's ending. *Dirty Computer* tricks its audience into a sense of anguish by revealing a cleaned Jane and cutting to the credits. However, the film returns for a post-credit scene in which Jane, Zen and Ché escape from the cleaning complex, brains still intact and ready to carry on the queer revolution. Whatever happened to those cleaned memories, they left a trace on Jane that allowed her to maintain her queerness. To my mind, *Dirty Computer* contains a powerful message about queer resistance—however thoroughly your mind and body are conditioned, no order, not even our current chrononormative one, can fully rid you of your body as an agent of queer expression and resistance. The queer rhythms you contain can be hidden but they cannot be destroyed. This moment provides both a clear explication of what is perhaps Lefebvre's core point about rhythm—that some bodily rhythms will always evade the clutches of normativity—as well as a poignant message of defiance and optimism that is transported to this film's mass audience that will, almost certainly, contain within it a significantly sized queer audience. *Dirty Computer* provides a clear message that distils complex theoretical ideas and adds in a dash of practically useful hopefulness. In addition to this, the emotional roller-coaster of the end of the film ultimately does well to remind the audience that issues of queer resistance, no matter how theoretical they become, ultimately must speak to real world political struggle. When placed within the context of the film's constant fourth wall–breaking references to late 2010s America, it becomes easy to see how the combining of dystopia and hope in *Dirty Computer* can be read as a rallying cry for change within the context of Trump's America. In this sense, one can see *Dirty Computer* as a site of queer resistance in its own right. *Dirty Computer* presents an image of the unbound body and of different queer spatiotemporalities whilst simultaneously reminding the audience this could, in theory, be a political reality. By attending to how Monáe figures becoming irregular, then, one can highlight novelly an avenue of political potential within Monáe's work regarding the way they think the connection between sexuality and temporality.

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17 Imagining Neuroqueer Futures

Crip Time and Care-Ful Connections in *Night in the Woods*

Lisanne Meinen

Introduction

In *The Minor Gesture (2016)*, Erin Manning evocatively demonstrates how neurodivergent lived experiences are often characterized by relating to time in ways that differ from societal norms. Manning writes that "altering the speed at which the everyday tends to function creates openings for neurodiverse forms of perception. It also makes time for modes of encounter otherwise elided" (2016, 15). Those who want to relate to neurodivergent experiences would better adapt their own speed or temporal scale, rather than expecting neurodivergent people to meet theirs. This idea resonates well with Alison Kafer's statement that "rather than bend disabled bodies and minds to meet the clock, crip time bends the clock to meet disabled bodies and minds" (2013, 27). As Manning also stresses, crip time does not only have a role in individual experiences but also generates possibilities for connection. In video games, crip temporalities can be a reference point for players to make affective connections with the game world and its characters. An issue often discussed in the literature on videogames and crip time is how videogames and their players can challenge chrononormativity, inviting players to engage with the games in creative ways (Vanderhoef and Payne 2022; Hanson 2018). However, crip time also plays an important part in how lived experience is structured and feels, a much less studied aspect of video games.

In this chapter I explore how, using crip and neuroqueer temporalities, the action-adventure game *Night in the Woods* (NITW, Infinite Fall 2017) helps players engage carefully and ethically with neurodivergence without "making them care" in an oppressive manner. I will turn to new materialist care ethics to argue that a care-ful approach is crucial if we want to use games to relate to another person's lived experience and make sense of it (Puig de la Bellacasa 2017). I adopt Maria Puig de la Bellacasa's threefold definition of care as "maintenance doings and work, affective engagement, and ethico-political involvement" (2017, 6) and argue that *NITW* effectively includes each of these elements. Several other scholars have argued that one of this game's main components is building relationships. Players are made to build connections with both the main character, Mae, and through Mae

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with other characters as well (Harkin 2020; Veale 2022). This focus on character development and choice-making which is typical of many adventure games, makes it an excellent case study for care-ful ethical reflection (Reed et al. 2021; Caravella 2021). Additionally, while *NITW* focuses on building relationships, it does not isolate the stories of the individual characters but embeds them within an explicit (anticapitalist) political and economic position (Fiorilli 2022). As such, the video game offers an excellent case study into the potential role of videogames as a speculative medium to imagine neurodiversity-affirmative and disability justice-informed worlds.

Guided by Puig de la Bellacasa's threefold definition of care, I argue that crip time functions as a way for players to make care-ful connections on the level of gameplay, storyline, and the ethico-political positioning of the game. To make this argument, I offer a close reading of *NITW* structured by three ways in which the game attends to (crip) temporality. First, I explore the prominence of slowness and repetition in the videogame, interpreting them as neuroqueer affects. Second, I discuss how temporality functions as an affective structure that implicates the player in the task of building relationships both with Mae and with other characters through her. Finally, I discuss how *NITW* offers an imperfect but imaginative exploration of what just disability futures (Kafer 2013) might look like, which are more oriented towards healing instead of curing. As such, I argue that videogames like *NITW* can help break with the perceived dichotomy between neurotypical caring players and neurodivergent cared-for players, effectively working towards disability justice to the benefit of all.

Neurodiversity as Praxis

NITW follows the life of 20-year Mae Borowski, who has dropped out of college and has just moved back to live with her parents again in Possum Springs. The tiny rural town struggles with a declining economy due to the decaying mining industry on which it once depended, which influences almost all of its townies in one way or another. On her return, Mae expects to easily rejoin her old group of friends (of which Bea, Angus, and Gregg are the most central characters), since they did not go to college and stayed in Possum Springs to work. However, they each have their own busy lives to manage amid tough economic conditions, little social support, and personal (mental) struggles. Mae (and the player through her) must actively invest time to reconnect both with them and the town. The game characters are designed to look like animals—Mae and her parents, for example, are designed as anthropomorphic cats, while the game also features an alligator, a fox, a bear, and a bird. However, the game simultaneously tells believable and recognizable stories about human life events, offering an in-depth (neuro)queer representation and a sharp critique of capitalism and its harmful influences in rural American society. Formally, the video game is characterized by the

prominence of everyday tasks and an episodic nature due to Mae's dreams and dissociations. The narrative-driven aspects of the game, which include a lack of gameplay options, take away the agency of the player only to return it in dosed units.

Many of Mae's friends experience issues related to depression, bipolarity, anxiety, and suicidal thoughts. Their problems are probably worsened due to few resources being available to attend to their mental struggles. The only doctor in town, Dr. Hank, appears to have neither the time nor qualifications to properly deal with the psychological problems of all townies. Mae herself has been experiencing undiagnosed depersonalization and dissociation, which sometimes result in anger issues where she is violent towards others or her environment. As she puts it herself during an exceptionally frank moment with her friend Bea, "Suddenly, something broke. [The video game] was just like pixels. The characters on screen. . . . They weren't people anymore. They were just shapes" (Infinite Fall 2017). Mae describes how this sudden change in perception starts to affect her real-life experiences as well: "There was this guy walking by, and he was just shapes. Just like this moving bulk of . . . stuff" (Infinite Fall 2017). Later in this episode, Mae describes how the experience of disassociation made her anxious, sad, and very confused.

NITW is often praised for normalizing mental health issues and reminding players that "it is okay not to be okay" (Wald 2018). Although Mae's problems are primarily discussed in regard to mental illness and psychiatric diagnoses, some strategic benefits exist to interpreting Mae and her friends as neurodivergent. As a concept with a dynamic history, neurodiversity was originally put forward as an autistic people-led social justice movement. Neurodiversity is now often used in an explicitly emancipatory manner, to question the immediate pathologization and medicalization of any kind of nonnormative psychiatric experience without denying or rejecting the uses of therapy or medication (Chapman 2020). Seeing psychological vulnerabilities through this lens also changes how we interact with people experiencing these issues. Neurodivergent experiences are characterized by their dynamic nature, with an impact changing throughout the course of a lifetime. Additionally, they are heterogeneous and express differently in each person (Conelea et al. 2022; Hens 2021). Importantly, our conceptualization of neurodiversity must not be guided by neurotypical ways of experiencing the world, which, with regards to neurodiversity in video games, translates in not getting stuck in an "outsider view" of neurodiversity guided by visual atypicalities (stimming, hyperactivity, vocal tics). Instead, the outsider view needs to be accompanied by "insider experience" characterized by divergence in perception, sociability, emotionality, learning, and attention. Time perception is another factor that fundamentally shapes neurodivergent lived experience.

Even though Mae and her friends are canonically profiled as struggling with their mental health rather than being neurodivergent, strategically

reinterpreting a concept against the grain, or "cripping" it, allows us to critically engage with some of the normative concepts surrounding mental illness (Kafer 2013). With similar intentions as Kafer, Nick Walker introduces the idea of "neuroqueering" as a verb, which is "the practice of queering . . . neuronormativity and heteronormativity simultaneously" (Walker 2021, 160). The concept of neuroqueerness, for Walker, indicates how neuroatypicality is always already queer. Indeed, in *NITW* we already see how the different kinds of experiences lived through Mae and her friends cannot be neatly separated into different categories such as neurodivergent, queer, or anticapitalist. Mae and her group of friends often feel like outcasts in Possum Springs, displaying atypical behavior which is grounded on their age, political stance, mental health issues, and the fact that, according to Mae, she, Gregg, and Angus are "the only queer people in town" (Infinite Fall 2017). Engaging with the experiences of Mae and her friends as neurodivergent helps to avoid isolating their individual experiences with (temporary) neuroatypicality, viewing them instead as interconnected. In line with Puig de la Bellacasa's, a neuroqueer perspective lays bare the ethico-political dimensions of neurodivergent lives. In the case of Mae and her friends, these dimensions concern both the workings of a late capitalist society on their lives, as well as the speculative potentiality of their lives.

My point is, nevertheless, not just to claim that Mae and her friends *are* neurodivergent, in the sense of identity. Estee Klar and Adam Wolford convincingly argue that neurodiversity has a dynamic aspect to it, "the intrarelational, incorporeal *attunement* of neurodiversity" (n.d.), that is often overlooked by only conceiving of it as an identity falling on the former end of the dis/abled binary. Nevertheless, there are strategic benefits to using neurodiversity as an identity as well. Erin Manning describes how identity should be reinterpreted as not fixed but continually in progress (2019). Expressing a specific identity-in-progress is thus more associated with cripping as a verb—to explicitly question existing norms—than with its location within a "crip" individual. This involves actively proposing alternative practices and creating alliances which allow us to reclaim identity politics as far as it becomes a caring and political action to explicitly express an identity. In reality, society remains non-ideal, with norms surrounding "compulsory neurotypicality" still having an impact. Positioning oneself as neurodivergent can be a strategy to resist those norms (Manning 2019). In this sense, Walker has stressed the generative potential of neuroqueering as a practice. Neuroqueering, according to Walker, includes "producing critical responses to . . . cultural artifacts, focusing on intentional or unintentional characterizations of neuroqueerness and how those characterizations illuminate and/or are illuminated by actual neuroqueer lives and experiences" (2021, 162). This reading practice is both critical (aimed at revealing restrictive normativities) and creative (generating alternative possibilities) (Braidotti 2019). This chapter, which uncovers the different workings of crip temporality in NITW, ultimately aims to lay bare the speculative neuroqueer potential of the videogame.

Caring Thinking

Video games that thematize neurodiversity are released from perspectives ranging across the entire spectrum of the game industry, from autobiographical games about autism such as *An Aspie Life*, to low-budget games from small studios such as *Please Knock on My Door*, and finally AAA games such as *Hellblade: Senua's Sacrifice*. These games are often marketed as offering players a meaningful emotional experience that will increase their empathy towards neurodivergent people. The idea is that if a player can experience what, for example, auditory hallucinations or sensory overload feel like, they will care more about people with a psychiatric diagnosis. Although it forms a crucial aspect of ethical engagement with others, empathy is not harmless. Empathizing with others can also harm, especially when it becomes a tool to hide the power imbalances present in encounters. Many scholars have been critical of empathy-game discourse, where players are offered simulation games through which they engage with (marginalized) lived experiences to increase their understanding of others (Bennett and Rosner 2019; Nakamura 2020; Ruberg 2020). Seen as opportunistic, this reading critiques a game design that commodifies the lived experiences of others, thereby running the risk of displacing marginalized people as a target group from video games about their own experiences.

Although this position is certainly justified, these empathy-driven videogames often target only the part of empathy focused on (self-oriented) perspective-taking. Amy Coplan provides an extensive review of the conceptualization and use of empathy across many different domains (2011). She argues that empathy has several components that are often overlooked, making it a confusing and often inaccurately used term. Coplan defines three features of empathy, namely affective matching, other-oriented perspective-taking (as opposed to self-oriented), and self-other differentiation, that need to be present simultaneously for successful empathizing. Coplan's threefold conceptualization of empathy is quite exhaustive and also acknowledges the difficulties of empathizing, especially as far as other-oriented perspective-taking is concerned: even though fully experiencing something as if we really were the other is practically impossible, one should still try in spite of it. In this light, Puig de la Bellacasa conceptualizes care as an ongoing activity, always situated, relational and nonideal (2017).

Several other productive connections between Coplan's inclusive definition of empathy and Puig de la Bellacasa's speculative care ethics can be made. Coplan urges that even in our attempts to empathize with the other, we should differentiate between ourselves and the other person (self-other differentiation), while Puig de la Bellacasa stresses that we must think critically about our desire for complete fusion to the subject of our caring actions: "care is not about fusion; it can be about the right distance" (2017, 5). Similarly, in the context of video games, Ruberg puts forward Donna Haraway's notion of "becoming-with" as an alternative and more productive affective

model for togetherness.[1] Here, "two subjects can stand together, see each other, and value one another without attempting to possess one another or become one" (Ruberg 2019, 181). Puig de la Bellacasa stresses how becoming-with as an ethico-political stance means going into relations while remaining open to the possibility of being transformed in addition to being curious regarding the situated needs of others (2017). Finally, Coplan's affective matching and Puig de la Bellacasa's affective engagement share important characteristics. The question remains, of course, if this type of feeling-with can also be evoked in a mediated way, such as while playing a video game. In what follows, I turn to the workings of slowness and repetition in *NITW* as neuroqueer affects to analyze how this might happen.

Neuroqueer Challenges to Chrononormativity

In her introduction to crip time, Alison Kafer maps the extent to which disability is conceptualized in temporal terms:

> "chronic" fatigue, "intermittent" symptoms, and "constant" pain are each ways of defining illness and disability in and through time; they describe disability in terms of duration. "Frequency," "incidence," "occurrence," "relapse," "remission": these, too, are the time frames of symptoms, illness, and disease. "Prognosis" and "diagnosis" project futures of illness, disability, and recovery.
>
> (2013, 25)

Apart from the linguistic prominence of time, crip time plays an important part in how disabled lived experience is structured and feels. For example, practical obstructions that make navigating space in a wheelchair more time-consuming demand a reorientation to time, requiring not only more of it, but also a certain flexibility in time. Crip time can also be conceived of as a (forced) challenge to chrononormativity, in the sense that one's bodymind does not allow one to meet the level of productivity that society demands. Crip time is more often connected to physical disability than to neurodiversity or other disabilities that mostly express in a psychosocial manner. Nevertheless, the notion of crip time resonates just as well with many neurodivergent lived experiences characterized by differing attention spans, frustration with things not going fast enough, and atypical ways of processing information.

The videogame medium holds some affordances that are excellently equipped to challenge chrononormativity.[2] By design, many video games stand in contrast with the common "vision of time as seamless, unified, and forward moving" (Freeman 2010, p. xxii). Christopher Hanson argues that time in videogames contains a tension between potential malleability and high restriction (2018). The opportunity to manipulate time, Hanson maintains, is distinctive to the videogame medium: "players preserve, pause, slow, rewind, replay, reactivate, and reanimate time as part of the play mechanics"

(2018, 2). The ability to control time gets, then, effectively normalized in video games. In any case, regardless of the endless opportunities to engage with time that videogames hold, a hegemonic type of gameplay persists. Fullerton et al. maintain that a series of normative understandings that privilege particular forms of fast-paced, goal-oriented play—a hegemony of play—dictate the dominant modes of game design and interaction (Fullerton et al. 2008). Since games are such a time-focused medium, this hegemonic type of gameplay is characterized by "hegemonic game time" which indicates the prevailing temporal relations and rhythms of play created by hegemonic design conventions (Vanderhoef and Payne 2022).

These norms stand in sharp contrast with *NITW's* mediated environment and dependency of the player on Mae's decision-making. The game is better interpreted through "slow game time," conceptualized as a time-focused alternative to hegemonic gameplay, where process, stillness, and unproductive play become a dominant mode of engagement (Vanderhoef and Payne 2022).[3] Ruberg describes how the type of action-adventure game sometimes called a "walking simulator" focuses on slow game time by structuring the in-game experience around walking and observing, rather than running and fighting (2019). This type of game, to which *NITW* also belongs, showcases a preference for process over destination and is, as such, less goal-oriented. The term walking simulator was originally coined in a derogatory manner since these games didn't meet players' normative expectations of what a game should look like (Reed et al. 2021). Vanderhoef and Payne hint at the possibility that "players' affective aversion to slowness is partially a consequence of not wanting to relinquish a sense of control" (2022). Introducing slowness in a video game also requires an active contribution from the players themselves, as they have to adjust their expectations about the customary passage of time in games.

NITW resists chrononormativity primarily through goalless gameplay and players who have few concrete tasks to accomplish. The game is quite cyclical, and for most of the game the player follows and helps Mae with everyday tasks: she wakes up, changes clothes, walks downstairs and talks with her mother, goes outside to walk around the town, goes to an evening event, comes back home, watches TV with her father, goes to bed, and experiences a nightmare. This cycle continues throughout the game. At first, these nightmares and dissociations are sudden disruptive moments in the flow of everydayness. Later, they become part of the expected events, and the disruptions become integrated into the daily cycle. The open-endedness of Mae's days clashes with that of her friends. Unlike Mae, her friends all have very specific jobs to do and places to be. She regularly speaks about this with people in town, and through these conversations, the game critically engages with productivity. Mae is clearly busy as well, with days often completely taken up by one task. For example, she spends a full day finding her friend Angus so he can repair her laptop, which challenges normative ideas about how much time a specific task should take up. Sarah Harkin describes how through its

procedural rhetoric, the game connects repetition and goallessness with the "collective melancholy of the town's struggling residents" (2020). As such, the repetition does not only serve as a metaphor but connects a fundamental part of the gameplay experience for players with an aspect of the lived experiences of Possum Springs' townies.

A double layer is added because Mae is not only "wasting her time" and reflecting on this, but the player can also be perceived—and perceive themselves—as wasting their time by playing the game. Not necessarily because playing video games is perceived as a childish waste of time, but primarily because according to hegemonic game norms the player's actions could be perceived as wasteful. Repetitive player actions such as playing bass or chatting with Mae's friends do not improve any actual stats. Capitalist expectations also work their way into video game play, where players are expected to build specific skills: "players experience a sense of pleasurable productivity by completing the next challenge, leveling up, racking up impressive kill-death ratios, or by otherwise mastering games" (Vanderhoef and Payne 2022). Vanderhoef and Payne argue that players often react anxious or frustrated to the disruption of normative game time—which is oriented towards clear goals and achievements—because it conflicts with the expected possibilities: "such deployments of slow game time trigger player anxiety connected to capitalism by foreclosing play opportunities that would otherwise ameliorate such concerns" (2022). By playing "against the rules," for example, through speedrunning, players can resist (temporal) power structures. However, in *NITW* slowness becomes not only a player-induced subversive act but the dominant mode of play. Subsequently, as a neuroqueer affect, crip time becomes the framework through which we can relate to the experiences of Mae and her friends.

Despite the seemingly gently continuing nature of *NITW*, its mystery plot reaches a climax with an event taking place in Possum Springs' old coal mine. Here Mae and her friends get confronted by a group of right-wing conservative cult members who have been conducting some mysterious rituals in the abandoned mines. They present themselves as just a "buncha old boys doing their damndest to protect their own and their neighbors," but this has to happen at a certain cost (Infinite Fall 2017). After narrowly escaping the cultic kidnapping, Mae's movements slow down dramatically. The player feels her emotional and physical change impact their playing experience as well, since the few buttons they can control in the game no longer function in the same way as before. The player's frustration grows as Mae's body won't allow them to go as fast as they would like to. In this way, the game confronts players with their expectations of how long an action such as walking somewhere should take. Even though the game only lasts about ten hours in total, most players do not play it through in one sitting, taking days or even weeks to complete it. The slow pace and repetitive gameplay invite a type of player engagement that is different from hegemonic immersive and goal-oriented interactions. Quite typical for adventure games, as Reed et al. argue, the point is often precisely not to complete a game in one sitting, but to put

it away and return to it again (2021). Indeed, putting away *NITW* allows for reflection, so it should not too readily be interpreted as a fault of the game that it is not immersive enough (Caravella 2021). In their essay on crip play, Adan Jerreat-Poole rightly asks if we can "slow down, instead of forcing [m]ad and crip players to catch up?" (2018). This call reinforces the idea that moving beyond a strict focus on fast-paced and immersive gameplay can be a conscious choice.

Building Relationships

Building relationships with the different characters is one of the core mechanisms in *Night in the Woods* (Harkin 2020; Veale 2022). Players are not merely watching these relationships unfold while playing, but become implicated in them through the choices they make (or don't make). There are two basic "friendship paths" that the player can pursue by spending most of their time with either Gregg or Bea. Most days players will visit Bea and Gregg at their respective workplaces: the hardware store, The Ol' Pickaxe, owned by Bea's father but almost completely run by Bea, and the convenience store called Snack Flacon for Gregg. However, hanging out with Bea or Gregg also triggers some character-specific story events. With Bea, players will have difficult conversations while hanging out at the local mall or go to an out-of-town party where Mae connects with some of Bea's more punk and activist friends. With Gregg, players will mostly be "doing crimes" such as having a lighthearted but bizarre knife fight or destroying an abandoned car to retrieve its battery, which will later turn into a robot-gift for Angus.

Under this seemingly lighthearted game mechanism of pursuing side quests hides a moral choice with serious impact: who do we dedicate most of our time to? At the beginning of the game, the atmosphere between Bea and Mae is quite awkward, and there is a lot of mutual misunderstanding and jealousy about the life choices they each have made so far. Hanging out with Bea will allow the girls to clear the air and reconcile. Although the bond with Gregg requires less attention, he and Mae have much to offer each other. For Mae, the adventures with Gregg offer a welcome distraction from the anxiety she experiences. Gregg, despite his regular struggles with bipolar episodes, is in a good place with the support he receives from his partner, Angus. However, his life has become a lot more serious since Mae left for college, and hanging out with her allows him to bring out his messy, wild side more. As such, *NITW* stresses the importance of building relationships for their own sake and persisting even if we do not immediately get something tangible in return.

Besides reconnecting with her friends, the player also has to connect with Mae herself. When the game begins, the player doesn't yet know what happened to Mae before she arrived in Possum Springs. Mae is actively vague about the events in her past, not talking about them with her friends and, as a consequence, the player also doesn't know. At times the game builds up to a cut-scene where Mae shares an intimate moment with one of her friends,

and they touch upon the topic. Typically, this would be a moment where a videogame slowly reveals part of a character's backstory to the player, but Mae gets closed off instead. By choosing not to share much personal information with her friends, Mae effectively also prevents the player from exploring parts of her personal story. Situations like these reinforce the outsider perspective of the player, where Mae is more than a player avatar since she holds information that the player does not. The design choice to only let the player have indirect access to Mae returns in the role the player gets assigned in Mae's conversations with others. Occasionally, the player is offered the option to participate in the dialogue and choose what Mae will say. However, Mae's words often come out completely different from what the player decided on, only offering the illusion of choice. Mae's behavior during these conversations has two consequences: it highlights the separation between her and the player, while also making the player feel-with the lack of control over Mae's experiencing of her own actions.

The affective materiality of *NITW* has integrated the process of dis- and reorientation that is characteristic of crip time. *NITW* effectively foregrounds "diagnosis time," indicating the timeframe between when someone first starts experiencing difficulties, and the moment they start making sense of what is happening to them. In Mae's case, the diagnosis time began when she started experiencing dissociative episodes at the age of fourteen that are still ongoing. Kafer describes the time of undiagnosis as "the shuttling between specialists, the repeated refusal of care and services, the constant denial of one's experiences, the slow exacerbation of one's symptoms, the years without recognition or diagnosis, the waiting" (2013, 37). Just like the town of Possum Springs itself, which is dealing with a combination of nostalgia and hopelessness because of its disappearing mining industry and connected economy, Mae is stuck in a period where after dropping out of college, she has no future and all possible futures at the same time. This interrupted linearity very well demonstrates the precarity of the future and strange temporality after receiving a diagnosis or acknowledging your illness. Through gameplay that brings across the affect of dis- and reorientation, the player can care-fully connect with this feeling. However, the fact that Mae is more than the player-avatar and players have to work to get to know her, allows for the self-other differentiation that helps to avoid the undesirable complete fusion that often accompanies simulation games.

Imagining Disability Futures

Mae, Gregg, Bea, and Angus do not exist merely as individual characters, and the player has to help them reconnect as a group of friends once connected through music. In a mini-game resembling a simplified version of *Guitar Hero*, Mae and the player learn to adapt to the rhythm of the other characters and find a place for themselves within the group again. During this regular band practice, taking place in an old building called "The Party

Barn," the player has to find the right rhythm by pressing specific keys at the right moment in the song. The player's rhythm skills effectively become a stand-in for Mae's bass-playing skills. During this mini-game, the player becomes a part of Mae's band and plays together with her and her friends, which serves as another way of tuning in and connecting with the characters. The band practice becomes, then, a space where the friends get to reexperience being a group and openly talk about the issues they are dealing with.

NITW offers a speculative view of other possible futures for neurodivergent people beyond finding a cure for their problems. Kafer, discussing disability in relation to common cultural conceptualizations of the future, describes how anticipated disability is often (mis)used to indicate a future that no one wants (2013, 46). In an attempt to think beyond this stigmatizing view, Kafer urges to imagine what "desirably disabled futures" would look like (2013, 68). She defines crip futurity, which is characterized not only as a future that actively welcomes disability, but also as one being shaped according to the collective knowledge and practices of the disabled community. In *NITW*, crip futurity becomes visible on both an individual and a structural level. Mae's individual journey is not necessarily concerned with finding a cure for mental illness, but instead with working towards acceptance of, and learning to live with, mental illness. On the level of gameplay, this is integrated through the goallessness of the game. Although Mae will sometimes enter a new area or scene, the town of Possum Springs does not significantly expand over time. There are no secret areas to unlock, and Mae does not acquire or improve specific skills throughout the course of the game. Instead, she revisits the same places, again and again, sometimes finding only small things have changed. The game stresses, then, how healing is a never-ending process different from curing and does not necessarily champion a return to prior able-bodiedness. In this light, Mae's experiences in *NITW* could be interpreted as a nonlinear coming-of-age story that deals primarily with coming to terms with a specific diagnosis but which allows space for healing from diagnosis-related issues as well.

The climactic episode taking place in the old mine centers the importance for Mae and her friends to engage in nonhierarchial dialogue to find a safe way out of the mines. After the group escapes the confrontation with the right-wing miners, it is suggested that the cult is trapped down in the mine, effectively ending their activities and the influence they had on Possum Springs. The old miners who previously defined the town are no longer calling the shots. Instead, Mae's group of friends—who are all dealing with neuroqueer experiences in some way—now jointly define the future development of the town. Mae and her friends can be read as an example of Kafer's desired disabled community whose collective knowledge and practices shape new futures. In the case of Mae's friend group, that might mean not concerning oneself with the future at all, instead remaining "stuck in neutral," as Mae says, endlessly playing songs with their band and eating pizza (Infinite Fall 2017).

Conclusion

NITW offers an example of how videogames can move beyond pushing their player towards an end goal of achieving (more) empathy promoting, instead, the continuous task of creating caring connections. Of course, creating such connections still requires reference points. In *NITW*, crip time functions as a way for players to make affective connections that do not rely solely on empathy exercises concerned with representing specific symptoms (which can be stigmatizing) or on literal simulations of depersonalization or dissociation. Crip time functions as an affective mode that helps to communicate "what it is like" to be neurodivergent in an informed and affective way. At the same time, the open-endedness of this affective mode leaves space for players to relate to the game in their own way, instead of prescribing what they should feel about or learn from the game.

On the level of gameplay, slowness becomes not only a player-induced subversive act, but the dominant mode of play. Goallessness, which is integrated into the game by design, unsettles normative expectations of what a player should get out of a game. On the level of the storyline, the video game thematizes the weird and unsettling temporality of undiagnosis, and of not trying to find a cure but instead focusing energy on acceptance and healing. Mae and her friends function as an example of a disabled or "neurocosmopolitanist" community (Walker 2021, 74). They move forward in time not by trying to achieve future goals, but by attending to the present moment and seeing what comes out of it. However, beyond the level of game design, *NITW* can also be strategically read as neuroqueer to lay bare existing hierarchies and societal norms. For example, *NITW* critically engages with societal issues such as financial insecurity and gender stereotyping that worsen neurodiversity-related problems, without having to locate the root of that problem within an individual. The game thus also provides a tentative exploration of disability justice (Piepzna-Samarasinha 2018).

NITW also offers a prime example of what a caring understanding of neurodiversity—which attends to all three dimensions of Puig de la Bellacasa's definition of care—looks like. By commenting on issues such as the lack of mental health care in small towns, or socioeconomic issues that are often entangled with the lives of disabled and neurodivergent people, the game stimulates ethico-political involvement. The neuroqueer affect of slowness in the game, which forces the player to adjust to the pace and rhythm of Mae and her friends, invites care-ful affective engagement. Finally, the way the game questions standard expectations about hegemonic game time urges players to actively adjust their judgment. An equal relationship with Mae and her friends must be actively created, with the player also having to surrender to her whims at times. In this way, care in the game is also presented as a laborious and ongoing activity. Rather than working towards a full understanding of neurodiversity, the game focuses on the process of trying to understand someone, changing feeling-of into feeling-with. Rather

than attempting to achieve synchrony, the game focuses on what happens in the process of synchronization. As such, video games like *NITW* that discuss neurodivergent experiences with care and promote a caring stance in players have the potential to be highly beneficial to everyone, as they promote a more nuanced view on neurodiversity and help remove internalized stigma while allowing neurodivergent players to feel recognized and validated.

Notes

1 See Haraway (2008) for a more extensive discussion on the notion of becoming-with, as applied to animal–human associations.

2 Although I will focus on the prominence of chrononormativity in specific video games, the impact that the obsession with productive time has on the game industry itself must not be overlooked. Kara Stone, for example, challenges the "strenuous and damaging ableist demands placed on game developers" by arguing for a design process that obeys queer and crip (disability-centered) notions of time (2018).

3 Resisting chrononormativity does not necessarily have to be slow. Speedrunning, where players attempt to complete a game as fast as possible, is goal oriented but complicates the notion of goals as well: "it elevates goal orientation to a hyperfocus, choosing to ignore certain elements of the game as designed in order to intentionally reset the terms of gameplay" (Ruberg 2019, 196). Speedrunning is pure progress, without much space for dwelling. But it is also entangled with confronting failure since a successful speedrun requires hundreds of failed tryouts. Ruberg stresses how speedrunning is also entangled with (neuro)queer ways of knowing: it requires hyperfocus and detailed knowledge of a game. As such, it resonates well with neurodivergent lived experiences characterized by differing attention spans, frustration with things not going fast enough, and atypical ways of processing information.

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