

UC Berkeley

nineteen sixty nine: an ethnic studies journal

Title

Reading Between the Lines: Searching for Epistemologies of Healing

Permalink

<https://escholarship.org/uc/item/7ks8m78k>

Journal

nineteen sixty nine: an ethnic studies journal, 2(1)

Author

Alvarenga, Giuliani

Publication Date

2013

Copyright Information

Copyright 2013 by the author(s). All rights reserved unless otherwise indicated. Contact the author(s) for any necessary permissions. Learn more at <https://escholarship.org/terms>

Peer reviewed

Reading Between the Lines: Searching for Epistemologies of Healing

Giuliani Alvarenga

WE TWO BOYS TOGETHER CLINGING... POWER ENJOYING... FULFILLING OUR FORAY.

-WALT WHITMAN¹

My paper visualizes a space of healing that departs from current politics within LGBTQ movements that function under a Euro-American grid of intelligibility. I wish to construct a methodology that brings forth marginalized LGBTQ people who have yet to tell their stories by challenging what queer thought means and rendering it visible through the practice and literary logic of gay cruising.² Furthermore, through close reading analyses and archival research, I explain how gay cruising as a practice and an epistemic metaphor reveals itself in literature, such as Walt Whitman's poetry, David Wojnarowicz's memoirs, and John Rechy's manifesto with the purpose of interrogating the Colonial education of erotic desire by understanding the sexual activities in these spaces rather than simply focusing on sexual identities. Thus, I argue that reading between the lines is the epistemic metaphor of gay cruising that tacitly performs within the fissures of the heterosexist public. Rather than leaving behind traces of discarded condoms and semen stained sidewalks and bathroom stalls, reading between the lines of the literature leaves prints of narrative that not only challenges a sexual globalization within the U.S. but also allows sexually marginalized people to claim visibility— even if it means finding such visibility between the lines. This mode of thinking works in tandem with an epistemology of healing by acknowledging the presence of marginalized subjects who have had to contain their desires and stories. Although I utilize several theorists to uncover this overarching argument, my point of departure is Jose E. Muñoz's concept of a queer utopia— a radical strategy that critically questions current LGBTQ politics within U.S. culture.

Cruising Away From Straight Time

Jose E. Muñoz suggests that queerness is not yet here. These powerful words contest the notion that the dominant culture has finally accepted LGBTQ communities as part of their kin. Social issues such as the “don’t ask, don’t tell policy” and same-sex marriage rights overshadow the fact that work is still in order. His book *Cruising Utopia* encourages us to imagine a world that escapes the social confinements produced by capitalism and mainstream culture. But how can we imagine a world that strays from these systems of oppression found in society?³ Gay cruising as a practice (I will explain this more thoroughly later in my paper) helps find a way of thinking outside this rigid and oppressive box—an escape from what is also understood as “straight time.”⁴

Jack Halberstam defines straight time as the “temporal frames of bourgeois reproduction and family, longevity, risk/safety, and inheritance” in his text *In a Queer Time & Place*.⁵ Straight time also functions under what Lauren Berlant and Michael Warner describe as a heterosexual culture in their manuscript called “Sex in Public.” According to Berlant and Warner, this heterosexual culture and its material practices are not explicitly sexual.⁶ In other words, society follows a linear form of time, explicitly read on the white middle-class heterosexual body, which elides queer subjects. This socially constructed form of time is visible when the heterosexual subject grows up and follows the requirements heterosexual culture advocates for: forming a family, building a career for oneself, and paying taxes to the nation like any other docile American subject.

The implicitness of heterosexual culture leaves queer spaces in very fragile conditions. Berlant and Warner provide readers with an example about Rudy Giuliani’s zoning law that restricted the proliferation of any type of “counter public sexual culture by regulating its economic conditions.”⁷ They argue that by removing sex shop businesses the status quo deems deviant, the streets become less queer and less accessible for people to function under a subculture. This heterosexual logic of space antagonizes people who do not function under its apparatus. It advocates for family reproduction, trans-generational inheritance, and capital investment—the aphorism “time is money” applies to this logic. Straight time also functions as a social order that promotes linear and static ontological processes manifested by privatized institutions such as religion, the media, and the state. Unfortunately, these structures of time and space efface groups of people who do not follow similar systems of order.

According to Muñoz, many LGBTQ people try adapting to this form of time; he calls this phenomenon “the measures of homonormative codes.”⁸ He continues to write about the processes of assimilation that historically persecuted groups commit themselves to follow.⁹ Thus, the practice and literary methodology of gay cruising is an important component that counters these structures. This subcultural practice challenges family order as well as the desire to assimilate by unapologetically creating a space that embraces the stigma of erotic desire, as well as disrupting social identities such as class, race, and citizenship. But why is this important? According to Halberstam, “queer subcultures preserve the critique of heteronormativity that was always implicit in queer life.”¹⁰ This alternative space queers the issues affecting society by visualizing hope. For the sake of clarity, I will explain the concept of cruising and why it serves as a circuit for coping with trauma and the violence of invisibility present in dominant culture.

Cruising Through the Margins

Gay cruising has historically been a subculture in which male-identified people acknowledge their sexual desires. These men meet in bathrooms (AKA tea rooms), dark alleys, bathhouses, and any other space that gives them the opportunity to fulfill their erotic desires. For John Rechy, a notorious gay cruiser¹¹ who documented his sexual encounters, it is a myriad of feelings: “His mind explodes with outlaw images: men and men and men, forbidden contacts, free, time crushed, intimate forbidden strangers.”¹² Rechy’s vision of gay cruising is always in motion, it’s forbidden and free. He describes time as crushed. Hence, gay cruising creates a space of intimate contact zones between male-identified individuals from different backgrounds. These intimate contact zones blur the borders of compulsory heterosexuality, sexual identity, class background, race and age as these men engage in sexual activities without caring who they fuck, thus challenging Western notions of erotic desire and identity politics. It comes to no surprise that Rechy’s usage of words like “free” and “time crushed” explain how cruising functions as a therapeutic space that breaks away from normative ideologies that antagonize marginalized queer subjects.

In another passage of *The Sexual Outlaw*, he describes his sexual encounters as “time-stopping” and “sexually isolating moments” that pull him away from the homophobia he experienced in the 70’s when he wrote this manifesto. He also writes about a sexual encounter

in Griffith Park, a large municipal park in Los Angeles famous for its cruising spots. The vignette illustrates Rechy’s ecstatic feelings: “Time stops. . . [His] body contracts, feeling his own cum flowing into the other’s throat. . . both men still coming, as if the universe itself were gathering into their bodies, their mouths, their cocks.”¹³ In this moment Rechy successfully escapes straight time. He describes this sensation as ecstatic—as if the universe were gathering into their bodies. Before this sexual interaction, he explains the arduous task of finding the perfect location where the two men can cruise, since police surveillance was (and still is) very common in Griffith Park. Eventually he finds a location and within that ephemeral moment he distorts the socially constructed form of time that functions under institutions such as the imprisonment of monogamy and the white cookie-cut heterosexual family in the seventies. This counter practice functions as a political performance as well as a critically engaging logic that multi-tasks with complex issues regarding mainstream representations of desire, which Rebecca Schneider writes about in her book, *The Explicit Body in Performance*.

Rebecca Schneider’s work on the political performance of bodies helps articulate my argument on the practice of gay cruising. Her book *The Explicit Body in Performance* describes the political performance of a group of feminist artists/activists from NYC called The Guerrilla Girls. This radical group began posting political messages near SoHo art galleries that read: “ONLY FOUR COMMERCIAL GALLERIES IN NEW YORK SHOW BLACK WOMEN. ONLY ONE SHOWS MORE THAN ONE.” Schneider does a close reading by analyzing the way they choose to perform their politics. These women wear Gorilla masks for several reasons: to remain anonymous, to avoid partial publicity for any one of the artists, and to “quote the racist primitivism at the heart of colonialism.”¹⁴ In other words, these gorilla masks “make explicit a social contract which has historically marked women and people of color as less evolved, more ‘primitive,’ than the implicitly higher primate, white [man].” Schneider’s concept on the “explicit body” is relevant to my discourse on gay cruising because both examples exceed the act (the practice), and in doing so allow the performances to be read “between the lines.” Through their political performance, the Guerrilla Girls work with complex subjects, such as the genealogy of colonialism and racist science. These masks work with anonymity and expose the functions of racist ideologies by the activity rather than the identity. Gay cruising also grapples with complex issues, such as coerced principles of monogamy that address the omnipresence of heterosexual culture visible in the social constructions of time and space in tandem with erotic desire.

Gay cruising is a practice that goes against public order. I argue that by understanding the logic behind this activity, one learns that it does exactly what the Guerrilla Girls do with their activism: it calls into question straight time and the tropes that follow this social construction. Cruising reclaims public spaces that allow people to “fuck and suck in every street corner,” alley, or bathroom stall.¹⁵ In other words, cruising is not only understood as a sexual practice, it also reclaims desire within a realm understood as predominantly heterosexual by avoiding the use of such fictitious identities. This logic is also relevant in literature. I argue that cruising in literature forms an alternative space meant to heal marginalized folks as they read their untold stories between the lines. The next portion of this paper explains the experience literature provides readers and how such an experience is affiliated with an epistemic metaphor of cruising.

The Cruising Experience of Literature

I use the idea of cruising as an epistemic metaphor, as a form of thought that mimics the ways gay cruising is there but not there. According to Wallace Bacon, a pioneer of Performance theory, “reading literature is a common experience.”¹⁶ He is interested in the “relationship between the writer’s manuscript and its reader” by focusing on the performance of writing; an incorporeal space develops within this relationship, which sparks magic and has the potential to heal marginalized people whose history is rendered invisible. This metaphysical space has the potential to imagine another world other than the one we live in. Bacon writes that those “who believe that literature provides a memorable experience, who take the printed page seriously as an opportunity to enjoy a significant experience, are thought of as foolish.”¹⁷ But why should this be foolish? Bacon understands that this experience gives folks the opportunity to reimagine their world, to cope with traumatic experiences found in hostile environments. This is precisely what Rechy provides readers—a literary experience that gives sanctuary to an epistemology of healing through the literary methodology of cruising. This kind of reading is necessary for people that fall outside the lines of mainstream culture and whose sexual activity does not correlate with society’s definition of sexual identity. Rechy’s writing allows men who have sex with men to identify with a sexual activity, rather than the assimilation of a current LGBT culture dominated by heterosexism.

When one thinks of gay cruising they may think of the following: desire, euphoria, constant motion, playfulness, ecstasy and mischief. These ideas all fall under queerness — thoughts blending together to form an orgy of words and meanings that describe a doing rather than a being. The quotidian task of cruising brings forth the possibility for an alternative to queerness with these flexible thoughts. Muñoz argues that “performativity and utopia both call into question what is epistemologically there and signal a highly ephemeral ontological field that can be characterized as a doing in the future.” He claims that critically engaging, short-lived performances, in this case the practice of cruising in both corporeal and incorporeal spaces, ultimately break away from straight time through a doing that avoids identities produced by the historical formations of Colonialism, along with the imposition of compulsory heterosexuality. He believes that queer thought is “not simply a being but a doing for and toward the future.” His references to utopian ideas parallel with my thoughts on a metaphorical interpretation of gay cruising seeing as both ideas try finding an alternative to queer thought by avoiding assimilationist labels. However, it is immensely important to keep in mind that such an alternative to queerness is a process, which is only possible by critically thinking about issues found in the present.

“The Present is so Poisonous”¹⁸

Same-sex marriage supporters argue for an inclusive we are just like you except for who we sleep with rhetoric, which neglects past struggles. Muñoz calls into question a text written by Evan Wolfson called “All Together Now (A Blueprint for the Movement),” which forms a single-minded argument about the topic of marriage in the LGBT community. He thoroughly criticizes this manifesto by arguing that Wolfson fails to understand anything more than the “social recognition and financial advantages offered by traditional marriage pacts as the key to what he calls “freedom” (20). Jasbir Puar’s book, *Terrorist Assemblages*, analyzes the assimilation of gays in popular culture. She brings up the risk gays face when they join institutions, such as the military, that have ostracized them in the past with the “Don’t Ask, Don’t Tell” policy. Puar argues that certain queer subjects identify with the status quo, which creates a divide between good subjects versus bad subjects¹⁹. The dominant culture ultimately decides which queer subjects live and which ones die. This depends on whether the queer subject embraces reproduction, assimilation, and capital (ideas that fall under a Western grid of intelligibility). She focuses on the issue with gays in the military and the universal goal to assassinate the bad guys everyone can count on hating — marginalized people such as queer of color folks and trans-folks. She argues that this structured feeling of hate encourages white middle-class gays to unite with heteronormative society in order to stop the real queers from destroying the institution of the family. However, these power structures are acutely complex, therefore folks must critically understand the issue in order to avoid simplifying the matter.

Muñoz argues that searching for an alternative to queerness is not an intrusion on current LGBT politics. He recognizes that “it is important to understand that a critique of our homosexual present is not an attack on what many people routinely name as lesbian or gay but, instead, an appraisal of how queerness is still forming, or in many ways formless.”²⁰ I am not condemning same-sex marriage, nor arguing that gays entering the military are selling out. On the contrary, this ever shifting thought on queerness is only offering an escape from heteronormative ideologies found in our present condition. These politics remind everyone that there are still issues at hand, that what Cherrie Moraga calls “the war years” are far from over.²¹ The possibility of escaping straight time is possible by understanding queer thought as a space of healing, as an alternative to the stagnant present.

Two [Queer] Boys Together Clinging

Why have I chosen gay cruising as my model? As I have mentioned before, gay cruising has been an alternative to the heteronormative present as well as to lesbians and gays that function under this grid of intelligibility. It counter-identifies with the institution of marriage and the family, especially in times when homosexuality was pathologized and regulated by police brutality. It should come as no surprise that cruising serves as an epistemic metaphor that pays homage to queer theory by adding an alternative interpretation of homoerotic desire that departs from sexual identities produced by Western epistemologies. In Walt Whitman’s collection *Leaves of Grass*, the poem “We Two Boys Together Clinging” shows readers ways in which cruising serves as an epistemic metaphor in literature that offers fluidity, thus poetically describing the sexual activity:

WE two boys together clinging/ One the other never leaving/ Up and down the roads going — North and South
excursions making,/ Power enjoying — elbows stretching — fingers clutching,/ Armed and fearless — eating,
drinking, sleeping, loving,/ No law less than ourselves owning — sailing, soldiering, thieving, threatening,/ Misers,
menials, priests alarming — air breathing, water drinking, on the turf of the sea-beach dancing,/ Cities wrenching,
ease scoring, statutes mocking, feebleness chasing,/ Filling our foray²².

The poem gives us an experience of joy and harmony read as an epistemic metaphor of cruising through the poem’s fluidity and homoerotic content. These two boys inhabit a homosocial space and reject the social structures of heterosexuality by embarking on a journey of relations that reshapes their reality. They could care less about the semantics of identity — their “doing” is what addresses an alternative desire that departs from dominant Western narratives of being. For example, Whitman uses words like “clinging” and “fingers clutching” to describe an ambiguous sensual motif that describes a sexual activity rather than identifying them as queer or gay. I particularly like the phrase “no law less than ourselves owning,” because it describes the task of occupying a world that deflects heterosexist order. These boys are reclaiming agency by disassembling powerful fictions, such as sexuality, gender and even race, found in Western forms of thought.²³ I envision these two boys as lovers, running away from the hegemonic forces of the dominant culture — cruising towards a queer utopia in which queer men can heal from the violent experiences of the heterosexist present by reading between the lines.

The 1883 collection of *Leaves of Grass* illustrates a letter Whitman wrote to an intimate friend of his by the name of Peter Doyle.²⁴ The letter and the poem have many ambiguous overlaps of erotic desires. In the letter he describes, “great long jovial walks [they] had at times for years . . . often moonlight nights (1866-’72).” He continues to write about the times they would keep each other company and nurse each other back to health when one of them was feeling ill²⁵. This letter and “We Two Boys Together Clinging” describes the doing of homoerotic content rather than explicitly writing about their sexual identities. This literary way of cruising allows readers to understand the context hidden within the traditional U.S. literary canon of Whitman’s writing (AKA straight time). Muñoz calls this “performance writing,” the ability to illustrate pictures of utopia in a society that antagonizes queer subjects. These boys are cruising past the heterosexist present, empowering themselves with an unstoppable force of mischief and play. Whitman’s poem is controversial and refreshing; he assigns these boys agency as they cruise alongside each other.

The poem also pokes fun at the taboo subject of child sexuality by welcoming a homosocial space where these two boys can fulfill their “foray” on heteronormativity. It contrasts with queer theorist Lee Edelman’s piece *No Future* and his anti-relational interpretation of “The Child.”²⁶ His interpretation considers the child a threat to queer subjects. Edelman argues that there is no hope for us because “The Child” follows the heteronormative codes present in the dominant culture such as stability, security, and stagnancy²⁷. Contrary to Edelman’s argument, the two children are enjoying each other’s company — this homosocial space reflects the context of the homoerotic. By incorporating the literary figure of the child, Whitman’s poem challenges the taboo subject of sexuality and responds to Edelman’s argument, proving that the child holds a message of hope rather than an “us versus them” polemic. Thus, rather than understanding gay cruising as an anti-relational strategy, one should take into account that much more is at stake. Readers are encouraged to analyze this poem as more than a text about cruising, but also as a way of welcoming an epistemology of healing that breaks from anti-relational polemics and strategies of assimilation. The poem also uses the power of play, a queer and innovative idea Ben Shepard argues for in his text *Queer Political Performance and Protest*,²⁸ as an important quotidian performance that contributes to the epistemic metaphor of gay cruising by embracing erotic desires of playful activities and political statements.

Playing Politics

Shepard’s theorizing of the performance of “play” cavorts with my argument on spaces of healing. He understands that play is necessary in queer politics; it pushes away the oppressive ideologies in society and works to help folks recuperate emotionally, spiritually and even physically. He argues that “play is viewed as a distinct tactical tool” and that such a strategy “has been particularly important for queers who have had to reject anti-vice statutes, psychiatric classifications, and published health recriminations, which render nonprocreative sexual practices as acts of illness.”²⁹ The moment I read this passage, I immediately thought of David Wojnarowicz’s memoir *Close to the Knives*,

which addresses the ways public institutions discriminated gay, male-identified folks during the AIDS crisis. He describes the traumas people faced during the epidemic crisis in the 80's, along with the scores of public health policies that bureaucratically discriminated against men who have sex with men (MSM)³⁰. There were absurd conspiracies suggesting that folks be quarantined or exiled altogether. The dominant culture hid behind science and federal bureaucracy in order to achieve its goal of discrimination. This shared structure of feeling, produced by fear and ignorance, created chaos and drove many marginalized queer men into a state of depression and internalized homophobia.³¹ Shepard believes that strategizing with the performance of play can exceed straight time in order to heal from the hegemonic forces of institutions. Wojnarowicz's memoir reminisces on the past as a therapeutic tool to fight off the aftermath left by society's ideologies and engages with Muñoz's work on queer utopian memories.

Reimagining Corporeal Activism and Abstractions

Muñoz's chapter "Ghosts of Public Sex: Utopian Longings, Queer Memories" found in *Cruising Utopia* and Shepard's thoughts on play see past the oppressive ideologies that antagonize minoritized folks by taking a moment to reimagine their reality. In other words they visualize a space of healing — Muñoz through his argument of the utopia and Shepard through his politics on play. Both writers understand that survival depends on imagining an alternative. Shepard's chapter, "Play as Pleasure," chronicles an interview Allen Ginsberg³² conducted in response to the 1968 Democratic National Convention held in Chicago. The convention immediately broke into a riot led by the Youth International Party, a counter-culture youth group fighting for free speech and anti-war movements of the storming 60's. Ginsberg wished the riot would have been a "glow of thousands of naked bodies intertwined, making love," or so a public orgy. Shepard writes about Ginsberg's vision in order to describe how the politics of play work "as a resource, a sign of social vitality, an investment in passion that serves as a reminder that there is sometimes more to life than productivity." He recognizes the importance in building spaces that rejuvenate the soul while advocating for social justice. Ginsberg's orgy and my argument on cruising are proof that politics of play reimagine social normative spaces as sources of healing for marginalized folks. If we imagine cruising as both political and pleasurable, than maybe hope is possible — only then can folks start the process of healing.

Muñoz's concept of queer utopian memories also works to break away from the present by recollecting the past as a source of hope, thus drawing from a talk by Douglas Crimp titled, "Mourning and Militancy."³³ Crimp's piece addresses the issues with the HIV/AIDS crisis in the 80's. This conference took place during that moment in history; Crimp's talk responds to the crisis by recollecting a pre-AIDS world as a way of imagining a space of healing. He mentions Sigmund Freud's argument that explains how the mourning a loved one is also the mourning of an abstraction: "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.'" Crimp is not only mourning friends who have died at the hands of AIDS, he is also mourning the death of a time when sex did not come with a death sentence. He humbly adds the "ideal of perverse sexual pleasure" to the list of abstractions Freud mentions, such as fatherland, liberty and even love. After I read this section of the chapter, I could not help but imagine the conference as a funeral. I am of a younger queer generation fortunate enough to not have witnessed the pain and loss through which people suffered; however, after understanding Muñoz's concept of queer utopian memories, I realize that Crimp conjures the past as a way of dealing with the present AIDS scare. Although he mourns the death of perverse sexual pleasure, "its ghost... still fuels and propels our political and erotic lives." I understand Muñoz's discourse on utopian memories as a strategy marginalized folks use to escape the chaos in society. Both Muñoz's piece and my argument on gay cruising rely on reimagining a "space outside of heteronormativity" for the sake of healing.

Avery Gordon would agree that ghosts and hauntings play significant roles in finding an alternative to Queerness. In *Ghostly Matters*, Gordon conjures up the concept of haunting as a way of understanding lingering forces. One of her examples is on the subject of slavery. She mentions, "slavery has ended, but something of it continues to live on... Such endings that are not over [are] what haunting is about."³⁴ Her concept reflects the utopian memories in Crimp's mourning of lost abstractions since both writers understand that ghosts linger in the institution of slavery as well as in tearooms because the issues are not completely over. However, Crimp's ghost is a positive haunting; it conjures hope and gives marginalized folks the opportunity to dream of a utopian world that will forever be locked in a moment, or ghost. But how do ghosts relate to my argument on cruising? Well, whenever folks walk in a bathroom stall, or stroll through a park, they

might be in the presence of public sex ghosts. These ghosts are proof that no matter how much popular culture polices social relations, they will never kill queer spirit; marginalized folks can rest assured that the presence of an alternative to queerness will always remain intact. This is another way gay cruising serves as an epistemology of healing, as a way of standing in solidarity with folks from all walks of life.

Theory in the Carnal Flesh³⁵

I utilize John Rechy's manifesto *Sexual Outlaw* to explain the concept of "theory in the flesh" Gloria Anzaldúa and Cherríe Moraga advocate for in *This Bridge Called My Back*. In other words, Rechy's experiences are testimonies written on his body as he makes political statements with the performance of cruising. The book chronicles his sexual encounters from the 70's and illustrates his activist work as a cruiser, exploring the city of Los Angeles, "[fucking] and [sucking] in every corner." His motives for cruising are justified as promiscuous rage, he argues that "a man [can] emerge staggering out of the brush in a park, his face smashed... four thugs [kicking] and [beating] him with sticks;" however, the cops remain absent, "but tell them two men are fucking, and they'll storm the area in minutes."³⁶ His personal vendetta against the penal system is visible through the performance of cruising; his promiscuous rage attempts to imagine hope — the potential for more through an alternative to queerness.

Rechy's performance closely resembles a counter-identification Muñoz mentions in his infamous book, *Disidentifications*; however, Rechy is paving the way for something more, he is rebelling with a cause.³⁷ Muñoz argues that marginalized folks often neglect and antagonize other "minoritarian positionalities;" however, he mentions that disidentification offers a way of understanding a "multiplicity of interlocking identity components and the ways in which they affect the social."³⁸ Rechy is making a political statement by wandering the streets of Los Angeles having devious sex to spite heteronormative policing while standing in solidarity with folks that confront popular culture in different situated experiences. His manifesto also reflects Muñoz's concept of queer utopian memories by taking the initiative in breaking from straight time.

Rechy's story is not an anti-relational queer template of the "here and now;" this statement is much more complicated. Even though queer identified men were charged as sex offenders for casually walking up to other men, that never stopped Rechy from searching for the utopian moment in the ghosts of public sex. He had to rage against the injustices done to the gay community in order to release his frustrations. Through his manifesto, Rechy finds a space of healing — even though critics may read it as violent, radical and even passé, his piece reads as an epistemology of healing from all the pain and violence he has experienced. The pleasures he experiences through his sexual encounters reflects Ben Shepard's politics on play since both writers recognize that pleasure with politics is a source that helps them get through the turmoil.

David Wojnarowicz's *Close to the Knives* also shares an epistemology of healing through the politics of cruising by rejecting the fear and shame associated with HIV/ AIDS.³⁹ He boldly faces the stigma and fear of living with AIDS and condemns the political injustices the American government commits against folks who have contracted the virus. He calls out the social injustices he faces:

I want to throw up because we're supposed to quietly and politely make house in this killing machine called America and pay taxes to support our own slow murder and I'm amazed we're not running amok in the streets, and that we can still be capable of gestures of loving after lifetimes of all this.⁴⁰

He is amazed folks did not burn down cities when the government refused to fund research for vaccines, or when they approved legislations that allowed employers and government institutions to discriminate against HIV positive citizens. For him, this is something more than theory could ever provide; he is living theory in the flesh. His writing also finds utopian pictures in his confinement to straight time; in writing this all down on paper, he is inscribing his soul on the pages, hopeful that all these stories were not written in vain. All these writers — Whitman, Rechy, and Muñoz — understand why an epistemology of healing is essential for marginalized folks. They all strive to find that fountain of healing many of us have forgotten as we cruise along the yellow brick road in the land of straight time — coerced to face heterosexism and the politics of sexual globalization functioning under a Western grid of intelligibility.

I conclude with an essay by Robin D.G. Kelley titled "Finding the Strength to Love and Dream."⁴¹ Kelley chronicles his academic career and reflects on where twenty years of activism and theory took him. He describes that marginalized and excluded folks "have done the

most to make democracy work in America;” however, he also recognizes that many radical movements have done terrible things by working under the premise that the ends justify the means⁴². But he adds: “to drone on about how oppressed we are or to merely chronicle the crimes of radical movements doesn’t seem very useful. . . my main point is that we must tap the well of our own collective imaginations, that we do what earlier generations have done: Dream.” By tapping into our collective imaginations, we have the opportunity to inhabit a world unlike the one we are experiencing. The seed of change and hope has always been there, earlier generations know this; however, it is this generation’s turn to move forward and critically envision a world without patriarchy, racism, heterosexism, or xenophobia. Marginalized folks cannot afford to not dream.

Endnotes

1. WALT WHITMAN, *Leaves of Grass* (New York: UP, 2005).
2. I AM AWARE THAT GAY CRUISING IS A BROAD TOPIC. I WILL EVENTUALLY EXPAND THIS WORK BY CRITICALLY ADDRESSING WHAT GAY CRUISING LOOKS LIKE FOR PEOPLE OF COLOR GRAPPLING WITH THE PRECARIOUS BALANCE OF HOMOEROTIC DESIRE AND RACE.
3. I USE THE TERM “WE” TO DESCRIBE QUEER IDENTIFYING FOLKS FROM ALL BACKGROUNDS (E.G. ACADEMIA, ACTIVISM, ETC.).
4. JACK HALBERSTAM COINS THIS TERM. STRAIGHT TIME IS THE CONCEPT THAT UNDERSTANDS THE TROPES FOUND IN DOMINANT CULTURE WHICH ARE AS FOLLOWS: MARRIAGE, REPRODUCTION, CAPITAL, ANYTHING THAT IS UNDERSTOOD AS HETERONORMATIVE.
5. J. HALBERSTAM, *In a Queer Time and Place* (New York: UP, 2005), 6.
6. LAUREN BERLANT AND MICHAEL WARNER, “SEX IN PUBLIC,” *Critical Inquiry*, no. 2 (1998): 561.
7. BERLANT AND WARNER, “SEX IN PUBLIC,” 562.
8. MUÑOZ, *Cruising Utopia*.
9. MUÑOZ, JOSÉ ESTEBAN, *Cruising Utopia: the Then and There of Queer Futurity* (New York: UP, 2009), 26.
10. HALBERSTAM, *Queer Time and Place*, 154.
11. I WILL BRING UP RECHY AGAIN LATER IN THE PAPER.
12. RECHY, JOHN. *The Sexual Outlaw: a Documentary* (New York: DELL, 1978), 27.
13. RECHY, *Sexual Outlaw*, 130, 131.
14. REBECCA SCHNEIDER, *The Explicit Body in Performance* (LONDON: ROUTLEDGE, 1997), 32.
15. RECHY, *Sexual Outlaw*, 56.
16. WALLACE BACON, *Literature as Experience* (New York: MCGRAW HILL, 1959).
17. BACON, *Literature as Experience*.
18. QUOTE TAKEN FROM JOSE E. MUÑOZ.
19. JASBIR PUAR, *Terrorist Assemblages: Homonationalism in Queer times* (NC: DUKE UP, 2007).
20. EMPHASIS IS MINE.
21. CHERRIE MORAGA, *Loving in the War Years*, (CAMBRIDGE: SOUTH END, 2000).
22. WALT WHITMAN, *Leaves of Grass* (New York: OXFORD UP, 2005), 78.
23. “POWERFUL FICTIONS” IS A PHRASE I BORROWED FROM MARIA LUGONES TO DESCRIBE THE PHENOMENON OF RACE, GENDER, AND SEXUALITY CONSTRUCTED IN THE 19TH CENTURY BY INSTITUTIONS SUCH AS RACIST SCIENCE AND COLONIAL PROJECTS.
24. I FOUND THIS LETTER WHILE I WAS DOING ARCHIVAL RESEARCH AT THE BANCROFT LIBRARY IN UC BERKELEY.
25. WALT WHITMAN, *Leaves of Grass* (BANCROFT LIBRARY, 1883), APRIL 17TH, 2012.
26. ANTI-RELATIONAL THEORY CONSTRUCTS A RIGID “US VERSUS THEM” BINARY THAT REINFORCES THE VIOLENCE QUEER FOLKS LIVE WITH BY DISREGARDING A CRITICAL ANALYSIS OF INTERSECTING STRUCTURES SUCH AS RACE AND CLASS. THIS THEORY IS PARTICULARLY NEGLECTING OF THE EXPERIENCES QUEER PEOPLE OF COLOR FACE.
27. LEE EDELMAN, *No Future: Queer Theory and the Death Drive* (DURHAM: DUKE UP, 2004).
28. BENJAMIN SHEPARD IS AN ASSISTANT PROFESSOR AT NEW YORK SCHOOL OF TECHNOLOGY/ CITY UNIVERSITY OF NEW YORK. HE WROTE *Queer Political Performance and Protest*, A BOOK I AM USING FOR THIS PAPER.
29. BENJAMIN SHEPARD, *Queer Political Performance and Protest* (New York: ROUTLEDGE, 2010), 54.
30. DAVID WOJNAROWICZ, *Close to the Knives: a Memoir of Disintegration*, (New York: VINTAGE).
31. I REFERENCE RAYMOND WILLIAMS’ “STRUCTURED FEELING” THEORY TO DESCRIBE THE DISCOURSE ON AFFECT, SPECIFICALLY CALLING OUT THE FEELING OF SOCIAL FEAR WITH THE CRISIS ON AIDS/HIV.
32. ALLEN GINSBERG WAS A QUEER AMERICAN POET AND A PROMINENT FIGURE OF THE BEAT GENERATION IN THE 1950’S.
33. DOUGLAS CRIMP IS A PROFESSOR AT THE UNIVERSITY OF ROCHESTER. HIS TALK WAS HELD AT THE SECOND NATIONAL LESBIAN AND GAY STUDIES CONFERENCE AT YALE IN 1989.
34. AVERY GORDON, *Ghostly Matters: Haunting and the Sociological Imagination* (MINNEAPOLIS: UM, 2008), 105.
35. CHERRIE MORAGA AND GLORIA ANZALDÚA COINED THIS PHRASE.
36. RECHY, *The Sexual Outlaw*, 28, 29.
37. JOSÉ ESTEBAN MUÑOZ, *Disidentifications* (MINNEAPOLIS: UM).
38. JOSÉ ESTEBAN MUÑOZ, *Disidentifications*, 14.
39. DAVID WOJNAROWICZ WAS A PERFORMANCE ARTIST, ACTIVIST, WRITER AND FILMMAKER THAT TOOK THE NEW YORK CITY STREETS BY STORM WITH HIS POLITICAL ART AND PERSONAL EXPERIENCES IN LIVING WITH AIDS.
40. WOJNAROWICZ, *Close to the Knives*, 108.
41. ROBIN D.G. KELLEY IS A PROFESSOR OF AMERICAN STUDIES AND ETHNICITY AND HISTORY AT UC LOS ANGELES.
42. ROBIN D.G. KELLEY, “Finding the Strength to Love and Dream,” 9.