THE POLITICS OF INVISIBILITY

by

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ABSTRACT

Rather than offering a traditional interpretation of what constitutes a spatial queer politics, which Brown and Knopp (2006) describe as "claiming space," this dissertation seeks instead to explore a Foucauldian politics of disappearing, of incoherency, and illegibility. I call this the politics of invisibility, describing a queer politics that questions visibility at every avenue and that is extremely critical of the ways that queer bodies are often made less complex, indeed less visible, when "gays and lesbians" are incorporated more and more into the mainstream. The work does this through three different papers. First, it lays down the theory of the politics of invisibility through a Foucauldian analysis of the changing nature of heteronormativity since queer theory's origin in the early 1990's. Second, it asks whether new directions in mapping gays and lesbians based on problematic census data from the 1990 and 2000 censuses should be reconsidered in light of this changing heteronormativity. Third, it explores the radical potential of a gay male subculture that is striving to become more visible and by doing so ruptures the taken-for-granted notions of how traditional forms of masculinity should be interpreted in a queer theoretical framework.

INTRODUCTION

Prelude: The Queer and Visibility

The queer should not be visible. It should not be fixed. It should always be weird, ghostly, uncapturable, frightening, and uncontrollable. Part of being queer is being unseen and even unseeable. We do not subvert by changing, we subvert by not calling attention to ourselves at all. Walking among others. Fucking among others. And living our lives freely among others. Through becoming more visible, more written about, more "queered," the queer is actually becoming less free, more disciplined, less unseeable. Rather than write another clichéd and passé lament on how the queer should claim space, should act up, should protest, this project instead calls for the queer to disappear. Rather than fix the queer to its usual place, it seeks instead to unleash the queer to other expressions and let it be exactly and inexactly what it is — an amorphous, selectively visible, haunting, slippery, ghost of a subject that refuses to be coherent or defined or to play by the rules of our, or anyone else's, games. But most of all, it seeks to allow it once again to be invisible.

Of course, one can hear the protests immediately – how do we study something that cannot be seen, how do we check it, make it rigorous, trap it, run our tests, study it, castrate it, fix it? On top of that, I can hear the dissenters as well, screaming about closets and erasures and all of those other words that fail to understand the inventiveness of heteronormativity (or any kind of normativity). Although I will engage them in time, I argue firstly that the queer is not a *thing* but a *goal*, a *standard*, or better a *challenge*. Whether anything approaching the queer can be found in material life is hardly the point. The queer is an analytic, like a stem cell able to become many things but never limited to the things that it can become or has become in the past. Whether the queer holds up to empirics is not the point. The queer delights in haunting us. The queer rattles chains only to disappear at a second glance. The queer is dangerous—look in the shadows, the blind spots of our analyses, and you will find it there for a fleeting moment only to be not there the next. The queer exposes just how limited our tools are, and instead of fearing it, we must let the queer be dangerous again. The queer is a monster, at home with lurking in shadows, our creation that is both us and not us, what we are and what we can be. The queer is the limit of us, of our flaws and our potential. The queer is a concept, a subject of pure potential, a goal never attained nor meant to be attained. The queer scoffs at us and is crafty. The moment you or they or we have captured the queer, the queer has already changed. Instead of defying the logic of the queer, to tether it or worse yet ignore it for the more comfortable and safer waters of narratives and metanarratives, we should accept and even celebrate its potential, open ourselves to its advances and its seductions, and allow it to do its work to our theories, our techniques, our very acceptable way of doing things. But mostly, we should let it disappear. Let it cloak when need be. Let it simply become invisible.

This is nowhere more important than in geography, the most conservative radical discipline going. If we do not leave the queer unfixed in geography, un-where'd and un-there'd, we are in danger of fixing the unfixed, of defining the uncaptured spaces in between in ways that remove their unspecificity, their relationships to moments and spaces and subjects seemingly unrelated. Most importantly, we are in danger of letting our analytics become "dominant knowledges," reified vestiges that simply speak for and ultimately erase the very things we study, leaving them no more alive than dinosaur bones in some forgotten museum. I know this sounds queer. But the queer should not be defined by the things it leaves behind, the shit of the normal and the business as usual. By the time we get around to its fossilized droppings, it has already evolved, become something else, and if we and it are lucky, just beyond the reach of our eyes.

Toward a Foucauldian Understanding of Heteronormativity

This project is most of all one about power, and it concerns itself with a theorization of how bodies should act counter-*discursively*, should resist capture and coherency, and most of all should always be critical of any visibility. I choose to highlight the ways that the queer community has seemingly become addicted to visibility, and how we as geographers, queer and otherwise, have seemingly followed suit (Harper 1994; Kwan 2000; Bartram 2003; Sheppard 2005), even after warnings about the consequences of our obsession with the visible (Rose 2001; Crang 2003; Driver 2003; Matless 2003; Rose 2003; Ryan 2003). Concurrently, I examine how knowledge producers, specifically in queer geography but in general as well, often propagate dominant knowledges that contradict the very political action they seem to valorize. They do this by failing to take into account firstly how subjects often act outside of the discursive limits that we set for them ("Beyond Subversion"). Secondly, they fail to take into account how heteronormativity has changed since the inception of queer theory with the works of such authors as Butler and Sedgwick and rather than being repressive has become a productive and even accepting force - but by no means less disciplinary ("The Politics of Invisibility"). Thirdly, they concomitantly fail to recognize the very essence of queer theory by boiling down queers to their basest spatial expression – the map, where they are, and where they are moving ("Unmapping Queer Geography").

Throughout all three of these papers, I choose to follow Foucault's advice and refuse to see power as a repressive phenomenon, although many of the works that I analyze and the people in them choose to do so (for example, Jack Fritscher's incessant anger that the bear subject is not more recognized in both a gay culture he detests yet from which he seemingly desires approval). I take this position from Foucault's later work, and I believe that is the most underutilized part of his theories, yet the most important, and the one where he lays down most explicitly his theorizations of disciplinary power. In these later works, Foucault very emphatically denounces the possibility that power can be repressive:

> We must cease once and for all to describe the effects of power in negative terms: it 'excludes', it 'represses', it 'censors', it 'abstracts', it 'masks', it 'conceals'. In fact, power produces; it produces reality; it produces domains of objects and rituals of truth. The individual and the knowledge that may be gained of him belong to this production. (Foucault 1977)

Although I am sympathetic to the criticisms of Foucault that this, at first, seems to erase the often oppressive nature of power, I am convinced by Foucault's argument when it is placed in the context of his larger project to remove power from a simple binary of "sovereign/subject." By theorizing power as productive, power is decentered from its traditional understandings, understandings that still plague us even today. Instead, Foucault updates power to our post-sovereign inheritance, to a time and place where power is indeed multimodal and most discipline comes from within rather than outside of our bodies. Any project that claims to be Foucauldian cannot treat power as a one-way, top-down mechanism. But I also don't want to trap this interpretation of Foucault into its usual cliché: that mundane bodies can wield, utilize, and resist power just as easily as the State, the Church, the medical establishment, or any other traditional center of authority. Instead, I am concerned here with critiquing these plays for power, which I examine in the context of visibility – seeking it, desiring it, and being generally bitter when we don't get it. For example, in the case of the Bears that are the subject of a chapter of this project, I argue that gay men's queering of traditional stereotypes of masculinity often operated more productively when they were definitively *outside* of the mainstream's attention, where they could operate as radical counterdiscourses to traditional and mostly generalized understandings of what constitutes resistances to heteronormativity and patriarchy, exposing these forms of knowledge production for the ultimately limiting techniques that they are. It is only when we have been accepted by mainstream gays and lesbians, recognized as valid, that we have become effectively unqueered, stereotypes of our former selves, and I would argue have lost our radical edge.

Following Foucault, this project, rather than seeking to simplistically present heteronormativity or patriarchy or classism or (fill in the blank with any taken for granted evil) as the overt power structure yielded against helpless or subjected queer bodies, is concerned instead with the discursive linkages that allows power to reproduce itself through the actions and disciplinary techniques of both knowledge production and bodily action. Thus, it does not present heteronormativity as a grand narrative of repression, one which hovers above the bodies that both enact and endure it, a structural view of power that is often present in branches of feminist and queer theory and has roots in both second-wave feminist characterizations of “the patriarchy” and Marxist conceptions of capitalism and class struggle. I also do not choose to portray heteronormativity as power that some “they” wields against some “us.” Most importantly, I do not believe that it is the goal of heteronormativity to extinguish, or wipe away, or erase the queer body, as most queer theory and even queer geography seems to assume, especially those that center around the political project of what Brown and Knopp (2008) call “claiming space.” If Foucault has shown us anything, it is that normativity – hetero- and otherwise – disciplines best when it defines, so it often seeks to capture, to normalize, to set limits, and to ultimately define what it is that it is seeking to control. I am not concerned here with victims or even ontologies of oppression, which I think betray Foucault's conceptualization of power and often digress into binaries that erase differences in order to tell neat stories of good guys and bad guys. I refuse to limit or even concentrate heteronormativity to its traditional spaces and its usual villains – Christianity, patriarchy, straight men, white people, etc. Instead, I am concerned more with the hidden normativity that hides in our own ranks, inside gay and lesbian bodies and communities and inside academia, with a challenge that asserts that heteronormativity is often propagated through the very techniques that seek to liberate, that seek to help, and that tend, however well-intentioned, to define the queer subject out of existence.

Foucault's work mainly dealt with the historical mechanisms through which the contemporary subject came into being. Rather than present the subject as a Cartesian given, a choosing subject, a self that is completely defined by itself, he instead explores how the contemporary subject is instead a complex construction of various historical institutions and forces that, rather than repress the subject into submission, sets out to more and more specifically normalize the subject so that the subject ultimately disciplines itself. Although my own work is not historical in nature, I am concerned here with writing counternarratives that cast anew the ways that we study, we write, and we speak for subjects. This work can hopefully offer an alternative, a means of being less visible and less coherent, a work that can hopefully unmap the queer subject, unspeak for it, and let it be exactly what it is. Or, as that is damned near impossible in a field that sets out to map, to speak for, and to understand, at least make us think about the benefits of invisibility.

Discourse and Knowledge: The Foundations of Power and the Politics of Invisibility

Foucault opens *Discipline and Punish* (1977) by quoting, at length, a description of the March 2, 1757 execution of Damiens the regicide outside the main door of the Church of Paris, published in the *Gazette d'Amsterdam*. He carries us through each agonizing moment, from the torn flesh that was filled with "molten lead, boiling oil, burning resin, wax, and sulphur" through the prolonged drawing and quartering of the body and finally his body parts being burned, "reduced to ashes and his ashes thrown to the winds" (p. 3). Foucault uses this opening very effectively, establishing at once the reality of public execution, its ritualized and theatrical elements, and its horror. He also gives the modern, especially Western, reader a glimpse of what it would be like to be a spectator at such an event, a move made even more effective because public executions, officially anyway, have been relegated in the Western imagination to a more barbaric and less civilized time. Rather than a spectacle, power has become more and more concerned with surveillance, control replaced by discipline. Execution, and indeed any violent exercise of power, has become more and more closeted. However, Foucault goes on to turn this closeted punishment in on itself and argues instead that power is indeed still embodied, just as it was in the time of Damien the Regicide. But here, just past the threshold of modernity, "power relations have an immediate hold upon the body, they invest it, mark it, train it, torture it, force it to carry out tasks, to perform ceremonies, to emit signs" (26). Thus, power in the modern age has shifted from a relatively straightforward and violent display of the sovereign's right to take one's life to the more docile but equally sinister Panopticon, a prison layout based on surveillance and discipline. In the modern age, not only are we disciplined and shot through with power, but we are also charged with drawing and quartering ourselves.

However, to truly understand Foucault's theorizations of power, one must also understand the other two components of Foucault's trinity: discourse and knowledge. It is on these two subjects, and specifically how Foucault sees them as interlinked, that I will concentrate on in this short introduction. Foucault was first and foremost concerned with knowledge, specifically "official" knowledges that sought to produce a one and only truth about a subject. McHoul and Grace (1993), in their lucid introduction to his work, explain that Foucault sets out to explain "how official knowledges (particularly the social sciences) work as instruments of 'normalization,' continually attempting to maneuver populations into 'correct' and 'functional' forms of thinking and acting" (p. 17). The most sinister way that this happens is when "science transforms non-scientific discourses into data – mere objects for analysis – and so produces an explicit hierarchy of knowledges" which "make inferior forms of knowledges which patients have about their bodies" (p. 17). However, most important for our understanding here, Foucault does not allow for an all-powerful subject who is in control of these knowledge formations, and this is in fact his biggest break from structuralism. There is no bad guy in Foucault, or even a good guy. In order to be Foucauldian, we must understand this knowledge creation as existent in systems, contexts with historical progressions in which the modern subject must operate and indeed becomes a subject in the first place. Therefore, rather than seeing the subject – or the sovereign for that matter – as a Cartesian subject, an ahistorical calcification that transcends time and place, Foucault instead sees the subject as a temporally and, to a lesser extent, spatially specific construction of the multimodal systems of power in which it must exist (Foucault 1980).

This conception of the subject allows Foucault to challenge our traditional understandings of power, which often break down into variations on the simplistic binary of "sovereign/subject," where this binary takes various guises: bourgeoisie/proletariat, man/woman, straight/gay, State/citizen. Instead, Foucault argues that

> Power is everywhere; not because it embraces everything but because it comes from everywhere. Power comes from below; that is, there is no binary and all-encompassing opposition between ruler and ruled at the root of power relations, and serving as a general matrix – no such duality extending from the top down and reacting on more and more limited groups to the very depths of the social body. (Foucault 1976, p. 93-94)

This is perhaps Foucault's most overused theorization, especially when applied as a critique to Marxist state theory. However, it is not as simple as it sounds. Although often, I believe, misinterpreted to show that power is given to the sovereign voluntarily by those subjected (which is not entirely wrong, but not entirely right), instead Foucault is arguing that power cannot be *had*, it cannot transferred because it cannot be possessed. It is simply everywhere. We, all of us, walk in it, talk in it, write in it, fuck in it, shit in it, piss in it. Everything we do is intimately linked with power, and in fact, our whole subjectivity is constructed from its techniques. Although Foucault's work sometimes examines specific historical techniques of power (the prison, the clinic, sexuality - in fact he makes a clear case that resistance must be catered to a specific technique of power rather than power writ large), it must be remembered that these are simply small parts of the larger field of power. We live in a matrix of power relations and nothing can exist outside of them. Therefore, if we follow Foucault's logic, we must not see invisibility as a giving up of power, an erasure whereby we are erased, because power is not something that can be given up. However, it is something that can be slipped around.

We must understand that Foucault's conceptions of power – as a field of power, systems in which we exist rather than a system that wrangles control from us – is intimately linked with his theorizations of discourse. Here I am using a very specific and very Foucauldian definition of *discourse*. Rather than treating discourse as simple speech actions, as it is treated in some forms of discourse analysis, Foucault defines it instead as what is said *that ultimately defines what can be said*. Thus, discourse is tied into what Foucault calls *dominant knowledges*, power techniques that seek to categorize, control, and define subjects' existences. He writes in *Power/Knowledge*:

> In a society such as ours, but basically in any society, there are manifold relations of power which permeate, characterize, and constitute the social body, and these relations of power cannot themselves be established, consolidated nor implemented without the production, accumula-

> tion, circulation, and functioning of a discourse. There can be no possible exercise of power without a certain economy of discourses of truth which operates through and on the basis of this association. We are subjected to the production of truth through power and we cannot exercise power except through the production of truth. (Foucault 1980, p. 93)

In this modern age, we are compelled then to produce the truth of ourselves – through confession, through activism, through consumption, etc. This has led to, according to Foucault, the contemporary reification of the individual, which Foucault argues

> is one of the prime effects of power, that certain bodies, certain gestures, certain discourses, come to be identified and constituted as individuals. The individual is not the *vis-à-vis* of power; it is … one of its prime effects. (p. 98)

It is through this theorization, that the modern exercise of power compels us to confess, to write a discourse of individuality around our practice, our gestures, our bodies, and it is through this linkage of this discourse to the field of power that Foucault comes to reject Wilheim Reich's repressive hypothesis, which states that sexuality became more repressed with the advent of capitalist modes of production. Rather, Foucault argues that the capitalist age brought with it a great increase of discourse surrounding sex and the practice of sex and sexuality:

> On the contrary, it acted by multiplication of singular sexualities. *It did not set boundaries for sexuality; it extended the various forms of sexual-*

> *ity* [italics added], pursuing them according to lines of indefinite penetration. (Foucault 1976, p. 47)

This is the main theme of my own project – that rather than repressing queer forms of sexuality, heteronormativity instead is a changing beast, one which, rather than setting boundaries for sexuality (which forms the impetus for Butler's work on subversion of naturalized gender roles), it has instead started to embrace us, to coddle us, to "pursue" us even, penetrating our culture, seeking to understand us, and make us coherently disciplined. This can be seen in the increased calls for marriage for gay and lesbian folk, literally putting a square where a circle should be, and the increased permissiveness of the state to allow it on the state level and to consider it on the federal level. After all, how do we resist when it seems that we are getting exactly what we always wanted?

One can get so lost in Foucault's complex theorization of power that it is often hard to articulate how exactly one is to resist this power. Foucault's project, and mine, "poses a series of questions intended to undermine the familiarity of our present, to disturb the ease at which we think, we know ourselves and others" (McHoul and Grace 1993, p. 60). If power is indeed everywhere, an all-inclusive matrix in which we all exist, Foucault forces us to question the ways we become more enmeshed in it, to break its grasp over us, to expose it, and to resist its benefits, its temptations. Foucault ultimately forces us to ask extremely uncomfortable questions, to turn a calcified “truth” inside out (i.e., is the closet really that bad, indeed preferable to constant visibility, compelling us to perform for the state, conform to its biddings, and do what it says in order to be at all?). By doing so, we metaphorically take the part of the crowd that turns on the executioner, rejects the spectacle, the visible displays of power, who storm the killing space and rescue the condemned.

PRESENT STUDY

This project uses Foucault's three major foci — power, discourse, and knowledge, but most of all power — to theorize a radical queer subject. This has ramifications for how we create knowledge about the "bodies" we set out to study but also in how we designate and focus political action. It is meant to be a political project, a metacritique that seeks to understand how knowledge creation, often under the indefinite umbrella of social justice, serves to limit the very people it is professedly helping. Counter to traditional understandings of radical political action, ones that seek to make visible the lost, the ignored, the left behind, I argue that our biggest injustice is that we theorize, count, map, and understand traditionally marginalized[1] populations out of any viable political viability – hence we replace resistance with visibility although they are by no means equal. Secondly, by ultimately removing power from these populations, by telling their stories to the State, to cultural powers that be, and/or to Big Brother and Big Sister and anyone else who will listen, we in fact make them more coherent to powers that seek to discipline them, although they seem to be doing a good enough job of that on their own. This project seeks to get back to a truer understanding of Foucault's novel theorizations, especially those of his later works before his

[1] Although that is a word definitely foundationalized on the equation, justice = visibility. It is an equation I would like to do away with.

death and in his interviews that have been translated into English (Foucault 1976; 1977; 1980). It sees power not as oppressive or repressive but as productive of specific sites of resistance and mostly serves as a warning to the dangers of making ourselves more and more visible.

Secondly, this project does not set out to create grand narratives or histories. I by no means have any answers to the problems that plague us, but I do have a healthy amount of disgust at the modern, civil-rights-based gay and lesbian movement and the directions it and its leaders are taking in this young century. But, although I am a queer man, I cannot speak for all queers. Although I identify as a Bear, I cannot speak for all Bears. And although I am a geographer, I cannot speak for all geographers. Instead, I offer one viewpoint of what I see is a population of queers and a generation of academics that have fallen off the path to liberation, have ignored their willingness to enmesh themselves with power even more, and have entered an uncritical marriage with acceptance and recognition. This disgust, because there is really no other word for my true feelings, forms one theme of this project, namely disgust over our blatantly unqueer march to visibility, our acquiescence to a neutered multiculturalism's token grip on us, and our unquenchable desire to whore ourselves for State inclusion and mainstream acceptance (after all, isn't that the point of all of those damned equal signs anyway?). Other than disgust, this project also takes as a theme knowledge creation, and spends a good amount of time questioning how we, as knowledge creators, go about our business — how we understand, how we privilege, and how we propagate the same old kinds of political action although the times, yes, they have changed. Throughout three very different (yet somehow related) contexts, it infuses a Foucauldian distrust of visibility and recognition into certain bodies of knowledge — the politics of invisibility, which segues nicely into a critique of the counting and mapping of gays and lesbians, and finally a critique that focuses on geographies of masculinities and one formerly queer masculine sub-subculture's desire for visibility in the mainstream. It hopes to show, especially in the last piece, what a monster the desire for visibility can become.

I am most entranced here by Foucault's theorizations around *disciplinary* power. However, I do not wish to present power as an ending or a goal, but as a thing to be wary of and a thing to avoid if we must compromise ourselves in the process of attaining it, especially if our goal is to become normalized, known, and one of them (Holloway 2005). I believe that Foucault's most singular achievement is his removal of power from any sort of oppressive theorization, and much as Foucault discounts the repressive hypothesis, I want to also call into question the political efficacy of tried and true visibility as a response to oppressive power. I am especially resistant to any attempt to fix power, or responses to it, in any sort of permanent and rigidly visible way. I do not want to make the mistakes that Marxists sometimes do with capitalism, and I have tried very hard not make the mistake of seeing heteronormativity as unchanging in its strategies or even its motivations. If we entomb power, calcify it in some box with dirt and roses, it leads to theorizations of dead structures, devoid of life and complexity and chomping at the bit to become misunderstood straw men. Much like Foucault's (1976) brilliant counterhistory of sexual "repression," I would like to give voice to the things unseen, the spaces in between that traditional concepts of power (whether Marxian, feminist, or Freudian) choose not to focus on, how we uncloset to hide, how we cloak to exist, how we speak to say silent.

This dissertation consists of three different papers, which are included as Appendices A-C. The first paper, "The Politics of Invisibility," lays down a theoretical foundation, a theme, or a mood if you will. It seeks to address what I see as a changing heteronormativity that, rather than erasure, seeks to make lucid and coherent certain queer behaviors in its construction of the desirable gay – one that is rich, white, sexually monogamous, and essentially neutered. Rather than concentrating on uncovering clichéd strategies of structural power formations (through repression and oppression), I am interested more in where they specifically fail to oppress and repress, but instead embrace and include, and by doing so discipline and control.

This paper lays down a theoretical theme that is taken up again in Appendix B, “Unmapping Queer Geography?” This paper grounds the politics of invisibility in the recent discussions around the use of 1990 and 2000 census data to map where gays and lesbians “are.” This paper offers a critique that firstly addresses the dangers around the use of this data in the first place and secondly addresses the suitability of this work to the goals of a queer politics. I argue that, although this work is wrapped by its practitioners in tropes of social justice, instead it presents a very uncritical, stereotypical, and spatially flat version of who gays and lesbians are and what their needs are from academics and governmental agencies, a version that ignores even the *Cliff’s Notes* of queer geography and queer theory.

Finally, the last paper of this project, “Beyond Subversion,” examines the radical potential of Bears, a gay male subculture that started 30 years ago as a response to the perceived invisibility of “real men” in the gay community. It is at once a celebration of the Bears, especially in how they embrace rather than spurn traditional masculinity and by doing so ruptures the category in a very non-heteronormative way, but also a cautionary tale when juxtaposed to the other two articles. The main theme of the extent writing, interviews, and discourse surrounding bear culture is always a lament over perceived invisibility, and although I believe there is much to be learned from the subculture, this lament (or more specifically who gets to control to what a Bear should look like, act like, dress like, etc.) often leads to bitterness and downright turf wars over who belongs and does not belong.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX A: THE POLITICS OF INVISIBILITY – RESPONDING TO A CHANGING HETERONORMATIVITY

Visibility and the Desert of the Real

We live in an increasingly visible age, so much so that Guy Debord's (1967) opening to *The Society of the Spectacle* has never rang truer:

> In societies dominated by modern conditions of production, life is presented as an immense accumulation of *spectacles*. Everything that was once directly lived has receded into a representation. (p. 7)

Debord goes on to argue that the *spectacle*, which he defines not as a "collection of images" but as a "social relation between people that is meditated by images" (p.7) has become "both the result and the goal of the dominant mode of production" (p. 8). It is no wonder then that Debord, a Marxist who unfortunately died before Facebook, before Twitter, before YouTube, and the myriad ways available today to represent one's daily minutiae for all of the world to see and comment on, does not see the spectacle as a benefit but a sort of distraction, a moment in which we are "caught" (p. 9), a "visible *negation* [sic] of life" (p. 9), and one so powerful that it removes the focus from itself, from its reality that is it indeed only a moment and can be changed. It is tempting to see our contemporary willingness to become more and more visible – to Tweet ourselves, to broadcast our foibles and our opinions, to sacrifice ourselves to the great Web 2.0, as a completion of this, a fulfillment of Feuerbach's missive from *The Essence of Christianity* that Debord uses to introduce *Society of the Spectacle*:

> But for the present age, which prefers the sign to the thing signified, the copy to the original, representation to reality, appearance to essence..., truth is considered profane, and only illusion is sacred. Sacredness is in fact held to be enhanced in proportion as truth decreases and illusion increases, so that the highest degree of illusion comes to be the highest degree of sacredness. (quoted in Debord 1967, p. 6)

Of course, this talk of the spectacle, these illusions that pass for real in our world that has increasingly lost any sense of it, would not be complete without bringing up Baudrillard, who had more than a few things to say on the subject. Baudrillard has such respect for the simulacra and the simulation that he argues that the image has increasingly worked, through the three orders of premodernity, the Industrial Revolution, and the postmodern, to replace any sort of signified – it has, indeed, become the simulacra, the simulation that becomes reality itself. Thus, according to Baudrillard, we live in the "desert of the real" (Baudrillard 1994, p. 1), a place where there is only the image, a perfect simulacra, where no reference to the real is even possible anymore because the image and the real have become the same thing.

To say that these two philosophers have had a profound influence on contemporary geographies would be a gross overstatement. In fact, in a discipline that is obsessed with the next fashionable philosopher, both are in fact out of fashion, relegated to the trash heap of a 1980's geography that was concerned with such things as images, postmodernity, and mind-altering philosophies that made us question our own realities. In a world that is at war, that is seemingly melting, with genocide in the Sudan, and terrorism a constant threat, our attention has moved away from a philosophy of cheap trick mindfucks to one that is more in line with our current fascinations with the apocalypse. Of course there is a real, stupid, and it is in fact extremely dangerous. No one, after all, was ever, *Halloween 3: Season of the Witch*-style, killed by an image.

That may be true. But, in this paper, I would like to start again the discussion of the image, the spectacle, through a critique of it based mainly in Foucault, especially how the spectacle often betrays the actual surveillance techniques that constitute disciplinary power. Rather than examine it from the context of Marxist politics, I instead question its influence on our idea of what constitutes a radical politics, or more clearly how visibility has become an unquestioned goal of the identity and nonidentity politics of the last two decades. More importantly, I would like to trace the philosophical foundations that have led to this obsession with visibility in queer theory, a self-consciously radical theory if there ever was one, an obsession that I believe traces back to Butler's being foundational to this somewhat nascent theory. This paper argues that, although Butler's theories are very effective in their arguments that gender and sexuality – indeed all material life – is nothing more than a constantly constructed phenomenon and have no inherent essence in themselves, they are not suitable as guidelines for resistance to a contemporary and rapidly changing heteronormativity, especially in that, according to Butler, in order to become subjects, political or otherwise, we must constantly be the results of the performative, the unspoken foundation of which is visibility[2]. This is extremely important because Butler has been an instrumental theorist in geography's treatment of gender and sexuality, which echoes her influence in the larger body of queer theory. I argue, however, that Butler's theories, although important at a time when calcified ideas of identity were the norm, are perhaps less politically viable for a generation of queers that, instead of subverting a normativity that constantly erases them, are currently renegotiating their relationship with both a more tolerant heteronormative society and the increasing allure of the State, vis-à-vis marriage, nondiscrimination laws, etc. I believe this weakness, this addiction in the mainstream gay culture for the State and all of its benefits, calls for a reorientation of our conception of a radical

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[2] Although intellectually diverse from my own leanings, I do agree with Harvey's 1990 vivisection of postmodernity's fascination with the image in *The Conditions of Postmodernity*. Harvey's sword is at its most sharp here when it exposes postmodernity as the vacuous theory that it is.

political, and I opt here for a de Certeau-nuanced Foucauldian politics of invisibility – of incoherence, stealth, and disappearing as a replacement to Butler. This paper will discuss at length Butler's performative, an idea that has been broadly used but rarely understood, with special attention on how the performative and citation traps us in a politics of visibility. Finally, I will offer an alternative Foucauldian queer criticism that will question if a politics centered on making proposedly vulnerable populations more visible is, in fact, the most efficacious route to political viability. Rather than being a navel-gazing experiment, the stakes in this debate are high, especially in a discipline so obsessed with the visible (and by extension visibility) (Rose 1994; 1996; Rose 2001; Rose 2003) and in a population that has, in the mainstream anyway, seemingly agreed that visibility is an unquestioned good.

Interlude: Silence = Death?

When I was 21, in 1994, I worked at a gay bar in Tuscaloosa, Alabama. Because gay bars are the epicenter of all gay culture in the South, fortresses standing defiantly against an ever threatening storm surge of hate and violence, I knew most of the gay men in the city. It was where we drank, it was where we met people to fuck, and it was where we fell in love. I say that to say this. In 1994, a mere 16 years ago, I went to, what seems almost unbelievable now in my memory, at least one funeral a month. And most of them were for men in their late 20s and early 30s.

No doubt anyone who lived through the advent of AIDS in the 1980s and 90s remembers the sea of signs that were prominent at any AIDS march. In a time where AIDS was sometimes wiping out, by some estimates, 50 percent of a city's gay male population and the president of the United States had never publicly mentioned the word, it felt that mainstream heteronormative society was either ignorant of the death that AIDS was causing or, more tragically and most offensively, simply didn't care. The stakes felt so high, and the challenge so overwhelming, that all we could do is scream. And with our signs held high, brandished with that simple yet desperate equation SILENCE = DEATH, we did indeed scream. And things did get better, although only after the face of a young boy named Ryan White, who contracted HIV from a blood transfusion, became the poster child of the disease, leaving me to wonder whether our screaming did any good.

I by no means want to betray that important moment in queer politics, nor lessen the tragedy that we were and are still facing with the AIDS pandemic. I do not want to ignore that the violence many queers face, in spaces like Caddo, Alabama and Laramie, Wyoming and even in San Francisco. Far from a theoretical violence, HIV and AIDS are very real and very dangerous still. Nor do I want to lessen the legacy of those activists, many of whom lost the battle and whose voices were silenced way before their time, to our current relative luxuries that I, among many, enjoy everyday. I am also not immune to the fact that through coming out of the closet, making ourselves more visible, demanding that who we love is not only valid but should be respected and honored and recognized, stepping onto the street in full drag, stitching names in a quilt, and generally making spectacles of ourselves and our culture that, 16 years after those times in Tuscaloosa and over the last 40 years in general, I am writing from a place of privilege that is the result of those many hard-fought battles, that I fought in and, most important, were fought for me. Visibility, being loud and proud, has seemingly paid off, and I am a living result.

I know how it feels to be invisible, to not be noticed, to not be seen when all you want is to be visible, noticed, and seen. I can understand the desire to shout, to draw attention, to finally be recognized and supported. I too read *Invisible Man* by Ralph Ellison, and I sympathize with the narrator when he says:

> I am an invisible man. No, I am not a spook like those who haunted Edgar Allen Poe; nor am I one of your Hollywood-move ectoplasms. I am a man of substance, of flesh and bone, fiber and liquids – and I might even be said to possess a mind. I am invisible, understand, simply be-

> cause people refuse to see me. (Ellison 1952, p. 3)

I can definitely understand the anger that runs both above and below the surface of Ellison's book, the anger at the crushing feeling of not counting, not being, not even matter-ing. But I also sympathize with Ellison's counterpoint:

> Most of the time (although I do not choose as I once did to deny the violence of my days by ignoring it) I am not so overtly violent. I remember that I am invisible and walk softly so as not to awaken the sleeping ones. Sometimes it is best not to awaken them; there are few things in the world as dangerous as sleepwalkers. I learned in time that it is possible to carry on a fight against them without their realizing it. (Ellison 1952, p. 4)

The narrator then goes on to describe how he steals power from Monopolated Light & Power, a stand in for the "sleepwalkers" that Ellison's narrator passes on an everyday basis, although they don't realize that "a hell of a lot of free current is disappearing somewhere into the jungle of Harlem" (p. 5). The narrator also manages to live "rent-free in a building rented strictly to whites" in a forgotten and secluded part of the basement. Although invisibility is crushing, it is also liberatory and opens up possibilities that wouldn't exist if the narrator, "like other men, was visible" (p. 5).

Invisibility is indeed sometimes crushing. It sometimes makes you feel that you are a stranger in a familiar land. It sometimes makes you want to lash out, to raise a fist, to revolt. It is then no surprise that the struggle against invisibility has played such an important role in the politics of vulnerable populations for the last century. However, at some point, we need to look back, to reassess, to update our politics and our tactics to the current situation, our current challenges. I believe that time, that moment even, is now, because we are quickly moving into a space and time where being gay, if not queer, not only has some credibility but desirability as well. AIDS has become so manageable in the first world that we sometimes forget that gay men are still dying of it and are contracting HIV in numbers not seen since the early 1990s. After Richard Florida and Gary Gates, cities find us so desirable that the idea of a gay ghetto is becoming a quaint and increasingly historical idea, an ugly reminder of a time when we had to clutch together for protection and politics (Klein 1999). The Castro of 2010 feels more like a museum rather than a neighborhood, and the internet, the iPhone, Facebook, MySpace, and gay cable channels like LOGO have replaced the bar as places to connect, hook up, learn, and operate within gay culture. Rather than silent, never has gay culture been so cacophonous, so varied, so visible, so easy to plug into. We can even be counted on the Census, in a roundabout way.

A politics rooted in visibility, especially academic papers rooted in such, seem at best moot and at worst condescending in this new space, this new time. So much so that old queer project of writing the queer, understanding the queer, begging for the queer to be accepted in larger academic circles, queering geography, queering sociology etc. and the political prescriptions that surround these projects seem as quaint and old fashioned as the gay ghettoes of yesteryear, out of place and time, like a tired Liza Minnelli film you've seen a thousand times that almost makes you forget that she has become nothing more than the last gag in a Snickers commercial. The danger with becoming desirable, of course, is that you lose a great amount of control in the process. And this is made even more dangerous in that power, hetero/homo/gender/racial/ethnic normative powers, are often wrought upon our bodies in the guise of liberation, of openness, of recognition. In theoretical terms, desirability often demands more and more visibility, and as we have learned from Foucault (1976; 1977), power is at its most powerful when it is at its most productive. The more visible we become, the more produced we are, the more tangible, the more certifiable, the more rigid our definitions become, and the more managed and disciplined we become in the process. And, given that this is an academic document, the elephant in the room, bigger than Ms. Minnelli's fabulous ego, must be addressed. Should our own work, no matter how well-intentioned, contribute to this project? Or should we stop? Just simply stop studying, cataloguing, scoping, seeing, disciplining, producing, writing the queer.

Visibility in Queer Theory/Geography and Changing Heteronormativity

Although those last questions surely reek of an academic cliché, these are questions that I have both academically and personally struggled with for years. I honestly believe, as a gay man who has dedicated a good amount of his life to the “cause” and an equally good chunk of his life becoming schooled in critical theory, especially critical theory dealing with the dangers of the State (Deleuze and Guattari 1987; Bell 1994; Deleuze 1994; Duggan 1994; Agamben 1998; Robbins 2000; Mitchell 2002; Duggan 2003; Agamben 2005; Day 2005; Holloway 2005), the less we make ourselves available to the State (and by extension any heteronormative institution or society or culture or whatever inexact, ontologically unsound noun you want to call the powers that be), the less it knows about us and our practices, about how we constitute ourselves and our relationships, about where we cruise and how we cruise and how we fuck and where we fuck and who we love and how we love and how we spend and where we spend and how we vote and what we would vote for. The less it knows, the more free we are and the less we are incorporated, assimilated, made pretty and acceptable, the less that the freaks among us, those that do not fit into neat and State/society-ordained boxes will be marginalized and ultimately destroyed – both figuratively and in some cases literally. Instead of the modern civil rights movement serving as a model for my politics, as it does for the contemporary gay rights movement that has set as its focus to become accepted and protected by the State, I argue that civil rights should be considered more of a liability, a warning of just how well paved the road to Hell is with good intention. Although the civil rights model has led to obvious benefits from the State, it has failed to recognize that these benefits often, if not always, come with a smack in the face, a limiting of options, an expectation of normalcy, a method of control and coherency that will, in the end, lead to no good and most often anything but liberation. It fails to recognize that any queer politics worth its snuff, and indeed worth studying or knowing or using, has no business cruising the State, wanting it to notice, seducing and being seduced by it. As queers, we have always intuitively known that the State brings police to arrest us in our bars and in bathrooms, that the State cannot be expected to do anything other than use us for political gain, that it only acknowledges those who benefit it, that the State is to never ever be trusted. As James Scott (1998) exposes in *Seeing Like a State*, his examination of Austrian environmental governance in the high modern period and its disastrous results on cultures whose livelihood and environmental health relied on traditional forms of agriculture, the State rarely if ever leaves things better than it finds them. The State, far from ignoring those it wants to control, instead seeks to "see" them out of existence, or at least their original existence. Visibility, coherency, and legitimacy are tools of control, not liberation, especially where the power of the State is concerned. This is far from just impotent navel-gazing. Although there is an old adage in academia that no one reads what we write, as we have seen from Richard Florida and Gary Gates and the hundred American city governments that are following their advice from Pittsburgh to Poughkeepsie and making themselves desirable to the desirable ones among us, sometimes they unfortunately do. One wonders what Poughkeepsie is going to do when the white trash/homeless/Pig Bottom/trannie hooker queers invade their parks and refuse to go away? Of course, if you throw enough of them in jail, embarrass enough of them and ruin enough of their careers, lo and behold they start to discipline themselves, down to controlling their eyes when they pee.

Far from being an unmitigated good, visibility has a dark side. And it is this dark side that I choose to concentrate on. Although mostly unspoken, I believe this problem is at the heart of the debates around politics and nonrepresentation (Thrift 2004; Amin and Thrift 2005; Smith 2005; Amin and Thrift 2007) that is raging between different camps in geography, though I also believe that both camps miss the point by concerning themselves too much with the philosophy and not enough with the effects.[3] In this section, I will explore how visibility has been treated in the geographic literature, although Rose's criticism that visualization, visuality, and visibility have never had a fair reckoning in geography still holds up just as well almost 14 years after the publication of a special *Antipode* issue on it, and with the exception of Beverly Skeggs' (1999; Skeggs, Moran et al. 2004) work on lesbianism and recognition and leisure and visibility and queer identities, there has not been much work on visibility proper in the discipline. Instead of taking on the whole discipline in a small essay, however, I would like to explore visibility in my little postage stamp of it, namely queer geography. I argue here and in the next chapter on mapping gays and lesbians that one of the reasons visibility has been treated so uncritically in queer geography is because it is treated so uncritically in its theoretical foundations, namely the theories of performativity posited by Judith Butler and *de rigueur* cited in almost every

[3] For an enlightening genealogy of how Butler's performativity cuts through this debate between representational and non-representational theory, please see Nash's (2000) piece in the *Professional Geographer* on dance and performance's relevance to cultural geography. Although I have problems with Nash's interpretations of performativity, I believe that her analysis of the current debate between rep and non-rep works in geography is spot on.

work on queer theory and queer geography (including this one). Although Butler is often seen as very compatible with the theories of Foucault, if not an extension of his work into gender and sexuality, and although she offers a compelling and very Foucauldian theory of subjectivity (which is perhaps her greatest contribution to philosophy), I argue that Butler ignores Foucault's warning that power is never repressive of subjects but instead disciplines through knowledge, creation, and discursive productions of subjectivity. By doing so, she fails to address the danger that is inherent in her political prescriptions of subversion, and the performativity and citation that it is built on, especially in that it requires making oneself visible, a spectacle even, in order to be radical (hence Butler's use of the most spectacle-oriented and visibly-dependent gay subcultures – drag – as the example). This, as I discuss in the last section on Foucault, effectively shuts down the most radical aspect of the queer – that it is slippery, unnamed, ever changing, un-interpellatable, dodgy, silent, and incoherent – which robs it of any subversive potential. Applying Butler's theories on the subversive, in order for the queer to "become," it must be cited, performed, and made coherently visible, and only then does it do its political work on drawing attention to the incoherency of gender. Although this was a very effective response in previous decades where erasure was a serious danger to queer liberation, and one that is found to this day in the work of geographers who study gay and lesbian populations (Knopp 1994; Valentine 1995; Brown 1997; Binnie and Valentine 1999; Brown 1999; Knopp 1999; Brown 2000; Brown and Knopp 2006; 2008), I argue that it does not sufficiently address a changing heteronormativity – one that does not repress but seeks to explicitly produce tolerable queer practices.

Visibility, Performativity, and Citation

Butler's theorization of performativity has proven to be one of her most misunderstood concepts, although this misunderstanding has no means diminished her use in geography and in the larger terrains of gender and sexuality studies (Bell, Binnie et al. 1994; Valentine 1999; Gregson and Rose 2000; Sahlil 2002). However, an understanding of it and its theoretical underpinnings are crucial to understanding Butler's assertion that gender is "the repeated stylization of the body, a set of repeated acts within a highly regimented frame that congeal over time to produce the *appearance* [italics added] of substance, of a natural sort of being" (Butler 1999, p. 43-44). Although the performative is often used simply in place of performance, and is sometimes misinterpreted as drag or the constant calling into question the authenticity of gender roles, it is actually much more complicated than that, a complication that is rooted in Butler's theorization of subjectivity and materiality. In language similar to Deleuze, Butler argues that *woman*, and by extension any *congealed* gender identity, "is a term in process, a becoming, a constructing that cannot rightfully be said to originate or to end" (p. 43). With this decentered understanding of gender, Butler differentiates performance (which assumes a pre-existing subject who performs) and performativity (which does not):

> Hence, within the inherited discourse of the metaphysics of substance[4], gender proves to be performative — that is, constituting the identity it is purported to be. In this sense, gender is always doing, though not doing by a subject who might be said to preexist the deed. … There is no gender identity behind the expressions of gender; that identity is performatively constituted by the very "expressions" that are said to be its results. (Butler 1999, p. 33)

Thus gender, as a performative, does not possess any sort of naturalized material foundation but is simply a discursive act produced (and this is important to Butler's Foucauldian reading) by a series of structural relationships (what Butler calls a "heterosexual matrix") that is in turn produced and made coherent by the effects it produces. However, because gender has no material origination, that the "doer" does not preexist the deed but is simply an effect of it, it is open to subversion, especially subversions which expose all gender constructions as simply varying levels

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[4] "Metaphysics of substance," according Sahlil, "refers to the pervasive belief that sex and the body are self-evidently 'natural" material entities" instead of, as they are for Butler, "'phantasmic' cultural constructions which contour and define the body" (2002).

of parody and play, by the same methods by which it is produced. Although there is a strategic element to gender, especially since "discrete genders are part of what 'humanizes' individuals within contemporary culture; indeed, we regularly punish those who fail to do their gender right" (p. 178), there is even more strategic value, according to Butler, in subversive bodily acts[5] that expose that "there is no preexisting identity by which an act or attribute might be measured; there [are] no true or false, real or distorted acts of gender," and that *draw attention* to and *accentuate* this decentered unreality to the extent that "the postulation of a true gender identity would be *revealed* [italics added] as a regulatory fiction" (p. 180). In short, the subject has no preexisting materiality, therefore gender is simply the context by which we become subjects and can be constantly subverted because of its un-materiality.

As one can guess, an easy criticism of Butler's theorization of subjectivity is that it is nothing more than hard constructivism, a refusal to allow for any excess reality outside of the human construction of matter. After the publication of *Gender Trouble,* Butler revised her theories of performativity to address criticisms that she had overlooked any sort material realities of sex and gender — after all, gender may indeed be a construction, but aren't people with one genitalia materially different from

[5] Butler uses the unfortunate example of drag, which muddies her distinctions between performance and performative.

those who possess another? What about all of those penises and all of those vaginas? Butler responds with *Bodies That Matter*, a continuation and revision of the ideas she puts forth in *Gender Trouble,* which concentrates on a theorization of the material "realities" of genital sex and offers a challenge to a discourse that determines that some bodies "matter" while others do not. Not willing to concede that there is some pre-discursive moment that determines how we are sexed, Butler grounds "sexing" in Althusserian notions of interpellation. Thus, we only become human when we are medically interpellated as sexed bodies by medical authorities (Butler 1993, p. 7), when we are hailed as one gender or another. Thus, our very "material" humanity, predicated upon this primary moment of sexing (where Butler argues we move from an "it" to a "she"' or a "he"), is actually wrapped up in a symbolic, or representational, moment. This forms a foundation of Butler's theorization of materiality, which she argues is discursively limited. The penis or the vagina does not "do" our sex, our sex "does" (or perhaps, more accurately, makes matter) our penis and our vagina. Once again, sex is presented as a performativity and, much like gender, is a discursive moment that has, as its effect, sex, but which has no bodily actor (only a set of constructions) in the pre-discursive moment. Butler's theorizations of materiality is that "sex" is a temporal process that is produced and embodied by language, which is itself a materiality (p. 9). To assert otherwise is, according to Butler, to misread the Foucauldian deconstruction of power and subjectivity:

> If Foucault's view of power is understood as the disruption and subversion of [the] grammar and metaphysics of the subject, if power orchestrates the formation and sustenance of subjects, then it cannot be accounted for in terms of the "subject" which is its effect. And here it would be no more right to claim that the term "construction" belongs at the grammatical site of subject, for construction is neither a subject nor its act, but a process of reiteration by which both "subjects" and "acts" come to appear at all. (Butler 1993, p. 9)

This leads Butler to formulate a very Foucauldian-sounding sense of "matter, not as a site or surface, but as a process of materialization that stabilizes over time to produce the effect of boundary, fixity, and surface we call matter" (p. 9). To simplify, any concept of objective matter is made moot by the intervening process of construction that must take place in order for us to recognize it as such. Thus, to Butler, meaning and indeed the real substance of life is intimately tied up in its recognition, its effect, its stabilization.

This concept of construction (and specifically sex as a constructed, or interpellated, process rather than objective materiality) forms the foundation of Butler's theorization of citation, which she uses to form the roots of a "critically queer" politics:

> To the extent that the naming of the "girl" is transitive, that is, initiates the process by which a certain "girling" is compelled, the term, or rather its symbolic power, governs the formation of a corporeally enacted femininity that never fully approximates the norm. This is a "girl," however, who is compelled to "cite" the norm in order to qualify and remain a viable subject. *Femininity is thus not the product of a choice, but the forcible citation of a norm* [emphasis added], one whose complex historicity is indissociable from relations of discipline, regulation, punishment. (p. 232)

We are not able, as subjects, to "take on a gender norm" and we are not subjects before we are sexed through interpellation. Rather we have to be cited as a gender norm in order to become a subject in the first place. Butler reads the subversive potential of "sanctioning the desanctioned" not in terms of "self-creation," but in terms of interpellation:

> Within queer politics, indeed, within the very signification that is "queer," we read a resignifying practice in which the desanctioning power of the name "queer" is reversed to sanction a contestation of the terms of sexual legitimacy. Paradoxically, but also with great promise, the subject who is "queered" into public discourse through homophobic interpellations of various kinds *takes up* or *cites* that very term as the discursive basis for an opposition. (p. 232)

However, although Butler's theories were extremely compelling when they were written in the mid to late 90s, I believe they are geared toward a temporally-specific brand of heteronormativity, one with very rigid goals of enforced gender norms, anti-queer policies, etc. In addition, there is a definite fear of erasure that runs through Butler, and her theory of resistance is not surprisingly tied up in late 80s/early 90s-era visibility and the spectacle. Thus, we are *interpellated*, we are *signified* and are *resignified*, we are *revealed*. Most importantly, according to Butler, we can take control and signify right back. However, as we will see in the next paper, "Unmapping Queer Geography," heteronormativity in 2010 is rapidly changing, especially in the United States, and is increasingly adapting techniques to a time when gays have seemingly never been so accepted, visible, and powerful, or in other words, so recognized and seen. Although I do not want to suggest that older brands of heteronormativity have by any means gone away, or that there is not still pressure to hide one's sexuality, even in certain regions of the United States, today's heteronormativity is more likely to be wrapped in discourses of acceptance, multiculturalism, and celebration of gays and lesbian rather than the hate-filled rhetoric of yesteryear. Instead of closeting us, the new heteronormativity tries to appropriate us into more hetero-friendly versions of ourselves, whittling down our rough edges so that we do not offend, so that we are more palpable to the tastes of a mainstream culture to which some in our ranks apparently want desperately to belong. Rather than subversion, rather than visibility, this changing heteronormativity requires a different response, one which is hardly found in Butler and which is more in line with the later works of Michel Foucault, namely those developed in *Discipline and Punish* but also his unfinished *History of Sexuality*, an exploration of which, along with a discussion of the ~~closet~~ cloak and de Certeau's theorization of strategy and tactics, will constitute the next section.

The Politics of Invisibility: Inside and Outside the ~~Closet~~ Cloak

My thesis (Whitlock 2004) dealt with the spatiality of the closet in the lives of gays and lesbians. In it, I found that the closet, far from being an oppressive monolith, was instead a politically ambiguous and moveable phenomenon that gays and lesbians often utilized to alternatively cloak and uncloak their sexuality when need be. Most of the respondents in that study identified as "out of the closet," and many were indeed open about their sexual orientation in most of their lifespaces. All of them, however, admitted that they often found the closet to be a very useful tool, especially in spaces where they did not find it advantageous to be gay or lesbian or for various reasons did not choose to be identified with the gay and lesbian community. Thus, for many, what we had traditionally designated as "the closet" was in fact a politically ambiguous phenomenon that was highly dependent upon both space and time. When I was writing the thesis, I found it very hard to interpret this variable closet, which I choose now to call a *cloak* rather than a *closet* (after all, a cloak is something removed and put on at will and a much more useful, given these empirics, than the metaphorically questionable term, the "closet"), as anything other than politically wrong, and I, teethed on identity politics and SILENCE=DEATH, was indeed critically immature in my treatment of the closet as a political binary – in bad, out good.

This is hardly surprising, especially given that so much of the academic work on queer theory and gay and lesbian studies has mainly worked from this binary, including the recent work inspired by Richard Florida's (2002b; 2002a; 2002c; 2003; 2004) work on the creative class (Black, Gates et al. 2000; Smith and Gates 2001; Black, Gates et al. 2002; Gates and Ost 2004; Gates 2007) and even those who critique it (Brown and Knopp 2006; 2008). There is a great amount of work on the liberatory potential of gays and lesbians' sometimes extremely visible consumerism (Gluckman and Reed 1997), although many have also shown the problematics of the somewhat simplistic equation of consumerism = visibility. Often, those who point out this problematic are doing so because they argue that, by being excluded from consumerism, groups are also excluded from visibility (Clark 1991). This, without questions, still propagates visibility as an unmitigated good. What I realize now is that the data from my thesis study was showing in a very empirical way the politics of invisibility. Although some cloaked their sexuality because they were afraid of the consequences of homophobia, which fell neatly into line with my own binary politics at the time, I found that most used the cloak as a shield, as a disidentification (Munoz 1999), a relief from the responsibility of shouldering a specific identity politics, a respite from being made coherent as a "gay or lesbian" person, with a certain set of given obligations, political motivations, cultural preferences, spatial practices, etc. This made me start asking questions that ultimately led to this project: Although the closet has mostly been presented in the academy and in popular culture as a negative concept, should we reconsider how we contextualize it, given that even the most proudly queer among us at some time or the other utilize it in order to maneuver through their everyday spaces? Is a better metaphor, given that the closet is neither rigid nor uniform nor ever really completely hidden, the cloak? Where should we place the cloak's political ambiguity? Is it a space of empowerment or disempowerment, or, perhaps more spot-on, one that renders both meaningless in their binary oppositions?

Bain (2008), in fact, finds the same thing in dealing with the often paradoxical politics of invisibility and visibility among artists in Toronto's inner cityarguing that "invisibility can bring relief and respite from surveillance and responsibility and it can introduce an element of privacy" (p. 420). Phelan (1993) has also argued that there is real power in remaining invisible, unmarked and unseen. Perhaps unsurprisingly, both of these writers have worked extensively from de Certeau's (2002) *The Practice of Everyday Life* in order to develop theories of visibility and invisibility, namely his conceptions of *strategy* and *tactics*. In this book, de Certeau provides a theoretical framework for the examination of cultural production in what he calls the practice of everyday life. Critical of theories which present everyday agents as passive receivers of the production of space, he instead chooses to concentrate on how everyday people ("consumers") "make do" within the contexts of their spaces, constantly managed and regulated by the holders of power, which de Certeau identifies as "a business, an army, a city, a scientific institution" (p. 36).

de Certeau uses the binary of *strategy* and *tactics* in order to contextualize the struggles between the overcoded and materialistic space of the holders of power and the ability of "weaker" people to subvert and move through that space. To de Certeau, *strategy* is the "art of the strong," an "establishment of a break between a place appropriated as one's own and its other that is accompanied by important effects" (pg. 36). The "important effects" which de Certeau speaks of is summarized below:

> The "proper" is a *triumph of place over time*. It allows one [in power] to capitalize acquired advantages, to prepare future expansions, and thus to give oneself a certain independence with respect to the variability of circumstances. It is a mastery of time through the foundation of an

> autonomous place. … It is also a mastery of places through sight. The division of space makes possible a *panoptic practice* proceeding from a place whence the eye can transform foreign forces into objects that can be observed and measured, and thus control and "include" them within its scope of vision. (de Certeau 1984, pg. 36)

To this idea of *strategy*, de Certeau contrasts the *tactic*, the "art of the weak," a "calculated action determined by the absence of a proper locus" (pg. 37). He describes

> …the space of the tactic as the space of the other. Thus it must play on and with a terrain imposed on it and organized by the law of a foreign power. It does not have the means *to keep to itself*…: it is a maneuver "within the enemy's field of vision"…. It does not, therefore, have the options of planning general strategy and viewing the adversary as a whole within a district, visible, and objectifiable space. It operates in isolated actions, blow by blow. It takes advantage of "opportunities" and depends on them, being without any base where it could stockpile its winnings, build up its own position, and plan raids. (pg. 37)

Most important in the framework that de Certeau presents, especially to our discussion of the visibility, any win of the weak is temporary at best—"what it wins, it cannot keep" (pg. 37).

I find de Certeau's theories compelling, especially in his assertion that

> The ordinary practitioners of the city live "down there," below the thresholds at which invisibility

> begins…. These practitioners make use of spaces that cannot be seen, that elude legibility. (2002, p. 93)

I also am intrigued with his concept of *strategy*. However, I do believe that he often falls into the trap of a simplified politics, with an oftentimes convenient unified objective for the tacticians (that of temporary capture and making do with temporal victories) and an equally unified objective for the strategist (that of controlling space and the tacticians' operation within in). Therefore, although de Certeau provides us with a tempting way of thinking about alternative populations' interactions with space, I believe that he would ultimately lead us right back to where we are right now, with an uncritical fascination with visibility, especially given his very hierarchical divisions between the haves and have nots. No, in order to deal with a changing heteronormativity, one that seeks to discipline the queer through making it more visible, to map it, to write it, to seduce it out of existence, we need the one theoretician who offered a complete critique of visibility and explicitly showed its role in disciplining the contemporary subject. Ironically, it is the same continental philosopher who is most closely associated with queer theory, due in no small part to Foucault's multivolume but incomplete *History of Sexuality*.

Foucault's later work was most concerned with the disciplinary nature of power, specifically the multimodal techniques that are exercised upon the body of subjects in order to control them when classical forms of discipline (the sovereign's power over life and death) had become severely restricted through the advent of individual rights. Foucault is critical of structuralist conceptions of power, which he argues inevitably cast power as a top down phenomenon that is enforced through the threat of violence. Even when power is not cast as repressive, but productive as it is in Kristeva's and Lacan's work, it is often unhinged from its historical specificity, and Foucault argues that there are no general power techniques that work over multiple periods of time. Thus, Foucault, in his last four books, develops a very historical and very differentiated exploration of the specific systems of discipline and power – namely that of criminality and sexuality. Contra to Debord, Foucault argues that "our society is one not of spectacle, but of surveillance: under the surface of images, one invests bodies in depth" (Foucault 1977, p. 217). And because social power is so dependent upon this surveillance, we are constantly compelled to make ourselves more and more visible and more and more individualized. The central metaphor Foucault uses to illustrate the disciplinary nature of surveillance is Bentham's Panopticon, a layout of prisons where a central viewing area is surrounded by facing prison cells. Foucault uses this example, especially in that the prisoners could not tell if they were being viewed or not but were always in danger of being so, to describe the power of surveillance in creating a disciplined subject. This has been most influential in my conception of the changing nature of contemporary heteronormativity, which is too often treated as historically undifferentiated in the works of queer researchers and which is often conceived as repressive and hierarchical. This betrays a traditional and static understanding of the closet's relationship with heteronormativity, a relationship that we have seen is in fact very complex and ever-shifting, highly reliant upon a both time and space and even race and class (Chauncey 1994).

Most relevant to this chapter, and as foundationalized in the introduction, Foucault warns us to never conceive of power as repressive. Because of this, he dedicates a major part to his *History of Sexuality Vol. 1* to dispelling what he calls the "repressive hypothesis," or the hypothesis that institutions seek to repress the individual's sexuality. Instead, Foucault argues that modern society compels us to confess, and it is through this confession that disciplinary power flows:

> The confession has spread its effects far and wide. … One confesses in public and in private, to one's parents, one's educators, one's doctor, to those one loves; one admits to oneself, in pleasure and in pain, things it would be impossible to tell to anyone else, the things people write books about. … Western man has become a confessing animal. (Foucault 1976, p. 59)

This is so integral to disciplinary power that the very act of individualization contributes to our own discipline. Foucault argues that “as power becomes more anonymous and more functional, [it causes] those upon whom it is exercised to be more strongly individualized” (Foucault 1977, p. 193). Thus, in a system obsessed with collecting knowledge of the distinct and using distinction as a technique of disciplinary power, “the child is more individualized than the adult, the patient more than the healthy man, the madman and the delinquent more than the normal and non-deliquent” (p. 193). Thus power is exercised through the subject’s making themselves evermore individualized:

> I would say that we are forced to produce the truth of power that our society demands, of which it has need, in order to function: we *must* speak the truth; we are constrained or condemned to confess or to discover the truth. Power never ceases its interrogation, its inquisition, its registration of truth: it institutionalizes, professionalizes and rewards its pursuit. In the last analysis, we must produce truth as we must produce wealth, indeed we produce truth in order to produce wealth in the first place. (Foucault 1980, p. 90)

This I believe is where Foucault can be interpreted as most critical of Butler and even de Certeau. In order to “subvert” this disciplinary power, which compels us to confess our every minutiae, our every crevice and abnormality, it is not be performed or cited, or to create new visual interpretations sex and/or gender, or fight for recognition in the workplace, the street, the church, the government, and so on. Instead, if we carry Foucault to his logical end, it would not be to subvert, to overthrow, or to undermine and thus open ourselves up to new ways to be seen and recognized. It would be to stop confessing, to stop contributing to their knowledges, their strives to catalogue, map, illustrate, and write us. To voluntarily cloak ourselves, our practice, to become illegible and unseen. This is what I call the politics of invisibility.

Conclusion: The Application of the Politics of the Invisibility

Even if I offered here that we should stop writing the queer, I am not naïve enough to think that writing the queer would actually stop. However, I can say that we should always be wary, if not openly resistant, to being written. Although Foucault's theories have never rung truer in a day of mainstreaming queer culture, we do not have to make their jobs any easier for them. This paper, therefore, offers a mode of resistance, one which may seem counterintuitive in this ever visible age. As I will explore more in the next paper, I am not sure it is possible to simply disappear in today's society. The more we hear about privacy issues that affect the internet and other facets of communication and everyday life, the more we realize perhaps that it is impossible to live a private life in 2010 and beyond. So, knowing this, I do not offer the politics of invisibility as an infallible prescription of political practice. However, I do offer it as a standard, a goal, a measure that is in constant criticism of the ways that we make ourselves more visible, and in return more knowable and sometimes more desirable to the State and other institutions. By positing the politics of invisibility as a measure, we must constantly question if queers were not, perhaps, better off in another time, one that was considered repressive but where we were free to construct our relationships, our practices, our conceptions of what we were in the comfortable space of invisibility.

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APPENDIX B: UNMAPPING QUEER GEOGRAPHY?

"To date, the U.S. Census Bureau has only released counts of gay and lesbian coupled households, but as more information is released, we will be able to determine the number of children living in these households, income, racial profile, home ownership and other important demographics. *These facts will help us dispel stereotypes and present a fuller, more accurate picture of the gay and lesbian family in America.*" (Smith and Gates 2001, p. 2) (emphasis added)

"The information gathered in Census 2000 will be a coup to big gay organizations that insist on painting gay and lesbian people as suburbanites in happy, marriage-like relationships, driving their 2.4 children around in minivans. The 'we're-just-like-you' distortion does nothing to counter the real problems of discrimination, violence, and health—the burden of which is disproportionately carried by those who do not look like, nor share the values of, mainstream America." (Kadour 2000)

"Everytime we give in to the impulse to be thought *important enough, beautiful enough, powerful enough, real enough, rich enough*, we have spurred the transition from queer to certified." (Minkowitz 1997)

In the last decade, there has been an increasing interest in the spatial demographics of gays and lesbians, both in academic literatures and the larger mainstream writings. However, this literature rarely, if ever, engages the critical queer theory that could potentially call into question the goals of this work in the first place. For example, in the August 2007 issue of *The Professional Geographer*, Cooke and Rapino (2007) start their article on the migration of gays and lesbians with the following justification:

> The regional migration patterns of gays and lesbians are of interest for any number of reasons. Economic development officials are interested in attracting gays and lesbians to their communi-

> ties because of Richard Florida's research (2002b; 2002c; 2003) on the *creative class*, which links the presence of *nonnormative* [emphasis added] populations to economic vitality. Knowledge of migration patterns and processes would help epidemiologists and public health agencies *address issues related to the transmission and diffusion of AIDS* [emphasis added]. Gay and lesbian activists could target growing gay and lesbian population clusters for political and community organizing. (p. 285)

Although obviously existing in a long tradition in geography that has increasingly moved away from essentialist identity politics when addressing the spatial significance of gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender, and queer communities and toward a truly more sophisticated and radically queer conceptualization, the authors, like many of their colleagues doing this kind of work (Black, Gates et al. 2000; 2002; Gates and Ost 2004; Gates 2007), do not engage any of the more theoretically informed queer geographies. This may not be apparently problematic, especially in that the article is an examination of migration patterns and not an article on queer geography, yet it does allow the authors to present somewhat simplistic understandings of the needs of the populations they study. How else could the authors, in 2007, make such an offensive (and unsubstantiated) argument about how understanding gay and, perhaps most interestingly, lesbian migration offers any kind of sound understanding to "issues related to the transmission and diffusion of AIDS", which the authors do not differentiate from HIV? Would the authors be allowed to assert, in an academic journal in geography, that an understanding of African-American and Hispanic migration could help epidemiologists in a similar vein, considering the increase in HIV infections in these communities (Karon, Fleming et al. 2001)? And what about the author's equally uncritical use of *nonnormative populations* and their importance to economic vitalities, an assertion grounded in the increasingly popular work of Richard Florida (2002b; 2002a; 2002c; 2003; 2004), especially in his argument that a city's tolerance of gays are viable indicators of the success of those same cities in the new economy?

Far from being pedantic nitpicking, the gays that are focused on in Richard Florida's work and the gays that are being "attracted" by cities influenced by his work are only non-normative in that, unlike most of the gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender, and queer population, they have higher amounts of wealth and more credibility among straight culture than the larger queer population (Badgett 1994; 1997a).[6] After all, one never sees cities trying to "attract" truly nonnormative peoples like brown and/or single-mother lesbians, homeless gay teens, or illegal immigrant

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[6] In an interview with CNN's In the Money on June 23, 2007, Florida argued that "places that a large gay and lesbian community gravitated to, … when these kind of geeky entrepreneurs became important economic growth, those were the places that accepted them, too." Interview can be accessed at Florida's own website (http://creativeclass.com/richard_florida/video/index.php?video=20070623-CNN_In_the_Money).

queers, and most disturbingly but perhaps unsurprisingly, these are *not* the queers that Florida concerns himself with (or the queers that are focused on in literature that looks for spatial concentrations of gays and lesbians). So, how is it that, after thirty years of literature concerning gay and lesbian and then queer geographies (Binnie and Valentine 1999; Knopp 2007), a literature that has done an excellent job expanding our understanding of the nuances of sexuality and space, can an article that deals with gays and lesbians appear in one of our mainstream and most visible peer-reviewed journals with such a limited critical understanding of the very population that it sets out to explain? How has such a disconnect developed between a literature that deals with gays and lesbians in a quantitative way and the literatures that have developed with a more theoretical and qualitative bent? Most importantly, how has queer geography failed to register in the disciplinary consciousness to such an extent that quantitative literature can utilize data on “gays and lesbians” with only the most basic, and stereotypical, ontologies of being queer or of how queer people exist in the socio-spatial *milieu*?

This paper is first and foremost a queer critique of the uncritical use of 1990 and 2000 same-sex household data in order to firstly show where gays and lesbians lives in the United States and secondly, and, much more problematically, assert the value of gays and lesbians to regimes of urban growth and economic prosperity. It seeks to expand on the work on feminist and participatory GIS, qualitative GIS, and Brown and Knopps' 2008 work on creating maps that are more cognizant of queer theory, while taking seriously both calls in the larger body of queer theory for an increased awareness of the materiality of queer politics. It also explores Gillian Rose's (2001; 2003) foundational critiques of visuality's special place in the discipline of geography, concentrating specifically on her call for more attention on the importance of audiences for geographic imagery. Although this paper does not seek to continue the "confrontational polemics" (Kwan 2002b) that dominated the debates between GIS and critical geographies in the 1990s, it does assert that, GIS's value to feminist and critical geographies aside, cartographic representation of gays and lesbians are especially problematic in light of these communities' appropriation by organizations and policy-makers who often have no vested interest in the unique issues facing queers (especially the closet, isolation, teen suicide, health, etc.) but instead are attracted first to the myth of the great buying power of gay men and lesbians (Badgett 1994; 1997a), and second to the use of this community in order promote their cities over other cities as viable locations for "geeky entrepreneurs," justifications that pepper almost every extant work on mapping gays and lesbians (Black, Gates et al. 2000; Smith and Gates 2001; Black, Gates et al. 2002; Gates and Ost 2004; Cooke 2005; Cooke and Rapino 2007; Gates 2007). Rather than refusing to see GIS and cartography's potential in understanding queer communities, this study hopes to expand that debate beyond methodological considerations into a clearer understanding of the material contexts in which these maps exist and how they are being used in the larger discourse outside academia. As queer communities become more defined and desired by marketers and corporations and more mainstreamed and homogenized by the very groups that lobby for its causes, this critique calls for a rethinking of queer theory and queer geography's relationship to the map, the often heteronormative work that extant maps of gays and lesbians do, the decidedly unnuanced foundational socio-spatial assumptions of "being queer" on which most of these maps of gays and lesbians rest, and the ontological violences and injustices that are often these maps' result.

The Spatial De-queering of Gays and Lesbians

In 2004, The Urban Institute published the *Gay and Lesbian Atlas* (Gates and Ost 2004), which works from the Census 2000 question on same-sex partnered households to create various maps of where "gays and lesbians" are in the United States. In their review of the *Atlas*, Knopp and Brown (2005), although cautiously supportive of the work's importance, go on to critique it, arguing that the problems of the atlas go deeper than the methodological (and mostly technical) handwringing that dominate the authors' introductory chapters. Knopp and Brown are correct in asserting that the *Atlas* fails on a philosophical (and I would argue critical) level, and they draw attention to the authors' lack of nuance in assessing gay and lesbian relationships:

> Yet the final chapter's musings indicate little if any interest on the authors' parts about queer forms of sexual partnering that are anything other than (purportedly) monogamous. In this respect, their imaginations seem strangely driven (and limited) by the data with which they are working and its own embedding within a set of cultural norms about relationships. (Knopp and Brown 2005, p. 892)

This data-driven epistemology creates other problems throughout the *Atlas*, including but not limited to the authors' linkages between their work on gay and lesbian locational choices, which Gates and Ost wrap into a "behavioralist, rational-choice" narrative of migration, and the larger social and political geographic reasons that gays and lesbians are first attracted to a place and second able to self-identify there (Knopp and Brown 2005, p. 892). Although limited by the length of a review, Knopp and Brown do question the authors' lack of consideration of the politics of the *Atlas* itself, asserting that Gates and Ost's univocal assumption that mapping from this data is good "foreclose[s] any serious discussion of ways to use quantitative data in more complicated and critical ways or of the pitfalls associated with hitching their political wagon to this particular rationale" (p. 892).

The power of this criticism is somewhat muted when, obviously seeking to end the paper on a positive note, Knopp and Brown lament that, given their previous criticisms, they "ultimately find it difficult to fault these authors too harshly since they clearly 'scooped' American geography in producing this resource" (p. 893). I do not find it difficult, nor do I believe that American geography should feel any remorse at being "scooped" here, especially given that this work is founded on the most simple and oftentimes stereotyped versions of what constitutes *being* "gay" and "lesbian." Between the *Atlas*' painting of gays and lesbians as victimized by political power while valorizing their "$485 billion" of buying power that, because of marketing efforts to capitalize on it, "offer gay men and lesbians a sense of being included in the broader society" (Gates and Ost 2004, p. 4), Gates and Ost boil the reasons for understanding queer spatiality down to the easily mappable contributions of "voting blocks," "marketing," "public health," and "community and economic development" (p. 3-5). This effectively equates queer spatiality to maps of politically similar, rich, HIV-infected gentrifiers.

Unfortunately, *The Gay and Lesbian Atlas* is not the only avenue for this kind of work and, as just a brief perusal of the Human Rights Campaign Fund's list of "resources" will show, many of their resources have been either written or co-written by Gary Gates (e.g., Smith and Gates 2001) or use his work heavily. Interestingly, the HRC's list of resources rarely, if ever, quote a queer theorist or even mention a queer geographer, which is surprising given the spatiality of much of its work and its extensive use of the 2000 census data. It is perhaps less surprising that, given the HRC's main task as a lobbying organization for the inclusion of gays and lesbians in mainstream American life, almost all of these resources draw heavily from the seeming ubiquity of Richard Florida's work (2002c; 2003; 2004). Florida utilized the aforementioned census data in order to offer up a "Gay Index," a composite index co-developed by Gary Gates derived from same-sex household partnership data, which Florida argues is the key determinant in the success of United States cities in the new information and creative economies.[7] By linking economic success with gay tolerance and by extension problematically conflating gay tolerance with location of same-sex households, Florida and Gates have created a cottage industry of sorts around the using of admittedly flawed census data that uses self-identified same-sex household counts to make spatial claims of the importance of "showing" where gay and lesbians are.

7 In turn, this has produced a lot of publicity that has given Florida almost superstar status among city planners, mayors, and gay rights organizations, who have scrambled to apply his work to issues ranging from how to better attract gay tourists to South Carolina to attempts to defeat gay marriage propositions at the city and state levels.

In *The Gay and Lesbian Atlas*, and in other work that uses statistics, maps, and census data to explore the geography of "gays and lesbians," Gates and Ost use a dataset that derives from a check-box on a census form that simplistically asks if one considers herself or himself part of a same-sex partnered household, not if they even identify or participate in a collective gay and lesbian identity, to make extremely problematic assertions about gays and lesbians. This is problematic, because, as Brown and Knopp (2006) explain

> … the categories themselves only allow inferences about *same-sex couple households*, which are a small and not entirely valid subset of the gay and lesbian population, since not all gays and lesbians live in same-sex households and not all same-sex households are gay and lesbian. The result is a governmental closet for all but those gays and lesbians who identify in the census as members of same-sex households. (p. 226)

By letting this data stand in proxy to the larger gay and lesbian population, as Gates and Ost frequently do in using the "Census to resist the closet, [they] unwittingly (and inevitably) reproduce certain aspects of it" (Brown and Knopp 2006, p. 224).

According to the *Atlas*, this census data is important to our understandings of "issues such as civil marriage for same-sex couples, gay and lesbian adoption rights, domestic partner benefits, and hate crime and antidiscrimination statutes" (Gates and Ost 2004, p. 3). The authors do not provide any clear explanation of how, logically, simply showing that self-identified same-sex partners are concentrated in certain census tracts, which they describe as “hard facts on the gay and lesbian population” (p. 3), can address issues such as civil marriage, adoption rights, etc without any deep contextualization of this data or even addressing caveats that have dominated discussions around queer geography. Gates and Ost argue that these data “illustrate that it [sic] is a sizeable voting block and an increasingly visible constituency in many American communities” (p. 3), without displaying any sensitivity to the fact that there may be deep spatial, social, economic differences within populations in the same census tract. More problematically, Gates and Ost extrapolate so-called “regional closets” from this data and argue some regions have bigger regional closets than other regions based on the simple assertion of those region’s “lower level of acceptance of homosexuality” (Gates 2007, p. 9). This is derived from the taken-for-granted premise that States that vote Republican are more socially conservative than States that vote Democrat and thus have larger closets, thus crudely scaling a phenomenon that is seriously understudied in geography (Brown 2000; Whitlock 2004), and which Sedgwick argues is the “defining structure of gay oppression (Sedgwick 1992, p. 71). If we have learned anything from Brown, who offered in *Closet Space* (2000) geography’s most sustained treatment of the closet, it is that the closet is an extremely complex spatial phenomenon and does not lend itself easily to being mapped, if only because it so effectively challenges our understandings of structure, agency, and even spatial assumptions about identity. The closet is intimate and extremely variable over both time and space and even politically ambiguous (Whitlock 2004). Lesbian and gay bodies challenge even often taken-for-granted microspaces like households (Elwood 2000), so how can we resort to the most coarse spatial expressions of the closet and say that queers in Atlanta, GA or Asheville, NC live in a larger regional closet than those in Poughkeepsie, NY or Condon, OR? Or, even more problematically, how can we say that a middle-class African-American gay man in Atlanta is less or more closeted than a working-class Hispanic lesbian in Atlanta? The closet cannot and should not be relegated to coarse understandings, especially those fueled by regional stereotypes, and it should never be mapped from agglomerated data, which often acts in the guise of promoting understanding but in fact only creates rigid and oftentimes incorrect understandings of how and where queers exist.

While acknowledging that "queer geography's intellectual ken in queer theory and poststructuralism has certainly contributed to a thoroughgoing interrogation of Cartesian rationality, Euclidean spatial ontologies, and the often norming fixity inherent in cartographic representation" (p. 40), Brown and Knopp (2008) still seek to make an epistemological compromise with mapping. Building off the work of feminist (Kwan 2002, 2004; Schuurman 2002, 2002) and participatory GIS (Elwood 2006), they offer up an ethnographic analysis of the production, using computer mapping, of a queer map for the Northwest Lesbian and Gay History project, "driven by [a] motivation to uncloset queer space empirically and visually, at the same time retaining as much as possible a sense of the queerness of what we were representing" (p. 49). More specifically, Brown and Knopp make the processes of mapmaking transparent by incorporating epistemologically-driven awarenesses throughout the mapmaking process that does not "just let the map speak for itself" (p. 44). This effectively translates into using the map's marginalia in order to elucidate the "colliding epistemologies" inherent in its production. In speaking back to a reviewer who questions the impact of this work on a GIS community who, because of their lack of familiarity with critical theory, "will remain unconvinced that there is anything of worth here," Brown and Knopp question why maps that seek to incorporate queer epistemologies are not being made. They argue that it may be suggestive of "structures of homophobia and heteronormativity, or their own ignorance of queer lives" and argue that queer theory, rather than "simply destabilizing epistemologies and ontologies" is "also about pointing out how normal and neutral forms of representation insidiously closet queer folk" (p. 55). Most cogently, Brown and Knopp assert that researchers "cannot just add gay and then lesbian layers to [their] shapefiles [sic]" (p. 55). This leaves a question that begs to be asked: Should queers, or by extension any vulnerable population, ever be a shapefile, which are built on databases that, because of the limits of their own ontology, must deal in the language of specific defined data-types which, when related to other data types, must have a very rigid and very specific definition of that relationship?[8] Or, more specifically, does mapping's inherent ontologically-based inability to deal with incoherency in a meaningful fashion outweigh any understandings that mapping and counting can offer? Does the rigidly incomplete knowledges gathered by visualizing this population in an easily accessible, easily visible, and easily comprehensible way trump the ontological violences that it performs, namely that the map itself does ontological work, especially given maps' abilities to shape opinions and create ontologies of the populations they show and the often uncritical audiences that view these maps as well (Monmonier and de Blij 1996)?

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8 It is because of this that, in teaching GIS, I start with the database and the inherent problems with laying out specifically the relationships (which can exist as one to one, one to many, many to one, and many to many) between different fields within a table. This is, of course, an a priori exercise, because there is no room for incoherency in a GIS database.

I am not unsympathetic to Brown and Knopp's critiques, nor do I seek to be dismissive of the political value of producing epistemologically, rather than methodologically, driven maps of queer folk or even queer epistemologies (Binnie 1997) in general. I also believe that Brown and Knopp make a valuable contribution and address many of the issues that researchers like Gates and Ost do not explore at all, especially in synthesizing feminist and participatory GIS literature's contribution to queer maps and most importantly not allowing the map to speak for itself but instead be a conflicted document that does not hide the problems inherent in its creation. Also admirable is the Brown and Knopp's reflexivity on both what the goal of their map was and their refusal to "scale up" these goals to the larger queer communities. However, I believe that, especially in mapping queers, our criticisms must go further if we are to ever redeem mapping this population, and we must firstly address that there is an ontology that runs through the mapping of gays and lesbians that should be addressed, which allows for the shapefiling of gays and lesbians in the first place and which is in danger of "standing in" for a more material ontology of queer bodies in space (Foucault 1977). Also, I differ with Brown and Knopp's use the somewhat general queer activist project of "claiming space" as one justification of making queer maps:

> The relevance of "Claiming Space" was never primarily policy oriented nor conceived as a tool

> to redistribute resources. Its relevance was constitutive: to claim sexuality and space as an urban historical geography, and to say, vividly and visually, "The city is our space, too" (Wick 2004, 1). That form of intervention—in the political context of an epistemology of the closet—surely is a powerful form of relevance! (p. 881)

Surely one could argue that, especially in the United States, this is moot post-Richard Florida, who served to put a city's attractiveness to "gays and lesbians" front and center to new urban economic success and has sent cities from Charlotte to Tempe trying to figure out how they can capitalize on their gay communities by quantifying and making them more visible (we have this many gays; we have more gays than x; our gays are richer than your gays). One could argue that, in 2010, the city is unquestionably "our" space; we are written all over it in richly visible (lesbian bars, gay-borhoods, and feminist bookstores) and nonvisible (informal activist circles, cruise areas, and locker rooms) ways that make a map of queer space seem almost disingenuous in its motivations, spaces whose occupants may or may not want to be made so easily appropriated or visible. After Florida and similar work that studies the economic impact of hom(o)wners to urban regimes and neighborhood revitalization (Knopp 1990), can we really assert that the city does not *see* us, much less consider us a valuable *object* of study? With these questions in mind, should we stop making maps of queer people in favor of new ways of materializing the spatial queer body? Or put more simply and perhaps crudely, should we just unmap queer geography?

My position on this is perhaps moderated, as I'm sure Brown's and Knopp's is, by the fact that, even in a discipline as critically aware as geography and especially in the larger world outside of geography, maps of gays and lesbians will never simply go away. Given the increasing economic validity of gays and lesbians, if we do not map queers, someone else will, so calling for an unmapping of queer geographies is first not pragmatic and second mostly serves to shut down the potentialities of these types of geographies. However, *if* there is a future for mapping queers in geography, this mapping must be done with full awareness that queer politics and materiality, and even heteronormativity in the early years of the 21st century, is in numerous ways different from the years in which most of our theoretical tools to understand this population were developed. Visibility is not always an unquestioned good and instead can serve interests that run counter to the more non-mainstream and radical segments of the queer population. The complex relationships that queers have with public spaces and how queers often muddy the neat binary of public/private separation cannot be tossed away. Only by engaging with the mapping literature's ontological conflation of queer bodies with "hard facts" derived from agglomerated data sources, especially its ontological privileging of those who are most *economically* important that often forms the primary impetus, as Cooke and Rapino (2007) point out, for quantitative scholars' examination of queers in the first place, can we counter, borrowing a term from Miranda Joseph (2002), the uncritical *romance* with counting gay men and lesbians that has proliferated through both the academy and the larger culture. Epistemologically, this romance is based on the liberal notion that increased visibility, numbers, and economic power are necessarily effective countermeasures to address the myriad oppressions experienced by a misleadingly coherent queer population, especially in terms of policy and governance. Rather than being effective "tools" of political action, i.e. if we know where queers are we can help them even more, most maps and statistical analysis of queer folk, especially those derived from the census, effectively *de-queer* queer socio-spatial relationships to such extent that they not only are ineffective in a methodological and epistemological way but bolster (hetero)normative constructions of this community. This should be considered alongside any analysis where we as geographers, and perhaps most importantly the users of our maps who may not be so spatially sophisticated, "see" queer ways of being. In the next sections, I develop an argument, based on queer theory's emerging material side and the work of Rose on visuality in our discipline, that geographers must not only develop better methodologies of mapping queers, in the tradition of Brown and Knopp specifically and Kwan, Schuurman, and Elwood generally, but also must be acutely aware of the material contexts and potential appropriations of our work. Or more simply, in addition to an attention on *how* we make maps, we should also be equally concerned on *what* our maps do.

The Visuality of Queer Maps and the Dematerialization of Queer

There is great potential of Gillian Rose's work on visuality to this debate. Rose's (1996; 2001; 2003) work on the importance of images in geography was groundbreaking in that it was the first sustained critique of the use of the visual in geography that also provided theoretically informed methodological guidance on these issues. Rose argues that geography is, at its core, an extremely visual discipline, but this emphasis on the visual must be tempered by the fact that visual renderings "are never innocent, … are never transparent windows on to the world,…they interpret the world…and display it in very particular ways" (2001, p. 6). She goes on to separate vision, what we are able to see, from visuality, "the ways in which vision is constructed in various ways," (Rose 2001, p. 6) and, working from Foster, explains that visuality is "how we see, how we are able, allowed, or made to see, and how we see this seeing and unseeing therein" (Foster 1988, p. ix). Rather than rehashing extant criticisms of how images themselves represent hierarchies, Rose instead chooses to concentrate on “the ways in which geographers and their images and audiences also intersect in ways that produce hierarchies and differences” (2003, p. 212). Rose, building from various literatures on visibility, designates three sites at which the meanings of images are made: 1. the site of production, 2. the site of the image itself, and most important to this paper, 3. the site of its audiencing. Rose argues that this third site is the most difficult, especially in how “economic processes and relations determine the meaning of visual images” (2001, p. 191), and she calls attention to the unsuitability of such methods as content analysis, with its assumption that “audience variability is a problem to be overcome rather than an issue to be explored” (p. 191), to these sorts of audiencing problems.

Rose’s work on visuality has found some traction in the feminist GIS literature. Kwan (2002b) uses Rose’s work on visualization in order to ask important questions about the intersections of feminist theory and GIS, namely around the critical agency of GIS users and increasing the visibility of women in GIS representations. However, most of the work on feminist GIS has centered around critiques of the oftentimes masculinist production of GIS output and have thus concentrated almost exclusively on how to incorporate feminist perspectives in the creation of GIS data, with special emphasis on the critical agency of the users and producers of GIS itself (Kwan 2002a). Thus, Schuurman's (2002) work on Haraway's cyborg theory and GIS and Kwan's (2000) work on using 3-D visualization in GIS to understand the daily movement of African-American women serve as excellent representative samples. Although this work has been an invaluable contribution to both the literature of GIS and critical feminist geography, especially in that it has challenged the sometimes overly neat assumptions that GIS is too problematic to contribute in any substantial ways to such a complex construction as gender, it often concentrates on methodological considerations to the detriment of any sustained discussion of the complex economic structures in which the products of this work often exists, especially around the potential for appropriation by economic and marketing interests that may not be shared by those whose lives and activities are being mapped, nor by those who are making the map itself. Therefore, I agree with Kwan that there needs to be much more attention paid in feminist and, although not the focus of her work, queer geography, to determine not only how visual representations are created but also "how these representations will be viewed and understood by the viewers in specific contexts," especially in the "tendency of our visual representations [to produce] the objectifying male gaze" (2002b, p. 276). To this "male" gaze, I would also add "heteronormative."

In addition to the feminist GIS literature, issues of cooptation and geographic representation has been explored in the growing literature around participatory GIS, which has sought to address issues of access, power, hierarchy and representation by increasing stakeholder participation in the goals, creation, and use of cartographic and GIS output. This emerged from “self-conscious reflexive efforts of some GIS researchers, but also through the efforts of non traditional user groups to gain access to GIS and adapt it to fit their spatial knowledge, priorities, and needs” (Elwood 2006, p. 694). Because of the empirical nature of this literature, empirics that often must balance complex and often conflicting interests of the organizations that it serves, participatory GIS has been especially concerned with the political ramfications of its work, yet to my knowledge, none of the discussions have centered around specifically queer issues, although there have been calls for an increased attention to the potential contributions of the intersections between critical theory and GIS, most often called “critical GIS” (Sheppard 2005; Cope and Elwood 2009), which would most likely include queer theory, along with postcolonial and critical race theories.

I would also argue that important to this debate, though rarely mentioned in either feminist or participatory GIS literatures, is the lack of development of a queer materiality. Although by no means a coherent group, many queer geographies, along with feminist and other cultural geographers who have extended poststructuralist theory into geography, have focused their lens in the cultural realm, to the exclusion of a substantial understanding of how queer bodies and spaces are materially linked to economic processes such as neoliberalism, global capitalism, and other social injustices. This has led to a call to “rematerialize” cultural geographies (McEwan 2003; Del Casino and Marston 2006) most controversially in Mitchell’s (1995) argument that culture is too relativist of a concept to be granted ontological, and we would assume material, status. Although a great amount of this criticism of cultural geography’s lack of materiality works from very limited frameworks of what exactly constitutes the “material,” most of queer geography’s work often builds theoretically on postmodern and poststructuralist theories, many of which do border on in-depth treatments of cultural texts without a concomitant recognition of the ties of this work to economic processes such as global capitalism, market policies, etc. (Harvey 1990). This has led to a tendency in the discipline for identities, especially sexual identities, to be considered without a critical understanding of how they are often linked to economic and other multi-site processes. Although there have been exceptions — for example Knopp’s work on the importance of gay men to processes of gentrification (1990; 1992; 1994; 1995) and Puar’s work on queer tourism (2001; 2002)— this work overwhelmingly has failed to allow the queer body (and to a large extent queer theory) to complicate larger spatial practices and economic frameworks of social justice analysis.

The debate over the materiality of queer politics is also apparent in the larger literatures of queer theory, which set out to "rethink identity in ways that would open up identity categories — man, woman, white, black, straight, gay — to the difference within them" (Hennessy 2000, p. 209). Queer theory's foundational thinkers — Butler (1993; 1999), Sedgwick (1985; 1992), Warner (1993; 2000; 2005) and Berlant (1997; Berlant and Warner 1998) — have almost exclusively centered their analysis in the cultural and textual realms, so much so that Michael Warner, in his introduction to *Fear of a Queer Planet* (1993) boldly dismisses class relations as "conspicuously useless" to our understandings of sexuality (p. *xxiv*). Thus identity, and the political realm that it occupies, was often seen through the exclusive, and increasingly abstract, lens of culture. Hennessy (2000) is very critical of this cultural turn in studies of sexuality, one that has left the work of capitalism in the production of sexuality "completely invisible" (p. 53). Hennessy's genealogy places the cultural refusal to consider class's mitigation of sexual relationships in the "intractable refusal of many of the socialist groups [and theorists] to meaningfully address sexuality, and homosexuality in particular" (p. 49). She argues that, by ignoring the interactions between sexual identity and the complex social processes of capitalism, and by concentrating instead on performative subjectivities, Butler and other queer theorists have reduced materiality to "simply a matter of norms" (p. 56). This "normative" understanding of social life, Hennessy argues, "limits social relations to the domain of culture and law" and "excludes in advance other important dimensions of social life from critical considerations" (p. 57). Hennessy calls for a reinsertion of class, not in how it has been misread by cultural queer theorists, but one that takes "a certain priority in capitalism" and that is a material "social relationship, not a reified cultural category" (p. 58). This, Hennessy argues, allows for a critique of the mechanisms that have pried apart labor and class from sexuality and affect (p. 51).

Most important to this paper, Hennessy argues that, because of this ontological binary, queer visibility itself has become a fetishized commodity in the current culture. Although acknowledging the debt that academics and activists have to organizations like the National Gay and Lesbian Task Force, the Human Rights Campaign Fund, and ACT-UP, she also is very critical of this commodification of cultural queer visibility, especially when it obfuscates the very real material processes that have led to the tendency of this visibility to produce “new and potentially lucrative markets” whose bottom line is, “as in most marketing strategies, money, not liberation” (p. 112). This often actively works against the stated goals of queer theory, especially in that *queer* “not only troubles the gender asymmetry implied by ’lesbian and gay,’ but potentially includes ’deviants’ and ’perverts’ who may traverse or confuse hetero-homo divisions and exceed or complicate conventional delineations of sexual identity and normative practice” (p. 113). This is nowhere more apparent than in how “visibility is still fetishized to the extent that it conceals the social relations new urban gay and queer identities depend upon” (p. 115), especially in the erasures that are often apparent in the liberatory tropes of gay and lesbian consumerism. Hennessy suggests that the problem that queer theory fails to address, especially in its current cultural form, is not the de-queering of bodies through identity politics, a common assertion in queer theory, but a *dematerialization* of the queer body itself, especially in a lack of acknowledgement of the social relationships, *vis a vis* labor and class, within which queer bodies exist. This is echoed in Alexandra Chasin’s (2000) examination of the importance of marketing and advertising in the creation of the contemporary gay and lesbian civil rights movement, along with a small body of work by queer theorists (Badgett 1994; 1997a; 1997b; Gluckman and Reed 1997; Strubb 1997) that address the economic importance of gays and lesbians that have found traction in mainstream avenues such as urban economic policy and public health.

Miranda Joseph, in *Against the Romance of Community* (2002), expands on this logic and offers an important Marxist critique to form an ultimately queer response to the discursive and material work that singular conceptions of community (especially conceptions of community that fall along often simplistic identity lines) often perform. Far from being a passive and pragmatic category around which people with deep differences strategically align themselves, Joseph argues that community "is one of the most motivating discourses and practices circulating in contemporary society" (Joseph 2002, p. xxx). In language that could be directly applied to this paper's argument, Joseph, building on the feminist and queer writings of Cherríe Moraga, Audre Lorde, and bell hooks, argues that there are serious concerns surrounding "singular identity categories as an organizing principle for social change" (p. xxii). Rather than letting *community* float innocuously above existing structures of oppressive power, she goes on to argue that "to invoke community is immediately to raise questions of belonging and power" (p. xxiii). Joseph does not argue, however, that community is not without its own logic, thereby turning a blind eye to community's discursive erasure of difference among those who exist in these community. Instead she argues that “many participants in identity-political movements have recognized that rather than simply referring to an existing collectivity, invocations of community attempt to naturalize and mobilize such a collectivity: *on both left and right* community is deployed to lower consciousness of difference, hierarchy, and oppression within the invoked group” [emphasis added] (p. xxiv). Joseph does not concentrate so much on the violence that this systematic and intentional erasure of difference creates but instead focuses her critique on “how community is produced and consumed, rather than what community ought to be” (p. xxxi). By “reading community as articulated through capitalism,” she argues that “progressive movements would be well-served by articulating themselves through a critique of capitalism” (p. xxxi).

That community, to Joseph, often hides its supplementarity[9] to capitalism in the decidedly anti-modern and anti-capitalist nostalgia for some past social space that pre-exists them both allows for a romance to exist that should be critically analyzed and resisted:

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[9] Joseph paraphrases Derrida’s definition of a supplementary reading as one that “denotes the void, the absent center, of any structure, suggesting that a given structure cannot be by itself coherent, autonomous, self-sustaining” (p. 2). She goes on to note that this implies that “the structure constitutively depends on something outside itself, a surplus that completes it, providing the coherence, the continuity, the stability that it cannot provide itself” (p. 2). Thus, a supplementary reading of race, for example, would seek to understand the ways that whiteness, far from being coherent on its own, depends on others of color in order to maintain its own coherency.

> Deployments of community, both verbal invocations and practices, are conditioned by a larger discourse of community, a pervasive way of thinking and doing community that would seem to answer all the important questions before they have even been asked, that sets the terms in which we might ask questions, and that shapes what we can see and do and even who we are. … This discourse includes a Romantic narrative of community as prior in time to "society," locating community in a long-lost past for which we yearn nostalgically from our current fallen state of alienation, bureaucratization, rationalization. It distinguishes community from society spatially, as local, involving face to face relations, where capital is global and faceless; community is all about boundaries between us and them, boundaries that are naturalized through reference to place or race or culture or identity, while capital would seem to denature, crossing all borders and making everything, everyone, equivalent. (p. 1)

In contra to this, Joseph argues that capitalism does not "entail freedom and equivalence" and in "generating and legitimating social hierarchy, …'community' supplements (enables, fills a void in) capitalism" (p. 9). Much like extant maps of gays and lesbians, which often masks its heteronormative removing of difference and political potential by framing the pre-defined "needs" of queer bodies in limited ways, the romance for community, far from being innocuous, is most dangerous in that it enables, through its supplementary relationship with its other, the very thing that it so self-consciously seems to work against. Also, concomitantly, Gates and Ost and other are seemingly unaware of the dual nature to such un-grounded tropes such as “community,” “gay and lesbian politics,” and “visibility,” especially in that, as we see in Joseph, these floating signifiers can actually erase necessary interrogations of how we construct our politics, our bodies, and most importantly representations of ourselves – visible or otherwise. I use Joseph and Hennessy here as a caution, a warning, and a challenge to do better, to be constantly critical of instruments that seek to norm us, to show us, to elucidate us, or more specifically complex notions of us, right out of existence.

Mapping Queers: Directions for Future Research and Practice

It would be easier perhaps to argue that GIS, cartography and such an ornery and complicated theory like queer theory are and should remain mutually exclusive and, given the potential dangers of appropriation and discursive erasures (Foucault 1982) that are seemingly inherent in cartographic representation, that we should simply unmap queer geographies. Easier, but not necessarily the most efficacious solution to these problems. With the data offered by the 2000 census and an increasing economic importance being attributed to gays and lesbians, the strive to show *where* gays and lesbians live, work, and perhaps most importantly, consume is not going to go away, no matter how many times we argue that maps and queers should not mix. Therefore, I share Sarah Elwood’s (2006) sentiment in justifying future work in participatory GIS :

> In 2005, speaking about the challenges of participatory GIS research with grassroots community organizations, I was asked, "Why use GIS? If it is so challenging and potentially problematic, why do it at all?" Interestingly, this inquiry was nearly identical to questions posed about early participatory GIS initiatives that began to emerge almost ten years ago, following the publication of *Ground Truth* (Pickles 1995) and other critical GIS texts. For me, the answer to this question remains largely the same. In spite of its limitations and challenges, GIS is tremendously important because it is such a powerful mediator of spatial knowledge, social and political power, and intellectual practice in geography. In short, the answer is the same today as it was ten years ago: Because the stakes are very high.

Indeed, as this paper has shown, the stakes *are* high, not only to geography but to the very communities that have to live with the cartographies and geographies that we, and others outside of our discipline, create. Instead of turning our backs on GIS and mapping, queer geographers should instead seek to explore potential radical intersections between the map and queer theory, not only methodologically but also with special attention on our responsibility to mitigate the dangerous potentials of any map to construct, interact, and be appropriated by multiple viewers. We must continue, following Brown and Knopp, to allow queer theory to complicate and muddy the processes of map creation and explore new ways that conflicting epistemologies can be represented in these maps' creation and display, textually and visually. Applying the material turn in queer theory, and the increased focus on homoeconomics and the caveats about the intersections of capitalism and queer communities, we need to be more attentive to the emerging economic desirability of gays and lesbians and more reflexive about how our work contributes to these interests, especially in the potential appropriation of any geographic representation of queers for the promotion of urban growth machines and other interests that, rather than being concerned about the liberation of the communities these maps represent, are often more concerned with promoting their own economic interests. We must move away from any justifications that work from singular conceptions of queer communities, especially in that queer theory has done a very good job of exploring the often conflicting nature of the goals and identitarian formations within these communities, as well as being very self-critical of how both theoreticians and non-theoretricians operationalize the term itself – what it means to those who utilize them and most importantly what its value is in elucidating the complex spatial processes of queer bodies and queer political actions.

Although there are immediate correlations between feminism and queer geographies (Knopp 2007), I argue that, although feminism and queer theory often share similar political goals, we should never forget that queer theory is most useful in that it brings its own set of problematics to anything it sets out to queer. Thus, although we should not ignore the work of feminist GIS and its potential contributions to queer GIS and mapping, we should also be extremely cognizant that it is not always a neat fit to the unique problems of queer communities, especially in the complex constructions that the queer body often finds itself, the changing nature of queer politics around issues of gay marriage, and the ways in which queer geographies should be developed in order to address the issues of appropriation by dominant regimes of urban growth and development, issues of the closet and the problematics of visibility within this community, the often non-normative sexual practices within these populations, and concerns around the isolation of queers outside of the urban space. Therefore, we should open up conversations between feminist GIS, critical GIS, and queer GIS, not only in how we are similar but also in how we may and should differ. It is only by seriously considering these issues can we move outside of the confrontational polemics between cartographic representation and critical geographies and break new ground in both queer geography and in GIS.

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APPENDIX C: BEYOND SUBVERSION: BECOMING-BEAR IN THE *AFFINITE GAP* OF RADICAL MASCULINITY

"What is 'masculinity'?" (Halberstam 1998, p. 1)

"Ain't much of a difference between a bridge and a wall…" From *Hedwig and the Angry Inch* (2001)

In her 1998 examination of *Female Masculinity*, Judith Halberstam starts her discussion by asking what *is* masculinity? Rather than being rhetorical or pedantic, Halberstam asserts that this question is central because, without it, we are in danger of reducing masculinity to "the social and cultural and indeed political expression of maleness" (p. 1). Because of this reduction, Halberstam argues that feminist theory has avoided a substantive discussion of "how masculinity is constructed as masculinity" (p. 1), a construction that she argues is problematic and made even more so when examining the "rejected scraps of dominant masculinity" that often comprise female masculinity (p. 1). But exploring these "rejected scraps" is also productive in that it exposes in a very material way the "mythologies" that have made "masculinity and maleness … profoundly difficult to pry apart" (p. 2). Rather than shying away from the contradictory tensions inherent in female masculinity, Halberstam instead uses it to make a powerful argument that, instead of a kinder and gentler imitation of masculine male-embodiment, female masculinity is valid masculinity in its own right. Most importantly, however, female masculinity offers both a challenge to patriarchal masculinity and a call to rethink how feminist and queer theories have limited masculinity by reducing experiences of it to the male body. By expanding our examinations of masculinity from their traditionally heterosexual embodiments and essentially "queering" it, Halberstam's work calls us to ask how masculinity operates across all bodies — male or female — where it *rarely* functions as a taken-for-granted and unproblematic category.

This work answers that call and extends it through the geographic discussion of the masculine experience into these problematic and mostly unmapped spaces of masculinity, where the affective body and the category fail to neatly snap together in any smooth way, creating gaps that not only destabilize the foundations of the category but rupture it in productive and ultimately inclusive ways. Rather than striving to resolve these conflicts, to patch the gaps created between representation and non-representation, it argues instead for a radical embrace of the tensions that exist between categorical masculinity, the nonnormative and seemingly normative bodies that often uneasily and affectively wear it, and the bodies who sometimes but not always feel excluded from it but have affinity with it. It does this first by introducing to geography an understudied subculture of gay men called the Bears, who use archetypical masculinity as the foundational cornerstone of their identities yet exist in constant struggle with their often problematic personal and communitarian constructions of it. This paper seeks to move beyond an examination of Bears in a representational sense, especially in that representational theories fail to adequately capture the radically open and *affinite*[10] potential inherent in the material masculinity of the Bears. Instead, it explores the gap that exists between representational theories and Deleuze's non-representational machinic theories of difference, repetition, and becoming. Rather than treating the differences in these ontologies as an infinite gap that can never be bridged, it proposes a counter-theory, ontologized as the *affinite gap*, that rather than limiting gay male and male-embodied masculinities to truly nonradical and oppressive past representations of it, or alternatively rigidly limiting it to its non-representational moments, free it to become radical in an *affinite* sense by creating openings in and between the category itself.

This pause to consider the radical nature of masculinity comes at a time when the nuanced spatial experiences of men, and by extension masculinity, are becoming ever-more established as a relevant focus of geographic work (Pile 1994; Woodward 1998; Berg 1999; Valentine 1999; McDowell 2000a; 2000; 2001; Jackson, Stevenson et al. 2001; 2002; Berg and Longhurst 2003). Although these first wave of writings on the

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[10] I derive the word *affinite* from three different roots. The first, and most important, is that of *affinity*, which finds commonalities in difference. The second is *affect*, especially how the affective nature of bodies often defy categorical representation. The third is in contrast to the *infinite gap* that is often created by the either/or nature of discussions around non-representational and representational ontologies.

geographies of masculinities have done the very important work of making visible, following Connell (2005) and similar works by Kimmel (1995; 2006), the unhegemonic experiences of men and addressing the additional lack of spatial understanding apparent in the existing cultural studies and theorizations of masculinity and men, geographers have been very reticent to push the concept of *masculinity* itself in any new theoretical direction, especially in examining how it operates in nonnormative, affinite, and radical ways. Instead they have taken their lead from representational feminist theorists and feminist geographers in order to conceptualize, theorize, and criticize men's spatial practices. Most important to this paper's argument, outside of the geographic literature on gay men that rarely addresses *masculinity* in any sort of ontological way, intersections between radical queer theory and masculinity have been mostly underexplored, especially in the often important ways that lesbian and gay male bodies operate within the category of masculinity and in the larger communities and spaces in which those bodies exist and interact.

This has left us a literature that has failed to separate the constructions and practices of *masculinity* from the constructions and practices of heterosexual *men* and *boys*, who have increasingly been the focus of geographic studies of youth masculinity (Cunningham and Jones 1991; Maynard 1999; McDowell 2000a; McDowell 2000b; McDowell 2002). And most importantly, as I rectify in this paper, it has left us unable to allow, as Halberstam does, the radical potential of embodied masculinity in men *and* women, both straight and queer, to cut through the moribund identity politics that radical queer and feminist theories repeatedly caution against and move instead toward an *affinity* politics of masculinity that embraces rather than eliminates difference. Geographers, realizing that material bodies often react against and bend the very categorical representations that they affectively take on, should instead move beyond the experiences of different men in different spaces to explicitly ask, in a focused and sustained way, the even more important and more theoretically significant questions of what *is* masculinity, what is its potential, and what does a thorough geographic theorization of it add to the current discussions in the larger bodies of cultural studies and social sciences. And, even as we have seemingly all agreed that critical studies of masculinity have a place in geography, we have failed to ask, to the detriment of a discipline that is finding more relevance than ever in academia because of its willingness to embrace radical and cross-disciplinary thinking and to those larger bodies of literature that look to geography as a partner in radical political projects, what exactly would (or even *should*) a radical masculinity look like?

First Wave Geographies of Men and the Limits of Representation

Because geography was a bit late to the table in examining men and masculinity (Berg and Longhurst 2003), most of the “first wave” of work on the geographies of men and masculinity have existed in a tradition that has actively sought to be sympathetic to and complementary of feminist criticisms of patriarchy, oppressions of women across space, and the lack of sensitivity to and visibility of these oppressions in geographic studies. Peter Jackson (1991), in his seminal work on the cultural politics of masculinity, called attention to the often uneasy positionality of men in the feminist project and unnuanced portrayal of them in feminist literature. As a result, he argues that “it has been easier for…men to voice our support of feminist imperatives rather than to work through the contradictions of our own experiences as men” (1991, p. 199), especially in how those experiences are mitigated by race and (hetero)sexuality. Jackson’s call to understand the experiences of men in the larger theoretical framework of feminist theory rather than the reactive drum and chest banging of the mythopoetic men’s movement created both a tonal and theoretical trajectory in geographic literature, and in the last decade, there has been a surging interest in the material and spatial experiences of men and boys, a high percentage of which, to Jackson’s credit, has been written by feminist geographers.

Geographers have naturally injected a spatial sensitivity into the overall work on masculinities and have shown not only how masculinities exist in non-hegemonic ways but also how the experiences of men vary across multiple spatial contexts, including the urban (Sommers 1998), the internet and cyberspaces (Lagran 2003), the workplace (McDowell 2000a; 2002), postcolonial landscapes (Berg 1999), and spaces of disability (Valentine 1999). One of the most prolific areas for examinations of masculinity has been the rural space, especially the work of Jo Little (2000; Little 2002; 2003), and attention there has been focused on the specific amplifications and mitigations of masculinity that exist in the unique contexts of nonurban landscapes. Case studies have been conducted that explore masculinity and farming advertisements (Brandth 1995), masculinity and forestry (Brandth and Haugen 2000), and masculinity and military practice in the countryside (Woodward 1998; 2000). Although Philo (1992) lists the nonurban experiences of gay men among his many neglected rural geographies, the varied and well established examinations of the spatial experiences of gay men have mostly been explored in the urban context (Harry 1974; Lyod and Rowntree 1978; Castells 1982; Knopp 1990; 1994; Brown 1997; Bell 2000b; Brown 2000). Our spatial understandings of the tenuous and often contradictory relationships gay men have with masculinity in general, or more specifically how the nonurban landscape is seen as a space among certain subcultures of gay men where new masculine identities can be forged to address their perceived “placelessness” in the larger urban gay male community, still very much remain neglected geographies, although some have started to work in that direction (Bell 2000a; 2000b; Bell and Holliday 2000). My own future work will be concentrated here as well.

This last point suggests that there are still certain directions that present themselves when looking back on this literature, especially in the disconnects that considerations of masculinity in geography possess with the larger body of queer and radical gender theory. Halberstam’s queer deconstruction of female masculinity is a powerful example of the radically *affinite* potential of *masculinity* when it is removed from its usual context of the male body, but it is also a powerful reminder of the affective excesses that we lose by limiting masculinity to its traditional heterosexual embodiment and to representational theories that treat the matter of the body as an afterthought of representation. It is ironic then, given that so much of the geographies of masculinity were developed with feminist frameworks in mind, that non-heterosexual constructions of masculinity, specifically in how it is radically and very visibly embraced in alternative gay male communities like the Bears and Leather & S/M cultures but also how it works through lesbian space, is perhaps the most underdeveloped in geographic literature. Bell and Binnie’s (1994) argument that the hypermasculine bodies of gay men and their spaces, along with those of the hyperfeminine lesbian, have the radical potential to expose "not only the fabricated nature of heterosexuality but also its claim to authenticity" (p. 33) has never been expanded.

The hypermasculine being of the Bears challenges neat assumptions of how masculinity and the male body interact. Although masculinity is the cornerstone in the constructions of a Bear identity, it is one built squarely on a fault line of contradictory tensions between a heterosexual culture that does not take their unhinged masculinity seriously and a more mainstream homosexual culture that has always treated them as mostly invisible. Rather than follow many in the culture and lament this tension, I argue that Bear masculinity is at its most radical and most *affinite* not in its strive to be a rock solidly stable categorical construction but in its temporary affective slips that rupture the category altogether, moving it from a prescriptive necessity to what Jack Fritscher calls a "beautiful blank" (Suresha 2002a). Most importantly, however, these temporary slips not only rupture the category but open it up completely to affinity.

What exactly *is* a Bear masculinity, anyway?

Growing out of such diverse gay male subcultures as the Radical Faeries, leather, S/M cultures, and the seventies clone trend, the Bears have evolved from a little known phenomenon in the SoMa district in 1970s San Francisco (still an enclave of all things Bear to this day) into a recognized and increasingly visible movement. They have been parodied in a

John Waters movie (2004), been mentioned twice on *The Simpsons*, have had movies made about them (the 2004 Spanish feature *Cachorro* being the most prominent example), and have everyone from Camille Paglia to Andrew Sullivan, who in 2003 suddenly claimed to be one, singing their praises (Paglia 1999; Sullivan 2003). In addition, Bears have their own websites for meeting each other (Bear411.com and BearWWW.com being the two most prominent), books from fiction to nonfiction of which they are the subject (*Bears on Bears*, *The Bear Book (I* and *II)*, *Bear Like Me*, *The Bear Cult*, *The Bear Handbook* etc.), numerous magazines catering to their tastes (*BEAR Magazine*, *American Grizzly*, and *A Bear's Life*), and countless businesses and bars that have recognized them as an emergent market and responded in kind (Hennen 2005; RfB 2006). Although there is no one overarching definition of what makes one a Bear, they tend to weigh more and be more hirsute than the stereotypical gay male often gracing the covers of such mainstream publications as *Out*, *Genre*, and *The Advocate.* Bears also tend to glorify masculinity, drawing heavily on such über-masculine archetypes as the frontiersman, the lumberjack, etc. (Locke 1997). Unlike the clone cultures of the seventies and early eighties which as Tom of Finland's artistic works show took stereotypes of masculinity—police officers, construction workers, etc.—and amplified them to almost drag-like proportions, Bear masculinity tends to take itself more seriously and yet be much more understated, drawing more heavily upon blue collar and rural aesthetics — beards, jeans, and work boots — than their counterparts in other urban gay male subcultures (Rofes 1997; Suresha 1997; Wright 1997b; 1997a; Suresha 2002c; 2002b; Hennen 2005).

As Hill (1997) and Sullivan (2003) so accurately note, masculinity is valued above all else within the Bear movement—in personal ads, advertisements, magazines, and porn. This has led one Amazon.com reviewer of Ray Kampf's *The Bear Handbook* (2000) to lament that the book presents Bears as solely "butch, … as if Mama Bears don't exist!" (Amazon.com 2007). This criticism, both inside the Bear community and in the larger gay community in which it exists, is nothing new. There have been many wars among self-identified Bears as to what, actually, constitutes a member of the Bear community, along with a concomitant cynicism for any foundational tropes that attempt to define what a Bear should be: Does one have to be hairy? Does one have to be butch? Does one have to like the outdoors? What about straight people? What about women? This tension is very evident throughout the texts that have explored Bear culture, and much of the work almost self-consciously strives to keep the practice of Bear masculinity as open to new interpretation as possible. However, although there is still a tolerance among most of the Bear community for differing body-types, dispositions, and attitudes, the ideal of a "butch" masculinity still pervades even as the movement approaches its third decade, as any walk through a Bear bar or any time spent on a Bear personals site will immediately make clear. This obsession with masculinity is an artifact of the Bear movement's original affiliation with the larger mythopoetic men's movement, popularized by Robert Bly's controversial *Iron John* (1990). Robert B. Marks Ridinger traces its coeval development within the gay male culture as well:

> Discussions of "what it means to be a man" had been ongoing in the gay male community since its very inception… *Indeed, the very concepts of being masculine and homosexual were viewed by many as mutually exclusive*, notably psychologists and counselors. The new … men's movement … offered a model … to men within the gay community whose physical types and social and spiritual needs were not being reflected by established images such as the queen or the clone. (Ridinger 1997, p. 85) [emphasis added]

Although the mythopoetic men's movement has been rightly criticized for its often exclusionary heteronormative prescriptions (Bonnet 1996), it is important to note the *affinite gap* created by the mythopoetic men's movement that opened a social and spiritual space in the category of masculinity that was and still is very inclusive of gay men. Because of this *affinite gap* that it opened in masculinity, especially a more responsible and caring masculinity that strives to redeem itself from the oppressions of its historical counterpart and more "sincere" and "authentic" than that found in the feminist discourse, it has allowed a redeemed masculinity to serve as a productive and ultimately radical capstone to Bear identity formation since the inception of the movement. The tagline for now defunct *BEAR* magazine, the first and still perhaps the most pervasive publication of the Bear movement, proudly proclaimed in an homage to Bear's mythopoetic beginnings, "Masculinity - without the trappings". And although gay male masculinity is rarely dealt with in a popular mythopoetic literature that chooses instead to dwell on reactionary missives against women and especially as the mythopoetic movement struggles to deal with its decreasing relevance in the 21st century, it is ironic that its most vital and lasting remnant may be Bear masculinity.

Although the Bear movement grew directly from this search for a more sincere and positive conception of gay male masculinity, specifically grounded in mythopoetic models of support for other men, the erotic aspects of masculinity also served as foundational fodder to the movement. Bear masculinity is most often contextualized as a response to a perceived hegemonic gay femininity, as Jack Fritscher, who in 1975 co-founded *Drummer* magazine and who has proven to be an eloquent yet controversial voice both as a supporter and critic of the Bear movement, expresses in the following excerpt from an interview with Ron Suresha on "ursomasculinity":

> Everybody was reading *Drummer,* [one of the first magazines which featured erotic content for masculine-identified gay men]. It was the third glossy format magazine founded after Stonewall.

> The rest were like *Blue Boy* and *Queen's Quarterly*, [which] were mostly pictures and jokes — men pretending they were girly, or doing that sort of self-hating satire of masculinity. ... Basically, gay male self-hatred of the masculine animus comes from straight people's stereotype that *gay men are not real men* [emphasis added], are girly, effeminate, and maybe even, a third sex. ... Ultimately, Bears are a masculine retort to that kind of effeminate stereotype which people feel they can control like they think they can control women... (Suresha 2002a, p. 80)

Fritscher's almost vitriolic disdain for campy femininity inherent in the larger gay male culture is important, as it is characteristic of much of the Bear discourse that sees the movement as a reaction to its members' "placelessness" within gay culture. However, Fritscher's arguments here and elsewhere are far from a simplistic or heterosexist casting of gay male femininity. Fritscher is fully aware of the ramifications of his statements, both to the homospace of narrowly defined gay-male gender and to the heteronormative structure that makes it necessary. Although Fritscher goes on to clarify in his interview that he is tolerant of these manifestations, he quite strongly asserts his beliefs that the pervasiveness of the feminine gay male stereotypes has its origins in an internalized masculine-phobia among the larger gay culture, which is instilled by heteronormative expectations of how gay men should "do" gay.

Fritscher's quote also suggests the radical potential of Bear masculinity, especially how it sets itself in counterpoint to the often hegemonic imaginaries of how gay men should act and how they perceive themselves. That he classifies Bear masculinity as a “retort” to “effeminate stereotypes” that get caught up in discourses of control and expectation is even more provocative, especially in its succinct framing of Bear masculinity as a radical response to patriarchal and heteronormative gender expectations. Although, following from Fritscher, gay masculinity, especially as it is practiced among Bears, has the potential to challenge oppressive and compulsory heteronormative notions of how gay men “do” gender, the discursive tendency to capture this practice in the images of what a Bear “looks” like or how a Bear should “act” has proven to be very problematic within the culture. Many in the movement have lamented how quickly the focus has moved from explorations of masculinity to a territorialized encoding of what Bear masculinity should be through images in Bear media, Bear “beauty” contests, and the glorification of a narrow segment of the Bear population in porn:

> What began, perhaps, as a reaction against prevalent gay behavioral and visual models has led to something that is just as rigid and just as reactionary as what went before. … That more and more bear groups are being founded has little to do with increasing numbers of men getting in touch with their masculinity, or expressing it with simplicity, love, or affection for other men. (McCann 1997, p. 258)

Although masculinity continues to be a foundational trope of the movement, another equally important trope has been tolerance for different body sizes and shapes. Fritscher, always the critic, sees this as a threat to the very foundations of what it means to be a Bear and places the original definition of a Bear in hirsuteness (and by extension masculinity) and not weight. He laments that "everyday the measure goes up on what weight a Bear is before he becomes a chubby" (Suresha 2002, p. 92). Fritscher centers his criticism in the fact that most people are drawn to the movement because they are looking for an easy categorization, which dilutes the more "authentic" origins of the Bear movement:

> "Bear" has appeal because it's not exclusionary. Unfortunately, it's a cheap way to pull off an image. If you go into any crowd of Bears, you'll see mostly a bunch of stereotypes, rather than an archetype. Most gay men don't even know how to walk like man! I mean there should be a butch academy — not in the bad sense of butch, but to overcome the self-hating effeminacy and PC-whipped passivity lived as lifestyle by some gay men. (Suresha 2002, p. 93)

Although Fritscher's statements sound extreme, they are very much indicative of those in the movement who fear that Bear bars, websites, and chatrooms have been overrun by a bunch of fat sissies that fit in nowhere else but the Bear community. Fritscher's sentiment is echoed in many of the profiles found on Bear411, the most popular meeting site in "cybearspace" (Suresha 2002). One particular profile, which expresses a sentiment that is by no means uncommon on the site, asserts that "if 'mangina,' 'girlfriend,' or 'diva' is part of your vocabulary, we are probably not compatible as friends" (Bear411 profile). These statements are often followed, as is the case in this profile, by assertions of the member's more "valid" masculinity, often supported by claims of physical health, fitness, and a love for the "outdoors" and "wilderness." The outdoorsy, masculine brutish man is the ideal that Bears must live up to. After all, what "diva" can worry about his "mangina" when there is wood to be chopped and animals to be killed? It is perhaps not surprising then that the frontiersman archetype recurs almost self-consciously throughout Bear porn and through advertisements targeted at the Bear community. This use of wilderness as a space that bolsters Bear masculinity cannot be underemphasized. In *The Bear Cult: Photographs by Chris Nelson* (1992), the first picture in the collection is that of John Muir, the turn of the century wilderness advocate who founded the Sierra Club and prolifically wrote about his experiences in the Western wilderness. Muir is posited as the "original" Bear. And that many Bear events often center around camping and outdoor living in nonurban space is material evidence that this nonurban spatiality of Bear identity is not just "campy" portrayals of masculinity to most in the community. It is in this troubling of wilderness (Cronon 1995) along with gender, specifically the queering of how masculinity and wilderness are related, that is perhaps the Bears' greatest contribution, especially in how they challenge taken for granted assumptions of what practice and what people belong in what spaces.

This could inject a much need critical analysis of masculinity and wilderness into the feminist political ecology debate (Roucheleau, Thomas-Slayter, Wangari 1996).

Because I am primarily concerned here with the potential of the Bears to affectively rupture our ideas of masculinity and in that rupturing open up the category to challenges and radical reorientation, I do not find any traction in the exclusionary rhetoric of mythopoetic authenticity or in any homophobic and misogynistic conceptions of how "real men" should do masculinity, especially when this excludes, as they do in Fritscher's arguments, the equal and very real radical potential of the feminine gay man. Nor do I find any traction in the nostalgic-fueled pessimism about the movement's evolution from its supposed origins in the mythopoetic men's movement (or the longing for a masculine reality grounded in wilderness narratives that it implies) into a more "superficial," but hopefully less prescriptive, plane. However, I agree with Fritscher's assertion that the radical potential of the Bears is that "*Bear* is a concept so receptively blank that as a label it welcomes and absorbs all masculine fantasies, fetishes, identities, and body types" (Suresha 2002, p. 80). What I find most radical about the Bears can rarely be found in the extant discourse posited by them in their porn or in their numerous metawritings that often put a bit too much energy defining what they are not. It is ironically and materially suggested in an understated but productive editorial introduction written by a straight feminist woman for *A Bear's Life*, established in 2005 as the first non-porn lifestyle magazine dedicated to the Bear community. Caroline Corley, the copy editor for the magazine, writes that, in working with the Bears, she has realized that "I'm not all that different from my bear brothers and that we actually have a lot in common" (Corley 2006, p. 4).

What Corley's statement drives home, and ironically what Fritscher rallies against through the rest of his interview with Ron Suresha, is the core radical power of the Bears. Their imperfect mapping of seemingly stereotypical representational masculinity onto their affectively non-heteronormative and decidedly non-stereotypical bodies, allowing the light of affinity to shine through the gaps created, opens up the traditionally exclusionary cartography of masculinity to new interpretations and new inclusions. Corley's statement suggests that Bear masculinity is at its most radical *not* when it is protecting the sanctity of an oppressive heterosexual masculinity that never applied to them anyway, or even when it completely subverts the narrow views posited by heteronormative conceptions and homonormative denials of it by policing who belongs in the sacred Bearspace of masculinity. Bear masculinity is radical simply for not lining up *perfectly* with either gay femininity or straight masculinity and thus subverts both. Because of this, there is much to be learned from reading the Bears through Butlerian representational theories of performativity and citationality (Butler 1993; 1999), if only to understand how their subversive potential expands Butler's theories. However, in order to understand the full radical potential of Bear masculinity and understand the truth of Corley's statement, to move beyond subversion and into a productive opening of the category, we must also add the theoretical tools to understand how this imperfect mapping creates an *affinite gap* within it, an inherent immanence that prevents Bear masculinity from ever being trapped in a repetition of either gay femininity or straight masculinity and thus always leaving open an affective difference that redefines the categories altogether. It is this *affinite gap* that opens up the concept of masculinity for all, just as the mythopoetic men's movement opened the concept of masculinity for gay men. And also, it is this *affinite gap*, embodied in the Bears and in the statements of Corley, that are made invisible if we limit the Bears to subversion.

Performativity and Subversion

Judith Butler's representational gender theories have gained significant traction in feminist theorizations of space in geography (Nash 2000; Longhurst 2001; Bondi 2004; Valentine 2007). Butler's theories have been very useful in breaking down, as Domosh (1999) does, the boundaries between the constructions of gender and the seemingly objective realities of sex, especially in how these tensions operate across spatial contexts. Also, performativity has been used as an entrance into our geographic understandings of performance and affect, as exemplified by Nash's (2000) exploration of the intersections of affect geographies and the geographies of dance. This ubiquitousness of Butler's theorizations continue into the geographies of masculinity, especially in challenges to how hegemonic masculinities are challenged by the particular spatial practices of men (Longhurst 1997; Woodward 1998; Little and Jones 2000; Day 2001; Little 2002; 2003). Butler, and other cultural representational theorists such as Warner (1993; 2005), have endured significant criticism from more marxist leaning critical theorists such as Hennessy (2000), especially in how theories based on performativity "present sexual identification as the effect of *discourses* … that assemble a provisional coherence on the surface of the body" (Hennessy 2000, p. 55). Hennessy's main problem with Butler's theories is that "materiality of the body is inseparable from regulatory conventions that function in a performative fashion to constitute sex and to materialize the body's sex and sexual difference," thereby reducing materiality to "a matter of norms" which are always open to subversion (p. 57). However, she rightly argues that this normative reduction of materiality limits our understanding of the often complex and contradictory nature of social relations and the bodies that operate within them and have thus limited our understandings of the interlinked politics of sexuality and gender.

Although Hennessy is mostly arguing for gender theory that is more aware of economic and market politics, our almost exclusive reliance on representation has also shifted our attention away from how the often affective, non-representational, and material nature of bodily practice often conflicts with the representational nature of categorizations. This is nowhere more apparent than in Hennen's (2005) work on the Bears. Instead of concentrating on the radical potential of the Bears' use of masculinity, how Bear bodies often tear through categories of masculinity and create *affinite gaps* within it, Hennen's treatment concentrates on how the Bears reinstitute patriarchy and heteronormativity through their sexual practices, a criticism that itself reduces the complex nature of "topping" and "bottoming" in gay male communities to its somewhat inapplicable heterosexual counterparts. By doing so, I argue that Hennen misses the point. It is not in how Bears affirm categories but in how they defy them, and by defying them open them up, thus making their practices of masculinity such a fascinating subject. It is perhaps not surprising that Hennen misses this *affinite gap* because he reads the Bears through Butler and other feminist theorists, and as a result, can never see Bear masculinity, in the last instance, as anything other than politically threatening. However, this suggests the obvious question. If Butler, and the representational ontologies that she presents cannot get us there, who can? In order to answer this, we must move beyond subversion and consider ontologies that are non-representational in nature.

Beyond Subversion: Notes for a Radical Ontology of Masculinity

My reticence to read Bear masculinity, or masculinity in general, exclusively through Butler stems from my own personal experiences with how the affinite potential of Bear masculinity can often be wiped out if read exclusively through representational theory. The local Bear group to which I belong experienced, previous to my membership, a somewhat lengthy debate on whether the Bearspace of our events should be limited only to men. After exploring issues such as the narrow definition of "male," especially concerning female-to-male transgendered bodies, and whether women should be excluded from clothing-optional events, the group overcame a highly vocal and misogynistic minority to state that Bear events sponsored by the group, even clothing-optional ones, were to be made open to everyone — straight, gay, male, female, transgendered, etc. This is not just lip-service. I have, on many occasions, seen straight men, effeminate gay men, and straight and gay women at these functions, all of whom are made to feel welcome and included. While this may be the case for our local Bear group, but the designated "Bear" bar in town, which caters not only to Bears but also to leather and other masculinist gay male subcultures, actively works to exclude both straight and gay females from the bar. Although there are patrons who do not support this policy and there are bartenders that actively subvert it as well, this exclusion is done in numerous ways. Female customers are often the last to be served by the more misogynistic bartenders, and women often experience very loud resistance from some patrons when they enter the bar, with women often being called "pussies," "cunts," and "fish" and then summarily told to go home. This is even more spatially enforced by the lack of a women's restroom, which rather than being a gesture of solidarity between the genders is actually a tactic of discomfort. Drag queens often endure the same harassment, although to a lesser extent, so even representations of femininity are scorned and bodies that display them are often negated from the category of "men." On top of this, the bar advertises itself as the town's only "Bar for *Men*," making very clear to whom the space belongs.

Although I do not want to suggest a simplistic spatial reading that puts these two spaces into an easy binary, I believe these two spaces of gay male masculinity elucidate our problem. The bar is obviously a space based heavily in the exclusivity of masculinity and the Bear event is a space that opens up the heretofore closed space of masculinity to others' participation within it. Obviously, the space of the bar, with its naturalized assumptions of what constitutes the spaces of masculinity and who belongs in them, lines up very well with what Butler is rightly trying to tear down and is a space ripe for subversion. However, if we read the space of the Bear group's events through Butler, dutifully searching for naturalized and oppressive spatial practices of masculinity which are both supported and subverted by Bear practice, we are in danger of missing the *affinite gaps* altogether, *affinite gaps* that have always been inherent within it. A sufficient theorization of masculinity can allow for both. I offer Deleuze's non-representational theory, especially in how it has been read in geography, as an oppositional endpoint that creates a gap between itself and a representational endpoint that *limits* masculinity's potential. It is interesting that Dewsbury (2000), departing from Butler and working with Deleuze's theories on difference, reads the performative as a gap. I seek to do the same here, but rather than settling with Deleuze to do away with the representational nature of Butlerian performativity, I use him in tension with Butler rather than as her replacement. So, what does Deleuze offer masculinity that Butler does not?

A Deleuzean intervention offers an immanent ontology of masculinity, a being in itself that finds a way out of the ontological traps that we have set for it and ourselves. Deleuzean interventions range from geographies of emotions (Anderson and Smith 2001; McCormack 2003; Davidson and Milligan 2004; Thien 2005), the body (Dewsbury 2000; Hall 2000; Harrison 2000; Valentine 2003), and political action (Thrift 2004). Most controversially, Marston, Jones and Woodward (2005) move beyond affect and emotion and use Deleuze's non-representational theories to challenge how our constructions of scale often serve to preframe and limit our understanding of geographic problems. I would like to extend Marston, Jones, and Woodward's criticisms of the *a priori* nature of scale into our constructions of masculinity.

I will risk three assertions, important to the *affinite gap*. First, because of Deleuze's emphasis on difference and how repetition by no means necessarily limits it, it offers an ontological challenge to a politics of masculinity that relies on representational identity politics, which is nothing more than repetition that seeks categorical visibility by necessarily wiping out differences within categories. Deleuze's theories offer a more forward looking politics of masculinity that is open to difference in each of its repetitions and, because of this, challenges the often cautious traditional ways that the category and the bodies living in it and through it have often been represented. Second, I will also assert that the non-representational nature of Deleuze should by no means serve as our stopping point and should instead serve as a complication to representation, the aforementioned endpoint that creates a gap in our thinking. Deleuze's contribution to our current analysis should be treated much as he presents the *concept*, not as a given but as a problem — a machine, even — that challenges us to consider how our traditional representational assumptions often close off our ability to see the radical potential right in front of our faces. Finally, the representational ontologies of Butler and the non-representational ontologies of Deleuze are, as we have suspected all along, not ontologically compatible, however they are not necessarily antinomic either, especially in that Deleuze, through the *concept*, creates an *affinite gap* that allows for them to speak to each other. We can use this momentary conceptual cease-fire to create an *affinite gap* in masculinity that, instead of smoothing out the affective differences that violently push through the category, embrace them in a radically productive way.[11]

Although *masculinity* as a concept has come to be defined in a certain way through feminist theories, we should never forget that there are very real and infinitely complex bodies — queer, female, straight, bisexual, transgender — operating within it who often bend the boundaries of the category and thus challenge the closed nature of the concept altogether. Thus, Deleuzean concepts are not "abstract concepts [that] merely gather together discrete particulars *despite* their differences" and "do not privilege concepts over what is supposed to be explained" (Stagoll 2005, p. 51). The concept, for Deleuze, is the "means by which we move beyond experience so as to be able to think anew" (Stagoll 2005, p. 51), and

[11] My reading here of gaps is influenced firstly by Richard J. F. Day's (2005) critical reading of the newest social movements and how affinity often works through and between them. Day uses the Deleuzean concept of the *smith* to offer helpful insights on the usefulness of affinities between groups whose objectives may differ but who find radical potential in temporarily working together. It is also undoubtedly influenced by Slavoj Zizek's *The Parallax View* (2006), a summation of his project to revitalize Marxist dialectical materialism through Lacanian theories of the Real. I am not, however, trying to insert a Zizekian reading onto Bear masculinity.

therefore should be used to explore connections and new lines of thinking, or as Amin and Thrift (2005, p. 22) argue “the promotion of emergence through the process of disagreement.” This suggests that Deleuze is not, as has been suggested, exclusively a non-representational theorist but instead offers that an affective understanding of concepts must acknowledge and then actively work against representation even when it is the conceptual starting place. Thus, in the case of Bears, we get at the true radicalness of allowing affect and difference to resist inherited categories when we allow Bear masculinity to emerge as an *immanent concept*, one with “knowledge of itself, and what it knows is the pure event, which must not be confused with the state of affairs in which it is embodied” (Deleuze and Guattari 1994, p. 33). And, moving beyond Butler’s theorization of subversion, its true potential is not as a reaction to a transcendence but a machinic connection to other events through immanence and difference.

Immanent Bears vs. Transcendent Bears

This, of course, has somewhat obvious ramifications for identity theory, specifically Bear masculinity, if only for the questions it forces us to ask. Would Bears’ reactions to what they sense as prohibitions of their masculinity from both straight and gay culture change if they reconceptualized their masculinity (both how it is theorized and how it is practiced) as a Deleuzean concept, emerging from a plane of immanence rather than a plane of transcendence? What if Bear masculinity was reconceptualized through a relational ontology (not only relational — with connections that flowed both ways — with the larger gay community from which they perceive themselves as ostracized but straight culture as well) instead of the isolatory and victim ontologies that seem to run through much of the interviews and discourse that define the Bear movement? How would Bear masculinity inherently change if difference was reconceived as a creational positive rather than a reactive negative? Is Caroline Corley, who self-identifies as a straight woman connected to a gay-male oriented, masculinist movement, symbolic of the deterritorializing potential inherent in the Bear movement? What if the key to being radical is not to recapture a category but to transform it into something radically new? Finally, what if the true radical potential of Bear masculinity, like female masculinity in Halberstam, is in the *affinite gap* that it creates in masculinity, opening it up to everyone — straight, gay, woman, man, transgendered, and nongendered? Would Jack Fritscher's sometimes potent and quite Butlerian viewpoints of the radical potential of Bears look naïve in comparison?

These questions are all opened by reontologizing masculinity as a space of openness rather than a space of closure, as a Deleuzean *machine* that, feeling constrained by the productive processes in its own factory, strives to make connections to other machines. A Deleuzean theorization of Bear masculinity would instead concentrate on this group's use of masculinity as a "machinic becoming,"wrought with positive multiplicities that are "defined not by the elements that compose it in extension, not by the characteristics that compose it in comprehension, but by the lines and dimensions it encompasses in 'intension'" (Deleuze and Guattari 1987, p. 245). Bears' radical potential is not in their longing for a moribund and masculinist masculinity that will fulfill some desiring-machine reaction to their perceived placelessness in the mainstream gay community, or to see themselves as some privileged vector for that desiring machine. Their true radical potential is opening up that placeless masculinity into a realm of difference, something that sets them so far apart from the normative and ultimately oppressive form that masculinity has taken up in its imagination of itself up until this event that it has no other option but to be radical. Thus, instead of falling into oft-written narratives of masculinity, this first line of flight allows the Bears, who have always been accused of superficial masculinity, to expose those preordained and idealist and supposedly 'non-superficial' masculinities for the exclusionary fictions that they are. This first line of flight lines up very well with Butlerian subversion theory.

But, in order for Bears to be radical in any Deleuzean sense, *they cannot stop there*, content in their subversion. In order to be radically queer, to progress from the reactionary and ultimately paralyzing theorizations of themselves found in Fritscher and McCann, they must *become* an *immanently conceptual* response to any sort of trapping representational masculinity — patriarchal, non-patriarchal, homosexual, heterosexual, bisexual, queer, or otherwise. The Bears' radical and ultimately queer calling is not a 'return' to masculinity as some sort of closure (a completely non-radical narrative that works through both Bears' conceptions of themselves and those of their observers) but is that they are in a position where they can uniquely and summarily embrace the differences that their masculinity as a Deleuzean concept can create. I therefore choose not to see masculinity in the Bear movement as a negative concept because it has contested meaning or that it has often been linked to patriarchal narratives of oppression and destruction of difference, but instead choose to see it as a *productive* and *positive* problem that Bears, as gay men, encounter and which has the radical potential to transform both themselves and masculinities — all masculinities — and eventually perhaps gender as we know it.

The true radical potential of the Bears is not in the infinite gaps that are inevitably created in trying to force the affective and complex being of Bear masculinity, as Hennen does, to fit into a subversive framework that neatly addresses patriarchal heterosexuality. It is also not in the equally infinite gaps created by ignoring representation altogether and *limiting* Bear masculinity to its non-representational expression. It is ironically in a bastardized ontology, one that does not exist purely in representation nor in the radically different waters of affect but that can be found in the *affinite gaps* in between. To be more explicit and more Deleuzean, Bear masculinity's radical potential is immanent in itself, in *both* what it is *and* what it is not, in the very bodies that take it on and by doing so both subvert and open the category. It is in its rough edges that refuse to be smoothed away in an appropriative representational moment. Because we must refocus our attention on the material bodies and how their practices open up the category, there is a limit to where Butler *ontologically* can take us with the Bears or with any kind of radical rethinking of masculinity. Despite this, we cannot replace representation completely, because *it is this category of masculinity that allows for the tension in the first place and offers the conceptual starting wall that the non-representational affect of being masculine and being Bear radically bounces against*. Without this representational starting place of masculinity, we cannot understand the radical challenges that non-representational affects offer in the first place. By realizing this as its true radical potential, a more productive theorization of masculinity can emerge, not in the infinite gap between these ontologies that we create by positing them as exclusively oppositional but in the *affinite gaps* that become apparent when we allow them to exist in conflict with each other. This theoretical intervention moves us beyond always being restrictively cautious about masculinity, either categorically or affectively, and can allow us to take masculinity *on its own*, while opening our epistemologies to the affinite potential in it.

Conclusion: Becoming-Bear in the *Affinite Gap*

If we are to be true to the conflict inherent in the *affinite gap*, any analysis of Bear masculinity must embrace this tension and resist the representational temptation to reterritorialize masculinity, to create it in some image of acceptable masculinity, or less patriarchal masculinity, or different-from-the-old-way masculinity. But in resisting these representational tendencies, we must not also forget that representational categories, because they are populated by affective bodies, often contain the roots of radical potential in themselves. Bear masculinity is at its most productive and creative when it becomes an *affinite gap* through which differences, like electrons in a quantum jump, can circulate and deterritorialize. In other words, Bear masculinity must always be seen not as an event in a traditional sense, one imbued and foundationalized by a patriarchal and heteronormative masculinity, but as an *affinite* event, which creates a new line in time and space, taking on and allowing for difference in each instance of thinking and repetition.

I argue here that the Bears should present, to themselves and most importantly — considering the venue of this writing — to us, an event that tears through what came before, especially in masculinity and how marginalized bodies interact, utilize, and react to it. They should force us to reconceptualize feminist and queer theories (and ultimately geographic writing that uses these theories) with an eye not to some preordained transcendent agenda that replaces another preordained transcendent agenda but to a becoming whose true radicalness is that it is not limited to what it thinks it can (or should) become. The potential radical masculinity of the Bears, allowed to flow through an affinite Deleuzean event, challenges not only how we have "done" masculinity in geography and in literatures beyond the discipline. It also gives us a way to conceptualize the much larger spaces of masculinity not as a careful and constantly apologetic addition to already extant feminist theories but as a radical machine or an unstable quantum shell, a beautiful blank in itself. Thus, masculinity studies become not a simplistic correction or even continuation of feminist theory, but ultimately its culmination in understanding the affective potential of all bodies to open up the categories in which they exist and transform them altogether.

But we cannot stop with the Bears, or worse yet, treat the *affinite gap* that they open as an isolated event in the trajectory of masculinity studies, or in gender studies, or in the much larger horizon of feminist theory. Bears are most useful and at their most radical to the whole discipline as both a caveat against closing ourselves off to the potentialities to which our traditional understandings often blind us and a way forward into *af-*

finite futures, ones that see the relevance of both representational and non-representational geographies but also the potential of the inherent conflict between them. The point is not, as Jackson argues, to understand our experiences, or even to uncover how our experiences are caught in some oppressive repetition and, by doing this, point to a way out to some goal already agreed upon. The point is to understand how our affective experiences as men or women or not-men or not-women do not always line up neatly to the representational categories we have inherited and, by doing so, find a radical way out of the oppressive mechanisms that have trapped us (women, men, boys, girls, gay, straight, white, black, brown, citizens, non-citizens, bourgeois, proletariat) in a very real and a very dangerous way in ontological reliance and repetition of the very thing that we proposedly seek to tear down.

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