

Common Ground:

Performing Gay Shame, Solidarity and Social Change

A DISSERTATION SUBMITTED TO THE FACULTY OF THE UNIVERSITY OF
MINNESOTA BY

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IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF
DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

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Abstract

This dissertation examines Gay Shame activism of the late 1990s and early 2000s through case studies of three distinct performance sites: Gay Shame San Francisco, Kvisa Shchora, a Tel Aviv based collective, and Euroshame (London). Analyzing the performance work and self-articulations of these three groups, I demonstrate how their performative and rhetorical use of shame attempts to both critique the “pride” of mainstream LGBT groups and to forge solidarity between queer communities and others marginalized by neoliberal economies and nationalist rhetoric through what I refer to as “hyperidentification”. These performances can, at their best, be aesthetically challenging and creative interventions that reimagine and place queer identities in ideological and, at times, actionable alliance with marginalized others; while at their worst they imagine themselves in solidarity with other communities, but ignore or fail to account for the perspectives, agendas and values of those communities. My exploration of these sites examines the limits of solidarity and empathy and investigates the contributions of queer activist performance to debates regarding the ethics and efficacy of political performance within the disciplines of Theatre and Performance Studies.

Table of Contents

List of Figures.....	iii
Introduction.....	1
Chapter 1.....	36
Chapter 2.....	113
Chapter 3.....	191
Conclusion	232
Works Cited	243

List of Figures

Figure 1, Outbreak Alert.....	71
Figure 2, Original HRC Poster.....	80
Figure 3, Reworked Gay Shame HRC Poster.....	81
Figure 4, The GLBT Center: Office Park Portal to the 8th Dimension.....	98
Figure 5, The Center Sucks.....	101

Introduction

We are on the brink of a new era of total equality in the United States and have almost achieved a point in which the dreams of the Enlightenment will be realized and rights equally guaranteed to all American citizens. It is the end of prejudice, discrimination, and the new age of egalitarian access for all. At least this is what many of the proponents of gay marriage have implied with the rapid progress of gay rights and marriage equality during the past several months. These comments by attorney general Eric Holder are indicative of the optimism pervading liberal politics: “With each new state where same-sex marriages are legally recognized, our nation moves closer to achieving full equality for all Americans” (Peoples). If one believes people such as Holder, the ascendancy of gay marriage marks the end-point for gay rights and that goal is now in sight for most Western countries.

In 2004, the UK signed into law the Civil Partnership Act. As of the date of writing, November 26th, 2014, sixteen countries will grant same-sex marriages outright: Belgium, Argentina, Denmark, France, Brazil, New Zealand, Norway, South Africa, The Netherlands, Uruguay, Sweden, Canada, Iceland, Portugal, the United Kingdom, and Spain. In addition, within the US, Massachusetts began issuing marriage licenses in 2004, followed by the states of California and Connecticut in 2008; Iowa, New Hampshire, Maine, and Vermont in 2009; and the District of Columbia in 2010. After the Supreme Court's decision to confirm the overturning of Proposition 8 in California, a number of other states followed. Currently a total of thirty-five states in the US grant same-sex marriage licenses, and this number seems destined to increase. Mexico City also began

granting marriage licenses to same-sex couples in 2010, followed by the state of Quintana Roo. These recognitions of gay rights are applauded by gay and lesbian activists as signs of progress and acceptance.

Meanwhile, organizations such as GLAAD and the Human Rights Campaign are overjoyed by the sudden abundance of representations of “normal” and “everyday” gay and lesbian characters on television and in film. This shift reflects the movement of gays and lesbians from the margins to the mainstream, at least in the neoliberal West. Such mainstream status means, among other small acceptances, full inclusion in the consumer marketplace, where individuals have their identities and desires confirmed and performed in advertising and the media. To be mainstream is to participate fully in the bourgeois culture of consumption, where national consumer citizenship takes place. I define consumer citizenship as the method through which individual subjects negotiate their identity and relationship to the community through their buying habits and corporate allegiances. This culture of consumption becomes a means of exerting political allegiance and power under neoliberalism (Cronin 11).¹ While these accomplishments by gay and lesbian activists mean greater acceptance for some, they ignore the structural similarities between the oppression of non-conforming LGBTQI² individuals and the oppression of women, people of color, transgender folks, the poor, ethnically marginalized groups in

¹ For a full discussion of consumer citizenship, see Anne M. Cronin’s *Advertising and Consumer Citizenship: Gender, Images, and Rights* and Margaret Scammell’s *Citizen Consumers: towards a new marketing of politics?*

² In this dissertation I sometimes use the acronym LGBTQI (Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer and Intersex), however, at other times I use LGBT (Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender). I do this because LGBT is a much more common reference for the gay and lesbian community and because Queer and Intersex identified people represent a part of the community that is often excluded from Gay Pride celebrations and gay rights discourse. I therefore use LGBTQI when I want to reference the wider community not covered by the former term.

the US and abroad, and people who inhabit multiple marginalized identity positions simultaneously. These structural similarities include the denial of rights and full participatory citizenship, as well as the lack of access to monetary and legal equality; too, these groups face a greater risk of threats and violence based on race, gender, sexuality, affiliation, or nationality. Also obscured by all this “progress” are the ways non-conforming gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender, intersex, and queer folks and GLBTQI people of color are still marginalized through systemic and cultural bigotry, as well as a lack of access to resources.

The Gay Shame movement has developed since the late 90s as an intervention into the gay rights agenda, which Gay Shame groups see as increasingly narrowly focused on corporate and mainstream media representations of middle class gays and lesbians and particularly on gay marriage. Rights-based activism, they critique, has been defined by a normative drive for full participation in the neoliberal economy and institutions of power, excluding those marginalized by those institutions and denied access to normativity. Additionally, this mainstream push has shifted focus away from the more radical politics of the older LGBT movement. Gay Shame groups use performances that stress connectivity and solidarity while re-empowering shame as a force for social change rather than for normativity to create a space within mainstream, gay, and lesbian discourse. These groups identify oppression (which I define as systemic violence and a lack of access to rights and resources on a large scale), rather than commodification, as a common cause and experience that links people, in order to forge

solidarity.³ In essence, Gay Shame groups attempt to both represent and mobilize political activists who are concerned with different forms of oppression (i.e. homophobia, sexism, racism, classism), avoiding the dichotomous thinking that places different forms of oppression in opposing categories.

This project examines the work of specific Gay Shame groups because they expose a facet of queer activism that stresses a connectivity of the oppressed within global capitalism through performances of solidarity that transcend discrete identity categories and a politics of division. Through performances that engage the affective experience of shame, Gay Shame groups expose the limitations of identity-based pride discourse, through showing how exclusionary and reaffirming of status quo power relations this discourse can be and they reveal the need for a connectivity and solidarity of the oppressed to question power relations and expose socioeconomic, racial, national and gender discrimination overlooked by identity-based configurations. These groups also bring into strong relief the great potential and limitations of performing solidarity within an international rights context and the different forms of solidarity generated in these performances.

I explore the work of three groups: Kvisa Shchora in Israel/Palestine, Euroshame (Gay Shame London), and Gay Shame San Francisco. The work of these groups has gone largely unrecognized by scholars in the past, who have not written in any depth about Gay Shame performance as a whole. This project attempts to address this lack while

³ I define solidarity as a mutual investment in the struggles of another identity group that is premised on identification and the desire for reciprocity. Solidarity can take on the form of real world mutual understanding and reciprocity, or can be imagined and performed. It is different than empathy, because there is an intentionality of mutual engagement, whether, or not that mutuality is realized.

bringing attention to the immense contribution these groups can make to contemporary understandings of oppression and solidarity. Each of these groups approaches shame and solidarity differently, but they all utilize shame and the language of affect to question normative appeals by the gay and lesbian community and to attempt a solidarity between oppressed groups.

These groups also help explore important questions about the limitations of queer activist performance: What does it mean to *perform* solidarity and what is the difference between literal and imagined forms of solidarity in performance? What can performances of shame accomplish in relation to social change, and what are the limits exposed by affective performance? Can Gay Shame performances reflect the absurdity of regulated social identities under neoliberalism and global capitalism? How is solidarity linked with their attempts to communicate with an audience? And can both communication and solidarity be reached through these performances? In addition, I ask what bodies are represented in these performances, what bodies are absent and who is doing the representing. What corporeal and bodily relationships are established and altered through these performances, and do they reaffirm or question received cultural bodily habitus? And finally, how do these groups deal differently with decision-making and culpability within their distinct sociopolitical and regional contexts? I analyze these questions of performance and perception in light of the rhetorical, aesthetic, and spatial choices made by performers as they articulate their intended effect on perception and attempt social change.

Gay Shame performance emerged directly from the radical queer performance groups of the 1980s and early 1990s, such as ACT UP, Queer Nation, The Lesbian

Avengers, Twin City Avengers, and Fed Up Queers. Gay Shame groups in New York and San Francisco emerged in the late 1990s and early 2000s, and these groups adapted the performances, techniques, and strategies of queer street performance for a new generation of LGBTQI activists and for a new set of geopolitical problems. These groups formed to combat what they considered the globalizing and neutralizing force of neoliberalism around the world, through performing coalition and solidarity with other oppressed groups. To analyze and fully render the performances of Gay Shame groups, I draw from a varied toolbox of theoretical and analytical methodologies. In the next section, I lay out the terrain of my practice in these three sites.

I employ a variety of methodologies to examine these performances, including ethnographic analysis of interviews and events, a charting and analysis of spatial and bodily emplacements during performances, and careful examination of textual performances by these groups. Each of the groups I examine uses different strategies to enact and perform solidarity and post-gay queer activism. Solidarity as a *modus operandi* demands that spectators and performers see, and more importantly feel, the connectedness of different social issues. Indeed, solidarity accomplishes this by pulling spectators out of the everyday and drawing them into the physical and/or emotional performance, affecting their perception of reality, with hope this will lead to direct changes in behavior, which I access through observation and interviews with Gay Shame group members.

Gay Shame SF uses political satire, grotesquerie, and parody to expose San Francisco's discriminatory and highly regulatory practices toward the disenfranchised and to bring attention to the lack of radical politics within the LGBT community there. I

consider their performances of shame as a reclaiming of space at the margins, where city ordinances based on monetization and tourism have alienated the homeless, as well as poor and working class communities; and gay acceptance of normative values has made many in that community immune to the oppression of others. Gay Shame SF employs shame both in a celebration of things that are normally held as shameful (sexuality, BDSM, grotesquerie, public nudity, outlandish costumes, gender-play, excessive makeup and big hair) and through publicly shaming individuals and institutions that they interpret as leading the gay and lesbian community astray. These performances have some efficacy in bringing attention to these issues, but they also expose the extent to which these performances can fail to clearly communicate their message, or to create the solidarity they seek. They also reveal the tension between agitprop, message-based performances and those based on affective engagements of shame meant to generate hyperidentification, or a form of identification beyond one's own identity category based on striving for solidarity.

Their performances expose at least two distinct forms of solidarity. The first form entails a real building of links and coalitions between groups and the second denotes a form of performed or imagined solidarity, where links are performed, embodied and felt, but might not in fact exist outside of the performance. Additionally, the shocking nature of their performances can also alienate their intended audience and the communities with which they attempt to forge coalitions.

Kvisa Shchora, an Israeli and Palestinian queer protest group, uses street performances to parody Israeli state militarism and to demand an end to the occupation of the Palestinian territories through an agonistic call to solidarity and coalition. I use the

work of Kvisa Shchora to observe the way shame and solidarity can be used to re-imagine the Middle East and specifically Israel/Palestine as a place where queer aesthetics and political activism can make an important and unique intervention into state sanctioned violence and identity struggles. Kvisa Shchora's performances bring shame and solidarity to a general public, by performing shocking, humorous and often painful demonstrations in the midst of Gay Pride parades and other celebrations. In these performances, members of Kvisa are often performing their own shame (as Israelis, Palestinians, queers, or just as bodies), but they are almost always asking their audience to feel and acknowledge the shame of being inextricably tied to an oppressive regime. A clear example of this comes from their performances at Gay Pride Parades and the slogans they chant, such as: "There is no pride in the occupation." Kvisa Shchora also attempts to forge solidarity through their performances of shame and shaming, particularly between queers and Palestinians. However, their gestures of solidarity are not always returned and many of their performances expose the limits of performing shame in creating solidarity. I argue, via the work of Kvisa Shchora, that it is possible to have different forms of solidarity, one being only representational while another represents a true coalition building, but that both have a function in encouraging action. Kvisa Shchora's performances also indicate the tension between message-based political performance and affective engagements with shame in forging solidarity.

Euroshame (Gay Shame London) and Club Duckie create a yearly "carnival of homosexual misery" where multiple artists stage performances meant to satirize and parody gay and lesbian decadence and corporatization. Euroshame, Europride and Club Duckie all exploit the relationship between neoliberalism, nationality and sexual

citizenship within the UK and the larger European Union, by creating performance art events and club-nights. As a celebration of neoliberal consumption, Europride in particular has come to stand for much more than just gay and lesbian visibility. It has also become a commercial marketplace and proving ground, where companies court gay and lesbian consumers. Euroshame, on the other hand, illustrates the important critique Gay Shame discourse can make of the economics of the new Europe, while also indicating the limited social change potential of performances for a niche audience, contained in a light club-night atmosphere. This event triggers important questions about performances for profit and their ability to engage neoliberalism. Furthermore, the attempt by Club Duckie to cater to a specific paying audience, already familiar with the issues and their desire to keep things light and fun, complicate both Euroshame's critiques and their attempts to create a sense of cross European queer solidarity and empathy. While a nightclub atmosphere allows for certain aesthetic freedoms and autonomy not always available to more established performance spaces, Euroshame also forces me to ask what sorts of political intervention and solidarity can be reached by this genre of performance? Finally, Euroshame allows for an investigation of the relationship between empathy and solidarity in the context of Gay Shame performance.

I focus my research on these three groups not merely because they provide a framework for understanding the operations of the Gay Shame movement, but because of the intervention Gay Shame activism is making in the current political and social climate of neoliberal conservatism worldwide. Neoliberalism is foremost an economic theory that stresses free markets and an absence of government regulation, which can be interpreted to have made a few richer and the remainder economically depressed. However,

neoliberalism as a cultural manifestation of economic principals not only celebrates individualism but is concerned with the consumer subject on a global scale. It is a “strong discourse” as Bourdieu argues in “The Essence of Neoliberalism” (1): because of the need to control populations and their productivity, neoliberalism not only pervades, but also shapes, all other discourses around itself. Furthermore, this is an economics of identity, in which citizens are formed into legible worker-consumers who are carefully regulated and defined. He argues that citizens become atomized through the normalization of corporate dominance when Darwinian competition “is extended to individuals themselves, through the individualization of the wage relationship....” (3). Competition then becomes a means of regulating the bodies and minds of workers and creating a highly individualistic worldview. The discourse of neoliberalism destabilizes collectivities and disbands solidarities, according to Bourdieu (3). It is a theory that stresses that the welfare of society can only be guaranteed by assuring the unrestricted rights of the individual over the community. One of the effects of this atomization is to equate identity with the assertion of individuality. Within LGBT politics, this focus on individual rights and gratification has allowed the movement to become complicit in the process of individual consumer identity and has moved it away from the coalition and community-based model of older queer activism.

Even humanitarianism and the forms of empathy and solidarity it enables often take on an individual focus under neoliberalism that obscures systemic oppression. As Lilie Chouliaraki argues, in their campaigns humanitarian organizations often, “illustrate the institutional logic of contemporary humanitarianism—a neoliberal logic of micro-economic explanations that ignores the systemic causes of global poverty and turns

humanitarianism into a practice of depoliticized managerialism” (9). The intention of Gay Shame groups in these three sites is to expose mechanisms of power and explore issues of identity as they relate to the economic and social roles assigned under neoliberalism and to question and expand those roles.

A Brief Review of Pertinent Literature

This project develops an area of Performance and Queer Studies research that has been undertreated in scholarship. Some of the work dealing with gay and lesbian theater and performance focuses on finding traces and representations of homo-desire and gay identity in performances, plays, movies and novels, as a form of historical reconstruction. These works attempt to forge a gay and lesbian history and narrative where one is currently lacking. Books and anthologies such as *Staging Desire: Queer Readings of American Theatre History* (2005), *Stages of Desire* (1996), *The Queerest Art: Essays on Lesbian and Gay Theater* (Minwalla and Solomon 2008) and *Out On Stage* (Sinfield 1999) do the work of exposing this gay and lesbian past within literary and theatrical history, but often address gay and lesbian identities as static, concrete, divorced from issues of race, class, and nationality and wholly homogeneous. This project instead assumes that gay and lesbian performances and identities are cultural productions and should be treated not as isolated effects, but as dynamic sites where the social, the political, and the economic converge.

The Gay Shame movement has caught my attention because it attempts through performance to re-inject questions of politics, race and class into the LGBT movement. Julia Kristeva, Sedgwick, Bosch and Probyn have theorized shame as a powerful affect

with the ability to both solidify and question identity categories. Similarly, I write with the intention to unsettle narratives of progress and linearity in gay rights discourse: this work treats the very fringes of queer activism where the categories of gay, straight and queer are being questioned and redefined.

Another aspect of this dissertation is to remedy the lack of scholarly attention to Gay Shame performance. Gay Shame groups have never been closely examined in scholarly works, with exceptions of passing references from authors such as Halberstam and Margo D. Weiss's article "Gay Shame and BDSM Pride: Neoliberalism, Privacy, and Sexual Politics," which argues that BDSM Pride reiterates normalized marriage and heteronormative conventions, while Gay Shame challenges these conventions. This project seeks to remedy this oversight.

Too, this project attempts to acknowledge and include critiques and contributions recent scholars have made to discussions of queer identity and culture by suggesting that LGBTQI identity can only be understood in relationship to race, class, and gender. I draw upon Roderick Ferguson's "queer of color critique" as a recognition of the significance of race in queer(ing) sexuality in *Aberrations in Black: Toward a Queer of Color Critique* (2003) and José Esteban Muñoz's idea of disidentification as a method of queering identity categories in *Disidentifications* (1999). Hiram Perez's "You Can Have My Brown Body and Eat It Too!" (2005) argues that queer discourse often silences voices of color, while exoticising bodies of color. Discussions of race and nationhood often normalize sexuality and erase gendered bodies. All three authors look toward the critical potential generated by the intersections of race, gender, and sexuality and how this can expand current thinking. In the 2005 issue of *Social Text*, "What's Queer about Queer

Studies Now?” and especially in the introduction of the same name by Muñoz, Halberstam, and David L. Eng, the authors argue for a need to reinvigorate queer theory by moving its concerns away from solely gay white male bodies. As I will argue with Muñoz, Halberstam, and Eng, queer critique still holds radical political potential in a neoliberal global marketplace, but demands a “renewed queer studies ever vigilant to the fact that sexuality is intersectional, not extraneous to other modes of difference, and calibrated to a firm understanding of queer as a political metaphor without a fixed referent” (1).

My project assumes that identity categories are socially constructed and are therefore not universal. It examines how queer performances are attempts to create a space for different experiences of non-normative sexuality and challenge hegemonic constructions of white gay male identity and the politics and processes of globalization. Gayatri Gopinath, theorizes diasporic queer viewing communities in *Impossible Desires* (2005) by suggesting that queer sexuality is often expressed and experienced by diasporic Indian communities, not through Gay Pride celebrations, but through the circulation and re-reading of filmic texts. Martin Manalansaan IV considers the experience of gay Filipino men in the diasporic spaces of North America and opens the possibility of the active layering and negotiation of multiple cultural and sexual identities in his book *Global Divas: Filipino Gay Men in the Diaspora* (2003). Meanwhile Eng-Beng Lim’s, “The Mardi Gras Boys of Singapore’s English-Language Theater,” (2005) offers a careful analysis of the globalization and transnational migrations of the gay male identity while Lisa Rofel’s *Desiring China* (2007) explores the relationship between neoliberalism and the emergence of gay and lesbian identities in China’s major cities.

Each of these authors looks at queer sexuality as a complex cultural construct that is complicated, questioned and renegotiated by global subjects. Furthermore, these authors address the relationship between neoliberalism, homonormativity and solidarity, bringing the concepts of economy into discussions of sexuality.

Embodied and lived realities, as well as spaces of commerce, are often ignored in sources that examine gay and lesbian spectacle. This project draws heavily on the work of authors who have recognized the civic and cultural importance of the LGBT spectacle. Lynda Johnston looks at the intersections of tourism and economy in major Gay Pride parades in *Queering Tourism: Paradoxical Performances at Gay Pride Parades* (2009). Johnston argues that queer studies and tourism scholars have lost sight of the lived queer bodies present in Pride events. As I argue, this is because of the commercialization of gay identity. In light of this, Jon Binnie argues that gay male spaces are tied to the commercial and political spaces of the city and not just social and sexual communities in *The Globalization of Sexuality* (2004), and Katherine Sender's *Business, Not Politics* (2004) takes the stance that contemporary gay and lesbian identities since the 1970s are, and were, formed through the neoliberal marketplace and corporate niche marketing. The performances I analyze mobilize shame and abjection as tools for questioning contemporary iterations of Gay Pride with its normalization of sociopolitical and economic identity.

Performance and social change literature is useful to examine the ability of performance to animate and complicate social and political relationships in ways that can empower the oppressed. This literature argues that performances have the ability to challenge regimes of power and to inspire audiences to political and social action. I draw

on this extensive body of work, because it is useful in understanding and theorizing Gay Shame events as a type of social change performance that attempts to undermine extant power relations and engage audiences and performers in societal transformation. My discussion of these groups also prompts important questions about performance and solidarity and explores the dimension of radical queer street performance within performance and social change.

Gay Shame groups attempt to enliven the radical potential of live performance through directly engaging with the line between spectacle and the everyday and between spectators and performers. In *The Society of the Spectacle* (1983), Guy Debord theorizes the spectacle as occupying all spaces of modern existence and replacing active participation in cultural and political life. This mediatization of all aspects of life has only intensified over the last thirty years and been hastened along by technological developments. For Baz Kershaw the only means of critical engagement with the spectacle is through radical performance. Kershaw further suggests that in the age of the spectacle, live performance and particularly street performance has the potential to instigate radical change and to directly involve spectators in this process. As Kershaw argues in *The Radical in Performance: Between Brecht and Baudrillard* (1999), “radical performance always participates in the most vital cultural, social and political tensions of its time” (7). Gay Shame performances not only contain elements of radical street performance, but also many aspects of community and social change performance, such as direct audience interactions, audience participation, witnessing and catering directly to local communities.

Gay Shame performance can be thought of as a form of radical community-based

street performance. Jan Cohen-Cruz describes the radical as, “acts that question or re-envision ingrained social arrangements of power” (1). For Baz Kershaw the radical in performance comes from, “...a potential to create various kinds of freedom that are not only resistant to dominant ideologies, but that also are sometimes transgressive, even transcendent, of ideology itself.” (18). Gay Shame performances have the potential to interrogate and disrupt power structures and entrenched social relations.

Gay Shame groups also draw on aspects of community theater as both a force of community building and a reflection of communities back to themselves, as Jan Cohen-Cruz describes in *Local Acts: Community-Based Performance in the United States* (2005). Related to this, Sonja Kuflinec explores the ability of performances to create and represent communities and identities in *Staging America: Cornerstone and Community-Based Theater* (2003). Here Kuflinec discusses Cornerstone’s work as both a site where communities cohere and where the discursive and physical limits of communities are exposed. I will use this work to explore the assumptions Gay Shame groups make about their communities and the communities they are attempting to form coalitions with. By examining how communities are represented and delimited, I am able to explore how performance can disturb communities in a way that rehearses change.

Shame and Pride: The Terrain

Gay Shame activism has historically formulated itself as a reaction to Gay Pride and normative appeals within the GL community: they understand pride as antithetical or dichotomous to shame. However, I explore the connection and interdependence of these two affective states through looking at Gay Shame performances.

Gay Pride has come a long way from the emergence of gay identities in the West. In “Capitalism and Gay Identity” (1983) John D’Emilio recognized that gay identity in the West owes its emergence to industrial capitalism in urban centers during the 19th and 20th centuries. This seminal essay connected sexuality to economics with its daring suggestion that certain economic models and patterns of labor, mobility, and migration created the opportunity for the emergence of new identities. However, D’Emilio’s essay never foresaw the emergence of the megaprude in the 1990s and early 2000s, that uniquely neoliberal event that brings swaths of corporate money and tens of thousands of travelers together to celebrate the illusive affect of pride.

In less than two hundred years, Western gay and lesbian identities have transitioned from a nascent marginalized category, to a protected class that is fully engaged in neoliberal practices of identity. In the neoliberal landscape identity becomes a specific codified set of allegiances, such as nationality, race, religion, and sexuality. Performances of solidarity mirror, exaggerate, and complicate identity in complex and important ways that build on José Esteban Muñoz’ concept of disidentification from his book of the same name, *Disidentifications* (1999). To disidentify is to find one’s self unhoused by culture and without a clear identity category: “A disidentifying subject is unable to fully identify or to form what Sigmund Freud called that ‘just-as-if’ relationship” (7). The “just as if” relationship for Muñoz is one where the subject fully identifies with a character, cultural production, or artistic representation. They are able to see themselves and their identity in some way directly represented. In disidentifying, the individual cannot, and does not, identify, because a particular site of identity does not allow the subject a way in. “To disidentify is to read oneself and one’s own life narrative

in a moment, object, or subject that is not culturally coded to ‘connect’ with the disidentifying subject” (12). Muñoz argues that disidentification allows for a critical stance beyond the limits of any single identity position, in which systems of identity and normativity can be critically engaged and questioned. For Muñoz (drawing on Sedgwick), shame is also an integral part of this process. Shame creates a space between the subject and full identification and in that space a process of anti-identification occurs, where the subject actively separates from identity categories in order to forge novel identity configurations. Gay Shame performances challenge identity constructions not through disidentifying which is a type of critical distancing and dissociating, but through what I call “hyperidentifying,” which is a form of doubling, where one identifies with multiple identity positions at once and where various struggles and identities come together and are challenged. Much like Muñoz’ disidentification, hyperidentifying is a means of reaching beyond limiting identity constructs, but through a different mechanism.

Through performances of shame, Gay Shame groups attempt to link themselves to other oppressed peoples. Common experiences of shame and oppression become the ground where hyperidentification is performed. These groups attempt to relegate other forms of affiliation in favor of hyperidentification through oppression. They test, question, challenge boundaries, and problematize established sociopolitical landscapes. In this project, I will ask whether these groups accomplish the goal of hyperidentification and effectively create the grounds for coalition building and solidarity. These groups tap into larger discourses on performance and social change, as well as a long history of activist street performance in constructing performances of hyperidentification.

Methodology

My first and primary method in examining these groups entails participant observation and performance ethnography, as I describe below. I have attended several performances and compiled copious notes, pictures, and recordings from these events. I analyze these materials with an eye to the specific performance strategies these groups employed and the various aesthetic choices they made in their performance work. In addition, I look at the cultural context in which they operate, the bodies performing and those that are absent, the goals they articulate for their own work and the tactics they use to disrupt the operations of public space, local and national governments and Pride festivals. In these performance events, I primarily pay attention to how these choices work to generate solidarity and hyperidentification in the hope of understanding each Gay Shame group's operational strategies. I want to know how these groups attempt to reclaim shame, in order to further their goals of solidarity and how successful they are in this reclamation.

In accessing Gay Shame Performance, I draw on a number of sources, both experiential and textual. My archive for the present work is construed broadly: these groups use a wide array of performance methodologies, from art installations in public spaces, to staged performances and parades, to written articles, manifestos, posters, and books. As Diana Taylor suggests in *The Archive and Repertoire: Performing Cultural Memory in the Americas* (2003), "performance constitutes the methodological lens that enables scholars to analyze events as performance" (3). Examining these sources as performances, I approach them as events, looking for their intention as well as their

intended audience. Here I borrow Jan Cohen-Cruz's definition of performance as a "category of heightened behavior intended for public viewing", (Cohen-Cruz 1) with an understanding that they are oriented toward a particular audience in a specific historical and political moment. I will be looking for how these events transform public space for an audience, both stabilizing and destabilizing public boundaries and relationships, and separating that space from the everyday operations of urban life.

Additionally, Gay Shame groups have published and blogged extensively and these websites are of great use as spaces where these groups voice their intentions, discuss their work, and plan future events. I plan to examine these sites for the messages they espouse, the aesthetic choices they reveal, the public they are trying to reach, and for insight on how each Gay Shame group is using and performing shame and solidarity. Besides writings and manifestos, a number of pictures of Gay Shame actions and performances can be found on each group's individual website, as well as on blogs and on the website flickr.com. It is also possible to find news articles about many of their performances and even video footage online. These materials help me understand how shame and solidarity are construed and performed differently by each group through an analysis of the aesthetic and editorial choices the group makes in presenting itself through various media. Is the group primarily using the web as a place to record and archive performances and posters? Or are they creating discussions, forums and writings intended for a specific audience, or the general public?

In addition to written archival sources, I will analyze hours of recorded interviews with members of Kvisa Shchora in an attempt to understand how these groups articulate themselves in relationship to discourses of protest performance and social change, as well

as solidarity. These interviews were conducted with several current and past members of Kvisa Shchora during the summer of 2007.

I did not have the same level of access to members of Gay Shame SF and Euroshame; therefore, I do not have individual interviews with those groups. However, because I was able to participate in more performances by Gay Shame SF and Euroshame and because of the extent of Gay Shame's writings and images, I was able to access both groups in a different way. I did not interview all the members of Kvisa Shchora, but was able to get a good cross-section of several of the most active members through an organic qualitative network, developed by asking each person to suggest who else I should interview. I developed a series of questions which asked them to examine their own political and performance methodology and efficacy, and to reconstruct past performances and protests. I inquired about the history of the group and each member's favorite memories, actions and performances, in order to construct a historiographic landscape of the group. With this site, I was particularly interested in the individual motives, stories and opinions of Kvisa group members and, therefore, used interviews as my primary ethnographic resource. While I was unable to attend some of their past performances and protests, I use interviews and archival sources to reconstruct these events and provide access to past Kvisa performances.

My main purpose during these interviews was to discover the impact group activism has had on these individuals and the larger community (at least in terms of how they interpret this individually) and discover the role performance and solidarity had on each member's emotions, perception and behavior. In addition, these interviews help me understand each group member's relationship to solidarity. The solidarities articulated

and performed by group members are complex and multi-faceted. To fully develop their treatment of solidarity, I position solidarity as an historical and theoretical concept and render it in relationship to the performance work of Gay Shame groups. Here I define solidarity not just as an attempt to encourage empathy with other oppressed groups, but as the intention to work toward mutual investment and understanding in one-another's struggles. I argue that this solidarity can be real, or imagined, actual, or performed.

Solidarity and Gay Shame

Gay Shame groups attempt to enact solidarity through shared experiences of shame. Gay Shame groups treat solidarity as an engagement with affective empathy and social responsibility through individual and communal shame, which overcomes extant identity categories through hyperidentification. Solidarity is the mode through which Gay Shame groups articulate their purpose, attempt to enact social change, and build coalitions of the oppressed. Solidarity, as we use the term in English, comes from the French word *solidarité*, a term that implies mutual responsibility. This further derives from the “Roman law of obligations...the unlimited liability of each individual member within a family or other community to pay common debts was characterized as obligation in solidum” (Bayertz 1). The idea of carrying a common burden is at the root of solidarity and a mutuality of purpose and this has carried down to modern interpretations of the term. Modern solidarity emerges from the Enlightenment as a humanitarian moral imperative to help fellow human beings escape from suffering. As Lilie Chouliaraki argues in *The Ironic Spectator: Solidarity in the Age of Post-Humanitarianism* (2013), contemporary understandings of solidarity come largely from the, “eighteenth century

‘culture of sympathy’” (10) and from humanitarian appeals that came along with modern capitalism (10). Richard Rorty describes the need to understand solidarity as part and parcel of philosophies of community and responsibility in *Contingency, Irony, and Solidarity* (1989). Gay Shame groups are drawing on an understanding of solidarity as a deeply human and communal responsibility. However, there are other iterations of the term that are useful in examining this work.

The three applications of the term I draw on in this project involve solidarity’s relationship to the welfare state deriving from the concept of human rights during the Enlightenment, the concept of a solidarity of liberation (emerging most recently from the labor movement and the social movements of the 1960s and 1970s and based on a Marxist model of revolution) and an affect driven solidarity of feeling (Chouliaraki 11). I argue here, that Gay Shame groups utilize a methodology and understanding of social change that emerges from a humanist responsibility, grounded in the desire to make things better for a larger human community, as opposed to an understanding of solidarity as a responsibility only to members of one’s immediate community, or society. However, Gay Shame groups also engage in a solidarity of feeling through shared experiences of oppression and shame.

For Gay Shame groups solidarity connotes the coming together of different identity communities because of shared suffering, or because of a desire to end the oppression of others. Important in this definition is a sense of both shared humanity and of difference (usually based on space, or identity). For Gay Shame groups, shared oppression can performatively supersede identity in the form of hyperidentification. To hyperidentify is to feel a sense of obligated solidarity, because of the experience of

shared oppression and because of a deep feeling of connection. However, solidarity of feeling does not demand reciprocity: it can exist as a felt and performed solidarity that is unidirectional and subjective, although it is always seeking a mutuality of intention.

It is important to question the forms of solidarity being generated by Gay Shame groups and what these accomplish, or are intended to accomplish. I have found two primary forms of solidarity in these performances: imagined solidarity and literal solidarity. One of these forms is a productive complication of identity, while one is capable of appropriating the oppression of others. However, this dichotomy is too simplistic, because imagined solidarity can at times be powerful and real, while literal solidarity is not always effective in producing real change. I am interested in the power of different iterations of solidarity to empower and perform coalition and community, but I also want to know whether direct coalitions are formed and actionable change can be seen outside of the performance. One of my primary research questions asks what types of solidarity are accomplished in these performances. In looking at each group's relationship to solidarity I will attempt to answer this question by examining moments from Gay Shame performances when solidarity coalesces in powerful emotional breakthroughs or when it breaks down to become problematic, because it alienates the community Gay Shame groups are attempting to reach and actually reduces the prospect of social change.

Literal solidarity involves a genuine attempt to feel and forge connections with other oppressed groups, as in the case of a San Francisco street performance that brought Gay Shame performers and the homeless together in one event to fight for an end to homeless evictions and the relentless gentrification of a shared queer and homeless

neighborhood. The other is an imagined and performed solidarity that, in certain instances risks appropriating the struggles of other oppressed groups, such as a performance at a Tel Aviv Gay Pride Parade, where symbols of Palestinian nationalism were misappropriated in the service of queer visibility. In *Methodology of the Oppressed* (2000), Chela Sandoval theorizes a liberating methodology and differential form of consciousness based on “those U.S. Women-of-Color feminisms that insist on international solidarity and resistance to racism, class bias and homophobia” (Davis xi). Sandoval’s concept of solidarity of the oppressed is invoked in Gay Shame’s performances through a liberating methodology that attempts to link oppressed communities in struggling against the status quo. However, they sometimes fall short of this ideal when their solidarity is imagined. Sandoval is helpful in understanding a consciousness of solidarity that distinguishes much of Gay Shame’s best work, but also forces me to grapple with the limits of solidarity of feeling that is not grounded in praxis.

As I have mentioned, imagined solidarity can give participants a false sense of alliance with the potential to co-opt struggles and obfuscate the voices of the oppressed. Gay Pride events expose another form of imagined solidarity, where power relations and societal norms are reiterated. Gay Pride events create a sense of community that is often assumed to equate to social change through good intentions, large utopian celebrations and mass consumption. Unfortunately, the solidarity created through Gay Pride events often mimics other forms of solidarity with the imposition of neoliberal values and systems. At these events solidarity is experienced as an individual feeling of “supporting” and “participating” in social progress. This rights-based celebratory solidarity works for social progress within current relations and structures of power, but fails to question the

status quo. How does one reclaim solidarity then, in the absence of a re-thinking of the public sphere and the willingness to reject traditional forms of connectivity, such as parades and humanitarian events? Perhaps performing shame can be useful in re-animating solidarity of feeling, where important forms of questioning and connecting can still take place.

Performance works as a primary mode in the formation of solidarity because it allows for the representation of utopian, dystopian and antagonistic spaces. As Victor Turner describes in *Dramas, Fields, and Metaphors: Symbolic Action in Human Society* (1974), experiences of common connection and *communitas* can be powerful in evoking a sense of solidarity. But is this always the case? And what is the efficacy of felt solidarity in the face of ontological suffering and real oppression? As solidarity of feeling has a strong subjective component and can either be literal, or imagined, each performance demands a careful analysis of the type(s) of solidarity produced. One place where Gay Shame groups are most efficacious is in their ability to counteract the constraints and implied normalization of pride. In the performances of Gay Shame groups, an implicit critique of pride is represented as the foundation of gay activism/identity and as the backdrop against which solidarity is performed.

Sexuality and Affect in Performances of Gay Shame

To understand the Gay Shame movement's use of shame and its relationship to pride, I draw heavily on affect theory and shame theory. In this project I turn to authors who have theorized the importance of affective experience in shaping and critiquing sexual identities. Affect theory emerged to address the space where the interior meets the

exterior and where self and other come together. This branch of theory, along with the specific area of shame theory, is useful in theorizing identity formations and the operations of solidarity in this project. Affect theory has taken two specific trajectories, one based on the theories of Silvan Tomkins (as adapted by Sedgwick and Frank) and one following the work of Gilles Deleuze and Baruch Spinoza, as Gregory J Seigworth and Melissa Gregg explicate (2010).

With Tomkins, affect follows a quasi-Darwinian “innate-ist” bent toward matters of evolutionary hardwiring. But these wires are by no means fully insulated nor do they terminate with the brain or flesh; instead they spark and fray just enough to transduce those influences borne along by the ambient irradiation of social relations. Meanwhile, Deleuze's Spinozan route locates affect in the midst of things and relations (in immanence) and, then, in the complex assemblages that come to compose bodies and worlds simultaneously. (5-6)

The Tomkins branch of affect theory uses the bodily and somatic terrain of affective and emotional drive(s) as a point of departure for exploring the meeting of internal and external movements and gestures. These affective states mark, “...a certain insideout/outside-in difference in directionality: affect as the prime “interest” motivator that comes to put the drive in bodily drives...” (6). In other words, this branch examines the way bodies move and are moved by drives and emotions. Meanwhile, the Deleuzian strain of affect theory, situates “affect as an entire, vital, and modulating field of myriad becomings across human and nonhuman” (6). In this project I draw primarily on the Tomkinsian trajectory of affect theory, as I utilize affectivity to explore the inter-

workings of pride and shame and the use of affect in Gay Shame performance and activism. Affect theory has also expanded and branched out over the last few years and there are now many new trails opening up. One of these paths, as outlined by Seigworth and Gregg, involves the tracing of emotional states, which is also tied to “psychological and psychoanalytic inquiry where a relatively unabashed biologism remains co-creatively open to ongoing impingements and pressures from intersubjective and interobjective systems of social desiring” (7). Shared by all these theories is a sense of affectivities as a compelling force. Affects stir the body, or bodies to action and are not stable.

These threads of affect theory both connote the innate bodily characteristics and experiences of emotions and simultaneously mark the broad open field of emotional subjectivity. In this sense, affect theory can bridge the gap between a phenomenology of emotional experience/knowing and a “hard” science of biological stimuli and response. These are the primary threads of affect theory that I borrow from in this project. I am interested in how pride and shame form and inhabit zones of sexual citizenship, where affective identification takes place and how and where hyperidentification and solidarity tie to experiences of affectivity.

Affects are not strictly emotions, but they are also inextricable from our experience of emotion. Pride and shame in particular can mark the limits of identity and delimit the boundaries of the self. Sara Ahmed clearly outlines in *The Cultural Politics of Emotion* (2004), “...in my model of sociality of emotions, I suggest that emotions create the very effect of the surfaces and boundaries that allow us to distinguish an inside and an outside in the first place” (10). In other words, for Ahmed, emotions are tied up in distinguishing self from other and no emotion has a more important role in this than

shame. Emotions and their affective counterparts are not something layered on top of subjective experience, but are at the very core of shaping that experience and community forms a central part of that process.

Shame Studies has largely evolved from the work of S. S. Tomkins, who argues in *Affect, Imagery, Consciousness* (1991[1963]), that shame occurs at the site of desire. To feel ashamed is to have desired and to have that desire rejected, or repudiated. However, shame is always also an inward movement. It is a “painful sensation that is bound up with how the self feels about itself, a self-feeling that is felt by and on the body. When shamed, one's body seems to burn up with the negation that is perceived” (Ahmed 103). So, shame is both a drawing inward and a communal and performative affect, because it is always relational. Through shared experiences of communal shame, solidarity is invoked by Gay Shame groups as a means of reimagining self/other dichotomies in order to question the very ground of subjectivity. In this case shame is used as a tool for undermining divisions that operate within and facilitate oppressive state and social formations. Gay Shame groups re-empower the performative dimension of shame as a project of questioning identity positions and working toward solidarity.

Shame, as an affect emphasizes humility and responsibility and is therefore directly tied to social responsibility and can fundamentally disturb relations of power and work toward social change. Gay Shame performs shame in order to confront the normativizing power of shaming and to question the efficacy of the drive toward normativity in the gay and lesbian community. Fully realized sexual citizenship in the neoliberal moment is a movement away from shame into the “healthy” and normative embrace of the mainstream, with access to marriage and military participation. Gay

Shame not only points to the exclusionary nature of the discourse on citizenship, but also reclaims shame as a means to totally disturb system-wide discourses of citizenship and normativity and to forge community and common ground.

For Silvan Tomkins, shame threatens individual identity and fosters humility and inward contemplation. Tomkins argues that shame is the most intimate of affects and that it cuts to the core of identity. Shame causes the individual to move inward, dropping the eyes and avoiding contact with other people (120). So what happens when shame is brought out of the closet and extroverted? This is the question we must ask of Gay Shame, because that is precisely what these groups are doing. Shame is all about dignity. And according to Tomkins, humans are driven toward an essential dignity and toward “walking upright”. Shame undermines this and is therefore felt viscerally (132). However, Gay Shame groups revel in this shame, instead of a dehumanizing force, the celebration of shame becomes the very site where alienated queers find their humanity.

It is significant that pride is typically performed demonstrably. In order to overcome shame, pride must mount a dramatic performance. As Eve Sedgwick writes, shame is active and activating. Shaming is a profound act that performs. “Few words, after all, could be more performative in the Austinian sense than: ‘Shame’, ‘Shame on you...’” (32). As shame is a powerful and active agent, all aspects of Gay Pride must align around the opposition to shame in the performance of pride. One can see this in the performances of Gay Pride that I describe in the coming chapters.

In this project, I examine shame from multiple perspectives. On the one hand, Gay Shame groups attempt to reencounter and reinvigorate shame through a call to solidarity, or connection through shame, while simultaneously calling into question

narratives of pride and questioning identity formations based on pride. Radicalized, racialized and sexualized bodies are the sites of shame, experienced as a unilateral shaming from the normative center toward the margins. In a normative scenario shame acts as a cultural demarcation that distinguishes the ashamed from the proud. However, the old categories, such as gay/straight, are no longer the site of radicalization and instead normative gay and lesbian culture has become fully participatory in shaming the radical fringes of the queer community. Gay Shame groups draw attention to mainstream gay culture's participation in hierarchies of shame and attempt to re-empower shame as a site where affect and identity are called into question. Their performances, which I describe in the following chapters, have varying degrees of success at meeting these goals. Through looking at the writings, performances and intentions of Gay Shame groups, I examine the nature of these goals and ask when they are, or are not, successfully met.

Chapter Outlines

In the first chapter I present and expound upon a series of writings, performative documents and protest performances by Gay Shame San Francisco. Specifically I plan to mine the work of Mattilda (a.k.a. Matt) Sycamore Bernstein and the other members of Gay Shame San Francisco for their ability to elucidate the strategies and intentions of their group and their attempts at building solidarity among Bay Area communities. As a leader in the early years of Gay Shame San Francisco, Bernstein has helped to both chronicle the work of the group and produce a literary form that corresponds to the efforts of Gay Shame SF. In *That's Revolting* (2008) and *So Many Ways to Sleep Badly* (2008) Bernstein and others have created work that engages politically and affectively

with the work of Gay Shame SF. I also analyze Gay Shame San Francisco's performance work, focusing specifically on their attempt to intervene in the ongoing gentrification of the SF Bay Area and the marginalization of the poor. Particularly, I plan to look at their takeover of the San Francisco Gay and Lesbian Center in 2009 and their protest at the Department of Public Health in 2010. The first event meant to call attention to the people who were part of the queer community, but were excluded from the normative spaces of the gay and lesbian community, while the second focused on the hysteria around the H1N1 epidemic, as a distraction from the national health-care crisis. I look at how these performances employed shame and attempted solidarity through their aesthetics and spatial choices and also examine the tension between aditprop message-based performance and affectivity in this work. Finally, I will include other Gay Shame San Francisco events that have criticized San Francisco policies on the homeless, the Human Rights Campaign and the practices of Mayor Gavin Newsom.

In chapter two I explore the work of Kvisa Shchora, an Israeli and Palestinian Gay Shame activist performance group centered in Tel Aviv. This chapter focuses on four Kvisa Shchora events that encapsulate their work. One protest organized by Kvisa Shchora and by other Israeli activist groups, titled "Support the National Erektion" used grotesquerie and shaming to contest Israeli nationalism on the 40th anniversary of the 6-day war. "Support the National Erektion" linked the political struggles of queers with those of other groups oppressed under the militarism of the Israeli state more generally and this attempt at coalition building makes this a key site for beginning to understand this movement. I also look at Kvisa's use of Israeli ID cards at Tel Aviv Gay Pride in 2002 as another example. This protest performance utilized the rubric of identity to

deconstruct the exclusionary and racist policies of identity construction within the Israeli government, which went unquestioned in the Pride event itself. In addition, I focus on the “alternative beauty pageant” organized by members of Kvisa Shchora in order to advocate for solidarity and performed as a means of owning and counteracting shame. Finally, I examine a performance from the 2003 Tel Aviv Gay Pride Parade. This performance mixed symbols of Palestinian Nationalism in a seemingly inappropriate and offensive way in creating a form of Palestinian Drag with female nudity and anti-occupation messages which led to a dangerous amalgamation of queer imagery, politics and anti-occupation rhetoric. Here I look at the contradictory messages generated by this performance. These performances utilize the logic of solidarity to link queerness with other forms of oppression in Israel and to complicate and question militarism in Israeli society. I examine Kvisa Shchora's attempts to forge solidarity between oppressed groups and ask what forms of solidarity are generated by these performances and if literal, or imagined solidarity can be reached through this type of performance intervention.

In chapter three I look at Euroshame and EuroPride in London, during the summer of 2006. EuroShame, “A Festival of Homosexual Misery,” is presented yearly by Club Duckie. Club Duckie uses installations and performances as a means to critique the commodification and spectacle of Gay Pride in the UK (it can also be argued that this critique has far wider implications, as the Pride industry is a growing force throughout the UK, Europe, North America, Australia and throughout the world in nearly every industrialized country). EuroShame uses a number of artists to explore the hypocrisy of mainstream GL festivals through grotesque performances that link economy with sexuality in nuanced and humorous ways. I speculate about whether these performances

are able to create a space outside of empathy, where spectators can undertake critical engagement. Is Euroshame seeking solidarity, or a form of empathy and do they create a space of critical engagement that opens up a possibility of political activation, or do they simply create a fun club night for small community of sympathetic consumers, reaffirming the feelings of that community in a light and satirical way? I will answer these questions through a careful examination of several of the performances at Euroshame. Each performance was held in a particular “booth” and focused on a different European country, in order to queer the European Union and the unfulfilled promise of equality across the continent.

In the conclusion, I go back to my initial questions and examine the effecting and affecting dimensions of Gay Shame performances and the wider implications of this work. Looking at the three Gay Shame groups I included in this project, I explore how each one engaged a form of solidarity (or at least empathy) and shame and the effects these performances were intended to have on their communities. Additionally, I look at the tensions between communication-based performance and affective performance in each of these sites. I ask how Gay Shame performances might be useful in elucidating other types of political performance through their relationships to affect and solidarity. I also address the currency that Gay Shame and solidarity hold within contemporary capitalist economies and cultures. I theorize that performances of solidarity have the potential to change perception and emotion and create social change through performing hyperidentifications, but that this potential is tempered by limitations in communication and the complexity of achieving solidarity. Finally, I discuss the present and future of Gay Shame activism and ask whether this work will remain relevant and where it may go

from here.

Chapter 1

Shameful Consumption: Performing Shame and Solidarity

Over the last thirty years something remarkable has happened at Gay Pride Parades. They have gone from fringe protest events with meager attendance and no government support to well- sponsored spectacles that can draw millions. This is exemplified by San Francisco Gay Pride, which began in 1970 as a small unsanctioned “gay-in” in Golden Gate Park and now draws over one million attendees per year.⁴ This shift is best illustrated by the recent presence of Facebook employees at the San Francisco Gay Pride Parade in recent years:

Two years ago, Facebook employees marched in San Francisco’s Lesbian Gay Bisexual Transgender Pride Celebration with a contingent of about 70 employees and one jeep with a broken stereo. For this Sunday’s Pride parade, the company geared up to bring a team of 700 — more than 15% of its staff — a decorated trolley, and its chief executive, Mark Zuckerberg , who is expected to march alongside his employees for the first time, the company said. (Rusli)

Most people laud this transformation as indicative of the great leap forward in mainstream acceptance of gays and lesbians over the past few years. However, this shift is indicative not merely of the extent to which Facebook has become a corporate

⁴ This information was gathered from the San Francisco Gay Pride website, which tracks attendance numbers and discusses the history of the parade at <http://www.sfproude.org/heritage/>

powerhouse, but also of a major paradigm shift in how large companies and corporations are courting the pink dollar. The idea of a major national brand like Facebook participating in a Gay Pride Parade would have been unheard of in the late eighties and early nineties, let alone profiling their CEO front and center in such a parade. This suggests a substantial shift in the relationship corporations are taking to the LGBT spectacle today, especially when these companies are interested in courting LGBT folks as consumers. The article goes on to state that:

Facebook's bolstered presence at this year's Pride reflects a larger push by some in Silicon Valley to champion Gay Rights in hiring practices, and even in their products... Google is sending about 1,400 employees marching in San Francisco on Sunday, about 40% more than last year, according to a company spokeswoman. An Apple spokeswoman said a large group of employees will participate, though declined to provide specific details (Rusli).

This mainstreaming of Gay Pride Parades also coincides with other major steps toward fuller inclusion of gays and lesbians into mainstream culture. This year's San Francisco Pride Parade also coincided with the landmark repeal of the Defense of Marriage Act and the rejection of Proposition 8 by the US Supreme Court. Cumulatively, these events suggest significant shifts in both policy and public opinion toward gays and lesbians. Yet there is still something deeply troubling about the appearance of Mark Zuckerberg and his Facebook posse at SF Gay Pride, not to mention the hordes of other corporate sponsors in attendance this year. These included everything from Virgin Airlines to Absolute Vodka, but also many other corporate sponsors who paid for their own floats

and booths. Indeed, on the one hand, these corporations voice their support for the LGBT cause, but there is also something subtly sinister at work, deeply capitalist and inherently neoliberal. Facebook and similar companies are courting the pink dollar and doing it in the guise of acceptance and neoliberal free-expression identity culture.

Amid all of this celebration and reverie, there is one small minority who is unwilling to accept the money, normality, corporate tie-ins and community feel at face value. Since the late 1990s, Gay Shame has demanded that people recognize the commoditization of gay and lesbian identity and the marginalizing of the BTQI (Bisexual, Trans, Queer and Intersex) peoples who do not fall within the purview of public acceptance. Additionally, Gay Shame groups work against the constraints of identity under neoliberalism and attempt to forge new identities. Gay Shame groups use a variety of modalities, from street performances, to agitprop, to demonstrations, to protests to bring attention to these issues.

Gay Shame's actions and performances reveal the philosophy of founder Mattilda Bernstein and show how Gay Shame's new form of queer activism, based on a combination of agitprop communication and affectivity, has emerged as an intervention into the narrowing Gay Rights agenda, as well as an attempt to forge solidarity between oppressed groups. Gay Shame San Francisco attempts to jar spectators out of a neoliberal consumer haze, through outrageous, satirical, political demonstrations that question citizenship and rights discourse. Gay Shame groups use performance as a primary mode to communicate their messages of solidarity and political engagement and to affectively connect performers and spectators to issues of human rights and oppression. This chapter examines the moments in these performances in which affectivity and solidarity are

invoked and explored and analyzes the tension between agitprop communication-based performance and affective engagements with shame that attempt to forge connections in Gay Shame's work. Finally, this chapter will segue into the rest of this project, which explores the broader scope of the Gay Shame movement through performances at three distinct sites.

Neoliberalism and the Fight

The Gay Shame movement owes its emergence to a long history of queer activism. Radical queer activists have fought for LGBTQI rights and visibility since the 1960s. Gay Shame developed as many gay and lesbian activists narrowed their focus and relegated non-conforming queers. A focus on universal human rights became secondary as the gay neoliberal consumer became the primary focus of an ever-narrowing Gay Rights agenda. In *The Tourist State*, Margaret Werry defines liberalism as "...that body of thoughts, feelings, expectations, discourses, modes of governance, and political fictions that takes the autonomy and rights of the individual as the basis for collective life" (xxiii). In a neoliberal framework, individual identity and rights have come to represent ultimate life goals. Furthermore, individual identities are taken for granted, as the basis of society. Identity is performed in neoliberalism through a framework of grand consumerism, where identity is played out in the mall and in the online land of endless desire for commodity.

Identities under neoliberalism represent cultivation and branding of discrete identity positions. These positions can then be embraced and are embracing, as a space of acceptance and capitalist participation. To identify as gay or lesbian in this context means

to gain (nearly) full access to the capitalist state through economic participation. However, the title of consumer-citizen comes at a cost, literally and figuratively. Consumer-citizens pay with the foreclosure of other ways of being and the active distancing from the violence and oppression of others. In the struggle to overcome the paradoxes and oppressiveness of this new market identity, Gay Shame groups attempt to re-infect a radicalism into LGBT struggles, while arguing for a sense of genuine connectedness that moves away from market-consumer identities and toward a human-centered network, based on a broader appeal to humanitarian struggle and connectedness. At times, these performances take the form of 60s nostalgia and agitprop; at other times, they create novel forms of community based on solidarity of the oppressed.

While focused on the problem of contemporary consumer neoliberalism, the roots of Gay Shame can be traced back to the flourishing of post-Stonewall queer radicalism represented by groups such as Queer Nation and ACT UP. These groups proved foundational for Gay Shame's activism, as they also reacted to a lack of radicalism in the more conventional Gay Rights movement based on the legacy of Civil Rights. As Erin J. Rand argues in *Risking Resistance: Rhetorical Agency in Queer Theory and Queer Activism*, the urgency and terror of the AIDS epidemic in the late 1980s and early 1990s made the necessity of queer activism immediate and desperate (5). This began in the late 80s with a reclaiming and re-circulation of the term queer as a signifier of non-normative sexuality. The AIDS Coalition to Unleash Power formed in 1987 and Queer Nation formed three years later in 1990. These groups began to center protests and mounting demonstrations on issues of queer rights and visibility and on the total lack of government intervention in the early years of the epidemic.

The systemic homophobia and neglect of the federal government, drug companies, and medical institutions led many commentators to suggest that the delays in finding practical AIDS treatments represents at best a policy of benign neglect and at worst a tactic of outright genocide. (Rand 2)

Between 1980 and 1986, the AIDS epidemic raged with no strong government stance or action until in 1986 President Reagan instituted a homophobic testing regime (3). In addition, a series of hate crimes and homophobic acts were inflicted on those who were or were perceived to be gay. In “Mourning and Militancy,” Douglass Crimp writes that “seldom has a society so savaged people during their hour of loss, the violence we encounter is relentless” (2). Instead of laying down in defeat, gays and lesbians fought back and reacted with anger (137).

Indeed, [with] the formation of activist groups such as the Gay Men’s Health Crisis (GMHC), AIDS Coalition to Unleash Power (ACT UP), Sex Panic!, Queer Nation, the Pink Panthers, the Lesbian Avengers... the face of lesbian and gay activism seems to have undergone a significant shift. (Rand 3)

However, it was with the formation of ACT UP and Queer Nation that contemporary queer activism really began. These groups initiated a tradition of provocative performances that often utilized shame.

Queer Nation formed in New York in 1990 and consisted of members of ACT UP and other activists. Angered by the anti-gay violence and homophobic government policies and media representations of gays and lesbians, Queer Nation formed as a direct

action activist group. Their satirical, confrontational, and performative slogans and actions catalyzed the newly forming queer activist movement and the discipline of queer theory. Some of their more famous and influential slogans included “out of the closets and into the streets” and “two, four, six, eight, how do you know your kids are straight?” and the now overused, “We’re here, we’re queer, get used to it!” They were also famous for staging actions such as kiss-ins, and for publicly outing people, and they quickly spread around the US with a large chapter in San Francisco and chapters springing up in most major cities within a few months. ACT UP’s actions tended to be much more somber and macabre and were marked by a mode of protesting taken directly from the Civil Rights movements of the 60s and 70s. This included shutting down public offices, such as the April 15, 1987, action in which they captured the news media by arriving at the post office at the last minute for filing tax returns.

However, Queer Nation marked a shift in LGBTQI activism, because they were not advocating for inclusion in the system, but were attempting to undermine and critique the emergence of neoliberalism, Reaganomics and the conservative turn in US politics. Instead of framing their protests as a rights-based discourse, they performed a structural critique of the neoliberal turn and of normative citizenship. They also engaged shame to show liberalism’s bad-faith, by putting abject queer bodies on display and introducing an element of satirical playfulness to their slogans and actions. This new element of satire, as well as the reclaiming of the term “queer,” can be interpreted as directly influencing the queer activist groups that followed, fundamentally paving the way toward the Gay Shame movement of the late 1990s.

Emergence of Gay Shame

The late 1990s were ripe for the development of a totally new type of queer activism. With the AIDS epidemic still prevalent but better managed, and with the waning of the intense burst of activism from the 1980s, queer activists began to refocus their objectives and strategies. As new groups such as Fed Up Queers and Gay Shame appeared, a completely new type of activism emerged. Queer activism of the 90s developed less as a cry for help and more as a satirical and performative appeal to community, coalition and partnerships across marginalized groups. This moment catalyzed the left fringes of the LGBTQI community, because of the rate at which gay and lesbian concerns were being absorbed and reconstituted under neoliberalism's wary eye.

ACT UP and groups like it emerged at a time of extreme crisis for the LGBT community. These groups were extremely effective at addressing and bringing attention to that crisis, but lost momentum and focus during the 1990s and particularly after the National Institutes of Health protest in 1990, in which there was conflict over the direction of the group (Hubbard 43). Additionally, Fed Up Queers was gaining traction and working collaboratively with ACT UP in the late 1990s (Shepard 14). The late 90s and early 2000s needed a new approach to queer activism, one that addressed the omnipresent and spectacular form of contemporary neoliberalism and that used solidarity as a primary mode of engagement. A rapid mainstreaming and commoditization of the gay and lesbian community became a primary target for the members of these new radical queer organizations, who felt this obscured the issues still faced by queers of color, trans folks, those suffering from HIV and AIDS, and other oppressed peoples.

These groups re-imagined the activist landscape as one of radical perturbation, where the everyday habitus of the city is disturbed and people's expectations and trajectories through the city are unsettled. They also meant to enliven an LGBT community that had become far less radical. Through humorous performances of coalition, Gay Shame groups of the late 90s attempted to reclaim shame as a source of radical alterity from which identity politics could be questioned and re-imagined. These performances activated shame to question fixed identity positions. In some cases this allowed for the formation of coalitions of the oppressed and led the way toward progressive social change. Furthermore, Gay Shame groups used performances and demonstrations to enact a utopian community, in which they attempted to push beyond the confines of identity.

When Fed Up Queers (FUQ) developed in 1998, they changed the activist landscape by focusing on solidarity and community building and moving away from the single issue politics of many of their predecessors. This is directly linked to the work of Gay Shame, which also developed in 1998, however Fed Up Queers only lasted for one year. The group developed in reaction to the police brutality toward those holding a protest and vigil after Mathew Shepard was brutally murdered in Laramie Wyoming (Flynn and Smith 249-250). According to Estacia Smith, a former member of the group, "Fed Up Queers sought to up the ante of the status quo of activism by pushing the limits whenever possible, through acts of civil disobedience and covert actions" (249). Specifically members of FUQ became fed up with the slow processes and seemingly endless meetings of other groups such as ACT UP and were looking for a group that discussed less and did more activist interventions. "FUQ took action over queer issues and brought a queer voice to any other social conflicts that members were interested in

addressing” (249). This statement reveals that this group was already engaged in and concerned with solidarity and the combining of different social causes and therefore occupies a lot of common ground with Gay Shame.

Gay Shame developed simultaneously with FUQ, at a time when new queer groups were forming and established queer activist groups were in a moment of transition. Gay Shame SF initially began in New York, when Mattilda Sycamore Bernstein, who was involved with ACT UP and Fed Up Queers, founded the group in 1998 as a reaction against the consumerism of Gay Pride events in the late 90s. Bernstein began her activist career in the early 90s in New York and she carried many of the traditions of ACT UP and Fed Up Queers with her when she formed Gay Shame. Specifically Bernstein wanted to create an alternate space where queer youth could escape the homogenized nature of Gay Pride events. She describes New York Gay Pride as a corporate whitewash: “By 1998, New York’s Gay Pride had become little more than a giant opportunity for multinational corporations to target market gay consumers” (269).

Bernstein chronicles the beginning of Gay Shame as an attempt to create an anti-consumerist festival for radical queers and those that did not fit into mainstream gay and lesbian culture. “The goal of Gay Shame was to create a free, all-ages space where queers could make culture and share skills and strategies for resistance, rather than just buy a bunch of crap” (269). “Festival,” in this case, could mean either a collective gathering, or a combined party and performance space where a utopian community is imagined and demonstrated through performance. In finding a location for Gay Shame, Bernstein wanted a private space, but one that could be opened up to anyone interested in participating. She held the first Gay Shame event in June 1998, at a communal living and

performance space in Brooklyn called Dumba (269). This initial event centered on putting together a free zine called: “Swallow your Pride: A Do-It-Yourself Guide to Hands-On Activism.” According to Bernstein, “Swallow Your Pride contained advice for stickering, wheatpasting, civil disobedience, and stenciling, as well as sample propaganda and stories” (ibid). The zine also contained “rants and articles about sweatshops, union organizing, the crackdown on public sex, Megan’s Law, Welfare ‘reform’, fat activism, AIDS profiteering, and needle exchange” (270). The zine was not concerned with narrowing content, or restricting subjects based on political opinion, but was intended to serve as an open forum for radical queers and followed the greater theme of Gay Shame, which was first and foremost intended as a space where radical queers could congregate and share ideas and company in an open and communal forum.

Gay Shame’s first strategy was to hold a counter-event to Gay Pride, as a utopian celebratory protest and Bernstein and others continued to hold a yearly Gay Shame event at Dumba. Flyers for the event in 2001 called it, “a radical queer alternative to consumerist ‘Gay Pride’ celebrations. A day of fierce performers, speakers, art, film, and a dance party” (Halperin 42). They created a space where those who felt alienated from mainstream New York Gay Pride could come together and find common ground: “In a New York City where a visible culture of radical queers barely existed, Gay Shame was essential in building ties between queers who might otherwise have been isolated from one another” (42). Bernstein eventually relocated to San Francisco, because she felt that New York had alienated the radical queer community. “I returned to San Francisco because late-nineties New York offered me little more than a rabidly consumerist, commodified, careerist monoculture that drained and disgusted me” (270). Bernstein

helped the group travel to California, where she hoped to find a less gentrified and more open cultural landscape.

Unfortunately, once they got there, Bernstein was dismayed, because she felt that the late 90s San Francisco resembled the New York she had left:

I returned to a San Francisco that mimicked all the worst aspects of New York. Entire neighborhoods had been bulldozed to make way for giant new lofts, and the radical outsider queer culture that I craved had been virtually demolished and replaced by high fashion hipsters looking for the coolest parties. (270)

Bernstein was further obliged by the gentrification and consumerism in New York and San Francisco to make Gay Shame a vital and disruptive part of the queer community. San Francisco, like New York, lacked this radical outsider queer voice in the activist scene that Bernstein felt necessary for the culture.

Gay Shame became a project for Bernstein to reintroduce and catalyze a radical queer community, that, according to her, had been further marginalized by San Francisco's gentrification and homogenization. Gay Shame held the potential to re-map the city along queer lines and to exploit the spaces the city had failed to fully gentrify, or homogenize, such as beaches, parks, dumps and superfund sites.

Helping to instigate Gay Shame in San Francisco holds a central place in my struggle to create a cultural home and find maybe a little bit of hope in a world of rot. For me, Gay Shame has been an opportunity to help build something transformative, deviant, and dangerous out of alienation and desperation. (270)

The first Gay Shame SF event was held at Tire Beach: "...we decided to hold Gay Shame in an outdoor public space. We chose Tire Beach, a rotting industrial park on the San Francisco Bay where discarded MUNI streetcars are dumped..." (270-271). The idea of a dump on the fringes of a post-industrial wasteland, on the margins of San Francisco seemed like an appropriate choice to begin a new chapter of Gay Shame. They made a specific choice to hold the event outside, in a public space, which was meant to make the event truly open and public. These spaces were completely overlooked by San Franciscans on their daily trajectories through the city. The choice to keep Gay Shame events public and open has become a primary operating logic of the group and part of Gay Shame's mission in questioning neoliberal identity categories and spatial logic, through building coalitions.

Contextualizing Gay Shame

One of the few substantive collections of Gay Shame writing comes from Bernstein and Gay Shame SF. Bernstein decided to compile a book about Gay Shame activism in both San Francisco and New York to set the tone of the emerging movement and to articulate the aesthetics and agenda of Gay Shame. Indeed, even the book's title, *That's Revolting*, draws attention to the disgusting and the shameful. The cover features an extreme close-up of a lipsticked mouth, covered in glitter. The mouth is slightly open and the teeth are covered in lipstick. This image dirties the glamor of drag and the sleekness of conventional book covers, an expression of Gay Shame's attempt to subvert normativity and unsettle identity through a re-activation of shame and disgust.

That's Revolting contains a diverse series of articles and writings on the Gay Shame movement. The articles run the gamut from serious intellectual rants to political satire. The sheer diversity of the Gay Shame movement comes into sharp relief in this collection. It becomes clear when perusing the book that this is not a univocal group advocating for one thing, but is instead a complex chorus of voices demanding social change across multiple registers. Ultimately, unsettling identity and expectations are at the core of most of the writings, as is an anti-consumerist rhetoric and a questioning of neoliberal categories.

In the introduction to the second edition from 2008, Bernstein elucidates what she considers as the hypocrisy of the Gay Rights movement and the intervention(s) Gay Shame SF is making. Bernstein argues that “[m]ost people in this country—especially those not born rich, white, straight, and male—are not full citizens. Gay assimilationists want to make sure they’re on the winning side in the citizenship wars...” (3). In other words, she argues that in the struggles for full access to citizenship and cultural inclusion, mainstream lesbian and gay people are not interested in forming coalitions or fighting for others alienated from mainstream culture, but instead are fighting fiercely for full inclusion in all of the bourgeoisie centrist cultural institutions in the US with the rights, privileges, and capital that accompany that position. Bernstein’s clearest summation of her thoughts appears later in the book, when she argues that “[w]illful participation in U.S. imperialism is crucial to the larger goals of assimilation, as the holy trinity of marriage, military service and adoption has become the central preoccupation of a gay movement centered more on obtaining straight privilege than challenging power.” (3) Importantly Bernstein links LGBT participation in national life, through marriage,

adoption and military service to tacit acceptance of U.S. militarism and international policy. The end goal, for Bernstein, seems to be a questioning of the entire military industrial complex and the neoliberal economy, starting with mainstream gays and lesbians.

Bernstein articulates two important threads of the Gay Shame agenda here. First, she hints at the need for coalition building between the disenfranchised and secondly, she critiques the Gay Rights movement for its assimilationist and centrist politics. This sets the tone for the entire movement, focused on solidarity of the oppressed and an attempt to question power on a systemic level. However, Bernstein fails to articulate two of Gay Shame's major contributions: using shame in the service of solidarity and the ability of Gay Shame performances to connect sexuality and economy. Instead she focuses specifically on normativity and its relationship to nationalism and militarism. She also positions assimilation and normativity as monolithic categories, which does not account for the diffuse nature of power under neoliberalism, a major oversight of her criticism and agenda.

Bernstein does hit on one of the primary tenets of Gay Shame activism. Gay Shame activists are extremely critical of the triad-issue approach that gay and lesbian activism has taken in recent memory. Gay Shame groups argue that in striving for assimilation, GL activism hastily shed its history and connection to other oppressed groups in the US and internationally.

The idea of how aberrant identities can become accepted and normativized through sexual citizenship is a question addressed by Margot D. Weiss in her 2008 article "Gay Shame and BDSM Pride: Neoliberalism, Privacy, and Sexual Politics." In this

article, Weiss looks at the model of citizenship espoused by Gay Shame SF and the very different model put forward by the yearly BDSM pride event in San Francisco. Weiss argues that Gay Shame SF and BDSM pride use two opposing models of citizenship in their activism:

Marriage figures in both of these conflicts as a key site of contemporary sexual activism. Gay Shame's critique in the face of citywide support for marriage equality and the NCSF's deployment of married, heterosexual normalcy to defend a kink conference represent differing strategies available to activists in the neoliberal United States today. (88-89)

While marriage becomes a primary issue through which each group articulates their activist methodologies and objectives, Weiss argues that the 2008 BDSM Pride focused on an appeal to heteronormativity and marriage, while Gay Shame approaches citizenship through "performing difference in public." (90)

Stressing the interlinkage of the economy and culture, Gay Shame's actions attempt to make visible precisely the relations obscured by neoliberal ideology, including the role of class privilege in constructing multiple kinds of social marginality. Deemphasizing individuality (e.g., all members of Gay Shame are publicly identified as "Mary") and instead making public claims for the social good, Gay Shame focuses on the neoliberal collapse of public sexual culture, the privatization of care, and the (hetero- and homo-) normalization of privileged relationships between citizens and the state (like marriage and docile consumerism). (90)

Weiss's claim that Gay Shame's primary contribution is in marking the relationships between sexual identity, economy and citizenship captures one aspect of their contribution. However, the group is also positing new community formations, premised on oppression and exhibiting a clear nostalgia, harkening back to an older era of queer activism.

In a 2004 interview, Bernstein stated Gay Shame's agenda, vis-à-vis normativity, and pointed to the group's use of dis-identification as a means of disturbing identity categories. Furthermore she demanded that people challenge any normative impulse and argued that this is part of Gay Shame's purpose.

I moved here [to San Francisco] in 1992 and was absolutely terrified . . . just a few years ago, when activists first tried to set up a shelter for queer homeless youth in the Castro, residents argued it would bring down property values! Talk about values. . . . People need to step back and challenge . . . everything that is normal. That's the gift that queers have. But all that's being thrown away, discarded, just for a taste of straight privilege. In short, Gay Shame combats assimilation and an increasingly homonormative gay mainstream by performing disidentifications with, and critiques of, privilege in public. (91-92)

Citizenship, rights and access to resources are at the center of how Bernstein articulates the work of Gay Shame SF and are also central to Weiss' examination of Gay Shame in relation to kink pride.

The word "citizenship" is often used by Bernstein in the introduction to *That's Revolting*, but is not clearly defined. While I agree that a lack of concern for the full

human rights of all peoples is a primary problem in the contemporary gay and lesbian rights agenda, I suggest a more careful look at the definition of citizenship and of her application of the term “rights” is necessary, so that citizenship does not become a vague, all-encompassing term. As Keith Faulks elucidates in *Citizenship*, full citizenship involves rights and privileges, as well as responsibilities, such as military service and service to the nation (1). I don’t necessarily subscribe to the notion that this is the “citizenship” Bernstein values, as I’m skeptical that mandatory military service is something she would endorse. The usage that Bernstein is employing is part of the term’s transformation in recent years. As Faulks argues, this is a rather recent shift in the way people have treated the term, “Since the late 1980s, thinkers on the left have also embraced citizenship as a potentially radical idea...in the past, the general attitude of those on the left was one of suspicion” (2). Historically citizenship also carried with it the weight of individuality and ownership.

Citizenship was seen as part of the problem rather than a solution to the injustices of capitalism. Indeed, the rights of citizenship seemed to be imbued with a capitalist logic. They helped legitimize private property and hid the inequalities of class society behind an abstract rhetoric of equality.

(2)

Gay Shame would want to distance itself from this definition of citizenship. They would not be comfortable with a form of citizenship that was premised on maintaining and defending property.

Bernstein and other Gay Shame activists refer to a different and very contemporary notion of citizenship, defined as full and equal access to human rights and

resources, based on a welfare state understanding of citizenry. She is not just writing about literal judicial and legislative rights, but also access to monetary and cultural capital and basic human rights such as clean water, food, healthcare, education, and freedom from violence and oppression. As Benjamin Heater suggests:

The notions of autonomy, equality of status and citizenly participation in the affairs of the polity set citizenship theoretically apart from the feudal, monarchical and tyrannical forms of sociopolitical identity. (Heater 1)

This differs dramatically from the neoliberal definition of citizenship, as individual autonomy and access to capital, without government intervention. For Faulks, the term takes on a meaning of autonomy and basic human rights for all people. This is the definition Bernstein is deploying and is also how I will be using the term here, to mean an access to basic human rights.

For Bernstein the gay right's agenda is not focused on universal human rights, even within the wider LGBTQI community. She specifically addresses the problems and oversight of the mainstream "Gay Rights" agenda: "I'm using the term 'Gay Rights,'" (3) she says, "instead of the more popular term of the moment, 'LGBT rights', because 'LGBT' usually means gay, with lesbian in parentheses, throw out the bisexuals and put trans on for a little window-dressing" (3). Her point is that a hierarchy of voices exists within the struggle for Gay Rights and that non-conforming queer people lack advantages in the struggle for rights, recognition, and even a political voice. She continues to reveal the ways in which the mainstream Gay Rights struggle is actively missing (or avoiding) the point: "A Gay Rights agenda fights for an end to discrimination in housing and employment, but not for the provision of housing or jobs; domestic partner health

coverage, but not universal health coverage” (4). The logic is always that gays and lesbians deserve full inclusion in the system as it stands, but the inherent exclusionary logic of neoliberalism need not be questioned. This is an astute observation on her part and one of Gay Shame’s most important critical contributions. In addition, she asserts that “...a Gay Rights agenda fights for tougher hate crimes legislation, instead of fighting the racism, classism, transphobia (and homophobia) intrinsic in the criminal ‘justice’ system” (4). Through this narrow agenda, according to Bernstein, gay and lesbian “assimilationists have created the ultimate genetically modified organism, combining virulent strains of nationalism, patriotism, consumerism, and patriarchy and delivering them in one deadly product: state-sanctioned matrimony” (4). Her critique of the gay and lesbian movement rests primarily in the tendency toward individual identity categories and rights-based discourse, while gays and lesbians disavow any relation or obligation to others who are marginalized. This avoidance of the shame and stigma of marginalization is countered by gays and lesbians through their alignment with a nationalist agenda of conformity.

According to Bernstein, the Gay Rights agenda is strongly drawn to nationalist appeals, because they are seeking inclusivity. Bernstein pays special attention to the nationalism that is a primary and visible part of the Gay Rights agenda. She argues that the Gay Rights struggle, in attempting to take advantage of full rights and privileges of United States citizenship, is not only ignoring the violence the US is participating in worldwide, but is indirectly endorsing that same violence, by not speaking out against it.

Marriage proponents are anxious to discard all those tacky hues of lavender and pink, in favor of the good ol’ stars and stripes, literally

draping themselves in Old Glory as the U.S. occupies Iraq, overthrows the only democratically-elected government in the history of Haiti, funds the Israeli war on the Palestinians, and makes the whole world safe for multinational corporations to plunder indigenous resources. (3-4)

By “hues of lavender and pink” Bernstein reveals the more radical left and gender-queer portions of the LGBTQI community. “The tyranny of assimilation lies in the way the borders are policed. For decades, there has been strife within queer politics and cultures, between assimilationists and liberationists, conservatives and radicals” (4). This “strife” is part of the history of queer culture in America, but it has made a strong swing to the right in the last couple of decades. The borders Bernstein references are the borders between who inhabits mainstream gay and lesbian culture and who remains on the outside looking in. There is unequal power and access to representation among those who are in the gay and lesbian mainstream and those stranded outside, according to Bernstein: “Never before, however, has the assimilationist/conservative side held such a stranglehold over popular representations of what it means to be queer” (4). Bernstein’s primary thesis is most clearly present when she argues:

If gay assimilationists wanted actual progress, they’d start by fighting for the abolition of marriage (duh), and for universal access to the services that marriage can sometimes help procure: housing, healthcare, citizenship, tax breaks, and inheritance rights. Instead, proponents of assimilation claim that access to marriage will “solve” fundamental problems of inequality. This is not surprising, given that the gay marriage movement is run by groups like the Human Rights Campaign and the Log

Cabin Republicans, who have more in common with the National Rifle Association than any sort of left agenda, queer or otherwise. (ibid)

Bernstein does not believe that mainstream gay and lesbian groups, such as the Human Rights Campaign, are passively fighting for a centrist agenda, but instead she feels they are actively working toward conservative goals and to silence the voicing of more left and radical ideas. Along with her dislike of organizations such as the HRC, Bernstein expresses a strong anti-intellectual bias, which is detrimental to the effectiveness and reflexivity of Gay Shame's actions. This bias seems to have emerged predominantly at a conference Gay Shame attended in 2003.

In a section of the book entitled "Gay Sham," Bernstein writes about the Gay Shame conference held at the University of Michigan in 2003. The conference seemed to borrow its title directly from Gay Shame activism and was meant to explore the relationship between Queer Theory and shame. Bernstein and other Gay Shame SF members were immediately skeptical about the conference's investment in activism in general and their work in particular. "Though the conference used the name of our activist group, we were the only activist-specific panel" (285), Bernstein complained. Indeed, she took to calling the conference Gay Sham, because for her it smacked of appropriation. "It was obvious to us that we were a fetish object, called on for a few realness points, and we arrived at the conference ready to stimulate a debate on this blatant appropriation" (284). Bernstein had the expectation that the scholars at the conference would take for granted, or at least be prepared to discuss the issues of appropriation she felt were at play. Much like in their activist work, they strove to use

their panel as a provocation and an opportunity for discussion. They decided to use a model based on Reaganomics to explain the sort of appropriation found at the conference.

The Gay Shame conference, we explained, was trickle-down academia, by which academics appropriate anything that they can get their hands on—mostly people’s lived struggles. . . and claim to have invented them. (285)

Clearly they went to the conference looking for a fight and certainly got one, but the validity of their criticism must not be taken for granted. The conference organizers planned a panel immediately following theirs called “Fuck Activism,” a choice that would seem both defensive and uninviting to the actual activists in attendance. Bernstein posits that, “clearly, the conference was organized in such a way that one activist panel in an entire weekend was still too threatening without immediately questioning the validity of activism altogether” (ibid). The contention between activism and scholarly production is prominent in this episode, an example of the discursive tension between different understandings of queer citizenship.

As could be expected, many of the conference participants reacted violently to the accusation of appropriation and this event repelled Bernstein and the others.

No one at the University of Michigan physically assaulted (or) attacked us, yet the unwillingness of conference organizers to hold themselves accountable for their appropriation felt eerily similar to the Center’s unwillingness to take responsibility for allowing queers to get bashed on its doorstep. (286)

Here Bernstein refers to an incident at a Gay Shame action in front of the LGBT Center in San Francisco, where members of the group were assaulted by riot police. Gay

Shame's experience at the conference is probably the reason for an anti-intellectual bias that has emerged within the group. Gay Shame San Francisco's current stance on the relationship between activism and scholarship is that scholarship is an elitist practice that feeds on activism but does not give back to it, or contribute to social change. The statement on their website concerning this is called "Gay Shame and Academia" and reads,

If you are writing a paper, GAY SHAME offers plenty of materials online and hopefully our meetings are great sources of inspiration. We hope that once your paper has been turned in that you remember to unleash your defiance on the world for all to see. GAY SHAME challenges you to step away from the classist pillars of theoretical "discourse" and celebrate direct action deviance. (<http://www.gayshamesf.org/about.html#meetings>)

While this statement does not suggest that activism and scholarship are mutually exclusive, it does imply that academia is an elitist institution that lacks the connection to real world struggles necessary for change and that the academe practices elitism that divests cultural productions and activist work to serve the selfish needs of the scholars and with little or no reciprocation to the communities in question. Gay Shame groups tend to have an unabashed bias toward activism as a means of social change and against intellectual discourse.

This argument takes for granted the potential of intellectual exchange and argumentation as another mode of social change and the necessity for critique and reflexivity in all aspects of activism. Furthermore, academic production has the ability to bring a cerebral praxis to the performative dimension of activism, reflecting on Gay

Shame and asking important critical questions of the work. Activism without critique and analysis has the danger of lacking thought and reflexivity, and academic analysis allows activists to examine the direction and impact of their work and to place it within a national, historical, cultural and international framework.

This discussion of academic responsibility, culpability, and its relationship to praxis leads me to question my own role in the work of Gay Shame and in the larger activist community. I must ask very specifically: how does my critique influence the physical work of activism and is appropriation at play in my own writing? In addition, I do think that Gay Shame SF's anti-academic bias is unfortunate, because social change theory and lived activism are both necessary components of creating change, as are thought and action. In this sense, acting without a critically engaged response can be foolish, as can thinking without acting. Shame is invoked in a very different sense here: to shame the academic for being removed from action and therefore removed from activism. Gay Shame's understanding of activism is that it is only one of physical protest, where the activist uses his or her own body as the ground of activism, through an activation of shame. This is clearly evidenced in the writing of Gay Shame members and this is far too narrow a definition for activism to fit in.

Bernstein's language performs shame and shaming in significant ways. Within radical queer protest literature the language itself takes on both a form and content that creates a queer literary politics. First, in applying the term "performative" to language, I must address Angela Esterhammer's caution in *Creating States: Studies in the Performative Language of John Milton and William Blake*, in which she argues that

[w]hile speech-act theory per se is uncommon as a primary approach to the interpretation of literature, its terms have been so widely disseminated in literary and cultural study that 'performative' can now be used loosely to describe discourse which is operative in society and establishes a social construct, or even, following Paul de Man, to denote the rhetorical dimension of language in general. (3)

Therefore, it is important to apply a more precise definition when employing the term “performative” to written text. Diana Taylor assiduously traces performativity as a product of rhetoric and the linguistic turn, where the words performative and performativity emerge from the discourses of J. L. Austin, Judith Butler and Jacques Derrida. Austin posits that “the issuing of an utterance is the performing of an action” (5). The most commonly cited example is the repetition of the ubiquitous words “I do” in the marriage ceremony (that has a direct connection to contemporary GLBTQI politics and the struggle for marriage rights). This tradition borrows from philosophy and rhetoric, but is modified in the case of Butler, who argues that socialization and repeated citationality have rendered gender and sexuality (as well as numerous other societal iterations) fixed within systems of repetition and citation. Taken in the most strict and canonical terms stemming directly from Austin, a speech-act has a direct result in the world, such as “I thee Wed” (3). However, the definition I apply here is a little different. I borrow heavily from Esterhammer’s definition of performativity. Esterhammer isolates two different uses of performativity in Literary and Cultural Studies:

Critics who concentrate on context... focus their attention on speech acts in the literary text, while those who study poetic authority and the

phenomenological status of utterance usually regard the text itself as a speech-act (12).

In this sense, performativity represents the border between the discursive and the embodied. It is at the border between presence and absence.

Queer performance moves to the core of performativity, because queer methodologies both perform and yet refuse to perform. They are what Eve Sedgwick would refer to as periperformatives. They propose new systems of meaning, but leave those systems unfinished and in that sense never fulfill their promise. As performance is a mode of transformation, queer performance transforms through a series of perturbations that never finish in a prescribed mutation, but simply perform a process of releasing transformative potential. Similarly, shame works in an analogous realm of affective knowledge. Shame is both a moving inward and an outward identification. Shame performs through abjection, but shame does not perform concretely. Shame makes us acutely aware of our presence, but also exposes our desire to disappear. Does queer performance and more specifically Gay Shame recuperate the experience of abjection and shame for their transformative potential? This is a question I will examine via observation of the performances of Gay Shame San Francisco.

Gay Shame SF and Gay Shame groups in general perform activism in an enlivened and an enlivening way; however, they rarely perform in theatrical spaces, or in well-lit, well-rehearsed plays. Instead, these performances take place in the streets and in public spaces. They are often held as part of Gay Pride events, or as counter-events. These groups choose performance as their primary form of engagement, because as Soyini Madison argues “Public performance invokes public discourse by becoming a

communicative instrument where the shared naming and marking of injustice can be realized....” (6). For Gay Shame groups the only path to engaging the public in the human rights issues and inequities that they address, is through public performances that shock and provoke. With varying degrees of success these performances expose the public to important issues of injustice and inequity within and beyond the LGBTQI community. These performances also expose the tension between performances of communication, premised on a direct political appeal and performances of affect, where shame and shaming become primary modes of engagement.

Performance as communication is definitely one aspect of Gay Shame’s activism, but the group also utilizes performance for other purposes and tactics. As Madison also articulates, “Performance, as a tactic and as emergent, in the service of human rights and social justice is variously effective and affective” (2). In other words, it is a feeling, an energy exchange, a communal experience, action, and an event. Gay Shame performances utilize affect and shame as a means of drawing spectators in via engaging empathy and solidarity. Additionally, Gay Shame performers attempt to use performance as a means to create social change. Gay Shame groups utilize performance as a way to both affectively engage with neoliberal identity culture and also attempt to effect social change through these performances. Many of their tactics and aesthetics also draw on a lexicon of street performance and, at times, this can give their events a sense of nostalgia.

Gay Shame San Francisco’s Performances

It’s a sunny afternoon in downtown San Francisco and a suit-clad mob is just emerging from the dozens of high rises along Market Street. They pour into and out of

the MUNI and BART underground stations around Van Ness. Meanwhile, a couple of homeless men shelter in the doorway of an old brick building. Something is happening in front of the LGBT Center and a crowd begins to gather. There is someone dressed as Ben Franklin shouting into a microphone; other people are dressed as though they've just stepped out of the 18th Century, but something isn't right. There is cross gender, genderfuck, and all sorts of strange costuming going on. There is a lot of glitter and lipstick and large poster board signs that look like collages assembled from fashion magazines. In the middle of the clamor is some sort of large machine, or something meant to represent a machine (parts of it are made of rusted metal, other parts are cardboard). A crowd gathers, and if one wants to move around, one needs either to walk into traffic or momentarily join the crowd and shuffle along. One has just stumbled into a performance of Gay Shame San Francisco, called De-Center the Center. Their performance work utilizes a reclaiming of shame in order to question identity and to thumb their nose at the normative, rights-based system they see the gay and lesbian community as striving steadfastly to join. Gay Shame performances revel not merely in shame and abjection, but in one of shame's primary vehicles: disgust. Disgust is a means of reclaiming shame through putting abjection on display. Gay Shame San Francisco stages performances of shame, where the spectator cannot look away.

As I will explore in this section, Gay Shame's performances each utilize shame and disgust in a slightly different way, but always with the goal of calling into question normative identity categories and rights discourse. Each of Gay Shame's performances works to re-envision identity through performances of solidarity and shame that attempt to destabilize identity categories and allow for a human connection through experiences

of shame that open the possibility for progressive social change and attempt to forge coalitions with oppressed Bay Area communities.

Shame is commonly perceived as the site of trauma where identity is threatened. Alternatively, pride is considered the redemptive affect that builds community and unifies identity. However, recent scholars such as Eve Sedgwick and Elspeth Probyn have argued that shame has the power to question identity, re-invigorate community, and build coalitions (38). This recent intensity of identification is a sort of weariness of identity, where there is a push to identify and simultaneously an oscillation away from identification (at least for some). Identification in its most heightened form becomes an over-identification, and these iterations of identity are always premised on pride: gay pride, national pride, black pride, feminist pride, latino/a pride, Pakistani pride. Communities of pride fall into rigid, easily commodifiable entities. Some of these identities are also based on a neoliberal model of the individual subject-citizen, when they involve the self-identification of the consumer, who is in no way obliged to others and must simply undergo the process of knowing themselves. Gay and lesbian culture has reached such an impasse, in which a politics of over-identification and pride have led to an individualistic and consumerist community. *Gay Shame San Francisco* capitalizes on shame, because it counters narratives of pride and is a means of reclaiming what has been abjected from the Gay Rights movement.

Shame relates Kristeva's concept of abjection, because it is through shame that abjection occurs, through a process of getting rid of what is unwanted in identity. For Kristeva this process of abjection occurs in a performative space, a "theater without makeup or masks" (3). Abjection and shame are experienced always in the presence of

others, or in the awareness of others' presence when one is alone. Abjection is therefore always performative, in the sense that it is always experienced as a public affect. Shame is also performative, as it is always experienced as the dual drive toward introversion and extroversion. Gay Shame San Francisco utilizes the performative nature of shame to reclaim the fringes of the queer community (queers of color, trans individuals, queer immigrants and impoverished LGBT folks) through placing abject bodies into public view and then making those bodies perform shame. Shame also becomes the site where solidarity is attempted and performed, between the fringes of the queer community and other abject Bay Area groups, such as the homeless, immigrant communities and the poor.

For Gay Shame San Francisco, Gay Pride represents the project of domesticating and normalizing the LGBT community through demarcation and boundary production. Gay Pride works to extricate shame from identity and the shameful from public view, by claiming its opposite affect, pride. This process not only acknowledges shame's great power, but also attempts to ignore shame, throwing out its important beneficial attributes while accepting its significance. Shame and abjection can both work as normalizing tactics when not openly addressed and reworked. Neoliberalism, with its focus on the individual and consumerism, is based on a liberal-humanist project that always takes the individual's identity as a starting place. This idea of over-individuation reduces the desire for participatory community and limits the efficacy of coalition building across identity categories. As Lauren Berlant has argued, easy enactments of pride manifest a readily accessible narrative of oppression without acknowledging the complexities of that narrative and without examining its relationship to the state as first inequitable and

eventually benevolent and fair. Narratives of pride drive the individual consumer-citizen away from communal experience and toward a solipsistic political project, in which knowing the self equates to knowing the world. Ultimately pride is an affective project of the state, of progress and of rights and reproduction. It lacks the potential to enact a revolutionary project of social change.

Gay Shame San Francisco adds an important dimension to the Bay Area sexual identity landscape, by questioning pride and critiquing the production of an affluent gay Bay Area citizen, where their identity is premised on consumerism and a tacit acceptance of the social landscape as it stands. Gay Shame performances attempt to add a radical and shameful dimension to discussions of sexual citizenship in the Bay Area and attempt to forge solidarity through their performances between oppressed Bay Area groups. Their performances also trigger important questions about shame's role in generating solidarity and the difference between imagined solidarity in performance and literal solidarity and coalition building between groups. Furthermore, their performances indicate a clear tension between agitprop, message-based performances and an affective engagement with shame. In the following section I use their performances to illustrate how performing solidarity can forge new identity formations based on shame and when these performances fall short of accomplishing their goals. I also examine several Gay Shame performances, paying particular attention to how shame and abjection are employed in the service of solidarity and the forms of solidarity attempted. These performances and demonstrations run the gamut from highly theatrical street performances, involving scripting and costumes, to what I term guerilla art, which I classify as a transformation of objects and spaces to perform in a different contexts. I ask when these performances

generate imagined solidarity, or when they produce reciprocal solidarity and what the relationship is between message-based performance and affective performance. In addition, I explore Gay Shame's varying performance strategies and their attempt to link themselves to other oppressed groups, form hyper-identifications, and redefine identity categories through shared experiences of shame.

Emergency Quarantine

Through shaming and abjection of bodies, Emergency Quarantine queered medical hysteria to reveal how epidemics are used as a mass distraction from the national medical care crisis. However, the affective dimensions of the performance, which sought to build solidarity, added a level of opacity to the performers' attempt to communicate these issues to an audience. Additionally, Emergency Quarantine argued that medicalization and media representations of illness are always tied up with sexuality, race, class, and gender. Emergency Quarantine, one of Gay Shame's more recent large-scale demonstrations on October 15, 2010, was aimed at the Department of Public Health and the closure of the New Leaf LGBT Counseling Center. The demonstration was held in front of the Department of Public Health in San Francisco, at the intersection of Market Street and 9th Street. Emergency Quarantine utilized the fear and disgust of contagion and disease to critique the medical establishment's relationship to queer and marginalized communities. The poster for the event read:

OUTBREAK ALERT, Pandemic Level 6. This is NOT a test. This is an
OFFICIAL NOTICE of virulent social inspection, effective immediately.
You are under extremely close monitoring as of now. Your friends may

have already reported your behavior to us. If you have not been recruited already, you are defective. All supposed persons able to read this are subject to its requirements. (1)

Next to this text was a copy of the official pandemic alert system, put out by the WHO when the “swine flu” emerged in Mexico earlier that year and taken directly from the Homeland Security’s terror threat level. This warning system is color coded from green to red, with level six in red as a full-blown pandemic, while green simply represents an interpandemic. Next to the warning list is written the following: “If you are not already in contact with the following institutions, you will be subject to immediate arrest, quarantine, detention, torture, and psychotropic medications. Treat yourself now. Report to the DPH on October 15th, 2010, Final Deadline.” Below the text is a list of the “institutions” referenced, “Safe List: Marriage, Health/Hospital Services, Criminal Justice, Academia, La Milagra.”

This performance meant to emphasize the hysterical and overblown nature of the WHO’s and media’s reaction to SARS and the Swine Flu epidemics and to show how they circulated a xenophobia based on contagion, abjection, and foreignness. In addition, the performance meant to critique how disease is used as an excuse for surveillance culture. The international reaction to and coverage of Ebola is a contemporary example of how disease is used to justify the intense scrutiny of bodies and their movement across international borders. Within the poster this was articulated by the statement: “This is an OFFICIAL NOTICE of virulent social inspection, effective immediately. You are under extremely close monitoring as of now.” Contagion becomes the excuse for a system of regulation and monitoring premised on “protection” and public “well-being.” However,

the poster repurposes the language of disease to suggest that xenophobia and paranoia are contagious and that surveillance has become virulent. Many of Gay Shame San Francisco's flyers and posters have a rough, DIY aesthetic that performs in opposition to the sleek representations of Gay Pride and advertising. These posters also circulate an activist nostalgia for a time when most flyers and posters were hand made. However, the poster for Emergency Quarantine is professional and sleek and mirrors official WHO bulletins. The Pandemic Alert System creates a visualization around disease and is purportedly to protect the public, while it actually facilitates panic and hysteria, making the public more pliable and willing to listen to the government. This is lampooned by Gay Shame's poster, where the alert is at a bright red level 6, the highest level.

Figure 1, Outbreak Alert

U.S. Department of Mental Security

OUTBREAK ALERT

Pandemic Level 6

This is NOT a test. This is an OFFICIAL NOTICE of virulent social inspection, effective immediately. You are under extremely close monitoring as of now. Your friends may have already reported your behavior to us. If you have not been recruited already, you are defective. All supposed persons able to read this are subject to its requirements.

If you are not already in contact with the following institutions, you will be subject to immediate arrest, quarantine, detention, torture, and psychotropic medications. Treat yourself now or report to the DPH on:

OCTOBER 15, 2010 FINAL DEADLINE

Interpandemic
Phase 1 Low risk of human case
Phase 2 Higher risk of human case
Pandemic Alert
Phase 3 High risk of sustained human-to-human transmission
Phase 4 Widespread and sustained human-to-human transmission
Pandemic Alert Elevated
Phase 5 Widespread and sustained human-to-human transmission
Pandemic
Phase 6 Efficient and sustained human-to-human transmission

SAFE LIST: Marriage, Health/Hospital Services, Criminal Justice, Academia, La Migra

Null and void where prohibited. Anything you say can and will be used against you in a court of law. Manufacturer's restrictions may apply. If you are under age 18 at the time this alert was issued, you must appear at DPH with your parent or guardian. By reading this warning you hereby waive your right to notify next of kin upon your detention and quarantine. Your status as a member of the human race has been temporarily revoked until further notice of Court ruling in the positive by the U.S. Department of Mental Security. Your symptoms cause clinically significant distress or impairment to social, occupational, or other important areas of functioning. Contact the Court for full information. Any person who fails to appear as provided by law may be deemed to have accepted the relevant mandatory control through a court order. Your attention is drawn to the fact that the information herein is a warning for a drug of abuse, a controlled or a psychoactive substance. This information is provided for informational purposes only and does not constitute an offer of any financial product or service. The information herein is provided for informational purposes only and does not constitute an offer of any financial product or service. The information herein is provided for informational purposes only and does not constitute an offer of any financial product or service.

This event focused on the eroding of social services for marginalized people in San Francisco and in the Nation at large, specifically focusing on the mental health needs of the LGBTQI community. However, the demonstration also meant to critique the medicalization, clinicalization, privatization and fear mongering of the media-medical complex in the US. This is salient because the LGBTQI community is hit particularly hard by mental illness with approximately 40% of the LGBTQI identified community suffering from a mental disorder, according to a survey conducted in 2004 in the UK (Warner, McKeown, Griffin, Johnson, Ramsay, Cort and King).

As with all Gay Shame SF events, there was also a clear satirical element at play here. In this context, humor and satire make the pill of critique easier to swallow, by allowing an entrance into the performance for those spectators who are leery of street performance, or hesitant to really see the bodies abjected by medicalization. Additionally, humor is one of the few outlets for the ashamed and abjected and can become a site of common ground where tensions around identity and difference are defused by the communal experience of laughter. The demonstration meant to satirize the fear mongering that had occurred earlier that year when the H1N1 virus emerged in Mexico City and there was a generalized panic and hysteria, fostered in part by the media and in part by the WHO's pandemic alert system. The satire itself came from an overblown performance of medical hysteria. From the use of colorful "pills" that were dumped over the "sick" participants to the use of random medical jargon and hazmat suits, the performance clearly meant to portray humorously the way the media represents abject bodies and illness on the national stage. These bodies include Mexican and Asian immigrants, the poor, queers, and those infected with contagious diseases, such as Swine

Flu and SARS. This xenophobia can be witnessed in the media's framing of the recent Ebola outbreak in several West African countries.

The smaller flyer for the event asked participants to “[c]ome dressed in your queerest, or finest medical attire.” Again, this attempted to bridge the aesthetics of a “straight” send-up of organized medicine with a decidedly more queer protest aesthetic that corresponds to most of Gay Shame's organized demonstrations.

The protest itself consisted of several people in hazmat suits, scrubs and gas masks, rolling and writhing on the ground, while other group members hovered over them “trying to help” them and calling out a variety of medical diagnoses. This all took place on the sidewalk and in the middle of Market Street, San Francisco's main artery. In addition, a few participants wore the full camp of a typical Gay Shame costume, with bright wigs, ripped t-shirts, heels and makeup. One Gay Shamer wore a homemade pink sparkly dress and glittery hoop earrings. She had a number of toy syringes and plastic medical paraphernalia glued to her dress and a nametag that read, “Dr. Mary.”

Gay Shame's use of drag and camp can be understood as an attempt to unsettle the gender binary, grab the attention of those passing by and draw a clear aesthetic connection between this protest and queer performances of the past. Susan Sontag's seminal essay on camp, “Notes on Camp” argued that camp lacked subversiveness; however, I would side with the numerous scholars who have critiqued Sontag's essay and argued that camp is essential to the aesthetics of queer activism, and that when done well, it manages to parody and critique normative gender identities and sexualities. As George Piggford argues, camp's critical power comes in large part from play with androgyny, where sexuality and gender become indecipherable (287).

The indecipherability in Emergency Quarantine came from queering the signifiers of disease and medicalization in order to link systems of gender and sexuality with the medical establishment. The protester with the sparkly dress and toy “medical” equipment can be understood as performing both a parody of gender and of organized medicine. Her stethoscope and medical paraphernalia were clearly toys designed for children. She was not attempting to resemble a “real” doctor, just as she was not trying to appear like a “natural” woman; instead she was employing cartoonish signifiers of each in order to show the cultural specificity and codification of these signs. This was also an attempt by members of GS to link systems of gender and sexuality with privatized medicine, as one of the only options left as public services decrease. The analogy of medicine and gender further indicated the regulatory nature of both.

Several of the other members in scrubs still had on glittery earrings and lipstick. On the ground they scattered multi-colored pills and pill bottles. The demonstration began at the New Leaf Clinic, where two GS members walked up to the door and knocked, to indicate that it was closed for business. New Leaf LGBT Counseling Center had been one of the few places for people to get inexpensive counseling and medical services in the city and was particularly focused on the needs of the LGBTQI community, before the Department of Public Health shut it down in 2010. The second part of the demonstration was held in front of the Department of Public Health on Grove Street, where Gay Shame members chanted and unveiled their signs that read, “Kuarentine: Are you infected?” and “DPH is disorder.” Finally, the protest ended with some GS members writhing on the ground, while other Gay Shamers in scrubs poured colorful pills over the bodies on the ground.

In this instance, shame and abjection were evoked through a queering of the signifiers of contamination and disease. The colorful scrubs and pill bottles, along with the invocation of the Pandemic Alert system, meant to manifest a sense of threat and dread in viewers. The fear of already being contaminated by the queerness of the performance and by the other was meant to call into question the fear mongering, alienation, and shaming at the root of the Pandemic Alert System and the ways this campaign meant to reaffirm the xenophobia and the system's support for non-porous borders, which are meant to keep others out.

The message of this demonstration might have been lost on many of the observers, because they might not have recognized the critique of medical hysteria and the link between the performance and Swine Flu. They may have also not been aware of the reducing of medical services to underserved communities and the closing of the New Leaf. However, this message was certainly meant to target the general public and to bring attention to the healthcare crisis. It also meant to argue that the pandemic fear mongering was a means of distracting from the healthcare crisis and the privatization in medicine. The spirit of subversiveness would have certainly come through, because this was staged in a public space and lacked all trappings of official sanction. Sidewalks were blocked by performers and protesters and this forced pedestrians to either walk through the performance, or around (through Market Street traffic). Still, many a passerby may not have understood with any greater depth what the performers were trying to communicate, despite the abject queer bodies and representations of contamination and disease. The location (at the Department of Health office) would certainly speak to Gay Shame's dissatisfaction with that organization and the signs they carried emphasized this point.

Communication and message-based performance was only one aspect of Emergency Quarantine, which also embodied Gay Shame's commitment to performing a connectedness and solidarity of social issues through shame. The agitprop, communicative aspect of the performance did not correspond perfectly to the affective dimension of Emergency Quarantine, which sought to forge coalitions of feeling. As Jan Cohen-Cruz argues, agitprop performances attempt to "mobilize people around partisan points of view" (5), whereas performances of shame and solidarity seek to forge communities of feeling and connections through shame.

Gay Shame members sought solidarity with the homeless, the poor, those with psychological disorders and marginalized queer residents of the Bay Area, who needed access to affordable psychological and medical treatment and who were losing out on that treatment due to the closing of the New Leaf. The performers writhing on the ground in gaudy makeup, scrubs and high heels attempted to link themselves to the shame of being seen as diseased, or different, recognized as the other due to class, nationality, gender expression, or homelessness. These affective dimensions of the performance may have further obscured the message and the agitprop qualities of Emergency Quarantine.

Emergency Quarantine also satirized the culture of hysteria, anxiety and panic around diseases and pandemics generated by a media apparatus that circulates and feeds on fear mongering. This hysteria is further fostered by the government and the media (as exemplified by the H1N1 scare of 2010). This cultural panic and anxiety is a mass distraction from the continued privatization and eroding of the healthcare system in the US and the disappearance of basic social services for those below the poverty line. With the Ebola panic in 2014, this performance seems especially relevant. Once again, medical

panic and hysteria is widespread and fostered by the media apparatus. Furthermore, Emergency Quarantine attempted to show the connectedness of LGBTQI issues to those faced by other oppressed and disadvantaged groups in the US, to undermine neoliberal identity formations, and to propose new modes of identity based on abjection and alienation. This proposition was based on a connection through shame by those abjected and portrayed as foreign by the media and the government, so that these folks could then form affective communities of shame.

On one hand, this performance meant to get the attention of the San Francisco public and hopefully lead the way toward social change and further healthcare reform. However, Emergency Quarantine was also an attempt to affectively form connections through shame. These two opposing aspects of the performance did not entirely mesh and created some incoherence and incomprehensibility.

Shop for Your Rights

In the event “Shop for Your Rights: Homos for Homosapiens,” members of Gay Shame San Francisco rewrote a poster, on a San Francisco MUNI bus stop by the Human Rights Campaign (HRC) in the predominantly affluent gay neighborhood of the Castro that brought attention to the killings of gay men in Iraq. Through subverting the language of advertising, Gay Shame attempted to critique the Gay Rights movement, while calling for solidarity with Iraqi victims of ongoing war and violence and not just gay Iraqis.

The HRC openly employed the medium of advertising to deliver their message and garner donations. Through ad-busting, Gay Shame attempted to call out the HRC on their narrow focus and hypocritical message. Gay Shame brilliantly reworked the poster

to ask: why should LGBTQI people only be concerned about gay Iraqis? In this action, Gay Shame used elements of the spectacle to call for a broader, anti-war agenda for the gay and lesbian community and for a stronger sense of solidarity and a wider identification. This poster deftly and wittily put forward Gay Shame's message of coalition building and the necessity to see discrimination of gays and lesbians as a part and parcel of larger issues of discrimination that affect other oppressed groups.

Gay Shame levied an incisive critique through re-directing the message and content of the original campaign, while still utilizing the forms and conventions of advertising. In *Society of the Spectacle*, Guy Debord argues that it is necessary to use the spectacle's language to effectively critique it: "In analyzing the spectacle we are obliged to a certain extent to use the spectacle's own language, in the sense that we have to operate on the methodological terrain of the society that expresses itself in the spectacle" (18). Gay Shame San Francisco followed this logic when they reinterpreted this poster. The HRC already utilized the language of advertising and the spectacle to send their message of gay marriage rights, however, the HRC has historically been a conservative organization and Gay Shame SF sought to point to the hypocrisy and conservatism inherent in the original HRC message.

The HRC is a large lobby organization that works for the rights of gays and lesbians and uses the symbol of the equal sign as their logo. They also maintain a storefront in San Francisco's Castro neighborhood, where they sell a lot of merchandise (specifically bumper stickers, T-shirts, coffee mugs and flags). However, their agenda has been criticized as benefiting only mainstream gays and lesbians and of being both

populist and corporate, by groups such as Boycott HRC, a group of queer and transgender activists.

The HRC developed a poster campaign and organized a protest in 2009 to bring attention to the targeted killings of gay men in Iraq (when more than 30 men who were perceived to be gay were tortured and murdered). As a side-note, this violence has continued and saw an uptick in 2013 and it is estimated that approximately 750 people have been killed since 2006 (Faiq). Gay Shame SF planned the Shop for Your Rights action to critique the HRC campaign and that organization's larger focus on gay marriage and corporate tie-ins.

This ad-busting intended to draw attention to the lack of protest concerning the killing of Iraqi citizens regardless of sexuality, as well as the absence of war coverage from the mainstream gay and lesbian community and organizations such as the HRC. The HRC poster features a handsome smiling man in approximately his mid-twenties. His skin is flawless and his lips are glossy. He looks like he might be Middle Eastern and has on a HRC T-shirt, tucked provocatively into his jeans. The poster asks you to "Shop HRC."

The Gay Shame version of the poster at a number 24 bus stop on Castro Street is the same, but the model now has conversation bubbles around his face. One of the bubbles reads,

Most of my family are in Iraq. It pains me that much of the GLBT community here in the U.S. keeps silent about the 100,000 gay and straight Iraqi civilians who've been killed because of the U.S. invasions

and only speaks out when 20 gay Iraqis are killed there.

<http://www.gayshamesf.org/homosforhomosapiens.html>

Figure 2, Original HRC Poster



Figure 3, Reworked Gay Shame HRC Poster



The other bubble contains the following text: “I wish my GLBT community worked for safety and human rights for everyone not just human rights for gay people and couples” (ibid). These comments belie his smiling face and the open, embracing look in his eye. The poster is brilliantly reworked so that it could easily be mistaken for an HRC poster, and the critique is almost entirely within the content and not in the form of the poster itself. His T-shirt has also been changed to read, “Homos for Homosapeins.” At the bottom of the poster the equal sign and “Shop HRC” have been changed to read, “Double Standards in Human Rights = Discrimination” (ibid) and the HRC equal sign has been re-signified as inequality. Instead of “Shop HRC” from the original poster, the bottom on the new poster reads, “The HRC says ‘shop (for) your future’” (ibid). Here Gay Shame is asking that the oppression of LGBTQI folks be seen as related to other forms of oppression and not as a single issue. This is an attempt to voice oppression as a complex network that cannot be entirely divided by identity groups. Gay Shame SF is arguing that any engagement with humanism and human rights is hypocritical if it fails to address oppression in its multiple forms and the different and overlapping communities affected by various forms of oppression. The caution here is that if we see one group as entitled to human rights (Iraqi gays in this case) but we see others as not entitled to those same basic rights (Iraqi civilians), we will therefore dehumanize them, while we identify with gay Iraqis. The idea and danger of separation is taken up directly by Debord:

Separation is the alpha and omega of the spectacle. The institutionalization of the social division of labor in the form of class divisions had given rise to an earlier, religious form of contemplation: the mythical order with which every power has always camouflaged itself. (20)

It is through the act of separation that the spectacular is able to further enact oppression by means of self-hating, animosity, and infighting. In this way, every individual becomes a sort of micro-oppressor focused only on a single issue or cause to the exclusion of all others, instead of resisting or critiquing the primary oppressive mechanism. In the example of the HRC poster and protest, the logic at work is “I am gay or lesbian and therefore must stand with gays and lesbians around the world, but as I am not Iraqi, I am not obliged to stand with the Iraqi people.” This separation of identity makes one feel responsible only for members of their immediate identity group.

The separation of discourses around LGBTQI oppression and oppression more generally is exactly the trap that the HRC fell into and what Gay Shame SF was criticizing. The HRC participated in activism and PR that advocated ending LGBT oppression in Iraq. Meanwhile, they took no stance on the war in Iraq, tacitly condoning the war and its casualties, while demanding an end to the oppression of gays and lesbians there. Similarly, the “Shop HRC” poster asked for capital to support measures aimed at gay rights, but separated this from issues of oppression more generally and still managed to cater to the Log Cabin demographic concerned with gays serving openly in the military and with gay marriage rights.

Gay Shame’s “Shop for Your Rights” also aspired to break consumers out of the stupor of every day encounters with the spectacle by forcing them to rethink the nature of rights and advertising culture. As Debord describes, the spectacle lures subjects into a consumer haze.

In contrast, the modern spectacle depicts what society could deliver, but in so doing it rigidly separates what is possible from what is permitted.

The spectacle keeps people in a state of unconsciousness as they pass through practical changes in their conditions of existence (20).

In other words, the spectacle creates a soma-like trance that citizen consumers exist in. Through the spectacle's own language Gay Shame SF intended to create a counter spectacle. The hope was that in seeing the "Shop for Your Rights" poster, both tourists and members of the local LGBT public would rethink their relationship to the HRC and gay rights discourse. The sleekness of the poster belied the radical nature of the text and some of the audience may have interpreted this as a literal HRC advertisement. However, it is in the subtlety of the poster's redesign and message that the power to question and undermine the spectacle lies.

The HRC's willingness to fight for the safety of gays and lesbians in Iraq, while refusing to account for other Iraqis, or to engage with the larger ethical issue of the US's involvement in the Iraq war, shows the hypocritical threat at the root of modern understandings of identity. Gay shame reinterpreted the HRC's discourse in an attempt to disturb identity categories and open up new forms of identification around the experiences of shame.

Shame operated in at least two ways in this action. First, a clear shaming of the HRC was being performed and it was meant as a site of connection between members of Gay Shame and others who do not fall under the purview of the HRC's message. This shame extended to the public and particularly the gay and lesbian public, for their complacency, or tacit agreement with the US's involvement in Iraq. Secondly, members of Gay Shame owned the abjection of not being embraced by the HRC's appeal. Clearly

their intention was to forge solidarity with Iraqis whose lives had been torn apart by the war and to connect to those who felt some level of culpability or shame around this.

This action was one of Gay Shame SF's more successful actions, because their message was direct and the aesthetics of their ad-busting made the message clear. This performance's success came from its direct rhetorical appeal, which stayed in a more agitprop, direct style of communication. This message was meant for a general public and particularly an LGBT public and meant to engender shame in members of that community for not speaking out against the war and US involvement in Iraq. Shame and affect were still invoked here, but in the direct service of Gay Shame's message. However, the direct rhetorical nature of "Shop For Your Rights" lacked the direct bodily and phenomenological affect of some of Gay Shame's other performances.

De-Center the Center Demo

The "De-Center the Center" demonstration used humor and shaming to demand that the San Francisco LGBT Center better serve the fringes of the community and those alienated by the gentrification of the neighborhood. Gay Shame's "De-Center the Center" demonstration from 2009 targeted the LGBT Center, the central edifice of the San Francisco gay and lesbian community. In this street performance, staged in the middle of San Francisco's Market Street, members of Gay Shame SF wanted to emphasize what they saw as the exclusivity and marginalizing presence of the LGBT Center. To them, San Francisco's LGBT Center served predominantly an affluent white gay and lesbian population but failed to serve the community at large. Furthermore, they felt the Center did not have enough outreach to other communities in the Bay Area. Group members

also took issue with the forms of representation employed by the Center, which largely involved posters for support groups, donor events and performances that Gay Shamers felt represented only a fraction of the community.

With this demonstration and street performance, members of Gay Shame attempted to humorously create and perform the sort of festive inclusiveness that they felt the LGBT Center had failed to deliver. Additionally, they argued that the Center was siphoning resources from the community and not giving anything back in return. They performed this critique humorously, through a scenario where Ben Franklin had invented a machine that could “reverse the polarity” of the Center, so that it would go from “sucking” (resources, energy, time, and space) to “blowing” (giving back to the larger queer community and the local neighborhood). The idea that the Center “sucked” was certainly an intentional pun, meant to drive home Gay Shame’s dissatisfaction.

De-Center the Center was billed as a “dance-off” and meant to bring the community together in a re-unifying street party, where those who had been sidelined could connect through shared experiences of shame. I argue that this was also an attempt to throw off the confines of neoliberal identity categories and to publicly perform new modes of identification.

I attended the De-Center the Center demonstration in 2009 and here I would like to share my account of the performance in its entirety, as only a complete account can elucidate how Gay Shame SF members employed both shame and satire and attempted to call for solidarity and hyper-identification with oppressed communities throughout the SF Bay Area. I also want to chronicle my own relationship to the performance as an observer. In my experience of this performance, I found myself both alienated and

embraced by the over-the-top aesthetics and street performance strategies employed by the performers. The aesthetic choices of over-the-top affective performance, such as grotesque costuming and shouting in the middle of the street, as well as the opacity of the message, complicated Gay Shame's goals of forging solidarity and shows the tension between clear message-based performance and full-blown affective street performance.

I felt a little tense. I hadn't been to a protest in a while, and as I walked over I had to talk myself into going, I was a glowing ball of apprehension and shame; yes, there it was again, shame. Just being at the performance, I could feel the shame of disrupting the daily life of the city and acting out and out of place. There is always a certain threat of violence when going to a political action as well. You never know if the police are going to be called and what their reaction might be. At a protest organized by the same group and at the same location two years ago, protesters were brutally beaten by police. So I was apprehensive to say the least, and I really had to drag myself to the demonstration.

The protest was taking place at the San Francisco LGBT Center. The San Francisco LGBT Center was formed in 1996 as a non-profit organization to serve San Francisco's Gay and Lesbian community and originally housed in the historic Carmel Fallon building at 1800 Market Street, one of the few buildings in that area that survived the 1906 earthquake and subsequent fire. However, the Center did very well, with effective fundraising and development and in 2002 opened a brand new eleven million dollar building, the Charles M. Holmes building at their new location just up the block. A building whose architecture belies its presence in the community and the community that it serves. It is a sleek modern and gray non-descript building with a large central atrium

and huge glass windows. The doors were open as a gesture of apparent welcome. This was the day before Gay Pride weekend would begin in San Francisco with the Friday night kickoff parties throughout the Castro neighborhood.

An apparently disorganized group of about forty or fifty people had gathered in front of the center: a surprisingly diverse crowd, some in nice evening dress, like coats and slacks, others in costume, dressed as historical figures. There were people of every possible gender and ethnicity, some in drag and some transgender. People were passing out flyers for a rally the next day. What was not immediately apparent in the disorganized crowd was that they were preparing for something. People were making signs and putting on costumes and a sound system was being assembled. In addition, some sort of large robot, or other cardboard sculpture was being pieced together. Finally, pop music was booming from the speakers and everyone was dancing. The cardboard machine came together in a variety of pieces and looked like a large weather station, with a meter on top and a number of wind gages set around the space at even intervals. This would later be revealed to be the “Polarity Change Meter”, which I will describe below.

Eventually they got the microphone working and Sir Isaac Newton took the stage. The performer wore a powdered wig and a lacy shirt and pants. In addition, Newton had on spectacles and a lacy kerchief. He spoke with an affected drawl, reminiscent of historical documentary reconstructions. However, the words he spoke did not create verisimilitude with the way he was dressed. “What’s up mother fuckers? There is something fucking wrong!” he bellowed. “Can you tell what the problem is?” This drew a blank, but anticipatory reaction from the audience. “Where are we?” He asked, with the confusion of someone beamed four hundred years into the future, into an

unrecognizable place and time. People responded by calling out, "the center." He responded with a confused look, "What is this center for?" He looked at the large sign that read, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Lesbian Center above the door, "What does that sign say?" He read each word slowly, methodically, "Gay, Lesbian, Transgender, Bisexual Center. There is something fucking wrong. How many of you are gay? Lesbian? Transgender?" Most people reacted in the affirmative to one of these questions. "Well," he continued, "how has this center served your needs? Has it ever served your needs?" A couple people responded. "Well that's right, a couple of people have had their needs met by this here center, but that's about it. What about the rest of us?" To this a cheer went up. "Who is this center for?" To which the crowd responded, "Everyone" She gave up and grabbed the megaphone. "This center should be for everyone and it's not. I think there's something wrong with this center. This is a vortex that uses resources. What does it do?" The crowd seemed a little baffled. "It sucks! Repeat after me. It sucks!" The crowd repeated. Newton had the crowd do this several more times. "This is a vortex and that's what vortexes do, they suck. What do we want it to do? We want it to blow." Laughter was building throughout the proceeding speech, as well as cheers and applause. "What we need to do is reverse the polarity of the center. We are going to use this device to reverse the polarity. This is not our Center, it should serve everyone, but it's not. If we're going to talk about resources we need to talk about the Military Industrial Complex. That's who is served by the Center, so what we need to do is to reverse the polarity." Another Gay Shame member stepped forward and demonstrated the polarity reversing machine, which he explained used audience feedback. A dial he was operating would turn based on the audience reaction and then if they could

successfully sway the machine to the other side from sucking to giving resources, they would have successfully reversed the polarity. Newton retook the microphone and went on. "The Center does not serve the needs of trans people and people with HIV and AIDS, it does not serve the needs of immigrants and the poor." He was gathering for the big event. "What we need to do is reverse the polarity from sucking to giving. We're going to do that with a polarity match."

The first event was to knock down the oppressive structures theoretically representing the Center and the bureaucratic manifestations of the not-for-profit sector. They began by taking big cardboard swords and knocking those down. These were written on large cardboard "buildings".

Next someone dressed as a cop, wearing all black, with a cap and a cardboard tommy gun stepped forward and said, "You will need to disperse. If you don't I will arrest you and I will take all of you inside the center. You must disperse immediately." This evoked both laughter and boos from the audience. He also put a strong emphasis on the "I will take you inside the center." Giving it a humorous and sarcastic dimension: the Center represented systemic oppression and authority.

Next a woman representing a corporation stepped forward, to join Isaac Newton in a "Polarity Match." She wore a platinum blond wig and a blue suit. "I'm a corporation, hehehe!" To which an audience member yelled, "Which corporation are you?" She responded by saying, "I'm every corporation! I own everything. I own everything on this block. I own this center." She then joined Newton in a Polarity Match, which in this case became a wrestling match. It was not rehearsed and they wrestled

violently. However, Newton of course won the match to loud resounding cheers from the crowd and the polarity meter being pushed all the way to the left.

However, just as this match was resolving the “police officer” stepped forward and started beating the “Radical Queer” with his cardboard tommy gun. This mirrored real events from the last time Gay Shame protested in front of the LGBT Center and activists were badly beaten by the police and one person’s face was smashed in. This echoed that horrible incident with a humorous and critical air and garnered a loud “boo” from the crowd. Finally someone pulled the cardboard gun away from the “cop” and broke it, knocking the cop to the ground, unleashing another round of cheers from the crowd.

There were several performers with signs that read: Board of Directors, Non-Profit Sector, Government Funding and Assimilation. These were representative of the different facets that control non-profit funding and distribution and that, the performance argued, prevent resources from getting to everyone. The Board of Directors, the Non-Profit Sector and Government Funding said, “We should have a meeting about this.” And they all met and talked in exaggeratedly hushed voices. Assimilation wore a suit and offered us a big shiny carrot, with Food written in big letters across the front. These are the desirable resources offered to people in exchange for embracing mainstream culture and fully assimilating. This demonstrated how subjects are interpolated and become part of mainstream society.

Finally a lesbian representing the ghost of Queer Activism Past, decided to challenge The Corporation to a Polarity Match. Instead of wrestling it was decided that their task would be to make water cooler gossip. They began discussing the show

“America’s Next Drag Superstar,” a show I will discuss later for its implications for trans queer politics. The Corporation, kept saying, “The corporate one should have won, she looked like the next Rupaul.” While the Ghost of Queer Activism Past disagreed. Finally the ghost of QAP won the match, sending the polarity meter off the charts.

Newton retook the megaphone and said, “We haven’t won yet. We must present our demands for the Center.” He turned and faced the Center and said, “Make it free! Make. It. Free.” He waited for the audience to repeat his words. “Make it free.” He said again, until everyone was saying it with him. “Make it free. And dismantle the board of directors. Open all decisions up to the community in order to serve the needs of the community.” This got a loud boo from the Board of Directors, Government Funding and the Non-Profit Sector, who said, “Let’s decide this democratically, let’s take a vote.” Newton continued. “We don’t want to pay to use our own center. Make it free!” A few workers from the center had stuck their heads out the window at this point and the two people at the front desk were working hard to ignore the spectacle, but overall there seemed to be little reaction from the Center. Newton went on, “Now we don’t seem to be getting much of a reaction. This is your last chance. Last time we were here you broke our friend’s face.” The crowd was cheering loudly and applauding at this point. “What other demands do we have for the Center? It needs to serve the whole community, make it free, make it open to trans people and gender queer people put in a pharmacy to make medicines available and counseling and services for immigrants.” The crowd continued to cheer loudly. “And make it free. Because right now it sucks! It sucks!” The crowd took up the cry. Someone in the audience, yelled out, “Yeah! The Center Sucks!”

Newton looked at him and then continued. "But we have not yet finished changing the polarity. We need to do the rainbow dance to fully reverse the polarity." Earlier we had been handed a sheet with dance moves on it. Each dance move represented a different primary color. Four women, each dressed in one of these colors, performed their dance moves one at a time. A different song was played for each one, although the music was tough to hear. The man working the polarity meter demanded, "You all need to dance and make the meter work." So the entire audience participated in the ridiculous dance moves. Finally we finished the dance and the polarity meter had been fully reversed. The crowd began to break up and people started to clean the space.

Gay Shame SF staged the "De-Center the Center" protest performance in 2009 to coincide with San Francisco Gay Pride and the protest was primarily meant as a juxtaposition to Gay Pride. In San Francisco, Gay Pride takes place every year on the last weekend in June. The festival begins with a giant street party in the Castro on "Pink Saturday" the night before Gay Pride. On Pink Saturday, the streets are blocked off within a several block radius of the Castro neighborhood, about a square mile in total, and stages are set up. All the bars and clubs open their doors, huge speakers are placed in the streets and the party begins throughout the Castro.

Pink Saturday is organized by the Sisters of Perpetual Indulgence, a group I will discuss in greater detail, and the majority of the suggested seven-dollar donation goes to a particular charity or non-profit organization of their choice. This street party attracts tens of thousands of people (mostly gay men) who fill the entire space from approximately seven in the evening until the next morning.

De-Center the Center can be interpreted as an attempt at solidarity between marginalized factions of the LGBTIQ and queer communities that might not otherwise see themselves as having a common agenda. People in this group came together to protest the San Francisco LGBT Center because they felt that it was elitist and failed to reach out to non-mainstream queer communities, such as queers of color, trans folks, immigrants, the poor, and others on the margins of the LGBT community. These factions are shamed and abjected from more mainstream lesbian and gay culture through indirectly being alienated. Members of Gay Shame see the SF LGBT Center as representative of this alienation. They have felt this way about the Center ever since it moved into its new space in 2002. The Center itself articulates its message very differently. On their website they write:

The mission of the San Francisco Lesbian Gay Bisexual Transgender (LGBT) Community Center is to connect our diverse community to opportunities, resources and each other to achieve our vision of a stronger, healthier, and more equitable world for LGBT people and our allies. The Center's strategies inspire and strengthen our community by: fostering greater opportunities for people to thrive, organizing for our future, celebrating our history and culture, building resources to create a legacy for future generations. (1)

The Center does carry on a variety of programming that caters to a wide swath of the community, including regular support groups that serve different communities, such as the transgender community. However, many feel that the environment is cold and hostile to those who don't fit into mainstream culture. A comment from the website Yelp sums

up some people's feelings about the Center: "Sad that this failure continues to consume community resources. If it still isn't working after all this time, they should put the building and the operating expenses to better use" (Bay G). Another Yelp user complained both about the sterility and lack of transgender acceptance at the Center.

There are four floors, each more empty than the last. And while yes, the LGBT Center boasts some queer art, most of the center is empty office space. What queer photographs they did have seemed to be themed towards the masculine and entirely missing Trans focus." (Meg T.)

Despite the Center's good intentions, many feel that it is not reaching its goals of serving the greater Bay Area LGBT community and that is representative of the way non-conforming individuals are abjected from the community and made to feel ashamed.

De-Center the Center meant to reclaim those abjected factions and form solidarity through shared experiences of shame. In particular, this was an attempt to grab the attention of and form solidarity with the upper-middle class members of the LGBT community, who lived in the Castro neighborhood, but it was also a means of performing over-the-top shame, through a reveling in the shame of putting abject bodies on display.

In addition, this was a critique of the spatiality of the LGBT Center, which sits on the edge of the Castro neighborhood, San Francisco's gay ghetto dominated now by gentrified upper-middle class gay and lesbian people. This neighborhood can be extremely alienating to people of color and those who do not fit in with a crowd of pretty, thin, well-groomed men and women. Although not overtly inaccessible to lesbians, the Castro neighborhood is dominated by gay men, apparent to those on the streets and the numerous commercial spaces within the neighborhood.

The concept for this action, that the LGBT Center “Sucks” and the subsequent reframing of the proposal in that the Center should “Blow,” provides a great example of the humorous double-entendre at the root of the demonstration. De-Center the Center meant to bring people together and to create solidarity and inclusion in order to argue that the LGBT Center had failed to generate inclusive community and instead excluded and marginalized a large portion of the community. In this case humor works as another form of shaming, by which Gay Shame is calling out the Center and its staff for not following through on their commitment to the community. This event intended to stage a counter-site to the Center, one that was inclusive, supportive, and embracing and propose a new type of community center that had free services, open policies, and did not require large amounts of bureaucracy to use its services and spaces. The idea of reversing the Center’s polarity from “sucking” to “blowing” was meant both as a satirical, sexual double-entendre, but also meant to critique the way in which the LGBT Center sucks up resources and monies and then does not give back to many of the neediest communities that would benefit most from its services.

The flyer for the “De-Center the Center” action from the Gay Shame SF website read,

Does today’s mainstream LGBT movement make you feel like you’re lost in an alternate reality? Perhaps even another dimension? Do the things groups like the HRC fight for cause you to feel as if you’re going the wrong way backwards through time?

<http://www.gayshamesf.org/index2.php>

The flyer managed to walk the line between being a call to arms and a satirical parody of corporate marketing. It continued,

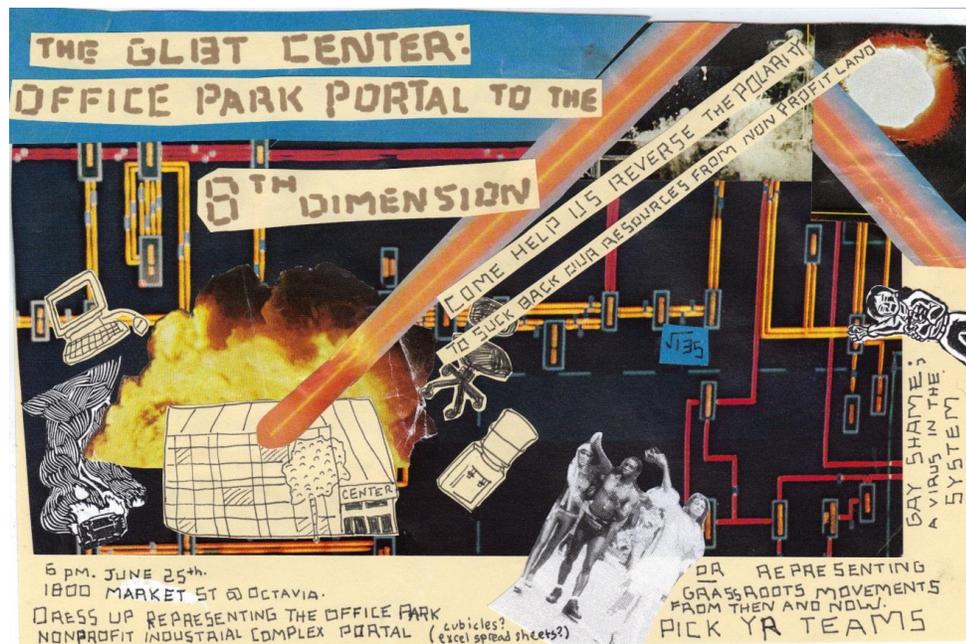
GAY SHAME has uncovered shocking new truths! upon studying the blueprints to the San Francisco LGBT Community Center, GAY SHAME has gathered evidence that it is in fact a portal to the 8th dimension. Cleverly disguised as a community center, familiar evil mega-corporate donors (ranging from Lennar to PG&E to Bechtel) and the San Francisco power elite, have been using their office park portal to suck away all our time, energy and passion. Who does the Center serve? What is the real agenda of the non-profits housed there? What could possibly undo such vile machinations? After further careful research, GAY SHAME has discovered that this vortex gate SWINGS BOTH WAYS. Join us June 25, 2009 as we converge upon the San Francisco LGBT Community Center to attempt to REVERSE THE POLARITY of this terrifying non-profit office park vortex. (ibid)

Gay Shame was concerned with some of the specific objectives of the LGBT Center, but also the LGBT Center stands in here for the mainstream gay community. This was not the first action Gay Shame performed in front of the Center, discussed below.

The publicity that Gay Shame created for De-Center the Center added a supplemental performative element. Here I would like to take a look at the posters and banners Gay Shame hung up before and during the event. These posters clearly articulated Gay Shame's intention for the performance and strategically played with gay and lesbian aesthetics in order to demand visibility, inclusiveness and solidarity.

A poster from the Gay Shame website outlined the purpose of the event: “This will be a high-concept anachronistic interpretive dance-off to determine the fate of radical queer politics!” (ibid). A flyer conveyed a space shuttle and a futuristic collage, complete with a small hand-drawn LGBT Center and a huge orange ray emanating from the top, with the words, “The GLBT Center: Office Park Portal to the 8th Dimension,” floating above it in blocky science fiction font (ibid).

Figure 4, The GLBT Center: Office Park Portal to the 8th Dimension



The idea of channeling resources away from the community was at the center of this critique and the poster associated this with a corporate model of non-profit operation. The poster presents the idea that the non-profit sector is effectively channeling resources away from those who really need them within the queer community and pumping money into paying for services for mainstream gays and lesbians, who are already within the elite minority. Meanwhile, the 8th dimension represents the mysterious things, such as

salaries, new buildings and services that siphon funds that could be used for crucial services for poor queer people, trans folks, the HIV positive community, and immigrant queers. Another poster for the event asks one to “demonstrate your queer defiance, Reverse the Polarity” (ibid). The idea of an 8th dimension portal within the LGBT Center clearly indicates Gay Shame’s playfulness and sarcasm, present in most of their actions. Aesthetically the poster enacts an intentionally crude and anachronistic maneuver. It is clearly handmade. The collage design also hints at a 60s futurism with images of light rays and explosions, as well as figures, obviously cut out of magazines. Meanwhile, there is a hand-drawn representation of the Center, on the left side of the image and crudely drawn office furniture (the water cooler and computer). The poster is meant to perform in aesthetic opposition to the sleek sterility of the Center itself and the efficient aesthetics of the business world. This is a performative maneuver that allows one to imagine spatially a concept that is difficult to grasp intellectually, i.e. where a large non-profit center’s resources are distributed and why specific groups are being targeted or passively left out. In addition, this low-cost aesthetic injects humor into the performance. Activism and activist performance are often criticized aesthetically for being crude, agitprop, unimaginative and overly serious. However, Gay Shame works to make their performances, nuanced, humorous, fun and celebratory.

Humor is one way that Gay Shame attempts to lighten the extremely serious issues of corporate dominance and eroding social services. These are both issues that group members are passionately serious about and that playfully bleed through all of their performance work. It is also important to look at the ways anti-capitalism and anti-neoliberalism are played out in Gay Shame protests and specifically in De-Center the

Center. A press release from Indybay.org, a Bay Area independent online news source read:

With corporate sponsors such as American Express, Bank of America, US Bank, Wells Fargo, AT&T, Comcast, Macy's, Bechtel, Clorox, Lennar and Morgan Stanley, the current agenda for the Center is one of cold, consumeristic capitalism. Instead of being a Robin Hood-esque pipeline that feeds cash into programs that actually serve the community as a whole, the Center invests their corporate largesse into creating and nourishing a queer consumer/entrepreneur culture.

<http://www.indybay.org/newsitems/2009/05/26/18598413.php>

The protest was obviously also a clear anti-neoliberal critique lodged at the Center for its corporate ties.

Gay Shame's largest banner, which they hung immediately prior to the demonstration, repurposed images of male models through the medium of collage in order to foreground Gay Shame's message that the Center was praying on the normative agenda of the gay and lesbian community to siphon resources.

The banner showed two male models and a rainbow of energy coming from their rock hard stomachs and joining in a large swirling vortex of energy. At the top in big bold letters is written "The Center Sucks" followed by the words, "potential, inspiration, time, money, dreams, hope, resources" (<http://www.gayshamesf.org/index2.php>). The sign was hung directly on the front of the building, facing busy Market Street traffic. The choice of two pictures of nearly naked models was meant to perform and undermine a gay

normativity at the heart of the Center and to stand in for body fascism (one form of the repressive mechanisms of mainstream queer culture).

Figure 5, The Center Sucks



In particular this critique of the normative gay male body pointedly references the history of the LGBT Center's physical building. The new building is named after the founder of Falcon Studios, a large gay pornography company that donated one million dollars toward the new building. According to their website the LGBT Center claims that:

The Center's doors opened in 2002, and since then, it has become the “home” of the LGBT community in San Francisco, serving approximately 2,200 people each week representing the full and wonderful diversity of the Bay Area. (<http://www.sfcenter.org/programs/roomrentals.php>)

The new building is beautiful, with a nearly all glass front and a bright atrium. Part of Gay Shame’s resentment is no doubt about the building itself, which was expensive to

build and named for the founder of a porn company. This criticism can also be seen in another of the posters for the event that was hung on the side of the LGBT Center. It also repurposes images of white gay men from advertisements with rippling muscles and normative gender expression. De-Center the Center demanded that non-conforming and non-normative embodied queers be recognized and served by the wider gay community. Through performing a coalition around shame and abjection, Gay Shame members proposed new identity formations that were inclusive and communal.

De-Center the Center, Emergency Quarantine and Shop For Your Rights were some of Gay Shame SF's more recent actions, but it is important to situate these in relationship to some of their other actions as well as San Francisco Gay Pride. The following section examines how Gay Shame emerged originally as a counter-site to Gay Pride and also explores other Gay Shame SF actions. The Gay Shame performances I explore in the next section: The Gay Shame Awards, Mary for Mayor and Polk Street Séance, all use shaming as their primary device for garnering attention and attempting to form coalitions.

The SF Gay Pride Parade and Further Gay Shame SF Actions

The emergence of Gay Shame San Francisco is a direct result of Gay Pride's massive growth and narrowing focus over the past two decades and it originally emerged as a reaction against the commercialism and depoliticizing of Gay Pride. To understand the emergence of Gay Shame it is important to briefly examine SF Gay Pride. San Francisco's Gay Pride parade and celebration is a collection of so many facets and events that the parade alone takes nearly three hours, with hundreds of floats and thousands of

participants. In addition, a large street fair closes down the City Hall plaza and fills the area with booths and stages. Overarching questions about SF Gay Pride, such as, “Has it sold out to corporate buy-ins and greed? Or is it totally independent?” and “Does it fully represent the LGBTQI community?” become untenable in the face of something so large and complex. I believe making any pat moral or ethical judgments about the entire event would run afoul via a patronizing and dualistic logic that prevents useful critique and engagement. However, I would like to explore the ways in which SF Gay Pride is subscribing to a particular model of neoliberal identity. It is a mythical model premised on the fully realized consumer-subject, who has the ultimate power to choose and who is not following a prescribed path to identity.

Instead of arguing that Gay Pride is exclusionary per se, I argue that Gay Pride operates through a sort of oppressive inclusiveness, one modeled on capitalist practice itself. San Francisco’s Gay Pride is largely commoditized, but not completely. In many respects it represents the city itself, and to a greater extent represents the late neoliberal landscape with its mainstream leanings, normative agendas, and small but significant moments and performances of revolt and dis-identification.

The event, like the city, must be looked at as a collection of individuals, or as a collection of individual moments and performances. I might not identify with the queer Israeli supporters who took part in the Pride Parade, but I might identify strongly with the Jews who supported a liberated Palestine. Therefore, nearly everyone can find some way in which to participate in, or identify with, this event. I do use the term “nearly,” because some of the subjects I discuss do not find a way in at all. They are instead left outside in the cold, looking in at an event that bills itself as fully inclusive. “Something for

everyone” may be the logic followed, but what is left out is “something for everyone with money, who happens to fit into a mainstream crowd.” Additionally, the event gives a number of identity positions a way in, but through a neoliberal interpolating apparatus that demands location of an identity position in those that have already been articulated. It is fine in the logic of Gay Pride to be gay or lesbian, as long as you adhere to a distinct identification and participate in the capitalist spectacle that is Gay Pride. The Gay Shame Awards emerged as a reaction to Gay Pride and attempted to open an agonistic dialogue with the many Gay Pride events, beginning in 2002. Gay Shamers performed an alternative to the oppressive openness of Gay Pride and instead proposed an alternate space of identity, where the oppressed could form coalitions and new identity formations based on shared experiences of shame.

The first Gay Shame performance/protest event that acted as a public demonstration and put Gay Shamers into direct confrontation with the wider community was the Gay Shame Awards in 2002. Specifically, Gay Shame wanted to confront the Gay Pride community that had taken the Budweiser ad campaign, “be yourself make it a bud” and had changed it to “be yourself – change the world” and used it as the slogan for the 2002 San Francisco Gay Pride Parade (Bernstein 272). In writing about the Gay Shame awards, Katie Dettman posits that

[o]ver the years, it seems as though Pride celebrations have become inundated with products and ads, free samples and surveys, mailing lists and a platform for companies to hawk their wares at the ‘gay market,’ and for politicians to tout their support to the powerful gay voting bloc.

(Dettman)

For Gay Shame SF members, this level of sponsorship and corporate advertising pointed directly to the connection between SF Gay Pride and big business. In a sense, this use of the popular Budweiser campaign could be seen as a wink between the organizers and Budweiser, who was also a sponsor of the Gay Pride events. As one Gay Shamer remarked:

Gay Shame started as an alternative to Gay Pride. Gay Pride had become a disgusting consumerist and assimilationist nightmare, and Gay Shame was devised to be a space for queers who didn't want to deal with that shit.

(Sumptions)

Members of Gay Shame SF felt this direct collusion between big business and gay and lesbian culture demanded action and as a response put together the Gay Shame awards in 2002. They described the event as:

...the ceremony where we reward the most hypocritical gays for their service to the 'community'. That's right - it's time to expose the evil-doers who use the sham of gay 'pride' as a cover-up for their greed and misdeeds....Shame requests that all participants and attendees dress to absolutely terrifying, devastating, ragged excess. The Gay Shame Awards will be a festival of resistance, a queer takeover of the bland, whitewashed gayborhood, a chance to express our queer identities in ways other than just buying a bunch of crap. (Halperin 42)

The Gay Shame Awards proposed another way to be queer. They proposed a community outside of the constructs of gay and lesbian identity categories. Furthermore, the awards

asked, “Why feel proud when there's so much to be ashamed of? Gay landlords evicting people with AIDS. Gay cops beating up homeless queers. Gay Castro residents fighting a queer youth shelter” (ibid). In this instance shame and abjection became the common grounds of experience for Gay Shamers. The Gay Shame Awards were an attempt to forge solidarity between oppressed Bay Area groups, such as the homeless and immigrants, through shaming others.

The awards themselves performed an over-the-top parody of glamor, with grotesque and excessive makeup and costumes. Participants were “dressed to excess, in exaggerated, smeared makeup and glitter, torn ball gowns, and crumpled dress shirts” (ibid). The Gay Shame Awards utilized satire and a celebration of shame to question neoliberal identity categories and to propose a questioning and re-examination of identity. However, shame also functioned as a shaming of those people and institutions that they saw as being in collusion with big business, or people who had been proponents of legislation that was anti-homeless, anti-poor, or in favor of gentrification. Awards were given in a number of categories: “Exploiting Our Youth, Helping Right-Wingers Cope, Making More Queers Homeless, Best Target Marketing, Best Gender Fundamentalism, Best Racist-Ass Whites-Only Space” (ibid).

Gay Shame awards continued yearly and became a ritual. In 2003, Gay Shamers again held the awards at the intersection of Market and Castro streets in the Harvey Milk Plaza. In 2003 they marched up Market Street with a banner that read, “Queer Mutiny, not consumer unity!” (ibid) and carried signs that read, “Budweiser makes me sick” (ibid). Each award carried a satirical name and targeted an individual or corporation that group members felt deserved to be publicly criticized and humiliated. For example, a

large effigy of the then mayor of San Francisco, Gavin Newsom, was built using papier-mâché and later burned. He was given the Gay Shame Legends award in 2003 (ibid).

Another award was the Golden Shower for Tony Hall Award. “Tony Hall is a San Francisco Supervisor who attempted to have people locked up for urinating outside. He attempted to do this with full knowledge of the lack of public rest rooms in San Francisco” (ibid). This award involved a Gay Shamer dressed in an orange wig and pink tutu attempting to pee on an image of Hall. As with all the individuals awarded, Hall had not been criticized by mainstream gays and lesbians, because his legislation was seen as a “benefit” to elite gays and lesbians.

The Gay Shame Awards attempted to implicate those people and businesses who were being lauded by mainstream gays and lesbians as supportive and progressive pillars of the community. Through performances of subversion, the Gay Shame Awards called into question the balkanizing nature of identity politics in US neoliberal culture. Instead, through performances of coalition and shame, the awards re-injected the radical potential of shame to destabilize identity categories, opening the possibility of new forms of identification. As Sedgwick wrote in “Queer Performativity,” “If queer is a politically potent term, which it is, that's because, far from being capable of being detached from the childhood scene of shame, it cleaves to that scene as a near-inexhaustible source of transformational energy” (4). It is precisely the transformational nature of shame that Gay Shame capitalizes on for their performances, such as the Gay Shame Awards. The awards were both a way of owning and celebrating shame through a grotesque parody of glamor and a call for solidarity with other abjected Bay Area communities through the shaming

of others (in this case, those who they saw as discriminating against the poor and other alienated Bay Area communities).

Other Gay Shame actions included *Mary for Mayor*, in which Gay Shame members wanted to confront Mayor Gavin Newsom on his anti-homeless policies. Gavin Newsom ran for mayor of San Francisco in 2003 and introduced Proposition M. Prop M called for a ban of all types of panhandling (291). In an attempt to forge solidarity with SF's homeless population and to protest the active gentrification of the city, members of Gay Shame performed their own mayoral campaign. A campaign that celebrated the "shameful" aspects of the city that Newsom hoped to get rid of. In this performance, they staged a campaign rally for a fictional mayoral candidate who humorously mocked Newsom's gentrification platform. They created fictional groups in support of their candidate, "Terrorists Against Gavin (TAG), Fashionistas Against Gavin (FAG) and Riffraff Against Gavin (RAG)" (291). FAG used the slogan, "Gavin Newsom is so last season" (ibid). The primary point of *Mary for Mayor* was one of shaming SF politics and this performance was predominantly direct in its message and appeal and focused on forging solidarity with San Francisco's homeless population, many of whom participated in the protest.

Forging solidarity and coalitions with the homeless has been a recurrent strategy in Gay Shame performances. Gay Shame members also attempted to forge solidarity with San Francisco's homeless population during the Polk Street Séance held by Gay Shame in the spring of 2008. This event was meant to target the gentrification of Polk Street and San Francisco's Tenderloin neighborhood by the Lower Polk Neighbors, a neighborhood association that the flyer for the event refers to as a "brutal gentrification squad." Lower

Polk Street is in the middle of San Francisco's Tenderloin neighborhood. It is an area that has remained relatively untouched by the city's massive gentrification over the last 20 years. Specifically, the Tenderloin has remained a refuge for the homeless and working poor in a downtown San Francisco that is generally very hostile to those without much money. In an effort to bring attention to the gentrification of lower Polk and the attempts to rid the neighborhood of its homeless residents, Gay Shame staged the Polk Street Séance. For this action, they called for participants to dress as the spirits of Polk Street past.

This event is significant, because it points to a specific form of solidarity. Here Gay Shame staged a coalition between themselves and the San Francisco homeless community. Specifically, they attempted to empower and bring attention to the displaced queer and homeless communities of the lower Polk area and to question neoliberal identity formations, while proposing new communities of the ashamed and alienated and therefore suggesting new forms of identity.

Gay Shame San Francisco is not the only group that has emerged as a counter-site to Gay Pride. In recent years the Dyke March has also developed as an alternative to the consumerism and glamor of Pride. The Dyke March performs a come-as-you-are, informal parade and gathering every year that ends in a large festival. The march does not accept sponsorship of any kind and attempts to perform a utopian alternative to Gay Pride, one that harkens back to the Gay Liberation Front parades of the 1970s and early 80s. Additionally, the Dyke March lacks the structural support and money making aspects of SF Gay Pride by eschewing corporate endorsements. The march lacks a particular activist platform, or bent, but is instead meant as a more open, less

commoditized version of SF Gay Pride. In a sense the Dyke March is a reclaiming of Gay Pride weekend from a feminist left direction. It attracts a diverse crowd of lesbians, trans-folks, as well as men and women. Specifically, the event is characterized by a free organizational pattern where a variety of expressions are supported. In the context of Gay Shame, the Dyke March also offers another alternative to the mainstream and corporatized Gay Pride events.

In recent years, a much smaller but growing Transgender Pride event has been taking place the day before the Dyke March, also in Dolores Park. This event is newer and smaller and stays primarily in the park, but it appears to be gathering steam in the past few years. This event is primarily for transgender folks who find themselves unrepresented by both the Gay Pride Parade and the Dyke March. This once again represents an attempt to forge an inclusive anti-corporate alternative to Gay Pride and the Gay Rights agenda.

Gay Shame, the Dyke March and Transgender Pride represent attempts to think outside of the totalizing logic of Gay Pride. As San Francisco Gay Pride has become a more fixed and conservative event in recent years, a series of new groups and events have emerged as an alternative to Pride culture. Gay Shame is the most outspoken, performative and radical of these manifestations, but the Dyke March and Transgender Pride have developed as counter sites to San Francisco Gay Pride. The attempted reification of pride itself through parade and festival has given rise to these counter sites because pride is fraught with nuances and contradictions that represent a plurality of voices. These alternate sites and particularly Gay Shame, create space for thought and

dialogue about identity, where identity categories can be questioned and redefined and where shared experiences of shame allow for new communities and identities to emerge.

Beginning in 2002 with the Gay Shame Awards, Gay Shame San Francisco has increasingly attempted to forge coalitions with San Francisco's marginalized communities through satirical performances that utilize shame and disgust as a starting point of political action and solidarity. At times their performances can be outlandish, or esoteric, but there is an attempt to enliven the radical potential of shame and to hyperidentify with oppressed communities throughout the Bay Area and beyond. Gay Shame's performances also show a clear tension between political performance as a communication and as an affective call to solidarity through shame. In the next chapter, I will describe the performance work of Kvisa Shchora (Black Laundry). Kvisa's work is specific to the sociopolitical conditions of Israel and its occupation of the Palestinian territories and its members focus on forging solidarity primarily between Jewish Israelis, queers and Palestinians. However, as I will explore in the next chapter, they draw on much of the same lexicon of performance techniques and strategies, in order to protest the occupation of Palestine and to draw attention to the apathy in the Israeli gay and lesbian community.

Chapter 2

Airing Our Dirty Laundry: The Activist Performances of Kvisa Shchora

Kvisa Shchora (translated as “Dirty Laundry”) emerged as a direct action Israeli/Palestinian queer activist and Gay Shame group at the 2001 Gay Pride Parade in Tel Aviv. The group coalesced because a small liberal faction of the LGBTQI marchers could not reconcile a celebration of Pride with the shame of the second Intifada, which had begun almost a year earlier (Katz 1). Dressed all in black and carrying signs that called attention to the occupation of Palestine by Israeli forces, Kvisa members brought a somber and ceremonial aura to an otherwise festive and lively occasion. On that sunny June day in 2001, Kvisa Shchora came into being as a way to connect one form of oppression with others and as a statement that all types of oppression are intricately linked. Kvisa’s use of queer aesthetics and performances of solidarity are useful in re-examining Israel/Palestine through a queer lens. Furthermore, their specific style of direct action street performance can be used to ask important questions about the limits of solidarity in the context of political performance and the efficacy of communication-based activism. Through analyzing several of Kvisa's performances and through personal interviews with Kvisa's participants, I will show how Kvisa attempted to invoke solidarity through performances of shame and shaming. In doing so, they also exposed the limits of imagined solidarity in political performance and of hyperidentification.

Imagined solidarity and hyperidentification are useful tools in evoking the feeling of solidarity and connection across identity categories, but they can give the guise of literal coalition building and mutual connection, when the solidarity achieved is only unidirectional. Imagined solidarity is useful in understanding where political performance needs to draw on real-world connection and when feeling solidarity is enough.

Today gays and lesbians are finding their way into Israel's mainstream with increasing fluidity. As the queer fringes are interpolated into a mainstream Israeli framework, a critique of Zionism and Israeli militarism can only be lodged from a further and further left perspective. Israel is considered the most tolerant Middle Eastern country toward gays and lesbians and same sex sexual activity has been legal since 1988. Israel now recognizes same sex marriages attained elsewhere (despite not allowing same sex marriages internally). Tel Aviv is considered the gay capital of the Middle East and the Israeli government now grants Aliyah for gay couples (Sharon). In a 2013 press conference in Mexico City Israeli president Shimon Peres even expressed strong support of legalizing gay marriage in Israel (Lehman). The Israeli state has also taken clear action to end discrimination against LGBT citizens. The Knesset outlawed job discrimination based on sexual identity in 1992 and in 1993 the IDF banned all discrimination of gays and lesbians in the armed forces (Walzer 113). Additionally, Israel has begun recognizing same sex partner benefits and in 2000 the Israeli Supreme Court granted same sex partners full adoption rights. It is clear that Israel is moving progressively toward equal rights for the LGBT community. However, this liberalization and acceptance has not been spread evenly throughout the queer community, or throughout Israel.

Despite this greater acceptance of LGBT people, Israel is still a deeply religious country. Mainstream decisions are closely tied to the conservative right in Israel and the country is largely divided between east and west, with Tel Aviv occupying a liberal cosmopolitan role, while Jerusalem maintains a more religious place. Although Gay Pride parades have been held in Jerusalem since 2001, they are still tenuous and met with protests and the threat of violence. Additionally, the situation in the Palestinian territories and the Israeli settlements is even worse. The term “pinkwashing” has been coined to represent Israel's use of gay rights as a way to distract from Palestinian oppression, by holding gay rights up as an example of Israel's progress. Queerness in the Israeli context has become tied-up with Israeli exceptionalism. As Jasbir K Puar argues about queerness in a U.S. framework, “Queerness colludes with U.S. exceptionalisms embedded in nationalist foreign policy via the articulation and production of whiteness as a queer norm and the tacit acceptance of U.S. imperialist expansion” (Puar 517). She is specifically talking about the U.S. LGBTQI community, but her statement could easily be translated to Israeli exceptionalism. The issues of Jewishness and expansion are at least as salient in Israel/Palestine as imperialist expansion and military dominance are in the United States. In order to exact any meaningful critique of Israeli politics and of the occupation, it is necessary to avoid being completely subsumed by identity categories that are already strongly rooted in the region, such as Jewish/Arab, Mizrahi/Ashkenazi and Israeli/Palestinian. This is what Kvisa tried to do. They attempted to avoid the pitfalls of identity, with varying degrees of success, through combining multiple identity fields and engagements in their performance and protest work and also creating meaningful communications with their audience and with the larger community. Ultimately, Kvisa

invoked shame in their performances in order to forge solidarity of the oppressed that reached beyond the confines of identity and culture. Through invoking queer shame, Kvisa attempted to show the analogous relationship between different forms of shame and to use this as the basis for building solidarity between themselves and other oppressed groups, especially Palestinians living in Israel and the territories.

In 2007, I spent the month of August in Tel Aviv and Jerusalem conducting research on Kvisa's actions and interviewing a number of Kvisa's Jewish and Arab members. I would like to examine several of these actions in order to look at the way shame and solidarity can be used to re-imagine the Middle East, specifically Israel/Palestine, as a place where queer aesthetics and political activism can make an important and unique intervention into state sanctioned violence and identity struggles. What can performing shame and solidarity in a queer context tell us about discourses of nationality and statehood within Mid-East culture and what, if any intervention do these performances make into state sanctioned violence in Israel? I also intend to use the work of Kvisa to question where the limits of solidarity reside in political performance and whether an attempt to represent and communicate solidarity through performance can affect social change for the performers, or viewers.

In this chapter, I will analyze several of Kvisa's demonstrations and performances between 2001 and 2007 with an eye to the intentions of Kvisa members and the performative strategies employed. I will especially focus on how Kvisa's actions and performances employ shame in the service of hyperidentification and solidarity and I will ask what forms of solidarity these performances generate. I will be examining this work as a knowledgeable outsider and a scholar. I was never part of Kvisa, and therefore, I can

only reconstruct many of the events and performances I detail here. I am also sympathetic to the work of Kvisa and other queer street performance groups and my own investment in their project undoubtedly colors my treatment of the work. That said, I do attempt to analyze these performances through a dispassionate lens in order to explore my core research questions. Some of the performances I attended, while others I reconstruct here through extensive interviews and archival footage, images and articles about these events. Finally, I focus on several indicative events that represent both the group's contribution to Israeli discourse and the limitations of their attempts at solidarity with Palestinians.

Although Kvisa has recently become less active as a group, they were extremely active between 2001 and 2007, during which time they staged many types of political demonstrations and performances. These ran the gamut from pulling a giant pink erection bobbing through the streets of Tel Aviv as a satirical lampoon of Israeli nationalism, to a warm-hearted all-embracing beauty pageant meant as a ritual of affirmation of its performers and spectators. They also included protests at roadblocks in the West Bank and intentionally mis-appropriating signs of Palestinian statehood with the use of the keffiyeh during an Israeli Gay Pride Parade.

Organized as an activism and performance collective, Kvisa members met regularly to plan and coordinate actions based on collective group input. Kvisa's structure was non-hierarchical and they were affiliated with several other left-wing organizations in Israel, which meant that members of Kvisa were often involved with more than one group simultaneously. The overlap and exchange of members and ideas was a hallmark of Kvisa's activism, thus one or two of the events treated here were not strictly done under the aegis of Kvisa-proper. However, they still involved many Kvisa members and

fundamental Kvisa aesthetic and performative strategies, including performances that were solely put on by Kvisa. I therefore consider such activist performances as part of the Kvisa tradition and treat them as such.

Through a series of interviews conducted with Kvisa members in the summer of 2007, and an archive of images and writings, I have been able to re-construct the Kvisa performances I did not attend. Additionally, I draw on archival materials, such as articles about Kvisa's performances and protests and writings produced by Kvisa members, in order to bring these performances into relief and to add nuance to my discussion of these events. Through analyzing these primary and secondary sources, and by applying the lens of affect theory, I am able to access the intentions and engagements of Kvisa members. Kvisa's most profound intervention into Israeli politics was to engage with multiple issues of oppression simultaneously in one action or one performance. These actions and performances demanded that LGBTQI Israelis recognize the limitations of queer politics in Israel when queer campaigns and celebrations failed to address state sanctioned violence while passively affirming a culture of racism and warfare.

Kvisa's various protests and performances have intervened in the social climate of Israel/Palestine by introducing a unique form of queer activism to the region and by asking that Israeli's examine the relationship between different forms of oppression. I ask several questions of this group's performances: What strategies of performance, citizenship and affect did Kvisa employ to realize their goals on an individual and/or communal level? Can their approach lead to a true solidarity amongst the oppressed and forge connections between Israelis and Palestinians, or does it simply build an imagined solidarity and what is the efficacy of that form? In looking at the strategies and aesthetics

employed by Kvisa, it is possible to begin answering these questions. Kvisa's performances of shame, in order to invoke political solidarity amongst oppressed groups, were able to articulate powerful critiques of Israeli politics and culture. However, these attempts to forge solidarity have not always been effective and at times have been muddled, or even alienated the very groups Kvisa was attempting to reach, limiting their ability to enact social change. In these performances it is possible to clearly discern a tension between literal and imagined solidarity and between communication and affect, that I will examine through looking at Kvisa's demonstrations.

In this chapter I will also include a quick primer on the history of the Israeli State and the emergence of radical queer activism in Israel. I will then discuss how queer identities and activism have played an important role in establishing voices of dissent and solidarity in Israel/Palestine. This important background will lead me to a discussion of Kvisa Shchora and their performances as interventions that attempt to build coalitions and to use queerness as a means to open up a space of agonistic dialogue within Israeli society and abroad. Here I will ask: What does it mean to perform solidarity, and what are the limits of political solidarity and the terminology we currently have to describe this phenomenon?

I feel I must begin by describing my own complex and daunting relationship to the state of Israel and to Zionism. In order to understand my interest and investment in the work of Kvisa Shchora, I must first reflexively examine my own investment in their struggle for solidarity. I was raised Jewish in a very liberal North American Jewish family. I grew up in Santa Fe, New Mexico where the Jewish community is small, but close-knit. Everyone's private lives are widely known and discussed. The community

tends to be on the same page regarding international Jewish issues, and in the eighties and early nineties that page was all about Israel. To the Jewish community in far-flung Santa Fe, thousands of miles from the “Jewish Homeland,” little seemed more important than the mission of Zionism. From the perspective of a small Jewish child growing up thousands of miles away from the land of Palestine, it seemed like people were constantly talking about traveling to Israel, or discussing a cousin who was living on a Kibbutz outside Jerusalem. For Hanukkah, I received gift certificates with donations made in my honor for planting trees in Israel. The US-based Jews I encountered at the time had a seemingly unproblematic relationship to Zionism and a sense of affective attachment to the idea of Israel. Again, I must point out that these observations were made through the lens of a child and should not be mistaken for objective fact. Clearly, the Jewish community is, and as far as history tells us, has always been a heterogeneous one, often humorously defined by its seemingly endless internal debates and disagreements. However, as when I was young, we were told frequently that Israel was our homeland, and we were citizens who could return to the Middle East whenever we wanted. We learned the history of Israel in Sunday school. It was the story of a poor, defenseless tiny nation of refugees who were besieged on all sides. Much like the Hanukkah story, the state of Israel survived only through the providential passive support of a higher power, the active and financial support of Jews around the world, and the fortitude and determination of a displaced people who had finally made it home and were never leaving again.

My relationship to Israel and to Zionism remained dormant, but predominantly unchanged, until I developed a friendship with a Palestinian girl in high school. Her

parents were Christian Palestinians, who had emigrated from the West Bank city of Nazareth to Southern California, where I had relocated and was attending high school. Our friendship was fraught, because she would often go on at length about what the “Jews” were doing. Sometimes, I corrected her by saying, “I think you mean the Israelis,” rolling my eyes at her lack of nuance. I certainly was not burning villages, designing new indignities and setting up checkpoints for her family back home. Yet, I could not entirely reconcile the things she told me with the idealized Israel of my childhood. I found these exchanges painful at the time, because I felt I was being attacked for something I had no part in, and because I found her logic difficult to follow and reductive. I was already harassed and called “the Jew” by the largely Christian and Persian Muslim population at my school. “Hey Jew!” became my nickname and this always registered as a sort of benign bullying (with a few exceptions, such as when someone from my school yelled, “kyke!” out of a car window). Despite the over-determined nature of my friendship with the Palestinian girl, it did two things to my thinking. First, I began to actively separate my own identity from that of Israel. What they did over there was not part of who I was. Secondly, I started to question the narratives I was force-fed as a child. How could the besieged and benevolent society I had learned about also be the perpetrator of these crimes?

A couple of years later, that would change. I decided to reconnect with my Judaism in college. I went to a couple of services with my campus Hillel organization and heard about a “free” trip to Israel through the Birthright organization. Since 1999, Birthright has sponsored ten-day trips to Israel for mostly North American youth. Approximately 350,000 people have now gone on these trips, and the organization is still

active today (<http://www.birthrightisrael.com>). At the time, I had no idea this trip would eventually lead to my interest in anti-occupation activism in general and specifically to my fascination with Kvisa. Upon landing in Israel, I found the trip filled with a new level of pro-Zionist propaganda, wholly unrivaled by what I had encountered as a child. We were lectured in depth about how happy Palestinians and Israeli Arabs were with the status quo and how everyone was overjoyed that the Jewish State was doing so well. We spent an afternoon with an Israeli Arab family in Haifa and were told how happy they were to live in Israel. We were shown major religious and cultural sites and, in a move reminiscent of cult-style indoctrination tactics, they hauled us from one area of the country to another without ever being shown a map or given more than three hours of sleep per night for the entire ten-day trip. I developed a minor bacterial infection on my tour, which turned into a nasty case of strep throat without proper medical attention. The bile building in my system seemed to reflect the bile of a desperate sort of Zionism. I became sicker in both an existential and physical sense. On the last night, we slept in a Bedouin camp before an early morning ascent of Masada in the middle of the Negev desert. I threw up all night long, and in the morning, they rushed me to a hospital in Jerusalem.

The trip also coincided with the beginning of the Second Intifada, in which the PLO waged war on Israel with rampant bombings in Jerusalem and Tel Aviv in August of 2001. The trip was nearly canceled because of the violence. The atmosphere was one of anxiety and tension. Somehow, this only seemed to heighten the group's determination to show us that the Israeli project was working, and that Zionism was successful. This caused the entire trip to take on a heightened element of surreality and performance. This

univocal encounter with performed Israeliness set the stage for a cognitive dissonance between my perception of a complex society, fraught with social issues and a cohesive, if tenuous narrative of happy Jews and Arabs living side by side. Furthermore, other forms of diversity, such as sexuality and immigration were all neatly subsumed by this master Zionist narrative. When I found Kvisa in 2005, their work seemed a natural extension of what I was already feeling. At the time, Kvisa seemed to be performing a counter-narrative to the one I'd been force-fed since I was a child.

That experience catalyzed my unease with the State of Israel and queered my relationship to Zionism, which brings me to 2014, when the world has turned a weary and frustrated eye on Israel and its colonialist occupation of the Palestinian territories.

Kvisa Shchora seemingly exists as an extension of my personal history and cultural / religious connection to Israel. When I first discovered the work of Kvisa Shchora in 2005, I felt compelled to document and explore it. Kvisa brought together many of the identity struggles and issues that had catalyzed in my relationship to Israel. They were using thoughtful protest performances as a means to end the occupation of the Palestinian territories and they were also asking interesting and provocative questions about queer identity and sexuality and the occlusion / exclusion of certain minoritarian identities in favor of embracing others. Furthermore, they were connecting all of this to the conscriptive nature of identity culture.

To understand Gay Shame performances in Israel/Palestine it is necessary to delve into the history of the Israeli state, the occupation of the Palestinian territories and the current state of collective political concern in Israel. Kvisa Shchora and the activist community in Israel/ Palestine represent a radical left movement that is not only focused

on ending the occupation of Palestine, but is centered on a complete shakeup of the Israeli political system advocating for the Palestinian right to return and a single-, or dual-state solution that is fully equitable. Further, Kvisa Shchora seeks to end any and all discrimination against sexual minorities.

Although most of the actions and performances I write about took place five to ten years ago, the present state of Israeli society and politics has changed only marginally in terms of Palestine and the Gaza Strip⁵. As Baruch Kimmerling argues, Israeli society is fundamentally militarized. Kimmerling states that “military and other social problems, are so highly intermingled that social and political issues become construed as ‘existential security’ issues....” (3). This sense of ever-present threat and a fear of teetering on the edge of annihilation, along with a sense of unobstructed flow between civilian and military life, has led to a militarized and ever vigilant public and, as Kimmerling argues, a civilianized military (ibid). “In addition, I am arguing that the strength and capability of the Israeli military to penetrate society is predicated by the military’s all-embracing and civilian nature” (ibid). Israel built this all-embracing military that Kimmerling references due to a long history of anti-Semitism, Zionism and gradual land acquisition in Palestine. It is also an important aspect of the Jewish world-view that informs a sense of threat and victimization. Kimmerling argues that the Jewish world-view is one predicated on an identity of victimhood⁶. From the Egyptians to the Seleucid Empire and from the Romans

⁵ Conditions have worsened in Gaza, particularly during and after the 2014 Israeli bombardment.

⁶ Israel/Palestine has a long history of public dissent, although much of this is discursive. One of the most famous and widely read examples of public dissent was Kimmerling’s essay “J’Accuse” published in the February 2002 in the anthology, *The Other Israel: Voices of Refusal and Dissent*. In his essay Kimmerling calls out both Israel’s government and Palestinian leadership when he writes, “I ACCUSE MY prime minister, Ariel Sharon, of creating a process that will not only intensify the reciprocal bloodshed, but which may lead to a regional war and partial or nearly complete ethnic cleansing of Arabs in ‘Greater Israel’”

to the Nazis, the Jewish people share a collective identity of victimization. This identity position makes conceptualizing themselves as oppressors an extremely difficult and complicated leap to make. How can a people who understand themselves as victims also see themselves as oppressors? As Rashid Khalidi argues, “There is clearly a paradox here. Its core is that Israelis, many of them descended from victims of persecution, pogroms, and concentration camps, have themselves been mistreating another people” (5). The situation of Israeli oppressiveness is only comprehensible in so much as Israeli identity cannot be construed as oppressive and has, therefore, been somehow historically immune to accusations of ethnic violence and cleansing. Additionally, the history of the Israeli state and people has solidified both a sense of vigilance and a need for military readiness amongst Israelis.

To disidentify with militarism in Israeli society is to deny the primary myth of Israel as a victim in need of constant defensive action. “Israel has not only faced violent resistance on the part of the hostile local population...but has also made confrontation with them a source of internal strength for its settler elites and leadership...” (4). Many refer to the yearly cycles of engagement and militarism on the part of Israel against the Palestinians today and the Lebanese and Syrians in the past as a bloodletting that imposes Israeli dominance in the region and maintains the threat of imminent violence and the usefulness of the military. For many activists in Israel, pacifism itself becomes a radical disidentification. By performing subjecthood through the act of pacifist and refusenik

(75). He goes on to accuse the Israeli Labor Party of colluding with “ultra-nationalist, right wing” groups, Yassar Arafat and the PLO of shortsightedness and the United States military-industrial complex of misinterpreting and mis-directing the Middle-East conflict (75). Kimmerling has become a voice of dissent and an outspoken public intellectual regarding anti-occupation issues in Israel

politics, pacifist actors characterize Israeli Zionist style occupation and military policies as the enemy to peaceful (co)existence in Israel and in the region. By refusing to accept yearly cycles of bloodletting and ever more crushing circumstances for Palestinians in the Territories, these groups, such as Kvisa Shchora, attempt to mark out a space for an untenable identity position, a position made yet more unknowable by its co-presence as both pacifist and queer. Bodies that maintain the marginal spaces of both pacifism and queerness disturb the pernicious dark side of Israeli nationalism: Zionism, racism and homophobia. In this sense, queerness itself opens people up to pacifism precisely because it begins the project of disengagement and disidentification.

The heart of the issues surrounding the history and identity of Israelis and Palestinians hinges on the events of 1948, which are remembered in two radically different ways by each culture. For Israelis, the war of 1948 was a great victory. Between 1947 and 1949, Jewish Israelis changed from a substantial minority of colonists in a land occupied by others, to the possessors of most of the land in Palestine, including a small percentage of land still belonging to Palestinians. For Palestinians, the 1948 war was a catastrophe, or the Nakba. It was a violent and genocidal ethnic cleansing, in which Arab villages throughout Israel were destroyed and burned, and people were driven into two distinct reservations (the West Bank and the Gaza strip). As Ilan Pappé describes, the Nakba dislocated hundreds of thousands of people. “Most of the 900,000 Palestinians living in the newly formed state were expelled by force, their villages destroyed and their city neighborhoods settled by Jewish immigrants. Israel’s creation was thus enabled by military power, ethnic cleansing and the de-Arabization of the country” (110). Kvisa and groups like them recognize the violence of the Nakba and the ongoing oppression of

Palestinians in Israel and in the territories. A large part of their activism attempts to reframe these events for Jewish Israelis and draws attention to the need for restitution. Furthermore, members of Kvisa acknowledge the right of Palestinians to claim land and an independent national identity. For Palestinians, left stateless and landless, the events of 1948 catalyzed their identity as Palestinians.

The turbulent and conflicting political currents that affected the Palestinians immediately after the 1947-49 war completed this process. For in spite of their dispersion and fragmentation among several new successor states and forms of refugee status, what the Palestinians now shared was far greater than what separated; all had been dispossessed, none were masters of their own fate.... If the Arab population of Palestine had not been sure of their identity before 1948, the experience of defeat, dispossession, and exile guaranteed that they knew what their identity was very soon afterwards: they were Palestinians. (Kahlidi 194)

Kahlidi is careful not to suggest that Israel's actions were the sole, or even the primary reason Palestinian identity began to solidify when it did, but he does argue that The Catastrophe and its aftermath, including the Israeli occupation of the remaining Arab territories and the cold shoulder Palestinians received from other Arab states, acted as a rapid catalyst for the formation of a national consciousness. Indeed, as Kahlidi goes on to argue, "...most of the elements of Palestinian identity-particularly the enduring parochial, local ones-were well developed before the climactic events of 1948...." (21). Since 1948, the violent confrontation of two strong national identities and the oppressive forces of Israeli rule have led to a simmering and at times explosive conflict.

Today, issues are far from resolved in relationship to the occupation and the current cultural tensions and divisions in Israel (this is especially true after the July and August Israeli assault on Gaza in 2014), but some on the Israeli left have argued that over the past few years Jewish Israelis have become less concerned with the occupation of Palestine, or the Jewish-Arab conflict. These same critiques say that mainstream Israeli society seems to throw its hands in the air and embrace a generalized apathy in relationship to the occupation. Meanwhile, the second Intifada is simply a nasty memory for most Israelis. As Joel Braunold quipped in Haaretz, “The famous Israeli apathy - generated from a toxic mixture of conscription, terrorism and living in a small, hot country has resulted in a culture of solitude and cynicism” (1). This apathetic attitude is fostered by a complex set of circumstances, which can only partly be ascribed to the influence of the media and a conservative Knesset, focused on perceived external threats, such as Israel’s relationship to Iran and Syria. “The position that the Palestinian-Israeli conflict once held in the Israeli agenda has since been assumed by major strategic threats, such as those posed by Syria and Iran” (Eldar 2). On the ground, this has meant that Jewish Israelis have largely distanced themselves from the occupation. As Ethan Bronner describes in an op-ed from the New York Times on May 25th, mainstream Israeli culture is less and less concerned with the conflict these days. “Few even talk about the Palestinians or the Arab world on their borders, despite the tumult and the renewed peace efforts by Secretary of State John Kerry, who has been visiting the region in recent days” (1). However, Kvisa, and groups like them, re-inject a radical left agenda into the mainstream, arguing that these issues cannot be ignored and that this oppression must not go unnoticed. They not only give voice to Palestinians and Arabs living in Israel, but also

attempt to form coalitions with queer groups in Palestine. Kvisa makes a powerful critique of Israeli politics, by arguing that Gay Pride and Israeli nationalism work together to obscure the mechanisms of oppression and by connecting the identity of victimhood of both queers and Israelis. Kvisa's performances demand that war not be naturalized and ignored, but instead open an agonistic space where the public needs to reconcile their roles as victims with their role as oppressors.

Kvisa's performances further argue that, as horrible as the atrocities of 1948 were, there has been a more modern shift in Israeli occupational strategies, and even in the consciousness of Israelis, and that this shift primarily began with the occupation in 1967 of the West Bank and the Gaza Strip. "The Six-Day War was forced upon us; however, the war's seventh day, which began on June 12, 1967 and has continued to this day, is the product of our choice. We enthusiastically chose to become a colonial society..." (Ben-Yair 13). Even today, the tinder-box that is Israel/Palestine continues to heat up and, whether or not Jewish Israelis choose to ignore the occupation and its disastrous consequences, the violent occupation of Palestine persists.

New Jewish settlements continue to spring up in the West Bank and East Jerusalem, with 350,000 settlers now living in the occupied territories, which is an increase of 15,000 people since 2011 (Sherwood 1). In fact, settlements and army bases have created a patchwork quilt, weaving throughout the West Bank, the Golan Heights and East Jerusalem and dividing the already diminished and overcrowded Palestinian territories. This further encroachment has made a peace deal and the establishment of a free and independent Palestinian state a nearly impossible dream for the future.

Meanwhile, the Israeli military carries on with its violent sanctions and control over the

nearly five million Palestinian people, most of whom are stateless, even after the horrific destruction, abandonment, sanctioning, and sealing of the Gaza Strip in 2005 and the recent bombardment in 2014.

This is why the work of Kvisa Shchora and other groups like them is so important, because they are attempting to confront the apathy caused by naturalizing war throughout civil society by reminding those who occupy mainstream Israeli society that serious issues exist in their backyard, and they must not accept Palestinian occupation and oppression. Furthermore, these groups try to inventively and visibly inform Israelis that differing forms of oppression are tied to one another and that one form of liberation will lead to more freedom and liberation for all. They argue that as rights begin to accrue for queer people in Israel, so must they grow for Palestinians. Though they reach these goals at times, their ability to effectively communicate their ideas and build coalitions with Palestinians are not always successful.

Though there are numerous books and articles about Israel/Palestine, few look at queer activist work on the ground. For instance, the book *The Other Israel: Voices of Refusal* is a wonderful anthology of activist and anti-occupation articles. However, it fails to discuss the direct-action activism of queer groups such as Kvisa. Published twelve years ago in 2002, it does a good job of laying out the terrain and giving a sense of the political landscape and the sheer volume of dissent among Israelis, but it fails to discuss activist performance. Instead, the editors give more time to pundits, critics and public intellectuals. A more grounded, though less complex, discussion of queer Israeli and Palestinian activism is Jason Richie's 2010 issue of GLQ, *How Do You Say "Come Out of the Closet" in Arabic: Queer Activism and the Politics of Visibility in Israel-Palestine*.

Richie theorizes the checkpoint, instead of the closet, as the metaphor for coming out for queer Palestinians and Israeli Arabs. He also documents the extent to which Palestinians are excluded from many forms of queer activism in Israel and from full participation in the LGBTQI community. However, he does not give an in-depth discussion of anti-occupation queer activism at the intersection of Israeli and Palestinian identity.

Oppression in Israel/Palestine takes a variety of forms, and Jewish Israelis who speak out against the status quo are often ostracized and ridiculed. Additionally, they risk imprisonment and bodily harm for either engaging in activism, or for simply refusing to serve in the military. This slips over the edge into physical danger if one is of an Arab background. Understanding the environment that Israeli dissenters, refusers (those who refuse mandatory military service), anti-occupation activists and anyone who speaks out against the occupation find themselves in is important in understanding the work of Kvisa. Identities and ethnic divisions in Israel are strongly enforced by the state and are enacted through border checkpoints, identity cards and spatial segregation in order to track and control bodies (Loewenstein 24). The system of checkpoints and ID cards makes movement complicated for Jewish Israelis and nearly impossible for Israeli Arabs and Palestinians. Assaf Oron, one of the originators of Israel's "refusenik" movement, and an outspoken critic of the occupation, describes his experiences of being a conscientious objector in Israel as a daily struggle of ridicule and rejection. "Right-wingers see me as a traitor who is dodging the holy war that's just around the corner. The political center shakes a finger at me self-righteously and lectures me about undermining democracy and politicizing the army" (138).

Members of activist groups such as Kvisa Shchora, whether they are Jewish Israelis, Palestinians or Arab-Israelis living in Israel, face similar types of persecution for speaking out. If they are Israeli citizens, they are usually either conscientious objectors, or they are forced to confront the hypocrisy of speaking out against the occupation and then participating in mandatory military service. Israeli activists find themselves in a double-bind, where they are judged by their families and the general public and face the possibility of prison time and public ridicule if they refuse to serve, or they are ostracized by other activists and the far left if they do their mandatory service. In understanding the complexities of left wing activism in Israel, it is important to grasp the ethnic and social groups that make up Israeli society and the role of performance and activism in connecting social engagements and highlighting oppression.

Activists in Israel use performance because it is a powerful tool in communicating social issues and bringing the public into the dialogue around social change. Performance also becomes an essential tool in creating an agonistic, and at times utopian space, where social and political boundaries can be seen and connections can be forged among oppressed groups that might not otherwise be possible. Examining the activist landscape can also be used to pose important questions about the limits of solidarity and the ability of activists to communicate specific political aims to their audience and the general public. Kvisa was unique among Israel's leftwing activist community in their use of performance to demonstrate the links between oppressed groups and in their attempts to invoke performances of shame in order to reach solidarity. However, their performances also force me to ask where the limits of solidarity lie and where these performances fail to articulate, or clearly reach their goals. In order to understand the social context of

Kvisa's activism, it is important to understand the social and ethnic groups that make up Israeli society.

Baruch Kimmerling has divided ethnicity in Israel into the Ashkenazi elite (European Jews who are not Sephardic), the Mizrahi (Middle Eastern Jews), Israeli Arabs (a diverse group comprised of several ethnic communities), Russian settlers (made up of two large groups of recent immigrants from the USSR in the late 1970s and from the post-soviet countries of Eastern Europe and central Asia during the early- to mid-1990s), Ethiopian Jews (primarily from two waves of immigration), and non-resident workers (comprised of both Palestinians without national status in Israel and of workers from other countries on a temporary work visa, or not holding visas at all). These groups make up the great majority of Israeli society and exclude nearly all of the Palestinians in the Territories and some in East Jerusalem who are either citizens of Jordan, or are stateless peoples officially recognized by Israel not only as a threat to both ethnic majority and land claims, but as a source of cheap labor (130-172). It is important to note that Kimmerling's list is a simplification, as Israeli society is more complex with a large population of citizens who are not Arab or Jewish, such as the Druze and Bedouins.⁷ While Ashkenazi dominance is declining, it is still the group largely in power, and the Ashkenazim also make up the majority within left-wing political activism in Israel. This is a problem that many in the movement acknowledge openly. Mizrahim and Israeli Arabs are also somewhat active in left-wing activism, but these groups have a lot more at stake in contesting the status quo. Palestinians without Israeli or Jerusalem ID cards have

⁷ This is not to mention Christians, holders of multiple passports and non-Jews born elsewhere who have been granted Israeli citizenship.

a great deal more at risk in making themselves even remotely visible. This population finds it nearly impossible to travel outside of the Territories at all, which is further heightened in Gaza where the current situation is extremely dire.

The political conditions in Israel-Palestine have laid the groundwork for a vocal peace movement within Israel and the Palestinian territories. Ever since the first Intifada in 1988 the Israeli Peace movement has gained traction. Women in Black began holding vigils during the Intifada (Svirsky 235). Bat Shalom has been a vocal and active coalition of Jewish Israeli and Palestinian women activists since 1989. Additionally, numerous other groups have formed since the late eighties and continue to add to the activist landscape in Israel and Palestine. Most of these groups do not stage performances, or involve theatre in their activist work. One group that heavily employs performance is Combatants for Peace, which uses theatre to work toward ending the occupation of Palestine. Even within the Israeli Peace movement there are a lot of class and ethnic tensions between Jewish Israelis, Arab Israelis, Palestinians, Ashkenazim and Mizrahi activists. Additionally, individual politics and goals often come into conflict. Kvisa Shchora has not been immune to these tensions and conflicts either, but the openness of their decision-making process and performative choices have helped to mitigate these issues. The next section explores how Kvisa's performance work adds an important voice to Israel and Palestine's activist landscape and what they are attempting to achieve with these performances.

Kvisa Shchora's Activist Performance

Kvisa Shchora stresses connectivity in their activism to question state sanctioned categories of identity and to forge solidarity among the oppressed. Through both real and imagined connections and solidarity, Kvisa Shchora is attempting to undermine the borders between Arab and Jewish, gay and straight, and to reconfigure identity positions based on activism and political affiliation. They are also attempting to communicate their political goals and ideas to Israeli activists and the general public. The idea of connecting one form of oppression to others, through embodied performances of struggle, stresses the extent to which national and economic boundaries are fostered and reproduced in order to control bodies. However, this attempt to equalize different forms of oppression also holds the danger of equating and flattening all forms of suffering. To say that the suffering of Israeli LGBTQI people can be equated to the suffering of Palestinian women, or LGBTQI Palestinians equates forms of oppression that cannot and should not be fully equated. Using shame and solidarity to compare oppression holds the potential to forge connections through suffering. If queer activists in Israel understand themselves as connected to Palestinians, to Mizrahim, to women and other oppressed minorities, this undermines the value placed on separation. The action of connecting performs a doubling by which multiple oppressions are stressed as individually significant and are also blurred into one overarching gesture against state and social violence. However, this attempt at a communicative one-sided solidarity exposes the limits of connection and begs the question: what is the efficacy of imagined solidarity and is this solidarity always clearly communicated?

In a personal interview at a busy coffee shop in the center of Tel Aviv, IM (I will use the first and last initials of my interview participants in order to maintain anonymity),

a 27-year-old self-identified lesbian from Tel Aviv and a founder of Kvisa Shchora, alludes to this connectivity of the oppressed. Originally from Russia, IM immigrated to Israel with her family when she was a child in order to escape the persecution of Jews. She is a beautiful woman, with a large round face and thoughtful green eyes. She brings an interesting perspective to Israeli politics, as an immigrant herself. In her words,

There is a connection between our oppression as lesbians, homosexuals and the oppression of the Palestinians. Since the *intifada*, the city of Jerusalem is covered with posters and graffiti saying, 'Expel the Arabs.' Yesterday, the city was covered with graffiti saying, 'Expel the homosexuals.' I don't want this [parade] to be a fig leaf for the abuses of human rights. A few kilometers from here there are people under siege, people who are hungry.

IM alludes to the point that this connectivity of oppression is not meant to suggest a hierarchy of suffering. It is not a matter of comparing one form of suffering to another. It is not about indicating that homosexual suffering in Tel Aviv is comparable to Palestinian suffering in the Territories. I doubt that is an argument any Kvisa members would make. Instead, it is a matter of calling attention to specific kinds of suffering through their connection to other forms, so that the homophobia and transphobia experienced by queers is seen as connected to racism, which is then related to Palestinian oppression.

IM indicates that the focus of the newly founded group was to combine issues and, in particular, to tie the fight for queer rights with the fight for Palestinian liberation. Combining political issues and the impossibility of disentangling the positions of victim and oppressor quickly became the primary themes of the group. Kvisa members saw

identity categories in Israel (particularly Jewish and Arab) as part of an oppressive military-industrial system. They also saw their role, whether Jewish or Arab, as culpable in that oppressive Zionist regime. Feeling a sense of responsibility for Palestinian oppression was a common theme of my discussions with Kvisa members. Kvisa activists felt a certain level of helplessness in the face of this large-scale oppression and looked to redress this situation in a variety of complex ways. Furthermore, an individual's specific history in relationship to Palestinian oppression made a large difference in their feelings of responsibility. IM, as a recent immigrant felt differently than members of Kvisa who had served in the military and may have played a more active role in the occupation.

Further, these were queer and Palestinian people whose bodies were already marginalized by mainstream Israeli culture. Kvisa members saw the oppression of queers as inextricably tied to the oppression of Palestinians, and demanded that there be no pride in others' oppression. The group saw discrete identity categories as a means of further dividing and distracting people from the real human connectedness that needed to come before any discussion of peace and liberation in Israel and the territories. For Kvisa, oppressed groups needed to find common human ground for forging coalitions against the dehumanizing racism and militarism of the Israeli state. Kvisa sought to forge these coalitions through performances of shame and solidarity and to communicate a message of common ground among the oppressed. The group used street performance strategies to parody Israeli militarism, gender identity politics and public apathy toward the plight of Palestinians and other oppressed groups and to demand an end to the occupation of the Palestinian territories. They directed their message at Israeli civilians, predominantly in urban centers, such as Tel Aviv and Jerusalem, but also in smaller Israeli cities. Their

message was particularly directed at the LGBTQI community, but also at the wider urban Israeli population.

The work of Kvisa can also be used to ask questions about what solidarity means and if there can be a form of solidarity that is purely representational. At the end of this chapter, I will discuss a performance from a 2003 Gay Pride Parade in Tel Aviv that brings these questions to the surface. Three lesbian members of Kvisa, all Jewish Israelis, marched topless in the parade with a banner that read: “No Pride in The Oppression of Others” along with other slogans written on their bodies. These women also wore Keffiyeh on their heads to show their solidarity with Palestinians in the West Bank and Gaza. Chained together, these marchers performed a symbolic solidarity with the millions of Palestinians within and outside Israel’s borders. This attempt at solidarity meant to employ shame as a means of claiming solidarity. By making their bodies abject these women claimed a position of solidarity with Palestinian women. However, this performance could be seen as a radical affront to Islam and to many aspects of Palestinian culture. This specific performance tested the limits of what it means to perform solidarity and forces me to ask important questions about the limits of this form of solidarity. Can an attempt at solidarity reproduce the oppressive regime it means to critique? What are the limits to imagined solidarity and does this performance expose them?

What interests me in this performance is the affective experience of solidarity, which blurs the line between embodied and representational forms of political solidarity. This means that “feeling solidarity” can imply both an embodied dimension, where one experiences the sense of solidarity and a representational form, where solidarity is

performed for an audience. In addition, this performance brings up important questions around whether solidarity can ever really be reached without the actual presence of all those represented, and if an event can backfire enough to prevent the very social change it is trying to create.

Finally, it raises the question of whether we can think of solidarity as imagined and what would be the use of one-sided solidarity? Maybe it can be useful in unifying both spectators and performers toward a common goal even when it is one-sided, or maybe it can't. Perhaps, thinking that we know the other and can speak for them, in imagined solidarity, is more dangerous than just feeling a sense of solidarity and is therefore a form of appropriation.

The History of Kvisa Shchora

Kvisa Shchora began its life as an activist collective at the Tel Aviv Gay Pride Parade in June 2001 in large part because the second Intifada was in full swing and had been for nearly a year. On September 28th 2000, the second Intifada broke out in East Jerusalem. It is estimated that approximately 1,000 Jewish Israelis and 3,000 Palestinians were killed during the Intifada years (Harel and Issacharoff 1). Initially Kvisa members were loosely organized around a showing of dissent at the 2001 Gay Pride Parade and that galvanized the group. Kvisa members came together because they could no longer reconcile a celebration of gay pride with the shame of the occupation and the nearly year-long violence of the Intifada. As YW describes the group's emergence: "It was just we have a gay pride. A gay pride is a big celebration. It's the first gay pride after the second intifada. Almost a year after the beginning of the second intifada, we cannot celebrate."

In the beginning, Kvisa members shared two common political goals: they wanted to fight for queer rights and visibility in Israel/Palestine, but they also fought for ending the occupation.

Tel-Aviv's first Gay Pride Parade took place in 1989, as a small, but visible LGBTQI minority began to emerge in Tel Aviv (Walzer 4). The first parade was followed by an article in *Ha-Olam ha Ze*, a weekly newspaper that talked about how nervous and self-hating the small marching contingent was (4). Homosexual sex had been legalized only one year earlier in 1988 and the community was just finding its footing. Since the late 1980s Tel Aviv has become the center for gay and lesbian life in the Middle East and Israel has become progressively more tolerant (even recognizing gay marriages performed outside of Israel). As Brian Schaefer has chronicled in *Haaretz*, gays and lesbians from around the world are moving to Tel Aviv and it has particularly become a haven for Middle-Eastern and Palestinian LGBTQI people (1). However, the environment outside of Tel Aviv and particularly in Jerusalem could not be more different. Although Jerusalem Gay Pride is now a yearly event, it is still the site of protests and there is the ever present threat of attack. Meanwhile, in the Palestinian territories, it is still dangerous to even be out as gay or lesbian.

For members of Kvisa, the LGBT community in Israel had a central unifying logic based on a hypocritical relationship to rights. While the community demanded rights and autonomy for themselves, they remained neutral, or silent on the occupation of the Palestinian territories and on other humanitarian issues. Kvisa's most famous slogan, "NO PRIDE IN THE OCCUPATION," encapsulates their politics, which argued that there was culpability even in passive acceptance. They saw a direct connection between

sexuality and Palestinian oppression. These things were not discretely separate. Much like Gay Shame SF, Kvisa demanded that LGBTQI people see their struggles in relationship to other oppressed groups. However, one key difference between Gay Shame SF and Kvisa was the lack of engagement with neoliberal capitalism and gentrification in the work of the latter, but instead a strong focus on regional social issues.

Tel Aviv's Gay Pride Parades have become massive events over the past twenty years, but the parades have increasingly become less political and more spectacular. It is now largely a tourist attraction and money-making venture for the city. According to the LGBT tourism website for Tel Aviv (gaytlv.com), the city is a top tourist destination for LGBT tourists. "With a gay scene that competes with all gay capitals around the globe, an amazing beach, good weather, great food and other attractions in the country like Jerusalem and the Dead Sea, Tel Aviv is definitely a place you should check out for your next trip"(1). Additionally, the website highlights Gay Pride as the main attraction of the year, "with over 50 gay events throughout Pride Week, not to mention all the regular attractions the city has to offer, coming to Tel Aviv will be a vacation you will never forget!"(1). In a 2011 survey Tel Aviv was voted the world's best gay travel destination and the largest share of international travelers come for Tel Aviv Gay Pride (Haaretz.com). The number of attendees has gradually increased to a staggering 150,000 people in 2012.

Kvisa members re-injected a strong political message into the parade by claiming solidarity with Palestinians and performing a sort of vigil amid all the celebration. "We need to be (in) solidarity with the Palestinians and with what's going on in the occupied territories. And the idea was not blocking the Gay Pride Parade. Not joining the Pride

Parade, but kind of using the Pride Parade” (YW). This attempt to perform counter to the Pride Parade, while marching in it, allowed Kvisa to garner a lot of media attention and to take its first tentative steps toward the goal of solidarity and combining of issues that would come to characterize the group. Kvisa saw their role as a direct action group with a focus on multiple issues, but with a primary focus on ending the occupation of the Palestinian territories and on queer issues in Israel/Palestine.

Kvisa also had what members defined as a fully consensus-based and feminist way of working. As JM describes, the process of choosing political actions and issues was fully participatory and egalitarian.

We never really had a meeting where we defined the political goals and that’s I think one of the things that were working for us. Because we didn’t really have to agree theoretically about something, but we would suggest an action and people would talk about it and, if they liked it, they did it, and that was fine.

This process meant that all members of the group were able to suggest actions and together decide whether, or not, the actions would be done through a process of radical consensus, where everyone had to agree. This broke from how most activist performance collectives work. Generally activist groups start from a place of political consensus. They choose the issues they want to address first and then decide on actions and methodology based on those political ends. For Kvisa, this was not the case. Despite avoiding the pitfalls of a typical activist model, this methodology often led to a muddiness, or lack of clarity in Kvisa's performance work.

JM talked about this process as her first exposure to feminist decision-making.

She goes on to describe this feminist consensual decision making process:

Yeah, consensual decisions, but this is a very small expression to actually describe the atmosphere, which is much more important, at least for me, than actual consensus. The atmosphere was that every view mattered, no matter if you're just one person. And the way the discussion goes is really by what's behind your view.

This sort of collaborative decision-making was mentioned by all the members I interviewed and each informant expressed how very different this process was from what they encountered in other groups. This consensus based decision-making reflected the larger patterns of solidarity Kvisa was trying to accomplish, however, without strong leadership the specific purpose of individual actions were sometimes muddy and their intended communications blurred.

These multiple social engagements, that performatively link different forms of oppression, also hold the power to force viewers and participants alike to see the humanness of various marginalized groups. Furthermore, even imagined solidarity holds the power to communicate a group's social commitments, and that appears to be part of what Kvisa intended to do here.

The idea of combining different issues stems from an attempt to forge solidarity among the oppressed and draws attention to connectedness and chaos as the natural state of human experience. Furthermore, separating different forms of oppression is part and parcel of a process of de-humanization, through which the suffering of others is deemed distinctly their own and not the responsibility of everyone. Members of Kvisa attempted

to forge connections in order to foreground shared human experience, over identity politics. In the contemporary West, identity politics have become the primary discursive means through which communities are defined. In this culture issues are separated, identities are discursively isolated and people approach only one issue at a time. However, for members of Kvisa Shchora it was urgently necessary to bring different social engagements together, because this helped to shed light on the nature of human experience and oppression and reflected the subjective experience of existence. Another informant, SS, describes her experience of working with other direct action groups before she joined Kvisa:

But the way I felt was like: “I am being torn in pieces” every time I went to an organization that had an issue to deal with. For example, something against the occupation, I would really love the action they did, or the political work, but I would really get annoyed at things that would contradict other parts of my identity

This became especially true when the hypocritical operations of some of the groups that SS was involved in became apparent to her. Misogyny and homophobia particularly emerged in some of the anti-occupation activist groups that SS attended.

For example, I went to a place where it was anti-occupation, but it was terribly chauvinist. I was thinking God, how can it? So, I was starting to look for places that combine, but I was starting to try and change these places that I was in that would include other stuff and it got me to many - I don't know - not very pleasant experiences.

For SS, Kvisa became that place in which she could bridge her identities and activism by finding a common ground where SS's different political and social engagements could be reconciled and the different parts of her personality brought together.

Tellingly, JM, another informant, describes her experiences of finding Kvisa for the first time like this:

I think at that time I was already political, vegan, or vegetarian. That was also the time when I moved from vegetarianism to veganism and also began to rethink the connection between my sexual identity and the way I view other issues. I really, really liked the things I heard about Kvisa. For example, the most clever slogan Kvisa ever had was "NO PRIDE IN THE OCCUPATION." Which is a sign they carried through Gay Pride marches. So, the first thing I did was get in touch with Kvisa and go see a meeting.

For JM, Kvisa also offered a place where she would not feel hypocritical, but could instead advocate for the many different parts of her identity and the political struggles she is passionate about. JM describes the way Kvisa members saw the inter-linkages between multiple forms of oppression in Israel/Palestine. "Like viewing the class oppression in Israel as connected to feminism, and viewing feminism as connected to militarism. Viewing militarism as connected to something that has to do with homophobia...." This idea of connectedness became a way of seeing the world for group members. Feminism becomes not just a separate category in this instance, but functions as a way to undermine and reframe militarism. Meanwhile, homophobia becomes one of the avenues through which militarism is circulated. When they are seen as standing in relationship to one

another, these connections have the potential to represent the messiness that is life and culture. Along with a focus on connectedness, Kvisa members also brought different aesthetic techniques and genres into their actions and performances.

Keeping their aesthetic choices simple and direct allowed Kvisa members to avoid dichotomies, such as performance and everyday life, by using some theatricalized, but simple aesthetics, costuming and a basic script. They blurred that line between performance and reality through foregrounding activism and community above aesthetic conventions, or artistry. This often gave Kvisa performances a crude, agitprop aesthetic and feel. By mixing strategies, genres and categories, Kvisa's blending of multiple social causes worked toward breaking down other binary relationships, such as activist and pacifist and Israeli/Palestinian. Admixture further brought an element of play into Kvisa's actions and performances, thereby erasing the division between serious political rant and playful satire.

However, Kvisa's attempt to combine and compare various forms of oppression in their performances also holds the danger of leveling and universalizing all oppression. Members of Kvisa hold a privileged relationship to oppression in that they are able to speak openly against it and have freedom of movement and expression. The majority of the group is Ashkenazi, with a smaller number of Mizrahi and Israeli Arab members. Additionally, there are an even smaller number of Palestinian identified members who live in Israel. Most of the group members are queer, with a larger majority of women and several transgender members. Therefore, Kvisa's performances are always in danger of co-opting the struggles of other oppressed groups that do not have the same freedom of expression: such as Palestinians in the West Bank and Gaza. To combine is to undermine

divisions and identity categories, but it also runs the risks of speaking for, or over others and of reducing their struggles. Additionally, Kvisa members ran the risk of alienating the Palestinian groups they were working to form solidarity with. Imagined solidarity can be a powerful tool, but it can also be a double-edged sword.

Kvisa's technique of combining multiple ideas, strategies, aesthetics and agendas is also a form of play and pastiche. YW, a Jewish Israeli member of Kvisa from Jerusalem, talks about the use of play and fun in Kvisa's actions. He argues that injecting fun and a playfulness into activism was one of Kvisa's strongest interventions. "This is actually one of the main contributions that Kvisa had to left wing activism in Israel. They showed creativity. I think this is something queer politics has to contribute to activism. Creativity and fun in activism." Playing with expectations, conventions and ideas is yet another form of performing solidarity. To combine elements in unexpected ways brings in the element of surprise. Playfulness and combining are not strategies exclusive to activism, or to the left. But, in an Israel obsessed with identity and history, these strategies have the unique potential to disturb discrete identities and partisanship.

A great example of playfulness and combination was Kvisa's "Holon Beauty Contest", which used the format of a beauty pageant staged at lunchtime in a park in the middle of a large industrial suburb of Tel Aviv. The aesthetic choices included a red carpet, pageant music, flowers and a crown. However, all the "contestants" were dressed in garish, ridiculous outfits that revealed the humor and fun of the event. Additionally, instead of the "contestants" attempting to show their mainstream beauty and grace, they deliberately emphasized the parts of their body that they were ashamed of. Finally, they performed a strip-tease, in which one performer stripped completely naked, from a

chicken suit to the performer's own naked male to female transgender body. Despite the planning, the detailed performance retained a rough, unrehearsed and playful atmosphere. Additionally, the use of animal costumes was meant to connect issues of sexism and body fascism to cruelty to animals. The whole show ended in a big party, where spectators were encouraged to parade up onstage as contestants.

YW, a transgender man involved in Kvisa from the beginning, also talked in our interviews about the idea of combination, or bringing different issues together. I asked him why he felt it was important that Kvisa combined different political and social issues in their activist work. He answered, "Well, I believe that these things cannot be isolated from each other." For YW an activist admixture was a way of expressing reality. He felt that to separate things was to perform an artificial and tautological act of violence, because these things are inherently connected in the world. In Kvisa's practice, the theoretical work of combining becomes a political action in itself and the starting point for a particular type of solidarity.

For YW, combining social causes in activist work forms the beginnings of solidarity. "It's really more in terms of political or philosophical belief...I think that one thing about combining things is creating solidarity between groups." This idea of solidarity is not only an important aspect of Kvisa's work, but also a starting point for important questions about efficacy in political activism.

Sally J Scholz describes two primary forms of solidarity: social and political. She uses configurations of solidarity around the issue of domestic abuse as an illustration of this concept, "...the solidarity that victims of domestic abuse share with each other is not equivalent to the solidarity of a social activist movement aimed at changing a culture of

abuse" (5). The first example she characterizes as social solidarity, wherein members of a particular community or oppressed class are united by a common cause, experience and intention. She argues that political solidarity is characteristic of social activism. The use of this term denotes an intention of shared human solidarity in order to improve conditions for the oppressed (the social activists fighting against domestic abuse in her example). "Political solidarity is a unity of individuals each responding to a particular situation of injustice, oppression, social vulnerability, or tyranny" (Scholz 51). When Kvisa's strategies are examined through this lens, their unique position is evident. It clearly straddles these two forms of solidarity. Members of Kvisa largely fall within one or more oppressed groups within Israeli society. However, they see the goal of their activism as working toward solidarity with other oppressed groups to which they do not belong, such as Palestinians living in the West Bank Territories and the Gaza Strip.

YW makes a fine distinction between what Kvisa does and what he feels is true solidarity. He argues that, "What Kvisa Shchora did was more approaching groups and recruiting them to our struggles, which is important also." By recruiting YW refers to actually asking groups to join in with the work of Kvisa. Members allowed other groups to participate in the decision making process while maintaining control over the performance work that was eventually produced. To him, this represented a lack of true solidarity because the power remained in the hands of Kvisa. Others draw the line in different places between solidarity and cooperation. For some Kvisa members political solidarity worked as a unifying agent, foregrounding human oppression above identity categories, while for others the sort of solidarity Kvisa practiced was clearly different than their attempts at recruiting other groups. I argue that while solidarity has the power

to overcome some of the trappings of identity, it still does not erase difference, or privilege. Through looking at Kvisa's actions, it is possible to see these forms of solidarity, as well as literal and imagined solidarity.

Kvisa's Actions

I would like to describe a few of Kvisa's actions that truly exemplify the group's strategies, the issues they addressed and the challenges they faced. I will start with a discussion of some of the actions and performances Kvisa members have staged at Gay Pride events. Next, I will revisit and discuss in greater depth the Holon beauty pageant, which was staged as an alternative celebration of beauty. In this discussion, I will also address an action that assumed a dangerous false sense of solidarity. I will then focus on an action at Gay Pride Parades in Tel Aviv and Jerusalem in 2003 that demonstrated the racist and oppressive underpinnings of the identity card system in Israel. Finally, I will look at a large demonstration on the anniversary of the 1967 war that was not strictly a Kvisa event, but involved many Kvisa members and used many of the same strategies Kvisa employed. I will end with a discussion of smaller and less performance-based actions as well as direct political actions in which Kvisa was involved in order to develop a deeper representation of the group's engagement and analyze whether their use of solidarity and idiosyncrasy helped create an atmosphere of provocation and the potential for change.

Performances at Gay Pride Parades

At the 2001 Gay Pride Parade, members of Kvisa chose to distinguish themselves by unifying their dress and disseminating their message through signs and posters. Their message was inflammatory and it definitely got attention. As YW explains, “they just came in black, in a very huge block and they were the front of the Parade. They were in the news. They were the main issue of the Pride Parade that year.” The signs Kvisa members carried were tall and clearly visible. The signs carried slogans such as “Break down the border police,” referring to the Israeli police posted at Palestinian borders and at border checkpoints. Further signs read “Social Justice Now” and “We don’t have sex with soldiers,” which implicated sexuality within militarism and vice-versa by suggesting that the Israeli army contains many gay and lesbian soldiers. Members meant to link sexuality with nationalist and military doctrine. Here sexuality cannot remain a free unencumbered term, but becomes weighed down by its social and political reality. Signs also read “Transgender not transfer.” YW explained this to me in an interview, “‘Transfer’ relating to forcible transfer of Palestinians, which is a political agenda of some parties in Israel.”

These were the beginnings of Kvisa Shchora. Over the next few years their demonstrations at Pride Parades would continue, but they would also begin to branch out and plan independent demonstrations and performances, as I will discuss later in this chapter.

Kvisa’s performances and messages during Tel Aviv Gay Pride, changed over the next few years, but generally stayed with the themes of queer liberation and ending the occupation. Kvisa began choosing a primary issue to focus on during each parade and tying that issue to other issues. As JM describes, “A few years ago there was a Gay Pride

about feminism and we wanted to talk about families that are not allowed to meet because they live on both sides of the green line....and families that are torn apart because of violence.” Within this particular Pride Parade, members of Kvisa connected issues relating to the occupation with domestic violence, violence against women and cruelty to animals.

There were Arabic signs and Hebrew signs about Arab families being broken down because of the occupation and domestic violence and a lot of stuff that has to do with feminism, and we distributed [them].... (YM).

Unsatisfied with merely reaching out to an audience, Kvisa members worked to get other queer Israelis marching in the parade to hear their message as well, “....the people we wanted contact with were the people marching and not (just) the people watching and that’s a characteristic of a lot of the things Kvisa did.” They wanted “to communicate on two levels at least, with the people that are doing and the people that are watching” (YM). Puns and humor were also a big part of Kvisa’s representational strategies, and their signs and slogans always had an aspect of playfulness and irreverence. Many of these puns do not translate well into English.

Kvisa members invoked shame in these parades as both a way of reclaiming shame and as a means to shame the Pride marchers. Pride asserts itself as the affect of identity politics, to feel pride in your identity is to come out as a resilient individual. However, members of Kvisa meant to draw marchers away from the experience of pride and to re-awaken their sense of connectedness and culpability through an affective engagement with shame.

Humorous slogans and provocative messages were a mainstay of Kvisa's performances at Pride events. It was during Tel Aviv Gay Pride in 2002 that the slogan, "No Pride in the Oppression of Others" was first used and became a primary tag-line for Kvisa. This single statement eloquently sums up Kvisa's message that while there is oppression (especially oppression in which we are all complicit, or culpable) we should not be prideful and certainly should not be holding celebrations of pride. In order to show how we are all tainted by and implicated in others' oppression, Kvisa members employed various aesthetic and performative strategies. "In one Pride we were symbolically chained to each other" (YW). The chains represented a common link that ties everyone together, but also showed how everyone is tainted by oppression. As with many of Kvisa's representational strategies, this representation may have been too vague to have communicated effectively.

Sometimes Kvisa members would plan a demonstration in relationship to the theme of that year's Pride Parade. YW describes one such action: "In another one the general issue, the general subject of the pride parade, was family, so we had an idea where we are not going to (marry) a soldier, so we had soldier puppets on our backs" (YW). This image demonstrated the direct link between civilian and military life in Israel. This performance was meant to communicate the need to sever that link in order to show solidarity, but it is unclear how effective the message was in this more obscure form.

Kvisa's success in communicating their messages varied widely. Some performances either didn't communicate what Kvisa members wanted them to, or missed

the mark completely. YW describes a demonstration from a Jerusalem Gay Pride Parade that didn't really get the intended message across.

In another pride parade in Jerusalem we did something that was totally [not] understandable....we performed as if we were oppressors. We dressed as soldiers and as Rabbis and we had slogans like, "Nuclear Power stations create quality of life." "Cut the health budget I want to die too" and stuff like that. (YW)

These choices were made without much reflection, or concern for comprehensibility. One problem with Kvisa's performance at this parade was that they lacked a unified vision, or objective. Each member brought their own issues and slogans to the fore. This choice made for an uneven presentation, with aesthetics and choices that did not mesh. And while this type of structure reflected the open and democratic nature of the organization, it wasn't necessarily effective in accomplishing a sense of solidarity and a common political agenda and movement.

Here I would like to discuss an event that really missed the mark and worked at cross purposes to achieving solidarity between Kvisa members and the Palestinian community. This demonstration from Tel Aviv Gay Pride garnered a lot of media attention. However, rather than creating solidarity with Palestinians and Arab women, as was the intention, it risked alienating the very people it sought to connect with. In order to explore important questions regarding literal and imagined solidarity, I would like to describe that event in detail here.

A photograph that has now become the most famous single artifact of a Kvisa demonstration features a bare breasted woman, wearing only a checkered black and white

Keffiyeh, which covers part of her face. This woman brandishes a sign like Lady Liberty in the famous painting, but the sign escapes the edge of the photograph. Something not quite visible is written on her body. Another woman stands behind this one. She is a near perfect replica of the first, but her Keffiyeh does not cover her face so that we can see her playfully sarcastic expression clearly. A third woman in the background is also topless, but does not wear the Keffiyeh. In a zoomed out version of this photo, which is actually another picture altogether, you can see that these three women are in fact surrounded by a large crowd of demonstrators wearing black and pink with various amounts of skin visible. They brandish signs in English, Hebrew and Arabic. However, these three women are the only ones clearly topless. In front of the group parades a large sign that says “No Pride in the Occupation” in English, Arabic and Hebrew. This particular framing of the event points up the difficult balance between activism, spectacle and commodification in political demonstrations.

To further analyze what these three women wore in relationship to the intention of the event as a whole, it is important to point out that this demonstration was held at the 2002 Tel Aviv Gay Pride Parade. Since Gay Pride is meant to unify the gay community and encourage nudity and celebration of the body beautiful (though not all types of bodies are generally represented), Kvisa's focus on issues of objectification was not too far flung. Even so, their blantant use of nudity, body writing and the keffiyeh, separated their method and message from the mainstream one. Kvisa's flyer for the event stated that:

if you agree that the oppression of one minority is tied to the oppression of others, if you understand that the commercialization of pride is tied to

class oppression, the oppression of lesbians is tied to capitalism and the trade in women, that the oppression of Mizrahi Israelis is tied to the oppression of Palestinians, that the oppression of new immigrants is tied to the oppression of foreign workers... (“Tel Aviv Pride June 2002”)

The list went on from there, stressing the connectivity of regimes of oppression and the need for solidarity in humanitarian struggles. Finally, the flyer ended with the words, “you better show up all tied up, we’ll meet on the day, dressed in black, or undressed” (ibid). Under these directives the three women had shown up topless and wearing Keffiyeh. The Keffiyeh, though a traditional Muslim headscarf, is also a sign of Palestinian nationalism and solidarity, especially when it is woven with the checkered pattern that they wore. The women obviously wore the scarves for that reason and this has no doubt been communicated in the circulation of pictures from the event. Still, their nudity has also instigated the further and continued circulation of this image and lends a certain apolitical sex appeal to the human rights struggles of Kvisa. The life of this picture forces certain questions of whether or not the spectacularization and containment of political activism can be avoided.

Kvisa members recognized that this demonstration had done something wrong. YM describes the original intention and problems associated with this demonstration:

There is a very famous picture of one of the Kvisa members with her breasts out and a slogan against the occupation on her breasts, or something like that. Which is kind of missing the point. You know all the photographers, ‘Yeah, yeah’ taking pictures. But the idea was like writing on the body. (YM)

YM goes on to describe how this event became so famous, but in many ways subverted the actual intention of the demonstration. The nudity itself incited a media frenzy and many people still associate Kvisa with this image, rather than the work they did. And there are indications this demonstration may have alienated Palestinians and other Israeli Arabs who interpreted the use of the Keffiyeh with nudity as an affront. This is unfortunate, as the very intention of the event was to bring attention to issues of objectification and to form solidarity with Palestinians and Arab Israelis. So, instead of strengthening coalitions and furthering political goals, it may have created the opposite effect.

It is also important to consider how this use of the Keffiyeh points to a specific iteration of imagined solidarity. The scarves worn by these women could and, in the previous example, did work to alienate mainstream Palestinians. This performance no doubt created a strong affective *sense* of solidarity for the marchers, but this solidarity may have been as much imagined as real, and may have actually alienated the very people it was meant to encompass. This is one example of imagined solidarity that has a powerful affective dimension, but that threatens to appropriate the struggles of others. I do want to mention that it is not my intention to discredit Kvisa's work as a whole, which has often used physical solidarity and bodily risk, but merely to point out how some of their methodology and material may have backfired on them in this instance.

Now I would like to describe some of Kvisa's other actions that had more success at communicating the group's political goals while creating a celebratory atmosphere. These actions performed different types of literal and imagined solidarity and engaged

with different political goals, but always with the intention to combine issues and question identity categories.

The Holon Beauty Pageant

Most of the Kvisa members I spoke to agreed that the Holon Beauty pageant was one of the most successful and exciting events the group ever staged. The day of the event starts like any other day in Holon. Surrounded by sand dunes, Holon is a city of white towers and blue sky that stretches toward the peaceful Mediterranean coast. The skyline looks fantastical, as though it has risen out of the sand, fully modern. Unexpected. Smoke emerges from a handful of factories and the heat of the day has yet to descend.

People gather in a park in the center of this working-class Tel Aviv suburb. A pink statue of a cat waves at them and buildings cluster all around. It is hard to imagine that an Arab village once occupied this urban center. The people who lived in that village are long since re-located. The village destroyed. Most of the people who live here now are Jewish immigrants from Eastern Europe and the Middle East, Ashkenazim and Mizrahim. Today something unusual and fun is taking place. On a makeshift stage in the center of the park, people in costume are preparing for a performance and a small crowd has gathered to watch. This is the day of Kvisa Shchora's Holon beauty pageant and also the day that a similar, but completely different pageant, is happening in neighboring Tel Aviv.

Every member of Kvisa that I interviewed mentioned this event: a beauty pageant organized as an alternative to mainstream beauty and as an answer to the body fascism of the gay community. Kvisa members chose to stage the beauty contest in Holon on the

same day that Israel's mainstream gay magazine F.O.D. was holding a pageant for gay men in Tel Aviv. This was not meant as an oppositional or satirical parody of the gay beauty pageant, but was instead meant to counter the negative aspects and body fascism of the actual event. Where beauty pageants emphasize exclusivity through enforcing universal standards of beauty, Kvisa Shchora's beauty pageant created an inclusive, fully participatory and subjective sense of beauty.

It seems that throughout the world, beauty pageants epitomize a bland sort of cultural performance and spectacle. As Richard Wilk argues, "...they are widespread and heavily commercial sites where judgments of cultural value are both made and displayed" (Wilk 118). Live bodies are made to stand in for what is valued and they are rewarded, both metaphorically and financially, for possessing a culturally specific type of "beauty." They are also often adopted by marginalized communities as a means of reifying and validating beauty standards within that group. Beauty pageants are a place where standards of beauty and body fascism are replicated, performed and spectacularized. In this sense, gay beauty pageants have emerged as a recent phenomenon, in order to enforce a strict regime of beauty and aesthetics and also to affirm the place of the gay community as centrist and mainstream. However, while enforcing a strict hierarchy around aesthetics, gay beauty pageants also play with gender. As Wilks argues, pageants "expose the critical role of gender in the configuration of otherness." (118). The pageant artificially creates a unified rubric of gendered beauty, which alienates those who do not fit neatly within the aesthetic, or gendered categories presented. Kvisa's members performed their beauty pageant as a means to critique this normalizing process, thus re-

staging the pageant as a place of warmth and acceptance, where all body types are embraced.

For Kvisa Shchora beauty pageants were a particular site of focus and a large part of their intervention. As SS describes, “There is one sort of tradition that Kvisa does something at beauty contests, usually mainstream women’s beauty contests.” Why did this single event epitomize the work of Kvisa for so many of its members? To begin with the pageant combined issues (animal rights, body fascism, racism, homophobia and gender discrimination) in a playful and innovative way, for an audience not otherwise critically engaged with many of these issues. The audience that had assembled for the pageant represented a diverse cross-section of the Holon community. As YW describes, there were “....a lot of children, but also old immigrants from the Soviet Union and middle aged men.” He attributes this to a good flier that Kvisa members had put up around town. Interestingly, they chose only to engage with the occupation and Palestinian liberation secondarily as an afterthought, which may have been because of their audience. Because of the conservative nature of that community, Kvisa members might have been too intimidated to really focus on those inflammatory issues, although no Kvisa member specifically mentioned this in our interviews.

Members decided to stage the pageant in Holon because it was not glamorous and they wanted to make the participants and audience feel beautiful. However, Holon was still a strange choice. If this event was meant as a critique of the mainstream gay and lesbian community, then choosing to stage it away from Tel Aviv for an unfamiliar community lost a lot of that critique. The pageant meant to create a space of engagement and dialogue for the community, however the community may not have been fully aware

of the issues at stake. SS describes the decision by Kvisa members to stage an alternate beauty pageant in Holon. “There was a beauty contest, for gay guys, organized by the only gay magazine now, which is a chauvinist and terrible magazine. Um, and so the event of course was a beauty contest. So we decided to do something about that.” This was not central Tel Aviv where the magazine was staging their pageant. They chose Holon specifically because they wanted to give people the “feeling [of] how it was to be a beauty queen and the idea was everyone is beautiful....” (YW). Kvisa members wanted to share this experience with a community that may not otherwise have the chance to participate in a pageant. The pageant succeeded in bringing the community together and in giving them a space to celebrate their bodies, however, it may not have engaged the community with the wider issues of body fascism.

To critically explore Kvisa’s beauty pageant, I would like to revisit Guy Debord’s concept of the spectacle. Debord states that, “Considered in its own terms, the spectacle is an *affirmation* of appearances and an identification of all human social life with appearances” (18). The beauty pageant becomes the ultimate affirmation of appearance, especially in the world of mainstream gay male culture where surface is often valued above content, wherein the body is displayed and its objective appearance and value quantified and ranked against others. The danger here is in Debord’s thesis that the spectacle is taken as reality and the audience internalizes the objective code of beauty set forth in the pageant. Debord goes on to suggest that, “...a critique that grasps the spectacle’s essential character reveals it to be a visible *negation* of life – a negation that has taken on a *visible form*” (18). The beauty pageant in Holon levels just this sort of critique at the spectacle of the mainstream beauty pageant by reinterpreting the pageant

as a celebratory and communal affirmation. Where the actual beauty pageant negated beauty through an aestheticism that reified and quantified beauty as a commodity and a highly limited resource, the alternative pageant attempted to open a space where beauty could be seen everywhere in a natural and fluid state. It looked to question the neoliberal values of image and commodity fetishism in mainstream queer culture and its identification with the larger society.

For Debord a society of spectacle turns subjects into objects. Beauty pageants could be seen as a form of production that actually performs objectification onstage. Reality TV is another exceptional example of a similar level of transformation, where subjects are reconstituted as marketable objects. The whole series of shows such as Eurostar, American Idol, America's Next Top Model and Jersey Shore (to name a very few) utilize a system of transforming the individual into a fully branded object, salable in the workforce. "The spectacle is able to subject human beings to itself because the economy has already totally subjugated them. It is at once a faithful reflection of the production of things and a distorting objectification of the producers" (19). Because consumers are forced to operate within the economy of the spectacle and have already fully internalized its logic, their objectification is in progress. For Debord, citizens are already spectacularized and objectified. However, I would argue that this is a complex process, with no concrete endpoint and many stops along the way. Consumers are inculcated as soon as they are born into a society of consumption and spectacle. However, they are never completely objectified. They may lose some agency, but they will also maintain some level of agency, as long as they are still breathing air. This disparity between the spectacle and the individual subject is where activist performance

can make a profound intervention. Activism has the power to reawaken in the individual a sense of liveness and agency that might otherwise feel absent in a society of spectacle. Shame is one performative device that can affectively break spectators out of their stupor. Shame was the mode through which Kvisa members attempted to awaken individuals from the spectacle. As Tomkins, Sedgwick and Ahmed have argued shame carries the unique ability to make us acutely aware of our own individuality and makes us empathetically aware of others. Through an activation of humility, shame breaks us out of an objectifying relationship to identity and otherness and forces us to see one another's humanity.

Kvisa's pageant also intended to reclaim the shame that body fascism places on bodies and that is internalized and reinforced through a lifetime of encounters with objective standards of beauty. In this sense, there is already a relational tie between standards of beauty and sexual identity, because both forms of subjectivity are defined and performed in a constantly renegotiated relationship to shame. Pageants are a way to reinforce and validate the expectations of a neoliberal society without obvious persuasion. They are sites of subtle, or not so subtle, programming and training.

For Kvisa the process of reclaiming this shame meant embracing it. Members of Kvisa would not, perhaps could not, do away with objective standards of beauty. Instead they maneuvered to overcome the shame that is placed on bodies and revel in the aspects of themselves that they were most ashamed of, such as body hair or weight. However, embracing shame may have meant something very different to the inhabitants of Holon. Within the LGBTQI community discourses of pride and shame are readily discussed and comprehensible, but for a working class immigrant community in the suburbs of Tel

Aviv, it is important to ask how shame might have operated differently. None of the Kvisa members I interviewed addressed this particular issue. We can assume their attempt to reclaim bodily shame might have read as a grotesque carnival, or just a strange spectacle to members of the community. The social and economic differences between Kvisa members and the Holon community, may have made clear communications impossible and have altered the audience's affective engagement with the event.

In the typical style of Kvisa, the beauty pageant was meant to bring together issues that members of the group cared about.

What we thought of doing was to combine the issues of beauty with the issues of animal rights and the way we saw that intersecting is the way that the body is being manipulated or manufactured as a product. For example, many of the contestants took their hair out, like hair removal. And we thought this really resembles the plucking of feathers for example, from chickens, but not only that specific similarity, but the whole process of being a product, taking a body and marketing it. I don't know, in the case of the contest photographing it, consuming it, as a product and also the body of animals that is consumed as a product. So naturally we wrote a short text describing the issue, but we also made up sort of a show. (YW)

Since combining issues is a common thread that emerges over and over again in Kvisa events, members of the group were constantly searching for the places where issues intersect and overlap. In this case they explored the relationship between the commodification, objectification and packaging of the body in a beauty pageant and the packaging of animals for sale as meat. However, engaging with multiple issues

simultaneously ran the risk of blurring all these messages and leaving the audience confused.

In an attempt to communicate these multiple engagements, members of Kvisa carried signs. Many of these signs were also meant to point directly to the absurdity of spectacularized beauty (Katz 1). SS describes the pageant Kvisa put on as a, “small show. Some of us were holding signs professing the bodily qualities they have that are not considered beautiful. They’re outside the beauty standard. People [held] signs saying, ‘I’m Short,’ ‘I’m hairy,’ ‘I’m butch’”. These signs were not meant as a denial of the spectacle of beauty *per se*, but instead were a public reclaiming of the qualities that are meant to be the site of internalized shame and are generally the things we hide from the world.

Other signs communicated something else entirely. As Sue Katz has described, these signs were meant to playfully communicate the intentions of the group and also to draw from activism's past to link the various issues on display. Their signs helped spectators make connections between the beauty event and the dominant political crisis. “Glamor Won’t Cover the Crime: End the Occupation,” and “Children in Ramallah aren’t Hungry; They’re Just on a Diet” (1). These signs were additionally meant to connect the psychic violence regimes of beauty perform to the very real violence of the occupation and to perform that link in a satirical way. These signs also meant to evoke shame by questioning society's fixation on the external and aesthetic over a deep engagement with nationality and identity. They also recycled signs from activism's past, recycling slogans from nineteen seventies feminist pamphlets, such as, “‘We’re not beautiful, we’re not ugly, we’re mad’” (1). These signs helped in making the event fun

and lively, while linking the multiple issues Kvisa members were focused on, but they also served to make the politics of the event scattershot and not entirely clear, again complicating rather than streamlining the process of solidarity.

Creativity and fun were almost always an aspect of Kvisa's actions. There was an element of playing with performance and ideas that could even be seen as silly, or jovial. Again they utilized the process of combining seemingly disparate ideas in order to add elements of play. According to JM, "We added the animal issue to it. For example, 'I'm a short chicken,' 'I'm a hairy fish,' and the fliers explained the connection..." This adopting of particular animals by members linked the issue of animal cruelty and the consumption of meat to the issues of body fascism, dimorphism and objectification, particularly within the gay community. It also brought playful fun to an otherwise serious subject matter. However, it's no less important to note the clear presence of shame within this action. Kvisa members were supposed to identify the body parts for which they felt the most shame with a particular animal. Thus shameful bodies became integral to the claiming of beauty in the performance. It is also important to ask whether the silliness of these choices negated the activation of shame. Satirical humor has the ability to undermine shame and that may have happened in this case.

Finally, JM came out in a chicken costume: "Dressed up as a chicken in a costume that we borrowed from the animal rights organization, I wore some layers. I wore a woman layer, a man layer and (they were) very stereotypical." This served to bring an even more playful element to the performance and to reinvigorate the playful humor and embracing nature of the event, but also intended to remind the audience of the sort of connections the performance meant to draw. For members of Kvisa this

performance became an opportunity to not only tie one issue to another, but also an opportunity to experiment with and blend discrete categories.

JM wore multiple layers to reveal the layers of identity and a core humanness that could not be removed. She then further connected her body to a chicken's to include animal rights and vegetarianism in the mix of issues being addressed. The danger of this admixture is a level of muddiness in performance, which is one of the main ways Kvisa members critique themselves, but this blending of issues can also become too light and whimsical, lacking grounding and clear explication. But when it worked, the fun and participation became a major part of their attraction to the onlookers and their effectiveness as messengers of change.

In a parody of the spectacle of beauty, the layers reveal the ultimate image of both the female and the male form. "The woman layer is an apron with a naked woman on it and some lettuce and tomato slices to cover those areas. The man apron is very similar, but it is the statue of David, but without a head, so when (you) wear it, (it) is you." Satirical and light, this critique still managed to bring attention to the ridiculousness of beauty pageants. "And we continued to strip and dance and wear the clothes, and to all the people who came to the event we handed out flyers explaining what the hell (this was). I think it didn't really do a lot at that point for the people that came in, but it went a long way." What I believe JM means here is that the effects of the beauty pageant spread out and had a greater impact over time than they did at the actual event. Did this performance cause people to become vegetarian, or to stop looking in the mirror? Probably not. However, it did have the effect of bringing a spontaneous and diverse community together for a celebratory event and members of Kvisa were able to revel in

their imperfect bodies and question societal norms of gender and body image, while connecting these to other important political concerns.

The runway show ended with a strip-tease meant to expose bodies as they are, naked and without embellishment and airbrushing. This revelation also offered a moment of serious communal vulnerability from members of Kvisa and a reclaiming of the shameful aspects of bodies. “And underneath the chicken costume there was the woman and underneath the woman there was the man and I was left with my own body hair and all the (other) things that contradict the beauty contest.” An interesting moment occurred at the very end, when Kvisa members performed a reversed strip tease and replaced their clothes. “And then we did the ceremonial dance of strip tease and dressing up again.” Though nakedness on stage always seems referential to the experimental theatre of the nineteen sixties and seventies, Kvisa Shchora was employing this strategy without knowledge of Richard Schechner and the Wooster Group and most of their audience certainly would not have been familiar with experimental theatre in the US and Europe.

Kvisa members come from a variety of backgrounds and although most of them have done activist and performance work before, they do not have a strong background in Theatre. In the beginning, Kvisa did not use performance tactics, but they realized these were effective for communicating their vision. As YW described in our interview, they began experimenting with and “using performative tools in a creative way. It’s not that Kvisa Shchora invented using performance in demonstrations. I think it (Kvisa) really brought it (street performance) to another dimension and used the performance, the performative level, as part of their political action.” YW had more of a background in avant-garde performance than most Kvisa members and acknowledges that Kvisa did not

set out to be a performance troop, but that performance tactics became effective tools in expressing their dissent and worldview of connectedness.

Concerned about being too esoteric, Kvisa members also handed out flyers and tried to explain their purpose in organizing the Holon action. Unfortunately, these have all long since disappeared so I can only reconstruct the events through my interviews and through news articles and images. When I asked JM if she thought the event had immediate political and social implications, she gave a somewhat vague answer. However, JM did feel that the action had a large reach and a long afterlife. “People heard about it, like years later (and) said, ‘we really liked it,’ or ‘we didn’t really understand what it’s all about and we got a chance to talk about it.’” These would have been people in JM’s urban Tel Aviv circles and not those originally at the event. This suggests the eventual reach it had, at least within the activist community. JM talked more about the layers she wore in the contest that were revealed when she removed the outer layers and revealed the male and female costumes beneath. According to JM, the Holon beauty pageant ultimately allowed bodies to speak for themselves, by removing the artifice of both performance and of beauty standards. The argument being made was that embracing real bodies, and reclaiming even the shameful aspects of our bodies, are the only ways to undermine the body fascism and normativity enforced through beauty pageants.

SS, a Palestinian Kvisa member who lives in Tel Aviv, discussed some of the questions the Holon beauty pageant meant to raise, “What’s going on with this beauty contest, who (is) enjoying the profits of it? Is this really a beauty contest? What is beauty?” Kvisa members did not intend to answer these questions, but merely to raise them. The intent was that the audience would ask these questions of mainstream beauty

standards. “Not answers, with questions. Because he will get to the answer, or she will get to the answer himself and to [leave] from this beauty contest and to say, something...” For SS the intention of the performance was to not only get the audience thinking, but to ask them to develop their own opinions about the spectacles of mainstream beauty and to take these questions and ideas back to their communities.

A number of my interviewees discussed the importance of creativity in political activist performance. They argued that the beauty pageant at Holon is a terrific example of how important creativity is to activist work. YW discussed creativity in Kvisa’s work: “This is actually one of the main contributions that Kvisa had to left wing activism in Israel. They showed creativity and I think this is something queer politics has to – lesbian, gay and queer politics - has to contribute to activism.” For YW, queer activism and a queer lens by default foster a creative and humorous way of approaching politics and performance. This may be because a radical queer positionality comes from a place of disidentification and therefore engenders a certain satirical outsider distance from the subject of representation. YW not only discussed the “Creativity and fun in activism,” but also gave a detailed account of Holon, which I would like to present in its entirety.

The best action of Kvisa, that I remember, was a small one in Holon.

Holon is a provincial kind of city south of Tel Aviv. Kind of middle-low class people. Very provincial, very boring place. I hope people from Holon don’t hear it. It was the day of a beauty contest and Kvisa had a tradition of doing a demonstration against beauty contests. Instead of demonstrating in front of the beauty contest we decided to go to Holon and we brought a very long purple carpet and crowns, which they use in

kindergartens (very cheap), and we let people just go on the carpet from side to side with a crown on their heads and people were clapping their hands and (we brought) a video camera. And feeling how it was to be a beauty queen and the idea was everyone is beautiful and we had, well a lot of children, but also old immigrants from the (former) Soviet Union and middle aged men.

In his account YW highlights the extent to which community involvement and engagement along with a simple but creative aesthetic were the most important aspects of the pageant. Instead of careful selecting and editing, ideas were used in bulk with each idea simply added to the final performance. There was no concept of a specific directorial aesthetic and they made no attempt at a simple sleek quality or even a fully rehearsed and scripted event. Instead, through a messy excess of material, they intended to question and undermine the spectacle that keeps its images clean and hermetically segregated. These images were not clean and presented a variety of views on beauty and shame. Thus every performer and the audience were able to participate and add ideas and questions to the discussion. Most Kvisa members I talked to considered this one of the single most successful events Kvisa had ever done. The somewhat raw and simple aesthetics were an important part of making the contest accessible to the audience. This is why a paper crown was appropriate to the aesthetics and the roughhewn quality of the staging, making it both accessible and unpretentious while representing an opposition to the sleek well-lit .formal beauty pageant. This was also meant to create a clear communication

YW talks about the importance of communication.

All that and we had a good flier and it was a very good action about body politics and beauty politics and going to people who are not involved usually and very communicative to the audience, which was very good. Especially, because Kvisa Shchora was blamed from time to time for being uncommunicative.

His assertion that activism is largely a communication was echoed in several of my interviews. Here YW stresses performance (in addition to the flyers) as a way to affectively communicate specific messages about the body to their audience.

According to SS, “the beauty contest (was) one of the (most) empowering things that I did. Very few actions, or moments of my life (were as empowering as that): I’m there only as a woman, not as a Palestinian, not as a gay. Only as a woman...” For SS the idea of being able to select parts of her identity was an important aspect of the pageant. For her, the empowering aspect of the pageant dealt with her relationship to being a woman and the body fascism and politics of that identity category. She was used to dealing with certain aspects of herself in political activist performance, for instance being a Palestinian and a lesbian, but the pageant allowed her to focus on something else. Through the pageant she could embrace feminism and her relationship to animal cruelty and did not have to abject those parts of her personality in service of her Palestinian and lesbian identities.

One thing that Kvisa members did not speak about was the irreconcilable differences between “body politics” in radically different communities. The one-size-fits-all model of the pageant failed to take this into account and it was not acknowledged in any critical way by Kvisa members. Obviously a Jewish man from Ukraine viewing the

pageant would have had a radically different experience than a Muslim woman from Iran. Further, the pageant meant to dialectically engage with the gay male pageant happening in Tel Aviv, although their audience was largely not gay men. Body fascism within the gay community largely denotes an aesthetics of lean muscularity (chiseled abs and carefully coiffed hair), while the expectations placed on straight women's bodies are much different and these aesthetic conventions vary from culture to culture. A higher degree of critical engagement with this specificity of experience around bodies would have been useful to members of Kvisa and the pageant they created.

The physical location of the pageant emerged in all of my interviews. The significance of holding the pageant in a place that was not the liberal, cultural and urban center of Tel Aviv (a place accustomed to left-wing activism), but a provincial suburb made up largely of immigrants from Eastern Europe and other parts of the Middle East, was reiterated by everyone. As with all the other Kvisa members I interviewed, SS notes the significance of choosing to hold the pageant outside of Tel Aviv, which was both a riskier, but ultimately more rewarding venue. "We had it also not in Tel Aviv, in some city next to Tel Aviv, (called) Holon. It's a suburb. We bring the beauty politics to Holon and the intention to do it there. And it's (an) amazing feeling." The crowd was already excited to simply have something going on in their provincial city and this made them easier to win over.

SS also noted the excitement of the crowd. Whether or not they understood the full critique of body politics, the pageant succeeded in making everyone in the audience enjoy performing and taking part in the celebration of their own beauty.

We had this carpet, this red carpet. And we asked people to go on it and to be a queen for a day. It was amazing to see the faces of the women, or the kids, or the people there. And no matter how you look, you are beautiful and to go with this feeling. It is amazing.

The red carpet, as a signifier of glamour, celebrity and recognition, was an important aspect of the ritual. It emphasized each individual's right/rite to be the object of adoration and to participate in the act of being viewed. Being seen and viewed are important aspects of beauty pageants. Kvisa's alternative beauty pageant eliminated the process of reification and selection through which the wheat and the chaff of beauty are teased apart. Their alternative pageant reversed the assumption at the core of traditional beauty pageants and regimes of beauty more generally: that being viewed is only a right for those deemed beautiful and that normal people should not be watched as objects of desire and adoration. By placing the normative standard of beauty, inclusion or exclusion, under the microscope of performance and spectacle, the pageant exposed to the light some of the beliefs and values held unquestioningly by the body politic. It brought those who attended and performed together in solidarity to have fun while questioning their own values as a reflection of the larger society.

Salute the National Erection

Imagine you are walking down a lush street, huge ficus trees overhang the boulevard with wiry branches and roots that octopus to the ground in a way that might seem frightening at night. But this is high noon. It is also mid-June and the Middle-Eastern sun and Mediterranean humidity have already turned the air into a thick, hot

soup. The streets are beginning to quiet down from the morning rush and many people stroll down the sidewalk, or sit on benches, or in cafés. After all, this is Rothschild, the gentrified hub of Tel Aviv's upper-middle class and also the site of great nationalist and civic pride. In the distance, on this otherwise quiet street, something bright and pink pierces the edges of your vision. Whatever it is, it is tall and bobs along, coming right toward you.

As it approaches, you ask, what's that? Then you hear drumming and a low chant. Cheers echo up. This pink monstrosity stops suddenly, turns sideways, and you realize you are looking at a giant pink phallus, ten feet high and rolling on a black platform with two inflated orange balloons serving as testicles. The platform is illustrated with a number of military vehicles each painted to look somewhere between a tank and a penis. In Hebrew under the contraption it reads, "Salute the National Erection."

The "Salute the National Erection" demo represented the culmination of two weeks worth of protests aimed at critiquing the nationalist celebrations commemorating the victory of the Six Day War, forty years earlier, during which Israel captured the West Bank, the Gaza Strip and East Jerusalem. The "Salute the National Erection" event had a decidedly queerer aesthetic than the other protest events (for example, another protest involved pouring "blood" in the fountains at Rabin square). A flyer that had gone out the week before the protest read,

On the occasion of the 40th anniversary of Israel's glorious victory in the 6 day war, to celebrate the ongoing screwing of the Palestinians by the occupation army and Israel's governments; And in worship of the generals who have shown us over and over that theirs is the biggest; We shall hold

a march to salute the national erection of the Zionist state. (“Saluting the National Erection – Giant Penis Parade”)

Even within their flyer, which featured an image of a penis-like tank, the organizers of this event made their parody evident. This flyer points to the overt and political nature of this event and also performs a specific discursive call to action.

The demonstration began at Meir House and Zina Dizingoff, where the State of Israel was originally declared. “The ceremony began with samba drumming, and went on with reading parts of the declaration alongside [a] booing call” (Adar 1). The “Salute the National Erection” demonstration clearly attempted to undermine the Israeli state military complex by pointing to its patriarchal construction as a phallogocentric colonial power and to pervert and queer that construction through a celebration of the ludicrousness of that power. A crowd of approximately fifty people had gathered, mostly wearing black and pink. This was an impressive group in the middle of a summer day in central Tel Aviv, when many people are inside avoiding the heat.

The march began at Meir House...the house where the state's establishment was announced. Later we used our big dick to spray on the house, calling 'the national erection - will be our termination!'(Adar 1)

The visual performance of spraying the Meir House attempted to connect sexuality and reproduction to violence, by arguing that the reproduction of Israeli state doctrine, as well as Israeli citizens, performs violence by expanding state militarism against Palestinians. Similarly, the language also performs a rhetorical operation by connecting masculine sexuality and the reproduction of soldiers and militarism with violence. By combining language with the embodied visual and physical presence of the demonstrators, this

becomes both a point of clarity, but also seeks to represent the group's politics in specific linguistic form. However, this indicates the extent to which the message may have been ambiguous and therefore language seemed necessary to specify what otherwise may have been a vague political message. The shocking and vague nature of the demonstration may have reduced its efficacy as a protest performance.

Ejaculating on one of the primary historical and current sites of Zionism served as a specific symbolic sacrilege in an expression of large scale dissent. In addition, the participants shouted “get out of Ramallah,” and “Enough murder and mourning - the occupation fucks everything” and “chauvinism - racism; thanks a lot to Zionism...we resist the occupation - don't sleep with anyone that's armed” (ibid). This call to resist militarism is a perilous stance to take in Israeli society. Refusing mandatory army service can result in imprisonment and cultural isolation for Israeli youth.

“Salute the National Erektion” functioned as a protest of disidentification in certain key ways while simultaneously not fitting within the term altogether. José Esteban Muñoz defines the conditions of disidentification as follows⁸, “A disidentifying subject is unable to fully identify or to form what Sigmund Freud called that ‘just-as-if’ relationship.” (Muñoz 7). To disidentify is to find oneself outside the walls of identity, in a space of impossible subjectivity, where one is not represented in mainstream discourse. “Disidentification is meant to offer a lens to elucidate minoritarian politics that is not monocausal or monothematic...” (8). The queer pacifist, anti-capitalist and anarchist

⁸ For a fuller discussion of Muñoz's theories on performance, see my other article “Once Again: Performance as Significant Doubling in the Writings of Victor Turner, Eve Sedgwick, Judith Butler and José Esteban Muñoz.”

bodies that participated in the “Salute the National Election” have been cut directly out of Israeli state discourse and, in this sense, must disidentify. As nationalistic gays or lesbians these folks would fit in, but not as anti-state military activists. Yet “Salute the National Election” is not a perfect fit for Muñoz’s disidentification. His theory defines itself in relation to minoritarian identity formation and spectatorship in the US. This is not to say that it does not have a cross-cultural applicability, but disidentification does specifically have a relationship to queerness in the US.

In addition, disidentification is primarily defined by Muñoz as an individual project of identity negotiation and performance. The “Salute the National Election” demonstration articulated itself as a group identification. The participants were made impossible, in the sense that they were made invisible by the heteronormative militarism of the “Jewish State” and they were attempting to demand their visibility within that state. In addition Muñoz theorizes disidentification as finding one’s identity not represented in discourse. While this may have been true for many of the demonstrators in “Salute the National Election” who would have found themselves unrepresented, others may still have fit within the heterosexual Ashkenazi elite.

As I have shown, Kvisa Shchora often works on the fringes of Israel politics and society, where disidentification, playful performance and solidarity are employed in ways that question many forms of socially acceptable behavior. While Kvisa isn't always successful in its approach to building bridges, or communicating their message, because their type of political activism is often messy and can even be infuriating and alienating, they are always provocative and creative.

Identity Cards

In order to further illustrate Kvisa's urgent need to stress the connectivity of activism, I would like to end with one final example of a Kvisa event that embodies their different engagements. At the 2003 Tel Aviv Gay Pride Parade, Kvisa members designed, carried and handed out an alternative version of Israeli identification cards. ID cards in Israel are mandatory and must be carried at all times by any Israeli citizen, whether Jewish or Muslim. As JM describes, "In Israel you have to carry an identification card at all times and if you don't have it, you break the law. Which probably won't get you in trouble, but if you are Palestinian then it would." The ID cards become another means of tracking and controlling the movements of Palestinians in Israel. These ID cards present particular challenges to anyone who is transgender, or wants to officially change their name. "And if you want your name changed (from a) gender free name, (to) a gendered name, they would put a whole lot of problems in your way" (JM). According to TR, Kvisa members planned this event, because, "we wanted to plan something that would focus on transgender issues" (TR). The ministry of the interior mandates that the cards maintain one gender designation that cannot be changed, short of a sexual reassignment procedure, including "top" and "bottom" surgery, in addition to hormone therapy. TR explained her feelings about the identity cards:

How institutional oppression works, not only in relation to, um, gender...but the need to define yourself according to national institutional criteria...also you are defined according to your father's name, or if you are Jewish or Arabic. What's your nationality, not only what's your

citizenship, but also what is your nationality, because you can have an Israeli identity card and it will be written that you are Arab or a Jew. (TR)

The fake “identity cards” were designed by Kvisa members to closely resemble an official Israeli ID card from the Ministry with some key differences. First, the cards are full of writing meant to “queer” official ID cards, which have an institutional feel and contain only terse and official language.

SM, another one of my interviewees, translated the Kvisa cards for me. They were written only in Hebrew and Arabic. She began with the family name line, “That is my father’s name, not mine,” and under Official Name the cards read, “I am transgender but not [operated on]. The internal office won’t give me the right to change my name” (SM). The right to change one's name is a core identity issue and is an important issue for members of the trans community. The cards meant to call into question heteronormative and patriarchal systems of naming. She translated the next few lines of the card: “I don’t need to prove citizenship to have rights” and “the Nation (is), Palestinian, Jewish, Anarchist, Immigrant, Betrayer of the national border” (SM). This list attempts to critically engage with and resignify governmental identity categories. Through a discursive intervention these categories are opened to interpretation and the ID holder (as well as those denied IDs) can recognize their own agency in defining their identity and the extent to which the state does violence in reifying identity and regulating national participation.

After this list, it says, “open for a moment your ID, what’s in there? What’s not in there? The city capture(s) us in specific categories that only she, only the government ha(s) the right when and in what condition(s) to change. (Does) the category define

you?”(ibid). These ID cards were distributed by members of Kvisa and were also carried around as a small performance of protest. ID cards in Israel/Palestine are such a pervasive means of tracking and enforcing social norms that the act of carrying a fake one has the power to perform a biting social critique. This action also contains a certain amount of risk. Creating alternate ID cards may seem like a minor and subtle performance, but within Israeli society it was an incredibly empowering performative strategy.

The ID card performs identity in a specific and highly prescribed way. When Palestinians and Israeli citizens are asked to pull out their ID cards, it is usually by an officer, or government official and is meant to replicate and enforce identity categories and hierarchies of power. In this instance, the ID cards do not perform their ordinary function, but instead become a site of critical engagement with identity itself. This performance asked everyone in attendance to think about their own emplacements and privileges and to think about how others might engage with identity. Members of Kvisa hoped that this would also create a sense of empathy with those who have a fraught relationship with their ID cards.

Simply changing the gender on an official ID card is a huge process. JM is a transgendered woman who would like to change her official name and gender. She described the exhausting and dehumanizing process that she would need to go through for an official gender and name change on her card:

I would probably have to go to a psychologist and start a sex change, a sex assignment thing and maybe start taking hormones, I don't know.

Very recently someone succeeded to change the name without an

operation, but that wasn't possible before, it was really horrible. So that is for trans people (JM).

YM also explained how Palestinians and Arab Israelis living in the territories have subtle differences on their ID cards. These differences distinguish them from Jewish Israelis who always carry blue ID cards:

... but for Palestinians it's also terrible because, even though you can have identification cards today that don't have the nationality on it, what it says is, Nationality column and then stars instead of actual letters, but then they have different number of stars for Jews and for Arabs, so they can still tell the difference. But also they can tell by the name, usually. So if you have an identification card with a Palestinian name, expect trouble when you get into places. You will get searched. You won't be able to get into the places. You will be asked a lot of questions. You'll be a suspicious person. So we did something about the identification card. We issued an identification card of ourselves. And it was orange, because the color codes are important, the blue one is for Palestinians that live in the 48 territories inside Israel and the orange one is for Palestinians in the Occupied Territories, after 67 occupied territories. Even if you get a blue one they would know. So we issued these cards and I really liked the idea, because we distributed them and also at a Gay Pride and they really connected. (YM)

These subtle differences and classifications allow the racist and homophobic bureaucracy of the Israeli State to operate in a passive way. The protest staged by members of Kvisa

allowed them to bring attention to this apparatus of oppression, and to perform a utopian version of the state wherein each individual takes control of their identity.

The ID cards attempted to manifest, in a purely discursive, but performative form, the embodied politics and performances of the Kvisa protests at the 2003 Pride Parade by performing solidarity with those who were either not given national identity or who were given a secondary citizenship through their IDs. Kvisa attempted to collapse the division between embodied and discursive ways of knowing. This was part of their larger project of breaking down identity categories and demanding human rights across identity boundaries, by communicating solidarity between and among the oppressed. While many of Kvisa's strategies and performances have been effective in forging connections among the oppressed and making clear communications about human rights in the Middle East, other performances have the effect of creating an affective experience of imagined solidarity that is not always effectual and remains one-sided. "No pride in the occupation" is a powerful statement, but has an entirely different meaning and efficacy if it is said by a Jewish Israeli or an Arab Israeli, or a Palestinian, or someone who is not grounded in the lived experience of Israel/Palestine. This solidarity is further complicated by the fact that Kvisa's message is spoken directly to Jewish Israelis and does not consult Palestinians living in the territories (many of whom might not want the support of LGBTQI Israelis). All of these examples bring to light the complexity of forging solidarity and the impossibility of using one term to encapsulate all its many forms.

March of Return

I would like to finish this chapter with an example that captures the complexity and problems at the core of imagined solidarity. For the last several years Palestinians and a few Jewish Israelis have participated in the March of Return. In 2013 approximately 7,000 people participated (Matar). The March of Return illustrates the limits of Kvisa's solidarity and coalition building movement. It is not a Kvisa event. Instead, it is organized by the Committee for Internal Displaced Refugees. The committee holds the March of Return yearly as a show of protest and solidarity over the forced deportation of more than 800,000 Palestinians and the destruction of 400-500 Arab towns between 1947-1950 (YM). Marchers, most of whom are displaced Palestinians living in Israel and Jewish Israeli supporters, march to the ruins of one of the Palestinian villages destroyed in the Nakba. In my interview with YM she explained that this is the kind of action Kvisa liked to be involved in and at one point she attempted to sign Kvisa members up as participants in the March. She explained that this is one of the few ways to make these villages visible to the public because they have usually been leveled to the ground and trees are generally planted on the ruins so that they disappear completely into the past. She pointed out that often the only way to recognize the location of a ruined Arab village is by looking for groves of pine trees with remnants of agricultural walls and ruins of structures still visible. For the Jewish Israeli public this makes the Nakba nearly invisible and easy to forget (JM).⁹ The March of Return brings visibility to these settlements and undermines a myth that the land was empty, or that Palestinians migrated peacefully. This myth is spread by the Israeli government, which makes informing Jewish

⁹ She also explained that when American Jews pay for the planting of trees in Israel, this is often what they're paying for in her opinion.

Israelis about the Nakba and showing solidarity an important part of Kvisa's mission (JM). So it was with shock and dismay that members of Kvisa realized that they were not welcome to participate in the march. As JM explains, "[this is] because the Committee of Refugees is a very conservative organization. It's male dominated [and] I don't think there's a woman in the committee. [Not] even one. Some of the men are religious" (JM). Ultimately Kvisa members decided not to participate in the March of Return, but it was a disappointment for the group. Instead of reclaiming shame, sexualized and gendered shame was externally re-imposed on Kvisa members. Additionally, this forces me to ask what the limits of reclaiming shame are.

This example clearly illustrated the limits of Kvisa's sense of solidarity and their positions of privilege in relationship to this community of Palestinian refugees. These Palestinian refugees are the people Kvisa members most wanted to form solidarity with and yet the one-sided nature of that perceived solidarity became clearly exposed in this rejection. This is not to suggest that an imagined solidarity has no affective weight or actual efficacy, but that the character and nature of a particular form of solidarity can only really be seen when the limits of that solidarity are tested and stark differences between groups are exposed. Members of Kvisa did not grasp the full extent to which their attempt to forge a solidarity beyond the limits of identity crashed hard against the very real, lived struggles and embodied lives of Palestinians. This is not to suggest that one form of oppression is more severe than another, but that perhaps there is a point at which cultural identity and experience become irreconcilable and full solidarity cannot be forged. Therefore, imagined solidarity may have a role in unifying a particular

community and in communicating with a specific audience, but runs up against its limit when full solidarity is denied.

For members of Kvisa, this rejection marked that impermeable barrier and the limits of imagined solidarity. Despite this one example, the group has participated in other demonstrations in coalition with Palestinian groups and I will describe a couple of those here.

Other Kvisa Actions

Kvisa has been involved in, and the instigator of, a number of other actions and performances. These have involved everything from staging protests at border checkpoints, to holding counter events at Gay Pride Parades in Tel Aviv and Jerusalem. I will not discuss all of these in detail, but I would like to talk about a particular type of activism and solidarity that the Jerusalem chapter of Kvisa participated in over a period of months. This involved helping the Palestinian families stuck for hours, or even days, at the Ministry of the Interior in East Jerusalem.

In order for Palestinian families (or individuals) to do such things as add an addition to an overcrowded home they must get a permit from the Ministry of the Interior. These permits are almost impossible to obtain and families are forced to wait for days on end at the Ministry in order to even speak to a bureaucrat and have a remote chance at attaining a permit. As YW explains, “The Ministry of the Interior in East Jerusalem is an organ of oppression, not an organ of service. An organ that makes people cower” (YW). She goes on to explain why people cower in fear at the Ministry. “Their residency may be taken from them and their rights. It’s a very oppressive place and one

thing was, you couldn't get in and people would come in the evening and take a place in the line to get into the office the next morning" (YW). As JM explains, "the Ministry of the Interior in East Jerusalem is supposed to be serving the Arab population of East Jerusalem, the Palestinian population there, but they are torturing them." Often people who arrive at the Ministry will camp out and have to wait for several days before ultimately being turned away. "They have to wait all day and sometimes they are told to just go away and come back again, because they are missing this, or they are missing that. And it's hot. It's the most terrible place to stand in line ever" (JM).

There is a unique shame and humiliation in being subjected to these dehumanizing bureaucratic conditions. Kvisa members wanted to alleviate, but also identify with the shame of those trapped at the Ministry. Kvisa's contribution began as simply a humanitarian action, meant to ease people's suffering, but they also added a performative dimension, as YM explains,

So we went each night with pots of tea and distributed (them) to people and talked to them. Trying to get connections, so we will do something later, which will be more of a protest. Eventually there was a protest in West Jerusalem. We stood in a long line and explained to people (what it was)...It was also performative, we all came in red shirts, but we stood in line and it was very visible.

Though the action was meant to be small and humanitarian, it garnered a lot of attention for Kvisa and became controversial. As YM explains, "People were furious that, 'what you go and help those people, don't you have people that need help? Jews that need help.' You know the whole criticism that you Arab loving leftist" (YM). For YM this

action had a major impact, because its critics appeared racist and were encouraged by members of Kvisa to re-examine their positions.

And it really did, I think, make a change, because it was small, because it was so, I don't know, delicate. It made a huge impact, because it was so obvious that the objection to it was terrible, you can't justify an objection to it, but people still were angry about it. (YM)

Though smaller and less ostentatious than many of Kvisa's actions, their time spent at the Ministry had just the kind of impact the group hoped to have through all their actions. It made people think and talk about the oppressiveness of the state and led to real, on-the-ground coalitions and a real sense of solidarity with the Palestinian community in East Jerusalem.

For Kvisa members this action raised several interesting issues. For one thing, Kvisa members were not "out of the closet" as a queer activist group in the presence of the Palestinian East Jerusalem community, at least not entirely. And this created an interesting and playful dilemma for a group that at its core was a queer activist group. As JM explains, "it was interesting in terms of talking to people and playing with the issue of how much we are out of the closet. Because we were in the closet" (JM). Members of Kvisa were forced to reveal their sexual identities in subtle and covert ways, so that they didn't alienate the very community they had gone to help. This playing with boundaries and identity became an interesting and new experiment for members of Kvisa. "We didn't come in as queer, as gay people, or as lesbians. It was kind of an interesting play" (JM).

The Ministry action showcased one facet of Kvisa's activist work. In this action, they simply attempted to forge solidarity with, and lend help to, the Palestinian community of East Jerusalem. I included this small action because it showcases the range of Kvisa's activist work, which has not always been successful in building literal solidarity, but has definitely been effective in generating an affective response to its actions and creating both dissension and dialogue.

From beauty pageants to Gay Pride activism, and from actions at checkpoints to helping people through bureaucratic oppression, Kvisa runs the gamut from agitprop to satire, from humanitarian aid to protest. What makes this group so interesting, in the tradition of Gay Shame, is their unrelenting mission to find common cause and commonality between oppressed identities while disturbing discrete identities and their unquestioned and unreflexive myopia. Kvisa and the Gay Shame movement seek to connect people's humanity through experiences of suffering and oppression by working against a neoliberal impulse toward individualism and identity categories. Instead, they argue that experiences of shame and oppression cut across identities of gender, nationality, race and sexuality. They argue that there is "no pride in the oppression of others" and that Gay Pride should not be celebrated until queer people can march unencumbered by the oppression of others. In the next chapter I discuss the performance work of Euroshame, a night of political performances aimed at the corporatization of Europride and Gay Pride London. Euroshame uses satire and critique to examine the relationship between sexuality, nationalism and the neoliberal marketplace. Solidarity and empathy are approached in a different way by the performances at Euroshame and it is a useful site for examining these issues in political performance. I end with Euroshame,

because it provides a different lens through which shame, solidarity and empathy can be viewed.

CHAPTER 3

A Proudful Excess of Shame: Europride and Euroshame

On July 7, 2006, an invasion took place in the middle of London. They took Trafalgar Square, they took Piccadilly Circus, and they filled up Oxford Street. However, this was not an invasion of Martians, or an angry mob bent on overthrowing the monarchy. Instead, these were the proceedings of Europride 2006, taking place throughout London's West End and adding nearly a million people to the city's already crowded streets. Meanwhile something very different was gearing up right across the river.

Two events, Europride and Euroshame took place on the same July day in London in 2006. While Europride was held in the fashionable West End and represented the culmination of years of planning in a multi-million dollar parade attended by over half a million people, Euroshame took place off the beaten path in a Vauxhall warehouse and featured a number of independent performance artists in a direct critique of Europride and of the whole Eurozone.

These events have the ability to expose a particular cultural moment in which the confluence of big business and the de-marginalization of the gay and lesbian community have set the stage for a Gay Shame activism that can performatively and insightfully critique the commercialism and lack of radicality in Gay Pride Parades through a reclamation of the affective experience of shame. Euroshame attempted to counter the

simple and neoliberal narrative of pride, with performances that revealed in the shameful and that questioned identity.

In this chapter I will explore both Europride London and Euroshame to juxtapose the affective states of pride and shame by looking at the grand spectacle that has become Europride and the radically different Euroshame. I will ask: What forms of shame were being summoned by Euroshame and how did these manifest in the various performance installations? Further, how was Euroshame positioning itself against Europride and what are the limits of for-profit performances staged at a nightclub for a niche audience? Was Euroshame invoking solidarity, or empathy and how was this different than other Gay Shame sites? Finally, which installations were successful at critiquing Europride and EU nationalism and which fell short in their aesthetics and communication?

Performances of pride deny shame and therefore cut us off from an essential part of existence and from an important affect that connects us to empathy and our own humanity. Paradoxically, performing our pride turns us into consumer-citizens cut off from humility. Meanwhile, Euroshame, as a counter-site, performed a reclamation of the human experience of shame. In 2006 it was held in a large Vauxhall warehouse the night of the Europride Parade. Through juxtaposing Euroshame to Europride, I will show how shame usefully exposes the relationship between nationality, affect, and sexuality and where Gay Shame can expose the cleavages and limitations of the new Europe under the European Union.

In early July of 2006 Europride was held throughout London's West End. I attended not only the celebrations and parade on July first, but also many of the two weeks' events that Europride and London Gay Pride organized around the primary

Saturday parade. I went to Europride London primarily because of my interest in Euroshame, as a counter-pride organized by Club Duckie as an artistic critique of both Europride and the new European Union.

As the EU has broadened its political and economic scope to include 28 member states and a population of over five hundred million, LGBT issues have become both a primary rallying point and divisive hurdle between Eastern and Western sides of the Union (Staab x). Many scholars argue that the expansion of the EU and particularly the economic inequalities exacerbated by it have resulted in a new wave of nationalisms, xenophobia, and East versus West dichotomies. LGBT rights have in many respects come to represent progressive democracy to Western Europeans. As Milija Gluhovic argues, "LGBT rights and freedoms, [are] increasingly taken up by both liberal and conservative forces as a sign of modern civility against the other's allegedly backward culture" (195). Pride and specifically European pride becomes aligned with Gay Pride in order to shore up the boundaries of European identity, while also dividing Europe along national and longitudinal lines, simultaneously articulating to Europeans what it means to be a liberal democratic nation. As Gluhovic argues via Roy (2005),

Some have argued that gay marriage reform in Europe is 'less about gay rights and more about codifying an ideal of European values' against Islam and various Third-World Others. (196)

In 2006 Europride performed a neoliberal LGBT nationalism through corporate-sponsored spectacle. This neoliberal vision of pride, was also a shaming of Europe's fringes and the Middle East as underdeveloped and drew a clear division between modernity and lack of development. The Europride Parade marks the most visible

development in the pact between big business and LGBT spectacle. Europride takes place in one major European city each year and is administered by the Europride committee and the Pride organization in that city.

The Gay Pride movement can be traced dubiously back to the Stonewall Riots that took place on June 28, 1969, in New York. Some scholars have argued that the riots, provoked by the raiding of the Stonewall Inn, were only the most visible manifestation of a building queer public consciousness and presence. The first Liberation March was organized by the Gay Liberation Front one year later in the summer of 1970 to commemorate the Stonewall Riots. Initially these yearly marches were called Gay Liberation marches, where marchers demanded visibility and equal rights (Sergeant). The London chapter of the GLF was quick to react to the events taking place in New York, with protests and events. The first official GLF march in London was held in 1972.

In the early 1980s Gay Liberation marches were re-branded as Gay Pride marches, because more conservative members of the gay and lesbian community wanted to give them a less confrontational name. The change in name also indicated a shift from a concern with basic rights for sexual minorities to a concern with the struggle to forge a positive identity and public reputation.

A brief historical overview of Gay Pride London is helpful in understanding the transformation of queer parades from small-scale rallies and marches to spectacular tourist draws with corporate tie-ins. Through tracking the evolution of Gay Pride London from a Gay Liberation Day Parade to Europride it is also possible to witness how performing pride becomes the only speakable narrative in the early 21st century neoliberal marketplace. Hannah Dee argues that we are at

...the point that London Pride - once a militant demonstration in commemoration of the Stonewall riots - has become a corporate-sponsored event far removed from any challenge to the ongoing injustices that we [the LGBT community] face. (8-9)

The first event billing itself as Gay Pride in London took place during the summer of 1982 when approximately 2,000 people marched up Oxford Street to Hyde Park ("Knitting Circle"). The event grew massively during the 80s and early 90s and began billing itself as Gay Mardi Gras. By 1986 the attendance had risen from 2,000 people to 10,000 people and in 1991 their numbers were up to 45,000 (ibid). Enter Europride, the grand vision of a number of businesses and Pride organizers throughout Europe. The intention of Europride was to focus Pride attendance and revenues at one European Pride event, in a different major city each year. The consolidation of pride events into major Pride centers is part of a trend of re-marketing Pride events around the world. In 1992 London was selected to play host to the first Europride event and this drew in an estimated 100,000 people, an unprecedented number at a Pride event at the time. The next year the numbers dropped off drastically, without the support of the Europride organization. Bill Short from the *Gay Times* commented that "[w]ithout the organized European presence which made last year's Europride so special, the numbers seemed down and the mood more subdued" (Short). It was already clear in 1996 that Europride had significantly bolstered attendance at London Pride. Attendance continued to fall and was down to only 40,000 people in 1997. In 1999 London was scheduled to host Europride, but canceled the event at the last minute (ibid). In 2000 London Pride attempted to re-imagine Pride itself and started charging greater amounts for tickets. This

also presented a major shift in strategy, as they had only begun selling tickets beginning in 1997. It is difficult to find concrete numbers on London Pride attendance since 2000. In 2000 the London Pride Organization also became an official charity.

The EPOA (“European Pride Organizers Association”) represents a shift in LGBT events, toward the embrace of market culture, neoliberalism and EU post-nationalism. The Europride organization itself looks like a UN delegation because it attempts to tie as many national Pride organizations and national representatives together as possible. This is accomplished through an inter-European administration and through the involvement of representatives from multiple Pride organizations throughout Europe

Europride 2006 was organized and administered by two primary organizations. On the one hand, the and on the other the London Pride Organization. Europride is an independent organization that works with local Pride organizations, businesses and city governments in order to maximize attendance at Europride each year. Both groups worked for well over a year to plan the event, gather sponsorship and participants and apply for space. The London Pride Organization and the city of London really wanted to entice the EPOA to hold Europride in London once again. According to their website, the European Pride Organizers Association describe themselves as:

...a network of European Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual and Transgender Pride Organizations. EPOA was founded in London and incorporated in 2002 in Berlin as a non-profit association. EPOA holds the rights to the title **Europride**. The purpose of EPOA is to promote lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender Pride on a pan-European level and to empower and support local and national pride organizations in their efforts of planning and

promoting Pride celebrations.¹ (ibid)

Europride is designed to function primarily as a non-profit association. They also pay five administrators. Member Pride organizations support the EPOA through yearly dues. I would also assume there are fees paid for coordinating and sponsoring Europride in a particular city.

The London Pride Organization expected Europride to significantly bolster their attendance numbers in 2006. The Europride media kit predicted that, “this year we expect the crowds to double as London plays host to the Europride 06 festival” (ibid). This was in part because in 2002 one million people had attended the Europride in Köln. The media kit goes on to argue that Europride 2006 “...will be bigger and better than ever with the Europride license awarded by the EPOA making it Europe’s no.1 Pride event in 2006”(ibid). This is significant because it indicates the understanding of Europride as a business venture, where attendance numbers are the most important factor and equal greater revenues. London Pride Organization is registered as a non-profit and run entirely by volunteers, while Europride has never made these claims. However, despite Pride London's not-for-profit status, it can still be understood as a large-scale marketing opportunity for the city, for corporate interests and as a tourism draw. These numbers also indicate the extent to which Europride does in fact increase attendance at Pride events.

Actually finding concrete numbers on the attendance at Europride 2006 is another matter. The press is in agreement that Europride was a success, but the attendance numbers they give are widely divergent. *Time Out London* and Wikipedia claim 600,000 people attended the event, but most legitimate news sources cite far

smaller numbers. The *Daily Mail* said merely, “tens of thousands of men, women and children turned out on the streets of London yesterday for a parade marking the culmination of Europe’s largest gay and lesbian festival”. Meanwhile the *Hounslow Guardian* stated that about 500,000 people attended the parade and events.

Gay Pride can be understood as part of a transformation of gay and lesbian identities from marginalization to being understood as a marketable class. The relatively new economy of pink tourism and spectacle involves a rebranding of identities as a source of revenue and market participation. Gay Pride has become a huge business; a major Pride event pulls in hundreds of thousands of people and can generate millions of dollars in tourism and revenues for the city that plays host to the event. The revenues for an event as large as Europride can number in the tens of millions of pounds. For example, the 2007 Atlanta Gay Pride had an attendance of 200,000 people and generated substantial revenues (“History of Atlanta Pride”). With an attendance of twice that and many more people from out of town, the revenues were undoubtedly much higher for London in 2006. These revenues were spent on plane tickets, hotel rooms, drinks at the events, transportation, and much more. They would have also utilized numerous other industries and services in London. This is a great deal of profit for a single Gay Pride event and does not begin to take into account sponsorship and related revenues. In 1999 Los Angeles Gay Pride brought in over one million dollars in sponsorship and the Sydney Gay Mardi Gras had already attracted approximately 500,000 attendees by 1993 and according to their website these numbers continued to grow into the new century. “By 2002 the organization had grown to encompass a large full-time staff, including its own travel organization” (“mardigras.org”). From this data it is possible to extrapolate that

London was most likely desperate to have Europride 2006 go off without a hitch.

Over the past decade an industry of Pride tourism and “pink” tourism have emerged. Additionally, a branch of hospitality and tourism targeted at gay and lesbian travelers has also emerged during the last few years. Howard L. Hughes' *Pink Tourism* (2006) was one of the first examples of this new literature and analyzes the gay and lesbian tourist market in the UK and how to specifically target these travelers. Additionally, there is an older extant literature of tourism and space in relationship to sexuality (Bell and Valentine 1995).

Pride is one of the primary draws and hallmarks of this new pink tourist economy. A GLBT traveler is likely to attend one or more major Pride events when they travel abroad, because major Pride events tend to occur close together, staggering themselves by a few days throughout the summer. Europride seems like an ideal way to maximize and focus Pride attendance and revenues. The media pack sent out by the London Pride Organization and Europride plays on these ideas in an attempt to market and promote the event. In a section of the kit they directly address the idea of both bolstering GLBT tourism to London and improving the city's image through hosting Europride.

...since 1992, Europride has been the major gay and lesbian event in Europe, attracting millions of visitors from around the world. Not only is the title economically valuable but also gives the host city an opportunity to promote itself as a gay friendly destination. Pride London is delighted to be the license holder for 2006 and fully intends to embrace the Europride spirit. (“London Pride Media Kit”)

These sentiments were in fact echoed by Ken Livingstone, the Mayor of London, who

said of Europride: “What this shows as we march through the city of London – one of the greatest cities on Earth – is a city can be a wonderful place to live in with people of every race, religion and sexuality”.

Gay Pride has not only become a way for cities to promote and perform themselves as liberal, tolerant and gay friendly, but it has also become a way to create a nationalist narrative of progressive democracy in the new Eurozone and a way for corporations to win over clients and consumers. Nearly all the events at Europride 2006 were free and this was primarily thanks to generous corporate sponsorship from a mind-boggling list of businesses, as well as funds from the city of London. Europride listed Mayor Ken Livingstone as one of its primary sponsors. The major sponsorship came from a group of businesses listed as “partners” by the Pride organizers. This list included Virgin Mobile, British Airways, Strongbow, Gay.com, Ford and other large corporations. Interestingly, the Metropolitan Police Authority and the Metropolitan Police were both listed as partners of the event. Many smaller sponsors did not make this list.

Virgin Mobile was the first major corporate name to sign on to Europride London. Virgin Mobile sponsored the cabaret stage in Leicester Square, where they also hosted the “Drag Idol” competition. British Airways signed on soon after, offering discounted flights to London from the US and Europe, as well as an inventive promotional campaign, the “Chill Out Lounge.” On the British Airways website they describe themselves as, “hosting a Chill Out Lounge on Europride Day, 1 July. We will be transforming the Sound Club on Leicester Square into a chilled oasis...” (“britishairways.com”), according to their promotional materials this would be an opportunity to take a break from all the excitement. They gave out exclusive tickets to the

booth, in an attempt to make it a trendy affair. “Register for entry into the British Airways Chill Out Lounge and you will be sent your exclusive invitation, via text to your mobile, valid for you and a friend” (ibid). This sort of marketing attempted to brand the entire event, by essentially making British Airways and glamor indistinguishable from Europride itself. The Chill Out Lounge was a different sort of marketing than the banner, flyer, or street sign. With this sort of strategy British Airways and Virgin Mobile were able to weave their products directly into Europride. Sponsors want their products to be recognized as part of the community, and at a Pride event, these corporations also want to seem friendly to gays and lesbians. By actually becoming an event and taking up space within Europride, British Airways, and Virgin Mobile infiltrated the spaces of the event.

In this instance, Gay Pride celebrations took the form of a spectacle, in which corporations could perform their own ubiquity, insidiousness and power. For Debord, the spectacle’s ability to reaffirm power relations, while obscuring oppressive mechanisms, was indicative of modern life.

The spectacle is the ruling order’s nonstop discourse about itself, its never-ending monologue of self-praise, its self-portrait at the stage of totalitarian domination of all aspects of life. The fetishistic appearance of pure objectivity in spectacular relations conceals their true character...(20)

In the contemporary moment, this self-praise can be reinterpreted as pride and corporations as the engines hiding behind the celebration of identity.

The Chill Out Lounge also indicated the extent to which corporations are gradually consuming more and more space at Pride events. When attendees entered the lounge they were activated performatively as walking billboards, or at least lent their

bodies to Virgin advertising. This active courting of gay and lesbian consumers may have felt like acceptance, but it was an insidious attempt to grab pink dollars. This corporate dominance at Europride also marked a stark contrast to Pride events of the past. Since the 1970s LGBT parades have had a massive makeover that took them from festivals of resistance to spectacular celebrations of corporate dominance.

Footage of a New York City Freedom Day Parade from the mid-1970s gives a drastically different feel than the Europride in London thirty years later (“Gay History: A Pride Parade from the 1970s”). The 1970s parade appeared far more like a street party, or a gathering, than what we would associate with a parade today. People milled about *en masse* and the streets were full of mingling throngs. Nearly everyone was in drag, or wearing nearly nothing. The video followed several people as they prepare for the parade and then lurched suddenly onto one of the floats. The spectator was swept along in the parade, as they become a participant and view the watchers on the street below. There was not only a clear lack of organization, but also little funding, as indicated by homemade costumes, basic floats and live music. The city did not shut down the streets, instead cars and buses could be seen paralleling the parade. A woman sticks her tongue out in a bus window. There were also no corporate logos and no banners, or eighteen wheelers. There were evidently no professional dancers and the floats seem less specific than what one sees at a major Pride event today.

As Richard Schechner argues in *The Street is the Stage*, street protests and festivals follow a specific choreography, but unsanctioned public protest performances are improvisational festivals. In his description of the 1989 protests at Tiananmen Square, he describes the difference between the students and officials: “the students improvised in

public, while the officials, as always, rehearsed behind closed doors...." (202). The 1970s Freedom Day Parade can be construed as an unsanctioned political rally and Carnavalesque form of street theater. Again, in describing street theater, Schechner writes, "they eat, drink, make theatre, make love, and enjoy each other's company. They put on masks and costumes, erect banners, and construct effigies...."(197). Additionally, these early queer demonstrators were protesting despicable conditions for LGBTQI people at the time. "They protest, often by means of farce and parody, against what is oppressive, ridiculous, and outrageous"(197).

We see a radical shift between these early LGBTQI Parades and the large-scale spectacles of Gay Pride Parades today. Schechner also describes this domestication and corporatization of street festivals, "Over time in Europe and Europeanized America, festivals were cut to size, hemmed in by regulations, transformed into Chamber of Commerce boosterism, coopted by capitalism's appetite for profit..."(198). A contrasting description of Europride gives a clear sense of this transformation.

In stark contrast, a video depicting Europride 2006 looks more like a well-rehearsed and orchestrated music video. The floats were orderly and well planned-out and numbered in the dozens. Each float was extremely specific and indicated rich, and often corporate, funding. Professional dancers made up nearly half of the participants on these floats. Several floats asked spectators to "Join the Rat Race" and had numerous dancers in green spandex dancing on the back. These floats were specifically dedicated to drumming up donations for the event. They were coordinated with people holding buckets and collecting donations at street level. It is not immediately clear what "Join the Rat Race" referred to, but it may have been meant to indicate that float dancers were

working hard to raise money for Europride. These tips would have gone back into bolstering the Europride organization. In the footage from the 1970s the crowd mingled with the paraders and there were nearly as many participants as audience. In the Europride Parade the audience outnumbered the participants. In addition the chaotic atmosphere of the earlier parade allowed all the lines to blur, whereas in the 2006 parade, the groups were clearly cordoned off by dividers and there was nearly no interacting between spectator and performer.

Europride's success at taking over large amounts of space in central London is in no small part because of a series of cultural policy changes in the UK over the past two decades. The call from the Labour Party as well as official cultural policy has been for more public art projects and art that involves a wider audience. The department for Culture, Media, and Sport (DCMS), formed in the early 90s, is responsible primarily for funding and supporting forms of art that involve a wider audience (Kawashima 55). The largest part of this agenda has involved "social inclusion," a cultural policy intended to bring in minority and underprivileged populations. Although Europride was not directly funded by the Arts Council, groups participating in Europride were. The London Gay and Lesbian Switchboard was given five thousand pounds toward their participation in Europride.

In Claire Bishop's *Artificial Hells*, she notes the extent to which social inclusion as a project has become synonymous with progressive politics and anti-capitalist organizing (12). However, she also notes the ways in which art has become part of the neoliberal project through becoming the place where feeling of inclusion are fostered. Bishop also explains that this affirmation of any form of collective performance avoids a

critical investigation of the nuances of individual events. Europride is a perfect example of a collective spectacle that is in fact affirming neoliberal values through performances of inclusion and creativity that are clearly tied to corporate interests. The effects of this legislation can also be seen at the London city and general government levels. The *Greater London Authority's Sexual Orientation Equality Scheme* drafted just six months after Europride contains a forward by Mayor Ken Livingston which echoes his speech at Europride. Livingston points specifically to the desire to “ensure that London’s service delivery reflects its status as a world class, lesbian and gay friendly city” (Livingston 1). “World classness” can be assumed to mean both tolerance and marketability: a city that is a beacon of tolerance is also a center of commerce. This scheme is a great example of city initiatives to end discrimination against gays and lesbians and to attract pink tourist dollars. It was drafted as part of the Greater London Authority Act of 1999 and established a mayoral assembly made up of the mayor of London and 25 other members. The scheme defines their external agenda as “promoting equality of opportunity and good relations between different groups through engagement and consultation, cultural events, supplier diversity and partnership working” (“SOES” 5). The scheme’s focus on cultural events is certainly connected to the overall cultural objectives under the Labor Party’s government. These written manifestations of policy make it clear that holding major LGBT events is a top priority for the city of London. Mayor Ken Livingston made it more than clear that he was intent on promoting LGBT events and gay tourism. Europride fits the bill perfectly for the sort of event London city government would love to attract.

It is important to note that the scheme was one of the most progressive city

agenda statements on LGBT equality drafted to date. While the document stresses the desire to make London a world class city for gays and lesbians, it also takes into account the need to address the diversity of the LGBT community in city legislation. The following comments in the mayor's forward make this priority clear:

The lesbian and gay community is frequently perceived as being essentially a young, white, male, affluent community. This is of course untrue and excludes lesbian and gay people from a range of other backgrounds and cultures. London's lesbian and gay population is as diverse as the broader population. Unfortunately, London's lesbian and gay community are rarely portrayed this way and as a result inadequate service provision remains an issue of concern. ("SOES" 2)

Although the report fails to make clear how exactly it plans to address the diversity of this community, the mayor's comments make it clear that the city is aware of and concerned with the diverse social and economic needs of the greater LGBT community. Livingston's socialist leanings are clear in his desire to bolster social programs and support. It is interesting to recognize that Livingston as a labor socialist was at the political helm of an extremely neoliberalized economy. The city of London and Europride were focused on an inherently neoliberal performance of identity and one that capitalizes on Pride, commerce and spectacle.

To understand these performances as neoliberal, it is important to define neoliberalism, as it has become a rather murky category of late. In the version of his essay, "The Local and the Global," from *Dangerous Liaisons*, Stuart Hall describes processes of globalization and neoliberalization as both managing old forms of identity,

while also generating new ones. Hall describes the effortful illusion and myth of neoliberalism that “everywhere; all particularity would disappear; capital in its onward, rationalizing march would not in the end care whether you were black, green, or blue so long as you could sell your labor as a commodity”(Hall 180). Hall goes on to state that it “would not care whether you were male or female, or a bit of both, provided it could deal with you in terms of the commodification of labor”(180). This model of neoliberalism envisions a great benevolent and democratizing force in current globalization that would eventually homogenize everything under a capitalist, humanist appeal. Queerness itself would simply become another form of equal difference, unthreatening to and unthreatened by global capitalism. While this myth is not outright false, globalization has also heightened, utilized and fed on differences, but in often unpredictable and contradictory ways, a point Hall also makes. Hall points to the underbelly of neoliberalism and globalization, one that is only now becoming fully visible, when he argues that “...alongside that drive to commodify everything, which is certainly one part of its logic, is another critical part of its logic, which works in and through specificity” (180).

Europride as an inherently neoliberal performance, creates a space where certain differences are not only accepted but also celebrated (for example gender and sexuality), while others, such as class are excluded for not being able to buy their way into the marketplace. In exchange for embracing difference, Europride also claims the urban landscape and identity fluidity. Euroshame was able to perform the appearance of celebratory radical collectivity, while ascribing fully to the logic of capitalism, with all the trappings of corporate sponsorship and neoliberal identity formations.

The End of Shame? An Analysis of Europride

Europride attempted to ignore and distance itself from all things shameful. The sexualized shame that often comes with non-normative sexual identity is replaced by a celebratory Pride that encourages mass consumption and civic participation. Gay Pride is an attempt to ignore shame and to forge identities as consumer-citizens who exist in a state of perpetual positivity, where identities are affirmed and the only price is participation in the consumer marketplace. Pride is the effect of neoliberalism *par excellence*. Europride was an attempt to harness the affective experience of pride in the service of fostering social formations and organizing that enabled tightly controlled market capitalism and denied the shameful disorder of historical queer events.

Elsbeth Probyn writes of the shame of being out of place, the shame of wanting nothing more than to fit in and not quite making it. She refers to it as the, “body’s sense of being out of place” (38). This out-of-placeness is related to the performances of Gay Pride, because this pride asks the body to fit itself in(to), in terms of identity, normative understandings of body and behavior. This process only further displaces bodies that do not fit within these Gay Pride modes and models. Pride cannot be experienced without the abjecting of others. It cannot be experienced without the forced fit of a puzzle piece crammed into somewhere it does not belong. Through obscuring shame, Europride created a mythologically inclusive neoliberal democratic new Europe through demarcating the borders between East and West, liberal and conservative, affluent and impoverished, and through reaffirming entrenched nationalist identity frameworks.

Euroshame by contrast attempted to capitalize on shame to expose shame's role in

EU nationalisms and the identity politics obscured by the call to liberal democracy. If shame can be understood as that which catalyzes identity through fear and abjection, then the embrace of shame and the reclamation of the abject can be thought of as the attempt to face the threat of dissolution and to laugh, inviting shame in to play. This move dispossesses shame of its normative power and leads to the conscious embrace of the community, while still spotlighting individuality. Shame also becomes the locus of critical engagement where citizenship and identity are interrogated and re-negotiated.

The reclamation of shame by Euroshame divorces shame from its intentional normative power. Shame is re-signified through a variety of performative strategies. Shame normally functions in two primary linguistic ways, active and passive: to shame and to feel ashamed. The act of shaming actively engages in a power play that places the shamer in control and gives them the moral high-ground. The ashamed is forced to experience a sense of withdrawal; the feeling of existing, but wanting to disappear. As I have outlined, this process is not unidirectional, as shame can be self-inflicted, so that the shamer is also the shamed. To feel ashamed is always an internal process of self-infliction. If this were not the case, shaming would have no affective power. However, in this sense, shame is a way of normativizing, or moderating behavior in a normative way. The power of shame is to make one feel difference acutely and want to change that difference. Shame can also take on a communal form, as expressed by Sara Ahmed, who argues that shame can be experienced communally as a sort of masochistic working through of group guilt and as a substitution for action.

Euroshame attempts to summon the other side of shame, where shame becomes a site of community and celebration. This active and figurative power of shame is precisely

what makes it such a compelling and foundational affect. Euroshame takes the subjects of shame, such as queer sexuality and the church, and re-produces these objects as revelations instead of refuse. The examples I discuss below examine this reclamation of shame. In one instance the Catholic mass is turned into a site of sexual liberation, where being ashamed is perhaps the best part of going to church.

Euroshame

I have a strange experience every time I am trying to find a new theater, club, museum, or restaurant. When I arrive at the appointed location, I feel a sudden urge to run. I am suddenly and mysteriously overcome by a sense of shame. Will I fit in? Am I dressed appropriately? I am forced to overlook these fears and to march ahead. Even when I do not know anyone and am going by myself, I am able to overcome my own introverted streak most of the time and to walk inside. Euroshame gave me an opportunity to approach my shame reflexively and to circle back to it. Euroshame is designed as a grand exploration of shame and particularly queer shame. This shame begins as soon as you emerge from the underground to find that you are forced to wait in a long line outside a shuttered warehouse and this shame follows you through the many art installations and performances that fill this warehouse. In this section, I will explore Euroshame as a counterexample to Europride. What is the relationship between pride and shame in these two events and what can discourses of pride and shame tell us about European identities in the early 21st century? What sort of critique does Euroshame make of Europride and does it successfully propose novel ways of imagining queer identities, neoliberalism and Europe as a whole? Finally, what sort of collective social relationships

does Euroshame perform and how are these different than the social formulations generated by Europride?

While Gay Shame SF and Kvisa Shchora worked through direct action street performance, Euroshame was held as a private night of performances in the style of a club night. Euroshame used numerous performance art pieces as a means to critique normativity and the joining of Gay Pride and corporate money. Additionally, Euroshame employed shame as a critique of neoliberal post-nationalist Europe. Before I describe my experiences as a witness and participant at Euroshame 2006, I would like to theorize Euroshame as a site and a performance. First of all, Euroshame should not be thought of as a perfectly neat, discrete, and specific site, where a focused artistic vision prevailed and congruent aesthetic choices were made. It can certainly be placed within the Gay Shame movement and its accompanying aesthetics and yet it eluded that definition, because Euroshame was not organized by a particular activist group, or engaged in attempts at solidarity and coalition building, based on a social justice. Instead, Euroshame 2006 was a collection of installations organized by Club Duckie, a nightclub and performance space, and by Simon Casson the primary event planner and artistic coordinator for Duckie. Euroshame can at best be considered a collection of artists and installations around a common theme and intent, performing sexual citizenship in the same place at the same time and engaging many of the same themes around queerness, shame, capitalism, and the state. The installations often took national identity as a starting place. They were arranged randomly within the space as booths, but they each focused on one country in the European Union and they were each organized and curated by a different artist, or group of artists.

The call for artists for Euroshame read:

The brief is for artists to invent an interactive activity that audience members can participate in. The theme is Euroshame. Each artist is asked to choose a European country to theme their installation around. (Casson)

As this call makes clear, the event intended to be a plurality of voices and not a univocal exhibition. The call did go on to state that “[t]he mood of the project is playful, satirical and light hearted. The installations should contain some sort of audience interaction that is ideally quick and inventive”(ibid). This indicates the importance of audience involvement and bodily engagement with the installations, which is necessary for an affective experience of shame. However, this last bit indicates a desire to keep things somewhat humorous and not to push boundaries too far. This also aligns Euroshame with traditions of political satire and with playfulness as a central focus. This desire for humor and play is a central theme in Gay Shame aesthetics and in queer aesthetics more generally.

Casson seemed to have a lot of say over the main structure and some of the content of Euroshame. I had a brief e-mail correspondence with Casson, where he assured me that Euroshame was satirical and droll and contained little that would interest an academician. He wrote that Euroshame “in a fun, satirical way...explores the relationship between the whole Gay P***e shenanigans and capitalism” (Casson). This was in response to my question about the relationship between Euroshame and the Gay Shame movement more generally. Casson also implied that there was no relationship and that Euroshame was an island unto itself and not connected to the global Gay Shame movement.

The call for artists specified the themes of the event as a reaction to and mockery of the commercialization of LGBT culture and the connection of mainstream gay culture to normalized logics of the state. In addition artists were asked to stay fun and entertaining, which limited the seriousness and intensity of the pieces chosen. Keeping the event light and playful indicates a clear contradiction at the heart of Euroshame. While espousing a desire to critique capitalism and its relationship to Gay Pride, Euroshame, as a nightclub event, was also attempting to seduce patrons through a fun and light atmosphere and therefore to sell more tickets. They were meant to revel in and take pleasure in that which is shameful. This sort of artistic coalition leaves a lot of room for artistic creativity for the artists themselves, but still forces them to conform to an aesthetics that meant to critique capitalism, but paradoxically also needed to be saleable. They were not significantly restricted in their content, although Casson carried out a selection process that filtered out projects that did not fit with the aesthetic intentions of Euroshame. With these parameters, how was shame at play in these performance pieces?

Euroshame used performance as a means to both question and reclaim shame. Euroshame's diverse artists gathered in an expansive old Vauxhall warehouse in South London for only one night. These were professional and non-professional artists, both visual and performance artists, who responded to Casson's call, posted on arts list-serves throughout England. They did not get paid for their participation in the event. However, Duckie does receive Arts Council funding and this gave the artists a budget for materials. The activist dimensions of the Gay Shame movement, which attempt to manifest visible change in the world was not clearly visible in most of Euroshame's fun, lighthearted critique. While Euroshame activated critical subjectivity on an individual level, it also

performed certain exclusionary practices such as charging a high price for admission and taking place in a non-descript warehouse instead of in a more open place. This was a radically different approach to performance than Gay Shame San Francisco, or Kvisa Shchora, which both attempted to transform public spaces. The public addressed by Euroshame was a specific one: a community of young urban queers, with some money to spend and with a savvy, detached interest in Europride. It would have been interesting to see other publics interact with this sort of work. In this sense, Euroshame is a different animal than the other Gay Shame groups I describe, which generally perform in more open and public venues, often for a public who is previously unaware of the issues and stakes being addressed. What follows are some of my observations from my attendance at Euroshame 2006.

Euroshame mobilized shame in multiple ways. In one instance the Gay community was being shamed for its normative embrace of corporate branding and an identity politics model. Yet shame was also being embraced for its possibility of empowerment, knowledge and transformative potential and for promoting an ethics that does not view overcoming shame as its primary object. Capitalism is focused on the individual as the seat of consumerism, production and profitability. In capitalism the individual must be reproduced, as the consumer base and the population must always be growing. This focus on growth, expansion and reproduction circulates through identity politics and Pride campaigns. Gay Pride is one expression of this social imperative for individual identity and consumerism. Neoliberalism does not allow for identification through shame, as shame makes us want to disappear into the crowd, or to disappear into the world more generally returning to the status of objecthood in a move of total

communal identification. To revel in shame is to perform in a way that runs counter to neoliberalism's totalizing logic of pride.

The directions on the Club Duckie website were vague. They simply said, "Elephant and Castle Tube, one minute." It was near dusk, I had come directly from Europride. I felt filthy, sweaty, and tired, and I was still dressed in a T-shirt and shorts. After strolling the post-industrial streets around Elephant and Castle station for nearly fifteen minutes, I spotted a vague line forming in front of a non-descript gray warehouse that gave a feel of decay and ruination. It did not shine with the glimmer of capitalism today but had the flecked paint and dark entrance of capitalism's hazy past. This may have been a cannery or upholstery shop in its day, perhaps a factory. I walked up behind two men in their thirties. Both stylish, they seemed to be dressed in less hard edged, or punk clothes than I had imagined the audience for Euroshame to wear. One wore a leather jacket and the other had a button up plaid shirt. We chatted about the neighborhood. They talked about a large new condo-development that promised to displace the neighborhood's lower income residents. This led to a more general conversation about the gentrification of London neighborhoods. A group of women came up behind us. They had spiky hair, tattoos, and fit my preconceptions a little better. A whole crowd began to gather in the line and just then, with a creak, the large metal door swung open and we were ushered into the darkness. Inside the space was vast and it felt like a rave in the 90s. Upon entering I felt I must be doing something bad, or secretive: the building made me feel that way.

When you entered you were handed a passport full of pink euros, in increments of five. The bills looked exactly like Euros only they had all been printed on monochrome

pink paper. These were given to you by a flamboyantly dressed woman wearing a short hoop skirt and powder blue blouse. She was made up to look like a vaudeville performer, or Can-Can dancer. First you passed a woman dressed in "peasant" clothes, gray rags in several layers and a head scarf, a costume reminiscent of rural Romanian peasants. At her side stood a small child. They both had their hands out and were apparently begging for the money we had just received. Next along the walkway a man held a bunch of purses over his arm and attempted to sell them to us. After we passed this there was a window off to one side, I assume this functioned as a coat-check on ordinary club nights. Behind the window, a woman in a blue and white European "customs officer" uniform took our passports, stamped them and our hands. She wore a uniform akin to the uniforms of Dutch or German customs personnel and she imitated the cold and official attitude customs officials are famous for. At this point I was ushered into the large central stairwell. I had the choice to go up or to walk directly out into the main dance floor on that level. The entire entrance hallway was meant to give the feel of a European train depot, replete with beggars, hawkers, peasants and officials. This performance, it appeared, intended to bring attention to the specific forms of poverty generated by late capitalism and the EU.

The dance floor had been covered almost completely in booths. These booths each held a plaque for the particular EU-country they represented, and most were occupied by a hawker, or guide, trying to entice people over. In most cases I assume these were the artists of those particular installations. The floor was brightly lit and no one had ventured down there yet, which I found rather intimidating. At the top was a booth that advertised "Poland." In front stood a large drag queen with an enormous blonde wig

and a beautiful, if outrageous, sequined dress. Behind her stood a large makeshift wooden box that was painted with a stripe to look like a car. I asked, "what is this?" and she said, "a ride." Two people stood atop the box and they were pushing it up and down. It operated on some sort of pulley system, because it undulated very smoothly and yet they were working hard, making groans and breathing heavily as they heaved the box up and down. Finally they stopped, and the woman inside came out stumbling, looking a little dizzy and not smiling. She looked perplexed, like she did not quite get the point. The drag queen asked, "What did you think?" To which she simply shook her head, looking a little shaken by the experience. I prepared myself for what I thought would not be much fun. She ushered me into the box and then shut the door. The box was empty except for a chair. In front of me, projected on the back wall was a street scene, it was obvious that I was in a car and facing a major street in a large European city. She called out, "are you ready?" from behind the door and I answered "yes," not knowing if I really was. Then, the two people at the top, who I could hear because there was no roof, began to rock the box. It rolled on its axis. The video started and there were the sounds of cars and lots of horns. I could also hear the two operators breathing heavily as they rocked the cart and I could make out the creaking of the booth over the soundtrack as it rolled back and forth. We were driving really fast and nearly hit a few teenagers. We kept stopping short in front of several cars. Finally we rear-ended a car. The rocking of the booth continued, along with a video and sound closely approximating one of those hi-tech, but always ridiculous, "virtual reality" rides at amusement parks and in malls. Except that in this case I sat in a plain wooden box and I could hear the effort being exerted to move the box. I wondered if they could possibly keep this up all night. I laughed hysterically the

whole time, at the ingenuity and the sheer excitement of the illusion of moving through space while being (mostly) stationary. We came to an abrupt halt and the image froze. The car in front of us, projected on the screen said, "Polish Tours" or something to that effect. I left the booth and the drag queen asked, "Did you like it?" Her real Polish accent was apparent now. I said to her, "I'm such a horrible tourist." She answered. "It is our roads in Poland; they are no good." I realized that I had missed the point of the installation. I thought the piece meant to bring awareness to the miserable practices of tourists descending on Poland's cities in increasing yearly numbers. It was really intended to satirize the economic disparities present within ostensibly equal European Union countries. However, this was not all it intended to do, or certainly not all that it accomplished.

The experience of riding around in a tourist van came as surprisingly natural to me, even if it was simulated. The mixed feelings of guilt, shame, and voyeuristic pleasure were also natural to my experiences of tourism. They used a structure that anyone who had been to an amusement park could easily understand. The virtual reality, carnival ride simulation was perfected by Disney, with "Star Tours," and reached its zenith in the mid-90s, when these sorts of amusements could be found everywhere from shopping malls to fairs. The simulator was designed to actually move, while simulating motion and projecting a video of travel through space. Euroshame's "Virtual Motion" ride meant to expose the labor behind the tourism industry. The actual bodies and extreme endurance and effort necessary for producing seeming effortless motion were exposed. This exposure made unequal divisions of global labor and structural and infrastructural differences under neoliberalism visible. There are those who enjoy touring and there are

those who provide the labor of tourism. This installation brought into sharp relief the extent to which human labor is engaged in the smooth experience of being a tourist. Additionally, the inequitable nature of the European Union was starkly exposed here. This action gave both a visual and bodily sensory experience of moving. However, these machines also demand a largely visual engagement with the world; one must understand the conventions of watching and sitting. They are therefore premised on passive forms of cultural consumption, with the addition of a small amount of motion.

Within this framework, the “ride” installation at Euroshame performed a well-lodged critique of the myth of even funding across the EU. The experience of driving on the terrible roads of Poland could only be passively observed by the participant.

This installation also made an interesting choice in invoking the mundane and the everyday. Roads are a good indicator of local or national economics. Bad roads can indicate national monetary crises, lack of public investment or a depleted tax base, a corrupt government, or even an area of violent conflict. This installation called attention to the less apparent indicators of economic status and the complexities surrounding new membership in the EU. Poland became a member state in 2004, two years before the Euroshame event and yet little improvement had been made on major infrastructure projects, such as roads. Meanwhile, there was a general feeling in the UK that Poland was not up to EU standards and the installation reflected this.

Meanwhile, the Poland booth evoked queerness and shame in complex ways. Shame served as the shaming of the EU for unequal economic development across its member states. There was also the implication of corruption both in the EU and in Poland’s government as road conditions can be a good indicator of money not finding its

way into the infrastructures it is intended for. Similarly the passive participant is forced to feel ashamed, as a tourist who uses the city of Warsaw as merely a voyeuristic experience without any intention to improve the material conditions of the people living there.

Shame is also invoked as a point of revelation. To embrace the shame that can and should accompany the act of gazing on poverty as a spectacle is to find something in it. Ideally this became a revelatory moment where different experiences of shame allowed for a critical experience of citizenship. None of this is inherently queer, but the drag queen in this installation introduced a queer element. Queerness became the lens through which this ride was experienced, but remained external to it. Queerness as a lens installs queer politics and theory within the material conditions of social and economic life, staining the trappings of identity with lived realities. Queer refuses to become a solely theoretical and aesthetic concern here. Instead the fabulous, decked out drag queen is dirtied by the mud and muck of socio-economic realities and global capitalism. The shame of material realities and lived queer bodies and identities has the potential to critique and undermine systems of global capitalism through the stain of shame that cannot then be removed by the display of ostentatious glamor and consumption. When paired with the dirt of economics, the drag queen queers a neoliberal celebration of pride through invoking shame. This takes a directly oppositional stance to Europride where economic and material concerns are ignored as mundane and insignificant, while gay identity and performance is held up as trans-historical. It is also important to note the ways in which this installation points out that traditional forms of camp and drag, while espousing liberal social values, are complicit with global capitalist consumption.

The drag queen in her fabulous attire also meant to give a sense of incongruity

between her appearance and the city as less than fabulous. While she invites the participant in to what should be a fun and extravagant experience, the tables are turned once inside the booth and the viewer instead discovers degradation and inequality. This experience of a queer bait and switch was meant to leave the participant with an even greater sense of shame for desiring the drag queen to represent only fun and frivolity, while she in fact acted as a distraction. The floats from the Europride Parade embodied the performance of pride through the transcendence of glamor and drag, whereas this installation refused the simplicity of spectacular transcendence.

Next I wandered up the stairs. All the way at the top stood a small room that was crowded by this point. In it were a whole series of booths, many of which were difficult to even get close to, owing to the long lines. In a booth representing "Italy" people were asked to take communion. Two nuns with a lot of lipstick on were crouched in the small makeshift booth surrounded by white curtains and backed by two small cardboard "confessionals." A group of repentant sinners were lined up in front of the booth, laughing and chatting. When you arrived in front of the nuns, you stood towering above them, as they sat on velvety pillows. One asked you to kneel down and close your eyes. Instead of a wafer the other placed a piece of mushy pineapple in my mouth and asked me to tell her what it was. "The body of Christ," I responded to which they smiled and said "very good," seductively. All of this was performed with self-conscious excitement, making it clear that this had been well rehearsed. They handed me a cup of what appeared to be a fruit punch and asked me to drink. I didn't drink it. I grabbed the cup from them, brought it up to my lips and mimed drinking from it. This seemed to satisfy them. They then asked me to step into a cardboard booth and to write my sins on the wall

The writings already there ranged from absurd to thoughtful to silly. Unlike an actual confessional, this parody of confession drew attention to the performative nature of giving confession. The “private” act of confessing to a priest is meant to keep the confessor’s shame between themselves, the priest and God. In this case everyone’s shame became a public performance. As a public affective experience, this causes the ashamed to ruminate on their shame and to find meaning in it. The act of taking communion, while satirical, was also a therapeutic attempt to embrace and work through the normalizing shame religion imposes on bodies. The Communion booth managed to sexualize the act of taking the Eucharist.

The safety of taking the Eucharist and giving confession in the context of Euroshame took some of the performative potency from these acts. These were apparently not real nuns, as indicated by their lipstick and habits, which were specifically low cut to reveal maximum cleavage. The confession booth was also made of cardboard, which made it clearly unlike a real confessional. Instead of wine the participant was given juice and instead of the wafer, they were fed a juicy sweet piece of mushy pineapple. It became a significant performative encounter with religion because the participant went through all the motions of taking communion and giving confession, from receiving the wafer to entering the confessional.

Communion was subverted in every sense here. The Eucharist is taken before the body is cleansed and is given by the nuns instead of the priest. Furthermore the erotics of taking the body of Christ into one’s own body was placed in the foreground through the use of pineapple and the “sexy nuns” with heavy lipstick and exposed cleavage. Placing nuns at the center of this ritual also queered the typical gender roles of the church. They

performed the acts knowingly in defiance of the church, which would likely see this sort of mockery of its most sacred rituals as the worst kind of sin.

This performance also posited Catholicism as the domain of “old” Europe and of underdevelopment, contrasted with the West’s focus on secularism and democracy. Here religiosity itself, because a form of difference that is being shamed by the European Union and its celebration of capitalist consumption.

The communion booth forced its visitors to reclaim their childhood religious shame, in order to question the function and utility of that shame. Childhood was evoked through the act of writing one's transgressions on the board for others to see and this was tied to the shame that religion, and especially Catholicism, places on bodies. In this installation, the sensuality of the piece, the pineapple Eucharist, sexy nuns and public acknowledgement of past transgressions, acted as an invitation for the participant to encounter and perform shame in novel ways. Instead of shame's expected function as a shutting down, or introversive device, this encounter opens shame's power to revisit the past and to explore shame more deeply. While the Euroshame communion stall maintained a light and satirical air, the experience still maintained an aura of shame, yet this shame was transfigured. Shame itself became the object and question of this performance.

I proceeded on to the main floor. Here I discovered a vast open space. This must have been the center of the warehouse in its former industrial days. Rows upon rows of cardboard booths were set up all over the floor, and music blared from somewhere. A stage and catwalk had been set up in the center. People crowded nearly every inch of the floor, mostly men in their twenties and thirties, but there were some women and they

were all drunk. I pushed my way through the crowd to one of the booths at the far corner of the room that was labeled "Czech Republic." Made entirely of cardboard, this booth was set up to look like a house with a barred window. People inside, one at a time, were asked to remove their clothes and, once naked, were photographed, while others crowded in at the "windows" to see. The photographer used a massive old Polaroid Land Camera from the 1970s that surprisingly took high quality pictures. They kept all the pictures they took, and they paid you 50 euro for the service. There was only one woman directing, and a man with a large Polaroid taking the pictures. She wore a very professional suit and barked her directions with a confident forcefulness. I walked up and said I wanted to participate. She asked me to "Take off your clothes," which I did. Then he took a bunch of pictures. She ordered me to "turn around," and he took some more pictures. Stripping while strangers watched on through the "window" caused a sense of shame to wash over me. She directed with barked orders and a stifling intensity that made it nearly impossible to pose. The body was fully and voyeuristically made into a prop, or plaything for the photographer and director. Suddenly my body felt smaller. The window put me on the same level with the spectators who crowded in to watch. Unlike film and digital technologies that distance the performer from the viewer, this installation put us face-to-face. This meant that the viewer was also forced to confront their own shame and the shame of the "performer." This shame takes on an active and communal role that is typically absent from voyeuristic spectacle. This performance of voyeuristic shame had elements of both being imprisoned (mug shots) and being exploited for sexuality (pornography). I also had a certain excitement and pride in being watched. I felt both pride and shame as an ebb and flow at that moment. I looked at some of the other photos

piled up on the small table off to the side. A few people looked as though this were a mug shot, others posed in flamboyant, self-conscious, poses. One woman showed off her tattoos, another man his chest. One tall pale man looked meek, with his head down, like he had done something horribly wrong. Both the sorts of shame encountered and the reactions to that shame varied wildly and this seemed to be part of the intention.

The naked body, put on voyeuristic display, worked as a form of public shaming. The manner in which the director spoke was terse and dehumanizing. She asked you to “turn around, bend down, show more skin,” etc. The cameraman tried to find unique angles and they filed all the pictures away when the participant was done, not showing them the photographs and with no clear indication as to what they would be used for.

The piece meant to link shame and the Czech Republic's inclusion in the EU on two levels: it attempted to shame the Czech Republic, as their inclusion in the EU was a means of selling themselves, as exemplified by the metaphor of sex work and it also drew attention to the sex industry. Hungary and the Czech Republic have generally lax pornography laws and have been destinations for both producing and filming porn since at least the 1990s. In many ways this installation had the most conventional relationship to shame within the Euroshame complex. However, this voyeuristic display of nudity was actually invoking shame both for the participant and for the audience crowding in to see. They were certainly meant to engage with this shame on a deeper intellectual level and to empathize with one another's shame.

Under neoliberalism, and utilizing modern digital and photographic technologies, the exploitation of the body and sexuality for market consumption is trans-nationalized. In this sense certain places become the producers, or labor, of sexuality, while others

become the consumers of that sexuality. Voyeurism, as an act fostered through the neoliberal exchanges of the sex industry, is threatened through the return of the gaze. The audience and the participant were on the same level and were forced to face one another, allowing shame to be experienced and questioned by both the viewer and the participant.

In the Europride Parade bodies were also displayed for a voyeuristic audience. In the parade a similar breakdown of labor and consumption took place. Beautiful bodies were paraded before the spectators to sell everything from drinks to websites. This critique was also waged at sexualized gay performances within London, such as stripping, or dancing, which often utilize labor brought over from places like the Czech Republic. Meanwhile, this installation did not allow the body to perform as a source of marketing and commodification. Instead the body as unglamorous, desexualized object became the site of exploration for national and bodily shame and shaming. It was through this live performance of voyeurism that the audience and participant could encounter and question shame.

Kvisa Shchora's beauty contest from chapter two presents an important counterpoint to the Czech Republic booth at Euroshame. Both attempted to use the body as the medium of exploring beauty and the body's objectification (either through beauty pageants, or the sex industry), however, each site engaged with these issues in strikingly different ways. The Czech Republic booth confronted participants with the shame of being watched, or being a voyeur, while forcing them to re-negotiate that relationship. This performance called for a nationalist solidarity with people and countries on the fringes of the EU, whose labor is used by those in more privileged positions. This forced audience and participants to actively examine the body's role in power-dynamics

between Eastern and Western Europe. However, solidarity was a secondary concern here, with intellectual, affective engagement and empathy as the primary aims. Kvisa's beauty contest attempted a radically different engagement with the body, where participants were encouraged to celebrate the parts of their body they were ashamed of and to put them on display in order to liberate themselves from the confines of body fascism. The audience for their contest were working-class residents of Holon, who had just stumbled on the performance and not the paying guests of Euroshame and they were attempting a direct solidarity and coalition with that audience. In contrast to this, Euroshame performed an alienation of their audience, where the joke was partially on them and they were not invited entirely into the performance.

Other Installations

I also visited three other installations worth mentioning here. One installation for Romania involved a dentist who painted her patients with "blood" and drew cavities and blackened teeth. I asked her what this signified and she said, "this is the decay of western civilization." In this instance Romania became both the site of shame and empowered by that shame. The Romanian installation embodied the double meaning of shame within Euroshame as it both shamed the EU for its representation of Romania as backward and threatening while also reveling in this idea. Here the "decay" of Western Civilization is embraced with a sort of joyful anarchy and play. Reading between the lines, this would also signal an end to hierarchies that place Western Europe in a First World, civilized

position, while Eastern Europe is relegated to the position of long suffering relative.

Another installation for Sweden had people measure their penis length with a small object they fit together themselves. Everyone who entered this booth was asked to build the object and measure their penis, regardless of gender identity or sexed body. The booth was reminiscent of IKEA, because all the colors were bright and monotone and the shapes and objects blocky and square. The “workers” in the booth were also dressed in blue uniforms, resembling what IKEA workers wear. This installation critiqued the clean hyper-modernist, borderline fascist and patently neoliberal aesthetics of IKEA through a ridiculous and profane mockery of IKEA’s masculine form of capitalism that is premised on dominating the market and is fixated on the size of market share.

Other booths were sillier, such as the Denmark installation which involved large hairy men in Viking costumes pole dancing. These costumes were merely speedos and Viking horns. This booth replicated the performances at Europride in numerous ways, without any substantive critical engagement with nationality, or sexuality. Though directly engaging a nationalist pride narrative through performances of sensual festivity, this piece missed the mark.

Euroshame indicates the difficulty in merging queer aesthetics with national, economic and political critique, although the event made strides toward linking these concepts. Some of the most powerful critiques of nationalism and the neoliberal world view were in the installations I covered. The Poland booth managed to create a space where mythical glamor could be challenged through the friction of placing queer aesthetics in the form of drag, against the realities of life on the EU margins. The Italy, Sweden and Czech booths also managed to perform powerful critiques of the European

Union, through performatively reactivating religious, national and sexual shame through queer aesthetics. The Italy booth used “drag” nuns to critique religious shame. The Czech booth, on the other hand, used the body to question nationalist expectations and shaming. The Romanian booth utilized camp aesthetics to expose the shaming of the European East in Western narratives. However, despite these successes and powerful critiques, Euroshame still bumped up against the difficulty of exposing the complicated relationships of shame, sexuality, nationality and economy. These subjects are difficult to render individually, let alone in concert with one another. Some of these same installations failed to fully expose these connections, or contained too much opacity to be clearly readable as critique. In particular, the Denmark installation, failed to do anything but replicate the trappings of the Europride Parade itself.

Euroshame’s approach to performance was radically different than other Gay Shame sites. Euroshame chose to stage their event as an exclusive admission-based club night, as opposed to an unsanctioned street performance and I am left wondering if this was the best medium. On the one hand, Euroshame was not concerned with solidarity, but instead attempted to garner empathy in its spectators and that might have made a smaller more focused audience desirable. Site specific performance enacted in open and public spaces becomes highly accessible, but also throws its net wide. Euroshame was meant partly as a satirical critique lodged at a specific public and further meant to engender empathy in that public. Performance becomes immensely more complicated when its public is unknowable. The event was gloriously and ornately executed, but could have been done in a paired down version for a lot cheaper. Though I understand the money required to put something like Euroshame on, I am left uneasy by the fact that an

event that was meant to insert queerness and shame back into the commodified glamor of Gay Pride cost fifteen pounds to get into. Working-class queers, recent immigrants and other poor and disadvantaged groups that could have added an important element and commentary to the event were implicitly excluded by the expensive price-tag of admission. The event addressed a specific queer public with a certain amount of money to spend on this sort of thing and a public that would be aware that it was taking place. The intended public also had to have an interest in performance art and be comfortable with it. The cloistered nature of the event brings into distinct relief its differences from Europride. While Europride took place for free, in public and made most of the city its audience, Euroshame took place within a relatively small closed space and charged a lot for admission.

We tend to think the economic as unrelated to issues of sexuality and gender and this is precisely the power of the Gay Shame movement, to connect these seemingly incommensurable areas of knowing. Euroshame's primary problem had to do with its inability to complicate the nature of neoliberal capitalist exchange through its actual format. The event was organized for a private club, charged admission and was conceived as a private money making venture. Euroshame may have criticized the relationship of sexuality to neoliberal capitalism, but it also participated in this economy, which is truly problematic.

Within the confines of Euroshame the abject is made visible and is celebrated. This is significantly different than manifestations of Gay Pride where the abject is denied and shame silenced. Euroshame can be seen as a particular manifestation of Gay Shame activism, where shame and abjection are activated in the service of questioning neoliberal

narratives of sexuality and nationalism. If Euroshame had been more accessible and direct in its critique, the message might have been more evident and less confusing. Additionally, Euroshame's attempts at exposing the uneven nature of the European Union and speaking for those excluded by the new Europe, also indicated the limits of an attempt to move beyond identity categories and find solidarity in the constraints of a for-profit club night atmosphere.

Conclusion

In this dissertation I set out to thoroughly explore the important contribution Gay Shame groups have made and are making in the landscape of Theatre Studies, Queer Studies, Performance Studies and Performance and Social Change discourse. Particularly significant and unique are the ways in which Gay Shame San Francisco, Kvisa Shchora, and Euroshame utilize affectivity in their performances to accomplish hyperidentification and solidarity. Additionally, these groups expose the complexity and difficulty in performing solidarity and the extent to which all solidarities are subjective and perspectival. They show that there can be both literal and imagined forms of solidarity in political performance and that affect plays an important role in how they are negotiated and portrayed.

These groups' actions can easily be housed within the aesthetics and strategies of queer political protest performance, but how they accomplish these goals through employing shame and solidarity is unique to what I describe here as the Gay Shame movement. My approach to this material through an investigation of the use of shame and hyperidentification in queer performances of solidarity is also new and sheds light on facets of these performances and of performance in general that have not often been explored. In this conclusion I plan to return to my primary research questions and to my three sites to fully examine the conclusions I draw from this material and the questions that remain after this investigation.

I began this dissertation with a few key questions regarding the relationship of Gay Shame activism to performance and to social change. What goals do these groups

share and how successful have they been at achieving those goals? And to what extent have these groups been able to make meaningful critiques of neoliberalism and gay identification through employing hyperidentification? Before I answer these questions directly, I would like to look at two Gay Shame actions that straddle the vast extent of this activist landscape and that help me to answer my primary questions.

On June 27, 2010, at 2:30 in the afternoon, a truly sad lot met in front of the San Francisco LGBT Center. Plastered in white cake make-up and with dramatic mascara running down their faces, they cried for the loss of radicalism in the LGBT community. “The Goth Cry-In is a space for basking in our sadness around the current state of LGBT politics and the horrors of the larger world” (Mary 1). Attendees were asked to “Skulk in shame to grieve Pride. Sad songs, (a) goth make-up booth and possible eulogy!” (flyer). Members of Gay Shame SF organized the event and were not hesitant to tell anyone who would listen the purpose and rationale for the cry-in. “We’re encouraging everyone to break out their most dreadful fishnets and gallons of eyeliner so that our tears of sorrow over the corporatization of gay pride run down our faces” (Mary 1). These quotes, taken from an interview with Mary (as all group members are known), indicates the extent to which this performance meant to draw consciously on past queer performance devices. The tactics employed for the cry-in were perfectly in line with most of Gay Shame SF’s strategies and aesthetic choices. Glamorous, overwrought, maudlin, and harkening back to drag and camp, they attempted to create a spectacle in their favorite spot for organizing, the San Francisco LGBT Center, which they see as the epitome of what is wrong with the current state of LGBT politics in the US and throughout the West. “The current state of LGBT politics is a scramble for straight privilege via a rainbow of

traditional Americana family values, like settler colonialism, free-market capitalism and good old-fashioned racism” (ibid). They clearly lodged this critique directly at San Francisco's LGBT community, particularly the affluent community of SF's Castro neighborhood, where the Center is located. Additionally, they utilized the stigma of homelessness and queer gender and sexuality to aesthetically revel in and draw the audience into the shame of being abjected from consumer-citizenship in San Francisco. I consider this a successful GS performance, because members set out to perform a clear communication and to combine that critique with the affective and performative aesthetics of shame and queer protest and they largely accomplished that goal. In one of the most well-articulated summations of their political critique, Mary stated:

Gay Shame believes that things like health care — which is argued to be a result of the extension of marriage rights to gays — should be available to us all. We also work to remember the long history of feminism, particularly women of color feminism, that has been critical of the institution of marriage as a racist, classist and misogynist institution. For Gay Shame, a queer identity is about challenging institutions of domination, like marriage and the military, not becoming part of them.

(ibid)

The cry-in was meant as a fairly specific communication and affective performance for an intended community. Hyperidentification was employed, through a call to universal issues of health care and women of color feminist critiques of the institution of marriage. In this sense, it was successful, perhaps not in reaching out to all San Franciscans, but certainly in bringing visibility to these issues in a theatrical way for San Francisco's

LGBTQI community. Before exploring this action further and how it relates to the questions I stated at the beginning, I would like to discuss another very different action.

In chapter two I focused on a demonstration performed by members of Kvisa Shchora at a Tel Aviv Gay Pride Parade. The demonstration featured several women wearing keffiyeh on their heads with their breasts bare and marching in the parade, while shouting Kvisa slogans and carrying signs. This performance was meant as a call to solidarity between queer identified Israelis and Palestinians in the territories, but also engaged with affect, through a bodily performance of shame. These women are the subject of a now infamous and well circulated black and white image from the parade. Who was the intended audience of this protest? LGBTQI Israelis? Palestinians? Arab Israelis? Mainstream heterosexual Israelis? In theory this protest was meant to be seen by most, if not all of these communities. The shock-value itself allowed a disembodied form of this protest (in the form of the single frozen image) to circulate widely.

I juxtaposed these two actions because I think they indicate two edges of Gay Shame activism, imagined solidarity through performing shame and direct communication. On the one hand, Gay Shame SF performed in a directed and satirical way, making their critique as clear as possible for their intended audience, including and giving voice to the groups they were attempting solidarity with, while simultaneously performing shame and abjection. In opposition to this, Kvisa Shchora's demonstration took hyperidentification in an opaque and problematic direction, through a performance that employed specifically queer performative strategies (nudity and pastiche) in the service of a misfired identification with Palestinians that merely represented, but failed to include the bodies of those they were attempting solidarity with. Both performances

created a visibility and espoused a message, but one did this with clarity, inclusion and affectivity, while the other fell into offensive opacity through a spectacle of association and hyperidentification without any reciprocity.

These two performances and the ways in which they perform solidarity, shame and hyperidentification, leave me with important questions as to where the line of appropriation and reciprocity lies in Gay Shame activism and how and when these performances can effectively communicate their message(s) and utilize shame and affectivity to accomplish that end.

Hyperidentification and Performing Solidarity

In the first chapter I asked what social change potential performances of shame hold and what the limitations of these types of performances are. I also wanted to understand the relationship between shame and performances of solidarity. I would like to explore these questions through each of my three sites separately, because I think they each present their own answers and further provocations. Clearly shame holds a great deal of potential as a place for empathetic engagement and therefore as a reservoir for empathy and solidarity.

In the work of Kvisa Shchora shame is employed specifically in order to facilitate solidarity among oppressed groups and particularly between queer Israelis and Palestinians. In this site I found that performances of shame were rather effective in generating imagined solidarity, particularly among participants and performers and making them feel that they were effectively helping to end Palestinian occupation. However, it is impossible to measure the actual effectiveness of this campaign, except to

note that the group's larger goal of ending Palestinian occupation has certainly not yet been accomplished (and if anything the situation in Gaza has become significantly more dreadful since the bulk of my research in 2006).

Within the work of Euroshame, shame is employed as a means of humorous critique and identification, but without a clear call to solidarity. Euroshame attempted to use shame as a provocation to criticize the commodification of Gay Pride festivals in Europe and to present artists with a forum, where they could creatively engage with important questions about Europeanness in relationship to shame, solidarity and capitalism in the new Europe. There was a great diversity of different voices and performance strategies within this site and each installation engaged shame in different ways. Particularly noteworthy was the “Polish” booth, which asked participants to look at the relationship between national shame and sexualized shame and attempted to use this to draw attention to actual material inequities that are elided by the glamorization(s) of capitalism. However, Euroshame left me with important questions about how effective this type of critique can be when it is housed within a club night that is a capitalist venture for a niche community. I was left wondering how the performers and artists involved with Euroshame might have increased the event's reach and depth by making it more open and inclusive. Euroshame also exposed the complicated terrain between empathy and solidarity, as there was no direct call to solidarity, but an overall attempt at using shame to activate empathy.

Gay Shame San Francisco employs shame and hyperidentification overtly through an aesthetics of affective parody and through performing public shaming. Actions such as the Gay Shame Awards, and De-Center the Center, use a totally public venue to argue that

members of San Francisco's queer community should feel ashamed of their complicity in the gentrification of the city and in participating in racist and classist policies. This is a different invocation of shame, but one that also asks spectators to examine shame and use shame as a motivator for empathizing and making change. Meanwhile, shame and affect are played up in these performances as a means to create critical engagement and distance. The costumes and make-up are absurd and over the top and the language hyperbolic. In looking at how Gay Shame SF attempts to forge identification and solidarity, I have found that the call to solidarity is there, but there is also a concern with empathy and humanity. The need for equity is stressed in these performances. However, the work of Gay Shame SF leaves me wondering at the utility of their performances. Their actions have both a direct real-world applicability and a pragmatic purpose, such as universal healthcare, but also attempt to critically engage with huge and pervasive social realities, such as neoliberalism and sexual identity. I am left wondering if these performances become muddy and opaque because of their broad reach.

The Limits of Solidarity

Gay Shame San Francisco, Euroshame and Kvisa Shchora all utilize models of solidarity in their performances. To say that they either fully accomplish solidarity with other oppressed groups, or to say that they do not accomplish it, is overly reductive. These groups attempt to forge and invoke solidarity in novel and interesting ways, however, the question of whether they truly reach solidarity has been an important centerpiece of this research. What forms of solidarity are these groups trying to perform and is there a difference between literal and imagined solidarity?

Here I would like to focus on Kvisa Shchora and Gay Shame SF, because I believe these two groups most pursue solidarity in their performances. For Kvisa Shchora solidarity and coalition building among oppressed groups is a primary purpose of their performances. Kvisa particularly strives for solidarity with Palestinians. Their performances at Gay Pride Parades, including their mock-up Israeli ID cards, as well as their actions at The Ministry of the Interior in East Jerusalem show a clear attempt at forging solidarity. Kvisa works overtly through hyperidentifications that suggest oppression should forge links between people and they employ shame in the service of empathy and identification in their performances and actions. However, they also assume solidarity through intentionality. By performing solidarity, members of Kvisa create a form of solidarity which I have called imagined solidarity, because it attains a very real status for those who perform it. However, in moving back to my political efficacy question, I am left wondering what sort of efficacy imagined solidarity can have. For members of Kvisa, it holds affective and actionable power, because they make political choices, such as rejecting military service as a result of their activism, as I discovered through interviews with group members. However, that may be the extent of the social change capacity of this type of solidarity and I am still left wondering at its efficacy.

Gay Shame SF, also employs different forms of solidarity and hyperidentification. Much like Kvisa, Gay Shame SF performs solidarity between oppressed groups. Through their actions and performances, they attempt to utilize affect as a mechanism for linking oppressed groups. Whether they are connecting queer issues in the San Francisco Bay Area to those of the homeless or those in need of health care or public assistance, they too suggest in their performances that forms of oppression and common experiences of

shame are a point of affective connection in and of themselves and that political action should follow from these connections. However, much like Kvisa Shchora, I am left wondering at the far-reaching efficacy of the real and imagined forms of solidarity performed by Gay Shame San Francisco. I think that they are most successful when they are able to combine messaging with affect in engaging ways, such as in Emergency Quarantine.

In this dissertation I have made a number of discoveries about Gay Shame performance and solidarity. However, I have also been forced to question my own assumptions about solidarity and affect in political performance. If social change is the end goal of these performances, then does an imagined, or performed solidarity move in that direction? And what are the limits of political performances that do not actively form real-world coalitions outside of the space of performance?

The Future of Gay Shame Activism

With the continued progress of the gay rights movement to achieve gay marriage and other forms of equity in the West and with the ever-expanding reach of global capitalism, Gay Shame groups certainly have their work cut out for them in the second decade of the 21st Century. Here I will briefly describe what these groups are doing now and where they may go in the future.

Gay Shame San Francisco is still as active as ever, planning several events a year, such as their Gay Shame Awards and usually at least one yearly performance in front of the San Francisco LGBT Center. Meanwhile, Euroshame and Gay Shame London disappeared for a few years, but returned in 2014. Billing itself as a: “A compulsory

celebration for the post-queer precariat,” the Gay Shame London event was advertised on London's Gay Pride website as just another Gay Pride event. This suggests a much greater association with Gay Pride and a full embrace of the “it's all in good fun” veneer that was already present in Euroshame in 2006. The event was again organized by Club Duckie, but not by Simon Casson and the full description read:

The Annual Festival of Homosexual Misery makes its grand return on Gay P***e night at the legendary danceteria formerly known as The Fridge. Welcome to the Pleasuredome; a rainbow flag version of North Korea. A COMPULSORY celebration for the post-queer precariat.
(<http://prideinlondon.org/>)

While Euroshame continues in an altered form, it is still attempting to critique Pride culture, but through the use of North Korea as a “safe” place from which to wage their critique. This suggests that my questions about the efficacy of Euroshame and my concerns with their practices have only intensified.

Meanwhile, Kvisa Shchora has not been active since 2007, but has had a strong influence on left-wing activism in Israel. Many groups that are active today in demonstrating against occupation, such as Zochrot, have a direct lineage from older left-wing activists like Kvisa Shchora. Many activists have been wearied by the lack of progress on ending the occupation of the West Bank and Gaza, but activism continues and is more needed than ever with the recent bombings of Gaza and the continued settler development in the West Bank.

My hope is that Gay Shame activism will continue, but that it will also continue to evolve and that it will be self-reflexive and address the nuances of identification and solidarity. The work of these activists is unlikely to result in a revolution, or to end major wars and conflicts, but they do the very real work of awakening sexual citizens to a critical awareness of the oppressiveness of global capitalism and the participation of gays and lesbians in many of the oppressive practices that queers of the past fought against. My hope is that this dissertation is able to shed light on the work of these tireless activists and to ask important questions of these groups, in the hope that they can themselves engage critically with questions of literal and imagined solidarity, hyperidentification and affect theory and use this reflexivity to improve their activist performances and to provoke further questioning among performers and their audiences.

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