Circuits of Desire:

Exploring Queer Spaces, Public Sex, and Technologies of Affiliation

by

Riley McGuire

A Thesis submitted to the Faculty of Graduate Studies of

The University of Manitoba

in partial fulfilment of the requirements of the degree of

MASTER OF ARTS

Department of English, Film, and Theatre

University of Manitoba

Winnipeg

Table of Contents

Abstract

This project looks at the mutually imbricated relationship between space, sex, and technology in cultural output from the end of the twentieth century until today. Primarily through a close examination of sexual cruising cultures in Samuel R. Delany's essay collection *Times Square Red, Times Square Blue* (1999) and John Cameron Mitchell's film *Shortbus* (2006), I unpack the ways in which technology is represented as a facilitator and a barrier to the formation of spaces that foster queer sexual interactions. This thesis is centrally interested in the ability of different technologies (filmic, digital, etc.) and different spaces (pornographic movie theatres, sex clubs, wireless networks, etc.) to promote the formation of heterogeneous relationships that cross categories of social difference, including race, class, and sexual orientation. I contextualize my engagement with these texts in the rhetoric of safety that emerges in the wake of the HIV/AIDS crisis and is compounded following the events of 9/11. Alongside an investigation of the potential of technologies of affiliation to support these kinds of interpersonal contacts, I argue that representations of technologically mediated intimacy are often limited to a hesitant ambivalence due to a cultural unease about the new types of non-normative relation offered by technology. This leads to the reification of certain social power dynamics based on identity politics by prioritizing and celebrating corporeal, face-to-face interactions.

Acknowledgments

First and foremost, I owe Dr. Hee-Jung Serenity Joo my immense gratitude for her patient, insightful, and encouraging contributions to this project. Dr. Joo provided me the freedom and support to form my ideas and I could not ask for a more inspiring and remarkable mentor.

I would also like to give my sincere thanks to Dr. Brenda Austin-Smith and Dr. Trish Salah for dedicating the time and effort needed to be on my thesis committee, and for providing such provocative and productive feedback.

In addition, I want to take this opportunity to thank my graduate chair, Dr. Vanessa Warne, for being a source of invaluable and unfaltering support to me over the last four years and for giving me a gentle nudge in the direction of graduate studies.

I would like to thank all of my peers in the department for their stimulating work, engaging conversations, and emotional support. Special thanks to the members of the Queer Biopolitics Research Cluster for reading and writing alongside me over the last few years and to my amazing co-workers at *Mosaic* for making my graduate studies a truly exceptional experience.

Of course, this project would not have been possible without the support of my spectacular family and friends. Among many others, I am grateful to Steven, Kaitlyn, William, and, of course, my mother Valerie, for listening and caring.

Finally, I would like to thank the Government of Manitoba, the Lambda Foundation, and the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada for supporting this research.

Dedicated to my mother, Valerie,

for reading to me,

reading with me,

and believing in me enough for two.

Introduction

The present epoch will perhaps be above all the epoch of space. We are in the epoch of
simultaneity: we are in the epoch of juxtaposition, the epoch of the near and far, of the
side-by-side, of the dispersed. We are at a moment, I believe, when our experience of the
world is less that of a long life developing through time than that of a network that
connects points and intersects with its own skein.
　　　　—Michel Foucault, "Of Other Spaces: Utopias and Heterotopias"

When you're a man and a woman, you can do anything. You can… you can almost have
sex on the streets if you want to. The most somebody's gonna say is "hey, get a hump for
me," you know? But when you're gay, you monitor everything you do. You monitor how
you look, how you dress, how you talk, how you act. Do they see me? What do they think
of me?
　　　　—Pepper LeBeija in *Paris is Burning*, dir. Jennie Livingston

A young man, surrounded by greenery, takes a deep breath, looking uncertain. He

encounters another man, a stranger, who promptly unbuttons his pants, kisses him, and tells him

to "stop talking." As the two begin touching, the young man's cell phone rings. He answers, and

breaks away from the other man. Later, as Patrick (Jonathan Groff) recounts the experience to

his friends, he tells them that "the minute my phone rang […] I immediately thought that it was

my mom, like she somehow knew where I was and she was calling to stop me from becoming

one of those gays that hooks-up with people in a park."

This scene of aborted sexual cruising fills the first few minutes of the premiere episode of

HBO's new highly anticipated show, *Looking* (2014), a comedy-drama that follows three

homosexual men "living – and loving – in modern-day San Francisco" ("About the Show").

Looking is a contemporary example in dialogue with the archive of texts primarily under study in

this thesis project, a current cultural text that is useful in introducing my central focus on

representations of non-normative sex in public spaces. I am interested in the connection between

this moment and the title of the show, 'looking,'[1] and the politics of visibility and the gaze it

invokes. In her mediation on social categories of visible difference, Linda M. Alcoff claims that,

in contrast to race, which "works through the domain of the visible" (187), homosexuality "can

be rendered invisible on the street" (6). Different types of sexual desire do not entail any

corresponding corporeal difference that is visually detectable, but can be rendered visible on the

street (or in this case, the park) through certain sexual *acts*. Additionally, certain *spaces*, such as

a park known for male same-sex cruising, can perform a similar function of making desire

legible on the body, or at the very least, suggest the presumption of legible desire. Clearly, for

Patrick "Visibility is a trap" (Foucault, *Discipline*, 200) as he imagines his mother attempting to

circumvent his actions: not his desire (for another man), but rather the publically visible location

of acting out this desire (the park), to stop him "from becoming one of those gays that hooks-up

with people in a park," to stop him from becoming visible.

　　More to the point, I am interested in what Patrick says to his friends, which serves as a

starting place for unpacking the other texts and ideas I will be examining in the proceeding

chapters. It is not the suggestion of an omniscient maternal figure—the infiltration of normative

filial/parental expectations and relations into a sexual moment—that I find particularly

noteworthy, but the first part of his sentence: the role of the ringing phone as a mediator and

interrupter. This vignette is emblematic of the central focus of the pages that follow; namely,

representations of public sex[2] (primarily, but not exclusively, of male same-sex desire) in queer

---

[1] Further emphasizing the show's preoccupation with visibility, each episode's title starts with the word "Looking." All quotes from this introduction are taken from Episode 1: "Looking for Now," indicative of a temporal emphasis on the present.

[2] The slippery nature of this term is largely attributable to the fact that "what is conventionally called 'public sex' is actually characterized by its perpetrators' subtle transmutation of an ostensibly public space into a tentatively private domain" (Harper 106). As these sex acts unfold in spaces that are unique largely due to their liminality between dichotomous definitions of private and public, Pat Califa's preference of the term "quasi-public sex" seems appropriate (76).

spaces, mediated by technology. Admittedly, this reads like a catalogue of perpetually

destabilized and destabilizing terms—public, queer, technology—"flags of convenience"

(Dangerous Bedfellows 13) and terms that will take on different, even contrasting, meanings

throughout the rest of this project. For now, I want to focus on the idea of queer space, keeping

in mind Scott Herring's reminder that "Space and place are as much *act and experience* as they

are dirt and rock, concrete and steel" (13, italics added). To begin with, I do not want to suggest

that there is anything inherently queer about the social act(ors) under study, or that non-

normative sexual desires and acts are synonymous with queerness. Instead, I will use queerness

as an entry point for understanding marginalized and potentially subversive conceptions of space

and relation. Specifically, I seek to unpack how various technologies of affiliation and

interruption work to carve out, reorient, and/or dismantle queer spaces in which bodily contact

and desire are acted out; for example, how Patrick's cell phone impedes his attempt at public

sexual cruising. In the introduction to *In A Queer Time and Place* (2005), J. Halberstam notes

that "In queer readings of postmodern geography, the notion of a body-centered identity gives

way to a model that *locates sexual subjectivities within and between embodiment, place, and*

practice" (5, italics added) and in the readings that follow I will be looking at how bodies, sexual

acts, and queer spaces—with an emphasis on the last—function together under a rubric of

technological intervention.[3]

    Halberstam goes on to define queer space as "the place-making practices within

postmodernism in which queer people engage and […] the new understandings of space enabled

---

[3] Shifts in technology are responsible for the changing meanings of other central terminologies for this project: as Anna Ward states "The advent of such technologies as the Internet, mobile technologies, digital video, and Web cameras has thoroughly altered our conception of the public and the private" (162).

by the production of queer counterpublics" (6),[4] while for Aaron Betsky queer space is "in

between the body and technology" (5). In the context of these definitions, I aim to explore the

role of technology in representations of public sex and the making of queer spaces, rather than

focusing solely on the sexual acts depicted, thereby illuminating the potentially socially

subversive types of sexual and communal heterogeneity[5] fostered in these spaces. By

concentrating on queer spaces and not merely sex, I hope to avoid what Foucault has termed "the

speaker's benefit" (*Sexuality* 6), an alluring theoretical trap for discussing sexual discourse and

subversion. Foucault rightfully critiques the reductive reading strategy of the speaker's benefit—

the misleading idea that because sex/sexuality are supposedly 'repressed' and 'taboo' subjects,

the very act of speaking about them is inherently radical and progressive—adamantly

establishing that "We must not think that by saying yes to sex, one says no to power" (*Sexuality*

157). Patrick acting out male same-sex desire is not transgressive, but the space he inhabits

might be.

By examining these ideas in literature, film, and other media, spanning from the 1990s

until today, I hope to form a necessarily diverse archive featuring representations of technologies

of affiliation—demonstrating the dynamic and varied nature of these technologies—to connect

traditional texts to new forms of language and media. This archive will facilitate the

---

[4] Halberstam's definition, while instructive, can be further unpacked. Halberstam usefully situates queerness as "refer[ing] to nonnormative logics and organizations of community, sexual identity, embodiment, and activity" (6) and the technologically mediated queer spaces I will discuss foster shifting combinations of all these social formations. Michael Warner's work on publics and counterpublics is also illuminating, as he discusses the existence of queer counterpublics in the context of "an understanding of queerness [that] has been developing in recent decades" leading to "a culture […] in which intimate relations and the sexual body can in fact be understood as projects for transformation among strangers" (88). I aim to examine the extent to which the representations featured in this project function as "transformative," and to destabilize Warner's claim that "A public is a relation among strangers" (55). In other words, what happens when public stranger sociability gives way to an intimate familiarity that still remains outside of normative relations such as family and friendship?

[5] Throughout the following pages, I will be using 'heterogeneous' relations to denote relationships that cross multiple categories of social differentiation—race, class, and sexual orientation, to name a few. These relationships are not necessarily (or even primarily) hetero*sexual*.

investigation of the evolving relationship between cultural representations of public sex in queer space and its various material manifestations via new technological advancements. My readings will center on how these representations relate to the limits and potentialities of an increasingly technologically mediated queer sexual experience for challenging dominant modes of social relation, particularly by facilitating interclass and interracial encounters.[6] I will map how technologies of affiliation have been instrumental in the establishment and, after the HIV/AIDS pandemic,[7] subsequent resuscitation of a "culture of sexual possibility" (Crimp140), and I will link this to a related culture of *intellectual* possibility that invites thinking about alternative modes of interpersonal connection outside of the restrictions of reproductive heteronormativity and assimilationist homonormativity. Nuancing views of technology's increasing influence on sociality, sex, and space as either dystopian or utopian, I will borrow Halberstam's concept of "technotopias" to discuss sexual spaces—literary, filmic, physical, and digital—that "are preoccup[ied] with the body as a site created through technological and aesthetic innovation" (*Time* 124).

I will demonstrate how diverse sites of representation reflect related narratives about the alteration of socially stratified borders through technological intervention and a concurrent focus on pleasure and the potential formation of relationships that are often brief and atypical, yet intimate and significant. My exploration of these "queerly imaginative affinities" (Fackler 398),

---

[6] Related arguments on cruising cultures and spatial politics have been made by scholars in other disciplines: architect Aaron Betsky comments that these spaces are able to "wipe out, for at least a moment, class distinctions" (142) and cultural anthropologist William L. Leap talks about how cruising practices "created ties between men who were otherwise separated by social and economic differences" (5). Building upon cruising scholarship, this project will look at the rise of and ambivalent dependency upon technology as a means of connection at a time when public queer spaces have become increasingly endangered.

[7] While HIV/AIDS has had a significant impact on the structuring of public sex subcultures, the topic does not receive exhaustive treatment in this project. For a diverse and comprehensive account of interrelated discourses about public sex and HIV/AIDS, see *Policing Public Sex: Queer Politics and the Future of AIDS Activism* (1996), edited by Dangerous Bedfellows. This book is referenced in one of my project's primary texts, *Times Square Red, Times Square Blue* by Samuel R. Delany.

embodied in sexual interactions, will trace reifications and transgressions of not only sexual dichotomies but also the division of spaces (rural and urban, heteronormative and queer, etc.), interpreting these cultural expressions as active engagements with tensions between subversion and hegemony, configured sexually, socially, and spatially. I will situate my readings within an increasing contemporary anxiety regarding technology's role in(between) interpersonal relationships, as both a constituent element and a barrier.

While I argue that technology is crucial to forming the queer spaces under discussion, I also focus on the ambivalence of the representations of technologically mediated intimacies. As Matthew Tinkcom states, "the ubiquity of digital media for sexuality is rivaled only by the fact that any positive outcome for such media is largely ignored in both popular and scholarly imaginations about it. It is as if the sex life of the digital does not exist but as an array of demonized forms" (694). The texts under study in this project function both to support and nuance these claims: despite a clear suspicion of what Tinkcom refers to as "digital sexualities," these texts unabashedly explore the possibilities of how technology and intimacy can re-script one another, and even feature occasional moments that embrace these potentials. Nonetheless, the primary pattern of these texts is an insistent prioritizing of corporeal contact and personalized intimacy, using technology as a way to eventually access more conventional modes of relating, rather than maintaining and expanding the anonymity and non-normativity of cruising cultures. Whether progressive or restrictive, the following representations map how technologically mediated public sex encounters are an extension of cruising cultures following the reduction and securitization of public space. As public spaces for sexual encounters continue to disappear or face vilification, technology becomes an increasingly integral constituent element in providing evolving formations of cruising cultures, for better or worse.

Again, *Looking* is demonstrative here for showing the mixed relationship between technology and cruising. Following the interrupted encounter in the park, Patrick (who is almost always shot in front of his MacBook in this episode, regardless of his location in his apartment or at work, where he is employed as a video game designer) sets up a date on the Internet dating site *OKCupid*, exemplifying an increasingly prominent form of digital matchmaking. Encouraged by an algorithm from the site claiming Patrick and his prospective match have a high compatibility, the two meet up at what is described as "a very heterosexual" bar. In this quintessential space of normative bonding the date goes awry when Patrick mentions his encounter in the park, a decidedly queer space of non-normative bonding. His date takes this as proof that Patrick is not interested in a monogamous, committed relationship—clearly, the type of relationship deemed desirable—signalling the untimely end of Patrick's second attempt at male same-sex intimacy in approximately fifteen minutes of screen time. The episode is preoccupied with how technology interrupts (phone calls that suggest sanctions from domestic nuclearity) and facilitates (through websites and algorithms) various attempts at social and sexual relation in different spaces, both normative and otherwise. While the types of technologies discussed in the proceeding chapters will divert from contemporary epitomes of mainstream technology—movie screens will feature as prominently as cell phones and the Internet—the interest in the role of evolving technologies in social and sexual interactions is apparent in current cultural output.[8]

---

[8] Spike Jonze's film *Her* (2013) is just one of many illustrative examples. In the critically acclaimed movie, Theodore Twombly (Joaquin Phoenix), representing the failure of normative marital monogamy as a recent and emotionally devastated divorcée, falls into a relationship of emotional and sexual intimacy with his computer operating system, Samantha (voiced by Scarlett Johansson). Samantha's disembodied voice and ability to speak to countless other technological entities simultaneously allows her to be with Theodore at work, at home, and on the street, queering all these spaces through their non-normative relationship. The film is not primarily interested in the issue of technology as a mediator between human interactions and instead underlines anxieties about the affective bonds formed between humans and technology, and later the relationships between different technologies, without the mediation of a human. It challenges the social elevation of human bonds over other connections and destabilizes borders between animate and inanimate, sentient and insentient.

In an attempted justification of his experience at the park to his date, Patrick claims with a laugh that he only went there because he wanted to know if "people still really do this," positioning public cruising cultures as a joke, and an archaic one. I hope to argue that these types of cultures have not disappeared, are not some elusive relic of the past, but rather have undergone a transformation into different types of spaces, a transformation indebted to the neoliberal reconstruction of public space and the advent of various types of technology. As Patrick and his friends laugh about the "pervert[s]" in the park, Lauren Berlant's and Michael Warner's words on public sex come to mind: "Respectable gays like to think they owe nothing to the sexual subculture they think of as sleazy. But their success, their way of living, their political right, and their very identities would never have been possible but for the existence of the public sexual culture they now despise" (563).[9] It is the second sentence that I want to take as my focal point: the (not inherently progressive) world-making potential of public sexual cultures. To counteract the logically tenable claim that "if there is no one around to see an act of public sex, it doesn't really occur" (Harper 105), this project is about tracing an archive of attempts to make public sex public knowledge, to make sure it is seen, "to map a commonly accessible world; to construct the architecture of queer space in a homophobic environment" (Berlant and Warner 551).

Specifically, my chapters will look at representations that explicitly fuse a discourse on sex with a critical discourse on space, advocating for a "theoretical as well as a sexual pluralism"

---

[9] While in 1998 Berlant and Warner maintained that "Because homosexuality can never have the invisible, tacit, society-founding rightness that heterosexuality has, it would not be possible to speak of 'homonormativity' in the same sense" (548, n. 2), more contemporary discourse on the subject would suggest "homonormative gays" as an apt substitute for "respectable gays." Lisa Duggan popularized theoretical understandings of homonormativity, defining the concept as "A politics that does not contest dominant heteronormative assumptions and institutions, but upholds and sustains them, while promising the possibility of a demobilized gay constituency and a privatized, depoliticized gay culture anchored in domesticity and consumption" (*Twilight* 9). Patrick's date ends because he is perceived as invested in 'sleazy' sexual subcultures, in opposition to heteronormative institutions like committed monogamy (leading to marriage), and, by extension, as resisting the assimilationist impulse of homonormativity.

(Rubin 309), while also complicating the conventions of their representational genres, in terms of both medium and narrative style. In other words, these representational spaces destabilize generic spaces, including the genre of cruising narratives. My initial chapter—"Pornotopic Problems and Potentials: The Alternative Erotics of Film Spectatorship in *Times Square Red, Times Square Blue*"—will explore investments in sex, space, and technology through a historically grounded reading of Samuel R. Delany's *Times Square Red, Times Square Blue* (1999), a blend of erotica and urban planning. Delany's text will establish an overarching interest in "familiar debates regarding the difference between pornography and erotica in film, still photography, and literature" (Ward 172) that fills this project by blending the explicitly sexual with academic ruminations on urban planning. Writing from a doubly marginalized subjectivity, as both a sexual minority and a racial minority as an African American gay man, Delany seeks to create an overt dialogue between class and race relations, sexual practice, and spatial politics by splitting his text into two main distinct essays. Delany's first essay explores his sexual experiences with other men in the pornographic movie theatres of New York City from the 1960s to the 1990s, while his second essay is a theoretical critique of late capitalism's restructuring of social relations, sex, and urban space, as epitomized by the new zoning laws introduced against sexual businesses in New York City and the related corporatization of Times Square.

This split nature of the text—the first essay representing sexual possibilities and the second building off of this to demonstrate how sexual possibility feeds into and leads to intellectual possibilities for imagining other societal formations—is crucial to Delany's project. The mutually complementary nature of the two essays is captured in the title: while the title of the complete text is *Times Square Red, Times Square Blue*, the essays actually appear in the

opposite order, with "Times Square Blue" preceding "…Three, Two, One, Contact: Times Square Red" in both date of composition and location within the text. In short, the relationship between the sexual experiences of the first essay and the urban planning of the second essay goes both ways. The colourful titles of the essays also encapsulate this important duality. In addition to all of the symbolic connotations inspired by the colours red and blue (notably, for one, American nationalism), the nature of red and blue as primary colours points to the additive nature of the essays; mixing red and blue yields magenta, and, perhaps, the magenta of Delany's essays is what is most important, the dialogue between sexual and intellectual possibility.

As Delany states, the essays are "two attempts by a single navigator to describe what the temporal coastline and the lay of the land looked like and felt like and the thoughts he had while observing them" (*Times* xviii) and while the non-normative forms of sexual expression prevalent in the first section inspire Delany's ideas about how to reorganize cityscapes, these latter thoughts—theory-based ideas coming from an institutionalized academic—help to circumvent dismissals of the first essay as a debased pornographic narrative. The more formal and detached tone of the second chapter emphasizes a shift in content, a move from micro recollections of sexual encounters to macro theories of urban life. The form of the text as a whole, along with the various mediums of documentation and argumentation Delany uses (from photographs of male hustlers on the streets to dubious statistics based on personal experience), allows the text to sidestep derisive labels such as pornography and to instead function as a work of compelling social theory. By intellectualizing the sexual (and, of course, sexualizing the intellectual), Delany creates a text about loss and possibility. In this sense, the form of the text relates to the content (which will be unpacked in chapter one) in which the creation of a queer space enables thinking about the possibilities and shortcomings of other ways of relating.

Significantly, Delany's text's interest in filmic technology is consistent throughout both essays, though primarily on a spatial rather than a stylistic level. The cruising culture recounted by Delany, one which embodies a "reconfiguration of the social" (Muñoz 51), uses the visual technology of film as the backdrop for a queer space to create what Delany terms a "pornotopia" (*Times* 78): a space where men of different races, classes, and sexual orientations form pleasurable sexual and social bonds through the cinematic genre of pornography. However, Delany ultimately prizes the encounters that lead to long-lasting, personalized relationships, rather than the more ephemeral and anonymous contact facilitated by the technology of film. Through a series of close readings of the queer space of the pornographic movie theatre—and the non-normative social and sexual connections fostered within—in Delany's mediation on urban sexuality and space in America during the second half of twentieth century, I will examine how technologies of affiliation have the potential, though far from the prescriptive power, to facilitate positive interclass and interracial contact, something Delany maintains makes life as "rewarding, productive, and pleasant" as possible (*Times* 111). Overall, the deployment of film in *Times Square* is emblematic of the central concerns of this project as Delany's filmic space uses aspects of this visual technology as an integral element in creating a queer social and spatial imaginary, one that demonstrates how different types of technology work to circumvent legal sanctions to foster heterogeneous sexual and social relations, while the text still remains loyal to older models of queer intimacy.

However, I do not mean to idealize these imaginaries. My readings will also heavily focus on two critiques: an overarching erasure and marginalization of female subjectivities and a decided urbanized bias. In his critique on the glorification and radicalization of non-normative sexual subcultures, Leo Bersani highlights the "phallocentrism of gay cruising" (220), an issue

readily apparent in Delany's sexual accounts and social critiques. Additionally, as this project is primarily concerned with ideas of space, Herring's critique of queer metronormativity will be instrumental, particularly his notion of the "bicoastal stereotype of queer urbanity" (78) captured in the location of Delany's text in New York City, the emblematic location of one coast of metronormative queerness, and the West Coast queerness of *Looking*'s San Francisco, which serves as the other. While my choices of primary texts are seemingly complicit with this bicoastal bias, I intend to read Delany with an aim to uncovering the ways in which metronormativity has helped and hindered the carving out of queer spaces. Bersani is right when he insists that radical sex does not equal radical politics, but I contend that the sexual and spatial possibilities invoked in Delany do equate to provocative intellectual and political possibilities, although importantly limited ones.

Times Square will be utilized to start mapping the continually shifting "sexual geography" (Leap 2) under study. Ultimately, I argue that Delany's essays demonstrate how the rise of neoliberalism and the rhetoric of safety reordered public space, eradicating prior sites of social and sexual interaction and inadvertently helping to create alternative ones, such as those described in the following sections. My next primary text—which I position as a more contemporary attempt at materializing and embodying the possibilities remembered by Delany— invites further speculation into the technological facilitation of non-normative interactions and spaces. From the literary representation of filmic space to depict interclass sexual encounters, I will move in my second chapter to a film dedicated to documenting such encounters on screen.

This next chapter, "Ambivalent Technotopias: Digital Sexualities and Missed Connections in *Shortbus*,"[10] will focus on John Cameron Mitchell's *Shortbus* (2006), a film

---

[10] An earlier version of some of these ideas regarding *Shortbus* can be found in the co-authored article "Riding Renga: Low Theory and Collective Critical Dissatisfaction," *Writing from Below* 1.2 (2013): 45-60.

which depicts "a salon for the gifted and challenged" (Mitchell): a queer space for artistic expression and sexual encounters—a spatial example of what José Esteban Muñoz, paraphrasing Derrida, calls the "surpassing of a binary between ideality and actuality" (43). The physical space of Shortbus divorces the utopian from the ideal and deploys a critique of sexual atmospheres rooted in monogamy, privacy, and conventionality, and is populated by characters who seek new understandings of self and community through the formation of impermanent sexual and emotional collectives. The film shares the spirit of the piece by Delany by blending sexual and intellectual possibility, an impulse neatly captured in the title of Beth Johnson's article about the film, "Shortbus: Highbrow Hard-core," while continuing to explore questions of genre, especially in the narrative arc of James (Paul Dawson), for whom the film is largely about documenting his process of making a documentary. Much like Delany's text, the first half of the film is extremely sexually explicit (the opening sequence features multiple 'money shot' ejaculations), while the second half of the film focuses more on interpersonal struggles and narrative closure, shying away from showing sexually explicit imagery (visible penetration, full nudity, etc.) and thereby steering the film away from the label of pornography. *Shortbus*, too, seems to have a red and a blue section. This duality within the film demonstrates the twin importance of *Shortbus* as a film and the fictional physical location of Shortbus the sex club/artistic salon that serves as the primary setting of the film. Even when sexual acts are not explicitly depicted in *Shortbus* the film, it does not mean they are not occurring in Shortbus the place.

Stylistically, *Shortbus*, also notably set in New York City, is unique for largely using improvisation rather than script and for featuring unsimulated 'real' sex, linking the cinematic form to the imaginative impulse of alternative narratives. As a distinctly post-9/11 film, *Shortbus*

adds to Delany's concerns about how the rhetoric of safety reorganizes public space. While Delany's pornographic theatres are contextualized in the increasing regulation and reconfiguration of public space in the midst of and following the HIV/AIDS crisis, *Shortbus* reveals how a post-9/11 focus on 'security' and 'health' compounded these movements. Both texts emphasize how evolutions in capitalist urban planning and commercial rezoning impact public sex cultures. In this sense, *Shortbus* functions as an extension of the concerns that fill Delany's text, yet with a more explicit (though critical) focus on the role of technology in changing modes of intimacy.

Although both *Shortbus* the film and the salon space of the same name can be viewed as results of the concerns raised in Delany about public sex cultures and urban life, they also grapple with how these issues are shifting alongside evolving technologies in the present, while speculating about the future. Essentially, the film explores "the sexual possibilities of the digital epoch" (Tinkcom 713), interspersing sexual scenes with a digitally animated urban center and featuring symbolically significant sexual technologies like a remote-controlled vibrator and handheld matchmaking device (a prescient fictional ancestor to contemporary cellular phone applications), while remaining adamantly unconvinced about the preference of technologically mediated intimacy over face-to-face interactions. As *Shortbus* revels in "rhizomatic networks of erotic possibility" (Jagose 96), it repositions technology from the background of queer sexual spaces to an increasingly central element. However, akin to Delany's text, technology remains a facilitator of personalized and embodied relationships, rather than a way to rewrite what intimacy entails. The problematic elements of Delany's piece persist here as the sexual experiences of the women in the ensemble cast are decidedly secondary and the glorification of strictly urban queerness is prevalent. Nonetheless, the film's depiction of sexual space, paralleled to a "magical

circuitboard" (Mitchell), represents a recuperation of the world Delany laments the loss of and prefigures the centrality of technology to contemporary queer sexuality while remaining suspicious of technology, establishing the film as a mediation on queer spaces past, present, and future. By focusing on the under-studied importance of technology in *Times Square* and nuancing the omnipresent representations of technology in *Shortbus*, I will examine how technology is viewed as both a facilitator and barrier to forming queer spaces and alternative types of relation.

In a brief conclusion, I will position my readings in relation to current deployments of technology in relation to non-normative sex, such as *Grindr*, a cellular phone application popular with homosexual men that uses GPS for location-based social and sexual networking. *Grindr*'s emphasis on "anonymity, decorporalization, self-invention and reinvention" (Tinkcom 694) facilitates alternative types of connections by creating a queer virtual network that supplements the lack of physical spaces for minority sexual orientations.[11] Does this latest technological manifestation of "public space for homoerotic desire" (Hartman 36) reiterate urban monopolies on 'authentic' queer selfhood present in the aforementioned texts through an emphasis on geographic proximity, or permit an escape through the potential formation of globalized spheres of sexual connectivity? Through questions such as this, I hope to finish by positioning literary and filmic representations of past technological and sexual cultures as forms of queer world-making in dialogue with our contemporary moment, with an aim to understanding how literature—in its many manifestations—influences the re-figuration of public space and private intimacy. I will add to ongoing critical projects that interrogate borders between the public and private and reincorporate a focus on sex into queer theory. In sum, through reading these cultural

---

[11] Not surprisingly, *Grindr* features prominently in the second episode of *Looking*, "Looking for Uncut."

expressions my project will ask the salient question: when technologies of affiliation change, what spatial narratives of bodily difference persist?

Ultimately, the primary texts of this project demonstrate how "Queer social practices like sex and theory try to unsettle the garbled but powerful norms supporting […] privilege" (Berlant and Warner 548). They explicitly fuse both of these practices—sex and theory—in narratives that show how technology, variously manifested, works to create queer spaces that circumvent legal and social strictures, but stop short of changing the variety and very nature of what we construe as connection and relation. [12] I pause for now with a reminder from Muñoz: "It is […] important to practice a criticism that enables us to cut through the institutional and legislative barriers that outlaw contact relations and obscure glimpses of the whole. These glimpses and moments of contact have a decidedly utopian function that permits us to imagine and potentially make a queer world" (55). The following pages hope to map the extent to which technology is represented as an effective tool for seeking a queer world by looking at representations of temporary utopian spaces and the reasons why their promises of inclusion and subversion are less durable and more limited.

---

[12] These arguments can be expanded through recourse to Heidegger's mediation on humanity's orientation to technology: he broadly conceives of technology as a means to an end, a human activity, and, essentially, as a way of revealing—in the case of this project, a way of revealing alternative modes of interpersonal connection. Heidegger's reminder of the omnipresence of technology is particularly germane to the foci of this project: "Everywhere we remain unfree and chained to technology, whether we passionately affirm or deny it" (4).

Chapter I

"Pornotopic Problems and Potentials: The Alternative Erotics of Film Spectatorship in
Times Square Red, Times Square Blue"

> *Was Sodom destroyed?*
> Aye, and Gomorrah to six miles around
>   it. The river beneath it boiled in
>   the street. The mountain vomited
>   rock on the orchards. And no one
>   now can live upon the place.
> *Oh, my city! What city may I found? Where*
>   *now must I go make me a home?*
>   —Samuel R. Delany, *Driftglass*

Samuel R. Delany is perhaps best known as an award-winning and prolific writer of

science fiction. His imaginative creation of alternative worlds, times, and people has spanned the

last five decades and been immensely influential on the genre. Jeffrey Allen Tucker, in his

discussion of racial identity and politics in Delany's writing, also notes Delany's persistent

interest in "creative representations of the pleasures and breadth of human sexuality" (1) that

feeds into an "investigation of the ways in which sexual and social freedoms link to and inform

one another" (3), the dialogue between sexual and intellectual possibility central to this project.

The connection between literary imaginings of unconventional sexual relation and creation and

the queer other has long been apparent in the science fiction genre and is typified in Delany's

corpus, ranging from the sadomasochism of *Equinox* (1973) to the pedophilia, necrophilia, and

incest of *Hogg* (1995), texts featuring worlds both deeply flawed and provocative. Issues of

sexuality and affiliation are central in several science fiction texts as authors use them to

radically alter normative conventions by defying strict gender binaries, reconfiguring linear

notions of time and futurity, and reconceptualising ideas of community, allowing for the

exploration of alternative sexual and societal constructions. Of course, the genre does have

limitations, as Delany himself states he "would like to see the range—the space of possibilities" he explores in his writing reflected more broadly by other authors in the field ("Of Sex" 35), demonstrating his own investment in the ideas of space and possibility that foreground this project.

Speaking about Delany's science fiction, Tim Dean notes that the sexually explicit "pornographic fiction" functions to "creat[e] cosmologies in which what would be impossible in our world appears fully plausible, even unremarkable" (75). However, there are significant resonances between Delany's science fiction and non-fiction memoirs/essays—as exemplified in the epigraph to this chapter, originally found at the beginning of Delany's science fiction collection *Driftglass* (1977). This excerpt invokes the Biblical Sodom and Gomorrah, shortcut symbols for the punitive measures taken against sexual deviance from hegemonic norms, and serves as a lamentation over the loss of queer spaces and the uncertainty of where and how to reclaim them, sentiments that infuse the pages of *Times Square Red, Times Square Blue*. Arguably, there are enough intersections between works like Delany's short story "Aye, and Gomorrah,"[1] found in *Driftglass*, and his essays on Times Square to destabilize Dean's claim that Delany's fiction makes the impossible into the quotidian. Perhaps instead Delany's work features representations that normalize the unconventional and the subcultural that are already extant. Delany seems equally as interested in imagining other possible ways people can relate to one another as he is in recognizing and analyzing the ways in which people currently do relate to

[1] While I seek to unpack Delany's engagement with the neoliberal restructuring of urban space in *Times Square,* Gillian Harkins tackles related concerns in her reading of this short story in her article "Aye, and Neoliberalism." Delany temporally locates the story—a tale of spatial instability and sexual/intimate frustration—in a future where people are "fighting [their] way up from the neo-puritan reaction to the sex freedom of the twentieth century" ("Aye, and Gomorrah" 116), parrying the same sexual conservatism he critiques in *Times Square*. Harkins looks at this "futurism [that is] both proleptic and retroactive: what is imagined from 1966 appears as a refracted science fiction of a neoliberal present, seen from a future yet to come" (1074), and argues that the labor that foregrounds the events of the story in various spaces—both on Earth and extraterrestrial areas—represents a commentary on the contested and ambiguous societal and sexual place of children in neoliberal society (1078).

one another. This point can be usefully contextualized through Fredric Jameson's ruminations on the social utility of literature and other cultural constructions in his essay "On Interpretation." Jameson denies that literary creation ever takes place in isolation from its political context, or that politicized readings of literature are an occasionally useful supplement to other understandings, and instead posits the "political perspective" as "the absolute horizon of all reading and interpretation" (33). Delany's writing does not merely reflect an existing social problem—for the purposes of this chapter, the destruction of queer spaces that facilitate non-normative sexual acts and social relation—but is a "cultural artifact" that is "to be read as [a] symbolic resolution of real political and social contradictions" (Jameson 40). This commonality connects his science fiction to his non-fiction memoirs as both transcend mere representation to grapple with attempted resolution. Henri Lefebvre's conception of spaces known as "technological utopia[s]," elucidates the connection between Delany's genres of writing, particularly as they relate to the interests of this project, as the representation of these types of spaces are "a common feature not just of many science-fiction novels, but also of all kinds of projects concerned with space, be they those of architecture, urbanism, or social planning" (9)—texts ranging from "Aye, and Gomorrah" to *Times Square*.

This idea of technological utopias clearly bears resemblance to Halberstam's formulation of technotopias, which is central to this project and useful in unpacking *Times Square*. Jameson, in "Postmodernism," discusses "human subjects who happen into […] new space[s] […] unaccompanied as yet by an equivalent mutation," bereft of the "perceptual equipment to match this new hyperspace" of postmodernism, therefore this "newer architecture […] stands as something like an imperative to grow new organs, to expand our sensorium and our body to some new, yet unimaginable, perhaps ultimately impossible, dimensions" (219). Jameson's

words remain salient when removed from the context of postmodern architecture and applied to the advent of digital and virtual architectures, such as cyberspace. Halberstam uses these thoughts from Jameson to create the concept of technotopias, which Halberstam uses to investigate "transgender aesthetic[s]," arguing that "The transgender form becomes the most clear and compelling representation of our contemporary state of permanent dislocation" (105, 124). The following pages borrow and adapt Halberstam's term, retaining its emphasis on the ways in which technology reformulates bodies and spaces, blurring the lines between the organic and the artificial, as well as other binaries, but applying it to the very different context of representations of various sex cultures to map other ways in which subjectivity is currently evolving alongside the new spaces outlined by Jameson. While multiple different terms will be tested for their applicability to the spaces described by Delany, the technotopic potential of his representations provides a theoretical link to the following sections.

Delany, like Jameson, seems suspicious of overly simplified relationships of representation as reflection, particularly as they relate to sexuality, as demonstrated in his essay "Of Sex, Objects, Signs, Systems, Sales, SF, and Other Things." Arguing for the mutually imbricated nature of sex and sociality, Delany states:

> There's a prevalent theory that society, in some mysterious way, is and will always be a mirror of some mysteriously external sex act, i.e., standard missionary position. This theory, of course, is nonsense. Every sex act, from the most 'normal' to the most 'perverse,' is an internalization of one or another set of social parameters. Once internalized, however, they are sexual and no longer social—save in their social *effect* as sexual behavior [...;] an easy and uncritical

passage from the social to the sexual is, therefore, always suspect […] (39, italics

original)

Ultimately, Delany espouses the "society-contours-sex" over the "sex-produces-society" model

("Of Sex" 41). Rather than the sexual and the social simply reflecting each other, the two are

deeply co-constituting in multiple complex ways. The social effect of sexual behavior, the social

contouring of sex, is one of the central concerns of *Times Square*, which combines a memoir of

sexual encounters with a theoretical mediation on interpersonal relationships, while

contextualizing both in a discussion of the evolving spatial politics of New York City in the

second half of the twentieth century. Delany argues for the social utility of queer spaces that

facilitate subcultural sexual communities as well as the interconnected worth of non-

conventional relationships fostered in these places—relationships that do not need to be

"consecutive" and are often "simultaneous," functioning to enhance more normative bonds by

relieving various social pressures (57).[2] For Delany, the unique nature of these relationships is at

its most subversive and valuable when the constituents of the relationship come from disparate

social spheres, a mingling of backgrounds particularly promoted by the social space of

pornographic theatres in Times Square between the 1960s and 1990s. The essays function as a

counterpoint to several similarly motivated critiques of neoliberal capitalism, in which the

"experiences of working-class or ethnic-racial queers are beyond […] notice or interest" (Muñoz

31), instead positioning the transformative potential of interclass and interracial relationships as a

rhetorical focal point.

 Of primary interest to this project is the text's emphasis on the technological facilitation

of non-normative sexual acts, generally speaking, and the attendant potentially subversive

---

[2] Unless otherwise specified, all quotes from Delany for the rest of this chapter come from *Times Square Red, Times Square Blue*.

heterogeneous affiliations fostered within the queer space of the pornographic movie theatres, more specifically. While Delany touches on other public spaces for the acting out of male same-sex desire—parks, bathhouses, bars, restrooms, street corners—he maintains that, at least personally, "the movies were the most important" (83). The first essay in Delany's text, "Times Square Blue" (dated October 1996), recounts Delany's experiences in these theatres. Early on he stresses the diversity of the people who frequented the establishments alongside him: "The population was incredibly heterogeneous—white, black, Hispanic, Asian, Indian, Native American, and a variety of Pacific Islanders [....] I've met playwrights, carpenters, opera singers, telephone repair men, stockbrokers, guys on welfare, guys with trust funds, guys on crutches, on walkers, in wheelchairs, teachers, warehouse workers, male nurses, fancy chefs [...]" (15) ranging in age from "twenty-five to fifty, but with an extensive flattening of the bell curve at either end" (19). This range of ethnicities, vocations, abilities, and ages did not prevent the formation of close connections within the theatre, although these relations formed along what Berlant and Warner term "unsystematized lines of acquaintance" (558): these are relationships formed apart from institutions such as family units, workplaces, and schools, and that even defy dominant understandings of friendship. Delany maintains "The place seemed almost a kind of family, with a neighborhood feel—though men came there from as far as the Bronx, Queens, Westchester, or (a tree service worker and his uncle) Brewster, New York" (20), describing the foundation of a temporary and quasi-diasporic queer collective that shares characteristics with more traditional forms of community.

Halberstam notes that "Delany's book breaks the mold in the genre of gay male accounts of space that often take the form of travelogues and then compare the author's sexual experiences with gay men in a variety of global locations, only to argue for a kind of universal

homosexuality within which fluidity and flexibility are the order of the day" while also emphasizing that *Times Square* is "One of the best studies of sexual space that does still focus on gay men, but recognizes the fault lines of class, race, and gender in the construction of sexual communities" (*Queer Time* 13). In other words, both the geographic specificity and social diversity of Delany's essay make it stand out from similar narratives: it is not a claim for a border-crossing concretization of sexual identity nor is it exclusively invested in sexuality. Instead, it is a study of a specific queer space, a funeral dirge for its demise, and a call for the creation of future alternatives. It is crucial to be critical of Delany's account, to question who and what are excluded from the spaces of "Times Square Blue," but an examination of the relationships formed and institutions replaced by the theatres is also relevant.

The queer space of the theatre provides an instance of institutionalized cruising, a situated and fixed location that provides opportunities for multiple, random, and anonymous sexual encounters. In addition to fulfilling roles conventionally regulated to the bedroom, the theatre space, like other public sex venues, "offered trust, education, freedom, and political mobilization" to patrons (Hoffman 349)—it is not just a cruising institution, but stands in for several other institutions as well. Delany's critiques of judico-legal social imperatives extends to a skepticism of the direction the American education system is taking, in spite of or perhaps due to his own vocation as a university professor: he states in the second essay that "the only consistent and ultimately necessary learning that occurs across the field of 'universal higher education' […] is the two to four years of acclimation to the bureaucratic management of our lives that awaits more and more of the country's working classes" (174-5). In contrast, the pornographic movie theatres are consistently portrayed as a place of vital and diverse education—sexual, medical, and otherwise—throughout "Times Square Blue." Delany

postulates that the pornographic films function as "a sexual education for their working-class audience" ostensibly "improv[ing] our vision of sex all over the country, making it friendlier, more relaxed, and more playful" (83), positioning the technology of pornographic film as an effective education tool on issues of sex and wellness through a dialogue between the viewer, the film, and other theatre patrons. Countering the rhetoric of mass media and "anti-public-sex activists" during the HIV/AIDS pandemic which "seek[s] to enforce a more conservative sexual ethic on younger gay men in the name of paternalistic protection and HIV prevention" (Hoffman 349), the text recounts a young theatre patron telling Delany: "I learned half the stuff I *know* in this place. People told me here how not to get AIDS—and I sure don't got it [sic]. I get tested just about every year. You do too, professor—you told me that" (83, italics original). By interacting in a social matrix facilitated by the pornographic films, one that brings together a diversity of individuals and puts the subject of sex in the forefront, the younger patron utilizes the theatre space as a place of learning.

Rather than portraying the queer space of the theatre as a breeding ground for infection and illness, it is depicted as a place for education and prevention without the corresponding demand for abstinence—a point emphasized by the young man identifying his occasional sexual partner, Delany, as a professor.[3] The theatre space provides an alternative site to receive the benefits offered by normalizing hegemonic institutions, an alternative place for the intimacy of the bedroom and the knowledge of the school or hospital. Indeed, Delany's representations show

---

[3] Delany's subtle yet persistent inclusion of his academic credentials into the narrative of "Times Square Blue" is telling: it can be interpreted as a rhetorical strategy to legitimate his claims for the importance of the pornographic movie theatres and as a microcosm of the structure of the set of the essays. Delany must be both a participant in sexual subcultures (the predominant voice of "Times Square Blue") and a well-read intellectual/social theorist (the main voice of "Times Square Red") to culminate in a persuasive project, one delivered from a perspective of both invested involvement and comparatively objective knowledge, stylistically employing what Delany terms "A commitment both to the vernacular and to the expert" (xviii). In this sense, Delany's writing style demonstrates *Times Square*'s role as both an intellectual and sexual project as much as the content of his writing does.

this space of sexual relations filling in for the exact institutions that Foucault outlines as attempting to govern "new technolog[ies] of sex" (*History* 116)—namely, places of education and medicine. Delany's specific "technology of sex," heterosexual pornographic film, is essential to create this space. Above all other implications, Delany maintains the queer space of the theatre is "one of the necessary places where socializing and sexualizing actually touch for, dare I call it, health or just contentment" (45), positioning this mutual pursuit of pleasure as "socially beneficial" (90). As Dean notes, Delany's writing ultimately claims that "what motivates sex among men is neither a biological nor a political imperative but, instead, a search for connection in which bodily contact offers an especially pleasurable means" (Dean 75) and in this case connection is provided by way of the seemingly inconsequential pornographic films, a discussion of which will soon follow.

To unpack the various roles filled by the theatre space and the pleasurable contacts formed within, and return to the main interests of this project, a close examination of the queer space of the pornographic movie theatre is necessary. Significantly, Halberstam points out that these alternative intimacies "develop and are assigned meaning *only* in the context of the porn theater, and their meanings shift and change when the men leave the darkened theater and reemerge into the city" (*Queer Time* 13, italics added), spatially demarcating the theatre as the integral element in these social formations. The spatial politics of absence and presence in both the filmic space of the screen and the physical space of the theatre are crucial in understanding how the exclusionary discourses of heteronormativity and patriarchy thrive in this queer space and are also circumvented to foster limited subversive sexual and social connections. To reiterate, Delany sets the pornographic movie theatres apart from other sites of public male same-sex desire, and this distinction is indebted to the spatial dynamics of the theatre that are

structured by filmic technology. Foucault lists the cinematic viewing space as an example of a heterotopia, "capable of juxtaposing in a single real place several spaces, several sites that are in themselves incompatible," going on to state "the cinema is a very odd rectangular room, at the end of which, on a two-dimensional screen, one sees the projection of a three-dimensional space" ("Of Other Spaces" 6). The space of the pornographic theatres described by Delany fall under the rubric of a Foucauldian heterotopia[4]: a heterotopic space, as mentioned above, that fosters a variety of *heterogeneous* social relations between classes, races, and sexual identifications, yet maintains the divisiveness between some of these categories of difference due to its prioritizing of personalized intimacy over fully cinematically mediated and anonymous contact.

However, this queer space is not just a movie theatre, but a *pornographic* movie theatre; not only a heterotopia, but what Delany terms a "pornotopia" (78).[5] Phillip Brian Harper uses the legal case surrounding the arrest of Paul Reubens (known for portraying Pee-wee Herman) for masturbating in a pornographic movie theatre as an entry point to discussing the unclear spatial boundaries between public and private. Echoing Delany's complaint that the concept of public is "left hopelessly undefined" (91) in the rezoning laws that led to the closure of the theatres in Times Square, Harper acknowledges "the boundary between public and private space" is "extremely indistinct" (95). Harper provides a useful analysis of how the concurrently low amount of physical visibility (given the darkness of the theatre and the typically wide seating distribution of theatre patrons) and *social visibility*[6] facilitate sexual activity within the

---

[4] Specifically, the pornographic theatres would fall into Foucault's category of "heterotopias of deviation," those spaces "in which individuals whose behavior is deviant in relation to the required mean or norm" are found ("Of Other Spaces" 5)—in this case, sexually non-normative individuals.

[5] The term "pornotopia" was coined in a very different context: namely, Steven Marcus's study of Victorian literary pornography and sexuality, *The Other Victorians* (1966). Marcus describes a pornotopia as the idealized imaginative "utopian fantasy" inherent in pornographic space, a space with a non-normative relationship to place and time (268-9).

[6] Harper borrows and adapts the concept of social visibility from Laud Humphreys' foundational text on public sex cultures, *Tearoom Trade* (1970). Today, Humphreys' text is largely known for its controversial and ethically

pornographic theatre space (105). Significantly, on the note of social visibility and in defense of Reubens, Harper states it "is the circumstances under which a patron does his looking at the screen—one of which, it must be acknowledged, is precisely the nature of the movie being projected onto that screen—that preclude him from being looked *at* as socially inappropriate and disruptive" (105-6, italics original). The technology of film, particularly the genre of cinematic pornography, is therefore crucial in fostering the heterogeneous social relations championed by Delany by legitimating the sexual encounters that bond the participants in various ways.

Significantly, when Delany first introduces the concept of "movie cruising" he mentions that "The (*strictly heterosexual*) pornographic movies" had "been a gay sexual cruising ground" for years (19, italics added), summoning a spatial dynamic of presence and absence. While Delany champions the male same-sex encounters that supposedly run rampant inside the theatres, male homosexuality is not represented within the movies, as "pornographic film and video" were "aimed at a heterosexual male audience" (74). Indeed, amidst the variety of sexual acts Delany outlines within the films, "The only perversion that did not exist […] save for the *most* occasional comic touches (and even these would still get a groan from the audience […]), was male homosexuality" (88-9, italics original). Just as Delany admits the functioning of the pornographic theatre space is predicated on the reduction of women to images on a screen (more on this later), he contends that the absence of male homosexuality "from the narrative space on the screen proper is what allowed [male homosexuality] to go on rampantly among the observing audience, now in this theater, now in that one" (79).

---

questionable treatment of research subjects. Humphreys states "the settings for sex are socially visible in the degree to which they preclude the initial consent to copresence of those who may be involved as witnesses" (159). Harper uses this concept to argue that "It would seem that one's very entrance into a theater that screens sexually explicit triple-X features might well be construed as implicit consent to copresence in the sexual encounters that likely take place therein" (104), resulting in a low level of social visibility for the patrons of the theatre.

The heterosexual pornography helps maintain the fantasy that the screen is the focal point for all of the patrons, rather than simply the prerequisite backdrop for observing and participating in homoerotic activity for many. While the pornography is only mentioned in passing when compared to the vast amount of pages dedicated to the corporeal encounters within the theatres, it is important to note that the almost dismissed heterosexual films on the screen are actually what enable and propel the encounters within the theatre. It allows for an idea of sexuality based on acts as opposed to sexuality based on identity, a conception which is more expansive, more utopian in spirit, as it allows many patrons to participate in direct and indirect queer sexual acts while maintaining their self-identification as heterosexual, further emphasizing how space can construct sexuality and not only the reverse. Queer, heterogeneous encounters—relations that span divisive social categories of class, race, and sexuality—are predicated on the existence of a space to enable such encounters, and the technology of film and genre of heterosexual pornography facilitate the production of the requisite queer space of the theatre within the text.

However, the representational lack of homosexual acts on the screen is significant as "male-male pornography, as a public expression of homosexuality, is particularly essential for […] men coming to terms with their sexuality" (Hoffman 346), especially during the time of HIV/AIDS which threatens to limit sexual possibility: "When gay sex is inextricably linked with disease in the minds of so many gay men, making images of sex without disease public is itself a political act that promotes sexual freedom and erotic fantasy" (Hoffman 348). Interestingly, Delany's text itself is a form of pornography, as he describes his erotic encounters in varying degrees of detail: he depicts exclusively homosexual acts in a space that only depicts heterosexual acts—the films are 'purely' heterosexual and the essay is 'purely' homosexual. This again summons Foucault's notion of a heterotopia as "capable of juxtaposing in a single real

place […]several sites that are in themselves incompatible": the theatre (and Delany's essay) is a queer space that deflates binary constructions of sexuality by allowing heterosexual and homosexual activity to exist in distinct yet non-contradictory ways.

To summarize, the socially subversive queer space (whether labeled as a heterotopia or pornotopia) of "Times Square Blue" results from the low social visibility afforded through the joint viewing process of pornographic film leading to "a technotopic vision of space and flesh in a process of mutual mutation" (Halberstam, *Queer Time*, 103). In this sense, Delany's text is one realization of Lefebvre's claim that "Any revolutionary 'project' today, whether utopian or realistic, must, if it is to avoid hopeless banality, make the reappropriation of the body, in association with the reappropriation of space, into a non-negotiable part of its agenda" (166-7). In other words, neither the defiance of heteronormativity embodied in the sexual acts nor the queer space of the theatre and the attendant heterogeneous social contact in isolation are sufficiently socially subversive: it is through the contemporaneous re-scripting of norms for both people and places that Delany's impulse for change is granted serious legitimacy.

Delany's emphasis on interpersonal encounters must be met by a twin emphasis on the essential role of the screen, of technology and the space of technology, in allowing these encounters to thrive. The technology of film, while allowing people from disparate backgrounds to come together, also encourages a personalization of intimacy simply in virtue of the duration of the films. No one is required to stay for the entirety of a certain movie; the screen does not mandate unbroken contact as might be required in other cruising locations (such as park where lack of contact could signal rejection), allowing for a less pressure-filled and more temporally fluid space full of ample opportunity for personal bonds to form, rather than allowing the filmic technology to fully mediate an encounter. Co-presence in the theatre space indicates desire; in

this sense, the diversity of theatre patrons and the intimacy formed between them is both

spatially and temporally predicated on the filmic technology central to the pornographic theatres.

      Delany's text stands out from similar accounts of male same-sex cruising[7] with the

detailed and affect-laden portraits he provides of his various sexual liaisons during his time in the

movie theatres, breaking away from common conventions of singularity and anonymity.[8] The

essay weaves together Delany's intimate experiences with various men; for instance, Gary who

"was good conversation and good sex," knew Delany for at least seven years, and "was an

extremely affectionate man" particularly "In the world of quick, perfunctory sex" (38) and

another man who "eighteen years" after their last encounter "*still* writes and phones [Delany]

now and again from jail in Southern California" (48, italics original). Berlant and Warner aptly

describe cruising sites as "hard to recognize as world making because they are so fragile and

ephemeral" (561) and Delany's thorough documenting of these instances of alternative

intimacy—initiated exclusively as sexual encounters, but stretching over years—helps to

counteract this point by representing relationships that are certainly grounded in cruising yet are

---

[7] For instance, John Rechy's *The Sexual Outlaw: A Documentary* (1984) features "a vast cast of characters" most of which "are nameless and appear only briefly" and are "virtually 'pastless'" (15). Rechy's motivation was "to create characters […] who might be defined 'fully'—*by inference*—only through their sexual journeys" (15, italics original), contrasting to Delany's detailed and emotionally invested recollections of his various sexual partners.

[8] Ricardo Montez rightfully critiques what he deems Delany's "ethically fraught relationships with his subjects," especially as it relates to the photographing of two male hustlers introduced in the early pages of "Times Square Blue": "Delany acquires signatures that allow him to reproduce images of these men, binding them to a formal system of visibility that increases their vulnerability to the very structures of policing he is critically marking" (Montez 428). While Delany's identification of the men described in the first essay—both through name, and occasionally through photographs as well—marks a generic departure from other cruising narratives (by personalizing the identity of participants in sexual subcultures), it also emphasizes a drive to tie into conventional forms of social relation and power (by making them visible, and as such, vulnerable). The use of photographs (of people, streets, and buildings such as the theatres) is not surprising given Delany's evident interest in visual technologies, as represented by his focus on movie theatres, and works to buttress his claims of the reality of his personal accounts, emphasizing the 'non' of his non-fiction memoir. Also of interest, however, is the fact that Delany "often thought about taking photographs in the movies," but "never did," leaving him with only "Verbal accounts" (Delany 36) and suggesting something inviolable about the queer space within the theatre, something that cannot be captured through a photograph, but must be experienced corporeally.

surprisingly durable, creating "a complex discourse around them through narrative and the meticulous work of archiving" (Halberstam, *Queer Time*, 14).

These relationships display both resistance to assimilation and compatibility with the social trajectory of locating intimate relations in the private sphere. Delany invites Tommy, another theatre patron, to his home for breakfast several times and Tommy consistently stands him up, stating if he were to accept such an invitation he "might even get hurt or somethin'," (40) displaying a clear mistrust of private spaces contrasted to the perceived relative safety of the public space of the theatre. This logic—that public sex in a pornographic theatre is much safer than having a meal in someone's domestic space—is in direct contradiction with the logic Delany views as the driving force behind the destruction of queer spaces such as the theatre.[9] In contrast, Delany's interactions with a man named Arly lead to a collision of nuclear domesticity with alternative intimacies. The two form a close bond, largely based on the fact that Delany is especially skilled at mutually masturbating Arly in the theatre, and their "friendship *did* get to the point of going to each other's houses" (50, italics original); indeed, Arly even visits Delany's sick mother with him, implying a degree of closeness not usually associated with cruising relationships and challenging the conception of "domesticity and sexuality as dichotomous and practically mutually exclusive phenomena" (Harper 100). The connection between Arly and Delany is an embodied example of the creation of counterpublics as described by Warner, social forms that make "expressive corporeality the material for the elaboration of intimate life among publics of strangers" (57). The subversive possibilities Delany sees in his relationship with Arly

---

[9] Delany explicitly critiques the rezoning of urban space in New York City in the "name of 'safety'" as an attempt to "dismantl[e] the various institutions that promote interclass communication" (122). Tommy's view that the theatre is a comparatively safe space aligns with Delany's theoretical and political critiques in his second essay, as he maintains that "if *every* sexual encounter involves bringing someone back to your house, the general sexual activity in a city becomes anxiety-filled, class-bound, and choosy. This is precisely *why* public rest rooms, peep shows, sex movies, bars with grope rooms, and parks with enough greenery are necessary for a relaxed and friendly sexual atmosphere in a democratic metropolis" (127, italics original).

bleed into his literary imaginings: he admits Arly was the inspiration for a character in one of his science fiction texts (55). The last time they see each other they are both with their committed partner of the time—for Arly, a woman, for Delany, a man—emphasizing the non-normative script of their sexual and social relationship. Of course, the distinctions between the theatre space and the domestic space remain germane: Arly and Delany visiting Delany's sick mother connotes very differently from the social clout gained by Delany for his superior masturbatory techniques.

Muñoz's observations on Delany's other more sprawling autobiographical memoir, *The Motion of Light in Water* (2004), are applicable to the experiences outlined above as well. For Delany, these are "rituals that reconstruc[t] intimacy" as "the men in this space took care of one another not only by offering flesh but by performing a care for the self that encompassed a vast care for others—a delicate and loving 'being for others'" (Muñoz 51). In Delany's own words, while these relationships do not fit into the most normative social categories—they are "not love relationships" and are "not business relationships" (55)—the "salient fact is: These *were* relationships. In Tommy's case, in Gary's, and in several others they were relationships that lasted years. Intimacy for most of us is a condition that endures, however often repeated, for minutes or for hours. And these all had their many intimate hours. But, like all sane relationships, they also had limits" (40, italics original). This is the mutual contouring of the sexual and the social as the conflation of intimacy (beyond a purely physical sense of the word) and sexual cruising suggest alternative interpersonal connections outside of dominant models of private nuclear domesticity. These depictions demonstrate how "Queer culture has learned not only how to sexualize [...] other relations, but also to use them as a context for witnessing intense and personal affect while elaborating a public world of belonging and transformation" (Berlant and

Warner 558): by cultivating sexual encounters between people from disparate social spheres, the theatre space and filmic technology cultivates currents of subversive public intimacy.

Delany creates a theory of interpersonal relation based on these experiences that juxtaposes "contact" encounters to "network" interactions. Delany sees contact as the more spontaneous experiences of life, chance discussions and fleeting moments, far removed from institutionalized contexts and carefully scheduled meetings. As is the case with "pleasantries exchanged with a neighbor" and "conversation that starts in the line at the grocery store," Delany insists that "contact is also the intercourse—physical and conversational—that blooms in and as 'casual sex' in public [sex venues]" (123). He takes the encounters within the pornographic movie theatres as his primary example of contact relations. Contrasting to contact (in several senses, though Delany denies he is setting up a rigid binary), is networking: "what people have to do when those with like interests live too far apart to be thrown together in public spaces through chance and propinquity" (128)—academic conferences and art gallery openings are two examples provided by Delany.

Among the many differences between these types of social relations outlined by Delany is the potential for heterogeneous interactions. While "Networking crosses class lines only in the most vigilant manner," "Contact regularly crosses class lines in those public spaces in which interclass encounters are at their most frequent" (129), thereby contact provides "benefits […] [that] networking simply *cannot* provide" (173, italics original). This is Delany's macro justification for why the queer space of the pornographic theatre matters: it is a venue that provides a space for contact and contact has a much greater potential to cross various social strata, which, recall, makes life the "most rewarding, productive, and pleasant" (111). Today, Delany's use of contact and networking relations evokes the contemporary language of

technology—wireless networks, social networking, and the like—with Delany's comparative disdain for networking relations prefiguring a distrust for relationships primarily facilitated through technology that will be explored in the next section of this project, relationships that can be seen as 'networked,' both in Delany's sense and in a technological sense.

Despite Delany's utopian celebration of the contact relations fostered within these pornographic theatres, Bersani's critique of the notion that "radical sex means or leads to radical politics" (205) is apt here: the theatre does not foster an anarchistic dismantling of the social order or an overhaul of what intimacy entails. It is important to note that the carving out of this space is also dependent on key physical and representational absences attributable to the emphasis on forming personalized relationships; most notably, the exclusion of women's bodies in the theatre space and the aforementioned lack of homosexual activity on the theatre screen. Bersani's skepticism of how "The phallocentrism of gay cruising becomes diversity and pluralism" (220) is especially appropriate when considering the gendered dynamics of cruising cultures, and the pornographic movie theatres of Delany's essays are no exception. This is readily apparent even in the writer's preface when Delany recounts "a young woman editor, a reader of an early draft" of the essays inquiring what "went on *in* those theatres, before they were closed?" (xv, italics original). The female editor displays a desire to gaze into this queer space of male same-sex desire, implicitly suggesting that this space is ostensibly closed to women, something that is confirmed by the rest of the essay. While the successful promotion of other strata-crossing social interactions in the theatres is persuasively documented by Delany, the limitations of this queer space—especially the implications of the persistence of gender stratification within Times Square sexual society—are only touched upon in a limited capacity in the confines of the essay.

The essential absence of women from the subversive sexual spaces detailed by Delany is telling. In contrast to the several men—including the ones named above and several nameless encounters—there is only one description of the physical presence of a woman within one of the many pornographic theatres chronicled in the text. This instance, when Delay brings his friend Ana into the theatre, is brief, awkward, and singular: Delany expresses relief that Ana did not dress in "heels, miniskirt, and beaded halter"; the movie theatre manager is reluctant to admit Ana, exclaiming "This ain't no whorehouse," fearing Ana is a prostitute; and Ana admits she would never want to return, saying she was "scared to death" while in the theatre (26-30). The scene reads as a vignette of female invasion into a phallocentric space, as other theatre patrons are startled upon realizing Ana is a woman and this sole experience "exhaust[s] [Delany's] firsthand material on women visiting the sex movies" (30). Preceding Ana's visit to the theatre, Delany admits the simultaneously integral and excluded role of women in the functioning of the theatre space, stating that the "charm, sociality, and warmth" of the space "depend[s] entirely on the absence of 'the woman'" even though "she pervades, even fuels the entire process, from which she is corporally, intellectually, emotionally, and politically absent" (25). Although the visual technology of film is the requisite backdrop for this queer space, it also stands in for the female presence, relegating women's access to this sphere to the filmic space as the actresses in the various pornographic films, bound to be objectified or ignored (depending on the viewer), ultimately "flatten[ed] till she is only an image on a screen" (25).

Halberstam notes that "Women are tellingly absent from Delany's smart, engaging, and even revolutionary account of sexual subcultures, and one is led to conclude by the end of the book that as of now, there is no role for women in this subterranean world of public sex" (*Queer Time* 15). While Delany does not see "any reason that a woman (or women) couldn't take any (or

every) role" he outlines in the pornographic theatres, he goes on to make the problematic claim

that "What waits is for enough women to consider such venues as a locus of possible pleasure"

(31). He states that "the fear of the outside that Ana brought within, and provisional arguments

about women" need to be put aside to lead to "the introduction of numbers of women, gay,

straight, or bi into such a scene," which "might certainly cause some problems" but "those

problems would nevertheless be just that: social problems to be socially solved" (30). By

attributing the gendered absence in these transformative interracial and interclass spaces to a

collective failure of women to realize the potentialities of these locations (and the individual fear

of Ana), Delany provides the very reason he is unable to see: a male expectation for women to

carve out a place in patriarchal spaces. By describing aborted and less fulfilling encounters with

men from the pornographic theatres that take place in other external locations, Delany highlights

the exclusivity of the transformative social dynamic he celebrates to the interior of spaces like

the pornographic theatres—especially on a collective community scale—suggesting that this

dynamic may well be predicated on the exclusion of embodied women.[10] Delany's belittling of

Ana's fear, a very valid fear given rape culture and other related instances of patriarchal violence

against women, illustrates how phallocentric discourse maintains the gender division of spaces

like the pornographic theatres.[11] Opening up this type of sexual space would require more than a

---

[10] The absence of female bodies is not exclusive to the pornography theatres, but rather a commonality shared by several public sex spaces. As Leap contends, "Unavoidably […] assertions of privacy, as they apply to sites of sexual practice, depend heavily on questions of status and privilege. This helps explain why the dominant figures in the category 'participant' at [public sex] sites are more likely to be 'men,' rather than 'women.' This also helps explain why 'sex in public places' is so closely associated with male, rather than female, identities" (11). Additionally, this exclusion further aligns Delany's theatre space with Foucault's definition of heterotopias, as "the heterotopic site is not freely accessible […;] To get in one must have a certain permission" (7)—in this case, the price of admission is structured by phallocentricism.

[11] The text includes other problematic examples of Delany discrediting the physical, mental, and social inequities and abuse experienced by women under a patriarchal society. For instance, when he describes the tendency of Rannit (one of his sexual partners from the theatre) to grope women without their consent, Delany "playfully" chastises Rannit for what he labels as an "annoying habit" (87-8), as opposed to something deeply violating. While

group of 'enlightened' women marching into a room full of masturbating men. It would

necessitate a community that revels in the intermingling of various valences of power—of class,

race, sexual orientation, *and gender*—for the collective pursuit of pleasure, an example of which

can be found in the following chapter's discussion of the film *Shortbus*.

The complex place/absence of women in the theatrical queer space—both corporeally

invisible, yet visually essential—needs to be contextualized in contemporaneous feminist

discourses regarding pornography,[12] especially as they relate to the rise and demise of

pornographic theatres as social institutions. Andrea Dworkin locates evolving technologies of

representation—especially film—as encouraging the exploitation of women through

pornography as "The technology itself demands the creation of more and more [pornography] to

meet the market opened up by the technology" (201). Dworkin's concerns with the increasing

visibility and accessibility of pornography through different technologies are certainly

compounded and expanded by the currently massive scale of the Internet pornography industry,

which also has direct implications for Delany's pornotopia as Internet pornography encourages a

shift away from the public sex cultures celebrated by Delany. He comments that "By the early

seventies the movie industry was already reeling under the advent of home video technology[;]

Suddenly it became impossible to fill up the larger theatrical spaces," leading to the creation of

---

Delany vehemently critiques the spatial politics of neoliberal capitalism, patriarchy must be acknowledged as another formative ideology for creating socially exclusive spaces.

[12] Anti-pornography feminism, especially prominent in the 1980s leading up to the composition of *Times Square*, maintained that pornography fostered a culture of casualness towards and facilitation of violence against women. Andrea Dworkin, a leading feminist theorist of the period, emphasized that "The fact that pornography is widely believed to be 'sexual representations' or 'depictions of sex' emphasizes only that the valuation of women as low whores is widespread and that the sexuality of women is perceived as low and whorish in and of itself" (201). Pornography was one of the major divisive disagreements between feminists, as sex-positive feminists met "anti-pornography feminists' insistence that 'women' are uniformly subordinated by 'pornography' […] with the furious rejoinder that these founding terms are fundamentally incoherent—neither all 'women' nor all 'pornography' are alike enough to support the argument for state censorship" and argued that anti-pornography discourse often "operated against the interests of feminists, in an all-too-familiar melodramatic protectionist mode" (Duggan, "Prologue," x).

tetraplexes and ever smaller theatrical spaces, "an almost spontaneous mitosis" (16). The overwhelming contemporary privatization of pornographic spectatorship—leading to fractured theatre spaces and empty seats, which began with home video technology and has been intensified by the Internet—has removed pornography as an integral element in facilitating many public sex cultures, as queer spaces are increasingly structured by different technologies of affiliation, to be discussed in later sections of this project. In short, while filmic technology met a demand for pornography that created the queer space depicted in Delany's text, the demise of this same space was triggered by the capacity of other technologies (home video technologies and later the Internet) to meet an even greater demand.

In contrast to Dworkin's concerns, Delany—clearly a sex-positive thinker—posits pornography as the lesser of representational evils. He recounts doing "an informal tabulation of six random commercial porn films in the Forty-second Street area and six random legit movies playing around the corner in the same area during the same week" when "WAP (Women Against Pornography) was leading its tours through the area in the early eighties," ultimately concluding with two sets of questions and answers: "Was commercial film pornography sexist? Certainly. Was it anywhere near as sexist as the legit films playing across the nation's screens in the same years? Not unless you simply took sexist and sexy as synonyms" (80). In particular, Delany mentions the "extraordinary gender reversal saga[s]" (74) that take place in some of the films, particularly given the rampant feminization of male pornographic actors to "a kind of male androgyny" to reduce the threat of their sexual presence to male audience members (76). Delany's stance on the representation of women in pornography mirrors his views on the absence of women from the queer space of the pornographic theatre: neither is ideal, but they function to open up cultures of specifically male sexual possibility. Indeed, the "magical essence, [and]

mystical energy" (25) Delany locates in the actresses of the pornographic films are especially integral to the facilitation of contact between men of different sexual identities, as the female image functions as a normalizing mediator between homoerotic intimacy, rendering the contact between men less violent, less dangerously insinuating to hegemonic models of heterosexual masculinity.

This problematic utilization of women to expedite an exclusively male pursuit of sexual pleasure—a reiteration of some of the most foundational elements of patriarchy—is of particular interest in considering the actual sexual content of the pornography depicted on the screen. Just as the content of the screen represented in Delany's essays is subject to Dworkin's feminist critiques, Delany's text is held accountable to the reality that "pornography specializes in minimizing the distance between representation and audience, such that it is hard not to feel implicated in some way or another" (Dean 77-8). By excluding women in the flesh (and, by extension, in Delany's essays) and homosexual activity on the screen, Delany's pornotopia is revealed as complicit with aspects of patriarchy and heteronormativity, and therefore consistent with society-at-large, by privileging only heterosexual men to full access—able to enjoy unrestricted presence in both the physical space and the filmic space.

To tie together these concerns with spatial hierarchies and gender divisions, and to move on to the eventual neoliberal reordering/removal of queer spaces like Delany's pornotopia, it is important to turn to the idea of *safety* as it permeates Delany's second essay of the piece, ". . . Three, Two, One, Contact: Times Square Red," written between December of 1997 and April of 1998. To begin his second essay and transition away from a memory narrative of sexual accounts in the pornographic movie theatres to a politically infused account of social relation and urban planning, Delany explains the social utility of the relationships detailed throughout "Times

Square Blue," emphasizing that "given the mode of capitalism under which we live, life is at its most rewarding, productive, and pleasant when large numbers of people understand, appreciate, and seek out interclass contact and communication conducted in a mode of good will" (111).

This central statement, clearly exemplified in the experiences recounted from within the theatre space, is constantly contextualized in a rhetoric of safety: Delany claims safety is an integral element of the social and sexual appeal of the pornographic theatre (recall Tommy's suspicion of Delany's domestic space yet comfort with performing intimate physical acts in the theatre) while also disparaging how discourses around safety lead to the closing of the majority of the theatres and the attendant loss of opportunities for crucial interclass contact. Delany claims he only witnessed one example close "to real violence" in "over *thousands* of visits" to the theatres when an affluent-looking patron was assaulted and robbed, confirming for Delany what he had "already intuited: porn theaters were not a place to enter wearing good clothes or looking as if you had something" (65, italics original). This sole instance of violence, in addition to highlighting a class inversion that tilts the scales of power away from the rich in this ostensibly interclass space, is one of several examples of Delany's attempts to dismantle prevalent notions of perceived danger—in the pornographic theatres, specifically, and in urban centres, generally—views held, according to Delany, by groups ranging from the municipal government administration to small-town tourists.

Delany's text accomplishes this feat much better in the case of the particular rather than the general. For the latter, the defense of the safety of city spaces, Delany deploys an unacknowledged dichotomy in the spatial politics of his essays, flying counter to his general emphasis on the importance of non-normative spaces. While Muñoz accurately positions Delany's public sexual encounters as a catalyst for the move from isolation to collectivity,

describing a scene from Delany's work as a "moment of utopian rapture when [Delany] first realized he was not a solitary pervert but part of a vast world of gay men who fucked, connected, and had actual lives" (125), this transition from private shame to public euphoria is reminiscent of a binary that Delany tends to perpetuate, rather than dismantle. This recalls the pervasive spatial narrative that Halberstam labels as metronormativity, the "story of migration from 'country' to 'town' […] within which the subject moves to a place of tolerance after enduring life in a place of suspicion, persecution and secrecy" (*Queer Time* 37), and asserts the urban as the space for accepting queer collectivity, as opposed to the rural—a reductive opposition that persists throughout much of Delany's text.

In his attempts to rectify misguided notions of the dangers of the 'big city' and the safety of the 'small town,' Delany comes to deplore the "wholly provincial and absolutely small-town terror of cross-class contact" (153), reductively paralleling rural non-normativity to a "queer form of social death" (Herring 1). Delany goes as far as *blaming* stereotyped rural community values for the reconstruction of Times Square, contending that "A salient stabilizing factor that has helped create the psychological smoke screen behind which developers of Times Square and of every other underpopulated urban center in the country have been able to pursue their machinations in spite of public good and private desire is the small-town fear of urban violence," as the space is made more safe and palatable for tourists, and "Since the tourist to the big city is seen as someone *from* a small town, the promotion of tourism is a matter of promoting the image of the world—and of the city— that the small town holds" (153, italics original).

To Delany, the rural is in stark opposition with the type of contact socialization he highly esteems throughout the text, a place where people are uninterested in crossing social strata, and where violence occurs most frequently between people who know one another, and on a larger

scale than in urban centers, a view he supports with undocumented statistics that read as speculation (155). Reading Delany through Scott Herring illuminates how certain passages of the second essay fuel "the stereotype of the rural as a geography of hate, violence, and hostility" (Herring 187, n. 17). In his preface, Delany includes "rural and urban" in his list of dichotomies he aims to think through critically, but this list ultimately ends with the goal of discovering various ways for people to land on "*our* richly variegated *urban* shore" (xx, italics added), positioning the urban as the inevitable endpoint for those who have worked through problematic identity binaries, regardless of gender, class, race, or geographic region. Delany's joint defense of the sexual possibilities of the spatial make-up of Times Square before re-development projects and his dismissal of the rural as a place of queer possibility are not unique to the discipline of queer studies, as Herring notes that much of the field "wants desperately to be urban planning, even as so much of its theoretical architecture is already urban planned" (5). Both the drive to contour cityscapes (apparent in his constant references to the work of the renowned urbanists Jane Jacobs and Le Corbusier) and the urban contouring of his writing are readily apparent in Delany's piece, as he maintains "it is absurd to think that sexual pleasure and sexual opportunity are somehow exempt from the equations that make city life attractive and livable" (169): sexual possibility and urban possibility are seen as imbricated.

Critiques of metronormativity do not seek to deny that urban styles of living have long been and continue to be considered "subversive strategies for negotiating the physiological and psychological abuses of heteronormativity," but to demonstrate how "dominant versions of metropolitan queer stylistics often work internally to intimidate, to normalize, and to box queers into urbane habitus formations" (Herring 21). In order to deny a spatial stereotype (the rampant crime and danger of urban centres), Delany employs another spatial stereotype (the regressive

and prejudice-filled nature of rural spaces), and positions the queer theatrical space as not only

spatially segregated internally (excluding corporeal women and the representation of

homosexuality on the screen), but also spatially segregated on an external level, as a space

unlikely/impossible to appear outside of large urban centres. This contributes to the prescriptive

drive for those of non-normative sexual identifications to flock to cities, something supported by

Delany's denial of the allegedly higher violence of city life.

While Delany seeks to combat the perception of urban spaces as dangerous on a macro

level with problematic metronormative rhetoric, he also defends against a more focused critique

of the related discourses of safety employed in the corporate restructuring of Times Square and

destruction of queer spaces for sexual subcultures. Delany wrote his Times Square essays during

the institution of policies by New York City mayor Rudolph Giuliani to clean-up the city in order

to increase business (Montez 426), part of a "draconian rule" that "rezoned the vast majority of

public sex out of the city" leading to "the fragmentation that will [come to] characterize this New

York City's culture of public sex" as "alienating" (Muñoz 53). These new zoning regulations

prohibited sexual businesses from being closer than five hundred feet to representative

institutions of hegemonic heteronormativity—from day care centres to places of worship, these

bastions of normativity were deployed as buffer zones to corral and reduce sexual spaces—

leading to the closure of "all but 28" of "the estimated 177 adult businesses in the city,"

resulting in a "devastating" impact on businesses "catering to queer, especially to gay, men"

(Berlant and Warner 551). This clear attack on queer spaces, such as the pornographic theatres

depicted by Delany, aimed to replace local adult businesses with "more corporate

representations, such as Disney stores and Starbucks franchises" (Muñoz 53) and was "willing,

and even anxious, to exploit everything from homophobia and AIDS to family values and fear of

drugs" (Delany xiii-xiv) to support a logic of public protection as "the urban planners of the new Times Square […] deplo[y] a logic of 'safety' to justify the destruction of an intricate subcultural system" (Halberstam 14) for capitalistic profit.

Delany sees this set of zoning regulations as endemic to the intentional societal destruction of a plethora of institutions that foster interclass contact, a process that attempts to render accounts like Delany's essays as a "pernicious glorification of everything dangerous: unsafe sex, neighborhoods filled with […] unsafe characters […;] promiscuity, an attack on the family and the stable social structure, and dangerous, noncommitted, 'unsafe' relationships […;] though the danger is rarely specified in any way other than to suggest its failure to conform to the ideal bourgeois marriage" (122).Troublingly, this list of perceived dangers is not solely about sex—not just a well-intentioned or potentially misguided attempt to prevent the spread of HIV/AIDS—but is an attempt to normalize sexual and social behavior in public. As Delany states, New York City has by law "*criminalized each and every homosexual act* […] 'in public' […;] safe or unsafe, with *or* without a condom" (91, italics original) through the institution of these policies. The rezoning of Times Square can be seen as a neoliberal attempt to reconstruct space, as neoliberalism "attempts to totalize the social field through market mechanisms, conflating earlier differentiations between economic, political, and cultural domains and producing new forms of valorized, surplus, or residual life" (Harkins 1073): functioning within a capitalism paradigm, "The law aims to restrict any counterpublic sexual culture by regulating its *economic conditions*" (Berlant and Warner 562, italics added) by way of rendering non-normative subjectivities increasingly marginalized and invisible.[13] As a result, the area of Times

---

[13] However, it is also important to be aware of neoliberalism's insidious tendency to package, sell, and appropriate the counter-normative, regressively casting it as another element of conventional capitalism. After all, the pornographic theatres are businesses (in addition to being queer spaces); businesses that seek to make a profit by facilitating non-normative sexual subcultures. Their closure is attributable not only to government-supported

Square is open for transformation into what Muñoz calls a period of "late Disneyfication" as "Queer and other minoritarian subjects continue to be pushed further into this private sphere" allowing the revamped Times Square to function as a hub for "suburban tourists who are shuttled into the city in large tour buses" (Muñoz 53) to engage in a system of exchange that is devoid of the intimate and affect-laden subversive energies of the cultures of male same-sex desire within the theatres—to take part in networking, but not contact.

Delany's sadness over the loss of these queer spaces via the neoliberal corporatization of New York is infused with a resentment of the emptiness of the rhetoric of safety used to enact these destructions. For example, promoting the safety of women is utilized as a major force in the 'cleaning-up' of Times Square, and although Delany problematically dismisses the valid fears women may have of the pornotopic space he represents, he accurately notes that the driving out of female sex-trade workers in the area (in addition to the closure of pornographic movie theatres) invalidates these claims for female protection in clearly class-inflected ways. He states "It is naive to think that these developers, who make a city space safe for one class of women by actively driving out another class, have any concern for women *as* a class. The Times Square developers' concern for women and women's safety extends no further than seeing women as replaceable nodes with a certain amount of money to spend in a male-dominated economic system" (160-1, italics original). This combination of factors—an investment in economic expansion of socially normalized exchange and scattering minority individuals under the nebulous neoliberal rubric of 'safety'—coalesce to reorder space and eliminate the subversive potential of heterogeneous social and sexual contact in the area.

---

heteronormativity, but also a failure to maintain a profitable business—not an intentional, transgressive failure, but one largely based in shifting habits of film consumption.

What remains to be examined to conclude this engagement with Delany's account and transition to the next chapter is how these legal, economic, spatial, and social changes run parallel to contemporaneous technological changes in provocative ways. In his preface, Delany notes that Times Square is "one of the world's most famous urban areas," a reputation that "hinged on an image of the illicit and the perverse as much as it hinged on a reputation for entertainment, for being a 'film capital'" (xiv)—on both the sexual and the cinematic, which, as the preceding pages have demonstrated, are deeply intertwined. Not only did the judico-legal policies of neoliberal capitalism—which absorb "cultural formations of gender and sexuality […] into neoliberal reform" (Harkins 1074)—convene to dismantle the queer space of the pornographic movie theatre, but cinematic technology began to be inadequate as an isolated sustaining force for these public sex cultures, especially as the technology of film becomes increasingly privatized—a phenomena even more apparent today with online video hosting, Netflix, and other tools that encourage more isolated and private viewing experiences. As "The nature of the adult entertainment industry has largely been determined in the crucible of legal limitation and technological possibility," these changes in technology are as crucial for pornography as legal interventions; indeed, "The legal battles that haunted adult feature films shown in theatres in the 1970s forced the industry to harness quickly the possibilities of home viewership through videocassette and VCR technology and cable television" (Ward 167). Following these changes in medium of dissemination, it remains uncertain whether "sex in film [is] 'public' sex in any valuable or coalitional sense, especially as moviegoing becomes increasingly privatized in the sphere of flat-screen TVs, Netflix, and iTunes" (Davis, "View," 623). It is clear that Delany's pornotopic theatres were as much a product of as a victim to

shifting laws and technologies while the two phenomena also impact one another: legal changes may inspire technological innovation.

Accompanying the social changes that led to the closing of several of the pornographic theatres—wrought by HIV/AIDS, heterosexist legal intervention, and technological alterations—a sense of loss pervades that text, a loss of possibility, recalling AIDS activist Douglas Crimp's call "to rebuild our devastated community and culture, reconstruct our sexual relationships, [and] reinvent our sexual pleasure" (15). However, according to Delany, this past-dwelling is not the purpose of the essays: they are "forward-looking, not nostalgic" (xviii) and function as a call for "new institutions" to replace the old, institutions that would make the same "services available not only to gay men but to all men and women, gay and straight, over an even wider social range than did the old ones" (xvii). This idea serves as Delany's secondary thesis: while the "class war" is "perpetually work[ing] for the erosion of the social practices through which interclass communication takes place and of the institutions holding those practices stable, new institutions must always be conceived and set in place to take over the jobs of those that are battered again and again till they are destroyed" (111). This forward-looking, almost utopian energy of the essays—a drive for what can be based on the potentials of what has been, or a "turn to the past for the purpose of critiquing the present […] propelled by a desire for futurity" (Muñoz 30)—is representative of similar accounts in the generic strain of cruising narratives. Halberstam notes that "Many works in queer studies end with a bang by imagining and describing the new social forms that supposedly emerge from gay male orgies or cruising escapades or gender-queer erotics or sodomitic sadism or at any rate queer jouissance of some form or another," a trend clearly located in Delany's reading of "a harmonious narrative of social contact into anonymous sexual contacts in porn theatres" (*Failure* 149).

Despite this relatively generic link between depicting non-normative sexuality and envisioning revised social orders, *Times Square*, first released at the very end of the twentieth century—a period of turbulent sexual politics and rapidly changing technology—is a crucial text for understanding the reciprocal ways sex and technology shape space, and space shapes sex and technology. *Times Square* holds a crucial place in the lineage of cruising narratives and functions as a text that demonstrates how this particular culture was mediated by technology more so than one may originally think, thereby serving as an important prefiguring of future technology-based cruising cultures. The essays, admittedly limited in their focus on urban men, insist that socially subversive interracial and interclass contact is facilitated by both filmic technology and male same-sex desire to create a heterotopic pornotopia, a quintessential queer space. However, the limits of Delany's representation are clear when considering the reification of various social and spatial divisions within the text. Filmic technology largely remains a mediator to achieve hegemonic social formations such as the personalized relationship, rather than a tool to mutually reshape the compulsion towards intersubjectivity in space between bodies, or a way to reimagine intimacy. Both are significant: the enabling of heterogeneous social relations by the space of technology and the restrictions of these relations—the potentials and the limits.

This thoughtful account of which social barriers can be breeched in what contexts, and which remain adamant, invites further speculation into the spatial facilitation of diverse social interactions, into what sort of possibilities for thinking differently about relating to one another can be traced through various technological and textual engagements with alternative sexual cultures. *Shortbus*, the focus of the following chapter, will take up these topics a few years after the publication of Delany's essays and demonstrate that "the ideal spaces and practices" that activists such as Crimp described "never completely ceased to be," that "queer sex, […;] spaces,

and, to some lesser degree, the incredible sense of possibility" (Muñoz 33-4) depicted,

celebrated, and lamented as lost by the theoretical and artistic proponents of queer studies

mutated rather than disappeared. The similarities between these narratives, both set in New York

City and invested in filmic technology, allow for a useful dialogue while expanding the

conversation into the implications of new digital technologies and an interest in communal

sexuality beyond the phallocentrism of purely male same-sex desire. Delany's investment in

sexual and intellectual possibility—imagined and real—sets the stage for thinking about how

representations of technologies of affiliation and the ever-evolving innovations of new forms of

technology structure sexual and social change; in Delany's own words, "Desire and knowledge

(body and mind) are *not* a fundamental opposition; rather, they are intricately imbricated and

mutually constitutive aspects of political and social life" (168, italics original).

Chapter II

"Ambivalent Technotopias: Digital Sexualities and Missed Connections in *Shortbus*"

> The cinema of the body is not a picturing of the literal body. Rather, its goal is to give expression to forces of becoming that are immanent in bodies, as well as the body's receptivity to external forces through which it can transform itself.
> —D.N. Rodowick, *Gilles Deleuze's Time Machine*

> There is no romance of the impersonal, no love plot for it.
> —Lauren Berlant, *Cruel Optimism*

Since premiering at the 2006 Cannes Film Festival, John Cameron Mitchell's *Shortbus* has garnered the attention of both a dedicated set of fans in the general public and a host of scholars working in film and queer studies. Rather than clarifying the ambiguity of terms central to the proceeding chapter of this project—public, pornography, queer spaces, to name a few—the film further complicates these foundational ideas. The same aura of loss that permeates Delany's essays is paralleled in *Shortbus*. Though it too is set in New York City, the rupture of past possibilities and present stagnation takes a different central referent: while HIV/AIDS looms large over Delany's pornotopic theatres, 9/11 casts a similar shadow over the community of erotic partners represented in *Shortbus*, reifying the inexorable nature of sexual politics and social phenomena, especially in regards to the notion of safety and how it is deployed in these contexts. As suggested by this fixation, unstable and vulnerable American nationalism plays a significant part in the film, and, appropriately, it is the conjunction of the American roots of the film with scenes of explicit sex that have made it so notable to contemporary critics. Linda Williams singles *Shortbus* out as the first "uniquely American film of hard-core art" (284), while Nick Davis describes the film as "the most visible homegrown foray of [sexual] counterpublic[s] into the ecosystem of American film" ("View" 635).

Rather than simply engaging in a binary discussion of whether or not the representations of sex within the film are positive or negative, subversive or conservative (for the genre of pornography and/or queer cinema, for political praxis, or for sexuality in general), questions that are not easily resolved as demonstrated by a survey of criticism about the film, this chapter is most interested in unpacking and nuancing the omnipresence of technology in *Shortbus*. While filmic technology is championed in Delany's work, *Shortbus* is hyper-aware of a more diverse range of contemporary digital technologies[1] (while retaining an investment in the filmic) that populate an extremely high amount of the film's scenes. The film itself departs from standard cinematic casting and production procedures, instead using technology to locate its cast who in turn shaped the narrative. Mitchell posted an open-call for prospective actors on the Internet, requesting video audition submissions from those interested in participating in what he dubbed "The Sex Film Project" (Kaminsky), the early working title of *Shortbus*, which could also serve as an apt subtitle for Delany's "Times Square Blue." Mitchell was aware of the context he was releasing *Shortbus* into, stating that he hoped the film would depict real sex in film, much like a variety of European cinematic offerings, but without the almost inevitably attendant negative connotations and ramifications being attached to sex and sexuality. Instead, he aimed to "frame and screen real sex in a positive way" (Kaminsky), emphasizing a professed interest in sex-positivity, much like Delany.

While the Shortbus salon, the primary eponymous space of the film, certainly does function as a provocative sexual counterpublic and an apt space for exploring alternative

---

[1] Matthew Tinkcom usefully demonstrates the breadth of materials, relations, and institutions subsumed under the label of digital, including "the communications networks of fiber-optic cable, wireless broadcast and satellite distribution, computer hosts and servers, graphical interface designs, recording and playback devices, cellular 'smartphone' technologies and their applications [and] also the technologies of language, the body, and social practices of power" (696), a large amount of which are featured in *Shortbus*.

sexualities, the film's frequent rejection of the potentialities offered by technologies of affiliation and emphasis on embodied personalized encounters circumvents its ability "to think through the problem of the relationship between sexuality and sociality in less territorially identitarian ways than that turf is traditionally carved up" (Jagose 104), a twin limitation to that found in Delany's text. The omnipresence of technology in the film—from inception to content—does not align neatly with a celebration of technology's evolving impact on desire and interpersonal relations. *Shortbus*'s investment in pushing the boundaries of possibility (of sex on screen and of a range of heterogeneous sexual groupings) does not seem to extend fully to the representation of technologically mediated intimacy. Instead, the film seems ambivalent at best to the growing sexual and social centrality of technology—positioning it as a means to achieving importantly heterogeneous but relatively normative types of embodied connection, rather than an end in itself—and dismissive at worst, seeing technology as a barrier to a life of fulfilling connectivity. While the film is undeniably invested in exploring the types of alternative sexual possibilities granted by technology, it ultimately resorts to more traditional forms of queer intimacy, leading to an adherence to a range of dominant spatial and social norms—once again linking it to *Times Square* and Delany's re-investment in discourses of phallocentricism and metronormativity, among others.

Nonetheless, the Shortbus salon is a creative reimagining of the sexual culture Delany laments the unseating of following the neoliberal rezoning of New York City, a response to Delany's "polemic thrust […] toward conceiving, organizing and setting into place new establishments—and even entirely new types of institutions—that would offer the services and fulfill the social functions provided by the porn houses that encouraged sex among the audience" and "to an even wider social range than did the old ones" (xvii), featuring a more diverse range

of gender identifications and sexual couplings. *Shortbus* still grapples with the legal sanctions faced by the theatres Delany depicts—the mistress of the salon space in the film tells a patron that a great amount of time must be spent "blowing the NYPD to keep [Shortbus] open"—and functions as a revitalization, and even expansion, of the sexual possibilities and heterogeneous relations prized by Delany by once again spatially rethinking the lines between privacy and publicness.

In other words, the Shortbus salon demonstrates that the limits and potentials inherent in Delany's pornotopic theatres have persisted, albeit in evolving formations, positioning the text as an extension of the hopes and concerns of *Times Square*, a space that can only be imagined in virtue of the problems identified in Delany's text. Rather than diminishing in the twenty first century after a temporal gap emerges between the height of the HIV/AIDS epidemic and contemporary cultural memory, legal intervention into public sex cultures has continued, if not intensified, in the context of a post-9/11 obsession with regulating non-normative behavior in the proclaimed interests of national 'well-being' and 'safety.' In the words of Jasbir Puar, "the aftermath of September 11 entailed the daily bombardment of reactivated and reverberating white […] heteronormative imagery, expectations, and hegemonies" demonstrating how "heteronormative assumptions [are] still binding the fields and disciplines of security and surveillance analyses" (40, xiii). As a kindred space to Delany's text (both the space in the film and the space *of* the film), *Shortbus* is essentially interested in representing spaces where these strictures can be circumvented to explore non-hegemonic modes of relating and possibility. The role of technology as a mediator and facilitator of non-normative sexual encounters is expanded and made more blatant than in Delany's essays. Examples abound within Mitchell's film of how technology allows possibilities for re-scripting intimacy: a relationship based on technologically

aided voyeurism and a digitally mediated instance of matchmaking are just two examples of

many. Whether or not the film fully celebrates these possibilities does not preclude their

omnipresence to the film—*Shortbus* makes it clear that technology is now a part of thinking

through how we do and can relate to one another.

Before delving into the implications of specific representations of technologically

mediated intimacies in *Shortbus*, an overview of the relation between sex and space in the film is

useful. The movie ends with the phrase "characters and story developed with cast," a process

Mitchell felt was necessary to represent sex in a novel way on film (Foley). From the audition

tapes, of which over five hundred were received, Mitchell called back forty actors: they watched

each other's tapes, charted their level of sexual attraction to one another, and began creating their

characters and the movie's narrative through workshops and improvisation (Kaminsky). Using

this approach, Mitchell aimed to fill the film with what he views as 'real' sex, "visible

penetration, on-screen ejaculation, and so forth" (Davis, "View," 624), between actors.

Interestingly, despite this paramount emphasis on reality, the beginning of the film is computer-

generated. Directly engaging the connection between sex, space, and technology, *Shortbus* starts

by interspersing an animated cityscape created by John Bair with voyeuristic peeks into

apartment windows throughout Manhattan, revealing the ensemble cast of the film in various

states of undress participating in a variety of sexual activities. While the animation displays

various iconic and notorious symbols of New York City—from the Statue of Liberty[2] to Ground

Zero—the 'real' scenes represent nodes of sexual (mis)connection along the broader circuit of

relation that is the urban space, creating a dialogue between sex, space, and technology that

---

[2] Interestingly, Davis points out that the Statue of Liberty is "the first woman on screen" in the film (*Desiring-Image* 98), symbolically indicative of the relegated state of women in the film: Severin and Sofia largely serve as symbols of the struggle to carve out a fulfilling social and sexual identity, respectively, much like patriotic icons such as the Statue of Liberty represents an ambivalent negotiation of pride and shame, freedom and entrapment, in the post-9/11 American consciousness.

functions to introduce several of the film's main characters, putting onto screen what Delany experienced in the pornographic theatres.

In a hotel room, Severin (Lindsay Beamish), a struggling artist and frustrated dominatrix, is increasingly aggravated by her discussion with her male client: when he asks her thoughts on procreation, she responds "I wanna do it by myself, in the dark, like a worm." Almost in response to Severin's call for isolation, James (Paul Dawson), a suicidal ex-hustler turned lifeguard and uncertain partner to former childhood star Jamie (PJ DeBoy), attempts to engage in auto-fellatio in his apartment. The seemingly shared desire for personal, individual intimacy is taken away from both Severin and James: Severin, struggling to make ends meet (she would prefer to just be an artist, but New York City's exorbitant rent prices makes this too challenging), is forced to continue as a sex worker; and James films his own sexual act with a camera set-up on a tripod for what is later revealed to be a sort of love letter/suicide note to Jamie. Not only is James's moment of self-pleasure seen by the film's viewers and his own camera (with the goal of helping to ameliorate Jamie's pain over his decision to leave him behind by committing suicide[3]), it is also observed by his stalker Caleb (Peter Stickles)—through an elaborate aerial loop through the animated cityscape between their respective apartments, Caleb is shown watching James from his window. Through technology, James is not alone: Mitchell's camera, his own camera, and Caleb's technologically aided vision[4] make sure of this, making his auto-fellatio the subject of spectatorship both present and future: recalling Delany, film once again

---

[3] James's eventual suicide attempt recalls the colour symbolism of the titles of Delany's *Times Square* essays. Later in the film, James takes a large amount of pills before attempting to drown himself. The pills are red, white, and blue, which, as Davis points out "fuses the registers of publicness and pain into visual icons" and implies "a kind of *overdose* on 'America' and its ideological pharmacology" ("View" 630, italics original).

[4] This early scene of Caleb's mediated voyeurism is interesting for the uncertainty it inspires in critics simply trying to identify what Caleb is using to watch James: his viewing apparatus has been described as "surveillance equipment" (Davis, *Desiring Image*, 102), "binoculars" (Johnson 171), "telescope" (Tinkcom 697), and "telephoto lens" (Jagose 94) , demonstrating both the proliferation of a wide array of technologies of observation and the ever-increasing difficulty of apprehending the differences between this constantly evolving list.

makes sex communal. Furthermore, the desirability of auto-sexual intimacy is called into question as James ejaculates into his own face, promptly causing him to burst into tears.

Contrasting to Severin's desire to be alone and James's physical isolation, the film intersperses their sexual acts with those of married couple Rob (Raphael Barker) and Sofia (Sook-Yin Lee) who are engaging in various kinds of sex in a plethora of locations in their apartment, leading to an apparently satisfying climax for both. However, as the cast begins to converge—James and Jamie meet with Sofia, who works as a couple's counsellor (who is particularly averse to the label of 'sex therapist') to discuss the possibility of opening up their relationship—Sofia reveals that she has never had an orgasm, leading to feelings of personal and interpersonal inadequacy. Notably, all of these inaugural scenes have a few key elements in common: they take place in private domestic spaces (although Caleb's voyeurism continues to destabilize the link between private spaces and privacy as does the gaze of the film's viewers), they are characterized by sexual frustration either individually or as a couple, and they are linked by Bair's digitally generated New York City. As such, the stage is set for exploring sexual possibilities outside of the private realm through technology and outside of monadic and dyadic formations, the same emphasis on exploring sexual possibility in a public, communal, technologically mediated form that undergirds *Times Square*.

These possibilities are grounded in the quintessential queer space of the movie, the physical space of Shortbus,[5] where the ensemble cast cross paths. Like Delany's pornotopic theatre space, Shortbus is a reprieve from the strictures of privatized, monogamous, and

---

[5] Corroborating Wayne Bryant's claim that "the sort of gathering depicted in *Shortbus* occurs far more frequently than the general public might imagine" (187), Mitchell mentions "Cine Salon," "the place that most directly inspired the film," where "they would show experimental short films and then hand out food[,] [a]nd then at the end of the evening, in the same space […] sex would break out," noting that Shortbus "is perhaps an idealised version" of this place as it is "more sexual, and there is more diversity of people" (Foley). Williams lists other potential influences on the creation of Shortbus, including Dumba, "a queer performing arts collective and occasional site for orgies in Brooklyn," as well as other parties and venues (371, n. 28).

normative sexual mores: it is a place dedicated to "the pointed relocation of sex outside the bedroom" (Davis, "View," 634) and an escape from the social and sexual unease the cast face in their domestic spaces (recalling Tommy's mistrust of Delany's apartment and embracement of the public theatrical space instead). The mistress of Shortbus, transgender performance artist Justin Vivian Bond (who plays vself in the film[6]), describes the space as "a salon for the gifted and challenged"[7] and the multiple, labyrinthine rooms of the salon serve a multitude of purposes: it is a place for people to meet; watch films, performance art, and musical acts; and, most centrally, engage in sexual contact. This hybrid theatre space/performance venue/sex club fuses the intellectual and the sexual into an undeniably queer space, while prizing the latter element over the former, and refusing any clear alignment of the two—Justin humorously laments the screening of a three-hour Gertrude Stein documentary within Shortbus as a "real weenie-shrinker." Justin also refers to the salon as "my house," making the tension between the private and public within Shortbus explicit, and, as Davis points out, recalling the "deterritorialized House discourses of *Paris is Burning*" (*Desiring-Image* 102).

The critical interest in *Shortbus* as a film is largely due to the spatial politics of the salon space which crucially connect it to Delany's essays. Like Delany's pornotopic theatres, Shortbus fosters the creation of a heterogeneous community of relation, described by scholars as a

---

[6] On Justin's website, v notes v's preference of v's own coined and gender-neutral pronoun—the letter 'v'—to address v's trans identity. In the announcement, Bond mentions "visually a V is two even sides which meet in the middle" (Bond).

[7] The term 'Shortbus' is a colloquialism that refers to a smaller version of a school bus that is generally associated with children who have various physical, learning, and cognitive challenges. As Beth Johnson points out, the analogy works well for the patrons of Shortbus as "the salon can certainly be seen throughout Mitchell's film as a space in which those with seemingly impermeable individual 'difficulties'—often relating to love, intimacy and sex—can go to be permeated" (166). Nick Davis usefully problematizes the use of this metaphor in his critique of the limits of the "utopian promise of inclusiveness" ("View" 626) offered by the salon, as "no one manifests any of the mental or physical disabilities that might secure one's passage on an actual shortbus" (*Desiring-Image* 101). However, the comparison does emphasize the Shortbus salon as a place of sexual education, a reoccurring idea throughout the film, and one that connects the space to Delany's pornotopic theatres: both serve as substitutes for normative educational institutions.

"sexually and racially diverse community that is a utopian idea of New York City" (Williams 289) and "a culturally heterogeneous environment—a utopian space of racial, sexual and age-based equality" (Johnson 166) full of a "polymorphous breadth of nonhetero sexual combinations" (Davis, "View," 634). These connections to past sexual cultures, such as the ones meticulously detailed by Delany, have not been missed by critics. Johnson identifies the Shortbus salon as a distinctly "retrosexual space" in which "the discursive language of sexual freedom […] allows for a *beau monde* yet culturally diverse community of care, hope and support as well as a plurality of sexual perspectives" (165, italics original).

Critics have emphasized the centrality of this community formation to the film's investment in sex: Williams argues that the film is a departure from standard "pornotopic" tropes in which "the solution to the problem of sex is more or better sex," by instead suggesting that the cure for Sofia's preorgasmic state specifically (and the sexual frustrations of the various other patrons more generally) is "not the result of better technique; rather, it is the result of better community" (288, 292). While Williams recognizes how the ostensibly utopian sexual dynamics of Shortbus are grounded in community, Davis points out the potentially more insidious correlative of the inexorability of good sex and good community, stating "time for and by oneself is exactly what the politics of the Shortbus salon aspire to undermine" (*Desiring-Image* 102). The narrative trajectory impels the segregated cast members from their domestic spaces to a central node on the New York City grid of erotic connectivity and intimacy, Shortbus, even as this propulsion runs counter to the motivation behind Severin's fantasy of monadic procreation or James's auto-fellatio.

Within this context of Shortbus as a utopian sexual community that hazards being prescriptive in its emphasis on community, and following the work of Annamarie Jagose and

Tinkcom on the role of technology in the film, the remainder of this chapter will focus on the suitability of Halberstam's concept of "technotopia" for the queer space of the Shortbus salon and the queer space of *Shortbus* the film, as well as the related subversions and reifications of dominant social scripts of intimacy. A technotopia, Halberstam's "new conception of space and sexuality," is a site which "tests technological potentialities against the limits of a human body anchored in time and space, and that powerfully reimagines the relations between the organic and the machinic […]" (15, 103 *Queer Time*). While the film is undeniably invested in technological potentialities, it remains uncertain about the desirability of these potentials for changing modes of affiliation—it is an ambivalent technotopia.

The limits of *Shortbus*'s spatial and sexual reimagining is apparent in the film's depiction of technologically mediated intimacy, a pattern of representation that ultimately insists on the pre-eminence of embodied relation, in the "restricted terms that see corporeal presence as confirmation of desire" (Tinkcom 703), thereby reinforcing categories of bodily and social difference. An illustrative arc can be found in the relationship between Sofia, Rob, and various erotic technologies. After admitting to never having an orgasm to James and Jamie, the couple invites Sofia to come to Shortbus, expressing a significant difference between the Shortbus salon and Delany's theatres. While the price of admission to the pornotopic theatres is monetary—a class-inflected division dependant on a near negligibly low price that nonetheless serves as a reminder that the theatres are indeed businesses—Shortbus operates on a web of in-person connections, depending on word-of-mouth to allow new patrons access to the salon. To get in, you need to know someone, calling into question whether or not Shortbus is a public or private

venue: like a house, and contrary to a business, you need to be invited to enter Shortbus (recall, again, it is Justin's *house*).[8]

This is the initial evocation of the tension of *Shortbus'*s status as a technotopia; while the inception of the film resulted from embracing the reach of digital technologies for creating new types of connections through an open casting call for collaborative creation posted on the Internet, access to the salon itself is predicated on embodied interactions. Like Delany's pornotopic theatres, the salon can be seen as a type of institutionalized cruising, although in a form that is perhaps more exclusive, as entry is subject both to invitation and the "whims and sensibilities of its mistress," Justin (Davis, "View," 628). This fact is perhaps largely attributable to the legal restrictions against public sex outlined by Delany: Shortbus is a more selective place of 'contact' relations in response to the rezoning that destroyed spaces such as Delany's pornographic theatres.

Once again in sync with Delany's pornotopic theatres, Shortbus is a place where familiarity surprisingly emerges as an important social value within a counterpublic of strangers. As Jagose points out, the queer space has the vibe of "a neighborhood bar where, as the television jingle has it, everybody knows your name" (102), and, in Sofia's case, rapidly become aware of her orgasmic difficulties. After Sofia's tour of Shortbus with Justin during her first visit there, during which she walks by the "Sex Not Bombs" room full of an ecstatic orgy of several people in a variety of sexual positions and couplings (an embodied epitome of the sexual communitarianism mandated by Shortbus), she eventually stumbles into a more demure space.

---

[8] This invitation model of receiving access to the salon from pre-existing patrons recalls Delany's theory of networking and contact in which "Small businesses thrive on contact—the word-of-mouth reputations that contact engenders: 'You're looking for X? Try Q's. It's really good for what you want'" and "Big businesses promote networking as much as they possibly can: 'Shop at R's—and be part of today!' vibrating over the airwaves in a three-million-dollar ad campaign" (172). As such, the Shortbus salon would fall neatly into the category of contact relations outlined by Delany, not surprising given the level of heterogeneous contact engendered in the space.

Within this new room, the "Pussy Parlor," an apparently female-only space, Sofia quickly

becomes the centre of discussion. She admits to being uncertain about the way she is "wired,"

indicative of *Shortbus*'s continuous analogizing of sexuality with technological language. Akin

to Delany's focus on the term networking, it is clear that technology is just as integral to the

language of *Shortbus* as it is to the actual content; as the text grapples with questions of sociality

and sexuality, technology is frequently invoked in both a metaphorical and literal sense.

Sofia goes on to mention that she has only slept with her husband, Rob, proceeding to

liken sex to feeling as if "somebody is going to kill [her]." This relatively bleak view of sex

seems to function as a critique of the normative parameters of Sofia's and Rob's sexual

relationship as a heterosexual and monogamous married couple. The next time the two appear on

screen, they are back in their apartment, once again separated from the larger grid of erotic

connection symbolized by Shortbus, and they are both using erotic technologies to masturbate in

separate rooms. Sofia, dressed in lingerie, looks at herself in the mirror before lying down on the

washroom floor to use a vibrator. To her frustration, her latest attempt at achieving orgasm, this

time with a sex toy, is interrupted by Rob playing distractingly loud music while he masturbates

to Internet pornography on his laptop. This scene is in clear violation of the sexual ethos of the

Shortbus salon in both the privatized setting of their apartment and the individuality of their

sexual acts. It also marks out a severe departure from the representation of pornography in

relation to community from Delany's essays: where (heterosexual) pornography is positioned as

the requisite background for the heterogeneous relationships in Delany's queer space, it is

something both isolating and divisive in *Shortbus*, starting a feud between Sofia and Rob. Of

course, this is a matter of a change in transmission—from a communal theatre screen to a

personal laptop (the name of the technology itself being intensely personalizing)—leading to an

ambivalent representation that "mirrors the larger discomfort about the immense bulk of pornographic materials that circulate electronically" (Tinkcom 708).

After a shouting match, the interpersonal tension between Sofia and Rob is resolved by sitting cross-legged across from one another, holding hands, and talking about their feelings, literalizing *Shortbus*'s emphasis on face-to-face interactions, what Jagose calls the "narrative's prioritization of an unmediated face-to-face co-presence that almost always develops into relationships" (102). In this scene, removed from computers and vibrators, Rob attempts to placate Sofia's anger by telling her that "her skin is perfect" and he "could never get this on the computer," which Tinkcom views as "true if 'this' is physical contact *and intimacy*" (Tinkcom 707, italics added), aligning with *Shortbus*'s mandate that physical contact is mandatory for, if not synonymous with, intimacy, undermining the potential of alternative affiliations offered by digital technologies. While this scene begins with moments of individualistic pursuit of pleasure through erotic technologies to address the sexual and intimate inadequacies of a heteronormative marriage, it ends in a recapitulation of the necessity of embodied dialogue and physical touching. As such, the attempt to reimagine the divide between the "the organic and the machinic" offered by a technotopic view of sex and space is quickly sidelined.

The couple's next attempt at technologically mediated intimacy is more creative. Once again involving a vibrator, this next instance aims to bridge Sofia and Rob, rather than separate them, and takes place within the queer space of Shortbus, as opposed to the normative domesticity of their apartment building. Sofia gives Rob the remote control to a vibrating egg[9] that she has placed inside of herself to allow them to "check in" with each other during their separate experiences at the Shortbus salon. The vibrating egg parallels the "neo organ[s]"

---

[9] The egg is labelled with the name "In the Realm of the Senses," a clear homage to the earlier Japanese film of the same name (Nagisa Oshima, 1976) invested in depicting unsimulated and sexually explicit acts on screen, thereby establishing *Shortbus*'s place in this cinematic lineage.

endowed with "erotic meaning" that Halberstam examines in her discussion of transgender

aesthetics (*Queer Time* 14), suggesting bodily pleasure as a vibrator and symbolically invoking

bodily generation as an egg. The egg, blending the corporeal and the machinic, is intended to

diversify and enliven the possibilities of Sofia's and Rob's stagnating heteronormative marriage

by allowing new and multiplied forms of interpersonal erotic connection through technologies of

affiliation, while maintaining their core intimacy, turning the space between them and the space

of Shortbus into a technotopia. Through technology, Sofia aims to engage in non-normative

social and sexual encounters while simultaneously staying connected to her husband on a

sensorial and erotic level, blurring the lines between the conventional and the alternative.

However, much like the previous instance of their technologically mediated sexualities,

the mapping of technological potentialities onto bodies in a particular space—whether their

apartment, or Shortbus—is destructive rather than generative for Sofia and Rob. Rob proves

careless with his use of the remote, first accidentally pushing buttons and later losing the remote,

causing others to mistake it as remote control for the television and thereby leading to a chain of

unintended and badly timed vibrations for Sofia. Rob's refusal to take Sofia's attempt at an

eroticized technological connection seriously is endemic of a cultural industry that either refuses

to represent these affiliations or depicts them as pathological (Tinkcom 694). Furthermore, as

Jagose neatly articulates, "Although intended to maintain an eroticized connection between

[Sofia and Rob], the remotely vibrating egg disrupts Sofia's various face-to-face interactions

with others through the evening" (98). This observation is significant both as a reminder of the

pre-eminence *Shortbus* places on face-to-face encounters and for emphasising the gendered

dynamics of this failure of connection: it is Sofia's encounters that fail spectacularly and

repeatedly due to Rob's negligence.

For instance, while discussing her sexual frustrations with Justin, v urges Sofia to think about sex and sexuality as a "magical circuit-board, a motherboard, full of desire that travels all over the world, touches you, touches me," assuring her all she needs to do is "find the right connection, the right circuitry"—once again the film embraces technology as a metaphor for sexuality. Moments later, it seems possible that the right connection is in fact with Justin, as the two begin to kiss and caress. Their physical intimacy becomes increasingly uncomfortable as Sofia's egg continues inadvertently vibrating, eventually leading a frustrated Justin to comically question in exasperation, "do you have a cell phone in your twat?" before breaking off contact with Sofia. Although funny, this moment characterizes Sofia's attempt at alternative connections through "technotopic erotics" (Halberstam, *Queer Time*, 110) as exactly that: a funny joke, and not an emergent, prevalent, and important mode of relation. This quick swap—from the motherboard as a particularly apt metaphor for *Shortbus*'s views on sex and sexuality to the vibrating egg as a technology of interruption directly disruptive to intimacy—encapsulates the film's views on technology's role in connection: a useful metaphor, but not a primary constituent element to be embraced.

After her prematurely and awkwardly terminated encounter with Justin, Sofia runs into Severin. The two have since developed a bond wherein Severin works to coach Sofia to her first orgasm and Sofia helps Severin "have a real human interaction with someone," aiding each other in their self-perceived sexual and social shortcomings, respectively. Significantly, much of their bonding takes place in a location quite antithetical to the over-stimulation of the Shortbus salon with its countless milling bodies, flashing screens, frequent music, flamboyant colours and artwork, and much more. Severin and Sofia, notably the only cisgendered women in the main ensemble cast, meet at a sensory-deprivation tank, where they float together in darkness,

accompanied by a stereo floating in a plastic bag, not surprising given the film's consistent depiction of the omnipresence of technology, even in this location characterized by lack. Severin's and Sofia's burgeoning intimacy culminates as they begin making out and touching one another in a secluded room of the Shortbus salon, Severin hiding from her current client and seeking to develop her 'real' relationship with Sofia instead. Once again, the egg begins vibrating, leading to a split in the respective pleasures of each woman: Severin ecstatically orgasms while Sofia passively endures this reproachful reminder of her own preorgasmic state, ending this "fully clothed, awkwardly truncated contact" (Davis, *Desiring-Image*, 99). For the second time, the egg has blocked Sofia's attempts to find the "right connection," as she leaves an apologetic and distraught Severin alone in the room.

While Johnson views "the failure of Sofia's contemporary technology—the vibrating love egg—to 'work,'" as a questioning of "the link between the contemporary commodification and mass dissemination of technologies promising and rendering 'natural' orgasmic pleasure" (174), it is important to note that the egg itself did not fail to function; rather, Rob failed to be conscientious in maintaining the erotic link between himself and Sofia. Rob's refusal to use the remote-controlled vibrating egg as something reparative in his relationship with Sofia, something that could enhance or reorient their intimacy, mirrors a similar refusal made by the film as a whole in its depictions of technologically mediated connections. Ultimately, after an accidentally violent encounter with Caleb caused by more unintentional egg vibrations, Sofia storms out of Shortbus to smash the egg to pieces on the ground with an art installation shaped like a human leg that she rips out off the wall, using a prosthetic limb to end her attempt to use this neo-organic technology of affiliation. Significantly, the destruction of the egg coincides with the flickering of the streetlights, connecting to a pattern of brownouts throughout the film that occur

at moments of high emotional duress for the cast, all reminiscent of the Northeast Blackout of 2003,[10] which greatly impacted New York City, among other locations. Sofia's experience is just one example of how the film insists on physical co-presence to facilitate fulfilling connections— her attempt to reshape her intimacy with Rob while their bodies are separated is both interpersonally and materially destructive.

This dismissal of technotopic potentials can be expanded and nuanced through a comparative reading of Severin's and James's relationship with technology, another illustrative example of the "the many ways in which the flesh roughly encounters a technology that extends, supplants, and distends it" (Halberstam, *Queer Time*, 116). While every character in the film has a blatant attachment to a certain technology—whether Rob's preoccupation with Internet pornography, Sofia's various vibrators, or Caleb's ambiguous vision-enhancing apparatus— Severin and James share many commonalities in their relationship with technology. Severin captures people in socially discomforting situations—Sofia's face immediately after she likens sex to an impending death threat, for instance—with her Polaroid camera, then scrawls various marginalia onto the photographs, which she collects in the storage locker she lives in. James is filming various moments of his life and time with his partner Jamie—from his tearful auto-fellatio to his discussion with Sofia during their counselling session—and combining them with footage from his own childhood and Jamie's childhood. In this sense, both are documenters, and they both have complicated relationships to their respective art forms. In his list of the various characters and their respective technologies, Davis includes "Severin's loyalty to her *vintage* Polaroid, even amid intimate scenarios […] [and] James's digital camera and iMovie collaging

---

[10] In reference to the border-crossing potentials of disaster, Jerry Adler reported on the ways in which the blackout brought the people of New York together in a fashion reminiscent of that experienced following 9/11: contrasting the violent and catastrophic nature of 9/11 to the comparatively "gentle disaster" of the blackout, Adler notes "both were democratic in their effects: the rich breathe the same air as the poor, and an apartment on the 45th floor was, if anything, even less accessible than a fourth-floor walkup."

of various sheets of his *past* with Jamie" (*Desiring-Image* 102-3, italics added), pointing to the backwards temporality of both of their uses of technology. For Severin, her technology is old, outdated, contrasting with James's contemporary digital technology, which he uses to create a retrospective, mixing the long past with the near past. Despite the dominant symbolic linkage between technology and the future, Severin and James use technology to look back, sharing a certain nostalgic air present in *Times Square*.

Furthermore, the two characters are linked by their similarly troubled relationship with sex. While isolated in a closet together at Shortbus, Severin and James discuss their current and prior occupation as sex workers, Severin as a dominatrix and James as a former hustler.[11] The film implies this has fed into their respective sexual and social frustrations and limitations: Severin (prior to her aforementioned experience with Sofia) can only orgasm from her own hand, and feels she has never really connected with another person; while James has never let anyone anally penetrate him, and has been slowly and meticulously planning his own suicide. Their joint inability to connect is represented in their use of technology. Both Severin and James are invested in the past and use technology in isolating ways: as the medium for a socially awkward artistic compilation for Severin and as a suicide note for James. Their use of technology functions to "repeatedly underscore the inadequacy of technologically mediated relationships, thereby preserving *Shortbus*'s undiminished allegiance to an old-school understanding of community that softens the edge of the impersonally erotic stranger-relationality the club Shortbus hosts" (Jagose 100). For Severin and James, technology severs as often as it connects and is an outlet for their social and sexual behaviour that *Shortbus* pathologizes and works to

---

[11] James tells Severin that he began hustling after seeing the film *My Own Private Idaho* (Gus Van Sant, 1991), which largely focuses on male prostitution, mentioning that he picked up his first client outside of the theatre after the movie was over, recalling the connection between the cinematic space and non-normative sex that is well-established throughout *Times Square*.

remedy by subsuming them in the embodied communal atmosphere of the salon. Much like

Delany's pornotopic theatres, the queer space is celebrated because it is not a public of strangers

as described by Warner,[12] but rather a place that insists on the personalizing of intimacy.

Whether it is Caleb's technologically enhanced voyeurism, Rob's Internet pornography,

Sofia's vibrating egg, Severin's Polaroid pictures, James's film, or any of the other character's

technologies in the film, *Shortbus* remains ambivalent about the potential of technology as a

supplement or alternative to more conventional types of affiliation. These representations insist

on making intimacy personal and corporeal, leading to a limitation in the re-scripting of intimacy

offered by digital technologies. Caleb's voyeurism eventually leads to him rescuing James's life

and anally penetrating him for the first time; Severin's socially inappropriate photograph of Sofia

begins their friendship; James's suicide film actually functions to reconnect him to his partner,

Jamie. Technology is celebrated in *Shortbus* only when it leads to the formation of a more

conventional relationship, not when it attempts to substitute for these relationships—it is a means

to an end, but never an end in of itself. Bersani points out that "it is perhaps primarily *the

degeneration of the sexual into a relationship that condemns sexuality to becoming a struggle for

power*" (218, italics original), emphasizing a problem that both *Times Square* and *Shortbus*

grapple with: a desire to embrace sexual possibility, but an insistent recourse to the formation of

more normative forms of relation that consequently lead to imbalances in social power dynamics.

This tension parallels the generic tension of *Shortbus* as a film, its navigation between the

labels of queer cinema, a genre invested in the "promise of change, of productively disorganized

---

[12] As Davis points out, Michael Warner's name is listed under the "Very Special Thanks" section of the *Shortbus* credits. Davis notes how the DVD commentary by Mitchell and the cast reveals the space where Sofia and Rob work out their fight over Rob's pornography consumption is, in fact, Warner's living room: not only does Warner's scholarship provide "a guiding notion of a sexual public and indeed a counterpublic, terms that apply to the variously eroticized congregations of characters and to the locales where they confront and enjoy each other," but he also provides the physical setting of one of these spaces (Davis, "View," 627).

difference, and of new desiring-potentials that chafe against current categories" (Davis, *Desiring-Image*, 23) and the culturally demeaned label of pornography. The film retains its edge for its depictions of 'real' sex acts, for including sweeping shots of a writhing mass of orgiastic desire in the "Sex Not Bombs" room at the Shortbus salon, but ultimately focuses on the working out of complicated interpersonal relationships between its central cast. As Tanya Krzywinska points out, "The cinematic representation of real sex, it seems, is sanctioned only on the conditions that certain signifiers of 'art' are present," so "The presence of such elements prevent the viewer from enjoying these films as simply erotic spectacle" (226-7). The emphasis on relationships, on the human struggle to relate in personalized embodied ways, reorients *Shortbus* away from simply being a sex film. As such, while *Shortbus* prizes a non-normative queer space, the various representations of sex, technology, and relation also bolster the pre-eminence of the hegemonic constituent elements of intimacy—who you are, what you are like, inside and out. The Shortbus salon does circumvent some social divisions with its ethos of heterogeneous connections, but it also leads to the maintenance of certain power dynamics between subject positions and place, including elements of gender stratification and spatial hierarchies, by emphasizing the importance of identity politics. In other words, social place retains its divisive power when embodied identity is championed—a limitation to the sexual and intellectual possibilities provided by technology explored by the film.

With the redeployment of possibility and diversity found in *Times Square* come similar attendant shortcomings, also in evolved formations. While women are markedly absent from Delany's essays, except for an isolated and awkward experience, the same cannot be said for *Shortbus*. Sofia and Severin, though outnumbered by the men in the main cast, are integral to the film, though, as Davis points out, "*Shortbus* tends to deviate from its thematic, erotic, and

dialogic templates whenever women are on its mind" ("View" 628). Compounding the uneven

numbers of gender distribution in the main cast, the representation of female sexuality is

consistently marginalized in the film from the beginning—in which three men orgasm, and two

women do not—and throughout, such as the disintegration of Sofia's and Severin's friendship in

contrast to the renewal of James's and Jamie's relationship. The Shortbus salon has limits to its

diversity: as Davis points out the "liberal-pluralist tent does not stretch to cover everyone"

(*Desiring-Image* 101), and certainly does not cover everyone equally, as made clear by the

gender dynamics of the film.

Tinkcom elucidates the relationship between gender and technology within the film,

arguing that the film represents "female sexuality [as] resid[ing] primarily within the body, while

male (largely queer) sexuality finds its prostheses in the digital" (697) as "the women are

unfulfilled because their sexuality is not networked to a technology that would allow them to

find a partner with 'the right circuitry,'" while "the men in the film are highly technologically

savvy" (697, 702). Tinkcom's analysis is provocative, although the gender division he sets up

does not operate along such cleanly demarcated lines: recall it is Sofia who suggests the use of a

neo-organic prosthesis to expand her sexual experiences, and it is Rob's inattention that leads to

the vibrating egg's failure. Tinkcom's claim that the "film's explicit depictions of genital

sexuality distract a critical examination" of digital sexualities "because Mitchell's film is

concerned with female orgasm, a phenomenon apparently unrelated—at least in his account—to

digital media and communications technologies" (696) is useful for putting technology in

dialogue with one of the most frequently discussed moments of *Shortbus* by critics: Sofia's

eventual achievement of orgasm at the film's conclusion. Sofia's orgasm occurs at the Shortbus

salon, which is full of candles during a blackout as she gets physically intimate with a man and a

woman who have been consistently depicted as a sight of sexual interest for Sofia throughout the film.

This final scene depicts Sofia's disembodied face on a black background as she finally reaches climax—of her own sexual potential, of her narrative trajectory, and of the film itself—consequently causing the digitally animated New York City to recover from another power outage, revitalized with electricity. Sofia's individual node of sexual pleasure turns the whole grid of connection and desire back on. This scene clearly contrasts with the sexual explicitness of the earlier scenes in the film and some critics have viewed it harshly: Williams sees it as a return to "the old standby of the orgasmic woman's face" (292) prominent in pornography and a realization of the "orgasmic imperative" (288) dictated by the genre; Davis, too, comments that Sofia "can't experience her conclusive orgasm in any communal context, even though we understand her to be absorbed in a rambunctious three-way rencontre," due to the individualized shooting of her orgasm, going on to lament that "the excessive, chauvinist, and couple-driven ending […] reads […] like a capitulation on the film's prior investments, political as well as erotic" ("View" 631). However, the tension between Davis's claims—the film's refusal to depict Sofia's orgasm as communal and a problematic prizing of dyadic relations—can be viewed as a site of resistance to the phallocentrism of *Shortbus* by taking a final step back from "community […] imagined as whole-person, face-to-face relations" (Berlant and Warner 554, n. 15). Rather than a representational failure, Sofia's orgasm can be seen as a reconnection to the potentialities of digital sexualities, as symbolized by Sofia's individual energy, and not that of the entire salon, returning power to New York City. She is isolated, yet still connected, thereby symbolically embracing the potential relations offered by digital technologies.

Indeed, Jagose reads the final scene much differently than Davis, instead seeing Sofia's orgasmic close-up as "the film's last-ditch refusal to offer intersubjective communitarian bonds as the panacea for every social ill" (103). Furthermore, while Sofia's reenergizing orgasm is not achieved with technology—it is not the vibrating egg that relieves her sexual frustration—it does crucially and symbolically relate to the possibility of alternative intimacies offered by digital technologies: she is visually alone, yet the viewer knows she is surrounded by people, analogous to the potentials offered by digital intimacies to create communities of physical isolation. While someone may appear to be alone in an embodied sense, through a variety of portable electronics, social media, and other networks of technological connection, they may be involved in a complex web of intimacy. In this sense, technology cannot be seen as a strictly male domain within the film, as Sofia returns technotopic potentials into the final moments of *Shortbus*. Sofia's orgasm and the digitally generated electrical awakening of the city provides a last minute intervention into the dismissive representation of technologically mediated intimacy during *Shortbus*; by getting off, Sofia turns the grid back on.

A parallel recuperative reading can be made of Severin's last moments in the film. As the only other cisgendered female in the main cast, it is notable that Severin's ending is also isolating. The final scene of the film features Justin performing a show-stopping musical number in which v powerfully croons "We all get it in the end."[13] The demure, almost melancholic, musical number transitions to a euphoric cacophony as the Hungry March Band enters the salon,

---

[13] Interesting scholarship has been done on the place of music in Mitchell's films. Regarding *Shortbus*, Mitchell himself states "I wanted to use sex the way I used music in *Hedwig*" (Kaminsky), referring to his previous filmic undertaking of a musical comedy-drama, while Davis notes "so many critics likened *Shortbus* to a musical, with sex scenes serving as its 'numbers,' suggest[ing] how strongly the film demarcates these intervals from other scenes" (*Desiring-Image* 100). However, in addition to the analogical relationship between sex and music within the film, the film contains a large amount of music itself—with multiple numbers performed by cast members. For a more comprehensive look at the role of the song "In the End" within the film, see Jodie Taylor's discussion of "a sexually dynamic, musically embellished orgy" (607) in her article "Taking it in the Ear."

sparking a spontaneous orgy in which Sofia and almost everyone else in the salon (including

Rob, James, Jamie, and Caleb) engage in a sharing of physical desire. The song rings true as

everyone 'gets it,' everyone except for Severin. Again, this moment is seen in a primarily

negative light by scholars: as other characters achieve social and sexual satisfaction, Severin and

her desire to have a real interaction are "snuffed out to narrative insignificance" (Jagose 94) as

she "ends the film on the sidelines of the salon and the story, wracked with an inchoate scream

while two […] pairs of boys […] release themselves into frisky foreplay" (Davis, *Desiring-*

Image, 99). However, Severin's "inchoate scream" can be seen as a twin rebellion to Sofia's

individualized orgasm, a sonic counterpart to Sofia's visual refusal of a prescriptive

communitarian imperative.

It is not Severin's inability to connect with others that is ultimately her problem—as

Justin sings "We *all* bear the scars / Yes, we *all* feign a laugh / We *all* sigh in the dark"—issues

of social relation and sexual frustration permeate all members of the cast. Instead, the issue lies

in the film's pathologizing of this lack and its refusal to allow Severin to feel intimacy: she is

punished for enjoying the erotic technology of the vibrating egg and orgasming with Sofia,

allowing technology to mediate her connection, and loses her burgeoning friendship. In this

sense, Severin's scream—the only dissonant sound during the closing number,[14] full of cheers,

clapping, and people signing along—not only contrasts to the silence of the sexual acts of Sofia,

Rob, James, Jamie, Caleb, and others (drowned out by the all-encompassing music), but can also

be read as a cry for individuality amidst the totalizing sonic and sexual orgy. The sonic and

visual resistance of Severin and Sofia to a communal sexuality that explicitly prioritizes male

sexual gratification nuances the film's depiction of gender and symbolically aligns with the

---

[14] Notably, Severin's scream is edited out of the soundtrack version of "In the End," preserving the triumphant impression of a unified community singing along with Justin, multiplying v's voice and the imperative to 'get it.'

possibilities of digital sexualities to imagine intimacy without the necessity of corporeal presence and intersubjectivity.

The issue of decorporealization becomes significant when considering another problematic element of the representation politics of *Shortbus*, one also present in *Times Square*: the issue of queer metronormativity. This dialogue between Delany's and Mitchell's pieces functions to "conjure a sense of continuity and historical inevitability that helps glue 'metropolitan' to 'queer' across the decades" (Herring 32). In tension with the open audition process through the Internet, a technology of spatial equalization, the physical casting calls for *Shortbus* only took place in New York City and Los Angeles (Kaminsky), once again recalling Herring's identification of the bicoastal bias prominent in the queer urbanity of metronormativity. The content of the film, like Delany's essays, revels in "its exceptional New York-ness" by inundating viewers with "a bounty of iconic figures specific to New York" from the Statue of Liberty to Ground Zero, thereby making it impossible to view the city as "'any place whatever'" or an "open-access site of deterritorialized desires" (Davis, *Desiring-Image*, 103). The film is not interested in the question of the transplantability of the Shortbus salon: it is firmly and exclusively set in New York City and dedicated to an "overidentification between erotic release and specifically metropolitan vitality" (Davis, "View," 630).

This is apparent in a speech given by the sole elderly denizen of Shortbus, identified as a clear stand-in for former New York City mayor Ed Koch (Bryant 189; Davis, *Desiring-Image*, 101), who was criticized for his treatment of the beginning of the HIV/AIDS crisis in the early 1980s, one of the major reasons for the loss of sexual possibility lamented explicitly by Crimp and throughout Delany's essays. As the old man says in the film, people thought he "didn't do enough to help prevent the AIDS crisis because [he] was in the closet." More pertinently, though,

he reveres New York City as a sexual utopia, claiming that "the most wonderful thing about New York" is "it's where everyone comes to get fucked," being "one of the last places where people are still willing to bend over to let in the new." This idea of New York City as highly receptive to the innovative and current in terms of sex is refuted in the film's consistent suspicion of digital sexualities, as it defends Warner's claim, in reference to Christopher Street in New York City, that "Phone sex, the internet, and sitcoms cannot take the place of this urban space and its often unrecognized practices of sexual citizenship" (Warner, *Trouble*, 188). Technology is not seen as a viable substitute or supplement to more conventional intimacies perhaps largely due to its ability to destabilize the spatial prioritizing of the urban by allowing a variety of connections across geographic space, provided there is access to digital technologies.

Even when *Shortbus* does seem to embrace the potential of technologies of affiliation, such as in the above reading of Sofia's orgasm, it is spatially limited to an urban context: Sofia's orgasm reenergizes New York City as a grid of desire, the necessary first step to energizing the rest of the world. Indeed, the film insists that, though deeply fraught, the positions of the characters within the urban space of the city remain desirable. Severin laments the high rent prices of New York City during an emotional breakdown to Sofia, fearing the possibility of having to go live in Fresno instead, thereby invoking a "'Skyscrapers or Bust' mentality [that] constrain[s] the potentials and the ranges of motion that queer cinema envisions" (Davis, *Desiring-Image*, 105). This positioning of sexual counterpublics as an exclusively urban phenomenon contradicts the potential of digital technologies as a border-spanning mode of intimacy, an idea presciently invoked in a scene featuring the following character and his relation with sex, space, and technology.

The final central member of the ensemble cast, Ceth (Jay Brannan) and his particular technology of affiliation—the prescient Yenta650—have been deliberately saved until last to provide an appropriate point of intervention to wrap up this chapter and move on to a brief conclusion. Ceth is first introduced in the Shortbus salon when Sofia runs into him; later, he becomes the third member of a polyamorous relationship with James and Jamie, leading to a memorable rendition of "The Star-Spangled Banner" during a sexual daisy chain. However, the narrative of the film eventually makes it clear that James is only eager to introduce Ceth into the relationship so Jamie would not be left completely alone and devastated after the execution of James's planned suicide. In other words, this apparent exploration of a non-normative group of intimacies is merely a plan to ensure that a monogamous relationship is rapidly replaced by another monogamous relationship after James is gone. When this plan changes after Caleb stops James's attempt to take his own life, Ceth is left alone again until the film's finale when he and Caleb begin kissing during "In the End," apparently forgetting their prior animosity towards each other (Caleb thought Ceth was ruining James's and Jamie's perfect relationship), seemingly caught up in the pervasive orgiastic energy of the communal ending.

Ceth gets a very normalizing narrative arc; at the end, he has to be with someone, because everyone has to be with someone (except Severin, of course), even if it is not in keeping with the logic of the interpersonal relations within the narrative. Early on in the film, however, it seems Ceth could provide a reprieve from the personalizing and embodied relationships dictated by *Shortbus*. When he first meets Sofia, he is preoccupied with his handheld technological device, the Yenta650.[15] Ceth explains "it's supposed to find me a husband," immediately subsuming the piece of technology under a rubric of tools promoting assimilation into a homonormative model

---

[15] Yenta, or Yente, is a Yiddish name associated with elderly female gossips. Yente is the name of the matchmaker in the Broadway musical and film of the same title, *Fiddler on the Roof* (Norman Jewison, 1971), providing a likely explanation for the name of the matchmaking device in *Shortbus*.

of marriage, rather than a way to open up new possibilities of relation. The Yenta650 quickly

finds Ceth a match, comparing his data and preferences to those of others, and the normative

script falls away when Ceth is most preoccupied with the size of his match's penis. This is

indicative of the emphasis the Yenta650 places on the body: the data the user inputs into the

device includes height, weight, penis size, sex, ethnicity, and sexuality, among many other

categories. Despite this prioritizing of corporeality, the device does depart from the prescriptive

face-to-face interactions prized by the film. Unlike the Shortbus salon, the Yenta650 does not

rely on more traditional methods of beginning relationships—access is not granted through

word-of-mouth and selective invitations, but is wholly mediated by technology, a partial,

admittedly incomplete divergence from the film's championing of "personalizing intimacies that

are sustained across time by being lodged in the autobiographically particularizing details of its

characters" (Jagose 101).

Of course, to many contemporary viewers the Yenta650 conjures up the plethora of

prevalent networking applications currently available for cellular phones used for social and

sexual connections to be discussed in the following conclusion, even as it predates them. After

arranging his first encounter with his latest match, Ceth uses his cell phone to take a picture of

his hair to ensure it is looking presentable. Even if *Shortbus* is ultimately skeptical of the

sustainability and value of technologically mediated connections, it is undeniably interested in

imagining some of these possibilities as represented in this brief and narratively insignificant

scene with Ceth that stitches together ideas of queer possibility past, present, and future: it looks

back to imagine what lies ahead through a present context. As Tinkcom suggests, "Ceth's use of

Yenta650 suggests some of the implications of this social networking technology for its users,

not least that it reorganizes men in the cosmopolitan space as they seek sexual pleasure," adding

that "There is, of course, an older name to this practice: cruising" (711). The Yenta650 can be seen as an evolution in the cruising practices that permeate Delany's text, the institution of a digitalized and more intensely technologically mediated form of cruising that signals the beginning stages of embracing technology's ability to circumvent the conventions of personalizing intimacy and embodied encounters.

It is clear that both Delany's and Mitchell's texts give primacy—both in terms of pages/minutes and thematic/narrative significance—to the relationships where people meet several times, know each other's names, and lives; in short, where they engage in what traditionally constitutes interpersonal intimacy. While technology has opened the door for new forms of disembodied and anonymous sexual intimacy and a related potential of technology to foster alternative affiliations, the representations of technologically mediated sexual contact have not caught up to these queer potentialities. Mitchell focuses on embodied community-building and intersubjective revelations and struggles, and nimbly side-steps most other options for intimacy provided by the omnipresent technology in the film (from the vibrating egg to the Yenta650), technologies that offer an alternative to face-to-face interaction. Both of these queer cultural texts can be read as real desires to use technology to imagine something different, but not being able to fully commit to exploring these possibilities, either due to capitalist infrastructure and conservative ideology (as is the case with Delany), or because of a suspicion of technologically mediated encounters and preference for personalized, face-to-face intimacy (as is the case with Mitchell). In dialogue, *Times Square* and *Shortbus* represent Muñoz's claim that "queerness exists for us as an ideality that can be distilled from the past and used to imagine a future" (1), a future that has been contemplated for years in shifting formations, but is not yet realizable, a future in which technology and intimacy will continually reshape one another.

Conclusion

> As the people here grow colder
> I turn to my computer
> And spend my evenings with it
> Like a friend.
>   —Kate Bush, "Deeper Understanding"

Humanities scholarship has long been critical of problematic and destructive forms of social relation that lead to violence, oppression, and systemic inequality. Often, the amount of issues and flaws associated with a certain type of relationality correlates to its prevalence: from nation-state paradigms to prescriptive marriage models, despite the consistently demonstrated inadequate and outmoded quality of these ways of being together, they remain prominent. Instead, the trend remains towards assimilating outlying groups into these deeply flawed models; again, the homonormativity of gay marriage is perhaps the best-known contemporary example. However, a reiteration of the shortcomings of dominant models of intersubjectivity and community is perhaps not useful here. What is needed is for serious attention to be given to other ways people can interact with the world—the non-normative, the creative, even the counter-intuitional, both inside of academia and beyond. This need is reflected in increasing amounts of scholarship looking at the ways we can relate to and through technology, research being conducted alongside other kindred emergent discourses that think imaginatively and carefully about how humans can relate differently, discourses ranging from critical animal studies to affective studies of human-object relations. What is needed is not a blindly optimistic and utopian perspective that sees technology as the long-awaited cure for social ills, but a desire to acquire a deeper understanding of how contemporary technologies already are re-scripting sociality, sexuality, and intimacy and the future possibilities they offer to continue to do so.

Scholars such as Anna E. Ward and L. Ayu Saraswati provide compelling attempts at reaching this kind of understanding, striving to create frameworks, methodologies, and languages

for productively discussing technologically mediated relations in non-dismissive ways. In her

discussion of the erotic website *Beautiful Agony*, Ward coins the term "intimatics" to describe "a

relation of intimacy generated from, not in spite of, the accessibility and transmissibility afforded

by contemporary technologies" (163). Similarly, in her work on the websites of Tantric sex

goddesses, Saraswati offers "wikisexuality" as "a new formation of sexuality in cyberspace that

will allow us to consider the virtual space as its own epistemic point of reference," a type of

sexuality that is "always a (collaborative) work in progress," "constantly shifting with each

encounter" as an "editable" and "unfixed, fluid, and thereby non-essentialist" process (588, 591-

2). This project has attempted to add to this growing collection of work by looking at a brief

history of representation of technologically mediated queer spaces to reveal a persistent

ambivalence towards social relations developed from intimacy grounded in technology and

digital sexualities. The production of (queer) spaces is a key element in understanding these

evolving formations as Susannah Radstone points out "the association between the increasing

speed of technology and the flattening out or spatialization of experience" (7).

The reluctance of cultural output such as *Shortbus* to embrace emergent forms of relation

offered by technology and instead reify a preference for personalized and corporeal intimacies is

indicative of a cultural fear and shame of these types of intimacy, especially when eroticized—

think of the often sheepish response of 'we met online' following inquiries about the origins of a

relationship, despite the rapidly growing prevalence of this type of sociality. Digital and virtual

spaces and the processes of self-creation and mediated intersubjectivity they house need not

always be viewed with trepidation: while threats of deception, violence, and other dangers are

very real, it is clear that any form of interpersonal interaction necessarily entails a degree of

physical and emotional risk. Of course, a large part of the reason that these representations are

limited is because the possibilities currently offered by technology are themselves constrained by familiar limits, but it is this mix of potential and restriction that is fertile grounds for imagining different connections, as will be touched on in a brief look at the cellular phone application *Grindr* in the following pages.

In 1997, Betsky lamented that "Queer spaces are disappearing," postulating that perhaps the only queer space left is the "the space of electronic networks, a space to be surfed and cruised and connected to not through real experience, but through the mask of technology" (14, 182). Betsky sees this "only remaining place of resistance" as a location where "queers gather in anonymity, wearing electronic masks and creating artificial lives […;] revel[ing] in the freedom of the Web more than any other group," thereby "cruising the Web becomes a safe-sex version of cruising the city" (192). While Betsky's mistrust and derision of the supposedly artificial and masquerading quality of online subjectivity requires nuancing (after all, all identity is fundamentally performative), his point that queer online culture presents an evolution of cruising is a salient one. Just as the legal strictures and rezoning (and the heterosexism largely behind them) that led to the closure of Delany's pornotopic theatres facilitated the imagining of a place like Shortbus—a less accessible and semi-private location, still faced with the constant threat of dismantlement by the NYPD—they have also unintentionally aided in the creation of digitalized queer spaces. As Stephen Hartman points out, while "*eros* may be cyberfueled, […] it still needs a safe place to happen" (45, italics original): transferring flows of desire through new mediums does not eliminate the need for spaces to express those desires. Indeed, queers increasingly "cathect the privatized virtual public of phone sex and the internet" (Berlant and Warner 551) in ways that creatively circumvent past legal restrictions on non-normative social and sexual contact within emergent queer spaces.

Grindr is a prominent example of a contemporary queer space, in this case "a hybrid zone of digital and physical space" (Crooks), which functions in this way. The application, launched in 2009 and started in Los Angeles (unsurprisingly, given the persistence of queer metronormativity outlined in the previous pages), quickly rose in popularity, currently boasting "more than 4 million guys in 192 countries around the world" ("Learn More") according to *Grindr*'s website. *Grindr* is a social-networking application aimed at men with non-heteronormative sexual orientations (identifying as gay, bisexual, or queer, for instance)[1] that allows users to create a profile with relatively little information (in comparison to the majority of online dating services) and then connect through chat with other users nearby, thereby harnessing the "remarkable libidinal power" of the internet (Hartman 44). By combining the mobile connectivity of a smartphone with the geo-spatial capabilities of GPS technology, *Grindr* has "adapt[ed] smartphones and locative technology to modernize cruising," bringing about "a change in how queer men would interact" (Woo). Like the Yenta650, *Grindr* reminds us that matchmaking is not an archaic form of social relation, but an evolving one that has embraced technology to allow people to find each other based on various statistics and categories of body and identity. *Grindr* has largely become synonymous with gay promiscuity as many users treat

---

[1] While *Grindr* is primarily aimed at and used by queer men, similar applications for more normative sexual orientations soon developed. For example, about three years after the launch of *Grindr*, the application *Tinder* was launched in Los Angeles bringing digital, mobile, and geo-specific dating to a broader range of sexualities and borrowing generously from *Grindr*, both sonically with its title and structurally in its operation. This is not surprising given Betsky's claim over fifteen years ago that "straight society is no more than a nanosecond behind queers in the colonization of [the] last queer space," the Internet (193), which ties into a broader societal trend in which "heterosexual innovations in everyday life are patterned after homosexual ones as changing historical conditions mean it is no longer only homosexuals who are shaped by post-traditional forms of sociality, by a self-reflexive relation to the project of the self, by the impersonal intimacies afforded by the city" (Jagose 93). As Jagose notes, both Anthony Giddens's *The Transformation of Intimacy* (1992) and Henning Bech's *When Men Meet* (1997) provide comprehensive and provocative accounts of the modeling of heterosexual lives after those of homosexuals.

the application as a tool for quick and easy sexual hook-ups. As Roderic Crooks accurately

identifies, current mainstream perception of the application "in print, on television, and in public

health literature certainly recalls many characterizations of gay life as laughable, hyper-

sexualized, or dangerous." The harsh judgments against *Grindr* blur discourses of homophobia

and technophobia in familiar ways, recalling similar cultural attitudes outlined in the previous

chapters.

Despite these reactions, *Grindr*'s popularity is undeniable, attributable according to some

to its "ability to quickly locate hyper-local sexual partners, but also because of a sort of sliding

scale of anonymity" (Gudelunas 359), a twenty-first century method of seeking the spatial

proximity and relative anonymity prized by past cruising cultures. What is perhaps most

interesting about *Grindr* to this project is the ways in which it navigates the parameters of

embodiment and spatialization in comparison to the previously discussed queer spaces. In his

discussion of the Yenta650 in *Shortbus*, Tinkcom notes that "it is often lamented among urban

queer men that the possibility of encountering other like-minded men in the city—on the street,

in bars, in commercial spaces—has been supplanted by the Internet, given that the Web, with its

own social networking practices, has privatized sexual solicitation by situating users at home

while they surfed," adding that "Grindr, it would seem, restores the body of the cruising man to

the built space of the city" (711). The implications of Tinkcom's thoughts are twofold: they help

explain the ambivalence towards technology displayed throughout Delany's and Mitchell's

pieces (if certain technologies remove the necessity of visiting spatially fixed locations like the

pornotopic theatres or the Shortbus salon, this creates an obvious tension) and they reveal

Grindr's position as a mediator between past cruising cultures and contemporary technological

possibilities, both a backward-looking reprisal and a forward-looking exploration.

This move away from the "electronic bulletin boards, chat groups, and pornography sites on the World Wide Web" (192) deplored by Betsky towards a type of technological embodiment is a compromise between face-to-face and technology-to-technology relations: a technotopia. Indeed, when Crooks claims *Grindr* use "illustrates the simultaneous, mutual formation of bodies and space" (Crooks) he almost exactly echoes Halberstam's "technotopic vision of space and flesh in a process of mutual mutation" (*Queer Time* 103). The technotopic space of *Grindr* does not erase physical space but embraces it; however, it also renders space fluid and crucially mobile. In other words, a *Grindr* user can be anywhere, but the being in space is integral—as Jamie Woo puts it, it is "mobile cruising." Instead of needing to know the right park, the specific theatre, or get an invitation to the exclusive sex club to partake in a semi-public culture of sexual possibility,[2] the admission requirements for the queer space of *Grindr* is downloading the free application (or paying a small amount for a more advanced version). In this sense, the spatial imaginary of *Grindr* is both a liberatory and expansive one, creating a network of desire that is predicated on the generality of space, and not the particular, giving users a "new way to access the places where [they] already are" (Crooks).

This emphasis on space is apparent in much current work on locative media and related technologies. Malcolm McCullough notes that while people "can still hear residual invitations to 'visit' websites, all that information is now coming to you—with you, wherever you are; and is increasingly *about* where you are," adding that "In the process, one belief that has changed is

---

[2] As in the previous sections, there is no clear way to label the space of *Grindr* as public or private. Saraswati points out that the "shift to a more public form of sexuality is itself a product of historically situated technologies such as the internet" (594). In this sense, *Grindr* is immensely public: broadcasting a user's location and provided information to any number of nearby fellow users, while at the same time retaining an aura of privacy, as it is predominantly operated on a small handheld device that can be used at any location—behind a locked house door, for instance. As such, the application once again emphasizes the instability of the terms of publicness and privacy when defining intersubjectivity.

that the way to find and use networked information must be solitary, sedentary or virtual" (26,

italics original). Technologically mediated networks, including networks of desire, are now

mobile, communal, and embodied. Of course, in addition to being more expansive than a queer

space like the Shortbus salon, the spatial emphasis of *Grindr* also comes with inherent

limitations. A partial co-conspirator with the work of Delany and Mitchell, *Grindr* also

buttresses the prevalence of queer metronormativity even as it attempts to resist it, a problem

faced by the majority of locative medias (McCullough 26; Wilken 40). While *Grindr* resists the

necessity of fixed space, it still operates as a geo-spatial application dependant on the physical

proximity of users' devices. Those in sparsely populated areas or areas with a lower amount of

queer people may have fewer individuals to engage with, or at the very least less people willing

to respond to someone so far away given the continued high valuation of embodied interaction.

By emphasising physical location, *Grindr* "reaffirm[s] the importance of and prominence of

local connections, even as technology enables communication over greater distances" (Crooks).

Considering the space of *Grindr* in the context of Delany's distinctions between contact

and networking encounters is provocative. Despite undeniably being part of a wireless social

network, *Grindr* can also lead to the diverse interrelations Delany claims are primarily results of

contact. However, there is a tension between the potentials *Grindr* can provide (contact with a

variety of heterogeneous individuals) and the reality of the experience of many users

(networking with the types of people they are already familiar with). In *Times Square*, Delany

claims that "any social form (or, indeed, architectural form) that shies us away from contact and

contact-like situations and favors networking or relatively more network-like situations is likely

to be approved" by dominant conservative ideology (164), pointing to a significant element of

the spatial politics of *Grindr*. If the more institutionalized, less publically visible social

encounters of networking are more acceptable to various social hegemonies, what are the implications for these types of cellular applications? On the one hand, there is no singular space for *Grindr*-mediated encounters (unlike Delany's theatres or Mitchell's salon): it is an invisible web of interaction. However, the mobility of the application allows it to turn any space into a space for queer connections, flirtations, and sexual expression. *Grindr* is both nowhere and everywhere making it both compliant and threatening to conservative ideology. Ultimately, the space of the application (like many spaces) seems capable of encouraging both contact and networking relations, as Delany reminds us that "desire is fundamental to both" (168).

Of course, *Grindr* is not just preoccupied with *where* bodies are, but *what* these bodies consist of. After launching the application, the user is greeted with a grid full of square pictures of other users: this picture may be of the user's face, body, or anything else, including a black silhouette of a head for those profiles choosing not to provide a picture. The *Grindr* user is faced with a contemporary manifestation of the shop windows that are emblematic spaces of the architecture and commodity culture of modernity, presented with a virtually endless catalogue of potential sexual partners and social relations, constantly shifting alongside the user's physical location. Amidst this plethora of connections, *Grindr* functions on an ability "to recognize the fluidity of relationships, the potential for mixed motivations" (Crooks). However, societal emphasis on embodied identity politics remains strong as even *Grindr'*s website interestingly states that "Turning Grindr off and being there in-person with that guy you were chatting with is the final goal of using the app. Being 0 feet away is our mission for you" ("Learn More"). While *Grindr* insistently tracks distance and allows messages to cut across distance, it states the elimination of distance as its overarching purpose. As Crooks points out, this mission is evident in the marketing of the application as "Grindr's advertising creates an image of the app as

reminiscent of face-to-face contact, a vision of the Grindrscape as a cascade of handsome, friendly faces." Once again, *Grindr* aligns with *Times Square* and *Shortbus* by seeing technology as primarily a means to unmediated intersubjective contact, a contemporary tool for bringing bodies in space together, a new *method* of achieving intimacy rather than a new *form* of intimacy.

The prioritization of eventual embodied contact once again leads to the reification of judgments based on corporeal appearance and presentation. While Tinkcom picks up on the clearly class-inflected usage of the application (you need to own a smartphone to access *Grindr*) stating that the application consists of "comparatively affluent urban men seeking sex" (693), this is only one limitation to the inclusiveness of the virtual *Grindr* community. While anyone possessing the requisite technology can set-up a profile, regardless of gender identification, sexuality, race, ability, or other categories of social difference, this does not guarantee a welcoming or accepting response from other users. Clearly, as evident in the material quoted above from *Grindr*'s website, the creators of the application have a gender of user in mind ("more than four million *guys*"). Additionally, Crooks' statement that "Profiles often state age, racial, or body type prerequisites in crass or dismissive terms" only gently alludes to the brutal racism, femmephobia, ageism, and body-shaming that casually proliferates on the application.[3] The dual nature of *Grindr* in terms of spaces mirrors its relation to bodies: while it moves beyond the fixity of other examples of institutionalized cruising through geo-specific technology, it consequently is dependent on physical proximity, and while it presents an almost limitless selection of potential connections, the presence of the connections does not in any way guarantee

---

[3] The online blog *Douchebags of Grindr* provides a disturbing archive of representative examples: a brief survey of the site features tag lines and self-descriptions written by users such as "Not into girly guys," "If you aren't hot under social standards [sic], don't write," "NO ORIENTALS," "No dudes over 30," and "No niggers, kikes, our [sic] queens. Men only," demonstrating the diversity of the vitriolic discrimination perpetuated by users.

the receptiveness of other users—many nodes on the grid are broken, disconnected by discrimination, fear, and hate. In this sense, *Grindr* bolsters Ward's claim that "Everything becomes a bit alluring, a bit grotesque, under the intense glare of infinite accessibility" (185): both the appeal and the revulsion of *Grindr*, its possibilities and limits, are traceable to technological innovation, much like the queer spaces represented in *Times Square* and *Shortbus*.

Like Ward's work, this project has sought to examine "shifts in the relationships among representation, technology, and intimacy more broadly" (161). The persistent representation of a suspicion towards technologically mediated intimacy and emphasis on the centrality of personalized and embodied relations for satisfying sexual and social connection aligns with accounts from other disciplines grappling with similar questions: Rowan Wilken gleans from a summary of ethnographic accounts of "mobile telephony" that "technologies of distance do nothing to obviate the need for regular co-presence through face-to-face encounter in place. This recurrent finding validates the claim that we are influenced by an ongoing 'compulsion of proximity'" (44). This compulsion of proximity and the related personalizing of intimacy are not necessarily negative desires or relations, but they do run the risk of tempering the radical departures into new types of relationships offered through technology.

This project argues a few modest central points: contemporarily, and throughout the last few decades, technology has been instrumental in forming queer spaces for non-normative social and sexual bonding—this is represented in various cultural output created following the HIV/AIDS crisis in an era of both heightened security and late capitalist rezoning; however, these representations reify an investment in linking the sexual to the social by prioritizing personal and embodied accounts of intimacy; and this in turn leads to the reaffirmation of socio-cultural divisions influenced by hegemonic power dynamics. To close, a Muñoz quote once

again seems fitting here: as the beginning of *Cruising Utopia* suggests, "we must dream and enact new and better pleasures, other ways of being in the world, and ultimately new worlds" (1). Technology has repeatedly been demonstrated as a method to imagine otherwise—not always better, but otherwise—and it is imperative that we seek a deeper understanding of how our relationships to technology and through technology function as a world-making project that can make life different, both socially and sexually. If human embodied sociality is deeply, even irreparably flawed, we must embrace the potentials offered by evolving technologies to improve and redirect the ways we connect with our world and with each other.

Works Cited

"About the Show." *HBO Canada*. Web. 8 Feb 2014.

    http://www.hbocanada.com/looking/about.php.

Adler, Jerry. "The Day the Lights Went Out." *Newsweek* 142.8 (2003): 44-51. Web.

Alcoff, Linda M. *Visible Identities: Race, Gender, and the Self.* Oxford: Oxford UP, 2006. Print.

Berlant, Lauren. *Cruel Optimism*. Durham: Duke UP, 2011. Web.

Berlant, Lauren and Michael Warner. "Sex in Public." *Critical Inquiry* 24.2 (Winter 1998): 547-566. Web.

Bersani, Leo. "Is the Rectum a Grave?" *October* 43 (1987): 197-222. Web.

Betsky, Aaron. *Queer Space: Architecture and Same-Sex Desire*. New York: William Morrow and Company, Inc., 1997. Print.

Bond, Justin Vivian. "Mx Justin Vivian Bond: A User's Guide." *Justin Bond*. Web. 6 May 2014.

    http://justinbond.com/?p=537.

Bryant, Wayne M. "Shortbus." *Journal of Bisexuality* 9.2 (2009): 187-190. Web.

Bush, Kate. "Deeper Understanding." *The Sensual World*. EMI, 1989. CD.

Califa, Pat. *Public Sex: The Culture of Radical Sex.* Pittsburgh: Cleis Press, 1994. Print.

Crimp, Douglas. "Mourning and Militancy." *October* 51 (Winter 1989): 3-18. Web.

Crooks, Roderic N. "The Rainbow Flag and Green Carnation: Grindr in the Gay Village." *First Monday* 18.11 (November 2013). Web.

Dangerous Bedfellows. "Introduction." *Policing Public Sex: Queer Politics and the Future of AIDS Activism*. Ed. Dangerous Bedfellows. Boston: South End Press, 1996. 13-20. Print.

Davis, Nick. *The Desiring-Image: Gilles Deleuze and Contemporary Queer Cinema.* Oxford: Oxford UP, 2013. Web.

---. "The View from the Shortbus, or All Those Fucking Movies." *GLQ: A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies* 14.4 (2008): 623-637. Web.

Dean, Tim. "The Erotics of Transgression." *The Cambridge Companion to Gay and Lesbian Writing.* Ed. Hugh Stevens. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2010. 65-80. Web.

Delany, Samuel R. "Aye, and Gomorrah." *Driftglass*. Boston: The Gregg Press, 1977. 111-120. Print.

---. *Driftglass*. Boston: The Gregg Press, 1977. Print.

---. "Of Sex, Objects, Signs, Systems, Sales, SF, and Other Things." *The Straits of Messina*. Seattle: Sercona, 1989. 33-55. Print.

---. *Times Square Red, Times Square Blue*. New York: New York UP, 1999. Print.

Douchebags of Grindr. Web. 11 May 2014. http://www.douchebagsofgrindr.com/.

Duggan, Lisa. "Prologue." *Policing Public Sex: Queer Politics and the Future of AIDS Activism*. Ed. Dangerous Bedfellows. Boston: South End Press, 1996. ix-xi. Print.

---. *The Twilight of Equality? Neoliberalism, Cultural Politics, and the Attack on Democracy*. Boston: Beacon Press, 2003. Web.

Dworkin, Andrea. *Pornography: Men Possessing Women*. New York: Plume, 1981. Print.

Foley, Jack. "*Shortbus* – John Cameron Mitchell Interview." *indieLONDON*. Web. 6 May 2014. http://www.indielondon.co.uk/Film-Review/shortbus-john-cameron-mitchell-interview.

Foucault, Michel. *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison.* Trans. Alan Sheridan. New York: Vintage-Random House, 1995. Print.

---. *The History of Sexuality, Volume 1: An Introduction*. Trans. Robert Hurley. New York: Vintage-Random House, 1990. Print.

---. "Of Other Spaces: Utopias and Heterotopias." *Diacritics* 16.1 (1986): 1-9. Trans. Jay

      Miskowiec. Print.

Gudelunas, David. "There's an App for That: The Uses and Gratifications of Online Social

      Networks for Gay Men." *Sexuality & Culture* 16 (2012): 347-365. Web.

Halberstam, Judith. *In A Queer Time and Place: Transgender Bodies, Subcultural Lives*. New

      York: New York UP, 2005. Print.

---. *The Queer Art of Failure*. Durham: Duke UP, 2011. Print.

Harkins, Gillian. "Aye, and Neoliberalism." *Journal of Homosexuality* 59.7 (2012): 1073-1080.

      Web.

Harper, Phillip Brian. "Playing in the Dark: Privacy, Public Sex, and the Erotics of the Cinema

      Venue." *Camera Obscura* 10.3 (1992): 92-111. Web.

Hartman, Stephen. "Bondless Love." *Studies in Gender and Sexuality* 14.1 (2013): 35-50. Web.

Heidegger, Martin. "The Question Concerning Technology." *The Question Concerning*

      Technology and Other Essays. Trans. William Lovitt. New York: Garland, 1977. 3-35.

      Print.

Herring, Scott. *Another Country: Queer Anti-Urbanism*. New York: New York UP, 2010. Print.

Hoffman, Wayne. "Skipping the Life Fantastic: Coming of Age in the Sexual Devolution."

      Policing Public Sex: Queer Politics and the Future of AIDS Activism. Ed. Dangerous

      Bedfellows. Boston: South End Press, 1996. 337-354. Print.

Humphreys, Laud. *Tearoom Trade: A Study of Impersonal Sex in Public Places*. London:

      Duckworth, 1970. Print.

Jagose, Annamarie. *Orgasmology.* Durham: Duke UP, 2012. Print.

Jameson, Fredric. "On Interpretation: Literature as a Socially Symbolic Act." *The Jameson Reader.* Ed. Michael Hardt and Kathi Weeks. Malden: Blackwell Publishing, 2000. 33-60. Print.

---. "Postmodernism, or, the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism." *The Jameson Reader.* Ed. Michael Hardt and Kathi Weeks. Malden: Blackwell Publishing, 2000. 188-232. Print.

Johnson, Beth. "Shortbus: Highbrow Hard-core." *Hard to Swallow: Hard-Core Pornography on Screen*. Ed. Clare Hines and Darren Kerr. New York: Columbia UP, 2012. 163-176. Web.

Kaminsky, Michael Sean, dir. "Gifted and Challenged: The Making of *Shortbus*." *Shortbus*. Fortissimo Films, 2006. Film.

Krzywinska, Tanya. *Sex and the Cinema*. New York: Wallflower Press, 2006. Web.

Leap, William L. "Introduction." *Public Sex/Gay Space*. Ed. William L. Leap. New York: Columbia UP, 1999. 1-21. Print.

"Learn More." *Grindr.* Web. 11 May 2014. http://grindr.com/learn-more.

Lefebvre, Henri. *The Production of Space*. Trans. Donald Nicholson-Smith. Hoboken: Wiley-Blackwell, 1992. Print.

Livingston, Jennie, dir. *Paris is Burning*. Miramax Films, 1991. Film.

"Looking for Now." *Looking*. HBO. 19 Jan 2014. Television.

Marcus, Steven. *The Other Victorians: A Study of Sexuality and Pornography in Mid-Nineteenth Century England*. London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1966. Print.

McCullough, Malcom. "On the Urbanism of Locative Media." *Places* 18.2 (2006): 26-29. Web.

Mitchell, John Cameron, dir. *Shortbus*. Fortissimo Films, 2006. Film.

Montez, Ricardo. "'Trade' Marks: LA2, Keith Haring, and a Queer Economy of Collaboration." *GLQ: A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies* 12.3 (2006): 425-440. Web.

Muñoz, José Esteban. *Cruising Utopia: The Then and There of Queer Futurity*. New York: New

York UP, 2009. Print.

Puar, Jasbir. *Terrorist Assemblages: Homonationalism in Queer Times*. Durham: Duke UP,

2007. Print.

Radstone, Susannah. The *Sexual Politics of Time: Confession, Nostalgia, Memory*. New York:

Routledge, 2007. Print.

Rechy, John. *The Sexual Outlaw: A Documentary.* New York: Grove Press, 1984. Print.

Rodowick, D. N. *Gilles Deleuze's Time Machine*. Durham: Duke UP, 1997. Web.

Rubin, Gayle. "Thinking Sex: Notes for a Radical Theory of the Politics of Sexuality." *Pleasure

and Danger: Exploring Female Sexuality*. Ed. Carole Vance. Boston: Routledge, 1984.

143-178. Print.

Saraswati, L. Ayu. "Wikisexuality: Rethinking Sexuality in Cyberspace." *Sexualities* 16.5/6

(2013): 587-603. Web.

Taylor, Jodie. "Taking it in the Ear: On Musico-Sexual Synergies and the (Queer) Possibility that

Music is Sex." *Continuum: Journal of Media & Cultural Studies* 26.4 (2012): 603-614.

Web.

Tinkcom, Matthew. "You've got to get on to get off": *Shortbus* and the Circuits of the Erotic."

South Atlantic Quarterly 110.3 (2011): 699-713. Web.

Tucker, Jeffrey Allen. *A Sense of Wonder: Samuel R. Delany, Race, Identity, and Difference.*

Middleton: Wesleyan UP, 2004. Print.

Ward, Anna E. "Pantomimes of Ecstasy: BeautifulAgony.com and the Representation of

Pleasure." *Camera Obscura* 25 (2010): 161-195. Web.

Warner, Michael. "Publics and Counterpublics." *Public Culture* 14.1 (2002): 49-90. Web.

---. *The Trouble with Normal: Sex, Politics, and the Ethics of Queer Life*. Cambridge: Harvard

UP, 2000. Print.

Wilken, Rowan. "Mobilizing Place: Mobile Media, Peripatetics, and the Renegotiation of Urban

Places." *Journal of Urban Technology* 15.3 (2008): 39-55. Web.

Williams, Linda. *Screening Sex*. Durham: Duke UP, 2008. Web.

Woo, Jamie. *Meet Grindr: How One App Changed the Way We Connect*. Toronto: Jamie Woo,

2013. Print.

Works Consulted

Clatts, Michael C. "Ethnographic Observations of Men Who Have Sex with Men in Public:

Toward an Ecology of Sexual Action." *Public Sex/Gay Space*. Ed. William L. Leap. New

York: Columbia UP, 1999. 141-155. Print.

Delany, Samuel R. *Equinox*. New York: Lancer Books, 1973. Print.

---. *Hogg*. New York: Black Ice Books, 1995. Print.

---. *The Motion of Light in Water: Sex and Science Fiction Writing in the East Village*.

Minneapolis: U of Minnesota P, 2004. Print.

Goode, Luke and Alan McKee. "Conflict and Seduction in the Public Sphere." *Media, Culture &*

Society 35.1 (2013): 113-120. Web.

Jonze, Spike, dir. *Her*. Warner Bros. Pictures, 2013. Film.

Love, Heather. *Feeling Backwards: Loss and the Politics of Queer History*. Cambridge: Harvard

UP, 2009. Print.

Mitchell, John Cameron, dir. *Hedwig and the Angry Inch*. New Line Cinema, 2001. Film.

Moon, Jennifer. "Cruising John Rechy's City of Night: Queer Subjectivity, Intimacy, and

Counterpublicity." *disClosure* 15 (2006): 42-59. Web.

Oshima, Nagisa, dir. *In the Realm of the Senses*. Argos Films, 1977. Film.

Owens, Craig. "Photography 'en abyme.'" *October* 5 (Summer 1978): 73-88. Web.

Rechy, John. *About My Life and the Kept Woman*. New York: Grove Press, 2008. Print.

Sedgwick, Eve Kosofsky. *Touching Feeling: Affect, Pedagogy, Performativity*. Durham: Duke

      UP, 2002. Print.

Van Sant, Gus, dir. *My Own Private Idaho*. Fine Line Features, 1991. Film.