

GHOSTS OF PUBLIC SEX

Utopian Longings, Queer Memories

1. Witnessing

Queer Sex Utopia

In 1989 I saw Douglas Crimp give a rousing and moving talk on “Mourning and Militancy” at the second national Lesbian and Gay Studies Conference held at Yale University.¹ Crimp explained the workings of mourning in queer culture as he cataloged a vast, lost gay male lifeworld that was seemingly devastated by the HIV/AIDS pandemic. I want to call attention here to a specific moment in Crimp’s talk in which an idea of Freud is put in conversation with queer spaces and practices from a historically specific gay male lifeworld:

Freud tells us that mourning is the reaction not only to the death of a loved person, but also “to the loss of some abstraction which has taken the place of one, such as a fatherland, liberty, and ideal. . . .” Can we be allowed to include, in this “civilized” list, the ideal of perverse sexual pleasure itself rather than one stemming from its sublimation? Alongside the dismal toll of death, what many of us have lost is a culture of sexual possibility: back rooms, tea rooms, movie houses, and baths; the trucks, the piers, the ramble, the dunes. Sex was everywhere for us, and everything we wanted to venture: Golden showers and water sports, cocksucking and rimming, fucking and fist fucking. Now our untamed impulses are either proscribed once again or shielded from us by latex. Even Crisco, the lube we used because it was edible, is now forbidden because it breaks down rubber. Sex toys are no longer added enhancements; they’re safer substitutes.²

It has been seven years since the zenith of AIDS cultural criticism when Crimp wrote these words. One thing that has become clear at this moment in the epidemic is that the ideal spaces and practices that Crimp described never completely ceased to be. During the age of AIDS

gay men have managed to maintain our queer sex, our spaces, and, to some lesser degree, the incredible sense of possibility that Crimp evokes. At this juncture, commercial sex spaces (backrooms, movie theaters, bathhouses) are weathering a new round of attacks from both the repressive state power apparatus and reactionary, sex-negative elements of the gay community. Despite these eruptions of anti-sex and homophobic policings, many gay men have managed to maintain the practices that Crimp lists, as they have been translated in the age of safer sex. Negotiated risks and other tactical decisions have somewhat modified these sexual impulses without entirely stripping them away. True, the moment that Crimp describes is a moment that is behind us. But its memory, its ghosts, and the ritualized performances of transmitting its vision of utopia across generational divides still fuels and propels our political and erotic lives: it still nourishes the possibility of our current, actually existing gay lifeworld.

Crimp's writing stands as a testimony to a queer lifeworld in which the transformative potential of queer sex and public manifestations of such sexuality were both a respite from the abjection of homosexuality and a reformatting of that very abjection. The spaces and acts he lists represent signs, or ideals, that have been degraded and rendered abject within heteronormativity. Crimp's essay reclaims these terms, ideas, and remembrances, and pushes them onto a list that includes such timeless values as fatherland and liberty. Crimp's essay thus bears witness to a queer sex utopia.

In a starkly dissimilar manner, Leo Bersani's own important essay in AIDS cultural criticism, "Is the Rectum a Grave?," debunks idealized notions of bathhouses as utopic queer space.⁴ Bersani rightly brings to light the fact that those pre-AIDS days of glory were also elitist, exclusionary, and savagely hierarchized libidinal economies. Bersani's work does not allow itself to entertain utopian hopes and possibilities. His book of gay male cultural theory, *Homos*, further extends the lines of thought of "Is the Rectum a Grave?" in different directions.⁵ *Homos* is even more concerned with dismantling and problematizing any simplistic, sentimental understanding of the gay community or gay politics. Through an especially powerful reading of Jean Genet, Bersani formulates a theory of "anti-relationality." The most interesting contribution of this theory is the way in which it puts pressure on previous

queer theories and betrays the ways in which they theorize gay identity in terms that are always relational, like gender subversion. But this lesson ultimately leads to a critique of coalition politics. Bersani considers coalitions between gay men and people of color or women as “bad faith” on the part of gays. The race and gender troubles in such a theory—all people of color are straight, all gay men are white—are also evident in his famous essay. The limits of his project are most obvious when one tries to imagine actual political interventions into the social realm, especially interventions that challenge the tedious white normativity that characterizes most of North American gay male culture.

Bersani’s project does not need to see and believe in utopianism. Yet queer politics, in my understanding, needs a real dose of utopianism. Utopia lets us⁵ imagine a space outside of heteronormativity. It permits us to conceptualize new worlds and realities that are not irrevocably constrained by the HIV/AIDS pandemic and institutionalized state homophobia. More importantly, utopia offers us a critique of the present, of *what is*, by casting a picture of what *can and perhaps will be*. In this essay I will look at moments in a few gay male cultural works that imagine utopia, through what I will be calling *queer utopian memory*.

Memory is most certainly constructed, and more importantly, always political. The case I will make in this article posits our remembrances and their ritualized tellings—through film, video, performance, writing, and visual culture—as having worldmaking potentialities. Furthermore, I will suggest that these queer memories of utopia and the longing that structures them, especially as they are embodied in work that I will identify as public sex mimetic cultural production, help us carve out a space for actual, living sexual citizenship.⁶ This essay will single out moments, like the above passage from Crimp, that tell, remember, and reflect upon public sex. These texts will not be read as nostalgic discourse, but instead be presented as moments in which queer utopian remembrance reenacts what Crimp has called a culture of sexual possibility. John Giorno’s short autobiographical fiction and the visual work of conceptual artist Tony Just will serve as the textual sites for this writing on the workings of queer utopian memory and the structure of feeling that is adjacent to such a reconstructed notion of utopia and memory, a force field of affect and political desire that I will call utopian longing.

2. Fucking Keith, Remembering Utopia

John Giorno's *You Got to Burn to Shine* is a rich mosaic of poetry, performance text, activist mission statements, and autobiographical prose. The book reflects on Giorno's life as a queer writer and performer over the last four decades in Manhattan's Lower East Side. Giorno's text is the uncanny testimony of a man who has survived various risky lifestyles. It is studded with fabulous star-fucking stories that sparkle like tawdry gems. The reader is, for example, treated to a tell-all account of the author having sex with Andy Warhol, a tale that satisfactorily debunks popular myths that have circulated around Warhol to de-gay his sexuality.⁷

A section called "Great Anonymous Sex" recounts one of Giorno's encounters with another Pop Art superstar in 1982 at the Prince Street subway toilets. In this story Giorno fucks and sucks a young man who is later revealed to be Keith Haring. Giorno's sex narrative begins with his entrance to the Prince Street toilets, a space rife with public anonymous sex. Giorno writes about a plain-looking yet attractive boy with wire-rimmed glasses, a "kid" possessed of an "unusual passion":

He was making love with great energy and focus, affection and delight, different than the routine going on around me. The guy's heart was pouring love and I went with the flow. I sucked the kid's cock (it was cut, not large but very hard). He sucked my cock, with his eyes looking up into mine. Two guys with poppers kept sticking them in our nostrils. We continued alternating sucking each other's cocks. He managed a few times to get my cock all the way down his throat and I fucked his face, moments of surrender for both of us. The onlookers jerked off watching us.⁸

Giorno's narrative rings of idealization and writerly hyperbole, which is not to doubt the "truth" of his account. In the passage, Giorno functions as a disseminator of public sex culture. The idealization that his prose enacts is, within the scope of my analysis, an example of the way in which a rich remembrance of sexual utopia feeds a transformative queer politics. The excess that Giorno's text produces is indeed more than simple sexual bravado. The space of the Prince Street toilets and the practices of public sex that are rendered in his narrative engender a certain transformative possibility.

The politics I understand as being enacted in Giorno's text are not

immediately visible. In fact, the statement would seem to run counter to Giorno's assertions that "The great thing about anonymous sex is you don't bring your private life or personal world. No politics or inhibiting concepts, no closed rules or fixed responses. The great thing about anonymous sex is spontaneity."⁹ I would like to suggest that while Giorno understands this space as being one that is free of ideology, we can still read a powerful political impulse in Giorno's text, an impulse that is detectable in the acts that are being transcribed, the spaces that are being conceptually rendered, and the performance of writing that expresses his public sex history. I am most interested here in the latter of these. The cataloging of public sex culture that Crimp performs in "Mourning and Militancy" can be read alongside Giorno's text as an act of queer worldmaking. More specifically, I see worldmaking here as functioning and coming into play through the performance of queer utopian memory. That is, a utopia that understands its time as reaching beyond some nostalgic past that perhaps never was, or some future whose arrival is continuously belated—a utopia in the present.

I will turn now to a 1964 printed dialogue between Frankfurt school social theorists Theodor W. Adorno and Ernst Bloch on "the utopian function of art."¹⁰ At one point in the dialogue, Bloch turns to Adorno and confirms a basic truism about the politics of utopianism in spite of the climate of a mechanical age in which everything seems mechanically present and therefore cancels out the possibility of utopianism:

Bloch: Thus, the fact that there is also utopia in this area where it has the most difficulty... *the essential function of utopia is a critique of what is present. If we had not already gone beyond the barriers, we could not even perceive them as barriers.* [Emphasis mine.]¹¹

The saliency of Bloch's point lies not merely in the fact that imagining any utopia offers us something that is more than another time but also, as in the case of Giorno and the gay male cultural workers I am considering here, in that what is made available first is a critique of the present and of its limits, its barriers. Adorno follows up his friend's point by casting his statement within the frame of the dialectic:

Adorno: Yes, at any rate, utopia is essentially in the determined negation, in the determined negation of that which merely is, and by concretizing itself as something false, it always points, at the same time to what should be.

Yesterday you quoted Spinoza in our discussion with the passage “Verum index sui et falsi” (the true is the sign of itself and the false). I have varied this a little in the sense of the dialectical principle of the determined negation and have said Falsum—the false thing—index sui et veri (the false is the sign of itself and the correct). That means that the true thing determines itself via the false thing, or via that which makes itself falsely known. And insofar as we are not allowed to cast the picture of utopia, insofar as we do know what the correct thing will be, we know exactly, to be sure, what the false thing is.¹²

Dialectical thinking, especially what Adorno refers to as “the determined negation” enables us to read Giorno’s text as something other than a nostalgic foreclosure on future political possibility. Instead, via the lens provided by the above materialist philosophers, we can understand Giorno’s text as pointing beyond the barriers of our current conditions of possibility, beyond the painful barriers of the AIDS pandemic; it lets us see, via a certain conjuring of “the past,” and for many of us we see this past for the very first time. These pictures of utopia (a term that is used in later comments Adorno makes in the dialogue) do the work of letting us critique the present, to see beyond its “*what is*” to worlds of political possibility, of “*what might be*.”

Here is another instance of Giorno doing what Adorno calls the casting of a picture:

I unbuckled the kid’s belt and he pulled down his pants. I turned him gently around, slowly eased in the wet head and slipped my cock into his ass, and he pushed to me and took it all. His ass was slightly lubricated with Vaseline, I wondered if it was from this morning or from last night, and if he had someone’s cum in his ass. That thought made me hotter and the grease made my dick feel even better. Someone started rimming me, had his face buried in my ass, his tongue in my asshole, and was nibbling and sucking. This is also a great pleasure for me. I fucked the kid, gently at first, then gradually as hard as I could. Sweat poured off us in sheets. From the depth of the inebriating darkness of that underground cave, stretching my cock to the sky, I shot a big load of cum, straight and glorious. Perfectly arisen and accomplished, and perfectly dissolved back into primordially pure empty space.¹³

This, I want to suggest, is certainly a casting of a picture of sex, but, in the same instance, it is also a picture of utopian transport and a reconfiguration of the social, a reimagining of our actual conditions of possibility, all of this in the face of a global epidemic. The picture

rendered through Giorno's performative writing is one of a good life that both was and never was, that has been lost and is still to come. It performs a desire for a perfect dissolution into a "primordially pure empty space."

After this scene in the Prince Street toilet Giorno runs out and catches a train in the nick of time: "I said goodbye and I was out the door in a flash, onto the train going uptown." Once on the train he feels himself once again overwhelmed by the crushing presence and always expanding force field that is heteronormativity: "It always was a shock entering the straight world of a car full of grim people sitting dumbly with suffering on their faces and in their bodies, and their minds in their prisons."¹⁴ This experience of being "shocked" by the prison which is heteronormativity, the straight world, is one that a reader, especially a queer reader, encounters after putting down a queer utopian memory text like Giorno's. I think of my own experience of reading *You Got to Burn to Shine* at some predominantly straight coffee shop near where I live, looking up after the experience, and feeling a similar shock effect.

I will once again pick up the thread of Adorno's thinking from the same dialogue with Bloch:

[Negation] is actually the only form in which utopia is given to us at all. But what I mean to say here. . . this matter has a very confounding aspect, for something terrible happens due to the fact that we are forgiven to cast a picture. To be precise, among that which should be definite, one imagines for it to begin with as less definite the more it is stated as something negative. But then—the commandment against a concrete example of Utopia tends to defame the Utopian consciousness and to engulf it. What is really important here is the will *that* it is different.¹⁵

In Giorno's work we can see the will that is different. There are many reasons why these fantasies of rapturous unsafe sex might have a damaging effect on gay men living in the AIDS pandemic. But having said that, there is something noble and enabling about Giorno's storytelling. Adorno, in the above lines, speaks out against a trend in socialism (and in humanism in general) in which utopianism becomes the bad object. Utopianism can only exist via a critique of the dominant order; it has no space to exist outside of the most theoretically safeguarded abstractions. In a roughly analogous way the pictures drawn by Giorno are also bad objects in so far as they expose gay men

to acts, poses, and structures of desire that may be potentially disastrous. But, as Adorno teaches us, the importance of casting a picture is central to a critique of hegemony. Adorno explains, "If this is not said, if this picture cannot—I almost would like to say—appear within one's grasp, then one basically does not know at all what the actual reason for the totality is, why the entire apparatus has been set in motion."¹⁶

It might seem as though my oscillations between the worlds and sexual utopias produced in *Giorno* and the more theoretical utopian musing of Bloch and Adorno are something of a stretch. To that charge I would answer, "of course." But, beyond that, I would point to the words with which Bloch ends the dialogue: "In conclusion, I would like to quote a phrase, a very simple one, strangely enough from Oscar Wilde: 'A map of the world that does not include utopia is not even worth glancing at.'"¹⁷ While it might be strange, from most vistas, that Bloch would be quoting Western culture's most famous convicted sodomite, it is certainly not so odd from the perspective of this queer inquiry. Wilde's sentence, when properly broken down and appreciated for its stylized precision, makes explicit the connection between queerness, utopia, and worldmaking. Queer worldmaking, then, hinges on the possibly to map a world where one is allowed to cast pictures of utopia and to include such pictures in any map of the social. For certainly, without this critical spot on the map we ourselves become the pained and imprisoned subjects on the fast-moving train *Giorno* describes.

3. Ghosts and Utopia

I turn now from the ghost of Oscar Wilde that haunts Bloch's thinking on utopia to the ghosts that circulate in the photography of Tony Just. In 1994 Just completed a project that attempted to capture precisely what I'm calling the ghosts of public sex. The project began with Just selecting run-down public men's rooms in New York City, the kind that were most certainly tea rooms before they, like the Prince Street toilets that *Giorno* describes, were shut down because of the AIDS/HIV public health crisis. Just then proceeded to do the labor of scrubbing and sanitizing sections of the public men's rooms. The preparation of the spaces is as central to the series as the photos I choose to focus on themselves; the only evidence of this behind-the-scenes aspect of the larger project are the clean spaces themselves—Just's labor exists only

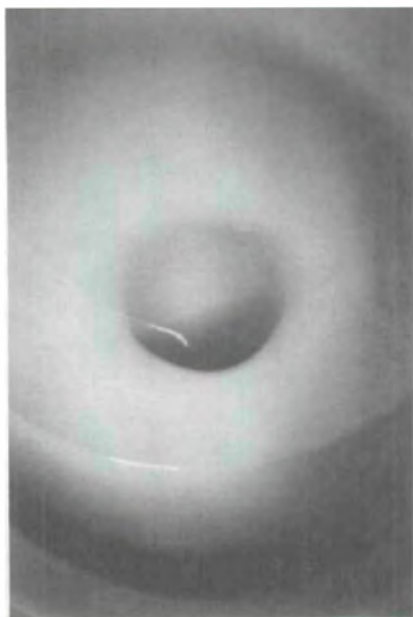
as a ghostly trace in a sparkling men's room. He documented this project through color slides and photographs (see illustrations) that focused on the bathrooms' immaculate state and the details of such spaces. The urinals, tiles, toilets, and fixtures that are the objects of these photo images take on what can only be described as a ghostly aura, an other-worldly glow. This aura, this circuit of luminous halos that surround the work, is one aspect of the ghosts of public sex that this essay is interested in describing.

These ghosts of public sex are the queer specters whose substance Just's project and my own critical endeavor attempt to capture and render visible. In part, I see the ghosted materiality of the work as having a primary relation to emotions, queer memories, and structures of feeling that haunt gay men on both sides of a generational divide that is formed by and through the catastrophe of AIDS. One of the things one risks when one talks of ghosts are charges of ignoring the living, the real, and the material. I bolster my formulations against such potential reservations with the work of Raymond Williams. Williams' notion of a structure of feeling was a *process* of relating the continuity of social formations within a work of art. Williams explained structure of feeling as a hypothesis that

has a special relevance to art and literature, where true social content is in a significant number of cases of this present and affective kind, that which cannot be reduced to belief systems, institutions, or explicit general relationships, though it may include all these as lived and experienced, with or without tension, as it also evidently includes elements of social and material (physical or natural) experience which may lie beyond or be uncovered or imperfectly covered by, the elsewhere recognizable systematic elements.

For Williams, the concept of "structures of feeling" accounts for

the unmistakable presence of certain elements in art which are not covered by (though in one mode, might be reduced to) other formal systems[. This] is the true source of the specializing category of 'the aesthetic', 'the arts', and 'imaginative literature'. We need, on the one hand, to acknowledge (and welcome) the specificity of these elements—specific dealings, specific rhythms—and yet to find their specific kinds of sociality, thus preventing the extraction from social experience which is conceivable only when social experience itself has been categorically (and at root historically) reduced.¹⁸



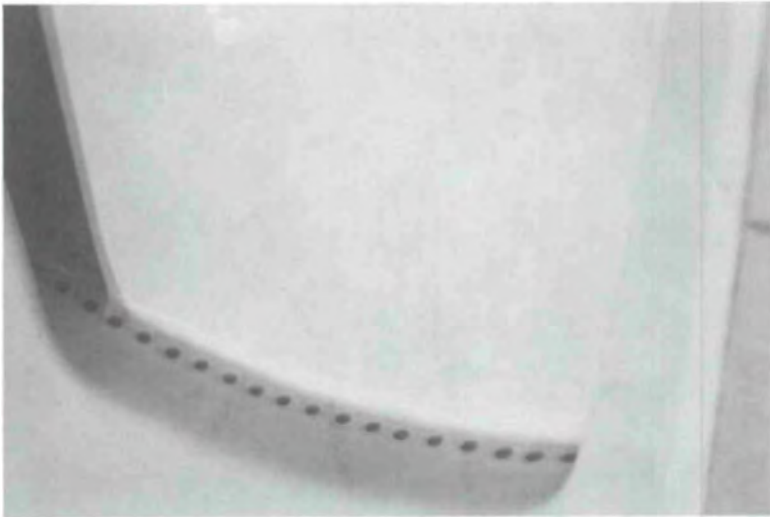
**Untitled, 1994, Tony Just.
Printed courtesy of the artist.**



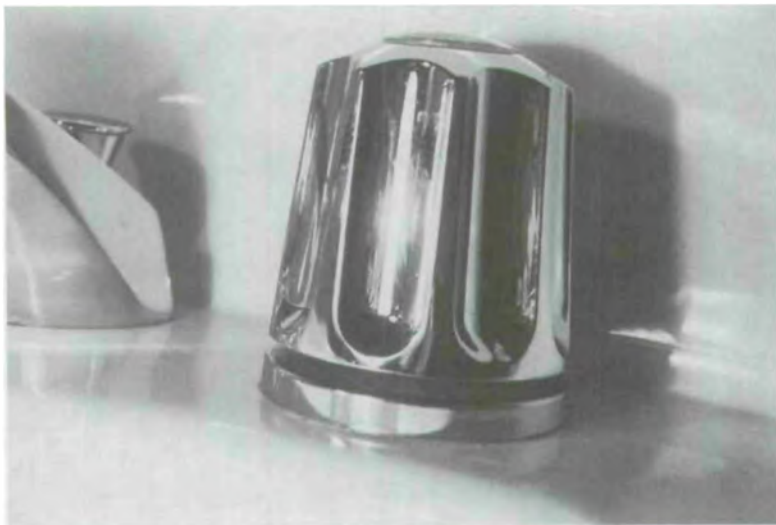
**Untitled, 1994, Tony Just.
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Printed courtesy of the artist.**



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Printed courtesy of the artist.**

The ghosts I detect in Just's project possess a materiality, a kind of substance, that does not easily appear within regimes of the visible and the tactile. These elements have their own specificity but are also relevant on a vaster map of social and political experience. To see these ghosts we must certainly read the "specific dealings, specific rhythms" that bring to life a lost experience, a temporally situated picture of social experience, that needs to be read in photo images, gaps, auras, residues, and negations. Due to the obstacles imposed by certain preconceptions of materiality—preconceptions that are often manifest as visual myopias—one cannot actually see the ghost of public sex in Just's project. But if the eye is sensitized in a certain way, if it can catch other visual frequencies that render specific distillations of lived experience and ground-level history accessible, it can potentially see the ghostly presence of a certain structure of feeling.

In the photos, the shine of porcelain and metal, the way in which light reflects around and off these surfaces and objects—be they a porcelain urinal or a slightly corroded chrome fixture—all of these cast an effect that is strangely mimetic of the haunted structures of feeling that circulate around the sites of the project. The pictures interrogate the curves and arches of lifted toilet seats and the rounded edges of porcelain toilet frames. The emphasis on tile, in conjunction with the empty foreground of the rooms, makes one think of an echo chamber. Through an associative chain the connotation becomes one of reverberation and resonance. The pictures, through the negative charge of absented bodies, instill in the spectator a sense of gathering emptiness. Such an emptiness is not the project's teleological objective; rather, that space of emptiness is meant to make room for other worlds of sexual possibility.

The deciphering enterprise at the center of this essay accounts for these visual effects (which are also photographic effects) as a performance of a familiar yet other-worldly affective function that leaves a certain ephemeral trace, the appearance of which I am calling the production of ghosts. *Then ghosts*. Jacques Derrida, in his recent study of ghosts in Marx, employs a notion of *hauntology*, which he understands to be a conceptual tool for the understanding of being within the postmodern age of an electronic *res publica*: "neither living or dead, present or absent" and ultimately "not belong[ing] to ontology, to the discourse of

the Being of beings, or to the essence of life and death."¹⁹ I want to suggest hauntology as a powerful mechanism for the work of situating semi-public phenomena like public sex within queer history and politics.

Earlier in this essay I discussed dialectics while conjuring Adorno. One reading of the absence of people and acts in Just's riffs on public sex would consider these representations of hollowed-out, mournful, and fetishistic spaces to be those of determined negations, the casting of pictures that represent utopia through the negative. Without casting out this dialectical optic, another critical vista, again found in Derrida's recent Marxian study, helps us to think about ghosts in terms that attempt to surpass the dialectic. Take, for instance, the moment in which Derrida ponders what he considers to be the logic of the ghosts:

If we have been insisting so much since the beginning on the logic of the ghost, it is because it points toward a thinking of the event that necessarily exceeds a binary or dialectical logic, the logic that distinguishes or opposes effectivity or actuality (either present, empirical, living—or not) and ideality (regulating or absolute non-presence). The logic of effectivity or actuality seems to be of a limited pertinence. . . . [The limit] seems to be demonstrated better than ever by the fantastic, ghostly, "synthetic," "prosthetic," virtual happenings in the scientific domain and therefore in the domain of techno-media and therefore the public or political domain. It is also made more manifest by what inscribes the speed of a virtuality irreducible to the opposition of the act and the potential in the space of the event, in the event-ness of the event.²⁰

Derrida is discussing a modality of techno-media that would include broadcast, videographic, and cybernetic communication, not the more established photographic technologies that Just works with and manipulates. Nonetheless, I continue to find an edifying understanding of what Derrida means by the surpassing of a binary between ideality and actuality when I consider these photographs. Within dialectical terms, Just weighs in on the side of determined negation, since, when one tries to unpack a dialectical opposition between "the act and the potential in the space of the event, in the event-ness of the event," we see with great clarity what Derrida has called the "event-ness" of the space. Just's work represents the ideality of utopia while also representing the importance of effectivity and actuality. Its negation of physical players and its choice to represent absence permits a viewer,

strangely enough, to occupy a space both inside and outside the predictability of such an established dialectical pattern.²¹

4. Situating Ghosts

The double ontology of ghosts and ghostliness, the manner in which ghosts exist inside and out and traverse categorical distinctions, seems especially useful for a queer criticism that attempts to understand communal mourning, group psychologies, and the need for a politics that “carries” our dead with us into battles for the the present and future. Ghosts have already been used by some queer scholars to explain the relationship of homosexuality to heteronormative culture. Mandy Merck, in a discussion that glosses ghost theory by Patricia White, Diana Fuss, and Terry Castle, explains the relational dynamic in this way: “The [homosexual] ghost that haunts heterosexuality is its uncanny double, the illicit desire needed to define legitimacy. The liminality of the figure, as Fuss and others have observed, reflects its ambiguity as a term of exclusion which nonetheless confers interiority.”²² If the terms and logic of Merck’s analysis were to travel to other divides, beyond the homo/hetero split to splits that are currently being reified within queer cultures, in some branches of queer writing and in gay male communities, and between different generational and health status markers, we could begin to decipher the ways in which the specter of public sex—ostracized by many “legitimate” factions within the queer community—is still a foundational presence/anti-presence that performs the illicit and helps these conservative factions formulate a “legitimate,” sanitized gay world.

Ghost theory also worries the binary between HIV-positive and negative men, a binary that is currently being concretized in new gay male writing. Recently, there has been a shift away from the initial moment of AIDS cultural criticism that concentrated on people living with AIDS and the ways in which they are represented and “caught” within the dominant public sphere to projects that figure the ontology of HIV-negative men. The aim of such projects is to make HIV-negativity a site of identity that can be inhabited despite the cultural morbidity that characterizes this historical moment. While such interventions can be potentially valuable for activists who work on HIV prevention, the bolstering of HIV-negativity as an identification that men should be encouraged to “come out” into concomitantly puts a new set of

pressures on people living with the HIV virus to also be out. The potential problem with cultural work and theory on and about HIV-negative men is that it does not resist and, in some ways, may inadvertently contribute to, the stigmatization that surrounds AIDS and HIV in both mainstream North American culture *and* AIDSphobic gay male regional and subcultural communities. In this essay I have been considering what I call haunting and haunted cultural work that remembers and longs for a moment outside of this current state of siege. My critical move here, that of employing key words and thematics like “ghosts,” memory,” “longing,” and “utopia,” has been to decipher the networks of commonality and the structures of feeling that link queers across different identity markers, including positive and negative anti-body status as well as bodies separated along generational lines.

Such a strategy is born out of a partial skepticism towards projects like Walt Odets's *In The Shadow of the Epidemic: Being HIV-Negative in the Age of AIDS*,²³ which bring the “psychological epidemic” that HIV-negative men face to light. The residual effects of such a project that focuses exclusively on negatives needs to be further interrogated. Some questions that linger include: can we afford to redirect our critical energies away from bodies that are infected by a physical virus towards uninfected bodies that are caught within a *psychological* epidemic? How would the already stigmatized lives of infected people be impacted by this work that bolsters HIV-negative identity? Does work on HIV-negativity produce a wedge between infected and uninfected sectors of the gay community, further solidifying a binary between negative and positive? In short, what might be the cost of work that affirms HIV-negative identity for those who are struggling with and attempting to manage illness? These questions cloud my reading of Odets and other writers attempting to delineate HIV-negativity. I do not want to foreclose the transformative and self-sustaining energies of such work. Asking these questions is merely an attempt to bring the specters that haunt such theories into the light, out of the shadow.

Instead of focusing on the different ways—psychological, others physical, and often both—in which men suffer in the epidemic, in this essay I have been concerned with the ways in which the politics around queer memory, fueled by utopian longing, can help us reimagine the social. To this end I have suggested that viewing Just's photography in

light of *Giorno's* writing, and vice versa, affords the spectator a certain understanding of the worldmaking properties of queerness. We see, for instance, the imbrication of sex and utopias across gay male generational rifts. We see the various circuits of narration that gay men employ. The notion of a strategic and self-knowing modality of queer utopian memory, and, more importantly, the work that such a memory does, becomes all the more possible. The utopian longing in both artists' work is neither a nostalgic wish nor a passing fascination, but, rather, the impetus for a queerworld, for what Crimp has called a culture of sexual possibility. The works I have surveyed in this article, taken side by side, tell us a story about the primary linkage between queer desire and queer politics. Taken further, this work allows the spectator to understand her or his desire for politics alongside the politics of desire. The lens of these remembrances and the hazy mirages they produce not only allow us to imagine utopia, but, more importantly, whet our appetite for it.

NOTES

Many of the ideas in this essay were first formulated and "tried out" in a graduate seminar, "Sex in Public," that I taught in the Performance Studies program at New York University in the fall of 1995. The experience of working with those students on this topic enabled my thinking in many important ways. I have also benefited from conversations with my colleagues May Joseph, Fred Moten, and Peggy Phelan about different aspects of this project. Early drafts of this essay were read with considerable care and intelligence by Wayne Hoffman, Ephraim Glenn Colter, Antonio Viego, Jr., and Ari Gold. Finally, I want to thank Tony Just for his work, friendship, and encouragement.

1. The talk was later published in *October*, a publication then under the editorial influence of Crimp, in which queer theory in its modern incarnations began to flourish.
2. Douglas Crimp, "Mourning and Militancy," *October* 51 (Winter 1989), 11.
3. Leo Bersani, "Is the Rectum a Grave?" in *AIDS: Cultural Analysis, Cultural Activism*, Douglas Crimp, ed. (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1988), 197-222.
4. Leo Bersani, *Homos* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1995).
5. The "us" and "we" I use in this article are meant, in the first instance, to speak to gay men in the pandemic. But beyond that, they are intended to address people who have also been caught in the HIV/AIDS pandemic—people who have been affected by the pandemic in ways that are both direct and relational, subjects who might be women or men, queer or straight. The unifying thread of this essay's "us" and "we" is a node of commonality within a moment and space of chaos and immeasurable loss.

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6. See the recent work of Lauren Berlant for a compelling reading of the political struggle currently being staged in the public sphere between "live sex acts" and "the dead citizenship of heterosexuality." "Live Sex Acts (Parental Advisory: Explicit Material)," *Feminist Studies* 21:2 (Summer 1995), 379-404.
7. These stories include "Andy was asexual" or "Andy only liked to watch." For more on the de-gaying of Warhol, see the introduction to my co-edited volume *Pop Out: Queer Warhol*, Jennifer Doyle, Jonathan Flatley, and José Esteban Muñoz, eds. (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1996).
8. John Giorno, *You Got to Burn to Shine: New and Selected Writings* (New York: High Risk Books/Serpent's Tail, 1994), 68-69.
9. Giorno, 71.
10. Ernst Bloch and Theodor W. Adorno, "Something's Missing: A Discussion between Ernst Bloch and Theodor W. Adorno on the Contradictions of Utopian Longing," in Ernst Bloch, *The Utopian Function of Art: Selected Essays*, Jack Zipes and Frank Mecklenburg, trans. (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1988), 1-17.
11. Bloch and Adorno, 12.
12. Bloch and Adorno, 12.
13. Giorno, 72-73.
14. Giorno, 73.
15. Bloch and Adorno, 12.
16. Bloch and Adorno, 13.
17. Bloch and Adorno, 17.
18. Raymond Williams, *Marxism and Literature* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1978), 133.
19. Jacques Derrida, *Spectres of Marx: The State of the Debt, the Work of Mourning, and the New International*, Peggy Kamuf, trans. (New York: Routledge, 1994), 51.
20. Derrida, 63.
21. I wish to assert that Adorno's version of dialectics, and especially his emphasis on the determined aspect of the negative, complicate deconstructive protocols. Adorno's formulations show a great resistance to deconstructive challenges to dialectical materialism.
22. Mandy Merck, "Figuring Out Warhol," in *Pop Out: Queer Warhol*. See also Patricia White, "Female Spectator, Lesbian Specter: *The Haunting*," in *Inside/Out: Lesbian Theories, Gay Theories*, Diana Fuss, ed. (New York: Routledge, 1991), 142-72 and Terry Castle, *The Apparitional Lesbian: Female Homosexuality and Modern Culture* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1993).
23. Walt Odets, *In the Shadow of the Epidemic: Being HIV-Negative in the Age of AIDS* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1995). See also Odets's essay in this volume.