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Peer reviewed|Thesis/dissertation

University of California
Santa Cruz

QUEER (BODIES IN PUBLIC) SPACE

A thesis submitted in partial satisfaction
of the requirements for the degree of

MASTER OF FINE ARTS
in
DIGITAL ARTS & NEW MEDIA

by
Patrick Stephenson

June 2023

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Abstract

QUEER (BODIES IN PUBLIC) SPACE

By Patrick Stephenson

QUEER (BODIES IN PUBLIC) SPACE was an interactive transmedia installation which incorporated a multitude of technologies to create an immersive environment of light and sound, focused on a central object - a sex sling fabricated from materials purchased through official university funding. The sling hung by chains under red light in the center of the vaulted gallery space while a noisy Heavy Metal soundtrack played. At opposite corners of the room were flickering televisions that blared out audio accounts of revelatory group sexual experiences atop two roughly hand-crafted oversized podiums. Drilled into the podiums themselves were glory holes which revealed tableaux of queer sexuality and voyeurism, one of which featured a lofty camera feed of the room, in addition to a second camera within which captured and projected the hole-gazer's face onto the back wall of the gallery as they peered inside - a closed-circuit loop.

The room was otherwise dark, but if a visitor mounted the sling, their body, read by a third (thermal) camera above, was projected on the remaining three walls of the space, lighting the room and through computational processes clarifying the distorted electric guitar soundtrack of the space into a mellow clubby refrain by reducing certain audio channels in response to the brightness of the body heat map.

As in a play party setting, a single body carried by an act of vulnerable exhibitionism transformed the space and allowed others to "cruise" around and investigate the experience. Built upon the research of Gayle Rubin, John Rechy, and others, this thesis "QUEER (BODIES IN PUBLIC) SPACE" challenged viewers to interrogate their

conceptions of a queered body in a gallery setting while simultaneously gesturing towards the potentiality of sexually charged queer spaces at large - proposing a dialogue between the architecturally and aesthetically erotic experience of play parties, and the oftentimes puritanical leanings of a sterile research institution.

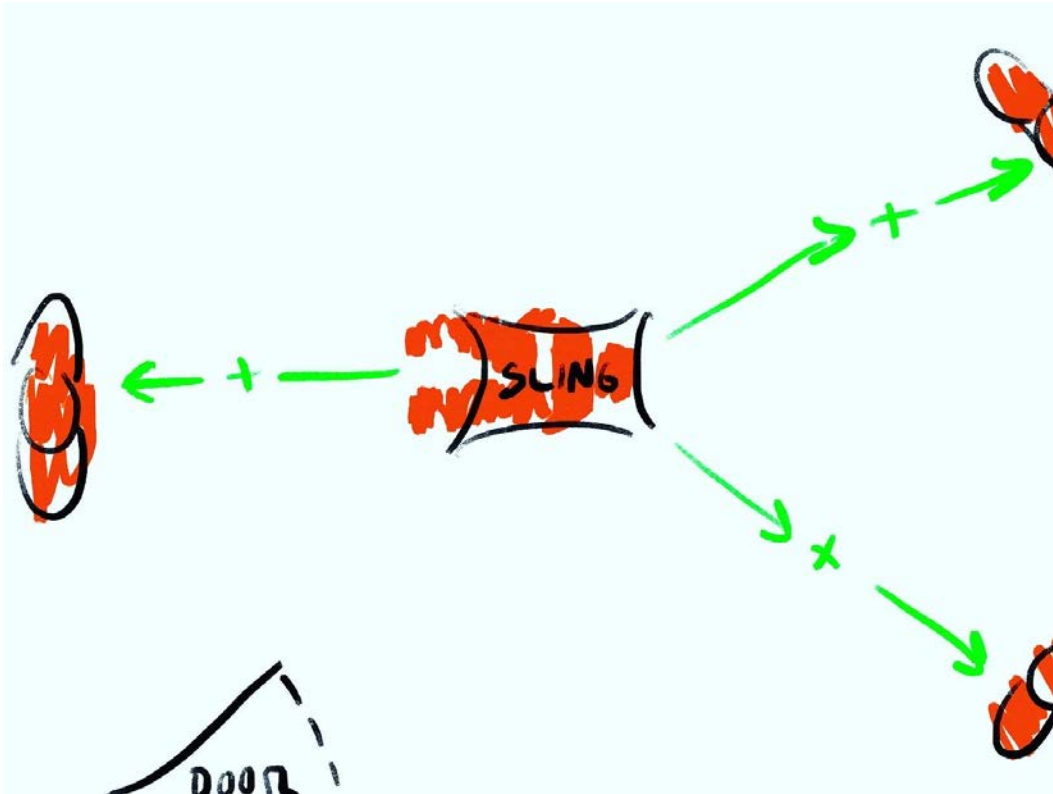


Figure 1: Preliminary sketch of gallery installation

Dedication and/or Acknowledgments

Thank you to my committee chair A.M. Darke for being a relentless advocate for my work, a source of inspiration, and for supporting the process all along the way. To Elliot Anderson for his invaluable critique of the installation in progress, for a wide range of artistic references, and for his unique insight into the scene. To Marcia Ochoa for coming into the process midway, providing what became foundational texts for deep research, and for her crucial support in structuring this written thesis. To Colleen Jennings for supporting my ever evolving wild ideas with all the tech and logistical assistance I needed. Additionally, I would like to acknowledge the efforts of the following members of my cohort, who provided much-needed collaborative assistance to get the installation up and running. Nicki Duvall for their early work in developing the sonic experience of the room and for being an all-around inspiration / psychic sibling in queer media installations. Rory Willats for his Isadora software wizardry and gentle pushes to do more (and more) with the technology available. Jordan Fickel for his musical chops, tech support, constant inspiration, hugs, and listening to my stressed-out pillow talk every night for months. To the media contributions of Byrd Bannick, Dorian Wood, Jojo Bear, Kamran Akhavan, Casey Wilson, Benny Serrato, Jason Villegas, and all the unnamed porn stars buried under psychedelic effects. To Terry Riley, Pauline Oliveros, Deli Girls, Patrick Cowley, and Suzanne Ciani for providing a soundtrack to write to. And lastly, to all the queers who couldn't make it and to those who live on rebelliously.

I. Introduction: A Dialectic of Rechy and Rubin

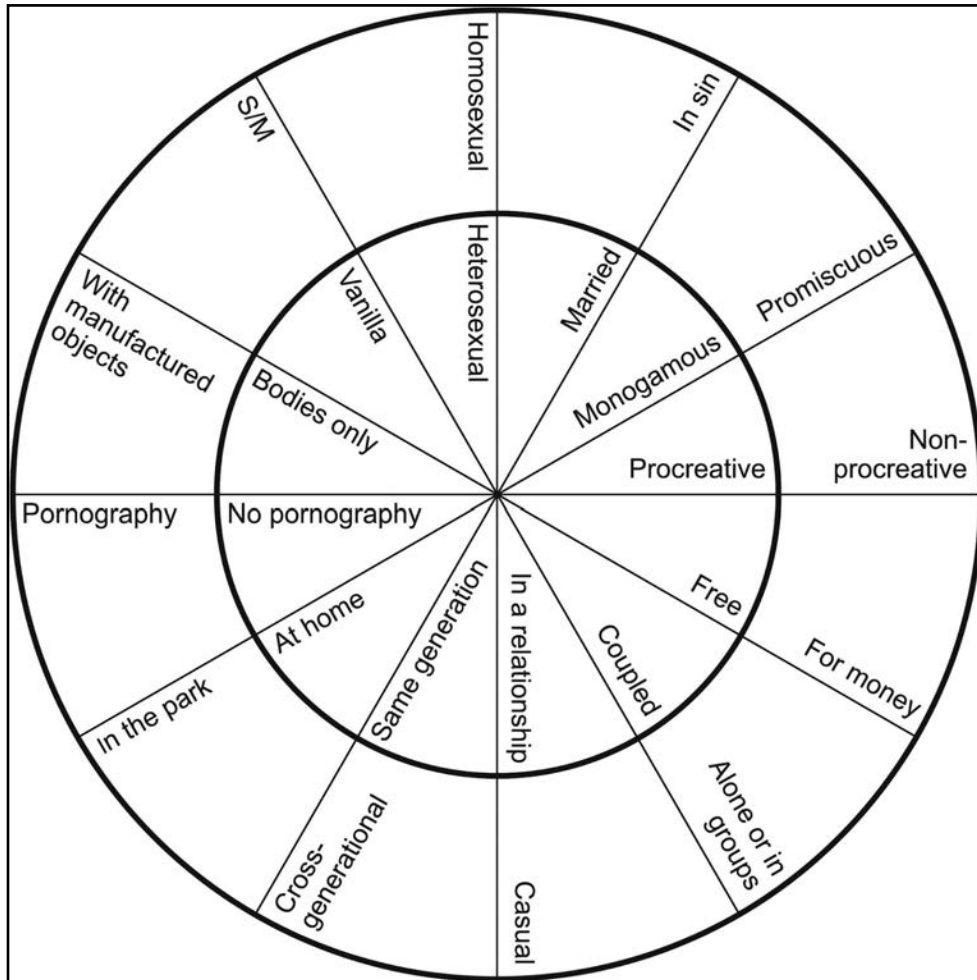


Figure 2: Gayle Rubin's "Charmed Circle" (2011)

Gayle Rubin, who positionally was an outsider in the scene of queer male play spaces, forged a path of speaking about sex and sexuality in her landmark essay "Thinking Sex: Notes for a Radical Theory of the Politics of Sexuality" (Rubin 2011, 137), becoming a foundational document for the frameworks of queer studies and sex positivity. She posited that "A radical theory of sex must identify, describe, explain, and denounce erotic injustice and sexual oppression. Such a theory needs refined conceptual tools which can

grasp the subject and hold it into view. It must build rich descriptions of sexuality as it exists in society and history. It requires a convincing critical language that can convey the barbarity of sexual persecution” (Rubin 2011, 145). In her essay, she developed the idea of the “charmed circle” - noting that societally approved acts existed within the protected center of a circle surrounded by deviations of the norm. She also established the idea of the “domino theory of sexual peril” which speaks about what happens if one crosses over into the outer circle of so-called deviance, stating that “The line appears to stand between sexual order and chaos. It expresses the fear that if anything is permitted to cross this erotic demilitarized zone, the barrier against scary sex will crumble and something unspeakable will skitter across” (Rubin 2011, 151).

Parallel to Rubin, John Rechy wrote from graphically personal experiences as a street hustler and participant in the cruising “sexhunt” which existed primarily within Rubin’s deviant outer circle. *The Sexual Outlaw* stands as an autoethnography which reads like a film noir novella, hypothesizing that individual sexual liberation led to collective liberation, ruminating about BDSM practices that “Here, the enactment of the fantasy is the reality, the object in the ritual, not a sublimation for ‘real’ violence.” (Rechy 1978, 384), continuing to say, “I believe in the necessity of exploring the real, not the rationalized, world of S & M. I believe that the energy produced by this hatred turned inward dissipates the revolutionary energy. Redirected, refueled, that inward anger would be converted into creative rage against the real enemies from without” (Rechy 1978, 405). Here Rechy advocates for action rather than repression, for a celebration of deviant passion - a radicalizing of the self to express and encourage a collective rage against the charmed inner circle of societal norms.

While both strategies of documentation have their merits, it is my goal here to forge a path through the trench between. The pulpy poetics of Rechy illustrate from hands-on experience the process of living through intimate queer male scenes. As a reader you are there, in the piles of sweaty bodies down shadowy corridors. Through Rechy's visceral tunnel vision though, you rarely get a wider view of the culture and context. To take a step out of that would be to kill the vibe he so thoroughly revels in. And so, while beautifully accounting his personal experience, the language can lose itself in passion. It is here that Rubin offers the wide view - an image of clarity describing in warmth how these palaces of pleasure functioned on a day-to-day level, and their position in cultural history.

While Rubin and Rechy both describe sexual acts explicitly, their strategies differ greatly. Rubin's approach centers these acts as crucial to understanding the structure they inhabited. This is perhaps best outlined in a direct comparison where Rubin describes "Fisting is an art that involves seducing one of the jumpiest and tightest muscles in the body." (Rubin 2011, 230). Whereas Rechy recounts, "Rapt, intent, others watch silently as if around an operating table. The wrist disappears. The naked man on the table lets out a howl of ecstatic pain." (Rechy 1978, 474). While Rubin aims to create a document that can be read legibly by perhaps a larger audience, threading her pros with a humorous quality, Rechy scribes a world so graphically explicit that he deliberately loses grip on place and time (which, in all fairness, is often true to the experience).

Structurally I have worked here to fuse the ethnographically informed works of Rubin with the autobiographical psycho-sexual poetics of Rechy in order to speak more fully about the aesthetic / architectural composition of these palaces and how these structures influence and reflect the intimate experiences of queer bodies within. In walking this line, I believe a more holistic view of these locales can be illustrated, by describing both the

interior and exterior culture of sex in public space. It is through these parallels that the following document depicts a series of locales along with their social, cultural, and personal significance to the project.

In the next section, I speak about my personal history in creating art for these spaces, from joining a drawing group to decorating sex parties as a career. From there, the document recounts my process (and struggle) in mounting a show inspired by these experiences. Overall, it aims to be a work that reorients conceptions of art, architecture, and design in queer spaces by considering its academic relevance within an educational institution wrestling with its own puritanical conventions. Bringing the messy human-centered culture of collective passion, from sex clubs like Blow Buddies, Eros, and more, to an environment that preferentially celebrates the neat, tidy structures and clear delineations between sex, art, and viewer.

II. A Brief History of Modern Queer Sex Palaces



Figure 3: A film still from *Cruising* (1980)

Though flawed, William Friedkins' film *Cruising* (1980) was my first introduction to a culture of sexual abandon. The movie illustrates a scene of late 70s New York - the meatpacking district - as a place where macho type men would gather underground for sex in a collective setting, away from the law's watchful eye, while simultaneously fetishizing their oppressors' aesthetics (Friedkin 00:38:18). Though the movie is mostly exploitative trash cinema (of the finest quality), and garnered much protest during production, its depictions of place and time have become an invaluable record of a lost generation.

The dimly lit bar with blaring rock and roll soundtrack is filled with greasy leather men - bodies sweating together in mutual ecstasy (Friedkin 00:26:56). The prophetic framing of

this film is of death circling around these spaces, frequently crosscutting in the edit between murder and intercourse (Friedkin 100:12:11). A year after its release, the first official case of AIDS would be named publicly (Altman, 3 Jul. 1981, A20), swapping the faceless killer of Friedkin's film with an unknowable virus which could be (carried by) anyone.

As a child of the 80s, I was born into an epidemic of death and fear. Sex with any man was a grave proposition, and sex in a group only multiplied those grim chances. From 1981, until fairly recently, the idea of a play party in the traditional sense has brought with it the specter of death and disease - the unknowable - an eldritch horror just beyond our understanding and capacity of science to cure. But as medicine has progressed, AIDS as of this year 2023 is no longer a death sentence, and sexual health is but a simple pill a day. With PrEP/Truvada*, a prescription which acts as prophylactic to expected "risky" behavior, the scene has once again emerged - barebacking has become the norm amongst men in the clubs, especially with a younger crowd that didn't live through the plague years. The queer counterculture ethos of the 1970s is rising from the fallout of this viral Chernobyl nearly half a century after the great meltdown of a hopeful generation.

And what an ethos those 1970s held for the gay (mostly cis-white) men of San Francisco! In 1978 Gayle Rubin, a radical lesbian anthropologist who was fully immersed in the leather/BDSM scene, wrote the essay "The Catacombs: A Temple of the Butthole", describing a scene where bodies gathered to touch, where people went to get laid, where eroticism was the dominant mode of social interaction. A place of liberation, a space where people could explore their sexuality free from the constraints of mainstream society. Throughout the text Rubin pushes towards a praxis of architectural survey, ruminating that "Once you made it to the Catacombs, you entered an environment that

was both intensely sexual and positively cozy.” (Rubin 2011, 227), and that “It looked and felt a lot like a leather bar, except that it was more intimate and everyone was nude. An extraordinary collection of male erotic art graced its walls” (Rubin 2011, 228).

Parallel to Rubin, John Rechy who came onto the scene through his novel *City Of Night* which depicted autobiographically his life as a street hustler, wrote in his followup work *The Sexual Outlaw* about what became an invaluable account of collective history by way of personal experience in the bathhouse scene of Chicago. Recounting his time at “The Baths” he wrote, “Towel wrapped around his middle, he passes the television room. Other toweled men, a few, the more subdued, sit pretending to be watching the screen. Jim walks on. His room—small, with a cot—will be one of many along dim corridors. Nude figures prowl. Bodies lie on cots in the cubicles, doors open. Naked men stand in doorways, playing with their cocks. Someone enters a cubicle. A door closes, another opens” (Rechy 1978, 408).

While Rechy speaks from participatory experience with a critical eye seeped in an almost film noir vocabulary, Rubin’s approach was warmly ethnographic, emphasizing the cultural significance of liberatory sexual practices. In her watershed essay “Thinking Sex: Notes for a Radical Theory of the Politics of Sexuality”, Rubin extrapolates on these themes by urging that as sex-positive communities continue to grow and expand, the architecture and design of these spaces will continue to be an important consideration. Bay Area institutions Steamworks, Eros, and the late Blow Buddies have all run with this tradition, to varying results.

Blow Buddies, a members-only club from whose name you can likely surmise function, was a multilevel maze of slots and canyons, peepholes and balconies housed in a warehouse off Harrison Street in San Francisco. When I started going in 2017, It felt

locked in time, from an era in which The Catacombs and The Baths bloomed. It was unfussy and functional, without much decor to speak of. As a white-walled gallery of a prestigious museum would, its black painted plywood channels efficiently served the subjects within - eager bodies searching for satisfaction through byzantine guts, cresting out of darkness for a blowjob before sliding into the depths and back to the world they dipped away from. It was evocative of how Rechy described The Baths Of Chicago, expressing that "Within dim lights, naked bodies toss and squirm in one groaning mass, heads, feet, hands, buttocks bob occasionally out of the sea of flesh" (Rechy 409).

And though Blow Buddies served this utility for many to come and go, there was a sense of community there, of accountability through membership which encouraged folks to return. Though it had the mystique of the random hook up, a system had been developed, perhaps modeled from Steve McEachern's Catacombs where "To be invited to the parties, you had to be on Steve's list. To get on Steve's list, you had to be recommended by someone he knew, and often had to be interviewed by him as well" (Rubin 2011, 227). With the revolution of networked computers, a shortcut to being known at a club of this type evolved into submission of your identity cards for a quick scan into the database, in addition to membership dues which forged a web of accountability. Steve's tradition of building a network of community has lived on in independent sex parties, but the larger institutions have opted for a modern system.

While I was visiting Blow Buddies after a night out on New Year's Eve years ago, the music was cut and the deep voice of a staff member boomed that the house lights would soon come up. For ten minutes the club went bright and with a tray of mini solo cups, the management passed around a swig of champagne to ring in the New Year. Those who had been sweating in the dark now talked and laughed, coming back to the ground for a

moment to collectively acknowledge a grander cultural tradition. Ten minutes later the lights went off again and everyone went back to business without skipping a beat.

Like many such spaces, Blow Buddies which at the time was the largest sex club in San Francisco shut down permanently when Covid tore through town. In closing, the staff released this official statement: "Sadly, Blow Buddies will not be reopening after the pandemic. We tried many ways to figure out a path to return and were unsuccessful. We appreciate the willingness of the Leather and LGBTQ Cultural District and our landlord to explore options with us. It was a good run, August 8, 1988 – March 15, 2020 We are sad to see this chapter close. We thank our many members for their support over all those years. The club was created in response to one virus and done in by another" (Blow Buddies 2020).



Figure 4: Blow Buddies logo, courtesy of <http://www.blowbuddies.com>

Club Eros, another institution of San Francisco, was my first interface to the queer community of the bay when moving back from New York. Primarily a sex club, its initial pull for me was a naked men's drawing group which had met there every Wednesday

night from 7-9pm for nearly 20 years. It was a place where men of any body type would gather and take turns posing on a sheet covered massage table while the rest of the folks who showed up transformed those bodies into sloppy ink sketches on paper. It was up the second floor and on a hot summer night, we all sweat through our seats, while in neighboring rooms the moans of pleasure from other patrons provided comedic punctuation to the pens on page and our inherent seriousness.



Figure 5: Overlay of all my sketches from an online drawing group (2020)

In the hands of queer artists, the male nude becomes a site of exploration, liberation, and self-expression, as well as a means of challenging the norms of a heteronormative society. Occasionally, a grease covered groaner from next door would wander into class lost, only to take the stage and pose between hookups. At the end we'd all take turns up

at the front presenting our work naked for critique, dressing in silence, then paying our one-dollar donation on the way out. Like Blow Buddies, Club Eros and its Wednesday night drawing class did not survive the pandemic like its competitor Steam Works across the bay.

As most of us in the sketch group were regulars, the sudden loss of this weekly tradition was felt, and together we formed an online version through zoom, piecing together our contacts to bring the class back. It was awkward at first for our naked bodies to be mediated by technology, but as the pandemic dragged on, eventually we all got comfortable. To quote myself in a post from June 1st, 2020, "And so we continue to meet virtually, to hang out as queer people and make art over the crackling static transmissions through ancient wires and old satellite arrays. What started as a sad frustrating substitution for our in-person drawing group has now reached outside and become something else it never was - existing nowhere and, possibly, everywhere - finding folks it never would have. Local drag shows are now fundraisers as Fluxus video art broadcast to the world. Strange times are mothers of invention. A queer data beam is cast through the clouds of smoke and ash, from Northern California to the south and back again. As the corona virus drags into what seems like an infinite reality, we have grown accustomed to these digital weekly gatherings of perverts with pens. Naked drawers anonymous, over electric wave cut clear across San Pablo Bay, through varying degrees of clarity, with some cosmic interference tonight over Marin County. Whatever has disrupted our queer space, we better get used to it, as it'll be for some time. For now, our electric fog hangs on like a multi-limbed ghost between us, abstracting our bodies with digital artifacts, but connecting us still, barely - soundtracked by the collective ambience of our environments: a Castro siren mixed in with a Kentucky thunderstorm." We did our best to save it, and in the process we transformed it into something new. Online drawing groups continue, but

Eros has relocated and our in-person meeting never came back. As a coda to this time of change, friend Dorian Wood (in addition to contributing their voice to my installation), also posed for groups like this, collaborating with the band Low on a music video for their song “Disappearing” (Low 2021). It was a rough patch in all our lives but it made clear the idea that queer space could (and should) be everywhere.



Figure 6: Still from Low’s “Disappearing” (2021) featuring Dorian Wood

Steamworks, which is one of the few sex club chains still in existence, continues to flourish and has weathered the pandemic from the strength of its holdings on the market. Though like many it still struggles to hold on, “In order to survive, bathhouses have to navigate not only the public health issues of our own era, but changing preferences in how gay and bisexual men hook up, as well as evolving expectations of service-industry workers.” (Maimann 2023) Sidestepping the recently loosened bathhouse bans of San Francisco, its Berkeley location is a sprawling maze of private rooms, hallways, group areas, showers, and saunas. The walls are painted black, accented only by tread plate

steel paneling and neon lights. On my birthday in 2018 a friend took me there and rented us a room. We cruised around and unknown to me, he whispered to a number of guys that he thought would catch my interest, telling them to swing by our room if the door was open. While two big bearish fellas my friend had invited teamed up on me, they struck up a conversation about their lives and shared histories while pounding away. They finished up together and left friends - bonding over the use of my body - a conduit for community building, as the space which housed us all had been, and as all bodies/spaces could be. A sex club functions as a space within a space, and within it are many more, an Escheresque landscape of nested architecture, both fabricated and organic, revealing its depths with further investigation..

III. Art In Queer Space

It was through the late Eros drawing group that I got my start as an artist in the Bay Area. I had shared my work in an online forum where a local bar owner, Charlie Stuart Evans reached out and asked if I would present my art at his establishment, The Lone Star Saloon which opened in San Francisco in 1989. "Following the closure of all gay San Francisco baths—the Lone Star functioned as a kind of Bear community center" (Suresha 2002, 98). As a neighborhood SOMA gay bar which purports to be the oldest still-running Bear bar in the world, that function continues, as a refuge for those seeking bodily acceptance in a culture which primarily encourages body fascism. Contrary to those ideals a large Tom of Finland woodcut greets all who enter. It depicts two impossibly fit white flirty leathermen in full uniform, dressed in the traditional military-adjacent garb, later epitomized by Marlon Brando's biker uniform in the motorcycle odyssey *The Wild One* (1953).

Tom Of Finland (born Touko Laaksonen in 1920s Finland) was forged in a repressive and homophobic era, beginning his career in advertising after serving in the Finnish army (who at the time were aligned with the Nazi movement) during World War II. Parallel to (and inspired by) his advertising career, he made erotic work in secret under the pen name Tom Of Finland. He reveled in the hypermasculinity of his subjects which in the 1950s were an inversion of the negative stereotypes present in most media depictions of gay men. His models were powerful and confident - existing in a utopian reality of sexual expression without shame. Coming from his experience in the war, his hypersexualized european square-jawed men were often dressed in Nazi-style uniforms, which over his career were de-signified with logos / patches excised while the shapes remained the same. When questioned about this parallel, Finland stated, "The whole Nazi philosophy,

the racism and all that, is hateful to me, but of course I drew them anyway—they had the sexiest uniforms!” (Rimanelli, Oct. 2015).



Figure 7: “Untitled” by Tom of Finland. Courtesy of the Tom of Finland Foundation.

Between the 60’s and 80’s Tom Of Finland’s work became embedded in the visual culture of queer male spaces, appearing first in the pages of Physique Magazine, then on posters, advertisements, and even signage for bars. In the early 90’s a man named Taurus Webster began to reproduce his style in the form of the woodcuts seen in most queer spaces today. All art was cosigned as Webster and Tom. He continued this tradition till 2014 (if he got official permission from the then fledgling Tom Of Finland Foundation is a point of contention), furnishing bars up and down California with Tom’s hot cops - an oppressive aesthetic which has now become the norm:



Figure 8: Photo of art at The Barracks gay bar. Palm Springs, CA. (2022)

Reflecting the aesthetics of this woodcut tradition in gay bars, I have come to fabricate more cuddly variations - of diverse big-bodied men affectionately intertwined, floating without the weight of status-imbued uniforms. My work proposes an alternative by uprooting what has become heteronormative and aggressively toxic archetypes of masculinity that are overt and latent to these kink and queer spaces. This work has countered the performance of sexual and physical dominance of a singular authoritative other with the intimacy and vulnerability of authentic affection and bonding with

multitudes - trading hierarchy and code for the casual, soft, and cozy. Centering candidly formed and lived in bodies, reminiscent of artists like Botero as colored by fauvism, over those molded by the monochromatic cop-worshipping cis-normative aesthetics of a physically fit singular beauty. I aimed to reflect the ethos of bear culture “With its emphasis on camaraderie instead of competition, with the rejection of ‘body fascism’ (as evidenced by the acceptance of heavier and older men), and by popularizing ‘cuddling’ and ‘the Bear hug,’ Bear culture provides ample evidence that this is not the type of masculinity that predominates in other gay cultures.” (Hennen 2008, 98)



Figure 9: Photo of art at Precinct DTLA gay bar. Los Angeles, CA. (2021)

My material practice has intentionally revolved around utilizing the tradition of woodcuts to depict a more attainable body, to replace the normative depictions of unhealthy

archetypes framing these venues. In the last decade of producing work I have made as BEARPAD strides to bridge the gap between queer sexual spaces and the fine art world - oftentimes having a single art object travel from party to gallery (where it was once documented in Art Forum Magazine), and back again - recontextualizing its meaning and function all along the route. As in the work of Finland that adorns these spaces, my art is intentionally too big to conceal, using multiple board lengths of 8'x4' plywood to compose a single colossal image. Even transportation becomes a public spectacle where the queer bodies portrayed exist in yet another context: through a liminal passage between origin and destination.



Figure 10: BEARPAD's "4way" (2022) installation at Lazy Bear Week in Guerneville, CA.



Figure 11: Tom of Finland's "Untitled" (1976) and BEARPAD's "Disco Bub" (2022)

Practically, this work has stepped off from Muñoz's conceptual futurity in *Cruising Utopia* by enacting physical manifestations of inclusivity in queer spaces that strive to trouble and reimagine the heteronormative order - to embrace a "queer feeling of hope in the face of hopeless heteronormative maps of the present where futurity is indeed the province of normative reproduction" (Muñoz 2009, 99). These spaces create the conditions for the emergence of queer worlds and alternative modes of existence. They are vital sites of possibility, pleasure, and resistance, where queer subjects can enact their desires, challenge norms, and forge connections with others who share their nonconforming identities. Through my expanding art practice I have built large-scale installations at events that cater to, and reach to represent an ever broadening subculture of nonconforming sex and body-positive queer folks, in ways realizing the depictions as illustrated in R. Yang and E. Davis' interactive work "We Dwell In Possibility". Ruminating about queer possibility space, Yang stated that "...there's also some possibility of

pleasure out there, and if we can just figure out how to share our garden then maybe we can all live in it.” (Yang 2021) While cultivating these gardens of possibility it has been my goal to actualize environments of a queer utopian dream-state, a continent of sexual freedom unmoored from our puritanical cultural leanings.

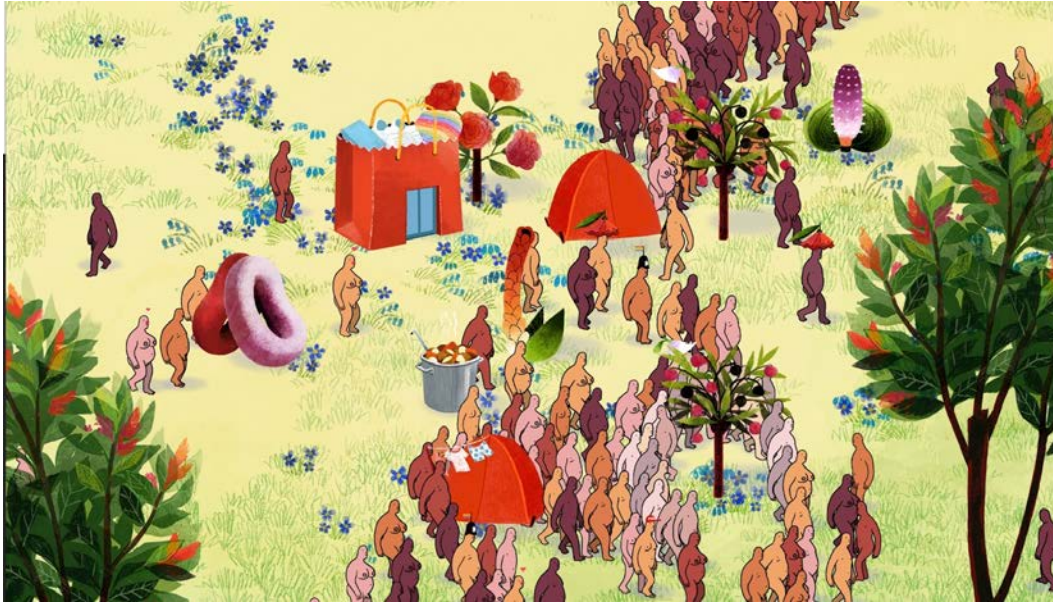


Figure 12: A game still of “We Dwell In The Possibility” (2021) by R. Yang and E. Davis

Many bathhouses and resorts that have approached these ideals have closed over the years, but among the stragglers is CCBC. Opening in 1983, Cathedral City Boys Club is a nude resort in Southern California that exists as a continent of unadulterated self-expression for queer male identified folks. Its sprawling campus is a mix of indoor and outdoor spaces. A central pool and hot tub is framed haphazardly by single-story private hotel rooms with porches looking inward. Between the hotel backs and the outer concrete block retaining wall are cruisy winding tree-lined paths, one of which contains a manufactured river (with a live turtle that has recently gone missing). On the path one can find a myriad of sexual activities day and night, with slings and two outbuildings that

house more traditional dungeon style layouts. In one such room, a gigantic mural signed by J. Peck 2003 depicts a psychedelic Giger-esque scene of desire, continuing the arched corrugated steel of the structure into the painting itself:



Figure 13: Photo of J. Peck's "Untitled" (2003) at CCBC. Cathedral City, CA.

Like many of Coachella Valley's gated communities, CCBC is an oasis of sexual freedom, a pocket universe of possibility that feels, like other such spaces, to be constantly in danger of losing it all - existing within loopholes of loopholes in order to allow what it does to occur. With waning interest from a community of sex-app users that no longer rely on designated geographically specific venues to hook up, the necessity for such spaces has fallen over the years. It's with this fragility in mind, that Weston Fischer and his late partner Brian Hill stepped in to revitalize the place, hosting events catering to bigger

bodied folks who felt out of place at the oftentimes cis-white young fit circuit parties of gay culture. Instead West and Brian proposed an alternative, aligned with the laid back all-inclusive ethos of the Bear movement. To quote the event website, "Western Xposure was created out of their love of social nudity and a fondness for their vacation resort, the CCBC. The CCBC's adult nature, clothing optional 24-hour facility, and sprawling grounds allowed them to create their concept of a 'free-flowing' event where the pool never closes, the fun never stops, and you can really make the most of your time. Do a lot, or do nothing but relax" (Fischer 2023).

In sex spaces such as those described previously, there tends to be no room for relaxation or conversation amongst it all, and with Western Xposure this idea is not only highlighted but vital. This dialectic between sexual and "other" spaces mirrors Tiffany Lethabo King's redefining of an ecotone - a concept most frequently ascribed to the border between natural ecosystems as, "A place to come to terms with a changing terrain that demands that you both walk and swim to shore—and whatever the shore may bring" (King 2021, 9). Ideally, a group sexual space exists as neutral territory where cultures and positionality are reformed as blooming palaces of collective pleasure. The ecotone is not a place of fixed identities or stable boundaries, but a zone of interaction and transformation where different forms of life and knowledge come into contact and are reshaped by that contact.

In the summer of 2022, West, who was previously trained as a landscape architect, reached out to me and asked if I would lend my artistry to the cause - to elaborate on his ethos of inclusivity by celebrating the bodies these places could contain. I agreed to the terms, continuing my academic research at CCBC and UCSC in parallel, fabricating colossal colorful bodies in various states of eroticism to decorate the grounds and attract

folks to various pleasure centers. It was during this process, while researching New Media works at UCSC, that I aimed to bridge the gap between research institution and sex club, to encourage an ecotonal space of communion by installing a visual experiment called The Video Sling with an infrared camera and digital projector on site.



Figure 14: BEARPAD's "Video Sling" (2022) installation at CCBC. Cathedral City, CA.

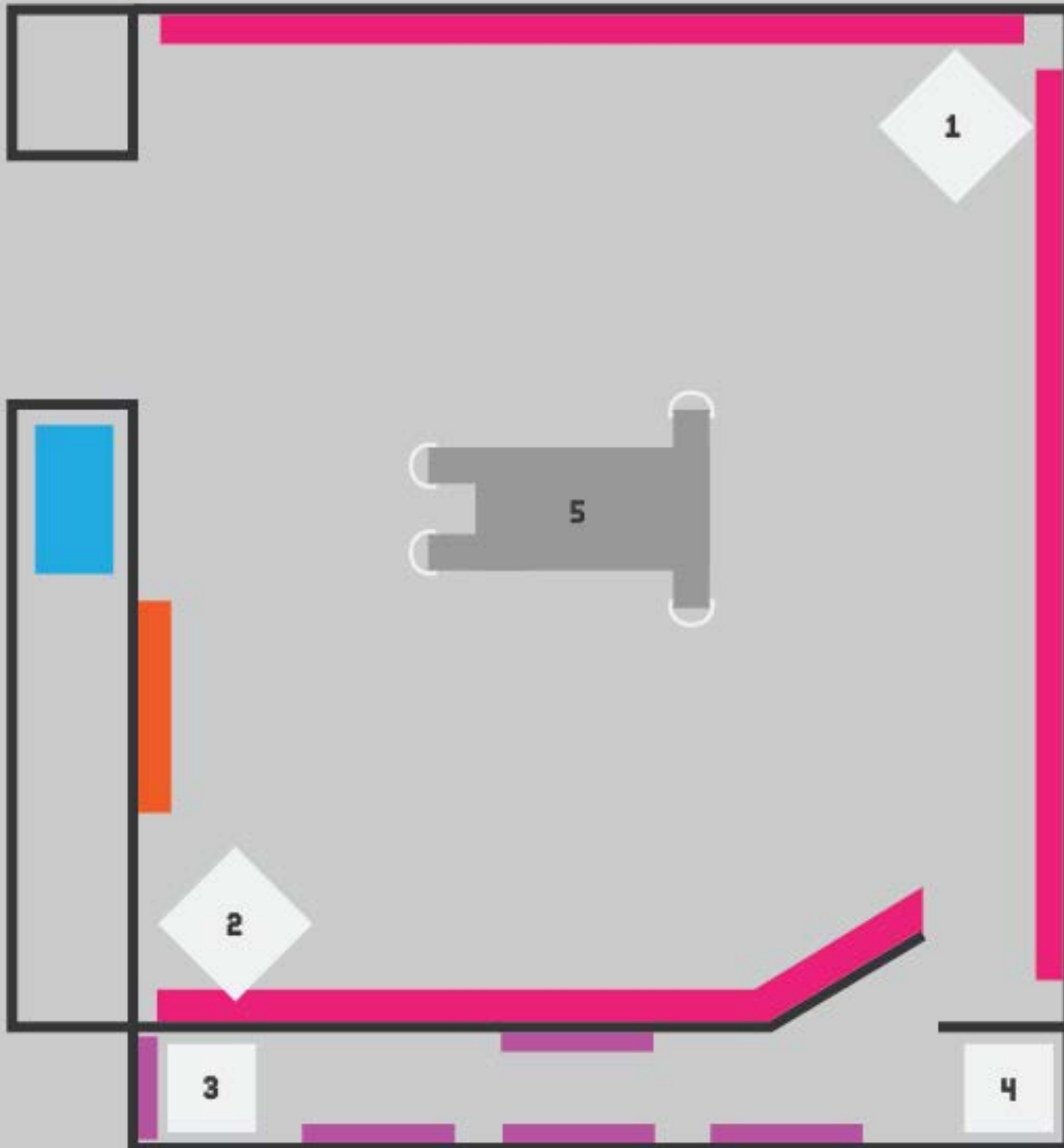
When I installed the Video Sling at CCBC, the participants perhaps unknowingly took part in what appeared externally as a Fluxus video installation - a closed circuit feed not unlike Nam June Paik's TV Buddha work, albeit centered on fucking. The attendees of the event now became its decoration - their bodies stretching to 12 feet wide - having agency to perform an aesthetically arousing experience for all those present. By hanging the large scale colorful art paired with an interactive media installation, I became aware as Yang

surmises that “...the design and upkeep of communal public spaces is precisely a political matter” (Yang 2021). The positioning of objects within these spaces simultaneously disrupts and encourages ordinary movement and behavior, queering the path while reaching toward possibility.



Figure 15: Storage of BEARPAD art installation at CCBC. Cathedral City, CA.

GALLERY LAYOUT



WALL PROJECTION

WALL PROJECTION

WALL ART

CONTROL CENTER

- 1: GLORY HOLE #1 PODIUM WITH DORIAN AUDIO, ACCESSIBLE "SLAT" DESIGN, AND INTERNAL SECURITY FEED INPUT PLUS CAMERA OUTPUT TO **WALL PROJECTION**
- 2: GLORY HOLE #2 PODIUM WITH JOJO BEAR AUDIO, CLASSIC CIRCULAR HOLE, AND FLOATING BODY WITH PSYCHEDELIC BEAR PORN INSIDE
- 3: TWO TELEVISIONS STACKED ON TOP OF EACH OTHER. TOP TV WITH BYRDS STORY, AND BOTTOM DISPLAYING ROTATING LIDAR SCAN OF CCBC SEX DUNGEON
- 4: PIXELATED BEAR PORN ON TV SHOT BY ARTIST OF FRIENDS/PORN STARS JASON AND BENNY
- 5: MOUNTABLE SEX SLING WHICH SENDS IMAGES TO THREE **WALL PROJECTIONS**

Figure 16: Gallery layout diagram for QUEER (BODIES IN PUBLIC) SPACE (2023)

IV. Installing a Sex Sling in an Academic Institution



Figure 17: Photo of installation in progress group critique (2023). Santa Cruz, CA.

Alongside my external research experimenting with the aesthetic possibilities of sexualized spaces, I honed in on my thesis project at UCSC which aimed to provide a venue to encourage exploration of queer sexuality while challenging the puritanical leanings of educational institutions at large. In practice this meant installing the interactive aesthetic experience of a sex club in the Light Lab of The Digital Arts Research Center (DARC), centered around a publicly mountable sex sling. Jennifer Tyburczy, assistant professor of feminist studies at the University of California, Santa Barbara, asserted right on page one in her book *Sex Museums: The Politics and Performance of Display*, “I view

sex as a diverse, dynamic, interactive, and interdependent social relation cultivated by the ways in which bodies, spaces, and objects interrelate; it is not, therefore, solely a relationship between human bodies but also a relation between bodies and objects and the ways in which bodies are invited, coerced, and positioned around and toward particular kinds of objects. Museums are theatrical spaces of everyday drama, veritable contact zones between bodies and objects” (Tyburczy 2016, 1). Later on, she details the importance of queer curatorship, proposing that “Above all, queer curatorship describes a diagnostic and procedural tool for studying how performative displays affect the ways in which objects and bodies are made to relate to one another in space while also coping with the danger of experimenting with alternative configurations.”(Tyburcsy 199)

My intention through this research and practice was to develop a cultural exchange between these spaces, by transposing the sexualized aesthetics of clubs and parties to a sterile gallery at the institute, queering heteronormative relationships between object and viewer while simultaneously bringing New Media concepts back to the locales which inspired them. To challenge what public queer sexuality could be within an academic framework, I placed a historically queer sex sling as the center point of interaction. As my proposal clearly defined “cruising” as a poetic gaze which Jack Parlett terms an “enquiry into the optical and visual dimensions of desire.” (Parlett 2022, 212), “cruising” in this case was to be a means of interacting with the space. This very conception was met with reactionary questioning of its legality by a former committee member followed by a prolonged restructuring of my thesis committee. Parallel to this, my attempted acquisition of a sex sling as an officially purchased and cataloged item of utilitarian merit was met with concern that it might not be an appropriate use of research funding.

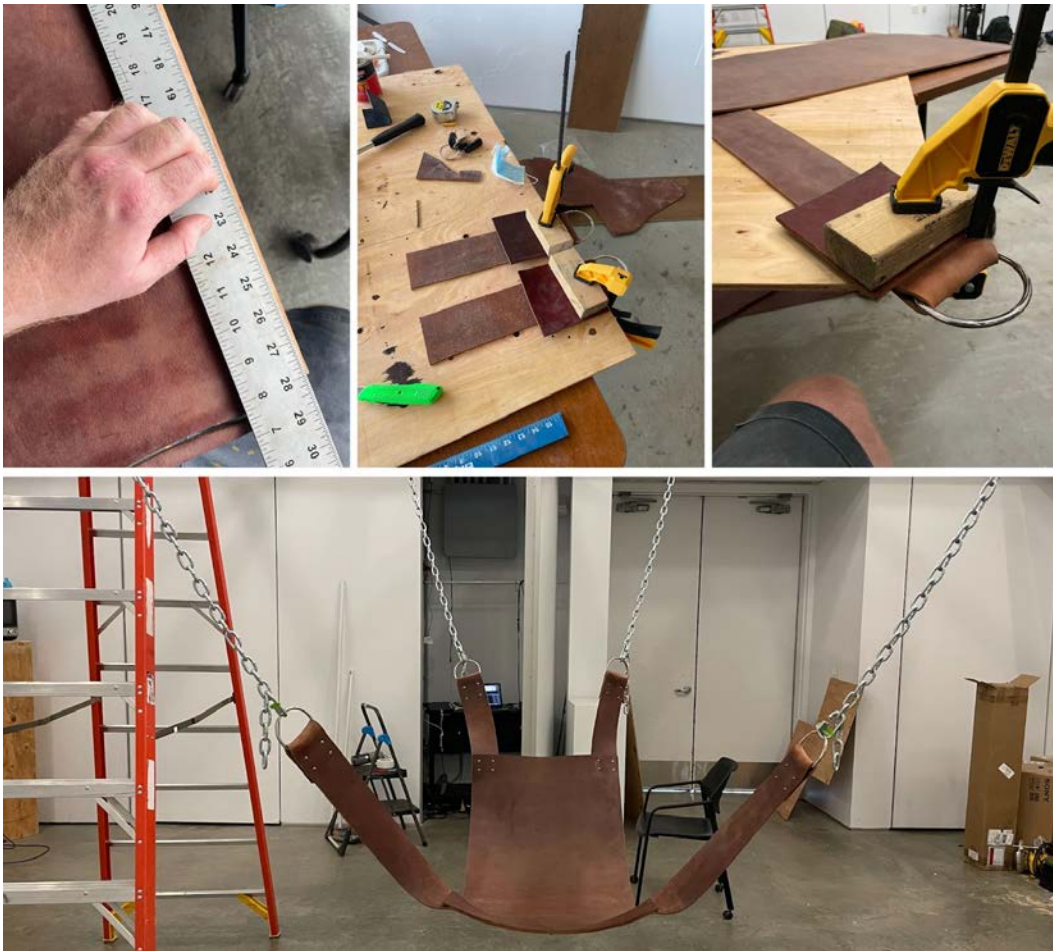


Figure 18: Photographic documentation of sling fabrication (2023). Santa Cruz, CA.

In the shadow of this pushback I forged ahead, reorienting my desire of challenging the institute to one of working within its affordances. If I couldn't purchase a sling, then I'd make one, and UCSC could foot the material bill of leather, chain, and hardware to create this forbidden object from its acceptable parts. With the opportunity now to build a sling from scratch I investigated what could be improved upon. A sling as designed is an object that is uncomfortable to use for most bigger bodied folks, with a maximum weight capacity of two-hundred-fifty pounds at best, and dimensions which allow for only folks under six feet tall to rest comfortably. With those amendments in mind and materials

arrived, I fabricated the sling by hand, cutting the leather, gluing, and riveting the pattern together on site under the remote advice of occasional leather fabrication employer Scott Tal.

With the sling built and hung in the gallery by chains, I now had a central object to frame the work around. Like a sex party, I wanted the human body to be the principle currency of experiencing the space - for one person taking a leap of vulnerability, allowing others to enjoy the scene, while having a transformative personal experience all their own.

When installing the Video Sling at CCBC with an infrared “night vision” camera I realized that the device, like many imaging technologies, did not treat all skin tones the same - leaving many in the shadows, unregistered as lighter skin folks would be. In order to truly be an accessible interface to all, I had the department order a thermal camera which unified all bodies into heat maps that could be read without consideration of melanin density. I placed the thermal camera above the leather sling to capture the heat map of any person who lay in it and projected that image onto three walls, using the body itself as lighting for the space. A hotter body meant a brighter image and a more legible room.

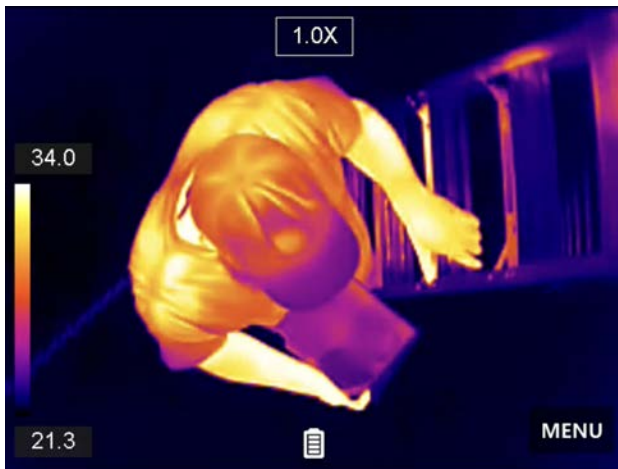


Figure 19: Screenshot of thermal image calibration (2023). Santa Cruz, CA.

But there was another element of play spaces that I wanted to transpose: the sonic nature of these locales. I recorded a series of prompted stories with collaborators Dorian Wood, Byrd Bannick, and Jojo Bear, recounting positive group sexual experiences they had as if

whispered in a friend's ear at a party. Dorian spoke about being penetrated by multiple men in the basement of a sex club years ago, feeling like “the nucleus” of a powerful energy exchange. Jojo Bear described a purely verbal group sex dynamic without touch. Lastly, Byrd recounted at length the minutiae of developing and maintaining sex spaces while being a trans man in primarily cis queer parties. I wanted to fill the room with stories - to make concrete these ideas of sexuality through specific juicy details and to give the sense that there was a collective experience occurring no matter how many bodies were in attendance. And though these voices resonated nicely, there was still a missing element: music.

As Gayle Rubin wrote, “Music was an essential ingredient of the Catacombs experience. An excellent sound system delivered music to every corner of the place. Steve was a brilliant DJ. He recorded a series of music tapes that he used to enhance, intensify, and manipulate the party mood. By changing the soundtrack, Steve could charge up the party, change its direction, or bring it down” (Rubin 2011, 231). Likewise while still considering accessibility, I aimed to have the sling be an activation point for not just sight but sound, and let participants have the agency to change not just the visuals of the space but the soundtrack too, using only their body heat.

Initially my thought process led me to the idea that when mounting the sling the music would increase in energy and complexity, implying that the act of participation led to more “action” in the room. As I saw folks interacting with the object and received some critical feedback from the thesis committee, I realized that the primary response to being in the sling was of personal revelation and clarity in understanding the dynamics of the room. So instead I inverted the musical concept, having a blaring dissonant heavy metal electric guitar be the baseline of the room, and a more chill Patrick Cowley-esque mellow jam

revealed through interaction - the noisy rock and roll fading away. Through the software suite Isadora, and with an immense amount of help from peer Rory Willats, I developed a computational system which transformed the thermal energy into sound control.

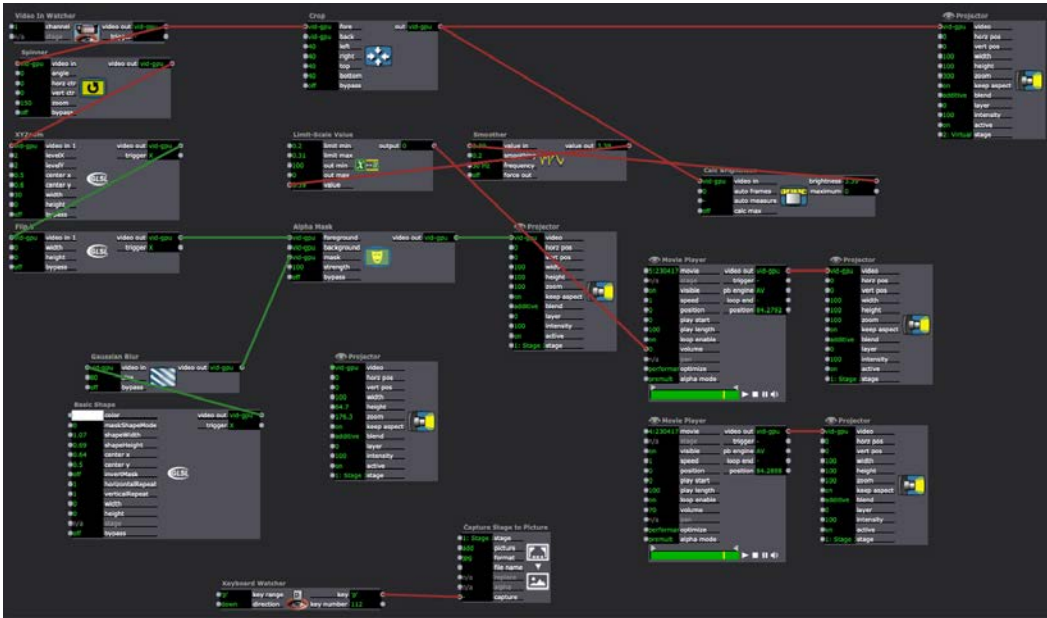


Figure 20: Screenshot of Isadora visual coding environment patch “Sling v5” (2023)

By interpreting heat as brightness, Rory and I tied a volume scale of 100%-0% with a brightness range of 0.2 - 0.31, meaning that a colder reading (blue at 0.2 or less) would have guitar/noise at 100% whereas a hotter reading of a body (oranges and yellows at 0.31) would duck the noisy soundtrack to zero, revealing a more mellow meditative score that had been resting beneath it all along. It was in the space between these two extremes that things got interesting, as the leather of the sling retained the body heat of any who lay in it for some 10 minutes after they had left. As the residual heat map (a quasi Turin Shroud) slowly faded away, the soundtrack became noisier, as the room fell back into ominous darkness.

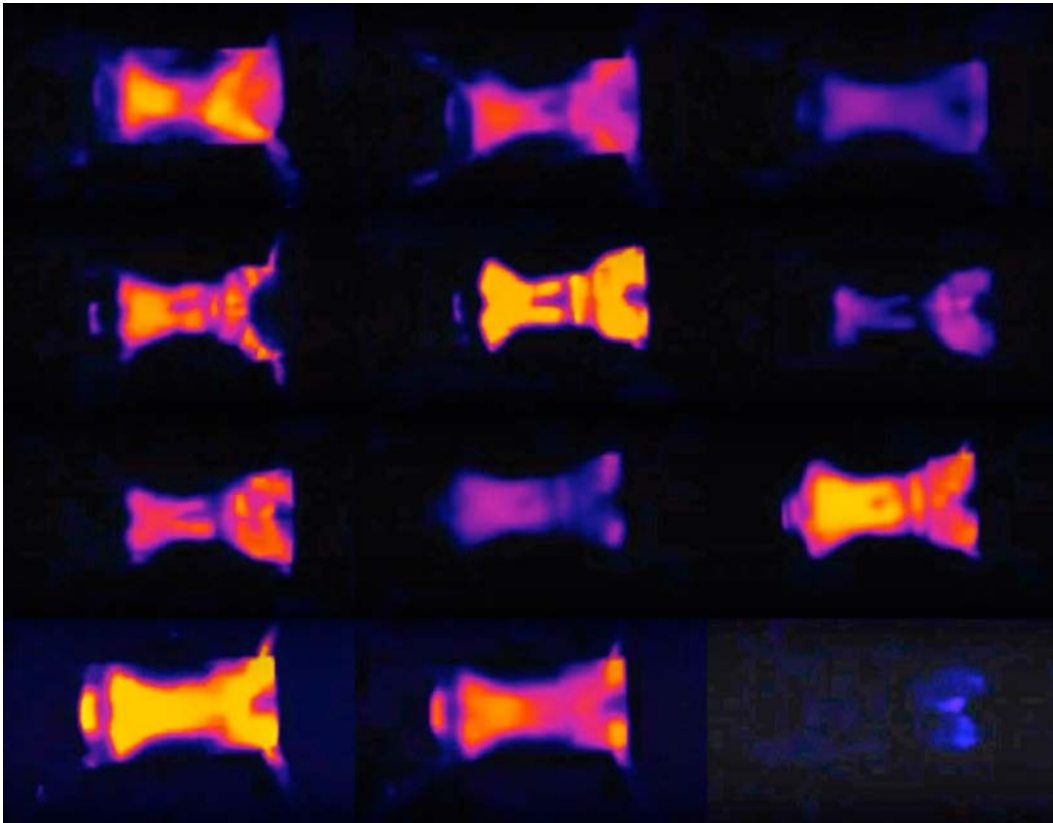


Figure 21: Photographic collage of various sling heat maps captured from tests (2023)

As the central viewer/volunteer exited the sling, their heat map remained in the leather - a visual record of their body for the next person to lay down upon and keep warm. If no one mounted the sling, the projections slowly faded away as the image transformed from fiery oranges and yellows to dim blues and purples, then darkness. The relaxed audio of the room returned to a chaotic din, masking the voices once more into an indecipherable murmur. The sling then waited for another patron to liven up the space with a gesture of vulnerability and allow others to “cruise” about.

The audio of the spoken words felt ghostly without a form to put them in, yet I wanted to maintain some visual anonymity of those who told these stories. So, I devised (through an accidental process I discovered some years ago) a way to push audio through the

video channel of old CRTs. Recalling again the new media works of Nam Jun Paik, I brought in a collection of televisions that approximately matched the ages of those speaking their stories. I then routed the audio signal of recorded data through the video coax port (with a myriad of conversion systems you can view in the following diagrams). I then built a human height podium to place the televisions atop, and it was only at that point the TVs felt embodied - having the presence of face and head to lean into and hear the words.



Figure 22: Photo of myself repairing one of the gallery CRT's (2023). Santa Cruz, CA.

Another goal of this project was to encourage people to “queer” their bodies in space. Mounting a sling achieved this on one front, but there were a few other aspects of clubs which I wished to represent. Voyeurism is a huge part of the physical dynamic of these spaces - and of cruising in general. Not only to look at but be looked back upon is a powerful exchange unique to these realms. As Rechy writes of the cruising homosexual, “Parks, alleys, subway tunnels, garages, streets—these are the battlefields. To the sexhunt he brings a sense of choreography, ritual, and mystery—sex-cruising with an

electrified instinct that sends and receives messages of orgy at any moment, any place”
(Rechy 1978, 33).



Figure 23: Photograph of a body heat map projected over CRT gloryhole at the finished installation (2023). Santa Cruz, CA.

To queer yet another aspect of the gallery I drilled glory holes into the podiums that the storyteller TVs sat atop, and placed inside them tableaux of sexuality. In one, a transparent filament 3D-printed heavysset body sculpted in the software Blender floated weightlessly above an upturned CRT playing a mix of psychedelic bear porn, coloring the form with heat and light in an otherwise dark space within. A quick glance produced only a superficial understanding of what was on view, but a sustained investigative gaze revealed the lighting's source. The body here also referred to the weightlessness of those who enter a sling, and the sexual experiences that are often cast upon them.

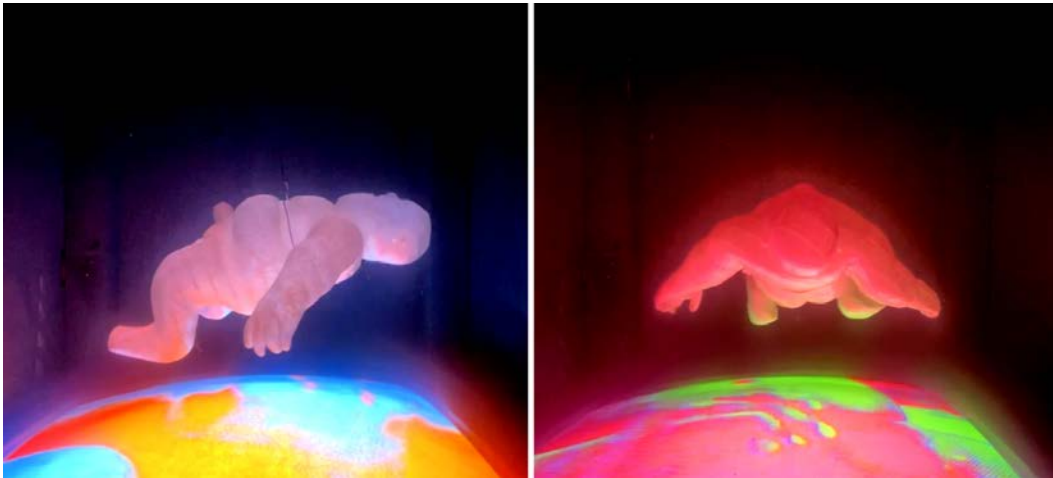


Figure 24: Photographs of first glory hole interior in finished installation showing 3D printed rotating model and psychedelic bear porn mix below (2023) Santa Cruz, CA.

In the second gloryhole, cut as the more accessible vertical “slat” style (which allowed for folks of different heights to use comfortably), displayed a live feed of the room while also recording whoever looked in, projecting their image large on the wall as if they were a giant peering into the room itself at scale. The person looking into this video hole was not able to see themselves, but they could see everyone else from the aerial camera view. To achieve this, I again placed an upturned CRT inside but this time fed in a live camera line from the room, so all who peered within could survey the larger space at their leisure. Three mirrors cut into organic shapes were mounted at angles to the interior wall of the box, reflecting light back at the viewer’s face, and above that is yet another floating model - a sexual threesome of big bodied men suspended by wire slowly rotating. Just at the edge of the interior television, a second camera captured the hole-gazer’s face peering through the slat, feeding it to a projector externally which cast this image onto the wall of the gallery at super human scale, placing their voyeurism in public view. In this case, as in most cruisy sexual spaces, you could rarely be a voyeur without simultaneously being surveilled.

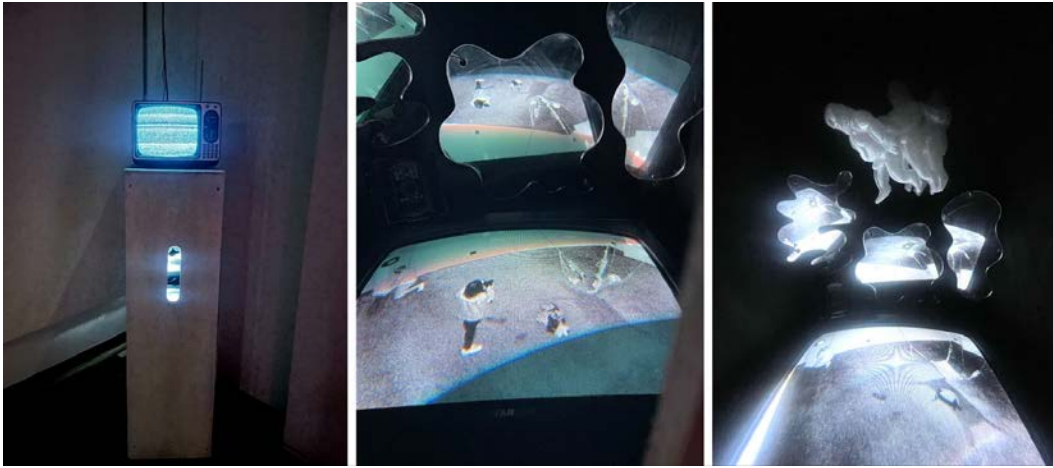


Figure 25: Photos of inside and outside second glory hole, showing podium, CRTs, rotating 3D printed threesome model, laser cut mirrors (2023) Santa Cruz, CA.



Figure 26: Photo of finished gallery installation with body heat map, sex sling in use, first glory hole exterior, and projected glory hole 2 slat (2023) Santa Cruz, CA.

The next architectural aspect of the gallery I wanted to transpose from sex clubs was that of the ubiquitous cramped hallways which are a main feature of exploration in these

venues. They are a design which funnels folks through a crucible of possible encounters while negotiating space with others passing through. The storage hall mostly unused in The Light Lab provided a dimensionally parallel experience to this reference point. At the end of the hall, accessed by a door half open, I placed the third and final interview with Byrd, who at length (and most graphically out of anyone) spoke about his trans-specific experience of negotiating the logistics of these spaces. Stacked below his talking TV was another CRT which displayed a slowly rotating LiDar scan of an actual play space at the CCBC resort which might be getting remodeled in years to come, as many similarly dog-eared queer spaces have.

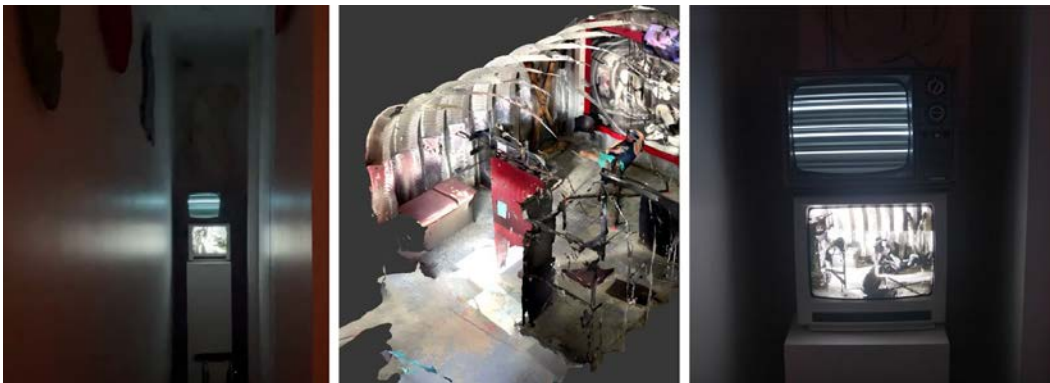


Figure 27: Photographs of final CRT installation down the hallway, and blowup of LiDar scan of CCBC dungeon room (2023) Santa Cruz, CA.

I lined the hallway with the same cozy art I've furnished various parties with to imbue the passage with another crucial aspect of any party space, a relaxed contemplative alternative to the main action of the larger room. In this hallway, the soundtrack was naturally muffled and Byrd Bannick's account was audible, framed by the cozy bodies that reflected the physicality of him and others in the community. His top TV contained the most graphic and longform audio account in the entire space, of Byrd describing in all its juicy details the scene of a sex party, and the process of cleaning up after. Below Byrd,

the second TV displayed a slowly rotating 3D scan of a sex club dungeon at CCBC. This functioned as a fragile physical record of the spaces which inspired this entire gallery, and it is the clearest view into this realm the entire show depicts. On the way out of the hall is a final TV which displays what on close inspection entering the space appeared as abstract pixelation but from a distance is clearly porn. A film I shot of friends (and professional porn stars) Benny and Jason thrusting their big bodies into each other.



Figure 28: More views of the gallery hallway including the pixelated porn TV at the entrance/exit (2023) Santa Cruz, CA.

The final part of the presentation was considering the entrance of the space, which felt crucial to preparing and informing folks of what they might encounter. From the outside of the gallery, door open, I tuned the post-metal dirge to be audible enough to strike curiosity, beckoning passers by to investigate the scene within, and functioning as the first step in a series of architecturally derived levels of consent. On the left closed door I pasted the title, printed in big block letters QUEER (BODIES IN PUBLIC) SPACE. On the right open door, I placed a set of two informative sheets which read:

GALLERY CONTAINS:

DARKNESS, LOUD SOUNDS, AND FLASHING LIGHTS

AUDIO ACCOUNTS OF EXPLICIT SEXUALITY

EFFECTS PROCESSED QUEER MALE PORNOGRAPHY

LIVE, NON-RECORDED "CLOSED CIRCUIT" VIDEO IMAGING

AN INTERACTIVE SEX SLING FABRICATED ON SITE FROM MATERIALS

PAID FOR WITH OFFICIAL UCSC RESEARCH FUNDING

GALLERY GUIDELINES:

THE FURTHER YOU INVESTIGATE THIS SPACE, THE MORE EXPLICIT YOUR

EXPERIENCE MIGHT BECOME

ENTER SLOWLY THROUGH THE BLACK PLASTIC CURTAINS

DO NOT TOUCH THE TELEVISIONS

DO NOT APPROACH/ENGAGE WITH ANYONE WITHOUT ENTHUSIASTIC CONSENT

IF YOU GET IN THE SLING, SIT SLOWLY, AND HAVE A FRIEND READY TO HELP

YOU OUT OF IT

In total, the technological spread of the installation included seven CRT televisions, four ceiling-mounted digital projectors, three audio playback devices, three raspberry pi computers, two security "night vision" cameras, one infrared camera, an iPad, a MacBook Air, five RF modulators, 3 HDMI to component converters, and about 500 feet of cables (audio, video, and power). Additionally, the materials comprised a spool of transparent filament, 5 ft of fishing line, three 4'x8'x.25" plywood sheets, eight 2"x2"x8' pine boards, one-hundred 2" wood screws, two rotisserie motors, 3 oz of contact cement, forty-four .5" Chicago style rivets, 80 ft of chain, ten heavy-duty locking carabiners, and a half-hide of 15 oz brown cow leather.

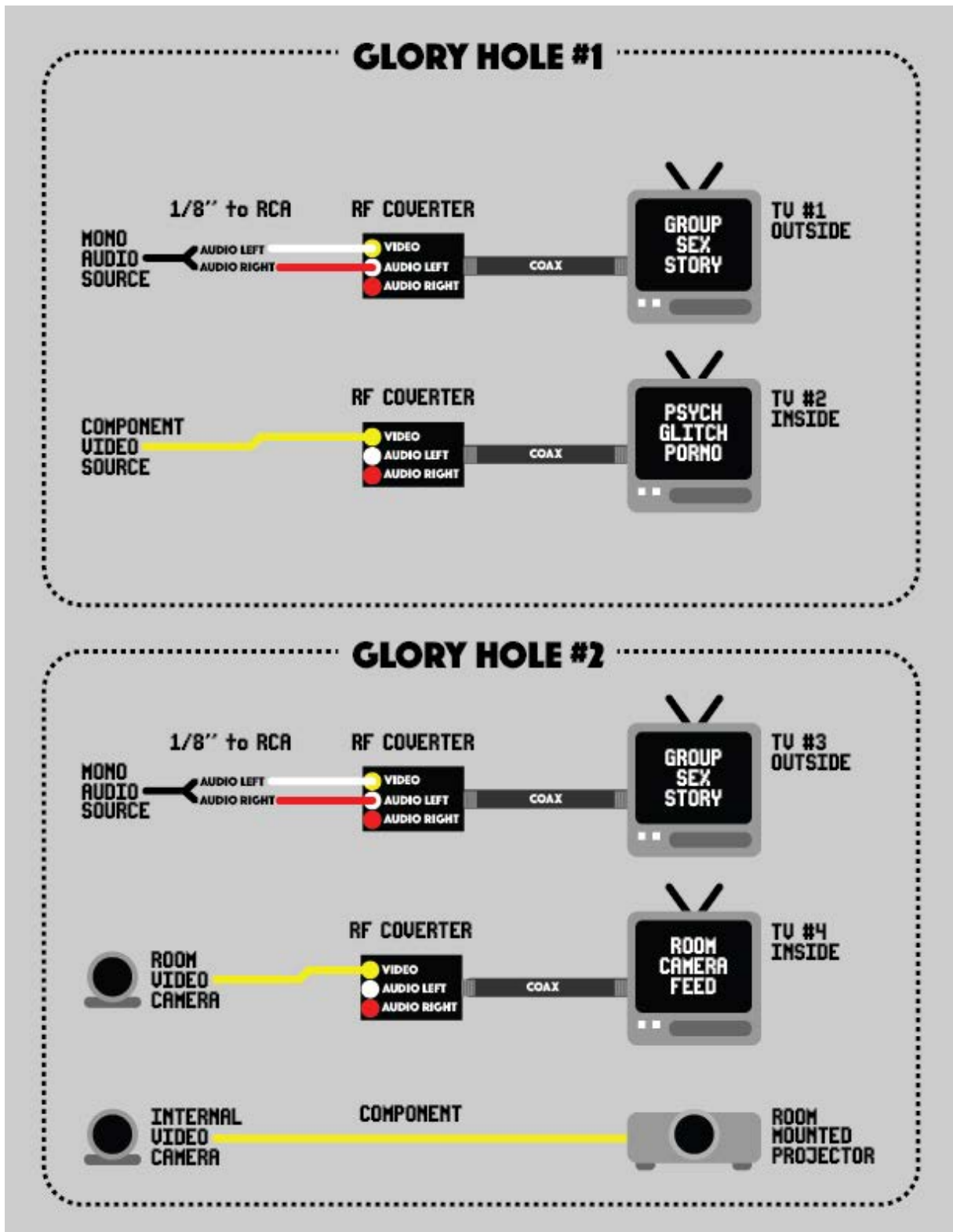


Figure 29: Wiring diagrams for glory holes 1 & 2 (2023)

V. Conclusion



Figure 30: Photo of final installation showing sex sling, heat map, first glory hole, and hallway entrance (2023) Santa Cruz, CA.

For my thesis presentation, I aimed to re-contextualize the queer play party scene in a new setting, proposing a dialectic exchange between public sex venues and the sterility of academic institutions. As a viewer entered the Light Lab through a few layers of heavy black plastic sheets, the music swelled to fill the dark air. I thought about The Oakland Museum's "Mothership: Voyage Into Afrofuturism" (2022) installation specifically here, and the idea of an entrance that transports you in - an intimate passage, holding your hand and guiding you into the scene. At Mothership, it was Octavia Butler's psychedelic sci-fi rumination with accompanying visuals in a long dark hall. Here, I had plastic, some wall text, and death metal music.

Upon entering my installation, a dim red light focused the attention on a sex sling in the center of the room - leather with silver hardware. Some folks may have never gotten past the front door, or to view the sling in the gallery, and it was with the intentionality of an architecturally, artistically, and sonically derived system of consent that I let people make those choices for themselves. If you were to cross that threshold into a noisy dark room, one would have found an experience of celebration, and experimental play. The sling itself was treated differently by almost everyone. Some approached it clearly never having sat on one before, while others reveled in its familiarity and the modifications I had made, flipping their ankles up into the stirrups immediately. One person even took a nap there for about an hour.



Figure 31: Photo of glory hole projection, and plastic entrance (2023). Santa Cruz, CA.

Stretched to thirty feet across, the images of the body to the right and left became abstracted into pulsing colorful shapes reflecting the temperature of the participants. Straight ahead, in a framing most visible to the participant, the body floated vertically on

the wall, encouraging a self-reflexive moment of self awareness, to consider that as Alix Sanchez wrote in “Land Acknowledgment For My Body”, “...their embodiment is not a privilege but a sovereign right” (Sanchez 2021, 222). In seeing themselves at once abstracted and exposed, many folks told me they felt empowered to control the lighting of the gallery with the pulsing colors of their own thermal energy. This mirrored the role of a person in a sling at a play party making a concession of limited movement in order to facilitate the pleasure of those around them, all while experiencing a unique pleasure compared to those freely walking around the room.



Figure 32: Photo of first glory hole external view (2023). Santa Cruz, CA

As viewers not locked into the central sling, participants were encouraged to “cruise” the scene, their gaze “...mediated by the technology that governs what is available to explore.” (Pawlett 22). Free exploration of the gallery, again gating erotic exposure with layers of architecturally derived consent, revealed tableaux of desire and voyeurism. The installation succeeded in allowing folks to go as far in as they desired, and conversely see little or nothing at all. In retrospect I might have pushed further, creating scenes and

situations that were more explicit. Through the drama of my thesis development I lost a bit along the way. I had initially wanted to be more deliberate in generating visuals that showed sex in all its raw power, but I pulled back and leaned on abstraction to imply sex without actually depicting it. I might have recorded video of such acts in the thermal camera set up, or even in the gallery sling itself, tucking it away down a hall for those curious to find.

In the world of art, it's been a challenge to find direct parallels to this exhibition, specifically in the depiction of mounting a publically interactive work in an erotic space. In 1993, Carsten Holler installed "PEA Love Room" at The New Museum, encouraging folks to inject themselves with the sex drug PEA and fucking in a sling installed nearby though no one did. In *Sex Museums*, Tyburczy posits that "...the history of the normalizing force of the museum always paralleled another history - a queer history - one in which the display of unruly objects of nonnormative sex rebels against museum norms, as do risk-taking curators." (Tyburczy 2016, 3), urging that a sex museum "...can also materialize a spatial and discursive approach to display that utopically imagines new forms of sexual sociality and collectivity between bodies, things, and nations in public institutional display spaces, such as museums" (Tyburczy 2016, 3).

Taking these words to heart, Oakland-based artist Sadie Barnett created a love letter to these erotically charged palaces as "The New Eagle Creek Saloon", a traveling exhibition as pop-up queer club. Barnette created here "a shimmering recreation of her father Rodney Barnette's now-shuttered San Francisco watering hole" (Barbagallo 2022) - an effigy to utopian queer dreams. Rodney's original business urgently functioned as a refuge to queers of color who had little other place to go relax, flirt, and live honestly in the open. Not only did this work evoke such spaces aesthetically, it aimed to function as

the space itself, transforming into a pop-up music venue and alcohol bar on some “activated” nights. A friend and artist who works at a museum which housed the piece noted that one rowdy activation saw a number of patrons mounting the bar top itself and voguing into the night, much to the curators’ dismay. And so there still is drawn a clear line between object and viewer in these settings - an unspoken code of conduct to pantomime queer space without really living queer space, in all its juicy, sharp healed glory.



Figure 33: Photo of Sadie Barnette’s “The New Eagle Creek Saloon” (2023) installation at SF MOMA, courtesy of SF MOMA’s website. San Francisco, CA.



Figure 34: Photo of Patrick Stephenson and Jordan Fickel peering into the second glory hole of the final installation (2023). Santa Cruz, CA.

Likewise, my installation at UCSC sought to bring the outer forbidden ring of Rubin's "charmed circle" inward for the general public to encounter and explore. Did it succeed? Well... by the numbers I got nearly a hundred people to lay in the sex sling and show off their hot (thermally processed) bodies to the room. I encouraged folks to kneel before a glory hole and investigate the other side. Visitors willingly squeezed past each other down a narrow hallway to hear a trans man talk about the necessity of puppy pads in absorbing bodily fluids at play parties. Addressing the pure physicality of the scene, folks turned out for it and were fully engaged. By entering the space and participating they became implicated in a queer scene, whether or not they identified as such. I didn't want to gate the door to anyone but rather encourage all to take a leap into a physical realm they perhaps hadn't experienced, while simultaneously legitimizing the idea of that experience. Some people walked in and walked right out. Others circled the sling cautiously and never interacted with it. Many passed by the televisions and moved on once hearing explicit descriptions of dialogue. A number of visitors sheepishly peered into the glory holes and backed off quickly before investigating the erotic interior details.

Through all this, there were unintended outcomes as well. The gallery, like a party, didn't quite read when enough bodies were absent from the room. Though ringing true to the experience of throwing a party that no one shows up for, the ideal set up would have been a resting state which referred to those which came before, to encourage an additive collective experience by way of a constant visual record of past interaction. The empty sling without a recent map of heat to clue folks into its interactivity felt unwelcoming and (literally) cold. As a solution I dipped into the gallery when I heard the heavy metal soundtrack swell (an indicator of no heat in the sling) and warmed it up for ten minutes. Like a sex party, this felt genuine to the experience of "breaking the ice" (or being a facilitating host) when folks aren't feeling engaged with the material, flesh or facsimile. That said, I had hoped more people would have taken the leap.

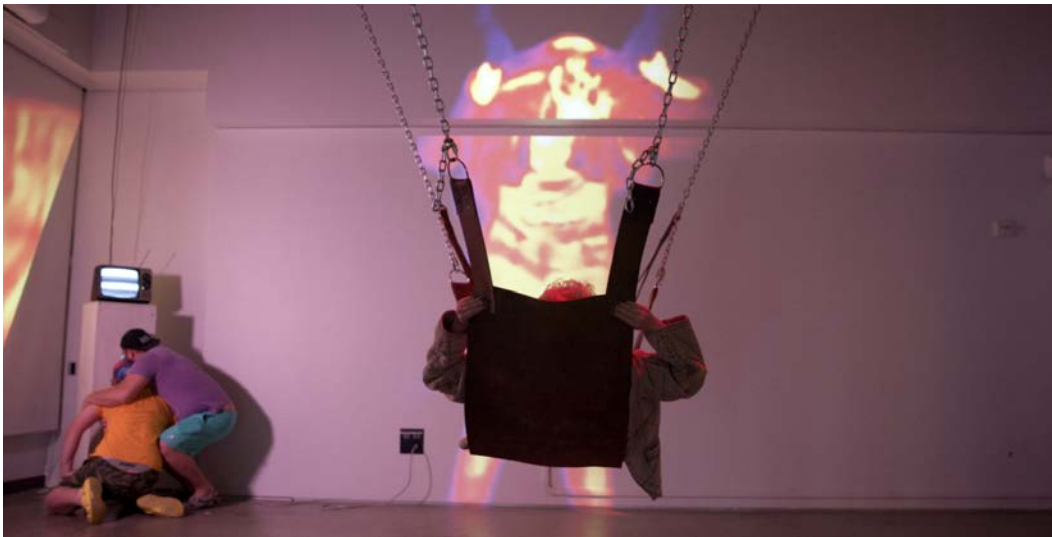


Figure 35: Wide view of final installation showing men peering into glory hole and patron laying in sling observing his heat map projected (2023). Santa Cruz, CA.

Initially I had imagined the show to be more deliberately representative of specific queer sex featuring the bigger male-presenting folks that my work outside the institute often depicts. I have wrestled with strategies of representation in my work, attempting to

illustrate the bodies which might show up to the events I have been involved in. It is through this installation at UCSC, my experiment of the Fluxus influenced Video Sling at CCBC, and through writing this thesis that I have come to realize the best way to depict the diverse folks who attend these parties. By handing the tools of representation over to those in attendance is to empower. Through the affordance of this control, individuals can celebrate their own specific identities and share through abstraction a unified collective visualization of pleasure in public space. Forging ahead I hope to experiment with these New Media technologies in order to accommodate an ever broadening queer culture of sexuality.



Figure 36: Photo of final gallery show, depicting sling in foreground, residual heat map in background, and first glory hole in the right corner (2023). Santa Cruz, CA

In mounting my exhibition QUEER (BODIES IN PUBLIC) SPACE I intended to blur the separation between artist, object, and viewer - to enact as Barnette, a queered installation highlighting the confluence of theoretical ecosystems as oceanic shoal, a disruptive oasis. What Tiffany Lethabo King named "...an in-between, ecotonal, unexpected, and shifting space, the shoal requires new footing, different chords of

embodied rhythms, and new conceptual tools to navigate its terrain” (King 2021, 4). In challenging institutional moorings of appropriate depictions of sexuality in collective venues, I set the foundations of a bridge between queer sexual representation and scholarly research. In this academic setting of the institute I subverted the assumed interactions between body and art, while provoking participants to look inward at their queered body and outward to a queered group dynamic. My thesis work considered what a queer space could be if unmoored from the puritanical limitations of modern culture and sought to actualize a utopian dream-state aligned with what Muñoz states here: “Some will say that all we have are the pleasures of this moment, but we must never settle for that minimal transport; we must dream and enact new and better pleasures, other ways of being in the world, and ultimately new worlds” (Muñoz 2009, 40).

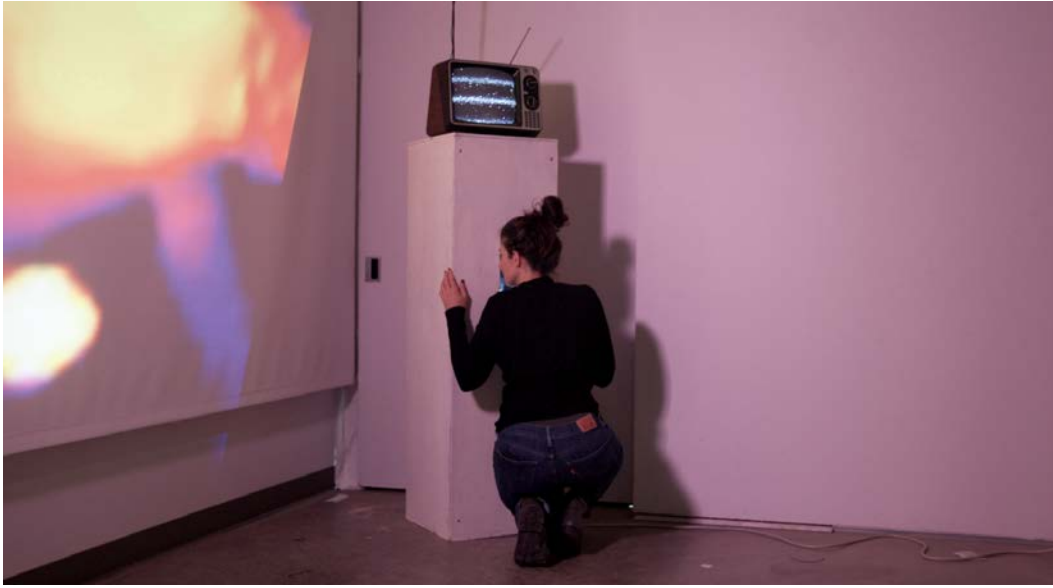


Figure 37: Photo of woman peering into second glory hole during final gallery presentation. (2023). Santa Cruz, CA



Figure 38: Photo of full scene of final gallery presentation (2023). Santa Cruz, CA

Glossary of Terminology

I have utilized the following terms that might be considered offensive to describe scenes of the community I know and love, to more accurately document and critique this unique culture and its relationship to my project. I am fully aware that by the time whoever stumbles upon this work reads it, these terms may have fallen out of favor or changed meaning entirely, so I hope that by defining a glossary, I will also capture a time and place of meaning, in this year 2023 which has seen a rapid evolution of queer culture and the language that describes it.

Bareback: (v) unprotected anal intercourse

Bathhouse: (n) a sex club incorporating steam rooms, hot tubs, and sometimes pools.

BDSM: An acronym that stands for bondage, discipline (or domination), sadism, and masochism (as a type of sexual practice).

Bear: (n) usually hirsute, heavy-set male-identifying queer people, oftentimes laid back, cuddly, and friendly.

Blowjob: (n) oral sex

Cis: short for cis-gender, meaning a gender identity that aligns with assigned gender at birth.

Cock: (n) penis or penetrative instrument used in sexual intercourse

CRT: (n) an abbreviation for Cathode Ray Tube, old-style box television made from 1934 to ~2015

Fist: (v) a sexual act performed by inserting a hand / lower forearm into a rectum

Fuck: (v) to have sex, vigorously

Gloryhole: (n) a round or slat opening, usually cut through a dividing wall which encourages voyeurism and sexual acts to pass through while users remain mostly

anonymous.

Hookup: (n) a (usually casual, mostly random) sexual encounter

Sex Sling: (n) a rectangular piece of material (traditionally leather but also neoprene, canvas, etc.) hung by chain or rope from a frame or support beam, allowing for lower gravity sexual activities such as fisting and anal sex.

SOMA: An abbreviation that stands for South Of Market, a historic neighborhood in San Francisco that housed the formation of the local leather scene.

Queer: (adj) a sexual or gender identity that does not correspond to established ideas of sexuality and gender, especially heterosexual norms. ; (v) to make strange, or to be imbue with queer ideas

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