Performing Queer Selves:

Embodied subjectivity and affect in queer
performance spaces Duckie, Bird Club, and Wotever
World

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I confirm that all work presented in this thesis is my own, and that all references to other sources have been cited accordingly.

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Acknowledgements

Abstract

This thesis explores the affective, relational, and intercorporeal intensities circulating in three of London's queer performance club spaces. Duckie, Bird Club and Wotever have staged queer cabaret, burlesque and live-art influenced performance work in bar and nightclub settings for many years, and yet have received little academic attention. Located at the intersection of cultural studies, performance studies, and body theory, this thesis serves not only to archive this rich and yet under-explored scene of creative endeavour, but also to bring into dialogue concerns and approaches from these divergent disciplines that appear to coincide within these settings. It asks two complimentary overarching questions:

• What can the debates around subjectivity, affect and embodiment emerging from body theory bring to our interpretation and understanding of performance practice and spectatorship?

• What can a consideration of performance bring to the ongoing interest across the humanities in the workings of affect and embodied experiences that challenge the rational, bounded, autonomous subject?

Through autoethnographic research, comprising performance analysis, one-to-one and group interviews with performers and regulars of the three clubs and extensive participation in both the social and performance aspects of this 'scene', I argue that much is to be gained from this under-explored crossover. Engaging theory on bodily integrity, relationality, trauma, fantasy and desire and the public sphere I investigate the workings of affect within these domains, and the complex intersections between affect and identity politics, performativity, subjectification and world-making. I trace the modes of subjectivity and belonging that appear to be enabled within these milieux, and address why it is that these debates become pertinent here. Shifting our attention to the affective register of what is occurring within queer performance, I argue, enables a consideration of experiences, subjectivities and performances that might otherwise seem paradoxical, impossible or illegible.

Table of Contents

Appendices (on accompanying CD)

Appendix 1: Transcript of interview with Amy Lamé, 24/11/09, Le Maison Bertaux, London.

Appendix 2: Transcript of interview with Bird la Bird, 10/12/09, Café Crema, London.

Appendix 3: Transcript of interview with Killpussy, 09/02/10, performer's home, London.

List of Figures and Images

All images (hereafter "Fig.") are used with permissions from the photographer.

Presentation Conventions

All citations in this thesis follow the Harvard referencing system. Performance work is cited with the performer's name, and the title of the piece given in italics. Quotations from spoken word content of performances are given in double inverted commas, and cited accordingly in parentheses. Interview material from my own transcripts is given in single inverted commas, followed by the name of the participant in parentheses. All interviews were digitally audio and/or video recorded, and fully manually transcribed using *Transcriber* software. These transcripts were then very sparingly edited in order to make the text read more smoothly and eliminate repetition, verbal ticks and pauses. A full set of these transcripts is included in the appendices to this thesis, on the accompanying CD. British spellings are used throughout, except in quotations from published texts wherein Americanised spellings are used, in these cases the text is quoted verbatim.

Queerness is not yet here. Queerness is an ideality [...] Turning to the aesthetic in the case of queerness is nothing like an escape from the social realm, insofar as aesthetics map future social relations. Queerness is also *performative* because it is not simply a *being* but a *doing* for and towards the future. Queerness is basically about a rejection of the here and now and an insistence on potentiality or concrete possibility for another world.

(Muñoz 2009a: 1, emphasis added)

Introduction: Me and my Thesis, two queer journeys

In July 2011 I took to the stage in London's historical gay pub, the Royal Vauxhall Tavern, to perform as part of Bar Wotever's *Wotever Sex* series of curated events for the RVT's annual *Hot August Fringe*.[1] In the following twenty minutes, I gave a performance lecture recounting the comedic perils of being simultaneously an academic, a queer cabaret performer, and a regular 'member' of London's queer club 'scene'. My satirical case study of the curious world of academia provided a detailed (auto)ethnography of its eccentric practices, complete with powerpoint slides, academic jargon, and references to seminal feminist theories. This performance was profound and cathartic for me on multiple levels. Performing always entails a very visceral pleasure for me - the heat of stage lights, the attention and response of the audience, the feeling of eyes and smiles and laughter directed at you engenders a distinct sensation of affective connectedness with those sharing your space and your story. As warmth envelops me, hairs standing on end, tingling all over I feel physically, to risk parodying Marina Abramović, incredibly *present*. Yet this performance also signalled the culmination (or perhaps, rather, the beginning) of two interconnected journeys that have dominated my private and professional life for the past four years: my discovery of a queer community, which in turn enabled my 'coming out' both as a Femme and as a performer, and my thesis, which seemed to develop of its own accord into something quite different from its original intent. This thesis began life as a (largely textual) analysis of queer, alternative or non-normative femininities as they surface in a range of media examples, including queer pornography and queer burlesque and cabaret performance. It has culminated in an interactive, creative, performance autoethnography of the functioning of affect, embodied subjectivity and

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[1] Since 2009 the Royal Vauxhall Tavern has showcased a broad range of cabaret, burlesque, comedy, music and variety performance in this special 25-night festival with three (often contrasting) performances scheduled every night throughout August. In 2011, Wotever World programmed a five-part series of events every Tuesday during the festival entitled *Wotever Sex*, which brought together some of the favourite performers, artists and activists involved in previous Wotever events. Both the *Hot August Fringe* and *Wotever Sex* will be repeated for the 2012 season, wherein I will be giving a performance lecture presenting some of the 'findings' of my PhD research. For more information see http://hotaugustfringe.com and http://woteverworld.com.

intercorporeality in some of London's queer performance clubs. [2] Whilst the former would structure my opportunity and ability to carry out the latter, and undoubtably have a significant impact on how I would be regarded and treated by my professional peers in both contexts, it was my PhD thesis' apparent autonomy that would revolutionise my attitude towards and position within the broader sphere of academia, and how I would come to conceive of the research process, and its relation to questions of ethics, epistemology and ontology. This introduction will guide you through these two inextricably intertwined journeys in order to set up and contextualise the main body of the thesis that follows. It will include the basic outlines of key theories, methods and findings you will be expecting to find in an introduction to a thesis. But more importantly, it will locate you within the narratives that I feel are crucial to making this very personal and embodied story come alive. Though, as the delightful Maria Mojo once said to me, you may not be able to share my exact experience, you may be able to appreciate, and hopefully enjoy it, by walking a mile in my shoes - both my stilettos and my Doc Marten boots.

© 2011 AbsolutQueer Photography

[2] Performance autoethnography is the term I use to describe my innovative research methodology, which is further explained later in this Introduction, and in more detail in Chapter 2 of this thesis. As examined at length in Chapter 1 of this thesis, the notion of 'affect' has been at the centre of an explosion of scholarly debate across the humanities and social sciences in recent years. I utilise the term throughout this thesis to indicate embodied intensities that are related to, yet distinct from, emotions and feelings, and that resonate on a fundamentally intercorporeal level, producing bodies as always open to affecting and being affected by human and non-human others. As discussed further below and in Chapter 1 of this thesis, the term 'embodied subjectivity' also emerges from a specific academic context and history, and I use the term to indicate a consideration of the key role of the body and bodily experience in the process of coming to conceive of oneself as a subject.

Figs. 1a & b: Myself, performing *Fuck(ing) the Academy* at *Wotever Sex*, 2011.
Photos by AbsolutQueer.

Introductions

Before I go any further I wish to begin by introducing the three performance spaces that orientate my attention throughout this thesis: Duckie, Bird Club, and Wotever World, and the seven performers at the heart of what is to follow: Amy Lamé, Bird la Bird, Maria Mojo, Killpussy, Emelia Holdaway, Josephine Krieg, and Jet Moon. Duckie is one of the longest running queer performance club nights in London, having taken place at the same venue, the infamous Royal Vauxhall Tavern, weekly since 1995. Referring to themselves as '[p]urveyors of progressive working class entertainment' (Duckie 2009), producer Simon Casson and host Amy Lamé set up Duckie's Saturday club night with the intention of clashing the lowbrow and the highbrow, bringing avant-garde art to a dingy local boozer. As an internationally recognised collective, Duckie's events draw live artists, burlesque, cabaret, music and theatrical performers from many countries, of different stages in their careers and of various degrees of commercial success or mainstream media recognition. Whilst endeavouring to create an open atmosphere of inclusion for all, Duckie is less explicitly engaged in the politics of queer or trans* recognition or visibility than Bird Club

or Wotever, and is predominantly frequented by cisgendered gay men.[3] Indeed, at a recent panel event on the significance of 'the common' in performance, organiser of Wotever World Ingo recalled discomfort attending Duckie dressed in male or explicitly gender variant attire as one of the key motivations for starting Wotever.[4]
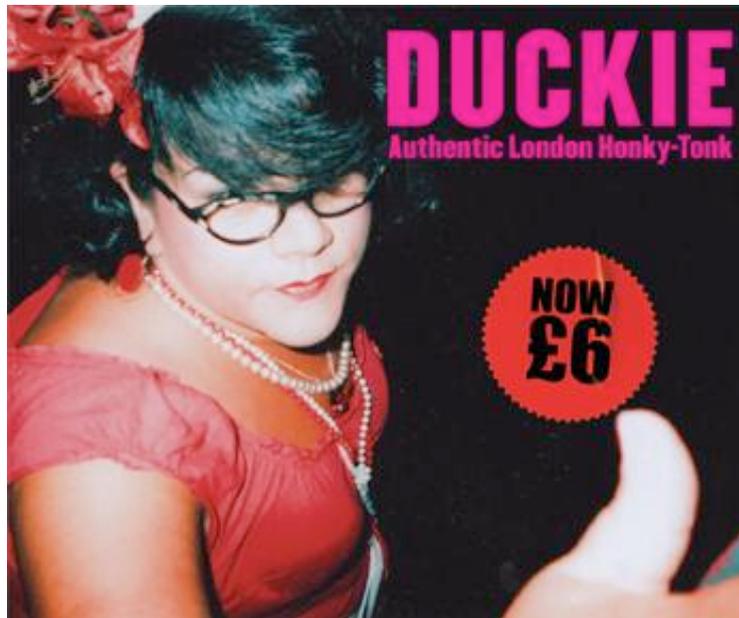
Fig. 2: Duckie flyer. Image courtesy of Duckie and rvt.org.uk

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[3] I use the term 'trans*' here and throughout to indicate both common suffixes to this term (ie. Transgendered and transsexual), positioning 'trans*' as an umbrella term that can encompass many forms of gender variance inside or outside the male/female binary (including genderqueer, 'two spirit', third gender or multi-gendered). Cisgengered, alongside cissexual, are terms commonly used to indicate a person whose sex/gender identity is in alignment with that assigned to them at birth, whilst removing the normalising hierarchy and derogatory nature of comparing 'trans' people to 'non-trans' people positioned as having more 'normal' or 'correct' sex/gender development. However, it must also be noted that the trans/cis distinction has limitations, as it does not necessarily encapsulate the complexities of intersexed experiences, as the alignment/non-alignment of assigned and experienced sex/gender is unclear in the case of intersexed individuals whose assignment may have always been ambiguous, and who therefore may not identify with the crossing/not crossing distinction implied by the trans/cis binary (for further elaboration on these issues and the functioning of cissexism see Serano 2007). Yet whilst the term cisgendered may not be faultless, I find it imperative to employ it as a strategy of naming and highlighting privilege and normalisation in contrast to the hypervisibility of trans* status. Therefore in this thesis, where relevant, an individual's position as someone identifying and living as female when unproblematically assigned female at birth, or vice versa, will be referred to as cisgendered. Similarly, individuals identifying as trans* will be referred to by that term, or if necessary transgender, transsexual, genderqueer etc., only if and when it is relevant to the discussion. Gender neutral pronouns such as 'they' and 'hir' will be also used throughout where necessary to refer to individuals who prefer them. I assume a sympathy for this ethical consideration in my reader, as well as an understanding as to why I deliberately choose to avoid Othering queer genders and identities by repeatedly defining and explaining these terms.

[4] This panel discussion was curated under the theme of 'Common' for the symposium forming part of the public programme of events for the three-year research project *Performance Matters,* with which I am an associate researcher. This joint creative project run between Goldsmiths, University of London, the University of Roehampton and the Live Art Development Agency is financially assisted by the AHRC and aims to investigate the cultural value of performance. For more information see www.thisisperformancematters.co.uk.

Figs. 3 a & b: Flyer for Bar Wotever, Autumn 2010. Image curtesy of
Wotever World.

The Wotever World collective of events is similarly built around an ethic
of inclusivity and openness to all forms of expression, but with a more specific
focus on removing the need to categorise at all, where 'wotever' is used in an
affectionate and humorous way as an identity label that is a true non-label and
can include everyone, including those who struggle to identify themselves in
any concrete or consistent manner. Wotever began as a queer cabaret
performance club night in 2003 and has since developed into a range of
occasional club nights, theatre, music, and cabaret evenings complimented by
the weekly open-stage Bar Wotever at which performers of all forms, from
spoken word to music, live art, dance and comedy perform in an intimate setting
that is strongly characterised by the feeling of community. Similarly to Bird Club,
Wotever is focused around the inclusion of those on the trans* spectrum,
although the shifted focus from identity politics to non-identities creates an
audience that is more varied and mixed than the predominantly butch/femme
aesthetic of Bird Club. Billed as 'a celebration of Queer Ladydom in all it's
species and splendour' (Bird Club 2008), Bird Club is more self-consciously
organised around the desire to celebrate expressions of queer femininity either
through full-time identities or particular performances. Emerging from a

performance piece by queer Femme performers Maria Mojo and Bird la Bird at the Transfabulous transgender arts festival in 2006,[5] Bird Club has had a strong focus on queer and trans* representation, issues of visibility, and identity politics from its inception. Whilst the cabaret, burlesque and live art inspired performances from a range of artists are generally selected in accordance with the focus on queer femininity, the club is strongly marketed as an inclusive queer space for all expressions of gender and sexuality with a focus on self-identification rather than identity - anyone can be a 'Bird' or an 'Admirer':

> It's not what's in your knickers, it's whether you like wearing them that counts. Being a Lady can be a once every so often or a full time affair. **Bird Club don't care as long as you do your hair**. (Bird Club 2008, original emphasis)
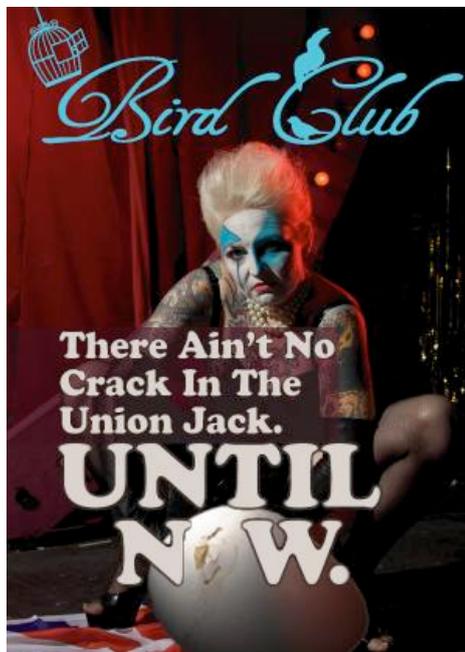
Fig. 4: Flyer for Bird Club's *Birds of Paradise: The Hatching,* 2008. Image courtesy of Bird Club and Sam Nightingale.

Fig. 5: Bird la Bird and Maria Mojo performing the original *Bird Club* at Transfabulous, 2006. Photo by Leng Montgomery.

In addition to being the 'mama' of Bird Club, Bird la Bird has performed at various venues on the queer performance scene in London and internationally for many years. As a trained artist, Bird la Bird has a great interest in feminist and cultural theory, often referencing theorists such as Donna Haraway in interviews. As highlighted in my analysis of her piece *Holding Court: A Period*

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[5] Transfabulous is an arts organisation run jointly by Serge Nicholson and Jason Elvis Barker since 2004 to showcase art and particularly performance by, for, and about transgendered and genderqueer artists and issues. For more information see http://www.transfabulous.co.uk.

Drama in Chapter 3 of this thesis, her performances often blend humour and politics in a performance art format resembling short sketches, scenes or vignettes, although she has also performed longer durational pieces in a 'promenade' style where the audience are invited to come and go. Her work often engages her own experiences of issues related to class, race, gender, sexuality, and a traumatic childhood, through the guise of characters such as Scousie-scouse (an homage to both punk heroine Siouxsie Sioux and her Liverpudlian roots), author of The SCUM Manifesto Valerie Solanas (1967), the mother of infamous journalist Julie Bindel,[6] and a demonic incarnation of the Pope.

Fig. 6: Bird la Bird performing *You'll feel the back of my hand in a minute* at Bird Club's *Wimmin's Disco*, 2009. Photo by Leng Montgomery.

Fig. 7: Maria Mojo as Dyke Marilyn at Bird Club's *Quiffosexual,* 2009. Photo by Leng Montgomery.

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[6] Julie Bindel is a prominent lesbian feminist journalist with a regular column in *The Guardian* newspaper amongst others. She has come under increasing criticism from the queer and trans*-positive community in recent years for apparently trans-phobic remarks made in several of her columns, and her call for a distinction to be drawn between, as she terms it, 'normal' lesbians and more 'odd' queer sexualities and practices (for further elaboration see her articles archived on *The Guardian* website, particularly 'It's not me. It's you' (Bindel 2008). Bird la Bird responded to the subsequent uproar with a performance piece entitled *You'll Feel the Back of My Hand in a Minute*, in which she played Bindel's disgruntled mother.

Fig. 8: Bird la Bird performing as Birdie Solanas in *The Society for Cutting up Couples*, at Bird Club's *Outta Wedlock Special*, 2009. Photo by Leng Montgomery.

Maria Mojo, Killpussy and Emelia Holdaway have all performed regularly at Wotever, Duckie, and Bird Club events. Maria was a prominent founding member of the Wotever Cabaret collective and although she no longer performs character-based or cabaret work is still a prominent member of the queer performance community. Growing up as a mixed-race Londoner in notoriously dangerous Harlesden, her most celebrated performance persona, Dyke Marilyn, explicitly confronted issues of race and gender, as I explore in more detail in Chapter 5 of this thesis. Dressed in a blonde wig and corset, armed with her heart-shaped guitar, Marilyn would take to the stage to perform short musical numbers and tell humorous stories in her meticulously impersonated Marilyn Monroe voice. The anecdotes would often introduce irony through the visual incongruence of a visibly mixed race woman regaling the audience with the experience of being judged as a blonde white idol, or from the comments themselves, such as the claim that she was the love-child of Marilyn Monroe and Jimmy Hendrix, who "inherited Jimmy's good looks and Marilyn's guitar skills" (Maria Mojo, *Dyke Marilyn*).

Killpussy has performed in queer contexts since childhood, having run away from school at the age of eleven and being adopted by drag queens. After exposure to extreme gang culture, violence and sex work as a young woman, she attributes her fierce and feisty image of femininity to the survival instinct and inner strength this gave her. Her performances are often burlesque-inflected in appearance, but deal with serious and often political subject matter, and, in her

own words, are not 'sweet and pretty' (Killpussy). In *God Save the Queen*, a collaborator in a Princess Diana mask and prom dress crashes a toy car and is subsequently kicked to the ground by Killpussy in a similar Queen Elizabeth II mask to the soundtrack of Queen's *Another One Bites the Dust*. After simulating sex with a cardboard cut-out Corgi dog, both performers strip off their dresses to reveal Union Jack bikinis and leap into the cheering crowd to The Sex Pistols' *God Save the Queen*.

Fig. 9: Killpussy performing *God Save the Queen* at Bar Wotever. Photo by AbsolutQueer.

Fig. 10: Emelia as Rollergirl performing Marilyn Monroe at Transfabulous, 2006. Photo by Leng Montgomery

Emelia Holdaway performs in both circus and cabaret contexts, though she considers them to be very different. Her cabaret work in queer clubs forms an extensive portfolio of acrobatic shows as *Roller Girl*, wherein she inhabits various caricatures and icons of femininity, from Wonder Woman to Kylie Minogue, on roller-skates. Her performances are self-consciously frivolous and fun, though, as will be further discussed below, she punctuates this flippancy with a feminist undertone. In her most uncharacteristically 'political' performance, *Meat*, she begins coquettishly teasing the audience dressed in pink pigtails and a floral dress, before stripping to reveal a flesh coloured body suit marked and sectioned in the style of a butcher's chart of an animal carcass, labelling 'flank', 'rib', 'brisket' and other cuts of meat. Smearing herself in blood,

she uses a butcher's knife to cut the body suit from herself section by section, ending the piece naked and bloody and leaving the audience entirely unable to objectify her in the way she encourages at the start.

Fig. 11: Jet Moon performing *XXX-Mas Shopping* at Bar Wotever 2011, Photo by AbsolutQueer Photography.

Fig. 12: Josephine Krieg performing as Miss Dotty at Bar Wotever, 2010. Photo by AbsolutQueer

Jet Moon and Josephine Krieg have performed together, solo, and with other collaborators for Wotever and in other venues for many years. Their most recent project, *Parental Guidance,* has been shown in various formats in both The Arcola and Cochrane theatres, as part of London-wide LGBT arts events, and at festivals internationally. Beginning as a photographer and visual artist, Jet Moon has been making performance work for over a decade. As well as Wotever and producing her own shows in theatres and other performance spaces, she was a founding member of the Queer Beograd collective, an anti-fascist resistance group using performance as part of festivals and pride events to combat homophobia in Serbia.[7] As well as strong political and anti-fascist messages, Jet's performances primarily deal with personal anecdote and stories through spoken word, working collaboratively with other performers (and

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[7] For more information, see their Serbian-language website: www.queerbeograd.org, or their bi-lingual Facebook page: https://www.facebook.com/pages/Queer-Beograd/149847668416190.

others with no performance experience) to bring untold individual stories into a communal space. This is particularly true of Jet and Josephine's current project *Parental Guidance*, a show presenting their personal difficulties relating to their families, told through comedic melodramatic skits such as the *Family Reunion Chain Saw Massacre*. Josephine's solo cabaret work frequently uses characters such as the highly strung Miss File, a repressed psychologist in training studying queer communities, to explore and play with elements of gender, sexuality and cultural norms and tropes. With a background in dance she also uses this to express the more visceral elements of queer experience that she feels cannot be encapsulated in language.

Fig. 13: Jet Moon and Josephine Krieg performing *Family Values* and the Arcola Theatre, November 2010. Photo by AbsolutQueer.

Fig. 14: Amy Lamé hosting at Duckie's *Gross Indecency*, 2010. Photo by Christa Holka.

Amy Lamé is a writer, journalist, producer and performer and has worked in the entertainment industry both within the context of queer performance and in more mainstream television, radio and modelling. Upon moving from New Jersey to London in the early 1990s she began performing as a 'lesbian drag queen' in her first one-woman show, *Gay Man Trapped in a Lesbian's Body,* and soon set up Duckie, the queer performance club night she still hosts weekly at the Royal Vauxhall Tavern. She has described her 2006 one-woman show, *Amy Lamé's Mama Cass Family Singers,* as a 'tragi-comic misremembered memoir' (Lamé 2006), which blends fact and fiction through the story of her

experience as a child-star in a cover-band with her siblings. The show blends scenes of Lamé sitting silently eating sandwiches on stage, telling stories of her experiences and video footage of interviews with her actual family members to portray the story with both humour and pathos.

Finding Femme

The British Film Institute is buzzing with queer excitement at the opening of another annual London Lesbian and Gay and Film Festival. A queue of rowdy women chatter as they wait to enter Carry on Objectifying, *the opening night special incarnation of Bird Club. At the door the gruff treatment by femme security guards in corsets and red lipstick bewilders. I give my best stern school ma'm voice. "Madam you'll have to step aside and wait for a moment to be fully briefed." As Femme Police bouncers on the door we are the first reversal of gender stereotypes the punters encounter, indiscriminately wielding power and singling out the long-haired potential trouble-makers.[8] "No groping, no grinding, no biting of any of the performers. Uncontrolled drooling will be charged extra. We know you ladies can get a bit overexcited but these gentlemen are professionals and they deserve to be treated with respect." Before the punters reach the Butch peep show they are greeted by a grotesque Miss World with balloon breasts and roller skates. A cloying pink glitter smile and candy floss blonde curls. The version of femininity that has frustrated and restricted many of the female clientele is exaggerated, parodied, held up for inspection and critique.*

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[8] Whilst tangential to this thesis, I find it pertinent to note the slightly problematic politics of this performance piece. Devised by Madame Jolie Rouge, the intention was to feed into the broader theme of reverse objectification of butches/masculine people by femme/feminine ones, reflecting the tendency for female or feminine presenting people to be objectified by male or masculine presenting ones, within queer communities as much as outside them. On the door this was manifested in the more feminine guests being treated as potentially lecherous trouble makers in the way young men would often be when entering a nightclub. Unfortunately, the experience of being singled out and struggling to gain entry to LGBT spaces is a common one for feminine presenting gay and queer women, and so was thought by some members of the Bird Club team to be a little too 'close to home'. In response to this concern, it was decided to discriminate not on grounds of feminine appearance but purely on hair length, in order to emphasise and parody the arbitrary nature of the distinction. Although this tactic was not able to eradicate the discomfort some people felt about the performance, it did provide a further level of interpretation in terms of the performative and also multiple nature of gender distinctions.

Fig. 15: Emelia as Miss World at Bird Club's *Carry On Objectifying* for the British Film Institute's London Lesbian and Gay Film Festival, 2011. Photo by Patrycja Grimm.

As an autoethnography,[9] it would seem fitting to locate the dubious beginnings of this non-linear tale in the personal revelation of my discovery of my Femme identity, and the impact that had on my development as a scholar. The publication in 2008 of Del LaGrace Volcano and Ulrika Dahl's stunning photographic book *Femmes of Power: Exploding Queer Femininities* had two significant effects on me. Firstly, it demonstrated that F/femme could be more than a denigrated proxy for an ultimately heterosexual or bi-curious 'lipstick lesbian' or an archaic aping of heteronormative gender dynamics in its (subsidiary) relation to Butch. Secondly, it introduced me to the curious delights of a thriving queer cabaret and burlesque scene in London, populated by many of the exotically plumed creatures gracing those glossy pages. As I eagerly devoured the visual feast of this coffee-table treat, I imagined myself, corseted, glossed and glittered, frolicking on those very stages, cavorting with those empowered Femmes. Months later, I found myself, indeed skirted and lipsticked at least, discussing femininity, performance, community, and the fabric of everyday life with several of the subjects of that book as well as other fabulous

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[9] The creative autoethnographic methods of this thesis are fully explored in Chapter 2, where I set out how the captivating work of Carolyn Ellis (2004), amongst others, has shaped my research practice.

femme performers I had met or become aware of along the way.[10] These early interviews with my performer protagonists led me both down unexpected theoretical pathways regarding the themes and topics of my research, and back onto the stage, a space I had abandoned in my teens in favour of pursuing a more reputable career path.[11]

Already familiar with the debates around embodied subjectivity and affect emerging from body theory,[12] I embarked upon these initial interviews expecting to hear stories of femme and femininity that disrupted binaries not only of gender but also of mind/body, inside/outside, nature/culture, normative/ transgressive.[13] What I discovered were stories of the radically non-dualistic mode of embodied subjectivity I had suspected would become visible through these performer's renditions of femme subjectivity, but these stories were about so much more than any singular subjectivity or identity. I heard how performance offered a vehicle for disrupting the distinction between truth and fiction, authentic and artificial, and self and other. I heard about theatricality allowing these performers to tell of unspeakable pain, trauma, shame, loneliness, and the struggle to reconcile their bodies and desires with the categories that seemed available to them. And moreover, I heard how performance enabled this reconciliation through collective processes of subject

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[10] By 'Femme performers' I am referring to female, feminine or Femme identified individuals (whether cisgendered, trans* or genderqueer) who identify as queer, gay, lesbian etc. and present a self-consciously feminine gender expression. For the purposes of this work, the term 'queer femininity' will be used to refer to performances of a self-consciously constructed version of femininity by female-identified persons within a queer context that highlights the constructedness and artifice of gender itself. This research is designed to complement the extensive work that has already been carried out on female masculinity by queer theorists such as Judith Halberstam (1998) and the accompanying growth in popularity of Drag Kings and other performers of queer or female masculinity that often share not only a sensibility and common aim for their performances but also a circuit of performance spaces and community with the performers of queer femininity this research focuses on.

[11] Though I utilise the word 'interviews' here, as will become clear throughout this thesis, the term for me contravenes the ethos of my broader research practice. As I discuss at length in Chapter 2, I hereafter use the term 'conversations' to denote the research encounters that form my sources for this thesis, in an attempt to indicate the more dialogical nature of these discussions.

[12] As explored in more depth in Chapter 1 of this thesis, body theory is a broad and varied field of trans-disciplinary study that is difficult to locate within a singular reference or subject area, though overviews of these debates can be found in the work of Lisa Blackman (2008b, 2012) and the range of work published in the journal Body and Society (see particularly the Special Issues on Bodily Integrity, September 2010, and Affect , March 2010).

[13] These dualisms are indicative of the kind of binary conceptions that are often linked to the Cartesian conception of the human subject as characterised by his (sic) capacity for thought and reason, a capacity residing in a mind fundamentally distinct from the body. As I address in Chapter 1 of this thesis, this influential philosophical position has framed how subjectivity came to be understood through subsequent binary oppositions.

formation and reformation. Thus began a significant shift in my theoretical focus: the object of my research was no longer 'femme' as a queer enactment of embodied subjectivity, it was now queer performance more generally as a practice and a site of unexpected subjective possibilities. When I say possibilities I do not wish to indicate a merely utopian field of identitarian freedom. Though of course acceptance, inclusivity, and self-affirmation are significant aspects of what draws people to these events, as will become clear in the chapters that follow, conflict, contradiction, pain, shame, and isolation run queerly alongside the joyful coming together of community enacted at Bird Club, Duckie and Wotever. My focus here is on the complex ways in which performance and spectatorship, along with the broader affective milieu of these queer performance environments appear to engender a kind of collective subject formation, and the possibilities this poses for understanding embodiment, subjectivity, and the psychic and discursive practices at play in reconciling the many paradoxes that seem to structure how we come to conceive of ourselves as subjects.

Stage to Page: an embodied performance praxis

This thesis is positioned at the intersection not only of performance studies and body theory, but at the apex of the personal and the collective, and the boundary between academia and the 'real world' of lived experience. The work presented here has significant life outside of these printed pages. As discussed above, in performances such as *Fuck(ing) the Academy*, I have worked to give this research back to its originators, on their terms and in their language (which are also, in my other incarnation as queer cabaret performer, *my* terms and *my* language). Similarly, when presenting this research-in-progress at academic conferences, I have taken the vocabulary from the academy, and the form from my incarnation as a performer. My position, inside and outside of this thesis, is therefore always double: I am always *both* scholar and performer, and this double positioning is what shapes and determines this thesis. However, through this double position I am also taking advantage of a peculiarity of the queer scene that has yet to be fully examined (besides a brief discussion by Judith Halberstam 2005), that of the widespread familiarity with academia (particularly queer theory) and its idiosyncrasies demonstrated by the predominantly urban

queers inhabiting these spaces.[14] The reasons for this are as yet unclear, and fall to a scholar more sociologically inclined than myself to discover. However, this characteristic of my performance audience, who also form the 'subjects' of this thesis, is worthy of note by my audience here.[15] These people know what it is to be the subject of academic debate that speaks for and over them, on their behalf and often without their consent, voices, or participation. And many of them are also able and keen to engage in these vocabularies and academic debates, particularly the ones emerging from queer studies. References to the work Judith Butler are unremarkable on this scene. Del la Grace Volcano, the photographer who has co-authored several archives of queer lives with internationally known queer theorists, also resides in this scene and presents hir work to an equally enthusiastic reception at Bar Wotever and at academic events. As will become clear throughout the following chapters, performance appears to offer a unique vehicle for blurring boundaries and disrupting binaries and taxonomies. This thesis is not only about performance, but, I argue, it is also performative - it examines and explores the ambivalence and contradictions of subjectivity evident in these spaces, and it enacts those ambiguities through its hybrid and interdisciplinary nature.

In order to set out its starting point, Chapter 1 of this thesis traces the academic debates from which my interest emerges. The multifarious ways in which performativity, and performance itself, have been deployed as tools for investigating, expressing, archiving and understanding selfhood, identity, and ways of life are examined, as are the ways in which work such as that by Vikki Bell (2007) has enabled the connections I draw between the methods and interests of performance studies, the key concepts of body theory and overall

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[14] It should be noted that, in my experience at least, whilst there is a generally high level of education amongst the audiences of Duckie, Wotever and Bird Club, this is by no means universal. There is great variety in the level of academic involvement of this scene, ranging from a significant proportion of attendees with undergraduate or postgraduate degrees or working within the academy, to many with little or no formal schooling. What is interesting, however, is that engagement with theory, particularly the queer theory of Judith Butler, Jack Halberstam and other well-known figures, appears to traverse this spectrum. Following the observations of Halberstam (2005) and anecdotal evidence, it seems this is by no means unique to London and appears to be the case in other large urban centres with strong queer scenes, such as San Francisco and Berlin for example.

[15] My marking of the term 'subjects' is intended to denote the critical mode with which I employ this term. As is discussed at length in Chapter 2 of this thesis, I prefer to refer to my research participants as 'protagonists', following Moffat (2008), in a move that is indicative of the far more collaborative, and less hierarchical, nature of the research process and interactions that produced this thesis.

intentions of cultural studies. These connections open up analysis of culture and performance in relation to embodiment, affect, genealogy, and subjectivity, allowing for the formulation of new and novel research questions. This consideration of performance frames my (inevitably partial) overview of debates from within body theory that can enrich discussions about performativity and performance - in particular Foucauldian inflected understandings of subjectivity and subjectification, the 'corporeal turn', and concepts such as bodily integrity and the body image or body schema.

I use the term embodied subjectivity here and throughout this thesis to indicate a break from dualistic conceptions of the subject as defined by cognitive rationality and a pre-formed inherent 'self', and to point towards how a sociology of the body and the emergence of body theory have established the importance of embodiment in subjective experience and any consideration of the social. I use the term subjectivity to suggest the dynamic and ongoing process of experiencing oneself as a subject, and prefix it with 'embodied' in order to mark the inextricably intertwined nature of the 'mind' and 'body,' particularly in this subjective process. This term is inevitably inflected with its roots in phenomenology, but I am also mindful of the way it has been deployed in body studies, critical psychology and the study of subjectivity, and the conditions of its emergence since the 1960s as a crucial concept in social theory, particularly post-Foucault (1972, 1976) and the developments of corporeal feminism. Chapter 1 concludes with an examination of what is often termed 'the turn to affect' - the explosion of interest in recent years across the humanities and social sciences in 'affects' as intercorporeal intensities that are related to and yet (for many, though not all scholars) distinct from emotions or feelings. Whilst my interest here is not in positing yet another theory or definition of *what* affect *is*, I consider how the turn to affect has revitalised radical models of subjectivity as porous and collective, and how models of affective transmission can allow us to conceive of intersubjectivity beyond the interaction of two bounded, autonomous subjects as discrete entities. Alongside debates on subjectivity and work from body studies, I thus utilise affect as a tool to enrich understandings of performance and spectatorship. This exposition is framed through the scholarly discipline I consider this thesis to be rooted within, that of cultural studies. Returning to Raymond Williams' (1977) 'structures of feeling', I utilise affect as a node through which to access lived experience, and

it is these lived experiences, of my protagonists as well as myself, which form the heart of the remaining chapters of this thesis.

Fig. 16: Bird la Bird (centre) and collaborators (including myself, second from left) performing *High Femme Mass* at Bird Club's *Easter Sunday Passion Play*, 2010. Photo by Leng Montgomery.

On Easter Sunday 2010 I nervously ventured onto the stage for the first time in ten years. I was delighted to have been asked by Bird la Bird to take part in her Bird Club re-imagining of Catholic Mass as High Femme ritual, and during the performance I was thoroughly infected by what performers of all kinds often refer to as 'the buzz'. The experience left me euphoric, and determined to return to the stage as soon as possible. Why did I ever stop? However, it was a small moment after the performance that would come to dramatically alter how I considered my own position within my research. Elated and stumbling in my borrowed, two-sizes-too-small 8-inch stilettos, I returned to the dressing room to be greeted by one of the other performers for that evening. "Well done," she beamed, "you were really fantastic, so great. I didn't know you were a performer! I just thought you were, like, doing a PhD or something and you were having a go on the stage, but like, you're a performer, a real performer. You were amazing."

Poised, as it is, at the intersection of two considerably disparate fields of enquiry, namely body theory and performance studies, this thesis also marries two distinct methodological approaches to critical enquiry. In Chapter 2 I

examine in depth how investments in feminist epistemology and queer theory led me to developing a hybrid creative research method, bringing together the qualitative methods of social science with the creative and textual analysis practices more common in arts disciplines. The imperative of this research design emerged from my own growing involvement in not only the social but also the performance aspects of this 'scene'. As evident in the anecdote above, my realisation that I was 'a *performer*' positioned me rather differently in relation to the practices and processes I was investigating. Not only was this an autoethnography in which I was implicated and involved in the social milieu of my study, but it was a *performance autoethnography*, which took shape as much through my own performance practice as through the more traditional ethnographic and autoethnographic modes of reflexive research. As is further explored in Chapter 2 of this thesis, my development of this term stems from the integration of Norman K. Denzin's (1997, 2003) notion of performance ethnography, and the practice of autoethnography as proposed by Carolyn Ellis (2004). Combining an investment in the reflexivity and the personal experience of autoethnography with the unique binary- and boundary-disrupting potential of performance, I argue that performance autoethnography allows me to access, construct, examine and challenge the ethnographic 'knowledge' produced here in a way no established research methods would, in order to answer the two overarching and intersecting research questions of this thesis:

- What can a consideration of affect and embodied subjectivity bring to our understanding, interpretation and analysis of queer performance and queer performance spaces/cultures/communities?
- How can a focus on performance and (collective) spectatorship augment and develop our understanding of the functioning of affect and its intersections with identity politics, performativity and subjectification?

The hybrid and interdisciplinary nature of my project has further allowed me to frame the following subsidiary research questions guiding each empirical chapter:

- Chapter 3: Why are Duckie, Bird Club and Wotever primary sites for exploring the above questions, and what does considering them together (and at the expense of others) bring to the fore?
- Chapter 4: What does performance *do* for these performers? What tensions and potentials does it pose?

- Chapter 5: What is at stake in these performance spaces for the audience? How does performance in these milieux revitalise the problematic of the one-and-the-many?
- Chapter 6: How might a *weak* theory of 'affective publics' allow for a theoretically rigorous and yet nuanced understanding of the cultures of queer performance, and the myriad interactions and affects circulating within and through them?

Performance is crucial, both theoretically and methodologically, to my aims in this thesis. I am interested in what performance does and can do both in the context of these club settings for the performers and audience, and within the academy. By engaging performance as both object and method of research, I am proposing that the embodied ways of knowing accessed through performance might enable a better understanding both of embodied subjectivity and performance practice.

There are several thematic strands that run throughout this thesis and emerge in various guises in the chapters that follow: the role of performance in the construction of embodied subjectivity, the collectivity engendered by performance, and the ambivalent affective exchange occurring through performance and a dialogic relationship with the audience-as-participants. The suggestion that performance facilitates a radically non-dualistic mode of embodied subjectivity is my primary argument in Chapter 4, where I explore how the ways my protagonists speak of their performance practice as well as specific performances engage with the problematics and tensions of embodied subjectivity. Utilising work from body theory addressing the notion of bodily integrity (Sobchack 2010, Throsby 2008, Schildrick 2010) and the role of perceived subject authenticity (the 'real' me), I posit performance as a particularly pertinent site through which these processes of subjectivity, and particularly the tension between subjectivity and subjectification, are illuminated. This concern resurfaces in Chapter 5 in relation to the role of collectivity and the processes through which subjects are intersubjectively co-constituted. I argue that the performances in these venues stage what I want to call collective memories, performing autobiographical, personal experiences which nevertheless tap into shared fantasies, desires and particularly trauma and shame to ignite the audience's interest and relation to the work. I also demonstrate in Chapter 5 that this is achieved primarily on an affective register,

where the relationality between bodies is negotiated through the sharing, management and exchange of affect. To theorise these methods of affective transmission I propose we consider performance as a form of affective labour, but perhaps an egalitarian one which is shared by the audience through what I call ethical spectatorship. The ambivalence of these affects- where a joyful sharing is often blended with the pain of trauma, is evident from Chapter 3 in the carnivalesque camping of Bird la Bird's *Holding Court: A Period Drama*, and the bittersweet nostalgia of Duckie's *Gross Indecency* event. Chapter 6 particularly addresses how a hybrid confluence of seriousness and levity is utilised to portray not only difficult personal experiences but to address challenging political messages to an often intoxicated nightclub crowd. The ambivalent emotional register perceptible across what is to follow forms the basis of one of my primary arguments throughout this thesis - that hybridity, ambiguity and fluctuation are crucial in these settings, not only in terms of the tone of the performances themselves, but as a broader survival strategy for constructing and enacting what Judith Butler (2004) calls liveable lives.

Fig.17: In the audience at Duckie, 2009. Photo by AbsolutQueer.

Fig. 18: The crowd at Bar Wotever, 2010. Photo by
AbsolutQueer.

<u>Chapter 1 - Contexts: Rethinking subjectivity, affect and performance</u>

[W]e are concerned with meanings and values as they are actively lived and felt, and the relations between these and formal or systematic beliefs are in practice variable (including historically variable).
(Williams 1977: 132)

As a study of London's queer performance scene from the perspective of embodied subjectivity, this thesis engages with a broad range of topics around gender and bodies, drawing together various debates from within psychology, feminism and performance and cultural studies on issues of subjectivity, embodiment, and performance.[16] It is specifically located at the intersection of cultural theory (and, more specifically, body theory) and performance studies in exploring what work on the body, affect and subjectivity could add to how we understand and interpret performance practices and spectatorship, and how performance might contribute to widening our understanding of the functioning of affect and intersubjective communication. As outlined in the Introduction to this thesis, the point of departure was initially performances of queer femininity, though the stories of my queer femme performer protagonists led me far from the terrain of simple representations of femininity to complex processes of belonging, co-constituted subjectivities, and the ambiguous bodily integrity of performing 'self' that is considered and experienced as simultaneously 'real' and fictional. However, I wish to commence here by returning momentarily to this origin in queer femininity, and particularly my initial stimulus, the publication of the photographic book *Femmes of Power* (Volcano and Dahl 2008). This simultaneously theoretical, political and anecdotal visual journey through the many permutations of queer femininity for an assortment of self-identified and endlessly varied 'femmes' contains, upon retrospective reflection, all of the above-mentioned surprises I encountered during my research. The points of identification and disparity within and between these queer women's accounts of femininity and 'femme' highlight how their performances of femininity

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[16] As examined in more depth in sections 1.2 and 1.3, embodied subjectivity is a term that is used in a multitude of ways and has a complex history. As discussed in the Introduction to this thesis, I use the here and throughout to indicate a break from dualistic conceptions of the subject as defined by cognitive rationality and a pre-formed inherent 'self', and to point towards how a sociology of the body and the emergence of body theory have established the importance of embodiment in subjective experience and any consideration of the social.

(whether on the stage or in everyday life) reach far beyond the superficial, representational aspects of gender norms, but in fact engage with much deeper questions of how we construct liveable subjectivities and find identification through our bodies in relation to norms, identities but also our intersubjective co-constitution with others. They indicate the relationality of a performance or subject position that, whilst expressed corporeally, extends beyond the body of the individual performing it, and in fact serves as a point of connection between bodies and identities:

> in bodies marked, adorned and adored, as a figuration, exploding femininities are always in relation, situated, but accountable for and speaking from more than our self-appointed positions. (Ibid.: 26)

The stories and images in *Femmes of Power*, then, indicate how the performance of queer femininity could serve as a site for the investigation of subjective and intersubjective processes through which bodies and subjects come into being. This coming into being is the overall primary focus of this thesis, namely: what can the intersection of body theory and performance tell us about how subjectivity is experienced, enacted and produced within the intercorporeal affective milieux of these performance events? By breaking apart the dualisms that structure our understandings of the human subject and looking instead at the intersubjective processes by which subjects construct and experience their sense of self we can begin to think and know bodies differently. This leads me to the second catalyst through which I wish to frame this thesis, that of cultural studies. As discussed below, a consideration of the affective intensities central to this thesis can be traced back to the beginnings of the discipline of cultural studies and Raymond Williams' (1977) concern with *structures of feeling*. Williams' interest in a cultural studies that would chart the *lived relations* of the whole of everyday life resonates strongly with my intentions here. Whilst I may analyse performances, and engage with performance theory, my interest is primarily in performance as an aspect of lived experience. Following E.P. Thompson (1963), I am positioning performance, and the overall milieu of the club nights that form my primary spaces of attention, as part of 'ordinary culture' for those that attend and view them. My examination of these spaces and performances, thus, is an engagement with the material of everyday life, with 'what it feels to be

alive' (Grossberg 2010: 310), to borrow Lawrence Grossberg's incisive paraphrase of Richard Hoggart (1957).

Rooted in cultural studies, then, this chapter maps the various scholarly debates that have influenced and inflected the work that follows.[17] It begins with a consideration of performativity as a concept central to my aims and intentions here, and one that has been instrumental in both cultural and performance studies. This overview of debates within performance studies then widens to consider how Vikki Bell's (2007) contributions open up analysis of culture and performance in relation to the questions of embodiment, affect, and intersubjectivity that are of concern here, and the existing work that has addressed the role of affect in art, performance, and spectatorship. In order to expand upon this surprisingly sparse engagement in performance studies with these issues, the remainder of this literature review then provides an inevitably partial account of the many complex and heterogeneous debates and fields of study from corporeal feminism, body studies and affect theory in order to enrich this discussion. I explore the different ways bodies and subjectivity have been positioned and theorised in various disciplines in order to locate this study of embodied subjectivity within the fields from which it emerges. Setting out the study of subjectivity beyond limiting dualisms as a key endeavour, this chapter evaluates the limitations and possibilities for this kind of work offered in the field of body theory. This culminates in an in-depth discussion of what has commonly been termed the *turn to affect* (Clough 2007) - the proliferation of interest across the humanities and other disparate disciplines in the circulation and functioning of the ephemeral, amorphous bodily intensities we term 'affects'. At its most fruitful, work on affect enables a breaking of the boundaries between self and other, inside and outside, mind and body, and nature and culture, enabling a consideration of the body's profound permeability and collective constitution in relation to human and non-human others.

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[17] Whilst I have criticisms of some of the work emerging from the Birmingham Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies, as examined in more detail in Chapter 6 of this thesis, my aims in this thesis are unarguably inflected with this British tradition of cultural studies. This thesis is founded upon the imperative to value and consider everyday life experience purported by the CCCS' founder Richard Hoggart, and continued by later members such as Paul Gilroy, Stuart Hall and Angela McRobbie, whose work has also been influential to my thinking.

1.1. Performativity and Performance

One of the primary ways in which bodies and subjectivity (particularly, though not only queer ones) have been theorised, and a key concept for this thesis, is that of performativity. Judith Butler's (1990) groundbreaking theory of gender performativity transformed the way many feminists negotiate the materiality of bodies in terms of the traditional sex/gender opposition. Butler criticised the 'presumed universality and unity of the subject of feminism' (ibid.: 6) that had often employed a distinction between sex as the natural or biological and gender as its socially constructed counterpart to theorise oppression and representation through a framing of solidarity in the face of patriarchy. She questions the way this distinction simply perpetuates the hierarchical binaries of gender and culture, claiming that through this model the very category of 'woman' continues to only be possible or stable within the heterosexual matrix.[18] Pushing the nature/culture distinction assumed in the traditional sex/ gender definition, Butler suggests that biological sex itself is constructed through gender and this very construction is concealed in order for 'sex' to become the legitimation and foundation of gender:

> If the immutable character of sex is contested, perhaps this construct called "sex" is as culturally constructed as gender; indeed, perhaps it was always already gender, with the consequence that the distinction between sex and gender turns out to be no distinction at all. (Ibid.: 9-10)

This refusal of the binary is vital to my project here, as all the related categories not only of sex and gender but also of nature and culture, inside and outside, self and other must be kept unbracketed in order to interpret the bodies and practices that disrupt these distinctions and upset the normalising discourse that usually keeps them hidden. However, it is in Butler's concept of gender performativity that her work becomes a real methodological tool for this research. Drawing from J. L. Austin's (1976) exploration of performative language that produces that of which it speaks (as in the proclamation of "I promise" or, famously, "I now pronounce you man and wife"), Butler positions

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[18] Another of Butler's key terms, she defines the heterosexual matrix as the framework through which bodies become intelligible, requiring a coherence between a fixed and stable sex, gender, and compulsory heterosexual desire.

sex and gender as similarly performatively produced through the habitual performance of repeated stylised acts:

> Such acts, gestures, enactments, generally construed, are *performative* in the sense that the essence or identity that they otherwise purport to express are *fabrications* manufactured and sustained through corporeal signs and other discursive means. That the gendered body is performative suggests that it has no ontological status apart from the various acts which constitute its reality. (Butler, 1990: 185)

Butler's famous example of the performativity of gender is drag, which as a radical example of stylised gender display works to destabilise the natural coherence of sex and gender and 'fully subverts the distinction between inner and outer psychic space and effectively mocks both the expressive model and the notion of a true gender identity' (ibid.: 186). Butler's suggestion that drag not only toys with the distinction between sex and gender, natural and unnatural but also inside and outside through its pointing to and destabilising of the relations between them is significant to this thesis and plays into not only the questions of artifice and performance that I wish to investigate but also the deeper issues of embodiment, subjectivity and affect that are involved in this kind of breaking open of binaries. It has been claimed that Butler's example ignores important political and ethical problems relating to the context and intention of the performance, and the issue of choice, as these are not always autonomously chosen performances with the objective of disrupting the distinction of these categories. Bell (1999) discusses performativity in terms of Anti-Semitism and racism to highlight that while the idea of mimesis is liberating in its undermining of an 'original' that discredits the categorisation of natural/unnatural and real/ fake, the occasional necessity for mimicry as a form of cultural survival rather than always a self-conscious playfulness sometimes limits its radical potential. Performativity is thus far from a freely chosen autonomous act, but emerges as a condition of necessity:

> Performativity cannot be understood outside of a process of iterability, a regularized and constrained repetition of norms. And this repetition is not performed *by* a subject; this repetition is what enables a subject and constitutes the temporal condition for the subject. This iterability implies that 'performance' is not a singular 'act' or event, but a ritualized production, a ritual reiterated under and through constraint, under and

through the force of prohibition and taboo, with the threat of ostracism and even death controlling and compelling the shape of the production, but not, I will insist, determining it fully in advance. (Butler 1993: 95)

In their Introduction to a special issue of the journal Women and Performance on Performing Excess, Braziel and LeBesco site its potential as a site of resistance, and state their desire to:

rethink bodies as excessive sites situated within performative matrices of desire, politics, power; and second, to situate excess as performative "production" (in the multiple and interrelated senses of staged, choreographed, composed, written, but also economically produced within capitalism. (Braziel and LeBesco, 2005: 12)

Thinking of excess in this way as a corporeal performance produced through the interrelation of the personal and the social provides us with an important tool for analysing bodies and performances outside of binary distinctions and in a way that can encompass the multiple and contradictory processes through which subjectivities are constructed, performed and experienced. Whilst the problems of heteronormative roles, issues of passing and politics are pertinent, in the context of a dedicated performance space these queer displays of gender artifice do serve to parody gender itself and highlight the lack of an 'original' from which this 'copy' is drawn. This positions the performance of femininity by queer women in complex ways. Although the primarily visual paradigm of this interpretation of performativity would situate women performing femininity as 'normative' in relation to the 'subversive' nature of cross-gender performance, this is precisely where performance works in 'excess' of its own production. The performances of femininity staged by my performer protagonists, I argue, produce more than their gender parody. Throughout this thesis I examine the ways which they performatively produce a complex affective milieu through which radical modes of co-constituted, collective embodied subjectivity can be glimpsed.

Although the concept of performativity is often engaged within a limiting visual paradigm, Butler's later work revising this theory has provided some crucial ways around this restriction. In *Undoing Gender* (2004), Butler reframes performativity as never a singular isolated act, but something always done in accordance with others and through the need for intelligibility. She poses the

significance of liveability through the need to be readable and recognisable to others as a subject, which becomes highly problematic for those who are not easily recognisable through normative categories, of gender or otherwise. The conundrum of performing a 'self' lies in the possibility of being 'undone' as a subject if not recognisable in relation to norms, but also in the equal possibility of being undone by the norms themselves if one cannot consolidate one's sense of 'self' in relation to them. Butler relates this double-bind to precisely the kinds of impossible subjects and bodies she had previously been accused of forgetting – such as trans and intersexed bodies, whose undoing of cultural norms in their attempt at not being undone by them is precisely what makes them unreadable and thus threatens that 'self':

> I may feel that without some recognizability I cannot live. But I may also feel that the terms by which I am recognized make life unlivable. This is the juncture from which critique emerges, where critique is understood as an interrogation of the terms by which life is constrained in order to open up the possibility of different modes of living. (Ibid.: 4)

She proposes, then, that the imperative of queer theory, activism and identity politics should not be an attempt at abandoning altogether identities, norms and categories, but rather a reframing of them that creates a more open and less regulated space for subjects to use them to make their 'selves' possible. What is needed is a distinction to be drawn between those norms that are crucial in allowing one to live and create an intelligible, liveable subjectivity, and those that make this impossible by undoing the subject that cannot be recognised through them. In this way Butler reframes the possibilities and necessity for performativity, as the need to *perform* a liveable subject position in order to construct a subjectivity through which to survive in a world of highly regulated norms. Therefore what queer performative practices such as drag are able to put into question is the way these structures, such as gender, are produced as real:

> Although there are norms that govern what will and will not be real, and what will and will not be intelligible, they are called into question and reiterated at the moment in which performativity begins its citational practice. One surely cites norms that already exist, but these norms can be significantly deterritorialized through the citation. (Ibid.: 218)

Following Butler, then, I would argue that queer performance is not only about the spectacle of highlighting the norms themselves, or how they are reproduced, but more significantly how they are reinforced as reality. This crucially extends performativity beyond the visual paradigm of what bodies externally perform and how they appear, and engages the deeper and more complex processes through which they are lived and made liveable. This is evidenced in Chapter 3 of this thesis where I consider the primary function of Bar Wotever as providing a space of possibility for seemingly impossible identities. I also develop this further in Chapter 5 by addressing the complex and contradictory ways in which identities and identity politics are negotiated in these three settings. Engaged in acts of survival, these bodies are performatively producing a 'self' that is able to exist in a world structured by norms that exclude the possibility of that 'self'.

1.1.1. Performing Subjects

The term performativity has entered the vocabulary of cultural and social theorists as a tool to address the constructedness of various elements of subjective experience, and to expose the discontinuities that open up different potential ways of being or seeing. However, it has also had significant value in problematising the distinction between theatrical performance and the 'everyday' cultural performances usually at the heart of social research, and has created some slippage between the usually distinct categories of deconstruction, philosophy and performance. Pioneering queer theorist Eve Sedgwick noted early on the potential for the concept of performativity in philosophical theorising to 'prove useful in some way for understanding the obliquities among *meaning, being,* and *doing*' (Sedgwick 1993: 2). Meaning, being and doing are of course terms that hold significant value in performance and cultural research, though perhaps on different grounds, hence the difficulty in providing a clear distinction of the differences in meaning of 'performativity' in relation to performance and deconstruction or poststructuralism. Juxtaposing the *extroversion* of the actor or performer to the *introversion* of the signifier, Sedgwick locates this slippage between the simultaneously 'outside' and 'inside' self-referential nature of the performative and 'its necessarily "aberrant" relation to its own reference - the torsion, the mutual perversion as one might say, or reference and performativity' (ibid.: 2). Others, like performance theorist

Richard Schechner (2002), more simply identify the meaning and use value of the term performativity within performance studies as closely related to postmodern theory and the disintegration of stable fixed categories of knowledge. Through 'performativity', the precarious and volatile nature of performance is exposed, both in terms of the multiple possibilities of that which delineates itself as 'performance' in the more traditional theatrical sense, but also in terms of what can be categorised as performance. Schechner (2003) outlines 'performance' as an inclusive term, comprising not just theatre but religious ritual, social performances of play, sport and everyday life. These multiple sites of performance, however, are all concerned with the possibilities of make-believe, eternally played out in the 'subjunctive', and thus hold great potential: '[p]erformance is an illusion of an illusion and, as such, might be considered more "truthful," more "real" than ordinary experience' (ibid.: xix). The functions of performance, Schechner argues, are manyfold, never simply to entertain, but also to teach, explore identity, form community or heal, amongst others. This intersection between the performance of the social with the performance of theatre practice highlights the crossover of use value of the performative. Performativity as a deconstructive tool for analysing social constructs such as gender can also be applied to the constructedness and social function of performance practices.

Traditional histories of performance practices have documented the emergence and structures of different styles and types of performance through time (for example Zarrilli et al 2006). Whilst these histories may at times address the historical context of particular styles of performance in relation to documented events, few address the interrelatedness of performance and culture indicated by Schechner. Performance is often positioned as an aesthetic practice, an art form for its own sake even if encompassing some element of social commentary, rather than indicative or, crucially, formative of culture itself. This may be at least in part due to the focus of much writing on the history of performance on the culturally sanctioned forms of high-brow performance that have traditionally positioned themselves as such. More marginal and low-brow forms of performance such as cabaret, burlesque, vaudeville and music hall have been less documented, but where they have, tend to address far more directly the socio-economic conditions of their emergence, and the forms of culture they constitute. Schechter's (2003) comprehensive survey of popular

forms of theatre aligns this with the confluence of pleasure and enjoyment with political commentary common in popular entertainment.

Often created by and addressing the working class, bohemians or artists, Schechter indicates the inevitability of low-brow performance addressing political issues, from the emergence of the cabaret form from the artistic and intellectual communities of late nineteenth century Paris (Houchin 2003), to the ongoing influence of Brechtian (1964) political theatre, itself inspired by cabaret clubs of 1920s Germany (Calandra 2003). A particularly interesting history of the cultural performativity of performance comes in the form of Shane Vogel's (2009b) analysis of cabaret of the Harlem Renaissance. Engaging the status of cabaret as 'low-brow', Vogel investigates how cabaret was used to address issues of race, class and gender left untouched by other art-forms at the time. As a social event, Vogel argues cabaret stages a public intimacy that both extends out beyond itself and reconfigures the possibilities posed within the space. Harlem cabaret acted as 'a space of subjective complexity rather than simplicity, density rather than exposure, performativity rather than truth' (ibid.: 93), and thus created alternative narratives and 'new ways of performing, witnessing, and writing the racial and sexual self' (5).

Such possibilities have proved crucial to the emancipatory struggles of marginalised subjectivities, and it is perhaps not surprising that performance practices, as well as the concept of performativity, have been significant within these struggles. Ambiguity of gender and sexuality have played a part in historical forms of performance since Shakespearean drama (see Traub 1992), and the practices of cross-dressing in traditional theatre and more contemporary incarnations of drag performance have been well documented (Baker 1994, Garber 1997, Newton 1979). Histories of women's roles and gender issues in relation to feminism are also multiple (see for example Goodman 1998), as are surveys of gay or lesbian theatre addressing the issues of identity, visibility and representation emerging from gay liberation movements of the 1980s (see Freeman 1997, Sinfield 1999, Clum 2000). However, rather than simply charting the role or influence of women or LGBT individuals or characters within the history of performance practice, cultural analyses like Vogel's (2009b) are significant in their addressing performance as productive and transformative, both socially and individually. Much like the cabaret of the Harlem Renaissance, the work of lesbian feminist performance company Split

Britches engages low-brow performance traditions to mine this transformative potential by addressing individual and collective questions of subjectivity and society.[19] In their inaugural performance piece they staged the histories of marginalised women in a complex and ambivalent manner of 'recreating the past in order to point ahead to a kind of future space, to a space for new possibilities' (Patraka 1993: 223). The work of Split Britches is a good example of how vaudeville and comedy can be used to disrupt not only conventions of various modes of historical representation and performance practices, but also of dominant concepts of the coherent, rational subjectivity, that have traditionally been employed to give marginalised performance and subjects a legitimate voice.

Much feminist performance work has sought to destabilise the assumed position of woman as objectified other by asserting the female performer as a speaking subject (Forte 1990), and thus feminist performance has often been understood as a 'disruption of the dominant system [that] constitutes a subversive and radical strategy of intervention *vis-a-vis* patriarchal culture' (ibid.: 251). Split Britches work against the grain of this emancipatory project of feminist performance that seeks to validate women as sensible, coherent subjects as worthy of public address as men through their 'commitment to dramatising "forgettable" people who others perceive as "unforgivable," "embarrassing," and "eccentric," (Patraka 1993: 217). This opens tangential alternative possibilities of modes of being not defined by this masculinist sense of selfhood, and allows the unseen and invisible to become queerly visible through the disruption and blurring of multiple boundaries.

The popular feminist edict of 'the personal is political' (Hanisch 1970) is perhaps nowhere more relevant than in relation to feminist performance practices that utilise autobiography and personal experience to variously assert the role of woman as speaking subject, disrupt the concept of selfhood this subjectivity is based upon and problematise the very notion of authority and authorship implied by performance itself. According to Schechner (2002), this

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[19] Founded in 1981 by lesbian performers Lois Weaver, Peggy Shaw and Deb Margolin, Split Britches has revolutionised queer performance through their experimental vaudevillian performances that draw from popular culture in order to satirically address issues of gender, sexuality, politics and aesthetics. They continue to make work in this vein, collaboratively and solo, and one of Lois Weaver's recent projects commissioned by the AHRC research project *Performance Matters* is discussed in the Conclusion of this thesis.

disruption is particularly potent in the tradition of feminist performance art (as distinct from theatrical performance) wherein the dominant tendency for solo work conflates the relation of the work itself and the artist. Unlike a staged play encompassing writers, directors and actors playing characters amongst others, performance art stages an unequivocally singular self - the performance is the result of the artist using their own body as medium to create the work, and thus the distinctions between them are almost impossible to draw. This blurring of the boundary between work and artist also, inevitably, calls into question other distinctions such as those between the audience and the work or performer, directing us once again to the deconstructive impulse of the performative. Taking the performativity of performance into consideration requires an acknowledgment of the partiality, precariousness and insecurity of any interpretation or meaning-making garnered from the performance due to its constantly shifting and contingent contexts and subjectivities:

> The body (as the corporeal enactment of the subject) is known and experienced only through its representational performances—whether presented 'live,' in photographs, videos, films, on the computer screen, or through the interpretive text itself. Interpretation, like the production of works of art, is a mode of communication. Meaning is a process of engagement and never dwells in any one place. (Jones and Stephenson 1999: 8)

Performance has been diagnosed as the ideal art form for the exploration of the fluctuating and indiscernible nature of subjectivity (Phelan 1993). Phelan challenges the assumption within much cultural and social research that identities and selves are accurately manifested in the physical and recognisable visually. Breaking from the dominant representation paradigm, Phelan turns to the 'unmarked, unspoken and unseen' (ibid.: 7) of performance to understand the self. Whereas visual representation always fails to encompass the identity it claims to reproduce, she suggests there lies a value in that which is not visible or identifiable for understanding the precarious and shifting nature of human subjectivity. Performance, she claims, addresses this through it's ephemerality - the disappearance and 'nonreproductive' nature of performance that results in no material value or artefact disrupts the rationalising discourses of capitalism and forces us to be attentive to the alternative possibilities of invisibility and silence:

Performance implicates the real through the presence of living bodies. In performance art spectatorship there is an element of consumption: there are no left-overs, the gazing spectator must try to take everything in. Without a copy, live performance plunges into visibility - in a maniacally charged present - and disappears into memory, into the real of invisibility and the unconscious where it eludes regulation and control. (Phelan,1993: 148)

The heightened visibility of the performer's physicality within performance actually works to dissolve the performer into something far more abstract and symbolic - a concept or an art-form. In making the performer invisible, performance practice also enables the recognition and exploration of that which is otherwise not visible or detectable - particularly personal experiences of pain and trauma. The work of visual artists such as Tracy Emin have long used the image to express experiences that lie beyond verbal representation (Watson and Smith 2002), but perhaps there is something in the visceral experience of performance that allows it to move beyond the abstract (non-linguistic) visual to the invisible but distinctly felt. This is where the body plays a crucial double function in performance - as the hyper-visible and simultaneously unseen subject of the performer, but also as the intersubjective site of relationality:

By surfacing the effects of the body as an integral component (a material enactment) of the self, the body artist strategically unveils the dynamic through which the artistic body is occluded (to ensure its phallic privilege) in conventional art history and criticism. By exaggeratedly performing the sexual, gender, ethnic, or other particularities of this body/self, the feminist or otherwise nonnormative body artist even more aggressively explodes the myths of disinterestedness and universality that authorize these conventional modes of evaluation. (Jones 1998: 5)

1.1.2. Performing archives

Another key function of performance, particularly autobiographical performance, is that of documenting or archiving lives and experiences that are seen as unremarkable and insignificant, and thus usually lost. Elaine Aston

(2002) characterises feminist performance artist Bobby Baker's[20] ambivalently self-referential performance work as forming a kind of feminist archive of women's experiences that are either marginalised, belittled or ignored. By performing a complex version of her 'self', Baker enacts a counter-memory that opens up and allows personal knowledge to circulate. This knowledge is circulated not through factual narrative retelling, but, Aston argues, through a felt, affective register experienced by the audience. Deirdre Heddon (2008) makes similar arguments about the autobiographical performance work of Baker and others, but pushes this further to address how the ambiguity of autobiographical performance poses radical subjective possibilities. As is examined in-depth in Chapter 4 of this thesis, Heddon argues that the slippages between self and other, truth and fiction, inside and outside evident in autobiographical modes of performance allow for a consideration of a more ambiguous and, importantly, relational mode of subjectivity and bodily integrity. Both Heddon (2008) and Aston (2002) position Bobby Baker's performance work as a kind of emotional archive, a suggestion which parallels Ann Cvetkovich's (2003) interpretation of lesbian public culture as forming an *archive of feelings*. Cvetkovich's analysis proposes that performance, as well as more disparate public products such as literature and activism can, through emotion, feeling and affect, document and record that which is otherwise invisible and unrepresentable. Particularly for queer and otherwise marginalised subjectivities, this archiving of personal experience made communal allows the formation of a kind of public 'by bringing together live bodies in space' (ibid.: 9), wherein the significance of performance is not only in its content, but 'who's in the audience creating community'. This creation of a public echoes the transformative potential identified above in the cabaret performance of the Harlem Renaissance and the feminist lesbian theatre of Split Britches: performance works to enact and enable different possibilities for queer forms of subjectivity. The complex ways in which queer performance can work to archive ephemeral lives and simultaneously bring new ones into possibility is further explored in Chapter 3 of this thesis in relation to Duckie's re-imagining of gay

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[20] Bobby Baker is a feminist performance artist whose performances often deal with issues around personal domestic life and mental health. Her performance persona as an exaggerated and caricatured middle-class mother characterised through extreme neuroses hidden by a facade of control and calm plays on her own subject position as a middle-class mother herself who is also nevertheless a trained and successful artist.

pride through their *Gross Indecency* event: a night dedicated to visually and affectively recreating the experience of attending a gay club before the decriminalisation of homosexuality in Britain in 1967. This account initiates a broader argument running throughout this thesis and re-emerging particularly in Chapters 5 and 6, that paying attention to the multifarious and ambiguous circulation of affect within the milieu of the performance setting enables a more nuanced understanding of performance practice and spectatorship beyond the visual or representation paradigm that tends to limit so many discussions of queer performance in particular. As demonstrated below, affect, and particularly the circulation of negative affects such as pain and loss, can be effectively used to reconfigure queer performance, and particularly the alternative modes of being and belonging it facilitates (Blackman 2011a). As also noted by Amelia Jones (1998), the interpretation of the content of performance cannot stand solely and securely under the framework of performativity, our understandings of performance, performativity, their significance and use value must be modified to incorporate these dynamic possibilities:

> The focus shifts from 'meaning-making' and the relationship of meaning-making to representational practices [...] To posing different questions about the production of subjectivities which privilege process, movement, affective and intensive relations, bodies and practices. (Blackman 2011a: 194-5)

This approach engenders a slight shift of focus in performance studies from one of purely analysing or considering the performance itself, to a more holistic approach such as the one initiated in this thesis, wherein the performances, the broader milieu of the performance spaces, and the lived experiences of both performer and audience are considered together.

1.1.3. Performative Belonging

This question of the production of subjectivities through performance is directly addressed by the work of Vikki Bell (2007), who utilises and develops both Butler's theory of performativity and Gilroy's (1993) work on diaspora to look beyond the external and representational but engage with performativity on a deeper subjective level. Bell (2007) uses performativity to move beyond the image of the individual bounded subject and shift the focus from interiority to coextensivity – how subjects perform and therefore experience an identity or

self within, through, and in relation to others, to systems and networks of people, power, and possibilities. This focus on coexistence stresses the importance of cultural survival, and the need to construct a subject position within the categories that society makes available or possible by being readable to others. What is of particular interest here is how she employs the example of diaspora to explore the possibility of a sense of kinship and genealogy based on embodied connection that is not essentialist but constructed and experienced through the performance of the identity and subsequently of that intersubjective experience. In locating 'the modes of commemoration through which the work of maintaining identities occurs' (ibid.: 31), Bell reframes the potential of what performativity could be, and what can (and is) performatively produced, as well as reframing the relationship between the performative and the embodied, inherent or 'natural', asking:

> might there not be ways of exploring the notion of cultural identity that acknowledge embodied identities but understand them as performative achievements that are attached to others in ways that are partial but not identitarian? (Ibid.: 32)

She poses Judaism as an example of this embodied but performed genealogy, where genealogical connection is not the basis or presumption but rather what is maintained through ritual and practices. Through this framework, far from sidelining the materiality of the body as Butler is often accused of doing, performativity can be usefully deployed to engage with precisely that interplay between the embodied experience of the individual subject, their relation and co-constitution with others and wider social norms and pressures. This is particularly pertinent for the study of community and sense of belonging that is being investigated here, as the process through which the individual can be enacted within the collective as multiple and fluid yet also singular and stable as suggested above taps into precisely the kind of coextensivity Bell is proposing, as:

> we are engaged in modes of being that are in turn also modes of constituting the habitats in which other entities (concepts, organisms, objects) survive or disappear. To partake in these environments or assemblages, then, is to partake in the actualization of the present's potential, the composition of tomorrow. (Ibid.: 124)

Through this reframing of performativity in relation to belonging Bell draws out the significance of how any performative action is never singular or isolated, but rather an enaction and engagement with the world in which it takes place. This is vital in terms of the liveability Butler discusses, as through the process of undoing particular norms in order to prevent the 'self' from being undone, the subject accesses the possibility of refiguring and shaping the norms themselves and the world from which they emerge. As is further discussed in relation to identity and identification in Chapter 5, the ways these processes are enacted in the queer performance space are complex and varied. Whilst multiple and various objects such as 'femininity', 'queer', and 'self' are being multiply enacted, sometimes through performance as fun but also as survival, what is also being performatively produced is a sense of belonging. This belonging, as suggested by Bell, is set up as embodied connection that is not essential or biological but performed, and thus whilst it revolves around the circulation of particular identity categories and visual external markers of the body, it incorporates much deeper subjective processes. As is explored at length in Chapter 5 of this thesis, Bell's understanding of performative routedness - the diasporic 'carnal' connections that traverse generations and continents and are performatively reproduced, are crucial for considering the modes of intergenerational affective transmission that underlie many of the performances I am analysing. Although appearance, surface and labels may appear vital to a community so invested in identities such as queer, trans, femme, and butch, the identification and embodied experiences being enacted here go far beyond the limitations of the body as image, and performatively produce the more holistic kind of schematic body implied by phenomenological work.

1.1.4. Performance Affects

I conclude this account of some of the key debates within performance studies of significance to this thesis by pondering that there has as yet been surprisingly little engagement with affect theory within the realm of performance studies, either in terms of a consideration of the affective milieu engendered through performance or the labour of affective transmission on the part of the performer. Whilst many scholars have utilised the term, often, though not always, in a fairly self-evident way to indicate the emotional register of a performance or artwork, few have delved into the debates over what we mean

when we talk about affect, what affects do, or why they matter. Scholars may identify the affective chord of a particular performance, for instance, without considering the multiple, complex ways in which that might resonate differently with different members of the audience, and what other affective chains might ensue. Susan Best's (2011) recent survey of feeling and affect in what she calls 'the feminine avant-garde' of predominantly 1960s and '70s conceptual art addresses art history's surprising ignorance of the affective dimension of art, despite the evident importance of feeling when it comes to spectatorship - we respond to art, after all, primarily because of the way it makes us *feel*. This omission, Best argues, may be a deliberate avoidance of the challenge affect poses to the mastery and ownership of voice in art criticism. The profoundly relational process of moving and being moved implied by the workings of affect also works to de-centre the artist as holder of expression and meaning, opening the work to ambiguity and ambivalence. The doing and undoing of identity and subjectivity Best associates with the affective dimension of art is particularly relevant to my aims here, as this is precisely where I locate the power and potential of the queer performance practices and milieux I am analysing here. Despite Best's assertion, however, there have been several instances of performance or art criticism that have worked to reappraise the significance of affect in the study of art and performance in some form. Banes and Lepecki's (2007) edited collection under the moniker of *The Senses in Performance* makes inroads into considering the embodied intensities of performance and spectatorship, though it still seems to rely primarily on the relatively neatly distinguishable sensory faculties of touch, taste, hearing and smell (in contrast to the dominance and ubiquity of vision alone). The essays gathered in this volume begin to pry away performance studies' (as other academic disciplines') myopic over-reliance on sight to creatively expand the sensorial activation possible in performance which, they argue, is uniquely able to intervene in a range of sensorial perception beyond sight and sound. Despite a narrow and limited descriptive language for these alternative senses (as opposed to our rich vocabulary to describe what we *see*), their claim for the 'unsuspected sensorial-perceptual realms' (ibid.:1) of performance argues a strong case for a reconsideration of *other senses* when discussing performance, and I would consider the perception of affect as one of those *other senses* requiring reconsideration.

Several significant contributions to this reconsideration of affect in art have, however, come from the realm of trauma studies. Jill Bennett's (2005) exploration of visual art produced in conflict zones uses a language of affect to examine the political potential of trauma. By focusing on 'the affective operations' (ibid.: 3) of art, Bennett suggests that we can conceive of a different kind of politics in art, politics that are fundamentally relational and intersubjective and, importantly, structured around *empathy*. Though Bennett's sources and approach are very much positioned in the disciplines of visual art theory and trauma studies, neither of which is my natural scholarly home, I find her focus on the intersubjective affective intensities engendered by trauma useful for considering the ways in which affects resonate between bodies, objects, and geographical locations useful for my purposes in this thesis, and her consideration of trauma echoes my reading of much of the performance work staged in these spaces (as explored in Chapter 5 of this thesis). A similar argument for the political potential of affect comes in the form of James Thompson's (2011) call for a valuation of applied theatre as *affective* rather than *effective*. Though again focusing on the emotive extremes of war zones and communities in crisis that distance it somewhat from the focus of this thesis, Thompson works to prioritise affect in community based performance in a way that resonates with my intentions here. In community performance where funding bodies and other institutions often demand a focus on impact, action, and measurable effect, he argues that the affective productivity of performance work is often overlooked and certainly not considered a measure of worth, value, or efficacy.

Two separate special issues *Women and Performance: a Journal of Feminist Theory* have also occasioned the consideration of affect by performance studies scholars, one entitled 'Reparations' concerned with the work of Eve Sedgwick, and a more recent one entitled 'Between Psychoanalysis and Affect, a Public Feelings Project'. The former prompted various examinations of how seemingly negative affects might have reparative effects, particularly for marginalised or minoritarian subjects (Balance 2006, Cho 2006, Diaz 2006, Kim 2006). This collection (with the exception of the contribution by José Muñoz 2006, with which I engage in more detail below) is predominantly of interest to me for the (sometimes fleeting) ways in which it

poses a potential formulation of a sense of affective belonging - a collectivity manifested through a shared affective experience. This echoes with several of the articles of the more recent special issue, which aims to suggest that bringing psychoanalysis and affect together in queer and performance studies might allow us to trouble the inside/outside binary and reconfigure subjectivity outside of it (Muñoz 2009b). Throughout this collection, affects intersect in various guises - as theme, as object of study, as method of analysis or interpretive tool, or as guide to be traced and followed in search of unexpected insights and new questions about subjectivity, trauma, and the everyday (see particularly Vogel 2009a). It examines the structures of feelings that privilege and enable certain knowledges, social interactions and forms of subjectivity at the expense of others (Pellegrini 2009). Both Jasbir Puar (2009) and H. N. Lukes (2009) use affect effectively to reconsider bodily capacities and bodily integrity in relation to ability and disability, though they ultimately remain at the level of the individual. Tavia Nyong'o (2009) suggests that reading affect, rather than identity, into the writing of Paul Goodman might allow us to consider a queer project that is unfinished and unsustainable. Recasting supposed 'ugly feelings' (Ngai 2004) as a kind of punk utopia, Nyong'o suggests, might give a richer picture of the cultural landscape and allow unusual insights to be gained from unexpected sources. Though her subject matter is the performance of the psychoanalytic therapeutic encounter, Patricia Clough's (2009) contribution usefully engages the concept of 'enactive witnessing' to consider the affective transmission that might occur in the telling of trauma. As I examine in Chapter 5 of this thesis, the recounting and witnessing of trauma is one of the key themes of much of the performance work staged in these spaces, and Clough's treatment of enactive witnessing is an important model of the ways in which these stories can be framed in terms of their affective power and resonances.

Following this brief survey of reflections on affect from within the field of performance studies, I want to return and dwell now on José Muñoz's (2000, 2006) consideration of what he terms 'feeling brown' - the burden and possibility of performing inappropriate, 'ethnic' affective comportment. Muñoz (2000) borrows from Williams (1977) to propose ethnicity as a 'structure of feeling', an embodied way of being that marks out and homogenises all people of colour in terms of their affective excess. By performing affect wrongly (or more precisely, not 'white-ly'), Muñoz suggests people of colour, and

particularly ethnic minority artists such as Nao Bustamante,[21] challenge normative expectations of dominant culture. Interestingly in light of the debates about ontology emerging from much of the recent work on affect (see section 1.4. below), the scientific and material language of affect is entirely absent from Muñoz's exploration. Whilst this might align him with the school of theorists who conflate affect with emotion, I would assert that his concept of 'feeling brown' does fall into the amorphous, diffuse and, crucially, intersubjective characterisation of affect that I am interested in. What we see in Muñoz's expositions on 'feeling brown', then, is perhaps a tentative example of some of the ways in which affects traverse the boundaries between self and other, singularity and plurality, and conscious and unconscious as explored above. Muñoz's account does appear to take up the proposition of the performer as a conduit for affect when he characterises Bustamante's body as an 'affective beacon' (Muñoz 2006: 199), and thus sets a useful precedent for my intentions in this thesis. However, for all his detail *writing about* affect, he never mentions *feeling* it himself. This for me highlights how performance studies in general seems only to have located affect within the body of the performer or within an art object, rather than addressing the ways in which affects might circulate and transmit between performer and audience and amongst the audience themselves, and how the audience's affects might resonate back towards the performer on stage. One site in which which the transmission of affect between performer and audience is addressed is in Amelia Jones' (2009) meditation on the affective power of the wound in various forms of 'live' or mediated body art. Whilst this exploration poses useful arguments for the fundamentally relational nature of subjectivity, it does, however, appear to reduce this affective intensity to a visceral gut response that seems more akin to psychoanalytic understandings of abjection (Kristeva 1982) than the complexly embodied modes of affective transfer that are of interest to me here. It is clear, therefore, that whilst several scholars within performance studies, and particularly ones working within a queer framework, have made some useful contributions to the

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[21] Nao Bustamante is a performance artist based in New York, whose work often explores the intersections between gender, sexuality and ethnicity (and particularly Latina identity) through the medium of her body. This has included a prank appearance on the Joan Rivers Show as exhibitionist character 'Rosa', inviting white men to absolve themselves of guilt by taking a bite from a phallic burrito strapped to her in a dildo harness, or performing archetypal white feminine beauty by trussing her curvaceous figure with packing tape before precariously climbing the ladder of 'success' in platform heels.

consideration of affect in performance and spectatorship, there is room for a more sustained engagement, and particularly one that takes into consideration the perspectives on affective transmission that a position informed by body studies and the potentially radical relationality of embodied subjectivity can bring. In order to develop this perspective I will now go on to provide an account of the debates from the study of subjectivity, corporeal feminism and body studies and finally affect theory that have influenced my thinking and frame how I wish to develop performance studies in this thesis.

1.2. Exploring Subjectivities

A major difficulty faced by theorists attempting to do justice to corporeality within the predominantly social constructionist paradigm of cultural studies is how to theorise embodiment. Subjectivity has become a key concept across psychology and many humanities disciplines as scholars have grappled with theories of how individuals come to recognise themselves as subjects. The prevailing concept of the 'unitary, rational subject' (Henriques et al 1998: xi) still dominates much psychological and cultural discourse on subjectivity, working to reinforce the long-standing Cartesian mind/body dualism that posits the disembodied rational 'cogito' as fundamental to human experience. This Cartesian Dualism constructing two entirely separate domains of mind and body has structured ways of thinking about the human subject and has generated numerous subsequent dualisms such as nature/culture, individual/society, self/other, all of which hold a hierarchical binary relation to the mind/body distinction. The relation of these binaries to the underlying opposition of male/female is essential to understanding feminist theorising of the body and knowledge, and is further discussed below. It is important to explore further here, however, the role of this conception of the human subject as rational individual, distinct from culture and governed by the mind. Attempts within psychology to encompass the role of the social dimension within an individual's cognitive functioning have resulted in theories of internalisation and socialisation suggesting that external social norms and values are learnt and taken on by the individual, who envelops them into their pre-given self. Though contentious, both concepts have had enormous influence not only within the field of psychology but also in much social and cultural theory and so have further reproduced the concept of

the bounded singular individual and the presumption of interaction between two distinct objects, making them unhelpful for theorising subjectivity outside of these paradigms (ibid.: 18-21). Much of the difficulty of theorising the process by which human subjects construct a coherent experience of themselves is tied to this image of the individual as fixed and bounded, a concept that cannot fully appreciate the multiple positions subjects hold within discourse, something which can only really be understood if we remain open to seeing subjectivity as 'multiple, not purely rational, and as potentially contradictory' (ibid.: 203). This is closely interrelated to the process of subjectification, often associated with the work of Michel Foucault (1972, 1976), through which particular subject positions are constructed and henceforth subjects come into being. One of the key voices in discussions of subjectivity and the self is that of sociologist Nikolas Rose (1996, 1999), who utilised the works of Foucault and other philosophers revolutionising the understandings of individuals and bodies to investigate the role of 'psy' disciplines and other cultural forces in the construction of subjects through knowledges about what constitutes the human subject. This Foucauldian framework, supplemented by an analysis of desire, has been used to suggest that:

> [s]ubjectivity, in this account, is the experience of the lived multiplicity of positionings. It is historically contingent and produced through the plays of power/knowledge and is sometimes held together by desire. (Blackman et al 2008: 6)

This frames the study of subjectivity as an endeavour of uncovering the practices through which individuals experience this multiplicity of their own positioning, and manage to pull together a sense of 'self' to experience themselves as a subject. The complexity of this process is clearly evident in Chapters 4 and 5 of this thesis, wherein the intermingling of that which is perceived as socially constructed with what is considered the authentic 'real me', alongside the workings of fantasy, desire and shame are used as frameworks through which to interpret the performances and investments of the audience in these spaces.

The role of the body in this process of identifying and experiencing oneself as a subject is often referred to as 'embodied subjectivity'. This term is a useful and crucial one to this thesis as it is grounded in the desire to break down the boundaries that structure the way we think and theorise the human

body, and is premised on the need to draw together the seemingly contradictory elements that make up the body as subject and object, mind and body, individual and social:

> the essential characteristic of embodiment is existential indeterminacy… in which embodiment is reducible neither to representations of the body, to the body as an objectification of power, to the body as a physical entity or biological organism, nor to the body as an inalienable center of individual consciousness. (Csordas 1994: xi)

Such an unstable and multiple embodied self requires the body to be read not as a fixed entity implicated in the subject but as mediated and in process. This contradictory and indefinable lived experience of corporeality can be explored under the concept of the 'somatically felt body' focusing on sensations that cannot be explained or articulated through cognitive or biological symptoms (Blackman 2008b: 29-30). Blackman deploys this concept to access that which is sidelined by many social constructionist accounts of embodiment and subjectivity that reduce bodies to static and inert objects shaped by cultural influence through the mind. By focusing on instances wherein the body 'reacts back, responds, often at a level that is felt through the body but might not easily be open to articulation' (ibid.: 32) the *aliveness* of this body allows us to think about the role of the social or cultural in more complex ways than the interactional models in influence and internalisation. Similar to the phenomenon of affective transmission (as examined below in section 1.4.), the concept of the somatically felt body allows us a way into theorising the body as 'made and remade through the mediation and modulation of biological capacities that are always dynamic and in relationship with what we might term 'the outside''' (ibid.: 137). Through focusing on this process we can dispense with the model of two separate spheres (of inside and outside, mind and body, or individual and culture) interacting, but envisage how they are deeply interconnected and inseparable. In analysing corporeal experience it is vital to retain the central issue of subjectivity, as it is through the way this multiplicity and uncertainty is

negotiated by individual subjects who experience themselves as coherent selves that these questions can be explored further.[22]

1.3. Articulating Bodies: Corporeal Feminism to Body Theory

By virtue of the inherent mind/body dualism in understandings of the human subject theorising of subjectivity has tended to marginalise the role of the body entirely in focusing on cognition, or reduced it to mere biological matter that holds no relation to thought processes or culture (cf. Blackman 2008b, Howson 2005). For cultural theory, this has resulted in a dominant social inscription paradigm in which cultural influence is seen to shape the body through the workings of the mind and sidelining the materiality of the body, leading to a form of social or discourse determinism (cf. Fuss, 1989). The tendency for cultural studies to theorise the social at the expense of the materiality of the body begun to be questioned in the mid-1990s (see Csordas 1994, Grosz 1994), however, when many cultural theorists began to investigate the physical body outside the essentialist paradigm of the naturalistic body or the biological sciences, but in terms of its role within culture. Importantly, certain feminist theorists participated in this shift towards investigating the materiality of the body, developing a field known as corporeal feminism that focused on the body as a key site to open up debates around female subjectivity rather than the essentialist source of oppression (cf. Braidotti 2002, Howson 2005). Elizabeth Grosz's (1994) seminal endeavour of defining a corporeal feminism highlights the tendency for theorists to sideline the body in accounts of subjectivity and human experience:

> Body is thus what is not mind, what is distinct from and other than the privileged term. It is what the mind must expel in order to retain its "integrity". It is implicitly defined as unruly, disruptive, in need of direction and judgement, merely incidental to the defining characteristics of mind, reason, or personal identity through its opposition to consciousness, through the psyche and other privileged terms in philosophical thought. (Ibid.: 3)

[22] I use the term 'coherent' here to indicate the ability to experience ourselves as subjects, as opposed to the supposed fracturing or disintegration of subjectivity posed by trauma or other experiences that may threaten a subject's sense of 'self'. However, as addressed in section 1.3.2. of this Chapter and particularly in Chapter 4 of the thesis, work on the concept of 'bodily integrity' explores the ways in which coherence may not always be so central to the phenomenology of lived experience.

Feminism's inadvertent reproduction of masculinist philosophy's neglect of the body is seen by Grosz as a result of the desire to avoid patriarchal ideologies identifying women with the body and irrationality and thus incapable of holding knowledge. However, she argues that the answer lies not in repeating this sidelining of the body itself but in bringing it into the focus of theorising in a way that acknowledges the markers of corporeal difference, such as sexual or racial difference (see also Barad 2007). Grosz (1994) sets out the importance of talking about the materiality of bodies and particularly 'other' bodies that do not fit the ideal of white, male, young, able bodies. By theorising a 'field' of different bodies in this way and analysing their function in society we can begin to appreciate the complex 'interlocking' of the material and the cultural in a way that is not simply inscription of values on the body but through a 'mutual constitution' (ibid.: 19-20). Borrowing from Lacan, Grosz applies his example of the Möbius strip to the distinction of body and mind to indicate how the two are indistinguishably intertwined, and both simultaneously 'inside-out' and 'outside-in'. Drawing together a vast range of work from within various fields of philosophy, social theory, psychology and neurology Grosz explores the complexity of subjectivity that is visceral and corporeal as it is structured through societal norms and power structures. The positioning of the body as external expression of internal truth proposed by several theories from psychoanalysis, phenomenology and neurology is contrasted with more constructionist accounts from the philosophy of Nietzsche, Foucault and Deleuze which present the body as a social production. Whilst being attentive to and critical of the masculinist accounts provided by these male theorists, Grosz demonstrates how elements of their work can be drawn out to develop a feminism in which the body is neither sidelined nor reduced to a symptom of culture, biology or the psyche. By refusing the dualist model of the mind and body as two separate spheres, Grosz sets up a conceptual apparatus through which we can engage a fully embodied subjectivity. Grosz's 'field' of non-ideal bodies are neither pure cultural constructions nor simple biological matter. They are fleshy materiality that is lived and experienced by subjects positioned within cultural norms, power structures and restraints, and thus are as much 'soma' as they are 'psyche', equally inside and outside. This repositioning of bodies in theory is crucial to the endeavours of this thesis, particularly in relation to the reframing of 'body image' Grosz provides through her critique of

psychoanalysis. As is further discussed below, breaking down these dualisms is vital to understanding bodies beyond the limiting focus on external surface or appearance that disregards the delicate interplay of other factors. As the interface through which subjects encounter, are encountered and interact with the world around them, what is externally visible on the body is an element of corporeal experience that must be acknowledged, but, unless positioned in relation to the complex inside/outside interconnection suggested by Grosz, this 'outside' risks merely reducing bodies to their surface.

Corporeal feminism thus initiated what is often termed the corporeal turn, and subsequently the field of body theory. The increased interest in subjectivity and embodiment (Csordas 1994, Grosz 1994, Shilling 1993) and Bryan Turner's (1984) groundbreaking examination of the body and society began to redress the absence of the body from social and cultural theory, and created the conditions of emergence for a sociology of the body (see Fraser and Greco 2005). This new branch of sociological enquiry was, and remains, however, far from unified and coherent. Effectuated by scholarship from a range of disciplines including sociology, feminist theory, post-structuralist identity politics, and philosophy, the field of body theory was also catalysed by several significant events and circumstances outside the academy. Developments in science and technology, medicine, changing lifestyles, and the shift into the postfordist economies of late capitalist second modernity (Giddens 1991, Bauman 2000, Lash and Urry 1994) have all contributed to the growth of interest in the body within the humanities and social sciences in the last three decades (Fraser and Greco 2005). More recently, the study of the body has also been impacted by the explosion of interest in affect (as examined in section 1.4. below), a return to ontology, and the developments of material feminism as seen in Karen Barad's (2003, 2007) radical engagement of quantum physics in order to reconsider the roles of language, matter and meaning in social enquiry. Body theory has thus developed as a broad inter-disciplinary field of study examining the myriad questions and concerns the body poses for social enquiry.

This inter-disciplinary area of scholarly endeavour has variously engaged critical psychology, work on subjectivity, Foucault, psychoanalysis and a multitude of other fields to address the significance and value of the body as a site of critical analysis. Whilst the field of body theory is broad, two particular

clusters of attention emerge that are of particular relevance to my purposes here: the question of how to reconsider the body outside of the limiting visual paradigm indicated by the vernacular 'body image', and the (related) problem of bodily integrity. The following sections explore various critical and theoretical tools employed by different theorists to understand and engage the processual, haptic experience of the body which cannot be reduced to its physical surface as in a mirror image. This is followed by a consideration of the problem of bodily integrity, and how recent work with surprising sources nevertheless lends a lot to my consideration of subjectivity here. Another key area of debate within the field of body studies is what has been termed 'the problem of the one and the many' (Blackman 2008a), or how the subject lives singularity in the face of the plurality and openness of the body to other bodies and objects. Whilst this concern is of crucial importance to this thesis, it is so closely linked to considerations of affective transmission that it is dealt with below in section 1.4. on affect, and particularly models of affective transfer that engage notions of suggestion or emotional contagion.

1.3.1. Beyond Body Image

Several theorists have attempted to move beyond the static visual paradigm of the 'body image' by finding ways of theorising embodied subjectivity that do not limit bodies to their external surface but rather engage a broader, more schematic sense of how we understand our own bodies. Whilst the term 'body image' has entered common vernacular as a descriptor of an individual's visual perception and resulting level of satisfaction with their body, several alternative terms and concepts have been developed in an attempt to overcome this notion of a singular, visually constituted image by engaging the conscious and non-conscious elements of experiencing and understanding one's own body in relation to other bodies and objects. Gail Weiss (1999) proposes a theory of body images that are multiple, adaptable and shifting, not only within the individual subject but also between people, understanding body images as intersubjective phenomena that blur the distinction between self and other. Drawing together the work of Foucault, phenomenology and psychoanalysis, Weiss suggests that none of these theories provide a framework for subjectivity that can acknowledge how Othered, non-normative or

non-ideal bodies are (generally speaking) still able to experience themselves as a subject, even if this is as a subject of prejudice. Like Grosz (1994) above, Weiss (1999) challenges the assumptions about subjectivity that go unnoticed in relation to 'ideal' bodies, but 'are violated by a body that refuses to behave as it should' (ibid.: 2). Refuting the notion that certain individuals (such as anorexics, schizophrenics, or those with congenital anomalies such as dwarfism) have *distorted* body images, Weiss suggests that the subjective process itself is characterised by a constant making and remaking of multiple body images. Phenomena such as abjection (Kristeva, 1982) and Lacan's (1977) 'mirror stage,'[23] Weiss argues, indicate the distortion and fragility of all body images that must constantly expel themselves in order to adapt to changing contexts and maintain boundaries between continuously shifting selves and others. For Weiss (1999) these numerous and varying body images are the key to understanding how subjective experience is pulled together and experienced as a singular self, as 'the multiplicity of body images that we possess, rather than signifying a fragmented or dispersed identity, is, paradoxically, precisely what helps us to develop a coherent sense of self' (ibid.: 167). This notion of multiple, shifting body images draws on notions of the body schema, as explored below. She proposes that rather than forming a static and visual image of our bodies, as through an image in a mirror, human beings are in fact constantly constructing multiple images through exchanges and interaction with others and their multiple images, and therefore a certain psychological flexibility to constantly adapt and negotiate these sometimes contradictory images utilised to navigate this instability and form a sense of self that is coherent but still open to change. The seemingly contradictory function of multiple body images in producing a coherent subject position here exposes the way our understandings of subjectivity are structured around the dualistic image of the rational fixed individual, limiting the language through which we can discuss and even think about the body as subject. Weiss' sophisticated pulling

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[23] Julia Kristeva (1982) defines the abject as moments or bodily functions, such as defecating, through which the body is seen not as bounded and sealed but porous and open to the world, disrupting the fundamental self/other distinction and therefore undermining an individual's entire sense of selfhood and subsequently of existence itself. The mirror-stage is one of the founding theories of Lacan's (1977) psychoanalysis, and is crucial but also problematic to many theorists working with subjectivity. Lacan described the mirror stage as both the moment in infant development when the child first recognises itself in a mirror and thus gains a sense of itself as a complete and bounded individual, as well as the ongoing process of subjectivity structured in relation to the 'body image'.

together of the psychological, physiological and social into a material body that is continually constructed through all three proposes an insightful way of theorising embodied subjectivity, particularly for those wishing to look beyond the visual paradigm and in relation to non-normative embodiment as discussed above. It also has significant implications for the study of potential sites or practices through which unusual or idiosyncratic subjective processes appear to emerge, such as in the performances of queer femininity that are the subject of this thesis. Weiss proposes that the continual making and remaking of our shifting body images indicates great possibilities for changing the ways we understand ourselves, and the kinds of 'selves' that can be understood:

> This may involve incorporating these bodily demands into our existing body images (and thereby transforming these latter in the process), establishing new connections between body images, or creating new body images and body image ideals together… These new body image ideals must themselves be grounded upon our own intercorporeality, rather than taking the form of singular ideals that individual, autonomous bodies are supposed to judge and be judged by. (Ibid.: 168)

Through this framework, is it possible that the performance practices at the centre of this research are participating in this creating of body images and body image ideals that are intercorporeal, intersubjective and able to meet the psychic and physical demands of queerly positioned bodies? And if so, how might this process occur and manifest itself in the performance space, and what implications might this have for the sense of community being created? These questions are further explored in Chapters 4 and 5 respectively, wherein I engage these debates from body theory further to consider what is at stake in these performances for both the performers themselves and their audiences.

Whilst Weiss chooses to refigure the meaning of 'body image' into a more embodied, multiple, shifting entity than the usual use of the term to imply a static visual singular, others, such as Mike Featherstone (2006, 2010), have drawn attention to the limitations of the 'image' in other ways. Featherstone uses Massumi's (2002) concepts of 'mirror-vision' and 'movement-vision' to attempt to break the symmetry of the mind/body split through which the body is positioned as both subject and object. For Massumi, the 'mirror-vision' through which an individual perceives their own body is always partial and incomplete because it can only be achieved from a singular perspective, and we are

physically incapable of seeing our bodies in movement as others do. This, he suggests, positions 'movement-vision' as the way of understanding and sensing oneself in a more embodied way, as that which breaks the symmetry of the subject-object divide, calling up 'a *multiply* partial other-perspective' (ibid.: 51) drawing together the tangible, visceral awareness of one's own body and movement through the sensing of muscles and ligaments. Featherstone (2006, 2010) borrows from Massumi's conceptualisation of the 'body without an image' to engage with the materiality and viscerality of the body and the emotional, affective dimension of subjective experience by moving away from a purely visual concept of the body. For Featherstone, the theoretical potential of the 'body without an image' is the body that is open to affects and intersubjective relationality with other bodies and entities. He links the body-without-image directly to the workings of affect, (as elaborated in section 1.4. below), arguing that this more felt, haptic experience of the body is exactly where affect does its work. He claims that body practices such as cosmetic surgery or the ubiquitous televised 'makeover' are not utilised in an instrumental way, but rather as a tool to allow subjects to reconcile their body image with their body-without-image through not just physical transformation, but a more haptic one. The body-without-image is perhaps best encapsulated by concepts such as 'charisma' which transcends physical appearance, epitomised in a recent cosmetic surgery advert wherein the model proclaims: 'I've just had my nose done, but everyone comments on the sparkle in my eyes'.[24] Crucially, however, Featherstone's understanding of the body-without-image also indicates the complex ways in which bodies and subjectivities are co-constituted in relation to images as well as other bodies. Rebecca Coleman (2008) makes a similar argument concerning the processes through which bodies and images are co-constructed in relation to one another to the extent that no clear distinction can be drawn between the two. The body without an image and the ways in which Featherstone and Coleman propose bodies are co-constituted with other bodies and images has significant implications of the study of embodiment and subjectivity, as this engagement with intercorporeal and intersubjective elements opens up the possibility of talking and thinking about bodies in more flexible and fluid terms without reducing them to theoretical abstraction.

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[24] http://www.transforminglives.co.uk/

Another key area from which reformulations of the 'image' of bodies is being theorised is that which can be loosely termed the Skin Ego after the work of French philosopher Didier Anzieu (1989). Drawing from Freud (2001a, 2001b) and psychoanalytic theories of the Ego, Anzieu proposed the skin not as a simple covering or external surface of the body, but as a site of interface between the 'self' and the outside world through which the subject is able to form their sense of being a coherent 'self'. The skin, like the mind, paradoxically shields and contains yet reveals the 'internal' state of the body, it is 'both permeable and impermeable, superficial and profound, truthful and misleading' (ibid.: 17). According to Anzieu, the correspondence between psychical functions of the Ego and the physiological ones of the skin create a parallel between the skin and the Ego, allowing the skin to be considered a crucial part of the formulation of the human subject's psychic understanding of itself as such. The Skin Ego is thus the site of interface between inside and outside of the body, and hence also between self and other. It supports and holds the psyche together as the skin holds together the organs of the body, yet also is the site of interaction and communication with the outside world. Through touch, the skin simultaneously keeps the body inside itself and opens it up to outside stimuli. Thus the Skin Ego forms the 'surface the body develops and uses to form something capable of thinking of itself as a self' (Pile 2009: 143). The concept of the Skin Ego thus demonstrates how self and other are in fact mutually constituted (Lafrance 2009). Combined with the phenomenology of Merleau-Ponty (2002), the work of Anzieu has led to the development of the term 'body schema' to explore 'how it is we are able to coordinate our bodies to perform actions without having complete sight of them or consciously monitoring our every movement' (Shilling 2003: 200). The body schema as a more holistic and fluid sense of the schematic whole of the body, rather than purely the visual image of its external surface, has been successfully used to grasp at the multi-dimensional aspects of embodied experience, described as:

> a flexible, plastic, systemic form of distributed agency encompassing what takes place within the boundaries of the body proper (the skin) as well as the entirety of the spatiality of embodied motility. (Hansen 2006: 38)

The body schema thus repositions the visual, external image as only one element of the schematic whole, and frames the development of subjectivity as a fundamentally far more embodied and corporeal process than the legacy of

the Cartesian mind/body dualism would indicate. As discussed above in relation to Weiss, this more schematic understanding of bodies allows for much more intuitive readings of those bodies whose images are non-normative or deviant, as a discussion of the multiple and shifting images, or body schema, can avoid reducing these bodies to their non-normative image. For my purposes here, this is crucial in terms of not only considering bodies beyond the visual representation paradigm, but by addressing the more complex processes and formulations of subjectivity, we begin to see how collectivity, intercorporeality and relationality are lived. As is explored in more detail in Chapters 5 and 6 of this thesis, these modes of being-together or co-constituted selfhood are crucial to how I am interpreting the sociality and spectatorship enacted within queer club performance.

1.3.2. Bodily Integrity

Another area of interest for the discipline of body studies that is of particular relevance to this thesis is the concept of bodily integrity. Recent work on bodily integrity has explored how we come to experience ourselves and our bodies as (sometimes) coherent and complete subjects, and indeed also reformulated the assumption of coherence and boundedness as a fundamental prerequisite of subjective experience. As argued above, bodily integrity is in many ways closely related to what has been termed the problem of 'the one and the many', or, how we reconcile our permeability and openness to affect and be affected by others with the (culturally and historically specific) need to consider ourselves bounded, singular subjects. A full discussion of collectivity, multiplicity and being singular-plural follows below in section 1.4. on affect theory, as it is through the transmission of affect that this problematic gains much of its purchase. For the remainder of this section, I explore other aspects of bodily integrity, particularly as they relate to processes of subjectivity and subjectification. As mentioned above, the prevailing notion of the human subject as independent, bounded and characterised by their capacity for reason and free choice has resulted in what Nikolas Rose (1989) calls the fiction of a autonomous selfhood. Following Foucault's (1976) concepts of subjectivity and subjectification, this fiction positions us as self-reliant entrepreneurs responsible for our own making (see also Bauman 2000, Beck 2002). The question of subjectification, the frameworks, knowledges and available subject positions

through which we are able to understand ourselves as subjects, thus highlights the limits of focusing on representation or stereotyping (Blackman and Walkerdine 2001). The relationships between identity, subjectivity, and cultural norms are reconfigured, and it becomes evident that we cannot rely on straightforward models of media effects or socialisation that rely on this image of the 'self' as pre-formed and bounded. Rather than external impositions requiring capitulation or resistance, cultural norms and expectations can therefore be considered a crucial element of subjective formation, whether the individual subject considers themselves to be in alignment or conflict with those norms themselves. As we see in Chapter 4 with the complex and contradictory role of femme and femininity in my protagonists' subjective positions, subjectivity is always articulated in relation to norms and modes of subjectification. The concept of bodily integrity, then, allows us to critically unpick these tensions and the discursive practices individuals use to hold themselves together as singular, authentic, autonomous selves. A key concern for this thesis, as addressed at length throughout Chapter 4, is how my performer protagonists are able to negotiate the tensions between their investments in a femininity that is culturally constructed with what 'feels real' to them, and how they do this in correlation with the tension between performing a 'true' or authentic version of themselves and an artificial fiction, on-stage and off. In Chapter 4 I explore this with reference to several studies dealing with the subject of bodily integrity. Though the majority of these articles cite medical corporeal interventions as the basis from which they examine the re-formulation of a bodily integrity after it has been breached, I feel they can contribute to my discussion. In particular Vivian Sobchack's (2010) discussion of the morphological imaginations that allow bodily integrity to be reformed anew address the ways in which these performers deploy performance as a tool for negotiating a liveable sense of self. Through a deeply phenomenological autobiographical account of her own experience of what is (for her, problematically) termed a 'phantom limb', and her eventual incorporation of a prosthetic, Sobchack proposes a radical reconsideration of body image and bodily integrity that may not always be as hinged on coherence and completeness as many other accounts might suggest. Rather than her body image rectifying or realigning itself into its previous and more 'correct' configuration once the sensations of her 'phantom' began to disappear,

Sobchack argues that her bodily integrity was radically transformed through a difference sense of 'completeness' - a new kind of 'whole'. Karen Throsby's (2008) account of the discursive strategies employed by weight-loss surgery patients to negotiate their bodily integrity in the face of not only medical intervention, but further mediation in terms of cultural norms and ideas of conformity, authenticity and 'cheating' also lends a lot to how we can understand and theorise what is understood as 'the real me'. The radically different modes of embodiment signified by consideration of bodily integrity and the tensions between what we experience as 'true' or 'real' in relation to the social world of supposedly 'outside influence' have significant implications for the kinds of intersubjective processes I argue are occurring within the milieu of Duckie, Bird Club and Wotever. The morphological imaginations enacted by both the performers and the audience (as developed in Chapter 5), suggest a mode of subjectivity that, far from the fiction of autonomous selfhood, implicates bodies as porous, unbounded, and endlessly open to affect and be affected by others.

1.4. The affective turn: Embodiment and the radical relationality of being

Perhaps the most significant development in the study of subjectivity and embodiment is what is often termed the 'turn to affect,' as an attempt at finding ways to theorise subjectivity without sidelining the body (Blackman and Cromby, 2007). Affects have been variously defined by different theorists, but can be more generally described as the capacity of bodies to affect and be affected by others, the 'processes that produce bodies as always open to others, human and non-human, and as unfinished rather than stable entities' (ibid.: 6). Whilst considerations of feeing, emotion and bodily sensation have emerged in a variety of disciplines in different times and contexts, it has been suggested that the current proliferation of interest in affect can be traced to the publication in the same year of both Eve Sedgwick and Adam Frank's (1995) 'Shame in the Cybernetic Fold,' and Massumi's (1995) 'The Autonomy of Affect' (Seigworth and Gregg: 2010). These two articles, drawing respectively from Silvan Tomkins' (1962, 1963) psychobiology of differential affects and Deleuze's (1988) Spinozist exploration of the possibilities of embodied becoming, can be characterised as precipitating two emergent 'schools' of affect theory. Work

following Sedgwick and Tomkins tends to presume the innate, evolutionary function of affect which are also clearly identifiable, whereas studies drawing from Massumi and/or Deleuze tend to consider affects as aspects of the immanence of bodies and worlds in constant states of flux. As will become clear below, however, this explanatory framework of two distinct debates around affect offers little to my purposes here, as both tend to locate affect within the autonomic responses of a singular body. What is of far more interest for my consideration of affect here is the ways in which affect has been used to radically reconstitute subjectivity and embodiment outside of the limiting dualisms of inside/outside, nature/culture, mind/body and self/other, as outlined above. Through work that has employed affect to consider the porous, unbounded nature of the subject, collective consciousness and intergenerational transmission, we can see how affect can be used to understand elements of embodied experience that appear to propose new possibilities of subjectivity, as I argue emerge in the collective modes of belonging enacted in queer performance spaces. As such, a more appropriate archive of affect for my purposes here might begin with cultural studies, and the call for scholars to address the 'structures of feeling' (Williams 1977) that characterise our lived experience and relation to the world around us:

> We are talking here about characteristic elements of impulse, restraint, and tone; specifically affective elements of consciousness and relationships: not feeling against, thought, but thought as felt and feeling as thought: practical consciousness of a present kind, in a living and interrelating continuity. (Ibid.: 132)

Eminent affect theorist Lawrence Grossberg (2010) makes just such a connection when he explains his first encounters with affect as a result of the inability for logics of ideology and representation to explain our investments in music. It is with structures of feeling, then, that I wish to align my understanding of affect, wherein affect functions as an element of the lived relation between selves and others, singular and plural, collective and individual, and always, ultimately, embodied.

Often associated with but distinct from feeling and emotion, affects are often characterised as amorphous, diffuse *intensities* experienced corporeally and interpreted through the framework of emotions. The debate over whether or not affects are in fact distinguishable from emotions is ongoing (for a more

detailed account of these debates, see Ngai 2004) and inextricably connected to ongoing discussion about the role of cognition and the psyche in affective circulation. Charting and arguing for the intricacies of this distinction is not my purpose here, though I will indicate that I concur with those theorists who, as outlined below, suggest that affects work in a fundamentally embodied way and thus are implicated in both the corporeal and the cognitive simultaneously. Leys' (2011) scrupulous critique of affect theory follows her cogent arguments concerning the overplayed separation of affect from cognition by suggesting the distinction between affect and emotion can therefore not be upheld. Whilst I concur with the proposition that affect does not occur within a purely corporeal realm hermetically sealed from consciousness, I defend the claim that affect and emotion can be considered as separate, if perhaps closely related, phenomena. Following Henriques (2010), I would in fact suggest that it is the discrete separation between affect and meaning or cognition, and the location of the psyche within a singular, bounded body, which results in the logic through which affect is understood in terms of feeling and emotion. Affects as collective, embodied intensities act as a node through which to examine modes of sociality such as performance and spectatorship in a way that sidelines neither the corporeal nor the cognitive, as they break down the boundaries between mind and body, inside and outside, and self and other. As demonstrated above, the work of Vikki Bell (2007) has utilised the concept of performativity to open up analysis of culture and performance in relation to these questions of affect and embodiment. This debate is further explored in Chapter 5 of this thesis, where I address the complex 'collective memories' accessed by many of the performances at Bird Club, Wotever and Duckie, and the extent to which these appeal to a register that is simultaneously conscious and unconscious, collective and individual, and cognitive and affective.

1.4.1. New Materialist Ontologies?

A recent special issue of the important journal *Body and Society* dedicated to the theme of affect testifies it's significance in current scholarly thinking on the body. In her afterword, Patricia Clough (2010) highlights why the concept of affect is vital in coming to new understandings of the body and subjectivity, particularly when the proliferation of science and technology destabilise the ontological status of the body. Affect's proximity to the materiality

of the body has, however, resulted in much work in this field focusing on the matter of the singular body or subject, often employing the biological or neuro-sciences as its evidence. The late Teresa Brennan (2004), for instance, is often considered one of the key proponents of the study of affect following her account of phenomena of affective transmission. Brennan presents a variety of incidents through which the spreading of tangible feelings or experiences between individuals, ones that are physically felt without necessarily being cognitively registered, indicate that human subjects are far from 'affectively self-contained,' as predominant understanding would have it, but rather more open to affective influence. As a social phenomena with a corporeal effect, Brennan poses affect as a phenomenon that blends the social, psychological and physiological paradigms that are generally constructed as separate entities. Taking any one of these paradigms of understanding bodies and experiences singularly, she claims, 'does not tell us how a social and psychological affect buries itself within or rests on the skin of an utterly corporeal body' (ibid.: 3). Rather than reject work from within biological science or psychology and rely on a truly constructionist approach, which as discussed above has been widely critiqued in the fields of corporeal feminism and body theory, Brennan draws together social and scientific theory. Taking hormones as her prime example, Brennan questions what studies in endocrinology might find if they did not begin from the perspective of affective self-containment but instead were open to the possibility of finding hormones and pheromones as a scientifically viable explanation of affective transmission between bodies. Whilst a scientific project is not what is being taken up here, Brennan's work opens up the possibility of theorising bodies and particularly communities of bodies such as the queer performance scene in innovative ways. Like the work on the body schema discussed above, being attentive to affect allows a theorisation of embodied subjectivity in which bodies are not physically or visually limited by their external surface, and can in fact be seen as emerging through relational engagement with other bodies and objects as well as social norms, ideals and pressures. Whilst there are interesting insights to be gained from some of this work, particularly in the potentialities of transmission (which I explore further below), the biological project of identifying the body's autonomic responses seems to me to reproduce, rather than challenge, the mind/body dualism and treatment of

scientific and biological knowledge as unquestionable 'hard fact' that preceding debates on subjectivity have worked to unpick.

The appropriation of neuroscientific work by many recent affect theorists to justify or validate their claims has come under intense scrutiny by Papoulias and Callard (2010). Focusing particularly on the ways in which scholars often depend on the writings of Antonio Damasio, Joseph LeDoux and development psychologist Daniel Stern, Papoulias and Callard argue the turn to affect has inaugurated a dangerous return to assumptions about the indisputable veracity of certain scientific ways of knowing. They warn that this 'strange and partial (mis)translation of complex scientific models into the epistemologically distinct space of the humanities and social science' (ibid.: 31) occludes valid challenges to the essentialist natural sciences and results in a positivist desire and demand for authenticating 'proof'.

The seminal work of Brian Massumi (1995, 2002) similarly engages neuroscientific data to corroborate another model of affect reproducing a singular body which, though in a dynamic process of becoming through contact with affective flows, is still defined by its material concrete edges. The autonomic bodily reflexes of the nervous system that Massumi describes, such as the enlarging of pupils and behaviour of pores and sweat glands, may be the result of intercorporeal affective transmission, but they settle, or remain, with a distinctly individualised body-subject (Leys 2011). One of Massumi's (2002) prime examples through which to demonstrate his characterisation of affect as the pre-cognitive intensities experienced by the body is his interpretation of a 1980 study of emotional responses to media. The experiment gathered children's physiological, verbal and motor responses to a short film shown with different soundtracks including varying levels of factual or emotive information, showing some surprising incongruities in the resulting data. These incongruities, such as the fact that the children appeared to judge the 'saddest' scenes of the film as the most 'pleasant' to view, indicate to Massumi the 'gap' between the 'content' and 'effect' of the image. The indeterminate intensities of the 'effect' are registered as affect by the body before cognitive-linguistic processes have responded to the 'content' or signification. For Massumi, these autonomous responses are temporally detached from cognition and meaning by taking place in the evasive half-second delay between non-conscious bodily reactions and cognitive thought.

However, captivating as Massumi's model of visceral, dynamic nonsignifying affective intensities may be, Leys' (2011) rigorous and compelling critique of the turn to affect directly challenges Massumi as having 'succumb[ed] to a false dichotomy between mind and matter' (ibid.: 457). Through meticulous investigation of Massumi's neuroscientific sources, Leys draws out assumptions and slippages in Massumi's interpretation of the data and the nature of mind-body interaction on which he bases his arguments. Like Papoulias and Callard (2010) above, Leys suggests that affect theorists whose intentions might seem antithetical to materialist science risk accidental or even deliberate misuse and misinterpretation of its data when they employ it as a tool of verification. Moreover, Leys identifies both those from the Tomkins-inspired strand of affect theory (such as Eve Sedgwick), and the Deleuze-inspired strand (such as Massumi) as similarly over-determining the disjuncture between affect and cognition. By so discretely separating the mind and body in this way, Leys argues, affect theorists belie the complexities of interaction between the conscious mind and material matter, thus leading her to characterise Massumi as 'a materialist who invariably privileges the "body" and its affects over the "mind" in straightforwardly dualist terms' (ibid.: 468). The determination to set apart affect and cognition can, thus, be considered a misinterpretation perpetuated by the use of neuroscientific data, as this is unable to account for the fact that 'affect and cognition are never fully separable - if for no other reason than that thought is itself a body, embodied' (Seigworth and Gregg, 2010: 2-3). Leys' (2011) extensive investigation entreats affect theorists to consider whether alternative, non-dualist accounts of affect might be possible which do not separate affect from cognition so strictly or discretely. In partial response, Leys begins this work by sketching a genealogy of affect in different 'schools' of psychological science since the 1960s. She may find answers to her questions, however, in Lisa Blackman's (2007, 2008a) genealogical inquiries into models of affective transmission emerging in early 19th century psychology in the form of the concepts of suggestion and emotional contagion, to which I will now turn. Elsewhere, Blackman (2011b) also echoes Leys' concern over the biological reductionism that can be a dangerous consequence of many affect theorists' interest in reflex bodily responses, and offers further potential resolutions in the form of a consideration of the intergenerational transmission

of affect, particularly through feelings of shame and experiences of trauma (as is discussed in detail below).

1.4.2. Communal affects: collectivity and contagion

In this section I explore models of affective transmission that stress the potential of affect not only for theorising the individual body or subject, but, crucially for this thesis, its potential for understanding relationality and intercorporeal connection and communication between bodies that are not bounded, discrete entities or characterised by a definitive split between body and mind. In addition to the kinds of ontological, positivist accounts of affect demonstrated through autonomic bodily responses as demonstrated through neuroscientific data (as with Massumi 2002), endocrinology (as with Brennan 2004), or even gastroenterology (see Wilson 2004), a range of other recent approaches to affect have emerged that revitalise the importance of the psyche in processes of affective transmission. It is these approaches, and, as will become clear below, the ways in which they allow for a consideration of the collective, relational nature of subjectivity articulated within and through affective milieux, that are most pertinent to my aims here. I begin my investigation of these accounts with Lisa Blackman's (2007, 2008a, 2010b) numerous and extensive examinations of the traces of early psychological concepts such as suggestion and emotional contagion which were sidelined by the dominant conception of the unitary rational subject, but which nevertheless seem to haunt contemporary engagements with affect. In a 2007 article for the *International Journal of Critical Psychology*, Blackman delineates the ideas of suggestion and emotional contagion, rooted in a fundamentally porous and permeable subject, which were disavowed and rejected by social psychology's more rationalist model. In pushing a particular 'version' of subjectivity as characterised by the individual as rational, bounded and autonomous, she argues, social psychology obscured the many other 'versions' evident at the emergence of the psychological sciences. This resulted in a paradigm wherein only certain questions could be asked about suggestion, and these could only be understood within the framework of 'social influence' which already assumes the distinctions between inside and outside, nature and culture, and self and other, for instance. Within such a dualist architecture, Blackman argues,

suggestion (or what we might now call affective transmission), is formulated as an abnormality or degeneracy affecting 'othered' bodies already considered deficient in the defining human capacity for reason and self-containment (see, for example, the controversial crowd psychology of Le Bon 1922). Through the work of early psychologists such as Boris Sidis (1898), Gabriel Tarde (1903), William James (1890) and Henry Bergson (1920), Blackman (2007) revitalises alternative 'versions' of subjectivity that positioned 'ordinary suggestion' as a common, rather than abnormal, aspect of communication.

The turn to affect, then, has the potentiality of reconfiguring our understanding of communication and contagion by supplanting the rational, bounded autonomous model of subjectivity with an altogether more intersubjective and relational conception that acknowledges rather than occludes our multiplicity, permeability and collectivity. She argues that re-engaging with conceptions of suggestion and emotional contagion in our considerations of affect enables:

> the radical intersection of nature and culture, the individual and the social, the inside and outside and the human and non-human, such that the idea of discrete entities interacting is beginning to lose its explanatory power. Rather what we start with is an assumption of the permeability of boundaries and the inextricable connection of mind with body, psyche with social, human with non-human and biological with cultural. (ibid.: 43)

Unfortunately, this rejuvenation of suggestion is somewhat lacking in much contemporary scholarship on affect (Blackman 2008a). Through their deployment of positivist neuroscientific data, many affect theorists (such as Brennan 2004 and Massumi 2002), repudiate or disregard the role of the psyche and suggestion, locating affect instead within the material confines of a singular body. However, a different route to affect through psychology, Blackman (2008a) suggests, might enable a fresh and innovative approach to the non-conscious, involuntary, and relational elements of subjectivity. Returning to William James (1890) this time through Despret (2004), Blackman proposes affect as potentially a key tool for understanding what James termed the 'problem of personality', or, how we understand and live ourselves as singular in the face of the undeniable openness and permeability of our bodies as unbounded, permeable, and ambiguous. What Blackman (2008a) terms the problem of 'the one and the many' also appears elsewhere as 'being singular-

plural' (Nancy 2000a), but in all its conceptions this tension identifies the subjective process of formulating a seemingly coherent subject (what Annemarie Mol 2002 terms 'hanging together,') in spite of experiences, like affective transmission, which highlight the ambiguity and unbounded nature of our bodies. Crucially, as seen above with the problem of bodily integrity and the tensions between subjectivity and subjectification, this reconsideration of the psyche also opens debate to the intricacies of subjectivity as co-produced, or:

> the complex processes of subject-constitution which are conscious and non-conscious, rational and irrational, cognate and desirous, real and unreal, material and psychological, historical and natural, and induce both becoming and becoming-stuck. (Blackman 2008a: 42-3)

In Chapter 5 of this thesis I explore how this very tension between singularity and plurality might be reconsidered through the circulation of affects in performances of collective memories and modes of belonging staged within queer performance spaces. I argue that the resonances of trauma, fantasy, desire and other experiences that are at once individual and universal, fictional and 'real' in these queer club environments suggest exactly the kind of radically co-constituted and collective subjectivity indicated by the 'problem of personality', wherein singularity is always lived in complex, dynamic relation to our multiplicity. This problem of how affect studies can position certain bodies as open and fluid in contrast to others as rigid and stuck also emerges elsewhere, suggesting the need to consider how affects work in conjunction with other factors such as the ideological positioning of bodies within norms and power structures (Ahmed 2004 and 2010, Blackman 2011a, Hemmings 2005). This is also addressed in Chapter 5 but also Chapter 6 of this thesis where I consider the ambiguity and ambivalence of affects within these spaces as a strategy for incorporating and acknowledging the stickiness of trauma and shame without allowing for the undoing of the subject.

By blurring these boundaries, affect allows us to think bodies and their relations differently, and thus rethink what constitutes the human subject and its formation. In her article for *Body and Society's* special issue on affect, Blackman (2010b) again argues for the value of marginal or seemingly dubious psychological phenomena as a source for the consideration of affect, presenting experiences of hypnosis, voice-hearing and telepathy as rich sources for a more radical and innovative model of affect. Telepathic communication appears to

present a radically different model of subjectivity and subsequently affective transmission, one in which the boundaries of inside/outside, material/immaterial, self/other and nature/culture become undone. By re-vitalising these debates and practices which have largely been silenced within both the psychological sciences and the turn to affect, Blackman argues, we are able to consider the role of memory and trauma in affective transfer. By reconceptualising the psyche as resident within a fundamentally unbounded, open subject rather than a singular and self-contained one, we are able to consider affect as an instrument of intersubjective psychic processes, such as the intergenerational transmission of trauma. Such revitalisations have already begun in both work on the transmission of trauma (Clough 2009, Cho 2008, Walkerdine 2010), and studies exploring the role of affect in reality television (Kavka 2008, Gorton 2009, Walkerine 2011, Blackman 2011b), and the affective milieu of Jamaican dancehall events (Henriques 2008, 2010).

Valerie Walkerdine's (2010) study of an ex-industrial community decimated by the closing of the town's steelworks opens up the potential of affect and the non-conscious for understanding community making in ways particularly pertinent to this thesis. Using the skin as a metaphor, much like the work of the Skin Ego discussed above, Walkerdine reconceptualises the affective and non-conscious communication that works to 'hold together' a community. Through feelings of loss and nostalgia different possibilities of being are imagined that work to value the self/other boundary and notions of self-containment differently. Although the social context of the queer performance culture at the heart of this thesis is significantly different, Walkerdine's study indicates the ways affect allows concepts of selfhood to be reformulated, particularly in the co-constitution of subjectivity through unconscious or traumatic intergenerational transmission. When the status of the body and the self is threatened, by socio-economic change or the impossibility or illegibility of the subject itself, more flexible understandings of the self and community must be employed to refigure the boundaries that have been breached without threatening the dissolution of the subject entirely. Through the framework of a collective, plural unconscious co-enacted and shared by members of a community, we can begin to see how affects might work to communicate knowledges, memories and experiences which are or have become unspeakable. Affect thus allows us to decentre the subject by thinking the

individual through relationality and interconnectedness, making visible how the communal actually constitutes the individual rather than threatening or disrupting it (Venn 2010). For the purposes of this study, affect is particularly interesting in this regard, as a tool for investigating the mutually constructive elements of subject formation and identity, especially in relation to complex formations of communities or publics as seen in the subsequent empirical chapters of this thesis. The forms of 'collective intelligence' outlined by Venn (2010), such as flocks of birds or the behaviour of market traders, echo the collective unconscious identified by Walkerdine (2010), and have some purchase in the affective milieux I am investigating here.

1.4.3. Performing Affects

Affect has also been taken up in valuable and fruitful ways in relation to reality television, where it appears to offer an alternative to the limits of media effects models positing viewers as dichotomously active or passive. Much like Walkerdine's (1990, 2007) early and more recent considerations of the role of fantasy and desire in media consumption, the realm of affect and feeling can invigorate how we understand our investments in media images that we may find embarrassing, unexplainable, or politically problematic. Misha Kavka's (2008) fascinating treatise on reality television proposes that the logic of representation and identity, such as is employed within media effects models, is incompatible with reality television which engages its audience through an intimate encounter with subjects who are individualised rather than representational. This public intimacy, she argues, produces a 'liveness effect' which in turn inheres a feeling of belonging in the viewer. Reality television thus functions as an affective interface through which subjects are co-constituted in their interpenetration with those on screen. Walkerdine (2011) pushes this even further, to argue that not only does reality television project affects towards the viewer, it also plays on already present embodied affective dispositions, particularly in the case of female viewers, a lived relation to shame. Echoing the intergenerational transmission of trauma as discussed above and in Chapter 5 of this thesis, Walkerdine argues that shame is transmitted affectively through generations, meaning that women's bodies are always already 'suffused' with shame and the desire for transformation. This enables an understanding of the pleasure gained (predominantly by female viewers) from the wide variety of

make-over and other reality television programmes which stage working class women's shame and transformation.

Much like Kavka (2008) above, Julien Henriques (2010) also positions affect as holding radical potential for understanding meaning outside of the logic of representation and encoding. Through his examination of Jamaica's dancehall scene, he proposes vibrations as an alternative model for affective transmission that might allow us to further challenge the bounded, rational subject. Because of their non-linear, diffuse, rhythmic and relational nature, Henriques argues that vibrations are able to capture how affects might reverberate simultaneously through material, corporeal and sociocultural mediums, disrupting not only the aforementioned binaries between inside/ outside, nature/culture and so forth, but also enacting the crowd as:

> an entirely corporeal, but at the same time *collective* subject. It is an individual entity that is not singular, but plural, or rather both at the same time, that is, the-one-who-is-many and the-many-who-are-one. (Ibid.: 67)

As seen above with the consideration of a collective consciousness, when combined with a conception of subjectivity as relational, porous and flexible, the workings of affect can be utilised to push our understandings of subjectivity, memory and belonging, and particularly how these processes are implicated in our investments and participation in media and other forms of cultural production.

Through the workings of affect, it is possible to locate certain embodied practices in which the bounded and singular self is disrupted and through which the complexity of subjective experience might become visible. By repositioning for instance the labour of modelling, a focus on affect can uncover how 'the body and the mind are simultaneously engaged, and that similarly reason and passion, intelligence and feeling, are employed together' (Hardt 2007: xi). Elizabeth Wissinger's (2007) exploration of fashion modelling engages with the intersubjective elements of modelling as a form of immaterial and affective labour. A now commonly utilised conception of contemporary labour forms emerging within the economies of late capitalism, immaterial labour is seen as work which 'creates immaterial products, such as knowledge, information, communication, a relationship, or an emotional response' (Hardt and Negri 2004: 108), affective labour as a subcategory of this as specifically work which manipulates 'a feeling of ease, well-being, satisfaction, excitement or

passion' (ibid.: 108). Wissinger's (2007) study is particularly pertinent to my intentions here, as rather than focusing on the particular beauty imagery or forms of body work perpetuated by the fashion industry, the framework of affective labour taps into how through this profession the body itself comes to function as a conduit of affect functioning on a non-conscious, pre-subjective level. Whilst the typical definition of affective labour accurately describes the conditions of modelling work as well as the fact that their labour is to manage and produce certain emotions, Wissinger extends this definition to define the affective work done by models as something distinct from emotional labour in that it occurs in an instinctive mode outside of conscious awareness, suggesting that:

> fashion models are valued for their ability to unleash a wide range of responses, responses that might shift or be modulated faster than they can be subjectively recognized as emotions. (Ibid.: 260)

By acting as a conduit for the flow of affects in this way, the model's body comes to signify the complexities of intercorporeal communication often functioning on a level that is not consciously articulated but something much more felt and experiential. This precisely mirrors my focus of investigation in this thesis, as taking as my focus a different kind of performance (as modelling could itself also be classified as a performance of sorts) I work to uncover how this affective communication occurs within the performance space, where not only is the body of the performer on stage the conduit of affect, but so are the various and multiple bodies of the audience members responding in relation to it and co-constituting subjectivities and a collective unconscious within the affective milieu of the space. In Chapter 5 of this thesis I argue that performance can be considered a form of affective labour, and in Chapter 6 further elaborate on the delicate manipulation of affective ambivalence seemingly required in these club settings.

Conclusion

As argued throughout this chapter, expressions of queer femininity appear to reach far beyond the superficial corporeal markers and adornments and in fact engage in a far more experiential and, crucially, relational element of subjectivity. How might the social and intersubjective milieu of a queer club

environment allow us to consider performance and spectatorship as processes through which subjects negotiate, manage and construct a liveable subject position? By locating queer performance within a dialogue between cultural studies, body theory and performance studies as I have done, we are able to focus on the affective and intercorporeal dimensions of experience being enacted and produced. The work set out here from performativity, corporeal feminism, phenomenology, the skin ego and work on affect provide a crucial conceptual and analytical apparatus through which I attempt to identify and understand the subjective processes occurring within these performance spaces. By extracting the concept of performativity from the limiting visual paradigm and instead focusing on the necessity to perform a liveable, intelligible subjectivity we can see how performance of any identity, whether everyday or on stage, is always deeply embedded in a sense of 'self' and the possibility of being in the world. By employing the concept of affect, I hope these deeper, more intersubjective processes will come to the surface rather than being obscured by the image of the external surface. As we have seen, the body is never singular, isolated or hermetically sealed from the influence of other bodies. This fluidity and engagement with other bodies through affective transmission and intercorporeality is precisely where the study of subjectivity can be pushed further within body studies, feminism, and cultural theory. Through the performance of multiple and ambivalent versions of 'self' as shown in the later chapters of this thesis, these performance spaces allow the transmission of affects that are constantly making and remaking the bodies and subjectivity of the collective and the individual within it. In performatively producing a sense of belonging, perhaps they are at the same time performing a particular kind of possibility for 'self'.

<u>Chapter 2 - Enacting the Balance: Performance Autoethnography and embodying the researcher/performer</u>

The queer trend that I am identifying is in many ways an effort to reclaim the past and put it in direct relationship with the present. Autoethnography is not interested in searching for some lost and essential experience, because it understands the relationship that subjects have with their own pasts as complicated yet necessary fictions. (Muñoz 1999: 82-3)

This thesis is based upon a research methodology that, although unconventional, has been developed from the ideas and techniques of a variety of important theorists whose own research has achieved outcomes related to those aspired to in this work. The empirical research took the form of a dynamic and interactive research *process,* combining several activities over an extended period of time, carried out and analysed reflexively. The aim was to encompass lived experience and particularly embodied subjectivity more intuitively than the static accounts of singular, impersonal encounters associated with traditional social science methods. This was achieved through in-depth autoethnography as the prime 'method' structuring this research, as elaborated in section 2.3. of this Chapter on research design. Two tandem complimentary questions guide the overarching rationale of this thesis, its impetus and imperative at the as-yet-underexplored intersection of performance studies and body theory:

What can a consideration of affect and embodied subjectivity bring to our understanding, interpretation and analysis of queer performance and queer performance spaces/cultures/communities?

How can a focus on performance and (collective) spectatorship augment and develop our understanding of the functioning of affect and its intersections with identity politics, performativity and subjectification?

Further, several more specific research questions guide the individual empirical chapters to follow:

Chapter 3: Why are Duckie, Bird Club and Wotever primary sites for exploring the above questions, and what does considering them together (and at the expense of others) bring to the fore?

Chapter 4: What does performance *do* for these performers? What tensions and potentials does it pose?

Chapter 5: What is at stake in these performance spaces for the audience? How does performance in these milieux revitalise the problematic of the one-and-the-many?

Chapter 6: How might a *weak* theory of 'affective publics' allow for a theoretically rigorous and yet nuanced understanding of the cultures of queer performance, and the myriad interactions and affects circulating within and through them?

In addition to myself, the participants for this thesis fall into two primary categories: performers/artists involved in the queer alternative scene in London who actively participate in the construction and performance of self conscious queer femininity through performance art, cabaret, burlesque and other activities staging a constructed femininity; and audience members who are reasonably familiar 'regulars' with what I am for the purpose of this thesis terming the London queer performance scene. This scene is identified as revolving primarily around the club nights Duckie, Bird Club and the collection of events and activities taking place under the 'Wotever' label, including Club Wotever and Wotever Cabaret but primarily the weekly open-stage Bar Wotever. These three clubs along with a number of other more occasional or newly formed collectives have relatively similar objectives and share many performers and audience members, yet are distinct from one another. Grouping these three clubs together and excluding others is purely an analytical strategy I employ in order to think beyond individual performances or specific clubs/ spaces and consider these social spaces more holistically. This 'scene' has no ontological status outside of my theorising it as such on these pages. My rationale and justification for this strategy is addressed in more detail in Chapter 3, as the autoethnographic nature of the discussion demands it follows, rather

than precedes, my exploration of method. Chapter 3 also points towards my concerns in Chapter 6 of this thesis, wherein I strategically allow my grouping of these three spaces to come apart in order to make room for some of the ethnographic richness than might be obscured by a unifying generalised approach.

In the spirit of collaboration and collectivity in ethnographic research, I follow Zemirah Moffat (2008) in calling my research participants *protagonists*.[25] This strategy is intended to convey a complex and collaborative research relationship belied by the traditional researcher/participant coupling, or the even colder researcher/informant distinction. The performers and regular attendees of these clubs featured in this thesis were (and continue to be) far more to me than sources of data. They are friends, acquaintances and colleagues. They are also all intelligent, passionate and proactive individuals producing and supporting a 'scene' that they believe in. Indeed, their very willingness to participate in my research stemmed from their proactive desire to participate in the ongoing an collaborative task of queer world-making.[26] Their experiences and stories moulded and shaped this thesis, provided its imperative, and challenged my expectations. Whilst, under the logic of autoethnography, my role and experiences within the research are significant, this is an ensemble cast. Their insightful reflections and fascinating stories speak for themselves, and are more interesting and inspirational than anything I could have said on their behalf.

By engaging both performers and audience members, as well as paying attention to the atmosphere and experience of the events themselves and the social network surrounding them I have found ways of talking (and writing) about what is circulated through this community that extends beyond, but incorporates, individuals' own stories and experiences. Between individual and group interviews with both groups of protagonists, and more ethnographic methods including field notes and analysis of performances I hope to gain an insight into the queer performance 'scene' and its associated milieu, and thus what narratives, experiences and affects are being transmitted therein. It has

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[25] It is a pleasing (yet unintentional) parallel that two of my protagonists here are in fact also hers: Joephine Krieg (then Wilson) and Maria Mojo were two of the key figures in Moffat's innovative exploration and documenting of Wotever World.

[26] I elaborate on the significance of this world-making, and particularly the role of performance in this cultural practice, in Chapter 6 of this thesis.

been suggested that performance, particularly queer or feminist live art, functions as a form of community of affect, within which individual and collective experiences of corporeality, shared narratives of trauma and exclusion and a celebration of the materiality of bodies and pleasure are circulated in embodied, intersubjective and intercorporeal ways (Blackman 2011b). I explore the subjective experiences of my protagonists as they construct and negotiate their own embodied experience in the face of normative gender ideals, identity politics and community interaction.

Following a short disclaimer regarding my ethical imperatives, the remainder of this chapter is split into two primary sections. Section 2.2. sets up the fundamental rationale of the thesis that informs the choice of particular objects of analysis, positioning feminist epistemology and queer theory as the key structuring principles of the design and method of this thesis. A discussion of ontology and epistemology provide the fundamental position and structure of the 'knowledge' that will be produced, which is firmly based in a queer imperative to disrupt binary categorisation and boundaries and a feminist commitment to the partiality and situatedness of knowledge. Section 2.3. covers the research design, outlining and adjusting the particular methods used in this project and discussing them in terms of their use and appropriateness for answering the research questions.

2.1. A note on ethics

In writing this thesis I encountered a peculiar dilemma of ethics familiar to fellow practitioners of collaborative or autoethnography: that of bias and criticality. As my research has progressed I have become increasingly immersed in the scene in question. These clubs have become my home, and my protagonists and other inhabitants of the spaces have come to form a significant portion of my social circle. I find myself as committed to their intentions and objectives as the organisers, and share the continuing fondness for these spaces of other regular audience members. Whilst this life/work crossover has been explored in depth by the proponents of creative methodologies that are discussed below, an imperative for objective criticality lingers in the academy, and the difficulty of achieving this when so involved and connected with the subject of one's research must be addressed. As a member of this 'scene', I am supportive of

these clubs, continue to have enjoyable experiences and a sense of belonging within them, and would not wish to compromise their continued running in any way. As a researcher, I am interested in these very experiences from a critical perspective, but I use critical here in the sense of detailed and rigorous analysis, not in the sense of negative or disparaging judgement. I have attempted to be faithful to my dual position by addressing incidences of conflict or tension, and doing so without judgement, taking instead the view that discord is productive and necessary (more on this in Chapter 6).

2.2. Thinking knowing differently: Queer theory and feminism

This thesis owes a great debt to the work of feminist and queer theorists of the preceding decades that have revolutionised the possibilities of what academic writing can look like, engage with, and do. This section sets out how work on feminist epistemology and the quest for situated knowledge opened the doors for theorising and critical academic work that addressed rather than concealed the position of the researcher and the process of the research itself, and how this intersects with the incentive of queer theorising to destabilise taken for granted binaries. In accordance with this epistemology it is crucial to confront not only the use of specific research methods but also how they are connected to the methodological framework, epistemology and ontology of this thesis. In setting out the ideological positions that lead to particular theories of knowledge and the objects of research, I wish to stress the importance of reflexivity and ground any 'knowledge' produced through this research as truly situated and embodied by myself as researcher, performer and 'regular' of the site(s) of my analysis. Strongly influenced by the work of Donna Haraway (1988), I am avoiding any claim to universal or objective truth by situating the account produced here firmly within my specific and partial perspective and context of the research process itself.

2.2.1. Feminist Epistemology

This thesis is firmly embedded in the endeavours of what is often referred to as feminist epistemology. In discussions of science and technology feminist scholars have been suspicious of masculinist claims to universal truth and objective knowledge made by privileged white male researchers, and

reactions to this have primarily concerned issues of reflexivity and the sources and basis of knowledge. Through this framework feminists have highlighted and confronted the connections between particular research methods, methodological theoretical frameworks, epistemology and ontology and the ways they are implicated in one another. By exploring these same issues and their interconnections here, this thesis hopes to uphold the aspirations of situated knowledge as a possible mid-point between the biased, restrictive paradigm of positivism and the endless individualism and contradictions of relativism. The intention of this thesis is not to produce 'objective' disembodied truth but rather to use an intersubjective methodology to achieve a situated knowledge figured through both epistemology and methodology. The importance of reflexivity for feminist research has been widely discussed, but it has been suggested by some that although acknowledging the position of the researcher is crucial, it is also vital to explore the actual process of knowledge production in order to be truly reflexive (Stanley 1990: 3-4). Stanley's discussion of the possibility of a feminist 'praxis' attempts to move away from the allocation of certain methods as inherently 'feminist', instead focusing on how feminism as a perspective, epistemology and ontology influence the nature and process of research. She highlights the importance of recognising the academic mode of production, which she analyses in Marxist terms of relations and forces of production and labour, stating how the concealment of labour in the research process through the write-up create an '*alienated knowledge*' (ibid.: 11) that cannot be reconciled with feminist ethics.

Much writing on the process of 'feminist research' has been focused around discrediting certain methods (particularly quantitative ones) as inherently 'male' and inappropriate for feminist research. However, this approach has also been criticised as relying heavily on the assumed unity of categories such as 'women' and 'oppression' (Stanley and Wise 1990: 21-2). Feminist standpoint epistemology was developed as a form of 'grounded analysis of women's material realities' (ibid.: 25) to incorporate reflexivity and the variation between individual's experiences, but was found by many to still be preoccupied with method rather than exploring the subtleties of methodology and epistemology. Theorists such as Harding (1986) have focused on the connections between these issues and suggested that in making a claim to a more objective truth, standpoint epistemology could be seen as a 'successor science' open to a

number of criticisms. Yet even Harding's account of feminist epistemology is challenged as being reductive in its failure to truly account for the possible pluralism of feminist standpoints and lack of engagement with other radical feminisms (Stanley and Wise 1990: 28). Under feminist epistemology all knowledge models are troubling and must be questioned, and it is important to always be attentive to the process of research and knowledge production as well as the position of the researcher, as 'judgements of truth are always and necessarily made relative to the particular framework or context of the knower' (ibid.: 41).

The key figure in discussions of feminist epistemology is the work of Donna Haraway (1988, 2004). Haraway coined the term 'situated knowledge' in an attempt to navigate the issues of objectivity in feminist science debates and suggest that feminists should strive for a true reflexivity that renders disembodied objectivity impossible and irrelevant:

> I would like a doctrine of embodied objectivity that accommodates paradoxical and critical feminist science projects: Feminist objectivity means quite simply *situated knowledges*. (Haraway, 1988: 581)

In romanticising the perspective of the subjugated as more 'innocent' and objective, she warns, relativism becomes as dangerous as totalisation in providing limiting accounts that are read as coherent truth. Instead she employs the metaphor of embodied vision and viewpoints to consider other ways of seeing and achieving 'partial, locatable, critical knowledges sustaining the possibility of webs of connections called solidarity in politics and shared conversations in epistemology' (ibid.: 584). The responsibility for locating claims to knowledge lies in the impossibility of defining a cohesive subject position for the researcher and is closely related to the basic flaw of identity politics that relies on a unified subject with a fixed and true identity. Therefore Haraway advocates consciously maintaining a 'partial perspective' that is faithful to the particular position from which it is generated as well as the possibility of other viewpoints. This partiality emphasises the split nature of the subject and draws on connections with others and communally constructed knowledge to break down dichotomies and allow room for ambiguity, contradiction and irony (ibid.: 590-4).

Haraway's (2004) seminal text on the practice of feminist research employs an explicit image to represent this splitting: the cyborg. As a symbol of

hybridity, the cyborg signifies a blurring of boundaries beyond the implied human/machine distinction, it calls into question the categorisation of nature/ culture, self/other, subject/object and also destabilises the very construction of binary forms. The partial, fractured perspective denoted by the cyborg dispenses with the problematic concept of a fixed, complete identity that implicates organisation around 'difference' and suggests a more transgressive model of affinity and coalition on the grounds of 'permanently partial identities and contradictory standpoints' (ibid.: 13). Essentially, the role of the cyborg for thinking about feminist research practice is that of disrupting seemingly clearly demarcated boundaries and the establishment of a 'border war' not only between human and machine but in all binaries, setting out the 'argument for *pleasure* in the confusion of boundaries and for *responsibility* in their construction' (ibid.: 8). As an exercise in disrupting and blurring boundaries this research follows Haraway's suggestion that '[c]yborg imagery can suggest a way out of the maze of dualisms in which we have explained our bodies and our tools to ourselves' (ibid.: 39).

This feminist epistemology of situated knowledge and the blurring of boundaries has been tested in practice through various examples of feminist cultural criticism. Nancy K. Miller's (1991) seminal text *Getting Personal: Feminist Occasions and other Autobiographic Acts* simultaneously makes a case for and enacts personal criticism, providing theorising that is deeply situated, embodied and indebted to narrative, fiction and autobiography. Preferring 'the gossipy grain of situated writing to the academic sublime' (ibid.: xi), Miller challenges the simple binary of public/private inherent in all academic writing, suggesting feminists must reclaim theory and the process of theorising through the personal. Self-display, emotion, excess and affect are all viable sources and aspects of critical enquiry, allowing for 'an explicitly autobiographic performance within the act of criticism' (ibid.: 1) and a self-consciousness about the process of theorising that is concealed in theory that claims objective distance. This focus on process is central to my aims here, as the experience and practice of carrying out the research from my complex position as researcher, performer, and participant is vital to the account being created.

The centrality of processes of cultural criticism is also evident in Jane Gallop's (2002) collection of her explorations in anecdotal theory, wherein she develops Miller's credo for the personal. Emphasising the importance of

carrying out theorising (as a verb) rather than producing theory (as a noun), Gallop proposes anecdotes as a site for thinking dynamically in a way that is precluded by the seriousness of academic writing, and like Miller, espouses the potential of embodied, affective experiences for thinking critically. Gallop argues that anecdotes can allow the binaries of humorous/serious, short/grand, trivial/ overarching and specific/general to be broken, 'in order to produce theory with a better sense of humour, theorising which honours the uncanny detail of lived experience (ibid.: 2). Much like Stanley and Wise (1990), Haraway (1988, 2004) and Miller (1991) discussed above, Gallop (2002) renounces the (supposed but inevitably false) objectivity of academic writing, locating her theorising explicitly in the very incident that motivated it (namely her experience of being accused of sexual harassment by a student). Though anecdotes per se are not the object of analysis for the theorising taking place on these pages, I take from Gallop (and Miller) a commitment to the personal, affective and embodied minutiae of lived experience as sites from which dynamic theorising can emerge. The research design of this thesis, as I set out below, has been carefully composed with the intention of accessing this personal, embodied level of lived experience through dynamic dialogic encounters, self-reflexivity, and creative experimentation. I am thus positioning this thesis in relation to the intersecting traditions of feminist work (for example Probyn 1993, Walkerdine 1990 and 1998) as well as sociology (Thornton 1995, Wacquant 2004), more philosophical work emerging from body theory (Nancy 2000b, Varela 2001, Sobchack 2010) and what can be broadly termed the turn to affect (Cho 2008, Hamera 2005, Stewart 2007) that have all utilised personal experience and autobiography to examine subjectivity and the process of academic writing and research. The particular practices being analysed and the unorthodox, hybrid method suggested here sustain the call for personal criticism and situated knowledge. By remaining attentive to the partial perspective from which this knowledge is generated, I hope to remain faithful to my complex position as researcher, performer, regular audience member, acquaintance, and friend, as well as to my own identity as a fat queer femme.

2.2.2. Queer(ing) Methods

The emergence in the last two decades of the field generally referred to as queer theory is both theoretically and methodologically significant to this thesis. Characterised by a desire to challenge naturalised identities and confront categorisation and strict boundaries ties much of queer theory to Butler's (1990, 1993, 2004) work on performativity and gender as discussed in Chapter 1, but the related issue of how to negotiate a sense of belonging outside the essentialist structure of inherent connection has been another key theme of much of this work. The desire to escape essentialist categories and deterministic identities seen in queer theory has opened great potential but also created the problematic issue of how to figure a sense of belonging and embodied connection outside of these limitations. A primary aspiration of this thesis is to advance the previous work of queer theorists in destabilising the traditional categories of sex, gender and identity. This breaking down of naturalised categories is the specific domain of the work of Judith Halberstam (1998, Volcano and Halberstam 1999), whose investigations of female masculinity have highlighted disruptions to the heterosexual matrix and the assumed coherence between sex, gender and sexual orientation. In a collaborative exploration of Drag Kings with gender variant photographer Del LaGrace Volcano (1999), Halberstam points out how conscious performances of gender readable as drag are often temporal, purely theatrical and not necessarily tied to particular sexual or gendered identities such as lesbianism, 'butch'-ness or transgender, despite frequent assumptions of continuities between the on and off-stage personas of such performers. This work is an important starting point for this research as a dialectically related exploration of the possibility of re-appropriating particular gendered performances outside of heteronormative identification. When Halberstam claims that although drag is so often linked with queerness and gender digression it is in fact possible for feminine hetero- or homosexual women to 'produce a camp mingling of femininity and masculinity' (ibid.: 150) through drag she opens up the line of analysis that takes place within this thesis, wherein this 'mingling' occurs not only between the categories of masculinity and femininity, but of many other related distinctions, including inside/outside and audience/performer. She also lays the path for this work through her development of a 'queer methodology'

that is interdisciplinary and flexible, combining elements of literary, historical and cultural analysis to incorporate a variety of texts, images, popular culture references and subject positions:

> I call this methodology "queer" because it attempts to remain supple enough to respond to the various locations of information on female masculinity and betrays a certain disloyalty to conventional disciplinary methods. (Halberstam 1998: 10)

A mistrust of disciplinary conventions and of assumed or implied continuity and unity throughout history leads her to present a 'perverse presentism' analysing a selection of historical accounts and case studies borrowing from Foucault's genealogical method in *The History of Sexuality* (Foucault, 1976). Similarly to the construction of novel identities such as the male homosexual pointed out by Foucault, Halberstam (1998) questions the now naturalised identity category of 'lesbian' as produced through twentieth century feminist discourse and intrinsically tied to contemporary ideas of gender and sexuality, but often used unquestioningly in historical analyses of sexual activity between women (ibid.: 50-2). This leaves us with a 'scavenger methodology' which 'refuses the academic compulsion toward disciplinary coherence' (ibid.: 13), and instead allows her to provide us with a selection of sites in which she sees female masculinity emerging and to analyse them on their own terms. Drawing together historical accounts of character types such as the 'tommy', contemporary and misunderstood identities like the 'stone butch', specific sexual practices such as Tribadism and the issues of categorisation and border distinctions raised around the subtleties of butch and trans* FTM subjectivities allows Halberstam the fluidity to engage with the contradictions and discontinuities presented without substituting or excluding each other.

By examining female masculinity through these contrasting sites we uncover how masculinity is constructed, and can begin to unpick and circumvent the ways in which it is associated with maleness. One of my aims in this thesis is to do the same with femininity, scrutinising how queer femininity problematises associations with female heterosexuality and the ties between 'feminine' attributes like passivity and feminine appearance. However, what is latent in Halberstam's accounts of female masculinity, particularly in *The Drag King Book* (1999), is the intersubjective nature of these identities and

performances: how they are constructed and supported between and in relation to other members and outsiders of the communities or subcultures in question. It is this relationality that is the primary concern of this thesis, and the construction of femininity or femme acts as a site of visibility for exploring this collectivity. Del LaGrace Volcano and Ulrika Dahl's *Femmes of Power* (2008) which opened Chapter 1 of this thesis has begun to more explicitly explore this intersection, posing the use of femininity as a tool for undermining and challenging heteronormativity, and as a site of connection between individuals who may or may not share the same identities or conception of them. In portraying a subversive femininity performed by a variety of women defining themselves as in some way queer, this project works to 'push femininity and point to its artifice, as constructed and plumed, beyond the strict gender codes [of society]' (Bird La Bird quoted in Volcano and Dahl 2008: 71).[27] The research design of this thesis extends this imperative, beginning with accounts of femme/ feminine identities, but ultimately focusing on how they are 'always in relation, situated, but accountable for and speaking from more than our self-appointed positions' (Volcano and Dahl 2008: 26).

Two other authors whose distinctly queer ethnographic works inspire this thesis are Esther Newton (1979, 1993, 2000) and Samuel Delany (1999). Newton's (1979) pioneering ethnography of drag queens is seminal to my aims in the archiving and documenting of marginalised LGBT communities and cultures, but also in its recounting not only of performances, but also of the social interactions, conditions and cultures surrounding them and the performers. Newton's holistic study addresses intersubjective relationships, identity, the particularities of individual performances and even the impact the layout of clubs can have on the atmosphere to provide 'an invaluable historical document, at once photograph and X-ray of the gay male world on the edge of historic changes' (ibid.: xiv). Her later work, documenting the gay beach resort Cherry Grove (1993) and various aspects and issues relating to lesbian, feminist and butch identification (2000) utilise oral history and narrative recounting of personal experience in tandem with ethnographic methods to provide theorising that is both revolutionary and moving. Echoing the 'gossipy grain' of Miller's personal criticism (1991: xi), Newton's experiments with

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[27] Another parallel lies in the subjects of Volcano and Halberstam's book, and my protagonists, as Bird la Bird, Maria Mojo and Josephine Krieg (then Wilson) are featured in both.

ethnographic method facilitate ways of rethinking social science that can account for situated knowledge and personal experience, disrupt binary categorisation, and explore intersubjective connection. Delany's (1999) intensely personal and exposing account of his experience of New York's sexual underworld and the sanitisation of Times Square similarly provides rich, evocative and sensuous detail that would be impossible to convey in any other form than the personal, narrative account of the essay *Times Square Blue* (1999). His methodology is, like Halberstam's (1998), fundamentally queer - it disrupts the norms and distinctions of usual academic writing and disciplines and brings the gritty and corporeal reality of sex and urban existence to life. Like Miller (1991) and Gallop (2002) above, Delany (1999) addresses the personal, the embodied, and the seemingly trivial detail of daily life in order to theorise and think differently about gentrification, class, race and sexuality in a specific temporal and spatial context. My imperative in this thesis is undoubtedly a feminist and a queer one, and I take the works of Miller (1991), Gallop (2002), Halberstam (1998, 2005), Volcano (1999, 2008), Newton (1979, 1993, 2000) and Delany (1999) as models of the kind of theorising I intend to carry out on these pages.

2.3. Research Design

The methods that were used in this research have been developed through and in compatibility with the aforementioned methodological and epistemological concerns, and were employed as the most appropriate tools to answer the research questions. The commitment to multiplicity, discursive production of objects and hybridity discussed above generated a level of mistrust of strict categorisation and knowledge systems and therefore made it very difficult to follow most traditional social science research methods whilst remaining faithful to this theoretical position. For this reason an innovative, hybrid methodology drawn from various forms of creative qualitative research was developed and utilised to fully appreciate the complexities of the subjective experience being researched. Although quantitative methods have been used successfully in a wide range of social and cultural research and can provide statistical significance and generalisable results, they are entirely unsuitable for this topic due to the richness of detail and understanding of often contradictory elements

required of this research. Qualitative methods have been criticised for their perhaps inevitable subjectiveness, but the suspicion of objective truth claims and importance of reflexivity at the core of much qualitative research foregrounds the contextual nature of knowledge and the research process itself in a way that is necessary for work grounded in a constructionist approach to social science. The attempt to translate and apply certain validity criteria similar to those used in quantitative research has been suggested by some to be irrelevant because of the fundamentally different nature of qualitative research that is context dependent and therefore cannot be placed in a hierarchy of more or less 'valid' versions (cf. Smith 1984). However, there are caveats to the unsystematic use of qualitative methods in an attempt to avoid any challenges of validity and certain issues must be considered. Whilst many theorists have discussed the difficulty of outlining criteria for the assessment of creative methodologies such as autoethnography, they have generally also provided some indication of evaluative measures, such as the importance of generating cultural criticism, theoretical reflection, reflexivity, and reader impact (cf. Bochner 2000, Clough 2000, Denzin 2000 and Richardson 2000).

The research process of this thesis can be roughly divided into three areas or phases. The first phase consists of a set of seven audio-recorded one-to-one interviews with key performers of queer femininity on the London scene. The performers - Amy Lamé, Bird la Bird, Killpussy, Maria Mojo, Emelia Holdaway, Jet Moon and Josephine Krieg, were chosen because of their self-identification as queer feminine women (whether tied to the label of 'femme' or not) as well as the significance of their work to the performance of queer femininity and their participation in the clubs discussed here. The one-to-one interviews were unstructured and undertaken in the style of the psychosocial method of interviewing (Hollway and Jefferson 2000) discussed below, to access the narratives that provided the central themes around which the later research was structured (more on this below). These interviews were then complimented with a more dynamic video-recorded group discussion with a selection of performers, based on themes emerging from their individual interviews to draw out the more intersubjective and shared elements of their accounts.

The second phase of the research was primarily concerned with audience members of the performance spaces that are at the centre of this

thesis. Working from my own participation in this scene, regular attendees of Bar Wotever, Bird Club and Duckie were gathered for group interviews discussing their experiences of the environment and performances they witness at these events. Protagonists for this phase were gathered primarily on a snowballing basis, and whilst I disseminated business cards and utilised mailing lists, the social networks I had developed proved far more effective for recruiting willing protagonists. The groups were therefore relatively self-selecting, although attention was paid to striving for a good level of diversity within the groups. Where appropriate organisers or significant figures within the clubs were utilised to gain access to groups that fall outside of my social network (such as the group of gay male Duckie regulars who I was not aquatinted with, but who responded to a request sent out on my behalf by Duckie producer Simon Casson). I intentionally structured the groups around already existing friendships and acquaintances in order to ensure a natural flow of conversation and familiarity amongst them, as the sterility of a formal exchange would likely have limited the affective engagement of the group.

Partly for this reason, and partly in keeping with my ethical consideration outlined above in relation to my calling them protagonists, I refer to the individual and group interviews throughout this thesis as *conversations*. Whilst they were constructed research encounters with a degree of formality beyond a naturally occurring conversation, the term conversation reflects the dialogic nature of these intersubjective exchanges. It also indicates the informality and relative autonomy of the discussions - with the content initiated by the protagonists and their responses to one another rather than my guidance or prompting. Whilst I did ask questions and facilitate the flow of discussion, as is necessary in such situations, my role was far closer to that of a participant in a conversation than an interviewer or mediator. I therefore feel it is unfaithful to my experience of those encounters to objectivise them as 'interviews' and to claim ownership or responsibility for them or my protagonists words and insights. They were not encounters in which I extracted data from 'participants', they were engaged, dynamic conversations in which we all shared, discussed, debated and listened. The group conversations also engaged verbal discussion on a more interactive level through the use of photographs from the performance nights in order to facilitate discussion. The recordings of the one-to-one and the group conversations were all fully transcribed, the audio

supplemented with my notes from the encounters in order to include the affective resonances that are difficult to capture in audio or video recording.[28] Throughout this thesis I utilise quotes from the conversations indicated by single quotation marks (or indented where longer passages are quoted), followed by the protagonist's name in parentheses. Quotes from performances or other material are indicated by double quotation marks and referenced with the performer's name and the title of the piece.

This was also complemented with the third area of research, extensive autoethnographic field notes taken over a two year period of my own observations and experiences of the various events that make up this 'scene' and cultural milieu as well as the performances themselves. This began in earnest in September 2009, continuing until September 2011, during which I attended almost every event hosted by Bird Club, Duckie and Wotever World in London, as well as performing several times at the three clubs.[29] During or shortly after these events I made notes paying particular attention to the affective intensities I observed or experienced. These field notes also contribute to the analyses of performances presented within this thesis, as do my memories and photographic and video documentation of them. The notes are kept in handwritten notebooks, typed up and quoted in the thesis where applicable. Staggering the research encounters over a number of months allowed me to be attentive to the dynamic nature of my protagonists' experiences and stories, remaining faithful to the processual nature of subjectivity by exploring the contradictions and different perspectives or accounts given at different times.

It is worth noting at this stage the significant shift this thesis undertook once the initial phase of research had begun. Originally conceived as an examination of queer femininity as constructed and expressed through club performance, the stories of my performer protagonists in our initial conversations took me in an entirely unexpected direction. What stood out from my early interviews were themes of autobiography and collective narratives, the catharsis of performance, relationality and connection with the audience, and a

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[28] These transcriptions are included as pdf documents in the Appendices of this thesis, on accompanying CD.

[29] On rare occasions other commitments prevented me from attending particular events, and both Duckie and Wotever hosted events abroad during this time, which due to financial and time pressures I was unable to attend.

sense of particular clubs (Duckie, Bird Club and Wotever) as set apart from others (more on this in Chapter 3). Simultaneously, my experiences attending the clubs in which my performer protagonists perform led me to consider the feelings of belonging and community circulating within them, the ambivalent significance of identity politics and how attendees constructed and performed their subjectivity, and the affective intensities engendered by the performances. Hence there may appear to be a disjuncture between the first phase of my research, which engages explicitly queer femme/feminine identified individuals, and the second phase in which the identity of my protagonists is of less significance. A disjuncture, but not an incongruity. As I increasingly discovered through the ways in which femme and non-femme queer audience members related and responded to the work of my performer protagonists, what is significant in these performances is not the matter of femininity or femme, it is the matter of subjectivity, of cultural survival and of belonging expressed through it. Following up these early indications, then, I modified my research design to accommodate these themes, and to make clear that whilst femme or queer femininity is a prime example of an identity through which these issues can be addressed, it is not the only one, and it is these universal narratives contained within it, rather than the identity itself, with which most of the audience identify.

2.3.1. Creative Methodologies

The research design of this thesis takes its inspiration from a range of projects located in varied disciplines and dealing with diverse subject matter, but all engaged in creative methodologies in an attempt to access lived and embodied experience to a degree rarely captured by traditional methods. Although the subject matter is rather different, the ethical and epistemological concerns of Kay Inckle's (2007) study of scarring and self harm are very close to this research and form a strong methodological link. In investigating normative femininity and pathology through the practice of self injury, Inckle seeks out 'how embodiment could operate as a methodological ethic and practice of knowledge and representation' (ibid.: 6). Suspicious of traditional research methods and the over-intellectualisation and concrete conclusions required by them, she sees creative methods as allowing for more nuance and ethical engagement as well as a greater potential for a transformative

experience for the researcher, participants and readers. Inckle provides an embodied, highly reflexive account with a strong feminist research ethic that I particularly identify with. Informed by the principles of autoethnography despite focusing primarily on participants' narratives, she blends her own experiences and reactions to the research process with the accounts provided by her participants through interviews and their own creative work. I see in her work an indication of the desire to break down boundaries both theoretically and methodologically that this thesis is working towards, whereby not only are questions of subject/object and inside/outside challenged, but we also see some bridging of the gulf between researcher and participant, lived experience and theory, and research process and product.

I also see an intersection between the conceptual framework and methodological imperative of this thesis and Julian Henriques' (2008, 2010) investigation of the vibrations of affect in Jamaican dancehall culture and events, as discussed in Chapter 1. Although this work is again very different in subject matter, Henriques' methodology provides a crucial insight into how to study the 'milieu' associated with a social scene and crystallised in particular events. Through his in-depth ethnographic account of the dancehall scene in Kingston, Jamaica, Henriques develops a methodology of 'sounding,' a combination of observation, participation and, most crucially, *listening*. Whilst the musical focus of Henriques' object of study inevitably places an emphasis on sound and sound vibrations in a way that does not directly translate to the performance events that are being investigated here, his study of the particularities of a scene and the contexts and specificities of particular events, actions or moments within the larger whole are directly related to this research. By paying attention to what he calls the material, corporeal and ethereal vibrations of 'sounding', Henriques is able to analyse the milieu of the dancehall scene in a way that draws together the particular embodied experience of the crowd, the environment and the cultural context of the event of the dancehall session. Although the 'material' vibrations of the music, equipment and soundwaves discussed are not as directly relevant here, the corporeal vibrations as 'the embodied sensory sensitivities and performance practices of the crew and the "crowd" (audience)' (Henriques 2008: 106) speak directly to how the performers and audience members on the queer performance scene manage and speak about their position within it. Similarly the 'ethereal'

vibrations of the scene itself set up a sense of the milieu I am hoping to access in this research:

> the customs and practices, seasonal calendar, cycles of style and fashion, lingo and so on – the "vibes" of the ambience, atmosphere and feelings the session generates… [t]hese ethereal vibrations are embodied in the crowd's way of doing and knowing with attitude, fashion and indeed life-style and way of life. (Ibid.:111)

Through the metaphor of sound, Henriques is able to draw together the component parts of the dancehall scene that would be lost in straightforward discussion of the performers, engineers or other individuals involved within it, accessed only through interview interactions. Direct participation and detailed ethnographic field notes allow Henriques an entry point into discussing this 'milieu' of associated feelings, experiences and practices that are not explicitly related to the performance of the event itself, but form a vital part of the atmosphere and experience as a whole. By borrowing from Henriques and using field notes that pay attention to the more 'ethereal vibrations' of the events in addition to the performances and performers' accounts, I hope to also access this milieu and draw out the intersubjective and corporeal elements that make up the specific temporal event, and the scene and community as a whole.

2.3.2. Experimental Ethnographies

In taking human subjects and their experiences as the primary research objects, this thesis takes up certain strands of the common social science method of ethnography, in particular autoethnography. This, in part due to the creative imperative of this work and in part due to the subject matter involved, is supplemented with some conceptual guidance from the method of performance ethnography, in order to develop the innovative research method I call 'performance autoethnography'. Whilst some of the key concerns of traditional anthropological use of this method, such as desire for 'naturalistic', realistic accounts and minimising (or obscuring) the impact of the researcher's presence are entirely irrelevant to the aims of this research, if we dispense with the concern of 'realism,' participant observation provides an interesting opportunity for researching subjectivity. Patricia Clough (1992) criticises the association between sociology and empirical science and the subsequent opposition of fact and fiction that occur, claiming:

not only that the ethnographic form exemplifies the narrative construction of factual representations of empirical reality, but that its narrative strategies are those of the mass media… Ethnography is the productive icon of empirical scientific authority. (Ibid.: 2)

She states that the criticisms of ethnography in recent years by sociologists and cultural theorists on the grounds of ethnocentrism and other forms of elitism that traditionally have underpinned the method are not sufficient, and it is in fact the fundamental issue of the 'realist narrative' around which ethnographic accounts are structured that makes ethnography problematic. By aligning themselves with empirical science and fact, sociology and particularly ethnography obscure their relation to fiction, narrative and mass media and how they are 'adjusted' to one another. In emphasising the importance of the relationship between sociology and the humanities rather than science, Clough suggests sociology should be seen more as a form of 'social criticism' (ibid.: 137) that offers readings of particular representations and experiences rather than facts garnered from empirical data. As a project located at the intersection between cultural studies, body theory and performance studies, this thesis takes up Clough's call for empirical work that nonetheless has an affinity to the humanities, and subsequently arts and humanities methods. This unique positioning, I argue, allows me to access both the texture and detail that can be lost through more scientifically-inflected sociological methods, and the sense of lived experience, relation and holistic view that more traditional textual analysis of performances alone risks overlooking. Performance autoethnography, thus, is a method devised not only in order to bridge the gap(s) between body theory and performance studies, but also to bring together the empirical methods of sociology with creative forms of expression and re-presentation. Another key proponent of transforming ethnography as a method of innovative cultural research is Norman K. Denzin. His critique focuses on the inability for traditional ethnographic method and presentation as depersonalised academic text to incorporate the multiple and shifting voices present in any account (Denzin, 1997). Through an emphasis on the power of performance in ethnography he highlights the falsity of a written text as a static representation of reality, and the limitation of the visual metaphor for knowledge prevalent in social science discourse (as also pointed out by Haraway 1988, discussed above) that obscures the complex interplay of subject/object enacted by the ethnographic

researcher who acts as voyeur but is also seen, observed as he is observing (Denzin 1997: 35). Drawing on radical and avant-garde theatre forms such as those developed by Bertolt Brecht (1964) and Antonin Artaud (1970), Denzin (1997) explores the differences between presentation and representation, and the potential for stylised performance that is not focused on realism as a way of escaping the text-centred approach concerned with truth that is so prevalent in social science. Denzin's (2003) focus on the power of performance as ethnographic object and method intersects with his desire for research as an emancipatory, collaborative and reciprocal experience. In highlighting how ethnographers themselves perform culture as they write it, Denzin engages with the processual and dynamic nature of research that I propose in this thesis, tapping into the aforementioned imperative of queer theory that '[i]n this interactionist epistemology, context replaces text, verbs replace nouns, structures become processes' (ibid.: 16).

Some researchers such as Carolyn Ellis (2004) have developed the method of autoethnography as a technique to avoid the limitations of traditional ethnography whilst carrying out cultural research. Defined as a 'methodological novel' and presented in a narrative style as a fictional tale yet interweaving theory with story, fact with fiction and writing with practice, Ellis' seminal text on the subject acts both as an example and a discussion of autoethnography as a creative, flexible and dynamic method for cultural research. In focusing on individual and personal experiences told through concrete details, emotions and embodied action, Ellis proposes the potential of Autoethnography as a method that allows connections to be drawn between the personal and the cultural, social, and political, and how '[b]y exploring a particular life, I hope to understand a way of life' (ibid.: xvii). Like Clough (1992), she draws out the close links between qualitative social research and the humanities rather than science, purporting a social science that is creative and artful, and consequently also a messy, non-linear process that is dynamic, interactional and dialogic.

The unsuitability of traditional social science methods and need to modify and revise them has been a strong theme in the development of work on subjectivity, embodiment and affect. By creating distance between subjects and their experiences, many traditional research methods work to reinforce the Cartesian dualism many of these theorists are working against and is unable to fully incorporate issues of somatic experience, emotions and embodied

subjectivity (Ellis and Flaherty 1992). As such those researching subjectivity have been vindicated and encouraged in their endeavours of blending methods and principles from social science and the humanities to provide more interpretive, complex accounts that are not founded in a rationalist desire for truth, as exemplified in the essays in Ellis and Flaherty's edited collection that:

> rejuvenate various traditional interpretive procedures and advance new methodological techniques for examining emotional processes… Included among their methods and materials are interviews, participant observation, systematic introspection, performance, the analysis of archival records, and documents from mass media such as films, newspaper accounts, autobiographies, and novels. (Ibid.: 4)

The essays presented engage with various objects and subjects of research, employing poststructuralist analysis of narratives, performance of personal experience, exploration of the body and self through embodied experiences and poetic retelling of participants' stories to explore the complex issue of subjectivity in a way that disrupts sociological knowledge production and challenges the concepts of authorship, fact, agency and genre (Davies 1992, Ellis and Bochner 1992, Olesen 1992, Richardson 1992). These texts all work to provide a more nuanced and complex understanding of the subjective experience they are investigating than straightforward interviews, textual analysis or ethnography would have done, and by blending various techniques, writing styles and sources of information create a holistic approach that is able to respond to the unstable and unfinished, constructed and yet embodied experience of particular subject positions, life narratives or corporeal occurrences in precisely the way intended in this thesis.

Although the central narrative of this thesis is of experiences shared by myself and my protagonists and those enacted between us in the research process, this research design is strongly indebted to the principles of autoethnography and its insistence on the importance of collaboration, reflexivity, and interactive research process and creativity. Whilst part of what constitutes the 'data' of this research can be classified as 'participant observation' or 'field notes' as commonly seen in ethnography, these activities were undertaken in a far broader, more engaged and more flexible framework than associated with the traditional method, as outlined above. Paying attention to the questions of intersubjectivity and the cultural milieu of the events, the field

notes explore the function of shared narratives, affective communication and the sense of community created at these events and through specific performances, and how these points of reference act as intersubjective experiences of embodied identity. Taking my cue from Clough (1992), Denzin (1997, 2003) and Ellis (2004), this research shows a commitment to social criticism rather than science, the dynamic and processual nature of research and the importance of personal narratives and experiences while I attempt to engage with ethnography in a way that maximises its potential for understanding subjectivity.

2.3.3. Research Encounters

In addition to the field notes and personal reflection of autoethnography, this thesis does employ one very traditional social science research method that has been strongly associated with the rationalist and depersonalised type of research challenged above, namely the interview. The practice of utilising traditional social science methods but questioning and subverting them is a common tendency in feminist research that has often criticised particular methods as inherently masculinist in their approach. Whilst much contemporary cultural research relies heavily on the method of interviewing as an opportunity to gain insight into the opinions and information held by individuals, it has also been criticised as a masculinist paradigm organised around the masculine/ feminine characteristics of active researcher subject and passive research object (Oakley 1987). In describing the traditional methods of interviewing in which the interviewer gathers but does not share information and views the respondent as simply a source of data, Oakley highlights how this technique ignores the significance of the interview experience, concealing the process of knowledge production and therefore feeding into the disembodied claims of objectivity critiqued by feminists. She challenges the presumed necessity for the interviewer to balance the need for a rapport with the respondent with retaining a professional distance and stance of objectivity, claiming that '[b]oth interviewer and interviewee are thus depersonalised participants in the research process' (ibid.: 37). This tendency in traditional interview research is deemed irresponsible for feminists researching women, who must engage in a more reciprocal relationship with their participants not only out of moral motivation but also in order to gain better information. Not only is it unethical from a feminist

perspective to treat the interview participant as simply a source of information in this way, this unidirectional format eradicates the potential for reflexivity. Concealing the role of the researcher and the context of the interview situation and reducing the experiences of the participant to a singular verbal account, she claims, cannot possibly engage with the complexities of the subject experience or the variability of narratives individuals tell about themselves in different situations.

However, the stories and voices of participants themselves, regardless of whether they are an 'accurate' or 'true' account of reality, must be heard, and the personal experiences of my protagonists are crucial to this research. Therefore I have chosen to conduct interviews, though have made them significantly more dynamic, utilising rather than concealing the constructedness of the account provided therein by treating them as interactional, reflexive conversations, and drawing the experience gleaned from them together with information from other research activities to produce a more rounded account that does not reduce participants to their interview data. The interview style I have utilised is based on the psychosocial theory of the subject developed by Wendy Hollway, and her style of free-association narrative interviewing (Hollway and Jefferson 2000). In seeking to avoid the pitfalls of truth and meaning posed by interviews used in the manner of scientifically objective research, Hollway and Jefferson draw on the principles of psychoanalysis and the biographical-interpretive interview method used in life history research to work within the participant's meaning frames and elicit stories that, although constructed in a particular way within the interview situation, relate to concrete experiences in individuals' lives and can access the unconscious emotional undertones. As suggested by this method, I have asked open questions inviting participants to tell stories of particular events or experiences within their own meaning frames rather than focusing on providing what the researcher is looking for. This allowed the conversations to be structured around topics that my protagonists deemed significant, and enabled the thematic shift discussed above when this was different from what I had expected. Similarly being aware of the intersubjective elements of the interview situation and relationship between myself and the participant, I was conscious of the emotional subtext of the issues being discussed without relying on the protagonists being aware of or

able to articulate them when faced with questions structured around meaning frames they may not relate to.

Another method that appears to offer potential for this interactive, dialogic approach and a feminist endeavour is that of focus groups. Although emerging from the positivist paradigm used in market research, a slightly modified version of focus groups have been found to be particularly useful for the study of collective or group identity, as they are fundamentally concerned with joint construction of meaning between participants and 'the process of interaction, negotiation and affirmation through which such an identity is produced and sustained' (Munday 2006: 90). It has been noted that focus groups have been underappreciated and underused by feminist researchers despite countering two of the major dilemmas of decontextualised individualism and disempowering hierarchical relationships posed by many other methods (Wilkinson 1999). As a highly contextual method focusing on interaction and the construction of meaning in a particular social context and a non-hierarchical one wherein the position of the researcher in relation to the group of participants is much more ambiguous, focus groups can be an incredibly effective technique for feminist research. Even one of the commonly perceived 'flaws' of focus groups as a situation in which it can be difficult for the researcher to maintain control in fact becomes an advantage to the feminist researcher wishing to allow her participants to express their views on their own terms:

> As the aim of a focus group is to provide opportunities for a relatively free-flowing and interactive exchange of views, it is less amenable to the researcher's influence. (Ibid.: 70)

Particularly for this thesis, the emphasis on group construction of meaning makes it an indispensable method for investigating the intersubjective elements and shared experiences produced through different narratives within groups of individuals. It has been stated that:

> Focus groups are ideal for exploring people's experiences, opinions, wishes and concerns. The method is particularly useful for allowing participants to generate their own questions, frames and concepts and to pursue their own priorities on their own terms, in their own vocabulary. (Kitzinger and Barbour 1999: 5)

The freedom for participants to present the issues that they deem to be important and negotiate them independently of the motives of the researcher is

also important, both ethically (from a feminist perspective), but also methodologically in terms of the production of knowledge and the importance of reflexivity. Particularly as the subject matter of this research deals with potentially sensitive topics in the frank discussion of sexuality and other emotionally charged issues such as self esteem, it is significant that focus groups have been suggested as an advantageous method for research on 'sensitive' issues (Farquhar and Das 1999). Although issues such as confidentiality and consent have been cited as disadvantages of using focus groups to research topics deemed sensitive, Farquhar highlights how the method can in fact be more useful than individual interviews as a supportive group environment may encourage disclosure and the aforementioned freedom for participants to control the discussion themselves may allow them to negotiate taboos in unthreatening ways.

However, although focus groups are useful in their emphasis on the process and specific research situation, and the freedom and flexibility they provide for the participants to structure the conversation the focus on verbal accounts is still limiting in the potential for investigating subjectivity. In order to fully maximise the benefit of focus groups as a research method and engage in an embodied, intersubjective research experience, I engaged visual stimuli to encourage a more embodied and not purely linguistic experience. Photographer Jo Spence (1995) utilises the method of phototherapy for the deep emotional exploration of identity and self. Spence's work is credited as groundbreaking in discussing the personal in light of the cultural and challenging:

> the boundaries between inner and outer, private and public, personal and political; and in so doing to 'make strange' the distinctions which pervade our culture and shape the ways we think about ourselves and our lives. (Kuhn 1995: 19)

By experimenting with fantasy and possible 'selves' through staging photographs that reinvent or retell family photos, events or stories Spence's phototherapy method is able to explore the idea of culturally sanctioned acceptable 'selves', narratives and images whilst maintaining the subject as processual, fragmented and embodied and not reducible to arguments of representation (Martin and Spence 1986). Although staging photographs within the research encounter was beyond my capabilities in this research, I utilised some of the principles of phototherapy by using photographs and images of the

performance events as visual stimuli for the group conversations. This elicited precisely the discussion of particular versions of 'self' performed in different contexts and the implication of fantasy and desire noted by Spence (as explored further in Chapter 5).

Conclusion

This research emerges from a strong ideological position informed by queer theory, feminist epistemology and the study of subjectivity, combining a commitment to interdisciplinarity, hybridity, reflexivity and the importance of personal subjective experience. Therefore the research methods themselves are developed as extensions of these epistemological, ontological and ethical considerations, drawing from previous work in the areas of performance and cultural studies that has utilised similarly hybrid, creative methodologies. Modifying and intertwining several methods in this way the innovative research design of this thesis is uniquely capable of engaging with the complexities of such issues as embodiment and subjectivity. By amalgamating information from several sources of interaction with different protagonists, I have attempted to give them a voice without reducing them to their interview accounts, and utilise the inevitable 'constructedness' of all research encounters to explore how these subject positions, identities and objects such as femininity and the sense of community are constructed, performed and enacted repeatedly and in different contexts. The creative, dynamic and interactional research process of performance autoethnography is intended to engage with the affective, intersubjective and corporeal levels of experience in a way that would not be possible through more straightforward ethnography, interviews or textual analysis. Whilst it is never possible to give an accurate, full or 'true' account of subjective experience, I believe that the innovative and creative merging of several methods and principles of social and humanities research with a commitment to reflexivity and process as outlined above is the most effective and ethical way of deepening and developing our understanding of subjectivity, embodiment and personal and social experience.

Chapter 3 - Setting the "Scene": Vignettes of a queer performance club culture

This first empirical chapter aims to give an overview of what I am constituting for the purposes of this thesis as a queer performance 'scene,' encapsulating three distinct, yet intricately linked, queer clubs centred around performance. In light of the creative 'scavenger methodology' (Halberstam 1998) discussed in Chapter 2, the source materials discussed here are deliberately disparate, encompassing analysis of written text, specific performances, and autoethnographic field notes. The bulk of this chapter discusses in more detail the three spaces of my attention in this thesis: Duckie, Bird Club and Wotever World, beginning to evoke an image of each of these clubs and why I feel they warrant further academic interest than they have previously received. These accounts are prefixed by a consideration of why I have chosen these clubs and excluded others, and why I find it strategically useful to discuss them together. Through autoethnographic recountings of my experiences in other clubs that *could* be featured in this thesis but are not, I demonstrate why spaces that are explicitly queer and explicitly performance oriented are prime sites for my analysis.[30] This discussion is followed by sections dedicated to evoking each of the three clubs in turn. Bird Club, Wotever and Duckie are discussed separately in this first chapter in order to reflect the distinctive but interrelated nature of these three performance spaces.[31]

The Wotever World manifesto is a written document available on the Wotever World website, setting out the intentions, beliefs, and guidelines of the Wotever World vision, providing a starting point for my introduction to Wotever. Alongside autoethnographic field notes and reflection, some textual analysis of the manifesto gives a flavour of the ethos of Wotever, and particularly the politics of identity and unique modes of subjectivity that are of concern in this space. An in-depth analysis of a particular performance by host of Bird Club and protagonist of this thesis Bird la Bird similarly draws out many of the key

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[30] As examined below, Duckie does not define itself as explicitly queer (though it has used the word in several of its events and advertisements), however, because of its self-identified position as outside of mainstream gay and lesbian club culture, as well as its broader ethos of challenging hetero- and homonormativity, for the purposes of this thesis I find it pertinent to retain the distinction of these spaces as *queer* as opposed to gay, LGBT, etc.

[31] Though I treat Bird Club, Wotever and Duckie as a relatively unified 'scene' in Chapters 4 and 5 of this thesis, in Chapter 6 I draw them apart in order to allow the tensions between them to come to the fore of my critical argument.

concepts of the club as a whole, and particularly how these are explored, expressed and challenged through the performances themselves. The role and function of this performance exemplifies the radical transformative potential of performance in general within this, and similar spaces that cross the boundaries between gallery, theatre and nightclub. Finally an autoethnographic account of Duckie's 2010 London Gay Pride event *Gross Indecency* locates all three clubs in relation to each other and within the historical, political and cultural context of 21st Century London, and the histories of Gay Liberation and alternative queer politics of resistance. These three initial analyses serve to outline the details of the three clubs to be discussed throughout this thesis, but also provide an overview of the interconnections between them and how and why they are usefully discussed in relation to one another. The politics of identity played out in the Wotever Manifesto reflect the sentiments and conflicts present in the other two, Bird la Bird's performance serves a very similar purpose to much of the work exhibited at Wotever and Duckie, and the account of Gross Indecency situates it within both the London LGBT social scene and the broader social context within which the other two also operate.

3.1. Queer Performance Spaces?

I am mobilising these three spaces (Wotever, Bird Club and Duckie) as a kind of complex and uneasy 'scene' that is, nonetheless, in no way concrete or unified. Particularly in the case of Duckie, as elaborated below, the confluence of these three discrete entities is not always straightforward, though I feel this difficulty in fact constitutes a significant element of this scene.[32] Whilst their audience demographics, intentions and atmospheres vary, I draw them together on the following grounds:

• They all feature and place great significance on performance that operates across and through the forms of cabaret, burlesque, live art, comedy and drag.

• They all also operate as bar/club spaces at the same times as exhibiting performance work.

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[32] The role of conflict and tension in maintaining this 'scene' is discussed in more detail in Chapter 6 of this thesis, where I explore the relevance of theories of subcultures and the public sphere in relation to these settings, and mine the differences and slippages between them.

- They are all aimed at an *inclusively* LGBT (or, not exclusively heterosexual) audience and encourage a queer ethos of questioning or challenging both hetero- and homonormativity.

- Each has been running for several years and has a loyal following of regular audience members.[33]

- They all articulate themselves against the mainstream and, importantly, commercialised gay social scene, but still within the commercial capitalist economy of bar and club space (unlike radical anti-capitalist feminist and queer ventures such as The Women's Anarchist Nuisance Café or activist network Queeruption - see Moffat 2008, for a more in-depth discussion of this distinction).

However, even in justifying this 'scene' I am constructing I am aware this in itself is inadequate and incomplete. I group these clubs together and exclude certain others as a purely analytical strategy, and this 'scene' has no ontological status outside of my own theorising (as becomes clear in Chapter 6 of this thesis, where I deliberately allow it to unravel). These clubs can be as fluid and transient as the relationships and subjectivities enacted within them. Duckie acts as the stalwart in this scene, running regularly in the same venue for an incredible sixteen years. Wotever and Bird Club are both relative newcomers, having both appeared in different formats and venues since 2003, though due to venue problems Bird Club has been on hiatus since July 2010. Even since beginning this research other events that fit all (or many) of the above criteria are appearing, growing and disappearing regularly (see footnote 33, below, concerning Eat Your Heart Out). Whilst they are distinct and separate entities, there are important crossovers, intersections and points of convergence between the three spaces that are the focus of this research, and the others that have been, are and will be a part of this 'scene' in different temporal

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[33] This is my primary reason for not carrying out systematic empirical research on *Eat Your Heart Out* and including it as one of my primary sources here. London based performance artist Scottee's avant garde performance collective Eat Your Heart Out has been gathering momentum and has recently become a significant figure in the performance landscape of London's social scene. Although it explicitly disparages the burlesque and cabaret performance styles at the heart of Bird Club, Duckie and Wotever, its progressive outlook, queer bent and tendency towards stage shows in a club (rather than a theatre or gallery) environment place it in close proximity to the spaces of attention of my thesis. However, EYHO came into into its own during the period in which the empirical research was carried out, and is therefore only featured as a secondary source with occasional reference in this thesis. For more information see http://www.scottee.co.uk/ and http://eyho.org.uk/.

moments. However for the purposes of this research, the collective cultural milieu I am identifying is limited to the convergence of Duckie, Wotever World and Bird Club.

Firstly, I will outline two significant 'kinds' of spaces that I have deliberately omitted from this research, and discuss why I have done so. A third space that is not featured in this thesis but has notable overlap with the clubs in question is that of fetish or BDSM clubs that also feature performance, often circus, burlesque or live art which is explicitly controversial in its portrayal of sexuality, nudity, pain or bodily fluids. London clubs such as the now defunct Club Fist, world famous Torture Garden or more arty Kinky Salon and After Pandora frequently feature performance with significant crossover with Duckie, Bird Club and Wotever in terms of aesthetics, genre, content and even performers and audience members. Many of these clubs, from the gender mixed but very much gay (and predominantly male) focused HardOn to the more metrosexual Torture Garden also tend to foster the ethos of queer challenges to heteronormative gender and sexuality I identify in the spaces of my attention.[34] However, these clubs are not discussed here in relation to Bird Club, Wotever and Duckie because of the fundamentally different affective atmosphere of a public sex space. Whilst intimate and sexual exchanges occur and are certainly sparked within the other three clubs, the interaction between audience members in a space that is expressly organised around the provision of semi-public sexual encounters is incredibly specific and therefore begs to be discussed on its own terms. Merging these with the queer performance clubs of this thesis would obscure the particularity of issues pertaining to sex work, sadism and masochism, power play, risk and public sex that are at stake in fetish or BDSM clubs.[35]

In evoking the term 'queer performance spaces' I consciously exclude queer or otherwise LGBT social spaces that are not centred around performance, 'mainstream' gay and lesbian bars and clubs that may or may not feature performance of some kind, and performance or cabaret events that are

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[34] For more information on the above clubs see http://www.torturegarden.com/home/, http://www.kinkysalonlondon.co.uk/web/, http://afterpandora.com/, and http://www.hardonclub.co.uk/homepage.html respectively.

[35] For this reason I am planning a follow-up post-doctoral research project to this thesis, investigating sex and fetish clubs, the function and value of performance, and the affective intensities and relationality engendered therein.

not explicitly queer or LGBT focused. Whilst my reasons for eliminating the former - queer spaces that do not feature performance - from a study of the affective circulation and relationality engendered by performance may seem clear, the other two categories necessitate further exploration. The remainder of this section provides autoethnographic accounts of two examples of my own experiences in what is commonly and unquestioningly referred to by the queer community as a 'mainstream' gay and lesbian bar and club scene (more on this shortly), and ostensibly heterosexual cabaret and burlesque shows. Evoking the feeling of these two spaces provides the basis for my discussion of why I find it appropriate and necessary to make this distinction.

Scene One

It is early evening on a sunny Friday and I am sitting on a leatherette upholstered bench in the window booth of a bar decorated exclusively in vast swipes of black and shocking pink. It is relatively quiet but there is a gentle buzz about the room, and the all-female bar-staff with variations on the same asymmetrical haircut stand and pout for several minutes before they serve anyone waiting for a drink. I haven't been to this steadfast feature of London's lesbian scene for some time, but neither have I missed it. The familiar suspicious look from the gruff female bouncer when I entered. "Er, have you been here before love? You know this is a gay bar right?" At least this time my straight and genderqueer friends have actually been allowed in. As we chat excitedly, a middle aged woman in a wrap-around dress approaches us with flyers. "We're, er, having some performances *downstairs later. The girls are really..... Lovely. Very, erm, sexy."[36] A few hours and several drinks later we find ourselves in the low-ceilinged rectangular basement room watching a barely-clad woman twirl on a tiny semi-circular stage impaled with a silver pole. A scattering of others stand around the edges of the room, breathing into their pints or trying to melt into the wall. A gaggle of rowdy women at the bar hoot*

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[36] This reference to the awkwardness of a slightly prudish and most likely heterosexual woman attempting to encourage lesbians to attend a strip show recalls a period in 2009 when Candy Bar was temporarily taken over (from the previous lesbian management) by a heterosexual couple. Many members of the gay and lesbian community, particularly those regularly involved with the Soho scene, voiced their irritation about this seeming injustice on social networking media and in face-to-face conversations. I am not in a position to judge whether or not this objection was justified, but I include this moment because it encapsulates how the framing of the performances in this space, whether promoted by other lesbians or anyone else, has always felt awkwardly sexualised as transgressive and 'risque'.

and whistle as she pulls the side strap of her minuscule g-string suggestively away from her hip. Jaw clenched I am laughing nervously with my friends. I feel incredibly uncomfortable. My gaze is drawn to the faces of my fellow spectators, all of whom work hard to avoid eye contact with anyone other than their own friends. I understand why, because I too feel acutely aware of the curious embarrassment I would feel should someone see me, break the anonymity of the crowd and interpellate me as a lech, a misogynist or an objectifier of women. The performer stares blankly out at us and I am wondering who she is, what her politics are, whether she is a feminist, or queer, or a parent. Whether she enjoys her job. Because while her performance tells me she is athletic, skilled, with good balance and rhythm and a beautiful body, it tells me nothing about her personality, her life, or what she thinks of this group of gay women standing here, staring back at her just as blankly.

Scene Two

The pink heart-shaped arch over the stage is about the only thing that feels familiar in this space.[37] A camp genderqueer boi[38] in a suit and yellow marigolds acts as bouncer, frisking the women as they enter, calling himself Trevor with cheeky East End charm. Most of the women seem bemused and smile awkwardly. The crowd is studded with occasional familiar faces, but straight couples, smart-casual clothing and non-regional middle-class accents dominate. The two comperes give us music hall wit as they enact an initiation ritual to a secret society of feminist cabaret performers. Though I know neither of them are exclusively straight, their flirting is played for the men in the room, a sapphic tongue-in-cheek Carry On. Though the club is grotty and dingy, the round tables and chairs make it feel like a rather formal affair, as though we could be in an upmarket burlesque salon. Most people are confined to their tables, facing the stage, and only a few mill about the bar area. Two doe-eyed

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[37] The Blue Stocking Society was at this time held in the same London venue, the Bethnal Green Working Men's Club, that hosted Bird Club for several years. The venue is known for scheduling a range of cabaret, burlesque and variety shows and club nights featuring performance, most often aimed at a young, trendy, metrosexual crowd. Bird Club was by far the most explicitly queer, and the most overtly political event held at the BGWMC, and this is considered to be one of the primary causes of the breakdown of the relationship between the venue management and Bird Club organisers.

[38] Boi is a term used in queer circles to identify a person (particularly a lesbian, genderqueer or trans* person) who identifies, presents and/or acts in a way that is masculine but not necessarily butch or male, usually embodying either a young or camp image of masculinity.

svelte brunettes take to the stage in a flurry of colour co-ordinated sequins, feathers and lace. Their fan dance is cheeky and amusing, with caricatured burlesque facial expressions in all the right places. The audience are quiet and barely respond to their encouragements for cheers and hoots.

Scene One describes an experience of watching strip show performances at Candy Bar, one of London's most well-known 'mainstream' lesbian bars in Soho. It demonstrates several of the reasons I make the distinction between the alternative queer performance clubs that are my focus and 'mainstream' LGBT bar and club spaces, that may also occasionally feature performance such as drag shows, live music and stand-up comedy. Scene two recounts one of The Blue Stocking Society's early burlesque nights, aimed at 'thinking women and the men who love them' (Vogue 2011). Though the audience is mixed and the venue generally hosts events aimed at a mixed metrosexual crowd, the focus is distinctly heterosexual, and in fact on the night that I attended, other regulars of Wotever also expressed to me a certain unexpected feeling of dislocation in the surprisingly heteronormative environment.[39] Both examples are chosen for their seeming proximity in certain respects to the spaces of my attention in this thesis. The stripping performance of Scene One 'looks' relatively similar to many of the performances at Bird Club, Wotever and Duckie, which often feature nudity and eroticism; and the venue is a small bar where audience and performer are in close physical proximity, as opposed to the large and detached stage of a cavernous nightclub for instance. The event of Scene Two is explicitly structured around a version of feminist politics, it is open to LGBT and queer individuals (and a small contingent did in fact attend the night in question), and the parodic burlesque and cabaret performances again appear very similar to those staged at the other three (in fact, several of the performers who have been involved with or performed at The Blue Stocking Society have also performed at Duckie, Bird Club or Wotever). However the ethos, intent, and

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[39] It is possible that this was at least in part related to the high level of promotion and coverage the night and its organisers, Tricity Vogue and Audacity Chutzpah, were receiving at the time in publications such as *TimeOut London* and *The Erotic Review*. These publications tend to reach a fairly 'mainstream' and predominantly straight audience and as such can attract a large number of punters with little or no knowledge or experience of either burlesque, queer, feminist, or avant-garde performance who are drawn by the promise of the new, novel, and trendy.

importantly atmosphere of both of these spaces differs greatly from that of the clubs I am investigating here.

In my experience, spectatorship in these spaces feels very individualised. Particularly in the case of stripping or other types of performance with a 'seedy' reputation, but also when watching a pop singer at a nightclub, I feel profoundly detached from, rather than connected to, the other members of the audience. This may be partly because of the variety of perspectives of the audience - they do not necessarily share my broad world view,[40] and partly because the content of these performances rarely seems to access the kinds of collective memories - the sense of a personal experience made universal or accessible - that I identify at Bird Club, Duckie and Wotever, as discussed at length in the following chapters of this thesis. Although in 'mainstream' gay and lesbian spaces I have some sense of the majority of the audience sharing at least one element of my identity - that they are likely LGBT - I am also aware of a significant political divide; not only is political apathy prevalent within these gay and lesbian spaces, but a distinct conservativism is often observable when politics are expressed.[41] As I demonstrate below, the often frothy frivolity of Bird Club, Duckie and Bar Wotever is nevertheless undercut by a political edge.

My protagonists also invoked this divide. For the performers, a deeper connection to the audience was cited as a reason they often preferred performing in 'queer' spaces. Many of them felt that their queer audiences 'got' the messages and intentions of their performances better than heterosexual or

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[40] The significance of what Lauren Berlant (2008) calls a broadly shared worldview to collective spectatorship is further discussed in Chapter 6 of this thesis, where I use Berlant's concept of the 'intimate public' constructed around broadly similar experiences of the world to understand the culture of community that circulates around these three clubs.

[41] The widespread conservativism - primarily racial prejudice and Islamophobia in particular- of dominant gay and lesbian rights discourse in the developed West has come under well-deserved scrutiny by queer theorists in recent years (see Puar 2007, 2010). Also of note is Judith Butler's high-profile refusal of the 2010 Civil Courage Award at Berlin's Christopher Street Day Parade on grounds of the organisation's alleged complicity with racist discourse (Butler 2010), and the controversy over the proto-fascist political party the English Defense League's alleged involvement in a planned (though never realised) Gay Pride March in London's (multicultural and predominantly Muslim) East End (see Roberts 2011, Geen 2011). In addition to racial conservativism, the previously mentioned ongoing trans- and bi-phobia of many prominent gay and lesbian figures and organisations (Stonewall and lesbian journalist Julie Bindel serve as two primary examples) further indicates a disconcerting reactionary traditionalism amongst many (though of course not all) gay and lesbian communities and discourses. Whilst the reasons for, context and content of this conservativism are complex and varied to the extent that they cannot be discussed at length here, this general tendency does feed into the reasons myself and my protagonists feel detached from the 'mainstream' gay and lesbian spaces in which this rarely (if ever) seems to be addressed or challenged.

mainstream gay and lesbian ones, giving them the responsiveness and engagement they enjoy. Many of the regular audience members I spoke to also contrasted the experience of spectatorship in queer performance clubs such as Duckie, Bird Club and Wotever to that of mainstream gay and lesbian or heterosexual spaces. For many of them, a certain level of discomfort again seemed to arise from this lack of connection - there was a sense that 'the audience [are] just consuming it' (Steppen Wolf) because 'there's no identification' (Dr J).[42]

It is important at this juncture to outline how I am utilising the concept of the 'mainstream' - both the 'mainstream' gay and lesbian social scene and 'mainstream' predominantly heterosexual cabaret events. In discussing the club cultures of the late 1980s and early 1990s British dance music scene, Sarah Thornton (1996) confronts the academic tendency of subcultural research to uncritically reproduce the taken-for-granted distinction of a ubiquitous and homogenous 'mainstream' from which subcultural participants tend to separate themselves.[43] Drawing on Bourdieu's (1984) work on class and cultural capital, Thornton identifies this process of distinction as an exercise in taste cultures. This distinction constructs a 'mainstream' (for her study suburban working class 'Sharon and Tracys' dancing around their handbags to chart music) as lacking in sophistication, knowledge and taste in the right kinds of cultural product (music) and forms of appreciation (buying vinyl records, attending underground raves). Whilst taste cultures and forms of subcultural capital certainly do exist in these three spaces, I want to suggest here that Bird Club, Wotever, and (to a lesser extent) Duckie distinguish the 'mainstream' less along lines of taste, and more along lines of acceptance and tolerance.[44] My protagonists frequenting London's queer alternative scene do imply a 'Sharon and Tracy'-type image of the unsophisitcated, depoliticsed masses that take part in the 'mainstream' gay

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[42] This feeling of engagement and dialogue is further discussed in Chapters 4 and 5 of this thesis, from the perspective of the performer and audience respectively.

[43] A more in-depth engagement with Thornton's work in relation to these queer performance clubs takes place in Chapter 6, where I discuss in more detail what theories of subcultures might bring to our understanding and interpretation of these spaces.

[44] To a certain extent the distinction of Duckie from other 'mainstream' gay and lesbian clubs is centred on taste in music, as one of the motivations for the organisers in the early 1990s was creating a gay social space that provided an alternative to the rave and house music that dominated London's gay club scene at the time, and embraced older and pop music that was maligned as 'uncool' (as by Thornton's clubbers). The role of this distinction in tandem with the issues of inclusivity mentioned above is discussed in more detail in Chapter 6 of this thesis.

and lesbian scene (though they never explicitly evoked it in any of our research encounters). However, this lack of taste is secondary to the reason the majority of them ventured away from those pubs and clubs to seek out something else, the primary one being rejection, exclusion or prejudice either personally experienced or observed, against diverse expressions of gender and sexuality. As the story above indicates, despite the media ubiquity of the 'lipstick lesbian' image and the highly feminine presentation of the vast majority of lesbians portrayed in the media, Femme presentation is viewed with the greatest suspicion in almost all gay and lesbian venues in Soho, London's primary 'mainstream' gay and lesbian district.[45] Myself, all of my Femme protagonists and every Femme or feminine presenting queer woman I have spoken to socially can recall experiences of being interrogated and refused entry to gay and lesbian spaces on the grounds of "looking straight". Others have experienced similar difficulty for being (or being perceived to be) transgender or bisexual, or presenting in a way deemed excessively masculine or Butch. The foremost distinction made between the queer scene and the 'mainstream', then, is not one of sophisticated taste, but one of tolerance and acceptance. It is because of this that I find it necessary to retain this distinction within this thesis, as this feeling of acceptance and tolerance is crucial to the affective relations I am investigating.

3.2. A Call to Arms: The Wotever World Manifesto

It has taken me years to find out about this place, and months more to build up the courage to come. It is my first night at Bar Wotever, and Bar Wotever's first night in this Victorian semi-circular bastion of London's gay history.[46] The Royal Vauxhall Tavern juts from the crossroad where traffic meets wasteland, and houses the intersection of gay histories of clandestine drag performance with the queer avant-garde of twenty-first

[45] A secondary gay and lesbian scene has recently emerged in the East End of London, comprising multiple periodic events held in various bars and clubs in Bethnal Green, Shoreditch, Hackney and Dalston, along with two full-time gay pubs and several bars with a metrosexual focus. Imbued with an arty, hipster style and an embracing of outlandish clothing trends, a certain freedom of gender expression (particularly for feminine presenting lesbian or queer women) seems to be welcomed on this scene. However, this expression is very much framed through a language of highly depoliticised 'cool', and a focus on style and fashion, bringing with it narrow standards of acceptability in terms of body size, age, beauty, and class, preventing this scene from becoming a suitable alternative home for the disenfranchised queers such as myself that seek refuge at Bird Club, Wotever and Duckie.

[46] In 2009, Bar Wotever moved it's regular Tuesday night gathering from the Central Station near Kings Cross in North London to Vauxhall's historic gay performance venue, also the longstanding home of Duckie, the Royal Vauxhall Tavern.

century London. My grudgingly self-imposed uniform of jeans and trainers feels like a drab cloak of monotony amongst these exotically plumed creatures in rainbow red, pink and black fishnet, leather and lace. Recumbent on throw cushions on the back bench I find myself in an unconventional living room surrounded by future friends and lovers I just don't know yet.[47] One day I will stride in here with the absent-minded confidence with which I enter my family home, my office, a party of good friends. But not yet. Today I am still unsure, unnerved, unaccustomed to this inconspicuousness. On stage a gregarious and comedic p/matriarch welcomes me in booming bouncing broken English.

"Boys, girls, and beautiful Wotevers. Hello! We like to say a special welcome to Wotever Virgins. Who have never been to Bar Wotever before?"

I am frozen, too scared to raise my hand. I hide in the invisibility of my unremarkable clothes and let the moment pass because I am terrified of the attention. I've never been shy before, but I am overwhelmed by this possibility. I'm not ready. Ingo tells me tonight is my night, I am given license to ask whatever, and most importantly flirt with whomever, I want to. I can be anything and anyone, any gender expression or experiment I like here. They won't assume pronouns. They won't assume who I will fancy. They won't assume the stability of my identity that might change week to week, moment to moment.

As Jet Moon saunters onto the stage with her macho swagger I am taken aback. Is this right? Her blonde wig is backcombed into an unearthly amorphous mass. Eyeliner and shadow make deep smoky pits of her eyes. She is more ghoulish than glamour. Again I feel unsettled. Disorientated. Her stories of being raised by drag queens in Sydney are familiar yet strange. The feathers, the glitter, the disco. I know them well. The anger. The loneliness. The stares. Yes. But what is this creature kicking and shouting on the stage? Even when crouching in a slip of a dress reveals her spread cunt, knicker-less under fishnet, I do not feel certain this being is female. And she isn't, not in any sense I have known before. "I'm your bastard daughter white trash whore sister bitch goddess chipped-brick über slut, fuck you in the ass nightmare kind of girl." Oh right. Could I be all of those things? Do I want to be? Maybe I already am, have been, will be. Maybe she isn't, or wasn't or won't be. They're just words. But up there, directed at all of us here, they do something. Possibilities. Potentialities. Because here, you're allowed as many nouns as you want.

Over weeks and months my queer self grows to recognise this place as far more than a bar. It is a Wonderland of unimaginable imaginings. The performers are the audience, and the audience perform. They perform survival, joy, pain and playfulness in the bar and on the stage. We do it

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[47] Bar Wotever is affectionately known and described by its crew and regulars as 'London's friendliest Living Room'. This phrase was taken up by AbsolutQueer's Living Room Project, a photo and video exploration of the subjective experiences of audience members at Bar Wotever (Harrison 2010).

together. Each tiny, seemingly insignificant fragment of a life that is bared and shared engulfs me in warmth. I am fully aware of the sentimental cliché of it all, but I want it all the same. It is all just a little bit easier when there are others like you. When you can make a joke, a connection, transform your pain into light and laughter. This is not high-brow, not polished professionalism. This is raw. The awkward shy burlesque numbers. The first flawed attempts at DJing. Forgotten lines, missed notes, accidental silence. Even the slick virtuosos can let their veneer fracture just a bit. Weekly I listen to timid wallflowers mumbling their "Community News" announcements. Fundraisers for top surgery or cancer charities, birthdays, dance classes, sex clubs, petitions and protests.They matter enough for someone to get up on stage and talk about them in the hope that they will matter to someone else, too. They're all part of it. We are all entitled to spectacularly fail on that stage.

Fig. 19: Jet Moon performing *Raised by Drag Queens* at Bar Wotever, 2009. Photo by AbsolutQueer.

Fig. 20: Fun in the DJ booth with Ingo and Joe Pop, Bar Wotever, 2009 Photo by AbsolutQueer.

I accost Ingo in the DJ booth. "I think I'd like to perform a little something-" blurts from my mouth before I have fully formulated it. S/he beams. "Sure."

Cramped in the dingy white rectangle of a dressing room I am sweating into my tightlacing. I'm not nervous, but it's hot. No air, bright lights, small space. How many times have I sat on the other side of that curtain? Taking in people's stories. The responsibility for responsiveness lies with me now. On stage I am confronted with a wall of heat, attention, emotion. I feel my being extending out beyond the borders of my body and mingling with every person in that room. I can feel the love. I am in love with every

single one of them in that moment. I want them to touch me with their fingers and lips as well as their eyes. I am naked up here, baring myself to them.

Fig. 21: Myself performing *Things my Mother Taught Me* at Bar Wotever, 2010. Photo by AbsolutQueer.

The hazy sea of faces become one to me. Those that I know, that I love, that I recognise or don't. I feel deeply, profoundly connected to them as I stand there, holding their attention, their hopes and their pain. They're laughing with me, but we all know there is much more to this. We all know there are tears threatening to break out and trickle mascara-tinted rivers down rouged cheeks. Maybe for some the glitter and feathers conceal the trauma here, but in most of them I see that tenuous empathy with the unfamiliar I have felt so many times sat there when they were here, where I am now. I reach down and hand a cupcake to a short haired, vaguely butch looking person who looks at me intently. Through the flurry of spotlights and adrenaline, we share a small moment, a connection barely detectable even to us. Me too, those eyes tell me. Not quite the same, but yes. I feel something lift and a little speck of shame melts away from both of us.

Wotever World is a collectively organised range of arts, culture and social spaces and events that acts simultaneously as a platform for the creation, dissemination and exhibition of creative endeavours and infinitely more. Far from a neutral social enterprise, Wotever is an explicitly political, community-based project founded specifically to provide a safe and welcoming space to those who feel excluded elsewhere (including mainstream gay as well as straight or other performance or art centred social events as discussed above) and challenge the often unquestioned prejudice underlying many such

spaces.[48] It is also intended as a space to foster and encourage myriad forms of creative expression, from accomplished and polished stage productions to barely rehearsed comedy skits or first attempts at DJing by amateurs. One important indicator of this clear and forceful intent is the Wotever Manifesto, a text available on their website outlining the ethos and objectives of the project. I utilise the manifesto throughout the following analysis to reflect upon the above narrative and gesture towards the wider public of the Wotever vision as one that is not centred around individual experience.

Figs. 22 a & b: Cabaret Wotever incarnations from 2004 and 2005, featuring Josephine, Killpussy, Maria Mojo (AKA Dyke Marilyn), Ingo, Lazlo Pearlman, Tom O'Tottenham and Trevor Forever. Photos by Sam Nightingale.

One of the primary concerns of the Wotever vision is that of identity. As previously discussed, Wotever came into being because of the lack of spaces catering for particular identities, including, or perhaps even more so, within the LGB(T) social scene. Yet more than simple tolerance, though this is paramount in Wotever spaces, the manifesto sets out the particular modes of selfhood that are enacted and encouraged at Wotever:

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[48] One of the original catalysts for the emergence of Wotever was the difficulty a group of trans and non-binary gendered individuals felt in finding spaces that included them - specifically in light of the tendency for mainstream gay bars to be very gay male dominated and lesbian bars to be at worst intolerant and at best not entirely welcoming to those on the trans* spectrum. For a detailed discussion of the founding of the Wotever vision see Moffat (2008).

Respect and welcome to one and all. No matter what identity, or multiple identities a person may have or choose, Wotever welcomes them. This includes, but certainly is not exclusive to: drag kings, queers, women, mtf, femmes, trans, butches, queerbois, gay, drag queens, dykes, bisexuals, ftm, men, straight... Wotever etc. All will respect all. No matter womever, however, or wotever you are in any moment, we ask all to respect all others, no matter whomever, however, wotever they are. (Anderson 2007)

Identity here is not constructed as singular, static, or tied to particular accepted definitions. As has been highlighted by many feminist theorists, identities such as 'female' never exist in isolation (see for example hooks 1982, Collins 2000, Lorde 2007). They intersect and are subject to the limitations of multiple other sincluding but not limited to race, class, age, and nationality. Yet the Wotever Manifesto extends this intersectionality - not only are gendered identities inextricably linked with others, even gender itself can be made up of various constituent parts, some of which may appear at first to contradict themselves. Butler's (1990) heterosexual matrix is thoroughly disrupted as identities that pertain to biological sex, legal/lived gender, cultural gendered expression and sexual orientation, attraction or desire can convene in infinite possible combinations. The Manifesto also argues that these identities, considered by many to be static, lifelong states of being, can be transient and temporary, relevant in a particular temporal or historical moment only to be replaced by something else the following day, year, or decade.

The usage of the term 'Wotever' enacts the multiplicity and fluidity of identity signifiers so fundamental to the Wotever vision, and is thus performative in the linguistic sense. Taking Butler's concept of gender performativity back to its roots in Austinian (1976) understandings of performative language, 'Wotever' could be understood as an example of language which creates that of which it speaks - Wotever as an identity, a principle, and a strategy creates the possibility of an alternative subject position that is not tied to the static, binary and self-enclosed vocabularies through which we usually understand them. Wotever performs itself by bringing another way of being into existence, a mode of being that both is, and is enabled by, 'Wotever'. Much like 'Wotever', subject positions, identities and their signifiers are presented as flexible and subject to change in any moment. This is a radical departure from the identity politics that structure most LGBT spaces. As previously discussed, much contemporary gay

rights discourse is founded on an identity politic of natural, inherent stable subject positions (Lloyd 2005).[49] Despite decades of academic debate to the contrary post-Foucault (1976), much common parlance continues to reflect this assumption of an essential, inherent truth in sexual and gendered identity that is involuntary and unchanging (indeed, even my performer protagonists demonstrated some investment in the trope of 'the real me' in our conversations, as discussed in Chapter 4). Wotever acts as a mode of resistance to these normative narratives of selfhood, a survival strategy opening other possibilities of modes of being. Whether identities, signifiers or labels are attached to the innate inner truth of a stable subjectivity, or the momentary desires of a relational subject-in-process are irrelevant. By proposing identities that an individual may either 'choose' or inherently 'have', the Wotever Manifesto presents both (seemingly contradictory) possibilities. It incorporates the ways many experience their own subjectivity and identity as essential and fundamental to their being, but indicates that for some, some identities in some moments may be choices that can relate more to a whim, a desire or a political conviction than to a deep inner truth of the 'self'. Far from undermining the aforementioned years of critical discourse of identity politics, this ambivalence provides empowering and radical possibilities for individuals who struggle to make sense of their own subjectivity under that logic. Returning to the work of Weiss (1999), it is clear that the dominant frameworks for understanding ourselves as subjects are of little use when that subject falls outside of the 'normative' category they are based upon. These subjects that fail to cohere under such a logic of personhood require different strategies in order to experience themselves as subjects. Wotever appears to provide a vocabulary for that multiple and shifting body image to cohere into a subjectivity that can be experienced as coherent and possible while acknowledging its own

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[49] Through this narrative of inherent or essential selfhood, all manner of supposedly non-normative identities, including gay, bisexual and trans are rationalised and justified through a language that invests them with the same status as perceived normative (heterosexual, cisgendered) ones - that they are natural and innate, we are 'born this way'. Clearly this is a worthy and necessary strategy for gay rights activism in a climate wherein the opposite is repeatedly reinforced - that homosexual or transgender subjectivities are not valid, pathological, unnatural or deviant. The purpose of highlighting this debate is not to discuss its relative value or achievements (this would require an entire thesis itself) but instead to contrast the bounded and static sense of an innate subject this is based upon with the dynamic and processual one posed by the Wotever Manifesto - echoing the earlier debate between Cartesian and other non-dualistic understandings of the subject.

contradictions and fluidity, providing, in Butler's (2004) terminology, liveable lives.

These liveable lives are importantly self-made, and yet they differ from the neoliberal vocabulary of freedom, flexibility and choice that can position investments in identity politics as defunct and problematically rigid (see Blackman 2009). The subjectivities and identities at Wotever are always enacted in complex and ambivalent relationship to their histories of oppression, activism and identity politics. As I examine at length in Chapter 5 of this thesis, the suspension of identity markers posed by the 'Wotever' label acknowledges both the necessary legibility provided by identity categories, and the troubling restrictions they may pose. As argued by Butler (1993, 2004), subjectivities can be threatened with being undone both *by* norms themselves, and by their obliteration. The queer subjectivities performed at Wotever, then, as with the other two clubs, enact that constant tension between the desire to transcend norms, categories and labels, and the continued investment in the subjective possibilities they pose and the desires and fantasies they might contain. I do not wish to claim Wotever as an identitarian utopia of queer self-affirmation. There is connection, sharing, and an intimate sense of belonging enabled in this space, but there is also tension, conflict, and exclusion. The very *queer*ness of this social scene means it is disruptive and uncategorisable in its very nature, which is why I argue in Chapter 6 for a *weak* theory of affective publics that is attentive to this taxonomic resistance.

Participation appears to be another fundamental principle of the Wotever vision that positions it as in constant flux and difficult to define in any static or definite way. In outlining an art platform in which the exhibition of performance and other creative work is central, it creates no space for an audience in the traditional sense - passive, silent spectators who simply observe but do not participate are not present here.[50] The manifesto's call of 'Wotever create! Create Wotever!' (Anderson 2007) invites everyone to take part in the collaborative production of their own space. This reflects the drive for self-creation within subcultures as identified by Dick Hebdidge (1988) and Sarah Thornton (1996), but also suggests a distinct form of citizenship in terms of a

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[50] This provides an intriguing reflection of the traditional image of the academic or cultural researcher as the silent, objective presence. As previously discussed in Chapter 2 of this thesis, this kind of detached researcher position is also impossible to sustain within the Wotever space.

public, or possibly a counterpublic (Warner 2005).[51] The mode of address of the manifesto is towards a yet to be formed public, a public that comes into being through being addressed as such (following from Althusser's 1971 theory of interpellation as discussed in Chapter 6 of this thesis). This appears to be closely linked to the Do-it-Yourself punk ethos of this cultural production. Despite its non-profit status, Wotever functions within capitalist structures of bars and clubs, as do the others (for a detailed discussion of Duckie's complex relationship with capitalism and consumerism see Silverstone 2012). This sets Wotever apart from other radical queer and feminist ventures that deliberately seek to function outside of capitalism, such as London's Women's Anarchist Nuisance Café (for a detailed comparison between WANC and Wotever on these and other grounds see Moffat 2008). The DIY attitude of Wotever lies in what it creates, what it puts 'out there in the world' through collaborative mutual creativity. As a public, a subculture or a collaborative project it is not a polished and complete entity, but one that is open to being remade.

Fig. 23: Helen Sandler hosting Bar Wotever, 2011. Photo by AbsolutQueer.

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[51] As further elaborated in Chapter 6 of this thesis, Warner (2002) utilises the term counterpublic to denote marginalised groups that are excluded from, and therefore in resistant opposition to, the generalised bourgeois hegemonic public sphere, and so form their own forum for oppositional debate in response.

3.3. Public Service Announcement: Bird la Bird's *Holding Court: A Period Drama*

Cries and grunts drown out the chattering of a lively midweek club crowd. Framed by the pink arcs of a heart-shaped stage backdrop, a camp caricature of Marie Antoinette screams as her punk courtiers descend upon her. Tottering on platform stilettos, she grapples to set down her stuffed pet fox before they seize her, dragging her to centre stage, clawing at her flesh. With struggle and profanities they strip her of her embellished corset and crinoline, smashing the tiny elaborate cakes that detach from her vertiginous wig into the floor. Fabric is ripped. Neon pink fishnets tear. Pierced nipples are revealed. Raised red scratch marks blend with the extensive tattoos decorating her chest and arms. Her courtiers, compact hubs of rage in tattered pantaloons, crowned with aggressive mohawks, shuffle and swirl around her. Their venomous grimaces are tinted with satisfaction as her expression slips from regal composure through pleading to indignant outrage. The audience watch her contorted limbs, her increasingly exposed body. Some stare in wonderment or confusion. Many cheer, whoop, clap. All are complicit. Nobody breaks out to help or protect her. As they wrestle her to the floor one of the attendants, face masked with glitter, punches the air with delight. They jubilantly gaze down upon her naked, slumped body, and the audience's cheers slowly burgeon into applause.

Figs. 24 a & b: Bird la Bird and collaborators in the finale of *Holding Court: A Period Drama* at Bird Club's *Cum the Revolution Part 3: Seditionaries*, 2009. Photos by Leng Montgomery.

London's Bird Club, a Femme dominated queer cabaret nightclub, buzzes with equal measures of political passion, sexual energy and drunken revelry. In the dingy surrounds of a working men's club, a pink light-up heart provides the backdrop for performance varying from live art to comedy to burlesque, but always fuelled with (queer) feminist fervour. Ranging in professionalism and skill as well as genre and tone, the performances at Bird Club are ambivalent in their function: they titillate, amuse, entertain, but also insight compassion, rage, and sometimes political activism. The dramatic climax of Bird la Bird's performance piece *Holding Court: A Period Drama* was first staged at her monthly Bird Club event in June 2009. It was the final night of a trilogy dedicated to the theme of revolution, celebrating Black Panthers and the Civil Rights Movement, communism, and seditionaries of the French Revolution. With influences from reggae, motown and punk to rococo, May 1968, Marxism and even Father Christmas and his elves, the series took a tongue in cheek approach to issues such as apartheid, sex trafficking, civil unrest and the monarchy. As usual, guests were encouraged to take part by coming dressed as royalists, insurgents, peasants, or bourgeois reactionaries, and the entertainment ranged

from film screenings, stage performances and interactive photo booths to themed DJ sets. The nights themselves were harmonious with Bird Club's other similarly frivolous and irreverent themes addressing serious issues such as *Butch Appreciation Night*, *The Outta Wedlock Special* (A Valentine's day lambasting of Civil Partnerships) and the Easter Sunday *Passion Play* parody of Catholic Mass re-imagined as queer Femme ritual. The aim of Bird Club is always to play out, disrupt, celebrate and lampoon controversial issues and problematic aspects of society that are respected or despised by its queer audience. Bird la Bird's often chaotic and confrontational performances address political issues through impassioned and personal polemic, delivered with anarchistic and bolshy zeal. *Holding Court* is in some senses a departure from her more typical performance style in featuring limited spoken word, a far more sombre tone and a (relatively) composed and self-contained character. As a durational and interactive piece it also breaks from her more common stage performances. However, *Holding Court* encapsulates many of the overriding themes of Bird la Bird's performance work and the intent and ethos of Bird Club as a whole in its exploration of femininity, politics and dissent through theatrical camping. Much like her other work it sits between the genres of burlesque, live art, and comedy, engages satire extensively and references feminist and social theory. It exemplifies clearly the themes, topics and approach of the club as a whole, and of much of the performance showcased within it through the interaction with the audience, the role of the performer and the atmosphere created. It is also a particularly interesting example as a piece that has moved and extended beyond the specific environment of Bird Club: *Holding Court* was performed for a second time in the 18th Century Gallery of the National Portrait Gallery as part of an event entitled 'Iconography Late' that accompanied the Gay Icons exhibition of summer 2009.[52]

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[52] For more information on the exhibition, see http://www.npg.org.uk:8080/gayicons/. For more on the series of arts and cultural events related to the exhibition including Iconography Late see http://www.npg.org.uk:8080/gayicons/event.htm

Figs. 25 a & b: Bid la Bird and collaborators performing *Holding Court: A Period Drama* at the National Portrait Gallery. Photos by Sam Nightingale.

The body of the piece stages a camp caricature of the eighteenth century aristocratic lady's toilette that parodies social hierarchy, power, and the nature of performance itself. Birdie Antoinette is dressed and prepared for court by her disgruntled attendants over an extended period of time, as the audience move around them. With great pomp and ceremony she is laced into a flower embellished corset, placed in an exaggerated skirt frame resembling a crinoline, and has a tall blonde wig reminiscent of parodies of French aristocracy, complete with real miniature cakes woven into the hair, placed on her head. Her make-up is elaborately done, including small painted spiders emerging from her wig and crawling down her face. During the activity, she barks orders, makes increasingly churlish demands, pontificates on the banalities of gossip magazines and disparages the peasantry. Occasionally the Queen calls upon individual audience members for adoration, or sends one of her courtiers to deliver tokens of appreciation to her subjects in the form of small cakes, tea in delicate china cups, or decorative fans emblazoned with the word 'cunt'. When out of earshot of the Queen, the attendants whisper suspiciously, and the audience catch glimpses of muttered insults such as "the Queen smells like dog shit", and suggested plots to overthrow her. Once the queen is dressed the piece disperses until coming to the climactic end illustrated above. I consider this performance's function as threefold - it acts as a form of public address similarly to the Wotever World Manifesto previously discussed, it stages a

carnivalesque disruption of hierarchy, and acts as a satirical exploration of power and femininity.

Figs. 26 a & b: Bird la Bird and collaborators in *Holding Court: A Period Drama* at Bird Club's *Cum the Revolution Part 3: Seditionaries*, 2009. Photos by Leng Montgomery.

Holding Court indicates public modes of address in several ways. By invoking the concept of royal court in general, and the Court of Versailles in particular, this piece comments on the role and function of the public sphere, and who is permitted to speak within it. Versailles is used as a symbol through which to explore hierarchy and power, and the potential disruption of those. Birdie Antoinette serves as a derisible and puerile character whose right to speak and command attention appears ridiculous and unjustified. As her petulant demands are met by her unwilling attendants, the audience is encouraged to question and reconsider this power hierarchy. This also serves as a reflection on the public address of performance itself, and the hierarchy inherent within it where the audience are expected to passively observe and listen to the performer (as discussed in section 3.2. above). Like Wotever, Bird Club challenges this traditional form of spectatorship, encouraging audience participation through interactive activities, themed dress up and some element

of dialogue with the audience during many of the stage performances. As is further discussed in the following chapter, this is a crucial element of the relational and collective sense of self enacted within these spaces. The divide between performer and audience here is not straightforward, and both roles are implicated within one another. As Birdie Antoinette's acolytes, the crowd during *Holding Court* merely provide an audience for the inconsequential ramblings of a despotic monarch. Within Bird Club as a whole, they serve a function far beyond this and are much more integral to the space. The hierarchy between performer and audience is constantly negotiated, and they as a whole form a collective far more akin to a public. In *Holding Court*, the audience is constructed as a literal public - a populace resided over by a grotesque caricature of sovereignty. Yet in Bird Club generally they have far more agency, and can be seen, similarly to the Wotever audience discussed above, as a public or counterpublic as described by Michael Warner (2002). The public comes into being through a particular mode of address - a mode of address that challenges unfounded hierarchical power structures - and thus provides an alternative possibility of public engagement that also challenges and questions the cultural hegemonies present inside and outside of this space.

In this *Holding Court* again serves as a key example of how much of the performance at Bird Club, and within this wider scene, incorporates elements of Bertault Brecht's (1964) Epic Theatre. Staging political theatre during the second world war, Brecht derided the Naturalist intention of having the audience absorbed and engrossed by the narrative. Attempting to incite dissent and social change through his theatre, he encouraged audiences not to identify or become emotionally involved with the characters or events portrayed, but to reflect, consider and critique what they are seeing, and ultimately apply this critique to their own social circumstance. *Holding Court* shares this objective, using the Court of Versailles to encourage the audience to consider contemporary holders of questionable or tyrannical power and the class structures they are themselves implicated within. It does this through a striking example of Brecht's infamous *Verfremdungseffekt* - the defamiliarisation that makes the seemingly commonplace appear strange, specifically the mode of theatre itself. By laying bare the device of theatre - highlighting its own staging and therefore its fiction, Brechtian theatre prevents the unquestioning

immersion of the audience in order to allow for the reflection needed to incite critique, anger, and ultimately social change:

> *The audience in the epic theatre says:* I wouldn't have thought that. - People shouldn't do things like that. - That's extremely odd, almost unbelievable. - This has to stop. - This person's suffering shocks me, because there might be a way out for him [sic]. - This is great art: nothing in it is self-evident. - I laugh over the weeping. I weep over the laughing. (Brecht 2000: 26)

Holding Court draws attention to the artifice and theatricality of performance itself by staging that which is usually concealed and completed long before the audience arrive - getting into costume. By bringing the dressing room onto the stage, not only does Bird la Bird make a comment on the technologies of femininity (a further *verfremdungseffekt*, discussed further below), she makes a comment on the technologies of performance, and of public address more generally.

The public constituted in *Holding Court* hold within them the potential for social change called for by Brecht, and at the climax of this performance, whilst it is not the audience that execute the mutiny, revolution is achieved and they are implicated within it. The monarchy and source of power is ultimately overthrown as the Queen lies defeated and naked on the stage. This disruption of hierarchy invokes Bakhtin's (1984) concept of the carnivalesque, which is crucial to my reading of Bird Club as a whole. According to Bakhtin's analysis of the work of French Renaissance author Rabelais (1929), the carnival played a crucial role in feudal society where the dominant power structures and codes of conduct were overthrown for a short period of time. Bird Club can be seen to act as a form of carnival in itself, inverting heteronormative culture and allowing a raucous and experimental space within which the dominance of heterosexuality and masculinity are undermined. *Holding Court* in particular stages its own complex version of the carnival, firstly by the very act of a performer imitating a monarch, and then by the overthrowing of that monarch. Power structures are parodied and dismantled, opening up a potentially radical space for rebellion. Much like the crowd at the carnival, the audience of *Holding Court* are more than merely a group, the temporary dissolution of the social strata that separate them create a collective whole. An unusual sense of time and space is enacted within the carnivalesque, not dissimilar to Halberstam's notion of 'queer time

and space' (2005).[53] The drawn out and extended ritual of the toilette, the renegotiation of power relations between performer and audience and monarch and subject and the spatial arrangement of a performance that originates on stage but moves through the audience as they themselves move around it all contribute to *Holding Court's* carnivalesque quality. It creates an alternative space of possibility that questions and undermines the frameworks through which we structure our social world. However it is important to note that, according to Bakhtin (1984), the disruption permitted by the carnival is necessarily temporary. Its purpose is to reinforce the power structures and maintain their function throughout the remainder of the year. This may be seen to detract from the radical potential of the carnivalesque, but it also importantly locates the need and desire for disruption and revolt within the hegemonic culture from which it emerges. Spaces such as Bird Club and Wotever are necessary because of the invisibility and intolerance of queer individuals within the broader public sphere. In this way, they also serve as carnivalesque spaces in providing an opportunity to redress the prejudices of heteronormative culture, without which there would be no need for such a disruption. Just as the audience of *Holding Court* are conscious of its fiction and that they (unlike others across the globe) are not the subjects of dictatorial rule, the audience of Bird Club generally are aware that this is only a temporary space that they will have to leave and return to an outside world in which these power structures are still firmly in place. Misogyny, sexism, homophobia and transphobia are rife just outside the doors, and when punters step out into late night East London, they have no way of knowing what they will be faced with on the way home. Performances such as *Holding Court*, I argue, thus demonstrate and incite the continued need, often considered lacking in particularly young urban queers, for political passion, activism and revolutionary fervour.

A common theme of Bird la Bird's performance work is that of satire. As discussed above, *Holding Court*, much like many of the other performances staged at Bird Club, parody and discredit figures of power or elements of society through humour, with equal gravity and irreverence. This is reinforced

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[53] Halberstam's work on queer temporalities is particularly relevant to considering the age range of the audience of these three clubs, one of the primary points that appear to make subcultural theory inappropriate for understanding this scene. This is further discussed in Chapter 6 of this thesis.

not only through the content, but also the aesthetic of the performance. The elaborate and exaggerated costumes of Birdie Antoinette invoke high camp and reference drag queen traditions highlighting the artifice of excessive femininity. The large satin flowers adorning Bird's corset and the exposed skeletal crinoline frame of the skirt give a parodic gesture towards rococo rather than striving for historical accuracy. Distinctly contemporary accents such as the neon fishnet tights and electric blue make-up slashes on the courtier's faces juxtapose the eighteenth century aristocratic image with overtones of punk, another revolutionary and anarchistic movement that invokes concepts of subcultures, counterpublics, and modes of resistance (see Hebdidge 1988, Warner 2002). Moreover, *Holding Court* explicitly stages the artifice of femininity. The elaborate dressing ritual highlights iconic technologies of female beauty: the corset is dramatically tightened with great difficulty, the make-up artist ceremoniously powders and paints her bare face into a barely recognisable mask. Femininity is performatively produced, both literally and symbolically for a queer audience who are familiar with the discontinuities between femaleness, femininity and Femme. As Butler (1990) contentiously claimed of drag, the performance of femininity here calls into question the assumed naturalness of all subject positions. Just as the coherence between female sex, feminine gender and heterosexual desire are disrupted by this camp spectacle, so are the associated class categories. By combining the performativity of gender and the performativity of social hierarchies in this way, *Holding Court* calls into question all assumed natural elements of our subjectivity, and encourages the audience to engage in the potential of a subjectivity that is collective and relational rather than individual and innate, performed rather than experienced as inner truth, and fluid, multiple and shifting rather than stable and concrete.

3.4. Living History: Duckie's *Gross Indecency*

Spectacle! Gross Indecency is a vast and glitzy production, pure showbiz. I was nervous that my 60s outfit won't pass muster with the dress code but was thrust right into the spirit of things with the entrance palaver. No sign of anything much outside, the Camden Centre appeared as a lifeless stone facade. A burly grave-faced doorman checks our tickets and ushers us into the entrance hall, all draped in black cloth with just a door visible. The key that came with the ticket opens the door into another little vestibule. Three of us cram in, it's quite hot; we're giggly and nervous. Not really quite sure what to do. We knock on the second inside door and a

little peep-hole shutter slides open, a square around Jay Cloth's mouth visible. "Password". "Scharda" I say, as printed on the key-tag. The shutter slams shut and the door opens, it's like a film. Inside is cavernous. An enormous old fashioned ball room buzzing and bopping with 60s atmosphere like in grainy documentaries of Beatles gigs. I can taste my Mother's giddy excitement at the opening of Biba.[54] Chandeliers, carved ceiling, and little podiums with fairy light frames. The Actionettes are doing choreographed routines in fringed dresses with perfect 60s hair and make-up. A few anachronistic hippies and a lot of sailors and soldiers but everyone's made the effort, it feels really authentic. A real vibe. The bar staff are in formal shirts and ties with long aprons. It may be accidental, but the mixers served from two litre wholesale bottles reminds me of time travelling seaside working men's clubs where you think you could be in the 60s anyway. As expected the crowd is very mixed. So many of the Wotever gang are here, and Bird la Bird's turn has brought the Bird Club flock. Many familiar faces, but still mostly men. Everyone is friendly and smiley. I want to go to the men's loo, apparently you can get cruised, but the ladies' is also quite entertaining - Emelia and Lucille are over-enthusiastic toilet ladies rationing out the toilet paper and trying to sell femfresh wipes and breath mints. Much fun to be had in there, every time I go there are gaggles of women just hanging out. The tiny, cramped and stiflingly hot Lounge Bar has a real atmosphere. With the low hum of chatter and maudlin piano music I can almost see the cigarette smoke making a dusky anonymous haze of the room. They've really created a feeling of clandestine possibility, where outside is a depressing monotony of lies and prejudice. Otherwise once inside the aesthetics dominate, the politics of the time are veiled by the music and the style. One delicious moment of bewilderment comes when authentic 60s uniformed policemen charge the main ballroom, blowing whistles and waving batons. Through a megaphone one of the them announces "You are all under suspicion of Gross Indecency... Under Section 11 of the Criminal Amendment Act of 1885 any persons in this public seen fraternising in an inappropriate and immoral fashion shall be charged and arrested." Boos erupt into raucous cheers as everyone cottons on to the performance, and the men commence their stripping dance routine to 60s pop classics. As we leave, I am handed a booklet and a CD featuring a mixture of 60s songs and audio tracks of veterans speaking about their experiences of 1960s gay London. Reading the transcripts in the booklet, I am touched by the stories of courage, camaraderie, persecution and pain, and can't help but feel that is what Gross Indecency was really about, not the fluffy beauty of beehives and monochrome shift dresses. Despite the tired exhilaration brought about by the dancing and the gin, I have a quiet moment on the night bus, thinking about those brave people, the battles they fought, and the love they found.

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[54] Biba was an iconic fashion label of the 1960s and 70s, launched in Kensington in 1964. The shops were known for their distinct atmosphere created through highly styled black and gold interiors with no natural light, large make-up counters, and the buzz of dozens of girls and young women who flocked there to try on make-up and purchase the relatively affordable copies of designer fashions.

Figs. 27 a-f: Scenes from *Gross Indecency.* Photos by Christa Holka.

Duckie have run their pioneering performance club night weekly in the same venue for sixteen years. Amongst other break out events, since 1996 they have also hosted a yearly alternative to London's Gay Pride celebrations under the tongue in cheek moniker of *Gay Shame*. *Gay Shame* was a response and counterpoint to the seemingly growing commercialisation and banality of the official Pride event, and a witty gesture towards the problematic histories of gay liberation and assimilation (for an in-depth examination of *Gay Shame*'s complicated relationship with consumerism see Silverstone 2012). Duckie's emergence in the 1990s coincided with the development of a different kind of LGBT politics. The term 'queer', traditionally a pejorative term used to designate homosexuals as peculiar or strange, was reclaimed and used as a strategic departure from what many identified as the assimilationist goals of the

mainstream gay rights movement (Weeks 1986). Groups such as the international activist network Queeruption and the Women's Anarchist Nuisance Café (both established in 1998) established a queer, feminist and anti-heteronormative politics that was fundamentally also anti-capitalist and anti-consumerist, positioning individualism as the underlying threat to radical queer ways of being. Rather than attempting to convince heteronormative culture that homosexuality was 'natural' and that gay people were unthreatening, healthy, and 'just like' heterosexuals, queer was defiantly rebellious and deviant, and incorporated all the sexualities and practices that could not be recuperated into healthy normative sexuality. This resistance was largely expressed affectively, with queer refusing the measured, rational debate of gay liberation rhetoric and instead embracing anger, uninhibited pleasure, and other extreme emotions considered inappropriate for political discourse. This was a deliberate and controversial strategy considering the historical association between homosexuality and mental illness (as it was only removed from the DSM register of psychological disorders in 1974) and the persisting cultural archetype of the 'unhappy queer' (Ahmed 2010). During this significant paradigm shift occurring during the 1990s, Duckie's staging of the *Gay Shame* events served a crucial double function of parodying and playing on the historical association between homosexuality and misery, and simultaneously proposing that deviant, unhappy queer as a preferable alternative to the non-threatening, happily assimilated, homonormative and commercialised gay wielding *his* pink pound at Gay Pride. Whilst Duckie has never explicitly associated itself with the term 'queer', it expresses a dissatisfaction with the limitations and rampant consumerism of mainstream LGBT culture and has defined itself as 'post-gay', which along with this aligning of itself with the melancholic outcast locate it firmly within the 'alternative' sphere of gay and lesbian culture.

In 2010, though funding changes had called an end to *Gay Shame* in the form it previously occupied, Duckie organised another alternative event on the evening of London Pride entitled *Gross Indecency*. Continuing the themes and intentions of *Gay Shame*, *Gross Indecency* harked back to the gay scene of 1960s London, before the sexual offences bill legalised homosexual acts in private spaces between consenting adults. This extended *Gay Shame*'s celebration of homosexuality's problematic past by embracing, rather than disregarding and renouncing the status of the homosexual as a criminal. Much

like the strategy of *Gay Shame*, *Gross Indecency* intended to counter and challenge the depoliticised and blandly commercial nature of the contemporary Gay Pride movement, in which corporate sponsored floats parade through the commercial centre of London celebrating gay visibility (and seemingly spending power) but failing to address the continuing battles for rights and recognition in Britain and globally. *Gross Indecency*'s explicitly historical focus was also particularly significant in 2010 following raging debates over London Pride's refusal the previous year to take on the suggested commemoration of the forty year anniversary of the violent and radical Stonewall riots in New York that are recognised by many as sparking the Gay Liberation movement. By recreating a fairly recent historical moment in which their subject positions and identities were denigrated and criminalised, Duckie challenge their punters to interrogate their own complacency and that of the gay mainstream gay scene as a whole, and consider both the anarchistic revolt and the assimilationist mainstreaming strategies that have resulted in this current climate.

Gross Indecency's attempt to authentically recreate the underground gay clubs of 1960s London was nostalgic, playful and sombre in equal measure. They placed great importance on historical accuracy, and paid meticulous attention to detail. The rigmarole of the entry procedure, though exaggerated, palpably recreated the bittersweet combination of anticipation and anxiety associated with this period of history when entering such a space made you vulnerable to arrest and social disgrace. Once inside the enormous space, the collective impact of the crowd, with very little exception adhering to the essential 1960s dress code sternly expressed on the ticket, furthered the sense of historical accuracy. Whilst most of the historical re-enactment such as the strictly authentic 1960s pop playlist, Dusty Springfield tribute artist and 60s girl dance group The Actionettes were for the purpose of light-hearted frothy fun, references were made to the grave undertones of this time travelling event. One of the most memorable performances took the form of a police raid, reminding the audience, with the usual camp humour, of the grim reality of a criminalised existence. As a troupe of uniformed officers stormed into the midsts of the crowd waving batons and blowing whistles, a feeling of confusion and bewilderment spread throughout the vast hall. Though quickly replaced by amused comprehension of the nature of this parodic performance piece, the affective moment of panic was significant in engaging the audience, not only in

the performance itself but in the broader aims of the event. The political moment quickly descended once more into light entertainment with the police breaking into a choreographed dance routine complete with slapstick movements, 60s pop music and ending in a strip. Yet, as previously discussed in relation to Bird Club and Wotever, this strategy of comedy and spectacle punctuated by serious undertones provides the satirical impulse of these events. Where an earnest and dry recounting of the troubles of life as a criminalised homosexual in nineteen sixties Britain is unlikely to have an impact on an audience expecting an enjoyable night of entertainment, through playful performance incorporating significant issues, they are made accessible and relatable to the punters who are encouraged to consider them in relation to their own experiences.

Figs. 28 a & b: *Police Raid* at Duckie's *Gross Indecency,* 2010. Photos by Christa Holka.

The Gross Indecency club night was also supplemented by other items and events that provided a greater platform for reflection on the graver and

more troublesome reality of the time. An accompanying booklet and CD handed out on the night shifted the balance between pop culture and politics evident on the night by providing soundbites and transcripts of interviews with veterans who frequented the 1960s London gay scene, and several days afterwards an additional event, entitled *Amy Lamé's 60s Talk Show*, invited historians and first hand witnesses to describe the gay scene at the time and answer audience questions. Accounts of camaraderie and persecution provided the guests with a poignant and moving glimpse into the difficulty faced by 'our older gay brothers and sisters'. Much like the *Police Raid* performance described above, this selection of 'true stories' provided humour, nostalgia and hard-hitting cultural commentary through the strangely familiar staging of recent history that is at only a slight remove from the experiences and contexts of its audience.

In this way, *Gross Indecency* can be seen to act as an affective archive of an otherwise neglected element of recent history. Ann Cvetkovich's (2003) study of the histories of trauma entwined in lesbian public cultures reconsiders cultural products and objects, from performance, music and literature to activism as 'repositories of feelings and emotions; which are encoded not only in the content of the texts themselves but in the practices that surround their production and reception' (ibid.: 7). Whilst the experiences of prejudice and criminalisation explored through *Gross Indecency* may not strictly fit accepted definitions of trauma (see for example Leys 2000), they nonetheless constitute the multiple and complex emotions Cvetkovich (2003) wishes to incorporate under the umbrella term of trauma as 'feelings of confusion and ambivalence that don't fit into neat models of anger and grief' (Ibid.: 284). Much like the oral histories, literature and performance that make up Cvetkovich's sources, *Gross Indecency* can be seen as establishing a public culture structured around affects, wherein individual feelings and experiences become communal public histories by addressing a 'collective audience'. It performs a very similar function of creatively archiving a historical moment to Isaac Julien's (1989) film *Looking for Langston*. Though the medium of film is vastly different from an event such as *Gross Indecency*, *Looking for Langston* proffers a non-linear and impressionistic celebration and exploration of the Harlem Renaissance from a black gay male perspective that has many parallels with my account here. The film uses archive newsreel footage, poetry, montage and monologue to record and consider the emotional, affective experience that is usually omitted from

accounts of an otherwise well-documented cultural movement. Rather than telling a biographical story or providing historical analysis, *Looking for Langston* is a multi-sensory meditation on an experience, enacted affectively to engage the audience. By recreating the experience of 1960s gay London, *Gross Indecency* similarly visually and affectively enacts a new public memorial of an experience rather than simply retelling it, proving that 'not only does performance act as a repository for ephemeral moments, it can also make emotion public without narrative or storytelling' (Cvetkovich 2003: 286). The emotional memories of the eye-witness contributors to *Gross Indecency* are shared, recorded and archived affectively by the audience, just as the facts surrounding law changes and socio-economic conditions are documented in history books. Thus I argue that *Gross Indecency* corresponds to Cvetkovich's call for ephemeral kinds of queer archives that can incorporate the affective: personal and private objects, feelings and experiences that otherwise dissolve and disappear in silence. Using a very different method to Bird la Bird's Brechtian performance but for similar aims, *Gross Indecency* encouraged it's audience to contemplate the multiple histories and presents of LGBT culture, its intersection, difficulties and continuing struggles.

Duckie is to some degree distinct from both Bird Club and Wotever in its apparent relative political apathy. As discussed above, the significance of organising the *Gay Shame* events at the cultural and historical juncture at which they began, and the professed desire to operate outside of and provide an alternative to mainstream gay culture indicates a certain politics of identity, though they refuse to explicitly align themselves with this. *Gross Indecency* reflects this ambivalence, with its commitment to aesthetic and atmospheric recreation without any direct address of the associated politics. Similarly, Duckie and *Gross Indecency* notably omit the descriptor of 'queer' so conspicuously present in the other two events, though as discussed above they have used the word elsewhere. This may be in part linked to the different key demographics of the three clubs, which interestingly all coalesce at *Gross Indecency*. Where Bird Club and Wotever are primarily populated by queer-identified individuals across the LGBT spectrum, prioritise gender variance and feature a strong female or feminist presence, Duckie appears to primarily appeal to gay men. The reasons for this could be manifold, and would warrant an entire research project alone, but this point is significant in relation to the demographic make-up of events

such as *Gay Shame* and *Gross Indecency*, which arguably (as outlined above) have an if not explicitly at least more discernibly political tone, and also happen to draw together a cross-section of the three clubs' audiences and performers. At *Gross Indecency*, different groups and communities are drawn together into a temporary public recreating a pertinent moment in LGBT history.

Conclusion

As an affective archive, *Gross Indecency* gestures towards the similar processes occurring in the other clubs being researched here. Duckie, Bird Club and Wotever are creating ephemeral archives of lives and experiences related to queer genders, desires and sexualities in a way that is otherwise not documentable. The performances enact and consider queer experiences and subjectivities and locate them within the dominant heteronormative cultures and political histories they emerge from. Like *Holding Court: A Period Drama*, many of the performances witnessed in these spaces use satire and metaphor to point out towards the world beyond the club space within which their audience must function, and use Brechtian (1964) modes of *Verfremdungseffekt* to encourage the audience to consider the implication and limitations of this. Rather than absorbing the audience into a narrative, these performances enact affective experience and incite consideration and critique. They enable different modes of being by opening up new subjective possibilities and an ambivalence to labels and identity politics that are experienced as multiple, fluid and flexible. As a 'scene', these clubs create something quite different to mainstream gay and lesbian nightlife and bar culture. Not only is the ethos of inclusion and openness (though slightly different in each) shared by these events unique, as discussed above, but through the inclusion and significance of performance the space is transformed into something more than a site of socialising. The following chapters of this thesis address how, as a focus and a shared experience, the performance functions as a mode of public address that brings into being something resembling a public - a public that may not be unified by a demographic sameness and includes crossovers and intersections of various communities and subcultures, but that is addressed through the performance as one entity. This Bakhtinian carnivalesque public is brought into being through the shared affective experience that emanates from the performance and

reverberates through the crowd. Far from bounded, static individualised selves, these affectively connected subjects enact a fluid and open subjectivity that defies the limitations of identity politics.

Chapter 4 - Performing (Femme)Selves: Bodily integrity and Autobiographical performance

> *[These] essays are about the experience of* becoming undone *in both good and bad ways. Sometimes a normative conception of gender can undo one's personhood, undermining the capacity to persevere in a livable life. Other times, the experience of a normative restriction becoming undone can undo a prior conception of who one is only to inaugurate a relatively newer one that has greater livability as its aim.* (Butler 2004: 1)

This chapter addresses the key themes of embodiment, identity and performance as they emerge from my one-to-one and group conversations with my seven performer protagonists, as well as their performance work. My analysis of this material is guided by my overarching research questions for this thesis, namely: what can a consideration of affect and embodied subjectivity bring to our understanding of queer performance, and how can the study of performance develop our understanding of affect and subjectivity? More specifically, this chapter is focused on addressing what is at stake in performance for my protagonists, and what tensions and potentials it poses for them. As I argue below, these tensions and potentials all seem to relate to the problem of subjectivity, and in particular, bodily integrity. As discussed in Chapter 1 of this thesis, the process through which individuals hold together a perception of their sense of 'self' as (often, though not always, as I explore below) coherent and bounded has been a key concern for body theorists and corporeal feminists (Grosz 1994, Weiss 1999, Hansen, 2006).

In the first section of this chapter, I examine how both the ways these artists talk about their work and their performance practice poses a paradox of subjectivity that is very familiar to Foucauldian scholars, that of subjectivity and subjectification,[55] or, how to reconcile sociocultural norms and disciplinary practices with what is felt and experienced as 'real'. For my performer protagonists, as Femme or feminine identified queer women, this takes the form of reconciling a critical and parodic iteration of norms and discourses of femininity with their continued investment in those norms and experience of their femininity as 'natural' or inherent. This problematic is present in all of their performance work, and was a significant source of tension in their accounts of

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[55] As outlined in Chapter 1, I use the terms subjectivity and subjectification here in the Foucauldian sense, ie. subjectivity being the process through which individuals come to experience and understand themselves as subjects, and subjectification being the process through which individuals are made into subjects through certain norms and identities.

their femininity when we spoke. However, as performing artists that perform as themselves or as characters of their own invention, their practice also calls into question the authenticity of the subject performing: are they performing as 'themselves' or not, and how 'true' is this portrayal of the self in the mediated context of performance? These two concomitant frictions are attended to in section 4.1. of this chapter, alongside a consideration of the specificity of female, queer, fat and non-white subjects that are always already (according to dominant psychological paradigms of rationality) conceived as less coherent and more 'leaky'.[56] In compliment to these conflicts of subjectivity, section 4.2. of this chapter engages with the potentials performance poses for counteracting or neutralising these threats to bodily integrity, enacting new forms of embodiment or what Vivian Sobchack (2009) calls *morphological imaginations*.[57] Through examples of performance work and their narratives about what performance *does* for these artists, I argue that the practice of performance provides a forum for negotiating these contradictions and tensions so that they can in fact become integral to, rather than disruptive of, a sense of 'self' that is liveable and intelligible to others (Butler 2004). Engaging work on the body schema I explore embodiment not only the visual paradigm of representation, but through a haptic, felt body that is experienced sensorially and holistically. As set out in Chapter 1 of this thesis, I utilise the concept of the *body schema* to indicate:

> the non-visual sense of the body, the haptic and proprioceptive feelings from the body – not just on the senses of hearing, smell and taste, but also touch and sense of inner body movement. This also points to the importance of synaesthesia, of the way the senses work together to produce not only our perception of the world, but the way we sense other

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[56] As addressed in Chapter 1 of this thesis, evolutionary biology and early social psychology have always positioned the white, middle class male as the exemplar of civil rationality and thus subjectivity (see, for example, Le Bon 1922, Darwin 1968). Consequently, female, non-white, queer, and working class subjects have been associated with a less stable, bounded and rational subjectivity. Through the development of corporeal feminism and the recently emerging field of fat studies, this presumption has been also been found in relation to fat bodies, particularly fat bodies that are also female, non-white, working class, queer or disabled (cf. Braziel and LeBesco 2001, Cooper 1998, Malson and Burns 2009).

[57] As discussed in more detail in Chapter 1 of this thesis, and below, Sobchack (2010) borrows the term morphological imaginations from Elizabeth Grosz (1994) to indicate the psychic frameworks through which we conceive of the form of the human body/subject, in order to suggest that a misalignment between the perception of the body and its physicality may in fact pose possibilities for a radically reconfigured sense of embodiment.

> bodies when we encounter them in everyday life, or through various media . (Featherstone 2010: 195)

The body schema thus repositions the visual, external image as only one element of the schematic whole, and frames the development of subjectivity as a fundamentally far more embodied and corporeal process than the legacy of the Cartesian mind/body dualism would indicate. Through this notion of a schematic sense of embodied 'self', I examine how the 'self' constructed on stage breaks apart the binaries that threaten to undo the traditional model of the Cartesian subject: including mind/body, inside/outside, self/other, as well as related distinctions of truth/fiction, performer/audience, and triviality/gravity.[58]

Following the work of Deirdre Heddon (2008), I propose that these performers' ambiguous use of autobiographic elements alongside character, fiction and universalised shared narratives and experiences enables them to simultaneously challenge the notion of a coherent and singular 'self' and construct a (to some extent) stable and therefore liveable subject position that is nevertheless multiple, shifting, and constructed in relation to others. This echoes Julie Hanson's (2007) claim that certain types of performance (in her case drag kinging performed by female identified lesbians) can facilitate a radical and unique mode of embodied subjectivity that is able to encompass the contradictions posed by the above dualisms, and access a more schematic understanding of the body. Despite some caveats (which I elaborate below), Hanson's concept of 'drag king embodiment' is a useful tool here for understanding the sense of bodily integrity engendered by performance for my protagonists, in which they manage to negotiate the contradictions and tensions between the identities they inhabit or discard, the norms surrounding them, their sense of a stable inherent 'core' self and their performative expressions on stage. This schematic subjectivity is constructed through the process of performance, and particularly through the intersubjective relationship with the audience and their own connection to the experiences being presented on stage. A consideration of what performance means for these artists, then, allows us to continue and develop the work of recent body theory in exploring and

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[58] As explored at length in the Chapter 1 of this thesis, the Cartesian model of subjectivity, in which the mind is deemed to be separate and independent of the body and the key distinguishing feature of human subjectivity, is the basic premise that much body theory has worked to challenge.

identifying the surfaces of emergence for a conception of subjectivity based on embodiment, intercorporeality, and affective relationality.[59] The performance work of these seven artists thus highlights and exemplifies the form of subjectivity explored within the field of body studies, but so rarely examined empirically. Concurrently, this focus on the subjective processes occurring through and within these performances and the broader debates and experiences of embodiment and intersubjectivity they are engaged in, allows for an understanding of performativity and performance beyond representation and the visual paradigm often used to understand transgressive queer performance. This literature from the field of body studies generally, and work on bodily integrity in particular, thus allows me to consider the contradictions and tensions in these performers' accounts of their own performance work productively, bringing to the fore important questions about subjectivity and selfhood. Following Les Back (2007), I am not reading for a 'truth' in these conversations, but instead seeking out the questions that this reading might allow to be asked which a reading of the performances alone would overlook.

The arguments presented in this chapter are based upon analysis of individual performance works by several of my performer protagonists, and source material drawn from our one-to-one conversations and the group conversation carried out with five performers.[60] As set up in Chapter 2 of this thesis, the conversations were carried out in a format inspired by work in autoethnography and narrative interviewing techniques. The conversations were structured only through my invitations to the participants to tell stories of their experiences and feelings, and I followed the references and narrative arcs they provided rather than prompting them to cover certain themes or topics. They also featured personal disclosures of my own, making for a more dynamic, conversational encounter, and I have attempted to remain aware of the specific

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[59] I use the concept of surfaces of emergence here to reflect Foucault's (1972) genealogical method of tracking the fields and sites in which discontinuities reveal the constructed and socio-historically specific nature of discourses presented as truth. Whilst this kind of genealogy is not my intention in this thesis, the field of body theory and the conceptions of subjectivity, embodiment and experience I am utilising are deeply indebted to work from critical psychology and related fields that have sought to identify a genealogy of the Cartesian, rational, bounded and autonomous self, thus providing opportunities for critique and a consideration of other possibilities (see, for example Rose 1996 and 1999, Henriques et al 1998, Blackman 2008b).

[60] As outlined in Chapter 2 of this thesis, the 'conversations' were semi-formal research encounters which I refer to throughout this thesis as 'conversations' to highlight their intersubjective nature as dialogic exchanges, and to avoid the hierarchical research relationship implied by the term 'interviews'.

context of the research encounter in my analysis. The conversations were then fully transcribed without obscuring any of my own input. These transcripts were analysed through extensive close reading drawing out the key themes, narratives and contradictions or points of tension within each individual conversation, and were then each cross-referenced with one another to draw out similarities or disparities between them. Whilst not assuming that the accounts given provide any universal 'truth', I believe the stories these performers tell about themselves, their embodied experiences and feelings about performance are nonetheless indicative in some way of how they negotiate and articulate their positions and experiences as subjects, and so whilst they do not access an internal ontological truth, they suggest some of the strategies and narratives through which we frame our subjectivity. Citations in this chapter and throughout the thesis follow the format of interview quotations marked by single quotation marks followed by the protagonists name in parentheses. Quotes from performances are given in double quotation marks with the performer and title of the piece in parentheses.

4.1. A Proviso: Female/Feminine/Femme/Fem(me)inist?

Of my performer protagonists, Bird la Bird, Maria Mojo and Killpussy are all quite happy to inhabit 'female', 'feminine' and 'Femme' in a fairly unproblematic (though not necessarily uncritical) way. In our conversations, they all utilised the terms fairly interchangeably when discussing the complexities and multiplicities of the forms of gender roles, expression, appearance and expected behaviour I am discussing here. However, for the remaining four of my performer protagonists the distinctions between these terms, their meanings and use value was more complicated. Neither Emelia Holdaway nor Amy Lamé self-identify as Femme (though they are both frequently misread as such because of their feminine appearance), and both deliberately distanced themselves from the term for different reasons. Emelia attributed this concern primarily to her strong feminist convictions and the ongoing need to fight patriarchy. She spoke at great length of the pervasive problem she identifies within the queer community of misogyny perpetrated against feminine, and especially Femme identifying women, often particularly committed by Butch women or Trans*men. Like Amy, she expressed discomfort with the tendency to attach the Butch-

Femme dynamic to Femme identities, but for her this was not as related to the sexual dynamic of Butch-Femme (which she, unlike Amy, has a personal investment in), but rather how she identifies this dynamic as based around 'quite misogynist assumptions that come from patriarchy, they come from ideals about men relating to women' (Emelia). As is further discussed below, Emelia feels unable to identify with the term Femme because of the way she perceives it as being a denigrated and disempowered subject position:

> If there was a better deal for Femme going culturally, I might be able to see myself as a shade of Femme but the way that I see Femmes talked about, and the way that I see the expectations going, for me, it feels like a cage, it doesn't feel like being free. (Emelia)

Like Emelia, Amy Lamé happily identified herself as female and as feminine, but found Femme limiting and 'way too prescriptive' (Amy Lamé). For her, the source of this difficulty with the term Femme is related not to misogyny but instead more to a question of body size. She appeared to suggest that while Femme provides favourable options in terms of gender expression for thin women, it was limiting and restrictive for bigger women who are subject to stereotyping associated with the public perception of fat:

> Fat Femmes always have this kind of, [pause] they're pigeon-holed into saying, all you like to do is just lie back, you're a pillow queen and this that and the other, but the thin Femmes get to be more active you know they get to be the dominatrix. (Amy Lamé)

This proposes an interesting slipperiness of the term Femme, which may therefore be more or less prescriptive or limiting for different kinds of subjects, according to the other cultural and social signifiers it is connected with, and how these are hierarchically positioned in relation to one another. For Emelia, the dominant precedence of 'male' and 'masculine' over 'female' and 'feminine' is exaggerated in the relation between 'Butch' and 'Femme', and so while she feels able to tackle patriarchy and this power struggle through a female and feminine identity, Femme is experienced by her as too fixed within this hierarchy. For Amy, it seems the intersection between feminine/masculine power structures and the widespread cultural denigration of fat subjectivity detracts some of the potential (that thin Femmes may retain) to subvert this hierarchy.

This interplay of different identities and the hierarchical positions they hold in relation to one another is further complicated by Jet Moon and Josephine Krieg's very similar conceptions of Femme, as a gender construct that is not necessarily analogous with femininity or female-ness. Jet very forcefully asserts her Femme identity whilst making clear she does not identify as cisgendered:

> I don't think of myself as female, I think of myself as some kind of creature, like some kind of fucking animal [...] I'm not really attaching much to this idea of like "woman." (Jet Moon)

She acknowledges the ways in which being assigned and brought up as female has influenced her perspective, and particularly her interest in femininity, but struggles to associate herself with the concept of 'femininity' because of it's association for her with a cisgendered female subject position. In contradiction to Amy and Emelia, for Jet the radical potential of Femme is that it is less prescriptive and tied to other identities or preconceptions, it is an identity which is entirely independent from biological sex, sexual orientation, or even gender expression. Jospehine's Femme identity in itself embodies this potential, as a queer Femme transwoman with no investment in the Butch-Femme dynamic, her subject position, and her taking on of the both feminine and Femme labels, challenge some of the assumptions and associations that prove problematic above. For Josephine, this is precisely the purpose and potential of Femme, and also of performance, as a tool for engaging in these debates, and addressing the limitations and assumptions related to these terms through the multiple and particularly genderqueer femininities her and Jet enact on stage:

> It's really cool to talk about, well how can you express to people, as an example, or exemplify or represent, that you can approach Femme and femininity as a gender construct in very different ways, and still be critical of the social norm, but also being very aware of the codes that you use [...] you live in a gendered society, every action, every behaviour, is codified, you know, and you have to engage with it at some point, and why not accept that, but also see the power of that. (Josephine)

The complexities of what the terms femininity and Femme mean to these seven artists, and the ways in which they are advantageous or limiting according to their intersections with various other elements of their identity are the continuous subtext of the forthcoming discussion of femininities. Unless

otherwise stated, I use the term 'femininity' in the spirit of Josephine's definition - to denote the broadly socially understood codes of appearance and behaviour traditionally associated with female gender expression, but engaged by these artists in a far more flexible and open way that is not necessarily bound to cis-gendered female-ness. The term Femme is used more cautiously, generally only in relation to those who self-identify as such, and if necessary with caveats as to its meaning within that specific context.

However, all seven of these performers were unanimous in their association of femininity/Femme with feminism, and all discussed how their encounters with feminism enabled their enactment of agency through a particular performance of femininity. As I argue below, these artists all separate themselves from a restrictive and normative version of femininity that they all set up as a potentially oppressive force, and redefine femininity as something that, while highly unnatural in its stylised expression, is experienced as a natural element of a true self that must be expressed. This reframing of femininity as an autonomous choice rather than subjugation calls up connotations of the post-feminist emphasis on empowerment that nevertheless still reinforces sexual difference and the need for performative femininity (Gill 2007, 2008, McRobbie 2009). McRobbie (2009) in particular discusses how the maintenance and performance of corporeal femininity through appearance is translated through the 'post-feminist masquerade'[61] into an individual and empowered choice that obscures the consequences and difficulties posed for women who do not take up this option. Whilst the way these artists discuss deliberate artifice, liberation and strength echoes the sentiments of McRobbie's post-feminist masquerade, their stories lack the constituent repudiation of feminism and particularly second-wave feminists as frumpy killjoys. Their spectacle of femininity is articulated *through* their commitment to and continuing desire for feminist

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[61] McRobbie (2009) draws on the work of psychoanalyst Joan Riviére (1929) and others who have engaged her work (such as Doane 1982 and Butler 1990) to develop her notion of the post-feminist masquerade. Whilst Riviére's version of the masquerade referred to the self-conscious manner in which women are compelled to perform a particular version of 'perfect' femininity, McRobbie reconfigures this for a post-feminist cultural context in which a performance of a knowing and ironic parody of artificial and stylised femininity takes feminism into account and yet dismisses it, ultimately reinforcing patriarchy and heteronormativity.

politics, rather than the post-feminist discarding of it.[62] In their performances and day-to-day lives, these performers integrate their feminism and their femininity, as queer subjects embodying a feminine appearance, or through appropriating performance styles such as burlesque usually associated with objectification to proffer their feminist messages. Emelia's challenge to the objectifying gaze when she emulates cutting her flesh from her body, Bird la Bird's confrontations of the plight of single people, Jet's expositions of radical anti-capitalist politics, and Dyke Marilyn's satirical and cheeky engagement with the intersection of racism and sexism are brief examples that demonstrate the inextricability of feminism and Femme/femininity for all of these performers.

4.2. The problem of bodily integrity

> "There's so much internal fakery that makes up the real me." (Jet Moon, *Femme-inism 101*)

A key problematic posed and simultaneously addressed by the practice of performance for these artists is that of bodily integrity. Bodily integrity has become a key concern for theorists working in the field of body studies in recent years, with scholars using different theoretical frames to understand and interpret how we manage to conceive and understand ourselves as subjects when faced with the unstable, slippery, unbounded and relational nature of our bodies.[63] Accounts of bodily integrity have often focused on various medical interventions that 'mediate' the physiological body in some way - from prosthetics and transplants (Slatman and Widdershoven 2010, Sobchack 2010) to cosmetic and Weight Loss Surgery (Throsby 2008, Heyes 2007). In bioethical debates, concerns over organ donation have centred on the psychological risk of interfering with bodies that are currently 'whole' (see Naumann 2010), or the imperative of restoring a bodily integrity to bodies that have been compromised by injury, illness or surgery. In both cases the *physical* violation of the body is what prompts a consideration of the workings of bodily integrity, with the aim of

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[62] The post-feminist masquerade is further complicated by these performer's motivations for this performance of femininity, as McRobbie (2009) argues the post-feminist masquerade orientates femininity around cultural norms rather than heterosexual desirability. For all of these queer artists, this removal of the need for male approval is evident, but it is not replaced by cultural norms in the way suggested by McRobbie, since their performance of femininity actually works against the subcultural homonormative norms of lesbian appearance.

[63] As discussed Chapter 1 of this thesis.

discovering how a person's conception of a whole and coherent sense of self can be restored or maintained. However, as Margaret Shildrick (2010) claims in a recent special issue of Body and Society, what is significant about these accounts is not necessarily the physical mediation of the body itself, but 'the insistent potential of radically different modes of embodiment' (ibid.: 11-12). Medical interventions such as prostheses and transplants may serve to highlight the contingency and fragility of the body that is complete and hermetically sealed, but they reveal the complex webs of hybridity and relationality *all* bodies are situated within, and subsequently the complex psychic strategies we must all engage to hold together a coherent sense of self. Discussions of bodily integrity, then:

> challenge the idea of bodies as discrete entities, clearly bounded and differentiated such that we know what is inside and what is outside, what is self and what is other, what is natural and what is cultural, and what is 'pure experience' and what is mediated. (Blackman 2010a: 1)

Though less spectacular than these physical threats to the body's integrity, we can see the functioning of bodily integrity at work in the day-to-day management of identities and performing a coherent notion of 'self'. For my protagonists, the tension between their (feminist) awareness of femininity as a socially constructed normative discourse (and particularly one that causes great distress to many women) and their continued investment and identification with it requires careful management. This seems inextricably linked to the tension between their on-stage personas and their sense of a 'true' self enacted on or off the stage. As we see below through discussion of their performance work and the narratives of femininity and 'the real me' they recounted in our conversations, their identification and performance of self-conscious femininity, and their investment in personal performance that is (in the broad sense defined by Deirdre Heddon 2008) autobiographical, delicate management strategies are required to draw together a sense of bodily integrity when the norm of the self-contained, discrete, bounded 'self' is challenged.

Figs. 29 a & b: Jet Moon performing *Femme-inism 101* at *Wotever Sex,* 2009. Photos by AbsolutQueer.

Jet Moon's performance *Femme-inism 101* exemplifies how performance using personal stories can challenge the rational, bounded image of the Cartesian subject. As part of *The Genderqueer Playhouse*, a performance event curated by Wotever World in collaboration with the Transfabulous Transgender arts festival, this piece was positioned between others celebrating and telling a range of trans* and queer stories about sex, bodies, and the lived experience of gender variance.[64] Similarly to the other performers, Jet uses humour and personal anecdote to satirise her own Femme identity. Sauntering onto the stage in a slick long blonde wig, heavy make-up, red PVC and clear plastic platform stilettos and wrapped in a long piece of lilac organza, her appearance is a cross between porn star and confection.[65] Unwrapping the fabric, she

[64] For more information see http://www.transfabulous.co.uk. The show was also the subject of a feature length documentary film entitled *The Lovers and Fighters Convention* (Wyeld 2009), for more information see http://theloversandfightersconvention.com.

[65] Echoing the above discussion of the post-feminist masquerade (McRobbie 2009), Jet's parodic femininity also reflects Louise Kaplan's (1991) discussion of the 'homeovestite'. Reinvigorating the work of Rivieré (1929) and fellow psychoanalyst George Zavitzianos (1972), Kaplan identified the homeovestite as an individual whose cross-gender identifications and fear of being perceived as the opposite sex leads them to impersonate an extreme version of their own gender. As discussed above, this masquerade of the supposedly natural sex/gender alignment highlights its artifice and undermines the heterosexual matrix.

reveals a leopard print basque with a pink satin push-up bra showing through the lace, a black thong and heavy diamanté jewellery as she tells of her relief at leaving behind the fashion disasters and "vanilla sex" of her 1980s lesbian feminism. Her strong jawline contrasts with the wig to leave the audience questioning: is she in drag? Is she trans*? Was she born female? She will provide no answers to these questions that are irrelevant to her. Her object of attention is Femme. Presenting Femmes as "a new social movement", we are told that, despite existing for decades, Femmes have until recently been "considered a bit too oppressed to be liberated". She asserts:

> Getting rid of my Femme-ness would be like trying to remove my bones, there's so much internal fakery that makes up the real me [...] The clothes, the shoes, the wigs, the make-up, I know that stuff is crappy make-believe. But what I want to explain, is that when I put on this drag, this fake, this costume, that's when the outside begins to match the inside. When I dress up, I'm becoming who I really am. (Jet Moon, *Femme-inism 101*)

Her framing of her Femme identity simultaneously evokes and parodies the psychologised language of authentic subjectivity that is ubiquitous in contemporary culture, and particularly in discourses around transgender (specifically transsexual) identity (see Prosser 1998).[66] Her attachment to 'crappy make-believe' as her access to becoming 'who I really am' gives a tongue-in-cheek twist to the common narratives of authenticity, inner self, and being 'trapped in the wrong body' that have become commonplace in medical discourse, mainstream media representations and the stories of many trans* individuals and communities. Transfabulous as a festival, and Jet as an activist and a performer, challenge this as *the only* narrative of trans experience, pushing for more diverse stories that encompass the variety, fluidity and flexibility of people's identifications and understandings of their subjectivities and bodies. Vacillating between earnest and mocking tones, Jet plays out the complex and ambivalent relationship many have to this monolithic narrative.

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[66] I make the distinction between transgendered and transsexual here as the 'trapped in the wrong body' trope commonly used to explain trans experience is particularly virulently applied to transsexual narratives. This trope relies on both the psychologised notion of the internally authentic subject ('the real me inside') that can be betrayed by the external surface of the body, and the unequivocally binary nature of gender, which is not necessarily reflective of the beliefs and experience of many who identify as trans*. For a fascinating Foucauldian-inflected in-depth analysis of the use of this authenticity narrative in relation to sex re-assignment and other forms of cosmetic surgery, see Heyes (2007).

She refers to herself as a 'faggot', and employs and plays on inane stereotypes of Femmes ("rifling around in our handbags") and notions of 'real girls' and 'real boys' whilst telling graphic stories of strap-on cocks worn under pretty pink skirts, BDSM, the magical Femme power of invisibility, and 'passing' as heterosexual.

Clearly the aesthetic of femininity Jet has chosen to re-appropriate in this performance is notable, with all the classed implications of inappropriate female sexuality associated with the trashy image, but what I want to focus on is something more - something more about trashing the very notion of rationalist human subjectivity and how we define it. Her performance refuses the kind of reasoned, cogent subjectivity often asserted by marginalised subjects asserting and legitimising their right to speak. There is no investment here in the white male Cartesian ideal of the rational subject - what we see instead is a celebration of the erratic, unstable, subject that does not strive for intellectual validation, but rather relies on the cheap, tawdry banalities of femininity to construct an entirely superficial sense of self, but nonetheless one which is experienced as fundamental and essential to her being. The association of women with irrationality has been mined by feminist performance artists from Carolee Schneeman to Bobby Baker and Split Britches (see for instance Heddon 2008, Case 1990, 2008, Forte 1990, Patraka 1993). The hysterics and histrionics stereotypically associated with women have provided feminist performers with a vehicle for social critique for decades, but what I see in Jet's performance goes beyond the strategic use of an irrational guise to claim quite the opposite - rather than striving for legitimacy, Jet seems to be disregarding it altogether, and instead embracing and celebrating a subjectivity that is unintelligible under that logic. By claiming that her stripper heels and push up bra are what make up 'the real me', and that the silicone dildo she wears accurately reflects what it would be like to have been born with male genitals (except, of course, her cock would be much bigger), Jet repudiates all the distinctions noted by Blackman (2010a) above that constitute how we understand the body and subjectivity. Jet leaves us in a position where it is impossible to determine what is self and what is other, what is natural and what is cultural, what is inside and what is outside, and what is 'pure' and what is mediated. For me, *Femme-inism 101* echoes Gavin Butt's (2009) call for irreverence as a mode of resistance to the normative codes of 'seriousness'

pervading not only performance studies, but academic endeavour in general. Jet's polemic enacts what Butt calls:

> the ways in which we might *queerly prize* something in not taking it seriously [...] a kind of trashy ethics or aesthetics in idly or playfully entertaining what it is that performance proposes. (Ibid.: 92)

Femme-inism 101 simultaneously stages both the failure of and the need for the psychologised languages of subjectivity and subjectification, and in doing so, I argue, values them *by* refusing to take them seriously. What Butt calls 'the minor, fallen spectacle' (ibid.: 92) is in this case the attempt at performing the ubiquitous trope of 'the real me', and just as Butt suggests, it is in this failure that this performance really *matters*.

Fig. 30: Bird la Bird and collaborators performing *The Femme Police* at Duckie's *Gay Shame Goes Girly,* 2009. Photo by Christa Holka.

4.2.1. Normative femininity VS natural femininity

The performance work of my protagonists problematises but also addresses the negotiation between identities and selves as multiple and shifting but simultaneously experienced as stable and inherent. This seems particularly true for their ambivalent and often contradictory engagement with femininity as something that is understood as socially constructed, normative and limiting, but also felt and experienced as natural and inherent to their sense of a 'real self' (the 'authentic' inner self is further examined in section 4.2.2. below). This

tendency is a particular trope of the kind of personal, autobiographical work that also provides political commentary as seen in Jet's performance and is evident in the work of the other six. As noted in Deirdre Heddon's (2008) thorough and detailed examination of the genre, the multiple and shifting 'self' of autobiographical performance is often nonetheless presented and experienced as a unified 'I', and is comprised of various societal and intersubjective elements:

> Recognising that all identities are discursive constructions and therefore historically and culturally located does not make the various experiences that adhere to any 'identity' less real or felt. (Ibid.: 31)

The ways these artists define and utilise the concept of femininity to negotiate their bodies and sense of self in relation to the world and societal norms and pressures indicates the complex and various elements of embodied experience that cannot be encapsulated by the static visual 'body image'. In our conversations they enacted a delicate interplay of a sense of femininity as a bodily property of appearance and external image, as is often associated with the post-feminist sensibility (Gill 2007), as expected (and often restrictive) norms of behaviour, and as more abstract (and often more liberating) qualities. In their performance and in our conversations two contrasting accounts of femininity seem to emerge: femininity as a set of normative expectations, both of heterosexual conceptions and lesbian standards of appearance and behaviour; and a sense of femininity as natural or inherent coupled with the performative and artificial nature of stylised femininity.

Fig. 31: Killpussy performing at Bird Club, 2008. Photo by Leng Montgomery.

Fig. 32: Bird la Bird and Maria Mojo in Bird Club press shot, 2006. Image by Baron Schwarz.

All of the artists employed some notion of a normative, mainstream universal version of 'femininity' in relation to which they articulated their own understanding, experience and enactment of the term. This conception of a normative femininity was described in our conversations in various levels of detail and structured around very different characteristics (such as standards of appearance or behaviour) by the different protagonists and at different points in the interview, but still presented as a universal concept that did not require particularly detailed description. As seen above in *Femme-inism 101*, Jet Moon frames the artificiality of her Femme identity in relation to being (and importantly being raised as) 'a girl' and notions of inherent womanhood. Though rarely in such explicit spoken terms, the others often also employ this tactic of looking or acting stereotypically 'feminine', even if only (and often this is the case) to lampoon this universalised image. In our conversation, Amy called up standardised appearance norms of mainstream media and culture as pervasive enough not to need outlining, referring to the 'cookie-cutter image of how we expect women to look' (Amy Lamé). She constructed normative femininity as very much associated with external markers of appearance such as clothing and make-up, but distinguished normative femininity from her own enactment as being restrictive and dull as well as oppressive and potentially harmful for

women, mirroring many of the feminist beauty arguments (such as Wolf 1990).[67] Her on-stage and real-life presentation reflects and troubles this normative 'cookie-cutter' image. With her always immaculate hair styles, dresses, exaggerated make-up and cat-eye glasses, Amy presents a very recognisable (particularly in queer circles) archetypal 1950s femininity, reinforcing the 'cookie-cutter' concept of a stereotypical way a 'woman' looks. However, she is also far from that 'cookie-cutter' image. In her gloriously curvy, queer body and in a (mainstream) cultural context where the popular icons of femininity are tanned but fair waif-like supermodels or pop stars, she disrupts the universality and endurance of norms of femininity that are historically, culturally, and even subculturally specific.[68] Amy, like the others, employs and relies on certain symbols and visual codes that are relatively universally recognisable as 'feminine'. Yet the context of their articulation disrupts the seemingly stable meanings of those signifiers - on different bodies, in different social environments and to different viewers, these universal codes become incredibly particular. Markers such as make-up, costumes, glitter and feathers can therefore be used to signify a universal femininity that everyone can relate to, and set the scene for a critique of the gender roles, misogyny, and society more broadly that produce that 'femininity' in the first place.

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[67] Whilst their discussions of femininity as limiting and pressuring expectations for women echo many of the common 'beauty myth' arguments of the last few decades (see, for example, Baker 1984, Berry 2007, Wolf 1990), this concept of the conflict of femininity and feminism is carefully negotiated by all seven of my performer protagonists, as examined in section 4.1. of this chapter. For all of them feminism was characterised as a vital aspect of their subjectivity and identity, and specifically as an indispensable tool used to construct an empowered image of femininity.

[68] There is of course a double nature to this normative feminine appearance - alongside the ubiquitous heteronormative image, these artists all also recalled facing specific and prescriptive lesbian or queer appearance norms, articulated around a delicate balance of femininity and masculinity. Evidence of the marginalisation of Femmes within queer and lesbian cultures is abundant, and stories of invisibility, shame, and accusations of replicating heteronormative strictures are central to many published Femme narratives (see, for example, Burke 2009, Hollibaugh 2000, Nestle 1992). I will therefore not dwell on this point here, but rather include it as another point of reference for the complex narratives of femininity that these performers employ to structure and articulate their own enactments and experiences.

Fig. 33: Emelia as cupid at Bird Club's *Outta Wedlock Special,* 2009. Photo by Leng Montgomery.
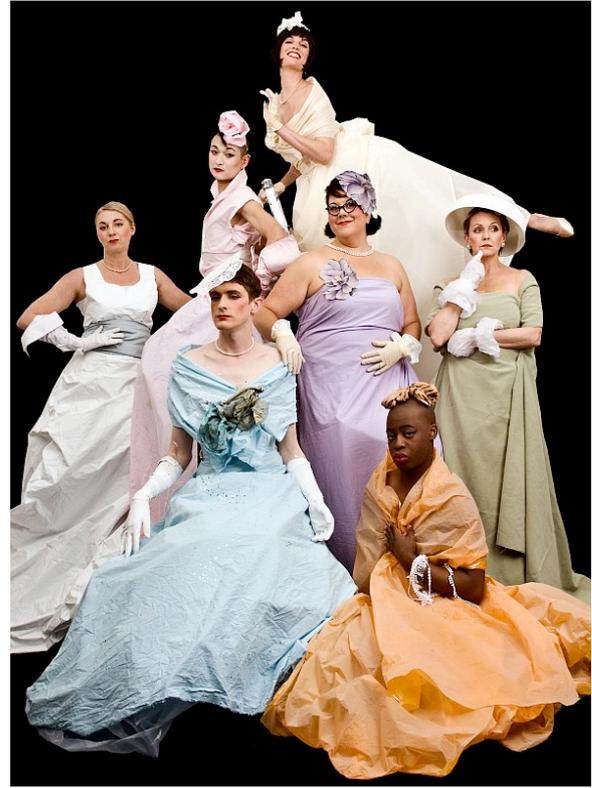
Fig. 34: Amy Lamé, centre, in a promotional image for Duckie's Gay Shame Goes Girly, 2009. Image courtesy of Duckie.

Indeed all seven of my protagonists draw on some notion of a universal or external 'femininity' to construct their stylised, theatrical and self-conscious queer femme/feminine look. Even Emelia, who refuses the Femme label in 'real-life', literally embodies well-recognised 'icons of femininity' (Emelia) such as Marilyn Monroe, Kylie Minogue and Miss World in her stage performances. The humour of Maria Mojo's performances hinges on the invocation of a fundamental norm of feminine embodiment, but one that is even more politically loaded, that of whiteness: 'there's always this cute blonde, the blonde ideal, that ideal feminine would be this blonde blue eyed kind of fey character' (Maria Mojo). As Dyke Marilyn exposes her 'black roots' (sometimes literally glimpsed peeking out from beneath her blonde wig), her dark skin spilling out of her clothes, she parodies the ideal of feminine whiteness and the stereotypes of exotic, dangerous, and excessively sexual women of colour. The satire is doubled by the image of Marilyn Monroe herself - likewise a caricature of uncontrollable female sexuality that would be dangerous were it not contained within a guise of fragility and child-like foolishness. Killpussy's performance work, both her cabaret performance and her wrestling, equally rest on the

incongruity between her tall, broad, muscular body and its feminine adornments. For her, the norm of a feminine body type hindered her expression of a femininity that she nonetheless identified with as a young woman: 'I didn't see that I was girly, or feminine even though I felt that because of my height, my weight, and my size' (Killpussy). The discord between the inherent femininity she always felt, and the expectations of body shape and behaviour she felt unable to meet, have acted as both obstacle and motivation for her taking up performance as a means of creative expression. In complement to her ultra-femme drag of feathers and jewels, Killpussy's brash, audacious performance style (often literally) kicks back at the other set of norms she associates with femininity - those of behaviour. In our conversation, Killpussy cited her estrangement from her femininity (and later reclaiming of it through performance) as the result as much of the need to be subservient, demure, 'sweet and pretty' (Killpussy) as of the issues with body type discussed above. This struggle with 'the girl card' (Killpussy) reflects Bird la Bird's refusal of the notion of 'ladylike', something that both of them express through their work. By coupling assertive, feisty and sometimes antagonistic performances - often featuring (simulated) violence or polemic spoken word - with their highly stylised feminine appearance, both Bird la Bird and Killpussy simultaneously trade on and discredit the normative expectations of feminine behaviour they abhor.

Despite its restrictions and limitations none of these artists have chosen to discard the normative femininity they identify, they all choose to utilise it as a tool, in life and in performance, for social critique and self expression. All of them to some extent articulate and embody an investment in a femininity that is experienced as inherent or natural to them. Amy Lamé particularly presented this inherent femininity as something internal that needed to be expressed externally: 'I had a very strong sense of myself, and of my feminine self, that expression of that was absolutely essential to my happiness and wellbeing' (Amy Lamé). The tendency for all of them to express 'feeling' feminine in a seemingly essential, organic way holds a tension with the construction of an external, normative, limiting sense of femininity as something which is imposed or policed poses an interesting subjective process here, especially considering the interplay of external makers of appearance and more abstract characteristics that are associated with femininity.

This is clearly exemplified in the complex ways in which Jet Moon articulates her own Femme-ininity in opposition to the cis-gendered 'implication of natural-ness' (Jet Moon). In our conversation she rejected the 'core value attributed to female-ness', yet asserted her own Femme expression as experienced as inherent and instinctual to her. This friction between recognising the social expectations of someone considered 'female', that which she has chosen to accept but also subvert and 'unpick,' was problematic for Jet as 'that really tricky thing between what I know I've been taught, and yet what feels completely internal and natural' (Jet Moon). This is evidenced in much of her performance work, which almost always references the femininity learnt as a child - how girls are supposed to look, act, sound, and 'all the things I was brought up to want' (namely, heteronormative domestic bliss), juxtaposing this with her dominant, aggressive 'macho' sexuality and her radical politics. Her very deliberate style and construction of Femme is always in dynamic and strained relation to 'natural' cis-femininity - she invokes a history of cisgendered feminine experience and being raised female (or being 'girled' to use a more Butlerian [1990] phrase) and in the same breath repudiates it: "I'm a girl, but there's no way that relates to any true notion of what a woman is" (Jet Moon, *Femme-inism 101*). Perhaps more so than any of the others, Jet's enactment of Femme, particularly on stage, continually unsettles the boundary between what is learned and what is inherent, or what is (self-consciously) constructed and what is (considered) natural. A similar tension between the experience of instinctual femininity in conflict with social gender norms was very eloquently highlighted by Josephine's depiction of Femme as the identity that 'came first', something that she felt was a part of her sense of self before she entered transition - 'for me Femme is the identity that embodies a lot of what I believe, what I feel I am, and trans is my way of getting there' (Josephine).

This entwining of inside and outside in association with cultural expectations and individual personal feelings poses the notion of femininity as one element in a body schema that engages with the 'outside' of society or culture in a way that is far more complex than mere interaction or influence, as the common psychological models of internalisation discussed in Chapter 1 have suggested. Through their references within our conversations and through their work and everyday styles of dress and appearance all seven of these artists appear to express their femininity performatively through stylised and

theatrical means. Yet they characterise this as an expression of something experienced as an inherent part of their inner selves, this deep identification making it no less self-conscious, thought out or studied. A key question, therefore, is how do they reconcile this supposed 'naturalness' with the cultural and external nature of the femininity they identify?

The multiple and flexible identifications demonstrated by these artists appear to function in a similar way to Gail Weiss' (1999) multiple body images, where the multiple and shifting nature of the images of the self, far from resulting in a fractured or contradictory sense of self, is precisely the mechanism through which we are able to experience ourselves as coherent individuals. As Weiss suggests, we all possess multiple body images that are constantly shifting and reforming in relation to one another as our position and relation to others, objects and the world constantly changes and remakes our subject position within it. Whether this process is conscious or not, it is this switching and altering of body images which is precisely how individuals are able to experience themselves as a subject and not experience their subjectivity or sense of 'self' to be ruptured or undone whenever it changes and has to be remade. The flexibility these artists indicate appears to function as a particular very conscious form of this multiple shifting of body images, wherein they utilise the very instability of these terms to allow them some stability in their sense of self, where static singular images would become problematic when they no longer seem to fit.

Weiss' work has been taken up in more recent debates to understand the functioning and role of bodily integrity in embodied subjectivity. As noted above, the concept of bodily integrity is often deployed to conceptualise the psychic process through which a coherent sense of subjectivity is regained after a significant (usually medical) intervention into the physical body that challenges that body's unity, boundedness and status as 'belonging' to the individual. Yet in this tension between femininity as both an external set of norms and an internal essence we see a similar struggle - how to conceive of your embodied 'self' as whole, coherent and unfractured when it is so obviously mediated in some way. Vivian Sobchack (2010) draws on Weiss' (1999) phenomenological turn of phrase when theorising her own journey from experiencing what is (for her, problematically) termed a 'phantom limb', to developing an embodied sense of herself without the leg she has lost, to eventually incorporating a prosthetic into

her psychic and felt conception of her body. Rather than a 'restoration' of a 'correct' body image when her physical presence matched her embodied experience, Sobchack suggests the development of a new *morphological imagination* allowed her to experience a transformed bodily integrity - a different kind of 'wholeness' that she actually considers a radically reconfigured sense of embodiment. I am not wishing to conflate my and my protagonists' struggles with femininity with the pain and trauma of losing a limb or undergoing drastic surgery, but to echo Maragret Shildrick's (2010) suggestion, am proposing that both of these experiences indicate complex processes of subject formation belied by the static visual of the 'body image'. Perhaps the performative expression of a stylised femininity acts for these artists on the level of a morphological imagination, whereby their multiple body images adapt and shift to formulate a sense of a coherent, liveable self in the face of the norms that render their bodies and desires unintelligible (Butler 2004).

In our conversation Josephine noted that for her, 'its not a question of transgressive value, it's a question of embodiment, and expressing something you believe is quintessentially yourself in a culture that only gives you a certain language to do that' (Josephine). Her characterisation of Femme as a possibility that 'gives people options' and has 'limitless' and 'permeable' borders is reflective of how this multiple and shifting object of femininity affords opportunities of expression to all of these artists. For these performers, femininity is a truly schematic element of their embodied experience that is simultaneously cultural and personal, internal feeling and external appearance, and stable and unified as it is fluid and constantly shifting. Jet encapsulated the possibility of Femme as a strategy through which to enact this multiple, schematic sense of self by proclaiming that 'I say what what it is, no-one else tells me what it is, and it gives me a space where I can integrate all the parts of myself and go yep, still Femme' (Jet Moon). In the following section of this chapter I explore how this process is further problematised specifically through performance, and in section 4.3. consider how, paradoxically, performance also acts as the strategy to negotiate, naturalise and explain this dynamic form of subjectivity that challenges conventional psychologised understandings of the self.

4.2.2. Performing the Self/Not-Self

> *'Even those characters I thought I'd plucked from the ether are actually just exaggerated versions of myself.' (Josephine)*

An interrelated tension that these performers have to negotiate through their performance work is that between their on-stage and off-stage personas, particularly since for most of them personal experience provides a substantial portion of their performance material. All seven of these artists, as well as countless more queer or otherwise, cite complex and difficult experiences of their bodies and identities as primary sources for their performance work. Through their performances of this, they uncover the multiplicities and contradictions in all subject positions, not just the performers' own, bringing into question the very notion of the stable unified subject. Related to the above problematic of a femininity that is experienced as natural and inherent even whilst it is acknowledged as a social construct, the way these artists talk about their performance practice poses a conflict between being 'themselves' on stage, and being 'something else'. By translating the 'self' of the performer into a character on stage, autobiographical performance has been attributed with the unique potential for exploring this multiplicity and the complex relations between 'real' self, performance persona, character and culturally constructed identity (Heddon 2008). In discussing the work of performance artist Bobby Baker, Heddon considers how the overlaps, gaps and tensions between and within Baker's exaggerated performance persona, her 'actual' self and the cultural expectations and stereotypes she plays on in her performances as the neurotic middle-class housewife lead to a situation in which '[c]onfronted by Bobby Baker playing Bobby Baker, I have no idea who Bobby Baker is' (ibid.: 43). A very similar confusion is created in the performance work of these artists, all of whom engage their multiple selves and identities, the stereotypes ascribed to them and the performative strategies of fiction to simultaneously tell real personal stories and experiences and distance these stories from any sense of 'truth' or reality.

This tension is exemplified by one of Josephine's most loved on-stage alter-egos, Miss File. A neurotic and uptight psychologist-in-training, Miss File takes to the stage to share the findings of her ethnographic examinations of 'the queers', whom she studies in their natural habitat by diligently frequenting the gay bars of Kings Cross and Soho (purely in the name of research, naturally), to

uncover their deviant practices and (imagined) psychological disorders. In an early incarnation, Miss File conducted a interview with Dyke Marilyn (one of Maria Mojo's alter-egos, discussed above and at greater length in Chapter 5), concluding, despite her patient's forceful contestations, that Marilyn must be deeply and profoundly depressed and psychologically disturbed. Despite her stern exterior and professed objective, distanced scientific interest in her queer patients, Miss File's presentations frequently descend into manic, reckless displays of her repressed sexuality. Getting carried away demonstrating the difference between safe, natural, heterosexual burlesque and deviant queer performance, for example, Miss File comes to her senses after thrashing around the floor in her underwear, concluding the performance by collecting the clothes she has strewn across the stage and scurrying away sheepishly, smoothing her dishevelled hair and straightening her spectacles as she goes. In our conversation, Josephine recounted to me her realisation that Miss File was far from an imaginative fiction - she was in fact a fusion and exaggeration of several elements of Josephine herself, combined with a particular prim teacher with a secret rock and roll lifestyle that Josephine had admired as a schoolchild. To those that know Josephine (and as audiences for these events tend to be regular, many of her audience do know her in some capacity), Miss File clearly highlights and exaggerates some aspects of her character. Like Josephine, Miss File is articulate and speaks softly yet sternly, she is immaculately and respectably dressed in pencil skirts and pussy-bow blouses, and she embodies the kind of demure, stifled female sexuality of English school m'ams and nannies. As an academic engaged in PhD research herself, Josephine is also parodying the traditional format of 'objective' research that obscures the researcher's own subjectivity and investment in their object of study.[69] Miss File's denial of her own queer passions is both comical and painfully familiar to audiences that are all too accustomed to prying requests from unsympathetic

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[69] Josephine's PhD thesis on the negotiation of trans subjectivity and community is due for submission in 2012 at the London School of Economics. While she may not use the same vocabulary of autoethnography as myself, her research is very much informed by the feminist epistemology and imperative of located research set out in Chapter 2 of this thesis.

journalists, academics and researchers investigating LGBTQ experience and the insensitive, pathologising narratives that often ensue.[70]

Fig. 35: Josephine Krieg performing as Miss File, *Wotever Sex,* 2009.
Photo by Sam Nightingale.

Moreover, Josephine uses Miss File to explore social conventions of acceptable behaviour, as well as different forms of acceptable and unacceptable femininity. Miss File's lectures on the perils of homosexuality mock the pathologising narratives that are all too familiar to her audience, but they also point to the repressed and potentially queer sexuality that can reside beneath even the most normative, prim exterior. Miss File's Jekyl and Hyde outbursts suggest that all is not what it seems when it comes to our understanding of what defines our own and others' sense of self. Regardless of an individual audience member's familiarity with or recognition of Josephine's temperament, Miss File's own demure facade addresses how, as Josephine put it in our conversation, 'everybody performs themselves to some degree and that changes from place to place from time to time' (Josephine). This cuts to a key problematic not only of stage performance but of the daily performance of our 'self' in a culture saturated with norms, technologies and processes of

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[70] As noted previously, it is worth remembering here the (jovial) way in which my own position as 'one of those PhD students doing research on the queers' was naturalised and justified only by my previous and ongoing involvement in the scene and acquaintances with my protagonists. I am certain that as a stranger to this scene appearing purely for the purposes of research I would have been denied access, as I have witnessed on several occasions when unfamiliar and/or presumed heterosexual researchers or journalists appear with questionnaires and notepads and are (usually politely) asked to refrain or leave.

subjectification that mediate our bodies - what is the real, authentic, true 'self' and what is artificial and affected?

Despite returning to the realm of major surgical intervention into the physical coherence of the body, Karen Throsby's (2008) consideration of the discursive strategies utilised by Weight Loss Surgery (WLS) patients to neutralise and authenticate their post-surgical subjectivity may provide us with a model for considering the various 'selves' and norms at play here. Throsby identifies the phenomena of online WLS discussion forums in which patients refer to the date of their surgery as their 're-birthday'. This rhetoric of re-birth functions as a strategy through which patients are able to negotiate a new sense of bodily integrity in relation to the surgical intervention, but most importantly the threats of inauthenticity and normativity posed by such an intervention (where WLS is often considered a 'cheat' or 'easy option' in comparison to the diet and exercise regimes that constitute the 'proper' way of losing weight). A careful balancing act ensues, where the 'new me' post-surgery is also the 'real me' - the surgery enables the becoming of a disciplined subject capable of self-control and thus weight-loss, thereby enacting the full 'self' that has been there all along but was previously obscured and stifled by excess fat. Crucially for Throsby, this also allows her to consider how what is experienced as authentic for many of the patients of WLS is also related to social norms. Echoing the common narratives of transgender experience discussed above, this model employs a notion of true inner self 'trapped' in a body that betrays it. Although it is not necessarily the body that betrays the authentic subjectivity of these artists, their performance practice and theatrical embodiment of femininity demands a very similar balancing act. This balancing act neutralises two interrelated tensions that threaten their sense of authentic, 'true' self - the tension between their feminism and their femininity, and the tension between their performance personas as 'real' or self-consciously constructed. This double tension is managed by my protagonists using the same discursive strategy wherein conceptions of authenticity and play or experimentation are carefully balanced to retain bodily integrity and a coherent sense of 'self' in spite of this openness.

In our conversations, several of my protagonists characterised their performance personas as 'the real me' to varying degrees. However, they also tended to integrate this with notions of exaggeration, play and experimentation

to account for the undeniable impossibility of that stable and coherent 'truth' in itself, whether on stage or not. As evident with Miss File, my protagonists demonstrated a complex awareness of the role performance plays in their sense of 'self', and vice versa. Killpussy presented being 'comfortable in your own skin' (Killpussy) as not only key to her own wellbeing but as the quality that allows her to perform on stage and elicit the audience's engagement and identification. For most of my protagonists this investment in a sense of authenticity was significant in their ability to connect with their audience, and they all cited the importance of honesty and being 'true to yourself' in performance.

Even for Emelia, this tension between the true self and that which is external to or outside of that is pertinent to how she understands and characterises her performance work. In our conversation, Emelia professed to utilising little personal or autobiographical material in devising her performance, challenging what she considered a misguided conception of performance as an opportunity or forum in which to experiment with particular elements of one's 'self'. She forcefully claimed that 'I'm actually becoming something that I'm not, and actually being a character' (Emelia). Yet she undeniably uses performance to explore and confront issues that concern her in daily life. She uses characters such as Marilyn Monroe and Kylie Minogue to express a femininity that she enjoys but feels unable to perform in her everyday life because of her fear it may expose her to misogynistic treatment. Her trouble with the term Femme, and with expressing her femininity in general, seemed at odds with her ability to perform hyper femininity in an empowered way on stage. Whilst she conceded that she didn't 'know a way to present that type of feminine sexuality without being degraded' (Emelia) in real life, she had no difficulty enacting 'sexually powerful, sexually strong, but not available necessarily, not passive' (Emelia) female sexuality in performance. The interplay between her sense of 'self', identities, and her characters seems to be more complex than Emelia has a language to describe, as performance appears to allow her to extract femininity from the misogyny and denigration she sees as intrinsically linked to it within society as a whole. Performance thus allows her to enact the strong and powerful femininity that she believes is 'possible in my own head' but not realisable externally within a patriarchal and misogynist culture. This suggests a curious doubling of the inside/outside distinction, whereby

something that is expressly external to the self - a clearly defined and recognisable character that one can 'become' can be used to safely explore and negotiate something that feels impossible when it is an 'internal' part of the 'self'.

Fig. 36: Emelia as a 'Trucker', with collaborators, at Duckie's *Gay Shame Gets Macho*, 2008. Photo by Christa Holka.

By contrast, the strongest attachment to the 'true' self of my performer protagonists came from Amy Lamé. In our conversation she stressed the continuity between her theatrical onstage persona and her sense of self in real life as 'how I live my life every day and how I live that on stage is just ramping it up a little bit' (Amy Lamé). This may be related to the nature of her performance work, which unlike the others predominantly requires her to appear as 'herself'. Though she has produced more theatrical work (such as her one woman show, explored in more detail below), her hosting duties at Duckie do not demand the character work, fiction and narrative of cabaret performance in the same way as the others, and instead call for a familiar and congenial authenticity. Yet this attachment to a notion of a true inner 'self' also points towards a very particular form of bodily integrity. Unlike the other six, who seem to use identification, fiction and character in relation to the individual and internal as a way of managing their concept of 'self' and locating a coherent subject position, Amy's experience of herself as a coherent subject appears to come from a more significant investment in an inner being as separate from cultural constructions and social influence. This is particularly interesting in relation to Amy's

embodiment as a fat woman, which, as noted above, is likely to align her with a more 'leaky' and less self-contained subject position in the first place. This could result in her desire to assert a coherent and stable, authentic 'self' that defies the impossibility of the 'fat' subject.

The ways in which these artists perform as 'themselves' are multiple. Whilst all of them utilise characters and fiction in their performances, they also all cite expressing and being themselves as a primary element of what performance signifies for them. Josephine discussed using performance to explore not only different aspects of versions of her multiple sense of 'self', but also the level of performance that is part of enacting any 'self' in day to day life:

> I'm trying to negotiate myself through performance, to realise that at almost all levels everybody performs themselves to some degree. And that changes from place to place from time to time, and your relation to that performance shifts according to your context. Whether you think that performance is more real to you or not, there is some sort of level of performance when you're being yourself in everyday life, and at the same time I as a performer use these characters as an exaggerated version just to sort of figure stuff out about myself. (Josephine)

This highlights the performative nature of any version of the self, be it a stylised and theatrical stage performance or simply the subjective process of enacting a sense of 'self' in order to conceive and understand oneself as a coherent human subject. Particularly through invoking the medium of performance, Josephine here draws out the interconnectedness of that process within queer spaces, how by performing shifting multiple selves on the stage, her performance enables that subjective process and the recognition of it in the audience. For Killpussy, performance is 'being myself, it's being everything, everyone, everything that I can be' (Killpussy). Whilst the double nature of being 'myself' and being something other than self implied by the 'everyone, everything' could be seen to indicate a tension in whether she experiences performance as herself or as someone or something else, it also indicates how this implied 'self' and 'other' are not necessarily mutually exclusive.

This is particularly interesting in its integration with a sense of play, dressing up and performance, which all of my protagonists associated not only with their investment in femininity, but also with their performance practice and their experience of a sense of 'self' on stage. Much like the rhetoric of re-birth

employed by Weight Loss Surgery patients (Throsby 2008), it seems that experimentation, play and performance are the discursive strategies through which these artists are able to reconcile a feeling of authenticity and 'wholeness' with the ambivalence of 'self' engendered by this kind of autobiographical, personal performance. Whilst Amy describes dressing up and experimenting with external appearances as fun, she clearly demarcates this as play that is separate from the true self, which interestingly seems to correlate with how she manages the superficial appearance elements of femininity in relation to the label of 'Femme'. This interaction between external appearance and inner feeling cuts across the distinctions of identities that are policed on appearance or more behavioural criteria and draws out a tension in Amy's sense of bodily integrity. Her sense of a true inner self is difficult to articulate in relation to her investment in markers of appearance and standardised norms that she employs in her performance of stylised femininity.

Interestingly, a similar negotiation of authenticity emerged from Emelia's discussion of her own performance style as character-based rather than autobiographical. Whilst she characterised her performance as about 'becoming someone else' rather than being herself, she also explained her choice of characters as instinctual and based predominantly on a sense of fun. This instinctual enjoyment may work to neutralise the sense of subjectification that Emelia seems to associate with the label of 'Femme', and simultaneously reinforce an unquestioned authentic 'self' separate from the performance of the 'other'. Her character-based performance paradoxically works to more deeply entrench and naturalise a notion of her subjectivity as authentic and inherent - her sense of 'self' is not questioned or challenged by performance if she herself does not consider that performance to be any reflection of or have an impact on, that 'self'. When read alongside the accounts of the five self-identifying Femmes featured here, this investment by both Amy and Emelia in an autonomous and authentic inner self, though characterised and enacted very differently, highlights the complex role that identification, as a self-chosen feeling of connection with particular norms or as a label applied by others can play in the development of a subject position that can be experienced as coherent and readable by the self and others, particularly for queer people.[71]

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[71] The complexities of identification and identity politics is examined at length in Chapter 5 of this thesis.

This highlights how for all of these artists a sense of playing and experimenting with identities and images as purely superficial fun also engages with their construction of a sense of 'self'. Jet Moon characterised her performance persona in a similar way to Amy Lamé, claiming that in performance she is 'not making anything up, I'm being Jet, a bit louder, with better lines, better make-up [...] I'm being me, in a very compressed, revised, and worked over form' (Jet Moon). Although this enactment of a sense of a true 'self' on stage may appear to be in conflict with the fluid, multiple sense of self these artists discussed at other points in the interviews, Josephine highlights how this tension is precisely what is allowed for and created on stage:

> It's a playground, it's an opportunity to try things out that you might not be able to otherwise [...] And I love costumes, and identities and playing as if you're somebody else [...] my friend calls it playing herself with the volume turned up, and I like that thought, [...] you can enact the extremes of those debates, and try to find some kind of middle ground for yourself. (Josephine)

By positioning the possibility of playing at another subject position that is not yours as a part of ones own subjective experience, Josephine uncovers the complex and perhaps paradoxical nature of a kind of bodily integrity that is being enacted as nevertheless simultaneously internal and external. Whilst as subjects we may (generally, though not always,) experience ourselves as coherent and unified, we can achieve this subjectivity through the self-conscious engagement of our more amorphous and relational engagement with the world and other bodies.

In the way these artists discuss external appearance markers in relation to a more schematic sense of self, we can identify what Mike Featherstone (2006, 2010) calls the 'body-without-an-image' as a body that is viscerally experienced and not reducible to its image. Unlike the static, visual 'body image', Featherstone characterises the 'body-without-image' as the haptic, felt experience of the body, closely associated to the functioning of affect (Massumi 2002). As felt rather than visual, this body-without-image is a crucial element of bodily integrity, pertaining to the relationship between how the body is lived and how it is perceived by others and thus breaking the mirror between subject and object. Featherstone (2010) uses the examples of cosmetic surgery and the televisual 'make-over' to consider how we move between the body-image and

the body-without-image. Whether sartorial or surgical, 'make-overs' are more than interventions on the external surface of the body - in order to be successful, Featherstone highlights, they must also work on the level of the 'body-without-image'. These interventions are ubiquitously justified and appraised through not only the rhetoric of 'the real me', as discussed above (see also Heyes 2007), but also certain intangible affective intensities encapsulated by such ideas as 'charisma' and 'confidence'. Commonplace notions that 'it's not the clothes you wear but the way you wear them', or the 'sparkle in your eye' (see the cosmetic surgery advert cited in Chapter 1 of this thesis) indicate the importance of the body-without-image, the non visual aspect of embodiment and intersubjective relations. From the stories my protagonists tell about their own performance practice, it seems performance similarly acts as a site through which they are able to manage and negotiate the constant shifting between a body image and a body-without-image, or between the body as a bounded, static whole and a dynamic, open subjectivity-in-process. In a very similar way to their discussion of femininity, by positioning performance as a form of playing at 'self' and a source of humour at the same time as being important elements of their lived experience, these protagonists construct their performance identities as occupying a liminal space between their internal sense of selfhood and culturally constructed identity politics, norms and labels:

> every time you get on stage you're performing and you're doing something different and you're exploring different aspects of yourself, you know, that is what the stage does, it transforms you into something else and someone else, and gives you the power to do that. (Amy Lamé)

Yet this escape or transformation is not simply a temporary distancing from the self or superficial engagement with 'other', it is also a part of the process through which the 'self' that is here being reshaped is in fact formed. In the following section I explore further how performance acts as a tool for these artists to enact a different kind of subjectivity, and utilise Julie Hanson's (2007) concept of 'drag king embodiment' to examine how performance may in fact provide the perfect forum for a reconsideration of embodiment and subjectivity.

4.3. Ambivalent Selves

For my protagonists, performance poses ambivalent tensions around bodily integrity. The performance of a self-conscious, theatrical femininity is problematic for all of these self-identified feminists, necessitating discursive strategies to reconcile their acknowledgement of femininity as a social construct with their investments in this artificial norm as something inherent or true to their sense of self. This complexity is further troubled by the intricate enmeshing of an authentic inner self, a performative expression of play and experimentation, and enactment of an 'other' through character that is evident in the performance work of all of these seven. Curiously, whilst the practice of performance may act as the source of these tensions of subjectivity and subjectification, it also appears to be the means by which these problems are negotiated and neutralised for these artists. The kind of ambiguously autobiographical performances of these artists present the discursive strategies they use to reconcile these tensions and construct liveable subjectivities for themselves and their audience.[72] On stage, we are able to experience and construct a sense of a stable inner core 'self' through the proposition that we do not have one and are instead pulling together a set of disposable, superficial and borrowed identities to experience a complete and individual self. Building on the preceding discussion of bodily integrity and the body-without-an-image, the remainder of this chapter argues that performance appears to proffer a site through which a radical, transformative and dynamic sense of subjectivity can be lived and enacted. Through the disruption of the binaries that structure a Cartesian understanding of the subject, the performances of these artists enact the radically different embodied subjectivity proposed by some body theorists (Sobchack 2010, Shilrdick 2010, Hanson 2007), allowing for a body and a subject that is unbounded, in process, and open to (human and non-human) others.

4.3.1. Playing serious for a laugh

It is the potential for ambivalence and ambiguity that imbues performance with its transformative potential for these artists. As we have seen above, the subjectivity of these performers is negotiated through discursive strategies that are able to reconcile conflict, tension and paradox in relation to

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[72] The subject formations enabled by the performances of my protagonists and others in spaces such as Duckie, Bird Club and Wotever are the primary focus of Chapter 5 of this thesis.

disciplinary norms and practices and the investment in an authentic 'self'. It is no accident that the performance styles of all of these protagonists, as indeed the majority of performances witnessed in all three of these spaces, employ hybrid forms that resist simple classification. Amy encapsulated the heterogeneous performance styles that are clashed together at Duckie as:

> working outside of those norms of, you know, drag, theatre, opera [...] crossing all sorts of the boundaries with all of that, so, a bit of drag, a bit of vaudeville, a bit of burlesque [...] a bit of theatre bit of musical bit of cabaret a bit of this bit of that. (Amy Lamé)

This statement is no less true of the performances staged at Bird Club and Wotever, and particularly of the performance work of my protagonists, who all combine elements of burlesque, cabaret, comedy, drag, autobiographical narrative and various other identifiable genres or styles of performance in their work. Not only do these hybrid performances disrupt the taxonomy of performance itself, but they use this as a mechanism through which to trouble the fundamental notion of binary distinctions such as truth/fiction, self/other, inside/outside, nature/culture for example. The performances of these seven artists stage a refusal of simple distinctions, be those distinctions between self and not-self, comedy and tragedy, or truth and fiction.

All seven of these artists translate the ambivalence about an authentic subjectivity into their performances using humour and comedy. For Maria Mojo's most well known character Dyke Marilyn, the humour in her as a mixed race queer woman performing Marilyn Monroe's white heterosexual ideal of femininity is what allows her to confront the issues about femininity, race and sexuality she is interested in. Yet she also challenges her queer audiences and their own presumptions or prejudices by turning Marilyn into Jimmy Hendrix on stage, increasing the humour in terms of her cross-identity display (or drag) but also making a serious point about the presence of a heterosexual, male and non-white character in a queer space. In this way comedy, particularly when utilised against notions of identity and self that are being portrayed in these performances, is a site of audience identification itself but is also a way of communicating the self in a particular way. Making the audience laugh then becomes an aim for these performers that is not merely about entertainment, but also about the message and the sense of self they are attempting to portray.

Killpussy's confrontation of gender politics and identities is achieved through humour that also engages with deeper issues:

> I do that through political satire, and I do that through social commentary, so my shows are really sexy, they're really funny, and they're really quite sick and twisted […] and I do it in a way that it makes you laugh, and you're kind of upset at yourself for laughing. (Killpussy)

Jet Moon also pointed out the potential of humour for allowing her to similarly 'undercut very sharply with your politics, and sort of stab people in the stomach with something that they won't forget' (Jet Moon). However she also noted the double function of humour as not only a means of making the message accessible to the audience but also as a self-protection strategy allowing the performer to present difficult and traumatic experiences on stage:

> there is that thing where you tell something in a comedic way, people laugh, and then they realise what they've just laughed at and, it might be funny, but there's quite a dark message underneath that. Sometimes that's the only way to get things across, sometimes it's the only way to deal with things [...] and it's something that both Josephine and I do on stage is that we send ourselves up, and we expose ourselves, but it's also a defence. It's how you keep yourself a little bit safe, you build a little bit of a fourth wall between you and the audience. Oh yes, I'm just laughing about this really terrible thing that happened to me, and I'll just tell a joke about it, I'm still telling you the story, we're all getting through it. (Jet Moon)

In these performances humour serves as a vital tool for exploring the use value as well as the irrelevance or limitations of identity categories and the very notion of a coherent self. As discussed above, the difficulty of constructing a queer feminine subjectivity that can give access to identification with others and a sense of community whilst still retaining a sense of self requires flexibility when it comes to identity categories and labels, investing identities with both power and fallibility in the role they play in subject formation. Bird la Bird highlights the difficulty but also importance of this light heartedness about identities that have been the source of ridicule, hatred and prejudice:

> that's caused a lot of introspection, and also us being too frightened to take the piss out of ourselves 'cause everyone else was doing it. And I'm really interested in holding a satirical mirror up… it's opened the doors to just be more irreverent, I think we should be irreverent about identity

> anyway, and that's why I like using comedy and humour, because I just got really fed up with really earnest discussions about boring gender identity politics. (Bird la Bird)

According to Bird la Bird, then, humour acts as a vital tool for exploring the very grave issues of prejudice, hatred, fear and otherness that perhaps cannot be related to in the distanced and sanitised form of serious debate or discussion. This use of irreverence to portray serious and significant issues, and thus the placing of importance onto the frivolousness of parody and comedy, calls up what Gavin Butt (2007) calls 'a queer kind of sincerity' (ibid.: 92). The complexity of emotion that this use of comedy is likely to rouse in its audience is similar to the combination of gravity and levity Butt identifies in the sentimentality of a Kiki and Herb show,[73] through which he suggests 'we might find queer value in being moved in a manner which is anything but straightforward and earnest' (ibid.: 89). This queer value, which is neither truly earnest nor ironic insincerity, is reflected in both the discussions and performances of identities by these artists. Whilst they all acknowledge the importance and seriousness of identity politics, they also all portray some flippancy and ambivalence about it, and the way they translate that in their performances into a combination of humour and gravity might perhaps work to move the audience in this complex and seemingly incongruous way. Perhaps in the ambivalent and contradictory 'selves' presented as simultaneously shifting and stable, amorphous and coherent, the performers place this kind of queer value on identity itself, allowing the audience to incorporate both its use value and its irreverence into their own subjectivity.

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[73] Kiki and Herb are a cabaret duo of Justin Bond and Kenny Mellman, who respectively play Kiki, an alcoholic lounge singer and Herb, her gay male piano accompanist. Their shows blend humour, camp and melodrama with dramatic yet comedic monologues and show tunes, engaging with the high camp of drag performance but often also engaging serious subject matter such as mental health and politics.

Fig. 37: Jet Moon and Josephine Krieg performing *Parental Guidance*, at The Cochrane Theatre for *GFest,* 2009. Photo by AbsolutQueer.

4.3.2. Performing Outside the Binary

This potential for ambivalence and irreverence through performance is also noted by Julie Hanson (2007) through her concept of 'drag king embodiment'. Hanson's article provides a rare account of performance, particularly queer performance, that addresses the subjective, embodied and transformative potential of performance practice. This allows her to incorporate the role of fantasy and desire in subjective processes, considering how they are embodied, incorporated and played out through queer performance practices such as drag kinging. For Hanson, drag kinging is a site where radical embodied subjectivity is enacted, and the body acts as a creative site of the production of a non-dualistic, dynamic sense of self. As we have seen in the narratives above, this radical mode of subjectivity is imperative for these queer (and I would, argue other non-normatively embodied) selves to construct subject positions that are liveable and intelligible (Butler 2004). Drawing from the work of psychoanalysis, corporeal feminism, phenomenology and Foucault, Hanson examines the materiality and felt experience of the body in relation to sociocultural norms, ideals and expectations. She positions embodied subjectivity as the enactment of desire, fantasy and imagination as much as the sensual and somatic of corporeal matter, and thus positions subjectivity as performative.

Figs. 38 a-c: Killpussy takes on the police and Margaret Thatcher,
at *Bird Club Cum the Revolution Part 2: Communists,* 2009.
Photos by Leng Montgomery.

However, the transformative and radical mode of embodied subjectivity Hanson bestows upon drag kings is founded upon the specificity of unproblematically female bodies enacting the traditional 'gender crossing' of drag performance. This, unfortunately, places the potential of drag king

performance and embodiment back into the visual transgression of binary gender norms that her anti-dualistic argument is trying to escape. The paradoxical challenging and incorporation of normative structures she cites as key to this dynamic subjectivity can equally occur in (queer or other) performance practices without necessarily having to reference the binary. As we have seen through the performance work of my protagonists, the Femme performance of Bird la Bird, Jet Moon, Josephine and the others enacts the same Foucauldian entwining of self-conscious conformity and resistance that enables the non-dualistic embodied subjectivity she attributes to drag kings. My protagonists also incorporate objects and artefacts into their body image (and body-without-an-image), be it feathers and heels rather than (or indeed sometimes as well as) dildos and stubble. The complex feeling of freedom, capacity for self-expression, ambivalent authenticity and empowerment Hanson identifies in drag kings is mirrored by my protagonists, without the constitutive visually coded binary gender-crossing. When performing any kind of gender camp, as trans or cisgendered queers, we also 'feel' our bodies differently, not because of the binary crossing of gender codes, but because of the complex intertwining of self and other, inside and outside, nature and culture that is being enacted.

For my protagonists, the ambivalences around authenticity and selfhood are at least to some extent resolved through the process of creating performances based on or inspired by their personal, autobiographical experiences, positioning performance as a formative part of this process of finding a liveable and coherent subject position. Autobiographical performance practices have long been associated with the claiming of identities, consciousness-raising and community making, since the emergence of the genre as a key tool during early 1970s second wave feminism (Heddon 2008). In her thorough and detailed examination of the genre, Deirdre Heddon highlights that in addition to the goals of representation often associated with autobiographical performance, particularly when associated with marginalised or disaffected identities or groups, this kind of performance repositions the subject itself, and rather than simply gaining a sense of fair representation, autobiographical performance can in fact reframe the very idea of the subject:

Performing stories about ourselves might enable us to imagine different selves, to determine different scripts than the ones that seem to trap us.

> Devising a performance out of the material of personal experience might enable new insights into the relationship between experience and structures of power, between identity and its formation (and reformation). (Ibid.: 157)

This desire to find ways of accessing and understanding self formation, and its various instabilities, is clearly evident in the performance work of these artists, whose ambivalence about identity categories and nuanced understandings of their bodies as individual and cultural, visual and corporeal, internal and external are portrayed through their performance practices. All seven of them blend their personal experiences and stories with those of others as they disrupt the boundaries of 'truth' and fiction, self and other, performer and spectator. Their performances, then, create a space in which they perform the instability of the subject itself by presenting themselves as both 'self' and 'other' and therefore blurring the distinction between the two. Yet they also cite their performances as a practice through which they have come to terms with and understand these 'selves', often through the experience of this very instability. Using their own experiences as starting off points, these artists utilise performance as a means of negotiating their own sense of true inner 'self' and that which is external, artificial surface, and how they can manage the interaction between the two to construct a subjectivity that, whilst being relational, multiple and fluid can still be experienced as singular and stable.

A particularly pertinent example of this is *Amy Lamé's Mama Cass Family Singers,*[74] Amy's surreal and bewildering one-woman show detailing her childhood stardom performing in a 1960s cover band with her sisters and brother. This 'mis-remembered memoir' presents amalgamated fact and fiction for the audience to decipher, engaging an ambiguous sense of 'realism'. Abstract scenes, such as Amy sitting alone on stage eating sandwiches, alternate with traditional narrative forms, utilising techniques borrowed from autobiography and docudrama such as 'real' family portraits and video footage of Amy's family members confirming the outlandish tale. This bittersweet tragi-comedy refuses binaries and elides classification. At once cabaret, performance art, comedy and autobiographical narrative, the story is woven from fact and fiction that become so elaborately entwined they cannot be unpicked. Yet

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[74] See http://mamacass.amyLamé.com/ for more information.

ultimately, what is fact and what is fiction becomes irrelevant in this convoluted account of a life and a subjectivity that is formed as much through the 'mis-remembered' fantasy of an active imagination as through 'real-life' experience. As noted by Valerie Walkerdine (1990), our subjectivities are formed through complex entanglements of fact and fiction, where fantasy, desire and the popular imagination play as crucial a role in our self-conception as our lived realities. Amy's eccentric parable of success and downfall is imbued with the cultural fantasy of the American Dream, incorporated into a very personal portrayal of a 'self' constructed through discourses of class, aspiration and the social meanings of fat bodies. The unsettling blend of the ordinary and extraordinary in *Amy Lamé's Mama Cass Family Singers* then does more than disturb the distinction between fact and fiction in the narrative, it troubles the very idea that this distinction can be upheld when applied to subjectivity. Amy is performing a version of herself that is far from the authentic or 'real' inner core she expressed such a strong investment in throughout our conversation. By performing this self that is also a not-self, she makes visible the ambiguous, complex investments in cultural ideals and narratives, norms and fantasies that constitute our subject positions.
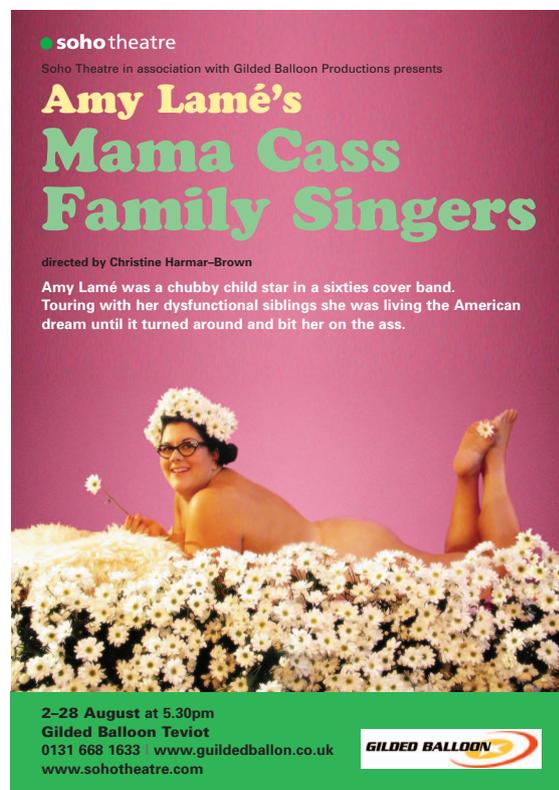
Fig. 39: Promotional poster for *Amy Lamé's Mama Cass Family Singers*. 2006. Image courtesy of Amy Lamé.

The permeability of this boundary between self and other in performance is echoed by the others, whose work all features them performing 'as themselves' as they are performing different characters. This interrelation is encapsulated by Maria Mojo's statement that '[performing as] Marilyn gave me the confidence to get up and perform as me' (Maria Mojo). This interplay between self and other in performance points towards how performance practices function for these artists as a process of constructing their own subject position. It has been suggested that performance can overcome the undoing of subjectivity resulting from trauma through the repetitive processes of devising, rehearsing and performing bringing about reconciliation (Heddon 2008: 53-4). Although many of the experiences being explored in these performances may not fit into the category of 'trauma', and an attempt to separate and outline those that do or those that do not would be a futile exercise in itself considering the relational and subjective nature of all experience, there is a distinct sense amongst these artists that performance is a reparative, healing process for them.[75]

This porous self/other distinction appears to be managed by these artists through the interplay of performing as 'self' or as 'other' through the use of characters and/or autobiography, and through the performance of their own 'otherness' in relation to societal norms and expectations. For Maria Mojo, her performances as Dyke Marilyn allow her to confront the issues of otherness she has faced as a mixed race queer woman, as well as giving her the space to experiment with the 'self' that has been subject to this othering, and how that related to her understanding of her own subjectivity:

> I thought, I'd love to express myself as the, as her, to see how that would work… playing the blonde and being, growing up mixed race it had so many different issues going on there. (Maria Mojo)

> if you're persecuted for being different I think, performing that difference can almost, I think it really helped heal me. (Maria Mojo)

This demonstrates the power of performance not only in terms of representation and emancipation, but as a subjective process. Josephine also very clearly

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[75] The ways in which trauma, and particularly the intergenerational haunting of trauma, can be utilised to understand the collective memories enacted through these performances are examined at length in Chapter 5 of this thesis.

described dance (her primary training and mode of performance) as a therapeutic coping strategy - as 'one of the ways to really survive, emotionally and very literally' (Josephine).

Conclusion

By performing a self that is also a not-self, these performers are able to highlight the tensions in performance, and particularly autobiographical performance, regarding the distinctions of truth/fiction, performance/life, and auto/bio. Jet Moon explained performance as a process of making the personal or individual communal through the application of political analysis. Her work and discussion of her work is very much focused around individual life stories, and she placed great emphasis on the importance of 'telling our stories' (the 'us' here being queer and trans communities) and creating something shared. Josephine articulated very clearly this function of performances that are simultaneously self and other, truth and fiction, personal and collective as a process of creating a 'universal language' for experiences of gender and otherness that are beyond the verbal and not explainable through the vocabularies we have available to us. By generating a shared language in order to communicate experiences and issues that are embodied and visceral, Josephine highlights how performance can engage a more collective, relational subjectivity wherein these complexities can be explored. The performance of otherness, whether as a highlighting of one's own difference or through the playing of or with another subject position entirely, is in this way positioned as a process that is truly performative in the Butlerian (1990) sense, of the routine everyday performance of subject positions. It is an act that creates the self of which it speaks (and disrupts), that self being complexly intertwined with its own otherness as well as other 'others'. What we find in the stories these seven artists tell about their experiences and work and the performance they produce is a deep sense of the interconnectedness of individuals, that the 'selves' and 'others' featured within and witness to these performances are connected not only through the temporal coming together in the performance space, the sharing of identity categories or the familiarity of any story being told, but through a complex combination of all of these elements. The shared narratives presented on stage tap into the contradictory and multiple ways in which we all

attempt to draw together a seemingly coherent and liveable subject position, and raise new questions about what we mean when we consider an experience or our sense of self to be 'authentic'.

Chapter 5 - Queer(y)ing the singular/plural: Collective memories, affect, and intersubjectivity

Theatre, which is nothing, but uses all languages (gestures, words, sound, fire and screams), is to be found precisely at the point where the mind needs a language to bring about its manifestations. (Artaud 1970: 7)

The central question structuring this chapter is what Lisa Blackman (2008a) has termed the problem of the one and the many: how is singularity lived in the face of the openness to affect and others that seems to characterise embodiment?[76] This question becomes particularly pertinent in the performance spaces in question here due to the complex functioning of subjectivity and subjectification exhibited through the performances, as discussed in the previous chapter, but moreover due to the ways in which affects combine with identity politics to generate feelings of belonging and co-extensivity (Bell 2007). As will become increasingly evident throughout this chapter, affective connections triggered through collective memories of trauma, shame and desire expose the fundamentally relational and co-constituted nature of subjectivity. The recent turn to affect across the humanities has prompted a re-engagement with a variety of embodied experiences which appear to trouble the bounded, contained, autonomous self. Experiences of what Teresa Brennan (2004) calls affective transmission re-activate concerns about suggestibility, emotional contagion and the fundamental openness of bodies that Blackman (2008a) has traced back to origins of 19th Century psychology. Building from the preceding discussion of how bodily integrity is negotiated through semi-autobiographical performance, this chapter argues that for both performers and audience, the performances staged in these environments provide the basis for a complex mode of identification that is able to embrace collectivity without 'undoing' the subject itself. Duckie, Bird Club and Wotever beg a reconsideration of collectivity and the fallacy of the bounded, autonomous "self" more broadly. Whilst the performers enact and engage a radically ambivalent mode of embodied subjectivity as evidenced in Chapter 4 of this thesis, this challenge to the rationalist Cartesian self does not end at the borders of the stage.

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[76] In her forthcoming book, Blackman (2012) explores a nineteenth century subliminal archive which maps the centrality of hypnotic suggestion, voice-hearing and contagion to understandings of communication, which crossed art, literature, science and medicine.

Performers and audience are enmeshed in complex circulations of affect making spectatorship and participation (considered in these spaces, as I argue below, as much the same thing) a profoundly intersubjective and intercorporeal experience. Legacies of emancipatory identity politics, regulatory discourses and oppression intermingle with this collective embodied experience to re-invigorate the 19th Century problematic of the-one-and-the-many: how can we reconcile our openness and co-constituted subjectivities with the necessity to conceive of ourselves as whole, separate and complete subjects? In the affective milieu created by performers and audience we see a lived relation to identity politics, world-making and self-making which can be pushed beyond discussions of normativity and representation to address the complexities of embodied subjectivity. The modes of spectatorship and sociality enacted in these settings address the suggestion inspired by the turn to affect that 'the ethical ideal is to increase one's ability to enter into modes of relation with multiple others' (Braidotti 2008: 16). The following chapter explores in more detail the problems that this relationality poses for how this scene or community can be theorised, and why none of the available conceptual models seem appropriate. In making way for this discussion, this chapter examines the complex subjective processes and relations enacted within the space, before we try to fit or understand these within a theoretical framework.

5.1. The personal/universal: Collective Memories

Whilst particularly Wotever and Duckie feature a wide variety of performance, ranging from comedy to music and dance, many of the acts make reference, even if in sometimes rather abstract terms, to common and shared experiences and stories that the audience are able to relate to. As explored in the previous chapter, the unifying possibilities of semi-autobiographical performance is significant for the performers, but it was also cited by my audience member protagonists as a crucial element of the atmosphere. Blending elements of personal experience with fiction, archetypal characters and abstraction allows these performers to tap into a register of what I call collective memory, allowing the audience to form a connection with the performer and acknowledge the specificity of their experiences, whilst also applying their own histories and narratives to what they see on stage. The collective memories portrayed

through these performances are, as set out in the previous chapter, far from revelatory confessions of an inherent or authentic 'truth' of subjectivity. Rather, they present a complex and ambivalent self/not-self through an intricate entanglement of truth and fiction, fantasy, desire, shame and trauma. This self/not-self, I argue, allows the performers to present intensely personal experiences, whilst also allowing the audience to connect affectively to what is being portrayed on stage.

This sets up the central function of performance as one of interaction between audience and performer, an engagement that forms another layer of self/other interplay occurring within these spaces. Notions of dialogue, discussion and sharing were mentioned repeatedly by Bird la Bird, Maria Mojo, Jet Moon, Josephine and Amy Lamé. Amy characterised this interaction as 'creating spaces for conversation, provoking, and enabling conversation' (Amy Lamé). She cited the interaction 'between performer, punter, promoter' as central to the ethos of Duckie as a 'club of outcasts' (Amy Lamé) in which there is a freedom to explore and experiment with who and what one is or wants to be. All of the artists shared this sensibility that what was most important about the queer performance scene, and the reason it was an ideal site for this exploration of self, was that it was a 'safe space to be whatever you are' (Killpussy) and a practice of 'bringing people together' (Bird la Bird). The conversation and interaction between performers and audience members then serves through these performances as more than the conventionally accepted need to engage and entertain the audience but becomes a key part of the performance itself forming a basis of a community around this interaction. Because of this, the stories told through the performances must not only be personal and serve as a transformative confessional or healing experience for the performer's own subject position, but must also be relatable and accessible to the audience, allowing for an intersubjective and importantly intercorporeal connection to be made between performer and audience on a distinctly affective register.

5.1.1. Fantasy and desire

Sickly cinnamon sweet barely masks her cavernous darkness. It is palpable, and feels dangerous. Precarious. Like she may slip at any

moment into demonic Witch holding the sheer power of her bleeding body over us all. This is my first encounter with Dyke Marilyn, reincarnated for one night of mischief in the National Portrait Gallery. She coaxes us through the Wonderland of portrait-lined halls. But is she Alice or am I? Is she the rabbit, the Cheshire Cat? Probably all of them. Her warm plump cheeks and smile are pure virtue, angelic childish excitement, but sin and sex are not far away; in her eyes, her curves. Her body is glorious abundance, spilling and straining, conquering the insubstantial clothes and the insubstantial words that try to trap it. Oozing seductive allure, her facade of breathy innocence only emphasises the hold she has on us. Ultimate sex symbol. Dangerous temptress. But through the veneer of confidence, fragility threatens the masquerade. Tragedy and vulnerability peek through the raw sex appeal and I am lost, no longer sure what is what in this triple bluff of Maria doing Marilyn Monroe through Dyke Marilyn. What I see is quintessential Marilyn - cloying, sensuous, slightly vacant - though we all know she is an impostor. Her synthetic blonde takes on an unnatural sheen under the harsh fluorescents. Her coffee skin marks her out. "I'm the bastard love-child of Jimmy Hendrix and Marilyn Monroe, unfortunately I inherited Jimmy's looks and Marilyn's guitar skills." The giggle is unearthly, almost eerie. Who is impersonating whom? The pastiche and the fakery are what make Dyke Marilyn real, a visceral bodily presence near me. She is nothing that she claims to be, and yet so much more.

Fig. 40: Dyke Marilyn in Soho, 2006. Photo by Leng Montgomery.

Fig. 41: Dyke Marilyn channels Diana Ross, 2007. Photo by Leng Montgomery.

Maria Mojo's now departed but much-loved performance alter-ego Dyke Marilyn encapsulates how these performers utilise easily recognisable characters and cultural norms to access a register of collective memories. These collective memories, I argue, enmesh their audiences in a potent concoction of fantasies and desires that are at once deeply personal and yet shared. Although the particularities and diversity of psychoanalytic theory lie beyond the scope of this thesis, I propose that a consideration of fantasy and desire might bring insight to how we can understand the audience's engagement with the performances in these milieux. Countering the common cultural perceptions of women and the working class as particularly passive consumers of media, Valerie Walkerdine (1990) utilises a Foucauldian framework alongside psychoanalytic theory to examine girls' magazines. The images of acceptable femininity and heteronormativity presented therein, she argues, position young girls within a distinct set of possible or available subject positions. However, this subjectification occurs not through authoritative didactic force, but rather through the girls' own investments in the fantasies of romance, fulfilment and happiness they present. My intentions here resonate with Walkerdine's, as rather than argue for the transgressive or subversive value of the images or narratives presented through performance, what is significant and potentially radical within these spaces is the ways in which the audience

members become entangled in collective memories capturing their own fantasies and desires. Other more recent work has also attempted to reinvigorate an understanding of television viewing beyond the limits of the active/passive binary model of media effects and explicitly within the recent turn to affect (Gorton 2009, Kavka 2009). Kavka in particular explores how reality television works as a conduit for affect and produces feelings of belonging, intimacy and connection through a 'liveness effect'. Though it has been argued elsewhere that performance is unique in the unmediated 'realness' of living bodies (Phelan 1993), I would agree with Kavka's (2009) contention that it is the *feeling* of intimacy, rather than the unmediated physicality of the performer's body which is the locus of the affective intensities experienced within these performance settings. Dyke Marilyn at once performs an intimate encounter with very personal experiences and easily recognisable, though historically and culturally specific, common fantasies of social mobility, achievement and the fairytale of overcoming adversity. As an itinerant character, Marilyn has seduced a variety of audiences, from ostensibly heterosexual ones at cabaret clubs to the kinds of 'mainstream' lesbian audiences discussed in Chapter 3 of this thesis. More specifically, the ambiguity of fiction and Maria's 'true' self portrayed through Marilyn taps into fantasies of escape from a body and identity that incites prejudice, and of remaking the world in new (queerer) images.

The role of ambiguity, fiction, fantasy and desire within the performances also appears to facilitate a sense of experimentation with multiple different 'versions' of the self by the audience members. In all of the group conversations, great emphasis was placed on particular items of clothing, outfits and dressing in general, and particularly forms of 'fancy dress', dressing according to a theme or dress code for a particular event, or a general feeling of entitlement to dress unusually or outrageously within these environments. At specific themed events such as *Gross Indecency*, the enforced dress code produced a feeling of involvement and being 'part of it' (Debra) - those that attended described an impression of both being implicated as a significant aspect of the event itself, and a sense of collectivity and connection with the others present. By dressing up and being 'part of it', the audience are able to both enact a slightly different sense of 'self' - a fantasy, a fiction or just a sightly modified version of the subjectivity they enact in everyday life, and simultaneously participate in a wider collective that constitutes something

greater than the sum of the constituent individuals making up the crowd. The significance of dressing up to the audience's experience of the atmosphere and energy at these events points towards how a malleable sense of self enabled within them functions as a point of commonality between those present, and a site within which the relational nature of subjectivity becomes apparent. However, particularly in the context of Bar Wotever this access to fictions or alternative modes of 'selfhood' through dressing up was not only positioned as the experimentation of play and 'fancy dress'. For many of the Bar Wotever regulars, these events provided the only safe environment in which to express their queerness:

> When I came to Wotever I felt much more inclined to go out and dress up [...] It has helped me in that way to feel a lot more comfortable, and I love wearing those clothes, I didn't think about it before it would have been dress-up, it would have been fancy dress, and now it's common dress. (Kirsten)

> At Wotever I just found this whole thing of I could go out in really fun fabulous clothes, and now I wear stuff like I'm wearing tonight [...] to my day job. (Dr J)

Crucially, this safe space in which to engage their sartorial desires also allowed for this confidence to be taken outside into the world beyond the club, and therefore influence their mode of 'self' more generally. Whereas 'in the beginning it was really the only space where I could be who I felt myself to be, I felt like I couldn't do it all the time' (Jet Moon), over time 'we've managed to export it onto the street and been able to do it more often' (Josephine). The performances and the general affective milieux of these environments thus engender connection between audience members and performers by accessing the realm of fantasy and desire. However, though these collective memories sometimes circulate around joyful fantasies of world-making, desire, and self-confidence, they are also often founded on deep-rooted shame and trauma.

Fig. 42: The audience at Wotever World's *Steampunk Tango Winter Ball,* 2012. Photo by AbsolutQueer.

Fig. 43: The audience at *Wotever Sex,* 2008. Photo by AbsolutQueer.

5.1.2. Gay Shame: Intergenerational trauma

One of the most captivating and mystifying figures of my childhood, who haunted my thoughts for decades, was my grandmother's upstairs neighbour, David. In 1992, in his minuscule south London council flat, David died of AIDS-related illness in his early forties. Having met him only occasionally, my grief came as a great surprise to my family. But I had always been drawn to David. He was charismatic, mysterious; I imagined his home (which I never had the chance to see) to be a carnival of colour and excitement. His thinness was to me an ethereal and unearthly quality,

adding to my suspicion that he was perhaps not quite of this realm. Precocious six-year-old me would study his movements and try to imitate the delicate, contained manner with which he inhabited his body, oblivious to this as my first exposure to the delights of camp that I would later come to treasure so dearly. This exotic creature would waft into my grandmother's flat with tight cords and jokes I never understood, though they inexplicably raised wry smiles from the adults. When he left, and even more so when he passed away, he was spoken of fondly, but this affection was always tainted with condescension and a tinge of shame. Single, lonely, and dying too young, David was imbued by others with a sadness I never witnessed from him. Lowered eyelids, sideways glances, and the tone of voice in which my questions were dismissed made it clear that his story touched on issues which could not be discussed. Something unseemly lurked in his mystery. His dating of men was never made secret, though I failed to comprehend what that meant. What I did understand was that this was the sad story of those who are different, those who fail to see the world or conduct themselves in quite the same manner as everybody else. I suspected that I might be a little bit different too, and my desire for David's eccentricity and my terror at a life condemned to a tragic tale mingled into a potent cloud of shame and excitement that would characterise my troubled relationship with my own sexuality for many years.

Whilst the sense of collectivity and a shared worldview implied above forms a significant aspect of all three of these domains, this cannot disguise another crucial point of connection between the performers and audience members: many of the bodies inhabiting these spaces, both performers and audience members, are coloured by trauma and shame. Consequently, alongside the collective feelings of belonging being enacted within these settings, I argue the subjective and intersubjective processes occurring in large part also work to allow subjectivities threatened with fracture under personal and collective trauma to be made 'whole'. From criminalisation, pathologisation and the AIDS crisis to the politics of assimilation and Gay Pride, queer bodies are located within long and complex histories of shame (Sedgwick 2003, see also Edelman 1994, Halperin and Traub 2009). Such is the potency of queer

shame that is has inspired what is often termed the recent turn to negativity in queer studies (Edelman 2004, Halberstam 2011) and a consideration within the affective turn of the value of such 'negative affects' (Ngai 2004, Love 2007).[77] Valerie Walkerdine (2011) has suggested that a deep-rooted embodied shame explains our affective enjoyment of and investment in reality television, and though she speaks of gendered and classed rather than queer shame, I wish to linger with her for a moment on the shame of improper, unclean working class female sexuality. Walkerdine's formulation of shame is particularly pertinent here because of the way she characterises it as lived and embodied, transmitted from one generation to another through the mode of affect. Not directly 'told', this shame is sensed from a look, a gesture, a mood or a feeling, picked up without being fully understood. Thus the bodies of young women, particularly but not only working class women, are always already 'suffused' with a shame that they embody before they have the capacity to understand it.

I argue that queer shame is similarly transmitted intergenerationally, and affectively. Much like the shame always already embodied by the female viewers of reality TV, subtle indicators of shame stick to queer bodies, often before they are even aware of their own queerness. In queer contexts such as Wotever, Duckie and Bird Club, this intergenerationality is experienced in multiple ways. Not only is this queer shame passed through the familial generations indicated by Walkerdine, where the affects of particularly mothers but also other older relatives provide the conduit for inherited shame, but these traumas also pass through generations of what is often termed the broader 'queer family' (see Love 2007). Though levels of understanding and interest in gay histories of oppression and liberation must vary wildly amongst young LGBT individuals, the ubiquity of references in a variety of both mainstream and

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[77] These texts give just an indication of what has been variously termed the anti-social turn, queer negativity or queer failure. Whilst this broad trend in queer studies is far from homogenous, it can be identified as a general shift of attention by a number of queer scholars in various disciplines away from the progressive, liberationist discourse of a gay politics of assimilation (exemplified for many by the fight for gay marriage) to an embracing and revaluing of failure, loss, and illegibility. Whilst it falls beyond the scope of this thesis to provide an overview of the emergence of this shift (and indeed Halberstam's book has already embarked upon this project), I would like to note here that this shift resonates for me with what Sara Ahmed (2008) calls the fiction of happy multiculturalism. Ahmed's argument that the promise of happiness through cultural interaction obscures the power relations and histories of violence behind them, particularly when individual, personal happiness is aligned with a greater social good, exemplifies for me they key premise of the anti-social turn that there is valuable work to be done by embracing, rather than eliding, the histories of shame, trauma, pain and loss queer bodies are imbued with.

LGBT-focused media forms to landmark events such as the Stonewall Riots and the AIDS crisis make these histories almost impossible to escape.[78] In addition, therefore, to the gay shame young people may affectively pick up from family members in the way Walkerdine (2011) describes (as evoked by the anecdote above), the legacies of previous generations of queers also rub off onto younger queer bodies. These intergenerational legacies include, as well as shame and trauma, histories of activism, community, collective strength and camaraderie, and are frequently evoked by all three of these clubs. Wotever showcased the importance of preserving LGBT legacies by inviting archivist Ray Reynolds to share footage and tales of London's drag history at its 2011 *Wotever Sex* series. Bird Club has also featured older artists alongside young and emerging performers, and events such as Duckie's *Queers and Old Dears* variety parties engender a level of cross-generational contact rarely seen in club environments.[79] These events foreground queer genealogies linking younger generations of LGBT people to those that came before us, and, crucially for my argument here, allow gay shame (and pride) to be affectively transmitted across generations.

In her poignant and inspirational account of the affective archive of lesbian public cultures, Ann Cvetkovich (2003) forges a way of considering trauma beyond the large scale catastrophes of war and genocide or the specificity of sexual abuse by situating trauma as 'connected to the textures of everyday experience' (ibid.: 3). Counter to Ruth Leys' (2000) forceful claim that the concept of trauma is 'debased' by its use in relation to less cataclysmic events, Cvetkovich (2003) successfully asserts the value of the language of trauma for understanding more personal experiences of violence and abuse and the ways this can be manifested in everyday affective life. To avoid

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[78] The familiarity of these legacies to young LGBT people through the media and particularly online sources is obviously highly historically and geographically specific and the result of multifarious factors including the spread of internet access, changing forms of broadcast and interactive media, and public discourses around sex and sexuality. Whilst it does not fit within the remit of this project to trace the socio-cultural and historic changes in media consumption and production that have resulted in this shift, I feel it is pertinent to note the different kinds of intergenerational contact enabled by the current media landscape in relation to the (different, though not necessarily lesser) interaction afforded by older and pre-internet means such as zines, books, and art as well as various forms of face-to-face contact, which all of course continue to serve as a crucial source and site of queer cultural production.

[79] All three clubs, and Wotever in particular, also seem to appeal to an uncommonly broad age-range in terms of their audience, as is discussed in more detail in Chapter 6 of this thesis in relation subcultures and youth.

collapsing trauma into psychoanalytic discourse she defines it culturally, rather than clinically, as 'discourse that emerges in response to the demands of grappling with the psychic consequences of historical events' (ibid.: 18). She argues that through cultural products like music and novels, a collective audience for trauma emerges, an audience that can be responsive to communal trauma such as the AIDS crisis whilst also providing a shared space for the very personal traumas of sexual abuse and violence. Using trauma to investigate community and intimacy in this way, Cvetkovich foregrounds the felt, the affective dimension of public cultures. These collective and personal traumas also colour the atmosphere of Duckie, Bird Club and Wotever. The tragic losses resulting from AIDS, homophobia, transphobia and neglect are present in the cultural memory alongside individual experiences of sexual assault, abandonment and violence. These traumatic histories which stick to bodies are brought into the affective milieu of these performance settings, and here do interesting work. As Deborah Withers (2012) notes in relation to the 'vicinity of trauma' to the history of the UK Women's Liberation Movement, traumatic experiences 'hang close' to bodies and thus are somehow 'always *there*' (ibid. : 81). Performance acts as a vehicle through which trauma can be accessed, shared, and defeated, if not overcome. For Killpussy, her mere physical presence, 'the fact that I'm even on the stage' (Killpussy) despite her own traumatic childhood and the struggles of negotiating the world in a queer body conveyed a basic message about strength, survival and the ability to pull a 'self' back together in the face of being undone by trauma. Performing stories that are at once personal and universal creates a sense of 'that could be anyone in the audience and that our stories are being told' (Jet Moon), these performers provide affirmation that it is possible to 'live to tell the tale' (Jet). Yet these traumatic experiences are not told in a straightforwardly narrative way. Stories of trauma are inevitably knotted with unspeakability and silence, as 'how does one listen to what is impossible' (Caruth 1995: 10)? They are insinuated and weaved into abstract or emotionally ambiguous tales. As argued by Grace Cho (2008) in her examination of the unspoken trauma haunting the lives of Koreans, trauma cannot be told, and in its unspeakability is transmitted intergenerationally through unconscious haunting:

> How does one work through this paradox of telling a story about loss that is unnamable and trauma that is dislocated and materializes in forms far

removed from the traumatic event itself, often through sensations, emotions, and unconscious thought?' (Ibid.: 24)

The unspeakability of trauma leaves behind affective resonances rather than concrete objects, the feelings and memories which attach themselves to bodies in unexplainable and ambiguous ways. In the context of these performance clubs, then, histories of personal and collective trauma are entwined into the memories and stories portrayed on stage. As I demonstrate below, performances such as Josephine Krieg's dance piece *Gender Violence* act as a way of 'telling' the trauma without the need for narrative or even necessarily speech. Though these traumatic experiences may not be explicitly addressed, they are, as Withers (2012) notes, always *there*. By considering the vicinity of trauma to the life experiences of many of its inhabitants, I propose the performances staged in these spaces can be read beyond their content or transgressive value. Through the model of intergenerational haunting, we see how performances tap into collective registers of feeling and are thus part of the processes of intercorporeal subject formation occurring within these spaces.

Fig. 44: Bird la Bird performing as Scousxie Scouse (with dog shit swastika), at Bird Club's *Night of the Banshee,* 2009. Photo by Leng Montgomery.

Fig. 45: Bird la Bird performing as Femme Jesus, at Bird Club's *Easter Sunday Passion Play*, 2010. Photo by Leng Montgomery.

Fig. 46: Josephine Krieg and Jet Moon performing Ninja Nuns against Homophobia and Transphobia, *Family Values* at the Arcola Theatre, 2010. Photo by AbsolutQueer.

5.2. Affective entanglements

Pacing, bopping, she oscillates between teenage bedroom angst and seduction as she kneels, back to the audience and arching, brown hair sliding across her bare shoulders. Her movements are wild and yet highly controlled, like something bursting out that she is trying to contain, to keep inside her belly. Face calm and serene, then contorted with pain. A seductive look, a coy smile, a joyful laugh. As I watch her I feel my heart rate increase ever so slightly. I realise that I am leant forward in my seat, trying to get closer, trying to get in.

Fists raised and biceps flexed, melting seamlessly into a hip-jutting coquettish twirl. Head banging, jumping, she beckons with both hands. "Bring it on!" A confrontation, a challenge we have all been forced to make, when we were too angry to run away. Then again the beckon, but with a smile. Playful. "Come on," more applause please.

Rigid robotic doll-like movements de-humanise her body. As she flails about, bouncing, I am twitching with her. She speaks of release. Letting go. Of the tension and anger and fear. Of street confrontations, lairy lads shouting. Of running away and trying to fight. Of being cast out, loneliness and heartbreak.

She throws herself on her back, every muscle tense - legs up, knees bent. One second it looks like the exquisite pain of climax, then childbirth, then a kick in the stomach. Outburst. Survival.

This description is my attempt to evoke Josephine Krieg's dance piece entitled *Gender Violence*, which has been performed may times in various forms at Wotever World and several related events such as the Transfabulous transgender arts festival. I read Josephine's performance as an expression of suffering and joy that cannot be spoken. It is about being trans, about being queer, and about being human. For me, this piece encapsulates the affective intensities elicited by the performances in all three of these spaces because the collective memories it calls forth stimulate the audience on both a cognitive and a visceral level.

Figs 47 a & b: Josephine Krieg performing *Gender Violence* at Stockholm Pride, 2004. Photos by Del lagrace Volcano.

The term 'affect' tends to be utilised by contemporary social theorists with one of two distinct meanings: either as a synonym for emotion (see Ngai 2004, Love 2007) or as an embodied sensation of intensity distinct from emotion by virtue of its pre-cognitive, pre-rational state (as purported most famously by Brian Massumi 2002). For Massumi and others following the work of Silvan Tomkins (1962, 1963), affects are the nebulous, diffuse intensities that are experienced bodily and become fixed through their interpretation as emotions with socio-linguistic meaning and a clear locus. Within this framework, affects act as high-speed reflexive responses working on the body before the brain has had time to catch-up and rationalise them. Whilst this conception of affects as embodied, amorphous and lacking any clearly identifiable object is crucial to how I understand affect, I wish to question the inverse dualism that appears to draw a distinct binary and subsequent hierarchy between body and mind. Ruth Leys' (2011) salient critique of the ontological bias in recent affect theory highlights the danger of work such as Massumi's which relies on neuro-science, as she claims this can easily lead to biological reductionism, distilling affects to reflex responses and the autonomic nervous system.

However, counter to Leys' argument I would suggest that this does not refute the perceived distinction between affects and emotions. I consider affects and emotions to be distinct and yet fundamentally connected. Not because affects operate fully or completely in the realm of the visceral, but because they occur within the indispensable interconnection between the body and mind, engaging both simultaneously. As Michael Hardt (2007) has proposed:

> affects refer equally to the body and the mind; and [...] because they involve both reason and the passions [...] the perspective of the affects requires us constantly to pose as a problem the relation between actions and passions, between reason and the emotions. (Ibid.: ix-x)

This disruption of the binary distinction between body and mind leads me to follow Hardt's statement by offering plurality and singularity as a further relation that is problematised by affect. Affective intensities not only merge body and mind, they also highlight the slipperiness of our understanding of ourselves as bounded, autonomous and rational subjects by calling attention our porousness. The passing of affective intensities between people, which Teresa Brennan (2004) has termed affective transmission, highlights the collectivity of bodies that are always open to affect and be affected by others. This transferral

is what aligns the workings of affect with vocabularies of contagion and suggestion used to understand the ways in which human subjectivity is relational and intercorporeal. Lisa Blackman (2008a) has traced the lineage of early nineteenth century conceptions of 'normal' suggestion which were later sidelined in favour of a more rationalist model of the human subject. Although, as Blackman notes, many contemporary affect theorists including Massumi (2002) and Brennan (2004) disregard the concept of suggestion in favour of more biological neuroscientific or endocrinological explanations, the non-conscious or psychic realm may offer significant insight into how we can understand and conceptualise affects and their circulation. Recent critical engagements with traditional crowd psychology (such as Le Bon 1922) have indeed revitalised concepts of contagion and suggestion as 'normal' capacities of experience which may allow us to better conceive the workings of affect outside of the biological reductionism of reflex bodily actions (Orr 2006, Thrift 2008). The transmission of affect thus speaks to the ways we are constantly reconciling the need to experience ourselves as coherent and discrete subjects with experiences that exemplify our fundamentally collective, relational being. Furthermore, considerations of diasporic and intergenerational transmission of affect, as seen above with trauma and shame, allow for a consideration of affects as embodied though not necessarily reducible to biology (Bell 2007, Blackman 2011a, 2011b, Walkerdine 2010, 2011).

Collective memories like Josephine's raw and visceral story of violence work in the space between cognition and sensation - in the space of embodiment where the mind and body are inextricably connected, and the subject is fundamentally connected and co-enacted in relation to others. The physical expression of dance, especially dance that defies the classical codes and conventions of regulated modern dance practices, provides no words, no story, no 'content' as such. It tells of abstract pain through movement and gesture, through embodied, pre-linguistic intensities that precede the interpretive structure of emotion and language. In the audience, we identify with the 'feel' of the piece rather than with the particularities of the narrative, and we do so in ambiguous, unquantifiable ways. As noted above, Patricia Clough's (2009) engagement with the psychoanalytic concept of enactive witnessing demonstrates how the recounting of trauma can transform language itself from an instrument of rationalist meaning to a medium of affect:

> Language becomes less about content and more about the accompanying rhythms of affect – the punctuated, pulsing beats in sound – moaning and groaning, or in the calming or agitating bodily gesture – rocking, rubbing, twisting, twitching and quivering. (Ibid.: 156)

As Josephine herself said to me in our conversation, *Gender Violence* is about finding a way to speak about that which we have no language for, but that is felt very viscerally. This channeling of unspeakable trauma through movement echoes Hamera's (2005) account of a family using Cambodian folk dance as a survival strategy to process the atrocities and losses of the Khmer Rouge, as I explore in more depth below. When watching *Gender Violence*, I am moved not by the specificity of Josephine's experience as a queer femme trans woman, but by the affective intensity induced by her movements. This affective intensity emerges from the fusion of the unanchored physiological responses Massumi (2002) calls affects (the goosebumps, the warming of cheeks, the quickening heartbeat), and, I would argue, the (if somewhat abstract) connections we make between the feelings of joy, pain, anger and isolation she is portraying and our own experiences of those feelings. My deployment of affect to interpret this performance piece is therefore much more closely aligned with the 'structure of feeling' outlined by Raymond Williams (1977):

> We are talking here about characteristic elements of impulse, restraint, and tone; specifically affective elements of consciousness and relationships: not feeling against thought, but thought as felt and feeling as thought: practical consciousness of a present kind, in a living and interrelating continuity. (Ibid.: 132)

The collective memory of *Gender Violence* works on both an emotional and and affective level. We are moved by the 'content' of the narrative, by her struggle and pain that we can associate with our own, but we are also moved by the medium itself, we have involuntary, unintentional bodily responses to her body, her rhythm and movement. It is significant that this piece was first performed at Bar Wotever, and that the overwhelmingly positive reaction of the audience there engendered the repeat performances that took the piece to wider audiences. For the Wotever audience, *Gender Violence* tells of familiar experiences of exclusion, harassment and personal turmoil resulting in intergenerationally transmitted queer shame and trauma. The audience of Wotever are united by these collective experiences of violence and

discrimination, usually but not always associated with embodied non-normativity in terms of genders, appearances or desires that do not fit various cultural and subcultural norms. But the feeling of collectivity at Bar Wotever particularly is not only due to the stories themselves. As an open stage, the performers are often audience members themselves, who by the atmosphere and supportive community of Wotever have felt inspired or emboldened to take to the stage and share their feelings and experiences in creative ways. What is important at Bar Wotever is that these amateurs and the professional performers alike are presented as carrying out the same vital task for the gathered audience - telling 'our' stories, individual experiences that pertain to the shared common experiences of love, loss and the comical banalities of negotiating public toilets with a non-normatively gendered body. By their very presence on the stage, and the self-assurance required to do so, all of the performers evoke the complex struggles with their bodies, desires and identities that all queer individuals must engage in order to form a sense of 'self' that is not 'undone' in Butler's (2004) terms by the norms it cannot fit. In the community-focused setting of Bar Wotever the performers and audience all engage their multiple selves and identities, the stereotypes and otherness ascribed to them and the performative strategies of fiction and exaggeration, to simultaneously tell real personal stories and experiences and distance these stories from any sense of 'truth' or reality. By performing a self that is also a not-self, and blending their personal experiences with those of others (and particularly the 'others' that make up the audience) these performers are able to highlight the tensions in performance, and particularly autobiographical performance, regarding the distinctions of truth/fiction, performance/life, and auto/bio. Almost universally, the performances at Wotever, be they burlesque skits or acoustic folk music sets, are framed in a way that highlights the construction of a liveable subject position as a complex and often difficult process that is aided and enacted through performance and creative expression.

5.2.1. Affective Labour

In the context of these milieux of affective transmission, I argue that the performer can be considered a conduit of affect, not only projecting affects towards the audience but also allowing them to circulate, and eliciting an affective response. Performance within this space, then, can be considered a

form of affective labour. In her insightful account of fashion modelling as immaterial and affective labour, Elizabeth Wissinger (2007) argues that the most successful models are prized not necessarily or only for their beauty, but for their talents in projecting and evoking affective states. Influential post-Marxist theorists Hardt and Negri (2004) have outlined the increasing importance within late capitalist economies of immaterial labour, or work which 'creates immaterial products, such as knowledge, information, communication, a relationship, or an emotional response' (ibid.: 108). As a subcategory of this, they consider affective labour as specifically work which manipulates both the body and mind at the level of feeling, generating 'a feeling of ease, well-being, satisfaction, excitement or passion' (ibid.: 108). Wissinger (2007) argues that in modelling, the body itself comes to function as a conduit of affect on a non-conscious, pre-subjective level. Distinct from emotional labour, this affective labour occurs in an instinctive mode outside of conscious awareness:

> fashion models are valued for their ability to unleash a wide range of responses, responses that might shift or be modulated faster than they can be subjectively recognized as emotions. (ibid.: 260)

By acting as a conduit for the flow of affects in this way, the model's body comes to signify the complexities of intercorporeal communication that often functions on a level that is not consciously articulated but something much more felt and experiential.

Fig. 48: Emelia Holdaway performing *Meat*, at Bird Club's *Wimmin's Disco*, 2009. Photo by Sam Nightingale.

Fig. 49: Emelia Holdaway performing *Meat*, at Bird Club's *Wimmin's Disco*, 2009.
Photo by Leng Montgomery.

Much like the fashion models of Wissinger's study, my performer protagonists use their bodies to induce reactions that are too intangible to be termed emotions. I argue that the act of performing therefore constitutes affective labour, where the performers use their bodies, often in an instinctual rather than entirely conscious way, to unleash affective responses from the audience. Killpussy articulated quite clearly her ability to generate particular feelings through performance:

> when you're on stage it becomes, sub-consciously, if you want to trigger, I mean obviously I don't want to make everyone in the audience angry at me, but if I wanted to I would know how to manipulate the audience in that way. (Killpussy)

Like fashion modelling, sex work has also been convincingly analysed as affective labour, labour that is concerned primarily with the production of an intersubjective experience, and particularly an embodied one (see Ditmore 2007).[80] This could explain why several of the performers I spoke to made reference to sex work, and sex more generally when discussing their art:

> I think of it in terms of sex work as well [...] I choose to work that space because [...] I want to directly have an influence on how people are going to interact in the space. (Jet Moon)

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[80] Indeed, as Jennifer Doyle (2006) has pointed out, art, and particularly pop art, has also been (though pejoratively) aligned with a rhetoric of prostitution in terms of the selling of that (art, or sex) which should not be sold or for sale.

In the group conversation the performers made several references to 'increasing [our] sexual opportunities' (Bird la Bird) and 'pimp[ing] ourselves out' (Jet) through performance.

Fig. 50: Jet Moon and Josephine Krieg performing an excerpt from *Parental Guidance* at Bar Wotever, 2010. Photo by AbsolutQueer.

Fig. 51: Jet Moon and Josephine Krieg performing *Miss Jet and Miss Dotty* at Bar Wotever, 2010. Photo by AbsolutQueer.

Sex was associated with performance not only for the performers but also by the audience members I spoke to. Beyond the obvious sexual connotation of burlesque and cabaret performance that is erotic in content, the possibility of (the right kind of) sexual interest and flirtation in the queer performance space was frequently mentioned. The audience members discussed seeking out and meeting potential lovers at Bird Club, Wotever and Duckie, and there was a particular emphasis on being 'appreciated' (Stanley) and getting 'attention' (Debra) that was denied them in more mainstream gay spaces. Generally the queer performance space was characterised as a space in which there was both freedom and opportunity to inhabit and express sexuality, to 'act how I want to be, in an everyday way and a sexual way' (Stanley). Bird la Bird explicitly noted this as her deliberate intention:

> I definitely want performance to fire people up and use that whole cabaret environment to stoke people's emotions, whether it's you know their sexual passion or their political passion, hopefully both at the same time. (Bird)

> [With Bird Club] I wanted to create a space where [...] you'd come in and you'd feel challenged, welcomed, hot, horny. (Bird)

As indicated in the discussion of dressing up above, many of the audience members suggested that the performances in these spaces somehow create an environment in which 'anything goes [...] you expect the boundaries to be pushed' (Stanley), creating 'the atmosphere that, you can do what you like' (Natacha). The 'buzz and energy' (Stanley) facilitated by the performance was generally perceived to reverberate beyond the act itself and remain with the audience 'for the rest of the night' (Kevin). In some cases, the affective state induced through the performances resonated beyond even the event or the venue itself: 'this feeling, and also the nonchalance with which I do it, how I feel, I take that sort of strut into my straight surroundings' (Steppen Wolf). As such the combination of this affect circulation and the general atmosphere of experimentation and play created by the performance facilitates the formation of a subjectivity that is at once co-constituted and yet coherent, that acknowledges its trauma without being undone by it. For Kirsten, and many other regulars of Bar Wotever in particular, there was a sense in which the affective milieu of these spaces 'has helped me become what I am in many ways' (Kirsten).

However, channeling affect in this way can be challenging, particularly when the collective memories addressed through the performances so often speak to difficult and painful issues such as shame and trauma, as discussed above. In addition to the affective labour of projecting and inciting affective responses, my performer protagonists must maintain a delicate balance between the solemnity of the content of the performance and their audience's receptiveness to this gravity.[81] Duckie particularly was positioned as an inappropriate venue for 'anything too poignant' (Robert) unless it was 'mixed with comedy' because 'everyone's trying to have fun' (Kevin). This was echoed by the performers' awareness of Duckie as more of a 'party crowd' (Jolie Rouge) than the other two, requiring a different affective register. However both audiences and performers of all three spaces noted the necessity for complex

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[81] As is further explored in Chapter 6 of this thesis, the audience's openness to earnestly sombre performance is a site of dissimilarity between Duckie, Bird Club and Bar Wotever, though performers in all three spaces often utilise an ambivalent, tragi-comic register when addressing particularly difficult or painful themes.

and ambivalent affects to make this pain not only palatable to a party crowd, but also understandable and relatable:

> There's no need for it to always be serious and painful [...] You can make political statements and it can be amusing and you know it can be funny, but it still has a very powerful message rather than all dire, dooh be dooh. (Wendyl)

The performers were also aware of this, suggesting that 'the harder the issues get the more *joie de vivre* you're got to have' (Bird la Bird) because 'sometimes that's the only way to get things across, sometimes it's the only way to deal with things' (Jet Moon). For my protagonists, humour was a key technique for accessing and relating the difficult experiences that were the source of true connection through performance as it 'opens up a space' (Bird la Bird). The performers thus utilise what Gavin Butt (2007: 92) calls a 'queer kind of sincerity', an ambivalent 'quathos' that allows the audience to engage and feel involved in the affective complexity being staged. For the performers, this translates into highly skilled and demanding work of balancing and managing the affective register through their performances in order to allow for this connection to be made with the audience. This labour might be considered to corroborate Claire Hemmings' (2005) critique of the turn to affect as an approach that tends to sideline the negativity of social critique in favour of the affirmative possibility seemingly posed by affective freedom. However, the very 'positive' affects Hemmings suggests can potentially close down critique are in fact used by these performers as a tool to frame hard-hitting political and personal messages in an accessible way. The ambiguous tone of the performances staged at Duckie, Bird Club and Wotever thus engage a lighter affective register precisely in order to 'undercut very sharply with your politics' (Jet Moon) or portray the unspeakable pain of shame and trauma and 'make it transformative so it's something that you can laugh at' (Bird la Bird). The emotional ambivalence being staged thus also creates space for further ambivalence, opening the possibility for complexity and hybridity in the audience - in their affects, but also in their self identification, and their role within the space.

5.2.2. Ethical Spectatorship

> *I tend to feel that, whoever's on stage is talking to the audience almost as if they weren't something separate, whoever gets up on that stage is usually part of the audience in one form or another. (Steppen Wolf)*

The responsibility for affective resonance does not, however, lie entirely with the performer in these settings. All of the regulars I spoke to felt a certain duty as audience members to be responsive and respectful to the performances on stage. Their affective entanglement with the performers and one another leads to what I am calling an ethics of spectatorship - a sense of themselves as active agents and participants with a consequent share of the responsibility for the affect circulation. All of the audience members I spoke to expressed an inclination to treat all performers, regardless of the quality of a particular performance, with esteem and courtesy. There was a general agreement that the appropriate response to disliking a performance was, somewhat euphemistically, to 'go outside for a cigarette, and I don't even smoke' (Natacha). Allowing discussion to take place without disrupting the performance itself, this method was presented in all of the audience group conversations as preferable to expressing or vocalising aversion within the realm of the performance itself and causing interference.[82] As seen above with the significance of dressing up at these events, a feeling of being 'part of the performance' and 'joining in' (Stanley) is crucial to the audience's experience of these clubs and particularly the performance. This participation thus calls for a mode of spectatorship more akin to a dialogue than consumption, wherein the audience hold joint responsibility for co-constructing the atmosphere with and for the performer:

> something brings us all together here and there's that kindness that makes
> you watch out for them, so [...] I wouldn't be able to just consume their act

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[82] Whilst there appeared to be a common desire amongst my protagonists not to disrupt or interfere with a performance if it was disliked on grounds of personal taste, this was not the same if the performance was considered offensive or otherwise aggressive towards the audience or any marginalised or vulnerable people or groups, which has occasionally occurred at all three venues. However, such incidents seem to be rare, and I have not witnessed a direct disruption of a performance at either of the three clubs. To my knowledge, such protest has only occurred in response to performers who were evidently not familiar with the clubs' shared ethos of acceptance and tolerance.

on stage [...] It's not just something where I put the penny in and something is happening and I'm not responsible, but I partake in this event because I'm in the audience, I'm there too, I'm watching and encouraging. (Steppen Wolf)

For some of my protagonists, such as Wendyl, this tactic was considered a result of the audiences simply being 'respecting about an art situation' (Wendyl). Yet others framed this explicitly as due to the role and participation of the audience in the space more generally. Steppen Wolf demonstrated this through comparing the experience of spectatorship at all three clubs with that of a more traditional strip-show in Candy Bar, the mainstream lesbian bar discussed in Chapter 3 of this thesis:

There was such a divide, I mean you could almost say that what was on stage was a bit exploitative, but, the audience were just consuming it, just consuming what was given to them [...] It wasn't like, we're watching somebody of our community do something, it was laughing at their expense, it didn't feel good at all. (Steppen Wolf)

Dr J substantiated this claim, associating the divide and Steppen Wolf's discomfort with there being 'no identification in that space' (Dr J). Similarly in my group conversation with Duckie regulars they cited a sense of participation as crucial to the experience: 'it wasn't just a case of, this is what we're serving you, come and enjoy it, people went there and that was part and parcel of what made the whole night' (Kevin).

Through the collective memories being portrayed on stage the audience are implicated within the performance itself, and are always already active participants in the conduction of affect. Many of the audience members conveyed this involvement in the affective milieu through an image of play. As seen with the performers' discussions of play and experimentation with a sense of 'self' on stage, the audience of these queer performance clubs all identified a transformative playfulness permitted within that space, as 'I want to play and just be silly [...] it was so brilliant, I just wanted to be part of it (Michael). Josephine and Kevin each described Wotever and Duckie respectively as a 'playground', as a space in which to explore and act out new possibilities. For Josephine, performance particularly provides 'an opportunity to try out things that you might not be able to otherwise, and to play with those things, I'm like that I love to play with that, I love costumes and identities and playing as if

you're somebody else' (Josephine). However this opportunity wasn't unique to the act of performance itself, as she and the other performers in the group referenced this possibility for playfulness both on and off the stage. As an audience member in the participatory sideshow performances of Duckie's *Gay Shame* events, Kevin experienced it as 'a giant playground, you were just totally utterly ridiculous, stupid, but everyone was involved, you couldn't be shy' (Kevin). Kevin's comment especially pinpoints the relationality involved in this playful experimentation - it is a process in which 'everyone is involved' and that unites the audience in their shared participation. By jointly playing with a sense of 'self' through dressing up and engaging in the activities, they are able to enact a temporary community of 'people who see the world slightly differently and interact slightly differently together' (Stanley). Yet this playfulness with regard to sense of self is not only experienced in the abstract sense implied by this collectivity - it is also sensory and affective.

Fig. 52: Interactive performance "stalls" at Duckie's *Gay Shame Goes Girly*, 2009. Photo by Christa Holka.

Fig. 53: Emelia Holdaway with collaborators and a punter, performing *Mommy's Little Helper* at *Gay Shame Goes Girly,* 2009. Photo by Christa Holka.

As seen above, for the performers in the group conversation sexual energy is one of the key affects produced through performance, setting up a relation between the audience and the performer, and but also disseminating and inducing relationality between audience members. Through their labour, the performers generate multiple and complex affective responses, but these responses do not remain within the bodies of the individual audience members, they are transmitted in multiple directions between audience members and back towards the performer on the stage. All of the performers also discussed the importance of the feedback they experienced while performing, the reciprocation of the affect they send out - 'it's that feedback effect where you gather energy from taking up that space' (Jet Moon). This affective exchange is crucial to how I am theorising the affective entanglements of performance, because the audience themselves in these spaces are active participants in the work of affect circulation, not passive recipients or consumers. The performers and the audience are jointly implicated in the transmission of affect that brings them together in the space - 'it just goes goes ping and you have this shared evening and it's really beautiful' (Bird la Bird). This unity was difficult for my protagonists to express, though many of them pointed towards moments when 'something magic kind of happens' (Michael). This again was a very embodied 'uplifting' (Steppen Wolf) feeling, and was often associated with dancing and

'how good I felt in my body' (Steppen Wolf). Everyone I spoke to unanimously agreed on the significance of the performances in producing what it was that was important or valuable to them in that setting. The feeling of comfort, ease and ability to enact and express a sense of 'self' was often attributed to the performances and what they enabled within the space, the circulation and feedback of affects between audience members and the performers, and the ambivalent, contradictory and complex nature of those affects.

The performances staged at Bird Club, Wotever and Duckie thus do far more than entertain. They are the locus of affect and intersubjective connection between the bodies that occupy the space. By 'bringing something into being on the stage' (Jet Moon), the performers carry out two crucial functions - they foster and provoke affective responses, and they enable a shared experience. Whilst this shared experience is often framed by the collective memories which, as outlined above, many of the audience can make a connection with, the experience of the performance regardless of its content is significant in itself as a focus, a point of connection between the audience who are being collectively addressed by the performer on stage.[83] Rather than simply transmitting a message to their receptive audience, the performers are 'talking with and dialoguing with audiences' (Josephine), a sharing that seems to be understood primarily on an affective register. The audience is affected by the performance, and give affect back:

> a warmth of feeling of being with them, and you're laughing with them [...]
> It's sort of a very broad 'we' feeling that's sort of uplifting. (Steppen Wolf)

> people glow in front of an audience, when they go out there shaking, and then the audience starts to support them and watching how, it's like a flame or something, they just start glowing and it's like, wow, you know, they get it, that feedback relationship. (Jet Moon)

For the performers and the audience of Wotever, Duckie and Bird Club, it is the affective exchange that is crucial, the interaction where the performer sends out energy and 'can feel the audience coming back' (Killpussy). Through this affective exchange, the audience members perceived that the performance

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[83]   In the following chapter, this address is analysed more closely when I propose the performance works to construct the audience as a temporary public focused around shared affects.

'create[s] space for me [...] it gives me room' (Steppen Wolf), enabling ways of being that may otherwise feel impossible or too risky. I propose that this ethics of spectatorship allows us to consider the transmission and role of affect within this space as crucial not only to how the audience experience the performance itself, but to the overall milieu of these spaces and the subjective processes that occur within them. The following section addresses more explicitly how the tension between collectivity and identity is manifested in these environments in order to argue that they facilitate what Butler (2004: 1) terms 'livable li[ves]'. The performative belonging and co-extensivity (Bell 2007) enacted through the performances and the affective relations they stimulate allow the collective memories of shame and trauma discussed above to be reformulated into the basis of a possible, liveable subject.

5.3. Living collectivity: Belonging and collective liveability

Here we can see at play what Vikki Bell (2007) calls performative belonging. In discussing how identities are performatively produced - given and created through language, ritual, and performance, Bell proposes a mode of reconsidering belonging and genealogy as equally performative. Drawing from Paul Gilroy's (1993) work on diaspora, she explores the role of carnal connections, unspoken, silent attachments which are embodied, felt, and can cut across generations and continents, uniting bodies temporally and spatially separated. Through this 'performative routedness' (ibid.: 32), subjectivity is always already relational, co-produced in contact with these affective connections and 'achieved through practices that maintain rather than rely upon genealogical connection' (ibid.: 36). Citing Hamera's (2005) account of her interactions with a Cambodian family relocated to Los Angeles by the atrocities of the Khmer Rouge, Bell (2007) examines modes of embodied performance which might allow these unspeakable affective echoes to be expressed. Faced with the trauma of genocide, displacement, and losing loved ones, the Sem family of Hamera's (2005) study turn to ancient folk dance as a mode of communication with those that did not survive, engaging silence as a survival strategy. Through this dance, the body channels and manifests the carnal, felt connections stretching spatially from LA to Cambodia and temporally through generations. Though this unusual and fascinating example is routed in the

specificity of the Sems' experience, it highlights the ways in which diasporic relations influence our subjectivity, and specifically how embodied forms of performance may reenact or even performatively produce this carnal enmeshment:

> [T]he Sems' movements are not about here and there, now and then, but about different sets of relations which their movements are producing and reproducing. (Bell 2007: 26)

The queer belonging enacted within Duckie, Wotever and Bird Club, as seen above, also taps into unspoken histories of trauma and subjectivities that are co-constituted and co-enacted through diasporic attachments and connections. The lack of 'genealogical connections' in the first place mean the performance itself, with nothing 'true' to perpetuate, becomes primary, and thus reveals its nature as a performance (as we see in Butler's [1990] own example of drag that exposes itself as a 'copy' without 'original'). Much like Valerie Walkerdine's (2010, 2012) account of a mining community fractured and disintegrated by poverty and job losses, queer performance can be considered to enact a 'holding together' in the face of trauma and the threat of becoming undone. As argued by Lisa Blackman (2011a), a consideration of intersubjectivity and relationality in relation to performance thus allows for an understanding of performance beyond representation or meaning-making, and for different questions to be posed concerning 'the production of subjectivities which privilege process, movement, affective and intensive relations, bodies and practices' (ibid.: 195).

The queer performance spaces of Wotever, Duckie and Bird Club explicitly position themselves as providing a space for those who do not fit in elsewhere, each is a 'club of outcasts' as Amy Lamé said of Duckie. They do this by actively working to be accepting and tolerant of however people wish to present themselves: 'come as you are, it's that kind of attitude' (Steppen Wolf). All of my research protagonists struggled to describe how their sense of self was articulated in the queer performance space, but they all pointed towards an indescribable *feeling*, a sense of comfort, ease and confidence with their bodies, identities, their holistic sense of who they were, and their position within the space and relation to others within it. They all cited interactions with others - conversations or lack of them regarding identity and 'who you are and where

you're at today' (Steppen Wolf) within this process, and referred to performance as a significant element of this.

For Killpussy the relationship with the audience is formed through accessing what she terms the 'bare bones' of emotion that she experienced through a difficult and traumatic upbringing. She suggests that whilst these 'base level' feelings and experiences are universal and shared, her extreme experiences allow her to manipulate and tap into these emotions through her performances because 'when you're around really very hard situations you really understand what triggers people, how to move people when you see raw emotion' (Killpussy). Although she herself characterises her experiences as extreme, she still positions them as a point of connection for audience members, all of whom, no matter what their personal experience consists of, can identify with the basic values of strength and courage she is presenting. By implicating and involving the audience in their performances of their own stories and experiences in this way, these performers highlight the relational nature of the 'self', presenting a 'self' that is 'not only a historical and cultural construct, but is imbued with, and indeed is inseparable from, others' (Heddon 2008, 124). This togetherness was important for creating a transformative experience, engendering a feeling of 'we can carry on now' (Jet Moon) that the queer performance space inspires. For the performers particularly, performance was a strategy for creating something positive from difficult or painful experiences, a technique of 'mak[ing] something out of it, something good [...] How do we turn it round, how do we make it into something where the audience are then together, going, yeah' (Josephine). As seen above the link between the transformative experience and the collectivity of audience and performer is key here, as it is precisely through this co-extensivity (Bell 2007) that different possibilities of ways of being and belonging emerge. The shared experience of the performance, whether a clearly identifiable common experience or a familiar affective response, thus temporarily suspends the normative conception of the bounded autonomous self, and within this interruption enables the making of the 'self' that is undone by the norms, and by constructing a bodily integrity that is nonetheless relational and intersubjective.

It is worth noting here the importance of such convivial affects to the audience members and to my own analysis here, which may seem to jar with the value often placed on tension and friction within academic enquiry. As noted

above, 'negative' or 'difficult' affects have been the focus of much attention both within the turn to affect and in queer studies, with theorists such as Heather Love (2007), Lee Edelman (2007), Judith Halberstam (2011) and Sianne Ngai (2004) seeking out ways to reconsider and reevaluate futurity, failure, loss, shame and depression in ways that are useful for my reading of the intergenerational haunting of trauma through queer performance. Such 'negative' affects have also become a significant point of debate within the realm of art criticism. In her critique of Nicolas Bourriaud's (2002) treatise on what he calls 'relational aesthetics', Claire Bishop (2004) forcefully asserts the unique value of antagonism and friction. Bourriaud's claim to the democratic possibilities posed by interactive and participatory art fails, Bishop claims, by its focus on the convivial affects of ease, belonging, sharing and safety:

> the relations set up by relational aesthetics are not intrinsically democratic, as Bourriaud suggests, since they rest too comfortably within an ideal of subjectivity as whole and of community as immanent togetherness [...] there is no inherent friction since the situation is what Bourriaud calls "microtopian": it produces a community whose members identify with each other, because they have something in common. (Bishop 2004: 67)

For Bishop, the congenial affects of relational aesthetics are depoliticised and depoliticising, swerving questions of artistic and aesthetic value in favour of a comfortable and reassuring enactment of sociality through art. Echoing sociologist Chantal Mouffe's (2009, see also Laclau and Mouffe 1985) endorsement of the democratic necessity for agonism, Bishop (2004) proposes instead a 'relational antagonism' that values art in terms of its production of discomfort, tension, and a feeling of being ill-at-ease.

It is possible that the disparity between myself and Bishop (2004) concerning the value of affirmative affects is fundamentally a disciplinary one. Whilst this is primarily a project of cultural studies, Bishop is enmeshed in the disciplinary expectations of what it means to do art criticism, including the accompanying standards of seriousness, objectivity, and legitimacy. The paradigm of performance studies has, as Jon McKenzie (2001) argues in his consideration of the efficacy of cultural performance, positioned 'challenge' as its central gesture, thus focusing on work that performs this challenge efficaciously (most notably through the staging of tension, conflict, and provocation). As noted by Gavin Butt (2005), previously unquestionable tenets

of the practice of art criticism, such as the imperative for 'critical distance', are increasingly being challenged, opening up different questions regarding what art criticism could be, do or say. Moreover, as a cultural studies project, the primary concern of this thesis lies in the experience of everyday life, and my focus on the art (performance) is as an aspect of that life and an element of the 'everyday culture' of my protagonists.

Critics have also argued that Bishop too discretely distinguishes art from activism in her suggestion that 'art can become legitimately "political" only indirectly, by exposing the limits and contradictions of political discourse itself' (Kester 2011: 32). As Kester argues of his examples of global collaborative art, in the context of Bird Club, Wotever and Duckie, this distinction between art and activism cannot be upheld. As I have argued above the struggle for a liveable subject position played out in these clubs is a crucial activist project, and the performances through which this is staged, I would argue, function simultaneously as activism and art (as many of my protagonists would attest). In a fairly recent article for the journal *Women and performance: A Journal of Feminist Theory*, Jasbir Puar's (2009) meditation on the value of convivial affects for considering a politics of debility further throws into question Bishop's (2004) claim of the subjective wholeness implied by relational aesthetics:

> [i]n its conventional usage, conviviality means relating to, occupied with, or fond of feasting, drinking, and good company – to be merry, festive, together at a table, with companions and guests, and hence, to live with. As an attribute and function of assembling, however, conviviality does not lead to a politics of the universal or inclusive common, nor an ethics of individuatedness, rather the futurity enabled through the open materiality of bodies as a Place to Meet. (Ibid.: 168)

Following Puar I would argue that relationality, even when it is a relation of conviviality rather than the productive antagonism or tension identified by Bishop (2004) and Mouffe (2009), always engenders a productive potential through which bodies and subjectivities are enacted. I thus want to suggest that Bishop overlooks the reparative function of convivial affects, one which is particularly vital to the queer audiences of these clubs who, as previously discussed, often face antagonism, discomfort and intolerance all too frequently in their day to day navigation of an aggressively heteronormative culture.

5.3.1. Identity Trouble

In this final section of this chapter, I address the complex ways in which identity is managed and negotiated within these affective milieux. I argue that it is at the intersection of identity and collectivity that we see how singularity is lived in relation to plurality and co-extensivity. Identity and identity politics have long been considered central to LGBT and feminist theorising and communities, and the problematics of identity, and particularly multiple intersecting identities, have been a primary concern for feminist and queer theorists. The emergence of queer theory in the early 1990s opened an invitation for a proliferation of identities and subject positions by challenging how and why sexuality, and thus gender, are the foundation of how we come to recognise subjects as such (Lloyd 2005). This multiplicity of identities (including vocabularies of butch, femme, queer, genderqueer, trans*, and androgynous, which are pertinent in the spaces of my attention), is intended to offer freedom, choice and flexibility in replacing the 'representational limitations' of gay and lesbian with the 'richness' of multiple queer identities (Marinucci 2010: xii). These infinite available categories of queer identities can be modified and reformulated on their own terms and in relation to other categories, and taken up, discarded or redefined at any time or within any particular context. This flexibility offers great opportunity to queer subjects who might not necessarily fit any singular, static identity category, enabling them to utilise this vocabulary without risking being 'undone' by it (Butler 2004). However, what then happens to fixity, to attachments and investments in identities, to the need to experience subjectivity as singular, coherent and bounded?

To address this tension between fixity and fluidity I take up Lisa Blackman's (2009) examination of the danger posed by the apparent freedom and flexibility offered by a cultural landscape structured by neoliberal and individualised notions of autonomy and choice. The seeming fluidity of identities risks concealing the structures of feeling (Williams 1977) that characterise our relations to identities. Investments in static, fixed identities such as 'lesbian', Blackman (2009) argues, become marginalised as limiting and stuck. A reconsideration of 'how subjectivities are produced at the intersection of a relational matrix, which might include desire, imagination, affect, emotion, power, discourse and signification' (ibid.: 123), she suggests, would allow

attention to be paid to the narratives and investments that are swept aside and disregarded in the discourse of freedom of choice in infinitely flexible, fluid subjectivities. Following this call, I suggest a consideration of the ambivalent negotiation of identity within the discursive milieux of queer performance cultures offers just the urgent attention Blackman is soliciting. The histories of trauma and shame associated with those 'fixed' identities, as discussed above, are what is 'eclipsed' by fluidity discourse, in these domains and in the broader cultural sphere. In affectively rich and ambivalent milieux like Duckie, Bird Club and Wotever, I argue a paradoxical space is created where that fixity (and singularity) can be lived in relation to the fluidity and plurality of affective openness. As seen in Chapter 4 of this thesis, the performances juxtapose narratives of fluidity and choice with static, fixed investments in identities and subjectivities. This negotiation of subjectivity and subjectification is played out in many of the performances through a performative utterance of a self/not-self - a mode of selfhood that is at once authentic and artificial. Through their entanglement in the affective milieu of the environment, the audience are complicit and subsequently implicated in this ambivalent subjectivity. When combined with the explicit ethics of inclusivity and 'come as your are attitude' (Steppen Wolf), this tension between the need for fixity and the desire for openness is enacted through a delicate and careful management of the pre-existing LGBT identity markers that simultaneously enable and trap queer subjects.

We can see in this ambivalent engagement with the politics of identity an echo of what José Muñoz (1999) has called *disidentification*. Muñoz draws from French linguist Michel Pêcheux's (1982) reconsideration of Althusser's (1971) concept of interpellation to read minoritarian performance (particularly performances by queers of colour) as a fundamentally political project. According to Pêcheux, the subject hailed within ideological address can respond in one of three ways - the 'good subject' identifies with the hail and thus is interpellated into the hegemonic ideology, and a 'bad subject' counteridentifies, refusing the ideological system and through this refusal reinforcing its dominance. The third mode of response posited by Pêcheux is of most interest to Muñoz and forms the foundation of his argument - the subject who *dis*identifies, and thus

neither opts to assimilate within such a structure nor strictly opposes it; rather, disidentification is a strategy that works on and against dominant ideology. Instead of buckling under the pressures of dominant ideology (identification, assimilation) or attempting to break free of its inescapable sphere (counteridentification, utopianism), this "working on and against" is a strategy that tries to transform a cultural logic from within, always laboring to enact permanent structural change while at the same time valuing the importance of local or everyday struggles of resistance. (Muñoz 1999: 11)

For minoritarian subjects, Muñoz posits disidentification as a survival strategy through which a toxic, shameful and pejorative identity is managed, remade, reclaimed, and made ultimately into a liveable one. We can see a very similar process occurring in the ambivalence to identity politics enacted at Duckie, Bird Club and Wotever. Rather than dismissing the stereotypes and limiting identities, labels and subject positions that might restrict or otherwise undo the subject, they are pulled apart and ambiguously recycled for the new possibilities of value those identifications might hold in allowing someone to construct a liveable life.

The members of the Bar Wotever group conversation unanimously agreed that what is fundamental to that environment is being given explicit permission to not label oneself, to be allowed to not fit in and not have to explain oneself, but equally having the space and the opportunity to do so if one wishes. This is how the space enacts the welcoming inclusivity it is known for and proud of. By suspending the need to be legible according to the normative gender and sexual identity frameworks of mainstream straight and LGBT communities, Bar Wotever creates a space in which 'you feel comfortable, you feel accepted' (Stanley). The norms that can threaten to undo the self (according to Butler 2004) are sidelined, but retain their use value as that which prevents the self from being undone. For many, Wotever acts as a refuge from the need to align oneself with the norms that threaten their queer selves: 'there's always the conversation, are you a transsexual [...] I don't have to put up with that at Wotever, you know, it's what did you do today? It's like a normal conversation' (Natacha). However, whilst this freedom from the need to explicitly label or mark oneself was considered vital, there was also a recognition of the discursive strategies and relation to regulation that structure

all identities, and the desire to explicitly state this as a necessary and legitimate mode of self-making:

> I think there's like, there's pigeon holes that you are caught up in yourself, that either that you think you are or you're afraid that you might come apart so you want to [fit in to ...] and there's things we share that might become a part of you. And then there are those that other people put on you. (Steppen Wolf)

What these discussions indicate, I argue, is a complex discursive practice through which the atmosphere of carnivalesque ambivalence within these settings facilitates a constant management of the shift between the desire to remove the need to discuss, describe or explain one's non-conformity and the necessity of engaging these practices in order to formulate and articulate a liveable sense of self, or, the tension between subjectivity and subjectification.

For many attendees of Wotever, Duckie and Bird Club, the need to ascribe a singular, stable identity to oneself has caused various degrees of distress and difficulty resulting from the norms and definitions associated with even seemingly radical queer vocabularies of identity. This discussion of categorisation and stereotyping created some tension amongst the groups. In three of the four group conversations, unease emerged from the resentment of being forced into categories that do not fit, but this was far from unified and was expressed in several contrasting ways. Most of the participants in the group conversations distanced themselves from this unease - it was characterised as temporally distinct - as 'before' (Kirsten), or as what distinguishes the queer performance space from others - 'oh my god at last I've got a place where people actually understand what I am' (Jet Moon). In the Bar Wotever group conversation, however, an uneasy exchange highlighted the difficulty of negotiating the seeming freedom and openness to reject identity categories with the need to experience oneself as a stable, coherent subject:

> Wendyl: Probably the whole Wotever scene will never be one of the places where I can wear one of my Drag Queen frocks.
>
> Dr J: Why not?
>
> Wendyl: Can you imagine how people would behave around me? I mean bad enough that I'm-
>
> Steppen Wolf: What all the panties thrown at you?

Wendyl: I do already have some difficulty, because I don't really fit into pigeon holes so people can't really get a handle on who or what I am, they make up their own stories, so I'm already kind of like on the fringe. There are all sorts of stories that go round about me that aren't necessarily true, because I don't necessarily fit into a particular category, because people can't define me.

Dr J: You see that's the fun of Wotever [...] I love occasionally going round to Wotever and just fucking with people's minds [...] It's the place to play with those things [...]

Wendyl: Uh no you haven't listened,

Dr J: I was,

Wendyl: to what I'm saying. I don't know [...] it makes me sad, this, you know, I can't be all the things that I am.

Wendyl felt that her position as an outspoken, explicitly political and confidently self-identified butch-camp dyke left her open to mis-categorisation by others on the basis of assumed characteristics associated with this identity and her appearance more generally. However, later in the conversation Wendyl described the importance of Wotever as a space in which normative gender and identity markers are suspended:

even though we often feel that we ourselves don't fit into those definitions we're still brought up, and very much brainwashed into thinking and behaving that way, and I think that having that environment where somebody turns around and says to us we don't have to think that way, is actually in itself quite liberating [...] Ingo's giving us this conscious permission, that's quite important. (Wendyl)

These tensions and inconsistencies demonstrate the problematic role of identity in these queer environments where inclusivity, openness and freedom of expression are paramount, but subjectification, singularity and taxonomies cannot be eradicated. Thus I argue that identity here works at the nexus of the traction between the porous, collective nature of subjectivity experienced through affective transmission, collective memory and co-extensivity and the need for people to consider themselves as whole, coherent and bounded. As we see with Butler's (2004) concept of legibility and liveability, the ability to form a subject position and not be undone by the norms that make your subjectivity illegible is a fundamentally intersubjective process, and yet relies on the

separation of a 'self' from the 'other'. This ambivalence is crucial to the role that identity categories and markers play in the mode of selfhood made possible in the queer performance space. It indicates how identity can be, to use Sara Ahmed's (2004) term, 'sticky'. How affective value adheres to certain objects (such as identities) making them difficult to let go of or separate from. The inability of even people with a strong investment in dismantling normative identity categories to fully disassociate themselves from them demonstrates the affective stickiness of this conception of a coherent and singular selfhood defined and constructed through certain labels or markers. Though they may be limiting, distressing, and cause us to be misread, identity categories are necessary because they might stop us from 'coming apart' (Butler 2004) and also form the basis for a shared experience. In these settings where ambivalence and hybridity are pivotal, it is possible for the performers and subsequently the audience to simultaneously tell a 'truth' of the self and a fiction, to perform a subjectivity that is simultaneously authentic and fake, singular and plural.

Conclusion

By way of a conclusion to this chapter's consideration of collectivity I find it pertinent to turn to a concept emerging from psychoanalysis that has had some purchase in body theory's attempts at understanding self-formation and intersubjectivity: that of the Skin Ego. Didier Anzieu's (1989) notion of the Skin Ego posits the skin as simultaneously the barrier and interface between the subject's interior self and 'outside'. A protective barrier from bacteria and disease, the skin literally demarcates the boundary between self and other. However, as a porous, responsive substance it also is a prime site through which that 'other' is incorporated into the self, and the self reaches out to make contact with the 'outside'. Drawing from Freud's (2001a, 2001b) notion of the Ego and British psychoanalyst Esther Bick's (1987, 2002) developmental studies, Anzieu (1989) proposes the skin as crucial to self-formation. Skin-to-skin contact in infancy enables the child's understanding of itself as separate from the caregiver, and a self-contained bounded subject in its own right, a 'mental skin' corresponding to the physical surface of the body. Thus, Bick's (1987) studies suggested that insufficient contact with a caregiver resulted in a

disordered, precarious or fractured 'mental skin' and subsequent disordered practices of attempting to 'hold together'. Though this pathologising psychoanalytic account of disorder is not of particular relevance or interest to my aims here, I wish to suggest that the Skin Ego points towards the fundamentally relational - and, crucially, inter*corporeal,* nature of subjectivity. The developmental processes suggested by the Skin Ego indicate not only the primacy of embodiment and the importance of a perceived *sense* of self-containment, but also how self and other are mutually constitutive (Lafrance 2009). Thus, rather than a disorder of development, we may utilise the concept of the Skin Ego to consider the processes and practices of 'holding together' (Walkerdine 2010, 2012) and co-constitution which, I suggest, characterise embodied subjective experience. The Skin Ego is pertinent to the problem of the one-and-the-many because of the way it positions the corporeal body in constant tension between containment and openness: the skin is at once envelope holding the body together, and interface through which the 'inside' gets 'out' and the 'outside' gets 'in'. This framework thus poses a subject in constant becoming through its engagement with both human and non-human 'others'. Though the Skin Ego was originally utilised to examine psychological disorders presumably rooted in fractured sense of self-containment, it can also be reframed to question that very self-containment:

> What if the skin were not a container? What if the skin were not at limit at which self begins and ends? What if the skin were a porous, topological surfacing of myriad potential strata that field the relation between different milieus, each of them a multiplicity of insides and outsides? [...] What if instead of placing self-self interaction at the centre of development, we were to posit *relation* as key to experience? (Manning 2009: 34)

Through the lens of the Skin Ego, the tension between singularity and plurality is reframed as a continuous, dynamic and embodied process of the relational co-constitution of subjects. This co-enactment, I propose, is made visible by the performance practices at the heart of this thesis. The collective memories and engagement of fantasy, desire and intergenerational trauma simultaneously play on and sustain the collectivity of their audiences and performers. The performances stage the tension between self and not-self, inside and outside, nature and culture, creating a situation wherein 'boundaries between inside and outside the body and between self and other are at once sensitized and put

(creatively) in flux' (Reynolds 2009: 27). Although Reynolds is speaking here specifically of modern dance, I propose that the above discussion indicates a very similar creative flux in which subjectivities are formed. By reconsidering the performance and modes of sociality enacted within these three spaces through the problem of collectivity, then, it becomes clear that queer performance, far from a mere site of cultural transgression, is in fact implicated in complex and ongoing processes of intercorporeal subject co-constitution.

Chapter 6 - Towards a weak theory of affective publics

What is it that happens when a group of people gather together in an ostensibly public space and experience an affective, intimate feeling of belonging? In this chapter I explore how the cultural milieu of the performance spaces I am analysing can be understood in terms of the sense of collectivity that comes into being therein. Building from the previous chapters on what is at stake in performance and these events for both the audience and performers, I address the problem of how to theorise or define what is occurring within these spaces I am analysing in terms of the atmosphere or environment of the public group setting. I argue that the performances at Bar Wotever, Duckie and Bird Club act as a form of public address, constructing an audience, if only momentarily, as a kind of public, a public structured around a very different model of possible subjectivities than those that dominate other spaces. Yet, as noted throughout this thesis, the embodied, affective and intercorporeal experiences and resonances I am attempting to outline here are difficult to encapsulate within language, and thus queerly resist theorisation. Hence I present in this chapter an argument for a *weak* theory of an affective public (or, more accurately, multiple, nebulous, affective *publics*). I utilise the term 'weak theory' after Eve Sedgwick (2003), who herself borrows it from Tomkins (1962), to indicate a theory that dodges generalisable, sweeping judgements of homogeneity, in favour of an in-depth exploration of the textures and particularities of lived experience that risk being papered over by such universalising gestures. My argument here may seem counterintuitive, but it is a deliberate epistemological and methodological move: I am arguing for the value of theorising that allows for the specific, the banal, the everyday, which rarely fits neatly into the strong explanatory structures we as academics are so fond of creating. By proposing affective publics as a loose exploratory concept rather than a generalisable hermeneutics, I hope to provide an account of these three club spaces that can meaningfully consider both their points of similarity and difference, whereby the insights gained from analysing them in unison do not and are not conceal/ed by those revealing disparities. This chapter therefore asks how a weak theory of 'affective publics' might allow for a theoretically rigorous and yet nuanced understanding of the cultures of queer performance and the myriad interactions and affects circulating within and through them. As with the preceding chapters,

this argument contributes to my broader consideration of how debates around subjectivity, affect and embodiment can develop our understanding of performance, and how practices of performance spectatorship may be able to augment and develop those debates.

To regulars, these clubs feel like 'home', cosy enclaves filled with queer family. Yet these spaces are not private, they take place in bars and clubs, distinctly public space, and are open and receptive to newcomers, strangers, 'the public'; they also, crucially, feature performance, another decidedly public activity. This curious public intimacy, and the slippages this allows between private/public, performer/audience and self/other encapsulate how and why I am proposing these queer performance spaces as an affective public. They constitute a public that is nonetheless structured around intimacy, affect, and an embodied feeling of belonging. Moreover, the primarily affective register of this public makes it nebulous and indistinct, lacking, as affects themselves do, any clearly definable, constant and generalisable characteristics. I propose a weak theory of affective publics, then, as a way of understanding the public culture evident in these spaces that encapsulates, rather than elides, the more dynamic, relational model of subjectivity underlining this thesis, and the particularities that are covered over by any attempt at a concrete, universalising theoretical construct. Far from the bounded subject of Habermas' rational debate, the affective public of these spaces is founded on the *in*stability, *in*coherence and *in*discrete nature of the subject engaged in an ongoing process of forming a sense of 'self'. Here, rather than a dangerous weakness or extraordinary capacity, an openness to affect is considered a typical element of subjectivity, enabling access to the pleasures, and traumas, of the performance and the general 'feel' of the community.

In order to address this I consider both the 'assets and deficits' (Sedgwick 2003: 134) of the pre-existing 'strong' theories that might be used to interpret or codify these scenes of cultural production and experience. Section 6.1. of this chapter sets out the 'strong theories' that enable us to consider the forms of sociality and collectivity, world-making and belonging occurring within these spaces. Through the concepts of communities, subcultures, and variations of the public sphere, I consider what can be gained from these theoretical frameworks, what they can contribute to our understanding and interpretation of these spaces. But ultimately I am arguing

that, whilst these theories are useful, they close down certain possibilities, peculiarities and inconsistencies of these queer cultural formations that I wish to remain open to - the messiness and paradoxes of a lived relation to identity, subjectivity, and sociality. Thus the second half of this chapter is devoted to paradoxically somewhat undoing the first - I set out rich ethnographic accounts, structured around key themes emerging from the aforementioned 'strong' theories, that trouble, challenge and disrupt these theoretical formulations. Drawing out the tensions, disparities and inconsistencies in how each Duckie, Bird Club and Wotever might relate to these concepts highlights the heterogeneity of the three spaces of my attention. This chapter draws primarily on my autoethnographic experiences, reflecting on my observations and participation in these three spaces over an extended period of time as an audience member and a performer. These autoethnographic reflections and analysis of specific performances and other incidents are supplemented here with use of the group conversations with audience members of all three clubs, particularly where these conversations indicated friction, tension or divergence between the three spaces, between protagonists themselves or between my observations and their discussion. As in previous chapters, quotations from the transcribed research encounters are included and cited as extracts from the conversations, noting the protagonist's name (or pseudonym) in parentheses.

6.1. Strong theories of the public sphere: communities, subcultures, and counterpublics

It seems queerly pertinent to begin to discuss what we might call this collection of performance events and audiences by first addressing what they are not, what they could be or might be similar to but don't quite seem to fit the pre-given definitions of. In this first section I delineate the 'strong' theories that hold some use value for what I am attempting to describe, but fail to fully encapsulate it. I consider the circulation of the concepts of community, subculture and counterpublics in relation to this scene, how and why they might have some purchase but ultimately why they close down possibilities I want to keep open for my analysis. It would be tempting to align this performance scene with the notion of a community, and indeed many of the organisers, performers and regular attendees of these clubs do exactly that. Most of those involved

with these clubs have some experience or contact with an abstract notion of 'the LBGT community' circulating around forms of citizenship and economic practices, manifested through specialist services, charities, social enterprises, media, and nightlife targeted specifically at those who identify as gay, lesbian, bisexual or transgender (for more detailed engagement see Brown 2009).[84] As events catering predominantly to LGBT individuals and allies, Bird Club, Wotever and Duckie can be seen as serving a predefined LGBT community, or indeed participating in its constitution. Equally the specific social networks built up around these three distinct spaces and their 'regular' attendees result in a sense of a community founded on familiarity with the specific club, detached from any identity or subject position. At Bar Wotever particularly, the weekly 'Community News' segment, where audience members are invited to make announcements they consider important and relevant to the gathered audience, indicates some attachment to the notion of the Bar Wotever audience as a community of sorts.

In each of the group conversations, and in most of my one to one conversations with performers, the term 'community' surfaced, whether as a term for critical discussion and questioning, or a simple shorthand for the collective sense of belonging associated with the various club spaces or a more general LGBT community. These included uncritical assertions that queer performance spaces provide an environment of community support - 'I feel part of a community' (Stanley), as well as more tentative claims - 'it's one of many' (Wendyl), or 'the intersection of different communities' (Natacha), '[it's] probably the closest thing to a community I've found' (Jolie Rouge). Yet there was also a lengthy, considered, critical discussion of the concept of community itself, it's use value and meaning:

I quite like the idea of a community because I feel its presence when I've had really shitty times [...] But we seem to be very hung up on the idea

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[84] Though I use the umbrella term LGBT here to indicate that the discourses of community and subsequent services do incorporate bisexual and transgender individuals, it is important to note that the 'B' and 'T' are contentious to some, and are often omitted or ignored, creating a distinct imbalance in services and support available for bisexual and transgender individuals in relation to cisgendered gays and lesbians. This is most visible in the conspicuous and frequently challenged refusal of Stonewall, Britain's primary charity for gay, lesbian and bisexual equality, to extend their remit to include transgender issues. Significantly, this kind of exclusion reflects the prevalence of regulation and identity policing within the LGBT community, an exclusion that is precisely the reason many seek out more inclusive spaces such as Bar Wotever, Duckie and Bird Club.

that it's always cohesive and that it's stable, that it's not continually produced by people coming in or coming out and changing it by their presence or by their actions, that it fades over time or grows over time by actions that you can't even measure, that it exists without your impulse. I do think they exist and they do come around but they don't exist necessarily around identities which I think everybody is very keen to focus on [...] I find these things tend to come up over issues or common experiences of location. (Josephine)

This excerpt from my group conversation with performers exemplifies the attachment many of my protagonists felt to the concept and term 'community', but the difficulties they experienced with it as a term that was limiting, over-determined, and tied to unified and supposedly coherent identities. Similar sentiments were expressed by Bird la Bird, and Bar Wotever regular Steppen Wolf:

Whenever I hear the word community it always reminds me of David Hoyle[85] [... when he] said "there is no gay community, only gay conformity". I also like Judith Halberstam's deconstruction of the word community because community comes from communion[86] [...] So I think there's groups of people who come together at certain moments but I don't know whether that is a community or not, I don't know. (Bird la Bird)

I'm the last person who likes to be in community things, but it's a very broad 'we' feeling that's sort of uplifting. (Steppen Wolf)

In both of these group conversations in particular some participants characterised the concept of 'community' as too fixed and restrictive - limiting participation to those who conform to certain limiting norms, posing a far too simplistic model of social connections, or generally reproducing a 'normative' model of identity and subjectivity. Yet others valued the term as an expression of the experiences of commonality and support garnered in those spaces. In both incidences this conflict was negotiated through mutual agreement that

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[85] Performance artist David Hoyle, formerly known as The Divine David, is a stalwart of the London avant-garde and cabaret performance scene. His satirical and often unnerving performances aggressively criticise both hetero- and homonormative culture, and assimilationist gay politics in particular.

[86] Judith Halberstam (2005) notes that the etymology of the word 'community' originates from the term 'communion', thus being strongly associated with religious ritual and perhaps not a particularly useful term for queer theorising.

whilst the term community was 'a strong word' (Steppen Wolf) with some problematic connotations, it was important in the context of the research encounter to find ways of indicating this commonality. However, the *feeling* of some sense of commonality and reliance on others is most definitely present in these spaces, as noted by Josephine:

> Whatever you call it, community or otherwise, what function it has, I guess we can feel its effects, 'cause it's more nebulous than we think it is but it's concrete in its effects and what we need it to do, what we need from it to create the work we do and what we hope present, how it will function as a space and the impact that will have on us and the wider society and the changes we want to make. (Josephine)

Despite the problematic connotations of the term 'community', then, the commonality, the *feeling* of togetherness, solidarity, and collectivity is significant in these spaces. There is a sense of *belonging*, but a belonging that is, as Josephine notes, nebulous, sometimes vague, and by no means inevitable or stable. I now turn to two concepts that have allowed scholars to theorise this ambiguous collectivity as it emerges through different forms of sociality and cultural formation: the subculture, and the public sphere. Scholarship on subcultures and the public sphere undoubtedly functions as the 'strong' theory suggested by Sedgwick (2003) to elide many of the vagaries of lived experience, and yet it may also provide us with valuable insight into the world-making and social and subjective processes occurring within these spaces.

6.1.1 Resistance and normativity: Taste, style and subcultures

As a distinct, yet minority, group (even within the larger LGBT social scene) structured around specific cultural products, these queer performance spaces could be categorised as a subculture. Emerging from the Birmingham Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies, certain key texts of the 1970s defined a new field of 'subcultural studies' (cf. Hall and Jefferson 1976, Mungham and Pearson 1976, Willis 1978 and Hebdige 1979). These studies, particularly Hebdidge's seminal work on punk, re-evaluated the stylistic codes, rituals and behaviours of disenfranchised and demonised male youth cultures. Though these approaches have been variously critiqued for biases in terms of gender (McRobbie 1991) and age (Halberstam 2005, more on this below), it is the traditional model of sociality and identity underlining the notion of the

'subculture' that make it inappropriate for understanding this club scene. However, there are insights to be drawn from the study of subcultures that may shed light on the modes of sociality being enacted at Bird Club, Wotever and Duckie.

Sarah Thornton's (1995) seminal text coining the concept of subcultural capital provided a model for adapting the concept of 'subculture' from the way it was set out within the CCCS, facilitating an alternative approach. In analysing the taste cultures of 1980s and '90s dance clubs, Thornton felt 'forced to conclude that subcultures are best defined as social groups that have been labelled as such' (ibid.: 162). Whilst Thornton's primary concern of mapping the taste cultures of a particular 'scene' differs to mine, the workings of subcultural capital she identifies resonate with my project and may offer valuable avenues for exploration. Drawing on the work of influential sociologist Pierre Bourdieu (1984), Thornton highlighted the practices of distinction through which subcultural participants distance themselves from an abject 'mainstream'. This homogenous group was characterised by her clubbers in the abstract, considered crude and indiscriminating in their taste and (lack of) knowledge regarding music, clothing, and nightlife. In a departure from earlier subcultural work, Thornton asserts that this imagined 'other' tells us more about the tastes and desires of the ravers themselves than those who attend popular suburban nightclubs and listen to 'chart' music. Taste cultures, of course, operate within the queer performance spaces I am analysing, particularly with the assumed distancing from an unknown but seemingly coherent 'mainstream' (as examined in Chapter 3 of this thesis). However, in the case of these three spaces this distinction forms part of a more complex and nuanced cross-section of questions relating to prejudice, exclusion and safety alongside the questions of style and taste identified by Thornton. These modes of distinction diagnosed by Thornton are generally played out along lines of prejudice, acceptance and the need to create 'safe space'. As discussed previously, Bar Wotever, Bird Club and Duckie are comparable in their endeavour to create spaces in which people who feel marginalised and excluded from other (LGBT or predominantly 'heterosexual') spaces can find a sense of belonging and acceptance. The taste cultures of these spaces therefore tend to operate on the impetus of preventing a threat to that belonging and sense of safety and comfort - the 'mainstream', rather than insipid in style, are instead characterised as judgemental, prejudiced

or intolerant of gender difference. Yet the taste cultures of Bird Club, Duckie and Wotever are formulated and played out through different values and concerns specific to their varying heterogeneous audiences. Though situating these three spaces in a similar relation to the concept of taste cultures may appear a viable possibility under the generalising theoretical manoeuvre, they demand a more precise exploration of the taste cultures at work in these three spaces. Section 6.2. of this chapter returns to the concept of taste cultures in order to articulate some of the intricate particularities of these three spaces that are constructed around slightly different modes of inclusion, acceptance, and entertainment.

Thornton's framework may not fully encapsulate the models of sociality being discussed here, and yet it provides some useful terminology for considering the deeper grain at risk of being varnished over by universalising theoretical constructs. There are also other aspects of Thornton's work that are extremely valuable to this study and cannot be dismissed. The 'spontaneous affinity', the temporary unity and feeling of belonging her clubbers feel echoes the experiences I am attempting to set out here. Also noteworthy is the interesting parallel between Thornton's assessment of the illusion of empowerment within subcultural participation and the concerns over misogyny, homophobia and transphobia upon with the taste cultures of these three clubs are determined. Thornton highlights the disjuncture between the *feeling* of freedom and liberation experienced through subcultures and the actual political emancipation of their participants, something rarely considered in academic explorations of club cultures or other subcultural formations. In spaces such as Wotever (in particular, but also to lesser extents Duckie and Bird Club), the distance between these freedoms is foregrounded and paramount. Far from being conflated, the very real lack of liberation (or 'true' political emancipation) for queers provides the conditions of necessity for the embodied *feeling* of liberation as an antidote to the desolation brought about by chronic oppression. Nevertheless, her focus also remains on youth, an association that has been difficult to prise away from discussions of subcultures and that has troubled those, such as Halberstam (2005), working to develop a model of queer subcultural participation that disentangles youth and age from the model of subcultures. As cited above, Halberstam deconstructs the concept of community, a term rooted in Christian ritual and based upon traditional kinship structures that are difficult to reconcile with queer experiences of dislocation.

Though previous work on subcultures such as Thornton's has disrupted the permanency and organic nature of the connections and belonging of community, Halberstam claims it still reproduces the traditional heteronormative kinship structure in its characterisation of youth subcultural rebellion against parent cultures. Her analysis of queer and dyke riot punk subcultures and bands questions the age bias and (subsequent) invisibility of queer subcultures in the field of subcultural studies. Challenging the dominant assumption that participation in subcultures ceases with maturity and development beyond adolescence (hence the unquestioned focus on youth), Halberstam suggests we must appreciate a queer temporality in order to see beyond this heteronormative progression narrative. She identifies a 'transmaturity' among (particularly urban) queers, whose exclusion from and/or disregard for the heteronormative markers of maturity (marriage, child-rearing, job security) endow them with a stretched out adolescence, enabling subcultural participation well into adulthood and thus opportunities for cross-generational subcultural contact. Halberstam's model of subculture structured around a queer temporality is indeed reflected in the scene of Duckie, Bird Club and Wotever, where the audience members and performers range in age from late teens to sixties and beyond.[87]

However, despite Halberstam's insightful amendments, the concept of a subculture still somehow feels woefully inadequate to describe what I have experienced in London's queer performance clubs. Even work from the discipline of 'post-subcultural studies' (such as Weinzierl and Muggleton 2003), which attempts to reconcile an understanding of subcultures within the postmodern condition of fluid, fragmented, multiple and partial identification, still seems primarily concerned with youth. Moreover, whilst much recent work on subcultures has worked to distance itself from the coherent and distinct groupings associated with the CCCS approach, the concept itself still seems

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[87] As all three events are held in public bars and clubs, alcohol licences require a minimum age limit of 18 and so for the purposes of this statement I work on the assumption that most attendees are at least 18 (though as with all bars and clubs, it is likely that some underage visitors attempt and sometimes do gain entry to these spaces). Wotever provides an exception to this with events organised explicitly to include younger people: the monthly 'Queer Fayre', a Saturday afternoon craft fair-cum-car boot sale is advertised as family friendly, and the occasional 'House of Stars' events organised in collaboration with LGBTQ charity Galop (www.galop.org.uk) are specifically intended to provide a safe and welcoming space to young queer people aged 13-26, with a combination of performance, music and socialising very similar to that of Bar Wotever, but where no alcohol is served.

fundamentally concerned with mapping, documenting and decoding the tastes, styles and meanings of various relatively recognisable cultural formations. This inevitably aligns 'subcultures' with questions of transgressive value, resistance and normativity that are not only at odds with the model of subjectivity at the heart of this thesis, but also rely on the visual, external paradigm of the 'body image', rather than the more haptic, schematic 'body-without-an-image' being proposed here (Featherstone 2010).

Perhaps unsurprisingly, illumination on this trouble emerges from somewhere temporally, spatially and conceptually close to home. At the British Film Institute's 25th London Lesbian and Gay Film Festival activist and scholar Dr. Bill Savage presented a short paper on a film directed by Eva Monkey (2010), a 'radical feminist karaoke' music video cutting together various groups of people singing along to Le Tigre's *Keep on Livin'* in front of a specially commissioned backdrop at Ladyfest London in August 2010.[88] Savage discussed how the video, and the 'real life' act of taking part in it, demonstrates the kind of Butlerian (2004) liveability explored in Chapter 5 of this thesis - how this form of activism enables new possibilities of being, not out of individualistic resilience, but through collective, communal action and participation. The power of making the *Keep on Livin'* video lay in 'finding your people and of a community and network of support and validation based on some sense of a shared outlook on life and living' (Savage 2011: 4). Although Savage was explicitly speaking of a particular one-off group activity and a resulting piece of video art, they were referring to a more ongoing practice of collective cultural formation, whereby networks of friends and acquaintances come together and support one another for various endeavours, be they actions, benefits, club nights or one off social or arts events. In this sense the community spirit of the *Keep on Livin'* video parallels the nebulous but still somehow tangible 'crowd'

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[88] Ladyfest is a locally and collectively organised non-profit arts festival designed to showcase female music talent, held annually in cities globally since 2000. In 2010, London held Ladyfest Ten to celebrate the tenth anniversary of the festival (more information at http://www.myspace.com/LadyfestTen). One of the events was *More Crackers Please!*, a benefit hosted by the organisers of London club night *Unskinny Bop* to celebrate New York based feminist punk band Le Tigre, at which the filming took place. View the *Keep on Livin'* film here: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=q0yumFIbq7U. *Unskinny Bop* is itself an interesting event that echoes many of the imperatives of the clubs I am analysing here - though it does not feature performance, it is a club night envisaged as an antidote to the body fascism and 'attitude' of many gay and lesbian dance clubs, where inclusion, communal enjoyment and comfort are paramount (http://www.unskinnybop.co.uk/).

that seems to coalesce around Bird Club, Wotever and Duckie, and the trouble Savage has in categorising this incident of queer collectivity resonates strongly with my purposes here:

> The question this throws up is, what is all this stuff? What do we call it? What or who is it representing? Is it a community? And is it one based on taste, sexuality, politics? A subculture? A scene? A tribe, clique or gang? Is it cultural production or activism, or both? There isn't really an adequate label for this kind of cultural formation and I want to argue that it is partly its uncategorisability which makes it queer. It disrupts or queers those other divisions or ways of categorising action, precisely because those labels/categories have been theorised around largely heterosexual, largely male kinds of activities and based in those people's experiences. (Ibid.: 4)

Notwithstanding Halberstam's attempt to circumvent the heteronormative, masculinist and youth-dominated associations of the term 'subculture', I agree with Savage in its inability to capture the disruption these queer forms of collective action produce. I want to hold on to Savage's destabilisation of the categories we might use to define these activities, as I feel this dynamic of flux is crucial to understanding what occurs within these spaces and social networks; we are not dealing here with a concrete, coherent and stable community that can be identified and described. Nor am I mapping or analysing an investment in a particular subcultural style or taste in specific clothing or music. Instead we are dealing with multiple and sometimes fleeting moments of connection between bodies that come together at particular events, in different configurations. The *queer*ness of this social scene, its disruptive nature and uncategorisability, is why I am arguing for a *weak* theory of affective publics that is attentive to this resistance of taxonomy. Like Savage, my scholarly impulse is to launch theoretical constructs and concepts at this vague and undefinable object until one sticks and appears to offer clarity. Yet, as discussed above, this strategy is incongruous not only with the methodological impetus of this thesis but also the multifarious and sometimes contradictory nature of its subject. Existing academic explorations of subcultures do indeed offer valuable models for critical engagement with this queer performance scene, and it would be possible and indeed even useful to map these spaces and their participants according to such frameworks. This, however, is not my intent or desire within this thesis. What work on subcultures does bring to my intentions here is a

number of themes and concepts, such as that of taste cultures (Thornton 1995), that can allow for a more nuanced discussion that can cause the homogeneity of the broader concept itself to fall apart.

6.1.2. From the rational to the affective: Publics and counterpublics

'[P]ublics are queer creatures, you cannot point to them, count them, or look them in the eye.' (Warner 2002: 7)

Any discussion of a public necessitates an engagement with Habermas' (1989) concept of the bourgeois public sphere. His world of white middle class men engaging in rational debate is far removed from the queer belongings and feelings catalysed by the ambivalent and often eccentric performances at the heart of this thesis. However, his vocabulary of 'the public' is crucial to how we can understand what is occurring within these spaces as more than simple spectatorship and appreciation of the performance on stage. The concept of the public enables us to consider the profoundly deeper social meanings and world-making happening at Duckie, Bird Club and Wotever. Habermas described the newly formed bourgeois public sphere of the eighteenth century as 'the sphere of private people come together as a public' (ibid.: 27), where institutions such as coffee houses provided a space for critical-rational debate. This presumption of the Cartesian subject whose defining feature is his (sic) capacity for rationality is in direct contrast to the conception of subjectivity proposed in this thesis. Yet the inclusivity, participation and notion of literature or other cultural products addressing an imagined audience as a public are important for how I am theorising the queer performance scene.

In his persuasive 2002 text, Michael Warner utilises the concepts of the public and the counterpublic to explore notions of citizenship, forms of address and their imagined audience, and the distinction between private and public that seems so central to the functioning of hetero-norms. His formulation of the public echoes my purposes here, allowing us to consider the nebulous cultural formation that is brought about in spaces where bodies form a temporary and partial collectivity. Publics, he claims, are always already invoked in any discussion of queer issues, because queer lives disrupt the public/private

binary; their deviance makes public what should be private (sex) and makes apparent the very public institutions that underpin this private act, namely marriage and child-rearing. As noted above, publics are in themselves rather queer - they disrupt and distort norms and expectations, they change and reform, and like the queer performance space I am theorising here, have no ontological status aside from their invocation at certain times. However, it is Warner's delineation of the *counterpublic* that provides the most useful material for my project here:

> a counterpublic, against the background of the public sphere, enables a horizon of opinion and exchange; its exchanges remain distinct from authority and can have a critical relation to power; its extent is in principle indefinite, because it is not based on a precise demography but mediated by print, theatre, diffuse networks of talk, commerce and the like. (Ibid.: 56-7)

The public(s) of the queer performance spaces being discussed here do seem to fit Warner's model of a counterpublic: they are subordinated social groups in resistant opposition to dominant cultural paradigms, they are formed not through common identification but through participation, and are brought into being as a collective through the address of the performance. Following the Althusserian model of interpellation,[89] Warner positions publics as coming into being only through being addressed as such, but with one significant variation. By virtue of being addressed to us as the strangers we were until we were designated its audience, public speech implicates us in a continual transition between being collective 'strangers' and individual addressees. Thus '[o]ur subjectivity is understood as having resonance with others' (ibid.: 77), and is a space in which individual subjectivity and collectivity collide - as a public, we are both the one and the many. This imbues the public with radical potential because it can address infinite personal and impersonal 'others', and thus is not tied to specific pre-existing identities or subject positions. Rather, the public forms and/or transforms subjects, and thus:

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[89] Althusser's (1971) concept of interpellation posits the subject as being produced through the address of ideology. He uses the example of a policeman hailing an individual in the street - when we turn, recognising ourselves as the addressee, we are interpellated as a subject of the state. Warner (2002) extends this to consider the formation of the public through the interpellation of individuals as members of that public - once individuals respond to a particular public address, they recognise themselves as its intended audience and thus form the public to which it was directed.

can work to elaborate new worlds of culture and social relations in which gender and sexuality can be *lived*, including forms of intimate association, vocabularies of affect, styles of embodiment, erotic practices, and relations of care and pedagogy. It can therefore make possible new forms of gendered or sexual citizenship - meaning active participation in collective world making through publics of sex and gender. (Ibid.: 57, emphasis added)

This is where the concept of the counterpublic lends critical value to my consideration of Wotever, Bird Club and Duckie. As a configuration concerned primarily with *lived* experience, the model of the counterpublic occasions a consideration of the world-making possibilities posed by these queer club spaces. The publics of queer performance spaces such as this are able to create worlds in which the identities and 'selves' that are 'undone' by the available languages can become liveable. The 'citizenship' promised by this public acknowledges and is responsive to the complex processes of subject formation. Linguistically even the names of all three of these clubs invoke a form of address, and subsequently a unique subject position or possibility: Duckie echoes 'duckie' or 'ducky' an old-fashioned British term of endearment particularly associated with camp and gay male cultures, Bird Club re-appropriates a traditionally patronising working-class British term for women, and Wotever does something very similar by posing 'Wotevers' as fabulous insubordinates of the gender binary (as examined in Chapter 3 of this thesis). As welcomes and forms of address, these terms invite their audiences to take up the subject position offered by being an audience member, one which, in reclaiming these words, already demonstrates its ability to remake the world with new possibilities of being.

However, a simple designation as counterpublic would camouflage the divergent ambivalence evident at Wotever, Bird Club and Duckie to governmental party politics, identity politics, and the politic of this thing we call queer. It could be argued that, to some degree, these spaces function instead in what Lauren Berlant (2008) calls the 'juxtapolitical' mode, as that which is proximate to, and sometimes crossing over with, politics proper, whilst always maintaining a critical distance. Berlant (1997) coins the concept of the intimate public when attempting to formulate a language through which to conceptualise the general privatisation of (particularly American) citizenship in the twenty-first

century (and consequently also for my own purposes the very specifically intimate dimension of queer public cultures such as these). For her, the public sphere is made intimate in contemporary American society, politics coming to be enacted through personal acts and values such as marriage and kinship. This has two significant effects: firstly, it foregrounds the importance of the minor, the mundane and the everyday which may otherwise be considered of no political transgressive value (including the realm of feeling, affect and emotion), and secondly it sidesteps the necessity for a Cartesian subject and poses the potential of a public structured around a different kind of subject, one that is not necessarily unitary, bounded, and defined by his capacity for reason and rationality. To focus on the former for now (I will deal with the latter in more depth in a moment), the intimate public enacts a different kind of politics because of its association with the everyday, that which is usually considered to hold no political significance. There is an acknowledgment of, and proximity to, legitimate political life, but little direct engagement. Through the 'women's culture' of literature and films deemed to appeal to women's universal attachments to romance and everyday life, Berlant (2008) highlights the limitations of the counterpublic in conceptualising the lives of those who do not consider themselves to be instruments of politics or revolution. In the same way that the subcultural work discussed above can be seen as limited in its focus on subversion and transgression, the counterpublic may overlook private, intimate, personal forms of resistance. At Bar Wotever, Duckie and Bird Club, we see evidence of the juxtapolitical in the acceptance and celebration of these small, personal forms of resistance, and an ambivalence concerning the realm of true 'politics'. Yet these spaces are neither straightforwardly political, in the sense of the counterpublic, nor juxtapolitical, as with the intimate public. Moreover, the three of them each vary in terms of their relation to political participation and possibilities. As evidenced below, the subtleties of the workings of political interest, both 'legitimate' and mundane, are more disparate than is suggested by either of these models, and in fact often differ and fluctuate within the individual spaces themselves.

There is a further aspect of Berlant's (2008) intimate public that is reflected in, and simultaneously disrupted by, the modes of intersubjectivity enacted at Bird Club, Duckie and Wotever. In investigating women's attachments and investments in melodramatic romantic fiction, Berlant identifies

an intimate 'women's culture' of readers and viewers, who form a loose public for these texts based on a broadly common experience. This already shared worldview allows for the consumption of cultural products on common grounds. In an intimate public, there is an assumed commonality of subject position, one which:

> flourishes as a porous, affective scene of identification among strangers that promises a certain experience of belonging and provides a complex of consolation, confirmation, discipline, and discussion about how to live as an *x*.' (Ibid.: viii).

The queer performance public is also structured around a broadly shared worldview, but an ambiguous and unusual one. This common subject position is held only in the abstract - myriad enactments of various forms of queerness, heterosexuality, identity politics and kinks of all kinds amalgamate into this shared mode of being that constitutes these publics. There is connection, sharing, and an intimate sense of belonging, but there is also tension, conflict, and exclusion. The queer intimacy and belonging experienced in these spaces resists Berlant's rather static conception of subject positioning. Much like in Ann Cvetkovich's (2003) analysis of lesbian public cultures, the archiving of personal experience made communal through the performances here allows the formation of a queer kind of public: 'queer performance creates publics by bringing together live bodies in space, and the theatrical experience is not just about what's on stage but also about who's in the audience creating community' (ibid.: 9). Like the oral histories, literature and performance that make up Cvetkovich's sources, Bird Club, Duckie and Wotever can be seen as establishing a public culture structured around affects, wherein individual feelings and experiences become communal public histories by addressing a 'collective audience'. These clubs visually and affectively enact a very queer kind of archive, evoking an experience rather than simply retelling it, proving that 'not only does performance act as a repository for ephemeral moments, it can also make emotion public without narrative or storytelling' (ibid.: 286).

6.2. Towards a weak theory of affective publics

For the purposes of my argument towards a 'weak' theory, throughout the remainder of this chapter I draw out themes and features of the various 'strong'

theories discussed above that disrupt or trouble the easy categorisation of the three spaces of my attention. This conceptual splitting allows for the textures of these spaces to come into focus in a way that would be obscured by a strong theory that inevitably must homogenise, standardise and neaten the untidy grain of lived experience. It will also, unavoidably, allow Duckie, Wotever, and Bird Club to pull apart, and escape from the generally compound status I have previously bestowed upon them. My intention in allowing for this fracture between the spaces is to argue that as much can be garnered from mining their differences and inconsistencies as from their similarities. By bringing the disparities, incongruities and problematic contradictions to the fore of the critical argument here, I hope to provide a rich and engaging account of the particularities of these idiosyncratic spaces, which like the complex and often chaotic texture of lived experience, resist categorisation. The argument here is precisely that these spaces are not homogenous, stable or straightforward. They are queerly complex, untidy, holding within them contradictory possibilities of inclusion and exclusion, shared joy, collective trauma, isolation, and belonging.

My starting point for this exposition of peculiarity is the relevance and use value, albeit partial, of the various 'strong' accounts of public spaces and social interaction given above. Broad, universalising and generally applicable, these theoretical structures are 'capable of accounting for a wide spectrum of phenomena which appear to be very remote, one from the other, and from a common source' (Tomkins cited in Sedgwick 2003: 134). They provide a potential taxonomy of spaces that can be grouped together or split apart on grounds of composition, context or function, and thus equip us as scholars with a vocabulary and critical tools to aid analysis and gain insight into the objects of study. However, as noted at several points above, the lived experience is rarely as elegantly clean-cut as our theoretical endeavours would want, and even the most dexterous of theories elides, obscures or neglects certain details. This is perhaps particularly the case, as noted by Bill Savage (2010), when dealing with queer objects that by their very nature disrupt and disturb any attempts to theorise them. The various 'strong' theories discussed above do indeed bring insight to our consideration of queer performance spaces, but they do so primarily by providing access points to investigate those knotty, sticky fissures where the resemblance is partial, temporary, or paradoxical. Whilst these

theoretical approaches can undoubtedly be advantageous to our understanding of these spaces, as Sedgwick suggests:

> there may also be benefit in exploring the extremely varied, dynamic, and historically contingent ways that strong theoretical constructs interact with weak ones in the ecology of knowing - an exploration that obviously can't proceed without a respectful interest in weak as well as strong theoretical acts. (Sedgwick 2003: 145)

What follows here is intended to provide a complex and nuanced account of the heterogeneity of queer spaces that resist theorisation and categorisation, because the material warrants this approach through its own refusal of taxonomic strategies. Following the feminist strategies of Nancy Miller (1991) and Jane Gallop (2002), it takes up the traits of personal, anecdotal and occasional writing in order to evoke the meaningful texture of my encounters with these spaces. Returning to my argument at the outset that this thesis is fundamentally a project of cultural studies and locating affect as the 'structures of feeling' (Williams 1977) crucial to encapsulating lived experience, this intention requires a nuanced engagement with both generalisable broad theory and the specificity of the mundane:

> We need, on the one hand, to acknowledge (and welcome) the specificity of these elements - specific feelings, specific rhythms - and yet to find ways of recognizing their specific kinds of sociality. (Ibid.: 133)

It is precisely this interplay between these 'specific feelings, specific rhythms' and the 'kinds of sociality' they are inextricably linked to (such as the histories of prejudice and liberatory identity politics examined in Chapter 5 for instance,) that I am attempting to access here by framing my venture into weak theory alongside a consideration of the 'strong' theories that are useful and relevant in contextualising this sociality. Through this thick description, I am arguing for the critical value of a 'weak' theory of affective publics. A tentative model rather than a definitive concept, this move is proposed as a way of conceptualising both the convergences and the differences that emerge from these spaces of our attention, in a way that allows us to give them substance and a vocabulary without disregarding those details that might trouble our analytical logic.

6.2.1. Queer belongings and public intimacy

All three of these clubs seem to be characterised by a certain feeling of comfort, belonging, and warmth. Even before developing friendship networks and familiarity in the space, my initial encounters at Duckie, Bird Club and Wotever were marked by a distinct lack of the intimidation and unease typically resulting from the widespread looksism, clique mentality, and suspicion towards outsiders that have characterised my experiences of almost all other club settings. There was a clear sense expressed in all of my group conversations with audience members that their enjoyment of these clubs was largely due to this sense of collectivity and a 'feel-good factor':

> It's warmer [than other clubs], it's just warmer, you can speak to people there. (Kevin)

> You feel comfortable, you feel accepted. (Stanley)

> That's the thing I like about Bar Wotever, is you meet new people and old friends and stuff like that, meeting new people, talking to people. (Natacha)

> I always feel really safe there, that I could do whatever and I'm comfortable. (HCP)

This was reflected in the sense of participation - 'you feel part of a gang there' (Kevin), and pleasure associated with these spaces - 'I remember how good I was feeling, how good I felt in my body and how uplifting it was' (Steppen Wolf). The performers also valued the sense of collectivity of these spaces:

> it just goes ping and you have this shared evening and it's really beautiful! (Bird la Bird)

> it's that point of communion, it's a ritual of coming together and watching something, engaging in a debate, other people. (Josephine)

However, there was also an understanding, by the performers particularly, that this connection is often not necessarily homogenous or unified, and that even in spaces where there is a strong sense of community, there can also be discord and disagreement. Jet Moon recounted experiences of being confronted by

homophobia and sexism in activist spaces that she considers one of her 'communities', as well as facing political attitudes that are problematic to her in queer spaces, asserting that 'community doesn't mean totally across the board sharing ideas' (Jet). The performers in the group conversation engaged in a lengthy debate over the relative value of performing to queer crowds in spaces such as Bird Club, Wotever and Duckie, over performing to other, less familiar spaces to 'mainstream' gay audiences or in predominantly or presumably 'straight' venues. Some, such as Emelia, claimed that 'the crowd who's going to get what I'm doing is going to be a queer crowd' (Emelia), whereas Jolie Rouge asserted that you have 'push it further' and work harder to 'explain where I'm coming from' (Jolie Rouge). What emerged from this debate was not only the slightly different perspectives on what designates a 'home' crowd, but also the fact that even a familiar audience is not necessarily unified in its attitude and response. Jet Moon's declaration that 'I like doing the gigs where people don't know who or what I am' (Jet) echoed Josephine's conception that 'it's great to be able to perform to a community that is similar but also has very different perspectives' (Josephine).

This experience of sharing and collectivity was also noted by the performers and audience members to be very fragile and dependent on a number of factors, which don't always merge. This lack was often associated with the venues:

> I don't think that necessarily carries over into the other Wotever spaces, I think about some of these events [at a larger venue], and I don't necessarily think that I feel as comfortable or welcomed, at any of those events. (Wendyl)

> it becomes very much more cliquey. (Steppen Wolf)

> in a bigger venue the intimacy is lost. (Robert)

However, this lack was also related (particularly for Duckie) to more ephemeral differences, such as the absence of certain members of the 'team' (Kevin):

> it's just not the same [...] It hasn't got the magic. (Michael)

> When the Reader's Wifes aren't there and you've got other DJs on it's not as good is it. (Kevin)

This delicate balance and occasional lack of connection was also observed by the performers:

> the crowd [in Birmingham] was very different from the crowd in London, people really enjoyed it but some of the crowd didn't really know what we were about, who are these weirdos [...] I think that one of the things that the queer cabaret clubs in London do is the audience come along to be entertained, and in some ways they know that they're going to get, there's a certain set of stuff that is understood beforehand. (Bird la Bird)

There thus appears to be a very contradictory conception of a very concrete distinction between events where the 'magic' is present and those when it is lacking, but a very vague definition of this difference by audience and performers alike. Whilst my protagonists all found it rather difficult to identify or articulate exactly what it is that makes Duckie, Bird Club and Wotever 'special', it seems very clear to them, as it does to me, that they are.

Duckie, Bird Club and Wotever do, however, appear to be articulated around very different taste cultures. As discussed above, Sarah Thornton's (1995) analysis of the practices of distinction inherent in subcultural participation brings interesting insight to the dissimilarities between these three spaces. Duckie was describes as significantly 'more boozy' (Debra) than the others, a claim that was confirmed by the Duckie regulars' suggestion that 'you need to have a drink really to put up with and get in the mood [...] It feels like you're not at the party if you're sober' (Michael). Yet Duckie was characterised as being run with an ethic of care that was very similar to the others:

> you know there's people who are running it you can tell they've got the interest of the audience number one on their list, of course it's a business and they're making money but the fact that they're charging six quid to get in, they're not ripping people off [...] They strike you as being really quite genuine. (Kevin)

Whilst the sense of authenticity and sincerity is common across all three spaces, Duckie do differ from the other two on grounds of how the regulars distinguish it from other spaces. As discussed above, Bar Wotever and Bird Club position themselves explicitly as catering to sectors of the queer community that have experienced prejudice, exclusion, and intolerance in other LGBT events or environments. Duckie, however, was primarily conceived as an antidote to the dance music monopoly of London's mainstream gay scene of

the 1990s. Whilst this positions Duckie, and its punters, as much closer to the taste cultures of Thornton's clubbers, the (arguably connected) social dislocation noted above was another primary catalyst for Duckie's emergence. In our conversation, Amy Lamé revealed her intention in starting Duckie had been to create a 'club of outcasts', a space to welcome those who, like herself, felt excluded from the 'mainstream' gay and lesbian spaces that tended to enforce prescriptive norms and expectations in terms of appearance, body shape and gender roles. The convergence between this question of a distinction of music taste and a necessity to find a safe and welcoming space was also reflected by the regulars in our conversation, as they revealed that their initial impetus to attend 'was mainly about the music' (Robert). Whilst they agreed that music was 'initially number one' (Michael) of their reasons for attending when it first opened, but also cited 'the atmosphere is a very close second' (Michael) and that 'there's no snobbery, there's no checking each other out, none of that kind of, the insidious things that are just a part of the gay scene now' (Kevin). Whereas the Duckie regulars described 'mainstream' gay clubs along taste lines of 'faceless pap' (Kevin), 'horrible music' (Michael) and 'fifty-two varieties of the same thing' (Robert), Bird Club and Wotever were distinguished more on a basis of accessibility and safety. Stanley recounted numerous experiences of 'feel[ing] the block' (Stanley) of prejudice and exclusion on grounds of appearance at various mainstream lesbian venues and events, something that was also echoed by many of the other Bar Wotever regulars:

> Wotever is countering not just hetero or whatever, cisgendered assimilation but also the gay and lesbian ghetto assimilation. (Steppen Wolf)

Despite explicit ethics of inclusivity and the sense of collectivity and belonging outlined above, it is inevitable that these three clubs are exclusionary to some communities or individuals. Despite the claims 'I don't think it's cliquey' (Michael) and 'you can take whoever you want and there's no door policy' (Kevin), there was an acknowledgement by the Duckie regulars that it does appeal to a very particular demographic, and that 'it is quite elitist isn't it, 'cause it does push some people out' (Kevin). They also recognised claims made by others that Duckie is 'fairly male dominated' (Robert) and 'for the boys' (Debra), agreeing that they would 'like to see more women there' (Kevin). This incongruity becomes even more curious when considered in relation to the

crossover between the typical Duckie crowd, and the more closely related queer crowds of Bird Club and Wotever. Whilst Duckie's core audience does indeed primarily consist of cisgendered middle-aged gay men, many regulars of Bar Wotever and Bird Club do attend, typically if a particular performer with a loyal following in that scene, such as Bird la Bird, is making an appearance. It is also notable that many of the larger events organised by Duckie, such as *Gross Indecency,* their *Gay Shame* events, and recent 'birthday parties' at the Southbank Centre, appear to act as a catch-all bringing together many of the regulars of all three clubs. Whilst the more radically 'queer' audiences of Bird Club and Bar Wotever do appear (if only occasionally) enabled to move into the Duckie space, the typical regulars of Duckie, however, rarely seem to enter the spaces of the other two. Regarding Bird Club, the explanation for this seems likely to lie in the explicitly femme-and-femininity-focused rhetoric of the club, which is likely to deter cisgendered gay men. Concerning Bar Wotever, this self-exclusion is less easy to define. The broad queer ethos of Wotever is actively inclusive of many regulars who fall within the demographic of the Duckie crowd, and moreover the two events take place in the same venue. Yet when asked, none of the Duckie regulars I spoke to knew of Bar Wotever, much less had attended.

6.2.2. Ambivalent politics

A significant disparity between these three spaces is the level, and nature, of political engagement that is played out there. As noted above, all three spaces could be argued to function in the 'juxtapolitical' mode set out by Lauren Berlant (2008) in relation to the intimate publics of women's culture. The juxtapolitical is defined by Berlant as that which operates in relation to, and sometimes crosses over with, more 'legitimate' forms of politics, while retaining its position strictly within the realm of everyday domesticity that precludes politics proper. Political life functions as a ghostly presence to the women who consume melodrama, she claims, as they are aware of their proximity to political action, and yet cannot consider themselves its agents. This bestows a curious political imperative and radical value upon minor, private forms of internal resistance to normativity and oppression, carried out, for Berlant's purposes, in the emotional relation to fantasy and desires of romantic fulfilment. At Wotever, this juxtapolitical mode is clearly evidenced in the assertion of the

mere existence and survival of queer bodies and subjects as the foremost radical act of queer politics. Wotever foregrounds the imperative of performing, archiving, creating and documenting queer lives in all their humdrum details as a crucial political strategy of survival and world-making. As discussed in Chapter 1, Duckie also toys with an ambivalence towards queer politics. It refuses the label of 'queer', and yet stages large-scale events coinciding with the annual Pride London festival that openly confront and challenge its commercialization and assimilationist politic. At Bird Club, 'legitimate' politics are trivialized by treating the Prime Minister David Cameron, Stalin and the Pope to exactly the same burlesque ridicule as Siouxsie Sioux, Avon Ladies, and Mystic Meg.[90]

Fig. 54: Bird a Bird performing *Forces*, at Bird Club's *Midsummer Night's Bird Club*, 2010. Photo by Leng Montgomery.

Fig. 55: Killpussy and collaborator in *Easter Chick,* at Bird Club's *Easter Sunday Passion Play,* 2010. Photo by Leng Montgomery.

Yet the relation to politics in all of these spaces is far more complex and knotty than the juxtapolitical framework suggests. Alongside the affirmation of the significance of queer lives, Bar Wotever's weekly Community News section invariably features appeals to join 'legitimate' political endeavours, in the form of

[90] Avon is an international manufacturer of personal care and toiletry products, whose door-to-door saleswomen ("Avon Ladies") have come to symbolise, at least in Britain, suburban banality and frumpiness. Mystic Meg is an astrologer and psychic whose predictions for *The Sun* tabloid newspaper and the National Lottery TV broadcasts earned her significant notoriety in the early 1990s in Britain. She was most known for her affected and caricatured 'mythic' image, cultivated through a breathy and ethereal voice, outlandish dress and ubiquitous photographs of her posed with a crystal ball.

protests, campaigns and petitions. These requests are often announced by awkward and shy audience members with no performance experience, and yet sometimes deliver the most impassioned manifesto of the evening. Wotever also explicitly involves itself with numerous charities, organisations and activist groups fighting for various LGBTQ rights, often organising fundraisers for various campaigns and protests. By far the most explicitly engaged in 'legitimate' politics, Wotever positions the juxtapolitical act of personal, private resistance alongside more public engagement with political life in a way that troubles Berlant's (2008) neat distinction between private and public. This enmeshment of the politics of the personal and more public political engagement is summed up by Natacha's experience of feeling enabled to undertake more direct political action through the support of the Wotever community:

It's given me the strength to feel more comfortable in myself, and then after a while to go out and start being a bit more political [...] Without being overtly political, it has a knock-on effect of empowering people. (Natacha)

Reflecting on the value of telling personal stories through her performance, Jet Moon also noted how the kinds of performance staged at Wotever disrupt the distinction between public and private politics:

I want to make that more broad in terms of the social change that I like, I am a political activist, that's a lot of the work that I do [... my shows] are [political activism], that is how they function [...] All that stuff is political theatre because what we're doing is presenting people's stories but contextualising it in a broader political way. (Jet Moon)

Despite little direct engagement with the public of politics proper, Bird Club stages its own mischievous confrontation of political activity. The various themes of Bird Club events often evoke explicitly political themes, such as its *Cum the Revolution!* series celebrating Black Panthers and the Civil Rights Movement, Communism and seditionaries of the French Revolution. The club is staged to simultaneously lambast and celebrate the politics the organisers are troubled by and hold dear, through a heady mix of comedy, sex and ferocious critical satire. In the group conversation Bird la Bird explained her intention to create a space in which the audience would 'feel challenged, welcomed, hot, horny' (Bird la Bird), wanting to 'stoke people's passion, both their political passion and their sexual passion' (Bird la Bird). At Bird Club, sex and politics

are so closely intertwined that there is little difference between feeling politically energised and feeling turned on sexually. This conflation of politics and sexuality is notable enough even post the politicised free love of 1960s counterculture, lesbian separatism and the feminist sex wars of the 1980s to account for why Bird Club is often considered radical, 'genuinely edgy' (Debra) and 'out there, really pushing it' (Stanley).

Fig. 56: Emelia Holdaway and Jolie Rouge as Elf Lenin and Soviet Santa at Bird Club's *Cum the Revolution Part 2: Communists,* 2009. Photo by Leng Montgomery.

Duckie, strangely, stages the least direct engagement with politics, despite hosting the most high profile challenges to depoliticised LGBT culture through its *Gay Shame* and *Gross Indecency* events. Regulars of Bird Club and Wotever noted that *Gross Indecency* 'could have been a bit more provocative' (Debra) criticising the apolitical nature of the acts as 'fluffy' (Stanley), whilst for the Duckie regulars the politics of the event were seen as significant in 'rais[ing] people's awareness' (Kevin). In my group conversation with Duckie regulars, explicit political messages were generally agreed to be a relatively rare occurrence at the club, as 'I've been to Duckie before when they've had a political angle to it, which isn't always someone's cup of tea but it makes a change' (Kevin). This difference in response may be a result of the differing expectations and attitudes of the crowds of Duckie, Bird Club and Wotever, as noted by Bird la Bird:

> if I could make a really crude distinction, performing [at Duckie] is like dogs
> versus cats! [Laughter] 'Cause the audience is just like, yay! Yay!

[Laughter] Whatever you do! Whereas at Bird Club everyone's like hmm, another saucer of cream please, people are harder to please. (Bird la Bird) Jolie Rouge confirmed this distinction that Duckie was considered 'more of a party crowd, while Bird Club and Wotever are more political [...] You go there for ideas as well, at Duckie you go there for partying' (Jolie Rouge). However, this seeming divide in the political expectation or engagement of the crowd was also suggested to be related to a broad generational divide. Whilst all three clubs appeal to an unusually broad age range, with audience members ranging from late teens to fifties and sometimes beyond, the average age bracket of Duckie's audience falls firmly within the early-forties category, predominantly consisting according to Amy Lamé and producer Simon Casson of those who were in their twenties when the club opened in 1992 and have continued to attended regularly. As regulars of all three clubs and of the same generation, Stanley and Debra both noted an age-related divide concerning political involvement:

> When I was growing up the generation before me was very political and they did the marches and they really suffered, they had to put gay politics on the agenda, queer politics, it was a fight to get rights etc. Whereas we've kind of been skimming and surfing on the backs of other people, other generational effort. (Stanley)

> It's something that the younger generation are missing a little bit because they don't see that in actual fact homophobia, people are reporting it more but it just goes on all the time. (Debra)

As examined in Chapter 5 of this thesis, these generational differences and the importance of what might haunt them is crucial to understanding the forms of sociality being enacted here. These spaces are haunted by the intersecting histories of shame, pride, trauma and collective action from which they emerge, connecting people through a shared experience of the world.

There was also variation between Bird Club, Wotever and Duckie in terms of the acceptance of the serious tone often associated with a political message. The performers all agreed that levity, humour and satire are crucial to their ability to portray painful, somber or upsetting personal and political messages. As discussed in Chapter 2 of this thesis, a sense of queer sincerity, or 'quathos' as termed by Gavin Butt (2007), acts as a strategic tool for these performers in all three of these spaces:

It's simply a great way to take the piss out of things that are horrible, to puncture holes in things that are so disturbing all you can do is laugh [...] Just to find a way to deal, to respond to the things that really upset me personally and the only way I've really figured to do this is to take the piss and have a laugh 'cause it's too horrible sometimes. (Josephine)

The harder the issues get the more *joi-de-vivre* you've got to have. (Bird la Bird)

Though this need for a queer ambivalence to seriousness was considered by the performers a general aspect of their performance practice and applicable to all three spaces, there are distinct differences to the levels of seriousness and gravity tolerated or appreciated in the three clubs. As a midweek event with much less of a 'party' atmosphere than the other two (and a seemingly significantly lower level of intoxication), Bar Wotever provides the most 'gentle space' (Debra) for performance that is sombre, earnest and sincere. With the open stage policy and ethos of support and consideration it was also noted by the Bar Wotever regulars that the audience are generally 'more respecting about an art situation' (Wendyl) than is common in other bar or club spaces. Chattering and disruption during performances is not tolerated at Bar Wotever, and polite reminders by the comperes to that effect are often followed up by more forceful assertions to 'shut the fuck up while someone's on stage' and more subtle forms of self-regulation by the crowd. Compared to Duckie and Bird Club, Bar Wotever stages by far the highest proportion of earnestly political or personal performances. The Duckie regulars were unambiguous in their suggestion that they 'don't really enjoy so much ones that try to be quite profound or just a bit wanky, I don't think there's room for that on a Saturday night when everyone's trying to have fun' (Kevin), and that 'I don't think it's a good place for anything too poignant' (Robert). Indeed the atmosphere of Duckie is high-energy Saturday night revelry, as noted above in accordance with the significance of alcohol and dancing. The performances rarely receive undivided attention or complete silence from the rowdy crowd, and generally win appreciation on grounds of their entertainment value through acrobatics, humour, bizarre costuming and props or outrageous acts. The crowd are 'really up for it' (Emelia) for simple but flamboyantly comedic performances such as Emelia and collaborator Lucille Power's *Pissing*, which by her own assertion

'went down really well' (Emelia). Dressed as old-fashioned British tea-ladies, the pair ceremoniously arranged teacups on a tiered stand, before Lucille urinated into a large teapot, from which Emelia filled the cups before they joyfully drank. When performed at Duckie this at first innocuous performance gained attention at the beginning for its slapstick quality and cheeky burlesque tone. As the piece developed and its outcome became increasingly evident, the crowd erupted into raucous laughter, which climaxed as Emelia's pouring of the 'tea' spilled over the table and sent splashes of urine towards the audience. This brazen performance was ideally suited to the boisterous, rowdy appreciation of Duckie's largely intoxicated Saturday night audience. Performances featuring a more direct political message do receive a positive response, though generally only when this is pitched in the same comedic manner. Bird la Bird's *Society for Cutting up Couples Part 2,* for example, staged the ritual murder of David and Samantha Cameron, run over by a giant cardboard cutout of a double-decker bus headed for Hackney to similarly clamourous cheers and applause.

Fig. 57: Bird la Bird performing *The Society for Cutting up Couples Part 2* at Duckie, 2011. Photo by David Gray.

Conclusion

I wish to conclude my case for a weak theory of affective publics by positing Bird la Bird's *The People's Pussy* as encapsulating the evasive, ambivalent nature of these performance spheres. Commissioned by Duckie in January 2011 and performed again in Eat Your Heart Out's more conventionally avant-garde ambience to a seated audience, *The People's Pussy* powerfully interpellates a public whilst highlighting the ambiguities that a 'strong' public sphere theory might obscure. A camp yet vitriolic response to the recent UK coalition government's austerity measures, Bird la Bird cites the piece's two main inspirations as The Communist Manifesto (Marx and Engels 1848) and Hollywood choreographer of elaborate musical showgirl scenes Busby Berkeley. In a socialist sartorial hybrid of the French Revolution's *Sans-Culottes* and communist references such as the Cuban Revolution's 26th July Movement, 'Comrade Birdski' takes to the stage to bemoan the ravages to public services implemented by the commonly entitled 'Tory cunts'. However, she warns:

> Next time you say Tory cunt, leave cunt out of it. Because there's nothing Tory about my cunt. Pure Socialist down there. My cunt is a breeding ground for revolutionary activity. My cunt says get your thieving fucking Tory hands off our NHS you robbing bastards! My cunt says we mustydestroy economic fascism before it destroys us! And my cunt is a kettle students would gladly pay a fee to get contained in [...] So next time you say Tory cunt, leave my cunt out of it. 'Cause my cunt is a communist! (Bird la Bird, *The People's Pussy*)

Ripping off her silken bloomers to reveal a large red star-shaped muff between her legs, Bird props one leg on a stool as her cunt proceeds to 'sing' (with the sound of a kazoo) leftist anthem *L'Internationale* into the microphone poised at her crotch whilst she mimes 'strumming' it with pantomime absurdity. The spectacle is flanked by four sailors emblazoned with the letters C, U, N and T on their chests, miming the word 'cunt' in choreographed semaphore. The audience, assisted by lyric cue-cards at the side of the stage, join in a rousing sing-along. After the final chorus, Bird leaps onto the stool, turning her back to the audience and bending over to reveal a golden anus fashioned of fabric.

> Then, a little voice piped up from the back, and it was my arsehole. And she said: "Cunt, I may be full of shite, but I'm not just that, I'm textured and multilayered and I'm tired of being oppressed. Come on cunt, let's form a coalition, you and me together, it'll be fun. We could overthrow the government!" (Bird la Bird, *The People's Pussy*)

Bird's tirade is at once public and political and yet deeply passionate and personal. It is burlesque spoof and gravely serious polemic. It also received an identically enthusiastic response from Duckie's inebriated party crowd and Eat Your Heart Out's generally more discriminating, arty audience which could be aligned more with Bird's own description of 'catty' Bird Club punters. Bird is at once reclaiming her cunt from misogynist reappropriation and making it profoundly public property. With queer sincerity, Bird la Bird makes the personal political and the political personal: the dire political situation turns out to be about nothing more than an uppity cunt, and Bird's genitals promise a direct solution to the problem, whilst the body part considered most private, personal, and, importantly, shameful, becomes *the* site of public engagement and political resistance. Utilising the Brechtian techniques examined in Chapter 3 of this thesis, *The People's Pussy* resists categorisation. It may look like burlesque, circus, Music Hall or even Live Art, whilst it sounds like stand-up comedy, a political manifesto and singalong musical theatre, and is deadly serious in its intent to incite revolution through titillation and humour.

This juxtaposition of references and forms from both lowbrow popular culture and high performance art is what leads Gavin Butt (2012) to position *The People's Pussy* as an example of what he terms a *performance commons* - a reclaiming of performance as common in the archaic sense of shared public property. Butt reads Bird lad Bird's performance through the framework of 'the common' - both in terms of taste and class distinctions and the common as communal, in order to allow him:

> to think again about how we approach relationships between high and low culture, elite and popular, and the valued and valueless in the field of performance. (Ibid.: 49)

In combination, I would argue, with the ambivalence of affect and ambiguous self/not-self examined in the preceding chapters of this thesis, the disruption of these categories enacted in Bird la Bird's performance, as indeed in many of the others discussed on these pages, initiates a public culture defined by its

contradictions, ambiguities and paradoxes. As I have argued throughout the preceding chapters, these ambiguities characterise the affective milieux of these environments and irreverent use of genre conventions, as well as challenging the ownership of performance itself, wherein the audience is as implicated and responsible for the performance as the performer. Moreover, as perfectly exemplified by *The People's Pussy*, the ownership of one's own body, sense of 'self' or an identity is problematised by the ethos of a *commons* in these clubs:

> the ownership of Bird's cunt becomes progressively more complicated. It quickly moves from being 'hers' - in the sense of privatized individual ownership - to becoming simultaneously and additionally, a communist and a feminist cunt *as well*. (Butt 2012: 60)

The People's Pussy, then, encapsulates Bird's own claim of the value of club performance over any other medium:

> What you can get from a club environment is you can be validated, validated in the things that you think, validated in your passion, and all of that, so maybe what you'll take from the club at the end is, hopefully you'll get laid, but then also you'll be fired up to go and continue with whatever you're doing, it's that energy. (Bird la Bird)

I conclude my analysis of these unique and heterogeneous yet strangely coordinated forums for performance with the significance of their status as *nightclubs* rather than galleries or theatres.[91] As nightclubs, the performances in these venues form only one aspect of a milieu primarily based upon more 'everyday' forms of 'normal' social interaction off the stage. As such, I propose that the performances in these venues form part of the 'everyday' social fabric of these environments, and are thus enmeshed in the intersubjective processes of co-production enacted therein. The previous chapters have examined how the performances staged at Duckie, Bird Club and Wotever appear to facilitate a radically relational, dynamic and collective subject-in-process through ongoing affective interaction with others. I now wish to suggest that this performative

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[91] Though, as noted previously, Bird la Bird and several of the other performer protagonists of this thesis have worked across theatre, gallery and academic settings, it is not possible to explore the various overlaps and differences between these environments here. Therefore, the argument I am making here can only (at present) be applied to their performances within these club environments (with the exception of *The FeMUSEum,* as discussed in the thesis Conclusion below).

capacity is enabled by the ambiguous, indistinct nature of the public generated through them.

Figs. 58 a & b: Bird la Bird and collaborators performing *The People's Pussy* at Duckie, 2011. Photos by Louise Brailey.

The affective public of these queer performance spaces is dynamic, shifting, complex and multifaceted. It is a public that is founded on affect and thus based on a more dynamic view of subject formation than the concepts of community or subculture. In being structured around performance, these

spaces enact a clear public address, an address that mobilizes its audience, both imagined and physically present, as a 'public', as a collective entity enacted through the shared experience of the affective resonances circulating. Through this address, the queer performance public participates in world-making, enabling relational modes of being and creating an ephemeral archive of lives and experiences related to gender variance, desire and sexuality in a way that is otherwise not documentable. As argued by José Muñoz (1999) in relation to Latina performance, performance practices are able to inaugurate new world formations for oppressed or marginalised groups. Drawing from Richard Schechner's (1985) characterisation of performances of transportation and performances of transformation, Muñoz (1999) examines the oppositional worldviews and political possibilities enacted through minoritarian performance practices, and how they performatively bring these potentialities into being. Rather than simply being temporarily delivered into an alternative (fictional) world for the duration of the performance itself (as in performances of transportation), transformative performances produce that alternative mode of being as real - they performatively enact the change of which they speak. Though Schechner (1985) aligns transformation performance more with cultural rituals such as coming-of-age celebrations, Muñoz (1999) locates this process of oppositional world-making in queer and Latina performance practices that enact alternative realities and possibilities:

> [these] utopian impulses [are] made manifest by the performers, cultural workers, and activists who are *not* content to merely survive, but instead use the stuff of the "real world" to remake [a] collective sense of "worldness" through spectacles, performance, and willful enactments of the self for others. (Ibid.: 200)

The performance work of my protagonists, and much else staged at Duckie, Bird Club and Wotever, works in much the same way as Muñoz's examples, 'labour[ing] to make worlds - worlds of transformative politics and possibilities' (ibid.: 195). These performances mine the personal, political, specific and universal to create not only an oppositional perspective or fictional utopia, but a very real alternative world in the space between the performance itself and the audience. As a focus and a shared experience, the performance functions as a mode of public address that brings into being a truly queer public - a public that may not be unified by a demographic sameness and includes

crossovers and intersections of various communities and subcultures, but that is addressed in that moment by the performance as one entity, and united by a history of individual but shared, communal stories and experiences. Returning finally to Vikki Bell's (2007) seminal work, we can see how these performances and the affective milieux of these three spaces enact what she calls performative routedness. Identities, belonging, and connections are performatively produced within these environments, relationally enacted between subjects and bodies, where deeply embodied fantasies, desires, and feelings of shame and trauma are played out collectively in order to remake the world in new possibilities. The performer acts here less as the focus of attention and energy, but rather as a conduit of affects that pass between audience members and between them and the performers in ways that complicate the traditional conception of spectatorship.

Conclusion: Performative Affect

In October 2011 East London's Toynbee Hall played host to *The FeMUSEum,* a very queer kind of ephemeral archive of the intergenerational and transnational performative belongings (Bell 2007) of queer femininity and Femme. This installation was commissioned as part of the 'Trashing Performance' theme of *Performance Matters*, a three-year creative research project investigating the cultural value of performance.[92]   *The FeMUSEum* brought together four generations of international Femme performance artists: Lois Weaver (aka Tammy Whynot), Carmelita Tropicana, and protagonists of this thesis Bird la Bird and Amy Lamé to consider each of their own "Femme muses".[93] I wish to conclude this thesis with a reflection on *The FeMUSEum* as I feel it gestures towards many of my concerns and intentions in the preceding chapters. Entering a cool, darkened room, the audience were greeted with the zen-like calm of a place of worship. Dotted throughout the room, white Perspex plinths illuminated the Museum's non-existent artefacts. After a few moments of confusion, audience members would eventually notice the nearby sign coaxing them into the (painfully familiar) Museum Gift Shop and Tea Room. Through a door and a beaded curtain adorned with fake flowers, we found ourselves in what turned out to be the midst of the performance: a bustling room of activity resembling a minuscule and cramped Village Fair. Each of the four performers were stationed at their own stalls, selling souvenirs and refreshments in homage to each of their Femme muses, including Dolly Parton, trans* activist and writer Kate Bornstein, cult drag icon Divine and Angela Carter's (1994) fictional part-woman part-bird aerialist Fevvers. More than redressing the lack of

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[92]   Financially assisted by the AHRC, *Performance Matters* is a collaboration between Goldsmiths, University of London, University of Roehampton and the Live Art Development Agency. Led by Gavin Butt, the 'Trashing Performance' theme was conceived to reconsider how we might go about valuing both the low-brow performance practices denigrated as 'trash' (such as the club performance at the centre of this thesis), and how the act of 'trashing' can be re-invigorated as a critical strategy in performance studies.

[93] Lois Weaver, as mentioned above, is a writer, lecturer and performance artist and was one of the founding members of lesbian theatre company Split Britches, as well as others including Spiderwoman Theatre. In her solo work she has used her trailer-trash country singer turned lesbian performance artist alter-ego, Tammy Whynot, to stage a series of public lectures on key issues such class, eduction, feminism, sex, ageing and human rights. Cuban-American performance artist Carmelita Tropicana began her career at the legendary lesbian performance space WOW Café in New York City. She uses her comedic and outlandish shows to explore stereotypes and stigma associated with her Latina identity, and to examine the issues of class, race, gender and sexuality arising from her experiences as a lesbian immigrant attempting to infiltrate the predominantly white male art world of 1980s New York.

female, and particularly queer Femme, presence in museums or a mischievous comment on the commoditisation or commercialisation of art and culture, this creative collaboration playfully satirised and celebrated the function, role and nature of performance itself. In bringing these performers together to share their legacies and the lineage of their "Femme muses", it placed diasporic and intergenerational 'carnal connections' (Bell 2007) at the heart of their performance practice and their construction of their own Femme identities. It both performatively produced and disrupted the very notion of an archive: how can the complexities and particularities of lives lived in dynamic relationality to human and non-human others be recorded? The resounding answer: through the practice of performance. *The FeMUSEum* staged an affective archive bringing the collective co-enactment of subjectivity both in on-stage iterations and through everyday interactions into focus.
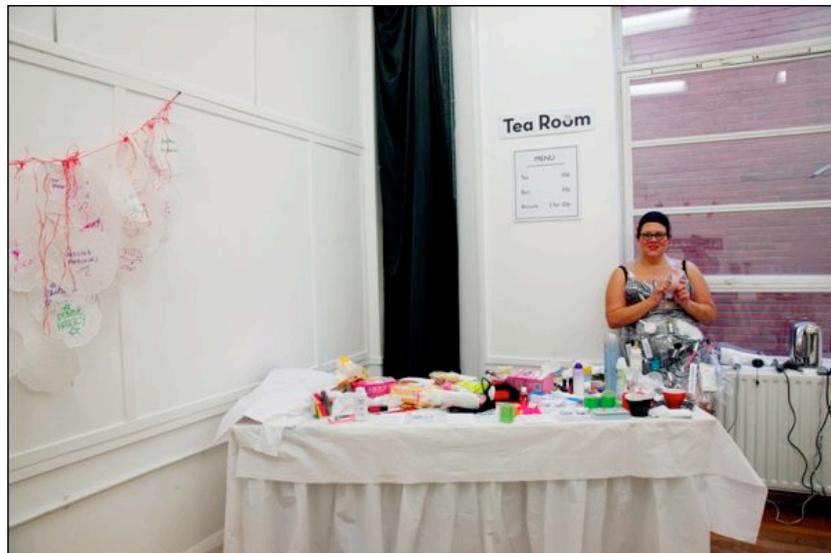
Figs 59 a-e: Scenes from *The FeMUSEum,* featuring Lois Weaver, Amy Lamé, and punters. Presented by Performance Matters, a collaboration between Goldsmiths, University of London, University of Roehampton, and the Live Art Development Agency financially assisted by AHRC. Documentation by Christa Holka.

This embodied archive both indicates what I wish to argue performance can do, and manifests an example of what I wish this thesis to do. By reframing queer performance as a practice of embodied, relational subjectivity enacted and registered affectively, *The FeMUSEum* addresses the key questions and concerns of this thesis.

The major contribution this thesis makes to academic debate stems from its initial impetus as a study of queer or alternative femininities. What is at stake in queer performance that lies beyond the visual paradigm of transgression or normativity? Throughout the preceding chapters I have endeavoured to address this through the two complimentary overarching research questions of this thesis:

- What can a consideration of affect and embodied subjectivity bring to our understanding, interpretation and analysis of queer performance and queer performance spaces/cultures/communities?

- How can a focus on performance and (collective) spectatorship augment and develop our understanding of the functioning of affect and its intersections with identity politics, performativity and subjectification?

My responses to these questions fall into three primary thematic strands roughly guiding the chapters but emerging in various guises throughout the thesis – the potentials of embodied subjectivity posed and illuminated by performance practice and spectatorship, the ways in which this subjectivity is constructed through an intercorporeal relationality, and how this relationality is experienced through affective exchange.

Through these three primary strands of argument, the overall propositions and contributions of this thesis to scholarship and future research are threefold. Firstly, it archives and brings to academic attention a performance culture (in terms of the three particular clubs in general, and the seven featured performers more specifically) that has otherwise been neglected. Aside from Zemirah Moffat's (2006, 2008) visual ethnography of Wotever World and Catherine Silverstone's (2012) very recent article on Duckie's *Gay Shame* series there has been no sustained academic consideration of either Duckie, Wotever or Bird Cub, something that is particularly surprising considering Duckie's 15-year legacy and international reputation. The performance practice of my protagonists has also received surprisingly little scholarly attention, given the innovative value of their work and the time-span of their careers, with many

of them having performed for over a decade. Again Zemirah Moffat's ethnographic film *Mirror Mirror* (2006) and unpublished accompanying PhD thesis (2008) feature both Maria Mojo and Josephine Krieg (then Wilson), though her focus is on creating an ethnographic, rather than a performance, archive. Gavin Butt (2012) has also notably gestured towards the revaluing of this area of performance practice in his analysis of Bird la Bird's work alongside veteran queer club performer David Hoyle and more conventionally avant-garde gallery-based artists. Lisa Blackman's (2011a) consideration of queer affects in the performance work of Bobby Baker and David Hoyle similarly gestures towards a reconsideration of queer club performance as a fruitful and worthy area of investigation. Thus I have argued throughout this thesis that there is an urgent need for the supposedly minor, low-brow practices of club performance to undergo a dramatic repositioning within both cultural studies and performance studies, as both their aesthetic content and their value as an aspect of the everyday lived experience of their audiences position them as key sites for examining queer subjectivities and world-making.

A second contribution of this thesis lies in the always developing field of creative methodologies, both in my interdisciplinary focus and my development of performance autoethnography as an innovative strategy through which to examine performance cultures. By positioning itself at the intersection of body theory and performance studies, this thesis draws its methodological approach from both fields of study, combining the qualitative methods of social science with the creative and textual analysis-based investigations of arts scholarship. I have argued throughout that this creative hybrid approach uniquely enables an appreciation of the embodied knowledges of performing and spectating, accessing the intercorporeal and affective milieux of these environments in a way that either approach alone would miss. Finally, the primary contribution this thesis makes to academic debate is by bringing together performance studies and body theory. This, I argue, is significant both in terms of what body theory can bring to performance studies, and what performance studies can bring to body theory. An appreciation of relationality and affect allows us to consider what is going on in performance beyond the interpretation, perception or analysis of individual performances by a singular spectator - it opens up what else is occurring within the performance space, the multiple other channels of affect aside from the simple one-way flow between audience and (individual)

audience member. This theoretical framework borrowed from body theory thus enables a consideration of how the practices of performing and watching fit into a broader social context, particularly in this case of queer performance, how they are implicated in subject formation and the creation of liveable lives. In the field of body theory, this thesis contributes a rare account of affect that is both empirically based and theoretically informed. Whilst much of the work on affect is written in the abstract, these particular performance spaces allow a consideration of how affect is experienced, felt and understood in a "real life" context. By addressing how the affective realm of these settings are articulated through the intergenerational transmission of trauma and collective fantasies and desires, I have also argued counter to the return to a biological reductionism of the autonomic nervous system that has emerged from the proliferation of affect theory. Herein lies the answer to my primary research question - what performance can bring to body theory and what body theory can bring to performance is a more nuanced understanding of the complex subjective strategies involved in forging liveable lives (Butler 2004). A consideration of bodily integrity, the problem of the one and the many, collective being and affective transmission allow us to look beyond the 'content' of a performance and appreciate what other work it may be doing, both for performer and audience and possibly both together. Meanwhile, performance acts as a rich surface of emergence (Foucault 1972) through which radically intercorporeal and enmeshed processes of subjectivity become apparent.

Performing Radical Embodied Subjectivities

Throughout this thesis I have argued that the debates within body theory around embodied subjectivity could be developed through a more sustained and nuanced engagement with practices of performance and spectatorship. I suggest that the queer performance clubs of my attention here act as a primary example of the kinds of subjective processes that might become visible through such examination, though they are by no means the only such source of exploration.[94] The subjective possibilities of queer performance are evident at

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[94] Indeed, as noted in Chapter 2 of this thesis, I have intentions of expanding my theoretical and methodological approach to an investigation of BDSM and public sex spaces as another possible surface of emergence (Foucault 1972) in the future.

the empirical beginnings of this thesis, in my account in Chapter 3 of the performative potential of 'Wotever' as simultaneously descriptor, title, mode of address and subject position. Chapter 3 set out the three spaces of my attention within this thesis: Duckie, Bird Club and Wotever, whilst also giving a flavour of the debates and themes that have emerged through this research. Whilst I by no means consider these three clubs to form any concrete or identifiable whole or ontological entity, I demonstrated why I consider it advantageous to analyse them in relation to one another - a merging I strategically unpicked in Chapter 6. I used Wotever and particularly the Wotever Manifesto to establish the promise of inclusion and queer possibilities of being heralded in these spaces. Though I do not wish to position Wotever as simply a utopian space of sharing and coming together (as I hope the later chapters demonstrate), the variation of subject positions and liveable lives promised by this queer inclusion indicates interesting processes of subject formation, wherein the tension between subjectivity and subjectification, or identity politics and the sense of a 'real me' are negotiated via a collective, intersubjective mode of becoming. These themes, which I set up in Chapter 3, were then further developed particularly in Chapters 4 and 6, and reconfigured in Chapter 5 through their intersection with concepts of fantasy, desire, trauma, and shame. Chapter 4 utilised a number of key concepts from the field of body theory - in particular that of bodily integrity, to examine the remarkable mode of embodied subjectivity seemingly offered by performance, and in particular the kinds of ambivalent, semi-autobiographical performance work of the protagonists of this thesis. By asking what is at stake in performance for these artists I was able to address the potentials and problems it poses for embodied subjectivity.

In the case of my queer Femme protagonists, the primary tension of subjectivity and subjectification was played out through a negotiation between that which is considered external or culturally constructed, such as the concept of femininity, and what feels or is experienced as real, authentic or inherent. Throughout Chapter 4 I engaged debates from body theory on the notion of a holistic and haptic body schema (Hansen 2006, Featherstone 2006, 2010, Shilling 2003) and questions of bodily integrity (Sobchack 2010, Throsby 2008, Schildrick 2010) in order to productively consider the tensions and

contradictions in the way these artists spoke to me about their practice and their performance work itself. I argued that through performance, my protagonists are able to construct a complex and ambiguous sense of a 'self' which is nonetheless also a 'not-self', or a 'real me' (Throsby 2008) which is simultaneously artificial, fictional and affected. Utilising Julie Hanson's (2007) concept of 'drag king embodiment', I explored the radically non-dualistic mode of embodied subjectivity that is accessible to my performer protagonists through their practice. Although I disagree with Hanson's claim that this radical subjectivity emerges from the visual transgression of an unambiguously female person performing masculinity, the performance work of my protagonists, and the ways in which they spoke about it, certainly confirm that the fusion of fact and fiction, or 'authentic' and 'artificial' enables an exploding of the accompanying binaries of self/other, mind/body and inside/outside, for example. By incorporating the 'outside' of costume, character, and gender norms they consider to be problematic social constructs into their on-stage body schema, these artists (as I am sure others,) are able to perform an ambivalent self/not-self which has radical potential, both for our understanding of subjective processes but also for their own ability to formulate a liveable subject position in the face of trauma and shame.

Performing Collectivity

The fundamental collectivity of this mode of embodied subjectivity is the primary focus of Chapter 5 of this thesis. Through the mode of what I call collective memories, I argued that the performances staged in these environments tap into shared registers of collective fantasy, desire, shame, and the intergenerational haunting of trauma that may or may not be speakable. Again these themes were set up in Chapter 3 through my analysis of Duckie's *Gross Indecency,* wherein I highlighted its function as explicitly staging the very queer kind of affective archives these performance practices implement, collectively remembering, recording and re-enacting the shame, trauma and joy of queer lives and histories. These collective memories, I have argued, transform the deeply personal into universal, shared experiences. Far from revelatory confessions of an inherent or authentic 'truth' of subjectivity, these collective memories present a complex and ambivalent self/not-self through an intricate

entanglement of truth and fiction, fantasy, desire, shame and trauma. This self/ not-self allows the performers to present intensely personal experiences, whilst also allowing the audience to connect affectively to what is being portrayed on stage. Thus, I argued, performance acts as a tool with which subjectivity is enacted by both audience and performers within these contexts, and that this subjectivity is radically co-enacted, co-produced and co-constituted in relation with others. This co-extensivity (Bell 2007) was further developed through the possibility of considering these spaces as a form of public in Chapter 6. Through the frameworks of the counterpublic (Warner 2002) and the intimate public (Berlant 1997, 2008), we are able to consider how modes of address such as those enacted by performance are able to inaugurate ways of being and modes of belonging. Drawing particularly from Lauren Berlant's theorisation of the intimate public sphere, I suggested that we consider Duckie, Bird Club and Wotever as forming a loose kind of public, one that is *affective,* rather than necessarily *intimate*. Though I argued that the queer intimacy and belonging experienced in these spaces resists Berlant's rather static conception of subject positioning, there are indeed traces of some kind of 'broadly common experience' enabling a sense of collectivity within these environments. Bird Club, Duckie and Wotever, I argued, can thus be seen as establishing a public culture structured around affect, wherein individual feelings and experiences become communal public histories by addressing a 'collective' audience. Building on the previous chapters' considerations of subjectivity and subjectification, collective memories, and the affective entanglement of performance and spectatorship, I used Chapter 6 to propose that the archiving of personal experience made communal through the performances here allows the formation of a queer kind of public that is registered affectively, and, therefore, amorphous, flexible, and volatile. I therefore proposed a weak theory of affective publics as a theoretical strategy that might enable us to consider both the parallels and the tensions between these three spaces, and how these tensions might be the very thing that allows them to function as an 'affective public'. I argued that though the existing 'strong theories' of communities, subcultures and the public sphere have a tendency to homogenise and gloss over the affective textures and particularities of lived experience, they may still

lend us an ability to consider cultural production beyond its content as a broader form of cultural participation and world-making.

Performative Affects

This collective world-making, I suggest, is primarily affective, and these affects are performative. The transmission and function of affects has been a key focus of my attention throughout this thesis, and forms the basis of my primary arguments concerning embodied collective subjectivity. Framing affect as a form of emotional contagion (Blackman 2007, 2008a) in which bodies are always open to affecting and being affected by one another, I have proposed a model of affect which, rather than inhering a strict separation between body and mind, indicates the deeply and fundamentally embodied nature of being. Thus, far from being antithetical to notions of the psyche and consciousness, we are able to consider how affect often works through fantasy, desire and modes of unconscious experience. The collective memories set out in Chapter 5 operate on a primarily affective register to enmesh the audience in the shared experiences and traumas being portrayed. I proposed in Chapter 5 that we consider performance as a form of affective labour (Hardt and Negri 2004, Wissenger 2007) in order to investigate the ways in which performance acts in the realm of affect and feeling, and how the performer's body may be seen as an interface or conduit of affects. However, I argue that this affective labour does not solely reside with the performer in these environments, as the audience are tasked with a mode of ethical spectatorship through which they are equally responsible for the affective milieu. The hard work of managing and manipulating affect is evident in the ambivalence of those affects as they emerge in all of the preceding chapters. As I have argued throughout, these performances are never straightforwardly jovial or sincere, always intertwining sincerity, gravity and parodic camp as a queer strategy of hybridity (Butt 2007). Working in parallel with the myriad other binary distinctions blown apart by these performance practices, I propose this affective ambivalence, this 'quathos' (ibid.), as a deliberate survival strategy facilitating the modes of subjectivity outlined above. The ambivalent affective milieux in these spaces , I want to suggest, provide the conditions of possibility for alternative modes of being: subjectivities are enabled and performatively produced *through* this affective exchange. In Chapter 3 my analysis of Bird la Bird's *Holding Court: A*

Period Drama exemplified the radical potential of the ambiguous performances staged at Bird Club and in the other two spaces - juxtaposing camp humour and burlesque razzamatazz with queerly earnest revolutionary politics, the nature and purpose of performance itself is disrupted, as it titillates, entertains, and incites political action in equal measure. Brechtian (1964) techniques and carnivalesque (Bakhtin 1984) play interpellate the audience as far more than passive spectators, and call upon them to remake the world, and themselves, in a different image. Returning to my interest at the very beginning of this thesis with re-invigorating Butler's notion of performativity beyond the limitations of the visual paradigm of representation and transgression, I want to argue that these clubs and their performances in particular enable the circulation of what I call performative affects. The affective milieux of these spaces is performative because it makes alternative modes of subjectivity possible, and thus brings liveable lives into being, even if only within the confines of the performance or the night itself.
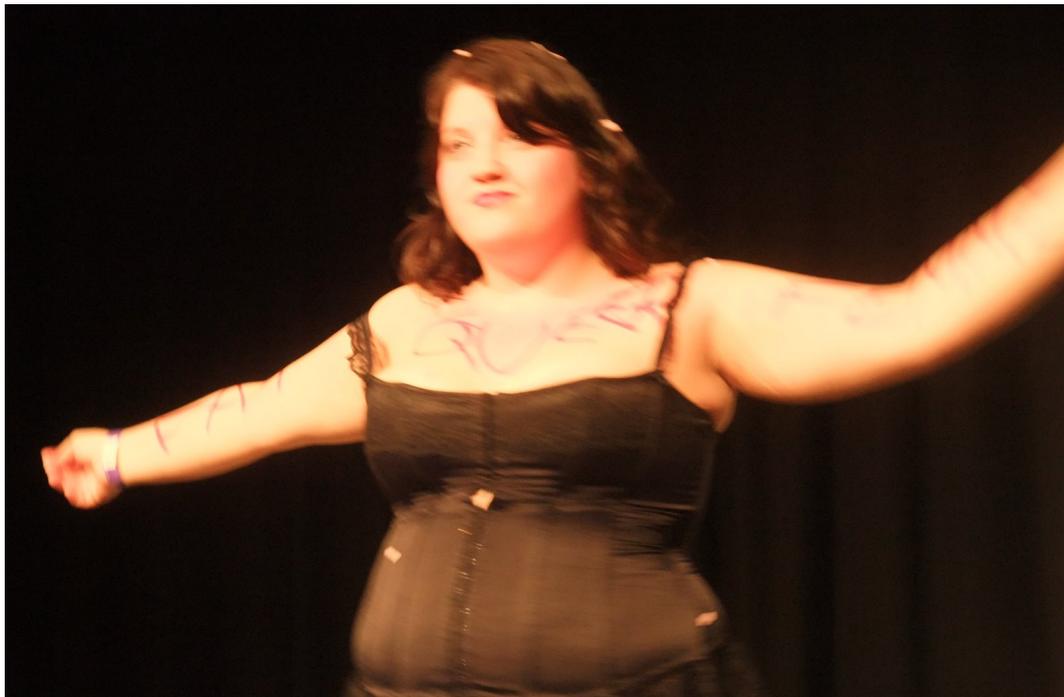

Fig. 60: Myself, performing *Shared Narratives/Collective Selves* (one of my first "performance papers" presenting this research to an academic audience through performance) at the *Carnival of Feminist Cultural Activism*, University of York, 2011. Photo by Evelyn Wan.

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