The Quiet Queer: Coming Out & Queer Fabrications

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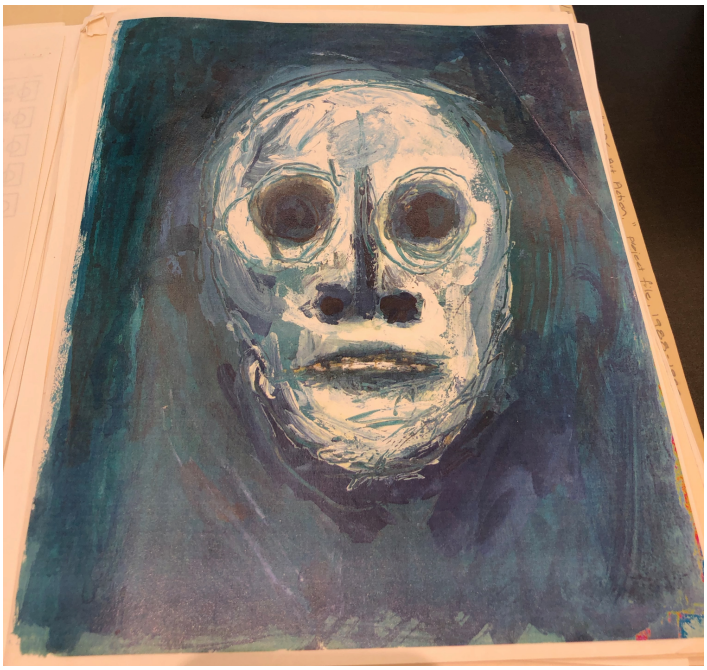

Figure 1 (S.A.M.E.): Bill Paul, *afterimage*, undated

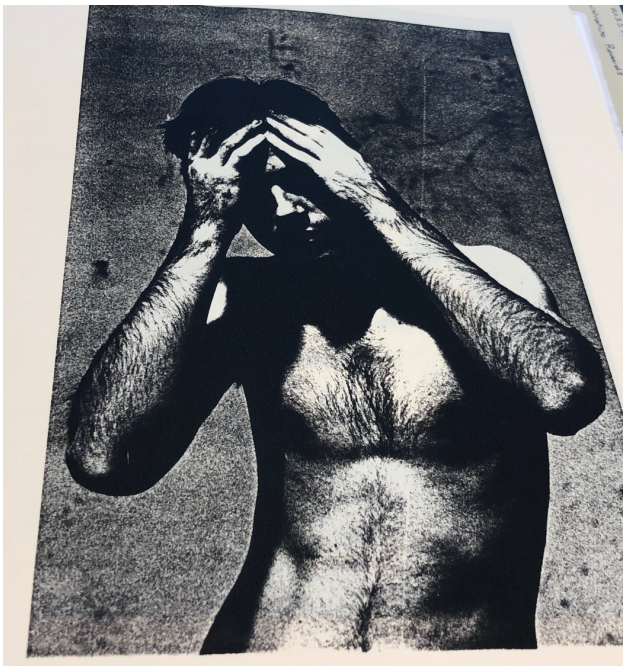

Figure 2 (S.A.M.E.): Bill Paul, *unnamed*, undated

"The goal of AIDS ART ACTION is to use visual art as a unique form to communicate an idea, an experience, a vision connected to AIDS or to the life of the person battling AIDS. The project will match a visual artist and a PWA, PWARC, or HIV positive person and together they will define the parameters of their collaboration" (S.A.M.E.).

Abstract:
The remnants of bourgeois consciousness maintain a split between the private sphere and public sphere, despite the ongoing mass privatization of all things in what Mark Fisher calls "business ontology" in *Capitalist Realism*. This proliferation of supposed borders between an interior world and an exterior world maintain the "in" and "out" of a conceptual closet from which one can come out. But coming out is not a universal or universalizing part of the queer experience: not throughout the globe, and not even in America. But how is it that somebody is generally not held up as "really queer" unless they've come out? Who gets to come out? Who doesn't have to? Who doesn't have the privilege to do so? And how does the fact that coming out never really ends insofar as coming out to new colleagues and friends and romantic partners is a perpetual process? Scholars like Jasbir Puar in *Terrorist Assemblages* and Chandan Reddy in *Freedom with Violence* reject the alleged hyper-immediate "outlaw" status of the homosexual subject by lamenting its militaristic deployment and its rearticulation into heterosexual terms, rendering it something palatable to the masses and exceptional only in its banal marketability. Other scholars, like Lauren Berlant and Michael Warner in "Sex in Public", still uphold the reign of heteronormativity. This article will examine the "magical" and revelatory properties of the speech act of coming out, as well as the structures demanding that those with big profiles come out, by looking at celebrity queer culture, fandom, and queer icons to interrogate why some are expected to come out, ultimately reifying the coming out process. The article will also examine the ways that the coming out process actually supports the reign of heteronormativity by placing regulations on the interpellation of queer identity.

1 Established on October 11th, 1988 to commemorate the Second Annual March on Washington for Lesbian and Gay Rights which happened that same day a year earlier (1987), National Coming Out Day (NCOD) entangled death and visibility with coming out, imbuing it with political significance ("History of Coming Out"). Notably, most of the sties containing information about NCOD all refer back to the *Human Rights Campaign* (HRC) entry on it, meaning its significance and discursive proliferations in other virtual locations are mediated through a human rights discourse. Sometimes known as "The Great March," the political rally that NCOD commemorates had goals to 1) raise awareness of the AIDS pandemic and to 2) mandate the overturning of the anti-sodomy decision from *Bowers v. Hardwick*, whether or not this history is acknowledged or celebrated (Williams). Significantly enough, the 'coming out' video genre on YouTube has increasingly propagated objects on or around NCOD since the latter half of the 2000s (Wong). Additionally, NCOD celebrates this dual mission by institutionalizing coming out – that is, mandated coming out through institutional mediation – and, at least once a year, urging people to do so. NCOD is both an 'event' (i.e. having happened for a first time with a beginning and an ending) and an 'ongoing process' (i.e. repeatedly celebrated annually as marked on a calendar). As an event, NCOD institutionalized coming out and calcified it as a routine experience within

'certain' queer structures of living. As a process, which is a part of the ordinary, it avows coming out as a repeating, compulsory, and asynchronic self-hail, something that never ends, something that 'never has a final event.' The logics of NCOD are as follows: encourage people to come out so that the heterosexual majority would learn that statistically they likely knew at least one member of the 'LGBTQ+ community,' enmeshing visibility of the community, discernible as a community as such, directly to the stakes of life and death. As Robert Eichberg, co-founder of NCOD said,

> Most people think they don't know anyone gay or lesbian, and in fact everybody does. It is imperative that we come out and let people know who we are and disabuse them of their fears and stereotypes. (qtd. in "Robert" n.p.)

2 Furthermore, as more 'professionals' came out, the proliferation of queer epistemologies and queer expertise ensured that queer knowledge structures could enter the discourse. NCOD was founded by a psychologist, Eichberg, and an activist, Jean O'Leary, and their coming together was a symbolic merging of science discourse and queer-cultural 'minority' knowledges in their absolute agreement that AIDS was, indeed, a crisis, despite the Reagan administration's inaction ("National" n.p.). The Second Annual March was the first time that activist group ACT-UP captured widespread media attention and received mainstream coverage ("Gay Rights"), despite a notable discrepancy in reported and estimated numbers of those in attendance, ranging from a quote of 200,000 in *The New York Times* (Williams) to an estimated 750,000 by police (qtd. in Balestrery n.p.). ACT-UP's theatricality was honed through chants into an attempt at reclaiming "queer": "We're Here! We're Queer! Get Used to It!" (Bronski 220). Their demands, taken together, indicated a desire for legal recognition for specific subjects, to be written into the code of law, to be judged using the paradigm of human rights discourse, and to be subjects deserving of state intervention—to be a citizenship category. As well, NCOD contributed to the *citizenification* of queerness insofar as sexual difference was acknowledged on a state-level, albeit in a limited capacity. To be recognized as a population meant recognition that they were worthy of being 'known' and thus 'studied' and thus, helped. Indeed, as Eve Sedgwick emphasizes in *Epistemology of the Closet,* the spatial metaphor of the closet as "publicly intelligible signifier for gay-related epistemological issues" is "made available… only by the difference made by the Post-Stonewall gay politics oriented around coming *out* of the closet" (14). Again, NCOD's original intention to celebrate coming out as a method of securing legal and medical protections cannot be ignored.

3 The central claim is thus: coming out, despite its subcultural and activist-political origins, has been subsumed by late liberal and infocapitalist regimes of intimacy; thus, coming out has lost some of its radical potential—and yet, it still maintains an aura of sacredness for many. This makes a complex ecology for coming out: its sacredness hides its complicity in upholding heteronormativity through legitimizing binary, spatiotemporal oppositions *and yet* allows many the opportunity to claim an identity and find radical queer spaces of intimacy not necessarily beholden to heteronormative structures of living and ways of being. This ambivalence—this Derridean 'undecidability'—makes coming out worthy of being re-interrogated, and perhaps re-situated into a larger structure of living. Another crucial element that cannot be ignored: gay maleness was largely the topic of most of the coverage of the Great March, and of many studies into coming out, subsuming and erasing lesbian and other identities under the umbrella of 'gay' (Balestrery). This of course begs the question: who is supposed to come out on NCOD? And, who is to come out at all? As what, exactly? NCOD may have institutionalized coming out, but it is not the first or only (or necessarily even most significant) political cooptation of coming out.

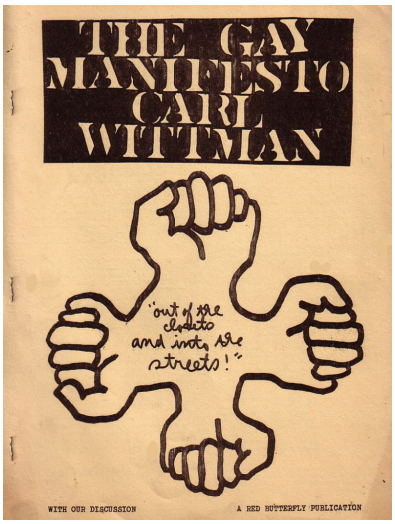

Figure 3 (Wittman): Notice the caption "out of the closets and into the streets"; this is one of the earliest instances of the spatial metaphor of the closet being used. Notably, homosexuality is linked with Communist ideologies in the manifesto, making clear a link between anti-capitalist politics and queer identity.

Come Out, Come Out!

4 In early 1969, coming out was designed as a political imperative by Communist Party member and activist Carl Wittman in San Francisco (Bronski 208, and Figure 3). In New York, a Marxist pamphlet urging gay liberation from Red Butterfly, which was a part of the New York Hay Liberation Front, emerged in manifesto-like aesthetic publication (Figure 4). This was followed by several iterations of active resistance against state intervention – typically the police – in queer spaces, which culminated finally in Stonewall in June of 1969, "less a turning point than a final stimulus" (Bronski 209) and yet still held up as the moment from which "the modern gay liberation movement dates its inauguration" (Sedgwick 14).

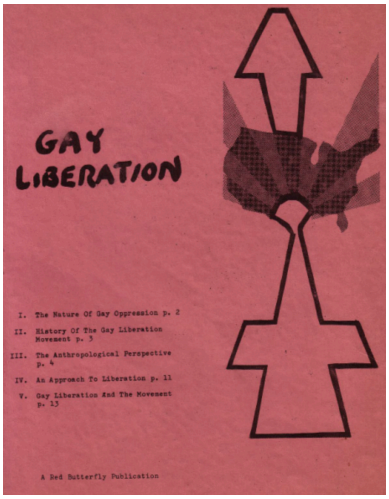

Figure 4 (Red Butterfly): The pamphlet clearly lines out the ways that they *feel* oppressed, translating affect into knowledge, and retroactively creating a shared sense of identity around suffering and survival.

5 Another notably major coming out movement came in 1978 in an effort to rally around defeating the ultimately doomed Proposition 6 in California, which prevented known lesbian or gay people and people "advocating, imposing, encouraging, or promoting 'homosexuality'" from holding positions as teachers in public schools (Bronski 220). Harvey Milk is typically held up as the martyr for this iteration of coming out qua political movement and, by extension, a symbol for coming out, having famously urged people to do so during his career as a public servant: "Gay brothers and sisters, you must come out" (qtd. In Knapp). In this way, coming out was not only about reducing "fears and stereotypes" (qtd. In "Robert"), but also was about making legible the "LGBTQ+ community" qua legitimate population as something with definable characteristics, specific demands, and particular health concerns. Another major 'moment' in coming out histories involves the sudden influx of coming out videos uploaded on YouTube in approximately the latter half of the 2000s (Wong).

6 This suggests an interesting entanglement of technology, identity, and public/private spheres, and will be a focus of the latter half of this article. The first half will establish working definitions for key terms, and demonstrate their instability and complex dependence on contextual arrangements of bodies, space, time, and affect. Additionally, the latter half will look at coming out's different forms: as vernacular expressions, racial components, entanglements with celebrity culture, and virtual embodiments in online spaces to better understand its mode and function in our contemporary moment of America. The article will consider the ways in which coming out has been coopted and rearticulated in market-friendly terms through infocapitalist algorithmic and platform technologies and reads "It Gets Better" videos as quasi-sequels to coming out narratives in a way that further obfuscates difference in queer experience and upholds heteronormativity through resignation and indoctrination into the world of 'queer fineness.' The concluding remarks will attempt to build a new paradigmatic infrastructure that looks beyond coming out narratives to the more complex ways that queer lives are lived, survived, and made.

Methodologies: To Stitch a Life

7 This article is invested in close-reading events and non-events as aesthetic objects in order to de-privilege the event as the locus of meaning-making and, instead, also locate significance in the ordinary, mundane, banal ongoingnesses. As such, it is devoted to compiling a discourse about coming out that contains affects, events/non-events, archival material, historical documents, and theory as aesthetic material-discursive texts. The methodological approach utilized is that of a variant of aesthetics, modeled on postcolonial scholar Deepika Bahri's usage of the term, partly taken from Theodor Adorno (Bahri 8); understanding aesthetics as the basic capacity for sensation and perception allows a reading of texts that interrogates the structures and patterns of objects that create particular affective states. Specifically, the article wants to understand the structures of queer living and how to read them in order to determine whether there may be structures specifically constitutive of the queer experience (i.e. universal) or if queerness is more of a fluid, particular, uncatchable thing. The article also wants to read queerness on its aesthetic limits of legibility across transnational contexts. What kind of 'object' is coming out?

8 'Coming Out': Coming out in the contemporary moment, generally speaking, names the moment whereby a person with otherwise non-heteronormative desires names themselves as such to another. This is more or less the cumulative average definition from four cultural sources: medical-institutional discourse via Planned Parenthood ("What's Coming Out?"); the commonsensical public encyclopedia entry via Wikipedia ("Coming out"); the vernacular, colloquial understanding via Urban Dictionary (GayerthanyouHA!); and the homonationalist, human rights discourse via the HRC ("Explore"). This definition, however, does not quite capture its ambivalences and uneven experiential distributions and proliferations of intimacies or affective intensities, so we must look for a better reading. Coming out, to begin is 'aspirational,' as it names the person one wants to become by speaking it. It is not enough to simply move through explicitly gay spaces like specific bars, nightclubs, or bathhouses, for instance, to engage in sexual acts, because coming 'out of the closet' is coming out as a 'kind,' rather than confessing an act.

9 Notably, the kind that a person may come out as may change with each retelling. This indicates an alteration in coming out as the person they intend to be: they may say something like 'I am bisexual' in order to become that identity, in order to initiative themselves into a particular community with its own rites and rituals and aesthetic ways of moving through the world. Troubling this further, there are sometimes conditionals attached to the coming out as such and

such ‘kind of person.’ ‘I am gay, *but I’m only into masculine guys*,’ for instance, they may say, disavowing certain components of the identity with the utterance and indicating a desire to simultaneously enter a particular space of group belonging and also distance themselves from becoming a certain kind of homosexual. Another example: ‘I am lesbian, *but I still want a family*,’ usually spoken as reassurance to family members concerned about reproducing bloodlines, which implicates queerness as somehow antithetical to established kinship systems.

10 Thus, the sonic components of coming out as a speech act are almost ‘transformative,’ and here language and utterance – self-proclamation – take primacy over actions. An ethical analysis of coming out ought to make room for difference, as well as for the aforementioned primacy of speech, and so the starting definition of coming out for this article is as follows: an ongoing, repetitive, and aspirational ritual speech act that, through its utterance, establishes belonging to a specific marginal community based around sexual or gender-based non-heteronormative difference. Notably, this article’s otherwise glaring absences include ‘coming out as disabled’ or ‘coming out as poor,’ as those are beyond the scope of this paper, but the article hopes to gesture towards a continuation of this project that can see to fruition the cross-comparative work linking together the politics of coming out for different marginalized publics. As such, in order to at least make room for contextual difference, this addendum is offered to the above definition: ‘coming out is not universally experienced by all non-heteronormative subjects, nor is it necessarily formally or content-wise similarly experienced by those who do come out, whether once or many times.’

Coming Out Rituals

11 The easiest way to understand the addendum is to defamiliarize coming out as a unique phenomenon and instead view it as a ritual that only some ‘members’ of the ‘community’ observe (‘community’ being always already an unstable term largely denoting the loosely definable aggregation of differing non-heteronormative sexual or gender identities). That is to say: there are some members of the community who have not come out and who do not need to come out to access certain intimacies; those who do come out must continually come out, ritualistically, in some way and at some point, to each new person in their life, directly or indirectly. Ritual is the “determined conducted of the individual in a society expressing a relation to the sacred and profane” (Penner). Coming out is a kind of ritual in which an individual expresses their identity,

orienting them towards a specific relationship with the sacred and profane, located within a sociocultural stratum with explicit majority logics defining what constitutes those two terms. Furthermore, viewing coming out as ritual allows an aesthetic analysis of its particular and heterogenous formalisms as though it were performance (Stephenson 141). Consider: coming out may consist of prepared speeches previously practiced in front of a passive audience, affective intensities, edited videos uploaded to YouTube, and, in some cases, dance ("Mac"). Ultimately, we must reconsider coming out qua ritual: 1) it is simultaneously a single event and an ongoing process and series of events; 2) it is not a universal queer experience, but is seemingly ubiquitous; and 3) it is only a small part of the unique crafting that queer people must do to build a life, and is not always the most significant component of an experienced life (which is to say, there may be significant ritual events, but they are not the primary register structuring experience).

12 Coming out troubles notions of the queer immediately by implying that there is a recognizable marker to tell whether or not someone is 'really queer': whether or not they have come out. Additionally, coming out, when viewed as a universal experience, by implication subsumes the diversity of sexual, racial, class-based, affiliation or ability-based difference found within the spectrum of LGBTQ+ into a single oppositional framework of straight vs. non-straight. Indeed, as Sedgwick pulls from Foucault, there is not one but many silences (3). Furthermore, Judith Butler argues that coming out implies a departure from heterosexuality, rendering non-heterosexuals as parodic copies of the 'original,' though she does ultimately destabilize this argument (313). 'Queer' as a signifier risks subsuming difference in a similar way, so the article's usage of it is mindful of ethical implications; that is, the instability of the term queer in naming a group that escapes strict boundaries or definitions is recognized, but its strategic rapidity in signaling particular experiences is the aim of its usage within this article. When a 'queer person coming out' is said, it is meant to signify a refraction of possibilities, as coming out as a bisexual person is different from coming out as trans, which different from coming out as non-binary or lesbian, etc. There is, said another way, no linear temporal narrative that is applicable to all who come out; instead, coming out operates as a prism, refracting bodies into different directions, who are moving at different velocities and coming into contact with different obstacles. My usage of queer thus indicates an unstable, fluid object, but recognizes the strategic usage of shorthand to hail massive difference that leaves suitable room for that difference. We simultaneously do not want to domestically exoticize the gradations of sexual desire and difference in such a way that

ignores transnational circulations of terms, categories, and identities. That is to say that coming out is not something that everyone has access to, and those who do have access to it experience it in vastly different capacities based on their embodied, intersecting, (il)legible identities.

The Repeating Self-Hail: Event Aesthetics

13 Now that there is a working definition of coming out and other useful terms, the political and material-discursive dimensions of coming out can be explored – the ones that ramify against the interests of queer people. Coming out can radically reconstitute relations between bodies, space, and time, imbuing particular sites with affective intensities in the same way its articulation may be registered as a non-event to the person receiving the coming out: 'Oh, we knew all along!' Coming out is not always an event, in that it is never just a referent to a singular Event, because it happens more than once. It is a never-ending process marked by significant and not-so-significant moments. It is, then, more of a repeating self-hail, straddling the generic line between event and non-event. In fact, coming out marks a unique aggregation of place, bodies, affect, and time in relation, reconstituting all with their entanglement and submitting them all to forms of future memory work. Privileging the event as the locus of meaning-making, and seeing coming out as only an event undermines the ways in which it repeatedly occurs and over-determines it as the most significant structuring experience that constitutes a (queer) subject.

14 The spatial registers 'outside of' and 'inside of' mark queerness as locative; but because nobody is ever 'out' to everyone, the queer figure, to borrow Spivak's usage of the term, is *undecidable*, that is, existing simultaneously on both ends of a polarity, and neither end at once, presence and absence (Spivak 71-73). The queer figure is both 'present' (outside of the closet) to some, and 'absent' (inside of the closet) to those not explicitly told. Attached to the notion of outside/inside is a measure of liberalist self-acceptance of one's particular individuality; to be 'inside of' the closet is registered as not having fully accepted oneself as such. To be inside of the closet is to be deceitful, a liar, 'hiding one's true self.' To be outside of the closet is to perform self-acceptance. Coming out, then, has been coopted by late liberal institutions and regimes of intimacy as a narrative of rehabilitation from a bad self to a good self, despite the impossibility of achieving full 'out'-ness. Consider the temporal dimension: to exist as outside of, one must have been inside of at some point; to simply exist outside does not imply ever having been inside, but to be 'outside of' a space specifically ties a temporal development to coming out as one has to

have been inside of that space. Therefore, to be out names the presence of a threshold, where at one point one was in the closet. Every out person was once in, that is to say. And every out person is still in to a degree that there are people who do not know about it. That is not to say that they are willingly in the closet, but without the utterance of coming out, one is not necessarily registered as queer. Especially if they pass and thus allow their queerness to fall into an illegible hypopresence for the reading of someone by others.

15 That is to say that every queer person, insofar as every queer person is either still in or was in the closet, is or was deceitful, a liar, and not capable of self-acceptance, 'self-denying.' This rehabilitation narrative marks a linear progression reminiscent of other linear mythologies of always already moving towards perfection, from a place of deceit, dishonesty, self-rejection, to a place of self-acceptance, self-assuredness, honesty, external truth birthed by internal reality, fact. Coming out, as the ritual becomes rearticulated and normalized within the logics of late liberalism, globalization, and the industries and regimes of infocapitalism, thus creates a current and former self-individual. Queerness must be legible in such a way that it is palatable to the masses in order for them to tolerate difference, as there is only just enough room for a little bit of difference. Coming out is no longer necessarily a radical act, but instead is tied to the neoliberal values of self-expression, multiculturalism, and diversity.

16 The locating of otherwise 'boring traumas,' which is a term this article seeks to introduce into the discourse, are those mundanely painful and painfully mundane atrocities, those microcosmic happenings that are neither spectacular nor interesting to others, is a method through which to understand the complicated and complex ways that structures of living are saturated in traumas that appear otherwise-ordinary. They are those series of micro-traumas that add up to an ordinary part of a subject experience: everyone incorrectly and repeatedly mispronouncing a first name; the Pavlovian-conditioning spankings a child receives every time they leave their toys out; the constant confrontation with beach-ready airbrushed bodies during swimsuit season in commercials and magazines advertisements and billboards. They are those things felt in the reverberations between feeling the ordinary and feeling the catastrophic. This repeating self-hail, this constant, perpetual coming out, is a boring trauma: an otherwise-unspectacular happening, an event that occurs so often one becomes inured to it, that it becomes a part of the ordinary, saturating the quotidian. Boring traumas do not imply a need to ignore the 'traumatic event,' but instead asks us to recognize the smaller terrors that build up to do just as much, if not more, damage. Seen

through this lens, coming out as a repeating self-hail is traumatic insofar as there is a compulsory obligation for queer people to reveal themselves, to constantly confess not necessarily a singular act but the self as a 'kind.' The person coming out is not just placed into a limiting box, but through heteronormative hegemony is obliged to place themselves in that very box through speaking their identity and rectifying reality for others.

Into the World of Queer Fineness: YouTube & Genrefication

17 Focusing largely on gay male subcultures, historian George Chauncey argues that prior to WWII, coming out was about "coming out *into*" (my emphasis), as opposed to coming out *from*, a larger gay world – specifically, drag balls. Modeled as a parody of the White Anglo Saxon Protestant (WASP) debutante rituals of letting women 'come out' to the public world, coming out for gay male subcultures meant entering and accessing a specific queer space, itself an inversion of straight society (Chauncey 28). Originally, the metaphor for coming out was tied to physical movement into a particular site of intimacy, rather than a conceptual movement from inside to outside of a closet-space. Prior to coming out of the closet, however, other metaphors were used: "'putting their hair up'" or "'[dropping] hairpins'" (qtd. in Chauncey 27), showing how indicating one's sexual orientation was originally tied to the body and to appearance. There was no movement of an internal reality through utterance to a spoken, external truth (the speech act of coming out), because the truth was already encoded within a specific customization of one's physical appearance; indeed, one merely needed to properly 'read' the text of the queer body for queerness to be legible.

18 In regards to coming out during and after WWII, Charles Kaiser argues that "the army then acted like a giant centrifuge, creating the largest concentration of gay men inside a single institution in American history" (qtd. in Waxman). For the veterans from WWII migrating back into urban areas, coming out was more about finding community and belonging and intimacy rather than about the very political ends of informing, raising awareness, persuading, convincing. It is with McCarthy, the Cold War, and the hostile anti-Communist political climate of the 1950s in America, culminating in the Lavender Scare, when "outing" (both homosexuals and Communists) was used as a weapon to subject, or at least make vulnerable, certain individuals to state and interpersonal violence (Chauncey 30). The confluence of Communist ideologies with homosexual identities helped set the stage for the sexual liberation efforts of the 1960s and 1970s, imbuing

non-heterosexuality (the then-being-reclaimed "queer") with political and radical potential, solidifying it as a threat to law and order. With this historical example, it is worth also emphasizing how coming out is complicated by the question of voluntariness, and whether one gets to come out (self-make) of if they are outed (other-made).

19 Is it 'good' or 'bad' to come out now? Some may regard it as a moral imperative, and others, a capitalist enterprise. Is it possible to 'come out for capital'? Consider the problem posed by Foucault:

> The question of knowing who we are sexually should no longer be posed. It is not then a question of affirming one's sexual identity, but of refusing to allow sexuality as well as the different forms of sexuality the right to identify you. The obligation to identify oneself through and by a given type of sexuality must be refused (*Wrong-Doing).*

Foucault's trepidations are furthered in his genealogical enterprise of determining sexuality's contextual unfoldings (*History of Sexuality*). Indeed, he does not attribute the same kind of power to the sexual liberation efforts of politicizing coming out because of his assertions that sexuality has always already been a function of power. Tying it so directly to identity imposes and maintains cultural hierarchical thinking. Jasbir Puar, (at least implicitly) seems to be arguing against the kinds of claims that Lauren Berlant and Michael Warner make in the article "Sex in Public," insofar as the U.S. is seeing the ascendancy of a national homosexuality that collectively, with heteronormative national forms, contributes to the War on Terror. Puar rejects the alleged 'outlaw' status of the homosexual subject because of the presence of gay subjects, themselves targets of marketing ventures, that are complicit in heterosexual projects of nation-building (*Terrorist Assemblages*). Indeed, Chandan Reddy makes a similar claim in *Freedom with Violence*: the legally encoded protection of LGBTQ+ identifying peoples was tied to a defense spending bill, inextricably and irrevocably linking together queerness with militarism in legal code and the committed national protection of individualism (Reddy 4-5). We can similarly see a series of ambivalences in the military trans ban proposed; in order to achieve 'equality,' queer subjects must protest for the right to engage in warfare. Berlant and Warner, taking a more spatial and affective approach than Puar and Reddy, who focus more on human rights discourse, however, gesture towards the idea that through zoning regulations heteronormativity is maintained through territory-making and mapping (Berlant, and Warner). That is, to take all three together, heteronormativity upholds its reign through literally taking up space and yet making a marginal amount of room for (some) kinds of queerness so long as it can be used to nationalist, and heterosexist, ends.

20 The earlier parts of this article dissected coming out's spatiotemporal ramifications to suggest that it is not necessarily a politically-motivated act, regardless of some of its very politically-oriented historical emergences. Additionally, the article has attempted to demonstrate how coming out refracts queerness into a heterogeneous mass of hyperdivisible bodies while at the same time subsuming difference, which, when taken with the former point, leads to the following claim: an analysis of the aesthetic components of coming out must always take into account its contextual unfolding as a coopted tool. That is to say, coming out 'in some ways' provides a limited, pessimistic view of queerness, found in dishonesty, self-rejection, and absence that only serves to reproduce neoliberal narratives of rehabilitated self-acceptance, privileging and ultimately reifying the 'individual' as the locus of personal responsibility in a world "operating by Thatcher-esque post-social logics" (Rodríguez Acosta, and Tennant). The commodification (and subsequent genrefication) of coming out narratives, recognized as profit-making products that are in demand for specific audiences, is another instance of infocapitalist subsumption: the taking of a radical act and rearticulating it in market-friendly terms to turn a quick profit. 'Coming out,' as a method that contributes to categorization processes and tagging as particular consumer categories, means coming out as a particular kind of 'buyer'; studies have been conducted and analyzed on the buying power of the LGBTQ+ community through companies like Bloomberg, revealing how the community is hailed as a market category in contemporary times (Green). This implicates coming out's secondary function as opening up new markets and new kinds of buyers.

21 Historian Blaine J. Branchik provides a history of the gay (white, male) market segment, and notes that in pre-1941 America, the conjuncture of urbanization and the Industrial Revolution led to gay migration to cities and other urban areas and, as Branchik notes, for the most part, any advertising to the gay segment was inadvertent. They were not yet legible as consumer categories; this changed in the period between 1941 and 1970. Gay-owned businesses, the territorialization of concentrated geographical zones where large swaths of the gay population converged and gathered and lived within, and publications needing advertisers all contributed to new economic activities oriented towards sexual difference (Branchik 3). The third period (from 1970 to the present) is a period of integration, where sellers are now devoted to "proactive mainstream targeting," which overlaps with "fear of boycotts," ramifying across industrial marketing ventures. This proactive targeting requires "studies completed on size and wealth of market," like the aforementioned buying power studies (3).

22 "Omnipresent surveillance technologies and performance assessment regimes" (Rodríguez Acosta, and Tennant) and algorithms accumulate data that construct profiles of online users built through behavioral tracking and data monitoring. With YouTube videos featuring coming out narratives marked and tagged as 'queer products' for search engine optimization purposes, searching for and watching a particular video can 'ping' the user as a particular kind of user. In this way, the act of virtual movement supplanting the speech act, one 'comes out' through their interaction with particular online queer objects and virtual sites of intimacy in a way. That said, imagine a 'questioning' teenager living in a rural area with limited access to queer resources seeking guidance and community by watching coming out narratives on YouTube when their parents aren't home; they will be tracked and targeted as queer, perhaps even before coming out themselves. Platform infocapitalism interpellates them as queer through virtual movements and economic activities, extending the identity of queerness into the realm of consumerism and queer markets (that to be queer means to be statistically likely to buy this or that product). The troubling implications are of course that infocapitalism can predict and thus 'know' before a yet-t0-come-out queer person may know about themselves. By contributing to networks of buyer-creation, coming out also supports the reign of heteronormativity by proliferating buyer-bodies, whose complicity in maintaining hegemonic market structures supports hierarches already in place. By conditioning queerness as a consumer category, in the way that most identity categories are subsumed into 'target markets' and 'economic populations,' its existence is tied specifically to economic activity, capturing queerness.

23 One of the ways in which celebrities come out, or at least exploit their queerness, is through "It Gets Better" videos, which are generally monologues by people announcing not only their non-heternormativity (coming out) but also providing hope to those currently in pain that life allegedly 'gets better' than it was when, say, one was being bullied in high school. Puar's interrogation of the efficacy and aesthetics of "It Gets Better" videos in *The Right to Maim* illustrates an alarming trend: a world of otherwise-queer resignation. The video rests on a temporal comparison and continuity: things will be better than they once were, the logic goes, which is itself a repetition of linear progress narratives. It is nothing but audacity to display such disaffection towards present suffering by undermining its urgency and instead foregrounding the alleged potentiality of, say, upward mobility, itself a recitation of the American Dream just translated into queer vernacular and a reification of capitalism, neoliberalism, and the present socioeconomic structures of living.

Considering the cataclysmic threshold that climate change puts us within, it would be perhaps too easy to argue about the ways in which it is not, in fact, getting better. The videos, frustratingly, ignore the ways that it may not even get better for people with intersecting marginal identities, ignoring and erasing processes of racialization, hypervisibility, gender expression, and so on. "It Gets Better" videos, to a more troubling extent, could arguably be said to be about recruiting queer representatives to become complicit in heteronormative power dynamics and structures by the very act of telling others that they too should resign themselves to the conditions of their world. Is it is about resignation, about being *just fine*. If 'coming out' is the process whereby one becomes one what says one is, then saying 'it gets better' is the process whereby one can become fully initiated into the realm of heteronormativity.

Conclusions: Queer Fabrications

24 Perhaps the most damning crime of coming out is in its attempt to capture desire, something no object can fully contain, and articulate it as a solidified identity. Coming out is about expressing something that simply cannot be fixed, that escapes whenever one speaks it. As such, its legitimacy as the primary marker of one's queer identity – whether they have come out or not – should be, and here this article says it is, in crisis. It is not the primary means of self-actualization for queer people, nor is it available to every queer person, nor does it ever end. Instead, this article proposes that we view coming out as a smaller ritual in a greater process, of a smaller connection in larger queer structures of living. Returning to NCOD (est. 1988) and the "Great March" (1987), the material-discursive and symbolic significance of the quilt cannot be understated. The AIDS Quilt was conceived in 1985 by activist Cleve Jones in San Francisco; following the assassination of Harvey Milk and George Moscone, an event was put together where placards displayed the names of those lost to AIDS and, visually, from afar, the placards together apparently looked like a patchwork quilt ("The AIDS Memorial"). Afterwards, a great quilt was stitched and used during the Second Annual March. The quilt itself displayed the names of those lost to AIDS, a visual entanglement of lives metonymically represented, and established hypermediate connections between previously disparate and disconnected lives.

25 This is what we may now call, and what I call, *queer fabrications*, because piecing a life together from disparate, disconnected parts involves a kind of stitching together of things that may not make sense together but are enmeshed regardless; formally, the quilt allows room for visual

asymmetry, for contradiction in image and representation, for potential to ever-expand. Queer fabrications names the creation of such a life-quilt, the aggregation of figural devices, and allows room to acknowledge coming out as a possible part of the quilt, as still sacred to some, but not universally stitched into everyone's quilt. It involves the very difficult task of piecing together a life whose desires in many ways are non-represented intimacies, whose desired relationship kinds have not many models to act as foundational knowledges. It involves processes of remembering lineages, of commemoration, of piecing together histories unknown into histories known, of weaving life and death and lost knowledges and experiences into a lived archive, messy it may be (Manalansan). It involves processes like disidentification, which is for José Esteban Muñoz a third approach to re-code ideology and strategically repurpose it for queer needs. If coming out is changing your interested in status on Facebook, then queer fabrications is building a dream-board for your life on Pinterest. Indeed, queer fabrications leaves room for difference, and offers a challenge to the idea that every queer person is somehow 'parody' or 'copy' of heterosexuality (Butler 313).

26 But it is not without intervention. There are those who say that the quilt ought to look a certain way. There are certain mediations that queer people must live through in order to survive, like through various private and public institutions and regimes of intimacy or how PrEP has now created a medical mediator for sexual relations (this article is not arguing that PrEP is bad, obviously, merely that queer relationships are in some ways intervened in by a state industry). Perhaps it wouldn't be a step too far to posit a metaphorical collaboration between queerness and the myth of Arachne, that to be queer is to be a quilter, who pieces together truths and narratives and bits and pieces about the pleasures and terrors of being and becoming queer. To be queer is to have a quilt destroyed, just like Arachne, by an authority enraged at the embodied defiance of majority cultural logics and jealous of talent and the kinds of epistemologies and perspectives that can come from being queer; indeed, jealous of the kinds of pleasures and joys that can only come from queer intimacies.

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