



**Queer fun, family and futures  
in Duckie's performance projects  
2010-2016**

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## Statement of originality

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## Abstract

This thesis argues that participatory performance projects can materialise better worlds for marginalised subjects. Drawing on and contributing to performance studies, queer studies and fun studies, it proposes a concept of *reproductive queer futurity*. This concept expands José Esteban Muñoz's work on queer futurity (a utopian position rooted in collective hope for better worlds for marginalised subjects) by foregrounding the intentional reproduction of technologies of hope.

The thesis argues that reproductive queer futurity is well served by forms and processes that emerge from lived experience and operate autonomously and adaptively to generate hope in routine ways. The operation of these *homemade mutant hope machines* (as the thesis calls them) is powerfully supported by queer understandings of family (framed here in relation to material support and intergenerational transmission) and fun (framed here in relation to the perception of low stakes and the capacity for civic intervention). Participatory performance projects can make good homemade mutant hope machines.

Chapter One articulates the concept of reproductive queer futurity. Chapters Two and Three respectively conceptualise revised understandings of queer family and fun. Subsequent chapters illustrate these concepts through case studies of participatory projects by the London-based queer performance collective Duckie (1995-), analysed primarily through participant observation, interviews and surveys. Chapter Four analyses the Duckie Homosexualist Summer School (2015-2016), a training programme for young LGBTQI+ performers. Chapter Five analyses the 'vintage clubbing' cycle of immersive nightlife events (2010-2016) reanimating past instances of queer socialising. Chapter Six analyses the Posh Club (2012-), an afternoon cabaret for older people at risk of isolation.

These analyses show how low-stakes situations, material support, intergenerational transmission and reproducible forms and understandings enable self-expression, relationality and agency in contexts of marginalisation. Collectively, they show how structures of queer fun and family mobilised through participatory performance can generate hope and materialise better worlds.

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## Introduction

### **'It's impossible to be hopeful'**

'Feeling optimistic?' ran the question on the promotional flyer. 'Don't be. It could get worse yet.'<sup>1</sup> This downbeat slogan advertised the 2018 edition of *Gay Shame*, the alternative performance and clubbing event that the London-based queer collective Duckie have produced on the night of Pride most years since Duckie's foundation in 1995. *Gay Shame* offers a tongue-in-cheek corrective to the feelgood capitalist normativity that characterises Pride in a market-dominated world. Each *Shame* event has had a different theme bearing on queer experience, ranging from mental illness to gender norms to national stereotypes. The 2018 night was subtitled 'The Light at the End of the Tunnel'. This was partly in reference to the fact that Duckie had secured the use of a pedestrian tunnel adjacent to the event's venue, the Royal Vauxhall Tavern (RVT), and partly in mordantly ironic acknowledgement that, to many people who identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans, queer or otherwise non-normative in their sexuality or gender identity (LGBTQ+), hope can seem hard to come by at this moment.

In many parts of the global north, recent years have seen legislative changes addressing longstanding denials of access to existing civic institutions and structures on the basis of sexuality or gender identity. In many places, being gay or trans is no longer a legal bar to marriage, parenthood, military service or access to goods and services. And yet, in terms of many people's lived experience, to be queer is still to be disproportionately vulnerable to rejection, discrimination, misrepresentation, exploitation, erasure, violence and death. In the UK, LGBTQ+ people are at particular risk of homelessness, mental and physical illness, addiction and abuse; rates of

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<sup>1</sup> Duckie, *Gay Shame* 2018 flyer, provided by Duckie producers.



homophobic and transphobic hate crimes have risen in recent years; and, in London, the number of queer venues, within which those at risk might hope for higher levels of safety and understanding, has declined by more than half in the past decade.<sup>2</sup> Life might feel more secure for LGBTQ+ people possessed of the social, cultural and material privileges that enable participation in mainstream institutions and structures but the terms of such access remain normatively constrained and, for many others in Europe and North America, the world remains a fundamentally hostile place. In some other regions, where transphobic and homophobic abjection and violence are culturally hegemonic and legally enshrined, often as a legacy of colonialism, the situation is worse still. Under such entrenched conditions of injustice and inequality, where is the light at the end of the tunnel? Little wonder that the main image on the flyer for *Gay Shame* 2018 was a photograph of Duckie member Jay Cloth looking jaded in the street, leaning against a hand-scrawled sign reading 'it's impossible to be hopeful'.<sup>3</sup>

Yet this thesis insists that queer hope does exist and that it materialises better worlds, worlds that are more empathetic, just, equitable and loving. These worlds are small, resilient, adaptive and generative. They cast wide

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<sup>2</sup> See, for instance, Albert Kennedy Trust, 'LGBT Youth Homelessness: A UK National Scoping of Cause, Prevalence, Response & Outcome', 2015 <<https://www.akt.org.uk/Handlers/Download.ashx?IDMF=c0f29272-512a-45e8-9f9b-0b76e477baf1>> [accessed 16 August 2018]; Nuno Nodin, Elizabeth Peel, Allan Tyler and Ian Rivers, 'The RaRE Research Report: LGB&T Mental Health – Risk and Resilience Explored', PACE, 2015 <[http://www.queerfutures.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2015/04/RARE\\_Research\\_Report\\_PACE\\_2015.pdf](http://www.queerfutures.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2015/04/RARE_Research_Report_PACE_2015.pdf)> [accessed 16 August 2018]; Catherine Donovan and Marianne Hester, *Domestic Violence and Sexuality: What's Love Got to Do with It?* (Bristol: Bristol University Press, 2014); Mayor's Office for Policing and Crime, 'A Hate Crime Reduction Strategy for London 2014-2017', 2014 <[https://www.london.gov.uk/sites/default/files/mopac\\_hate\\_crime\\_reduction\\_strategy.pdf](https://www.london.gov.uk/sites/default/files/mopac_hate_crime_reduction_strategy.pdf)> [accessed 16 August 2018]; and Ben Campkin and Laura Marshall, 'LGBTQ+ Cultural Infrastructure in London: Night Venues, 2006–present', UCL Urban Laboratory, July 2017 <[https://www.ucl.ac.uk/urbanlab/docs/LGBTQ\\_cultural\\_infrastructure\\_in\\_London\\_nightlife\\_venues\\_2006\\_to\\_the\\_present.pdf](https://www.ucl.ac.uk/urbanlab/docs/LGBTQ_cultural_infrastructure_in_London_nightlife_venues_2006_to_the_present.pdf)> [accessed 16 August 2018].

<sup>3</sup> *Gay Shame* 2018 flyer.

ripples and promise to grow. This thesis shows how this happens by attending closely to a number of projects produced by Duckie between 2010 and 2016 that engage with a range of normatively marginalised people. These include the collective's regular LGBTQ+ nightlife base and cohorts comprising emerging queer performers and older people at risk of isolation. Through this investigation, I intervene in the fields of performance studies, queer studies and fun studies, bringing these discourses into conversation to show how participatory performance events supported by queer structures of family and fun can routinely generate hope for marginalised populations and bring into being the better worlds I mentioned above.

Duckie is an ideal subject for such an investigation, having demonstrated proficiency in fun queer performance since 1995. As the primary outcome of a collaborative doctoral award resulting from a partnership between Duckie and Queen Mary University of London, this thesis constitutes the most substantive critical engagement to date with Duckie, whose innovative, prolific and influential practice has received limited academic attention. In using the collective's work to illustrate my thesis, I offer more sustained analysis of its audience-facing work than previous research and present the first scholarly engagement with the socially-engaged projects that Duckie has recently undertaken away from the nightlife contexts with which it is familiarly associated. Between 2014 and 2016, I had the privilege of engaging with these projects through extended periods of participant observation, constituting the primary fieldwork on which my findings are based and generating substantive documentary evidence for my claims about the world-making capacities of participatory performance practices.

In the context of performance studies, this longitudinal involvement yields new understandings of how performance projects engaged with marginalised people can enable the subjective expression of distinctive

sensibilities and forms of agency, understanding and relationality that support new, more just and equitable structures. In the context of queer studies, these observations enable me to build on the concept of queer futurity – a utopian position proposed by José Esteban Muñoz as a way of articulating the importance of collective hope for better worlds for marginalised subjects – to propose the concept of *reproductive queer futurity*.<sup>4</sup> This describes how queer futurity is served by cultivating hope in conscious, sustained ways rather than merely valuing it where it happens to appear. If reproductive queer futurity is the theory, its practice is located in what I refer to as *homemade mutant hope machines*. These are forms and processes capable of routinely generating hope that emerge from lived experience, operate relatively autonomously and adapt to changing conditions. In the context of fun studies, I demonstrate how reproductive queer futurity and homemade mutant hope machines are powerfully supported by fun. Fun, I argue, has considerable capacity to disrupt existing structures and materialise new ones but this capacity has been culturally and critically occluded to the benefit of capitalist normativity.

This thesis defines and contextualises these terms and shows how reproductive queer futurity is strongly supported by structures of queer fun and also queer family, which I critically rearticulate. Where queer family studies have largely privileged homogenous peer groups and same-sex nuclear domesticity, I propose that queer family can be generatively understood in terms of material support and intergenerational transmission. I demonstrate how participatory performance events can function as powerful vehicles for these ideas, taking as case studies three Duckie projects: the Duckie Homosexualist Summer School for young LGBTQ+ performers (DHSS); a cycle of immersive ‘vintage clubbing’ events inspired by moments of

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<sup>4</sup> See *Cruising Utopia: The Then and There of Queer Futurity* (New York: New York University Press, 2009).

twentieth-century queer socialising; and the Posh Club, an afternoon cabaret for older people at risk of isolation. Cumulatively, the thesis shows how such projects tangibly materialise better worlds for their participants, reliably generating hope in the future by delivering on the promise of genuine alternatives and change.

My research can therefore be understood as investigating several interrelated questions. How, if at all, might participatory performance projects help materialise better worlds for marginalised subjects? More specifically, what structures, forms or processes might support such projects? What challenges and problems might arise around their deployment and how might these be addressed?

As this introduction proceeds, I describe the critical contexts in which I intervene, specifically those around participatory performance practices, queer studies and the multidisciplinary field of fun studies. I then offer a history of Duckie and its operation in the context of neoliberal capitalism. I account for the selection of my case studies and methodologies, which include queer criticality, participant observation and the analysis of performance events and material from interviews, surveys, archives and media coverage. I then outline the structure of the thesis and précis each chapter in relation to my key claim: that participatory performance practices mobilising queer understandings of family and fun can be effective in generating hope and materialising better worlds for marginalised people. This thesis shows the power of homemade mutant hope machines and calls for more of them.

### **Critical contexts**

This research proceeded iteratively, with extensive initial fieldwork informing theoretical conceptualisation that informed further observation enabling further conceptual refinement. The thesis sits at the intersection of three

critical fields: performance studies (in particular study of participatory, socially engaged and applied performance practices), queer studies (in particular the consideration of futurity, live performance, family and kinship) and the emerging interdisciplinary field of fun studies (in particular the consideration of fun as a structure of social, cultural and political efficacy). I offer new understandings germane to each field in its own right and also show how each can be more generatively engaged with the others, notwithstanding the existing substantial critical investigation of queer performance practices.

### *The social turn in art and performance*

In the early twenty-first century, study of the 'social turn' in art and performance practice emerged as a way of critically engaging the proliferation since the end of the Cold War of projects mobilising the aesthetic, social and political potential of subjective interaction among a work's viewers, audiences or participants. Art curator and critic Nicholas Bourriaud seminally proposed the concept of *relational aesthetics*, proposing 'the sphere of human relations as artwork venue'.<sup>5</sup> He champions works in which artists facilitated encounters between viewers – through, for instance, meals or conversations – as offering inspirational 'ways of living and models of action within the existing real' rather than abstracted utopian visions.<sup>6</sup> Bourriaud brought new critical attention to the aesthetic potential of affective exchange, though his supposition of a cultural lack of 'free areas' of interpersonal engagement overlooks their longstanding and generative existence within experimental practices and subcultural forms such as queer club performance and cabaret.<sup>7</sup> Contemporary art historian Claire Bishop

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<sup>5</sup> *Relational Aesthetics* (1998), trans. Simon Pleasance and Fronza Woods with Mathieu Copeland (Dijon: Les presses du reel, 2002), p. 44.

<sup>6</sup> Bourriaud, p. 13.

<sup>7</sup> Bourriaud, p. 16.

responds sceptically to Bourriaud's claims on behalf of what she describes as the 'social turn'.<sup>8</sup> Bishop argues that the works Bourriaud champions avoid the tension and discomfort (or 'dissensus') vital to good art and risk exacerbating inequities by accepting state funding and romanticising fleeting connections.<sup>9</sup> Bishop's analysis fruitfully complicates the discourse of relational aesthetics but leans on reductive binaries (for instance, setting interpersonal interaction against social justice) and underestimates the power of enjoyment. Intervening from the field of performance studies, Shannon Jackson rejects Bishop's opposition of freedom against care and argues that Bishop underestimates audiences' reflexive capacities.<sup>10</sup> Aiming 'to raise the stakes of aesthetic conviviality', Jackson shows that socially turned projects can inspire understanding and appreciation of contingent forms of collective support, or 'sustainable social institutions', commonly disparaged from both neoliberal and avant-garde perspectives.<sup>11</sup> Jen Harvie expansively analyses the cultural-materialist forms and structures of participatory art and performance practices under neoliberal capitalism.<sup>12</sup> Emphasising that 'people are, need to be and benefit from being socially interdependent', Harvie anatomises participatory projects' ambivalent capacities to resist and reinscribe neoliberal diktats.<sup>13</sup> (Later in this introduction, I consider in detail how Harvie's analysis can inform structural understanding of Duckie's projects.)

Scholarship of the social turn, then, has powerfully delineated a field of civically engaged aesthetic practice invested in interpersonal exchange.

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<sup>8</sup> See 'Antagonism and relational aesthetics', *October*, 110 (Autumn, 2004), 51-79; 'The Social Turn: Collaboration and its Discontents', *Artforum*, 44, (February, 2006), 178-183.

<sup>9</sup> See *Artificial Hells: Participatory Art and the Politics of Spectatorship* (London: Verso, 2012), p. 40.

<sup>10</sup> *Social Works: Performing Art, Supporting Publics* (New York: Routledge, 2011), pp. 14-15.

<sup>11</sup> Jackson, pp. 4, 14.

<sup>12</sup> *Fair Play: Art, Performance and Neoliberalism* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013).

<sup>13</sup> Harvie, p. 2.

But research into such work tends toward a restrictive understanding of its potential forms (typically exhibition visits and one-off shows) and participants (to Bourriaud, those regularly attending gallery openings; to others, generally makers and audiences).<sup>14</sup> Little attention has been paid, for instance, to repeating or long-running projects and/or projects' impact on participants beyond the performance event itself. This thesis expands analysis of the field to include cabaret and club-based performances located within a socially dynamic and/or locally engaged environment, often over extended periods of weeks, months or years, revealing the affective, relational and civic potential of such critically neglected conditions. These understandings illuminate in turn the potential of participatory performance to materialise better worlds for marginalised subjects. In mobilising in the term *relational/relationality* in the context of arts practice, I follow Bourriaud, who variously defines it as that which engages 'the realm of human interactions and its social context' or 'the sphere of inter-human relations [...] [or] interactivity with the viewer within the aesthetic experience being offered'.<sup>15</sup> Relationality, then, describes forms of verbal, physical, emotional and affective intersubjective exchange. For Bourriaud, however, the relational is always aesthetically accountable: it has value insofar as it provides 'the raw matter for an artistic work'.<sup>16</sup> I embrace a more expansive appreciation of relationality as an important aspect of Duckie's work that might directly support an artwork but might not, while still supporting a broader project of subjective expression and world-making.<sup>17</sup>

Critics have used many terms to describe forms related to the social turn. Jackson surveys a lexicon including 'social practice', 'socially engaged

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<sup>14</sup> Bourriaud, p. 37.

<sup>15</sup> Bourriaud, pp. 14, 43.

<sup>16</sup> Bourriaud, p. 30.

<sup>17</sup> Relationality is also a term used in psychoanalytic discourse to refer to mechanisms such as identification, projection and introjection; see, for instance, Jay Greenberg and Stephen Mitchell, *Object Relations in Psychoanalytic Theory* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1983). I do not use the term with this discursively specific valence.

art', 'activist art' and 'collaborative art', embracing 'social works' as a broad if imprecise term for projects linking aesthetic and political considerations.<sup>18</sup> Harvie favours the term 'socially turned art and performance practices', which connotes a commitment to engaging non-artists and audiences in generative socially interactive ways; this is apt to many Duckie projects.<sup>19</sup> Adam Alston defines 'immersive' performance events as those placing 'audiences in an environment that surrounds them completely' and whose theatrical realisation requires audiences' conscious agency; this helpfully describes Duckie's overtly theatricalised and themed *Gay Shame* and 'vintage clubbing' events.<sup>20</sup> Astrid Breel, meanwhile, defines participatory performance as 'a form where the audience is able to affect material changes in the work in a way that goes beyond the inherent interactivity in all live performance' so that 'the responses and actions of the participants become part of the fabric of the show', making it an apt form for exploring questions of agency within the bounds of a given production.<sup>21</sup> This applies to all the Duckie projects considered here.

In describing my case studies, I use the terms *participatory performance event* and *participatory performance project*. The former term refers to a specific public event, scheduled at a given time and location, incorporating active engagement between performers and audiences within the confines of a planned on- or off-stage performance or more organically within the bounds of the event or both. The latter term refers more capaciously to such events *and* the structures that support them, such as funding, planning, rehearsal and the production of ancillary materials. This thesis investigates both and the

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<sup>18</sup> Jackson, pp. 11, 17.

<sup>19</sup> Harvie, pp. 4-5, 10.

<sup>20</sup> Alston, p. 220.

<sup>21</sup> 'Audience Agency in Participatory Performance: A Methodology for Examining Aesthetic Experience', *Participations: Journal of Audience and Reception Studies*, 12.1 (2015), 368-387, p. 369.



dynamic between them is seen to operate differently across different case studies. My analysis of the Posh Club, for instance, attends to both the Club as a series of participatory performance events (limited to the hours of 12-3pm in a given space) and the Club as a long-running participatory performance project, ongoing across multiple locations since 2014 (and earlier if you include its predecessor, the Tuesday Club). My analysis of Duckie's 'vintage clubbing' cycle focuses on the immersive participatory performance events that comprised it while referring to the material and conceptual qualities of the sustaining overall project. DHSS is analytically framed as a participatory performance project predicated on the production of a participatory performance event (a showcase of new turns, presented in a cabaret format, that mobilised punters as on- and off-stage participants); here, my argument attends more closely to the project than the events it supported. This thesis, then, locates participatory performance projects and events as Duckie's most significant recurring holding forms and argues that they constitute powerful vehicles for reproductive queer futurity.

#### *Applied theatre and performance*

Critical investigation of applied theatre and performance also relates to these projects. As Harvie notes, applied works tend to 'collaborate artistically and socially with a particular (often socially marginalized) group of people' and to emphasise 'socially meaningful' processes.<sup>22</sup> This could broadly describe Duckie's projects, particularly the Posh Club and the Slaughterhouse Club (a drop-in arts project based in hostels for people living with homelessness and addiction that is beyond the scope of this thesis, as I explain later in the introduction). Other articulations of applied performance describe aspects of Duckie's work: Stephen Greer situates it 'outside of conventional mainstream

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<sup>22</sup> Harvie, p. 20.

theatre institutions' and notes its 'interdisciplinary and hybrid practices' while Caoimhe McAvinchey articulates its frequent investment in 'communities of identity' based around attributes such as 'age, gender, race, disability [or] sexuality'.<sup>23</sup> But Duckie's approaches avoid the essentialising tendencies McAvinchey describes as habitual to applied theatre, and Duckie's forms are atypical to the field as commonly understood.<sup>24</sup> Helen Nicholson and Philip Taylor, for instance, note the common expectation that participants narrativise their experiences to support scripted theatrical productions intended to effect a specific social change.<sup>25</sup> In queer contexts, meanwhile, Greer has attended to applied performance practices marked by 'the particular quality of intentionality' such as theatre-in-education productions supported by Stonewall addressing homophobic bullying.<sup>26</sup>

None of this describes Duckie's work: co-founder and lead producer Simon Casson has been vocal about his disdain for conventional narrative theatrical forms, suggesting they induce feelings of being 'chained to your chair, punished by the show'.<sup>27</sup> Moreover, Duckie resists both biographical narrativisation and 'the claim to transformation' Greer locates as characteristic of applied performance, restricting its accountable intentions even around participation in projects such as the Posh Club and Slaughterhouse Club to such modest outcomes as leaving the house or engaging in conversation.<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> Stephen Greer, *Contemporary British Queer Performance* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), pp. 101-102, Caoimhe McAvinchey, ed., *Performance and Community: Commentary and Case Studies* (London: Bloomsbury, 2014), pp. 1-3.

<sup>24</sup> McAvinchey, p. 6.

<sup>25</sup> See Helen Nicholson, *Applied Drama: The Gift of Theatre* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004) and Philip Taylor, *Applied Theatre: Creating Transformative Encounters in the Community* (London: Greenwood Press, 2003).

<sup>26</sup> Greer, pp. 100-101.

<sup>27</sup> 'Duckie Screening and Talk with Simon Casson', *Performance Space*, Vimeo, 2011 <<https://vimeo.com/20586468>> [accessed 16 August 2018]. Duckie's socially engaged projects often can support participants keen to narrativise aspects of their lives but this is never foregrounded or obligatory.

<sup>28</sup> Greer, p. 102.

There are, however, points of connection between Duckie's socially committed practices and James Thompson's reframing of applied theatre's potential usage.<sup>29</sup> Thompson suggests the field's established emphasis on work that 'communicates messages or concentrates on identifiable social or educational impact' often results in banal, unclear or counterproductive outcomes; instead, he argues, it should privilege the 'bodily responses, sensations and aesthetic pleasure' enabled by foregrounding affect and its capacity to join the ethical to the political.<sup>30</sup> (Thompson understands affect to describe 'emotional, often automatic, embodied responses that occur in relation to something else – be it an object of observation, recall of a memory or practical activity' – and operate outside conscious cognition.<sup>31</sup> I follow this usage.) Attending to affect, Thompson argues, might open up sites of both respite and agency from which to intervene in 'the shape of the world'.<sup>32</sup> He frames this largely hypothetically, proposing his own 'limited attention to practice' as 'an implicit suggestion that the ideas need to be tested'.<sup>33</sup> Duckie's projects constitute such testing, validating Thompson's hypothesis that performance can qualify as 'a purposeful part of an intervention into our sensible world'.<sup>34</sup> Moreover, while Duckie's projects do not claim transformative power, I argue that in some cases they achieve it.

### *Queer criticality*

Queer criticality is central to this thesis both as methodology (as I describe later in the introduction) and as critical context. Queer as a critical move emerged primarily in the United States at the start of the 1990s, reclaiming

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<sup>29</sup> *Performance Affects: Applied Theatre and the End of Effect* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009).

<sup>30</sup> Thompson, p. 7.

<sup>31</sup> Thompson, p. 119.

<sup>32</sup> Thompson, p. 10.

<sup>33</sup> Thompson, p. 10.

<sup>34</sup> Thompson, p. 177.

a normative slur against difference to intervene generatively into understandings of sex, sexuality and gender. It was influenced by Michel Foucault's articulation of sexual identities as regimes of control, engaging knowledge, power, discourse and bodies, rather than descriptions of categorical realities.<sup>35</sup> Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick articulated how disciplinary binaries structure dominant understandings of sexual and gender identities, hierarchies and desires as natural, fixed and stable.<sup>36</sup> Sedgwick suggested queer as signifying instead 'the open mesh of possibilities, gaps, overlaps, dissonances and resonances, lapses and excesses of meaning when the constituent elements of anyone's gender, of anyone's sexuality aren't made (or *can't be made*) to signify monolithically'; she additionally proposed queer as a way of complicating understandings of 'race, ethnicity' and other 'identity-fracturing discourses'.<sup>37</sup> Judith Butler drew on Simone de Beauvoir's analysis of the contingent construction of womanhood and J.L. Austin's theory of speech acts to propose that gendered identity was performative, meaning it existed not as an essential reality but through the constant reinscription of the characteristics defining it through thoughts, words, actions and interactions.<sup>38</sup> The critical queering of essentialist understandings of sexuality and gender was not utopian but it opened new critical vistas. Butler noted early on queer's potential to reproduce unjust exclusions, divisions and hierarchies but argued for its utility in framing experiences of marginalisation and oppression as the site of 'a set of historical reflections and futural

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<sup>35</sup> See *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, trans. Alan Sheridan (New York: Pantheon Books, 1977) and *The History of Sexuality, Vol. 1: An Introduction*, trans. Robert Hurley (New York: Pantheon Books, 1978).

<sup>36</sup> See *Epistemology of the Closet* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990).

<sup>37</sup> *Tendencies* (New York: Routledge, 1994), pp. 8-9.

<sup>38</sup> See *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (New York: Routledge, 1990), *Bodies That Matter: On the Discursive Limits of 'Sex'* (New York: Routledge, 1993), 'Performative Agency', *Journal of Cultural Economy*, 3.2 (2010), 147-161.

imaginings'.<sup>39</sup> In this sense, queer was not an identity marker but a fluid, reflexive and perhaps ultimately disposable position or process of (self-) criticality. In the UK, Alan Sinfield and Jonathan Dollimore pioneered the study of sexual dissidence, with Sinfield articulating the power of subcultural readings of canonical literary texts.<sup>40</sup>

Since the 1990s, critical understandings of queer have proliferated, unsettling and enriching subjects including race, class, disability, trauma, history, time, location, empire, terrorism, affect, shame and refusal, often informed by Kimberlé Williams Crenshaw's influential articulation of intersectionality, or the complex and overlapping coexistence of many structures of inequality and oppression.<sup>41</sup> This thesis is substantively informed by work engaging queerly with questions of childhood, kinship, heredity, history and temporality, and proposes a critical rearticulation of queer understandings of family: where previous scholarship has focused on homogenous peer groups and nuclear domesticity, I centre material support and intergenerational transmission. The application of queer understandings to experiences of marginalisation, exclusion and oppression beyond considerations of sex, sexuality and gender informs my analysis of the Posh

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<sup>39</sup> 'Critically Queer', *GLQ: A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies*, 1.1 (1993), 17-32, p. 19.

<sup>40</sup> See Alan Sinfield, *Cultural Politics – Queer Reading* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1994).

<sup>41</sup> See, for example, José Esteban Muñoz, *Disidentifications: Queers of Color and the Performance of Politics* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1999), Jack Halberstam, *In a Queer Time and Place: Transgender Bodies, Subcultural Lives* (New York: New York University Press, 2005), Ann Cvetkovich, *An Archive of Feelings: Trauma, Sexuality and Lesbian Public Cultures* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2003), Sara Ahmed, *Queer Phenomenology: Orientations, Objects, Others* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2006), Jasbir K. Puar, *Terrorist Assemblages: Homonationalism in Queer Times* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2007), Elizabeth Freeman, *Time Binds: Queer Temporalities, Queer Histories* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2010), David L. Eng, *The Feeling of Kinship: Queer Liberalism and the Racialization of Intimacy* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2010); Kimberlé Williams Crenshaw, 'Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex: A Black Feminist Critique of Antidiscrimination Doctrine, Feminist Theory and Antiracist Politics', *University of Chicago Legal Forum*, 1 (1989), 139-67.

Club in Chapters Six. There, I draw on the attention paid by Heather Love, Jack Halberstam and others to how dominant scripts of progress, success and belonging rely on conspicuous, sometimes lethal forms of exclusion.<sup>42</sup> I also draw on what Joshua J. Weiner and Damon Young call the 'new relational possibilities' that emerge 'under different conditions of negation', considering, for instance, Cecilia Sosa's analysis of how responses to trauma can queerly reshape family.<sup>43</sup> As Sarah Mullan notes, however, such expanded understandings of queer sometimes risk further occluding subjectivities related to sexuality or gender already marginalised within LGBT contexts, such as lesbian.<sup>44</sup>

### *Queer futurity, queer performance*

This thesis is particularly invested in the critical position known as queer futurity, which emerged in opposition to queer antirelationality. The antirelational stance, influentially articulated by Leo Bersani, refused assimilation and embraced the abject status imposed on sexual dissidents, framing it as 'a political threat'.<sup>45</sup> Bersani argued for the liberatory potential of rejecting not only dominant norms around sexuality and gender but the social imperative inherent in any political or community investment, which he frames as simplistic, sentimental or complicit. This antirelationality was taken up by Lee Edelman in an argument refuting the hegemonic expectation that present individual pleasures should be constantly deferred in the name of the 'child',

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<sup>42</sup> Heather Love, *Feeling Backward: Loss and the Politics of Queer History* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2009), Jack Halberstam, *The Queer Art of Failure* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2011), Puar, *Terrorist Assemblages*.

<sup>43</sup> Joshua J. Weiner and Damon Young, 'Queer Bonds', *GLQ: A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies*, 17.2-3 (2011), 223-41, p. 223, Cecilia Sosa, *Queering Acts of Mourning in the Aftermath of Argentina's Dictatorship: The Performances of Blood* (London: Tamesis, 2014).

<sup>44</sup> 'Lesbian Performance in London 1992-2015: Identity, Representation, and Queer Epistemologies' (unpublished doctoral thesis, Queen Mary University of London, 2016), p. 78.

<sup>45</sup> *Homos* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1995), p. 123.

the fetishistic emblem of a supposedly precious future that in fact merely reproduces inequity.<sup>46</sup> While this antirelational stance powerfully illuminated the risks of non-normative subjects uncritically submitting to regressive dominant discourses, its programme implicitly took for granted the forms of privilege and agency available to middle-class cis gay white men.

In response, José Esteban Muñoz proposed a position of queer futurity, which insisted on 'queerness as collectivity' and as 'primarily about futurity and hope' for better worlds, particularly for those for whom withdrawal into a life of self-determined pleasure is simply not a feasible option.<sup>47</sup> Central to this is the understanding, influenced by philosopher Ernst Bloch, of 'hope as a critical methodology [...] a backward glance that enacts a future vision'.<sup>48</sup> To Muñoz, hope is vital but largely constructed as fleeting and evanescent, something to be taken where it is found and understood largely in the abstract, in retrospect or anticipation, and through cultural analysis. He is deeply invested in locating 'another way of being' but conceives the 'outposts of actually existing queer worlds' that he analyses as ephemeral and precarious.<sup>49</sup> The contributors to Angela Jones's collected volume *A Critical Inquiry into Queer Utopias* embrace Muñoz's understanding of queer futurity but foreground 'quotidian practices', seeking to locate empirically material instances of queer futurity in the here and now.<sup>50</sup> As Chapter One details, I follow this approach and extend it by proposing *reproductive queer futurity*, a form of queer futurity invested in the conscious, sustainable reproduction of hope through specific forms and processes. In this way, I explore the possible identification of pragmatically applicable general principles or practices

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<sup>46</sup> *No Future: Queer Theory and the Death Drive* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2004).

<sup>47</sup> *Cruising Utopia: The Then and There of Queer Futurity* (New York: New York University Press, 2009), p. 11.

<sup>48</sup> Muñoz, *Cruising Utopia*, p. 4.

<sup>49</sup> Muñoz, *Cruising Utopia*, pp. 96, 49.

<sup>50</sup> *A Critical Inquiry into Queer Utopias* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), p. 1.

conducive to the proliferation of queer futurity and the better worlds it promises. As I will show, this exploration takes me fruitfully toward considerations of participatory performance, family and fun.

Also central to this investigation is performance. Muñoz locates subcultural performance of various kinds as a methodology of queer futurity. It enables 'forums for public debate [...] away from the corrupt mediatized majoritarian public sphere', catalyses 'critical thinking and intervention' and serves as 'a mode of political pedagogy [...] that enacts a critique of sexual normativities allowing us to bear witness to a new formation, a future in the present'.<sup>51</sup> The significance of such witnessing is hard to overstate. Muñoz hails 'performances that allow the spectator access to minoritarian lifeworlds that exist, importantly and dialectically, within the future and the present' – and indeed the past.<sup>52</sup> In supporting such formations and lifeworlds and impressing their reality upon their participants, performance resists the structurally hegemonic majoritarian cultural project that aims 'to keep us from knowing ourselves'.<sup>53</sup> Performance 'facilitates modes of belonging', promotes agency and opens up spaces in which better worlds can materialise and flourish.<sup>54</sup> The hopeful and exciting civic implications of this deeply inform this thesis.

In articulating performance as a mode of 'utopian performativity', Muñoz follows Jill Dolan, who conceptualises the 'utopian performative' as a moment in a performance event when 'audiences feel themselves allied with each other, and with a broader, more capacious sense of a public, in which social discourse articulates the possible, rather than the insurmountable obstacles to human potential'; this generates 'a hopeful feeling of what the world might be

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<sup>51</sup> Muñoz, *Cruising Utopia*, pp. 61-62.

<sup>52</sup> Muñoz, *Cruising Utopia*, p. 56.

<sup>53</sup> Muñoz, *Cruising Utopia*, p. 64.

<sup>54</sup> Muñoz, *Cruising Utopia*, p. 99.



like if every moment of our lives were as emotionally voluminous, generous, aesthetically striking, and intersubjectively intense'.<sup>55</sup> This insistence on the hopeful and transformative capacity of performance is powerfully instructive. But for Dolan, the utopian performative remains indexical, a site of fantasy, imagination, rehearsal and possibility, an emblem of 'how the world might be better', just 'not yet [...] not here'.<sup>56</sup> My case studies show how performance events can actually materialise that potential, not just rehearse it. Dolan stipulates distance between the utopian performative and actual 'social action', and conceives only very limited agency on audiences' part within the performance event; my cases studies show social action can in fact be realised by enabling such agency.<sup>57</sup>

Other critics have attended to how queer and performance can inform one another. In the only full-length study of queer performance in the UK, Stephen Greer describes how queer opens 'fault lines between different logics of identity, visibility and representation' that can be powerfully investigated through live performance, especially in forms that are more experimental, collaborative or discursive than naturalistic scripted theatre.<sup>58</sup> Analysing multiple performance contexts, Greer shows how queer can support and inform performance practices through its interrogation of historically contingent constructions of sex, sexuality and gender, its embrace of 'openness, fluidity and flux' and its relation to Butler's performativity, which can facilitate disruptive interventions into dominant cultural forms.<sup>59</sup> Greer recognises Duckie's mobilisation of queer through performance, offering an analysis of the collective's *Gay Shame* cycle (to which I return later in this

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<sup>55</sup> Muñoz, *Cruising Utopia*, p. 99, Jill Dolan, *Utopia in Performance: Finding Hope at the Theater* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2005), pp. 2, 5.

<sup>56</sup> Dolan, pp. 6, 20.

<sup>57</sup> Dolan, p. 19.

<sup>58</sup> Greer, p. 3.

<sup>59</sup> Greer, p. 6.

introduction) and using a photograph from a Duckie event as his cover image. This thesis is informed by Greer's observation that queer aligns generatively with performance in showing that 'successful collaboration is not forestalled by difference but contingent on its recognition', while his attention to the narrativisation of the past supports my investigation of Duckie's 'vintage clubbing' cycle in Chapter Five.<sup>60</sup>

I also draw on Fintan Walsh's framing of certain queer performance forms as 'performative archives of alienation, displacement and searching which provide, in a way, their own kind of home for queer people, history and culture'.<sup>61</sup> Alyson Campbell and Stephen Farrier open their collected volume on international queer dramaturgies with a moment from a Duckie performance – an artist, Otter, removing a string of pearls from her vagina – illustrating their argument that the messy, transgressive embodiments of queer performance compellingly link the corporeally, spatially and affectively specific to intimations of macro-level cultural and political realignment.<sup>62</sup> Campbell and Farrier highlight how cabaret and club performance forms model queerly 'alternative making processes and production structures' and allow for richer audience affect, agency and intersubjectivity than conventional theatre.<sup>63</sup> Other critics engaged with the queer potential of cabaret performance include Shane Vogel, who analyses New York performers Kiki and Herb in relation to Lauren Berlant and Michael Warner's concept of queer world-making, and T.L. Cowan, who emphasises how the embodied and improvisatory nature of cabaret queerly valorises 'variety, risk,

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<sup>60</sup> Greer, p. 13.

<sup>61</sup> *Queer Performance and Contemporary Ireland: Dissent and Disorientation* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015), ebook, 76.5/567.

<sup>62</sup> *Queer Dramaturgies: International Perspectives on where Performance Leads Queer* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016), ebook, 38.0/984.

<sup>63</sup> Campbell and Farrier, 55.3/984.

difference, provocation, and surprise' rather than polished spectacle.<sup>64</sup>

Scholars have, then, articulated widely ranging understandings of how queer and performance (including participatory performance) can support each other but largely by focusing on the signifiatory potential of performance events. By analysing Duckie's participatory performance *projects*, which are extended over longer periods and engage various marginalised populations, this thesis expands understandings of how queer and performance can work together actually to materialise better worlds.

### *Fun*

During my observations of these participatory performance projects, I became increasingly conscious that, while they varied widely in terms of their forms, processes and participants, all were sites of tremendous fun. I grew curious about how understandings of fun could inform understandings of queer and performance but found little critical work in either field that acknowledged fun, let alone proposed ways of thinking queer, performance and fun together. This thesis is, among other things, an attempt to supply that lack. It has been informed by investigation of critical engagement with fun in various other fields. My survey was broader than any other critical consideration of fun I know of, moving across critical theory, cultural studies, etymology, history, ethnography, psychology, sociology, economics and the studies of parenting, childhood, education, play, games, computing, video games, leisure, consumerism, advertising, employment, politics, aesthetics and religion; I also drew on elements of popular culture and lived experience. This was a 'scavenger methodology' – to borrow the term coined by

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<sup>64</sup> Shane Vogel, 'Where Are We Now? Queer World Making and Cabaret Performance', *GLQ: A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies*, 6.1 (2000), 29-60, T.L. Cowan, "'a one-shot affair": Cabaret as Improvised Curation', *Canadian Theatre Review*, 143 (2010), 47-54.

Halberstam to describe opportunistic and unaccountable research into subjects 'deliberately or accidentally excluded from traditional studies of human behaviour' – and it constitutes perhaps the first sustained interdisciplinary approach to a subject that has received multidisciplinary attention.<sup>65</sup>

Through this investigation, I derived my own distinctive definition of fun as stimulating, absorbing and enjoyable activity that is bounded in space and time and whose stakes are perceived by those experiencing or observing it as being low. I define fun as a kind of activity but because it is affectively charged it can also be understood as an experience. I arrived at new understandings of fun as a form of disruptive agency or pleasurable experimentation with the capacity to model a range of ethical, moral and political positions. Fun can be thought of as a training ground; different kinds of fun build different kinds of muscles. It bridges lived affective experience and abstract political aspiration. It can effect civic change by operating technologically, intervening in existing structures, and performatively materialising new ones. My analysis reveals fun to be particularly well supported by participatory performance and peculiarly well suited to queer's appreciation of contingency, fluidity and instability. This thesis therefore offers a broadly critically synthetic argument for the civic significance of fun that constitutes a formative intervention into the nascent interdisciplinary field of fun studies.<sup>66</sup> Chapter Three constitutes a full articulation of the significance of fun to this thesis and is summarised toward the end of this introduction.

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<sup>65</sup> *Female Masculinity* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1998), p. 13.

<sup>66</sup> I therefore sincerely support the playful proposal by game and play theorist Bernard De Koven to institute a department of fun studies. See 'The Department of Fun Studies', *Deep Fun*, 5 March 2010 <<https://www.deepfun.com/the-department-of-fun-studies/>> [accessed 16 August 2018].

Even as scholars of participatory performance have attended to new forms of intersubjectivity, they have sometimes asked ‘what for?’<sup>67</sup> And even as scholars of queer futurity have insisted on the strategic importance of hope, they have sometimes framed it as a matter of ‘feeling’ rather than material practice.<sup>68</sup> Scholars of fun, meanwhile, have barely considered its civic capacities at all. My argument suggests how these ostensible blockages and blind spots can be addressed to the mutual benefit of their respective fields. This thesis puts into generative conversation for the first time understandings of participatory performance practices, queer futurity and fun in the service of illuminating and supporting the materialisation of better worlds. And when considering the confluence of participatory performance, queerness and fun, there’s much to be gained from considering Duckie.

### **A history of Duckie**

Duckie began as a club night at the Royal Vauxhall Tavern on Saturday 25 November 1995.<sup>69</sup> It was founded by six friends in their mid-twenties: host Amy Lamé, producer-promoter Simon Casson (aka Simon Strange), resident DJs Kim Phaggs and Chelsea Kelsey (aka the London Readers Wives) and so-called ‘door whores’ Jay Cloth and Father Cloth. All six remain at the heart of Duckie’s Saturday nights at the time of writing 23 years later. Duckie’s creation was primarily motivated by a sense of alienation from the mainstream gay scene of the 1990s, which Casson has described as being characterised by single-sex environments, house music, male gym culture and cruising, ecstasy and, when it came to performance, strippers and traditional drag queens; Duckie’s creators, meanwhile, were more excited by rock music,

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<sup>67</sup> Bishop, ‘Antagonism’, pp. 67-68.

<sup>68</sup> Dolan, p. 19.

<sup>69</sup> ‘Saturday Night Turns 1995’, *Duckie* (archived website) <<http://duckie.harmsen.net/clubnights.php?submenu=agenda&type=past&special=&year=1995>> [accessed 16 August 2018].

alcohol and performance art.<sup>70</sup> The launch of boozy, indie-based mixed gay club night Popstarz in May 1995 – at which Casson and Lamé quickly became regulars, and where they met the Wives – supplied the first two but not the third. Casson had directed and produced Lamé’s show *Gay Man in a Lesbian’s Body* at the ICA’s Live Art Department in 1994 and the pair were interested in providing a stage on which short-form live art could sit alongside contemporary versions of established working-class forms such as drag, burlesque, cabaret and vaudeville, within a club night format of drinking, dancing and fun.<sup>71</sup> Looking for a venue, Lamé and Casson found the RVT, a space of LGBTQ+ community and culture since the post-war years that, in 1995, was open only a couple of days a week; it also, they learned, occupied part of the former site of the Vauxhall pleasure gardens, which had a hugely influential history of popular, experimental and transgressive socialising, sex and culture between 1661 and 1859.<sup>72</sup> ‘It was just like: boom! That instantaneous feeling of, “This is exactly where we need to be”,’ Lamé later recalled. ‘It kind of felt like us carrying on this torch of performance history’.<sup>73</sup> They selected the name Duckie, an English working-class term of endearment with campy undertones, and embraced other demotic terms such as ‘turn’ (for short-form performance or the performer delivering it) and ‘punter’ (for paying audience member), which I use throughout this thesis.<sup>74</sup> In general, Duckie’s tone as expressed through publicity materials displays an ironic, demotic and bathetic register characteristic of Casson, who writes the collective’s bumph.

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<sup>70</sup> ‘Duckie Screening and Talk with Simon Casson’.

<sup>71</sup> See British Library Sound Archive Collection Guides, Drama and Literature, ‘Experimental Theatre and Live Art 1985-1995’, <[https://www.thisisliveart.co.uk/uploads/documents/Experimental\\_\\_Theatre\\_and\\_Live\\_Art\\_in\\_the\\_British\\_Library\\_Sound\\_Archive\\_2009.pdf](https://www.thisisliveart.co.uk/uploads/documents/Experimental__Theatre_and_Live_Art_in_the_British_Library_Sound_Archive_2009.pdf)> [accessed 16 August 2018].

<sup>72</sup> Ben Walters, ‘Supporting statement for an application to have the Royal Vauxhall Tavern added to the National Heritage list for England’, January 2015 <<http://www.rvt.community/wp-content/uploads/2015/09/Initial-RVT-listing-application-January-2015.pdf>> [accessed 16 August 2018].

<sup>73</sup> *Save the Tavern*, dir. by Tim Brunsden (Light Factory, 2017).

<sup>74</sup> *Oxford English Dictionary*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., s.v. ‘duckie’.

Duckie's Saturday night was, in Casson's words, 'a massive hit from day one'.<sup>75</sup> They weren't the only disaffected queers in town. Months after Duckie's launch, Mark Simpson delivered *Anti-Gay*, an edited collection of 'malodorous essays by various disgruntled non-heterosexuals' interrogating mainstream gay culture's uncritical 'feel-good-or-else politics' and banal consumerism ('Nowadays, gay is goods').<sup>76</sup> In the context of the 'post-gay' or 'post-queer' moment of the mid-1990s, Duckie constituted what Lamé has called a 'club of outcasts', a space of social and cultural cross-fertilisation between artists, audiences and promoters who felt at home in neither heteronormative nor dominant gay cultures.<sup>77</sup> It was cheap, too: entry initially cost £3, incrementally rising to £6 in 2010, still the current price.<sup>78</sup> And successful: Duckie has consistently been one of the RVT's highest-earning nights since its start.<sup>79</sup> Saturday nights platformed a range of local, national and international performers from first-timers to established artists; since 2011, two or three 'artists in residence' per year have presented work each week over a given month.<sup>80</sup> Duckie has produced other participatory performance events too, drawing variably on a pool of hundreds of potential collaborators.<sup>81</sup> Prominent among these is the *Gay Shame* cycle of large-scale immersive performance-based club nights held on the night of Pride in London from 1996 to 2006 and in 2008, 2009, 2014 and 2018, at a range of

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<sup>75</sup> 'Duckie Screening and Talk with Simon Casson'.

<sup>76</sup> *Anti-Gay* (London: Freedom Editions, 1996), pp. xix, xiv-xiv.

<sup>77</sup> On Duckie and 'post-gay', see Mullan, p. 220, and Victoria Chalklin, 'Performing Queer Selves: Embodied Subjectivity and Affect in Queer Performance Spaces Duckie, Bird Club and Wotever World' (unpublished doctoral thesis, University of London, Goldsmiths College, 2012) <<http://research.gold.ac.uk/7801/>> [accessed 16 August 2018], p. 193.

<sup>78</sup> Duckie, Saturday night flyers, 1995 and 2010, provided by Duckie producers.

<sup>79</sup> Dicky Eton, interview with the author, 11 September 2018.

<sup>80</sup> See Bibliography for a selected list of Saturday night turns and artists in residence.

<sup>81</sup> Details on all Duckie productions can be found via 'Duckie Archive 1995-2014', *Duckie* (archived website) <<http://duckie.harmsen.net/archive.php?submenu=old>> [accessed 16 August 2018] and/or 'Archive', *Duckie* <<http://www.duckie.co.uk/archive>> [accessed 16 August 2018].

venues including the RVT, the Coronet and Brixton Academy.<sup>82</sup> Satirically engaging perceptions of mainstream gay culture as superficial, consumerist and normative, individual editions of *Gay Shame* were (as mentioned above) themed around subjects such as mental health, gender norms and national identity.<sup>83</sup> These were mostly designed by Robin Whitmore in collaboration with many contributing artists.

Other Duckie productions have included *The World's First Lesbian Beauty Contest* (Café de Paris, 1997); tribute nights to Morrissey, Julie Burchill and Kate Bush (ICA, 1997, 1999, 2001); work with David Hoyle at various times between 1996 and 2013; and two programmes of longer experimental works in forms including 'a scavenger hunt, a flower arranging soiree, a funeral march with horses, school lessons [and] a sleepover' with various artists under the *Nightbird* banner (2000, 2002).<sup>84</sup> In 2002, Duckie produced *Ç'est Vauxhall!* at the RVT, directed by Mark Whitelaw, a format described by Casson as 'performance art as lap dancing' in which punters selected turns from a menu that were then performed on or around the tables at which they were seated.<sup>85</sup> The version that transferred to the Barbican Centre in 2003 won the Olivier Award for Best Entertainment in 2004 and, between 2003 and 2007, the format successfully toured to Birmingham, Manchester, Edinburgh, Berlin, Thessaloniki, Tokyo, Kyoto, Sydney and New York. Other large-scale immersive productions at the Barbican directed by Whitelaw included *The Class Club* (2006), *Lullaby* (2011) and *Copyright Christmas* (2011). Further productions at the RVT included *Readers Wives Fan Club* (2010) and

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<sup>82</sup> 'Gay Shame 2018', Duckie <<http://www.duckie.co.uk/events/gay-shame-2018>> [accessed 16 August 2018].

<sup>83</sup> Duckie, *Gay Shame*, flyers and paraphernalia, provided by producers and accessed via Bishopsgate Institute archival holdings.

<sup>84</sup> 'Nightbird (2000)', Duckie (archived website) <<http://duckie.harmsen.net/generic.php?id=14&submenu=old>> [accessed 16 August 2018], 'Nightbird (2002)', Duckie (archived website) <<http://duckie.harmsen.net/generic.php?id=13&submenu=old>> [accessed 16 August 2018].

<sup>85</sup> 'Duckie Screening and Talk with Simon Casson'.



*Performance and Cocktails* (2010). Every year since 2010, Duckie has produced an event headlining Saturday night in the Cabaret tent at Latitude festival in Suffolk. The collective has also mounted several events to celebrate key birthdays in its existence and produced events at Birmingham's Fierce festival, Liverpool's Homotopia festival, Tate Britain, Blackpool Tower Ballroom, Royal Festival Hall, Battersea Arts Centre, Wilton's Music Hall and in Brighton, Bexhill-on-Sea, Hull, Hebden Bridge, Lille and Vienna. In 2014, *Duckie in Sitges* saw hundreds of performers, producers and punters go to Spain for a holiday.

A 'manifesto' on Duckie's website describes the collective as 'purveyors of progressive working class entertainment who mix live art and light entertainment' in the belief that 'art and performance can be used as tools to bring about community solidarity, to make ordinary people happy and even for personal development and recovery for the most vulnerable amongst us'.<sup>86</sup> As performance scholar Sarah Mullan notes, this is the current version of a manifesto that has been repeatedly updated since 2008 in reflection of the collective's evolving practices and values around, for instance, shifting terminology from 'gay' to 'LGBTQIA' and expanding references to 'performance' to the more capacious 'event culture'.<sup>87</sup> Notwithstanding its commitment to working-class forms and its founders' largely working-class upbringings, Duckie has not always reached as diverse a constituency as its engagement with marginalisation might suggest, with core audiences since the beginning predominantly, though by no means exclusively, comprising university-educated cisgender gay white men. Ingo Andersson, who has run queer and trans community performance platform Bar Wotever at the RVT since 2003 and is in general a supporter of Duckie, has described feelings of awkwardness at Saturday night related to their gender nonconformity as

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<sup>86</sup> 'About', *Duckie* <<http://www.duckie.co.uk/about>> [accessed 16 August 2018].

<sup>87</sup> Mullan, p. 221.

a motivating factor in establishing Wotever.<sup>88</sup> Some critics have problematised Duckie's engagement with femininity and female and lesbian representation at events such as *Gay Shame Goes Girly* (2009).<sup>89</sup> Others perceived *Border Force*, Duckie's large-scale Pride-weekend event in 2015, as treating issues of immigration and asylum insensitively, prompting the collective to mount a town-hall-style debate.<sup>90</sup> Some attempts to address perceived imbalances were initially somewhat tokenistic. In May 2006, Duckie allowed 'ALL LESBIANS IN FOR 4 QUID' and a fixed period in 2007 offered 'Chicks only on stage'.<sup>91</sup> In 2009, there was a month platforming only performers of colour, dubbed *Token Black People* and based on the acknowledgements that 'Duckie has gotta be the whitest club in south London' and a month of performance programming 'won't change anything'.<sup>92</sup> In 2011, Duckie's board added its first female member, Áine Duffy, and in 2014 its first trans member of colour, Campbell X.<sup>93</sup> Further board members of colour George Chakravarthi and Azara Meghie joined in 2016. The present research project, instigated by Duckie in collaboration with Queen Mary University of London, demonstrates Duckie's investment in examining and evolving its own practice.

In recent years, Duckie has moved to engage the queer past and specific marginalised communities through the projects on which this thesis focuses. Between 2008 and 2012, Duckie produced *Queers and Old Dears* and launched the Tuesday Club in Crawley, projects whose engagement of

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<sup>88</sup> See Mullan, p. 246, and Chalklin, p. 17.

<sup>89</sup> See Catherine Silverstone, 'Duckie's Gay Shame: Critiquing Pride and Selling Shame in Club Performance', *Contemporary Theatre Review*, 22.1 (2012), 62-78; Rachel Zerihan, 'Gay Shame', *Dance Theatre Journal*, 23 (2009), 16-22, and 'Gay Shame Goes Girly', *Dance Theatre Journal*, 24 (2010), 11-15; Mullan.

<sup>90</sup> 'Border Force', *Duckie* <<http://www.duckie.co.uk/events/border-force>> [accessed 16 August 2018], 'Border Talk', *Duckie* <<http://www.duckie.co.uk/events/border-talk>> [accessed 16 August 2018].

<sup>91</sup> See Mullan, p. 234.

<sup>92</sup> 'Archive March 2009', *Duckie*, <<http://duckie.harmsen.net/generic.php?id=94&submenu=old>> [accessed 16 August 2018].

<sup>93</sup> Mullan, p. 221.

older people anticipated the Posh Club, an afternoon cabaret event for older people at risk of isolation that is analysed in Chapter Six. In 2013, Duckie delivered a vocational scheme for young queer performers, Duckie Upstarts, which evolved to become the Duckie Homosexualist Summer School, which is analysed in Chapter Four. In 2013, *Vauxhall Bacchanal* at the Royal Festival Hall investigated the area's lineage of revelry while *Happy Birthday RVT* (various venues, 2014) celebrated the pub's 150-year history. Other events engaging queer history – successors to *Gay Shame* in terms of their scale, format and scheduling at Pride weekend – include *Gross Indecency* (2010), *Duckie Goes to the Gateways* (2013) and *Lady Malcolm's Servants' Ball* (2016), comprising a cycle of 'vintage clubbing' events analysed in Chapter Five. In 2013, longterm Duckie collaborators Mark Whitelaw, Robin Whitmore and Tim Brunsden began an engagement with Thames Reach hostels for people living with homelessness and addiction that evolved into the Slaughterhouse Club. Duckie produced *The Palace of Varieties*, a project for people with dementia based in a south London care home, in 2016 and a series of events under the banner of Duckie Family, made by and for LGBTQ+ people of colour under the leadership of Kayza Rose and Campbell X, between 2016 and 2018. At the time of writing, by its own reckoning, Duckie produces 'about 120 events and 130 workshops each year' engaging 'about 28,000' people.<sup>94</sup>

### **Duckie and arts practice under neoliberal capitalism**

The sustained scope and success of Duckie's practice is all the more remarkable given the challenging political and economic backdrop against which it has unfolded and which provides the structural context for this thesis. I will now describe neoliberal capitalism, its impact on arts practice and

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<sup>94</sup> 'About', *Duckie* <<http://www.duckie.co.uk/about>> [accessed 16 August 2018].

Duckie's deft navigation of its particular contingencies. Neoliberal capitalism (or neoliberalism) describes the set of political and economic understandings that have increasingly dominated government policy in the UK (and elsewhere) over the past 40 years, with substantive social and cultural consequences. The geographer David Harvey describes how neoliberal capitalism emerged as an economically activist political project in opposition to the welfare state and the perceived power of organised labour.<sup>95</sup> The dominant model of government in the UK between 1945 and 1979, the welfare state positioned the state as responsible for delivering a wide range of social goods, including education, healthcare, housing and unemployment benefits, according to need and funded by redistributive taxation. Neoliberal capitalism, by contrast, mobilises the seventeenth-century British philosophical traditions of liberalism to privilege individual self-determination over obligations to the state, as Jen Harvie notes.<sup>96</sup> Articulated by Ludwig von Mises and Friedrich von Hayek in the 1920s and 1930s, and Milton Friedman and other members of the Chicago School in the 1950s, neoliberalism conceives the state's obligations as ideally limited to national defence, protection of citizens against violence or deceit and facilitation of the free flow of capital, implying lower taxes, fewer public services and fewer restraints on market forces.

Implemented by successive UK governments since the election of the Conservatives under Margaret Thatcher in 1979, neoliberal capitalism in practice has involved privatisation of public utilities and services, reduced financial regulation and lower, less redistributive taxation. Cultural effects have included the celebration of individualism, entrepreneurialism, competition, risk, resilience, flexibility and consumption and the demonisation of collectivity, collaboration and activities that do not generate economic

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<sup>95</sup> *A Brief History of Neoliberalism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005).

<sup>96</sup> Harvie, p. 12-16.

capital. This finds expression in ways ranging from the valorisation of financial income as an index of personal worth to the proliferation of competition-based reality-television formats.<sup>97</sup> Social effects have included more precarious employment conditions, fewer and less accessible public services and increasing poverty and inequality. These effects have accelerated under the so-called 'austerity' programme implemented by Conservative-led governments since 2010.

Various critics have analysed the political, economic and material contingencies of pursuing socially engaged or socially turned arts projects under neoliberal capitalism in ways that illuminate Duckie's practice: Jackson, for instance, attends to the complex interplay between sources of funding, the scaled-back state and structures of accountability in artistic practice in the US.<sup>98</sup> To explore this context in detail is beyond the scope of this thesis but I will sketch its broad outlines, partly to orient my analysis of Duckie's projects and partly to signpost potential areas of further research. I draw particularly on Harvie's cultural-materialist analysis in *Fair Play* because its sustained attention to London-based practitioners between 1997 and 2013 overlaps closely with Duckie's activity. Harvie incisively articulates the potential for social practice to operate in witting or unwitting complicity with neoliberal structures by, for instance, promoting neoliberal governmentality, substituting spectacle for substance or exacerbating rather than ameliorating inequality. I propose that Duckie avoids most if not all of the risks associated with such complicity.

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<sup>97</sup> My cultural references in this thesis largely derive from the UK, US and western Europe, regions where the powerful cultural entrenchment of neoliberal capitalism makes instances of the resistant operation of homemade mutant hope machines particularly instructive.

<sup>98</sup> Jackson, pp. 25-27. See also Halberstam, *Queer Art*; Greer; and Fintan Walsh and Matthew Causey, eds, *Performance, Identity, and the Neo-Political Subject* (London: Routledge, 2013).

Duckie initially operated as a private enterprise, using Saturday-night takings to underwrite its running costs, experimental performance projects and Casson's income as the only full-time Duckie employee. It successfully applied for funding for the *Nightbird* series in 2000 and 2002 from the Arts Council of Great Britain, which in 2003 became known as Arts Council England or ACE.<sup>99</sup> As an ACE Regularly Funded Organisation, Duckie received approximately £62,820 per year between 2002/3 and 2007/8 and an additional Grant for the Arts of £79,903 in 2005/2006.<sup>100</sup> In 2004, Duckie became a registered not-for-profit company. Dicky Eton became Duckie's second employee (part-time from 2008, full-time from 2014), handling business management while Casson oversaw creative direction. From 2008/2009 to 2011/2012, Duckie's annual ACE funding was increased to approximately £146,940 per year.<sup>101</sup> In 2011, Duckie became an ACE National Portfolio Organisation (NPO), receiving an average annual block grant of £145,828 over five years to 2015.<sup>102</sup> NPO status has been maintained ever since, with an annual grant (slightly reduced in line with sector-wide cuts) of £142,492 confirmed from 2015 to 2022.<sup>103</sup> In 2013, as Duckie started pursuing more socially engaged projects, the collective began working with fundraiser Emmy Minton, who in 2016 became its third full-time employee. Between 2013/2014 and 2017/2018, Minton secured £1,026,914 beyond Duckie's NPO funding from 22 charities, foundations, trusts, local authorities and other

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<sup>99</sup> Dicky Eton, interview with the author, 11 September 2018.

<sup>100</sup> Silverstone, p. 90.

<sup>101</sup> Silverstone, p. 90.

<sup>102</sup> 'ACE National Portfolio Organisation Grants 2011-15', Arts Council England, 1 November 2013, <<https://www.a-n.co.uk/research/ace-national-portfolio-organisation-grants/>> [accessed 16 August 2018].

<sup>103</sup> 'Our Investment - factsheet 2015 – 18', Arts Council England <<https://www.artscouncil.org.uk/our-investment-2015-18/national-portfolio-organisations#section-1/>> [accessed 16 August 2018], 'National portfolio organisations 2018 -22', Arts Council England <<https://www.artscouncil.org.uk/national-portfolio-2018-22/more-data-2018-22/>> [accessed 16 August 2018].

bodies.<sup>104</sup> (In later chapters, I refer to specific applications where relevant to case studies.) At the time of writing, Duckie is exploring crowdfunding (through a project called Handbag) and has applied to become a registered charity. The collective therefore excels at what Harvie describes as ‘the strategies arts organizations have pursued to build mixed economies of funding’ by being ‘resourceful, resilient [and] inventive’ despite a ‘ferociously hostile climate’ of restricted public funding and shrinking networks and institutions that has grown harsher since the economic crisis of 2008.<sup>105</sup>

Harvie outlines the figure of the ‘artpreneur’, the entrepreneurial artist adapted to survive under precarious neoliberal conditions. Some such adaptations might, Harvie grants, be advantageous, enabling the artist to ‘make her livelihood and her art more sustainable and resilient’.<sup>106</sup> Duckie has demonstrated such neoliberally-aligned capacity through its ability to engage risk, develop a successful brand identity, negotiate competitive funding mechanisms and operate flexibly across different scales and circumstances. The artpreneur is also susceptible, Harvie shows, to modelling more divisive neoliberal tendencies such as ‘selfish individualism, destruction as an apparently necessary consequence of innovation and growth for growth’s sake’.<sup>107</sup> Duckie has avoided these by modeling collectivity, cherishing and renewing existing forms and structures and choosing to explore new avenues rather than prioritising financial profit (as it could have by, for instance, expanding or franchising the *Ç’est Vauxhall!* format).

Harvie observes that social practitioners risk regrettably valorising individual agency and self-sufficiency both within the forms of their participatory projects and through their vocational practices; she suggests

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<sup>104</sup> Eton interview, 11 September 2018.

<sup>105</sup> Harvie, pp. 24, 14.

<sup>106</sup> Harvie, p. 75.

<sup>107</sup> Harvie, p. 63.

that such risks can be avoided by respectively producing works that 'model sound interdependent group relations, genuine collaboration and mutual support' and by pursuing cooperative vocational practices that 'offer more hope of social value in their collaboration' than competition-based practices do in their rivalry.<sup>108</sup> Duckie operates in just such ways. As my case studies will show, their projects powerfully model interdependence and support, doing so in ways that resist some projects' tendency to what Harvie calls 'superficial and temporary' relationality.<sup>109</sup> Indeed, Harvie cites Duckie's broadly networked practice as an example of non-individualistic working methods.<sup>110</sup> To the extent that its practice often involves one-off or short-term engagements, Duckie operates continuously with neoliberally deregulated and precarious market structures but it is notable in this context that Duckie has from its beginning maintained a reputation among its collaborators for fair pay, good working conditions and open and accountable conduct.<sup>111</sup> Harvie notes pressures for arts organisations to survive by 'using their own commercially successful productions to cross-subsidize other work, seeking micro-financing through crowdfunding and collaborating with corporate partners to make redeployable profits'.<sup>112</sup> Duckie has largely followed this model, using cross-subsidisation, exploring crowdfunding, applying for competitive grants, and collaborating with Vauxhall One, a 'business improvement district' representing more than 100 businesses.

In 2017, Duckie accepted backing for a Posh Club event in Elephant and Castle, south London, from a 'community fund' underwritten by the developers overseeing a high-end redevelopment scheme effecting huge change to the traditionally working-class neighbourhood. According to Eton,

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<sup>108</sup> Harvie, pp. 56, 87.

<sup>109</sup> Harvie, p. 57.

<sup>110</sup> Harvie, p. 87.

<sup>111</sup> Harvie, pp. 26-29. Christopher Green, interview with the author, 21 December 2016.

<sup>112</sup> Harvie, p. 152.



'we thought long and hard about the funding but given it was used to provide a brilliant service to working class older folk we decided to go ahead. Unfortunately, that also has some problems'.<sup>113</sup> This is a reference to the developers using an image and text related to the Posh Club as part of a display trumpeting their development's supposed 'positive contribution to the local community' – an assessment that might be disputed by longstanding council tenants who lost their homes to the scheme.<sup>114</sup> Such situations illustrate the risk, identified by Harvie, that complicity with corporate interests can 'potentially naturalize hierarchical social relations and the dominance of consumer culture'.<sup>115</sup>

There are other potential areas of tension. As Harvie notes, the so-called austerity programme of cuts pursued by Conservative-led governments in the name of economic prudence since 2010 has effectively hollowed out 'social welfare or social support' for 'those most in need', such as older people, students, artists and the vulnerably housed – all groups engaged by Duckie's projects.<sup>116</sup> This tendency has continued since Harvie's writing in 2013 and in some respects metastasised. A 2012 policy document published by the Nesta Impact Investments fund – a charity distributing £25m of National Lottery money annually – describes this new landscape as one in which 'being able to tackle social challenges whilst making a profit is an attractive proposition' and notes that the right 'evidence of impact' can secure money for 'entrepreneurs' able to 'deliver public benefit [...] whilst achieving a financial return'.<sup>117</sup> In such a context, organisations such as Resolving Chaos are 'spun out' from the Department of Health with a remit to develop 'economic case-making'

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<sup>113</sup> Dicky Eton, personal correspondence with the author, 22 August 2018.

<sup>114</sup> Developers' details withheld at Duckie's request.

<sup>115</sup> Harvie, p. 168.

<sup>116</sup> Harvie, p. 15

<sup>117</sup> Ruth Puttick and Joe Ludlow, 'Standards of Evidence for Impact Investing', NESTA, 2012 < <https://www.nesta.org.uk/report/standards-of-evidence-for-impact-investing/> > [accessed 16 August 2018].

around the needs of people who 'lead chaotic lives, which can be costly to public services'.<sup>118</sup> The success of projects funded in such ways is measured in terms of how much less their clients cost the public purse. In this landscape, artistic social practitioners are able to apply for funds from local authorities that were formerly earmarked for direct spending on health and social care and remain accountable on those bases. Duckie has participated in such structures, for example framing the Posh Club as a project that 'reduces the burden on statutory services' when bidding for public-health money from Hackney local authority.<sup>119</sup> Harvie has already noted the risk under neoliberalism of arts practices being instrumentalised to valorise competition or corporate interests; now a further risk exists that they can be instrumentalised to support the privatisation and deregulation of public welfare services by participating in processes of marketisation.<sup>120</sup> At the same time, the forms of the Posh Club (as I will show in Chapter Six) are powerfully resistant to key aspects of neoliberal capitalism. The Posh Club also relies on volunteer labour in ways that chime with Harvie's ambivalent assessment, capable of being framed, on one hand, as problematically avoidant of fair and sustainable remuneration and, on the other, as inspirationally indicative of a widespread desire to participate in projects of hopeful collectivity.<sup>121</sup>

Further research could illuminate this area in far greater detail. For my present purposes, however, I locate in the conclusion to Harvie's investigation a powerful starting point for this project. Amid the tumult of neoliberal capitalism's disruptions, Harvie identifies the potential for 'resilient, inventive new models' to emerge, 'dynamic and adaptable' forms characterised by

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<sup>118</sup> Resolving Chaos, 'Economic case making' <<http://resolving-chaos.org/our-services/economic-case-making>; <http://resolving-chaos.org/case-studies>> [accessed 16 August 2018].

<sup>119</sup> Emmy Minton, personal correspondence with the author, 10 September 2018.

<sup>120</sup> Harvie, pp. 135, 181.

<sup>121</sup> Harvie, p. 28.

‘enhanced communication’ and ‘dispersed mutual support’ that might ‘help us envision better futures’.<sup>122</sup> This thesis describes the powerful materialisation of precisely such models, with application not only in arts and performance contexts but also to situations of marginalisation across society.

### **Case study selection**

Given the volume and variety of projects produced by Duckie, the selection of case studies for this thesis required careful consideration. The thesis is supported by a Collaborative Doctoral Award from the Arts and Humanities Research Council, whose terms – framed prior to my own selection as the doctoral researcher – highlighted Duckie’s history producing participatory performance events in LGBTQ+ nightlife contexts as well as its recent expanded commitment to community engagement in contexts of marginalisation within and beyond LGBTQ+ contexts.<sup>123</sup> Case study selection remained at my discretion.

I was keen to explore projects directly related to Duckie’s established queer nightlife practices as this is the context with which the collective has the longest history, the closest public association and the deepest experience in generating participatory performance events. The best known, most enduring aspects of this practice – Saturday nights and the *Gay Shame* cycle – have received incisive critical attention. Victoria Chalklin’s ethnographic study of Saturday nights identifies how Duckie regulars ‘feel part of a gang’ with a perceived ethic of acceptance and care, a range of age cohorts and a common appreciation of distinctive music, participatory performance, alcohol and fun, while also recognising it as predominantly male, potentially cliquy

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<sup>122</sup> Harvie, pp. 188-191.

<sup>123</sup> ‘Fully Funded PhD Studentship: Duckie in the Community’, *School of English and Drama, Queen Mary University of London*, 25 March 2014 <<http://www.sed.qmul.ac.uk/news/items/fully-funded-phd-studentship-duckie-in-the-community-deadline-passed.html>> [accessed 16 August 2018].

and sometimes ambivalent with regard to explicit political engagement.<sup>124</sup> Mullan focuses on the intermittent strand of lesbian performance within Duckie's practice, at Saturday nights, *Duckie Goes to the Gateways* and elsewhere, framing it as the result of Lamé's self-described 'lesbian agenda' and existing sometimes harmoniously and sometimes in tension with the collective's other work.<sup>125</sup> Several critics have focused on *Gay Shame*: Rachel Zerihan analyses the cycle's 'Macho' and 'Girly' editions with attention to audience composition and the format's potential for inadvertent misogyny.<sup>126</sup> Catherine Silverstone also attends to this, as well as the format's critique of consumerism and engagement with shame from a position of relative security.<sup>127</sup> Stephen Greer investigates *Gay Shame*'s interrogation of homonormative consumerism, articulating not only its satirising of dominant logics of representation but also its creation of 'spaces of desire and desiring beyond the homogenised forms offered by the market'.<sup>128</sup>

Both Silverstone and Greer consider *Gross Indecency* as a successor event to *Gay Shame*, with Silverstone considering its historicisation of experiences of marginalisation and Greer attending to its processes of narrativisation in ways that inform my analysis of Duckie's 'vintage clubbing' cycle in Chapter Five.<sup>129</sup> But no critical attention has been paid to the 'vintage clubbing' cycle comprising *Gross Indecency*, *Duckie Goes to the Gateways* and *Lady Malcolm's Servants' Ball* as a whole; moreover, its provocative animation of aspects of the queer past was of evident relevance to considerations of futurity and perceptions of the persistence of queer subjectivity and collectivity over time, contributing to its attraction as a case

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<sup>124</sup> Chalklin, pp. 213-216, 253-259.

<sup>125</sup> Mullan, p. 216.

<sup>126</sup> Zerihan, 'Gay Shame', 'Gay Shame Goes Girly'.

<sup>127</sup> Silverstone, pp. 62-78.

<sup>128</sup> Greer, pp 20-21, 153-161.

<sup>129</sup> Silverstone, pp. 102-103, Greer, pp. 71-73, 161-163.

study. (I had also attended and made notes at *Gross Indecency* and *Gateways*.)

Such considerations were also clearly engaged by the Duckie Homosexualist Summer School, a project whose mobilisation of the participatory performance event to support vocational training and community-building avowed confidence in performance as a sustainable structure of queer futurity. The structure of DHSS – weeks of rehearsal followed by scheduled performances in different locations – also enabled deep and flexible observational engagement.

I was also keen to consider a project that spoke to Duckie's engagement beyond overt LGBTQ+ contexts to explore whether and how techniques and sensibilities developed through queer nightlife practices could find application generating hope in other situations of marginalisation. The Posh Club's format of a weekly event playing out over 10-week blocks to both regular and new audience members also allowed for deep longitudinal observational engagement. Duckie's own funding applications have framed DHSS and the Posh Club as comparably 'tailor-made for the needs of specific groups of people in response to the problems that they have and the situations that they face [...] in a way that makes them feel valued'.<sup>130</sup> The 'vintage clubbing' cycle, DHSS and Posh Club, then, all offered opportunities to analyse the capacity of participatory performance events and projects to support reproductive queer futurity and none had received critical attention. These became my case studies.

The contingencies of the research process had some bearing on case-study selection too. I carried out sustained fieldwork observing the Slaughterhouse Club but, although the project emerged from participatory performance practices and was initially intended to result in a participatory

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<sup>130</sup> Duckie, 'Big Lottery Fund Reaching Communities fund Posh Club Stage Two application form', 2013, provided by Duckie producers.

performance event, these plans were set aside in favour of a slower, less goal-oriented process; the fact this project generated no participatory performance events during my period of observation therefore left it outside the conceptual frame of the thesis.

I located the period of 2010 to 2016 as a manageable scope accounting for the shift in Duckie's practice toward a deeper engagement with the queer past and an interest in engaging marginalised groups beyond LGBTQ+ contexts. *Gross Indecency* in 2010 marked the move from *Gay Shame* as an annual event to commence the 'vintage clubbing' cycle. The period of 2010 to 2016 also marks the shift from New Labour's balancing of neoliberal capitalism with some degree of social investment between 1997 and 2010 to the more plainly market-supremacist Conservative-led platform known as austerity, and the rise of populist discourses that informed the Brexit vote in the UK and other right-wing governmental shifts in other countries. This thesis does not foreground such macro-level shifts but they structure and exacerbate the marginalisation experienced by participants in Duckie's projects. I also refer to projects of Duckie's from outside the period where they give context and inform understanding of how they influenced or were influenced by a case study.

During a notably dynamic period for Duckie, these bounds logistically excluded some projects. I planned to carry out fieldwork between 2014 and 2016, then collate, analyse and articulate my research between January 2017 and September 2018. Duckie Family and QTIPOC Collective (the successor to DHSS) marked a newly substantive commitment on the collective's part to engaging people of colour through structures explicitly mobilising queer understandings of family. These emerged too late in my research period to enable the sustained engagement they warrant: the first Duckie Family event was held in September 2016 and QTIPOC Collective began in 2017. Similarly,

the *Palace of Varieties*, which I was able to visit once in December 2016, warrants investigation for its capacity to happily reconcile the variable temporalities experienced by people with dementia by privileging the present-mindedness of fun. And the dynastic spectacle of *50 Queers for 50 Years* in July 2017 – a parade of homemade sculptural icons of British LGBTQ+ history mounted in Hull to mark the fiftieth anniversary of the partial decriminalisation of gay sex in England and Wales – could be considered alongside the ‘vintage clubbing’ cycle.

Collectively, the three case studies I focus on – DHSS, ‘vintage clubbing’ and the Posh Club – allow me to explore the relationships between participatory performance events and projects, reproductive queer futurity and queer forms of family and fun in a variety of intersecting ways. The analysis that follows will be informed by both their similarities and their differences. All these projects primarily engage people marked as normatively marginalised or vulnerable but they might be contained in single events or work across weeks, months or years; engage people with a sense of their lives before them or with more to look back on; mobilise material support in the present or engage narrative understandings reaching forward and back in time. Each illuminates in a distinctive way the capacity for participatory performance events to support distinctive forms of expression, relationality and agency to generate hope reliably under challenging circumstances.

## **Methodologies**

### *Queer*

The queer understandings outlined earlier in this introduction inform my research methodology in multiple ways, enabling nuanced engagement with the complexity, fluidity, contingency and instability of the identities and experiences that inform this thesis. I am informed by multiple critical

articulations of queer, whose referents include but are not limited to: structures and experiences of othering and marginalisation based on sex, sexuality, gender and other perceived characteristics; the contingencies and inadequacies of many essentialist and/or binary understandings of subjectivity and identity; a position of critical resistance to normative assimilation; an identity marker connoting experiences and understandings beyond binary gender or fixed and stable sexuality categories such as straight, gay, lesbian and bisexual; an identity marker connoting experiences and understandings encompassing gay, lesbian, bisexual and binary transgender experiences as well as experiences and understandings that exceed those terms. That some of these understandings sit in tension or opposition to one another is in keeping with the critical queer embrace of contingency, fluidity, instability, ambivalence and contradiction as real and sometimes generative aspects of human experience.

While *queer* in this thesis consistently connotes marginalisation, I do not propose a fixed and universal definition. I sometimes use the term as a capacious identity marker, encompassing those who do not identify with cisgender heterosexual identity. This might include individuals whose understanding of their own subjectivity includes fixed, stable identities such as 'gay white man' even as I recognise queer discourse's troubling of such fixity. This usage partly reflects Duckie's own promotional discourses and partly reflects my own belief that those who avow homonormative identities have also experienced the profoundly, queerly exclusionary experience of growing up differently in a social and cultural environment fundamentally inimical to their subjectivity. But this is in no way to ignore or erase the profound differences in experience, understanding and privilege that, say, a non-disabled middle-class cis white man like myself will have compared to a disabled working-class femme trans person of colour. Some experiences



of marginality are more marginal, precarious and vulnerable than others and the use of queer as a catch-all term for non-normative sexuality and gender identities can risk flattening difference and occluding the most vulnerable. At other times, I use queer to connote understandings and experiences that exceed, refuse, subvert or frustrate essentialist, normative or reductively binary categories or describe a political, cultural or aesthetic sensibility of conscious and critically engaged anti-normativity. And at other times, I use the term to connote experiences or subject positions vulnerable to majoritarian marginalisation and exclusion that are not related to sex, sexuality or gender. It is an abstract and a concrete noun, an adjective and a verb. The usage in this thesis of queer, as a word and a methodology, is unstable, fluid, contingent and contradictory.

#### *Participant observation*

'Very few observers', notes Claire Bishop, are able to engage with the complex, nuanced specifics of participatory performance projects 'first-hand' over 'months or even years' but I am fortunate enough to have been one such observer and I critically mobilise this privilege through the methodology of participant observation.<sup>131</sup> Developed in the context of ethnography, participant observation has great utility in the investigation of socially and culturally complex subjects involving multiple participants, relationships, discourses and locations over extended periods of time. Various ethnographers have described the value and techniques of participant observation. In terms of value, Michael Jackson influentially argued in 1989 that ethnography should place greater emphasis on distinctive 'lived experience' as a way of avoiding what he characterises as ethnographers' tendency to essentialise subjects into 'timeless categories and determinate

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<sup>131</sup> *Artificial Hells*, p. 6.

theorems'.<sup>132</sup> Instead, Jackson urges researchers to acknowledge 'a world of diverse and ever-altering interests and situations' driven by 'affect and will as well as thought', and the dependency of researchers' own inevitably subjective and contingent understandings of that world on 'participation as well as observation' and reported facts.<sup>133</sup> Participant observation, as Ian Cook puts it, 'involves living and/or working within particular communities in order to understand how they work "from the inside"'.<sup>134</sup> Dwight Conquergood argues for a critical shift from perceiving the social world as a text to be deciphered to acknowledging its processes – including that of research – as forms of collaborative performance.<sup>135</sup> Participant observation, argue Patricia A. Adler and Peter Adler, allows 'concepts or categories that appear meaningful' to emerge organically and be refined rather than seeking proof for predetermined understandings.<sup>136</sup> This, Tim May notes, 'assists in bridging the gap between people's understanding of alternative lifestyles and the prejudices which difference and diversity so often meet', making it an apt form for queer subjects.<sup>137</sup> Norman K. Denzin and Yvonna S. Lincoln characterise the participant observer as a '*bricoleur* [...] deploying whatever strategies, methods, or empirical materials as are at hand' while recognising their inevitable contingency and subjectivity.<sup>138</sup> In terms of techniques, Alan

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<sup>132</sup> *Paths Toward a Clearing: Radical Empiricism and Ethnographic Inquiry* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1989), p. 2.

<sup>133</sup> Jackson, pp. 3, 5, 9.

<sup>134</sup> 'Participant observation', in *Methods in Human Geography*, ed. by R. Flowerdew and D. Martin (Longman: Harlow, 1997), 127-149, p. 127.

<sup>135</sup> 'Rethinking Ethnography: Towards a Critical Cultural Politics', *Communication Monographs*, 58.2 (1991), 179-194; 'Performance Studies: Interventions and Radical Research', *TDR: The Drama Review*, 46.2 (2002), 145-153.

<sup>136</sup> 'Observational Techniques', in *Collecting and Interpreting Qualitative Materials*, ed. by Norman K. Denzin and Yvonna S. Lincoln (London: Sage Publications, 1998), 79-109, pp. 80-81.

<sup>137</sup> *Social Research: Issues, Methods and Process* (3rd edition) (Maidenhead: Open University Press, 2001), p. 154.

<sup>138</sup> *Collecting and Interpreting Qualitative Materials* (London: Sage Publications, 1998), p. 3.

Bryman and James J. Teevan note that the participant observer observes speech and behaviour, participates in conversations, makes detailed field notes, 'interviews informants on issues not directly amenable to observation or that the ethnographer is unclear about [and] collects documents about the group' to further their research.<sup>139</sup> Mike Crang and Ian Cook describe how the researcher must gain access to the social group in question and develop understanding of 'their world views and ways of life' before critically expressing their findings; they describe the method's potency 'as a means of developing *intersubjective* understandings between researcher and researched'.<sup>140</sup> This prioritisation of intersubjectivity (or relationality) makes the method particularly well suited to engagement with participatory performance projects. Colin Jerolmack and Shamus Khan's recent edited collection demonstrates the method's ongoing fruitful application to subjects including the Burning Man festival, doctor-patient interactions around genetic testing and contemporary workplace gender enactment.<sup>141</sup>

Given participant observation's emphasis on acknowledging and considering the researcher's position in relation to the subject of research, it's important to position myself in relation to Duckie and the projects I observed. I consistently tried to mitigate potential ignorance or bias related to my own relatively privileged subjective position as a cis white middle-class gay man by, for instance, embracing access to experiences and understandings that challenged my existing understandings. My personal experiences with Duckie are longstanding and positive. Saturday nights were among my first gay or queer nightlife experiences: from near its beginnings, I attended around once

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<sup>139</sup> *Social Research Methods* (Canadian edition) (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), p. 165.

<sup>140</sup> *Doing Ethnographies* (London: Sage Publications, 2007), p. 37, emphasis in original.

<sup>141</sup> *Approaches to Ethnography: Analysis and Representation in Participant Observation* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018).

a year and went to *Ç'est Barbican!*, *The Class Club*, some editions of *Gay Shame* and some productions involving David Hoyle, finding all these events stimulating, entertaining and provocative and appreciating their friendliness, criticality, irreverence and ambition. I interviewed Hoyle about his Duckie-related work in 2006 and 2007 for *Time Out London*, where I was working on the film desk.<sup>142</sup> In 2007, I moved to New York, where I wrote supportively about *Ç'est Duckie!* for *Time Out New York*; by then I was on cordial terms with Hoyle, Casson, Eton, Lamé and the Readers Wives.<sup>143</sup> In 2009, I returned to London and began editing the cabaret section for *Time Out London*, in which capacity I attended Saturday nights far more frequently and saw almost all Duckie's other productions, writing positively about several of them for *Time Out London* (including *Gross Indecency*, *Readers Wives Fan Club*, *Copyright Christmas*, *Weekend at Wilton's* and *Vauxhall Bacchanal*) before the cabaret section was cut for commercial reasons in December 2013.<sup>144</sup>

In March 2014, Duckie and Queen Mary University of London announced that the Arts and Humanities Research Council had funded a Collaborative Doctoral Award to support research into Duckie and I successfully applied for the opportunity.<sup>145</sup> I was excited at the prospect of researching a company whose sensibility and creative work I enjoyed and admired, whose culture I understood and felt comfortable in and whose members I knew a little and got on with. Casson and Eton were among my doctoral supervisors, ensuring access to Duckie's projects, support for

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<sup>142</sup> 'Coming down to earth', *Time Out London*, 5 July 2006, p. 80; 'The definite article', *Time Out London*, 2007, 1 August 2007, p. 116.

<sup>143</sup> 'Fowl play', *Time Out New York*, 13 December 2007, pp. 49-50.

<sup>144</sup> See 'Tough Love', *Time Out London*, 11 February 2010, p. 65; 'Bad times are here again!', *Time Out London*, 1 July 2010, p. 83; 'Duckie pioneers mix-tape theatre', *Time Out London*, 4 November 2010, p. 69; 'Duckie, not turkey', *Time Out London*, 8 December 2011, p. 66; 'Doing it for the kids (and the queers and old dears)', *Time Out London*, 24 May 2012, p. 61; 'Meet the neighbours', *Time Out London*, 6 August 2013, p. 42.

<sup>145</sup> 'Fully Funded PhD Studentship: Duckie in the Community'.

my presence as an academic researcher and the provision of any relevant documentation or archival material I requested. Many of the aspects of participant observation that often prove challenging to researchers – securing access to a community and the confidence of its gatekeepers, identifying a role for oneself within it, negotiating linguistic and behavioural norms – were therefore readily available to me.<sup>146</sup> During the doctoral research period, I worked with Casson and Eton to produce and present *Queer Fun*, a one-day experimental performance symposium, which was a harmonious, constructive and rewarding experience.<sup>147</sup> While I have been and remain supportive of the Duckie project, I have endeavoured to maintain critical distance, as this introduction's engagement with potentially contentious aspects of the collective's practice shows.

Before attending DHSS and the Posh Club, I made a successful application to the Queen Mary University of London Research Ethics Committee in which risks related to vulnerable adults were identified and appropriate practical guidelines established.<sup>148</sup> These included clear communication of the nature of the work and ensuring participants understood their rights to withdraw cooperation, retain anonymity and review my findings. I also followed Duckie's own ethical guidelines (as articulated with reference to specific projects), which include commitments to valuing difference and balancing all participants' interests around welfare, agency, respect, confidentiality, transparency, accountability, support and inclusion.<sup>149</sup> No related problems were experienced during my fieldwork. Given that many participants in these projects could be considered vulnerable adults,

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<sup>146</sup> See May, p. 153, Crang and Cook, pp. 38-45.

<sup>147</sup> '*Queer Fun*', Duckie <<http://www.duckie.co.uk/events/queer-fun>> [accessed 16 August 2018], event programme available via link. I discuss *Queer Fun* in Chapter Three.

<sup>148</sup> QMUL Research Ethics Committee application ref. 56473. This application also covered my observations of the Slaughterhouse Club.

<sup>149</sup> Internal Duckie documentation provided by Duckie producers.

particular care was taken to discuss any concerns with those participants, Duckie producers and third-party organisers (such as community centre, church and hostel staff). I have endeavoured throughout my research to continue engaged, informed conversations with all stakeholders, as well as my academic supervisor, to ensure that the interests of participants were not compromised by material published as part of this research.

The techniques of participant observation were useful in accounting for the one-off participatory performance events comprising Duckie's 'vintage clubbing' cycle and indispensable with relation to the weeks, months and years over which DHSS and the Posh Club took place as participatory performance projects. In using participant observation to engage with communities structured around performance, I follow other scholars interested in the social and cultural context of performance such as Gay McAuley, who describes a theatre company's rehearsal process, and Marlon M. Bailey, who analyses the American underground Ballroom community.<sup>150</sup> Like McAuley, I benefited from becoming a 'pseudo-insider', being granted informal access to various aspects of the process in question without taking on formal responsibilities.<sup>151</sup> Like Bailey, I acted in certain respects as what Dwight Conquergood calls a 'coperformative witness', an approach to participant observation that 'requires one to perform and lend one's own body and labor to the process involved in the cultural formation under study, particularly when it involves a struggle for social justice'.<sup>152</sup> The most overt example of this comprised my successful collaboration with senior members of Duckie in the campaign to defend the Royal Vauxhall Tavern from

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<sup>150</sup> Gay McAuley, *Not Magic But Work: An Ethnographic Account of a Rehearsal Process* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2012), Marlon M. Bailey, *Butch Queens Up in Pumps: Gender, Performance and Ballroom Culture in Detroit* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2013).

<sup>151</sup> McAuley, p. 7.

<sup>152</sup> Conquergood (1991), Bailey, p. 22.

redevelopment – a project beyond the scope of this thesis though mentioned briefly in Chapter Five. But, as I will argue, all the projects I analyse can be considered in terms of the pursuit of social justice and most involved some form of embodied labour, from helping to clear crockery at the Posh Club to setting up a campsite with DHSS. Participant observation has afforded me kinds of engagement and insight generally lacking so far from criticism explicitly related to the social turn in art and performance, which has tended either to presume that participatory projects are singular events whose social encounters bear a corresponding ‘slightness and artificiality’ (in Bourriaud’s words) or to engage in special pleading that sustained engagement with durational projects constitutes ‘a luxury not always available to the underpaid critic and tightly scheduled academic’ (in Bishop’s words).<sup>153</sup>

In addition to my observational fieldwork, I conducted interviews, organised surveys and had access to Duckie’s archival and administrative holdings. Following training in academic interviewing techniques, I carried out a total of 38 interviews with DHSS and Posh Club producers, organisers, volunteers and participants. I used the methodology of qualitative research interviewing, which allows for the development of hypotheses and testing of theories through dialogue with interviewees, and the particular technique of semi-structured depth interviews, which balances consistency of approach across different interviews with leeway to explore emergent information in a given interview.<sup>154</sup> I carried out several surveys of DHSS participants: short free-answer surveys for the 2015 and 2016 cohorts before and after their respective courses and a longer online survey for both cohorts combining free-answer questions and scores out of five on a range of assessments of subjective experience. I also had access to surveys of Posh Club participants

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<sup>153</sup> Bourriaud, p. 83, and Bishop, *Artificial Hells*, p. 6.

<sup>154</sup> See Dominic Johnson, *The Art of Living: An Oral History of Performance Art* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015), p. 11-13.

carried out by Emmy Minton as part of Duckie's work to track outcomes for funding-related purposes. Casson, Eton and Minton also provided access to documentation of funding applications, budgets, financial records and other information relevant to my research, and supplied information in person where requested. Other archival sources included holdings of Duckie promotional material and press coverage held at Bishopsgate Institute and by Duckie producers. I also used Duckie's current website and the archived version of the website operational between 1995 and 2014 which holds a particularly useful year-by-year record of Duckie productions. As Helen Freshwater notes, archives should not be mistaken for 'direct access to the past' but understood as subjectively selective in their contents and only partially representative of the pasts those contents represent.<sup>155</sup> I also consulted video recordings of certain Duckie productions, some of which have been published online, some of which were provided by regular Duckie collaborator and videographer Tim Brunnsden. Finally, I mobilise textual analysis of live performances and items of media coverage where appropriate.

### **Critical narrative and chapter outlines**

This thesis argues for the capacity of participatory performance projects to realise better futures. Its organising concept is what I describe as *reproductive queer futurity*, which builds on Muñoz's work on queer futurity. As described above, queer futurity is a utopian position rooted in collective hope for better worlds for marginalised subjects. It understands hope as vital yet ephemeral and precarious. Reproductive queer futurity, however, foregrounds the intentional and dependable reproduction of hope. This thesis proposes that reproductive queer futurity is particularly well served by forms and processes

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<sup>155</sup> 'The Allure of the Archive', *Poetics Today*, 24.4 (2003), 729-58, p. 739.



that emerge from lived experience and are operatively autonomous, functionally reliable and capable of adaptation and reproduction. I propose the term *homemade mutant hope machine* to describe such forms and processes in practice. The thesis further argues that homemade mutant hope machines are powerfully supported by participatory performance practices, and by structures of queer family (understood here with new critical emphasis on material support and intergenerational transmission) and fun (understood here with new critical emphasis on the perception of low stakes and the capacity for civic intervention). The first three chapters of the thesis, constituting Part I of the thesis, outline the critical understandings, shortcomings and interventions that substantiate these arguments; the subsequent three chapters constitute Part II and offer case-study analyses of three of Duckie's projects that demonstrate the efficacy of the homemade mutant hope machine in related but distinctive ways. The first two, DHSS and the 'vintage clubbing' cycle, are situated squarely in the context of participatory performance projects engaging LGBTQ+ participants. Reproductive queer futurity is then seen to be useful in illuminating broader contexts of marginalisation through analysis of the Posh Club. Collectively, these case studies show how reproducible forms and processes related to low-stakes situations, subjective expression and material and affective support can be powerful engines of queer hope and help materialise better worlds.

In Chapter One, I articulate reproductive queer futurity in theory and the homemade mutant hope machine as its practice. I describe (in more detail than above) how Muñoz's queer futurity emerges in opposition to Edelman's antirelational position, and I attend to Muñoz and Edelman's shared disdain for the cult of the child as fetishised emblem of rigidly reproduced heteronormativity. I note how this shared disdain leaves no conceptual room to think of the queer child. I critically track the figure of the queer child before

defining them as a person of any age emerging into queerness who might benefit from forms of guidance or example that are available but not compulsory. Such forms are well expressed through the homemade mutant hope machine, which I define and describe with reference to examples from culture (such as *Un chant d'amour* Duckie's Saturday nights) and lived experience (such as Casa Susanna and ACT UP).

In Chapter Two, I articulate how reproductive queer futurity can be served by reconsidering queer understandings of family. Tracking relevant critical debates, I show that understandings of queer family have tended to centre on demographically homogenous peer groups and nuclear domestic models of same-sex couples, sometimes raising babies or prepubescent children. Other queer critics have rejected family wholesale. I unpack the etymological roots of the word family, which relate to supportive labour and intergenerational lineage, and note its reformulation as a site of sentimental repose in tandem with the emergence of industrial capitalism. I propose that reproductive queer futurity is well served by forms and processes of material support and intergenerational transmission that can be understood as family. This is illustrated with examples from the Ballroom community in the US and Duckie in the UK.

In Chapter Three, I describe the utility of fun to reproductive queer futurity. I track fun's etymological origins as a form of disruptive agency and its reformulation as a site of triviality and leisure in tandem with the emergence of industrial capitalism. Drawing on this, I offer my own definition of fun as stimulating, absorbing and enjoyable activity that is bounded in space and time and whose stakes are perceived by those experiencing or observing it as being low. This perception of low stakes is useful in two ways: it strengthens fun as a site of experimentation for participants and weakens it as a site of disciplinary interest for observers. I offer an interdisciplinary

synthesis of multidisciplinary critical engagement with fun, foregrounding its subjective contingency, its support of social bonding and learning and its capacity to rehearse and naturalise a wide range of moral, ethical and political positions including socialism, fascism, Islamism and neoliberalism. Fun is not morally, ethically or politically charged in itself, then, but can be a powerful engine of civic engagement. I argue that fun can function as a technology, intervening in existing civic structures, and that it can function performatively, materialising new structures. I illustrate the application of this to queer experiences and understandings with reference to the Gay Liberation Front and Duckie.

Chapter Four, a case study of the Duckie Homosexualist Summer School (2015-2016), demonstrates how the first three chapters' findings operate through a specific participatory performance project. I frame the young LGBTQ+ performers who participate in DHSS as examples of the figurative queer child described in Chapter One and note the project's emergence from the lived experience of Duckie producers and performers and its forms and processes. Drawing on observations, interviews and surveys, I show participants' understanding of DHSS as family, both within its own structures and as part of a larger Duckie structure. I also show how it supplies vocational and other kinds of material support and intergenerationally transmits understandings of queer performance lineages and practices without expectations of hereditary deference. I show that DHSS was characterised by fun, which enabled learning, bonding and experimentation, helping to materialise a small new world and fortify hope in participants' queer futures, sometimes in transformative ways.

Where Chapter Four's hope is future-oriented and foregrounds performers' subjectivity, Chapter Five draws hope from the past and focuses on audience experience. It offers a case study of Duckie's 'vintage clubbing'

cycle of large-scale immersive participatory performance events reanimating moments of mid-twentieth-century queer socialising, which comprised *Gross Indecency* (2010), *Duckie Goes to the Gateways* (2013) and *Lady Malcolm's Servants' Ball* (2016). I mobilise queer critical understandings of temporality (particularly Elizabeth Freeman's concept of erotohistoriography) and storytelling to describe how the past can do things in the present that serve reproductive queer futurity. Duckie's encounters with the queer past foreground collective pleasures rather than isolated suffering and move critically rather than deferentially; they intergenerationally transmit understandings of the queer past as a site of fun as well as struggle and locate present queers not as distant beneficiaries of a finished tale of normative assimilation but as engaged participants in an ongoing lineage of resistant, disruptive, performative and liberatory agency. Material support for archival research and dissemination is central to this project.

Chapter Six is a case study of the Posh Club, an afternoon cabaret for older people at risk of isolation. It expands the purview of reproductive queer futurity beyond contexts specific to LGBTQ+ engagement while articulating vital connections between Duckie's nightlife performance practices and the Club as participatory performance event. I frame the Club as an adaptive structure of material support that emerged from Simon Casson's biological family experiences yet evolved without privileging biogenetic over queer kinship. Through more complex moves, older non-LGBTQ+ people became hereditary beneficiaries of forms and processes developed in queer nightlife contexts. I analyse the centrality of fun to the Club and its benefit to critical understandings. Conviviality and surprise, for instance, support challenging performance forms in ways that trouble Claire Bishop's critique of participatory forms, while dancing and dressing up support subjective confidence, agency and relationality in ways that extend the implications of

Fiona Buckland and madison moore's readings of queer nightlife cultures to other conditions of marginality.

In the Conclusion, I summarise the findings of the thesis. I describe how the incremental imbrication of various Duckie projects intimates a Duckie civics. I consider areas of potential further research, including the capacities of reproductive queer futurity and homemade mutant hope machines to operate beyond the context of participatory performance practices. By bringing into conversation the studies of participatory performance, queer futurity, family and fun, this investigation makes the case for the construction of more and more homemade mutant hope machines serving reproductive queer futurity and materialising better worlds.

### **The light at the end of the tunnel**

In her analysis of social projects, Jen Harvie wonders whether it can be credible to place faith in works that 'can only ever be temporary and limited, and which cannot remotely begin to compensate for the larger and would-be secure structures of social welfare that are simultaneously being dismantled and potentially destroyed'.<sup>156</sup> This thesis hopes to suggest that some participatory performance projects might indeed 'remotely begin' to compensate in such ways – with a full understanding of the fragility and contingency of that qualification but also an appreciation that it is not nothing. I think back to that *Gay Shame* night in Vauxhall, the ironically named 'Light at the End of the Tunnel'. Was the name, in fact, ironic? My lived experience of the event suggested otherwise. As we waited in line, a Duckie crew member doled out free cans of beer with a smile. Inside the RVT, tea lights suspended from the ceiling cast a fairytale glow. On stage, Amy Lamé invited us to think of ourselves as a family and the Pink Suits

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<sup>156</sup> Harvie, p. 3.

reconfigured the iconic routine from *Dirty Dancing* to make a female body the strong one, holding aloft a male body made decorative. A twentysomething person of colour, not long out of the closet, widened his eyes in astonished contemplation as he learned for the first time of the RVT's deep lineage of transgressive pleasures. The Tap Cats, a group of older women who met at the Posh Club in Crawley, tap-danced effervescently to the raucous delight of hundreds of queers and their friends. A fiftysomething working-class man, reeling from the end of a longterm relationship, found joy in MDMA and snogging a man he'd just met as an opera singer delivered an aria from *Tosca*. A thirtysomething immigrant in a peach one-piece swimsuit executed a perfect high leg kick to Irene Cara's 'What a Feeling' on the street. A nonbinary DHSS participant enthused about how transformative the experience had been, vocationally and personally. Another DHSS participant, an immigrant trans person of colour, sat at a chair on a raised area inside the Tavern, rolling cigarettes for anyone who wanted one. Spot-lit from above, in white vest and dark moustache, they offered a monumental vision of a new masculinity, strong and giving and beautiful. I took a cigarette and left the pub, its weight behind me as I entered the tunnel, heaving with smoke and music and laughter and queer life moving to a beat. This event was fleeting and fragile but it was really happening. It is vital to keep scanning the horizon for glimmers of utopia, to keep looking for the light at the end of the tunnel. But it is also vital to recognise the forms of kinship, pleasure and agency that insist themselves into being within the tunnel's dark confines. They are not utopia but they are *better* and they are *real*. This thesis will show that there are dependable ways to generate and sustain them, and that such cultivation is neither misguided nor naïve as older structures falter and we move with hope toward the light.

## **PART I**

# **ON THE ROUTINE GENERATION OF HOPE**

## Chapter One

### Reproductive queer futurity, its forms and uses

#### Introduction

In 1995, Simon Casson, Amy Lamé, Kim Phaggs, Chelsea Kelsey, Jay Cloth and Father Cloth believed no one in London was putting on the kind of queer nightlife event they wanted – one offering experimental performance and rock music as well as drinking and dancing – so they put on their own. They booked the Royal Vauxhall Tavern (RVT) on a Saturday night, programmed their mates as performers and charged a few quid on the door. Decades later, Duckie’s Saturday nights still fill the RVT every Saturday night. They emerged from lived experience and expressed a distinctive sensibility ill-served elsewhere. Their low overheads and reliance on personal networks allowed them to operate relatively autonomously in relation to dominant power structures such as commercial market forces and normative cultural tastes. They provided creators and punters – ‘my Duckie boys and girls and everyone in between,’ as Lamé calls them from the stage each week – with a sense of family, marked by lineage, belonging and support, and access to their own kind of fun, with cheap entry, short turns and a sense of relative security keeping the stakes of engagement low enough for enjoyment and experiment to proliferate. Saturday nights have proved hugely reproducible, resilient and adaptable, incrementally amending their own particular form while also mutating, directly and indirectly, into hundreds of other events and projects. As later chapters will show, their forms and processes have proven exportable to other conditions of marginality. And their sensibility has supported civic interventions: Duckie producers were instrumental in preventing the destruction of the RVT and Lamé became London’s first ‘night



czar', helping influence the functionality of the city and the lives of millions.<sup>1</sup> For the queers that love them, Duckie's Saturday nights routinely and reliably generate and reward hope. They promise and prove that better worlds are realisable – worlds that are less oppressive, less violent, more equitable and more loving than those typically enabled by the dominant structures of contemporary British society.

Because they are emergent from lived experience, relatively operationally autonomous, adaptive to new and changing conditions and routinely efficient in generating hope, Duckie's Saturday nights exemplify the forms and processes at the heart of this thesis: *homemade mutant hope machines*. Homemade mutant hope machines (which I define in greater detail later in this chapter) can be events, objects, activities, understandings or relations. They reproduce hope and are themselves reproducible (provided the contingencies from which they emerged persist). They are particularly effective as forms of proactive engagement with conditions of marginalisation because they do not only envisage but materialise alternative worlds, even if the conditions of such materialisation might be constrained in certain ways. Duckie's first event was bounded within a pub on a particular November night in 1995 but nevertheless it developed and disseminated emergent, adaptive and reproducible technologies of hope with concrete, beneficial application to queer lives.

This thesis argues that homemade mutant hope machines are a powerful technology in the service of a utopian position I call *reproductive queer futurity*. This builds on José Esteban Muñoz's concept of queer futurity, which insists that there is meaningful power in collective hope for better futures for

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<sup>1</sup> See 'Who's behind RVT Future?', *RVT Future* < <http://www.rvt.community/whos-behind-rvt-future/> > [accessed 16 August 2018]; 'Amy Lamé', *London City Hall* <<https://www.london.gov.uk/people/mayoral/amy-lame>> [accessed 16 August 2018]. I am also a member of the RVT Future campaign.

marginalised subjects.<sup>2</sup> Reproductive queer futurity expands queer futurity by foregrounding the conscious reproduction of technologies of hope: effectual, sustainable, adaptable and reflexive forms and processes that reliably help materialise better worlds for queer subjects. Embracing contingency, reciprocity and (self-)criticality, such technologies make existing queer understandings available but not compulsory. In later chapters, I show how these technologies can be supported by structures of queer family and fun. In this chapter, I articulate the concept of reproductive queer futurity as it emerges from queer critical discourse around relationality and futurity, and describe the figure of the *queer child* around whom reproductive queer futurity is structured. I then argue for the power of the homemade mutant hope machine as a practical means by which queer subjects can begin to address the ephemerality of hope under neoliberal precarity.

### **Reproductive queer futurity**

For Lee Edelman, the child is a site of horror and revulsion.<sup>3</sup> Edelman anatomises with compelling disdain a conservative set of ideas that he calls *reproductive futurism*. Reproductive futurism, Edelman argues, asserts the social, cultural and political hegemony of heteronormativity through the imagined figure of ‘the Child as the image of the future’.<sup>4</sup> This imagined Child becomes a kind of disciplinary fetish object, the site of projected anxieties that form the pretext for the repression of alternative political structures, which might jeopardise the Child’s supposed welfare. These anxieties also require the deferral of personal access to *jouissance*, or joy in the real, which reproductive futurism abhors as sterile and destructive because neglectful of

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<sup>2</sup> See *Cruising Utopia: The Then and There of Queer Futurity* (New York: New York University Press, 2009).

<sup>3</sup> See *No Future: Queer Theory and the Death Drive* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2004).

<sup>4</sup> Edelman, p. 3.

the long-term interests of the Child. To 'think of the children' in the way mandated by reproductive futurism, Edelman insists, forestalls the possibility of real change.<sup>5</sup> Thus the future is punningly revealed as 'kid stuff', in the sense that it is both normatively proscribed as the exclusive domain of the Child and laughably inadequate as a site of plausible investment in happiness or fulfillment.<sup>6</sup> Queer, by contrast, is figured as an oppositional stance that can give access to *jouissance* by embracing the position – normatively framed as abject and immoral – of those who 'choose, instead, *not* to choose the Child'.<sup>7</sup> Queer, for Edelman, stands against reproductive futurism to the extent that it prioritises present fulfillment over the perennial – and perennially unfulfilled – promise of better days to come. In fact, reproductive futurism reproduces present injustices and inequalities alongside human beings. For Edelman, then, the alternative to heteronormative hegemony is the rejection of the obligatory commitment to both history and relationality figured in the oppressively vulnerable figure of the Child, who always requires protection and self-sacrifice, and always functions as a narcissistic projection of the parent and, by extension, iniquitous present structures. For that reason, he argues, 'the fascism of the baby's face' must be rejected and 'the Child as futurity's emblem must die'.<sup>8</sup>

Muñoz affirms Edelman's diagnosis but proposes an alternative remedy: the majoritarian heteronormativity of the here and now must, he affirms, be refused but the ahistorical, anti-relational pursuit of *jouissance* will not suffice as an alternative. Muñoz demands instead 'an understanding of queerness as collectivity' and as being 'primarily about futurity and hope'.<sup>9</sup> *Queer futurity*

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<sup>5</sup> Edelman, p. 13.

<sup>6</sup> Edelman, p. 30.

<sup>7</sup> Edelman, p. 31.

<sup>8</sup> Edelman, pp. 75, 31.

<sup>9</sup> Muñoz, p. 11.

is the name he gives to 'a critical investment in utopia' sustained by the apprehension of contingent glimmers of existing queer forms of pleasure and support in the present and the embrace of hope as a methodology to sustain progress towards the concrete realisation of imagined better collective futures.<sup>10</sup> Muñoz resists Edelman's dismissal of the future as necessarily reactionary 'kid stuff' but without moving in any way to recuperate the kid. Rather, Muñoz shares Edelman's 'disdain for the culture of the child' in mainstream society, exemplified by 'the spectacle of the state refurbishing its ranks through overt and subsidized acts of reproduction'.<sup>11</sup> The child remains a symbol of compulsory heterosexuality and the queer future conceived by Muñoz seems to be populated by full-fledged adult queers. This makes for strange lacunae at points in Muñoz's argument. He approvingly quotes James Schuyler's poem 'A photograph' (1974), which includes these hopeful lines:

I really do believe  
 future generations can  
 live without the in-  
 tervals of anxious  
 fear we know between our  
 bouts and strolls of  
 ecstasy

Muñoz finds the invocation of these 'future generations' exhilarating because they signify 'a future collectivity, a queerness that registers as the illumination of a horizon of existence'.<sup>12</sup> I share this exhilaration but struggle to reconcile it with a sensibility that figures the child only negatively. Muñoz characterises queers as 'a people without children'.<sup>13</sup> Yet to consider future generations is, really, to think of the children – but to think of them differently, queerly, not through the prescriptive and tightly focused lens of genetic replication and disciplinary deferral but in a hopeful celebratory spirit of tantalisingly blurred

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<sup>10</sup> Muñoz, p. 12.

<sup>11</sup> Muñoz, p. 22.

<sup>12</sup> Muñoz, p. 25.

<sup>13</sup> Muñoz, p. 98.

anticipation. Muñoz is passionate about hope and shares glimpses of its operation through cultural analyses of sites in which he locates it. But *Cruising Utopia* offers few suggestions on how such hope might be consciously generated and strategically reproduced or how such practices might provide concrete benefits to those imagined future generations. I argue that it is possible to position queers as progenitors and inheritors, invested in forms of continuity and reproduction, without deferring to the oppressive constraints of heteronormativity and neoliberal individualism. It is possible to think of the children in ways that support queer futurity. *A reproductive queer futurity is conceivable.*<sup>14</sup>

By *reproductive queer futurity*, then, I mean an investment in the development of forms and practices that support the reproduction of queer futurity as a position of social, cultural and political engagement in and with the world. This is far from Edelman's reproductive futurism, in which the figure of the child 'marks the fetishistic fixation of heteronormativity: an erotically charged investment in the rigid sameness of identity that is central to the compulsory narrative of reproductive futurism'.<sup>15</sup> Reproductive queer futurity is emphatically not about this rigid, compulsory sameness of identity. Nor is it about same-sex couples raising children in homonormative nuclear domesticity (although non-normative forms of same-sex childrearing might be put to the service of reproductive queer futurity). Reproductive queer futurity queerly diverges from reproductive futurism by, for instance, rejecting one-

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<sup>14</sup> Kathryn Alderman passingly refers to 'a non-heterosexually reproductive queer futurity' in the context of Whitman's *Leaves of Grass*, specifically referring to Whitman's openness to a sense of growth and fecundity in which the matter of human bodies is just one component of earth's 'creative and soulful ecology' (p. 38). My approach here is limited to human experience and activity but future investigations could reveal fruitful meta- or post-human applications for reproductive queer futurity. See "'Until Death Brings Us Closer Together Forever": Spirituality, Corporeality, and Queer Identification with Nature in Transcendental Literature', Connecticut College, *English Honors Papers*, 32, 2017 <<http://digitalcommons.conncoll.edu/enghp/32>> [accessed 16 August 2018].

<sup>15</sup> Edelman, p. 21.

way heredity, welcoming two-way learning, communicating heritage critically and valorising divergence and difference; it evokes a tradition of challenging tradition and offers to provide support without reproducing boundaries or imposing accountability on the basis of conformist or disciplinary impulses. It does not share reproductive futurism's insistence on the child as fetishistic emblem of sameness, not only because such insistence stifles rewarding and generative avenues of distinctive agency and self-expression but because such insistence is moribund on its own terms.

As Julian Gill-Peterson, Rebekah Sheldon and Kathryn Bond Stockton have noted, the Child described by Edelman 'now stands for a future out-of-date', a world decisively knocked off its presumed economic, political and environmental course since Edelman's writing in 2004.<sup>16</sup> The always-questionable faith upon which reproductive futurism was predicated – faith that the next generation will enjoy better health, wealth and happiness than the last – has been rendered unsustainable by growing economic precarity, political instability and intergenerational inequality.<sup>17</sup> Also unsustainable is the presumption that those children will be pliant replicants ready to reproduce existing structures. To say 'I believe the children our are future' takes on a different meaning if those children are not the blankly innocent babies of

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<sup>16</sup> 'Introduction: What is the Now, Even of Then?', *GLQ: A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies*, 22.4 (2016), 495-503, p. 495.

<sup>17</sup> This is materialised, for instance, in rising zero-hours employment, declining confidence in established political parties and millennials being worse off than their parents, see respectively: Office for National Statistics, 'Contracts that do not guarantee a minimum number of hours: April 2018' <<https://www.ons.gov.uk/employmentandlabourmarket/peopleinwork/earningsandworkinghours/articles/contractsthatdonotguaranteeaminimumnumberofhours/april2018>> [accessed 16 August 2018]; BMG Research, 'Growing space for a new political party as two-fifths of public say they are not represented by current political parties', 26 April 2018 <<http://www.bmgresearch.co.uk/bmg-independent-growing-space-new-political-party-41-public-feel-not-well-represented-current-political-parties/>> [accessed 16 August 2018]; Adam Corlett, *As Time Goes By: Shifting incomes and inequality between and within generations*, Resolution Foundation, February 2017 <<https://www.resolutionfoundation.org/app/uploads/2017/02/IC-intra-gen.pdf>> [accessed 16 August 2018].

fantasy but the traumatised, angry and articulate mass-shooting survivors and anti-gun activists of Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School in Florida such as Emma Gonzalez and Cameron Kasky. 'The world failed us,' Kasky has said, 'and we're here to make a new one'.<sup>18</sup> This crisis of the future affords certain relative advantages to those already operating, willingly or otherwise, outside the normative edifice whose cracks are starting to show. The children of catastrophe might have as much to teach as to learn. Sheldon has powerfully argued that our current moment of manmade global change, marked by consciousness of 'sterility, extinction, entropy, dessication' and the falling-off of life itself, has engendered an imaginative shift in focus 'from the child in need of salvation to the child who saves'.<sup>19</sup> If, under such circumstances, reproductive queer futurity asks us to think of the children in a queer way, who exactly are these queer children? And, if they stand not only to learn but also to teach, renew and perhaps save, how, if at all, might existing queer forms, processes and understandings support them?

### **The queer child**

Considered literally, queer children might be prepubescent or adolescent people who think and feel against the grain of heteronormative expectations. This version of the queer child has been critically constructed as a conspicuous and instructive impossibility within dominant discourses. Edelman notes in passing that 'the cult of the Child permits no shrines to the queerness of boys and girls, since queerness [...] is understood as bringing children and childhood to an end'.<sup>20</sup> The queer boys, girls and others whose

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<sup>18</sup> Kasky quoted in Charlotte Alter, 'The School Shooting Generation Has Had Enough', *Time*, 22 March 2018 <<http://time.com/longform/never-again-movement/>> [accessed 16 August 2018].

<sup>19</sup> *The Child to Come: Life After the Human Catastrophe* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2016), pp. viii, 6.

<sup>20</sup> Edelman, p. 18.

actual existence is implied by this are excluded here: reproductive futurism has no use for them and Edelman's anti-relationality has no interest in extending a hand. Muñoz registers in passing the impossibility or inadmissibility of such a figure to heteronormative understandings by noting 'the way in which worried parents deal with wild queer children' by refusing to recognise their queerness, treating it instead as 'a moment of misalignment that will, hopefully, correct itself'.<sup>21</sup> These children are left to fend for themselves in life and in Muñoz's argument, which never returns to them. The sense of the queer child as inconceivable is developed by Stockton, who notes that queer children are simply 'not in History [...] They are not a matter of historians' writings or of the general public's belief'.<sup>22</sup> Stockton engages with the subjectivity of the queer child, evoking the experience of 'a frightening, heightened sense of growing toward a question mark. Or growing up in haze. Or hanging in suspense'.<sup>23</sup> They grow ghostly, these children, apprehending their alienation, fearful of rejection and attack, ultimately holding symbolic value less as subjects in their own right than as a kind of death in the family, 'a gravestone marker' for the straight member of society they will never become.<sup>24</sup> Abject and spectral, such children are framed (at least initially in Stockton's argument) as an absence, which makes them hard to help, hard to embrace.

Alternatively, the queer child might be the child queered, whatever their own gender or sexuality, by the fact of having same-sex parents. These are the children roped in by Kath Weston as flagbearers for rights-based progress

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<sup>21</sup> Muñoz, p. 98.

<sup>22</sup> *The Queer Child, or Growing Sideways in the Twentieth Century* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2009), p. 2.

<sup>23</sup> Stockton, p. 3.

<sup>24</sup> Stockton, p. 7.



towards equality.<sup>25</sup> 'This movement toward a world without heterosexism, which enlists the idealism of gays and lesbians to benefit generations yet to come out, looks with expectancy to the children raised within gay families for empathy and acceptance in the future,' Weston writes.<sup>26</sup> But this particular hope leans altogether too heavily and unpredictably on these unborn probably-straight saviours, depriving queers of the agency of self-liberation and remaining wedded to structures of normative domesticity. It is hard to embrace these queer children without embracing an iniquitous status quo. Other scholars, meanwhile, have attended to the child queered through storytelling. In their edited collection, Steven Bruhm and Natasha Hurley push back against the 'dominant narrative about children' – namely that they are at once 'innocent of sexual desires' and 'assumed to be heterosexual' – through provocative readings of literature for and about children, and memoirs of non-normative formative experiences.<sup>27</sup> The figure of the queer child here proves capable of troubling the heteronormative structures that nevertheless retain hegemony over their (fictional and non-fictional) juvenile existence.

I want instead to attend to a more metaphorical queer child. Stockton (who sometimes uses gay and queer interchangeably) notes that to apply the label 'gay child' in retrospect is to affirm the end of childhood: 'by the time the tombstone is raised ("I was a gay child"), the "child" by linguistic definition has expired'.<sup>28</sup> Yet a new 'child' is born too: the fledgling queer adult who is yet a child in the sense of being inexperienced and perhaps

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<sup>25</sup> *Families We Choose: Lesbians, Gays, Kinship* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1991, rev. 1997).

<sup>26</sup> Weston, p. 184.

<sup>27</sup> *Curiouser: On the Queerness of Children* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2004), p. ix. More recently, Stockton has analysed this narrative's roving referents in light of technological and geopolitical shifts. See Kathryn Bond Stockton, 'The Queer Child Now and Its Paradoxical Global Effects', *GLQ: A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies*, 22.4 (2016), 505-539.

<sup>28</sup> Stockton, p. 7.

vulnerable; perhaps alienated, unmoored, alone, confused, scared, hungry and ashamed; not an orphan because never queerly parented but perhaps imagining how it might feel to have kin. This queer child finds ways, in Stockton's term, to 'grow sideways' through cracks and dodges but I suggest might also be able, absent the constraints necessitating sideways movement, to grow up, not into the norm but into something else, something closer to a different, better horizon. This queer child might be childlike in queerly generative ways – playful, messy, disruptive, questioning, inappropriate – bringing to mind Muñoz's observation that 'many dismissals of queerness as childish' seem haunted by an anxiety that childish impropriety might really damage the edifice of conformity.<sup>29</sup>

For the purposes of reproductive queer futurity, then, I understand the queer child as a person of any age engaged in a process of emergence into experiences and understandings of the relational and collective aspects of queerness. Given the impossibility of exhausting all such potential experiences and understandings, any queer subject who remains at all attentive or responsive to discovery and change can therefore be understood as a queer child. (This distinguishes the queer child from, say, the 'baby gay', whose education is complete upon apprehension of the particular styles and mores of the mainstream gay scene.<sup>30</sup>) It is not to be taken for granted that today's 20-year-old will necessarily be engaged in queer world-making longer into the future than today's 50-year-old, or that the 20-year-old will have less to teach than the 50-year-old. And the same person might be a queer child under some conditions and a queer adult, elder or parent under others.

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<sup>29</sup> Muñoz, p. 156.

<sup>30</sup> See, for instance, Sarah Karlan and Heben Nigatu, '28 Stages Every Baby Gay Goes Through', *Buzzfeed*, 5 June 2014 <<https://www.buzzfeed.com/skarlan/but-queerer-things-were-yet-to-come>> [accessed 16 August 2018]. The article's web address tantalisingly hints at expanded horizons unacknowledged in the text itself.

If queer futurity insists that hope can support movement from a blighted present toward a better future, reproductive queer futurity attends to the development and reproduction of concrete technologies to aid the sustainable cultivation of that aim. Harvey Milk said he ran for public office in part to provide, visibly and reliably, 'some symbolic thing that would give them hope', understanding 'them' to include 'those young gays in Des Moines who are "coming out"' and, more broadly, 'all who feel lost and disenfranchised'.<sup>31</sup> To think of the children in the context of reproductive queer futurity is not to use the chimera of innocent weakness to enforce endless sameness but rather to take seriously the need to fortify future generations in the face of unimaginable difference. How can queer adults, elders or parents help fill queer children's packs for a journey that cannot yet be imagined? Reproductive queer futurity is about developing the knowhow to make, mend, pass on and replace accessible, reliable and adaptive technologies of utopian aspiration. Queer children need homemade mutant hope machines.

### **Homemade mutant hope machines**

The key technology of reproductive queer futurity is the homemade mutant hope machine. As noted, this is the term I use to describe objects, forms, processes, habits, understandings and relations that emerge from marginalised experience, express marginalised subjectivity, operate relatively autonomously, adapt to new and changing circumstances and function reliably if not perfectly to generate kinds of hope that support queer lives in concrete ways. Since I will return to the idea of the homemade mutant hope machine throughout this thesis, it's worth unpacking the constituent parts of

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<sup>31</sup> Harvey Milk, 'You've Got to Have Hope', speech delivered 24 June 1977, in *An Archive of Hope: Harvey Milk's Speeches and Writings*, ed. by Jason Edward Black and Charles E. Morris III (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2013), pp. 145-155, p. 155.

the term in some detail, which I will do now before offering some illustrative examples of homemade mutant hope machines in the context of queer culture, politics and society.

*Hope*, Munoz explains, 'permits us to access futurity', and is therefore indispensable.<sup>32</sup> Yet, in his argument, hope is taken where it is found. Reproductive queer futurity consciously aims to generate hope in more or less predictable, sustainable and reproducible ways, which is to say it values hope machines. I use *machine* here in the figurative sense used by some social scientists: the sociologist Howard S. Becker, for instance, understands a machine to be any process liable to 'produce [a] result [...] routinely'.<sup>33</sup> This sense has found application in art and performance studies: Marvin Carlson frames theatre as a 'memory machine' generating and maintaining individual and collective consciousness of aspects of culture and society; Nicolas Bourriaud refers to the relational artwork as 'a machine provoking and managing individual and group encounters'; and Adam Alston describes contemporary immersive theatre productions as 'experience machines' aligned with individual gratification.<sup>34</sup> Hope machines, then, are the engines of reproductive queer futurity.

Given that the forms and conditions of queer collectivity and expression are, as Lauren Berlant and Michael Warner have noted, 'fragile and ephemeral' and 'peculiarly vulnerable' to normative erasure, it is advantageous for hope machines to be capable of adaptation to changing

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<sup>32</sup> Muñoz, p. 98.

<sup>33</sup> *Tricks of the Trade: How to Think About Your Research While You're Doing It* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998), p. 39.

<sup>34</sup> Marvin Carlson, *The Haunted Stage: The Theater as Memory Machine* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2001); Nicholas Bourriaud, *Relational Aesthetics* (1998), trans. Simon Pleasance and Fronza Woods with Mathieu Copeland (Dijon: Les presses du reel, 2002), p. 30; Adam Alston, *Beyond Immersive Theatre: Aesthetics, Politics and Productive Participation* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016), p. 2.

conditions.<sup>35</sup> It helps for a hope machine to be *mutant*. In popular culture, the word 'mutant' has a history of connotations with powerful deviance, forms of variation deemed threatening to an established status quo or subversively non-normative. Examples include the X-Men of Marvel Comics and the giant insects of Cold War American science-fiction movies.<sup>36</sup> The word has also found application around queer performance. Stephen Greer refers to 'mutant stages' when articulating how British queer performance practices materialise the complex, shifting interplay of aesthetics, politics and theory; the phrase conveys a sense of the kinks, warps and accidents through which hopeful intentions navigate contingent circumstances to become concrete forms and processes.<sup>37</sup> In Los Angeles, Mutant Salon, founded in 2012, combines beauty treatments and collaborative performance work in the pursuit of 'connections between queer, trans, POC [people of colour], womyn and mutant communities' in a context that celebrates the adaptive qualities of 'transformation' and 'continual metamorphosis' as vehicles of marginalised expression and relationality.<sup>38</sup>

Hope machines can benefit from being *homemade* in two key senses: emergence and autonomy. In terms of politics and sensibility, 'homemade' suggests the emergence from lived experience of forms and processes addressing needs and desires not recognised by mainstream structures. In terms of practical operability, 'homemade' conveys a sense of autonomous or DIY functionality that makes up in independence, cheapness and amenability

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<sup>35</sup> 'Sex in Public', *Critical Inquiry* 24.2 (1998), 547-566, p. 562.

<sup>36</sup> See Joseph Darowski, 'Reading *The Uncanny X-Men*: Gender Race and the Mutant Metaphor in Popular Narrative' (unpublished doctoral thesis, Michigan State University, 2011) <<https://d.lib.msu.edu/etd/1030/datastream/OBJ/view>> [accessed 16 August 2018]; William M. Tsutsui, 'Looking Straight at *Them!* Understanding the Big Bug Movies of the 1950s', *American Society for Environmental History and Forest History Society*, 12.2 (2007), 237-253.

<sup>37</sup> Stephen Greer, *Contemporary British Queer Performance* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), p. 28.

<sup>38</sup> 'About Mutant Salon', *Mutant Salon* <<http://mutantsalon.com/about>> [accessed 16 August 2018].

to amendment what it might lack in smooth running or sophistication. There are connections here to the value placed on autonomy in anarchist thinking. The anarchist political geographer Gavin Brown notes that, whether or not anarchism is consciously avowed, the power of autonomy is mobilised 'anywhere people attempt to take control of their own lives and create what they desire for themselves rather than relying on others to deliver it for them [...] working with the resources that are to hand at the time, and without deference towards those claiming positions of authority'.<sup>39</sup> Such methods for the autonomous materialisation of non-normative subjectivities have powerful relevance to reproductive queer futurity. Brown shows how they sustain queer autonomous performance collectives with reference to Club Wotever, which produces events at the RVT and works with numerous Duckie collaborators.<sup>40</sup>

Brown writes:

Queer is an ethical process by which (some) gender outlaws and sexual dissidents strive collectively to reclaim and develop our ability to determine the conditions of *our own lives*. It is about attempting to prefigure in the here and now, through form and process, aspects of life beyond capitalism, and beyond the limiting range of consumable identities that are currently sold to us. Queer social relationships, in this context, are produced through the very process of working collectively to create a less alienated and more empowered space in which to explore a multiplicity of sexual and gendered potentialities [...] queer happens through experiments with autonomous practices.<sup>41</sup>

Brown conveys here the sense of what I mean by homemade: individuals or groups responding to experiences and feelings of alienation and marginalisation through the creation of forms and processes that allow for the broadly autonomous exploration of other ways of feeling, understanding, relating and being that are not accountable to market supremacy, heterosexism and other dominant discourses of exclusion. I say broadly

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<sup>39</sup> 'Amateurism and anarchism in the creation of autonomous queer spaces', in *Anarchism and Sexuality: Ethics, Relationships and Power*, ed. by Jamie Heckert and Richard Cleminson (London: Routledge, 2011), 200-223, p. 202.

<sup>40</sup> Brown, p. 203.

<sup>41</sup> Brown, p. 203.

autonomous because some degree of material dependence on existing structures is hard to avoid: emergent queer forms might still rely, for instance, on transport, water and electricity networks created and maintained by government or private capital; and my introduction has signaled how projects of service to reproductive queer futurity might be supported by funding from structures that uphold oppressive norms. Such projects' claim to economic autonomy is strongly qualified. Nevertheless, I argue, they maintain a claim to homemade status when they originate as autonomous responses to alienated or marginalised experience and demonstrably maintain forms and processes consistent with that emergent sensibility.

The homemade mutant hope machine is, then, a powerful vehicle for reproductive queer futurity. I do not insist that emergent, autonomous and adaptive forms and processes of this kind can *only* be put to queer ends but, given their embrace of contingency, fluidity, instability and unaccountability, they align more readily with queer ends than constrictive, normative or conservative ones. I will now show how these queer vehicles work in practice.

### **Homemade mutant hope machines in action**

The homemade mutant hope machines of reproductive queer futurity take many forms. Before serving queer collectivity, they might serve the survival of the isolated (figurative or literal) queer child by making imaginable and accessible even the glimmer of another kind of life. The practice of knowing when and how to dress in one's mother's clothes with minimal risk of discovery could constitute a homemade mutant hope machine operating to enable experimentation with aspects of one's gendered or sexualised identity; so too could a concealed stash of scavenged pornography or other tools of sexual exploration. In the context of describing her own precocious sexuality, Gina de Vries mentions one acquaintance who 'rigged up

a suspension bondage contraption' aged seven and another who 'made his own dildoes and buttplugs' aged six.<sup>42</sup> Such idiosyncratic improvised technologies can open up spaces for the investigation of sustainable selfhood before one's queerness is consciously articulated to others or, perhaps, to oneself.

Homemade mutant hope machines can also effect first contact between queers, often against considerable odds. Some enable relationality across time and space – zines, for example, or blogs – while others work locally, one to one. An instructive example is found in Jean Genet's film *Un chant d'amour*.<sup>43</sup> Two prisoners are held in adjacent cells. Neither can see the other but each knows he is not alone. One dances, the other paces, both exude erotic frustration. The pacer threads a straw from his mattress through a tiny hole in the wall and blows smoke through it. Contact! But the dancer is indifferent. The connection is missed. Later, lonelier, the dancer selects a straw from his own mattress and feeds it through the hole. He has, after all, noted the functionality of this adaptive DIY technique and successfully reproduced its operation. This time the contact is reciprocated and, as the smoke circulates, a utopian fantasia effloresces, a vision of woodland play, touch and freedom. That the bonds of the lovers' incarceration make themselves felt once more is less important than the fact that, without setting eyes on one another, they have created an autonomous, adaptive and reproducible technology routinely capable of generating hope.

Eyes can themselves constitute another body-to-body homemade mutant hope machine through the complex negotiations of the cruiser's gaze. A more sophisticated body-to-body machine operates through the rich vocabulary of the hanky code. An even more sophisticated one is embodied

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<sup>42</sup> 'Unsuitable for Children', in *That's Revolting! Queer Strategies for Resisting Assimilation*, ed. by Mattilda Bernstein Sycamore (New York: Soft Skull Press, 2008), 141-146, p. 142.

<sup>43</sup> *Un chant d'amour*, dir. by Jean Genet (Connoisseur Video, 1950).



in the format of ACT UP New York's general meetings, showcased in the documentary *United in Anger*, incorporating finger clicks, managed dissensus and structurally interventionist strategising.<sup>44</sup> This machine functioned routinely, every week, to sustain an activist culture of support and change. Evolutionary pressures of the most brutal kind yielded a highly complex, efficient, adaptive, autonomous and normatively unaccountable machine that ultimately proved capable of shifting state policies. I do not mean to suggest that the only thing produced by this machine – or indeed the larger machine of ACT UP itself – was hope. But without the generation of hope through the sense of mutual understanding and productive joint effort, the organisation's successes would have been inconceivable. In fact, its successes were such that not only the general-meeting format but the forms and processes of ACT UP itself proved reproducible in cities outside the United States. The feature film *120 BPM*, for example, powerfully dramatises their application in Paris.<sup>45</sup>

Homemade mutant hope machines can also be location-based. Nightlife venues such as the RVT are key sites, as was the San Francisco Gay Community Center feted by Harvey Milk as 'one of those few buildings that contribute in a very unique way to the hopes and aspirations of a particular group of people'.<sup>46</sup> So too are domestic and mobile spaces of refuge and relaxation. A striking example is the boarding house outside Hunter, New York, known as Casa Susanna at which, between 1955 and 1969, mostly self-

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<sup>44</sup> *United in Anger*, dir. by Jim Hubbard (Quad Cinema, 2012). See also 'Monday Night Meetings', *ACT UP Aids Coalition to Unleash Power* <<http://www.actupny.org/documents/newmem1.html>> [accessed 16 August 2018].

<sup>45</sup> *120 BPM*, dir. by Robin Campillo (Memento Films, 2017).

<sup>46</sup> Milk, p. 148 (emphasis in original). In relation to domestic or mobile spaces, see, for instance, Matt Cook, *Queer Domesticities: Homosexuality and Home Life in Twentieth-Century London* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan 2014), or the pick-up truck used by a group of young queer and trans people of colour in *Lucid Noon, Sunset Blush*, dir. by Alli Logout (2015).

identifying heterosexual transvestites found and made a space of their own.<sup>47</sup> They could wear clothing, accessories, hair and make-up of their choice in a relaxing environment of eating, drinking, gardening, swimming and playing games, undertaken in the company of some participants' sympathetic wives.<sup>48</sup> Casa Susanna was owned and operated by Susanna Valenti, sometimes known as Tito, and Tito's wife Marie.<sup>49</sup> The site was part of a network dedicated to materialising the expression of and support for transvestite (or 'TV') culture that also included the magazine *Transvestia*, for which Susanna wrote many articles.<sup>50</sup> Weekends at Casa Susanna proved to be a distinctively powerful hope machine whose routine outputs included techniques of feminine embodiment and expression that generated, in critic Sophie Hackett's words, 'a sense that this woman was possible and viable, that she could live'.<sup>51</sup> Other incrementally emerging techniques confirmed that she could not only live but join a sympathetic and supportive community, be lovingly documented through photography, express herself through live performance and even experience happy and sustainable interaction with mainstream society (on a successful group trip to a nearby pizza parlour which

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<sup>47</sup> See Susanna Valenti, 'Susanna Says...', *Transvestia*, 36 (1965), 68-75, repr. in *Another Kind of Life: Photography on the Margins*, ed. by Alona Pardo (London: Prestel, 2018), 262-265; Michel Nurst, and Robert Swope, eds, *Casa Susanna*, (New York: Powerhouse Books, 2005); Sophie Hackett, 'Casa Susanna', in *Another Kind of Life*, 60; Jay Blotcher, 'Queens of the Catskills', *Chronogram* (2007) <<https://www.chronogram.com/hudsonvalley/queens-of-the-catskills/Content?oid=2172129>> [accessed 16 August 2018]; Dallas Denny, 'The Historical Roots of Casa Valentina', *Chrysalis Quarterly* (2014), 10 May 2014 <<http://dallasdenny.com/Chrysalis/2014/05/10/the-historical-roots-of-casa-valentina/>> [accessed 9 May 2018]; 'Susanna Valenti (192? - ?) translator, broadcaster, activist', *A Gender Variance Who's Who* <<https://zagria.blogspot.co.uk/2012/02/susanna-valenti-192-translator.html#.WvMWVNXwa2y>> [accessed 16 August 2018]. Hackett notes that from 1955 to 1963 the site was known as Chevalier d'Eon and from 1964 to 1969 as Casa Susanna.

<sup>48</sup> Blotcher.

<sup>49</sup> Blotcher.

<sup>50</sup> Hackett.

<sup>51</sup> Hackett.

resulted in an invitation to return).<sup>52</sup> Casa Susanna allowed marginalised people to envisage and begin to inhabit a livable future in terms that otherwise seemed utterly fantastical: it was a place where ‘dreams come true’, where the ability to dress comfortably with no ‘guilt, no shame, no fear’ felt like ‘a form of magic’ and where guests could plausibly anticipate a group ice-skating trip ‘in full regalia’.<sup>53</sup> Casa Susanna was no queer utopia: it had hostile if non-violent neighbours who thought ‘it was wrong’ and said they ‘would not be disappointed if the place burned up’.<sup>54</sup> Nor was it a model of queer solidarity: its devotees insisted they were not homosexual and valorised ‘discreet, non-scandalous, lady-like’ conduct that, they believed, favourably distinguished them from ‘the screaming drag queen’ contemporaneously engaged in a fight against legal oppression in which Casa Susanna’s ladies believed they had no stake.<sup>55</sup> Nevertheless, it was a remarkable homemade mutant hope machine.

In attending to the autonomous, experimental and affectively charged materialisation of marginalised subjectivity, reproductive queer futurity and the homemade mutant hope machines that sustain it, I build on Berlant and Warner’s investment in practices of ‘world making’ that ‘allow for the concretization of a queer counterpublic’.<sup>56</sup> Berlant and Warner broadly champion ‘criminal intimacies’, the intense personal relations and narratives outside the normatively legitimising structures of domesticity, property and nationality that enable different kinds of ‘belonging and transformation’.<sup>57</sup> Of particular relevance to reproductive queer futurity are their references to pragmatic, concrete and reproducible forms implicit in such world-making:

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<sup>52</sup> Hackett; Valenti, p. 69; Valenti, p. 70.

<sup>53</sup> Valenti, pp. 68, 70-71.

<sup>54</sup> Blotcher.

<sup>55</sup> Valenti, p. 70

<sup>56</sup> Berlant and Warner, p. 558.

<sup>57</sup> Berlant and Warner, p. 558.

‘the critical practical knowledge’ and ‘common language of self-cultivation’ that logistically enable practices of queer relationality.<sup>58</sup> The value of homemade mutant hope machines in this context lies in their reliable generation of such outcomes and their fortifying (re)production of ‘modes of feeling that can be learned rather than experienced as a birthright’ – the queer child having no ostensible birthright.<sup>59</sup> Berlant and Warner’s analysis has direct application to queer clubbing and performance contexts. Fiona Buckland’s account of social dancing shows how it helps illuminate the liberatory potentiality of dancing’s ‘embodiment of experience, identity, and community’.<sup>60</sup> Shane Vogel, meanwhile, identifies experimental drag duo Kiki and Herb’s ability to cultivate through their cabaret work ‘counterdiscourses to dominant ideologies’ constituting a powerful queer world-making form.<sup>61</sup> Both social dancing and cabaret performance emerge in later chapters as highly generative aspects of Duckie’s practice.

If queer world-making is an activity, reproductive queer futurity can be considered a practically-minded expression of the ideology motivating it, and homemade mutant hope machines a powerful technology for delivering it. Such a formulation helps address some of the tensions identified by other critics engaged with the contingent local materialisation of utopian aspirations. As noted in my introduction, for instance, Jill Dolan powerfully articulates the ‘utopian performative’ as a moment generated through performance practices that offers participants a glimpse of a better world.<sup>62</sup> But she expresses ambivalence about whether such lived affective experience

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<sup>58</sup> Berlant and Warner, p. 561.

<sup>59</sup> Berlant and Warner, pp. 558, 561.

<sup>60</sup> *Impossible Dance: Club Culture and Queer World-Making* (Middletown: Wesleyan University Press, 2002), p. 2.

<sup>61</sup> ‘Where Are We Now? Queer World Making and Cabaret Performance’, *GLQ: A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies*, 6.1 (2000) 29-60, p. 34.

<sup>62</sup> *Utopia in Performance: Finding Hope at the Theater* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2005), p. 2.

can be practically applied to political ends, at one point insisting the utopian performative 'can't translate into a program for social action', at another asserting that the affect it generates 'translates into political effects' and at another proposing that critics 'too often flounder on the shoals of "what does this *do*," when how something *feels* in the moment might be powerful enough'.<sup>63</sup> Framing the utopian performative as a kind of hope machine offers a path out of this impasse: it offers a way of *feeling* that, through the cultivation of hope as a practical, routine methodology, enables subjects to *do* reproductive queer futurity. The practice of reproductive queer futurity, then, lies in just such *doing* and its forms are materialised by homemade mutant hope machines.

## Conclusion

This chapter has shown the value of emergent, autonomous and adaptive forms and processes capable of effectively generating hope for queer subjects in routine ways. It has shown how a homemade mutant hope machine might take the form of an event, like Duckie's Saturday nights, or an object, like the reed in *Un chant d'amour*, or a place, like Casa Susanna, or a process, like ACT UP's meetings. Each serves reproductive queer futurity to the extent that it allows hope in queer futures not only to be produced serendipitously or occasionally but to be reproduced routinely and replicably. It is through the provision of such forms and processes, I argue, that queer parents can serve queer children. The queer child benefits when homemade mutant hope machines are made available – available but, crucially, not compulsory and not with the expectation of rigid sameness in their use. Queer is neither fixed nor stable and its tools and their use benefit by embracing mutation and challenge.

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<sup>63</sup> Dolan, pp. 19, 111, 170 (emphasis in original).

Within this protean context, however, certain structures prove to be of persistent and enduring benefit to reproductive queer futurity, opening up ways of living through, despite or beyond the imperatives of heteronormativity and neoliberal capitalism. Two such structures are *family* and *fun*. Entering the English language in the fifteenth and seventeenth centuries respectively, both family and fun underwent a change in meaning with the rise of capitalism, becoming newly understood as forms of *not-work*. One was newly rendered sacred and sentimental, the other newly rendered trivial and harmless; both were newly framed as properly existing to support the operation of capitalist labour through the provision of uncritical relief. But looking back on the etymological roots of family and fun opens up other, queerer applications. Family, queerly reconceptualised, offers kinds of material support and active lineage that make conceivable a livable future and mobilise a galvanising past – ‘not a nostalgic past’, in Muñoz’s words, ‘but a past that helps us feel a certain structure of feelings, a circuit of queer belonging’.<sup>64</sup> And fun, queerly reconceptualised, enables pleasurable engagement in a now that is affectively marked not by jeopardy and hypervigilance but by enjoyment and discovery, and that enables disruptive kinds of experiment, intervention and construction. Queer family makes the past and the future more hopeful. Queer fun makes the present more hopeful. I show how these *doings* serve reproductive queer futurity in the next two chapters.

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<sup>64</sup> Muñoz, p. 111.

## Chapter Two

### Doing family queerly

#### Introduction

As Chapter One showed, *doing* is crucial to reproductive queer futurity and, in this chapter, I will articulate the value in this context of the doing of family. To do this, I will show how queer scholarship has tended to understand family through the limited frames of nuclear domesticity and homogenous peer groups. I will then show how the etymology and early uses of the word 'family' point toward other kinds of structure whose capacity to support the routine generation of hope gives them greater value to reproductive queer futurity. These alternative structures enact two things. The first is material support, which mitigates the queer child's vulnerability to precarity under neoliberal capitalism. The second is intergenerational transmission, which animates the queer past, promoting a sense of deep belonging, and makes available already existing and often hard-won queer forms of understanding, relating and acting, which can relieve the often-perceived burden on the queer child to create from nothing the means for a livable life. This critical rearticulation illuminates the capacity of homemade mutant hope machines to mobilise queer family structures of material support and intergenerational transmission to powerful effect. I illustrate this potential through analysis of the US Ballroom community and aspects of Duckie's practices, showing how various family structures can help to generate hope and materialise better worlds.

#### Expanding understandings of queer family

Family is something people do, not something people are. Anthropologists have convincingly established kinship, in Elizabeth Freeman's words, as

'a social not a biological fact' while the sociologist David Morgan articulates family as 'a constructed quality of human interaction or an active process rather than a thing-like object'.<sup>1</sup> Following Morgan, Jeffrey Weeks, Brian Heaphy and Catherine Donovan describe family as 'a historically specific, contextualised set of activities, intimately linked with other social practices'.<sup>2</sup> To share a high proportion of one's genetic material with close blood relations is not a matter of agency or choice. But to share genetic material is not to do family as a lived experience. To do family in contemporary society in the global north is to engage in practices that, according to the anthropologist Kath Weston, are widely understood to include 'symbolic demonstrations of love, shared history, material or emotional assistance, and other signs of enduring solidarity' including 'commitment to "working through" conflicts'; according to Weeks *et. al.*, family practices include 'continuity over time, emotional and material support, ongoing commitment, and intense engagement'.<sup>3</sup> Family, then, is culturally rather than biogenetically determined. To do family is not to evince an essential, fixed and self-evident identity but to participate in a shared enterprise contingent on empathy, reciprocity, imagination, trust, will and managed conflict. In this sense, all family relationships are, in the words of the homophobic Section 28 of the UK *Local Government Act (1988)*, 'pretended family relationships'.<sup>4</sup>

Family relationships are, however, no less real for that. Family is, in part, a matter of perception, politics and sensibility. What, then, does it mean to

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<sup>1</sup> Elizabeth Freeman, 'Queer Belongings: Kinship Theory and Queer Theory', in *A Companion to Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, and Queer Studies*, ed. by George E. Haggerty and Molly McGarry (Malden: Blackwell, 2007), pp. 295-314, p. 299; David H.J. Morgan, 'Risk and Family Practices: Accounting for Change and Fluidity in Family Life', in *The New Family?*, ed. by Elizabeth B. Silva and Carol Smart (London: Sage, 1999), 13-30, p. 16.

<sup>2</sup> *Same Sex Intimacies: Families of Choice and Other Life Experiments* (London: Routledge, 2001), p. 38.

<sup>3</sup> *Families We Choose: Lesbians, Gays, Kinship* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1991, rev. 1997), p. 109, p. 113; Weeks *et al.*, *Same Sex Intimacies*, p. 10.

<sup>4</sup> *Local Government Act (1988)* <<http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/1988/9/section/28/enacted>> [accessed 16 August 2018].



do family queerly? José Esteban Muñoz insists that the 'queerness of queer futurity, like the blackness of a black radical tradition, is a relational and collective modality of endurance and support'.<sup>5</sup> If the queer child of reproductive queer futurity is understood as a queer of any age emerging into a more expansive appreciation of this relational and collective queerness – someone who at once stands to benefit from non-normative forms of nurturing and guidance and participates in reciprocal processes of utopian investment – what kind of family structures might serve their interests? Existing queer scholarship on family, I will show, is of limited use here. While lived experiences of queer family structures are richly diverse, critical conceptualisation of queer family (my focus here) has been limited in scope. It has attended to the queer value of senses of belonging, security, self-development and support; but in so doing, it has privileged the structures of the domestic nuclear family and groups of peers of similar backgrounds, ages and experiences in ways that barely glance at the interests of the queer child as conceived by reproductive queer futurity.

This centring of nuclear family structures of domesticated intimacy and queer kinship groups comprising demographically homogenous peers was effectively proposed by Weston in 1991. Weston powerfully articulates multiple ways in which such chosen family groupings have enabled lesbians and gays in liberal societies to develop models of intimacy, support, affirmation, resilience and love often unavailable from their families of origin. Finding comparable outcomes studying UK relationships, Weeks *et al.* emphasise 'the search for a satisfactory relationship', typically one of cohabiting monogamy, as the cornerstone of family under neoliberalism.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> *Cruising Utopia: The Then and There of Queer Futurity* (New York: New York University Press, 2009), p. 91.

<sup>6</sup> Jeffrey Weeks, Catherine Donovan and Brian Heaphy, 'Everyday Experiments: Narratives of Non-heterosexual Relationships', in Silva, Elizabeth B. and Carol Smart, eds, *The New Family?* (London: Sage, 1999), 83-99, p.85.

Also in a UK context, Elizabeth B. Silva and Carol Smart track how social understandings of family have expanded to the benefit of marginalised populations, including lesbians and gays, while reinforcing the presumed centrality of domesticated childrearing.<sup>7</sup> Kath O'Donnell, meanwhile, shows how UK courts' understandings of family have increasingly privileged childrearing over marriage, to the benefit of same-sex parents before legal marriage equality.<sup>8</sup> Alexis Dewaele, Nele Cox, Wim Van den Berghe and John Vincke show that, among Flemish lesbians, gays and bisexuals, kinship groups of peers remain greater sources of support than blood family.<sup>9</sup> By contrast, Richard T. Rodriguez argues that, in navigating structural racism, biological and chosen family structures remain dialectically enmeshed for many Chicano/a queers in San Francisco.<sup>10</sup> Further US studies have shown the continued value of 'gay family' and 'chosen family' structures to Black gay and trans people and young gay and bisexual men in ways that can mitigate fraught blood-family relationships.<sup>11</sup> And Joanna Mizielińska and Agata Stasińska have shown how, in Poland, same-sex couples remain strongly socioeconomically incentivised to privilege blood family and coupled cohabitation over LGBTQ peer groups or community ties.<sup>12</sup> Matt Cook has

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<sup>7</sup> 'The "New" Practices and Politics of Family Life' in *The New Family?*, ed. by Elizabeth B. Silva and Carol Smart (London: Sage, 1999), 1-13.

<sup>8</sup> 'Lesbian and gay families: legal perspectives', in Wright, Caroline, and Gill Jagger, eds, *Changing Family Values* (London: Routledge, 1999), 77-97.

<sup>9</sup> 'Families of Choice? Exploring the Supportive Networks of Lesbians, Gay Men, and Bisexuals', *Journal of Applied Social Psychology*, 41.2 (2011), 312-331.

<sup>10</sup> 'Afterword: Making Queer Familia', in *Next of Kin: The Family in Chicano/a Cultural Politics*, ed. by Richard T. Rodriguez (Durham: Duke University Press, 2009), 167-176.

<sup>11</sup> See Heidi M. Levitt, Sharon G. Horne, Julia Puckett, Kristin Kay Sweeney and Martavius L. Hampton, 'Gay Families: Challenging Racial and Sexual/Gender Minority Stressors through Social Support', *Journal of GLBT Family Studies*, 11.2 (2015), 173-202; Jorge H. Soler, Cleopatra H. Caldwell, David Córdova, Gary Harper and José A. Bauermeister, 'Who Counts as Family? Family Typologies, Family Support, and Family Undermining Among Young Adult Gay and Bisexual Men', *Sexuality Research and Social Policy*, 15.2 (2018), 123-138.

<sup>12</sup> 'Beyond the Western gaze: Families of choice in Poland', *Sexualities* special issue on Queer Kinship and Relationships (2017) <<http://journals.sagepub.com/doi/full/10.1177/1363460717718508>> [accessed 16 August 2018].

demonstrated that queer domesticity need not be normative or wedded to nuclear family models while showing the criticality of material contingencies to enabling non-normative forms.<sup>13</sup>

Scholarship of queered nuclear domesticity and homogenous queer kinship groups has, then, yielded many instructive insights while overwhelmingly attending to the amelioration of life under neoliberalism rather than the formation of new structures. Furthermore, both forms have now been normatively assimilated to a considerable degree. The main forms of domesticated intimacy examined in the scholarship are coupled cohabitation and the parenting by cohabiting couples of infants and prepubescent children – structures that have proved largely (if not inevitably or always smoothly) assimilable to existing rights-based discourses of propertied private citizenship notwithstanding their participants' sexuality. Activist turned same-sex parent Stephanie Schroeder regretfully concludes that 'queer people having children conservatize not only themselves and their children, but tar the entire queer community'.<sup>14</sup> Meanwhile, the reframing of friendship groups as kin, though no more recognised in law than when Weston was writing, has become more widely accepted in mainstream heteronormative popular culture, albeit in ways that erase its emergence from contexts of non-normative sexuality. The theme song from *The LEGO Batman Movie* (2017), 'Friends Are Family', for instance, included the lines: 'We're not related but here's good news: / Friends are the family you can choose'.<sup>15</sup> And a recent UK television commercial for McCain frozen potato products entitled 'We Are Family' found space in its calculatedly diverse array of kinship

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<sup>13</sup> *Queer Domesticities: Homosexuality and Home Life in Twentieth-Century London* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan 2014).

<sup>14</sup> 'Queer parents: an oxymoron? Or just moronic?', in *That's Revolting! Queer Strategies for Resisting Assimilation*, ed. by Mattilda Bernstein Sycamore (New York: Soft Skull Press, 2008), 100-104, p. 103.

<sup>15</sup> Chris Sernel, Madison Love, Hovey Benjamin, Jeff Lewis and Chris Miller, 'Friends Are Family', Oh, Hush! Feat. Will Arnett and Jeff Lewis (WaterTower Music, 2017).

structures for families with 'two daddies' and suggested 'perhaps your friends are your family'.<sup>16</sup>

Other queer family structures receive scant scholarly attention. Weston grants that 'the nuclear family clearly represents a privileged construct' and notes 'the potential of chosen kin to expand the notion of family well beyond couples and kids' yet her study remains almost exclusively focused on couples, kids and 'close friends as kin'; other potential structures, such as Ballroom communities or prison families, merit only glancing mentions.<sup>17</sup> Weeks *et al.* assert a desire not to privilege couple-based dynamics but in practice focus heavily on coupling, cohabiting and parenting; where they attend to peer groups, these are largely socially homogenous.<sup>18</sup> Freeman notes that Weston's emphasis on the ability to choose kinship structures privileges 'those with the fewest bodily differences and local attachments that would preclude the full exercise of this autonomy', in other words 'bourgeois gays and lesbians over queers with less economic, racial, gender and national privilege'.<sup>19</sup> Freeman argues powerfully for a broader principle of 'queer belonging' with the capacity for renewal that 'makes people more possible' and establishes connections 'beyond one's own time'.<sup>20</sup> While this less normative conception of kinship and family avows openness to forms that 'exceed the matrix of couplehood and reproduction', Freeman struggles in practice to articulate concrete alternatives barring one footnote acknowledging Ballroom communities.<sup>21</sup> Rather, she suggests that 'queer "extended family" tends to collapse into amorphous and generic "community," while queer "descent groups" seem for the most part

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<sup>16</sup> 'We Are Family', *McCain UK*, 2017 <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aJ9fjN1az9g>> [accessed 16 August 2018].

<sup>17</sup> Weston, pp. 6, xvii-xiv, 112.

<sup>18</sup> Weeks *et al.*, 'Everyday Experiments', p. 90.

<sup>19</sup> Freeman, 'Queer Belongings', p. 304.

<sup>20</sup> Freeman, 'Queer Belongings', p. 299.

<sup>21</sup> Freeman, 'Queer Belongings', p. 295.

linguistically inconceivable'.<sup>22</sup> David Eng notes incisively how 'queer liberalism' has prioritised access to state-recognised rights such as marriage and military service over earlier queer efforts to 'provide a radical critique of family and kinship' but remains invested in the need to 'contest romanticized notions' attached to the normatively assimilated family rather than explore alternative models.<sup>23</sup>

Some scholars have pushed back against the construction of parenting as necessarily homonormative. Elizabeth Reed, for instance, notes that LGBTQ parents often teach their children 'queer reading' skills against the grain of mainstream culture.<sup>24</sup> Jane Ward, meanwhile, proposes that queerly non-hierarchical forms of childrearing can 'forge a utopian space' enabling children's growth 'without investment' in normative models; and Laura V. Heston argues that LGBTQ people having babies 'can contribute to queer world-making'.<sup>25</sup> These discussions open up space for queer understandings of childrearing practices, including the refusal of prescriptive models of heredity, yet they remain predicated on the identification of family with the nuclear domestic sphere. Anarchist scholarship offers other potentially fruitful avenues of exploration: Susan Song proposes polyamory as a structure capable of supporting 'new family and relationship forms not invested in sexual ownership and in becoming part of state-enforced and monitored relationships'; and Jason Lydon describes the Boston-based prison-abolitionist organisation Black and Pink as 'an open family of LGBTQ

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<sup>22</sup> Freeman, 'Queer Belongings', p. 297.

<sup>23</sup> *The Feeling of Kinship: Queer Liberalism and the Racialization of Intimacy* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2010), pp. 3, 8.

<sup>24</sup> 'Making Queer Families: Identity, LGBTQ Parents, Media, and Cultural Representation' (unpublished doctoral thesis, University of Sussex, 2016) <<http://ethos.bl.uk/>> [accessed 16 August 2018], p. 185.

<sup>25</sup> 'Radical Experiments Involving Innocent Children: Locating Parenthood in Queer Utopia', in *A Critical Inquiry into Queer Utopias*, ed. by Angela Jones (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), pp. 231-244, p. 233; 'Utopian Kinship? The Possibilities of Queer Parenting', in *A Critical Inquiry into Queer Utopias*, pp. 245-267, p. 265.

prisoners and “free world” allies’ with ‘the potential to help queer the notion of family and provide real care and attention too often denied’ by biogenetic family.<sup>26</sup> But neither illustrates such potential with material specificity.

Some scholars have rejected the queer utility of the concept of family altogether. Jack Halberstam suggests choosing ‘to forget family and forget lineage and forget tradition in order to start from a new place [...] where the new begins afresh’.<sup>27</sup> Such forgetting would, Halberstam argues, mark ‘a rupture with the eternally self-generating present, a break with a self-authorizing past, and an opportunity for a non-hetero-reproductive future’ that is not in hock to Oedipally-inflected kinds of ‘[g]enerational logic’ that structure relations with the past in terms of imitation or rejection.<sup>28</sup> This is a binary choice between enslavement to oppressive forms or a fresh start, ‘unfettered by memory, tradition, and usable pasts’, on scorched earth.<sup>29</sup> This fresh start is nearly impossible to conceive as actually realisable for anyone with a better memory than Dory, the forgetful fish from *Finding Nemo*.<sup>30</sup> Moreover, such a binary construction leaves no room for fluid and contingent engagement with the past through critically reimagined family structures. Halberstam notes that ‘normative understandings of time and transmission’ tend to be baked into the ‘deployment of the concept of *family*, whether in hetero or homo contexts’.<sup>31</sup> To recognise this, however, doesn’t justify the

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<sup>26</sup> ‘Polyamory and Queer Anarchism: Infinite Possibilities for Resistance’, in *Queering Anarchism: Addressing and Undressing Power and Desire*, ed. by C.B. Daring, J. Rouge, Deric Shannon and Abbey Volcano (Oakland: AK Press, 2012), pp. 165-172, p. 170; Jason Lydon, ‘Tearing Down the Walls: Queerness, Anarchism and the Prison Industrial Complex’, in *Queering Anarchism*, pp. 195-205, p. 201.

<sup>27</sup> *The Queer Art of Failure* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2011), p. 70. See also Halberstam, ‘Forgetting Family: Queer Alternatives to Oedipal Relations’, in *A Companion to Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, and Queer Studies*, ed. by George E. Haggerty and Molly McGarry (Malden: Blackwell, 2007), 315-324.

<sup>28</sup> Halberstam, *Failure*, p. 70.

<sup>29</sup> Halberstam, *Failure*, p. 70.

<sup>30</sup> *Finding Nemo*, dir. by Andrew Stanton and Lee Unkrich (Pixar, 2003).

<sup>31</sup> Halberstam, *Failure*, p. 71.

injunction to 'forget family' rather than reimagine it.<sup>32</sup> It neglects, for example, the hunger felt by many queer children for information about how queers in the past made their lives livable (and indeed for contact with those queers) and it dismisses queer elders who might want to make such understandings available but not compulsory or to relate to or learn from younger queers.

In framing family as a structure that necessarily privileges nuclear domesticity and 'erases other modes of kinship in the process', Halberstam overlooks the useable past of the word *family*.<sup>33</sup> Its etymology, surprisingly unattended to in queer kinship scholarship, reveals its associations with immediate biogenetic kin to be relatively recent and its now-primary associations with emotionally validating domestic intimacy even more so.<sup>34</sup> The word's origins relate to (likely coercive) labour relations, deriving from the Latin word *famulus*, meaning a household servant. The English word *family* was first used around 1400 to refer to the servants of a household and from around 1425 to connote those descended from a common ancestor wherever they lived. At its roots, then, *family* referred to forms of supportive labour and forms of lineage. Later usages referred to a nobleman's wider retinue, all those (biological relations, friends, allies, servants and others) living in a household or groups united by political, religious or ethnic descent. By the late seventeenth century, *family* could refer to the close biogenetic group of parents and their children regardless of living arrangements. For many, the feudal and post-feudal family structure was one in which biogenetic kinship and economic and material labour and support were inseparable and indistinguishable. As John D'Emilio incisively articulates, it was only with the advent of industrialised capitalism in the nineteenth century and the attendant emphasis on geographically mobile individual wage labour

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<sup>32</sup> Halberstam, *Failure*, p. 71.

<sup>33</sup> Halberstam, *Failure*, p. 71.

<sup>34</sup> *Oxford English Dictionary*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., s.v. 'family'.

that the economic aspect of family life was ostensibly decoupled from its biogenetic and affective aspects.<sup>35</sup> In practice, such decoupling was (as Rodriguez has noted) less easily available to people of colour and, even for white people, the economic dimension remained in place, concealed under the rubric of women's work or domestic labour.<sup>36</sup> Still, this concealment itself testified to a major shift in dominant understandings of family from being primarily a site of material need and support toward a newly valorised position as a site of intimacy and affection providing restorative repose to the capitalist wage worker.

What queer use might, then, be found by choosing not to reject the concept of family *tout court* but instead skipping backward over the word's relatively recent associations with close biogenetic proximity and capitalism-enabling intimacy, and returning to its original fifteenth-century applications to structures of labour and lineage? How might reconceptualising family along those lines speak to questions related to the economic viability of marginalised groups under neoliberalism or the potential capacities of the kind of queer descent group Freeman thought an impossibility? How can family support queer as utopian, relational and collective? Such questions are particularly germane at a time of vulnerability, as noted above, for the fantasy of perpetual economic growth upon which the strictures of heteronormative reproductive futurism are built. This is a good moment to think not only of how queer family structures can ameliorate the pains of exclusion but of how they might serve as vehicles to move in new directions, and whether they might do so without having first to forget all that came before. Robert Goss notes that, read faithfully, the Bible offers less powerful support for the

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<sup>35</sup> 'Capitalism and Gay Identity' (1983), repr. in *The Lesbian and Gay Studies Reader*, ed. by Henry Abelove, Michèle Aina Barale, and David M. Halperin (New York: Routledge, 1993), 467-476, p. 469-470.

<sup>36</sup> Rodriguez, p. 170.



procreative nuclear family than for 'new, alternative families [...] nonbiological household[s] of equal disciples'.<sup>37</sup> Truly queering the family, Goss argues, is not assimilationist or accommodationalist but 'politically destructive of the ethic of traditional family values'.<sup>38</sup> Can I get an amen?

I want now to suggest two ways in which the queer reconceptualisation of family in line with its etymological origins can support reproductive queer futurity. One way is to use the connection of family with labour not to look at ideas of literal servitude (as in the fifteenth-century usage) but to consider how family can support broader, queerer conceptions of economic and material sustainability. The other way is to use the connection of family with lineage not to look at ideas of literal biogenetic descent (as in the fifteenth-century usage) but to consider how family can support the intergenerational transmission of queer forms of feeling, understanding, acting and relating. As I will show, attending to these can help facilitate the ability to grow sideways or upward in new directions and enable the production and circulation of homemade mutant hope machines.

### **Material support**

D'Emilio unpacks how the advent of capitalist wage labour catalysed changes to the structure of the (implicitly white) American family, shifting from reliance on 'a largely self-sufficient household' to material conditions of greater autonomy that enabled 'the making of lesbianism and gayness' as individual identities.<sup>39</sup> D'Emilio describes a 'household economy, composed of family units that were basically self-sufficient, independent, and patriarchal', in which mutually interdependent people collectively produced the goods they

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<sup>37</sup> 'Queering Procreative Privilege: Coming Out as Families' in *Our Families, Our Values: Snapshots of Queer Kinship*, ed. by Robert Goss and A.S. Strongheart (Binghampton: The Harrington Park Press, 1997), 3-20, p.12.

<sup>38</sup> Goss, p. 12.

<sup>39</sup> D'Emilio, p. 467.

consumed.<sup>40</sup> Wage labour, however, 'allowed individuals to survive beyond the confines of the family', at once prompting the reconceptualisation of the family as 'an institution that produced not goods but emotional satisfaction and happiness' in theory and opening up space for the development and exercise of gay and lesbian identity for those who desired an alternative in practice.<sup>41</sup> This new identity informed demands for gay liberation in the post-war decades and, writing in 1983, D'Emilio anticipated that such liberation, supported by gay and lesbian learned understandings of creating 'affectional community' outside the bounds of family or state, could benefit all society.<sup>42</sup> He envisioned expanded equal civil rights and a thriving, emotionally nourishing commons, affording universal access to welfare support, housing, childcare, healthcare and performance spaces, which he frames as no less beneficial to the public good. In the presence of such 'structures beyond the nuclear family that provide a sense of belonging, the family will wane in significance', he predicted.<sup>43</sup> Thirty-five years on, however, it is clear that D'Emilio underestimated the structural resilience of the nuclear family under capitalism.<sup>44</sup> The normative family's ability to mould gay identity to its terms has proven stronger than gay identity's ability to effect widespread liberation from those terms, even as access to public goods and meaningful life choices has declined for most of the general population. 'Socialists do not generally respond to the exploitation and economic inequality of industrial capitalism by calling for a return to the family farm and handicraft production', D'Emilio winkingly noted.<sup>45</sup> But the promise of liberation fizzled while neoliberal precarity accelerated. When considering how to reconceptualise the family

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<sup>40</sup> D'Emilio, p. 469.

<sup>41</sup> D'Emilio, p. 471, p. 469. As noted above, not all subjects who stood to benefit had access to such agency.

<sup>42</sup> D'Emilio, p. 475.

<sup>43</sup> D'Emilio, p. 475.

<sup>44</sup> Nor could he anticipate the impact of the HIV/AIDS crisis.

<sup>45</sup> D'Emilio, p. 475.

in queerly fruitful ways under present conditions, lessons might indeed be drawn from past structures of collective economic and material labour and support enabling forms of self-sufficiency and independence, if not patriarchy. Given the absence of the radical civic transformation promised by gay liberation and the reality of shrinking state support for the marginalised, there is, in fact, something to be said for a return the family farm, at least insofar as it can be understood as potentially modeling the attributes of emergence, autonomy, adaptation and reliability that support reproductive queer futurity.

While some scholarship around queer family has noted economic and material contingencies, it has rarely proposed novel ways of thinking queer family and economics together. Writing in 1998, as assimilationism seemed decisively to have succeeded liberation as the primary focus of lesbian and gay activism and lived experience in the global north, Elisabeth Beck-Gernsheim suggests that 'a community of need is becoming an elective relationship. The family is not breaking up as a result; it is acquiring a new historical form', that of peer groups and varied nuclear families.<sup>46</sup> Weeks *et al.* frame this change economically, suggesting that expectations of community solidarity give way to individualistic interests 'in western societies as affluence grows, however unevenly it is distributed'.<sup>47</sup> Halberstam tracks this change more critically, noting the pressure it puts on even the most disadvantaged and precarious domestic units to be economically self-sufficient.<sup>48</sup> Eng also warns of the need to 'contest romanticized notions of privacy and family as outside capitalist relations' but without articulating alternative forms.<sup>49</sup>

Such concerns could be viewed through the lens of a political-rhetorical term that gained purchase around the time of the assimilationist ascendancy

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<sup>46</sup> 'On the Way to a Post-Familial Family: From a Community of Need to Elective Affinities', *Theory, Culture and Society*, 15.3-4 (1998), 53-70, p. 54.

<sup>47</sup> Weeks *et al.*, *Same Sex Intimacies*, p. 10.

<sup>48</sup> Halberstam, *Failure*, p. 70.

<sup>49</sup> Eng, p. 8.

noted by Beck-Gernsheim and Weeks *et al.* That term is *hardworking family*.<sup>50</sup> Much loved of centrist politicians in the UK, US and Australia, the term connoted the axiomatic unit of civic propriety under neoliberalism from the late 1990s to the electoral upsets in 2016 of the Brexit referendum in the UK and Donald Trump's election in the US. To be a hardworking family was to do family right by honouring both reproductive futurism and the Marcusian performance principle. There could be no hardworking family without the child or without labour that grew the economy. (Those reliant on state benefits rather than earned income were, by definition, not hardworking families.) In political discourse around the family, the *hardworking family* succeeded *family values*: a pseudo-Victorian moralistic vision of the family as wellspring of virtuous conduct gave way to a notion of the family as bedrock of socioeconomic responsibility in which, in exchange for dutiful participation in childrearing and economic growth, citizens could expect to see their individual interests recognised through lower taxation and better managed services. The hardworking family was constructed as one of procreative nuclear domesticity but it emerged at the same time as Duckie, which offered a model of a different kind of hardworking family, one more akin to the pre-industrial family farm. For Duckie, economic concerns were not simply a matter of atomised good housekeeping but connoted a broader idea of a family that took seriously the cultivation of a wider structure of material interdependence in which economic and emotional support were imbricated and certain kinds of autonomy valorised and pursued. I consider how Duckie put some of these principles into practice later in this chapter and unpack their application to specific Duckie projects in Part II of this thesis.

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<sup>50</sup> See Oscar Reyes, 'New Labour's politics of the hard-working family', in *Discourse Theory in European Politics: Identity, Policy and Governance*, ed. by David Howarth and Jacob Torfing (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005), 231-254; Nigel Healey, Letters, *Guardian*, 16 February 2017 <<https://www.theguardian.com/society/2017/feb/16/so-farewell-then-hard-working-families>> [accessed 16 August 2018].

If material support has received little attention in scholarship around queer family, it has been more closely attended to in relation to socially engaged performance. As noted in the introduction, materialist considerations structure Jen Harvie's analysis of participatory arts practice under neoliberalism, while Shannon Jackson pays sustained attention to the specific concept of support in ways that deeply inform this thesis.<sup>51</sup> Jackson celebrates performance texts that foreground material support, articulating their powerful challenge to the neoliberal fetishisation of individualist self-sufficiency; rather than demonising dependency, she writes, they valorise 'the relational systems on which any conception of freedom rests'.<sup>52</sup> Both Harvie and Jackson frame considerations of the individual against the structure of the state while proposing the network as a potentially helpful intermediary form. In this context, I argue that the queer family as site of material support offers a closer, tighter, more affectively charged structure of connection than the network. Jackson offers one compelling instance of valorised relationality in a queer family context through a reading of Joe Goode's play *Deeply There*.<sup>53</sup> The play embodies the complex relationality of performance, support, family and the child through choreography involving an adult character (Frank, whose partner Ben is dying of an AIDS-related illness) and a child character (the son of a friend of Ben's). The dynamic between the pair insists on a fluid and precarious mutual dependence in which neither is fully dominant or subordinate; Jackson notes how this 'troubles and even inverts generational conventions [...] [of] caring adult and cared-for child'.<sup>54</sup> Where Jackson is primarily interested in material support as a textual subject, I am

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<sup>51</sup> See Jen Harvie, *Fair Play: Art, Performance and Neoliberalism* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013); Shannon Jackson, *Social Works: Performing Art, Supporting Publics* (New York: Routledge, 2011).

<sup>52</sup> Jackson, p. 36.

<sup>53</sup> Jackson, p. 244-247.

<sup>54</sup> Jackson, p. 246.

more engaged with it as an aspect of lived utopian methodology; still, her reading of *Deeply There* inspires for its insistence on the value of 'queerness (and publicness) [...] as promiscuous attachment, foregrounding especially forms of attachment that bypass or exceed biological ties'.<sup>55</sup> It shows how material support is not a mere logistical consideration but is vital to the sustainable practice of hope upon which reproductive queer futurity depends. To rethink queer family as a structure of material support that sidesteps the normatively privileged alignment of capitalist labour and biogenetically derived nuclear domesticity is to open up the possibility of new and better ways of life.

There is also relevance in Jackson's reading of *Deeply There* to the other overlooked aspect of family that interests me here. Jackson notes the choreography's muddling of the categorical expectations of 'independently grown and dependently young' and its implication that the 'decision not to be a parent is not the same as not having children in one's life'.<sup>56</sup> I will now unpack the value to reproductive queer futurity of intergenerational transmission, a multidirectional process that is more fluid and variable than simple heredity. It recognises that elder queers might have access to existing forms and processes to pass along to the benefit of queer children but also that queer children might have the capacity to expand elders' understandings and agency in unexpected ways.

### **Intergenerational transmission**

Intergenerational transmission supports reproductive queer futurity by allowing distinctive kinds of thought, feeling, understanding and appreciation to extend across time and space beyond individual households or lifetimes, inspiring hope in the sustainability of queer existence. Yet, while researchers

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<sup>55</sup> Jackson, p. 247.

<sup>56</sup> Jackson, p. 247.

have linked queer lineage to temporality and literary studies, it has found little application in the context of queer family – a context in which intergenerational transmission can be distinctively framed in relation to a shared enterprise contingent on empathy, reciprocity, imagination, trust, will and managed conflict.<sup>57</sup> In queer family studies, queer is consistently and justifiably constructed as an experience of exclusion; that it might at the same time offer access to other pasts, other lineages, other kinship relations already existing in the world is barely considered. Weston, for example, notes the value of family as a technology for the transmission of tradition, identity and culture but frames this value as the exclusive preserve of hetero blood family, particularly where it intersects with ethnic or religious identity.<sup>58</sup> To assert a queer identity is, in this formulation, precisely to be disqualified from lineage, from that which ‘represents the past’, with the abject exception of access to the ‘specific history of categorical exclusion from participation in kinship relations’.<sup>59</sup> For Kathryn Bond Stockton, ‘the hunt for the roots of queerness [is] a retrospective search for amalgamated forms of feelings, desires, and physical needs that led to [the] death of one’s straight life.’<sup>60</sup> This search for the roots of queerness is notably conceived as an isolated, inward enterprise. Queerness figures as ground zero or blank slate elsewhere in the literature. As noted above, Halberstam advocates the queer embrace of ahistoricity through willful forgetfulness.<sup>61</sup> José Esteban Muñoz characterises queer as a sense of being vulnerably unmoored from continuity itself: ‘Heteronormative culture makes queers think that both the past and the future do not belong to

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<sup>57</sup> See, for instance, Jack Halberstam, *In a Queer Time and Place: Transgender Bodies, Subcultural Lives* (New York: New York University Press, 2005) and Carolyn Dinshaw, *Getting Medieval: Sexualities and Communities, Pre- and Postmodern* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1999).

<sup>58</sup> Weston, p. 37.

<sup>59</sup> Weston, pp. 68, 212.

<sup>60</sup> *The Queer Child, or Growing Sideways in the Twentieth Century* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2009), p. 7.

<sup>61</sup> Halberstam, *Failure*, p. 70.

them. All we are allowed to imagine is barely surviving the present'.<sup>62</sup> And Weeks *et al.* note the prevalence among their subjects of the sense that queerness necessitates self-invention from scratch: in one interviewee's words, 'discovering that I was homosexual meant having to invent myself because there was nothing there [...] there weren't any role models'.<sup>63</sup>

Such role models – people who have made lives with, through, despite or around queerness – do exist. But since liberation gave way to assimilation, there have been so few persistent structures of intergenerational contact among queers in the global north that they easily vanish. Intergenerational transmission has faded as a queer family value. Weston notes with glancing understatement that, although queers between the 1940s and 1970s 'were accustomed to speaking of generations in a strictly nonprocreative sense that excluded biological referents', the chosen gay families she observes in the 1990s seldom 'focus on the establishment of intergenerational relationships'.<sup>64</sup> Weeks *et al.* concur that, among peer-based kinship groups, 'age is perhaps the most difficult [difference] to bridge'.<sup>65</sup> They empathetically note the feelings of isolation this sometimes generates in older people but do not consider that such engagement might benefit younger queers too; on the contrary, rare instances of intergenerational friendship are celebrated on the basis of erasing such difference and insisting that 'age is totally irrelevant'.<sup>66</sup> Some scholarship evokes a poignant sense of misconnection. In his expansive and revelatory oral history of gay Black men in the southern US, E. Patrick Johnson declares he is 'invested in paying homage to my forebears' but,

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<sup>62</sup> *Cruising Utopia: The Then and There of Queer Futurity* (New York: New York University Press, 2009), p. 112.

<sup>63</sup> Weeks *et al.*, *Same Sex Intimacies*, p. 43.

<sup>64</sup> Weston, pp. 184, 116.

<sup>65</sup> Weeks *et al.*, *Same Sex Intimacies*, p. 68. Weeks *et al.* do suggest that to 'come out in present-day western societies is to encounter a wealth of local knowledges on *how* it is possible to be as non-heterosexuals' but in practice this seems to privilege the imitation of contemporary peers (p. 89).

<sup>66</sup> Weeks *et al.*, *Same Sex Intimacies*, p. 68.



while his subjects testify to nearly a century's worth of experience, they convey little to no sense of intergenerational contact or even awareness.<sup>67</sup> In a notable exception, an interviewee recalls his childhood knowledge of two local 'project queens', 'sissy Mickey and sissy Greg', who were figures of derision to be shunned, not a relational opportunity to be cultivated.<sup>68</sup> Where an intergenerational dynamic is discussed it is often in terms of the Oedipal dynamic anatomised by Halberstam in which younger generations can seem obliged to 'either accept without changing or reject completely' their forebears' example.<sup>69</sup> Halberstam, as noted above, advocates the forgetting of family – but also curiosity in less normative 'new models of generation' that might be considered family by another name.<sup>70</sup> Weston observes the Oedipal dynamic too and, apparently sceptical of pre-1990s anecdotal 'transmission models that posited a unified "lesbian culture" or "gay lore"', locates hope for the future (as noted in Chapter One) in the salvific image of the literal children raised by same-sex couples.<sup>71</sup> Weeks *et al.* offer the complementary proposition that it is the very absence of biological children that stymies queer intergenerational contact.<sup>72</sup>

Largely absent from such discussions is the possibility that queers might have something to gain from intergenerational contact and the associated transmission of distinctive kinds of thought, feeling, understanding and appreciation. Weston suggests that 'an observer could easily overlook the rich history of friendships, erotic connections, community-building, and other modalities of lesbian and gay solidarity that have preceded the contemporary

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<sup>67</sup> *Sweet Tea: Black Gay Men of the South* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2008), p. 473.

<sup>68</sup> Johnson, p. 517.

<sup>69</sup> 'Forgetting Family', p. 318. Halberstam here refers specifically to the context of women's studies to illustrate a wider point about queer relationality.

<sup>70</sup> 'Forgetting Family', p. 319.

<sup>71</sup> Weston, p. 184.

<sup>72</sup> Weeks *et al.*, *Same Sex Intimacies*, p. 68.

discourse on families we choose' and indeed, in practice, does just that.<sup>73</sup> Framing family and inheritance through the stark binary choice of 'seamless continuity or total rupture', Halberstam champions the latter and the creation of 'new futures not tied to old traditions'.<sup>74</sup> But this replaces one binary with another, leaving no room for the possibility that there might be something in the queer attic, so to speak, worth fetching down and passing on – not a handing down from high to low in expectation of the obligatory and unchanging preservation of a fixed past but a handing along in a spirit of mutual generosity, humility, curiosity and pragmatism in the service of a methodology of hope. Some of what's in the attic might be quaint or outmoded, some of it grotesque or cautionary, some of it powerful or inspirational. There might be some effective homemade mutant hope machines up there. Some might show the power of fun. Something, at any rate, might be gained by considering, together, structures that existed in the past, making them available but not compulsory.

Such concerns prompt consideration of the nature of parenting in the context of reproductive queer futurity. Parenting too has generally been constructed within queer family studies in fairly limited and normative ways related to the procreation and raising of infants and pre-adolescent children. Weston, for example, notes how gays and lesbians are othered by being constructed as non-procreative but seeks to redress this only by articulating their increasing participation in pregnancy and child-rearing.<sup>75</sup> And when Weeks *et al.* discuss 'reproductive technologies', they take for granted that this category includes only insemination, surrogacy, adoption and the like.<sup>76</sup> But reproductive queer futurity calls on and for other kinds of procreation,

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<sup>73</sup> Weston, p.213.

<sup>74</sup> *Failure*, p. 74, p. 83.

<sup>75</sup> Weston, p. 202.

<sup>76</sup> Weeks *et al.*, *Same Sex Intimacies*, p. 166.

other kinds of reproductive technology and other kinds of parenting. To think of the queer child of reproductive queer futurity is to think of someone who, whatever their age in years, is being born from the death of a straight life, emerging into a liminal period of rapidly expanding subjectivity with limited lived queer relational experience. Structures of mentorship and guidance might be helpful here. Mentor relationships seem in the scholarship to be a thing of the past: Weston observes their commonness among gays and lesbians in the post-war US but notes the category was 'losing rather than gaining currency' by the 1990s.<sup>77</sup> Freeman flags up how increasingly dated 'concepts or activities such as "bringing someone out," "Daddyding," and sexual apprenticeship can create networks of social bonds and modes of continuity between people of different ages', perhaps blurring lines between kinship and cultural reproduction.<sup>78</sup> Halberstam, meanwhile, notes with regret that queer youth groups tend to frame 'younger gays and lesbians not as the inheritors and benefactors of several decades of queer activism but rather as victims of homophobia'.<sup>79</sup> This doesn't mean mentoring is outmoded though: a recent US study of LGBT youth associated relationships with mentors (or 'accessible role models') with mental health benefits.<sup>80</sup> The utopian potentiality Muñoz attributes to queer performance has wider application in the context of family structures' capacity for intergenerational transmission. Like the dynamic between performers and audiences, queer parenting or mentoring dynamics can help 'generate a modality of knowing and recognition [...] that facilitates modes of belonging'.<sup>81</sup> Writing about LGBTQ parents raising prepubescent and adolescent children in nuclear domestic

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<sup>77</sup> Weston, p. 120-121.

<sup>78</sup> Freeman, 'Queer Belongings', p. 301.

<sup>79</sup> *Queer Time*, p. 176.

<sup>80</sup> Jason D. P. Bird, Lisa Kuhns and Robert Garofalo, 'The Impact of Role Models on Health Outcomes for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender Youth', *The Journal of Adolescent Health*, 50.4 (2012), 353-357.

<sup>81</sup> Muñoz, pp. 98-99.

settings, Elizabeth Reed notes that 'working to craft inheritances' – to narrativise non-normative family experiences – can 'alleviate anxiety and isolation, strengthen families' sense of legitimacy, and generate a sense of meaningfulness to the labour of family-making'.<sup>82</sup> Such narratives, Reed suggests, are indicative of a given family's 'relationship to an imagined future'.<sup>83</sup> This applies to non-domestic family structures too. Structures of intergenerational transmission, then, have tremendous potential value to the project of reproductive queer futurity, for their potential capacity to generate relationality across differences of age and experience, to perpetuate the use of existing forms and structures of queer livability and to generate hope by demonstrating the persistence of queer experience across time. As later chapters will show, they also enable things of value to be handed back from the queer children to parents.

### **Doing family queerly through Ballroom**

So far, this chapter has argued that reproductive queer futurity can be supported by redirecting understandings of queer family away from privileged models of nuclear domesticity and homogenous peer groups and toward the capacity of family to offer material support and enable intergenerational transmission in contexts of reciprocal empathy, care and trust. I have described the overall lack of sustained critical attention to such structures but one instructive exception is the study of Ballroom culture in the United States and Canada. In Ballroom culture, of which Marlon M. Bailey offers the richest analysis, groups of mostly Black and Latino/a/x people organise non-biologically determined family groupings that deliver social and emotional sustenance and collectively produce and consume

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<sup>82</sup> 'Making Queer Families', p. 18.

<sup>83</sup> Reed, p. 156.

performance events or balls.<sup>84</sup> The houses of Ballroom culture serve in important ways as queer family structures invested in ideas of material support and intergenerational transmission, even if these aspects have rarely been explicitly critically articulated as such. Attending to Ballroom community structures, as I will briefly now, and to elements of Duckie's operation, as I will go on to do in more detail, illuminates how expanded ideas of queer family can find application under various neoliberal conditions.

Ballroom houses emerged in New York in the 1970s, largely in response to the multiple forms of violence and oppression marginalising queer and trans people of colour, including racism within the gay scene and limited access to supportive biogenetic family attachments.<sup>85</sup> Houses, Bailey shows, 'create livable lives' for participants by materialising a 'family unit' that mobilises 'nurturing, affirmation, belonging, and conflict' to enable companionship, support and self-expression through performance at ball events, at which houses compete against one another.<sup>86</sup> Members take on the name of their house, providing, Frank Leon Roberts argues, a fortifying sense of identity, continuity and heredity.<sup>87</sup> Addressing contexts of vulnerability and precarity, houses can provide vital material support related to housing, healthcare, policing and violence, and help members manage their personal lives, including finances.<sup>88</sup> The intergenerational transmission of values, knowledge and material goods underpins Ballroom culture, working through alternative forms of parenting provided by house 'mothers' and 'fathers'; practices of 'rearing' or mentorship around identity, presentation

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<sup>84</sup> See *Butch Queens Up in Pumps: Gender, Performance and Ballroom Culture in Detroit* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2013).

<sup>85</sup> Bailey, p. 89.

<sup>86</sup> Bailey, pp. x, 95, 100.

<sup>87</sup> 'There's No Place Like Home: A History of House Ball Culture', *WireTap Magazine*, 6 June 2007 <<http://transgriot.blogspot.co.uk/2008/02/theres-no-place-like-home-history-of.html>> [accessed 16 August 2018].

<sup>88</sup> Bailey, pp. 14, 102.

and life skills; and the reproduction of understandings of 'legendary' Ballroom history, houses and individuals.<sup>89</sup> Ballroom performance is also powerfully related to earlier forms of Black American and diasporic performance and belief practices.<sup>90</sup> Bailey notes how this facilitates the enactment of 'a politics of social, cultural, and spiritual renewal' and forges 'an alternative social sphere'.<sup>91</sup>

There are echoes here of the pre-capitalist family farm and its interweaving of intimacy and labour, albeit with ambivalent consequences. Through labour related to kinship and performance, the Ballroom community comes into being, and some house members can parlay related skills into occasional, regular or lucrative paid work; yet, as madison moore notes, the community's collective achievements have often been subject to mainstream exploitation through unpaid or underpaid labour and cultural appropriation.<sup>92</sup> As a formidable family structure, the Ballroom house model has been successfully and adaptively reproduced locally, nationally and internationally, constituting a utopian project capable of routinely generating (in Bailey's words) 'intense pleasure' and 'moments of epiphany'.<sup>93</sup> Ballroom has rearticulated family to produce livable lives and hope in the future for some of the most marginalised, vulnerable and exploited queers under neoliberalism, using emergent, autonomous, adaptable, reliable and reproducible structures to materialise better worlds. It is perhaps reproductive queer futurity's most powerful homemade mutant hope machine.

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<sup>89</sup> Bailey, pp. 117, 49, 207-10, 144-145.

<sup>90</sup> Bailey, p. 144-145.

<sup>91</sup> Bailey, p. 144-145.

<sup>92</sup> See Eva Reign, 'The Ballroom Legends Who Helped Ryan Murphy's "Pose" Get 10s Across the Board', *them*, 30 June 2018 <<https://www.them.us/story/ballroom-legends-behind-pose>> [accessed 16 August 2018]; madison moore, *Fabulous: The Rise of the Beautiful Eccentric* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2018), pp. 181-183.

<sup>93</sup> moore, pp. 202-206; Bailey, pp. 6-7, 134, 180.

### Doing family queerly through Duckie

Considered as a family structure, Duckie typically (though not always) addresses conditions of less acute marginalisation than those affecting many Ballroom house members. And where Ballroom offers formal, hierarchical and close-knit kinship groups with powerful structural resemblances within and across houses, Duckie constitutes a network of structures of varying kind, scale and duration, each different from the others in significant ways yet sharing certain family resemblances. The house of Duckie has many rooms. These varying structures include Saturday nights at the Royal Vauxhall Tavern (RVT), larger-scale performance events such as *Gay Shame* and 'vintage clubbing' events, and socially engaged projects such as the Posh Club, Slaughterhouse Club, DHSS, Duckie Family and the Palace of Varieties. Each has a set of members and these sets overlap and intertwine to varying degrees, resulting in a queer network that is nothing like a 'collapse into amorphous and generic "community"' (to recall Freeman) but rather a family tree of powerfully distinctive branches, some of which will bear more fruit than others. The evolved form of the Posh Club, as Chapter Six will show, has proved capable of replication across space with minimal variation in the form of multiple clubs in multiple sites operating to very similar templates.<sup>94</sup> On the other hand, DHSS, as Chapter Four will show, mutated from earlier forms, reproduced itself once, then mutated into something else. Duckie, then, is somewhat like the beautiful and anomalous plant found, in the film *Annihilation*, within a shifted structure of reality called the Shimmer.<sup>95</sup> 'These are very strange,' a scientist character (Natalie Portman) says of its blooms:

They're all so different, to look at them you wouldn't say that they're the same species but they're growing from the same branch structure so it has to be the same species. It's the same plant. It's like they're stuck in a continuous mutation.<sup>96</sup>

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<sup>94</sup> See 'Clubs', *The Posh Club* <<http://theposhclub.co.uk/clubs/>> [accessed 16 August 2018].

<sup>95</sup> *Annihilation*, dir. by Alex Garland (Netflix, 2018).

<sup>96</sup> *Annihilation*.

The Duckie family tree has been in continuous mutation for more than two decades. Different people will respond to different branches in different ways, feeling different levels of kinship, comfort and support. The performer Krishna Isthā, who has experience of multiple branches, expressed this to me in terms of anthropomorphised embraces: 'I would definitely, if I saw the Posh Club on the street, give the Posh Club a massive hug. The bigger [performance events] as well [...] I wouldn't run up to [Saturday night] to give it a hug' because the personal connection there feels less strong.<sup>97</sup>

In their distinctive ways, the branches of the Duckie family tree all provide kinds of fun, nurturing and support not readily available to members elsewhere. They build kinship through shared experiences including socialising, performance and special occasions, collectively forming the group recognised by Amy Lamé from the RVT stage every Saturday night as 'my Duckie boys and girls and, most importantly, everyone in between'. This was fortified by group outings in the collective's early years such as a bus trip to Brighton, a practice revisited on a grander scale in 2014 as *Duckie in Sitges*.<sup>98</sup> This week-long trip to the Spanish resort town, incorporating scheduled tourist and performance events as well as plentiful free time for sunbathing and socialising, marked my first engagement with Duckie under the aegis of the Collaborative Doctoral Award that supports this thesis, and the first piece of fieldwork undertaken to inform it. The trip attracted many of the Saturday night regulars who, by 2014, were typically (though far from exclusively) white men approaching middle age with sufficient disposable income to fund foreign travel. (As Lamé said from the stage on the trip's Saturday night, 'we're just that little bit posh now, aren't we, now that we're over 40?')<sup>99</sup>

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<sup>97</sup> Krishna Isthā, interview with the author, 10 July 2016.

<sup>98</sup> '*Duckie in Sitges*', *Duckie* <<http://www.duckie.co.uk/archive/events/duckie-in-sitges>> [accessed 16 August 2018].

<sup>99</sup> Field notes, 20 September 2014.



*Duckie in Sitges* had the feel of a family outing, with a sense of kinship and cohesion among many of the hundreds who came, fortified by the presence of people such as Lamé, producer Simon Casson and performer Ursula Martinez, who had been part of *Duckie* since its inception, and some moments of resolved conflict related, for instance, to perceptions of cliquey exclusion. The trip offered the spectacle of the ‘human towers’ of the Santa Tecla festival, acrobatic feats of balancing undertaken by local residents huddled together and standing on one another’s shoulders. In Catalan, ‘fent pinya’ means ‘to make the base of a human tower’ but also ‘to work together’ or perhaps even ‘to do kin labor’; certainly, it felt like an apt parallel for the collective endeavour that gave *Duckie in Sitges* its family flavour.

*Duckie* also provides a platform for doing family in less happy conditions. On the Saturday following the death of David Bowie – one of the key artists celebrated at *Duckie* since its start – many veteran punters who no longer regularly attended returned to the RVT to be among kin. On stage in widow’s weeds, Lamé described Bowie, Morrissey and Kate Bush as ‘the father, the son and the holy ghost’ of *Duckie*, saying it had been ‘such a difficult week because our father has died. The father of *Duckie* has died [...] It’s wonderful to see so many old-timers. I wondered where you went.’<sup>100</sup> The family connection here survives periods of absence. The first night of the ‘vintage clubbing’ event *Lady Malcolm’s Servants’ Ball* was held the day after the Brexit referendum. Many *Duckie* performers and punters expressed dejection and anxiety about the result but also affection and reassurance related to their presence at a *Duckie* event.<sup>101</sup> ‘It’s the only place I could think of to be,’ one performer told me, ‘the most welcoming and inclusive. It’s a relief to be here.’<sup>102</sup> Another told me later that ‘it was so good to be

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<sup>100</sup> Field notes, 16 January 2016.

<sup>101</sup> Field notes, 24 June 2016.

<sup>102</sup> Field notes, 24 June 2016.

somewhere queer, somewhere where there was hope'.<sup>103</sup> Such experiences of festive holidaymaking and fortifying consolation both give a sense of how the Duckie family operates to offer social and affective sustenance and to reproduce technologies of hope. They convey an understanding of Duckie as home, in the sense, expressed by Weeks *et al.*, that 'home is more than a private place – it is often about broader communities and a wider set of belongings'.<sup>104</sup> In supporting gatherings after Bowie and after Brexit, and excursions such as *Duckie in Sitges*, Duckie modeled the widely recognised attributes of family identified by anthropologists and described at the start of this chapter, including a sense of belonging, intense engagement, emotional support, shared experiences and histories, continuity over time, ongoing commitment and the resolution of conflicts.

Alongside its provision of social and affective support, the Duckie family is deeply invested in the provision of material support to marginalised subjects. This takes various forms, including opportunities to socialise and engage in cultural activities on a weekly basis through Saturday nights and at times when a sense of belonging might be particularly valuable, such as Pride weekend. DHSS supplies unique forms of queer vocational training and support, as Chapter Three will show, while projects such as the Posh Club take seriously the provision of food, drink, relationality and means of self-expression to marginalised subjects beyond the LGBTQ+ frame, as Chapter Six will show. At the Slaughterhouse Club, Duckie's open-door drop-in arts project for people living with homelessness and addiction, material support took the form of provision of copious art materials and assistance in putting them to use. As noted in the introduction, Duckie has proven adept at securing and managing financial and institutional support to underwrite its practices, including the fair and generous treatment of artists it has prioritised

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<sup>103</sup> Field notes, 24 June 2016.

<sup>104</sup> Weeks *et al.*, *Same Sex Intimacies*, p. 101.

from its start. Duckie has consistently acted not to maximise income for the company but to promote equitable distribution of resources and a culture of independent and sustainable cultural agency in line with a position of reproductive queer futurity. In Duckie's early years, for instance, the financial success of Saturday nights underwrote experimental performance projects while, more recently, Duckie's NPO budget and fundraising expertise has enabled projects such as Duckie Family and Duckie QTIPOC Collective. The provision of material support of various kinds, then, has remained a consistent aspect of the collective's practice.

Intergenerational transmission has also been a key concern of Duckie's since its inception, predominantly through the production of performance events that reference and reanimate aspects of the queer cultural and social past. The 'vintage clubbing' cycle analysed in detail in Chapter Five is only the most prominent example of this rich seam in Duckie's work, which is consciously located at the intersection of multiple performance lineages; these include queer and alternative pop and rock music, live art, music hall and other forms of working-class popular culture, all of which have been overtly, lovingly and critically engaged with across the company's production history. Its performance events and publicity materials have mobilised past subcultures such as mod and punk and genres such as kitchen-sink drama, sitcom and traditional pub drag, evoking working-class British pop-cultural touchstones from *Quadrophenia* to Bernard Manning and queer nightlife legacies from Leigh Bowery to Soft Cell.<sup>105</sup> Resident DJs the Readers Wives have consistently centred the music of Bowie, Morrissey and Bush, all of whom cultivated distinctive sensibilities in which the rejection of normative sexuality and gender identities went hand-in-glove with attention to the queer

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<sup>105</sup> *Quadrophenia*, dir. by Franc Roddam (The Who/Universal Pictures, 1979); Duckie flyers and ephemera, Bishopsgate Institute archival holdings.

past.<sup>106</sup> Early Duckie productions beyond the RVT prioritised the intergenerational transmission of cultural forms related to past artists, subcultural expression and minoritarian struggles, including: *I Dream of Morrissey* (1997); *Wow! Duckie Salutes Kate Bush* (2001); *The Youth Club* (1999), which referenced youth subcultures from Teddy Boys to goths; *Wig 'n' Casino* (1996, 1999), which referred to Wigan Casino, a key site of the 1970s Northern Soul scene; *Upstairs, Downstairs* (1998), which referred both to the 1970s BBC drama series of the same name and the early-twentieth-century class-riven British society in which it was set; and *1954 Dancehall* (2000), which evoked the context of the Wolfenden report into homosexuality (and anticipated key aspects of the 'vintage clubbing' cycle).<sup>107</sup> *The London History Promenade Trilogy* offered walking tours of London locales engaging with site-specific transgressive subcultural recreation across different historical periods: eighteenth-century Vauxhall in *The Vauxhall Pleasure Promenade* (1998/1999); 1960s Swinging Soho in *Explosion!!! The Rock 'n' Roll Ghosts of Soho* (2000); and the Victorian East End in *Blowzabellas, Drabs, Mawks and Trugmoldies* (2001).<sup>108</sup> Through such productions, Duckie actively, lovingly and critically promoted understandings and appreciation of aspects of past queer and working-class cultural forms that are rarely acknowledged, let alone valorised. Considered as an aspect of family work, such projects contribute to participants' senses of lineage and belonging and open up space for potential collective application of past understandings to present conditions.

This family investment is also evident in Duckie's special interest in histories of the RVT and the pleasure gardens that formerly occupied its site.

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<sup>106</sup> Bowie, for instance, engaged with Oscar Wilde, Jean Genet and William Burroughs; Bush with Peter Pan, Hammer Horror and *Wuthering Heights*; Morrissey with Polari, *Billy Budd* and Vauxhall itself.

<sup>107</sup> See 'Duckie Archive 1995-2014', *Duckie* (archived website) <<http://duckie.harmsen.net/archive.php?submenu=old>> [accessed 16 August 2018].

<sup>108</sup> See 'Duckie Archive 1995-2014' and Duckie ephemera, Bishopsgate Institute archival holdings.

This has been materialised in performance projects such as *The Vauxhall Pleasure Promenade* (1999), *Readers Wives Fan Club* (2010), *Vauxhall Bacchanal* (2013) and *Happy Birthday RVT* (2014); *Readers Wives Fan Club* and *Happy Birthday RVT* generated a distinctive celebratory frisson of lineage and belonging by mobilising the RVT simultaneously as subject matter and performance site.<sup>109</sup> A family interest in the RVT has also underpinned protest and activism in its defence. In 1998, Lamé, Casson and others associated with Duckie spearheaded resistance to plans to demolish the RVT to make way for a shopping centre, referring in campaign materials to the century-spanning history of the site.<sup>110</sup> And in 2014, the venue's purchase by property developers prompted the creation of campaign group RVT Future, whose founding members included Lamé, Casson and myself, dedicated to maintaining the RVT's status as a site of queer community and culture. RVT Future strategically mobilised the venue's past in multiple ways commensurate with Duckie's investment in the intergenerational transmission of queer lineages, including my own successful 30,000-word application to Historic England to make the venue the first site to be added to the national list of statutorily protected buildings on the basis of its contribution to LGBTQ+ heritage.<sup>111</sup> Duckie also supported filmmaker Tim Brunsdon and

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<sup>109</sup> 'Vauxhall Bacchanal', Duckie <<http://www.duckie.co.uk/archive/events/vauxhall-bacchanal>> [accessed 16 August 2018]; 'Readers Wives Fan Club', Duckie <<http://www.duckie.co.uk/archive/events/readers-wives-fan-club>> [accessed 16 August 2018]; *Happy Birthday RVT* <<http://www.happybirthdayrvt.com/>> [accessed 16 August 2018]. For more about performances mobilising the RVT in this way, see 'Once upon a time there was a tavern: Metadrag and other uses of the past at the Royal Vauxhall Tavern', my chapter in Mark Edwards and Stephen Farrier's forthcoming two-volume collected edition *Drag in a Changing Scene* (London: Bloomsbury, expected 2020).

<sup>110</sup> See Ben Walters, 'Supporting statement for an application to have the Royal Vauxhall Tavern added to the National Heritage list for England', January 2015 <<http://www.rvt.community/wp-content/uploads/2015/09/Initial-RVT-listing-application-January-2015.pdf>> [accessed 16 August 2018]

<sup>111</sup> See Walters, 'Supporting statement', and 'Royal Vauxhall Tavern listed', *Historic England*, 9 September 2015 <<https://historicengland.org.uk/whats-new/news/royal-vauxhall-tavern-listed>> [accessed 16 August 2018].

comics artist Baz Comics in their respective projects *Save the Tavern* (2017) and *Tales of the Tavern* (2017), which celebrated multiple aspects of the RVT's past, including its status as a 'home', while warning of its potential erasure.<sup>112</sup> The sense of the RVT as an ancestral seat is viscerally expressed in Lamé's stated desire that her ashes be buried under its stage.<sup>113</sup>

The fiftieth anniversary of the 1967 Sexual Offences Act, which partially decriminalised sex between men in England and Wales, offered further opportunities for Duckie to reanimate aspects of the queer past in the mode of intergenerational transmission. In Hull, Duckie produced *50 Queers for 50 Years*, a parade of 50 effigies of British LGBTQ+ icons, handmade by artists and volunteers over two weeks, that bore a certain resemblance to the parade of the saints at Santa Tecla in Sitges; the event gave idiosyncratic physical form to a queer lineage including Lily Savage, Clare Balding, Isaac Julien, Leigh Bowery, 'camp comics', the GLF and several people and places related to Hull.<sup>114</sup> At the RVT on Pride weekend, the performance clubbing event *Duckie DeCrim: 1967* incorporated archive video material of the RVT, performances evoking queer subcultures of the 1960s and a piano singalong of period-appropriate tunes. 'It's so important that we know our own history,' Lamé told the audience.<sup>115</sup> An appreciation of the value of intergenerational transmission of queer lineages has also informed the Duckie Family project. Curators Kayza Rose and Campbell X produced an event themed around QTIPOC lineages entitled 'Legacy' (2018), advertised as 'exploring the roots of Queer People of Colour and the legacy they have left and continue to

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<sup>112</sup> *Save the Tavern*, dir. by Tim Brunsten (Light Factory, 2017); *Tales of the Tavern*, Baz Comics <<http://bazcomics.com/tales-of-the-tavern/>> [accessed 16 August 2018].

<sup>113</sup> 'Who's behind RVT Future?', *RVT Future* <<http://www.rvt.community/whos-behind-rvt-future/>> [accessed 16 August 2018].

<sup>114</sup> '50 Queer for 50 Years', *Duckie* <<http://www.duckie.co.uk/archive/events/50-queers-for-50-years>> [accessed 16 August 2018].

<sup>115</sup> 'Duckie DeCrim: 1967', *Duckie* <<http://www.duckie.co.uk/events/duckie-decrim-1967>> [accessed 16 August 2018]; field notes, 8 July 2017.

leave' as well as '[r]edressing the misconception that People of Colour have no LGBTQ+ history of their own'.<sup>116</sup> At the event, libations were poured for QTPOC ancestors whose 'blood runs in our veins' and whose understandings have been passed down; the event also highlighted the importance of archives, biogenetic family bonds and ritual.<sup>117</sup> Taking intergenerational transmission seriously as an aspect of family work, then, informs Duckie's practice in various generative ways, including the valorisation of queer and working-class cultural forms, the celebration and defence of vital sites and the recognition of community histories.

### **Conclusion**

This chapter has shown how the doing of family can powerfully support reproductive queer futurity. I have argued that, although family is a matter of contingency and agency rather than fixed and essential identity, queer critical understandings have tended to privilege forms of nuclear domesticity and homogenous peer groups, generating instructive insights but within a constrained and relatively normative frame. By considering the etymological origins and early usages of *family*, I have proposed critically reconfiguring queer understandings to foreground considerations of material support and intergenerational transmission. Attending to material support can open up avenues of livability that sidestep dominant neoliberal valorisation of capitalist labour aligned with biogenetically accountable domesticity as the only acceptable mode of living. Attending to intergenerational transmission can mitigate the sense of queer as unmoored from belonging, enable figurative queer parenting, celebrate queer pasts, disseminate forms and processes helpful to queer lives and support the fortifying apprehension of queer

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<sup>116</sup> 'Duckie Family presents Legacy', Duckie, Facebook event <<https://www.facebook.com/events/852492784933746/>> [accessed 16 August 2018].

<sup>117</sup> Field notes, 17 February 2018.

precedence, persistence and anticipation. (This chapter has foregrounded transmission from older to younger generations; later chapters will show more fluid forms of transmission.) I have demonstrated Duckie's provision of critically engaged characteristics of family and its consistent promotion of material support and intergenerational transmission. In the next chapter, I will articulate the value to queer futurity of something else that has always been at the centre of Duckie's practice but whose considerable potential value to queer futurity has been critically neglected: fun.



## Chapter Three

### Doing fun queerly

#### Introduction

Queer futurity is the utopian position that insists on the value of critically engaged hope in bringing about better worlds for marginalised people. So far, this thesis has argued that queer futurity is served by forms and processes that reliably generate hope on a routine basis. I call this position reproductive queer futurity and those forms and processes homemade mutant hope machines. In the last chapter, I articulated how reproductive queer futurity, which is about *doing* things, can benefit from the doing of family, where family is queerly critically understood as a matter of material support and intergenerational transmission. In this chapter, I will articulate how reproductive queer futurity can be served by the doing of fun. The theorist of play Johan Huizinga maintained that '*fun* [...] resists all analysis, all logical interpretation'.<sup>1</sup> While analysing fun might not be everyone's idea of a good time, I resist the notion that it cannot sustain – or doesn't warrant – critical consideration. Rather, I will argue that the widespread trivialisation of fun, both culturally and academically, belies the powerful civic capacities of this fleeting yet concrete mode of activity.

I define fun as stimulating, absorbing and enjoyable activity that is bounded in space and time and perceived by those experiencing or observing it as having low stakes. (I unpack this definition later in the chapter.) Understanding fun as pleurably charged agency linked to reduced concern and scrutiny illuminates its utility to participatory performance events as well as its capacity to support both disruptive interventions in existing structures and the experimental formation of new structures. This has tremendous

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<sup>1</sup> *Homo Ludens: A Study of the Play-Element in Culture* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1949), p. 3. Emphasis in original.

potential benefit for reproductive queer futurity. Fun thrives on present-mindedness marked by enjoyment and discovery rather than jeopardy or hypervigilance and enables pleasurable experimentation with and habitual naturalisation of new forms and practices. Fun models and rehearses ways of feeling, understanding, acting and relating that can support the generation of homemade mutant hope machines and promote material steps toward more livable lives for queer subjects. To put it another way, queer fun builds queer muscles and queer worlds. Queer use, however, is a contingent rather than necessary aspect of fun: while I insist on fun's power, I will show that power to be applicable to a range of ethical and political ends; other kinds of fun build other muscles and other worlds.

Understanding why fun is so important to reproductive queer futurity requires several kinds of critical work. These relate to the recuperation of fun from categorical trivialisation; the identification of lines of connection between the numerous but disconnected insights into fun emerging from disparate scholarly fields; and the articulation of powerful but unacknowledged (if not resisted) alignments between fun, queer and participatory performance. As the chapter unfolds, I will explore the shifting usages of the word *fun*, articulate my own definition and track understandings of fun in society, culture and a range of critical disciplines. I explain the centrality to my idea of fun of the concept of low stakes and how this relates to triviality and surveillance. I describe how fun can act as a technology, intervening in existing structures; and how it can act performatively to materialise new ones. I track through several versions of fun with different political and civic consequences before considering the particular value of fun to participatory performance practices, reproductive queer futurity and the routine generation of hope. In this context, I articulate the consistent emphasis on fun found throughout Duckie's practice.

### Fun tamed, fun defined

The current popular understanding of fun as carefree and childlike, even innocent and unworldly, belies the etymological origins that link it to mischief, vulgarity and exploitation. According to the *OED*, *fun* emerged in the late seventeenth century as a transitive verb, derived from the Middle English 'fonnen', meaning to con, trick or mock ('She had fun'd him of his Coin').<sup>2</sup> By the early eighteenth century, 'fun' was a noun, meaning a 'cheat or trick; a practical joke', and the usage 'to make fun of' appeared by 1737.<sup>3</sup> In William Kenrick's play *Fun: A Parodi-tragi-comical Satire* (1752), fun is personified as sneering, ignorant, licentious and irresponsible; the play's instances of 'good Fun' include theft, fraud, assault and falsely telling a man his son has died.<sup>4</sup> This sense of fun resonates with the grotesque inversions of the carnivalesque, evoking both exhilarating liberation and anxiety around social stability.<sup>5</sup> Dr Johnson described fun in class-inflected terms as a 'low cant word'.<sup>6</sup> The now-familiar sense of 'fun' as 'Diversion, amusement, sport; also boisterous jocularly or gaiety' emerged later in the eighteenth century while retaining classed connotations.<sup>7</sup> Matthew Arnold noted the working classes' distinctive appreciation for 'their beer, their gin, and their *fun*'.<sup>8</sup> Around this time, 'fun' also became an established synonym for sex.<sup>9</sup> Ethnographers Mark Blythe and Marc Hassenzahl note that as 'British society was industrialised and class relations came to be organised around production and labour rather

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<sup>2</sup> *Oxford English Dictionary*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., s.v. "fun".

<sup>3</sup> *OED*.

<sup>4</sup> *Fun: A Parodi-tragi-comical Satire* (London, 1752), pp. v, 15.

<sup>5</sup> See Mikhail Bakhtin, *Rabelais and His World* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1968).

<sup>6</sup> *OED*.

<sup>7</sup> *OED*.

<sup>8</sup> 'Equality' (1878), in *Arnold: 'Culture and Anarchy' and Other Writings*, ed. by Stefan Collini (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 212-240, p. 232. Emphasis in original.

<sup>9</sup> *OED*.

than feudal ties', fun increasingly 'signified the absence of seriousness, work, labour'.<sup>10</sup>

As industrialised capitalism grew, then, understandings of both 'fun' and (as noted in Chapter Two) 'family' were shifting, framing them most importantly as sites of *not-work* and thereby hollowing them out as sites of agency. In the case of family, an autonomous economic structure was sentimentalised as the locus of material and emotional support for the working man; in the case of fun, a structure of transgression, ridicule and even violence became trivialised as the locus of harmless, relaxing diversion. These shifts overlap in the idea of 'family fun' as the epitome of labour's restorative shadow, inconsequential child's play on parents' day off. The historian John Beckman links the emergence of 'family fun' to the changing conditions of the US after the Civil War (1861-1865).<sup>11</sup> Before the war, 'fun' had been conceptually associated with high-spirited public disorder, notoriously exemplified by a disturbance in New York's Astor Place in which 22 people died.<sup>12</sup> After the war, America increasingly valorised public order, moral virtue and industrialised capitalist enterprise. In this context, Beckman argues, the showman P.T. Barnum identified a 'lucrative new market', repositioning fun from riotous revelry to unthreatening consumer product; the 'ostensibly nutritious and virtuous pleasures' of Barnum's circus were sold as fun that was suitable for women and children.<sup>13</sup> In marketing terms, this exponentially increased revenue; in cultural terms, it operated insidiously to mobilise the absorbing and enjoyable aspects of fun to fortify passive consumerism.

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<sup>10</sup> 'The Semantics of Fun: Differentiating Enjoyable Experiences', in *Funology: From Usability to Enjoyment*, ed. by Mark Blythe, Andrew F. Monk, Kees Overbeeke and Peter C. Wright (Dordrecht: Springer, 2003), 91-100, p.92.

<sup>11</sup> *American Fun: Four Centuries of Joyous Revolt* (New York: Pantheon, 2014), pp. 129-132.

<sup>12</sup> Beckman, p. 127.

<sup>13</sup> Beckman, p. 130.

Barnum, Beckman notes, 'took citizens in moments of deep distraction and slotted them into postbellum America's increasingly corporate social structure', charging them to stand in line then sit to watch spectacle, simulacrum and schlock in the name of respectable domestic bonding – and then stump up for the merchandising.<sup>14</sup> From the start, then, family fun was a sanctimonious capitalist con. Once a site of danger and destabilisation, fun had become a matter of regulated, commercialised *not-work* or recreation – the re-creation, that is, of the compliant but depleted capitalist worker, rendered productive once more through the inert pleasures of exploitative leisure framed as the good work of heteronormative reproductive futurism. Hand over your cash to be a 'real' family and feel refreshed at the factory on Monday. Were they having fun or being fun'd?

Over the twentieth century, the sense of fun as harmless childish diversion steadily eclipsed lingering associations with subversive disruption, though not without qualification. Family fun took on such forms as the fun house and the fun fair, which, while certainly commodified and regulated, still mobilised embodied agency, surprise, discovery and elements of the carnivalesque. Fun found recognition in popular culture, especially in songs. 'Ain't We Got Fun' (1921), with its praise of fun's capacity to relieve poverty's worldly woes ('Times are so bad and getting badder / Still we have fun'), became a staple of both the Jazz Age and Great Depression, warranting mention in *The Great Gatsby* and *The Road to Wigan Pier*.<sup>15</sup> In post-war pop culture, fun's increasing associations with adolescent exuberance were evoked in such anthems as the Beach Boys' 'Fun Fun Fun' (1964) and Cyndi

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<sup>14</sup> Beckman, pp. 130-131.

<sup>15</sup> Raymond B. Egan and Gus Khan, 'Ain't We Got Fun', Billy Jones (Edison Records, 1921); F. Scott Fitzgerald, *The Great Gatsby* (1925) (London: Penguin, 2000); George Orwell, *The Road to Wigan Pier* (1937) (London: Penguin, 2001).

Lauper's 'Girls Just Wanna Have Fun' (1983).<sup>16</sup> By the 1990s, fun was predominantly associated with childhood socialising: it was, as *SpongeBob SquarePants* put it, 'for friends who do stuff together'.<sup>17</sup> This tallies with associations in visual culture between fun and intense, carefree, childlike enjoyment: Google Image searches reveal predominant associations with children, groups, laughter, dynamic embodiment and bright colours.<sup>18</sup> Beneath the surface, however, fun remained a site of ambivalence: 'Ain't We Got Fun' satirically raised awkward questions about class inequality; the Beach Boys and Cyndi Lauper expressed tensions between patriarchal authority and female adolescent agency; and *SpongeBob's* presumptions around fun's capacity to effect connection across difference were frustrated.<sup>19</sup> Nevertheless, by the twenty-first century, fun was widely, uncritically understood to be kid stuff.

Fun as disruptive agency has been tamed but this does not make it irrecoverable. I want to show fun's potentially powerful utility to reproductive queer futurity by offering my own critically- and culturally-informed contemporary definition and tracking the insights and oversights of a range of disciplinary engagements with fun. Existing critical definitions in sociology, psychology, cultural studies and play studies have variously recognised fun as pleurably embodied and unselfconscious activity that starts and stops; that is distinct from abstract, disembodied or disengaged apprehensions such as humour, happiness or relaxation; and is different from (though often associated with) the playing of games, which needn't be enjoyable and are

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<sup>16</sup> Brian Wilson, Mike Love, 'Fun Fun Fun', The Beach Boys, (Capitol Records, 1964), Robert Hazard, 'Girls Just Want to Have Fun', Cyndi Lauper, (Portrait, 1983).

<sup>17</sup> 'F.U.N.', *SpongeBob SquarePants*, Nickelodeon, 18 September 1999.

<sup>18</sup> Google Image searches for 'Fun', 'Fun The Word' and 'Fun Clipart' [accessed 11 May 2016].

<sup>19</sup> For more on pop-cultural engagements with the ambivalences of fun, see Alan McKee's readings of *The Simpsons* and *Futurama* in *Fun! What Entertainment Tells Us About Living a Good Life* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016), pp. 35-39, 79-81.

explicitly framed, through rules and rewards, as distinct from daily life.<sup>20</sup> My own definition of fun, which draws on these understandings but adds distinctive new emphases, is *stimulating, absorbing and enjoyable activity that is bounded in space and time and perceived by those experiencing or observing it as having low stakes*. I understand fun as embodied activity rather than an emotion or affect; to say 'I had fun' is, I argue, to report having engaged in an activity (albeit an affectively charged one).<sup>21</sup> I note stimulation to acknowledge the sensory engagement of fun; absorption to acknowledge its focused present-mindedness; enjoyability to acknowledge its positive affect; and spatiotemporal boundedness to acknowledge its contingent materiality. The perception of low stakes is an attribute of fun that has received little critical attention but deeply informs my understanding of its power, particularly in relation to its enablement of experiment and avoidance of scrutiny. Something might, of course, be *perceived* as having low stakes while in fact having high stakes; I return to this later in the chapter. First, though, I will track the wide-ranging, heterogenous engagement with fun across multiple academic discourses that comprises the critical context into which I intervene. This survey, which is broader than any other critical overview of fun I know of, constitutes a preliminary sketch of what I shall identify as the nascent interdisciplinary field of fun studies.

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<sup>20</sup> See Huizinga; Jean Piaget, *Play, Dreams, and Imitation in Childhood* (New York, 1962); Erving Goffman, *Encounters: Two Studies in the Sociology of Interaction* (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1961); Ben Fincham, *The Sociology of Fun* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016); Gwen Gordon and Sean Esbjörn-Hargens, 'Are we having fun yet? An exploration of the transformative power of play', *Journal of Humanistic Psychology*, 47.2 (2007), 198-222; Gregory Bateson, *Steps toward an Ecology of Mind* (New York: Ballantine, 1972); Asef Bayat, *Life as Politics* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2010); Gary Alan Fine and Ugo Corte, 'Group Pleasures: Collaborative Commitments, Shared Narrative, and the Sociology of Fun', *Sociological Theory* 35.1 (2017), 64-86.

<sup>21</sup> Fun can be used adjectivally too. To say 'that was fun', I suggest, usually describes an activity, though I refer later to the use of 'fun' to describe an aesthetic category.

### The nascent interdisciplinary field of fun studies

Fun first comes to analytic attention in the field of critical theory, where it is informed by the study of play. Between the 1920s and 1940s, Walter Benjamin articulated an appreciation for *Spielraum*, or 'room-to-play', which informs my understanding of fun.<sup>22</sup> Benjamin was concerned that the seismic technological and cultural changes driving modern collective experience were being powerfully engaged from the right, through the destructive forces of capitalism and militarism, but not from the left; the complex and shifting concept of *Spielraum* was his experiment in redressing this by attending to multiple senses of 'real, living play'.<sup>23</sup> Benjamin's consideration of play in terms of stimulating, absorbing and enjoyable children's activity is closely related to fun and instructive in several ways. He notes how it incentivises both experimental behaviour and its eventual naturalisation: 'play and nothing else is the mother of every habit,' Benjamin writes, noting that eating, sleeping and washing all 'have to be instilled into the struggling little brat in a playful way'.<sup>24</sup> This evokes the technological capacities of playful fun, its ability to intervene in existing structures and effect change; to put it another way, fun teaches ways of engaging the world as it is. Benjamin also observes that objects only truly become toys when given meaning 'through the child's powers of imagination' during undirected play.<sup>25</sup> This aspect is further emphasised in Benjamin's attention to play as public artistic performance, particularly in relation to a plan for a proletarian children's theatre, which he proposes can function as a window onto 'another world, in which the child

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<sup>22</sup> See Miriam Bratu Hansen, 'Room-for-Play: Benjamin's Gamble with Cinema', *October*, 109 (2004), 3-45.

<sup>23</sup> 'The Cultural History of Toys' (1928), in *Selected Writings Vol. 2 1927-1934*, trans. Rodney Livingstone, ed. by Michael W. Jennings, Howard Eiland and Gary Smith (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1999), 113-116, p. 116.

<sup>24</sup> 'Toys and Play' (1928), in *Selected Writings Vol. 2*, 117-121, p. 120.

<sup>25</sup> 'Toys and Play', p. 118.



lives and commands' and which might present a model for better living.<sup>26</sup> Self-directed enjoyment has utopian potential here. This, I suggest, constitutes an argument for the performative power of playful fun, its ability to materialise new structures of meaning, understanding and relation; to put it another way, fun builds new worlds. Finally, Benjamin considers play in terms of gambling, which he relates to embodied and instinctive present-mindedness (key aspects of fun) and also, as Miriam Bratu Hansen notes, to openness 'to chance and a different future'.<sup>27</sup> This affirms playful fun's mobilisation of the appreciation of contingency and imagined other worlds, a capacity that takes on particular resonance at times – like that of Benjamin's writing and like today – of social, political, technological and aesthetic upheaval, when established structures of meaning are discredited and appetites emerge for new forms and processes. Fun, then, can attain peculiar potency during periods when people have had enough of experts and are willing to gamble on something new.

Not all critical theorists were as open to the value of play or fun as Benjamin. Max Horkheimer and Theodor Adorno took at face value the relatively recent association of fun with downtime from wage labour, incisively identifying the discontents related to its Barnumesque construction as passive consumerism without acknowledging any potential for more disruptive application. They understand fun as the 'amusement goods' of low- and middlebrow leisure culture and scathingly assert that '*Fun ist ein Stahlbad*', a mere 'mineral bath' or pick-me-up, an 'instrument for cheating happiness' that furnishes just enough escapist relief to enable the continued operation of

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<sup>26</sup> 'Program for a Proletarian Children's Theatre' (1928/29), *Selected Writings Vol. 2*, 201-206, p. 203.

<sup>27</sup> 'On Some Motifs in Baudelaire' (1940), in *Selected Writings Vol. 4 1938-1940*, ed. by Michael W. Jennings and Howard Eiland (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2003), 329-332; Hansen, p. 8.

capitalist drudgery while actively suppressing criticality.<sup>28</sup> Revisiting the subject later, Adorno expresses horror at the banality he perceives in the popular hobbies and vacations that, he argues, support the widespread 'rigorous bifurcation of life' between alienated labour and stupefying leisure.<sup>29</sup> Adorno accuses fun of contributing to 'the defamation and atrophy of the imagination' and argues that it is, in fact, frequently experienced as boredom.<sup>30</sup> By accepting the identification of fun with consumerist leisure culture, Adorno and Horkheimer uncritically accept fun's capitalist reconceptualisation; yet both the terms of fun's original associations with disruptive agency and those of its lived associations with enjoyable stimulation argue that nothing stultifying can truly be called fun. The discontent diagnosed by Adorno and Horkheimer, then, is not a problem with fun per se but rather the fraud being perpetrated in its name. Not only are the workers being fun'd but so is fun itself: trivialised, misrepresented and made the fall guy for capitalist exploitation, occluding its actual capacities.

Others followed Adorno and Horkheimer in anatomising the mobilisation of the idea of fun to promote uncritical capitalist conformism. In 1950, Martha Wolfenstein and Nathan Leites proposed the concept of 'fun morality' in relation to American cinema.<sup>31</sup> In 1951, Wolfenstein expanded it in relation to American childrearing literature.<sup>32</sup> Wolfenstein articulated a shift early in the twentieth century from 'goodness morality', which valorised virtue

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<sup>28</sup> Max Horkheimer and Theodor W. Adorno, *Dialectic of Enlightenment: Philosophical Fragments* (1944, rev. 1947), trans. Edmund Jephcott, ed. by Gunzelin Schmid Noerr (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2002), p. 112.

<sup>29</sup> Theodor Adorno, 'Free Time' (1969), in *The Culture Industry*, trans. Gordon Finlayson and Nicholas Walker, ed. by J.M. Berstein (London: Routledge, 2001), 187-97, p. 190.

<sup>30</sup> Adorno, p. 192.

<sup>31</sup> See *Movies: A Psychological Study* (Glencoe: The Free Press, 1950).

<sup>32</sup> See 'Fun Morality: An Analysis of Recent American Child-Training Literature', *Journal of Social Issues*, 7.4 (1951), 15-25, repr. in *The Children's Culture Reader*, ed. Henry Jenkins (New York: New York University Press, 1998), 199-208.

and still linked fun to wickedness, to 'fun morality', which linked virtue to pleasure and made fun 'obligatory'.<sup>33</sup> Given the context of childrearing, this shift underscores the domestication and infantilisation of fun: formerly figured as a source of physical and moral jeopardy, then a site of working-class family recreation, fun was now reconceptualised as the proper mode of the nursery. This shift was complex and ambivalent. It offered new recognition of the capacity of fun to support education and socialisation through structures of curiosity, discovery and rehearsal – aspects connected to Benjamin's analysis and helpful to my understanding of fun's value to queer reproductive futurity. But, as part of the continuing repositioning of family as a site of emotional sustenance and *not-work*, it ushered in a new affective hegemony based on a view of fun aligned, Wolfenstein argues, with individualism, reproductive domesticity and economic productivity. As an emblem of successful civic engagement, fun was now 'not only permissible but required' both at home and in the workplace, in a form in which fun's earlier capacity for disruptive agency is occluded by expectations of a jovial inanity that is valorised just as far as it enhances rather than impedes productivity, whether in the nursery or the workplace.<sup>34</sup> Being perceived as 'fun' in a capitalist-friendly way is here identified for the first time as a desirable attribute for an employee; later, it would become a requirement in certain neoliberal contexts, as the sociologist Ben Fincham notes with relation to affective labour and the indignities of managerially mandated 'workplace fun'.<sup>35</sup> None of this 'fun', of course, is really fun.

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<sup>33</sup> Wolfenstein, pp. 204, 201.

<sup>34</sup> Wolfenstein, p. 204.

<sup>35</sup> Fincham, *The Sociology of Fun*, p. 121-152. See also Richard Butsch, working in leisure studies, on the regulated marketisation of time away from work under neoliberalism (*For Fun and Profit: The Transformation of Leisure into Consumption*, Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1990, pp. 3-27).

The expectation to be seen to be having fun has increasingly pervaded social life too but, as critics have noted, its hegemonic framing as emblem of successful living and panacea for discontent can prompt anxiety, frustration, failure or refusal.<sup>36</sup> These concerns also leak through in pop culture. Think of the lead character of the film *Carnival of Souls* (1962), whose disconcerting inability to have fun is revealed to signify the fact that she is actually dead; or the music video for 'Nothing Compares 2 U' (1990), in which Sinéad O'Connor's heartbroken speaker reports a doctor's advice 'to have fun no matter what you do' and spits out the response 'but he's a fool'; or Bill Griffiths's comic character Zippy, whose ambivalent catchphrase 'Are we having fun yet?' suggests, as Blythe and Hassenzahl note, 'at once a promise and a betrayal'.<sup>37</sup> The normative pablumisation of fun has proven both pervasive and problematic, then, even as the recentness and contingency of this framing goes widely unacknowledged. There are some defences, however, of fun's continued capacity for demotic agency: in cultural studies, for instance, Alan McKee offers a passionate reclamation of fun as emblematic of a working-class culture of self-determined hedonism.<sup>38</sup>

Sociology, meanwhile, attends to the phenomenology of fun and its facilitation of social bonding. Erving Goffman influentially articulated the dependence of fun on factors such as spatiotemporal boundedness and pleurably engaging stimulation.<sup>39</sup> Walter Podilchak further emphasised unselfconscious absorption, liberated agency and positive affective relationality or the sense of being 'outside' oneself while happily inside

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<sup>36</sup> See, for instance, Pierre Bourdieu, *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste* (London: Routledge, 1999), p. 367; Slavoj Žižek, *How to Read Lacan* (London: Granta, 2006), p.104.

<sup>37</sup> *Carnival of Souls*, dir. by Herk Harvey (Herts-Lion International Corp., 1962); Prince, 'Nothing Compares 2 U', Sinéad O'Connor (Warner/Chappell Music, 1989); Blythe and Hassenzahl, 'The Semantics of Fun', p. 93.

<sup>38</sup> See *Fun!*

<sup>39</sup> Goffman, p. 40.

an active peer group.<sup>40</sup> Fincham additionally notes the senses of exploration and irresponsibility associated with fun and suggests that its nebulous temporality has hindered research.<sup>41</sup> Gary Alan Fine and Ugo Corte describe how fun supports small-group cohesion and stability, attending to its capacity to engage the unexpected constructively.<sup>42</sup> Some argue that very expansive hopes are pinned on this capacity to engage the unexpected, proposing fun as a coping mechanism in the context of modern and postmodern existential doubt: for Russell Heddendorf, fun offers people in secular modernity a means of engaging through trivialisation with experiences of paradox that would previously have been conceived as matters of faith; meanwhile Christian Jantzen, James Fitchett, Per Østergaard and Mikael Vetner argue that late-capitalist fun promises self-realisation through consumerism, with inevitably disappointing results.<sup>43</sup>

Sociologists consistently frame fun as inherently collaborative, overlooking the possibility that fun can emerge as the distinctive expression of individual subjectivity. This has particular relevance in the context of reproductive queer futurity because fun for one can materialise non-normative understandings and desires in pleasurable, valorising and sustainable ways that generate hope in isolation; the first seven minutes of *Pee Wee's Big Adventure*, for instance, illustrate the nourishing delights of weird solo fun.<sup>44</sup> Sociologists' focus on collectivity also reflects a prevailing disciplinary interest in the relational mechanics of fun rather than its cultural, political or ethical efficacies. Sociology predominantly asks what fun does to small groups, and

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<sup>40</sup> 'The Social Organization of Fun', *Leisure and Society*, 8.2 (1985), 685-692, 'Establishing the Fun in Leisure', *Leisure Sciences*, 13.2 (1991), 123-136.

<sup>41</sup> Fincham, p. 41.

<sup>42</sup> Fine and Corte, pp. 64, 70.

<sup>43</sup> *From Faith to Fun: The Secularisation of Humour* (Cambridge: Lutterworth Press, 2009); 'Just for fun? The emotional regime of experiential consumption', *Marketing Theory* 12.2 (2012), 137-154.

<sup>44</sup> *Pee-Wee's Big Adventure*, dir. by Tim Burton (Warner Bros., 1985).

occasionally what it reveals about societal discontents, but not how it might actively reshape the terms of society. The instrumental consequences of such findings have been attended to in a range of fields related to social behaviour: studies of parenting, education, labour, consumption and incarceration have analysed the deployment of fun to incentivise participation in forms of activity linked to measurable or accountable outcomes, with limited critical attention to the terms on which such outcomes are set.<sup>45</sup>

Several works of social history attend, in specific historical contexts, to the consequential capacity of fun to model civic forms, processes and understandings; I mobilise these studies later in this chapter to demonstrate that fun is powerful without being necessarily aligned to any given political or moral position.<sup>46</sup> Meanwhile, the fields of computation, human-computer interaction and video game production and reception consistently engage with fun's cognitive and civic implications, drawing on theorisations of play and games by Huizinga, Jean Piaget and Bernard de Koven.<sup>47</sup> Mark Blythe, Andrew Monk, Kees Overbeeke and Peter Wright's collected edition

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<sup>45</sup> See, for instance, Karen Gainer Sirota, 'Fun Morality Reconsidered: Mothering and the Relational Contours of Maternal–Child Play in U.S. Working Family Life', *Ethos: Journal of the Society for Psychological Anthropology*, 38.4 (2010), 388-405, pp. 399-400; Olga S. Jarrett, and Pamela Burnley, 'Lessons on the Role of Fun/Playfulness from a Geology Undergraduate Summer Research Program', *Journal of Geoscience Education*, 58.2 (2010), 110-120; Donald Roy, "'Banana Time": Job Satisfaction and Informal Interaction', *Human Organization*, 18.4 (1960), 158–68; Katherine Karl, Joy Peluchette, Leda Hall-Indiana and Lynn Harland, 'Attitudes Toward Workplace Fun: A Three Sector Comparison', *Journal of Leadership & Organizational Studies*, 12.2 (2005), 1-17; Mohamed Saber Chtourou, and Nizar Souiden, 'Rethinking the TAM model: time to consider fun', *Journal of Consumer Marketing*, 27.4 (2010), 336-344; Courtney Elkin Mohler, 'How to Turn "a bunch of gang-bangin' criminals into big kids having fun": Empowering Incarcerated and At-Risk Youth through Ensemble Theatre', *Theatre Topics*, 22.1 (2012), 89-102.

<sup>46</sup> See Beckman; Gleb Tsipursky, *Socialist Fun: Youth, Consumption, and State-Sponsored Popular Culture in the Soviet Union 1945-1970* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2016); Asef Bayat, *Life as Politics* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2010).

<sup>47</sup> See Huizinga, Piaget and Bernard de Koven (1978), *The Well-Played Game: A Player's Philosophy* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2013).

*Funology* traces the expansion of study of fun in the field 'from standard usability concerns [around, say, making user systems engaging or games enjoyable] towards a wider set of problems to do with fun, enjoyment, aesthetics and the experience of use', including communicating identity and navigating social arrangements.<sup>48</sup> Raph Koster, meanwhile, powerfully characterises the experience of fun as a biochemical reward for activity that cultivates evolutionarily beneficial attributes such as memory, alertness and pattern identification: he calls fun 'the feedback the brain gives us when we are absorbing patterns for learning purposes [...] in a context where there is no pressure'.<sup>49</sup> Koster attends to fun as an individual rather than collective experience and to its civic consequences: asserting that fun potently models and rehearses civic values and behaviours, he regrets most video games' valorisation of obedience, hierarchy, binary thinking, force and aversion to the unfamiliar and argues for games to promote more critical and empathetic values.<sup>50</sup> Koster's framing of fun as edifying activity that can support a range of civic applications is highly instructive in considering its technological and performative potential in ways that bear on reproductive queer futurity. Introducing her collected edition *Fun and Software*, Olga Goriunova foregrounds fun's capacity to engage paradox, ambiguity and perversity and the fact that, although often associated with normative or consumerist imperatives, fun can also function in a utopian vein as 'a desiring process [...] a horizon, an idea, a passion and an action' that 'has the potential to disturb the status quo'.<sup>51</sup> As I will show later in this, chapter, these aspects of fun have significant queer applicability. Some gaming researchers wax technocratically

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<sup>48</sup> *Funology*, p. vii.

<sup>49</sup> *A Theory of Fun for Game Design* (Scottsdale: Paraglyph Press, 2005), pp. 96, 98.

<sup>50</sup> Koster, p. 68.

<sup>51</sup> *Fun and Software: Exploring Pleasure, Paradox and Pain in Computing* (London: Bloomsbury, 2014), pp. 12, 4, 11, 9.

evangelical. Jane McGonigal, for instance, suggests that harnessing online games' fun-motivated cultivation of 'urgent optimism', 'tight social fabric', 'blissful productivity' and 'epic meaning' might help generate solutions to 'problems like hunger, poverty, climate change [and] global conflict'.<sup>52</sup>

Whether such messianic confidence is justified remains to be seen. In any case, gaming studies informs my argument through its identification of fun with disruptive agency, the development of individual and collective capabilities and the modeling of imagined worlds in conditions exempt from the pressures of everyday life.

The nascent interdisciplinary field of fun studies, then, draws on a range of disciplines and approaches. Critical theory and cultural studies offer various perspectives on conditioned social understandings of fun while historical studies locate its mobilisation in specific geopolitical contexts; sociology analyses its material operation within small groups while computing and gaming studies imagine its capacities to remake the world. The purpose of my intervention in the field is to increase understandings of the subjective phenomenology of fun and the nature of the technological and performative capacities through which its potential for civic intervention is materialised. To do this, I foreground an aspect of fun rarely acknowledged in the field beyond occasional passing references: the perception of those engaging in or observing fun that its stakes are low.

### **Low stakes**

My definition of fun distinctively asserts that fun is perceived by those experiencing or observing it as having low stakes. As I will now argue, foregrounding low stakes helps understanding of how fun supports relief from

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<sup>52</sup> 'Gaming Can Make a Better World', *TED*, February 2010 <[https://www.ted.com/talks/jane\\_mcgonigal\\_gaming\\_can\\_make\\_a\\_better\\_world/transcript?language=en](https://www.ted.com/talks/jane_mcgonigal_gaming_can_make_a_better_world/transcript?language=en)> [accessed 16 August 2018].



normative pressures, collective engagement, experimentation with new forms and processes and critical engagement with what counts as serious. These considerations illuminate in turn fun's capacity to serve reproductive queer futurity's hopes for the generation of better worlds. So, while I argue that little is perceived as riding on the outcome of any given instance of fun, I don't suggest that fun itself is inconsequential. Rather, I use the consideration of low stakes to describe how people can engage in a carefree way in a type of activity that does, in fact, matter greatly.

Fun, as it is widely understood today, is possible only when nothing is perceived to be at stake beside its participants' enjoyment. To the extent that it is fun, an activity is undertaken for its own sake and its participants are unconscious or heedless of outcomes consequential to their wider lives. I emphasise perception here because the stakes of the activity might in fact be higher than supposed but the experience or observation of fun remains possible only so long as those stakes are not understood in ways that compromise perceptions of enjoyment and absorption. If I say 'I am having fun', it implies that I perceive the activity in which I am engaged to have low stakes. Yet an onlooker's view might differ: I might be playing on train tracks, unaware of a nearby live rail or oncoming locomotive. If I say 'they are having fun', it implies that I perceive the activity in which they are engaged to have low stakes. Yet the participants' view might differ: they might be not waving but drowning. Being conscious of high stakes, with significant consequence to one's wider life, precludes or short-circuits fun. In Alison Bechdel's memoir *Fun Home*, for instance, the family home cannot be a site of fun because Bechdel's father's jealous investment in the integrity of its décor rules out any 'elasticity, a margin of error' necessary for carefree childhood activity; the funeral home he manages unexpectedly affords more opportunities for playful

experiment and discovery.<sup>53</sup> A shifting understanding of stakes can kill fun. Goffman notes how the literal stakes of gambling can grow so high that a player must suddenly take the game 'too seriously' for it to remain fun.<sup>54</sup> A UK gambling awareness campaign frames such moments as thresholds between pleasurable activity and addictive compulsion, advising 'when the fun stops, stop'.<sup>55</sup> Fun can also end when participants have divergent understandings of the stakes of an activity, as Sianne Ngai observes of the 'unfun fun' to which Jim Carrey's hypercompetitive character subjects Matthew Broderick's in *The Cable Guy*: the former takes the supposedly larky activity of faux-medieval jousting so seriously it becomes a genuine ordeal for the latter.<sup>56</sup>

Once something really matters, then, it is no longer legible as fun. This association with low stakes reflects and reinforces the framing of fun in the age of capital as essentially *not-work*. Nothing, in this now-prevalent understanding, is at stake in the having of fun other than the replenishment of the human resources of economic growth; conceptualised as labour's shadow, fun can sustain no substantive or constructive value in and of itself. Dominant discourses recognise the meaningful agency of fun only by way of disciplining rogue applications of this mode of *not-work* to sites of properly productive labour such as the workplace or school, where, as Fincham notes, the policing of fun rises in proportion to expectations of accountable achievement.<sup>57</sup> This structural context also helps account for the typical absurdity of officially mandated attempts to instrumentalise fun in the workplace. Moves to amalgamate *work* and *not-work* generate a kind of

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<sup>53</sup> *Fun Home* (London: Jonathan Cape, 2006), pp. 18, 37.

<sup>54</sup> Goffman, p. 63.

<sup>55</sup> *When the Fun Stops, Stop* <<http://www.whenthefunstops.co.uk/>> [accessed 16 August 2018].

<sup>56</sup> *Our Aesthetic Categories: Zany, Cute, Interesting* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2015), p. 198.

<sup>57</sup> Fincham, p. 47-49.

cognitive dissonance hinging on the perceived stakes of the situation: to ask employees to 'have fun' with an assignment only makes sense if there are no consequences to how well it is executed on employers' terms.

This construction allows for – or perhaps necessitates – the categorical trivialisation of fun. One educational study quotes a participant's articulation of the widely held belief that something 'done for fun is something that is not meant to be taken seriously – in other words something that is not real, genuine or sincere'.<sup>58</sup> To locate something aesthetically as 'fun' is to offer faint praise, with connotations, according to Blythe and Hassenzahl, of the 'gaudy, and fleeting' or associations, according to Ngai, with the belittled category of zaniness.<sup>59</sup> In academic contexts, publications across a range of disciplines deploy the word 'fun' in their titles without defining or engaging with it in their arguments.<sup>60</sup> The effect of such superficial usage is to reproduce rather than interrogate the construction of fun as trivial, rendering it a kind of rhetorical window dressing rather than a subject of investigation in its own right. Those who do study fun frequently feel the need to justify it in the face of what Fine and Corte, borrowing a phrase from Brian Sutton-Smith, describe as the 'triviality barrier' to academic credibility.<sup>61</sup> In 1961, Goffman suggested the need to 'justify itself' had precluded sociological pursuit of 'an analytical view of fun'; 55 years later, Fincham observed, it was still considered an

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<sup>58</sup> M. Broner and E. Torone, 'Is it fun? Language play in a fifth-grade Spanish immersion classroom', *The Modern Language Journal*, 85.3 (2001), 363-379, p. 364.

<sup>59</sup> Blythe and Hassenzahl, p. 99; Ngai, p. 14. Annet Dekker offers a more celebratory aesthetic of fun rooted in process, destabilisation and sharing in 'An Aesthetic of Fun and Art', in Goriunova, *Fun and Software*, 233-252.

<sup>60</sup> In ethnography, see Reuben A. Buford May, 'What Is Having Fun and Who Has It' in *Urban Nightlife: Entertaining Race, Class, and Culture in Public Space* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2014), p. 29; in popular music studies, see Dave Harker, 'Taking Fun Seriously', *Popular Music*, 15.1 (1996), 108-121; in feminist studies, see Sarah Jaffe, 'Difficult Fun', *Dissent*, 62.2 (2015), 5-10.

<sup>61</sup> Fine and Corte, p. 68, referring to Sutton-Smith, 'The Psychology of Childlore: The Triviality Barrier', *Western Folklore* 29.1 (1970), 1-8.

'inferior' and 'peripheral' subject of research.<sup>62</sup> In computer studies, Blythe and Hassenzahl have noted fun's 'connotations of frivolity and triviality' and Goriunova the requirement for 'qualification or defence' of its academic engagement.<sup>63</sup> According to normative understandings, then, fun seems not to matter much to those who experience, observe or critically acknowledge it.

The combination of the perception of low stakes at an experiential level and trivialisation at a structural level does, however, enable fun to operate with certain practical advantages in relation to its application to reproductive queer futurity. The fleeting and contingent temporality of fun – the understanding, experience and expectation of a given instance of fun as short-term, spatiotemporally bounded activity with minimal impact on the rest of one's life – makes it well suited to experimentation with the homemade cultivation and expression of distinctive non-normative sensibilities. Within wider contexts of hegemonic oppression, fun can offer moments of relief that glimmer, however contingently, with hope and enable the enactment, however partial, of better ways of being. The low stakes of fun (what's the worst that could happen? who cares if this falls flat?) can incentivise individual expression and engagement, the formation of like-minded collectives, and experimentation with forms and processes from which homemade mutant hope machines might emerge. This understanding is reflected, for instance, in the name of Low Stakes, a London performance collective whose founders – Duckie collaborators Edythe Woolley, Jack Ellis and Malik Nashad Sharpe – 'invite failure' and embrace 'happy accidents [and] fortuitous fuck-ups'.<sup>64</sup> Meanwhile, the structural trivialisation of fun means activities conducted under its auspices will likely go unnoticed and unchallenged provided they

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<sup>62</sup> Goffman, p. 17; Fincham, p. 32.

<sup>63</sup> Blythe and Hassenzahl, p. 96; Goriunova, p. 2.

<sup>64</sup> Low Stakes, 'A Low Stakes Party 07/09', *Facebook* event <<https://www.facebook.com/events/434058730449573/>> [accessed 14 September 2018].

don't directly challenge normative authority. I return here to Casa Susanna, the transvestite or TV resort described in Chapter One that aimed, according to Susanna herself, to enable 'the healthy expression [...] of TV fun' on the basis that 'having a ball' with '[n]o guilt, no shame, no fear' constituted 'a form of magic' by materialising a joyful, fulfilling yet transgressive way of life.<sup>65</sup> One regular guest associated the resort with 'just having a good time in our party clothes'.<sup>66</sup> But that 'just' downplays the significance of what was, as the critic Sophie Hackett notes, 'serious play, a visual journey to discover [...] which self suits best'.<sup>67</sup> Activities that might seem and indeed feel like inconsequential recreation can, then, function as forms of relief from and resistance to normative expectations and enable the rehearsal and enactment of utopian forms.

The sense that fun might afford welcome opportunities for social cohesion and low-stakes experimentation has received some mainstream cultural recognition in recent years, often with connections to the participatory performance event as an effective holding form for fun. The ongoing Fun Palaces project, originally conceived in 1961 by Joan Littlewood and Cedric Price as a street-level forum for constructive and sociable enjoyment and exploration of arts and science, has been realised annually since 2014 at multiple sites across the UK under co-directors Stella Duffy and Sarah-Jane Rawlings.<sup>68</sup> In 2016, the British Library mounted 'There Will Be

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<sup>65</sup> Susanna Valenti, 'Susanna Says...', *Transvestia*, 36 (1965), 68-75, reprinted in *Another Kind of Life: Photography on the Margins*, ed. by Alona Pardo (London: Prestel, 2018), 262-265, pp. 69-70.

<sup>66</sup> Sophie Hackett, 'Casa Susanna', in *Another Kind of Life: Photography on the Margins*, ed. Alona Pardo (London: Prestel, 2018), 60.

<sup>67</sup> Hackett. Hackett's use of 'play' is commensurate here with my definition of fun. Gordon and Esbjörn-Hargens also discuss play in terms compatible with my conception of fun, attending to spatiotemporally bounded activity whose perceived limitations afford 'a safe way to engage risk' enabling 'experimenting with a new way of being'. See 'Are We Having Fun Yet?', p. 217.

<sup>68</sup> *Fun Palaces* <<http://funpalaces.co.uk/>> [accessed 16 August 2018].

Fun', an exhibition of its Victorian music-hall holdings with accompanying education and performances produced by longterm Duckie collaborator Christopher Green.<sup>69</sup> There is also a growing market for leisure activities that offer adults experiences of fun and play normally associated with childhood, such as bouncy castles, ballpits and playgrounds.<sup>70</sup> Such projects beckon fun into respectable view, celebrating its capacity for pleasurable engagement and discovery, and asserting the need for spaces of relaxation given the increasing incursion of work into all aspects of life. They resist the categorical trivialisation of fun, sometimes in the face of institutional scepticism (Green reports that the British Library initially thought the word too 'one-dimensional' and 'superficial') but stop short of articulating arguments for the capacity of fun to effect substantive structural change.<sup>71</sup>

Fun can, however, be radical and consideration of low stakes and trivialisation suggests how. Angela Carter articulated a common assumption when she characterised fun as 'pleasure that does not involve the conscience or, furthermore, the intellect [...] fun is *per se* harmless'.<sup>72</sup> I want to trouble this. To perceive the stakes of a given situation to be high or low is to set boundaries about what is or isn't to be taken seriously. This in itself is a serious business whether or not it involves conscious deliberation. To declare something 'just a bit of fun' is to make a claim about what warrants serious consideration, to adjudge both what is at stake and how much it matters.

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<sup>69</sup> 'There Will Be Fun at the British Library this autumn', *British Library* <<https://www.bl.uk/press-releases/2016/october/there-will-be-fun-at-the-british-library-this-autumn>> [accessed 16 August 2018].

<sup>70</sup> Rachel Aroesti, 'Ball pits and bouncy castles for adults: good clean fun or desperate nostalgia?', *The Guardian*, 14 August 2017 <<https://www.theguardian.com/lifeandstyle/2017/aug/14/youre-only-young-twice-the-rise-of-bouncy-castles-and-ballpits-for-adults>> [accessed 16 August 2018]; Lisa Bowman, 'There's a playground opening just for adults', *Metro*, 17 July 2017 <<https://metro.co.uk/2017/07/17/theres-a-playground-opening-just-for-adults-6785195/>> [accessed 16 August 2018].

<sup>71</sup> Christopher Green, interview with the author, 21 December 2016.

<sup>72</sup> 'Fun Fairs' (1977), in *Shaking a Leg: Collected Journalism and Writings*, ed. by Jenny Uglow (London: Chatto and Windus, 1997), pp. 340-344, p. 341.

Such questions consequentially delineate civic fault-lines and fun throws these lines into relief. For example, in September 2017, a themed bar called Alcotraz opened in east London. Patrons paid £30 to dress in orange jumpsuits, receive an inmate number and play at avoiding surveillance while sitting in barred cells drinking bespoke cocktails.<sup>73</sup> Alcotraz was promoted as 'hugely fun' but discussion among viewers of *Time Out London's* online coverage revealed disagreement about this.<sup>74</sup> One commenter suggested that people 'who've never set foot inside a prison think this bar is "fun" and those of us who have worked in this environment think it's tasteless and cruel'.<sup>75</sup> From this perspective, the civic stakes of incarceration are too high for its jovial imitation to constitute fun: to trivialise it through such forms is to mobilise the power of fun regressively. This position implies that fun is civically consequential and its forms bear ethical and critical consideration. Another commenter retorted: 'If you don't like it, then don't visit it. Simple as. It's all meant for a bit of fun, although fun seems to have bypassed you.'<sup>76</sup> From this perspective, fun is categorically trivial, and therefore incapable of being a site of civic agency; this position asserts that to designate a form or process a site of fun is sufficient in itself to remove it from ethical or critical consideration. This is, then, an argument about whether fun matters or whether it is trivial; whether fun is to be taken seriously. I argue that fun matters, among other reasons, precisely because it opens up a discursive

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<sup>73</sup> 'Prison Cocktail Bar', *Alcotraz* <<https://www.alcotraz.co.uk/>> [accessed 16 August 2018].

<sup>74</sup> Sophie Brown, 'A Prison-Themed Pop-Up Bar Is Opening on Brick Lane', *Eater.com*, 31 August 2017 <<https://london.eater.com/2017/8/31/16232368/prison-themed-pop-up-bar-opening-brick-lane-shoreditch>> [accessed 16 August 2018]; 'Inside London's prison-themed pop-up bar', *TimeOutLondon* Facebook page, 27 September 2017 <<https://www.facebook.com/TimeOutLondon/videos/10154962225017405/>> [accessed 16 August 2018].

<sup>75</sup> Commenter, 'Inside London's prison-themed pop-up bar'.

<sup>76</sup> Commenter, 'Inside London's prison-themed pop-up bar'.

space that reveals as contingent and arguable the question of what is to be taken seriously.

So from one perspective, if something is fun, it can't matter; from another, if something matters, it can't be fun. But things are messier than that. The performance practice of David Hoyle helpfully illuminates the tensions and nuances around fun and seriousness. Hoyle is celebrated for shows, often at the Royal Vauxhall Tavern (RVT), that combine charismatic showmanship and dazzling comic timing with radical political invective and sometimes uncomfortable interactions with guests and audience members. To his considerable following (including myself), Hoyle's shows are outstandingly stimulating, absorbing and enjoyable, key aspects of fun. Yet Gavin Butt incisively identifies Hoyle as occupying an unsettling position that throws into doubt all manner of value judgments.<sup>77</sup> Hoyle's ambivalence enables a criticality that Butt locates as 'queerly serious by dint of its playful sincerity', sidestepping 'the false choice of either serious high-mindedness or trivializing lowness' to probe the tensions, contradictions and hypocrisies of hegemonic normativity, gay subculture and Hoyle's own psyche.<sup>78</sup> At Hoyle's shows, the stakes of everything, from incest to international relations to interpersonal civility, are up for grabs. One thing that Hoyle does take seriously, Butt suggests, is the investigation of such questions through 'lay interactions between people in unguarded, open, and sometimes honest moments of exchange'.<sup>79</sup> In this sense, Hoyle takes fun seriously, as a mechanism of queer discursive investigation and of hopeful agency. Hoyle is, as Butt suggests, at once serious and not serious when he tells his audience '[w]e can create the

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<sup>77</sup> 'Just a Camp Laugh? David Hoyle's Laden Levity', in *Visual Cultures as Seriousness*, ed. by Gavin Butt and Irit Rogoff (London: Goldsmiths/Sternberg Press, 2013), 39-60.

<sup>78</sup> Gavin Butt and Irit Rogoff, 'Seriousness in Neoliberal Culture: A Conversation between Gavin Butt and Irit Rogoff', in *Visual Cultures as Seriousness*, 9-36, p. 31; 'Just a Camp Laugh?', p. 58.

<sup>79</sup> 'Just a Camp Laugh?', p. 55.



utopia we all want to live in': he does not anticipate its creation there and then but he sincerely believes that questioning values and enabling supportive, open exchange can materialise better worlds.<sup>80</sup> Hoyle is also, I believe, sincere when he tells his audience they are all equally valid, equally justified and equally beautiful. His performance practice can, then, be framed as a homemade mutant hope machine fuelled by fun, a set of forms and processes that have emerged from the expression of Hoyle's distinctive sensibility, adapted to various economic, material and cultural contexts, operated relatively autonomously and routinely generated hope by cultivating aspects of community and support for like-minded outsiders.

Fun matters, then, because it enables consideration of what qualifies, civically speaking, as high stakes and what as low. More than this, it matters because it enables forms of agency capable of dynamically mobilising these contingent and varying sets of values and beginning to make worlds out of them. Sidestepping the relatively recent construction of fun as passive, consumerist *not-work* and returning to the sense of fun as disruptive agency enables consideration of the many different forms fun can take and the many different worlds whose generation it can enable.

### **Fun as technology, fun as performative**

Fun can teach more than a brat to eat, sleep and wash. The construction of fun as the trivial shadow of labour erases its capacity to function as a mode of both disruptive and constructive agency, a vehicle for contingent and consequential civic intervention and influence with relevance to reproductive queer futurity and the generation of homemade mutant hope machines. Even as fun was being normatively reframed as the trivial and inert shadow of labour, intimations of its disruptive capacities sometimes glinted into view. As

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<sup>80</sup> 'Just a Camp Laugh?', p. 41.

consumer culture emerged, the potential civic agency of fun was critically noted in Weimar Germany in ways redolent of the English word's earliest associations with confidence tricks. From the Nazi perspective, Goebbels surveyed the 'cafés, [...] cabarets and bars' of the Berlin demimonde of 1928 and feared that the pleasurable appeal of this 'repulsive pseudoculture' was so strong that the proud German Volk would be 'borne to the grave with a smile'.<sup>81</sup> Goebbels knew fun could wreak havoc. The Jewish *Kabarett* pioneer Freidrich Hollaender concurred, though with approval rather than abhorrence, arguing that cabaret performance, posing merely as 'an evening's relaxing entertainment', can inspire criticality: a 'socially minded chanson', for instance, 'dispenses a poison cookie [*eine Giftoblate*]. Suggestively administered and hastily swallowed, its effects reach far beyond the harmless evening to make otherwise placid blood boil and inspire a sluggish brain to think.'<sup>82</sup> Hollaender knew fun could rouse passionate engagement. These analyses anticipate Horkheimer and Adorno's characterisation of fun as a 'fraud practiced on happiness': the perceived political valence and desirability of fun differs in each critique but all agree on its latent capacity to effect civic change despite or because of its perceived triviality.<sup>83</sup> They recognise that fun can train people in ways of feeling, thinking and acting without overtly engaging them in a political cause. I do not propose that fun must operate undercover to be effective; I am more invested in the recognition that fun can effect civic dynamism through carefree, enjoyable activity. Episodes of fun can microcosmically model social, cultural and political structures that can

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<sup>81</sup> Joseph Goebbels, 'Around the Gedächtniskirche', *Der Angriff*, 23 January 1928, repr. in *The Weimar Republic Sourcebook*, trans. Don Reneau, ed. by Anton Kaes, Martin Jay and Edward Dimendberg (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994), 560-562, p. 561.

<sup>82</sup> 'Cabaret', *Die Weltbühne* 28.5 (1932), 169-171, repr. in *The Weimar Republic Sourcebook*, trans. Don Reneau, 566-67.

<sup>83</sup> Horkheimer and Adorno, p. 142.

affirm, subvert or sidestep dominant ideologies. Fun builds habits that can find consequential application in situations whose stakes are perceived to be higher than those of fun itself.

Fun, then, can function as technology. Here, I echo Beth Coleman's articulation of race as technology, understanding the word 'technology' as describing prosthetic forms of agency and its use as illuminating 'the ways by which external devices help us navigate the terrain in which we live', with important consequences for 'how beings are subjected in systems of power, ideology, and other networks'.<sup>84</sup> Coleman demonstrates how race can be 'engaged as a productive tool' by 'denaturing it from its historical roots' as a supposed essential biological trait and instead viewing it as 'a collection of techniques that create certain people as things'.<sup>85</sup> I propose that fun can also function as a tool if it is decoupled from its cultural load of triviality and inconsequentiality and instead viewed as a site of potentially disruptive and constructive agency, a training ground in which values and behaviours can be exercised under conditions of low expectation and reduced surveillance.

This isn't to say that fun's technological application is necessarily subversive. As noted above, fun has been instrumentalised to incentivise normative participation in structures of parenting, education, consumerism and incarceration. Fincham notes the increasingly pervasive alignment of fun with neoliberal capitalist efficiency, quoting the Fun at Work Company's assertion of 'a direct relationship between "fun at work" and employee motivation, productivity, creativity, satisfaction and retention'.<sup>86</sup> Various self-help books encourage individual entrepreneurial self-application of such sensibilities outside corporate structures under titles such as *The Power of*

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<sup>84</sup> 'Race as Technology' *Camera Obscura*, 24.1 (70) (2009), 177-207, pp.177-178.

<sup>85</sup> Coleman, pp. 178, 190.

<sup>86</sup> Fincham, p. 129.

*Having Fun: How Meaningful Breaks Help You Get More Done*.<sup>87</sup> Fun here is constructed as a kind of lubricant for dominant forms and processes, its agency recognised but aligned with normative participation. Yet the contingency of this has also been critically acknowledged. Suzana B. Rodrigues and David L. Collinson analyse how fun can challenge workplace authority, noting that while corporate culture has powerfully instrumentalised fun for its own ends, fun can also be a vehicle for worker dissatisfaction and resistance, from subversive joking to 'the doing and telling of sabotage'.<sup>88</sup>

In civic contexts, fun's technological agency can be supported by its capacity, noted by sociologists, to generate and strengthen group identity. Fincham demonstrates how fun 'establishes and maintains bonds between people and, in a reflexive sense, informs identity. What we do for fun and who we have fun with say much about who we are'.<sup>89</sup> I argue that fun is more than indicative: it is generative. Goffman gestures toward this when he articulates how fun's mobilisation of absorption or engrossment enables certain repeated affective experiences to 'become real', to emerge as novel and distinct aspects of participants' lived experience.<sup>90</sup> This can happen individually but the collective impact, Goffman hints, might be exponential: 'Joint engrossment in something with others reinforces the reality carved out by the individual's attention'.<sup>91</sup> This can include the contingent development of civic values articulated and apprehended, in Fincham's words, through 'judgements and behaviours' that emerge during fun and express 'the sorts of

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<sup>87</sup> Dave Krenshaw, *The Power of Having Fun: How Meaningful Breaks Help You Get More Done* (Oakland: Berrett-Koehler, 2017).

<sup>88</sup> "'Having Fun"?: Humour as Resistance in Brazil', *Organization Studies*, 16.5 (1995), 739-768, p. 745.

<sup>89</sup> Fincham, p. 201.

<sup>90</sup> Goffman, p. 72.

<sup>91</sup> Goffman, p. 72. Emphasis in original.

people that we think we are'.<sup>92</sup> As Fine and Corte caution, this further implies that fun can work to define who 'we' aren't: its operation can also 'draw boundaries' or 'exert control over others'.<sup>93</sup> In addition to functioning as a technology, then, fun functions to make particular things – such as sets of values or distinctions between groups – become real. This 'becoming real' can therefore be understood as performative in the sense used by Judith Butler, meaning that it acts to 'bring into being certain kinds of realities'.<sup>94</sup> Through engaging in stimulating, absorbing and enjoyable activity that is bounded in space and time and whose stakes are perceived as low, individuals and groups begin to materialise worlds that would otherwise not exist. Fun, then, can be civically consequential as a vehicle for supporting existing structures, intervening critically in existing structures or materialising new structures. Each of these can serve reproductive queer futurity (through supporting existing queer structures, intervening in oppressive structures or materialising new queer structures).

The civically consequential capabilities of fun can generate political anxiety, as is shown by Goebbels's concerns about nightlife in 1928 or reactionary Polish fears in 2000 that blasphemous homosexuals 'draw the masses to themselves by an attractive vision of fun and games'.<sup>95</sup> Some structures of authority have acknowledged the disruptive and constructive potential agency of fun by vigilantly repressing its operation in ways that show it not to be trivialised but rather taken very seriously. One striking example is the Nazis' eventual liquidation of the Weimar demimonde. Another is the sustained effort toward regulation or prohibition made by some Islamist movements or states resulting in situations in which, as the historian and

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<sup>92</sup> Fincham, p. 43, p. 104.

<sup>93</sup> Fine and Corte, p. 78.

<sup>94</sup> 'Performative Agency', *Journal of Cultural Economy*, 3.2 (2010), 147-161, p.147.

<sup>95</sup> Andrzej Oseka, 'Fun conspiracy', *Index on Censorship*, 5 (2000), 76-77, p. 77.

sociologist Asef Bayat notes, 'the expression of fun turned into a site of the most dramatic social polarization'.<sup>96</sup> Bayat refutes scriptural justification for the programmatic repression of fun, arguing that what is really at stake in what he calls 'anti-fun-damentalism' is less the defence of virtue than 'the preservation of power' by 'ideologically monolithic regimes' who perceive their claims of hegemonic moral and political authority to be vulnerable to the spontaneous, expressive, experimental and disruptive agency of fun.<sup>97</sup> Such anti-festive anxieties, Bayat suggests, align the governments of Wahabbist Saudi Arabia, Taliban Afghanistan and Revolutionary Iran with the Jacobins and Bolsheviks.<sup>98</sup> This authoritarian anxiety, I argue, acknowledges the performative capabilities of fun to materialise new structures of feeling, thought and action. Less authoritarian Islamic governments can take a more nuanced approach while still taking fun seriously: Lara Deeb and Mona Harb show how governmental structures in Hizbollah-governed Beirut might frame fun in wartime as 'frivolous' but in peacetime (when done 'correctly') as a structure of edification compatible with faith.<sup>99</sup>

Where 'anti-fun-damentalists' demonise fun as inherently objectionable, some avowed progressives valorise it as inherently beneficial: Goriunova and Bayat, for instance, make rose-tinted moral claims for fun as 'noble [and] audacious' or marked by 'openness and critique' respectively.<sup>100</sup> Yet fun does not always support such values; Bayat awkwardly disqualifies from consideration occasions of ethnoreligious violence experienced as fun by participants because they aren't *his* idea of fun.<sup>101</sup> Such positions insist that

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<sup>96</sup> Bayat, p. 140.

<sup>97</sup> Bayat, pp. 139, 153.

<sup>98</sup> Bayat, p. 151.

<sup>99</sup> *Leisurely Islam: Negotiating Geography and Morality in Shi'ite South Beirut* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2013), pp. 40, 14-15.

<sup>100</sup> Goriunova, p. 8; Bayat, p. 156.

<sup>101</sup> Bayat, p. 143.

only one kind of fun has a legitimate claim to the name. By emphasising the technological and performative aspects of fun, however, I seek to draw attention to its operative power rather than insist on it as a vehicle for a given set of values. Understanding the power of fun requires acknowledgement of its subjective, contingent and multiple nature. As Fine and Corte note, fun can model 'communal commitments' so that the apparently 'trivial serves as the foundation for collective life and the possibility of social critique'.<sup>102</sup> But differences over the question of what is to be taken seriously – what constitutes high stakes – mean that one person's idea of fun can leave another fun-lover aghast. By enabling and naturalising various forms of feeling, understanding, acting and relating, fun rehearses and materialises worlds of many kinds, some of them irreconcilable. Coleman suggests the technology of race can be used 'for good or for ill' and the same, I argue, applies to fun (however one defines 'good' or 'ill').<sup>103</sup> I will now outline a few versions of fun showing the range of its conscious and unconscious civic applicability before offering the first critical arguments for fun's generative capacities in queer and performance contexts. This will illuminate the contingencies and practicalities of the homemade mutant hope machines through which Duckie supports reproductive queer futurity and which constitute the case studies of the remaining chapters of this thesis.

### **Some versions of fun**

Let me offer three civically consequential versions of fun. First, Adorno noted how the widespread recreational enjoyment of team sports in America supported industrialised capitalism. Through the valorisation, he argued, of 'physical exertion' and 'the functionalization of the body in team-activity [...]

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<sup>102</sup> Fine and Corte, p. 65.

<sup>103</sup> Coleman, p. 184.

people are unwittingly trained into modes of behavior which, sublimated to a greater or lesser degree, are required of them by the work process.<sup>104</sup>

People's enjoyable accommodation to collective embodied effort primes them for factory labour. This could be called 'factory fun'. Second, in the Soviet Union, historian Gleb Tsipursky notes, leaders of the party-state considered social and cultural activities programmed at state-run 'klubs' to be 'an important site of socialist construction, where youth subjectivity – a sense of self and one's place within society – undergoes modification into that of a model Soviet subject'.<sup>105</sup> Some such forms were overtly politicised, others expressive of traditional values, some oriented toward grassroots agency, others toward passive consumption; all understood fun as a civically consequential site of government agency.<sup>106</sup> Tsipursky calls this 'socialist fun'. Third, notwithstanding the dominance of passive consumerism in US leisure culture, historian John Beckman articulates a national lineage of 'joyous revolt', a kind of festive opposition to authority informing independence, westward expansion, abolitionism and post-war counterculture.<sup>107</sup> Where Soviet fun privileged top-down conformity and accountability, Beckman proposes bottom-up agency connoting individualist self-determination as characteristic of what he calls 'American fun'.<sup>108</sup>

Further unpacking fun in America reveals the range of civic applications of fun even within one national society. One notable example is the fun espoused in the 1960s by the American countercultural youth-oriented revolutionary movement the Yippies, specifically in opposition to consumerist fantasy. The Yippies' acerbic observation that 'the only people that you saw

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<sup>104</sup> Adorno, pp. 194-195.

<sup>105</sup> Tsipursky, p. 3.

<sup>106</sup> Tsipursky, p. 4, pp. 222-223.

<sup>107</sup> Beckman, p. xxiii.

<sup>108</sup> Beckman, p. xxv.



having any fun' in mainstream American culture 'were buying lousy junk on television commercials' echoed Adorno's critique; yet, rather than dismissing fun *tout court* as Adorno did, the Yippies proposed an alternative vision of people 'having fun while they were protesting the system' by, for instance, knocking down elaborate supermarket displays.<sup>109</sup> By supporting enjoyable collective resistance predicated on revolutionary anticapitalism, Yippie co-founder Abbie Hoffman argued, 'fun actually was becoming quite subversive'.<sup>110</sup> This could be called 'radical fun'. It echoed the fun of the European *flâneurs* and Surrealists, overlapped with that of the Situationists and anticipated that of the culture jammers.<sup>111</sup> Properly speaking, some of these groups' interventions mobilised humour rather than fun as I define it but there is comparable disruptive agency in their playfully subverting – or *making-fun-of* – bourgeois capitalist norms by throwing into question the seriousness of normative regimes of productivity, consumption, rationality and identity. The Yippies further brought into question the seriousness of electoral democracy by standing for office, proposing to narrow the distance between a political party and 'a party that you had fun at'.<sup>112</sup>

In 2016, a different version of American fun emerged: fascist fun. Donald Trump's rallies during and after the US presidential election used illiberal tactics such as deligitimising political opponents and a free press, scapegoating vulnerable out-groups, calling for increased nativist power as

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<sup>109</sup> Abbie Hoffman (here paraphrasing fellow Yippie Nancy Kursham), 'Chicago 8 Trial Testimony (1968)', in *Protest Nation: Words That Inspired a Century of American Radicalism*, ed. by Timothy Patrick McCarthy and John McMillian (New York: New Press, 2010), 178-197, p. 190. See also Abbie Hoffman, *Steal This Book* (New York, NY: Pirate Editions, 1971).

<sup>110</sup> Hoffman, 'Chicago 8', p. 190.

<sup>111</sup> See Benjamin Shepard, *Play, Creativity, and Social Movements: If I Can't Dance, It's Not My Revolution* (New York: Routledge, 2011) and Asa Wettergren, 'Fun and Laughter: Culture Jamming and the Emotional Regime of Late Capitalism', *Social Movement Studies*, 8.1 (2009), 1-15.

<sup>112</sup> Hoffman, 'Chicago 8', p. 189.

a matter of right, disparaging criticality and dissent and valorising violence, to the alarm of mainstream commentators.<sup>113</sup> The rallies, however horrifying to many observers, were marked by a carnivalesque atmosphere and experienced by many present as fun, and Trump repeatedly described them as ‘fun’ from the podium.<sup>114</sup> To some liberal commentators, such events were cognitively inadmissible as fun: Trump’s values represented a serious threat and fun was a categorically trivial matter so Trump’s rallies could not be fun.<sup>115</sup> Yet the failure to recognise that they were indeed *some people’s* idea of fun pointed to wider, civically consequential liberal blind spots. Acknowledging Trump rallies as fascist fun reveals important disagreements in American life about what deserves to be taken seriously. Trump’s fascist fun showed, for instance, that many Americans didn’t take seriously the rights of women, immigrants or political opponents to civic recognition and legal protection. It also offered a case study in fun’s capacity to naturalise under conditions perceived as low-stakes understandings and behaviours that can find higher-stakes application. A line can be drawn from Trump’s pantomime goading of the press at his rallies (in which not only supporters but some reporters gamely participated) to congressional candidate Greg Gianforte’s violent assault of a reporter to the fatal shooting of five people at a Maryland

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<sup>113</sup> See, for instance, Ashley Parker, ‘Covering Donald Trump, and Witnessing the Danger Up Close’, *New York Times*, 12 March 2016 <[http://www.nytimes.com/2016/03/13/us/politics/covering-donald-trump-and-witnessing-the-danger-up-close.html?\\_r=1](http://www.nytimes.com/2016/03/13/us/politics/covering-donald-trump-and-witnessing-the-danger-up-close.html?_r=1)> [accessed 16 August 2018].

<sup>114</sup> See, for instance, Alan Wall, ‘Attending A Trump Support Rally—It Was Fun, There Were Demonstrators And They Had Interesting Signs’, *Vdare*, 15 March 2018 <<https://vdare.com/posts/attending-a-trump-support-rally-it-was-fun-there-were-demonstrators-and-they-had-interesting-signs>> [accessed 16 August 2018]; Rachel Maddow, ‘Escalating aggression marks Trump’s rally rhetoric’, *The Rachel Maddow Show*, MSNBC, 12 March 2016 <<http://www.msnbc.com/rachel-maddow/watch/escalating-aggression-marks-trump-s-rhetoric-642743363967>> [accessed 16 August 2018].

<sup>115</sup> Parker.

newspaper.<sup>116</sup> Activity that might feel inconsequential in the moment or seem not to warrant serious attention can effect serious change.

With its ability to mobilise situations perceived as having low stakes to enable pleasurable experimentation, intervention into existing structures and the materialisation of new structures, fun is civically powerful but polyvalent in its applications. It is capable of supporting industrialised capitalism, revolutionary anticapitalism, state socialism, individualist self-determination and fascism. I will now show how this power is particularly effectively channeled through participatory performance events and subsequently how it is peculiarly well aligned with reproductive queer futurity.

### **Fun and participatory performance**

Trump's campaign rallies were, from another angle, a show on a national tour and their vaudevillian aspects – including an emphasis on entertainment, pace, variety, emotional intensity and audience embodiment, interaction and experimentation – point to the potential for participatory performance events to act as powerful holding forms for the generation of civically consequential fun.<sup>117</sup> This can be a calculated effect. In this respect, Trump's rallies were instructively anticipated by the *serate* held by the Italian Futurists between 1910 and 1914. These spectacular performance events, explicitly inspired by variety theatre, blurred lines between politics and aesthetics by cultivating an

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<sup>116</sup> Ed Pilkington, 'Montana assault breeds "frightening" talk of violence against journalists', *Guardian*, 27 May 2017 <<https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2017/may/27/greg-gianforte-ben-jacobs-media-donald-trump-journalism-montana>> [accessed 16 August 2018]; Maya Oppenheim, 'Capital Gazette takes swipe at Trump: "We won't forget being called an enemy of the people"', 2 July 2018 <<https://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/americas/us-politics/capital-gazette-trump-maryland-shooting-annapolis-us-media-fake-news-a8427251.html>> [accessed 16 August 2018].

<sup>117</sup> For links between Trump, vaudeville and Barnum, see Aaron James, 'A Taxonomy of the Ass-Clown: on Donald Trump', *Literary Hub*, 25 May 2016 <<https://lithub.com/a-taxonomy-of-the-ass-clown-on-donald-trump/>> [accessed 16 August 2018].

entertaining yet antagonistic ambience: seats were sold multiple times and laced with glue or itching powder and the heckling use of rattles, cow bells and foodstuff encouraged. The aim, as Claire Bishop notes, was less to empower the audience than 'to produce a space of participation as one of total destruction, in which expressions of hostility were available to all classes as a brutal form of entertainment'.<sup>118</sup> This valorisation of violence supported the Futurists' proto-fascist politics; the accessible, enjoyable low-stakes entertainment of the *serate* was conceived to provide 'a gymnasium to train our race's spirit'.<sup>119</sup> Fascist fun builds fascist muscles. The *serate* mobilised the performative capacities of fun to begin a world-making project with considerable civic consequences; other modes of performance can generate other (non-fascist) outcomes.

Participatory performance events are particularly well suited to the generation of fun because they offer spatiotemporally bounded, low-stakes conditions associated with stimulation, absorption and enjoyment. Compared to sites of more passive spectatorship, participatory performance events encourage active, embodied affective and relational experimentation. Jen Harvie has noted that 'fun can constructively engage audiences' at such events but most of the limited critical engagement with fun in participatory performance engages it warily, sceptically or cynically: Bishop, for instance, attends to fun only as a site of fascist normalisation.<sup>120</sup> Shannon Jackson observes some recent projects' use of the funhouse form, offering participants a precarious sense of control over a theatricalised environment: she notes

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<sup>118</sup> *Artificial Hells: Participatory Art and the Politics of Spectatorship* (London: Verso, 2012), p. 46.

<sup>119</sup> Filippo Tommaso Marinetti, Emilio Settemello and Bruno Corra, 'The Futurist Synthetic Theatre' (1915), in *Marinetti: Selected Writings*, ed. by R.W. Flint (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1971), 123-129, p. 128.

<sup>120</sup> Jen Harvie, *Fair Play: Art, Performance and Neoliberalism* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), p. 10.

how this engages 'curiosity and fear, risk and safety' but, by foregrounding how companies such as Rimini Protokoll ironically mobilise this qualified agency to highlight vulnerable, precarious labour, Jackson associates fun with exploitation and inequality.<sup>121</sup> Daniel Oliver notes that fun is central to Reactor's *Big Lizard's Big Idea* (2009-2010) but entangled with subordination, paranoia and disappointment, emblematic of what Reactor call an 'illusive and empty' civics.<sup>122</sup> Adam Alston, meanwhile, has noted how immersive theatrical events such as those produced by Punchdrunk offer 'fun, thrilling' experiences whose participants benefit by acting opportunistically, exploitatively and narcissistically.<sup>123</sup> In valorising 'entrepreneurial participation', such projects could be considered 'neoliberal fun'. Some such projects, Alston suggests, ambivalently locate fun as something 'to be both enjoyed and undermined'.<sup>124</sup>

These critical engagements, then, locate fun as satirical or suspect but not as a mode of constructive agency with potentially beneficial effects. These alignments of fun with participatory performance practices support or ironise its applicability to consumerism, fascism and neoliberalism while neglecting its potential applicability to more progressive or emancipatory interests. Yet such application is possible, as my earlier analysis of David Hoyle showed. In fact, participatory performance, fun and queer can make peculiarly good bedfellows through their related investments in contingency, fluidity, embodiment, agency, relationality, experiment and fantasy. Not to attend

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<sup>121</sup> *Social Works: Performing Art, Supporting Publics* (New York: Routledge, 2011), p. 177.

<sup>122</sup> 'The Efficacy of Awkwardness in Contemporary Participatory Performance' (unpublished doctoral thesis, Queen Mary University of London, 2015), provided by the author, pp. 216-222; 'Big Lizard's Big Idea', Reactor <<http://reactor.org.uk/projects/big-lizards-big-idea>> [accessed 16 August 2018].

<sup>123</sup> 'Audience Participation and Neoliberal Value: Risk, Agency and Responsibility in Immersive Theatre', *Performance Research*, 18.2 (2013), 128-138, p. 130.

<sup>124</sup> *Beyond Immersive Theatre: Aesthetics, Politics and Productive Participation* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016), p. 169.

to this, as I will now argue, is to neglect a set of conditions capable of generating powerful homemade mutant hope machines in the service of reproductive queer futurity.

### **Fun and reproductive queer futurity**

I have argued that the capacity of fun to support pleasurable, low-stakes experimentation and the building of group identity makes it a powerful vehicle for a wide range of world-making projects – including, I will show, queer world-making. Little critical attention, however, has been paid to how understandings of queer might benefit understandings of fun, or vice versa. Demonstrating and addressing these lacunae will support understandings of how participatory performance projects that mobilise fun can materialise better worlds for marginalised subjects.

Within the nascent interdisciplinary field of fun studies, no sustained attention has been paid to queer (and) fun. In a representative example, the sociologist Ben Fincham reports that findings from a survey about contemporary British understandings of fun indicate ‘fun is more uniformly experienced than we might imagine’ without due consideration of how normatively constrained his research sample is.<sup>125</sup> In queer studies, meanwhile, references to fun tend to reproduce its dominant construction as categorically trivial, often framing it in binary opposition to radical engagement: Heather Love, for instance, insists that Duckie’s *Gay Shame* ‘is about entertainment, not activism’, erasing fun’s capacity for disruptive agency.<sup>126</sup> Others echo participatory performance critics’ sceptical understanding of fun as normatively coercive, sometimes against the grain of their own arguments: Jack Halberstam, for example, disdains the ‘adolescent

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<sup>125</sup> Fincham, p. 19.

<sup>126</sup> *Feeling Backward: Loss and the Politics of Queer History* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2009), p. 186n5.

fun and games' of 'young white men' while locating queer enjoyment of music, clubbing, drag and performance under the altogether drier-sounding term 'subcultural involvement'.<sup>127</sup> Writing about video games, Bonnie Ruberg frames 'no fun' as a queer position in itself, asserting that the 'refusal to have fun represents [...] a rejection of the heteronormative status quo', without defining fun or recognising its contingent multiplicity.<sup>128</sup>

What queer use might, then, be found by choosing not to reject the concept of fun *tout court* but instead skipping backward over the word's relatively recent associations with consumerist conformity and harmless leisure, and returning to its original senses of resistance to propriety and disruptive agency? How might reconceptualising fun along these lines speak to questions related to illuminating sites of contested or neglected seriousness and conceiving and materialising alternative structures? How can fun support queer as utopian, relational and collective? I argue that to insist on fun's categorical normativity both occludes the widespread lived experience of different kinds of fun and denies queerness access to fun's performative and technological power.

Such queer anti-fun-damentalism might seem aligned with Sara Ahmed's suspicions about the promise of happiness and her figure of the feminist killjoy, who points out the oppressive iniquity of certain cultural constructions normatively understood as harmless or beneficial.<sup>129</sup> But there are important differences between happiness and fun, which illuminate the latter's queer utility. As Ahmed shows, normative claims for the power of normative happiness are totalising and absolute: such happiness is supposedly 'what

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<sup>127</sup> *In a Queer Time and Place: Transgender Bodies, Subcultural Lives* (New York: New York University Press, 2005), pp. 175, 75.

<sup>128</sup> 'No Fun: The Queer Potential of Video Games that Annoy, Anger, Disappoint, Sadden, and Hurt', *QED: A Journal in GLBTQ Worldmaking*, 2.2 (2015), 108-124, pp. 109, 111.

<sup>129</sup> *The Promise of Happiness* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2010), pp. 50-87.

gives purpose, meaning and order to human life'.<sup>130</sup> Fun, however, is quintessentially contingent. To pursue fun is to set the bar far lower than to pursue happiness. Happiness promises deep, secure and enduring fulfillment and contentment, a sense of freedom and peace with the world as it is. To pursue the ecstatic pleasures of *jouissance*, meanwhile, as Edelman writes, is to embrace the utopian potential of enjoyment but to disengage from the material contingencies of lived experience.<sup>131</sup> Neither pursuit is well suited to the hopeful yet pragmatic processes of concrete world-making central to reproductive queer futurity. Fun, however, is. Fun is temporary, bounded and fleeting, offering relief, diversion and alternative experiences to wider conditions that might involve obligation, frustration, disappointment or suffering. Fun does not pretend to overcome these things once and for all. It is not existentially load-bearing as happiness is; it does not promise the erasure of miserable marginalisation but rather its contingent qualification. Fun's promise to queer is not to end abjection but to make aspects of abjection contingently enjoyable, to enable ways of engaging and ameliorating that contingency and to start to build forms and processes with the potential to materialise better worlds. This is how fun can generate hope and support futurity.

Take dancing. In 1964, British television viewers saw queer abjection being rendered contingently enjoyable through fun when a documentary showed men dancing with men in an underground club: the narrator affirmed that 'for many of us, this is revolting'; the figures on screen knew that very well but were having a ball all the same.<sup>132</sup> After his death, the *Daily Mirror* described Freddie Mercury's life as 'a revolting tale of depravity, lust and

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<sup>130</sup> Ahmed, p. 1.

<sup>131</sup> Lee Edelman, *No Future: Queer Theory and the Death Drive* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2004), pp. 13-16.

<sup>132</sup> 'Homosexuals', *This Week*, ITV, 22 October 1964 <<https://player.bfi.org.uk/rentals/film/watch-homosexuals-1964-online>> [accessed 16 August 2018].



downright wickedness'; he knew many thought so but still had an absolute blast.<sup>133</sup> The repeated use of 'revolting' here is instructive: the embrace of the abject hints at revolutionary performative capabilities. Fiona Buckland describes the enabling strength one of her subjects found in social dancing: 'This fun aspect of his life was anything but trivial. It was in fact more empowering for him than going to a march or political meeting for gay and lesbian rights,' she reports, because it temporarily allowed him to enjoyably express aspects of himself that normally rendered him vulnerable or suspect and, crucially, he could mobilise the resulting self-confidence in everyday life.<sup>134</sup> A comparable charge underpinned the manifesto for 'partyism' delivered by Lavinia Co-op at Bishopsgate Institute in 2018 during which, garbed in red, white and blue sequined militaristic drag, Co-op championed 'beautiful futures worth dancing for'.<sup>135</sup>

There is agency in owning abjection. This is shown in Cecilia Sosa's research on the children of Argentina's disappeared, whose subjectivity she frames queerly.<sup>136</sup> Sosa details Lucila Quieto's photography project making joyful use of images of her murdered relatives: Quieto reported that people 'usually said, "I can imagine how painful and terrible this process must have been for you." But for me it was exactly the opposite; I had a lot of fun!'<sup>137</sup> Memories related to trauma and abjection become fun here when mobilised in a spirit of play and love without pretending that such gestures undo pain. Drag artist Panti Bliss offers a rich appreciation of the contingency and malleability of gender identity as exposed and exploited through queer

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<sup>133</sup> Joe Haines, 'Dark Side of Freddie', *Daily Mirror*, 1991, 28 November 1991, p. 20.

<sup>134</sup> *Impossible Dance: Club Culture and Queer World-Making* (Middletown: Wesleyan University Press, 2002), p. 37.

<sup>135</sup> Delivered as part of the *Pride: Past, present, future* event at Bishopsgate Institute, London, 6 July 2018.

<sup>136</sup> *Queering Acts of Mourning in the Aftermath of Argentina's Dictatorship: The Performances of Blood* (London: Tamesis, 2014).

<sup>137</sup> Sosa, pp. 46-47.

performance practice: drag, she says, is simultaneously a survival strategy in a hostile world and 'where all the fun is'.<sup>138</sup> Queer fun's radical capacities have been hailed in song by 'dyke rockers' Two Nice Girls and, recently, Blondie and Fischerspooner.<sup>139</sup> A similar dynamic intensity undergirds *The Serious Fun Fanzine*, an 80-page publication created in 2014 by London artist-performers Angel Rose and Oozing Gloop that marks the most sustained explicit queer celebration of fun to date. Expressing a punk-goth-Hollywood aesthetic and presented in a VHS case alongside two smaller publications, a party popper, a chewy sweet and two condoms, the *Funzine* drew on Adorno, Butler, RuPaul and others to reject commodified leisure and insist that 'fun catapults our energies into realms exceeding our normal state' and catalyses 'a more subversive and fun-loving idea of community'.<sup>140</sup> By embracing normatively verboten activities as sites of temporary enjoyment, then, queer subjects can find in marginalisation forms of pleasure unavailable through conformity, contingently mobilising abjection to find relief, affirm and express resistant subjectivities, and build worlds between the cracks and (mostly) beneath the attention of dominant structures. These queer forms of fun materialise criticality through their contingent relation to dominant structures. But they also illustrate the performative power of fun, bringing into being kinds of understanding, engagement and agency that otherwise would not exist.

Fun's capacity, well attended to by sociologists, to promote group cohesion can, I suggest, also serve queer futurity by nurturing coalitions of

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<sup>138</sup> 'A Woman in Progress', in *Queer Notions: New Plays and Performances from Ireland*, ed. by Fintan Walsh (Cork: Cork University Press, 2010), pp. 244-261, p. 245.

<sup>139</sup> Gretchen Phillips, 'The Queer Song', Two Nice Girls (Rough Trade Records, 1991); David Sitek, Daniel Ledinsky, Erik Hassle, Adiam Feireiss, 'Fun', Blondie (BMG/ Infectious Music, 2017); Fischerspooner, Michael Stipe, BOOTS, 'Have Fun Tonight', Fischerspooner (Ultra Records, 2018).

<sup>140</sup> *The Serious Fun Fanzine*, p.6, p.75. Angel Rose's 2016 follow-up zine, *Fun City: Utopia on the Dancefloor*, offered a more nuanced appreciation of fun's capacity to support both anti-normative and normative sensibilities.

difference. Fine and Corte describe this aspect of fun in ways that resonate particularly strongly with queer world-building. Noting that shared experiences of fun aid 'communal identification', they further propose that it works to render enjoyable collective experiences of surprise and alienation: 'Fun develops when participants treat a breach in social expectations as constituting an opportunity for shared understanding and the satisfactions that come with having produced an alternative frame'.<sup>141</sup> Fine and Corte refer here to breaches of social expectation within normative bounds. Yet their observation applies all the more powerfully to the capacity of fun to generate satisfying bonds among collectives of normatively abject people, especially when, as Fine and Corte put it, those having fun 'can make the space their own, limiting intrusions by outsiders, providing novel experiences available only to members'.<sup>142</sup> These conditions aptly describe many ongoing conditions of queer fun that operate as homemade mutant hope machines, from the 'TV fun' of Casa Susanna to runs of shows by Hoyle and others. In his study of autonomous space-making, Gavin Brown highlights performance events such as Club Wotever that illustrate 'the political importance of sharing fun and laughter in the process of building prefigurative spaces of queer feminist autonomy'; I have also noted Weiner and Young on queer bonds.<sup>143</sup>

Queer approaches to fun can also put into question civically consequential understandings of high and low stakes, probing the contingency and instability of social, cultural and political proprieties. There can be an intensity to queer forms of fun reflective of the pressures that bear on marginalised subjectivities: fun as release valve, shadow of oppression, less *not-work* than *not-suffering*. This sense, which could also be articulated as

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<sup>141</sup> Fine and Corte, pp. 64, 69.

<sup>142</sup> Fine and Corte, p. 72.

<sup>143</sup> 'Amateurism and anarchism in the creation of autonomous queer spaces', in *Anarchism and Sexuality: Ethics, Relationships and Power*, ed. by Jamie Heckert and Richard Cleminson (London: Routledge, 2011), 200-223, p. 213.

'struggle hard, play hard', is powerfully enacted in the clubbing scenes that alternate with adrenalised activism in the ACT UP drama *120 BPM*.<sup>144</sup> It is also evoked in 'The Fun and the Fury', a 2014 queer studies conference whose title, according to conference president Lisa Duggan, was intended to reflect 'the intensity of affect that [...] we experience in our social relations' and constitute 'two sides of the same coin.'<sup>145</sup> The role of play and humour in US queer activism has received some critical attention, including its relation to incentivising engagement, communicating arguments and maintaining group cohesion and morale. Benjamin Shepard surveys the role of playful political performance within the work of such groups as ACT UP, the Radical Faeries and SexPanic!, foregrounding social movements 'organized around play and connection, rather than confrontation and aggression' and the capacity of 'rambunctious fun' to support convictions that 'without pleasure, there can be no justice'; Shepard also traces queer critical investigations of pleasure.<sup>146</sup> In the aptly named collection *That's Revolting! Queer Strategies to Resisting Assimilation*, meanwhile, Mattilda Bernstein Sycamore describes the interplay 'between the party and the politics' of activist group Gay Shame (unrelated to Duckie's *Gay Shame* events).<sup>147</sup>

Queer fun can also take less intense or charged forms, materialising a gentle, lighthearted engagement with the embodied now. Such forms might take on value for queer subjects precisely because such lightness can seem scarce or precarious under normative conditions associated with jeopardy or

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<sup>144</sup> *120 BPM*, dir. by Robin Campillo (Memento Films, 2017).

<sup>145</sup> Sarah Mesle, 'Fun, Fury, and the American Studies Association: Sarah Mesle interviews Lisa Duggan', *Los Angeles Review of Books* website, 6 November 2014 <<https://lareviewofbooks.org/interview/fun-fury-american-studies-association>> [accessed 16 August 2018].

<sup>146</sup> *Queer Political Performance and Protest: Play, Pleasure and Social Movement* (New York: Routledge, 2009), pp. 10, 12-16.

<sup>147</sup> 'Gay Shame: From queer autonomous space to direct action extravaganza', in *That's Revolting! Queer Strategies to Resisting Assimilation*, ed. by Mattilda aka Matt Bernstein Sycamore (New York: Soft Skull Press, 2008), 268-295, p. 271.

hypervigilance. José Esteban Muñoz, for instance, appreciates the 'turn to the ludic and lyrical' represented by Warhol's *Silver Clouds* balloon installations and the almost idyllic sense in Frank O'Hara's poetry of being 'saturated with feelings of fun and appreciation'.<sup>148</sup> Butt finds comparable rewards in the visual art of Joe Brainard and its quiet valorisation of the mere pansiness of a pansy, a 'pleasurable and playful' appreciation that insists through – not despite – 'levity and lightheartedness' that certain normatively denigrated subjects are indeed 'significant and important' through their provision of access to humour, warmth and affection.<sup>149</sup> This queer fun offers reverie and repose, an opportunity to feel, think or act for a spell as if the world were better and thereby begin the conceptual and experimental groundwork that anticipates such worlds' materialisation.

Queer forms of fun can also include the Wildean lineage of camp, an insistence on treating things normatively framed as grave as sites of levity and on attending considerately to things normatively framed as unimportant. How seriously, queer fun asks, should we take seriousness? Gavin Butt and Irit Rogoff show how what passes as 'seriousness' in contemporary discourse is often a hollow performance calculated to convey (self-)importance.<sup>150</sup> Yet they remain invested in meaningful seriousness, which Butt links to imparting 'value to the things we hold dear' or reflecting a 'certain kind of commitment to a culture', and Rogoff to a commitment 'to act against cynicism'.<sup>151</sup> For Rogoff, such desirable seriousness is 'a form of unknowingness', a kind of

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<sup>148</sup> *Cruising Utopia: The Then and There of Queer Futurity* (New York: New York University Press, 2009), pp. 135, 5.

<sup>149</sup> 'Joe Brainard's Queer Seriousness, or, How to Make Fun out of the Avant-Garde', in *Neo-avant-garde*, ed. by David Hopkins (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2006), 277-297, pp. 290-291.

<sup>150</sup> Butt and Rogoff, pp. 20-21.

<sup>151</sup> Butt and Rogoff, pp. 18-19, 30.

'processual work' that sits with and sustains subjective heterogeneity.<sup>152</sup> From this perspective, queer forms of fun such as David Hoyle's, engaged with contingency, fluidity, questioning and instability, emerge as peculiarly serious fun; like Rogoff's seriousness, they 'give [participants] credit for being able to live out contradictions' and allow 'a certain sort of active inhabitation in which things are up for grabs'.<sup>153</sup> To Butt, the 'rejection of a sober and earnest seriousness' in queer performance work actually enables engagement with subjects of real 'gravity and profundity' otherwise occluded by pomposity or supposed good taste.<sup>154</sup> Queer fun reaches places po-faced propriety can't.

Attending to fun can also expose questions around what is to be taken seriously within LGBTQ+ cultures when it comes to pleasure. The gay disco of the 1990s was nirvana to some, intolerable to others. (I mentioned earlier Duckie founders' alienation from that scene, which Mark Simpson describes with vitriolic sarcasm.<sup>155</sup>) Fun in sex can be understood non-normatively in multiple ways. In contemporary online gay hookup culture, to declare an interest in 'fun' is often to imply expectations of tight spatiotemporal bounds and stakes so low they verge on indifference, leaving stimulation, absorption and enjoyment as optional extras. This kind of 'fun' might involve taking some normative values around sexuality and gender (such as masculinity, body type and sexual roles) categorically seriously while treating others (such as monogamy or the association of sex with emotional attachment) as implicitly absurd. Other queer understandings of sex as fun might engage the capacity to experiment without feeling subjectively challenged or constrained. Paul Morris of transgressive gay porn studio Treasure Island Media asserts the importance of fun, which he reads as 'social creative chaos, almost

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<sup>152</sup> Butt and Rogoff, p. 30.

<sup>153</sup> Butt and Rogoff, pp. 23, 31.

<sup>154</sup> Butt and Rogoff, pp. 29, 32.

<sup>155</sup> *Anti-Gay* (London: Freedom Editions, 1996), p. 10.

manageable chaos – the necessary chaos of queerness’ and a means of contingently exploring the body and ‘the necessity of its own realities, desires, imagination and its place in the social world’.<sup>156</sup> As Butt notes of Hoyle’s practice, playfully troubling normative binaries ‘offers up creative solutions to blockages within culture, often caused by the impasse suggested by an impossible either/or choice’.<sup>157</sup> Queer fun, then, can serve to render abjection contingently enjoyable; enable engagement with oppressive structures and experimentation with liberatory forms; and materialise criticality, collectivity and resistant structures. It can also afford reverie and repose, and open to interrogation questions of seriousness within and beyond LGBTQ+ contexts.

A brief case study of the UK Gay Liberation Front (GLF) in the early 1970s will illustrate how the lived experience of queer fun can support reproductive queer futurity by enabling non-normative forms of enjoyment and expression, low-stakes experimentation predicated on putting into question conventions of seriousness, and the generation of homemade mutant hope machines. I draw here on Stuart Feather’s memoir *Blowing the Lid*, which describes his experiences in the GLF in London in the early 1970s.<sup>158</sup> Some ‘aggressive, macho’ gay activists disdained fun, humour and playfulness in ways continuous with Fine and Corte’s observation that ‘some communities of intense solidarity, such as the radical political cell or the monastery’ categorically reject fun as trivial and selfish; this might be called the ‘radical critique’ of fun.<sup>159</sup> Feather and others, however, soon discovered fun’s activist power. At the GLF’s first action, protestors walked ‘hand in hand.

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<sup>156</sup> Paul Morris and Susanna Paasonen, ‘Risk and Utopia: A Dialogue on Pornography’, *GLQ: A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies*, 20.3 (2014), 215-239, p. 236.

<sup>157</sup> Butt, ‘Just a Camp Laugh?’, p. 58.

<sup>158</sup> *Blowing the Lid: Gay Liberation, Sexual Revolution and Radical Queens* (Alresford: Zero Books, 2016).

<sup>159</sup> Feather, p. 426; Fine and Corte, p. 66.

Someone gave us balloons. This was fun', fortifying group cohesion and resistance to normative power.<sup>160</sup> At later protests, spectacular, carnivalesque props, costumes and actions engaged serious issues through fun, sparking cognitively dissonant mixtures of 'amusement, disbelief and contempt' in onlookers, mitigating police authority and bolstering public support.<sup>161</sup> Drag emerged as an important site of contested seriousness. Feather and friends stood for committee election in drag as 'a fun thing to do', prompting indignation from others on behalf of a procedure that 'was supposed to be serious'.<sup>162</sup> But when they embraced drag as a sustained experiment in non-normative lived experience, what began as 'larking about' became more 'serious'.<sup>163</sup> Pleasurable low-stakes experimentation led to the performative materialisation of another way of being in the form of a drag commune that functioned simultaneously, in one resident's words, as 'a constant party' and a 'political hub'.<sup>164</sup> Another recalled it providing 'a bliss that we hadn't really encountered before'.<sup>165</sup> Although imperfect, the GLF drag commune constituted a powerful homemade mutant hope machine, emergent from non-normative experience, fuelled by fun, operating autonomously and adaptively, and routinely generating hope through its materialisation, however fleeting, of a better world.

Queer fun, then, starts with the acknowledgement and embrace of abjection, turning it to contingently enjoyable and utopian ends within conditions of structural marginalisation. It does not pretend to erase shame, misery, boredom, embarrassment, frustration, violence or unhappiness but

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<sup>160</sup> Feather, p. 59.

<sup>161</sup> Feather, p. 133; Peter Tatchell quoted in Lisa Power, *No Bath but Plenty of Bubbles: An Oral History of the Gay Liberation Front, 1970-73* (London: Cassell, 1996), p. 164.

<sup>162</sup> Feather, pp. 91-92.

<sup>163</sup> Feather, p. 159.

<sup>164</sup> Feather, p. 430.

<sup>165</sup> Feather, p. 494.



finds within them enjoyable or edifying elements of instructive absurdity or unexpected agency. Queer fun valorises empathy, collectivity, self-expression, complexity, fluidity, contradiction and criticality. Such fun powerfully supports reproductive queer futurity by enabling the development of affirming and reproducible experiences of enjoyment and collectivity, homemade mutant hope machines that begin to bring new worlds into existence. Queer fun builds queer muscles and rehearses queer worlds. I will now unpack its consistent role in Duckie's operation.

### **Doing fun queerly through Duckie**

Duckie's work helps illuminate how participatory performance forms predicated on queer fun can serve reproductive queer futurity by providing spaces of relief from normative pressures, enabling forms of enjoyment that subversively mobilise abject experiences and supporting the generation of homemade mutant hope machines. As my introduction showed, the desire for fun motivated Duckie's creation and has been foregrounded in its forms and processes ever since. Victoria Chalklin's ethnographic study of Saturday nights identifies Duckie punters' appreciation of the club as a performative 'playground' whose 'transformative playfulness' enables them 'to explore and act out new possibilities' unavailable to them elsewhere.<sup>166</sup> This is supported by positive affective exchange between punters, performers and promoters under low-stakes conditions enabling disinhibited experimentation: describing a *Gay Shame* event, one punter said it was 'utterly ridiculous, stupid, but everyone was involved, you couldn't be shy'.<sup>167</sup>

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<sup>166</sup> 'Performing Queer Selves: Embodied Subjectivity and Affect in Queer Performance Spaces Duckie, Bird Club and Wotever World' (unpublished doctoral thesis, University of London, Goldsmiths College, 2012) <<http://research.gold.ac.uk/7801/>> [accessed 16 August 2018], pp. 216.

<sup>167</sup> Chalklin, p. 217.

My own experience strongly affirms Duckie as queer fun. When I go to the RVT on a Saturday night, as I have done on an irregular basis for more than 20 years, I anticipate having fun and am rarely disappointed. The night's spatial and temporal bounds are clearly defined and I am confident that I will engage in stimulating, absorbing and enjoyable activity thanks to a range of variable factors that offer an engaging balance of the expected and unexpected. It will be fun on queer terms, where participants can take for granted certain things that do not apply in mainstream life, from uninhibited same-sex affection to performance work that valorises fluidity, complexity, marginality and criticality. The Tavern is exciting to navigate, large enough to reward exploration but small enough to keep track of friends and flirtations. The crowd will include people I have planned to see, other familiar faces, there for fun or work or both, whom I am (mostly) happy to see, and unknown figures whose presence at Duckie suggests a likely overlap with my own sensibilities. Both the volume of people and the level of intoxication will continue to rise, generating a stimulatingly variable terrain for social and aesthetic engagement. Participatory activities programmed at 'Activity Island' from around 9pm – making a hat out of coloured paper, say – will require a level of concentration and undisturbed application unavailable later in the evening, while the performances, which begin at 11pm, take place in an atmosphere of animated engagement reflective of moderate intoxication. Amy Lamé's welcome will feel like home and affirm a shared sensibility unlike mainstream life. The acts she introduces might be fantastic, intriguing, disappointing or, occasionally, disgusting but they will be short enough both to maintain attention and keep the stakes of engagement low. It will anyway be a bonding experience for the crowd. As the night is given over to dancing, the Readers Wives will play some songs I know and love and others that I don't recognise but express their sensibility and reward attention. More

embodied and affective pleasures will come to the fore before the night winds down, having most likely supplied a combination of collective laughter, animated embodiment, carefree discovery, transgressive thrills and unselfconscious pleasure that adds up to fun. On the off chance that it has been disappointing for some reason, it's not that big a deal: at £6, it's a cheap night out for London and there's always next week.

Duckie's other projects have offered different kinds of fun predicated on the same sensibility (even if, as detailed in the introduction, Duckie's kind of fun has not always been available or appealing to all kinds of queers). The *Gay Shame* events mounted between 2004 and 2014 exploited an immersive funhouse format to privilege participatory performances. These events' creative criticality rendered contingently enjoyable aspects of queer abjection including consumerist homonationalism, binary gender expectations, homophobic violence and depression and suicidality. As Stephen Greer has noted, the *Gay Shame* cycle ironically occupied the structures of competitive, individualistic neoliberal socioeconomics, ridiculing their positioning 'as the model through which respectability might be sought [and] drawing critical attention to the limited terms of what might be on sale and the forms of desire which neo-liberal economics might privilege'.<sup>168</sup> These events offered a parodic reflection of the neoliberal fun described by Alston: mock currency might have been issued, for instance, but its accrual offered no actual advantage whereas more rewarding experiences went to those who engaged creatively and empathetically. The successor event *Border Force* (2015) was also underpinned by the ironic mobilisation of un-fun emotions, affects and activities. Themed around immigration control, freedom of movement and xenophobia, it subjected punters to alienating and unsatisfying experiences

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<sup>168</sup> *Contemporary British Queer Performance* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), pp. 163-164.

including long queues, blocked access and opaque interrogations by capricious authority figures. It was frustrating, annoying and boring but also enjoyable because it was evidently absurd, participation was optional, the stakes of 'failure' were low and the event eventually resolved into a joyous access-all-areas party. A dystopian setting yielded utopian performatives.

Other Duckie events have offered different kinds of queer fun. *The Palace of Varieties* (2016), a 10-week project undertaken in an activity room at Waterside Care Home in Peckham, south London, for residents with dementia, foregrounded fun as lighthearted and animated engagement with the embodied now. The participants were older people whose everyday experiences of temporality were unpredictable and out of step with normative expectations in ways that, at best, resulted in confusion and logistical challenges in daily life and, at worst, generated anger, fear and distress. The *Palace*, however, constituted a fun event operating on terms different from daily life. It was spatially distinguished by being fantastically dressed according to a different theme each week and temporally distinguished by explicitly signaled dramatic lighting changes at its beginning and end. The event specifically supported stimulating, absorbing and enjoyable activities that were carefree, present-centred and required a short attention span, including singalongs, game-playing, music and dancing. For people who sometimes felt frustrated, impotent or worse, the *Palace* generated a utopian bubble of pleasure by mobilising the more gentle kind of queer fun that offers repose or respite from normative expectations.

Fun was also mobilised in distinctive ways at the Slaughterhouse Club, Duckie's open-door drop-in arts project for people living with homelessness and addiction. For participants accustomed to the transactional imperatives of street life and the disciplinary regulations of hostel residence, the Club offered a situation marked by unusually low stakes and associated with

stimulating, absorbing and enjoyable activity. It became understood as a site of fun where various kinds of support were available but not compulsory and minimal levels of accountability applied. This enabled forms of socialising, self-expression, reverie and repose otherwise unavailable to participants. The Club supported subjective enjoyment, empathetic collectivity, creative experimentation and the generation of a large and diverse body of artwork. Fun at the Slaughterhouse Club was transformative in distinctly non-normative ways. Participants can be positioned as queer in the sense used by Heather Love when she refers to the 'excluded, denigrated, or superseded others' who must be left behind – and be seen to be left behind – for dominant ideas of modern progress to have meaning.<sup>169</sup> As a conspicuously *not-working* population, people living with homelessness and addiction are typically abject and disdained, with no normative claim to uplifting recreation. 'One prominent attitude I've noticed toward the homeless', writes Brianna Karp, drawing on her own experience of homelessness, is that others 'expect them to give up every last indulgence and every last shred of fun. We should spend all of our time looking for work [...] you have no right even to HAVE fun'.<sup>170</sup> If attending to fun can illuminate questions of what is to be taken seriously, then to support homeless people having fun is to query presumed relations between productive labour, restorative leisure and the right to pleasure upon which normative neoliberal understandings of legitimate living rest.

Another Duckie event, *Queer Fun: An Ivory-Tower Vaudeville*, sought to deploy fun as a technology for disrupting perceived boundaries between

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<sup>169</sup> *Feeling Backward: Loss and the Politics of Queer History* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2007), p. 5.

<sup>170</sup> 'Who Says Homeless People Can't Have Fun?', *The Girl's Guide to Homelessness*, 11 August 2009 <<http://girlsguidetohomelessness.com/2009/08/11/who-says-homeless-people-cant-have-fun/>> [accessed 16 August 2018].

academia and nightlife performance.<sup>171</sup> Held at the RVT in June 2017, the event emerged from this research project, was produced by Duckie producers Simon Casson and Dicky Eton and myself and featured 16 performers and researchers giving quickfire eight-minute talks or turns on the theme of queer fun in a range of spaces around the RVT usually inaccessible to the public. *Queer Fun* aimed to support fun by enabling embodied movement with others (but not in defined groups) through unfamiliar surroundings; it emphasised contingent spatiotemporal boundedness by having Duckie 'door whore' Jay Cloth mark each presentation slot's start and end with a horn and a gong and using a format that only allowed punters to see half the presentations. Subjects included exclusions experienced by queer and trans people of colour, neurodivergent people and disabled people, childhood, neoliberal survivalism, alchemy, nature, aristocratic fabulosity and Kierkegaardian analysis of RuPaul. Forms included games, dance, running around the park, photography, grime, voguing, academic papers, hugs, municipal bureaucracy, conversations with passersby, shouting, drag, parodic pamphlets, ornate headpieces modeled on jeopardised queer spaces, nude poetry, endurance fish-holding and balloons. During the final discussion and afterwards, it became clear the event catalysed senses of excitement, intimacy, novelty, vulnerability, enjoyment, frustration, anxiety, obligation and exclusion. Capacity attendance, high engagement with optional elements and individually expressed opinions and affects confirmed that many had fun and left taking fun more seriously. Duckie, then, has both provided a rich and varied series of queer fun events and also variously interrogated the concept of fun itself, playfully putting into question what counts as fun for whom under what conditions and asking why it matters.

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<sup>171</sup> '*Queer Fun*', Duckie <<http://www.duckie.co.uk/events/queer-fun>> [accessed 16 August 2018].

## Conclusion

In this chapter, I have explored what fun is and how it can serve reproductive queer futurity's project of materialising better worlds for marginalised subjects. I have unpacked the origins of fun in deception, mockery, violence and other kinds of disruptive agency and tracked its cooption, exploitation and trivialisation by industrial capitalism as a form of *not-work*, alongside its increasing associations with harmless and childlike diversion. I offered my own distinctive definition of fun as stimulating, absorbing and enjoyable activity that is bounded in space and time and perceived by those experiencing or enjoying it as having low stakes. I surveyed understandings of fun, its uses and its discontents from fields including critical theory, cultural studies, sociology and computing and gaming studies. I argued for the importance to fun of the perception of low stakes, which disincentivises authoritarian surveillance and supports pleasurable experimentation. As a normatively trivialised site, fun can illuminate questions of what is deemed serious. Through low-stakes experimentation, as well as its capacities to support collective identity, group cohesion and learning, fun can provide relief from normative expectations and model, rehearse and materialise new worlds. In other words, it can operate technologically and performatively to intervene in existing structures and realise new ones. This makes it a powerful vehicle for civic change of many different kinds. I showed, however, that fun is particularly well aligned to reproductive queer futurity, and referred to the Gay Liberation Front to illustrate this from lived experience. I also showed how participatory performance events are particularly well suited to the generation of fun and demonstrated how Duckie has consistently mobilised participatory performance events and fun in the service of reproductive queer futurity.

### **Toward Duckie's homemade mutant hope machines**

In Part I of this thesis, I have articulated the conceptual framework for my research. I have built on queer futurity – the utopian position that insists on the importance of hope and collectivity in moving toward better worlds for marginalised subjects – by articulating *reproductive queer futurity*.

Reproductive queer futurity addresses the imagined needs of the *queer child* (a subject of any age emerging into collective, relational queer experience and understanding) by foregrounding the routine generation of hope through emergent, adaptive and autonomous forms and processes I call *homemade mutant hope machines*. These, I argue, can support the materialisation of better worlds on queer terms. I showed that *participatory performance events and projects* can be effective homemade mutant hope machines, and that such machines can be powerfully supported by queer understandings of *family* and *fun*. The value of family in this context relates to its capacity to provide *material support* and *intergenerational transmission* of forms, processes, understandings and relations. The value of fun in this context relates to its capacity to support *disruptive agency*, to open to question *what counts as serious* and to operate technologically and performatively to *intervene in existing structures and materialise new structures* of feeling, thinking, expression, relationality and agency.

Hope is a future-oriented thing; it cannot exist without anticipation; so anticipation is inherent to queer futurity. But anticipation is also a kind of waiting and waiting can be exhausting. madison moore articulates the empowering queer aesthetic of fabulousness as being, among other things, 'not about waiting for permission or [...] change. It's about creating a unique world for yourself according to your own terms, a world you can inhabit right



now.<sup>172</sup> *Doing* is not waiting. *Fun* is not waiting. Duckie is not waiting. 'If you want to make a change in culture then start doing it,' Simon Casson told me. 'You know, start doing it.'<sup>173</sup> In the remaining chapters of this thesis, I will show how Duckie has instigated a range of socially engaged participatory performance events and projects – the Duckie Homosexualist Summer School, the 'vintage clubbing' cycle and the Posh Club – that function as powerful homemade mutant hope machines, mobilising family and fun in distinct but related ways to materialise better worlds for marginalised subjects.

Reproductive queer futurity is about not waiting but *doing*. Let me show you how Duckie does it.

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<sup>172</sup> *Fabulous: The Rise of the Beautiful Eccentric* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2018), p. 101.

<sup>173</sup> Simon Casson and Dicky Eton, interview with the author, 1 April 2015.

## **PART II**

### **DUCKIE'S HOMEMADE MUTANT HOPE MACHINES**

## Chapter Four

### Doing school queerly at DHSS

#### Introduction

'I've never seen a van full of queers before,' marveled one of the participants in the Duckie Homosexualist Summer School (DHSS) as the minibus pulled away from Duckie's headquarters in Stockwell, south London. 'It's a first!'<sup>1</sup> It was the morning of 15 July 2015 and a week had passed since the DHSS cohort of 13 young performers had been at the Royal Vauxhall Tavern (RVT), triumphantly presenting a showcase of turns they'd created together with Duckie coordinators over the previous 16 days. Now they were regrouping to head to Latitude, a music and arts festival in Suffolk, where they would reprise the showcase. The bleary-eyed but excited participants caught up and exchanged avowals of anticipation, nervousness and mutual support. Once the minibus was fully loaded with backpacks, tents, sleeping bags, supplies, costumes and props – a confetti cannon, an inflatable whale, a replica handgun – Duckie producer Dicky Eton revved the engine and we set off. We drove through Elephant and Castle and over the river, passing the hoardings and cranes of one high-end, high-rise redevelopment project after another, while, through the speakers, British Sri Lankan musician M.I.A.'s 'Bad Girls' promised disruptive high-octane gender-mashed youth rebellion.<sup>2</sup> 'Live fast, die young, bad girls do it well,' M.I.A. sang. 'World's bouncing like a trampoline, when I get to where I'm going, gonna have you trembling.' The van buzzed with affirmation, movement, laughter and vigorous debate about the best Spice Girl and the price of rent. As we drove through the City of

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<sup>1</sup> Recorded in my observational field notes, 15 July 2015. Unless otherwise attributed, quotations and descriptions are from my field notes.

<sup>2</sup> Mathangi Maya 'M.I.A.' Arulpragasam, Nate 'Danja' Hills, Marcella Araica, 'Bad Girls', M.I.A. (Interscope, 2012).

London, wired epicentre of neoliberal capitalism, one of these queer children looked through the window, less in anger or anxiety than bemused pity: 'All these people look the same. All in white or blue shirts. All the women's hair cut the same way. So boring.' It brought to mind the queer theorist Jack Halberstam's description of human beings in Pixar films as 'empty, lifeless, and inert – in fact, unanimated'.<sup>3</sup>

There was nothing unanimated about the DHSS cohort a few hours later as they cruised the aisles of an out-of-town supermarket, gathering festival supplies, affectionate and exuberant in their non-normative looks, unapologetically taking up consumerist space, facing down some wary and disapproving pursed lips and narrowed eyes. There's strength in numbers, in vans full of queers. Before DHSS, as this chapter will show, some of its participants had felt isolated as artists and as people. Now they'd become a collective, nailed a show at an iconic queer venue and were on their way to play a festival. Being different together was giving them pleasure and strength. To be alienated from dominant structures needn't bring abject isolation if one is instead attached to and invested in alternative structures of belonging, meaning and agency, structures that open vistas to better worlds. 'I don't think Tesco knew what hit it,' someone chuckled as everybody piled back onto the minibus. A van full of queers, roving ideality of queer futurity, M.I.A on loud: 'Who's gonna stop me when I'm coming through?'

The first three chapters of this thesis articulated the conceptual framework of reproductive queer futurity, queer children, homemade mutant hope machines, participatory performance projects and events, family and fun. To show how this nexus can function to generate hope routinely and materialise better worlds for marginalised subjects, I now offer a series of case studies of projects by Duckie. I turn first to DHSS, which foregrounds queer

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<sup>3</sup> *The Queer Art of Failure* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2011), p. 45.

performance culture, the central critical field in which this thesis intervenes. Through its overtly vocational structure, DHSS shows how participatory performance projects can materialise reproductive queer futurity's capacity to intervene in dominant structures (by enabling expressive critique and transmitting skills for navigating neoliberal capitalism as a queer performer), to support existing queer structures (by bringing queer children into the fold of Duckie's network) and to materialise new queer structures (by supporting participants' development of new forms of understanding, expression, agency and relationality). It also enables substantive engagement with the figure of the queer child articulated in Chapter One as a crucial figure for reproductive queer futurity. This isn't to frame DHSS participants patronisingly or reductively as juvenile recipients of inherited wisdom. The queer child, as noted earlier, can be of any age and the same person can be a queer child in some contexts and a queer elder in others; DHSS participants arrived with expertise and could teach as well as learn. Nevertheless, DHSS offers a potent example of reproductive queer futurity in action, a project whose stated aims were both future-oriented and pragmatic. As Eton told participants at the start of the 2016 school, 'it's about hope. It's also about providing a grounding'.<sup>4</sup>

DHSS was a participatory performance project in its own right, generating work to be performed live to an engaged audience, some of which (as I will show) involved direct audience participation. At the same time, this project shifted the focus of Duckie's queer nightlife practice from the staging of such events toward the conscious cultivation of the conditions in which such work can flourish and the sustenance of those who create it. In exploring how such projects can materialise better worlds for marginalised subjects, I draw on interviews with producers and participants, observations from my sustained engagement with DHSS 2015 and DHSS 2016, questionnaires filled in by

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<sup>4</sup> Field notes, 20 June 2016.

participants before and after these schemes, an online survey of both years' participants carried out a year later, questionnaires from three participants in a 2014 predecessor scheme and performance analysis of work generated at DHSS.<sup>5</sup> After outlining the project's form, I foreground participants' words to express their lived experience of the project.

The chapter shows how DHSS powerfully mobilises forms of material support and intergenerational transmission otherwise unavailable to participants, enabling them to develop vocational skills, connections and opportunities, conceive of being (a) queer (performer) as a livable life and find meaning and belonging through location in a (performance) lineage and community within which they have recognition and agency. DHSS also enables queer fun supportive of relief, resilience, expression and collectivity and generative of work, selves, collectives and understandings. A sense emerges of DHSS participants as young people emerging into multiple queernesses, at once hungry for hope, guidance and inspiration, keen to offer appreciation and support, and expecting to be listened to and respected. Notwithstanding potential frustrations around kinds of relationality and differing conceptions of fun, I show how DHSS was emergent from queer lived experience, relatively operationally autonomous and adaptive to changing conditions. It functioned as a homemade mutant hope machine that mobilised participatory performance, family and fun in ways that routinely generated hope and helped to materialise better worlds for its participants.

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<sup>5</sup> I distributed in person and by email a survey to DHSS 2015 participants prior to the course beginning (referred to as 'pre-2015 survey'); 11 of 13 participants responded. I distributed in person and by email a survey to DHSS 2015 participants following the course's conclusion ('post-2015 survey'); 6 of 13 responded. At the same time, I distributed a survey to participants in the 2014 *Happy Birthday RVT* summer school ('post-2014 survey'); 3 of 14 responded. I distributed in person and by email a survey to DHSS 2016 participants prior to the course beginning ('pre-2016 survey'); 13 of 15 responded. In 2017, I invited all 27 participants in DHSS 2015 and 2016 to complete an online survey ('2017 survey'); 20 responded. (NB total participation for 2015 and 2016 is 27 – not 28, as the sum of each year's figure suggests – because one person participated in both courses.)

### About Duckie Homosexualist Summer School

DHSS emerged from Duckie members' interest in supporting the longterm sustainability of grassroots queer performance culture – including Duckie's own practice – by providing a training programme engaged with the contingencies of making work for, and making a living on, the London scene. By enabling the creation of a complete short-form turn, 'we were trying to help young performers to do a thing they could earn money from,' Eton told me, 'and we hoped that some of them would work with us. But that was only part of it.'<sup>6</sup> A strong pastoral impulse was also crucial. 'I went to a London youth theatre when I was a working-class 17-year-old in Hackney and it changed my life,' Casson said. 'That's what I want to do for them. It's an act of passion.'<sup>7</sup> These interests first found form in 2013 as Duckie Upstarts, a programme suggested by Amy Lamé, coordinated by Lamé and longterm Duckie collaborator Scottee and funded out of Duckie's Arts Council England (ACE) National Portfolio Organisation (NPO) block grant that supported six performers to create work shown on Saturday nights.<sup>8</sup> In 2014, as part of the broader Heritage Lottery Fund-backed *Happy Birthday RVT* project, the Duckie Summer School – coordinated by Mark Whitelaw, director of all of Duckie's Barbican productions – supported 14 performers to make turns related to the RVT as a subject for a one-off showcase event.<sup>9</sup> In 2015, the scheme was reconfigured as DHSS and allocated £7,266 from Duckie's ACE NPO grant, running again in 2016 with a budget of £9,800.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Simon Casson and Dicky Eton, interview with the author, 9 September 2018.

<sup>7</sup> Casson and Eton interview, 9 September 2018.

<sup>8</sup> 'Duckie Upstarts', *Duckie* (archived website)

<<http://duckie.harmsen.net/generic.php?id=153&submenu=old>> [accessed 16 August 2018].

Budget information from Casson and Eton interview, 9 September 2018.

<sup>9</sup> '*Happy Birthday RVT*' <<http://www.happybirthdayrvt.com/>> [accessed 16 August 2018].

Budget information from Casson and Eton interview, 9 September 2018.

<sup>10</sup> Casson and Eton interview, 9 September 2018.

DHSS was advertised through Duckie's social media channels and other networks, such as university drama departments, as a 'training lab for emerging young performance artists aged 18-26' who 'like live art, cabaret, DIY culture and post-queerness' and 'want to be part of the next generation of underground performance talent'.<sup>11</sup> Some performance experience was a prerequisite; in practice, such experience ranged from live art to circus skills, stand-up to synchronised swimming, in contexts ranging from student work to grassroots production to professional careers. The scheme was billed as 'particularly suitable for LGBTQU (the U is for unsure) people, but everyone is welcome'; in practice, all participants identified somewhere under the LGBTQ+ umbrella.<sup>12</sup> The age bounds reflected Duckie producers' perception of pastoral and civic needs particular to the subjects I call queer children (though here they are understood in relation to chronological age). 'It's a youth project,' Casson told me. 'It's a rite of passage, an education in how to show off and dance on tables, how to be queer, how to have multicultural friends, what to do instead of going to the pub.'<sup>13</sup> So while DHSS was, as I will argue, vitally engaged with intergenerational transmission, it was invested in supporting queer 'youth' as youth rather than generating material from intergenerational collaboration in the manner of organisations such as Magic Me.<sup>14</sup> According to questionnaires filled in before the 2015 and 2016 courses, DHSS participants' most common motivations for applying were creative progression (19 participants), vocational development (17), meeting people in the field (13) and finding a sense of belonging or community (10). According to the retrospective survey carried out online in 2017, only one had no prior knowledge of Duckie, suggesting applicants generally considered Duckie

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<sup>11</sup> DHSS application advertisement copy, provided by Duckie producers, 2015.

<sup>12</sup> DHSS application advertisement copy.

<sup>13</sup> Casson and Eton interview, 9 September 2018.

<sup>14</sup> Magic Me <<https://magicme.co.uk/>> [accessed 16 August 2018].



capable of delivering what they wanted. For some, these hopes were qualified by concerns (13 lacked confidence in their artistic ability and nine were anxious about meeting new people), suggesting it was a considered decision. DHSS participants also reported knowing people who 'would have been brilliant' but lacked the confidence to apply.<sup>15</sup>

For DHSS 2015, Whitelaw worked with 13 performers (out of 45 applicants) over 17 days of workshops, devising and rehearsal at Chelsea Theatre, leading to a showcase event at the RVT on 8 July, which was reprised on 17 July in the Live Art House at Latitude festival, where Duckie has produced events since 2010; DHSS participants also took part in Duckie's Latitude evening show the following night. In 2016, DHSS supported 15 performers (out of 51 applicants), this time coordinated by longterm Duckie collaborator Ursula Martinez. Twelve days of rehearsals and workshops were divided between Chelsea Theatre and the RVT, with showcases at the RVT on 6 July, Chelsea Theatre on 10 July and Latitude on 15 July, reprised at the RVT on 14 September. Both years, I attended a majority of rehearsal days, all showcases and both five-day visits to Latitude. Both years featured talks from coordinators and guests about creative practice (and, in 2016, about self-employment and self-care). Duckie covered all rehearsal, production and travel expenses and participants were paid a £300 bursary. 'We were trying to make sure they could come and do it and not be on the breadline,' Eton told me.<sup>16</sup> This distinguished DHSS from other contemporary queer performance training schemes, which charged for participation and sometimes did not have the economic leeway granted by Duckie's NPO status.<sup>17</sup> As in other situations,

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<sup>15</sup> PF, DHSS participants group interview with the author, 18 July 2015; PB, DHSS participants group interview with the author, 9 July 2016.

<sup>16</sup> Casson and Eton interview, 9 September 2018.

<sup>17</sup> See, for instance, 'Carnesky's Finishing School', *Carnesky* <<http://carnesky.com/productions/work/carneskys-finishing-school/>>, 'Scottee's Working Class Roundhouse Weekender', *Roundhouse* <<http://www.roundhouse.org.uk/young-creatives/autumn->

ACE and other institutional funding qualified Duckie's autonomy in some ways, rendering it ultimately accountable to external oversight, while supporting it in others, affording producers discretion to realise given projects on their own terms.

The DHSS working process was distinctively open and flexible with few expectations or obligations. Turns were anticipated for inclusion in showcase performances, suggesting duration of three to five minutes and a broadly accessible and engaging form, but these were not compulsory: some participants ended up developing ambient or installation work and others engaged with difficult or awkward affects. Participants were given few specific tasks, were not marked or graded in any way and were not obliged to attend rehearsals or workshops, or even to perform in the scheduled showcase events. (In practice, all participants appeared in all events with the exception of one who missed Latitude in 2015 citing ill health.) Whitelaw (in 2015) and Martinez (in 2016) worked flexibly with all participants and occasional group showings allowed for engagement with one another's work as it progressed. Whitelaw offered advice on how to achieve desired effects but no value judgments on participants' ideas or intentions, telling them on the first day that 'I don't want to suggest I'm any sort of authority [...] I presume you're already good at what you do or on your way to it', eschewing the role of authoritarian for facilitator.<sup>18</sup> Martinez was more focused on realising compelling and engaging cabaret turns, sometimes asserting that an aspect of a performance didn't work on its own terms, wasn't clear or should be modified, but was as unprescriptive about form or content as Whitelaw. Both were committed to enabling the realisation of participants' distinctive ideas,

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2018/scottees-working-class-roundhouse-weekender/> and 'DIY', *This is Live Art* <<http://www.thisisliveart.co.uk/opportunities/diy/>> [all accessed 16 August 2018], fees for which typically range from £10 to £200.

<sup>18</sup> Field notes, 22 June 2015.

offering constructively justified suggestions for consideration rather than insisting on changes.

DHSS worked as planned, generating viable turns from all participants. In 2015, these included a piece combining breakdancing with performance poetry about gender expression; a sensational drag-king act involving white tie, tails and a string of sausages; a live-art piece inspired by mythological sacrifice; and a cod-self-help guru offering guidance to the tragically straight. Acts in 2016 included a clowning piece mashing up Brexit, Britannia and a song from *Dreamgirls*; a queer ritual involving blood-letting to the Scissor Sisters; a propulsive spoken-word takedown of nationalist zombie consumerism; an erotically charged hula-hoop act; and a costumed investigation of the links between dragons and drag queens.<sup>19</sup> Not every act was as accomplished as these but each represented a significant development in its creator's practice. Further, as the rest of this chapter will show, critically commendable turns were just one measure of the value of DHSS.

Because the same basic forms and processes were used in both 2015 and 2016, in the following analysis I treat the two years as a single project, articulating specific contingent distinctions as relevant. Participants' names are anonymised through the use of initials that do not correspond to their actual names and of they/them pronouns (which some in any case use). Characteristics that do not render participants individually identifiable are mentioned where analytically relevant.

### **DHSS participants as queer children**

I proposed in Chapter One the figure of the queer child, the person of any age engaged in a process of emergence into experiences and understandings of the relational and collective aspects of queerness. The queer child might be

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<sup>19</sup> *Dreamgirls*, dir. by Bill Condon (DreamWorks Pictures/Paramount Pictures, 2006).

childish in queerly generative ways – playful, messy, disruptive, questioning, inappropriate – and might simultaneously be a queer parent or elder with forms of experience, understanding and guidance to offer in their own right. As an overtly vocational project promising guidance from people with decades of experience in the field of queer performance to young artists with relatively little, DHSS implicitly and explicitly structured participants as queer children and Duckie producers and instructors as parents. There was also a conscious element of care to the project. In Casson's words: 'We're not really parental but we are a bit [...] We don't have children of our own, most of us, and we're into that and that's part of what it is that we're doing.'<sup>20</sup> Rather than emphasising normative heredity or discipline, however, this was a queer kind of parenting akin to the sort Jane Ward proposes as possible in relation to biological children, parenting that seeks to 'facilitate without investment' in narcissistic replication, instead embracing 'unpredictability and fluidity', 'humility and unknowing', and recognising that elders 'may not always be the queerest people in the room'.<sup>21</sup> Notwithstanding such complex, fluid and reflexive dynamics, DHSS participants offer an axiomatic instance of the queer child conceived in the context of reproductive queer futurity.

During the visits to Latitude, DHSS participants were somewhat comparable to children on a conventional family camping holiday or students on a school trip: they were relieved of the financial and logistical burdens of arranging transport, site access, accommodation and food and drink while the 'elders' set the travel schedule, had slightly better living conditions and set the ground rules. In this case, the rules were minimal, related to helping build and dismantle the campsite and being present and fit to participate in the

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<sup>20</sup> Simon Casson and Dicky Eton, interview with the author, 20 July 2016.

<sup>21</sup> 'Radical Experiments Involving Innocent Children: Locating Parenthood in Queer Utopia', in *A Critical Inquiry into Queer Utopias*, ed. by Angela Jones (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), 231-244, p. 233.

scheduled DHSS showcase and main Duckie show. There were no specific rules around, for instance, curfews, drinking, drug use or sexual activity but advice and assistance were available. As Casson put it, 'we don't encourage them to take drugs but for the few of them that might take drugs, this is probably one of the safest places they can do that [...] We're not judgmental and they're over 18.'<sup>22</sup> When, in 2016, one participant did get over-intoxicated, producers were able to assess that there was no risk to their health and support other participants in helping the experience pass relatively comfortably.<sup>23</sup> There were also a number of sexual and romantic encounters between participants (characterised by KU as 'a web'), with a sense of adolescent experimentation that some favourably contrasted with disappointing or alienating experiences of formal education.<sup>24</sup> 'Drugs and gays everywhere – it's like what you wanted high school to be like,' said HU.<sup>25</sup> 'It is like high school,' agreed BT, except without the anxiety associated with expressing one's sexuality; CH compared the Latitude trip to 'school trips without the bullies'.<sup>26</sup> Producers' willingness to provide double air beds for coupled-up participants prompted LW to suggest 'it's like the best school ever!'<sup>27</sup>

As embodied in the participants of DHSS, the queer child of reproductive queer futurity differs in key ways from the normatively figured child while proving analogous in others. Katherine Bond Stockton notes how the foundational tenets of childhood studies frame childhood as a site of purity, connoted by innocence and weakness and requiring both

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<sup>22</sup> Casson and Eton interview, 20 July 2016.

<sup>23</sup> Field notes 16 July 2016.

<sup>24</sup> Field notes, 17 July 2016.

<sup>25</sup> Group interview, 9 July 2016.

<sup>26</sup> Group interview, 9 July 2016.

<sup>27</sup> Field notes, 13 July 2016.

'safeguarding measures and strengthening help'.<sup>28</sup> As suggested above, DHSS's queer children were not pure, innocent or weak yet they did benefit from certain kinds of safeguarding and strengthening help. Such ambivalences abound around the project, suggesting the limitations of both normative views of childhood and some queerly critical ones. Jack Halberstam, for instance, suggests that the conventional view of children as being in need of 'training' implicitly acknowledges the reality that they are, in fact, 'always already anarchic and rebellious, out of order and out of time', viewing 'family and parents as the problematic barrier' between them and 'other worlds underlying and overwriting this one'.<sup>29</sup> Many DHSS participants' reported experiences bolster Halberstam's understandings of chafing and restrictive aspects of normative childhood and of the emancipatory potential of collectivity and imagination to gesture towards better worlds. Yet to follow Halberstam in framing any child, queer or otherwise, as mere emblem of 'a constant state of rebellion' substitutes one reductive, sentimental projection for another.<sup>30</sup> Experiences with DHSS students and biological children show that the even the most disorderly child likely also wants (different) training, wants (another) family, wants (new kinds of) guidance and attachment as well as independence, agency and respect.

The queer child's desire not only to reject unsatisfactory lineages but to stake a claim to preferable ones was elegantly illustrated at Latitude when – for fun, not for a particular performance purpose – PF created a new persona, garbed in a back-to-front blue gown accessorised with plastic caution tape, that they described as the miraculous offspring of transgressive queer

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<sup>28</sup> *The Queer Child, or Growing Sideways in the Twentieth Century* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2009), p. 113.

<sup>29</sup> Jack Halberstam, *The Queer Art of Failure* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2011), pp. 27-28.

<sup>30</sup> Halberstam, *Failure*, p. 47.

performers David Hoyle and Christeene.<sup>31</sup> They were then given a name, Cricket Bat, by members of the Yeast London Cabaret collective who were present, affording a kind of triple parentage. The playful emergence of Cricket Bat simultaneously testified to young queer performers' independent subjective agency and their desire for forms of validation and belonging associated with recognised lineage. DHSS also enabled rites of passage from perceived childhood into adulthood, most overtly in the tongue-in-cheek graduation ceremony, complete with homemade mortar boards and gowns, that formed the climax to the 2015 RVT showcase, giving a chance for the multiple audiences present to celebrate publicly a perceived watershed. A comparable function was served in the 2016 showcase by CN hosting the event as their grotesque persona the Matron, framing each performer as a graduating pupil. HD described DHSS as 'a milestone' in their performance practice, marking a point where 'I feel like I'm not a child any more'.<sup>32</sup> There is resonance here with José Esteban Muñoz's argument that the value of queer performance can lie less in its formal qualities than in its 'insistence on process and becoming'.<sup>33</sup>

Some of the turns created by DHSS participants conveyed the childlike confluence of strident rebellion, yearning for acceptance and pursuit of self-determination by engaging in overt, complex ways with childhood as a textual subject. The staged child can be a disruptive figure. Shannon Jackson observes how the biological child on stage brings a 'social unpredictability' that makes them 'a walking threat to the divide between art and life', evoking, depending on circumstance, sentimental sympathy, aesthetic anxiety and incredulous appreciation.<sup>34</sup> Elizabeth Freeman, meanwhile, observes the

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<sup>31</sup> Field notes, 18 July 2015.

<sup>32</sup> DHSS participants, group interview with author, 8 July 2015.

<sup>33</sup> *Cruising Utopia: The Then and There of Queer Futurity* (New York: New York University Press, 2009), p. 106.

<sup>34</sup> *Social Works: Performing Art, Supporting Publics* (New York: Routledge, 2011), p. 241.

uncanny effects of the adult queer performer's mobilisation of childlike drag, as in Vaginal Creme Davis's creepy, liberating reworking of *The Bad Seed* 'to figure the apocalypse of a sexual and racial anarchy' by inciting disavowed desires.<sup>35</sup> The DHSS turns I'm thinking of combined aspects of both: the artists were certainly adults yet framed by the project as children, students or apprentice performers presenting works made under tutelage. For those invested in the future of queer performance, they sparked the sympathy, anxiety and appreciation noted by Jackson while also conjuring the uncanny potency channeled by Davis.

Analysing three turns created at DHSS demonstrates its support for participants' development and expression of complex queer understandings of childhood. RJ's piece engaged childhood as an idyllic site of unselfconscious physical and affective expression. 'I am not a dancer,' they said, wearing plain white shorts and a vest and holding a mug of tea, 'but from an early age, my favourite thing has been to dance.' RJ described being an instinctively animated child then danced to Jack Garratt's song 'Worry', slowly at first, then with thrashing, grinning abandon, discarding clothes in a carefree rather than sensual way that echoed the song's disavowal of anxiety.<sup>36</sup> As RJ left the stage, panting, happy, unclothed, holding their mug and thanking the audience, the sense emerged of carefree play as precious and accessible to adults if inhibition and anxiety are resisted. IL's turn saw the artist enter to the accompaniment of 'Thank Heaven for Little Girls', the icky ballad sung by Maurice Chevalier in *Gigi*.<sup>37</sup> Dressed in shorts, braces, jelly sandals and a sheer top, they described occasions on which they had been

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<sup>35</sup> 'Queer Belongings: Kinship Theory and Queer Theory', in *A Companion to Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, and Queer Studies*, ed. by George E. Haggerty and Molly McGarry (Malden: Blackwell, 2007), 295-314, p. 310; *The Bad Seed*, dir. by Mervyn LeRoy (Warner Bros., 1956).

<sup>36</sup> Jack Garratt, 'Worry', Jack Garratt (Island Records, 2015).

<sup>37</sup> Alan Jay Lerner and Frederick Loewe, 'Thank Heaven for Little Girls', in *Gigi*, dir. by Vincente Minnelli (Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer, 1958).



treated as or mistaken for a minor, in between each description blowing a raspberry and yelling 'I'm not a fucking child!' As the stories grew more patronising and dehumanising, IL's responses grew more agitated until they were effectively throwing a tantrum on stage. Then, to the accompaniment of the Runaways' adolescent rebellion anthem 'Cherry Bomb', they flung off their clothes in a spirit of defiance, confrontation and, in the display of mature breasts, assertion of adulthood.<sup>38</sup> Ambivalently using infantile registers – raspberries, tantrums, jelly sandals – to insist on adulthood, IL gave a sense of the gravitational swings of childhood and adolescence, asserting subjective maturity while retaining a claim to the arsenal of the constrained child. BT's turn also located childhood as a troubled site of mixed messages and competing emotions, lip-synching to the coy seductions of Marilyn Monroe's rendition of 'My Heart Belongs to Daddy', which opens with the speaker breathily identifying herself as Lolita and confiding 'I'm not supposed to play with boys'.<sup>39</sup> BT wore lace, frills, garters, corset and pearls, an all-white outfit that evoked the boudoir and bridal suite while hinting at the nursery. Their affect went from coquettish to predatory to frenetic as they dragged a couple of men from the audience onto the stage to ogle and pretend to ravish in line with the music. This child was erotic, vulnerable, assertive, desperate, rebellious, afraid, unignorable. An additional layer of queasy ambiguity came if one noted the words painted white-on-white onto BT's costume: 'HOMO', 'FAG', 'DADDY HATES ME', 'DADDY NEVER WANTED FAGGOT'. Not supposed to play with boys indeed. Lolita, it seems, yearns hopelessly for withheld love.

These turns generated a cumulative sense of childhood as precarious, unstable, even protean, now enviably free, now frustratingly constrained, now

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<sup>38</sup> Joan Jett and Kim Fowley, 'Cherry Bomb', *The Runaways* (Mercury, 1976).

<sup>39</sup> Cole Porter, 'My Heart Belongs to Daddy', in *Let's Make Love*, dir. by George Cukor (20th Century Fox, 1960).

intractably disappointing. DHSS, then, offered a structure supportive of the development and presentation of work in which these complex, thwarted, resistant, even utopian queer senses of childhood could be engaged as part of a process of queer growth. It was a space in which queer children could critically investigate which available forms of lineage and growth to embrace, adapt or reject. By engaging participants as queer children (in the terms of reproductive queer futurity), DHSS offered them non-normative forms of support, guidance, validation and belonging as well as enabling their subjective exploration and creative expression of complex understandings of queer experiences of childhood.

### **DHSS as a queer family structure**

To frame DHSS participants as queer children is to invite consideration of the kind of non-normative family structure that might sustain them – *won't somebody queerly think of the children?* – and to investigate the extent to which DHSS fulfilled that role. Many of those involved with DHSS explicitly framed it in family terms. Some participants stated prior understandings of Duckie as a space of 'love, family [and] acceptance' and of 'how much they care for and nurture' emerging performers.<sup>40</sup> DHSS's creators asserted that 'Duckie is a family' and that participation in the scheme offered access to this 'wider family'.<sup>41</sup> Participants were motivated by the chance to 'be part of a supportive family' or to create 'a different kind of family where we make our own family'.<sup>42</sup> One participant reported that DHSS 'made me feel accepted in a queer space and gave me a group of people who I now consider family' while another said 'we're all so different but at the same time have so much

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<sup>40</sup> LW, pre-2015 survey; DN, pre-2015 survey.

<sup>41</sup> Dicky Eton, field notes, 20 June 2016, Mark Whitelaw, field notes, 25 June 2015.

<sup>42</sup> RJ, pre-2016 survey; RO, field notes, 21 June 2016.

in common. It feels like a family.<sup>43</sup> At the end of the scheme, participants described having 'become part of the Duckie family' and 'feel[ing] we're like a branch on the Duckie family tree'.<sup>44</sup>

More than a vocational training scheme, then, DHSS was a structure displaying attributes critically associated with family as discussed in Chapter Two, such as demonstrations of love and attachment, solidarity, assistance, commitment and engagement. The structure was also able to offer senses of protection and conflict resolution: HU described it as 'a collective, safe space to learn and support and grow [...] that can be endangered by forces within the group and outside', such as internal disagreements or external hostility, while remaining functional.<sup>45</sup> (In practice, such forces were relatively mild, such as short-lived disagreements or constructively-engaged political differences.) To Whitelaw, the project was not simply vocational but also a way for young performers to connect to Duckie in more than a 'do-a-gig-get-some-cash kind of way so they become part of a network or family of associated artists and artists who are mutually supporting' one another, vocationally, creatively, socially and emotionally.<sup>46</sup> Whitelaw emphasised that learning how to 'ask each other for assistance' undergirded this, underlining a desire to create autonomous, replicable structures of support indicative of the capacity of DHSS to act as a homemade mutant hope machine.<sup>47</sup> DHSS was not the only potential structure of support available to young people interested in London's queer performance scene at the time: other examples with which DHSS participants were engaged included performance collectives such as Club Wotever, Sink the Pink and Yeast London Cabaret, mentoring schemes such as Carnesky's Finishing School and academic institutions such as the

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<sup>43</sup> CH, 2017 survey; PF, group interview, 18 July 2015.

<sup>44</sup> DN, group interview, 18 July 2015; LD, group interview, 18 July 2015.

<sup>45</sup> HU, 2017 survey.

<sup>46</sup> Mark Whitelaw, interview with the author, 25 June 2015.

<sup>47</sup> Whitelaw interview, 25 June 2015.

Department of Drama at Queen Mary University of London and Department of Drama, Theatre and Performance at the University of Roehampton. Yet participants reported DHSS as offering kinds of support and understanding unavailable elsewhere, as I will now show.

Many reported DHSS as significantly supporting participants' understandings of their own and others' queer experience. The 2017 survey asked: 'Did your experience at DHSS have an impact on how you think or feel about queerness?' Responses on a scale of one (minimal impact) to five (transformative impact) averaged 3.8, with six participants reporting 'a transformative amount' and personal reports, to the survey and elsewhere, showing the impact of experiencing a supportive queer context. BT had 'never [...] experienced an openness and community like this' while HU got 'so much confidence and courage in terms of everyday self-expression. I can't overstate that'.<sup>48</sup> Some reported previously feeling alienated from or ineligible for queer community: CH felt 'not cool enough' and 'so lonely', RO thought it 'didn't belong to me', IL thought 'I wasn't queer enough' while RJ valued the chance 'to not be the gay one' in an otherwise straight peer group.<sup>49</sup> IL appreciated the care Martinez showed for their work and wellbeing while affirming queer expression: 'I've never had that on such a personal level and that really helped me with confidence'.<sup>50</sup> Two trans participants of colour also favorably compared DHSS's supportive environment around queer expression with university experiences.<sup>51</sup>

Participants described how DHSS enabled reciprocal learning about diverse queer subjectivities even for those already engaged in London's queer performance scene. To LW, DHSS represented a rare queer-performance-

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<sup>48</sup> BT, post-2016 survey; HU, 2017 survey.

<sup>49</sup> CH, 2017 survey; RO, 2017 survey; IL, S participants' and producers' Chelsea Theatre post-show discussion, 10 July 2016; RJ, group interview, 9 July 2016.

<sup>50</sup> Group interview, 9 July 2016.

<sup>51</sup> Post-show discussion, 10 July 2016; group interview, 18 July 2015.

engaged space in which they did not feel expected to be accountable for or representative of a wider group: it was 'nice to be in a space where you're not that token person [...] If it's a queer thing, I'm the token trans. If it's a trans thing, I'm the token person of colour. Either way, there's something where I always feel like I've got to be the sound of an entire community. [...] You get tired of being the person who has to say stuff'.<sup>52</sup> At the same time, DHSS proved capable of supporting increased intersubjective understanding and empathy. One white cis gay male had previously been 'unaware of non-binary as a gender identity or even the they/them pronoun', another reported 'learn[ing] more about non-binary and trans experiences' while a cis gay male of colour 'did not realise I was so ignorant' about gender and became 'more tolerant and aware'.<sup>53</sup> CY appreciated how DHSS enabled discussion around 'confusing personal intersections of gender and sexuality', supporting mutual understandings of 'differing queernesses'.<sup>54</sup> HL, who valued queer as a process more than an identity, noted that 'if we are not in a space where we can listen and understand the intersections of gender and sexuality with race, class, neurodiversity [...] then we cannot really queer any thing [...] [DHSS] was a space where queerness could take place: through constructive and supportive critique of each others creative practice and the transmission of our political and sexual objectives we queered each other hard.'<sup>55</sup> Such dynamically engaged diversity distinguishes DHSS participants from the homogenous peer groups identified as queer family by researchers such as Kath Weston and Jeffrey Weeks, Brian Heaphy and Catherine Donovan,

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<sup>52</sup> LW, interview with the author, 10 July 2016.

<sup>53</sup> RJ, 2017 survey; EA, 2017 survey; SF post-2015 survey.

<sup>54</sup> CY, 2017 survey.

<sup>55</sup> HL, 2017 survey (original orthography).

locating difference as an advantage rather than a challenge.<sup>56</sup> DHSS as a family structure, then, raised participants' confidence by enabling affirmation, expression and understanding of their own queer subjectivities and understanding of others' queer subjectivities, and afforded access to structures of queer belonging, validation and dynamic critical discourse.

Performance was central to the DHSS family, as to Duckie in general. Muñoz describes how performance can serve queer futurity through 'its ability to generate a modality of knowing and recognition among audiences and groups that facilitates modes of belonging, especially minoritarian belonging'.<sup>57</sup> This value adheres not only to the performance moment itself (the collective of the performer plus audience) but also to the contexts of performance work's conception and development (the collective of performers); that is, it applies across both *participatory performance events* and *participatory performance projects*. This can mark an enriching change from lonely practice: queer performance-making can be 'very much an isolated process' involving 'people sitting [...] in their bedrooms and then rehearsing in a hallway', in HN's and DN's words respectively.<sup>58</sup> Collectivity underpinned all DHSS's output despite all but one of the turns being solo pieces: YO described how 'we spent so long deliberating with each other and helping each other that, even though it was one person on that stage, everybody had some contribution to that piece'; CY maintained 'there's no way I'd have made the work I made without this specific group of people [...] Every single person seemed to influence something in the process'.<sup>59</sup> This alignment of relational support and artistic production was also evident in

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<sup>56</sup> *Families We Choose: Lesbians, Gays, Kinship* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1991, rev. 1997), *Same Sex Intimacies: Families of Choice and Other Life Experiments* (London: Routledge, 2001).

<sup>57</sup> Muñoz, p. 99.

<sup>58</sup> HN, group interview, 18 July 2015; DN, in Tim Brunsden, 'DHSS video', 8 July 2015, provided by videographer.

<sup>59</sup> Post-show discussion, 10 July 2016.

a group dance created in 2016 to celebrate Dicky Eton's birthday (which fell during Latitude) that was subsequently programmed as part of Duckie's main Latitude show.

There was, LW reported, both vocational validation and familial reinforcement in producers supporting DHSS participants in making work and 'letting us put it on the same stage as all the other Duckie artists'.<sup>60</sup> This framed them as part of the 'wider family' mentioned by Whitelaw which, in the specific case of the 2016 Latitude show, included acts as diverse as Martinez, Frank Chickens, Barbara Brownskirt, Myra DuBois and Figs in Wigs.<sup>61</sup> DHSS enabled further imbrication in this wider family structure formally, through performer talks during the rehearsal period, and informally, through socialising at Latitude and the public showcases, which were also attended by members of wider social, creative, academic and industry networks connected to Duckie. The project also intersected with blood family dynamics in various ways although these were ambivalent: a member of the 2014 summer school reported coming out to their family as a result of participating while others reported apprehension around blood family members' reactions to the evident queerness of DHSS.<sup>62</sup>

Burgeoning confidence was a key affective association with DHSS overall. Describing Kevin McCarty's photographs of the stages in queer performance bars, Muñoz suggests that 'these stages are our actual utopian rehearsal rooms, where we work on a self that does not conform to the mandates of cultural logics such as late capitalism, heteronormativity, and, in some cases, white supremacy'.<sup>63</sup> Such a description applies to the whole process of DHSS, which enabled participants to work on distinctively non-

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<sup>60</sup> Group interview, 8 July 2015.

<sup>61</sup> Field notes, 22 June 2015.

<sup>62</sup> PP, post-2014 survey; YO, CY, IL, post-show discussion, 10 July 2016.

<sup>63</sup> Muñoz, p. 111.

normative individual and collective selves and to express them with increasing assurance both on and off stage. Participants' perception of DHSS as a family structure, then, enabled the affirmation, expression and understanding of participants' own queer subjectivities and their understanding of others'. It afforded access to sociocultural structures of queer belonging, validation and dynamic discourse. It also enabled participants to build collective performance practices, position their work in the context of a broader queer performance scene and develop critically engaged subjective confidence and public assertiveness.

### **Material support**

In Chapter Two, I identified the capacity of family structures to provide material support and intergenerational transmission in ways particularly helpful to reproductive queer futurity. DHSS shows how family structures that offer material support can enable 'queer children' as subjects and performers in distinctive and powerful ways unavailable from other potential structures of support such as government, academia or the market. Since the relocation of family from a site of production to a site of affection, childhood, like fun, has been emphatically constructed as a site of *not-work*; as Viviana Zelizer notes, the economically productive child became, per se, a neglected or abused child.<sup>64</sup> But in the context of Duckie's queerly reconfigured, supportive and generative family farm, space opens up for productive children. DHSS enabled these children to produce work (some of which will directly benefit Duckie through inclusion in future programming) and equips them with the requisite capabilities to produce more in the future.

This is hinted at in the name DHSS, which puns on the name of the UK government Department for Health and Social Services, operative between

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<sup>64</sup> *Pricing the Priceless Child: The Changing Social Value of Children* (New York: Basic Books, 1985), pp. 70-72.



1968 and 1988, whose responsibility for distributing unemployment benefits made its initials synonymous with the dole.<sup>65</sup> There's a double-edged humour in this adoption by Duckie of a term powerfully associated with rhetorics of work. The move ironically co-opts a label historically associated by the right with fecklessness and what is now called 'benefits culture'.<sup>66</sup> But it also evokes a time of higher state spending and lower real-terms living costs when such benefits enabled people to pursue non-normative cultural projects while living sustainably in London. Casson, for instance, was on the dole when Duckie started; Britpop musicians from the same period have also testified to its enabling power.<sup>67</sup> The transition since then from a livable dole to the more frugal, contingent and precarious Jobseekers Allowance exemplifies how, under neoliberalism, the state-managed material commons has become less robust and supportive and expectations of individual and blood-family self-sufficiency have grown. In the absence of the materialisation of the utopia anticipated by John D'Emilio (writing in a US context), DHSS marks a kind of return to the family farm, a reassertion of the family as a site of material and vocational as well as emotional and affective support whose distinctive forms of productivity and autonomy afford some contingent alternative to neoliberal expectations and understandings of individualistic survival and success.<sup>68</sup>

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<sup>65</sup> See, for instance, Rita Griffiths, 'No Love on the Dole: The Influence of the UK Means-Tested Welfare System on Partnering and Family Structure', *Journal of Social Psychology*, 46.3 (2017), 543-561.

<sup>66</sup> See, for instance, Colin Robertson, 'Our benefits culture is a joke.. parents should send their kids out to work at 13 – says Lord Sugar', *The Sun*, 17 March 2012 <<https://www.thesun.co.uk/archives/tv/458355/our-benefits-culture-is-a-joke-parents-should-send-their-kids-out-to-work-at-13-says-lord-sugar/>> [accessed 16 August 2018].

<sup>67</sup> Casson and Eton interview, 9 September 2018; see also David Lister, 'Dole-queue blues that gave Britpop its soul', *Independent*, 18 February 1998 <<https://www.independent.co.uk/news/dole-queue-blues-that-gave-britpop-its-soul-1145415.html>> [accessed 16 August 2018].

<sup>68</sup> 'Capitalism and Gay Identity' (1983), repr. in *The Lesbian and Gay Studies Reader*, ed. by Henry Abelove, Michèle Aina Barale and David M. Halperin (New York: Routledge, 1993), pp. 467-476.

For instance, the £300 bursary for DHSS participants revives, in a limited but importantly unironic way, the relief once afforded by the dole from some of the obligation to work to cover basic living expenses, freeing up time and energy for artistic practice. LD told me they anticipated leaving London because, despite working 50 hours a week, they remained dependent on parental support to pay rent.<sup>69</sup> The bursary, they said, 'made it possible for me to do' DHSS; HD agreed, adding that 'unless you're studying, it's really difficult to set aside a chunk of time to make a piece. I've never had this much time to make a piece of work'.<sup>70</sup> In PH's words, 'opportunities for young people have been systematically cut and stripped away [...] This just doesn't exist anywhere else [...] outside of university courses that cost money [many] people don't have. To be able to come and to do this for me has been amazing and I don't feel like there's anything else I could have done that would have been similar.'<sup>71</sup> Participants who had engaged in academic study articulated other constraints: LD found it liberating to make work without worrying about 'having to write an essay about it' or knowing 'you'll be marked on it'.<sup>72</sup> They also said that on the commercial cabaret scene, 'there's always a brief you need to fit into' and DHSS was 'the first time in my life [...] I genuinely felt like I could just do whatever [I wanted]'.<sup>73</sup>

Sources of material support for DHSS participants with obvious application to the weeks of the scheme's operation included the bursary, the provision of rehearsal space and directorial guidance in the making of work, the production of shows at the RVT and Chelsea Theatre, and the payment of transport, accommodation and administrative costs related to attending and performing at Latitude. The production of shows enabled pragmatic learning

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<sup>69</sup> Field notes, 15 July 2015.

<sup>70</sup> Group interview, 8 July 2015.

<sup>71</sup> Field notes, 8 July 2015.

<sup>72</sup> Brunsdon, 'DHSS video', 8 July 2015; group interview, 8 July 2015.

<sup>73</sup> Group interview, 18 July 2015; group interview, 8 July 2015.

around, for instance, the best use of limited lighting options and limited preparation time (as LW discovered when they let off a confetti cannon during a run-through and had to clear up the resulting mess).<sup>74</sup>

The support provided by DHSS also offered longer-term vocational and pastoral application. Through workshops and the opportunity to meet and engage with peers, DHSS helped participants develop pragmatic understandings of, for instance, the logistics of self-employment, tax payment and grassroots performance production. Attendance at Latitude enabled participants to view without charge dozens of national and international performers. Participants' work was exposed to a range of audiences, producers and promoters in ways conducive to building vocational capital helpful in sustaining a queer performance practice. The dedicated DHSS showcases were seen by programmers, producers and course leaders working with David Hoyle, Yeast London Cabaret, the Live Art Development Agency, Steakhouse Live and Queen Mary University of London, among others. (Some participants already had links with these organisations; for others, new connections emerged from DHSS.) As well as the dedicated showcases, all participants appeared in Duckie's main Latitude show too, increasing their exposure.

The 2017 online survey asked participants how far, on a scale of one to five (five being a transformative amount), they thought DHSS had had an impact on their creative practice (developing and expressing ideas) and their career development (developing professional skills, industry contacts and audiences). Regarding creative practice, the average score was 3.85, with nine of 20 respondents reporting a very significant impact and four a transformative impact. CH reported that DHSS 'completely changed how I make work and the way I think of making work'; CN said that without DHSS

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<sup>74</sup> Field notes, 8 July 2015.

they 'would not have had the courage' to pursue a new creative mode that subsequently changed the direction of their practice; and PH described it as 'the first time I was given the space and support to develop and stage a solo act', marking 'a significant change in my creative practice' that 'I have built on [...] ever since'.<sup>75</sup> In questionnaires immediately after the course, LW reported that DHSS 'was the best thing that happened to me' as an artist while HD said 'it made me realise the type of performance and work I want to make'.<sup>76</sup>

Regarding career development, the average survey score was 3.95, with nine of 20 respondents reporting a transformative impact. To HU, 'DHSS encouraged my integrity', enabling them to 'make the work I wanted to make and present it how I wanted to present it' at the specific intersection of particular performance contexts; HL said DHSS taught them 'to create works that are both academic and accessible', and went on to become artist in residence at a major cultural institution; others said it helped them self-identify for the first time as performers or public speakers.<sup>77</sup> Many participants reported how DHSS had helped cultivate a network of artists and performers with whom they subsequently collaborated.<sup>78</sup> Of the 27 total participants for 2015 and 2016, 22 have worked with Duckie since finishing DHSS. Many described how it enabled them to secure other paid performance work.<sup>79</sup> Others noted how Duckie's name adds 'weight' to a CV, as do associations with Latitude, Chelsea Theatre and the RVT.<sup>80</sup> In LW's words, 'working with Duckie gives you backing. It gives you contacts. I got loads of gigs from doing the summer school. That's the Duckie ripple effect.'<sup>81</sup> Some participants

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<sup>75</sup> 2017 survey.

<sup>76</sup> LW, post-2014 survey; HD, post-2015 survey.

<sup>77</sup> 2017 survey.

<sup>78</sup> RJ, CY and LD, 2017 survey; EA, HD and PF, post-2015 survey.

<sup>79</sup> RV, post-2015 survey; RJ, CH, FT and EQ, 2017 survey.

<sup>80</sup> LD, 2017 survey; HN and DN, group interview, 18 July 2015; RR post-2015 survey; JL, interview with the author, 6 July 2015.

<sup>81</sup> LW interview, 10 July 2016.

attributed to DHSS outcomes including debut performances in London, performance opportunities in Brussels in a context of post-colonialist discourse, in New York as part of the Live Art Development Agency's Just Like a Woman festival and in Manila with funding from Arts Council England and the British Council.<sup>82</sup> EA reported how the turn they developed at DHSS 2015 was programmed as part of Duckie's main show at that year's Latitude, 'remains my signature work and my most-booked piece' and contributed to their winning their first award (an Erotic Award) and being nominated for an Arts Foundation Awards fellowship.<sup>83</sup>

As a family structure of material support, then, DHSS reanimated advantageous forms undone by neoliberalism, such as the dole, enabling participants to work. The provision of bursaries, rehearsal space, professional advice and creative guidance allowed them to build pragmatic vocational understanding and develop their creative practice on their own terms, free of academic, financial or professional accountability around the work they produced. Festival participation enabled them to see and meet other practitioners and present work to multiple audiences. DHSS enabled participants to develop generative new forms and understandings around their practice and identity as performers. It forged collaborative relationships, generated paid work and catalysed international opportunities, institutional associations and vocationally beneficial awards.

### **Intergenerational transmission**

As a queer family structure, DHSS supported several forms of intergenerational transmission. These included drawing attention to instructive institutional and performance lineages; fostering contact between younger or less experienced and older or more experienced queer performance

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<sup>82</sup> DF, group interview, 18 July 2015; HL, LW and EA, 2017 survey.

<sup>83</sup> EA, 2017 survey.

practitioners; and enabling reciprocal forms of learning across perceived generational distance. A key institutional lineage for DHSS was the government department of the same name. Very few of the young performers had heard of this, requiring Eton to explain the reference during his introductory talk.<sup>84</sup> In this small way, the scheme informed young queer people today about a notable difference between their lives and those of young queer and artistic people of earlier generations, highlighting the consequential contingent political and economic changes of the intervening period – an instance of what Muñoz characterises as a turn to the past to critique the present.<sup>85</sup> A happier institutional lineage was that of the RVT. The pub's past had been the overt subject of the 2014 summer school held as part of the *Happy Birthday RVT* project, which enabled contact between young performers and older performers connected to the venue; furthermore, the turns produced at the event critically animated aspects of the Tavern's past.<sup>86</sup> Most participants in DHSS knew the RVT and many (of the 2016 group) were excited to be able to develop work there; some were partly motivated by the chance to join the list of those who had performed on its stage.<sup>87</sup> Others were excited to learn particulars of the site's past that resonated with their own practice or fell in love with it as a performance space: CH's turn, for instance, evoked veteran drag act Adrella in its satirical use of the Union Jack while CN published a journalistic article celebrating the RVT.<sup>88</sup> This affirmed the idea of the RVT as a persistent site of queer community and therefore a site of queer futurity, valued not only for what has previously happened beneath its roof but

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<sup>84</sup> Field notes, 22 June 2015, 20 June 2016.

<sup>85</sup> Muñoz, p. 26.

<sup>86</sup> Some of this work is analysed in 'Once upon a time there was a tavern: Metadrag and other uses of the past at the Royal Vauxhall Tavern', my chapter in Mark Edwards and Stephen Farrier's forthcoming two-volume collected edition *Drag in a Changing Scene* (London: Bloomsbury, expected 2020).

<sup>87</sup> LD pre-2015 survey; IL pre-2016 survey.

<sup>88</sup> Field notes, 6 July 2016. Reference for CN article withheld to preserve anonymity.

for what is anticipated to continue happening there. (As its name suggests, the RVT Future campaign, of which Duckie producers and myself are founding members, is explicitly dedicated to the venue as a site of queer futurity.)

Whitelaw overtly positioned DHSS participants within ‘a lineage of artists’ from whom they could learn about the distinctive contexts of queer cabaret performance, with his and Martinez’s guidance providing strong continuity with Duckie’s own production history.<sup>89</sup> In his talk in 2015, performer Dickie Beau articulated his experiences as an artist supported by Duckie (for instance as a Saturday night artist in residence), suggesting this as a route potentially available to participants.<sup>90</sup> In 2016, Martinez showed videos of turns for discussion, showcasing Duckie collaborators including Moira Finucane, Julie Atlas Muz, Jess Love and Katy Baird.<sup>91</sup> At Latitude in 2016, during the main Duckie show, Myra DuBois explicitly referred to DHSS participants’ presence, offering some tongue-in-cheek mentorship: ‘Let me teach the young performers a technique we old hands know. It’s called phoning it in. I’m doing it tonight.’<sup>92</sup> Beyond the specific context of Duckie, the material conditions of DHSS enabled access to other lineages: at Latitude, for instance, Oozing Gloop, also attending the festival, offered informal advice to several participants on subjects including pay rates and self-production.<sup>93</sup> There were other opportunities for social contact with more experienced performers and artists through the wider Duckie network: in 2016, some DHSS participants took part in the large-scale Duckie event *Lady Malcolm’s Servants’ Ball*, sharing a dressing room with Neil Bartlett, Lavinia Co-op, Gateau Chocolat, Christopher Green, Sue Hewlett and Wrench & Franks.<sup>94</sup> In fact, many

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<sup>89</sup> Field notes, 22 June 2015.

<sup>90</sup> Field notes, 30 June 2016.

<sup>91</sup> Field notes, 20 June 2016.

<sup>92</sup> Field notes, 16 July 2016.

<sup>93</sup> Field notes, 16 July 2016.

<sup>94</sup> Field notes, 24 June 2016.

participants wanted more intergenerational contact than the incidental amount enabled by the scheme.<sup>95</sup> HD noted that 'Duckie have got a strong idea of family and performance' and suggested more programmatic intergenerational interaction 'would have been nice to have as part of the experience'; LW articulated experienced Duckie collaborators as role models, saying 'I want to be making the kind of work that they're making now and I'd like to know how they got there'.<sup>96</sup> LD articulated a sense of being imbricated in the family yet not as closely as they might be: 'I feel we're like a branch on the Duckie family tree, like those cousins that you never see. That's us! I don't know who any of them are, they don't know who I am, any of the [veteran] Duckie artists!'<sup>97</sup> Such expressions speak to a hunger for intergenerational transmission around queer performance whose satisfaction was promised by DHSS but not always delivered.

Such connection was indeed of huge significance to DHSS participants. Asked in the 2017 survey how important they considered contact between queer people of different generations, 16 replied 'enormously' and four 'very', giving an average score of 4.8, the highest of the survey. Participants did not, however, feel such contact was common in queer culture or community, describing 'a generational knowledge gap between queer folks, especially today's youth and folks who lived through the 80s as adults', and reporting that 'I know almost no queers who are older than 35 and I wish I did'.<sup>98</sup> Artistic and vocational benefits were among the motivations expressed but wider senses of queer civics also emerged.<sup>99</sup> There was respect for elders' achievements, including 'how hard people had to fight for our right to have fun' and 'to live so openly', and a sense that 'the only way we can learn about

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<sup>95</sup> HD, EA, LW, group interview, 18 July 2015; PH, RJ, LD, 2017 survey.

<sup>96</sup> Group interview, 18 July 2015.

<sup>97</sup> Group interview, 18 July 2015.

<sup>98</sup> RV, LD, 2017 survey.

<sup>99</sup> EA, RO, 2017 survey; LW, post-2015 survey.



our history as queer people is to speak to other generations'.<sup>100</sup> Empathy for elders' potential vulnerability, including 'feeling isolated', was balanced by a sense that younger queers still sometimes experience rejection by or estrangement from blood family, lack role models ('we need mentors') and feel obliged to be self-sufficient ('we can't always feel as though we have to re-invent the wheel').<sup>101</sup> Increased contact was articulated as mutually beneficial. QN regretted that 'queer clubs can be so full of young people and exclude older ones' despite intergenerational friendship being 'vital'.<sup>102</sup> In an implicit retort to critical valorisation of homogenous peer groups as queer family, LD reported that 'being in a community of all twentysomething weird traumatised people can get a bit isolated and insular. I want some perspective!'<sup>103</sup> Intergenerational contact was articulated as a powerful source of hope. RO thought it invaluable 'to feel like queerness and queer people are resilient, and have longevity and diversity in their lives and practices'.<sup>104</sup> And PH reported that 'I'm mostly estranged from my family [and] I mostly don't see myself or people like me represented in the public sphere, so when I see someone who could be an older version of me it reminds me that I have a future and that things hopefully will be ok'.<sup>105</sup>

Unlike family structures involving intergenerational transmission that are heavily invested in imitative reproduction, DHSS enabled less prescriptive kinds of support and engagement. LD reported concerns beforehand based on their knowledge of the work of others accepted onto the scheme: 'They're very entertaining. I was, like, "Do I have to do that? Is that the way to do

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<sup>100</sup> RJ, CH, CH, 2017 survey.

<sup>101</sup> CY, PH, QN, PB, HU, HL 2017 survey.

<sup>102</sup> QN, 2017 survey.

<sup>103</sup> LD, 2017 survey.

<sup>104</sup> RO, 2017 survey.

<sup>105</sup> PH, 2017 survey.

Duckie?”<sup>106</sup> In practice, although the short, enjoyable and provocative cabaret turn was framed as the default form, DHSS participants were supported in multiple ways of ‘doing Duckie’, including longer performance lectures and durational installations. Whitelaw told me that he understood Duckie’s interests not to be located in the replication of specific forms or sensibilities: ‘I don’t think it wants to create a specific voice for itself. I think it wants to create a network of voices – a way of looking at the world that challenges itself rather than is self-congratulatory’.<sup>107</sup> This matched many participants’ experiences. YO suggested ‘it was more us producing the natural Duckie flavour than it being implemented in us’ while HD found it ‘a space of inspiration, a catalyst to start something’ rather than imitate existing forms.<sup>108</sup>

DHSS also afforded opportunities for the older or more experienced to learn from the younger or less experienced. In 2015, several participants perceived their cohort as able to support Duckie’s core sensibility in becoming, in PH’s words, less ‘male dominated [and] white dominated’ through attracting broader audiences and suggesting links to more artists and producers ‘who are not white cis gay men’; YO thought this ‘would be a good disruption’ even if it might ‘be hard for the people who are already in that community’.<sup>109</sup> Duckie has indeed pursued such a direction since then and employed YO as producer on some related projects. During the 2016 course, participants informed Martinez about Ballroom community slang, the definition of ‘cisgender’ and the uses of content notes and trigger warnings.<sup>110</sup> Martinez welcomed such new perspectives, saying some aspects ‘never occurred to me [...] I maybe have to sit with that for a bit. This is a new culture

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<sup>106</sup> Group interview, 8 July 2015.

<sup>107</sup> Whitelaw interview, 25 June 2015.

<sup>108</sup> Group interview, 8 July 2015.

<sup>109</sup> Group interview, 8 July 2015.

<sup>110</sup> Field notes, 20 June 2016; post-show discussion, 10 July 2016.

and I'm old-fashioned'.<sup>111</sup> There's a sense here of the critical reflexivity central to my understanding of queer. Participants also perceived a need for intergenerational transmission in broader queer performance contexts to be reciprocal and accountable. CN reported being alarmed to apprehend in her wider experience of the London scene 'a huge level of misogyny from older gay men toward women [and] a big problem with biphobia from both lesbian and gay communities'.<sup>112</sup> HU said: 'We need to listen to the experiences of older queer people and they need to listen to us and we can both grow from this exchange. A resounding memory from DHSS is restating, to older members of the group, the importance of using the correct pronouns.'<sup>113</sup> CY noted the capacity of empathetic intergenerational exchange 'to strengthen solidarity and understanding of how ideas of "queerness" change generationally'.<sup>114</sup>

DHSS, then, operated as a family structure invested in intergenerational transmission in several ways. These included drawing attention to instructive institutional and performance lineages, but without mandating imitative reproduction, and enabling reciprocal forms of learning across perceived generational distance. DHSS also fostered contact between younger or less experienced and older or more experienced queer performance practitioners, though not always enough to satisfy the huge appetite for such contact expressed by participants in recognition of its potential mutual benefits in terms of queer understanding, respect, empathy, welfare, resilience and hope.

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<sup>111</sup> Post-show discussion, 10 July 2016.

<sup>112</sup> CN, 2017 survey.

<sup>113</sup> HU, 2017 survey.

<sup>114</sup> CY, 2017 survey.

### DHSS and fun

DHSS, then, supported participants as queer children and through structures of queer family. As noted in Chapter Three, family and childhood are established sites of fun in dominant contemporary understandings; the sociologist Ben Fincham has noted the particular prevalence of associations of fun with childhood in contexts of bonding, learning and the outdoors.<sup>115</sup> Such normative associations do not correspond to all lived experiences, particularly for marginalised subjects. But the nexus of childhood, family, bonding, learning and the outdoors turns out to be useful in illuminating the capacity of DHSS to mobilise fun in the service of reproductive queer futurity.

Participants, I will show, overwhelmingly experienced DHSS as a site of fun. Expectations of fun motivated some applications and, when participants were asked to self-select words to describe their experience of DHSS, 'fun' was the most popular.<sup>116</sup> When asked how much fun it had been on a scale of one to five (five being the most), the average score was 4.4.<sup>117</sup> I argued in Chapter Three that fun depends on the perception that the stakes of a situation are low. This was achieved at DHSS through the distinctive set of circumstances outlined above, combining aspects of material and moral support, the encouragement of experiment and minimal formal obligations or accountable expectations. 'There's an invitation from us to fuck up big rather than succeed small,' as Whitelaw put it on the first day of DHSS 2015.<sup>118</sup> Eton echoed this on the first day of DHSS 2016, saying 'it's about you experimenting and failing if you want to [...] It's about starting something'.<sup>119</sup> According to EA, the project's pervasive 'sense of fun was made easier, quite substantially', by the bursary payment's lowering of the stakes of participation

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<sup>115</sup> *The Sociology of Fun* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016), pp. 75-77, 15, 47, 70.

<sup>116</sup> CH, QN, pre-2016 survey; 2017 survey.

<sup>117</sup> 2017 survey.

<sup>118</sup> Field notes, 22 June 2015.

<sup>119</sup> Field notes, 20 June 2016.

by offsetting living expenses and associated anxieties that can 'affect quality of life and contribute to feeling mentally and emotionally drained' as a young queer performer.<sup>120</sup> Still, some participants experienced pressure around perceived expectations – their own, Duckie producers', audiences' or others' – and some forms of accountability were imposed. When a pattern emerged in 2016 of absence without apology from workshop or rehearsal slots, Eton gave the group a dressing-down on the pragmatic rather than moralistic basis that performers with reputations for poor timekeeping got fewer bookings.<sup>121</sup> Overall, such pressures were still lighter than comparable contexts such as commercial shows or university performances.

I argued in Chapter Three that fun can function as a technology, enabling consequential intervention in existing structures of understanding, agency and relationality. Fun found multiple technological applications at DHSS, including the facilitation of learning, the generation of artistic output and the affirmation of group identity. Sociological research has repeatedly affirmed fun as, in Fincham's words, 'an important pedagogical tool', albeit one that tends to be phased out of institutional educational practices after early childhood.<sup>122</sup> At DHSS, fun was integral to the environment in which artistic and vocational skills were taught: workshops, rehearsals and showings abounded with laughter, experiment, discovery and harmonious provocations. Whitelaw suggested fun was crucial to both learning and creative expression because it is 'about finding new ways to do things, new ways to solve problems, new ways to meet problems, new ways to create art'.<sup>123</sup> This affirms scholarly research linking experiences of fun to forms of collaborative investigation and discovery, and also with anecdotal evidence from Duckie's

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<sup>120</sup> EA, 2017 survey.

<sup>121</sup> Field notes, 28 June 2016.

<sup>122</sup> Fincham, pp. 47, 92.

<sup>123</sup> Whitelaw interview, 25 June 2015.

own company history.<sup>124</sup> Martinez, for example, told DHSS participants how her signature ‘hanky act’ had been conceived on the spur of the moment as a way of entertaining founding Duckie members Casson, Christopher Green and Marisa Carnesky at a drunken party, while Duckie’s *Class Club* (2006), in which rival Christmas dinner parties faced off on the basis of social class, originated as a high-concept dinner party held by Martinez and friends.<sup>125</sup>

DHSS participants testified to the value of fun as a technology for artistic generation. ‘When I am having fun I am in the moment,’ said CN, ‘having complicity with those around me. I feel like a child playing again and that is when I am at my most creative and hardworking.’<sup>126</sup> (Indeed, fun was a preoccupation of CN’s persona, the Matron, albeit with a hypernormative emphasis on safety, cleanliness and punctuality.) The group dance created in honour of Eton’s birthday, mentioned above, offers an example of performance motivated by fun that later found vocational application. This also applies to ‘Um’, the turn made by EA at DHSS, a lip sync set to Touch and Go’s exuberantly flirtatious song ‘Would You...?’, during which the performer appears to cruise an online hookup app, locate a prospective partner in the audience, invite them on stage for a lap dance, including EA’s stripping naked, and then ficklely dismiss them.<sup>127</sup> EA reported that the piece’s creation was motivated by the desire ‘to have fun and entertain audiences’ yet it turned out to be their most successful work in many ways: it was the only DHSS piece programmed in its own right in Duckie’s main show at Latitude and became EA’s most-booked, award-winning, internationally presented act; it also turned out to resonate deeply with audience members who told EA

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<sup>124</sup> See, for instance, Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi, *Creativity: Flow and the Psychology of Discovery and Invention* (New York: Harper Perennial, 1996); Michael P. Farrell, *Collaborative Circles. Friendship Dynamics and Creative Work* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2001).

<sup>125</sup> Field notes, 20 June 2016.

<sup>126</sup> CH, 2017 survey.

<sup>127</sup> David Lowe, ‘Would You...?’, Touch and Go, (V2, 1998).

it evoked their own ambivalent, sometimes absurd feelings around sexual expression, confidence and indecision, particularly in the context of the particular version of 'fun' associated with hookup apps; and this in turn helped EA see how the piece's engagement with fun expressed more of their own ambivalence about the issue than they had realised.<sup>128</sup>

The fun of DHSS also technologically enabled group bonding for participants, an aspect of fun well attended to in sociology. Gary Alan Fine and Ugo Corte note fun's promotion of 'communal identification' and commitment through emotionally engaging moments characterised by 'building affiliation, modeling positive relations, and moderating interpersonal tension'; they conclude that 'fun builds collective intimacy', especially when supported by '[h]edonic interaction, including group joking' and 'public expressions of pleasure'.<sup>129</sup> DHSS had this in spades, in particular the trips to Latitude, which marked a watershed for many participants in terms of collective fun at DHSS: RV noted that 'it was only at Latitude that we started to create a lot of fun together'.<sup>130</sup> During the festival, participants enjoyed an extended period together during which, having finished creating their acts, they faced few logistical obligations. They could hang out, explore the festival, get drunk or high, have sex, play games of dare that sent them running through the camp naked shouting 'dildo' or paint their nails while discussing first drag experiences.<sup>131</sup> Asked to describe their DHSS experience for the online survey, LD conjured a cavalcade of fun:

Performing! Watching the others perform! Running around chelsea with the other DHSSers! Going to the supermarket in our costumes and getting Looks, dancing with no top on for the first time in my whole life after we performed, making grindr profiles to make people come to our performances at latitude, dancing, dancing, dancing,

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<sup>128</sup> EA, 2017 survey.

<sup>129</sup> 'Group Pleasures: Collaborative Commitments, Shared Narrative, and the Sociology of Fun', *Sociological Theory* 35.1 (2017), 64–86, pp. 64, 73–74.

<sup>130</sup> RV, post-2015 survey; also YO in group interview, 18 July 2015.

<sup>131</sup> Field notes, 15 July 2016, 18 July 2015.

doing each other's makeup, washing [LW]'s hair with facewash in the showers at duckie, falling in love with literally everyone [original orthography].

This litany combines many of the potent aspects of DHSS fun: the imbrication of pleasure with vocation, the witnessing of others' development, communal public queerness (sometimes in the face of normative scepticism or 'Looks'), exuberant embodied expression (sometimes involving nudity, experiment and discovery), inventive engagement with a wider queer public, offering and receiving care and feeling a euphoric sense of collectivity. This fun powerfully anticipated, rehearsed and started to materialise a better world.

DHSS, then, brought out not only the technological but also the performative power of fun, articulated in Chapter Three as the capacity to bring into being new structures of feeling, understanding, relating and acting. This was most noticeable at Latitude, where the Suffolk woodland became a site of world-making. There was something punningly pastoral about the festival experience in its provision of both shepherdly care and bucolic environs. The countryside setting brought to mind the queer potential of the woods as a world apart, redolent of carefree fecundity in a way that has been mobilised by the Radical Faeries' cultivation of forest getaways and Christeene's rhetorical use of 'the woods' to connote freedom from normative pressures (the latter adding resonance to the emergence from a dappled grove of PF's new persona Cricket Bat, supposedly Christeene's offspring).<sup>132</sup> DHSS's 'riotous forest commune', as QN described it, served as a platform for lighthearted fun – fun as reverie and repose – suggestive of Brainard's pansies or Warhol's clouds (mentioned in Chapter Three) and conducive to the kind of hope that, in Muñoz's words, 'helps one surpass the limitations of an

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<sup>132</sup> See 'About', *Radfae A Website for Radical Faeries* <<https://www.radfae.org/about>> [accessed 16 August 2018] and Chitra Ramaswamy, 'Christeene: "I Came Up from the Dirt"', *Scotsman*, 8 August 2014 <<http://www.wow247.co.uk/2014/08/08/christeene-i-came-up-from-the-dirt/>> [accessed 16 August 2018].



alienating presentness and allows one to see a different time and place'.<sup>133</sup> Participants spoke of Latitude in transformative terms: for EA, it was 'probably one of the best weekends of my life'; for QN, it was 'one of the most fun experiences of my life, it was so great to feel like I was in a big queer gang'; and for RJ it was 'life changing [...] Without this group, I wouldn't be able to have this unreserved fun, just indulging in the queerness of [...] a totally accepting group' in a way that prompted them to 'now use fun and joy as the driving force of my work'.<sup>134</sup> CH, meanwhile, related their belief that being, performing and having fun with the DHSS group, during and subsequent to the course, positively affected their mental health.<sup>135</sup>

DHSS fun was not without problems. Participants mentioned perceptions that the experience of Latitude could be 'super intense' and perhaps overwhelming, that some members of the group formed preferential cliques and that social anxiety mitigated enjoyment of the event.<sup>136</sup> CN reported that

the social aspects at Latitude in particular actually made me incredible stressed and anxious - and I felt slightly separated from the group as I am not a big drinker/drug taker - so I found it hard to relate and have the same 'fun' 'festival experience' that they were all having. HOWEVER, I enjoyed working with everyone the most when we were 'in the zone' - getting ready for our performances and helping eachother prepare - also giving eachother constructive feedback. That was when I had the most fun - when we felt like a theatre troupe [original spelling and orthography].

This illustrated an instance when subjective difference over what constitutes fun sometimes left one member of the group feeling isolated and excluded; yet they simultaneously articulate experiencing other DHSS activities as rewarding, generative fun. Some participants were also dismissive of or dismayed by aspects of Latitude, including high travel and entry costs that limited its access on commercial grounds (although not in this case to DHSS participants themselves), prohibitively expensive food stalls and culturally

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<sup>133</sup> QN, 2017 survey; Muñoz, p. 5.

<sup>134</sup> EA, QN, RJ, 2017 survey.

<sup>135</sup> CH, 2017 survey.

<sup>136</sup> Group interview, 9 July 2016; PH, PB, 2017 survey.

appropriative merchandising outlets.<sup>137</sup> In such cases, clashes between DHSS participants' and other festivalgoers' ideas of fun illuminated fault lines around what does and does not deserve to be taken seriously.

Where the online survey asked whether respondents believed that fun mattered, 17 of the 20 respondents replied yes, one replied 'probably', one 'not sure' and one 'no'. This last (anonymous) respondent offered the only categorically sceptical view of fun I know of from the DHSS experience: 'Having fun is an option – but it shouldn't be the driving force of life. Duckie is an entertainment enterprise [...] which doesn't want to rock the boat' but rather to serve a 'clientele, who is mostly out to have fun'.<sup>138</sup> The response is notable for combining aspects of two positions mentioned in Chapter Three: it participates in the normative trivialisation of fun through the construction of fun as not a 'driving force' (so presumably an escape or distraction) associated with mere entertainment; and it participates in the radical critique of fun as incompatible with substantive change (or rocking the boat), as noted in relation to the Gay Liberation Front. There's no space here for fun as disruptive agency. Of the 17 who did think fun matters, some acknowledged the radical critique. HU wrote that 'I worry sometimes that queers in my generation do reject certain kinds of queer fun as counter-revolutionary. It's complicated, but I think we need to try and maintain a sense of humour'.<sup>139</sup> PH suggested that 'the queer scene can be too dour and proper [...] Sometimes I feel guilty for moving away from "real activism" [...] but then I think, what's the "real activism" for if you aren't fighting to preserve fun and enjoyment of life, and to make fun more possible for more people more of the time?'<sup>140</sup> Such views defend fun as an important aspect of life

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<sup>137</sup> Field notes, 15 July 2016.

<sup>138</sup> ZZ, 2017 survey.

<sup>139</sup> HU, 2017 survey.

<sup>140</sup> PH, 2017 survey.

worthy of celebration and defence without specifically arguing for its generative agency.

Others also expressed appreciation of fun as a form of relief in the context of the lives of ‘people whose existence is already marginalised and stressful’, the ‘hard work’ of performance practice or the pressures placed on young people to be ‘the future’ (a noteworthy articulation of how rhetorics of futurity that frame ‘children’ as salvific can be perceived as burdensome).<sup>141</sup> There were also senses of technological benefits of fun to incentivise engagement with queer politics and culture (HL: ‘if it’s not fun people won’t want to do it’) and bolster collective power (CY: fun ‘helps strengthen a community and also the creative process [...] it creates a safe space where we can celebrate each other’s difference and queerness’).<sup>142</sup> And for some, fun was an integral aspect of queer experience, understanding and identity. ‘Queer is fun! Ludic expression is such a big part of queer lives,’ RV suggested.<sup>143</sup> HU suggested: ‘Much of our collective communal identity is built on fun – on having it, or dragging it into situations where there tends not to be any. [Performance artist] Jack Smith said you can be a pasty normal, or a flaming creature. Queer fun is the beating heart of flaming creatures.’<sup>144</sup> And PH maintains that ‘insisting that fun matters, that a good time and a knees-up is important, is pretty invaluable’.<sup>145</sup>

As a site of fun, then, DHSS provided a low-stakes situation that encouraged experimentation enabling learning, constructive collaboration, group bonding on queer terms and the generation of critically and vocationally successful creative ideas with emotional resonance for artists and audiences. Fun also acted performatively, materialising new worlds of queer

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<sup>141</sup> HL, RO, LW, 2017 survey.

<sup>142</sup> HL, CY, 2017 survey.

<sup>143</sup> RV, 2017 survey.

<sup>144</sup> HU, 2017 survey.

<sup>145</sup> PH, 2017 survey.

subjectivity and imagination associated with positive changes to participants' confidence, creativity and mental health. DHSS provided a space where different kinds of fun could be experienced to different degrees and where participants could engage fun critically in multiple ways.

### **DHSS as homemade mutant hope machine**

I argued in Chapter One that reproductive queer futurity is well served by homemade mutant hope machines that emerge from lived experience, generate hope routinely and operate relatively autonomously and adaptively. DHSS operated as a powerful homemade mutant hope machine, enabling the development of supportively imbricated forms of understanding, identity, relationality and creative and vocational practice, which in turn made better worlds more conceivable, realisable, sustainable and, I will show, reproducible. In straightforwardly concrete ways, DHSS supported participants as emerging queer performers by equipping them with turns that could be put to further vocational use, in ways noted earlier in this chapter and as part of other productions, such as *The Prime of Ms David Hoyle*, which I produced at Chelsea Theatre in 2015 and 2016, programming the majority of DHSS participants as guest performers alongside Hoyle.<sup>146</sup> Other directly stage-related outcomes included CN launching a new comedy night as their DHSS persona the Matron and becoming a member of Equity's LGBT+ committee to promote queer interests.<sup>147</sup> As mentioned, 22 of 27 participants have continued working with Duckie.

Notwithstanding such direct vocational applications, there was a pervasive sense among participants that distinctions between vocational and

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<sup>146</sup> *The Prime of Ms David Hoyle*, conceived by Ben Walters, devised and performed by David Hoyle, Thom Shaw and Ben Walters with guest performers (Chelsea Theatre, London, 20-21 November 2015 and 14-25 September 2016).

<sup>147</sup> CN, 2017 survey.

personal lives were ambiguous or inapplicable in queer contexts: according to Duckie fundraiser Emmy Minton, who conducted a group interview with DHSS 2016 participants to gauge their sense of the project's value, 'they vacillated constantly between saying that making the art was the most important thing to saying the social bonding was the most important thing'.<sup>148</sup> This is unsurprising given that participants had deep personal attachments to their creative practice and often associated it with feelings of solitude or insecurity. According to DN, 'being looked after' by Duckie in making work and assured that 'your creativity is worth this much' was validating 'because it's really easy to get really isolated and feel really shit'.<sup>149</sup> HN suggested there were artistic benefits to the creation of 'a temporary collective in a field of work that's usually very much an isolated process'.<sup>150</sup> For HU, the DHSS structure 'made being an artist seem more achievable' while EA reported that it 'made me more determined to continue making work', an intention echoed by many.<sup>151</sup> It gave CH 'a completely different perspective of how you can make a creative career and lifestyle work. It helped me to relax a bit [...] It also made it so clear to me that I am trying to do exactly what I should be doing'.<sup>152</sup>

Others felt empowered by DHSS to queer their expressive forms and processes. RJ suggested 'I'm going to use my queerness as a performance resource as opposed to hiding it so that I can be "more castable". Now my career and creative practice will be inextricably linked to queerness'.<sup>153</sup> PS considered the experience a 'starting point for a transformative process [around] embracing different ways of thinking about gender and sexuality

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<sup>148</sup> Emmy Minton, correspondence with the author, 2 August 2016.

<sup>149</sup> Group interview, 18 July 2015.

<sup>150</sup> Group interview, 18 July 2015.

<sup>151</sup> HU, EA, 2017 survey; also PF post-2015 survey, RJ, QN, LD, 2017 survey.

<sup>152</sup> CH, 2017 survey.

<sup>153</sup> RJ, 2017 survey.

within a performance practice'.<sup>154</sup> And CN expressed a new understanding that 'my work can be fluid and I can exist and have a right to exist in a variety of performance spaces'.<sup>155</sup> These emerging kinds of confidence also found expression in the formation of creative collaborations at DHSS that outlasted the project.<sup>156</sup> 'I met people on this course that I now call close friends but are also integral to my creative circles', noted PB, who had produced shows in which other DHSS participants performed and made further vocational connections, making the DHSS experience 'invaluable as a networking platform in more ways than I can say'.<sup>157</sup> CH echoed this, saying 'I met people on DHSS who I am sure I will know for the rest of my life. We have formed a company together and are making work regularly.'<sup>158</sup> This is *Queerlective*, a troupe formed by eight DHSS 2016 participants in the weeks following the scheme that has performed at Duckie on Saturday nights and produced its own occasional events.<sup>159</sup>

Beyond concrete vocationally-related outcomes, DHSS generated hope in the possibility of livable queer futures at personal and civic levels, not only as work but as a way of life. More than the possibility, it materialised such worlds: RV noted how the process of creating and delivering work to an audience made lived queer performance practice 'a real thing'.<sup>160</sup> Asked in the 2017 survey to rate out of five the impact DHSS had on how participants think about the future, the average score was four, with eight out of 20 respondents giving a rating of five (marked as a transformative impact). Simply articulating hopes and dreams of how the future might be, as 2016 participants were encouraged to do during an early workshop, can feel heartening, even radical:

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<sup>154</sup> PS, 2017 survey.

<sup>155</sup> CN, 2017 survey.

<sup>156</sup> HD, RV, post-2015 survey, HU, CY, CN, 2017 survey.

<sup>157</sup> PB, 2017 survey.

<sup>158</sup> CH, 2017 survey.

<sup>159</sup> Performing on Saturday night on 10 June 2017, for instance.

<sup>160</sup> Group interview, 18 July 2015.

for IL, 'that was really nice because you don't do that often'.<sup>161</sup> PB, who has worked regularly with Duckie since DHSS, said the process 'helped to give me a future [...] I've stumbled into what I am meant to do. I spent my later adolescence worried about what my future holds and now don't think about it that much because I'm too busy enjoying living'.<sup>162</sup> CY said that after DHSS 'I felt more brave' and 'more easily able to embrace and celebrate my queerness', and 'now couldn't imagine a future without those people' they met there.<sup>163</sup> QN too felt 'more validated in my own identity' while LD reported that 'because it made me realise that I need a queer community, it has massively changed my view of the future, and having that community meant that I could come out as trans which obviously changes things, if that's not transformative I don't know what is!'<sup>164</sup> Even the one survey respondent left cold by the DHSS experience found it helpful in shaping their understanding of the multiplicity and contingency of queer sensibilities: 'It made me realise that queerness is not a word that encompasses one particular thing or way of existing, but multiple ways. Duckie has its own preferences and ways of conducting business, but it wasn't for me'.<sup>165</sup>

For those who did like Duckie, its structures offered concrete senses of an accessible queer lineage. JL, who participated in the 2014 summer school and has worked regularly with the company ever since, told me: 'It makes you think about so many different people that have worked with Duckie and you think, "Well, actually, in about five years time, I could be working with all sorts of organisations and still come back a Saturday night here and there and do a Duckie gig".' A sense of supportive nourishment here is expressed through understanding of Duckie as provider of an inspirational past, a plausibly

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<sup>161</sup> Group interview, 9 July 2016.

<sup>162</sup> PB, 2017 survey.

<sup>163</sup> CY, 2017 survey.

<sup>164</sup> QN, LD, 2017 survey (original orthography).

<sup>165</sup> ZZ, 2017 survey.

conceivable future and a reassuring ongoing present redolent of the comforts of home. A sense of futurity, as well as the project's efficacy as a homemade mutant hope machine, was also conveyed by DHSS participants' confidence in the reproducibility of its effects. Some expressed this by participating more than once (one in 2014 and 2015, another in 2014 and 2016, another in 2015 and 2016 and another in 2014 and 2015 and then as a facilitator in 2016). Others expressed it verbally. 'It was a totally wonderful experience that changed my life that I hope will be available for many queers to come,' said CH.<sup>166</sup> PF voiced a desire for the project 'to expand, to be global. There should be one in Glasgow, one in Manchester, to give it more opportunities'.<sup>167</sup> And others expressed willingness to take on the work of replicating the project themselves, suggesting that each year's cohort could mentor the next group.<sup>168</sup>

As a homemade mutant hope machine, then, DHSS made a sustained queer performance practice seem more conceivable through the provision of concrete vocational opportunities, creative validation and affective support. It was homemade in the sense of emerging from Duckie's producers' lived experience and operating relatively autonomously, thanks in this case to pre-existing funding. It was mutant in the sense of adapting its forms from predecessors such as Duckie Upstarts and the *Happy Birthday RVT* summer school. And it routinely generated hope by materialising and naturalising non-normative forms of subjectivity, expression and relationality in ways that made living queer lives seem more conceivable. To some, DHSS made a sustainable, desirable and rewarding queer future seem not only possible but already underway; they also understood the DHSS model to be

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<sup>166</sup> CH, 2017 survey.

<sup>167</sup> PF, group interview 18 July 2015.

<sup>168</sup> Minton correspondence, 2 August 2016.



reproducible across time and space and were willing to undertake labour to realise that reproduction.

### **DHSS mutates**

In the event, DHSS would not be directly reproduced. Instead, it mutated. In response primarily to reservations around the demographics of its participants, Duckie producers decided to recalibrate the youth training programme to a different format, a more pastorally oriented, rolling once-weekly scheme that more directly addressed over a longer period the needs of young working-class queers. 'I wanted the service to be tailored to working-class youngsters, not to posh youngsters and arts grads,' Casson told me; DHSS, he felt, 'reinforced the status quo in terms of giving educated people opportunities in things they were interested in'.<sup>169</sup> Because DHSS had been funded from Duckie's ACE NPO block grant, producers were able to act autonomously to shift its operative terms. Having secured supplementary funding for this new direction from multiple streams, Duckie advertised for a coordinator and hired senior youth worker Aakash Bharania, who proposed catering specifically to young working-class queer, trans and intersex people of colour (QTIPOC).<sup>170</sup> Casson and Eton welcomed the idea. The result was Duckie QTIPOC Collective, which began working with 20 participants for 25 successive Monday nights in Hackney from 5 March 2018 with the stated aim of building 'creativity, resilience and confidence' in those taking part.<sup>171</sup> The creative directors were Duckie collaborators Azara Meghie and Lasana Shabazz; Meghie had been a participant in DHSS, materialising the idea that participants could reproduce the knowledge acquired on the scheme.

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<sup>169</sup> Casson and Eton interview, 9 September 2018.

<sup>170</sup> Eton interview, 11 September 2018.

<sup>171</sup> 'Duckie QTIPOC Collective', *Duckie* <<http://www.duckie.co.uk/events/duckie-qtipoc-collective>> [accessed 16 August 2018].

QTIPOC Collective consciously centred collaborative working and collective decision making and intended to address needs around minority underrepresentation in the arts, pragmatic vocational training, personal development, community building and 'art as an instrument for social and political change'.<sup>172</sup> In Casson's words, 'DHSS was really driven by performance talent and this has a much wider agenda'.<sup>173</sup> Unlike DHSS, no performance experience was required and applications were less formally restrictive and not competitive; a bursary was not given but participation remained free, food was provided and travel contributions were available to enable attendance. No specific outcomes, such as showcases, were scheduled before the project began but the Collective successfully presented a half-hour showcase at Latitude in July 2018 and a longer showcase at Rich Mix, east London, on 10 August 2018.

The shift from DHSS to QTIPOC Collective demonstrates the self-criticality, reflexivity, engagement with lived experience and capacity for autonomous agency and adaptation characteristic of homemade mutant hope machines. The result has been a new project that adaptively mobilises queer technologies of expression, relationality and agency inherited from DHSS (and elsewhere) to engage some of London's most disadvantaged queers in a project of world-making on their own terms. The material contingencies of the project (including its timing) precluded my ability to engage with it more substantively as part of this research but it seems to offer an excellent example of how an established organisation with access to means can direct its attention toward supporting particularly disadvantaged queers without expectations of imitation or repayment. At the same time, I want to tease out some of the complexities of how this shift happened to highlight opportunities

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<sup>172</sup> 'Duckie QTIPOC Collective'.

<sup>173</sup> Casson and Eton interview, 9 September 2018.

for understanding that risk being obscured by Duckie producers' conclusion that DHSS regressively 'reinforced the status quo'.

The shift from DHSS to QTIPOC Collective constitutes a strikingly queer disavowal of the investment in identity across time that characterises heteronormative reproductive futurism. To privileged subjects, challenges to this investment can feel disturbing or even seem like attack. Stockton proposes the notion of the 'reversed birth' in the context of cultural texts in which purportedly permissive privileged white parents find their self-conceptions challenged by black 'child-intruders' who reveal 'the limits of who these liberals say they [are]': Sidney Poitier's character in *Guess Who's Coming to Dinner?*, for instance, 'gives birth' to Katharine Hepburn and Spencer Tracy's characters as the inclusive intellectuals they have long presented as but only now prove themselves to be.<sup>174</sup> In describing Poitier's character type as 'the child queered by color', Stockton frames constitutively awkward adults as 'children' in a way that anticipates my figure of the queer child.<sup>175</sup> The structures of DHSS prompted in Duckie's producers a comparable impetus to 'reflect upon their ethics of inclusion', in Stockton's phrase, but rather than the conspicuous presence of the Other, Duckie's paroxysm resulted from their conspicuous absence.<sup>176</sup> 'All these youngsters are like us, really, only they're a little bit posher,' Casson told me shortly after DHSS 2016. 'But actually I wonder is that what Duckie should be doing – making more versions of me and Dicky and Ursula?'<sup>177</sup> Educational structures often valorise resemblance across generations: the cliché of the old school tie handed from father to son speaks to such expectations of continuity in conditions of privilege but they

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<sup>174</sup> Stockton, p. 184-192, *Guess Who's Coming to Dinner?*, dir. by Stanley Kramer (Columbia Pictures, 1967).

<sup>175</sup> Stockton, p. 192.

<sup>176</sup> Stockton, p. 192.

<sup>177</sup> Simon Casson and Dicky Eton, interview with the author, 20 August 2016.

can also apply in ostensibly queer contexts. Here, for instance, is Ballroom house father K-C Prestige describing his relation to his house children:

I say, be me but be you. Or we'll say it like this, still be yourself, but try to act like me. I want to be able to look at my child and be like, that's my child.<sup>178</sup>

There is a strong investment here in an evident sameness of identity: this aspect of parenting, even in a queer subcultural context, is predicated on discernible attributes of heredity, imitation and resemblance. This specific aspect of K-C Prestige's Ballroom family practice is closer to *reproductive futurism* than to *reproductive queer futurity*. Casson's disavowal of DHSS on the grounds of such sameness consciously resists the narcissism of hereditary norms, exemplifying reproductive queer futurity's tradition of challenging tradition. Yet, I argue, this position also risks becoming a dogma of its own, inimical to nuance in ways that might hamper rather than serve reproductive queer futurity.

Classed experience can significantly compound marginalisation related to sexual and gender experiences, even for populations ostensibly privileged within queer contexts such as gay men. Brian Heaphy argues that working class lives are often 'judged as lacking' in gay contexts while homosexuality often yields '[e]xclusion from the positive content of working-class identities', potentially rendering working-class queers doubly abject.<sup>179</sup> To neglect class when considering queer representation and agency, then, risks being regressive. Casson's class-based critique of DHSS rested on participants' having almost all been university educated, therefore being middle class ('the act of going to university is a transformational process,' he has said, 'you kind of become middle class') and therefore already having access to 'opportunities in things they were interested in', rendering the DHSS

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<sup>178</sup> K-C Prestige quoted in Marlon M. Bailey, *Butch Queens Up in Pumps: Gender, Performance and Ballroom Culture in Detroit* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2013), p. 114.

<sup>179</sup> 'Gay identities and the culture of class', *Sexualities*, 14.1 (2011), 42–62, pp. 47, 58.

experience ultimately little more than ‘a fun time all in a gang together’ compatible with how ‘the meritocratic privileged neoliberal world works’.<sup>180</sup> I want to trouble the assumptions underlying each part of this critique. First, Casson proposes that *almost all DHSS participants were university educated*. This was true but, I suggest, related more to supporting contingencies of the project – such as advertising within educational institutions and scheduling immediately after the academic year – than to the nature of DHSS’s core work, and could be addressed by broader outreach strategies. Second, *university attendance renders subjects middle class*. Definitions of social class are always variable and contingent but not all queer subjects agree with Casson. Heaphy quotes subjects asserting that university education does not qualify or negate their working-class identity.<sup>181</sup> Within DHSS, working-class participants of colour argued in response to Casson’s critique that ‘the working class now is going to be quite trained and quite educated’ and its members often ‘more knowledgeable and political’ than Casson thinks or might ‘seem like they’re middle class but they’re not’.<sup>182</sup> Third, *young middle-class people have access to fulfilling opportunities for queer self-expression and agency elsewhere*. Some participants who identified as middle-class were ‘made to feel sometimes that we’re not the people [Casson] wants to be reaching out to’, in CH’s words, while also experiencing DHSS as ‘a totally wonderful experience that changed my life’.<sup>183</sup> Other middle-class graduates described DHSS as ‘a profound education [that] changed my life significantly’, ‘one of the best things I’ve ever done’ and ‘fucking fantastic. Really life-changing’.<sup>184</sup> They did not know of comparable available opportunities. Finally, ‘a fun time

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<sup>180</sup> Simon Casson, interview with the author at Quorum, Queen Mary University of London, 7 October 2015; Casson and Eton interview, 9 September 2018; Casson and Eton interview, 20 July 2016.

<sup>181</sup> Heaphy, p. 50.

<sup>182</sup> Group interview, 9 July 2016.

<sup>183</sup> Group interview, 9 July 2016; CH, 2017 survey.

<sup>184</sup> RJ, FT, PH, 2017 survey.

*in a gang all together' is a trivial thing and the fun had at DHSS was aligned with neoliberal values.* I hope my grounds for querying these assumptions are, by now, evident.

I offer this critique of Casson's critique not to challenge the mutation of DHSS into QTIPOC Collective: as noted above, it represents a welcome attempt to address queerly the needs of multiply marginalised queer subjects, and it supports the argument of this thesis by handily illustrating the emergent, adaptive and autonomous operation of a homemade mutant hope machine. It also shows Duckie producers' avoidance of the uncritical reproduction of sameness either in terms of their own subjectivities or the collective's chosen forms. I want rather to point out that DHSS demonstrates how participatory performance projects structured around queer understandings of family and fun can support reproductive queer futurity by materialising better worlds for both working-class and middle-class queers (however the distinction is understood). This highlights that normative culture and society cannot meet the needs even of relatively privileged queer subjects, resulting in their disaffection with existing structures and openness to change. To ignore or trivialise this is to neglect the potential power of reproductive queer futurity to contribute to progressive civic change. Reproducing the normative trivialisation of fun or assuming that fun had by middle-class people must be neoliberally aligned also risks such neglect.

### **Conclusion**

DHSS was a participatory performance project that functioned as a circuit of queer belonging that materialised a better world in the present and supported hope in the future. As a family structure, it offered its queer children non-normative forms of guidance and support, enabling new kinds of understanding, expression, relationality and agency. It gave material

support through the provision of funds, resources and vocational training and opportunities with minimal accountability. Through intergenerational transmission, it foregrounded generative lineages and enabled reciprocal contact and learning that fortified understandings of queer persistence. Through fun, it enabled learning, collaboration, group cohesion and the generation of expressively rewarding and vocationally successful performance work. Fun helped performatively materialise new worlds marked by enhanced confidence, creativity and mental health. It was also able to sustain challenges around, for instance, conflict, exclusion or frustrated expectations. DHSS, then, was an effective homemade mutant hope machine that supported reproductive queer futurity by making a life of performance practice conceivable and realisable for its participants, fortifying the broader project of queer performance culture and itself proving amenable to both successful reproduction year on year and productive mutation to address different conditions of marginalisation. Perhaps the most potent aspect of DHSS was its location of its participants within queer lineages of which they were active members. In participants' words, this affirmed their 'right to exist', made sustainable queer performance practice 'a real thing' and 'helped to give [them] a future'. This was not a phase. DHSS helped materialise better worlds by supporting queer claims to the future. The next chapter shows how better worlds can be materialised by staking a claim to the past, through another of Duckie's participatory performance projects: the 'vintage clubbing' cycle.

## Chapter Five

### Doing the past queerly at the 'vintage clubbing' cycle

#### Introduction

In the wood-panelled library, Madame R. Sélavy sat, poised and erect, at a large wooden table. Her hands were splayed, palms lifted, fingers rooted to the tabletop. Strings and encrustations of beads and pearls cascaded from her wrists and neck, hiding and revealing themselves in the sheer flowing layers of her dark ensemble. Her chin jutted out imperiously, balanced by the voluminous black coif that circled her head, offset by a jeweled band across her brow. Her face was alabaster, her lips vermilion, her moustache vigorous. She cast her eyes around the table, enjoined the couple of dozen of us sat around it to link hands and began our communion with the dead. The spirits were quick. Here, speaking through madame, was Minnie – queer, Jewish, communist, arsonist – bringing reassurances from the 1930s that, grave as things might seem, every authoritarian edifice eventually crumbles or burns, and interventions that seem modest can prove decisive. It was fortifying to hear Minnie's dead vigilante words as I held a stranger's warm fingers in my own.

Critics Elizabeth Freeman and Stephen Farrier have proposed that drag can offer contact with the dead, accessing past subjectivities by reanimating historic looks, affects and expressions and synchronising dead voices with living lips.<sup>1</sup> Madame Sélavy – created and performed by Neil Bartlett as part of Duckie's participatory performance event *Lady Malcolm's Servants' Ball* (2016)

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<sup>1</sup> See Freeman, *Time Binds: Queer Temporalities, Queer Histories* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2010), p. xxi, and Farrier, 'That Lip-Syncing Feeling: Drag Performance as Digging the Past', in *Queer Dramaturgies: International Perspectives on where Performance Leads Queer*, ed. by Alyson Campbell and Stephen Farrier (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016), ebook, 535.0-585.0/984.



– literalised the idea of drag as séance but with a difference.<sup>2</sup> Bartlett did not seek to bring back a specific historic individual performer – or indeed activist, for Minnie was an invention – but rather to channel a cluster of lineages that might find renewed queer use in the present. These included the séance itself, a site of witchy, campy, domestic and unaccountably embodied female power; the Dadaist provocations suggested by the cooption of the name of Marcel Duchamp’s drag persona, Rose Sélavy; and the political agitation of mid-century working class British Jewish Communism. These were imbricated with the main theme of the night, the reanimation of the fancy-dress balls that Lady Jeanne Malcolm mounted for the benefit of domestic staff between 1923 and 1938, which became sites of scandalous queer socialising.<sup>3</sup> Madame Sélavy queered the past, bringing it into the present not as relic or warning but as a live site of magic, art, politics, violence and fun, inviting and inciting disruptive agency and upheaval. ‘Matches is cheap, dear,’ she reminded us with a glint.

Queer futurity is utopian in its insistence on imagining a collective futurity that is richer and more rewarding than what is available to marginalised individual subjects today.<sup>4</sup> This insistence, José Esteban Muñoz argues, constitutes a future-oriented ‘historical materialist critique’ of the present rooted in exposing the contingencies of current constraints and the utopic potentiality of actual queer experience in other times and places; this more capacious perspective enables resistance of the normative pressure that ‘makes queers think that both the past and the future do not belong to them’.<sup>5</sup> In this context, Muñoz argues, ‘it is important to call on the past, to animate it, understanding that the past has a performative nature, which is to

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<sup>2</sup> *Lady Malcolm’s Servants’ Ball* was held at Bishopsgate Institute, London, on 24 and 25 June 2016. Tickets cost £20.

<sup>3</sup> See *The Balls*, a free newspaper produced as part of the event, provided by Duckie producers.

<sup>4</sup> See José Esteban Muñoz, *Cruising Utopia: The Then and There of Queer Futurity* (New York: New York University Press, 2009).

<sup>5</sup> Muñoz, pp. 26, 112.

say that rather than being static and fixed, the past does things'.<sup>6</sup> How the past does things is the subject of this chapter. Among other things, this thesis articulates the utopian value of participatory performance projects-cum-homemade mutant hope machines that construct other times as credible and fortifying sites of collective queer agency vitally continuous with the present. The last chapter analysed performers' experiences and understandings related to the future. This chapter focuses on punters' experiences and understandings related to the past.

The vehicle for this analysis is Duckie's 'vintage clubbing' cycle (to use the collective's own term), a series of large-scale immersive nightlife performance events themed around moments of fun from London's queer past.<sup>7</sup> The cycle comprised *Gross Indecency* (2010), which was broadly themed around nightlife in the years immediately preceding partial decriminalisation of sex between men in England and Wales in 1967, *Duckie Goes to the Gateways* (2013), themed around the Gateways bar that predominantly served lesbians and their friends between the 1940s and 1980s, and *Lady Malcolm's Servants' Ball* (described above).<sup>8</sup> The cycle represents the outstanding expression to date of Duckie's longstanding investment in queer intergenerational transmission through participatory performance projects that animate the queer past, an element of the collective's practice that I surveyed in Chapter Two.<sup>9</sup> Particularly notable among Duckie's formal and thematic precursors to the 'vintage clubbing' cycle in terms of their mobilisation of aspects of London's subcultural past through

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<sup>6</sup> Muñoz, pp. 27-28.

<sup>7</sup> 'Vintage', Duckie <<http://www.duckie.co.uk/vintage>> [accessed 16 August 2018].

<sup>8</sup> *Gross Indecency* was held at Camden Centre, 3 July 2010. Tickets cost £16. *Duckie Goes to the Gateways* was held at Camden Centre on 28 and 29 June 2013. Tickets were between £15 and £20. I attended all three events and, unless otherwise attributed, descriptions and quotations are from my own notes.

<sup>9</sup> See also 'Once upon a time there was a tavern: Metadrag and other uses of the past at the Royal Vauxhall Tavern', my chapter in Mark Edwards and Stephen Farrier's forthcoming two-volume collected edition *Drag in a Changing Scene* (London: Bloomsbury, expected 2020).

research, costume, décor and participatory performance were the *London Promenade Trilogy* (1998-2001) and *1954 Dancehall* (2000), whose subject overlapped with that of *Gross Indecency*.<sup>10</sup>

I will argue that intergenerational connection between queer populations in the UK is weak and that the queer past is typically constructed in performance work as a site of negativity. By reanimating occasions of queer twentieth-century revelry, Duckie's 'vintage clubbing' cycle enhances connections between queer generations and constructs the queer past as a site of fun (without neglecting past oppressions). These events constitute family work through their complex and critical intergenerational transmission of queer experiences and understandings and their provision of material support for the processes of research and expression this involves. They mobilise fun in multiple ways, locating and celebrating it as a persistent and significant aspect of queer lineages, using it as a technology to encourage present subjects' engagement with the past and channelling its performative abilities to materialise a hopeful and temporally promiscuous commonality. They illuminate fun as survival strategy and fun as world making. Through participatory performance, the cycle renders the queer past affectively available and narrativises it differently. Where previously punters might have understood themselves as passive, grateful inheritors of a tale of suffering that concluded with the supposedly happy ending of normative assimilation, these events frame them as active participants in an ongoing tale of pleasurable disruptive agency that renders both present and future contingent and hopeful. This illuminates the performativity of the past: the past, like family or fun, can be mobilised into the kind of *doing* that fuels reproductive queer futurity.

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<sup>10</sup> 'London Promenade Trilogy', Duckie <<http://www.duckie.co.uk/archive/events/london-promenade-trilogy>> [accessed 16 August 2018], *1954 Dancehall*, Duckie archived website <<http://duckie.harmsen.net/generic.php?id=27>> [accessed 16 August 2018].

As the chapter unfolds, I will describe the 'vintage clubbing' cycle as homemade mutant hope machine; critically locate its events in the context of scholarship around queer history, temporality and story telling; and analyse its mobilisation of family, fun and narrativisation to generate hope and materialise better worlds. The 'vintage clubbing' cycle emerges not as an attempt to recreate the past as it was but to engage it, relationally, critically, generatively and pleurably, in the present for the sake of the future.

### **The 'vintage clubbing' cycle as homemade mutant hope machine**

I'll now describe and contextualise these three vintage clubbing events to give a sense of their scale, style, sensibility and contents, and argue for their operation as homemade mutant hope machines that emerge from lived experience, operate relatively autonomously, adapt to different conditions and reliably generate hope through the materialisation of better worlds in the service of reproductive queer futurity. *Gross Indecency* emerged as successor to the large-scale *Gay Shame* events that Duckie produced between 2004 and 2009 and shared many of their structural aspects, including scheduling over Pride weekend and a large-scale themed immersive format combining drinking, dancing, on- and off-stage performance and an invitation to punters to dress according to the theme. Although not as overtly satirical of Pride as *Gay Shame*, *Gross Indecency* still stood in discursive counterpoint to mainstream festivities, prompting imaginative engagement with collective experiences of marginalisation, exclusion and abjection rather than participating in a narrative of progress for individual citizen-consumers. This new format, continued in *Duckie Goes to the Gateways* and *Lady Malcolm's Servants' Ball*, departed from *Gay Shame* by animating specific periods of the queer past, using already-existing historical research, new interviews with scene veterans and new archival research to generate participatory

performance events that disseminated information about queer pasts rarely acknowledged in mainstream historical discourses or within LGBTQ+ performance and nightlife subcultures. Duckie described them as ‘an homage to the London queers who came before us’, aiming ‘to re-create our queer clandestine histories’.<sup>11</sup> This vintage turn constituted a shift, in Stephen Greer’s words, ‘[f]rom consumer parody to authentic history’: Duckie’s engagement with *Pride* shifted from ironically asserted alienation from dominant discourses of consumerist assimilation to sincerely asserted participation in older lineages predicated on kinship and commonalities between bearers of non-normative sexualities and gender identities in the present and the past.<sup>12</sup> One crucial commonality was the enjoyment of fun, notwithstanding the acute pressures of marginalisation, criminalisation and victimisation under which many queer subjects have operated. The ‘vintage clubbing’ cycle did not ‘re-create’ the past just as it was but reanimated aspects of it and brought them into dynamic, reflexive conversation with the present, thereby asserting the persistence and complexity of queer experience, and implicitly inviting consideration of its future.

*Gross Indecency* potently animated various aspects of queer London socialising before 1967, particularly the tension between forms of surveillance and discipline and forms of fun and self-expression. Billed as ‘a pre-gay lib gay club’, *Gross Indecency* was conceived to evoke not the milieu of overt liberation and experimentation associated with the ‘Swinging London’ of the late 1960s but rather the preceding period, during which defiantly non-normative forms of expression, enjoyment and relationality were structured around strategies of secrecy, concealment, deniability and evasion.<sup>13</sup> Entrance

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<sup>11</sup> ‘Vintage’ web page.

<sup>12</sup> Stephen Greer, *Contemporary British Queer Performance* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), p. 161.

<sup>13</sup> Duckie, *Gross Indecency* flyer, 2010, provided by producers.

to Camden Centre was via a cramped, gruffly-staffed speakeasy-style vestibule and required giving a password (provided in advance); inside, however, the chandeliered space was a wonderland of period fashions and tunes, chic dancers on podiums and celebratory catwalk shows and stage performances hosted by Amy Lamé. A snug piano bar offered a more relaxed, intimate space while performers enabled embodied engagements with the theme by, for instance, rendering the gents' toilet a cruising spot operating on 1960s conventions and the ladies' a social hub facilitated by comic attendants. In the evening's climactic act, performers dressed as policemen affected to raid the premises before delivering a striptease set to the Four Seasons' 'Walk Like a Man'.<sup>14</sup> The event's total budget of £42,290 was met by £11,868 in box office and bar takings, £1,000 from Camden local authority and the rest from Duckie's Arts Council England (ACE) National Portfolio Organisation (NPO) block grant.<sup>15</sup>

Following a similar format, *Duckie Goes to the Gateways* took inspiration from the Gateways Club off the King's Road in west London, which was open between 1945 and 1985 and catered initially to a gay and lesbian clientele and a predominantly lesbian crowd from the mid-1960s onward. According to Jill Gardiner, whose research informed the event, many lesbians considered it 'the only place we could go'.<sup>16</sup> Run by Gina Ware, whose husband owned the venue, and bar manager Smithy, the Gateways expected its clientele to adhere to butch or femme gender presentation and refrain from overt affection or political activism. Photo opportunities referring to the venue's famous green door and entrance stairs were provided but overall Duckie's *Gateways* aimed less to reanimate the club's material specificities than its

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<sup>14</sup> Bob Crewe and Bob Gaudio, 'Walk Like a Man', *The Four Seasons* (Vee-Jay, 1963).

<sup>15</sup> Simon Casson and Dicky Eton, interview with the author, 9 September 2018.

<sup>16</sup> *From the Closet to the Screen: Women of the Gateways Club, 1945-1985* (London: Rivers Oram Press, 2003), p. 2.

sensibility, for instance laying on pool tables for butches and clandestine Gay Liberation Front politicking in the toilets. The dress code for punters was less restrictive in terms of period (1950s to 1980s) than in terms of gender identity: promotional material demanded punters 'pick an identity: butch or femme' and 'remember: there is no in between'.<sup>17</sup> Lamé hosted as Gina Ware, in distinctive beehive and green dress, and the night featured exclusively female performers, including Ursula Martinez and Jess Love, who performed a gender-themed quick-change act, Eggs Collective, who were also dressed as Ware, and Figs in Wigs, whose drily understated choreography riffed on tropes of female masculinity. Like *Gross Indecency*, the event was advised and attended by veterans of the scene in question. The event's total budget of £50,803 was met by £17,808 in box office and bar takings and the rest from Duckie's ACE NPO block grant.<sup>18</sup>

Duckie's next vintage event attended to class dynamics in the context of one of the best-documented instances of interwar queer London socialising. Lady Malcolm's Servants' Balls were a series of events for domestic staff organised in London between 1923 and 1938 by Lady Jeanne Malcolm and one of few occasions when servants could socialise at scale.<sup>19</sup> Fancy-dress themes allowed for dressing up on a budget and with a satirical eye: some costumes referred to alarm clocks or cleaning products. The Balls became increasingly associated with cross-dressing and perceived homosexuality, attracting growing police surveillance by the mid-1930s. Duckie's *Lady Malcolm's Servants' Ball* was held in association with Bishopsgate Institute, where the event was held, and informed by archival research conducted by a team led by E-J. Scott and assisted by access to material from the National Archives, London Metropolitan Archives and the Royal Albert Hall Archives.

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<sup>17</sup> Duckie, *Duckie Goes to the Gateways* flyer, 2013, provided by producers.

<sup>18</sup> Casson and Eton interview, 9 September 2018.

<sup>19</sup> See *The Balls*.

Amy Lamé hosted as Lady Malcolm with the butch performance troupe the Drakes as her butlers. The Institute's main hall was dressed as a ballroom with a main stage, while installations and interactive performances were held in an upstairs room dressed as a 'Gentlemen's Club for People of All Genders' and the wood-panelled library where Madame Sélavy reached across the veil. The live event's total budget of £58,630 was met by £16,680 in box office and bar takings and the rest from Duckie's ACE NPO block grant.<sup>20</sup> The Heritage Lottery Fund contributed a further £69,350 toward costs of archival research and aspects of the event relevant to disseminating heritage but not directly related to performance. Bishopsgate Institute contributed a further £130,450 in kind through provision of venue space, staffing, workshops, archival research and exhibition production.<sup>21</sup>

Duckie's 'vintage clubbing' events can be generatively viewed as homemade mutant hope machines in the service of reproductive queer futurity. Their homemadeness relates both to their emergence from distinctive queer sensibilities and their relative autonomy. I have detailed how the 'vintage' events emerged from Duckie's longstanding engagement with the queer past. They were conceived, researched and realised on Duckie's terms; like all my case studies, their autonomy was qualified in principle by dependence on external bodies for funding and, in this case, archival access but Duckie producers report no tensions in these relationships and the resulting events were substantively consistent with works on comparable themes produced before such partnerships.<sup>22</sup> These events also show how Duckie's engagement with the past has mutated to encompass new forms and subjects. They operate as effective machines, routinely generating new kinds of archivally-based knowledge, new forms of participatory performance and

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<sup>20</sup> Casson and Eton interview, 9 September 2018.

<sup>21</sup> Casson and Eton interview, 9 September 2018.

<sup>22</sup> Casson and Eton interview, 9 September 2018.



new kinds of public understanding about queer pasts and their relation to structures of family and fun. Meanwhile, the cycle of multiple events demonstrates in itself the form's replicability. All of these aspects contribute to the production of hope through the reinscription and materialisation of understandings of queer experience as longitudinal, resilient and generative. The rest of this chapter will detail how such understandings come about.

### **Critical contexts**

Before analysing the contents of Duckie's vintage events with relation to my overall arguments about reproductive queer futurity, participatory performance, family and fun, I want to survey the critical contexts that inform this analysis. These include historical research on the queer past, queer scholarship around temporality and performance scholarship engaging the queer past in general and Duckie's 'vintage' events in particular. In terms of historical research on the queer past, cultural historians have paid attention to the lived experience of past queer subjects in London in ways that inform understanding of Duckie's vintage events. Matt Houlbrook has taken seriously experiences of fun, notably expanding understandings of (predominantly male) experience before 1967 as being structured not only by criminalisation and abjection.<sup>23</sup> Houlbrook considers sites such as cafés, pubs, clubs, cottages, parties and tea rooms, noting assertive pleasures found even in the moment of arrest: one man reported being aroused by his arresting officer ('I could love him and rub his Jimmy for him for hours') while simultaneously anticipating the eventual decriminalisation of 'our cult'.<sup>24</sup> Houlbrook's study also expands ideas of queer civics from the critically familiar figure of the 'respectable' campaigning middle-class homosexual to include effeminate

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<sup>23</sup> *Queer London: Pleasures and Perils in the Sexual Metropolis 1918-1957* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005).

<sup>24</sup> Houlbrook, p. 245.

'queans' and masculine 'trade', informing Duckie's engagement with queer class dynamics. Houlbrook served as historical consultant for Duckie's vintage events, as did Matt Cook, whose work on queer domesticity I noted in Chapter Two. Rebecca Jennings has analysed postwar London lesbian bar culture (including the Gateways) as a site of political tension and shown the variety and extent of lesbian socialising across postwar Britain.<sup>25</sup> Simon Avery and Katherine M. Graham, meanwhile, collect research that expands understandings of the queer past and pleasurable experience through, for instance, Carolyn Conroy's examination of Simeon Solomon's enjoyment of aspects of his normative abjection following his arrest and Anne Witchard's investigation of interwar lesbian socialising.<sup>26</sup>

Where history moves to narrativise the past, understandings of temporality aim, in queer studies researcher Kadji Amin's words, to recognise the 'social patterning of experiences and understanding of time'.<sup>27</sup> Such recognition helps contextualise how queer subjectivity can be rendered marginal or abject by dominant understandings or what sociologist Eviatar Zerubavel calls the 'hidden rhythms' of everyday life.<sup>28</sup> Elizabeth Freeman proposes that the prevailing mode of temporality under industrialised capitalism is 'chrononormativity', which Freeman describes as 'a technique by which institutional forces come to seem like somatic facts', acting to valorise 'forms of temporal experience that seem natural to those whom they privilege', such as those related to formal education, wage work, marriage,

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<sup>25</sup> See 'The Gateways Club and the Emergence of a Post-Second World War Lesbian Subculture', *Social History*, 31.2 (2006), 206-225 and *Tomboys and Bachelor Girls: A Lesbian History of Post-War Britain 1945-71* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2007).

<sup>26</sup> Carolyn Conroy, 'Mingling with the Ungodly: Simeon Solomon in Queer Victorian London' and Anne Witchard, 'Sink Street: The Sapphic World of Pre-Chinatown Soho' in *Sex, Time and Place: Queer Histories of London, c.1850 to the Present* (London: Bloomsbury, 2016), pp. 185-201.

<sup>27</sup> 'Temporality', *Transgender Studies Quarterly*, 1.1 (2014), 219-222, p. 219.

<sup>28</sup> *Hidden Rhythms: Schedules and Calendars in Social Life* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1981).

domestic childrearing and legal inheritance.<sup>29</sup> Queer temporalities disrupt or sidestep such understandings in various ways, including through different understandings of relations between present and past, living and dead. Carolyn Dinshaw, for instance, infuses medieval studies with an attempt to create 'a relation across time that has an affective or an erotic component', seeking queer connections with 'lives, texts, and other cultural phenomena' that testify to non-normative sexual and gender experiences and understandings in the past and thereby 'provide material for queer subject and community formation now'.<sup>30</sup> Dinshaw takes great comfort in this 'touch across time' though it has also been problematised.<sup>31</sup> Valerie Traub, engaging with early modern England, maintains that such identification says more about a present desire for connection than past subjectivity.<sup>32</sup> Heather Love, meanwhile, focusing on late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century texts, resists valorising an urge to community that, she argues, risks erasing forms of 'past degradation' whose effects both mark the subjective experience of the past and linger consequentially into the present.<sup>33</sup> Love insists that, for many queer subjects, community across time is neither possible nor desirable; her focus on 'ruined or failed sociality' and the political importance of attending to the continued impact of such 'pre-Stonewall feelings' as 'shame, secrecy and self-hatred' constitute a powerful corrective to blithely proffered narratives of recuperative assimilationism.<sup>34</sup> Yet Love's position leaves little discursive space for the possibility of other past queer subjects' engagement in enjoyment and

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<sup>29</sup> *Time Binds*, p. 3; 'Introduction', *GLQ: A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies*, 13.2-3 (2007), 159-176, p. 160.

<sup>30</sup> *Getting Medieval: Sexualities and Communities, Pre- and Postmodern* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1999), pp. 50, 22.

<sup>31</sup> Dinshaw, p. 22.

<sup>32</sup> *The Renaissance of Lesbianism in Early Modern England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002).

<sup>33</sup> *Feeling Backward: Loss and the Politics of Queer History* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2009), p. 19.

<sup>34</sup> Love, pp. 19-22.

collective disruptive agency. Jack Halberstam gives more room to the constructive capacities of queer temporalities that resist the normative 'time of inheritance' and instead 'challenge conventional logics of development, maturity, adulthood, and responsibility'.<sup>35</sup> This temporality of 'queer time' enables subjects to resist normatively scripted life plans and prolong subcultural participation.<sup>36</sup>

Elizabeth Freeman argues, in ways that deeply inform this chapter, for the power of queer temporalities that engage past and present together. Noting that queer subjects are often 'figured as having no past', she argues that new understandings of nonlinear temporality can give access to 'a richer past', for instance by mobilising 'eclectic, idiosyncratic, and transient archives including performances' such as drag.<sup>37</sup> Freeman proposes the pursuit of 'sociability and even erotics with the dead' through several modes.<sup>38</sup> These include *temporal drag*, which attends to how the past lingers, sometimes awkwardly, into the present through discernible markers of ostensibly outmoded forms of presentation, thought and behaviour, resisting neat consignment to the inertly historical in ways that might be either discomfiting or fortifying.<sup>39</sup> Another such mode, which particularly illuminates Duckie's 'vintage clubbing' cycle, is *erotohistoriography*. Freeman articulates erotohistoriography as a kind of apprehension of the past that 'sees the body as a method': it is predicated not on rational analysis but on the relation between historical materials and 'particular bodily dispositions' that resonate generatively across time.<sup>40</sup> This approach enables connections to the past to be felt as 'bodily responses, even pleasurable ones, that are themselves

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<sup>35</sup> *In a Queer Time and Place: Transgender Bodies, Subcultural Lives* (New York: New York University Press, 2005), pp. 5, 13.

<sup>36</sup> Halberstam, pp. 185-186.

<sup>37</sup> 'Introduction', pp. 162-3.

<sup>38</sup> *Time Binds*, p. xxii.

<sup>39</sup> *Time Binds*, p. xxi.

<sup>40</sup> *Time Binds*, pp. 95-96.

a form of understanding'.<sup>41</sup> It insists that engagement with the past can be embodied and affective as well as intellectual: we might apprehend something about a past subject not only by reading their public statements but by sitting in their armchair or standing in their prison cell.

Erotohistoriography refuses a clean distinction between past and present and rejects the idea that things, feelings or relations active *then* must be inert relics *now*. It does not pretend to 'write the lost object into the present so much as encounter it already in the present, by treating the present itself as hybrid'.<sup>42</sup> Erotohistoriography, then, muddles normatively linear temporality not only by insisting on the power of embodied and affective engagement with the past but also by insisting on the past as already part of the present. This and other queer temporalities place past and present, normative and marginalised, living and dead in dynamic, contingent conversation; understanding them provides a productive critical frame for engaging with the heady experience of Duckie's 'vintage clubbing' events.

Performance scholars have attended to work engaging the queer past but with little attention to the characteristics that distinguish Duckie's 'vintage' cycle: participatory forms and fun (as both aspect of past queer experience and mode of present engagement). Stephen Greer shows that queer histories have been staged in multiple ways, noting in particular the potency of life-story-telling on stage both 'in terms of individual empowerment and simultaneously as part of a broader attempt to identify, construct or preserve a lesbian and gay heritage'.<sup>43</sup> Greer unpacks how 'a history of the past may operate as a history of the present', drawing out discursively the imbrication of the two in ways that evoke Freeman's erotohistoriography.<sup>44</sup> Stephen Farrier

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<sup>41</sup> *Time Binds*, pp. 95-96.

<sup>42</sup> *Time Binds*, p. 95.

<sup>43</sup> Greer, pp. 67-68.

<sup>44</sup> Greer, p. 75.

also notes how erotohistoriographical approaches to performance can generatively sidestep expectations of normative 'tropes of heritability' around queer intergenerational contact, such as expectations that older people will narrativise the past and younger ones embody the future.<sup>45</sup> The past engaged in queer performance events tends to be negatively constructed: Farrier observes that LGBT performance projects engaged with 'what is shared between generations' tend to illuminate 'a primary victimhood' uniting queer subjects, compounded by 'an exacerbated generational gap that serves as an index of the community's communicative dysfunction'.<sup>46</sup> Greer also identifies such negativity, noting that it can be framed reparatively 'to argue for continuing, future action': theatrical performance, he suggests, can sustain shifting on-stage temporalities in which past and present contingently mesh, offering 'a mode in which one might challenge past pains and defeats, and describe sites of future resistance and opportunity'.<sup>47</sup> Fintan Walsh comparably argues that dramatic encounters with the past in contemporary queer Irish performance often focus on 'exiled, vulnerable and invisible queer bodies and histories' but can be used to enable audiences 'to imprint ourselves in the historical chain' in ways that encourage affirmation, resistance and activism.<sup>48</sup> The queer past attended to through performance studies, then, tends to be a site of suffering and oppression, and sometimes resilience and defiance, rather than pleasure or fun.

Duckie's vintage events are unusual, then, in foregrounding fun in their staging of the queer past, an aspect of the cycle neglected in critical

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<sup>45</sup> 'It's About Time: Queer Utopias and Theater Performance', in *A Critical Inquiry into Queer Utopias*, ed. by Angela Jones (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), p. 62.

<sup>46</sup> 'Playing With Time: Gay Intergenerational Performance Work and the Productive Possibilities of Queer Temporalities', *Journal of Homosexuality*, 62.10 (2015), 1398-1418, pp. 1403-1404.

<sup>47</sup> Greer, p. 71-72.

<sup>48</sup> Walsh, *Queer Performance and Contemporary Ireland: Dissent and Disorientation* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015), ebook, 247.0/567.

engagement with the 'vintage clubbing' events to date. Catherine Silverstone locates *Gross Indecency* in the context of the *Gay Shame* cycle that it succeeded; as noted in Chapter Two, she articulates *Gay Shame*'s complex engagement with fun but frames *Gross Indecency* in terms of shame, historical criminalisation and 'a residual sense of nostalgia' rather than enjoyment.<sup>49</sup> Greer also attends to *Gross Indecency* as successor to *Gay Shame*, presciently suggesting it 'might represent a turn towards the past in order to better understand the present – or imagine the future' and identifying the reflexive cross-temporal nexus that gave the event its frisson.<sup>50</sup> Greer frames the production in relation to others engaged with abject queer experience, foregrounding its expression of the 'struggles' of the past rather than its fun.<sup>51</sup> Victoria Chalklin, meanwhile, uses *Gross Indecency* to illustrate Ann Cvetkovich's articulation of performance's ability to act as an 'animate archive' of feelings and 'enable different possibilities for queer forms of subjectivity'.<sup>52</sup> Chalklin's autoethnographic descriptions conjure a sense of the imagined club night of *Gross Indecency* as a space of 'clandestine possibility' at odds with the 'depressing monotony of lies and prejudice' outside – a space marked by anticipation, anxiety, exuberance and escape – thereby showing how participatory forms can work to generate erotohistoriographical understandings.<sup>53</sup> Chalklin describes the night's fun evocatively but ambivalently: she values the location of fun in abjection ('embracing, rather than disregarding and renouncing the status of the homosexual as criminal') yet also insists the night 'was really about' the 'courage, camaraderie,

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<sup>49</sup> 'Duckie's Gay Shame: Critiquing Pride and Selling Shame in Club Performance', *Contemporary Theatre Review*, 22.1 (2012), 62-78, p. 76.

<sup>50</sup> Greer, p. 162.

<sup>51</sup> Greer, p. 162.

<sup>52</sup> 'Performing Queer Selves: Embodied Subjectivity and Affect in Queer Performance Spaces Duckie, Bird Club and Wotever World' (unpublished doctoral thesis, University of London, Goldsmiths College, 2012) <<http://research.gold.ac.uk/7801/>> [accessed 16 August 2018], p. 49.

<sup>53</sup> Chalklin, p. 138.

persecution and pain' of real historical subjects who effected political change rather than the 'light-hearted frothy fun' of dancing and performance.<sup>54</sup> This binary framing reproduces the normative trivialisation of fun, occluding its technological and performative capacities to intervene in existing structures and materialise new ones to the benefit of queer subjects. I argue, in contrast, that queer fun of the kinds both memorialised and enjoyed at Duckie's 'vintage' events warrants serious attention for its provision to marginalised subjects of the means for pleasure, collectivity and disruptive agency.

Sarah Mullan, meanwhile, frames *Duckie Goes to the Gateways* in the context of Duckie's relatively limited engagement with lesbian subjectivity and performance forms.<sup>55</sup> She quotes Amy Lamé's understanding of the night as combining her own 'lesbian agenda' within Duckie with the group's growing interest in 'our collective queer history'.<sup>56</sup> Mullan's analysis identifies the event's 'mass of various temporalities' and describes the presence of original Gateways regulars both in terms of Freeman's temporal drag and as emblematic of 'a desire to acknowledge a lineage of lesbian history'.<sup>57</sup> As well as this recognition of the event's intergenerational charge, she notes that its 'jovial atmosphere' runs counter to stereotypes of lesbian sociality as earnest, miserable or otherwise not fun.<sup>58</sup> Silverstone, Greer, Chalklin and Mullan all highlight these events' detailed historical research, describe the effectiveness of their participatory forms and recognise their enabling of enjoyment. None, however, locates the events' archival research as part of a wider project of family support or their overall contents as acknowledgement of a valuable queer lineage of fun or of the performative

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<sup>54</sup> Chalklin, pp. 138, 141.

<sup>55</sup> 'Lesbian Performance in London 1992-2015: Identity, Representation, and Queer Epistemologies' (unpublished doctoral thesis, Queen Mary University of London, 2016), provided by the author.

<sup>56</sup> Mullan, pp. 216, 230.

<sup>57</sup> Mullan, p. 231-232.

<sup>58</sup> Mullan, p. 231.



power of fun itself. These are aspects to which the following analysis closely attends, revealing their powerful support of reproductive queer futurity and the materialisation of better worlds for marginalised subjects.

### **Intergenerational transmission**

Reviewing *Lady Malcolm's Servants' Ball for Exeunt*, Alice Saville noted 'a generational divide in the queer community that's deep, sad and solemn. It's visible in the language we use, in how we dress, in where we go and how we meet each other'.<sup>59</sup> I referred in Chapter Two to the dearth of harmonious contemporary queer intergenerationality and noted above Farrier's observation of performance work's tendency to frame queer intergenerationality dysfunctionally; Halberstam and Greer also describe forms of subcultural intergenerational misalignment and tension.<sup>60</sup> Few UK projects explicitly aim to counter this perceived divide (a rare example, the Vito Project film screening series, ran between 2014 and 2018).<sup>61</sup> Duckie's 'vintage' events constitute an attempt of unparalleled depth and consistency to transmit information across generations about past queer experiences in the contexts of nightlife and performance. Lamé has reiterated this commitment to understandings of the past, saying 'we've been trying to concentrate on our collective queer history' and noting that 'it's so important that we know our history'.<sup>62</sup> This attempt is overtly framed by Duckie as family work: 'We are family,' the 'Vintage' page of the company's website asserts.

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<sup>59</sup> 'Duckie and radical queer nostalgia', *Exeunt*, 4 July 2016 <<http://exeuntmagazine.com/features/duckie-radical-queer-nostalgia/>> [accessed 16 August 2018].

<sup>60</sup> Halberstam, pp. 185-186, Greer, p. 85.

<sup>61</sup> 'The Vito Project', *ReShape* <<https://www.reshapenow.org/vito-project>> [accessed 16 August 2018].

<sup>62</sup> 'Duckie Goes to the Gateways', *Duckie* <<http://www.duckie.co.uk/vintage/gateways>> [accessed 16 August 2018]; Lamé on stage at *Duckie DeCrim: 1967*, Royal Vauxhall Tavern, 8 July 2018.

'This is our legacy.'<sup>63</sup> Duckie's 'vintage clubbing' cycle implicitly framed as queer children the punters whose attendance engendered in them new understandings of the material conditions, affective experiences and subjective expressions of the queer past; but these events also constructed as queer children the archivists, producers and performers whose labour in producing the events was also a deeply informative engagement with the queer past in the present.

The 'vintage clubbing' cycle therefore represents a major investment in understandings of intergenerational transmission as a key aspect of queer family, as articulated in Chapter Two. These events primarily pursued this aim, I will argue, through participatory performance forms. But before analysing those, I will attend to two others forms of transmission mobilised at these events: the provision of ancillary material and embodied relationality between younger performers and punters and veterans from the earlier queer scenes reanimated by the cycle. Duckie produced substantive ancillary materials communicating much information from archives and interviews about subjective queer experiences of the mid-twentieth century. The interview-based material affirmed what Joan Sangster, writing from a feminist understanding of the normative historical erasure of women's experiences, has described as the power of oral histories to reinscribe occluded subjects into understandings of the past and the construction of historical memory.<sup>64</sup> The 28-page booklet *Gross Indecency: True Stories from the Gay Clubs of the Sixties*, compiled and illustrated by Robin Whitmore, for instance, transcribed nine first-hand accounts of the pre-1967 scene from people described in Whitmore's introduction as 'our older gay brothers and sisters [...] random

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<sup>63</sup> 'Vintage', Duckie <<http://www.duckie.co.uk/vintage>> [accessed 16 August 2018].

<sup>64</sup> 'Telling Our Stories: Feminist Debates and the Use of Oral History', *Women's History Review*, 3.1 (1994), 5-28.

friends and friends of friends'.<sup>65</sup> They presented a complex collection of perspectives: for Amber, 'it was better when it was illegal' because 'it wasn't pushed in your faces'; Alex described a system of intergenerational relationality that 'may be surprising for modern gay guys' by which younger men sought out elders 'for safety and security and to really show you the ropes'; and Tessa noted that, although legal changes had little impact on lesbians 'because we were invisible anyway', increased social activism meant 'all the fun evaporated'.<sup>66</sup> Others described homophobic violence, class tensions and pressures related to criminal gangs and police surveillance. Readers were thereby invited to understand past and present queer experiences reflexively with attention to contingency and complexity. Why do generations engage in one way and not another? Which queer lives are more or less visible and valorised? What are the consequences? What might change? The booklet was given to punters as they left along with a CD of 1960s pop tunes, archive material and excerpts of Whitmore's interviews.<sup>67</sup> These were free, as was *Amy Lamé's Sixties Talk Show*, a panel event at the RVT on 7 July 2010 including participants in the 1960s scenes, enabling the distribution of information about the queer past.<sup>68</sup> Ancillary material for *Gateways* included a *Gateways Salon* event at the RVT on 12 June 2013, at which Gardiner, venue regular Crunchy and journalist Louise Carolin discussed the venue's pleasures, tensions and contingent memorialisation.<sup>69</sup> Ancillary material for *Lady Malcolm* was copious thanks to increased funding and institutional partnership, including multiple costume-making workshops and a panel event at the RVT, a two-day symposium event at Bishopsgate Institute

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<sup>65</sup> *Gross Indecency* booklet.

<sup>66</sup> *Gross Indecency* booklet.

<sup>67</sup> Duckie, *Gross Indecency* CD, produced as part of *Gross Indecency* (2010), provided by producers.

<sup>68</sup> *Time Out London*, 'Amy Lamé's Sixties Talk Show', 7 July 2010 <<https://www.timeout.com/london/lgbt/amy-lames-sixties-talk-show>> [accessed 16 August 2018].

<sup>69</sup> Field notes, 12 June 2013.

and *The Balls*, a 16-page broadsheet newspaper covering aspects of the balls from the diversity of interwar queer London life to Lady Malcolm's music-hall roots.<sup>70</sup> All were free. Wall-mounted displays and vintage costumes were exhibited at Bishopsgate Institute as part of the event. Such sustained attention to the dissemination of previously inaccessible archival material reinforced the vintage events' commitment to the intergenerational transmission of understandings of queer subjectivity across different periods. Largely avoiding historical narrativisation, this material proposed a dynamic conversation between the contingencies and complexities of queer past and present.

Intergenerational transmission was also facilitated through direct contact between younger Duckie performers and punters and veterans of the earlier scenes animated by the vintage events. Although the company knew of nobody who had attended one of Lady Malcolm's balls, *Gross Indecency* was informed by scene veterans including those interviewed for Whitmore's booklet, and informal conversational contact between them and younger people was enabled at the *Talk Show* panel and at Camden Centre. Such engagement was most notable in connection to *Duckie Goes to the Gateways*, in ways that conspicuously sidestepped normative intergenerational structures of heredity and authority, instead supporting a complex, reflexive and fluid temporality that fortified a sense of queer family across time. At the *Gateways Salon* at the RVT, I witnessed Gateways regulars' refusal of a simplistic framing of the venue's significance and continuing impact. They both acknowledged its overall adherence to binary butch/femme gender presentation and lack of overt sexual or political activity and offered qualifiers and counterexamples; they resisted notions of the Gateways as utopia, structuring the venue as a site of complex, divergent, even

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<sup>70</sup> See '*Lady Malcolm's Servants' Ball*', Duckie <<http://www.duckie.co.uk/vintage/lady-malcoms-servants-ball>> [accessed 16 August 2018].

inconsistent experiences and praising some subsequent sociocultural shifts while regretting others.

These Gateways veterans were a powerful site of temporal drag, in Freeman's term, refusing restriction to frames of sentimentality or obsolescence to insist on their engagement in an ongoing reflexive hybrid present in which generations can teach and learn from one another. This sense of temporal drag was powerfully embodied through these veterans' attendance of the main Gateways event: Mullan notes how their presence highlighted the 'overlapping of history and the present' and signified 'a desire to acknowledge a lineage of lesbian history' without analysing the reflexive complexity of the encounter.<sup>71</sup> Through these people, the past literally talked back to the present, good-naturedly critiquing the authenticity of the venue's reanimation ('all this snogging would never have been allowed at the Gateways!') while also playfully collapsing distinctions between periods and indeed persons by treating performers dressed as Gateways proprietor Gina Ware as if they in fact were Ware, insisting 'I slept with you!' or 'You dragged me out by my hair!'<sup>72</sup> Such moments enabled not only rational but affective communication between generations. Temporal drag catalysed erotohistoriographical understandings.

Participatory performance forms powerfully enabled erotohistoriographically charged intergenerational transmission at Duckie's 'vintage' events. At *Duckie Goes to the Gateways*, for example, Ware's signature look was evoked through ensembles of sequined green gowns, black elbow-length gloves and dark beehives worn by five performers (Lamé and the four members of Eggs Collective). Considered as drag, this affirmed Freeman's and Farrier's arguments (mentioned above) for drag as communion

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<sup>71</sup> Mullan, p. 232.

<sup>72</sup> *Duckie Goes to the Gateways* video, Duckie archived website <<http://duckie.harmsen.net/generic.php?id=156&submenu=old>> [accessed 16 August 2018].

with the dead, vividly enacted by the scene veterans' interactions quoted above ('I slept with you!'). For Eggs Collective, such interactions signified 'a real feeling of warmth [among] lots of generations, people that had personal experience of being at the Gateways as well as lots of newcomers'.<sup>73</sup>

Such erotohistoriographically-enabled commonality of feeling could also be catalysed by other performance forms that eschewed naturalistic reenactment or narrativisation, notions of generational conflict or reductive association of older and younger people with past and future respectively, as Madame Sélavy's séance or *Gross Indecency's* police raid showed. Rather, they supported a generatively messy and multidirectional hybrid present whose affective charge was comparably diverse. The transgressive pleasures reanimated by *Gross Indecency*, for instance, were precariously framed by a historical context of oppression. Chalklin articulates in detail the spectrum of feelings evoked by participation in this set-up, including uncertainty, anxiety, apprehension, surprise, exhilaration, jeopardy, courage, empowerment, confusion, fear, defiance and pride. Her understanding of this as 'an affective archive of an otherwise neglected element of recent history' highlights how Duckie's performance strategies generate erotohistoriographical understandings of unfamiliar aspects of the queer past.<sup>74</sup>

Later in this chapter, I attend in detail to these events' distinctive and generative affective premium on the enjoyment of fun. As Chalklin's roster of affects suggests, however, this was not at the expense of qualification or complexity. Duckie's participatory performance practices also constituted a technology of intergenerational transmission of understandings of negative aspects of queer pasts. This was most powerfully shown in *Gross Indecency's* climactic police raid, sparking a frisson of confusion or even fear that would likely be novel to those whose experience of London LGBTQ+ nightlife

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<sup>73</sup> *Duckie Goes to the Gateways* video.

<sup>74</sup> Chalklin, p. 143.

subculture began in the 1990s but potentially familiar to those with longer track records. Where *Gross Indecency* was laced with intimations of secrecy and surveillance, *Duckie Goes to the Gateways* was laced with elements of gender policing and *Lady Malcolm's Servants' Ball* with reminders of class inequality (analysed later in the chapter).

Duckie's 'vintage' events engaged with increasing depth with considerations of exclusion and marginalisation within past queer social contexts rather than simply valorising or sentimentalising them. Performances at *Gross Indecency* and testimony in the accompanying booklet included women's voices as well as men's and articulated a range of class positions, sometimes in tension, while *Duckie Goes to the Gateways* engaged critically with binary gender expectations and resisted canonising Ware or Smithy. *Lady Malcolm's Servants' Ball* offered the most sustained critically reflexive engagement with the site of queer fun on which it was based, articulating a range of contentious facets of the historic event emerging from archival work overseen by E-J. Scott. This was notably achieved through *The Balls*, the 16-page broadsheet distributed at the event, which, while generally celebratory, complicated both the original balls (by interrogating Lady Malcolm's ambivalent motivations and collaboration with police and Orientalist aspects of some costumes) and engagement with them in 2016 (by noting how surviving evidence disproportionately relates to white men and cautioning against over-identification between contingently distinct past and present queer subjectivities).

In mobilising intergenerational transmission as a form of family work, then, Duckie's 'vintage clubbing' events communicated information about past queer experiences and social and material contexts, reinscribed marginalised subjects into understandings of the past, demonstrated contingencies of present structures of feeling and relationality and made

freely accessible archival material of queer interest. They also enabled complex, empathetic, critical, reflexive and playful relational contact between queers of different generations in ways that defied normative temporalities. Erotohistoriographically charged participatory performance forms enabled complex affective understandings of past queer experiences and apprehension of commonality across time. The events also engaged critically with marginalisations within past queer scenes.

### **Material support**

Understanding Duckie's 'vintage clubbing' events as family work in the service of reproductive queer futurity is further enhanced by attending to them as vehicles of material support. As well as offering the fortifying opportunities for queer socialising and employment common to all Duckie performance events, the cycle also enabled and publicised research of past experiences of queer fun through the free events and ancillary forms noted above; Eton estimates that such material accounted for around £3,000 of the *Gross Indecency* budget, around £1000 for *Duckie Goes to the Gateways* and around £16,900 for *Lady Malcolm's Servants Ball* (which was supported by the Heritage Lottery Fund and Bishopsgate Institute).<sup>75</sup> Such support constitutes a considerable investment in the promotion of queer pasts as an aspect of reproductive queer futurity, enabling greater understanding and investment in longitudinal queer experience as hopeful collectivity. The wall-mounted displays at Bishopsgate, for instance, presented photos, tickets, press coverage, police reports and letters of complaint related to the balls that enabled critically inflected identification with past queer subjects. Archival workshops as part of the two-day symposium provided rudimentary practical and critical archivist skills supportive of further independent inquiry by punters. Meanwhile, the

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<sup>75</sup> Casson and Eton interview, 9 September 2018.



eight drop-in costume workshops at the RVT offered literal material support, enabling the reworking of textiles to facilitate participation in the erotohistoriographically inflected fancy-dress aspect of the event.

Material support was a central concern of many of the performance texts at *Lady Malcolm's Servants' Ball*, which foregrounded concerns of labour and class relations in ways that evoked the etymological roots of the word 'family' in the Latin 'famulus' or 'household servant', as discussed in Chapter Two. The historic balls constituted for many domestic workers a rare opportunity to socialise together at scale (or, for some, at all) and to engage in mutually beneficial structures of support distinct from the unequal and often solitary role workers played in supporting their employers' households. Such concerns were foregrounded in the night's centrepiece performance, a 15-minute dance routine choreographed by Florence Peake for eight performers in character as servants. As the piece progressed, regimented militaristic movements evolved into elegantly expressive romantic release and orgiastic writhing, followed by flight from and battle with a police officer. The dancers' costumes changed cleverly from monochromatic servants' garb to rainbow-hued ball-gowns to arse-out near-nudity. Meanwhile, their physical relationality shifted from isolated individuality to affectionate contact to sexualised interaction and mutual fortification – a moving expression of alienation giving way to forms of fun and desire whose liberating and emancipatory energies later undergirded political agency. Atomised service to others gave way to literal collective support as they held one another aloft in a form evocative of the human towers of Santa Tecla observed during *Duckie in Sitges* (described in Chapter Two).

The vintage events also proved a site of contention around material support within the Duckie family itself, with specific relation to *Duckie Goes to the Gateways*. Lamé expressed disappointment and anger stemming from her

understanding that many of Duckie's predominantly gay male regular punters stayed away from *Gateways*. Lamé told Mullan:

I felt betrayed by a huge group of gay men who I have nurtured and have gotten to know over the last 18 years, creating a space for them. And then we're trying to create a little bit of a space that is lesbian identified, to which everyone is welcome, and you're not turning up because you think it's women only. [...] It's not like we have to prove ourselves that it's going to be a great night, you know it's going to be a Duckie night.<sup>76</sup>

Lamé here frames her relation to Duckie punters in terms of family and emotion ('nurtured', 'betrayed') and articulates a sense of family division, with lesbian subjectivity and related material understood as second-best or disposable. There's a sense of double betrayal here: first, Lamé implies that the people she considers herself to have nurtured should have come to *Gateways* as a matter of family obligation even if they would not be centred; and second, she implies that, obligation aside, past experience should inspire confidence in Duckie's ability to provide a good time anyway. These disappointments constitute a breakdown in material support within the family in the sense that the relatively low attendance for *Duckie Goes to the Gateways* worked to the detriment of Duckie's overall budget.<sup>77</sup>

In mobilising material support as a form of family work, then, the 'vintage clubbing' events enabled the discovery and dissemination of understandings of past queer experience and illuminated through performance past instances of relational queer material support. While the cycle's operation also exposed potential sources of material and affective tension within Duckie's own contingently materialist project, it functioned overall to promote reproductive queer futurity by demonstrating how material support can promote understanding and experiences of queerness as enduring hopeful collectivity.

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<sup>76</sup> Mullan, p. 234.

<sup>77</sup> Mullan, p. 234. Factors other than misogyny might have been at work: this was the first Duckie Pride weekend event run over two nights, which might have dispersed attendance.

### Connections between story telling, family and fun

Reproductive queer futurity is about materialising better worlds for marginalised subjects through kinds of *doing*. I want to attend to another way in which the family work of intergenerational transmission can serve this project: through the *doing* of story, in other words the formulation and dissemination of family narratives or what the anthropologist Kath Weston calls 'shared history'.<sup>78</sup> I noted above that Duckie's vintage events mobilise the past in ways that avoid conventional narrativisation: *Duckie Goes to the Gateways*, for instance, did not cast one performer as Gina Ware and dramatise the tale of how she came to run London's preeminent lesbian venue. But I do want to attend to the 'vintage clubbing' cycle in terms of story telling on a larger scale, analysing the story they collectively tell about what queer life in the UK has been, is and could be, and how that story – which, I will argue, serves reproductive queer futurity by enabling particular kinds of agency, relationality and world-making – compares to others on the same theme. Researchers in several fields have described queer applications of narrative. bell hooks and Greer, for instance, note how autobiographical life-story-telling can offer marginalised people ways of defining themselves and resisting oppression.<sup>79</sup> Scott Bravmann has described how normatively legible narrativisations of the queer past can be strategically beneficial to the pursuit of political rights and protections, challenging the erasure of queer experience within rhetorics of 'the dominant culture that claims territorial rights over tradition and official history as its exclusive and unified domain'.<sup>80</sup> Walsh, meanwhile, shows how the work of Panti Bliss knits these two approaches

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<sup>78</sup> *Families We Choose: Lesbians, Gays, Kinship* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1991, rev. 1997), p. 109.

<sup>79</sup> bell hooks, *Talking Back: Thinking Feminist, Thinking Black* (Boston: South End Press, 1989); Greer, p. 72-73.

<sup>80</sup> *Queer Fictions of the Past: History, Culture, and Difference* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), p. 28.

together, framing personal testimony in contexts of civic change to generate an 'animate archive that keeps otherwise marginal and ephemeral experiences alive' and constitutes a powerful political intervention.<sup>81</sup>

Duckie's 'vintage' events differ from the works foregrounded by hooks, Greer and Walsh in their general indifference to narrativising life stories (an indifference, as noted in the introduction, that also sets Duckie apart from many applied theatre and performance practitioners' emphasis on the supposed capacities of life story telling to ameliorate trauma).<sup>82</sup> At these events, Ware and Lady Malcolm were not individualistically valorised but rather recognised for their facilitation of collectivity; meanwhile, the events' privileging of cabaret turns on main stages and in smaller participatory formats resisted cohesive narrative. Yet still a story emerged from the 'vintage clubbing' cycle: the story of how many queers in twentieth-century London consistently resisted adverse circumstances to come together and have fun on their own terms. This simple story constitutes a powerful new narrative in queer contexts, one that does not deny or occlude past and ongoing suffering but simultaneously insists on the resilience of joy and the power of collective disruptive agency to effect change and generate hope. Moreover, story is itself performative: the tales people tell about themselves, to themselves and others, bring new realities into being, from personal pride to legal recognition to better worlds.

Ken Plummer articulates the queer relevance of this performative aspect of story, proposing that resonant narratives among sexual nonconformists 'performed certain functions in the lives of their tellers' and 'had certain consequences for the social worlds in which they lived'.<sup>83</sup> Two such tales,

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<sup>81</sup> Walsh, 70.8/567.

<sup>82</sup> See James Thompson, *Performance Affects: Applied Theatre and the End of Effect* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), p. 45.

<sup>83</sup> 'Telling Sexual Stories in a Late Modern World', *Studies in Symbolic Interaction*, 18 (1995), 101-120, p. 104.

Plummer argues, had powerful purchase in the late-twentieth-century global north: a structural story, which described queers' normative victimisation and oppression by legal and social norms; and a personal story, which described the individual 'suffering and survival' involved in coming out.<sup>84</sup> They are tales of woe but the popular version of each ends well, in legal equality and personal authenticity respectively. Writing in 1995, the year *Duckie* began, Plummer suggests that such stories yield diminishing returns, not only through familiarity but because of their questionability in a postmodern world increasingly sceptical of master narratives and appreciative of multiplicity, contingency, fragmentation and nonlinearity.<sup>85</sup> In fact, since 1995, these stories have if anything become more entrenched: their hegemonic position as master narratives of post-war queer experience in the global north remains secure even as their happy endings have been interrogated by queer scholars: Lauren Berlant, Heather Love and Sara Ahmed, for instance, powerfully challenge the notion of harmonious assimilation as desirable, effective or even possible, while Greer analyses the shortcomings of simplistically liberatory coming-out stories and notes the potential benefits of 'the performative presentation of broader narratives'.<sup>86</sup>

Plummer's argument is, however, prescient in its application to *Duckie's* 'vintage clubbing' cycle. He suggests 'the future may bring readings that are more akin to endlessly playful/ironic layers of narratives' than to unified stories, if and when 'a community has been fattened up, rendered ripe and willing to hear' them, because such stories 'cannot easily be heard amongst isolated individuals: they gain momentum from an *interpretive community of*

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<sup>84</sup> Plummer, p. 101.

<sup>85</sup> Plummer, pp. 113-114. Around the same time, Judith Roof argues for the heteronormative tendencies of narrative itself in *Come as You Are: Sexuality and Narrative* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1996).

<sup>86</sup> See Lauren Berlant, *Cruel Optimism* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2011); Love, *Feeling Backward*; Sara Ahmed, *The Promise of Happiness* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2010); Greer, pp. 25-26, 30.

*support*'.<sup>87</sup> Such stories then influence the worlds such communities inhabit and construct. Duckie's vintage events offer just such a story, the story of queer fun against the odds, of familial collectivity in an increasingly individualistic age, told to a participatory interpretive community through multiple overlapping, fragmentary and reflexive forms both within individual events and across the cycle of events. Plummer offers a taxonomy of postmodern narrative channels including 'the leaflet, the pamphlet, the booklet, the book, the meeting, the recording, the newspaper, the television programme, the film [and] the chat show'; strikingly, Duckie's vintage events drew on or produced them all.<sup>88</sup>

Duckie's reflexive new master narrative was a story about fun told through fun. The performative capacities of this dynamic are considerable. I have argued above for the performative capacities of fun in its own right and of story in its own right. Sociological research further finds that telling stories about fun has a specific performative power: it enhances subjective understanding and group cohesion. In Ben Fincham's words, 'the retelling of particular types of fun is important not just for identity but also for maintaining relationships in groups'.<sup>89</sup> In other words, the kind of fun you enjoy says something about you, and the understanding that others enjoy it too brings you closer together. Fincham adds that the understanding of shared experiences as having been fun is sometimes collectively articulated retrospectively, 'in the retelling [...] some time later', in ways that belatedly become 'indicative of the sorts of people that we think we are'.<sup>90</sup> Fun, he suggests, is an activity 'experienced in the moment but it is also a discourse, applied retrospectively'.<sup>91</sup> Gary Alan Fine and Ugo Corte echo this view of fun

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<sup>87</sup> Plummer, p. 114, p. 116, emphasis in original.

<sup>88</sup> Plummer, p. 116.

<sup>89</sup> *The Sociology of Fun* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016), p. 194.

<sup>90</sup> Fincham, p. 194.

<sup>91</sup> Fincham, p. 197.

as aiding ‘communal identification’ both through ‘emotional engagement and [...] subsequent narrative possibilities’.<sup>92</sup> Story, family and fun can serve each other.

These sociologists consider fun in the context of mainstream leisure activity where the direct political stakes seem low and are not discussed. But there is political valence to such considerations. Cultural critic Alan McKee, for instance, champions fun in the context of class dynamics, celebrating popular culture that valorises fun as a kind of proudly demotic *joie de vivre* at odds with pretentious and restrictive bourgeois norms.<sup>93</sup> In the context of acutely marginalised minority populations, however, there is even greater power in the building of group cohesion through the narrativisation of associable past experiences of fun. To name it and claim it asserts cohesion across time in ways that build hopeful collectivity by fortifying apprehensions of longitudinal persistence, present resilience and confident anticipation. Such understandings also affirm the reality that groups normatively constructed as abject, for whom experiences of self-determined collective pleasure might be thought unexpected, improper or impossible, have had, do have and will have fun.

Duckie’s ‘vintage clubbing’ events, then, mobilised story telling as a form of family work, not by formulating individualistic narratives but through the performative articulation, in distributed, non-linear form, of an ongoing queer lineage of pleasurable disruptive agency. This supports hopeful queer collectivity, standing in galvanising counterpoint to unsatisfying prevailing narratives valorising the normative assimilation of individual queer subjects. In telling a new story of queer fun through the medium of queer fun, Duckie’s

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<sup>92</sup> ‘Group Pleasures: Collaborative Commitments, Shared Narrative, and the Sociology of Fun’, *Sociological Theory* 35.1 (2017), 64–86, pp. 64, 67.

<sup>93</sup> *Fun! What Entertainment Tells Us About Living a Good Life* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016).

'vintage clubbing' cycle operated as a powerful homemade mutant hope machine fuelled by the *doing* of family, fun, story and the past.

### **Enjoyment in abjection and the stakes of pleasure**

Duckie's 'vintage clubbing' cycle, then, told a new story about queer experience, past and present, to which fun was central. I want now to consider how foregrounding fun enabled a range of understandings to emerge from these events, including how fun has served to resist or make pleasure from abjection and how its operation can illuminate the uneven distribution of risk within queer nightlife contexts. The 'vintage' cycle's story of queer fun stood, as noted above, in conscious counterpoint to established expectations: although pre-1967 gay experience is typically constructed as miserable, 'it was a lark, really,' one scene veteran maintained in advance of *Gross Indecency*.<sup>94</sup> Such knowing revisionism was also evident within the participatory performance events: at *Lady Malcolm's Servants' Ball*, for instance, Sue Frumin's installation, hosting group painting activity, was called 'The Well of Jollyness' in ironic reference to Radclyffe Hall's iconic text of interwar lesbian abjection, *The Well of Loneliness*.<sup>95</sup> Such inversions invite questioning of the stakes of queer fun. Does the 'vintage' cycle's acknowledgement of a lineage of pleasure imply taking less seriously the negative aspects of lived experiences of marginalisation? I suggest not. Understandings of suffering and of fun are not a binary or zero-sum proposition; to acknowledge one is not to deny the other. To foreground fun in the context of the queer past is not to ignore or erase the range, scale and impact of historic and ongoing structural oppression against queer subjects; nor is it to neglect the uneven distribution of such oppression within marginalised populations. Within their

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<sup>94</sup> Stuart Feather quoted in Ben Walters, 'Bad times are here again!', *Time Out London*, 1 July 2010, p. 83.

<sup>95</sup> Radclyffe Hall, *The Well of Loneliness* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1928).



construction as events, the text of their performance elements and particularly the content of ancillary material, Duckie's vintage events made clear the injustices effected in the past and present against queer subjects; they also, I will show, attended to the material, political, social and cultural contingencies that made a wider range of fun activities more easily accessible to cis white homosexual men of means than other queer groups or individuals, and made their fun more likely to be recoverably documented than other kinds.<sup>96</sup> I will argue that taking queer fun seriously illuminates rather than occludes both the material conditions and subjective experiences of marginalisation. Rather than refuting the reality of queer abjection, foregrounding fun can contextualise and supplement appreciation of the agency involved in its resistance.

It might, for instance, illustrate the pleasures to be wrung from abjection, as when, in *Gross Indecency's* *pièce de resistance*, officers of the law became objects of the gay gaze. Or it might assert the persistence of self-determined enjoyment as a longitudinal aspect of queer life, as when Eggs Collective delivered a beautiful version of 'Downtown' at *Duckie Goes to the Gateways*.<sup>97</sup> Their rendition sincerely emphasised the song's celebration of escape and enjoyment on one's own terms, the pursuit of alternative ways of being when 'life is making you lonely' and 'you've got worries' and the value of places to 'forget all your troubles' and dance.<sup>98</sup> On their website, Eggs Collective describe it as 'our ode to glamour, flirting and the power of partying with people who get it', a message whose perennial queer relevance let it slip temporal boundaries to create a fluid erotohistoriographical *mélange*. This

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<sup>96</sup> See, for instance, the *Gross Indecency* booklet and *The Balls* newspaper.

<sup>97</sup> Tony Hatch, 'Downtown', Petula Clark (Pye/Warner Bros., 1964). The song also featured in *Gross Indecency*.

<sup>98</sup> 'Downtown'.

gave audiences watching under the simulated conditions of an earlier age an embodied sense of participation in an enduring lineage of resistant pleasure.<sup>99</sup>

By foregrounding fun, Duckie's vintage events revealed much about how individual and structural attitudes toward fun can illuminate the stakes of given situations in the past and present. In the moment of having fun, one must perceive the stakes to be low; that is, one cannot be consciously mindful of an activity's potentially negative outcomes. Yet such outcomes might still exist: you can't have fun if you're consciously mindful of an imminent police raid but that doesn't mean a raid isn't possible. This is acutely relevant in the context of experiences of queer fun in the past that could have resulted in severe consequences including potential blackmail, extortion, arrest, imprisonment, unemployment, homelessness, social ostracism, violence or suicide. The real stakes of such situations of fun were very high yet, as Duckie's vintage events cumulatively emphasise, queers have consistently considered such risks worthwhile. Even under conditions of considerable oppression and vulnerability, people undertook the labour and jeopardy needed to enable queer fun. Paradoxically, this reveals fun as serious business: for those who habitually took such risks, the stakes of any potential consequences were deemed lower than the stakes of not having fun at all.

Stakes are not, however, constant across participants in a given situation or across time. These vintage events instructively reveal variations in stakes around the staging of queer nightlife events, a continuum of risk that illuminates a range of individual and structural concerns. Different risks were undertaken by the producers of the original events evoked (that is, Gina Ware and Lady Malcolm); the punters of the original events; the producers of Duckie's events; and the punters of Duckie's events. The original producers were publically associated with their respective events and potentially liable to

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<sup>99</sup> 'Duckie Goes to the Gateways', Eggs Collective <<http://www.eggscollective.com/duckie-goes-to-the-gateways>> [accessed 16 August 2018].

criminal prosecution if perceived as enabling illegal behaviour. Their resulting pursuit of plausible deniability resulted in their acting as both enablers and disciplinarians: Gina Ware policed kissing and activism at the Gateways while Lady Malcolm cooperated with increasing police moves to quash queer expression through cross-dressing or sexual activity.<sup>100</sup> The original punters were less personally associated with events but at risk of potentially calamitous personal prosecution in the event of arrest. In contemporary terms, legal risk has receded but there are still economic and family risks. For Duckie producers, the vintage events were expensive to mount and, as noted above, sometimes opened up areas of contention around considerations of when and how certain groups within the Duckie family provided support to or withheld it from others. The direct stakes for present-day punters were, broadly speaking, low. They did need to be able to afford the ticket price, which was higher than a regular Saturday night at the RVT and might represent a significant outlay for some. They were unlikely to face arrest or victimisation, although the possibility of homophobic assault on Pride weekend is not to be discounted, particularly for those dressed in ways that mark them as queer. Overall, though, the stakes were as low as for any fun nightlife event. But that doesn't mean the fun of the 'vintage' events was inconsequential, as I will now show by attending to its technological and performative effects.

### **Fun as technology**

At Duckie's vintage events, fun functioned technologically to intervene in existing structures by incentivising engagement with the queer past through accessible and enjoyable forms and generatively complicating understandings of relations between pleasure and regulatory structures around and within queer nightlife contexts. Engagement with the past is sometimes framed in

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<sup>100</sup> *Gateways Salon, The Balls.*

contemporary UK LGBTQ+ discourse in terms of generationally inflected duty or even compulsion: 'Young queer people shouldn't be obliged to care about LGBT history,' in the words of one recent article that rejected as 'patronising' historical engagement centred on past suffering.<sup>101</sup> The distinctive approach of Duckie's 'vintage clubbing' events sidestepped such contention by reframing the terms of engagement with the past. The familiar narrative construction (stereotyped here as 'patronising') locates younger queer people in a position of presumed gratitude for a lineage of suffering that enables their present pleasures – a dynamic of sacrificial exchange and difference that reproduces in an intergenerational context normative binary distinctions between past 'activism and action' from present 'superficiality and fun'.<sup>102</sup> Duckie's 'vintage' events, however, asserted that past and present participate in a continuous lineage of bold pleasures, resilient resistance and disruptive agency. 'Vintage clubbing' events that were framed and functioned as fun nights out also enabled the development of rich, reflexive understandings of past queer experiences, their ongoing relation to present experiences and the politics of pleasure.

Through participatory performance practices, these events also used fun to lower the stakes of engagement with potentially contentious or uncomfortable aspects of the queer past. At *Gross Indecency*, this centred around the criminalisation of gay male identity and expression and the structural oppression of multiple kinds of queer identity and expression; in the ancillary booklet, for instance, Jo described being assaulted by police officers

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<sup>101</sup> Dylan Jones, 'Young queer people shouldn't be obliged to care about LGBT history – and that's the biggest sign of success there is', *Attitude*, 7 February 2018 <<https://attitude.co.uk/article/young-queer-people-shouldnt-be-obliged-to-care-about-lgbt-history-and-thats-the-biggest-sign-of-success-there-is-opinion/17046/>> [accessed 16 August 2018].

<sup>102</sup> Jones.

and others for wearing conventionally male clothing.<sup>103</sup> Casson described wanting to cultivate a balance between vulnerability and liberation: ‘we’re trying to recreate that sense of tension’, he said, between joyful expression and crushing constriction.<sup>104</sup> The faux police raid embodied this most powerfully but the event was laced with instances of fun qualified or haunted by historically-informed consciousness of potential victimisation. Lamé, for instance, told the crowd from the stage that even dancing with a member of the same sex had been grounds for arrest before exhorting just such behaviour with the call: ‘Fuck the police! Who gives a shit?’ The promotional tagline for *Lady Malcolm’s Servants’ Ball* conveyed a similar point. ‘No man impersonating a woman, and no person unsuitably attired will be admitted or permitted to remain’ was a genuine admonition printed on tickets for the 1935 ball, recycled and repurposed by Duckie as both salutary reminder and ironic incitation.<sup>105</sup>

At *Duckie Goes to the Gateways*, the primary regulatory structure engaged in fun ways through performance was one that operated within the confines of the Gateways itself: the binary gender norms related to butch and femme presentation and relational expectations. As noted earlier, promotional material instructed punters to ‘pick an identity: butch or femme’ and ‘remember: there is no in between’.<sup>106</sup> Again, disciplinary modes were ironically deployed to convey a sense of the real policing operative in the queer past without actually preventing present enjoyment: performers in character told punters off for wearing the ‘wrong’ clothes or directed them to the hairstyling station operated by Open Barbers to attain an ‘appropriate’ coiffure; butches warned punters off paying too much attention to ‘their’

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<sup>103</sup> *Gross Indecency* booklet.

<sup>104</sup> Casson quoted in Walters, ‘Bad times’.

<sup>105</sup> Duckie, *Lady Malcolm’s Servants Ball* flyer (2016), provided by producers.

<sup>106</sup> *Gateways* flyer.

femmes. On-stage performances also engaged the subject, notably those by Ursula Martinez and Jess Love. In one act, set to Paul Anka and Odia Coates's duet 'One Man Woman/One Woman Man' (1974), Martinez played both male and female partners in a couple.<sup>107</sup> Wearing a vertically bisected costume with suit, tie and stubble on the right and pink dress, make-up and jewellery on the left, Martinez lip-synched with exaggerated sincerity to the song's story of dysfunctional monogamy, evoking through ribald and heightened embodiment the potentially absurd intractability of a normative relationship model of binary codependence. In another act, Martinez and Love cycled rapidly through a series of looks and personae related to binary gender presentation, from Rat Pack-type alpha males to faux-naïve female lindy-hop dancers. Having highlighted the performativity, fluidity and contingency of gender presentation, the routine concluded with Martinez and Love dancing naked, proving themselves capable of pleasure and relationality without any sartorial gender markers at all. The fun of *Duckie Goes to the Gateways* therefore functioned at once to reanimate and promote understanding of the gender system structuring this key site of past queer socialising and to subject that system to scrutiny and ironic subversion. The effect was not to disdain butch and femme identities per se – on the contrary, their imaginative expression was richly celebrated – but to interrogate their compulsory binary enforcement, thereby illuminating the contingent terms of past queer fun and prompting consideration of how such constraints might linger into or find correspondence in the present.

At *Lady Malcolm's Servants' Ball*, the fun of participatory performance forms enabled engagement with the discontents of class inequality. Lady Malcolm had mobilised the balls' association with fun to intervene publicly in class relations by being photographed dancing with her butler: a transgressive

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<sup>107</sup> Paul Anka, 'One Man Woman/One Woman Man', Paul Anka and Odia Coates (United Artists, 1974).

act made permissible by the low-stakes context of a fun event. The theme of servants given license – or seizing the right – to have fun ran through many of the performances on the main stage at Duckie’s event, such as Lasana Shabazz’s spectacular transformation from shuffling washerwoman to exuberant flapper dancer. The group number choreographed by Florence Peake, mentioned above, also charted joyful liberation. Some performances prompted more uneasy or ambivalent responses. In the wood-panelled library, butch performance troupe the Drakes, in character as Lady Malcolm’s servants, hung around in shirtsleeves in an area marked ‘Butlers at Rest’, not acknowledging punters on the other side of a rope. To engage them seemed to intrude upon well-earned rest; to ignore them seemed to erase the labour made conspicuously visible by the installation. Nearby, George Chakravarthi, dressed as Marie Antoinette, handed out slices of cake decorated with a map of British imperial conquests – an intervention evoking both class tensions within European nation states and such nations’ exploitation of other peoples and territories. To accept cake seemed to accept complicity in colonialist imperialism; to decline it seemed to reject offered kindness. What price pleasure, such pieces seemed to ask.

The fact that *Lady Malcolm’s Servants’ Ball* took place within 48 hours of the Brexit referendum further qualified experiences and understandings of fun. Many present expressed regret at the result while none that I spoke to were happy about it. The situation did not, then, seem to inspire hope in the future for those present, lending a bitter irony to Wrench and Franks’s rendition at the start of the evening of ‘Happy Days Are Here Again’ and Gateau Chocolat’s rendition at the end of it of ‘Smile’ – though the fact that both songs (like ‘Ain’t We Got Fun’, mentioned in Chapter Three) are associated with contexts of hardship drew attention to the compensatory

capacities of fun.<sup>108</sup> The fun of the vintage events, then, functioned technologically to enable enjoyable engagement with and understanding of the queer past and its relation to the present, and understanding of relations between the queer past and present and regulatory structures including criminalisation, binary gender presentation and class relations.

### **Fun as performative**

Binary framings of activism against fun do not only apply to intergenerational contexts. Pride weekend, when Duckie's 'vintage clubbing' events were held, can operate as a site of contention around story, a locus of disagreement about whether the appropriate contemporary master narrative of queer community should decry ongoing injustice or celebrate progress achieved. Is Pride a protest or a party? Is the proper mode anger or pleasure? Is it about politics or fun? Such binary terms often inform debate within such communities and also some scholarship.<sup>109</sup> As noted, Heather Love dismisses Duckie's *Gay Shame* as being 'about entertainment, not activism' while Chalklin, as noted, proposes that *Gross Indecency* is 'really about' a legacy of struggle rather than pleasure and self-expression.<sup>110</sup> In such contexts, the question 'Is Pride a protest or a party?' can be rephrased as 'Is it still the past?' or, more expansively, 'Is this still a time of suffering or is it now a time of freedom?' Such questions rest on two premises: the construction of the past as a site of painful endurance and the construction of fun as a site of

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<sup>108</sup> Milton Ager and Jack Yellen, 'Happy Days are Here Again', Leo Reisman and His Orchestra (EMI Robbins Catalog, Inc./Advanced Music Corp., 1929); Charlie Chaplin, John Turner and Geoffrey Parsons, 'Smile', in *Modern Times*, dir. by Charlie Chaplin (United Artists, 1936); Raymond B. Egan and Gus Khan, 'Ain't We Got Fun', Billy Jones (Edison Records, 1921).

<sup>109</sup> See, for instance, Shannon Keating, 'Should Pride Be a Party or a Protest?', *Buzzfeed*, 16 June 2017 <<https://www.buzzfeednews.com/article/shannonkeating/should-pride-be-a-party-or-a-protest>> [accessed 16 August 2018]; Kathryn Snowdon, 'Outrage As Sheffield Pride Says Event Is A "Celebration, Not Protest" And Bans Political Groups', *Huffington Post*, 9 May 2018 <[https://www.huffingtonpost.co.uk/entry/sheffield-pride-outrage-banner-protest\\_uk\\_5af2e703e4b0a0d601e8914b](https://www.huffingtonpost.co.uk/entry/sheffield-pride-outrage-banner-protest_uk_5af2e703e4b0a0d601e8914b)> [accessed 16 August 2018].

<sup>110</sup> Love, p. 186n5, Chalklin, p. 138.



inconsequential frivolity. Duckie's vintage events muddle both constructions and sidestep the requirement of choosing between party and protest or between then and now, offering a new story rooted in understandings of past and present as dynamically intertwined and of fun not as emblematic of apolitical inanity but as queerly performative.

The vintage events told a cumulative story of fun as a survival strategy but also as a form of world making. The disruptive agency of fun emerged through its capacity to push back against dominant constraints, such as heading downtown to 'forget all your worries', finding pleasure in a police raid or making a fabulous costume out of workaday obligations. Fun's performativity, meanwhile, emerged through recognition of its capacity to forge new structures, such as the cottaging system cultivated in the toilets at *Gross Indecency*, the exquisite butch aesthetics showcased at the Gateways and the solidarity through sensuousness modelled in the group choreography at *Lady Malcolm's Servants' Ball*. Such moments testify to the ability of performance events to generate anticipatory glimmers of better worlds for queer subjects; the particular power of Duckie's vintage events was to reveal a glimmering chain of such moments running through the past and into the present, a lineage and a continuity that asserted, materialised and perpetuated the lived reality of queer alternatives to dominant structures. This insistence on continuity was cutely illustrated in the 'Gentleman's Club' at *Lady Malcolm's Servants' Ball* by classical-style portrait paintings on the walls onto which Duckie producers' and performers' faces had been digitally superimposed, as if to say they have always been there and still are.

By telling a story that positioned the past as pleurably continuous with the present rather than as its martyred and departed enabler, Duckie asserted the reality of a longitudinal queer life world to which fun has been performatively crucial. Cultural critic Alan McKee celebrates fun-loving

working class forms of entertainment as ‘culture that values doing things because you want to’, locating political valency in the assertion of desire by normatively denigrated groups.<sup>111</sup> Comparable (and, as *Lady Malcolm’s Servants’ Ball* showed, sometimes intersecting) valency applies in terms of queer experience. When queers do things because they want to, and take active pride in that doing rather than reproducing understandings of queer enjoyment as shameful or trivial, new structures informed by lived experience and subjective agency become possible. When George Michael was caught cruising, the *News of the World* expected him to grovel in debasement at what it called ‘new levels of depravity’ but he told their reporter: ‘Fuck off! This is my culture.’<sup>112</sup> What’s more, he later told *Attitude* magazine, it’s ‘fun, if I’m being honest’.<sup>113</sup> To recount a lineage of queerly performative fun, as Duckie’s vintage events do, is itself queerly performative. Set against the master narrative of past sacrifice enabling present (assimilationist) ‘freedom’, Duckie’s new tale of queer fun repositions punters from being consumers of a concluded story about suffering and assimilation to become participants in an ongoing story about alternative world making.

Eggs Collective’s rendition of ‘Downtown’ at *Duckie Goes to the Gateways* powerfully delivered the song’s message of relief from normative discontents, as noted above. But that’s only half the song’s message. It conjures a vision of downtown as a site not only of relief but of new kinds of pleasure and support: the ‘lights are much brighter there’ and there’s dancing and

you may find somebody kind to help and understand you  
Someone who is just like you and needs a gentle hand to

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<sup>111</sup> McKee, p. 33.

<sup>112</sup> Neville Thurlbeck, ‘George’s sex shame’, *News of the World*, 23 July 2006, p. 1.

<sup>113</sup> *Attitude*, ‘George Michael recalls the thrill of cruising in frank 2004 interview’, 25 June 2017 <<https://attitude.co.uk/article/george-michael-recalls-the-thrill-of-cruising-in-frank-2004-attitude-interview/13328/>> [accessed 16 August 2018].

Guide them along.<sup>114</sup>

The beauty and hope of this, the song's climactic lyrical turn, is the way it pivots, with grace and generosity, from a description of what the disaffected central character needs – help and understanding – to what they can provide: gentleness and guidance. With this, the song turns from a vision of relief to a vision of construction, of mutual support and commonality. The central figure might meet someone 'just like you' in their abjection – and the 'you' reminds us too that this is a lyric written in the second person, a kind of evangelical outreach, in fact, in which the singer asserts a connection with the disaffected central character to whom she sings and promises further connections to come in this new place, this downtown, where 'things'll be great' and there are 'little places to go / Where they never close'.<sup>115</sup> This movement from first person to second person to third person maps reproductive queer futurity in action, conveying a sense of new understandings transmitted and replicated – and intimating fourth, fifth and sixth persons to come. All of this raises the question – another question implicit in the narrative constructed by Duckie's 'vintage' events – what if downtown isn't a holiday but a home? What if you stayed there? These events both promise and materialise a better world, intermittent and imperfect perhaps but really existing.

The fun of the 'vintage clubbing' events, then, is performative in its assertion of a living lineage of alternative world making in which Duckie's punters can participate not just in the moment but longer term. The glimmering chain links then, now and the future. The cycle's articulation of this longitudinal material reality fortifies a sense of queer as sustained and sustainable, bringing into being new, critically inflected understandings of commonality, continuity and consistency across time that make new kinds of thought, feeling, relation and agency more plausible and attainable. It enacts

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<sup>114</sup> 'Downtown'.

<sup>115</sup> 'Downtown'.

new kinds of pride that undergird new kinds of agency and effect new kinds of change. This way hope lies.

## **Conclusion**

This chapter has shown how Duckie's vintage clubbing events served reproductive queer futurity by rendering other, better worlds more easily conceivable, realisable and inhabitable. By generating and disseminating nuanced understandings of a lineage of precarious, innovative, joyful, defiant and performative forms of queer fun, they offered a new kind of story about the queer past and its complex relation to the present. They created a hybrid temporality, supported by the production of erotohistoriographical understandings, that enabled contemporary queers to conceive of themselves not as external consumers or beneficiaries of a finished story about suffering but rather as active participants in an ongoing story about alternative world making. These events affirmed qualified kinship across periods of time and enabled pleasure and politics to be thought and felt together more easily. They showed how family structures engaging intergenerational transmission and material support can support reproductive queer futurity while also illuminating challenges and problems around their mobilisation.

Considering the vintage events specifically as homemade mutant hope machines, I have shown how they generated hope by establishing that alternative queer life worlds have existed at other times and under other conditions, making more feasible the idea of their generation in the present and future. They functioned routinely and reliably through a format that has proven replicable across three major events: *Gross Indecency*, *Duckie Goes to the Gateways* and *Lady Malcolm's Servants' Ball*. They have been mutant in the sense of adapting to the varying historical subjects of each given event and also to changes in material conditions (including venue and economic

structure) and substantive outcomes (including a range of publications and ancillary events). These forms continues to mutate: since *Lady Malcolm's Servants' Ball*, Duckie also produced *50 Queers for 50 Years* and *Duckie DeCrim: 1967* (both 2017), which engaged the queer past in new ways; a further vintage clubbing event themed around Vauxhall pleasure gardens is, at the time of writing, planned for 2020, and Duckie's engagement with the queer past is being restructured under a dedicated strand called Archive to Events that aims to ensure the production of further vehicles for this particular kind of hope. In the context of reproductive queer futurity, these vintage events modelled reproducible technologies of hope in more modes than the main participatory performance events themselves. *The Balls* newspaper, for instance, included an interview with Bishopsgate Institute archivist Stefan Dickers equipping readers with rudimentary skills related to the queer use of archives and the DIY archiving of queer materials. It's also notable that in and around 2017, coinciding with the fiftieth anniversary of partial decriminalisation of sex between men in England and Wales, a number of historically-inflected performance projects followed in Duckie's footsteps by foregrounding past sites of queer fun.<sup>116</sup>

Analysis of these vintage events also opens up a lineage of reproductive queer futurity itself. That is to say, the past queer subjects who created the sites of fun reanimated by Duckie were themselves engaged in reproductive queer futurity; were themselves in the business of making and operating

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<sup>116</sup> These included *Long Live Queen James!*, devised and written by Mark Ravenhill and Scottee (Banqueting House, London, 22 February 2017), which dramatised the homosocial intrigues of James I's court and was funded by Historic Royal Palaces; the National Trust's reanimation of 1930s queer hangout the Caravan in Soho including pop-up performances (Freud Café-Bar, London, March 2017); *We Raise Our Hands in the Sanctuary*, written and directed by Daniel Fulvio and Martin Moriarty (The Albany, London, 31 January-11 February 2017), about queer Black London nightlife in the 1980s; *Kings Cross (REMIX)*, written and performed by Tom Marshman (Camden People's Theatre, London, 16-27 May 2017 and elsewhere), about the LGBTQ scenes of that part of London in the 1980s; and *Jonny Woo's East London Lecture*, written by Jonny Woo, dir. by Douglas Rentoul (The Ditch, London, 20-30 April 2016 and elsewhere), about how Shoreditch got cool.

homemade mutant hope machines. Nights at the Gateways or Lady Malcolm's balls weren't one-offs but series of occasions that routinely generated the lived experience of better worlds than the ones supposedly available to their participants. They demonstrated that to take queer fun seriously is to take seriously the ability of queer subjects to come together and enjoy free expression and self-determined pleasure. By reproducing their technologies of hope, Duckie proves their continued adaptive reproducibility and extends the lineage of insistence that queer experience is about not just survival and not just fitting in but about making better worlds from the ground up. The 'vintage clubbing' cycle made a Madame Sélavy of every punter, enabling them in reflexive ways to understand kinds of belonging beyond mortality and through their bodies to feel how the past does things.

## Chapter Six

### Doing ageing queerly at the Posh Club

#### Introduction

At 85, Ella was an unstoppable dancer. No sooner had a volunteer seated her at her table in the Crawley community centre hall than her shoulders would start to bob and rock, her elbows to pivot, her legs to twitch. If there was some disco or soul playing and a few minutes before the acts began, she'd be on her feet, perhaps with her friend Jean, perhaps on her own, giving it some. As the afternoon continued, her moves got bolder. This week, as performer Paul Stewart was on stage crooning '(Is This the Way to) Amarillo', Ella felt the urge and began dancing her way between the tables, Jean in tow.<sup>1</sup> As Stewart sang, they picked up a couple more people and formed a conga line. Within minutes, dozens of pensioners and volunteer waiters were snaking their way around the room, grinning, singing and occasionally high kicking. Stewart looked on, entertained and bemused at his unexpected move from star turn to support for the real action. This kind of thing happened a lot at the Posh Club.

This thesis has argued for the power of emergent, autonomous and adaptive forms and processes known as homemade mutant hope machines to serve reproductive queer futurity – a utopian position rooted in the conscious and routine generation of collective hope for marginalised people – by beginning to materialise new and better worlds through participatory performance projects and events that mobilise family and fun. So far, my case studies have illustrated how this works in practice through reference to people whose sexual or gender identities frame them as lesbian, gay, bisexual,

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<sup>1</sup> Observations from field notes, 8 November 2016. Unless otherwise attributed, observations and quotations are from field notes. Neil Sedaka and Howard Greenfield, '(Is This the Way to) Amarillo', Tony Christie (MCA/Kapp, 1971).

transgender or otherwise queer (LGBTQ+). In this chapter, I argue that participatory performance's capacity to support reproductive queer futurity can apply in broader contexts of marginalisation. I attend to the Posh Club, Duckie's afternoon cabaret event for older people at risk of isolation, framing it as a homemade mutant hope machine that supports a population that can be usefully understood as queer regardless of the gender or sexuality of individual subjects. As the chapter unfolds, I will draw on observations, interviews, Duckie's internal data and reporting and performance analysis to show how the Posh Club emerged from lived experience, operated relatively autonomously and adapted to changing circumstances. Understanding it as family work, I show how it enables its guests to benefit from inherited technologies of support and queerly combines biogenetic and chosen family structures. I describe its construction of its guests as high status and show how this enables fun that supports new kinds of confidence, understanding, relationality, self-expression and agency. Catalysing fabulous experiments in performance, dressing and dancing, I show how the Posh Club materialised a better world for its participants whose effects spread far beyond the immediate time and place of the Club's staging – a world where people like Ella could follow pleasurable impulses, find like-minded collaborators and start moving together in new directions.

### **Welcome to the Posh Club**

At 11.30am on 21 January 2015, the doors of the church hall of St Paul's West Hackney in east London opened in anticipation of the site's first ever Posh Club. The Club is an afternoon cabaret event for people over 60 at risk of isolation, produced by Duckie at various locations since 2012. The audience of around 80 older local residents started to arrive, by bus, by taxi and on foot, some with friends, relatives or carers, most dressed smartly, formally



or exuberantly, as if for church, a celebration or a party. They were greeted on arrival and their coats taken by scrupulously solicitous volunteers in monochromatic waiters' attire, some wearing understated jewellery, some with chic hair and make-up that exceeded normative gender expectations. The unremarkable church hall was elegantly, transformatively dressed. Daylight was blocked by black curtains studded with star-like encrustations, radiators obscured by faux-marble covers, the room's perimeter adorned with pot plants, ornamental lamps and a raised stage area marked by closed red curtains and scalloped faux-metal footlights. A pianist played upbeat songs and showtunes as guests were shown to their seats, at tables of eight decked out in white tablecloths set with cups, saucers and cutlery. Places were largely allocated on a first-come-first-served basis though some more vulnerable guests had reserved seats towards the stage and larger groups were seated together where possible. St Paul's rector, Niall Weir, in his dog collar, and the Club's hosts, Duckie producers Simon Casson and Dicky Eton, both in black tie, chatted to guests and monitored logistics. Volunteers ferried tea and coffee to tables from the adjacent kitchen, where the caterers and more volunteers laboured efficiently.

Once guests were seated, food was served: generous plates of sandwiches with a range of fillings and tiered cake-stands bedecked with tarts, fairy cakes, chocolate fingers and biscuits. Scones with cream and jam were also served. The music, conversation, laughter and clinks and clatters of lunch died down as Eton took to the stage as compère to welcome the guests. Although inexperienced in the role, Eton quickly established a warm, chatty and irreverent rapport, sometimes with an edge of mock-sternness to enforce attention. He introduced the event's first performers, flapper-style dance act the Bees' Knees, who generated a buzz of excitement as they moved through the room, making their way to the stage from a door at the back of the room

linking to the church itself, serving today as a dressing-room. The afternoon then alternated between periods of performance (live music from local singer-songwriter Asabi Hawah, satirical striptease from Ursula Martinez and Jess Love) and periods of socialising, including a toast of sparkling wine or juice for each guest. A free raffle draw yielded prizes such as chocolates and pot plants and there were numerous opportunities to dance to pop and rock tracks; Pharrell Williams's 'Happy' was a favourite.<sup>2</sup> At 3pm, Eton thanked performers, staff, volunteers and guests from the stage and the hall began to empty to the sounds of scraping chairs, laughter, cooing, thanks and good-natured complaints about aches and fatigue brought on by the afternoon's exertions.

This format was followed throughout the Posh Club's 10-week run at St Paul's, which ended on 25 March 2015, and also applied at the other 10-week run I attended, between 24 October and 20 December 2016 at Broadfield Community Centre, a new location for the Club in Crawley, where it originated. The Centre's newly refurbished hall featured freshly upholstered faux-gilt-framed chairs, modular stage, blue curtains, lighting rig and mirrorball. There was more sunlight and less ornamental décor than at Hackney. The hall seated between 70 and 80 guests and had a kitchen at the rear, behind which a hallway opened onto the rest of the centre, including a nearby room that served as a dressing room for performers. As at Hackney, all-inclusive tickets had to be booked by phone in advance to manage capacity and logistics. Entrance fees – £3 in 2015, £5 in 2016 – were waived at the producers' discretion if they were felt to be the factor preventing attendance. All editions of the Club that I observed were fully booked with attendance figures in Hackney growing over the 10-week run to double the anticipated capacity with more names on waiting lists.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Pharrell Williams, 'Happy', Pharrell Williams (Backlot Music/i Am Other/Columbia, 2013).

<sup>3</sup> Anticipated capacity was 80. Actual attendance numbers, by my observation, were 77 (with three no-shows), 86, 94, 93, 132, 134, 158, 158, 149 and 156.

### **The Posh Club as homemade mutant hope machine**

This thesis argues that reproductive queer futurity operates in practice through forms and processes I call homemade mutant hope machines. These emerge from lived experience, adapt to contingent changes, operate relatively autonomously and routinely generate hope and support the materialisation of better worlds. I want now to articulate the Posh Club as a homemade mutant hope machine by detailing its claims to emergent, adaptive and autonomous operation.

#### *Emergent*

'All these things come out of the personal,' Casson told me. 'Duckie on Saturday night came because we wanted somewhere to go on Saturday night [...] [and] the Posh Club came out of my mum wanting somewhere to go.'<sup>4</sup> In 2012, Casson's mother, Irene, aged 84, moved from Hackney to Crawley, a town of around 107,000 people south of London.<sup>5</sup> Irene was bored and lonely so Casson and his sister, Annie Bowden, threw a tea party one afternoon as a 'special treat' for her and two older friends, decorating her home, selecting gramophone music and serving sandwiches and cakes on 'fancy crockery'.<sup>6</sup> When it went well, Casson and Bowden repeated the event and saw the potential to 'make that into something bigger', in Casson's words, scaling it up for more local guests, programming turns by Duckie performers and recruiting volunteer waiters.<sup>7</sup> Casson and Eton successfully applied for £9,600 from Awards for All, which distributes lottery money to community projects, to fund a 10-week run of the Tuesday Club, as it was known, catering to around 40 guests per week at St Mary's Church Hall in Southgate, Crawley, beginning

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<sup>4</sup> Simon Casson and Dicky Eton, interview with the author, 1 April 2015.

<sup>5</sup> Casson and Eton interview, 1 April 2015.

<sup>6</sup> 'History', *The Posh Club* <<http://theposhclub.co.uk/history/>> [accessed 16 August 2018].

<sup>7</sup> Casson and Eton interview, 1 April 2015.

in December 2012.<sup>8</sup> Regular Duckie collaborator Tim Spooner was commissioned to create the décor for the Club in Crawley (and later Hackney) and aimed for glamour with a human touch. 'I'm trying to make it look as classy as possible,' he told me, while also wanting it to 'look homemade, not too shiny, not too professional', so that the atmosphere still 'reflected that family affection, I suppose, like a cake your mum has made [...] You can see the edges.'<sup>9</sup> The Posh Club's homemadeness can be seen, then, in relation to its emergence and its aesthetic.

### *Adaptive*

The Posh Club constituted a mutation in Duckie's performance practice. It echoed Saturday nights not only in its originating motivations but in its forms: at the Posh Club, Duckie's established understandings and capabilities now enabled a different marginalised group to come together and enjoy a cheap event set in a specially dressed immersive environment that began with music, socialising and refreshment, then showcased participatory cabaret performance and then enabled dancing. An existing homemade mutant hope machine was adapted to new conditions in which, as I will show, it proved capable of routinely generating hope. The Posh Club also represented an evolution in the Duckie collective's interest in productions bringing together queer variety performance and older working class audiences. A cycle collectively dubbed 'Queers and Old Dears' comprised events marketed at 'poofs and pensioners' and held in Blackpool in 2008, Bexhill-on-Sea in 2009 and Battersea in 2010, all coordinated with local care services, and a show at Wilton's Music Hall in 2012, produced in association with intergenerational

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<sup>8</sup> Casson and Eton interview, 1 April 2015.

<sup>9</sup> Tim Spooner, interview with the author, 25 February 2015.

arts charity Magic Me.<sup>10</sup> As well as their intergenerational approach, these shows anticipated the Posh Club by offering cheap tickets for older people and inviting them to dress 'posh'.<sup>11</sup> The Posh Club's own capacity for mutation, meanwhile, is shown in its development from an event for three in Irene Casson's front room to an event for more than 80 in two church halls. 'Different formations were trialled' at the Tuesday Club in 2012 and 2013, according to a promotional Duckie video, and Bowden told me about the incremental improvements (such as sourcing nice crockery in charity shops) and dead-end experiments (with, for instance, hairdressing and film screenings) that anticipated the winning Posh Club formula described above.<sup>12</sup> This formula then proved successfully adaptive to multiple sites around the country, as I detail below, where mutation continues: in Casson's words, 'each new Posh Club takes on the identity of the local community that it is set in as a collaboration between us, Duckie and the local people who come'.<sup>13</sup>

### *Autonomous*

I have noted in previous chapters that the autonomy of homemade mutant hope machines is often qualified by their reliance on infrastructure created and maintained by government or private capital, and that the autonomy of Duckie's homemade mutant hope machines in particular is qualified by the collective's operational dependence on accountable income from outside sources, especially its block grant as an Arts Council England National

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<sup>10</sup> 'Queers and Old Dears', Duckie archived website <<http://duckie.harmsen.net/generic.php?id=106&submenu=old>> [accessed 16 August 2018]; 'Battersea 2010/Bexhill-on-Sea 2009/Blackpool 2008', Duckie archived website <<http://duckie.harmsen.net/generic.php?id=102&submenu=queers>> [accessed 16 August 2018].

<sup>11</sup> 'Battersea 2010/Bexhill-on-Sea 2009/Blackpool 2008', Duckie archived website <<http://duckie.harmsen.net/generic.php?id=102&submenu=queers>> [accessed 16 August 2018].

<sup>12</sup> Duckie, 'The Posh Club', *YouTube*, 31 July 2014 <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BnGEdhVGua4>> [accessed 16 August 2018]; Annie Bowden, interview with the author, 29 November 2016.

<sup>13</sup> Duckie, *The Posh Club* magazine, 2018, provided by producers, p. 4.

Portfolio Organisation. The claim to homemade status remains credible, I maintain, when projects originate in response to alienated or marginalised experience and maintain forms and processes consistent with that emergent sensibility. This, I argue, remains the case with Duckie's projects, including the Posh Club, which has always been overseen by Casson, Bowden and Eton according to the terms that first made it appealing to Irene Casson and her friends. The Club's autonomy is bolstered by the unpaid goodwill labour volunteered by people local to each site and/or already connected to Duckie: barely a handful of the 15 to 25 workers at each event receive income via funds raised. However, the Club is also dependent on competitive, accountable and precarious funding from charities, foundations and local authorities. Attending to this illuminates some of the complex contingencies of socially engaged participatory arts practice under neoliberalism and, although this area is not the main focus of this thesis, considering it in some detail, as I will now do, reveals how the deft manoeuvre of this landscape can support reproductive queer futurity.

In the introduction, I drew on Jen Harvie's analysis of participatory arts practice under neoliberal capitalism to contextualise Duckie's operation, including its proficient abilities as an 'artpreneur' (to use Harvie's term).<sup>14</sup> The Posh Club's development powerfully illustrates this capacity to navigate neoliberal structures and deliver outcomes that fulfill Duckie's aims while also proving amenable to rhetorics of instrumentalised art and privatised and deregulated health and social services. As Eton told me, Duckie asked soon after the project was conceived 'how can we leverage this in the right way' to secure necessary resources from potential backers.<sup>15</sup> Following the Awards for All grant for the Tuesday Club mentioned above, Duckie secured a further

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<sup>14</sup> See *Fair Play: Art, Performance and Neoliberalism* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), p. 62.

<sup>15</sup> Casson and Eton interview, 1 April 2015.

£39,000 annual grant for five years from the Big Lottery Fund Reaching Communities Programme to support ongoing operation of The Posh Club (as it was renamed) in Crawley, serving around 90 guests weekly between February 2014 and December 2018.<sup>16</sup> Between 2015 and 2018, Duckie fundraiser Emmy Minton secured £14,000 from Arts Council England to support the Club's refurbishment of and relocation to Broadfield Community Centre in Crawley and a further £19,000 from around 15 organisations to fund a total of 25 weeks in Hackney and 10 weeks each in Brighton, Hastings and Elephant and Castle, as well as one-off events in Peterborough and Elephant and Castle and at Bishopsgate Institute.<sup>17</sup>

While some of this funding supported the Club as an arts-based project, most of it understood the project as addressing the social, psychological, medical and/or care needs of older people in the context of austerity-based cuts to healthcare and social services and the privatisation, marketisation and deregulation of remaining provision.<sup>18</sup> Duckie has pragmatically framed the Club in aligned terms, accurately describing it in funding applications as a project that 'increases the numbers of older people participating in cultural and social activities, reduces participants' loneliness and isolation, improves general wellbeing and reduces the burden on statutory services'.<sup>19</sup> This is also

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<sup>16</sup> 'History', *The Posh Club*; *Crawley and Horley Observer*, 'Posh tea dance is "like the Ritz in downtown Crawley"', 12 October 2016 <<https://www.crawleyobserver.co.uk/news/posh-tea-dance-is-like-the-ritz-in-downtown-crawley-1-7622563>> [accessed 16 August 2018].

<sup>17</sup> Simon Casson and Dicky Eton, interview with the author, 9 September 2018. Supporting bodies acknowledged on the Posh Club website – in addition to Arts Council England – include Hackney local authority, Mind, West Hackney Parochial Charity and Peabody (Hackney); Baring Foundation and Big Lottery Fund Awards for All (Hastings and Brighton); United St Saviour's Charity Southwark, Elephant & Castle Community Fund, University of the Arts London: London College of Communication and Creation (Elephant and Castle); Big Lottery Fund, Crawley Borough Council, West Sussex County Council, Gatwick Airport Community Trust and Broadfield Community Centre (Crawley); Peterborough Presents (Peterborough). See 'Clubs', *The Posh Club* <<http://theposhclub.co.uk/clubs/>> [accessed 16 August 2018].

<sup>18</sup> Emmy Minton, correspondence with the author, 10 September 2018.

<sup>19</sup> Duckie, 'The Posh Club FAQs', 2017, internal documentation provided by producers.

the expectation of the Crawley general medical practice that began referring patients to the Club in 2016 as part of a 'social prescribing' programme, Prescription Plus, predicated on activities supportive of economically accountable healthcare metrics.<sup>20</sup>

On these terms, the Posh Club succeeded, as all 28 people I interviewed across both sites agreed. Duckie's internal evaluations revealed 'a marked reduction in loneliness and an improvement in health and wellbeing' among guests.<sup>21</sup> A survey carried out by Duckie in Crawley found that 94 percent of guests believed the Club helped them be more active, 98 percent thought it helped them make more friends and 87 percent of disabled guests believed the Club made them more active and less isolated.<sup>22</sup> A survey in Hackney yielded unanimously positive opinions of the Club and its effects and Duckie research also showed improvements in volunteers' wellbeing and attitudes towards older people.<sup>23</sup> The Posh Club's success on these terms could be understood as validating the neoliberal context on which its funding was predicated. Similarly, its use of volunteers, though common practice in the charity and (obviously) voluntary sectors, could be framed in performance contexts as participating in structures liable to reproduce privilege and inequality.<sup>24</sup> Moreover, its emergence from a situation involving Casson, Bowden and their mother could be understood as aligning the project with normative valorisation of biogenetic family relations.

I argue, however, that accountability to neoliberal funding has not hampered the Posh Club's practical operation on producers' terms, and that

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<sup>20</sup> Minton correspondence, 10 September 2018.

<sup>21</sup> Duckie, 'Arts Council England research funding final application [Posh Club]', 2016, provided by producers.

<sup>22</sup> Duckie, 'Survey of 111 Crawley guests' [Crawley data2.xlsx], 2015, provided by producers.

<sup>23</sup> Duckie, 'Survey of 100 Hackney guests' [Hackney Posh Questionnaire 1.xlsx], 2015, provided by producers; Duckie, 'Local Sustainability Fund application form' [LSF\_Application\_Duckie], 21 October 2015, provided by producers, p. 18.

<sup>24</sup> See Harvie, pp. 27-28.



to consider the project only as it relates to biogenetic family and neoliberal economic structures occludes its surprising potency in the service of reproductive queer futurity. I will show that the homemade mutant hope machine called the Posh Club demonstrates the capacity of participatory performance practices supported by non-normative understandings of family and fun to generate hope and materialise better worlds for marginalised subjects. I want now to explain how and why understanding this is supported by framing the Posh Club's guests, most of whom are straight and over 60, as queer children.

### **Queering the Posh Club**

I noted in the introduction to this thesis how critical mobilisations of queer, in Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick's words, spin 'outward along dimensions that can't be subsumed under gender and sexuality at all', applying queer understandings to positions of marginalisation related to race, nationality and 'other identity-constituting, identity fracturing discourses'.<sup>25</sup> I suggest that the older people at risk of isolation who constitute the Posh Club's intended audience occupy such a position. While, as sociologist Ben Fincham notes, older people are not per se psychologically disadvantaged, in practice many are exposed to potential contributory factors; in 2017, for instance, a poll on a social networking site for older British people found that 73 per cent described themselves as lonely.<sup>26</sup> The Posh Club's operation is predicated on the understanding of some older people as being at acute risk of social isolation and Duckie's funding applications for the Club referred to research linking

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<sup>25</sup> *Tendencies* (New York: Routledge, 1994), pp. 8-9.

<sup>26</sup> *The Sociology of Fun* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016), pp. 90-91, Haroon Siddique, 'Three-quarters of older people in the UK are lonely, survey finds', *Guardian*, 21 March 2017 <<https://www.theguardian.com/society/2017/mar/21/three-quarters-of-older-people-in-the-uk-are-lonely-survey-finds>> [accessed 16 August 2018].

such isolation to greater demand for health and social-care services and increased rates of depression, rehospitalisation, morbidity and mortality.<sup>27</sup>

Older people can also be subject to othering through erasure or prejudice, even within spaces such as the Posh Club, as my own observations illustrate. Particularly notable are stereotypical assumptions related to older people's supposed inability to have fun. Volunteers at the Club in their twenties told me 'old people are kind of invisible' in society and they were surprised to find them 'as receptive as they were' to performance culture.<sup>28</sup> One Hackney volunteer described her shock at seeing guests, whom she previously knew as St Paul's parishioners, enjoying themselves at the Club: 'I would never have dreamed of seeing them up and dancing. They used to terrify the life out of me.'<sup>29</sup> St Paul's West Hackney Rector Niall Weir reported experiencing the 'unconscious prejudice' that people over 70 'haven't got it in them to have a good time'.<sup>30</sup> Older people, then, can be considered as one of the queer 'targeted populations', in Judith Butler's words, that are normatively 'framed as being already lost or forfeited' and thereby rendered vulnerable and precarious.<sup>31</sup> Older people are not targeted in the same ways as, for instance, queer immigrants of colour yet their high levels of isolation and depression testify to the shortcomings of normative family models valorised as sufficient, or even ideal, by dominant discourses.

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<sup>27</sup> 'Preventing loneliness and social isolation: interventions and outcomes', Social Care Institute for Excellence Research Briefing 39, January 2011 <<https://www.scie.org.uk/publications/briefings/files/briefing39.pdf>> [accessed 16 August 2018]; John T. Cacioppo and William Patrick, *Loneliness: Human Nature and the Need for Social Connection* by (New York: Norton, 2008); C. Giuli, L. Spazzafumo, C. Sirolla, A.M. Abbatecola, F. Lattanzio and D. Postacchini, 'Social isolation risk factors in older hospitalized individuals', *Archives of Gerontology and Geriatrics*, 55.3 (2012), 580-585; John T. Cacioppo and Stephanie Cacioppo, 'Social Relationships and Health: The Toxic Effects of Perceived Social Isolation', *Social and Personality Psychology Compass*, 8.2 (2014), 58-72.

<sup>28</sup> Posh Club Hackney young volunteers, group interview with the author, 4 February 2015.

<sup>29</sup> Posh Club Hackney church volunteer, interview with the author, 18 February 2015.

<sup>30</sup> Niall Weir, interview with the author, 18 February 2015.

<sup>31</sup> 'Remarks on "Queer Bonds"', *GLQ* 17.2-3 (2011), 381-387, p. 383.

Attending to guests as queer in this sense doesn't mean the Posh Club was an exemplary LGBTQ+ friendly space. While I never witnessed any overt hostility on the basis of sexuality or gender at the Club, overt queerness around sexuality and gender was sometimes sidestepped, erased or denigrated. No guests to my knowledge openly identified as LGBTQ+ and LGBTQ+ organisers were initially wary about open expression. Casson described how, when first seeking partner organisations, 'we hid the Duckie thing from them a bit', for instance not supplying links to the company website in case images of 'naked people doing arty stuff' proved off-putting.<sup>32</sup> He also reported exercising caution around 'how out we are, how queer we are in those spaces'.<sup>33</sup> In Hackney, Weir characterised some of his parishioners who attended the Club as 'potentially homophobic'.<sup>34</sup> In Crawley, a volunteer disdainfully rolled her eyes as she mentioned having 'a theatrical in the family' while performers casually denigrated Barry Manilow's and Elton John's sexuality through reference to limp wrists.<sup>35</sup>

At the same time, the Club facilitated what might be called 'quietly queer' encounters. Some volunteers' looks and ensembles, for instance, disrupted gender norms even while conforming to the Club's volunteer dress code of monochrome smartness. This sometimes prompted questioning from guests, which gender-non-conforming volunteers characterised as expressive of 'curiosity' rather than 'hateful thinking' or 'hostility' and conducive to exchanges that they felt catalysed understandings of different subjectivities and provoked thought about the contingency of gender presentation.<sup>36</sup> Performances expressive of LGBTQ+ experiences and subjectivity also

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<sup>32</sup> Casson and Eton interview, 1 April 2015; field notes, 1 November 2016.

<sup>33</sup> Casson and Eton interview, 1 April 2015.

<sup>34</sup> Weir interview, 18 February 2015.

<sup>35</sup> Posh Club Crawley volunteers, group interview with the author, 29 November 2016; field notes, 8 November 2016, 29 November 2016.

<sup>36</sup> Young volunteers group interview, 4 February 2015.

constituted quietly queer interventions. These included a pancake-flipping drag act by Russella that found absurdity in aspects of normative feminised domesticity, a gentle hand-animated love story between 'Flyboy' and 'Mothboy' by Matthew Robins and (in a later run) Gracie's rendition of Andrew Lipka's lesbian-themed 'Old-Fashioned Love Song' while sitting on an audience member's lap.<sup>37</sup> These acts provoked some isolated tutting but mostly enthusiastic approval. Casson, meanwhile, found that, initial concerns notwithstanding, gradual disclosure of his and other organisers' and volunteers' sexualities was accepted as 'fine', and Weir told me nobody had complained to him about the Club's LGBTQ+ aspects.<sup>38</sup> Engaged by a performer as part of a turn, one male guest discussed in front of the whole Club having had several husbands without any visible or audible discontent.<sup>39</sup> A parishioner who reported her abstract dislike of 'homosexuals and perverts' also happily conversed with a queer-identified volunteer; Weir suggested that homophobic reservations fade 'when people are making human contact [because] they're not dealing with stereotype or prejudice, they're dealing person to person'.<sup>40</sup> The Posh Club, then, can be considered queerly both in terms of its provision of service to a population vulnerable to marginalisation and in terms of its enablement of generatively empathetic engagement across difference (related to both age and LGBTQ+ characteristics).

### **Doing family queerly at the Posh Club**

Queer understandings can inform not only individual subjective positions but also non-normative forms of relationality in ways that support the formation of queer family structures. Joshua J. Weiner and Damon Young describe 'queer

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<sup>37</sup> Field notes, 4 March 2015, 25 February 2015 and 15 February 2017.

<sup>38</sup> Casson and Eton interview, 1 April 2015; Weir interview, 18 February 2015.

<sup>39</sup> Field notes, 3 February 2016.

<sup>40</sup> Niall Weir interview, 18 February 2015.

bonds' that 'appear under different conditions of negation' beyond the structures of support normatively presumed adequate.<sup>41</sup> Through such bonds, conditions of exclusion can support 'at once disabled and inventive [kinds of] sociality' that yield 'new relational possibilities' beyond the scope, for instance, of the biogenetic nuclear family.<sup>42</sup> Cecilia Sosa, meanwhile, analyses new kinds of kinship, empathy and agency emerging from responses to the trauma of Argentinian dictatorship between 1976 and 1983; she frames these as queer, not by identifying individuals whose actions she discusses as LGBTQ+ but by framing their 'non-normative acts of mourning' as being productively positioned 'beyond traditional family settings' and thereby exposing the contingencies and limitations of normative structures.<sup>43</sup> These critics describe conditions whose relation to race, nationality and state power render implicated subjects much more acutely vulnerable to violence and harrassment than Posh Club guests. Nevertheless, their work instructively demonstrates how a queer theoretical framework can illuminate situations related to loss, the insufficiencies of the normative biological family framework and the potential for nourishing models of kinship exceeding that framework to emerge from situations of marginalisation.

I do not, then, frame individual Posh Club guests as non-normative in their sexualities or genders – though I don't rule it out – but rather seek to apply queer understandings better to analyse the Club's enablement of the kind of queer bonds that Weiner and Young characterise as occurring 'not in spite of but *because* of some force of negation, in which it is precisely negativity that organizes scenes of togetherness'.<sup>44</sup> Sosa also attends to how

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<sup>41</sup> 'Queer Bonds', *GLQ: A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies*, 17.2-3 (2011), 223-41, p. 223.

<sup>42</sup> Weiner and Young, pp. 226, 229.

<sup>43</sup> *Queering Acts of Mourning in the Aftermath of Argentina's Dictatorship: The Performances of Blood* (London: Tamesis Books, 2014), p. xi.

<sup>44</sup> Weiner and Young, p. 236.

those deemed normatively abject can be cherished through queer relations.<sup>45</sup> The Posh Club is structured not only to centre the subjectivity of older people at risk of isolation but to attend especially closely to those who might be marginalised even within that group, supporting participation for ‘people with high needs’ through forms such as specialised support around dementia and partnerships with hospices.<sup>46</sup> Efforts were also made to expand the ethnic diversity of attendance at the Club, engaging with local community groups to learn what barriers might exist to participation; to some, for instance, the forms of high tea might read less as invitingly luxurious than as an alienating spectacle of whiteness. In Hackney, where guests were mostly black or white, efforts were made to engage the local Asian and Turkish populations. In Crawley, where most guests were white, organisers learned that some local older south Asian women were put off because they didn’t like sandwiches; alternative catering was prepared and they attended and enjoyed the Club.<sup>47</sup> Since the run I attended, Crawley local authority has funded a community development worker with a remit to broaden the Club’s attendance.<sup>48</sup>

Some research into queer kinship places biogenetic and ‘chosen’ family structures in binary opposition, the one replacing or substituting for the other.<sup>49</sup> At the Posh Club, however, biogenetic and queer family structures worked in concert. The Casson family was central to the Club: not only did Simon and Annie create it for their mother’s sake but their brother Johnno sometimes hosted the event, Annie’s children and grandchildren sometimes attended and caterers Lorraine Trevarthen and Phil Vine joined through

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<sup>45</sup> Sosa, p. 40.

<sup>46</sup> Duckie, ‘ACE NPO application for 2018-2022’, 31 January 2017, provided by producers, p. 13.

<sup>47</sup> Viv Evans and Tracy Frake, interview with the author, 22 November 2016.

<sup>48</sup> Emmy Minton, private correspondence, 10 September 2018.

<sup>49</sup> See, for instance, Kath Weston, *Families We Choose: Lesbians, Gays, Kinship* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1991, rev. 1997) and Jeffrey Weeks, Brian Heaphy and Catherine Donovan, *Same Sex Intimacies: Families of Choice and Other Life Experiments* (London: Routledge, 2001).

a Casson family connection. Many guests attended with their children or other relatives, leading volunteer Tracy's young son regularly helped out and performer, choreographer and volunteer H Plewis brought her baby. Blood family ties were supported by and supportive of the Posh Club, then, but so were queer family structures associated with Duckie. These included the vocational networks through which acts were booked, though the fact that these were also paid gigs qualifies their framing simply as acts of family support; more compelling in this regard were the dozens of Duckie-affiliated performers and punters offering volunteer labour. Many understood this, as performer and veteran Duckie collaborator Sue Frumin put it, as a way to 'give something back' to a group they felt had supported them by showcasing their work when others wouldn't.<sup>50</sup>

Instructive here is Richard T. Rodriguez's analysis of intersections between biological and chosen family for Chicano/a queers of colour: their latitude to substitute one structure for another was hampered by the broader constraints of white supremacy but the contingently obligated encounter between biogenetic and chosen kin helped generate new counterpublics.<sup>51</sup> Very different sociopolitical contexts notwithstanding, the intersection of biogenetic and queer kinship structures at the Posh Club also generated new kinds of engagement and support within an overall form that could feel like a family. Many guests and volunteers at both sites related their hopes that the Posh Club would continue indefinitely and their sadness or anxiety at its uncertain future. 'It's a family,' one volunteer told me and, following the end of last run she attended, 'I felt bereft'.<sup>52</sup> The queerness of the Posh Club as a family structure lies not in rejecting biogenetic family ties but in exceeding

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<sup>50</sup> Field notes, 21 December 2016.

<sup>51</sup> Richard T. Rodriguez, *Next of Kin: The Family in Chicano/a Cultural Politics*, (Durham: Duke University Press, 2009), pp. 167-176.

<sup>52</sup> Field notes, 21 December 2016.

them, in predicating its operation on their insufficiency, and in placing them at the service of marginalised subjects. One illustration of how biogenetic ties were subordinated to broader kinship structures is the simple fact that the Club continued operation following Irene Casson's death in 2014. The Posh Club, then, can be viewed as a kind of hybrid family structure, one that is engaged with and benefits from both biogenetic and queer kinship structures to the benefit of marginalised subjects.

### **Intergenerational transmission and material support**

Like the other family structures analysed in this thesis, the Posh Club serves reproductive queer futurity by enabling forms of intergenerational transmission and material support that benefit marginalised subjects. Casson has characterised intergenerational contact as a central purpose of the Club. 'I think we've lost a lot of interaction between the ages, it's not the type of thing that capitalism encourages,' he told a reporter. 'But it's our responsibility to create that crossover between generations.'<sup>53</sup> At the relational level, this is enacted through socialisation at the Club between producers, guests, volunteers and performers whose ages range from four, in the case of members of a preschool group that visited the Crawley Club, to 106, in the case of regular Hackney guest Irene Sinclair. This mixing demonstrably redresses negative prejudices based on age such as the ones mentioned above: organisers and volunteers' presumptions about older people's capacity for enjoyment were revised through participation in the Club.

At the operational level, meanwhile, the Posh Club enacts a queerly inverted form of intergenerational transmission through which the elder cohort

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<sup>53</sup> Alexandra Topping and Carmen Fishwick, 'Cocktails and cabaret bring the generations together for Christmas', *The Guardian*, 26 December 2016 <<https://www.theguardian.com/society/2016/dec/26/cocktails-and-cabaret-bring-the-generations-together-for-christmas>> [accessed 16 August 2018].



becomes the hereditary beneficiary of the younger. As noted above, the format of the Posh Club was inherited from that of Duckie's Saturday nights, rendering Club guests as 'queer children' in this context, benefiting from existing forms and processes previously developed to enable collective enjoyment for marginalised subjects and retrieved from the metaphorical attic for the benefit of a new cohort. This backward, non-biological inheritance parallels Sosa's description of the *Madres* of the Plaza de Mayo, mothers of Argentina's 'disappeared', whose insistence that 'our children gave birth to us' enabled 'alternative kinship arrangements that go beyond normative ties' and opened up new kinds of relationality and agency capable of challenging normative structures and strictures.<sup>54</sup> The stakes of the Posh Club are perhaps lower, certainly less traumatic and acute, than those of the *Madres'* activism, but the operation of the Club's inherited format still constructed chronological elders as 'queer children' by positioning them as hereditary beneficiaries of life-enhancing social technologies. As one Hackney volunteer suggested, 'it's actually dragging the older generation into the younger generation's mindset'; one guest reported that 'they make my heart happy and young again'.<sup>55</sup> As I will show later, this inheritance was not contingent on the reproduction of sameness in its application but rather mutated to fit new conditions and enable new kinds of confidence, expression and relationality.

As a queer family structure, the Posh Club was deeply invested in material support, which in turn enabled forms of affective, relational and subjective support. A Duckie funding application asserted that immersive cabaret events 'directly support [participants'] wellbeing, confidence and self esteem'.<sup>56</sup> Lorraine Trevarthen and Phil Vine, who oversaw catering and other logistics for the Hackney Club, gave me some details of how this material

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<sup>54</sup> Sosa, pp. 16-17.

<sup>55</sup> Church volunteer interview, 18 February 2015; 'Survey of 100 Hackney guests'.

<sup>56</sup> Duckie, 'Application to Church Urban Fund Together Grant', 2016, provided by producers.

support, delivered on an average weekly budget of around £210, took shape. 'Our job doesn't stop,' Vine said. 'It's seven days a week.'<sup>57</sup> They regularly scoured charity shops for teapots and cake stands and shopped widely for raffle prizes. The day before the Club, they collected its 19 tablecloths from the laundry ('we found a lovely place that is half the price' of the previous laundry) then went to Makro wholesalers to buy four crates of sparkling wine, orange juice, bread, sandwich fillings, cream and milk, and Morrisons supermarket for cakes ('we cleared all their scones this week').<sup>58</sup> The day of the Club, they were up before 6am so they could be at St Paul's by 7am, when Niall Weir opened the doors. Trevarthen cleaned the kitchen ('I've got a hygiene certificate. I wouldn't serve anybody food off of something that I didn't know it had been washed') while Vine unloaded the stock and arranged platters.<sup>59</sup> Organisers and volunteers began arriving from 9am to set out the tables and chairs, set places and arrange décor, music, sound and lighting, heavy equipment for which was unpacked and repacked under the stage each week. Having booked turns weeks or months in advance and planned the running order, producers liaised with performers to ensure technical requirements were met and appropriate on-stage introductions made. Organisers engaged by phone where necessary with guests and carers to ensure particular needs around travel, seating or other logistics were met. Those who didn't arrive in their smart clothes changed into them before the doors opened soon before noon to welcome guests. Music was provided by a pianist or DJ and volunteers ensured guests were greeted, seated and refreshed, requests handled and the complex ballet of serving and clearing tableware in a tight space enacted. Following the end of the Club at 3pm, the labour of preparation was done in reverse: guests were bid goodbye

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<sup>57</sup> Lorraine Trevarthen and Phil Vine, interview with the author, 4 March 2015.

<sup>58</sup> Trevarthen and Vine interview, 4 March 2015.

<sup>59</sup> Trevarthen and Vine interview, 4 March 2015.

and helped with coats and transportation (and some given food to take home), tableware was cleared and washed, the kitchen cleaned, furniture, décor and technical equipment packed and put away, clothing changed, rubbish disposed of and laundry prepared for dropping off. The clear-up was completed by around 4.30pm. A time-lapse birds-eye video of an entire event's preparation, made by Tim Brunsdon, shows the scale and intensity of the supportive material effort on which each Posh Club rests.<sup>60</sup>

These specific forms of material support stood in contrast to a wider structural dynamic of material support – or rather its lack – in the increasingly straitened context of neoliberal social policy. This has been anatomised in relation to performance by Harvie (as discussed in my introduction) and Shannon Jackson, who foregrounds projects in which 'time and collectivity serve as medium and material for exploring forms of interdependent support'.<sup>61</sup> Older people, particularly those without means, are acutely vulnerable to the negative consequences of neoliberal individualism, almost never constructed as potential beneficiaries of individualist entrepreneurialism yet often subject, as noted above, to acute isolation. This is an example of how, in Butler's formulation, bodies are always subject to 'social and political organizations that have developed historically and that allocate precariousness differentially'.<sup>62</sup> Posh Club guests related an increase in such vulnerability to the scaling back of public services since the introduction of austerity-based funding cuts in 2010, with multiple guests in both Hackney and Crawley telling me there were fewer forms of material and social support for older and/or disabled people than in previous years; one Crawley participant told me 'they've got rid of all the social clubs'; in Hackney,

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<sup>60</sup> 'The Posh Club – set up – stop motion', *Vimeo*, 24 March 2015 <<https://vimeo.com/123141884>> [accessed 16 August 2018].

<sup>61</sup> See Harvie and Jackson, *Social Works: Performing Art, Supporting Publics* (New York: Routledge, 2011), p. 14.

<sup>62</sup> 'Notes on Queer Bonds', p. 382.

a volunteer described how many local disabled people were now simply unable to leave home.<sup>63</sup>

The Posh Club's success isn't only down to limited alternative sources of support, however. Even in this context, Club participants favourably compared it to other available services. One Hackney volunteer with experience of multiple social-outreach projects at St Paul's told me she had 'never come across a group where 100 per cent of [participants] say they want to come back'.<sup>64</sup> In Crawley, Broadfield Community Centre manager Tracy Frake told me 'you can't even compare' other services for older people to the Club; Centre development worker Viv Evans said the Club 'gives [guests] something to look forward to in a way that nothing else would because it's a whole experience'.<sup>65</sup> One guest was quoted in a Duckie application for local authority funds as saying: 'If I was going to Age UK, I would feel like I was being treated as an "old" person, they call you "clients" there. But the Posh Club is a very different thing'.<sup>66</sup> This testifies to producers' conception of the Club as a source of not only material support – or indeed entertainment – but subjective support too. Casson told me the project is rooted in 'a social connection between all the participants, all the volunteers and all the professionals [...] You're not an audience at the Posh Club. You're part of the Club'.<sup>67</sup> This vision of reciprocity was affirmed by the fact that material, subjective and other kinds of support were also offered to Duckie organisers by other members of the Club. As noted above, volunteer labour was indispensable to its operation. There were also multiple impromptu instances of help and gift-giving: in Crawley one week, when the show ran late, guests

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<sup>63</sup> Posh Club Hackney guests, group interview with the author, 18 February 2015, Posh Club Crawley volunteers, group interview with the author, 8 November 2016.

<sup>64</sup> Church volunteer interview, 18 February 2015.

<sup>65</sup> Evans and Frake interview, 22 November 2016.

<sup>66</sup> Duckie, 'West Sussex County Council funding application form', 31 March 2015, provided by producers, p. 3.

<sup>67</sup> Casson and Eton interview, 1 April 2015.

helped volunteers clear the space more quickly; and at the end of the run in Hackney, guests presented organisers with cards and gifts, including two cakes and a box of fish cakes.<sup>68</sup>

As a queer family structure exceeding biogenetic imperatives, then, the Posh Club mobilised intergenerational contact and transmission, reducing prejudice and framing guests as inheritors of participatory performance forms developed in other contexts of queer marginalisation. The Club mobilised extensive material support to enable its practical operation and was also notable for its provision of affective support through forms of subjective recognition and reciprocity. I want now to foreground a key aspect of this subjective support by analysing how the normatively marginalised population of older people at risk of isolation was constructed as having high status within the Club.

### **Making guests high status**

The Posh Club did more than materially support its marginalised guests. It valorised them, or rendered them high-status, through a range of methods including selection of site, promotional material, presentation of volunteers, décor and refreshments, modes of relationality, performance material, photography and media representation. Duckie's stated priorities as a company include using 'visibility, love and care' to make members of marginalised groups feel 'seen and held, rather than invisible and lost'.<sup>69</sup> In line with this, Posh Club guests often reported feeling not only satisfied by the event but recognised and even indulged. One guest responded to a Duckie survey by writing 'we feel VISIBLE and well catered for'; another told me 'it's nice to be pampered'; yet another told videographer Tim Brunsdon

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<sup>68</sup> Field notes, 25 March 2015.

<sup>69</sup> Duckie, 'Application to Church Urban Fund'.

the Club 'makes me feel special'.<sup>70</sup> Participants validated the Posh Club's name by comparing it to axiomatically high-status social experiences, hailing its 'Café Royal style' or 'Café de Paris' feeling; one called it 'Hackney's style of the Ritz', another 'a classy event that's top dollar'.<sup>71</sup>

The impression of poshness was enhanced by the selection of sites for the Club, which are located in predominantly working-class areas where provision of social care is typically low or, as one Duckie funding document puts it, 'local community venues in areas of deprivation'.<sup>72</sup> Broadfield in Crawley is associated by some with street crime and graffiti: 'we hear about Broadfield,' noted a local councillor from the stage while visiting the Club, 'but it's not as bad as all that.'<sup>73</sup> The Posh Club's arrival, Tracy Frake said, made 'a massive positive difference. It's brought over people that would never have come to this centre' because of its location.<sup>74</sup> Her colleague Viv Evans agreed, citing the spectacle of a volunteer 'in a bow tie and waistcoat' outside the centre's entrance marking the site not only as safe but as aspirational.<sup>75</sup> Such impressions were bolstered by media coverage and outreach marketing in both Hackney and Crawley. Press reports prominently featured images of dressed-up guests and organisers and references to the Ritz and champagne.<sup>76</sup> Flyers distributed near the venues and to relevant

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<sup>70</sup> Duckie, 'Survey of 100 Hackney guests'; Hackney guests group interview, 18 February 2015; Duckie, 'The Posh Club', *YouTube*, 12 March 2016 <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SPDjpE6pgNA>> [accessed 16 August 2018].

<sup>71</sup> Hackney guests group interview, 18 February 2015; Posh Club Hackney mother and daughter guests, interview with the author, February 18 2015; Hackney church volunteer interview, 18 February 2015; Evans and Frake interview, 22 November 2016.

<sup>72</sup> Duckie, 'The Posh Club FAQs'.

<sup>73</sup> Field notes, 15 November 2016.

<sup>74</sup> Evans and Frake interview, 22 November 2016.

<sup>75</sup> Evans and Frake interview, 22 November 2016.

<sup>76</sup> *Crawley and Horley Observer*, 'Posh tea dance is "like the Ritz in downtown Crawley"', 12 October 2016 <<https://www.crawleyobserver.co.uk/news/posh-tea-dance-is-like-the-ritz-in-downtown-crawley-1-7622563>> [accessed 16 August 2018]; Ella Jessel, 'Pensioners party at Posh Club with "Ritz-style" champagne tea', *Hackney Citizen*, 10 February 2015

organisations, meanwhile, deployed a visual vernacular of afternoon tea or evening cocktails through silver-embossed copperplate typefaces, elegant line drawings and imagery including cake stands, dinner jackets and strings of pearls; the copy invited 'swanky senior citizens, elegant elders and glamorous golden girls' to attend and to 'dress posh'.<sup>77</sup>

The construction of guests as high status was also achieved through attention to the aesthetics of the Club space, particularly the smart presentation of décor, refreshments and volunteer waiters' attire. (Guests' attire is considered later in the chapter.) Performer Christopher Green highlighted the role of smart dress: 'The fact that all the volunteers dress up, that's really important because that subtly suggests to the participants that it's being taken seriously.'<sup>78</sup> Care was taken over lighting and sound design, with staging considerations at the heart of Duckie's refurbishment of Broadfield Community Centre hall. As noted above, décor designer Tim Spooner was 'trying to make it as classy as possible' and convey a sense of 'palm-court tea room' through, for instance, plastic plants and marble-effect vinyl.<sup>79</sup> If any single element conveys a sense of luxury, ornament, abundance and occasion, it might be the cake stand, symbol of afternoon tea. 'There's something celebratory about it,' Spooner said. 'No one needs things in three tiers! It's special [...] Cornucopic!'<sup>80</sup> Neatly laid table settings enhanced the effect in a way that, to Niall Weir, distinguished Duckie from other event producers: 'They insist on doing it well. The fact that there's things like the cups and

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<<http://www.hackneycitizen.co.uk/2015/02/10/pensioners-party-posh-club-ritz-style-champagne-tea/>> [accessed 16 August 2018].

<sup>77</sup> Duckie, *The Posh Club*, flyers for Hackney and Crawley, 2015 and 2016, provided by producers.

<sup>78</sup> Christopher Green, interview with the author, 21 December 2016.

<sup>79</sup> Spooner interview, 25 February 2015.

<sup>80</sup> Spooner interview, 25 February 2015.

saucers match, the napkins are folded – that says to people, “You care about me and I matter enough for this to be right”.<sup>81</sup>

Rendering Posh Club guests high status depended more than anything on relationality. ‘We treat them really special and they love that,’ Bowden told me. ‘We work hard at doing that.’<sup>82</sup> Volunteers, she continued, were instructed to ‘make everyone feel special’ beginning at the entrance – or even before if, say, they need help from a minicab.<sup>83</sup> On arrival, Eton noted, each guest should receive ‘a tiny bit of flattery’ as a way of ‘making them feel happy and loved and cared for’.<sup>84</sup> Several guests confirmed this worked, respectively telling me that ‘from the time you get to the door, they make you welcome’ and that ‘you really appreciate somebody taking your coat and showing you to your seat’.<sup>85</sup> There were regular shout-outs from the stage to celebrate guests’ birthdays or other special occasions or praise their looks: in one typical exchange, Eton, while compère, invited a guest to ‘stand up, sir. I think you deserve a round of applause for your outfit’.<sup>86</sup> Evans suggested that ‘making you feel special, that’s probably what the Posh Club does that distinguishes it from other projects for older people’.<sup>87</sup> In a testimonial provided to Duckie, Charlotte Benstead, chief executive officer of social housing charity the Creation Trust, observed how the Posh Club’s ‘attention to detail, the quality of the acts and the care taken on the event makes the participants feel spoiled rotten’.<sup>88</sup>

Guests’ subjectivity was also valorised through performance works that foregrounded older people’s experiences and feelings in various ways. In

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<sup>81</sup> Weir interview, 18 February 2015.

<sup>82</sup> Bowden interview, 29 November 2016.

<sup>83</sup> Bowden interview, 29 November 2016.

<sup>84</sup> Casson and Eton interview, 1 April 2015.

<sup>85</sup> Hackney guests group interview, 18 February 2015.

<sup>86</sup> Field notes, 11 February 2015.

<sup>87</sup> Evans and Frake interview, November 22 2016.

<sup>88</sup> Duckie, ‘The Posh Club – Testimonials from partners, stakeholders and guests’, 2016, provided by producers.



character as music-hall star turned ‘artificial hip hop’ performer Ida Barr, Christopher Green delivered material about the absurdities of ageing and memories of the past while stand-up Steve Barclay offered some corny but well-received gags about older people (‘I don’t call them pensioners, I call them recycled teenagers. None of them work and they’re all on drugs’).<sup>89</sup> Performance poet Abe Gibson, who worked as a council-estate caretaker, offered work whose insights into the minutiae of life in Hackney for older and younger people reflected and validated local experience as a subject of public performance.<sup>90</sup> Lois Weaver, in character as Tammy Whynot, entertainingly discussed experiences related to sexuality and ageing and, more strikingly, catalysed guests’ subjective agency by successfully canvassing their opinions and ideas on the subject and projecting photographs of them taken earlier in the afternoon, generating a palpable frisson of excitement and affirmation of those present.<sup>91</sup> ‘It’s nice to see yourself,’ as one guest told me later.<sup>92</sup>

This point was further demonstrated by many guests’ enthusiastic participation in celebratory photography projects that emerged from the Club. Lorna Milburn, for example, literally enthroned guests on an ornate, armed wooden chair in front of a richly patterned crimson velvet throw, shooting them from slightly below eye level and rendering these poshly-attired figures – one, for instance, in floor-length gold Chinoiserie – powerful, even regal.<sup>93</sup> Caroline Furneaux, meanwhile, shot some images capturing the Club’s dynamic environment of fun and interaction and some revelling in close-up depictions of sartorial details of guests’ looks, such as a cowboy-themed amulet against a fringed jacket or a luxuriously embroidered

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<sup>89</sup> Field notes, 25 March 2015, 4 February 2015.

<sup>90</sup> Field notes, 25 March 2015.

<sup>91</sup> Field notes, 11 February 2015.

<sup>92</sup> Hackney guests group interview, February 18 2015.

<sup>93</sup> See Lorna Milburn Photography, Facebook post, 12 March 2015

<<https://www.facebook.com/lornamilburnphotography/photos/a.480247865373650/817753104956456/?type=1&theater>> [accessed 16 August 2018].

ensemble of white and cream silk and pearls.<sup>94</sup> This validating visibility extended to press coverage too: one guest whose image was featured as part of a spread on the Club in *Hackney Today* told me she ‘took [a copy] home and was showing anybody!’<sup>95</sup> All of this shows how the Posh Club doesn’t just offer relaxation or basic material support, important as those things might be to marginalised subjects; it also renders them high status in ways that, as the rest of this chapter will show, support them in forms of relationality, self-expression and agency that materialise better worlds. Crucial to the enablement of these forms was the construction of the Posh Club as a site of fun.

### **Fun at the Posh Club**

It is easier to construct marginalised subjects as high status in situations whose stakes are perceived by participants and observers as low; after all, nobody else’s power or privilege is directly challenged by centring the subjectivity of older people at risk of isolation within the bounds of an afternoon cabaret event in a church hall or community centre. This is not to overlook the Club’s potentially high impact on at least some guests’ lives: individuals told me that it was the highlight of their week or that they were anxious about the possibility it might not return after the conclusion of that 10-week run.<sup>96</sup> The stakes of any single Posh Club event, however, remained low in the sense that no specific activity within the venue during those three hours was likely to effect a specific, substantive change in itself: in the context of the project as a whole, it wouldn’t matter much if guests didn’t enjoy the turns, lost the raffle or weren’t fully satisfied with their outfit that week.

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<sup>94</sup> ‘The Posh Club’, *Caroline Furneaux* <<http://www.carolinefurneaux.com/the-posh-club/>> [accessed 16 August 2018].

<sup>95</sup> Hackney guests group interview, February 18 2015.

<sup>96</sup> Field notes, 20 December 2016.

These low stakes, spatiotemporal bounds and copious amounts of stimulating, absorbing and enjoyable activity supported the Posh Club as a rich site of fun. This was itself surprising to some: as noted above, even some Posh Club organisers 'would never have dreamed' older people could have fun, assuming they 'haven't got it in them'. Such cognitive dissonance is consistent with understandings of fun under capitalism as essentially a form of *not-work* (as I argued in Chapter Three). When fun is constructed and valorised only as the restorative shadow of labour, it becomes the proper business only of those who labour; on normative terms, the already *not-working* have no claim to fun. What use, then, would those past retirement age have for it? To construct a given population as ineligible for fun, however, denies it not only the pleasure of the activity itself but also the potential technological and performative benefits fun can generate. At the Posh Club older people had fun, valued it and, as I will show, powerfully mobilised it.

While the limitations of available data make it impossible to be sure that the Posh Club was fun for everyone, the animated conversation, joyous dancing and rapt spectatorship marking every event, along with consistent oversubscription, strongly indicated large amounts of fun had by a large proportion of participants. Other aspects of the Club also worked to support fun. In Hackney, for instance, Niall Weir regularly performed romantic songs in his clergyman's garb, describing this in terms related to lowering stakes, suggesting that the unexpected sight of a rector having fun 'loosens everybody up' and means 'people can just relax and [...] have a happy time'.<sup>97</sup> The Club's operation can also be understood in relation to sociological understandings of fun's capacity to promote collectivity both in the moment and in retrospect.<sup>98</sup> In the context of the Posh Club, this retrospective

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<sup>97</sup> Weir interview, 18 February 2015.

<sup>98</sup> See Gary Alan Fine and Ugo Corte, 'Group Pleasures: Collaborative Commitments, Shared Narrative, and the Sociology of Fun', *Sociological Theory* 35.1 (2017), 64–86.

appreciation of fun was also mobilised through the evocation of forms of fun associated with the period of many guests' youth such as ambience redolent of tea rooms and Lyons Corner Houses, playing period songs as guests arrived and posters in the style of music-hall bills.<sup>99</sup>

Some turns evoked earlier forms of entertainment too: Ida Barr and Steve Barclay explicitly referred to music hall; the Bees' Knees, Victory Sisters and Hotsie Totsies were styled in vintage fashions; and multiple Elvis Presley tribute acts were programmed over each run to enthusiastic responses, on at least one occasion sparking a guest to describe seeing the King perform live.<sup>100</sup> Another guest reported that it 'brings back lots of memories when old songs are sung'.<sup>101</sup> Many guests also wore clothes and jewellery associated with – and sometimes not worn since – earlier periods of more frequent socialising. Such aspects demonstrate the power of Elizabeth Freeman's concept of temporal drag, showing the capacity (described in Chapter Five) of the past to pull on the present and create a hybrid temporality.<sup>102</sup> Designer Tim Spooner invoked this too when he suggested 'there was a haze of time in front of the stage' when the Bees' Knees were performing.<sup>103</sup> Fun was both enacted and recollected through the Posh Club's hybrid temporality.

As noted in my introduction, scholarship of the social turn in performance has foregrounded works in which the relational is put at the service of the aesthetic. At the Posh Club, the aesthetic – the turns, the décor, the ambience – was put at the service of the relational and, more specifically, a relationality marked by fun. As noted in Chapter Three, sites of fun can serve

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<sup>99</sup> See images at 'Volunteers', *The Posh Club* <<http://theposhclub.co.uk/volunteers/>> [accessed 16 August 2018].

<sup>100</sup> Field notes, 21 January 2015, 28 January 2015, 4 February 2015, 18 February 2015, 24 October 2016.

<sup>101</sup> Duckie, 'Survey of 111 Crawley guests'.

<sup>102</sup> *Time Binds: Queer Temporalities, Queer Histories* (Durham, NC and London: Duke University Press, 2010), p. xxi.

<sup>103</sup> Spooner interview, February 25 2015.

to throw into relief questions of what is to be taken seriously, with what civic consequences. This opens up space for me to intervene critically around some of the tensions and impasses identified by scholars of the social turn in relation to questions of empathy, support, agency, political consequence and world making.

Claire Bishop, for instance, claims that participatory projects' typically harmonious affect precludes aesthetic challenge; I will propose that it can enable it.<sup>104</sup> Bishop also argues that an emphasis on 'compassionate identification with the other is typical of the discourse around participatory art, in which an ethics of interpersonal interaction comes to prevail over a politics of social justice'; I will trouble this binary (indeed, combative) opposition by locating relationality at the heart of reproductive queer futurity, which is a politic of social justice.<sup>105</sup> And Jackson seeks to question the perceived boundary between 'where the art ends and the rest of the world begins'; I, however, will propose continuity between where the art ends and a new world begins.<sup>106</sup>

In the introduction to this thesis, I noted the critical tendency to treat participatory projects as one-off events affecting a narrow group of participants and articulated how this presumption can limit understanding of such projects. Over the rest of this chapter, I will mobilise my longitudinal observation of the Club to expand critical understandings, showing how – by mobilising participatory performance practices that catalyse harmonious dissensus, an expansive range of relational networks and distinctive forms of self-expression and agency emerging from conditions of marginalisation – the fun of the Posh Club materialises a better world.

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<sup>104</sup> *Artificial Hells: Participatory Art and the Politics of Spectatorship* (London: Verso, 2012), p. 26.

<sup>105</sup> Bishop, p. 25.

<sup>106</sup> Jackson, p. 15.

### **Enabling harmonious dissensus through fun**

Unlike many projects considered in socially-turned performance scholarship, the Posh Club meets its participants outside an overt art- or performance-world context and foregrounds constructive engagement with the disadvantaged locations in which it takes place and people upon whose labour it depends. As Duckie's funding materials put it, each Club 'is developed with local partners to respond to local need [...] held in local community venues in areas of deprivation [and] employ[s] local people.'<sup>107</sup> These material contingencies overlap with those of many applied theatre and performance projects but, as noted in the introduction, Duckie differs from most applied practice in its indifference to scripted dramatic forms and the purported benefits of participants' life story telling. Rather, the Posh Club invites its guests to participate in a world-building project on their own terms, supporting this through the kinds of relationality discussed above.

Relationality is central to the operation of the Posh Club and to its mode of participatory performance, the cabaret show. This is a form with no fourth wall that enables and depends on active and dynamic audience engagement, from call-and-response exchanges with the compère to turns (such as Tammy Whynot's, mentioned above) that solicit substantive contributions from audience members. Casson located such involvement in the working-class performance lineage of music hall, noting that 'the connection [between punters and turns] is so real, like in somebody's living room. Powerful!'<sup>108</sup> The predominant mode of such engagement is harmonious and pleasurable, superficially supporting Bishop's assertion that, in participatory projects, 'idiosyncratic or controversial ideas are subdued or normalised in favour of a consensual behaviour upon whose irreproachable sensitivity we can all rationally agree', with apparently harmless fun taking priority over more

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<sup>107</sup> Duckie, 'The Posh Club FAQs'.

<sup>108</sup> Casson and Eton interview, 1 April 2015.

challenging material.<sup>109</sup> As previously noted, Harvie pushes back against this, arguing that 'pleasurable fun can constructively engage audiences while dissent's bad feeling can risk alienating them'.<sup>110</sup> This binary construction, however, still leaves unexplored the possibility of generative dynamism between fun and dissensus within an event.

At the Posh Club, I argue, fun and good feeling created an environment conducive to the presentation of challenging material that might be less constructively received by the same audience under different conditions. From the start, part of Duckie producers' conception of the Posh Club had been, Eton told me, to 'make it so that it's a bit like Duckie on a Saturday night: you give them a bit of what they want but then we also challenge them a little bit'.<sup>111</sup> As noted above, cabaret performance at the Posh Club took place within a context of fun, calibrated to combine low situational stakes with the construction of guests as high status while also evoking past instances of fun in individuals' lives and past cultures of fun associated with some guests' youth. Within this environment, other programmed acts were able to perform more idiosyncratic, challenging and potentially offensive material in ways that generated animation and even dissensus without destabilising the event as a whole. For example, one week at Hackney, Ursula Martinez and Jess Love performed a quick-change act (previously seen at *Duckie Goes to the Gateways*) that ended with them revealing their breasts.<sup>112</sup> This provoked a positive but scandalised response, with shrieking, gasping and the covering of mouths with hands preceding a big ovation and animated discussion. One guest's response, which she gigglingly recalled later, is worth quoting at length:

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<sup>109</sup> Bishop, p. 26.

<sup>110</sup> Harvie, p. 10.

<sup>111</sup> Casson and Eton interview, 1 April 2015.

<sup>112</sup> Field notes, 21 January 2015.

That was good! I said to Father Niall, 'St Paul's is going to get a bad reputation!' The lady sat next to me, she nearly choked! She had a glass of water and she said to me, 'I nearly choked!' We didn't know what to expect! Oh dear, that was hilarious.<sup>113</sup>

This response describes a performance event that was unanticipated ('we didn't know what to expect'), shocking ('she nearly choked') and uncharacteristic of church activities in a potentially negative way ('St Paul's is going to get a bad reputation').<sup>114</sup> It also directly prompted multiple relational encounters (between the speaker and her fellow guest and the speaker and Niall Weir) and was ultimately perceived as a positive episode ('good', 'hilarious'). An overall context of fun enabled engagement with challenging performance. A more pronounced example took place later in the Hackney run, when dancer Jordan Lennie performed a sensual routine, choreographed by Joseph Mercier, completely naked.<sup>115</sup> The response was sensational: that afternoon's Club never regained its regular rhythm but was punctuated by on- and off-stage references to Lennie and marked by a generally giddy, scandalised and destabilised air. (It was still being talked about the next year.<sup>116</sup>) Most guests' responses were positive but some were unmoved or disapproving, saying they found the act inappropriate or tasteless.<sup>117</sup> This, then, was a more divisive turn than Martinez and Love's, provoking both enjoyment and alienation. Yet such reservations were expressed without antipathy, aggression, insult or disengagement from the Club itself, affirming the event's capacity to sustain dissensus harmoniously.

Contrary to Bishop's binary opposition, then, this participatory event was both solicitous and disruptive, delightful and shocking, generative of both fellow-feeling and dissensus, much like Duckie's Saturday nights. This was

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<sup>113</sup> Hackney guests group interview, 18 February 2015.

<sup>114</sup> Casson did in fact seek and receive Weir's blessing for risqué acts such as those involving nudity (Weir interview, 18 February 2015).

<sup>115</sup> Field notes, 11 March 2015.

<sup>116</sup> Duckie, 'The Posh Club', *YouTube*, 12 March 2016.

<sup>117</sup> Field notes, 11 March 2015, Emmy Minton, conversation with the author, 25 March 2016.



recognised by observers. Duckie's Arts Council England officer Jamie Hadley attended the Club when Lennie performed and called the event 'the best of Duckie [...] I thought it might be sort of watered down but not at all'.<sup>118</sup> Weir approvingly described the Club's ability 'to skirt a little bit closer to the line and see what happens.'<sup>119</sup> And Matt Clack, public health strategist for Hackney local authority, provided testimony to Duckie recognising that performance at the Club 'mixed aspects that may have seemed comfortable to the attendees [...] and others that pushed boundaries with great success'.<sup>120</sup> This shows how socially-turned participatory performance projects that take place over longer periods and foster atmospheres of fun have the capacity to reach new and wide audiences, engaging them positively while also challenging them: Lennie's turn, for instance, took place in the eighth week of ten, by which time a strong sense of the Club's identity and cohesion had been established. Challenging material could, then, be engaged, and disagreed about, while maintaining a pleasurable collective experience through this technological application of fun. I will now consider performative applications of fun at the Club, showing how fun worked to catalyse relationality, self-expression and agency promoting reproductive queer futurity.

### **Enabling relationality as a project of social justice through fun**

I noted above how, unlike most projects considered in the context of scholarship around the 'social turn' or participatory artistic events, the Posh Club put the aesthetic at the service of the relational rather than the other way around. The kinds of relational dynamic at work at the Club far exceeded those related to on-stage turns. The development of rich relational networks over months and years supported the broader project of social justice

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<sup>118</sup> James Hadley, interview with the author, 27 March 2015.

<sup>119</sup> Weir interview, 18 February 2015.

<sup>120</sup> Duckie, 'The Posh Club – Testimonials'.

operating through the Club and was vitally lubricated by fun, which both lowered the stakes of social interaction and actively promoted collective experience and group identity, promoting empathy, understanding, self-expression and agency. Some of these networks operated within the spatiotemporal bounds of Posh Club events while others exceeded them. Understanding them reveals how, in refutation of Bishop's supposition, an ethics of interpersonal interaction and a politics of social justice can support rather than oppose one another.

One such relational network involved interactions between stage and audience outside programmed turns. These included Eton, as compère, conversing with individual guests in supportive and valorising ways, sometimes accompanied by music or small gifts, and also the weekly raffle, which saw an assistant jovially making their way through the room to distribute prizes, the toast accompanying the service of sparkling wine or juice and the thanks given to named volunteers and producers at each event's end. These repeated activities, characterised by smiles, laughter, cheers and enjoyment, were shared by all present at the Club at the same time and gave a sense of regularity, familiarity and shared experience. Off-stage social relationality, meanwhile, began with the greeting of guests upon arrival and included conversation, hugs, kisses and, over the weeks, sustained engagement with participants' lives. Casson, Bowden and Eton set a tone of solicitous bonhomie affirmed by other staff, volunteers and many guests. The significance of such relationality should not be underestimated in the context of guests at risk of isolation for whom the Club might represent a significant or even sole source of social contact during a given week. One Crawley volunteer reported a conversation with a guest who hadn't left the house for three weeks before attending the Club and another whose visit marked her

first outing since her husband's death.<sup>121</sup> One Hackney volunteer reported guests telling her that other available services for older people involve 'a glass of sherry and a deck of cards and being told to sit and watch TV. This isn't about that. This is actually bringing community together'.<sup>122</sup> Guests also reported rekindling friendships with old school friends at the Club.<sup>123</sup>

The Posh Club was also capable of supporting relationality across perceived boundaries of sexuality, gender, race, class and neurodivergence. As noted above, producers and volunteers reported constructive exchanges with guests around unconventional gender presentation and non-heterosexual identity. In Hackney, several guests affirmed that, although local residents have many ethnicities, they spend 'not so much' time together in general but at the Club 'a wide variety' of people socialised.<sup>124</sup> They thought this 'excellent' and 'fantastic' because 'it's nice to mix with a lot of other people and share the experiences'.<sup>125</sup> One Hackney volunteer saw friendships form across perceived class boundaries: 'some of them look well off and like they're not having to worry about finances but they're lonely [...] They've even said they feel richer for coming here and being able to [...] make new friends and know that the phone's going to ring later on'.<sup>126</sup> The Club also supported neurodivergent and learning-disabled people, as guests at both sites and, in Crawley, as acts and organisers.

Another powerful relational network involved volunteers, marking the Posh Club as a participatory performance project invested in the subjectivity of those whose labour enabled its operation. Volunteers varied in age from teenagers to octogenarians and were recruited through various channels,

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<sup>121</sup> Posh Club Crawley volunteers, group interview with the author, 29 November 2016.

<sup>122</sup> Hackney church volunteer interview, 18 February 2015.

<sup>123</sup> Hackney guests group interview, 18 February 2015; Hackney mother and daughter interview, 18 February 2015; Duckie, 'The Posh Club', *YouTube*, 12 March 2016.

<sup>124</sup> Hackney guests group interview, 18 February 2015.

<sup>125</sup> Hackney guests group interview, 18 February 2015.

<sup>126</sup> Hackney church volunteer interview, 18 February 2015.

including prior connections to Duckie and the Club's venues and through media coverage of the Club. Some older volunteers first came as guests but decided, as one told me, they would 'rather be up and doing things'.<sup>127</sup>

Multiple volunteers told me they were personally incentivised by the Club's 'fun', 'friendly atmosphere', 'socialising' and 'banter'.<sup>128</sup> Some found it gratifying to enable socialising for otherwise isolated guests while also valuing it as a source of achievement and validation for themselves, particularly if they were feeling vulnerable: one unemployed volunteer was grateful to have 'something regular to do, something enjoyable but that was valuable' for others; some retired volunteers, meanwhile, said the Club served a 'need to have some purpose' and to be 'wanted in some degree by somebody'.<sup>129</sup>

To Phil Vine – whose copious volunteer labour alongside Lorraine Trevarthen delivering catering and other aspects of the Hackney Club was detailed above – the Club's relationality was life-changing. He described

appreciation pumping back to us and we're giving it out as much as we can. Who wants to be sitting in front of the TV when you can enjoy this? [...] I couldn't get out of my own house before [...] I was scared [after being assaulted]. Post-traumatic stress disorder – I got that. With this, [it's] okay, when it gets too heavy for me, I just go into the kitchen and let everything go [...] With Lorraine and all our friends and all the people there, I feel great. It's the best year I think I've had for a long time. And it's done me good.<sup>130</sup>

This account positions the Club as a stimulating, absorbing and rewarding social experience marked by reciprocal relationality, favourably compared to isolation and perceived as beneficial to health. It also highlights the importance of relationality being available but not compulsory, with disengagement also an option.

The relational impact of the Posh Club extended beyond its scheduled three hours, for instance through supporting wider socialising: a Duckie survey

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<sup>127</sup> Crawley volunteers group interview, 29 November 2016.

<sup>128</sup> Field notes, 24 October 2016, Crawley volunteers group interview, 29 November 2016.

<sup>129</sup> Crawley volunteers group interview, 29 November 2016.

<sup>130</sup> Trevarthen and Vine interview, 4 March 2015.

of 68 Hackney guests found 62 had made new friends at the Posh Club and 37 saw them outside the Club itself.<sup>131</sup> The Posh Club also catalysed connections among other venue users: users of another service for older people and two pre-school groups based at Broadfield attended the Posh Club in ways that community-centre manager Evans suggested were ‘furthering community engagement across the generations’ while one Hackney volunteer told me the project ‘had a huge impact on St Paul’s’ through regular parishioners’ involvement with the Club and interaction with other projects for sex workers and rough sleepers.<sup>132</sup> Duckie’s engagement brought other indirect benefits: the Broadfield refurbishment supported local operatic and dramatic societies and St Paul’s association with Duckie, Weir reported, brought ‘enormous fringe benefits’ to the church by indicating its progressive sensibility to other potential collaborators.<sup>133</sup>

The Posh Club also connected broader networks related to local authority, health and social care and funding bodies. Crawley Club visitors included the Mayor, local councillors and care home and charity coordinators as well as a general practitioner involved in the social prescribing programme mentioned above; she brought an isolated older person whose companion favourably compared the Club to another socially prescribed project at which ‘no one talked to us’.<sup>134</sup> Visitors to Hackney included charity coordinators and the local chief superintendent. Many performers, producers or researchers from the wider Duckie family came as volunteers or observers too.

Finally, media coverage located the Posh Club within far wider networks, attracting guests and volunteers and disseminating understanding about the

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<sup>131</sup> Duckie, ‘Posh Club Hackney Evaluation Questionnaire’, December 2015, provided by producers.

<sup>132</sup> Evans and Frake interview, 22 November 2016, Hackney church volunteer interview, 18 February 2015.

<sup>133</sup> Evans and Frake interview, 22 November 2016, Weir interview, 18 February 2015.

<sup>134</sup> Field notes, 22 November 2016.

project's operation and ethos. This coverage ranged hugely in scale, from local newspapers the *Crawley and Horley Observer* and *Hackney Citizen* to the *Guardian*, *Time Out London* and BBC Radio 4's *Saturday Live*.<sup>135</sup> Such coverage consistently foregrounded the Posh Club's high-status aesthetic, production values, conviviality, sartorial elegance and aspiration to counter isolation among older people through fun. Online coverage on *Londonist*, *Vice* and *attn*: additionally foregrounded the Club's emphasis on dancing, framing it as a 'nightclub' rather than cabaret event, implicitly evoking its hereditary relationship to Duckie's Saturday nights.<sup>136</sup> By 6 September 2018, a video report posted to *attn*: 's Facebook account had attracted more than 11 million views with universally enthusiastic comments from many parts of the world, in some cases followed by enquiries to Duckie about international Posh Clubs.<sup>137</sup> The Posh Club's premium on fun, then, catalysed an extraordinary range of relational networks encompassing participatory performance forms, empathetic interpersonal exchange within and beyond the room and connections to local, regional, national and international networks and publics. I will now articulate how this relationality contributed to guests' self-expression and agency, supporting the materialisation of a better world and the project of social justice I call reproductive queer futurity.

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<sup>135</sup> See *Crawley and Horley Observer*; Jessel; Topping and Fishwick; Alexi Duggins, 'We could be heroes: six inspirational Londoners', *Time Out London*, 15 March 2015 <<https://now-here-this.timeout.com/2015/03/15/we-could-be-heroes-six-inspirational-londoners/>> [accessed 16 August 2018]; *Saturday Live*, BBC Radio 4, 14 February 2015 <<https://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/b0520pqz>> [accessed 16 August 2018].

<sup>136</sup> Will Noble, 'You Have To Be Over 60 To Get Into This Nightclub', *Londonist*, 13 December 2017 <<https://londonist.com/london/features/we-went-to-a-nightclub-for-over-60s>> [accessed 16 August 2018]; Colin Drury, 'This Nightclub for the Elderly Is Fighting Loneliness with Tea Party Raves', 30 April 2018 <[https://www.vice.com/en\\_uk/article/j5az48/this-nightclub-for-the-elderly-is-fighting-loneliness-with-tea-party-raves](https://www.vice.com/en_uk/article/j5az48/this-nightclub-for-the-elderly-is-fighting-loneliness-with-tea-party-raves)> [accessed 16 August 2018]; *attn*: *Well-Rounded Life*, 'Nightclub for the Elderly', 31 May 2018 <<https://www.facebook.com/WellRoundedLifebyattn/videos/662415347423569/>> [accessed 16 August 2018].

<sup>137</sup> *attn*: *Well-Rounded Life*, 'Nightclub for the Elderly'.

### **Enabling expression and agency: dressing up, dancing, performing**

So far, this chapter has shown how the Posh Club operated as a homemade mutant hope machine; how it functioned as a queer family structure, materially supporting marginalised subjects framed as queer children, intergenerationally transmitting powerful forms of participatory performance and mingling biogenetic and improvised family structures; and how its provision of low-stakes conditions and high status for guests promoted forms of fun supportive of subjective wellbeing, harmonious dissensus and an expansive relational mesh. I will now analyse how the Posh Club enabled marginalised subjects' self-expression and agency in ways that yield understandings, actions and interactions that materialise a better world in the service of reproductive queer futurity. The specific forms of this self-expression and agency were dressing, dancing and performance.

Glamour can act as a powerful technology of queer futurity. madison moore attends to spectacular forms of glamorous self-expression through fashion that he calls 'fabulousness'.<sup>138</sup> Fabulousness, moore writes, functions individually, representing the 'shedding of a past way of living' marked by self-doubt and invisibility, and collectively, because it 'changes the energy in a room' by resisting and reworking aesthetic norms.<sup>139</sup> Posh Club guests were less acutely vulnerable to 'surveillance, torture, and ridicule' than many of the transfeminine people of colour whom moore foregrounds, making what he calls 'the political stakes of fabulousness' lower at the Club.<sup>140</sup> But moore's analysis instructively highlights how extravagant sartorial self-expression can connote 'a form of creativity from the margins' for 'suppressed and undervalued' subjects 'disconnected from support networks'.<sup>141</sup> The looks

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<sup>138</sup> *Fabulous: The Rise of the Beautiful Eccentric* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2018), p. 4.

<sup>139</sup> moore, p. 4.

<sup>140</sup> moore, p. 22.

<sup>141</sup> moore, pp. 21, 8, 68.

at the Posh Club were fabulous both for their distinctive elegance and flamboyance and for the force of their subjective and aesthetic assertion, enabling members of a marginalised group, in moore's phrasing, to 'tell you about my vision of the world and my dreams for the day'.<sup>142</sup> I'm thinking of a red sequined beret matched with statement spectacles and a spangly black shift; lapels heaving with an array of outsized enamel Elvis- and rockabilly-themed badges; a cowboy-chic fringed denim jacket paired with a Western-themed charm necklace. Such overtly distinctive looks were more frequent in Hackney than in Crawley, where tastes tended more to the elegant and smart-casual, but fabulous guests were regular presences at both.

The mere fact of dressing up can be beneficial: in an online video about the Posh Club, fashion psychologist Karen Pine notes how clothing choices affect 'dignity and self-esteem and confidence [...] If you want to feel good, you've got to dress well'.<sup>143</sup> For many guests, this was a rare occasion. One told me 'the clothes sit in the wardrobe and you're only waiting for the invitation' to wear them; another called 'the chance to get dressed up [...] fantastic'; others grew animated relating anecdotes about specific items of clothing or jewellery not worn for decades.<sup>144</sup> As mentioned above, photographers validated guests' fabulousness through their celebratory imagemaking: Caroline Furneaux's shots, for instance, lavished close-up attention on pussy-bow blouses, silk scarves, ornate mother-of-pearl necklaces and feathered ornamentations in men's hats.<sup>145</sup> A drop-in event in Hackney in 2017, *The Pop Up Posh Club & Portrait Party*, offered both a taste of typical Club activities and, as the flyer put it, 'a fabulous fashion photo shoot that you

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<sup>142</sup> moore, pp. 8, 10.

<sup>143</sup> 'Posh Hub Forbes', Kirstie Forbes <<https://vimeo.com/127970295>> [accessed 16 August 2018].

<sup>144</sup> Hackney guests group interview, February 18 2015.

<sup>145</sup> 'The Posh Club', *Caroline Furneaux* <<http://www.carolinefurneaux.com/the-posh-club/>> [accessed 16 August 2018].



are invited to be the star of'.<sup>146</sup> The results could be printed and framed on site. These images illustrated a glossy *Posh Club* magazine given away at the Club's first run in Elephant and Castle in early 2018: glamorous full-page images of nine women were published alongside accounts of their fashion influences, valorising their distinctive sartorial sensibilities.<sup>147</sup> Fashion at the Posh Club was a mode of self-expression, a marker of high status and also a form of labour supporting hopeful collectivity: by positively responding to producers' invitation to 'dress posh', guests contributed to the aesthetic and affective construction of the event as fun and fabulous.

Dancing was another powerful form of self-expression and agency for Posh Club guests. Fiona Buckland's analysis of social dancing in the context of queer world-making is germane here.<sup>148</sup> Anticipating Moore's analysis, Buckland notes the importance to queer world-making and marginalised subjects (particularly queer people of colour) of spaces that are 'fabulous in themselves' and enable kinds of participation that render subjects fabulous as individuals.<sup>149</sup> Social dancing does this by supporting 'self-knowledge, self-preservation, sociality, and self-transformation' through individual expression and by valorising kinds of collaboration between dancers, DJs and performers that 'produced pleasure through valuing exchange' and made 'participation by anybody at any moment' possible but not obligatory.<sup>150</sup> Such a dynamic was potently at work at the Club, a fabulous space in which the significance of dancing increased over the course of my observation and beyond. Initially, dancing formed a largely incidental part of the later stages of the afternoon, with some guests partaking between acts and more during a brief musical

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<sup>146</sup> Duckie, *The Pop Up Posh Club & Portrait Party* flyer, provided by producers.

<sup>147</sup> *The Posh Club* magazine, 2018.

<sup>148</sup> *Impossible Dance: Club Culture and Queer World-Making* (Middletown: Wesleyan University Press, 2002).

<sup>149</sup> Buckland, p. 37.

<sup>150</sup> Buckland, pp. 66, 67, 70.

interlude concluding the event. Posh Club guests were subject to less acute social vulnerabilities than many of Buckland's subjects but they were more likely to be disabled or ill, making the activity of dancing more challenging and, potentially, more physically beneficial. Over the course of the run, guests began dancing earlier in the afternoon and in greater numbers, especially in Hackney, often accompanied by producers and volunteers. Some danced in their wheelchairs.

Guests' interest in dancing, like their interest in clothing, catalysed the emergence of new expressive forms specific to the Club. Some of these used dance as part of the creation of a fabulous environment centring guests' subjectivity. One was the 'cake dance', choreographed by Duckie collaborator and Posh Club volunteer H. Plewis, which theatricalised volunteers' delivery of cake stands to guests' tables at the beginning of the Club's tea service through a series of bobs and twirls. Another was *The Big Sexy Show*, an immersive contemporary piece for six dancers over the age of 50 choreographed by Karen da Silva that toured each of the five Clubs running in early 2018.<sup>151</sup> Funded by the Arts Council England Celebrating Age Fund, this was the first performance developed specifically for the Club: it centred guests' subjectivity by drawing on preparatory interviews with them about life and love, being staged between tables at the Club and encouraging guests to join performers in dancing.<sup>152</sup> Other dance-specific forms emerging from the Club were more directly structured around guests' agency. One was Tap Cats, a dance troupe comprising 12 guests-turned-performers that was informally convened to perform at the Crawley Club in 2014 and went on to be

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<sup>151</sup> Field notes, 2 April 2018, 9 April 2018, '*The Big Sexy Show*', The Posh Club <<http://theposhclub.co.uk/projects/celebrating-age/>> [accessed 16 August 2018]. I observed these Posh Club events subsequent to my main observation period.

<sup>152</sup> '*The Big Sexy Show*'.

programmed at large-scale Duckie events in London.<sup>153</sup> Another emergent form was Posh Club Dance Club, a project formed in 2015 in Hackney with funding from Sport England to provide movement-based stimulation for older people, which combined social dancing with helping eight guests to devise and rehearse a routine performed at the Club.<sup>154</sup> Dancing at the Posh Club, then, evolved from a minor optional aspect of the event to a generative platform for self-expression and subjective agency generating validation, wellbeing and joy.<sup>155</sup>

The Tap Cats and Posh Club Dance Club were not the only instances of guests becoming performers in their own right. Sometimes this happened onstage. At both clubs, bold guests invited themselves onstage to dance – in Hackney in between acts and in Crawley during Andy Wilsher’s rendition of ‘How Sweet It is to be Loved by You’, to the singer’s indulgent bemusement – but there were also an increasing number of programmed turns by guests.<sup>156</sup> The emergence of the ‘Posh Club Spot’ gave guests the opportunity to express their distinctive subjectivities through dance, singing or stand-up, with the handful of acts programmed this way during my observations met with respectful attention. One guest’s stand-up routine, for instance, was less a sequence of jokes than a dreamlike stream of consciousness connecting such diverse concerns as medical malpractice, older people’s surprise at new technology, authoritarian group dynamics and alien abduction.<sup>157</sup> Audience response ranged from amusement to disengagement but it was a confident performance, clearly evincing a distinctive individual sensibility and proudly

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<sup>153</sup> ‘*Duckie is Twenty One*’, Duckie <<http://www.duckie.co.uk/events/duckie-is-21>> [accessed 16 August 2018]; ‘*Gay Shame 2018*’, Duckie <<http://www.duckie.co.uk/events/gay-shame-2018>> [accessed 16 August 2018].

<sup>154</sup> ‘Posh Club Dance Club’, *The Posh Club* <<http://theposhclub.co.uk/projects/posh-club-dance-club/>> [accessed 16 August 2018].

<sup>155</sup> See Duckie, ‘The Posh Club’, *YouTube*, 12 March 2016 <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SPDjpE6pgNA>> [accessed 16 August 2018].

<sup>156</sup> Field notes, 11 February 2015, 1 November 2016.

<sup>157</sup> Field notes, 18 February 2015.

referred to by the guest for weeks afterward. As in the contexts of fashion and dancing, there are few other opportunities for older people at risk of isolation to express themselves publicly in such affirmative ways.

No less interesting than onstage performance was the growing sense of agency around guests' participation in performance from the floor. In her reading of *Def Poetry Jam* on Broadway, Jill Dolan describes the DJ catalysing audience interaction by encouraging those present to sing familiar songs, prompting laughter and affirmation of commonality.<sup>158</sup> Such singalong moments were frequent at the Posh Club, with the same results, and at times showed greater agency in that they were not always dependent on the actions of a charismatic on-stage performer, as Dolan's examples of 'utopian performatives' invariably are. In Crawley, for instance, guests began singing along to trumpeter Tim Bolwell's instrumental rendition of 'Can't Help Falling in Love', a gentle chorus filling the air, tentatively at first, then more robustly.<sup>159</sup> As one volunteer put it: 'All of a sudden, the room comes alive with everybody singing. Not prompted, weren't asked to sing along, they just automatically did. It was lovely.'<sup>160</sup> In such moments, authorship of a turn seemed to slip expected moorings – the event becomes an engaged and deeply participatory one. Such slippage could take unexpected turns. At the last event of the Hackney run, performance poet Abe Gibson brought two guests on stage to guide them in a kind of incantation, with matching hand gestures, whose refrain ran: 'We are the ones to get things done. You are the ones to get things done.'<sup>161</sup> After coaching the guests sufficiently, Gibson withdrew and the performance continued, with guests leading guests in a reciprocal assertion of agency. And then one of the on-stage guests, Ethan,

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<sup>158</sup> *Utopia in Performance: Finding Hope at the Theater* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2005), pp. 105-106.

<sup>159</sup> Field notes, 29 November 2016.

<sup>160</sup> Crawley volunteers group interview, 29 November 2016.

<sup>161</sup> Field notes, 25 March 2015.

took things even further: he had just written a poem on a paper napkin, an ode to the Club, a pastiche of Wordsworth, which he recited on his own initiative, referring to participants as ‘a host of friendly humans/Sitting on chairs, forgetting their fears, sharing their cares’. In this moment, author, audience, process and subject were one; here was an expression of the Club by the Club for the Club; a group so often denied a voice describing itself to itself for itself. The reception was rapturous.

### **Making a new world**

Posh Club guests’ experiments in self-expression and agency signified the materialisation of a better world for marginalised subjects, rough edges and all. José Esteban Muñoz describes performance subcultures as ‘the stage where we rehearse our identities’: in contexts such as post-war dive-bar queer performance and 1970s punk rock, amateur aesthetics are less an index of failed showmanship than the mark of ‘an insistence on process and becoming’ that refuses invisibility and abjection.<sup>162</sup> The Club – no less than the platforms of DHSS or the ‘vintage clubbing’ cycle – offered a stage on which an otherwise largely stageless group could explore its own subjectivity and collectivity. Performance, Muñoz asserts, is valuable for its capacity to generate understanding ‘that facilitates modes of belonging’ for outsiders, glimpsing ‘a manifestation of a “doing” that is in the horizon, a mode of possibility’.<sup>163</sup> Like Muñoz, Jackson and Dolan attend to performance as a space where glimmers of better futures can be perceived from afar. Jackson draws attention to the performance event as one foregrounding relational contingency and thereby beginning to imagine alternatives.<sup>164</sup> Dolan focuses

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<sup>162</sup> *Cruising Utopia: The Then and There of Queer Futurity* (New York: New York University Press, 2009), pp. 104, 106.

<sup>163</sup> Muñoz, p. 99.

<sup>164</sup> Jackson, p. 30.

on how moments of performance can create collective experiences whose hopeful intensity can 'gesture [...] through fantasy [...] toward a much better world', albeit 'fleetingly'.<sup>165</sup> The better worlds envisioned in these critical positions are distant, ephemeral and precarious, facets of them glinting into view for unsustainable moments. Value them for the hope they give, the argument runs, but take them where you find them rather than banking on them. I argue, however, that homemade mutant hope machines can materialise actual better worlds – contingent and imperfect but nevertheless real and sustainable.

The Posh Club operated effectively on the terms of dominant neoliberal structures, making guests less likely to exert pressure on the limited temporal and financial resources of what remains of UK social and healthcare infrastructure. But, as a fully functioning homemade mutant hope machine, it also showed that better worlds can be less fleeting, less tactical, more durable and more consequential than either neoliberal norms or previous critical framings allow. At the Club, the capacity of the broadly conceived participatory performance event to make change went beyond fantastical gesture, unrealised potential or transitory exemplar to become lived experience and sustained reality. Dolan describes how Peggy Shaw, singing 'My Way', makes eye contact and holds hands with audience members, catalysing collectivity.<sup>166</sup> In Dolan's argument, this is extraordinary; at the Posh Club such moments were unexceptional and no less potent for their regularity: they helped confirm it as a space with new norms. Over the Club's run, multiple Elvises moved through the crowd, looking, touching, serenading, kissing guests. On one occasion, Casson drew the whole Club's attention by repeatedly hurling himself into the arms of a delighted guest as Las

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<sup>165</sup> Dolan, pp. 6, 37.

<sup>166</sup> Dolan, pp. 31-32.

Alcachofas del Paraiso played a bluegrass hornpipe.<sup>167</sup> On another, while Andy Wilshire sang 'New York, New York', a dozen volunteers standing at the side of the room formed an impromptu kick-line. On another, while Paul Stewart sang '(Is This the Way to) Amarillo', Ella began her conga line of nearly 30 people. At the Posh Club, people did things that brought them joy and were supported and celebrated in doing so. 'It's the highlight of our life,' said one guest; 'for one day a week, people are alive and happy,' said another.<sup>168</sup>

As a Duckie funding application noted, other services offer 'information, advice and guidance to older people and the Posh Club offers glamour'.<sup>169</sup> The roots of the word 'glamour' relate to magic and the Club was conceived and experienced in terms of fantastical otherworldliness: Duckie described an intention to create 'a magical oasis of luxury' and designer Tim Spooner wanted the space 'to feel special as soon as you walk in [...] removed from a Wednesday afternoon'.<sup>170</sup> The leader of one pre-school group that visited the Club in Crawley told me 'it's good for [children] to see something different. Some of them it's just home, shops, here. It's all they see. This is something else'.<sup>171</sup> In testimony gathered by Duckie, guests describe the Club as 'a liberating break' from the norm, 'brilliant, beautiful, a different world', a space offering 'lots of interesting connections and a better world'.<sup>172</sup>

For a different world, different rules. There was a carnivalesque aspect to the Posh Club. In Hackney, the church proper became a dressing room for drag queens and burlesque dancers, wigs littering the nave, half-eaten sandwiches on the font. In Crawley, Mayor Raj Sharma, played up his

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<sup>167</sup> Field notes, 4 March 2015.

<sup>168</sup> Duckie, 'The Posh Club', *YouTube*, 12 March 2016.

<sup>169</sup> Duckie, 'West Sussex County Council funding application form', p. 3.

<sup>170</sup> *Oxford English Dictionary*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., s.v. 'glamour'; Duckie, 'Application to Church Urban Fund'; Spooner interview, 25 February 2015.

<sup>171</sup> Field notes, 22 November 2016.

<sup>172</sup> Duckie, 'The Posh Club – Testimonials', 'Survey of 100 Hackney guests', 'Survey of 111 Crawley guests'.

resemblance to comic turn Viv the Spiv: 'Looks like my brother!' the municipal dignitary said of the gaudy crook.<sup>173</sup> Identity was fluid. Photographer Caroline Furneaux aptly described the Club as 'a transformative parallel universe where members, volunteers and performers alike are allowed to leave one identity at the door, while they try on another'.<sup>174</sup> This radical fluidity applied to roles within the event's own bounds: guests became volunteers or performers; volunteers became guests or performers (as when Crawley's volunteer crew took to the stage en masse to perform 'Rudolph the Red-Nosed Reindeer'); and organisers could become performers (as with Weir's serenading or Eton's and, later, Bowden's performance as compères).<sup>175</sup> There is a sense here of materialising the utopian hope of the 'passionate amateurs' or 'romantic anti-capitalists' analysed by Nicholas Ridout that the forms of the theatre might 'perform at least some modest disruption of identitarian categories' and support the 'freedom to remain undefined' by one's position in relation to labour or economics.<sup>176</sup> Identity was fluid and contingent at the Club; reality could change; and, as I have shown, this changed reality spread beyond the room.

For critics of participatory artworks, relationality can be an ambivalent outcome. 'Connecting people, creating interactive communicative experience,' Bourriaud muses: 'What for? If you forget the "what for?" I'm afraid you're left with simple Nokia art – producing interpersonal relations for their own sake and never addressing their political aspects.'<sup>177</sup> This is the position Bishop builds on with her suggestion, noted above, that participatory

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<sup>173</sup> Field notes, 24 October 2016.

<sup>174</sup> 'The Posh Club', Caroline Furneaux <<http://www.carolinefurneaux.com/the-posh-club/>> [accessed 16 August 2018].

<sup>175</sup> Field notes, 20 December 2016.

<sup>176</sup> *Passionate Amateurs: Theatre, Communism, and Love* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2013), p. 28.

<sup>177</sup> Nicolas Bourriaud quoted in Bennett Simpson, 'Public Relations: Bennett Simpson Talks with Nicolas Bourriaud', *Artforum*, April 2001, 48.



projects privilege relationality over social justice.<sup>178</sup> For queer subjects, however, compassionate identification with the other is itself a political imperative that cannot easily be separated from the demands of social justice. How can a politics of social justice suspicious of empathy and communication be trusted to support marginalised subjects? Enabling collectivity, self-expression and agency for such people is political per se.

At the Posh Club, people normatively sidelined on account of their age, class, location or other characteristics were supported, valued, centred and enabled in reciprocal kinds of visibility, validation and world-building impossible in mainstream society. Through structures of family and fun, new and evolving understandings and alliances were made and hope was reliably generated. 'I've been switched on again,' one guest said.<sup>179</sup> Another found it an 'exciting, unbelievable experience'.<sup>180</sup> To one volunteer, the Club enabled a transformative and euphoric shift to another plane: guests 'can look like the most miserable people on God's green earth and they're smiling and they're dancing and they're not caring and leaving the world behind'.<sup>181</sup> The Posh Club's routine generation of collective hope and materialisation of a better world were habit-forming and the idea of its ending provoked apprehension. In the words of the poem Ethan wrote on the paper napkin at the final Hackney show, 'Now it's week 10, will they all return to their residential pen/And wonder when they are going to be posh again?'<sup>182</sup>

## Conclusion

In this chapter, I have expanded the purview of reproductive queer futurity by showing how the capacity of emergent, autonomous and adaptive forms and

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<sup>178</sup> Bishop, p. 25.

<sup>179</sup> *attn: Well-Rounded Life*, 'Nightclub for the Elderly'.

<sup>180</sup> Duckie, 'Survey of 100 Hackney guests'.

<sup>181</sup> Hackney church volunteer interview, 18 February 2015.

<sup>182</sup> Field notes Hackney, 25 March 2015.

processes to generate hope and materialise better worlds can apply to contexts of marginalisation beyond those related to sexuality or gender identity. Framing older people at risk of isolation as queer children, I have shown how biogenetic and chosen family structures can work together to affirm marginalised subjects through dynamic forms of intergenerational transmission and material support. I argued that constructing guests as high status offered affective support and catalysed a situation of fun that in turn enabled engagement with challenging performance work and facilitated multiple networks of generative relationality. I showed that mobilising forms such as dressing up, dancing and performance can enable kinds of self-expression and agency that help to materialise a better world whose participants understand it as transformative and whose operation exceeds the bounds of the participatory performance event itself.

In Chapter Three, I noted moore's articulation of the queer power of not waiting but instead 'creating a unique world for yourself according to your own terms, a world you can inhabit right now'.<sup>183</sup> The idea resonates with the guest I quoted earlier, describing how her 'clothes sit in the wardrobe [...] waiting' to be worn. The power of not waiting takes on additional urgency when time is short: when you have more, perhaps many more years behind you than ahead. Seven weeks into the run of the Crawley Posh Club, Ella, the unstoppable 85-year-old dancer, injured her shoulder, leading her to miss several weeks. On the last date of the run, she was back. 'I had to be here this week,' she told me, for the finale.<sup>184</sup> She had brought cards and gifts to thank organisers. And she was dancing again – good luck trying to stop her – even as she winced in pain. The Posh Club had not magically erased the problems in her life but it offered a space where they mattered less and things were different; things were better. If there was a way to get there, Ella couldn't wait.

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<sup>183</sup> moore, p. 101.

<sup>184</sup> Field notes, 20 December 2016.

## Conclusion

### Research findings

The first showcase by the Duckie QTIPOC Collective was held at Rich Mix, east London, on 10 August 2018.<sup>1</sup> Like the group itself, the audience mostly comprised young queer, trans and intersex people of colour.<sup>2</sup> The compère (a member of the collective) introduced a number of acts incorporating dance, music, spoken word, comedy, fashion, DJing, striptease, lip sync, video and a *Soul Train*-style line dance.<sup>3</sup> First, though, they told us how their mum had been shocked earlier to learn they were skipping mosque to hang out with a bunch of drag queens, queers and weirdos. This, mum said, was *besharam* – shameless. The compère was tickled by this and got us all to chant the word together. A term of normative abjection became an emblem of deviant collective pleasure; an inadequate blood family relation gave way to a more sustaining improvised one. But this wasn't a binary proposition: the biogenetic and religious bonds still held, as a matter of choice, even as their insufficiencies were acknowledged. The need is deep for 'something with a root', as another of the night's performers put it.

This research project set out to address several interrelated questions touching on how events such as the QTIPOC Collective showcase might engage matters of belonging and abjection by navigating existing structures and developing new ones. How, if at all, might participatory performance practices materialise better worlds for marginalised subjects? What structures, forms or processes might support these projects? And what challenges or problems might arise in deploying these and how might they be addressed?

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<sup>1</sup> 'Duckie QTIPOC Collective', *Duckie* <<http://www.duckie.co.uk/events/duckie-qtipoc-collective>> [accessed 16 August 2018].

<sup>2</sup> Field notes, 10 August 2018.

<sup>3</sup> *Soul Train* (Metromedia Square, 1971-2006).

Overall, I have found that participatory performance practices can generate sustainable, fruitful and replicable circuits of queer belonging, including for marginalised people positioned as queer for reasons unrelated to sexuality or gender identity. Such practices are powerfully supported by queerly understood structures of family and fun. For performers, they can offer non-normative forms of vocational guidance and support that make queer practice more conceivable as a life. For performers and audiences, participatory practices can offer understandings of non-normative lineages and fortify intergenerational connections, generating lived experience and new narratives that render queer lives more conceivable, sustainable and enjoyable. Participatory performance practices can stake claims to the past and the future, support the formation and cohesion of queer collectivity, and harmoniously engage a range of tensions and challenges. They can generate hope in powerful, routine and consequential ways.

This thesis has investigated these questions across two parts. In Part I, I mobilised a wide range of interdisciplinary scholarship to build a new conceptual framework upon which to construct my analysis. This framework drew on performance studies, queer studies and the nascent interdisciplinary field of fun studies to interrogate questions related to the materialisation of better worlds. What is a family and who has a right to it? What is fun and who has a right to it? What is a future and who has a right to it? And how can performance support the pursuit of these rights? Through this critical investigation, I articulated the concept of reproductive queer futurity, a position toward the future rooted in collective hope for better worlds for marginalised subjects and, crucially, pragmatically fortified by the conscious and routine reproduction of that hope through various kinds of *doing*. Such doing, I showed, catalyses kinds of feeling, understanding, expression,

relation and agency that begin actually to materialise better worlds in the present.

This doing can take place through emergent, autonomous and adaptive forms and processes that routinely generate hope. I call these vehicles homemade mutant hope machines. Such machines operate to the benefit of the figure of the queer child, which I define as a subject of any age emerging into hopeful queer collectivity. I developed new, mutually fortifying understandings of family and fun, framing family as an elective enterprise of material support and intergenerational transmission and fun as an affectively charged activity with the capacity to effect civic change by intervening in existing structures and realising new ones. I showed how homemade mutant hope machines that *do* family and fun queerly can powerfully support reproductive queer futurity. I also showed that such machines take particularly effective form as participatory performance events and projects.

In Part II of the thesis, I demonstrated the practical applicability of these findings through case studies of three of Duckie's projects: the Duckie Homosexualist Summer School (DHSS), the 'vintage clubbing' cycle and the Posh Club. My studies of DHSS and 'vintage clubbing' showed how participatory performance events and projects made by and for LGBTQ+ people can materialise better worlds now and stake powerful claims to both past and future as sites of self-determined, pleasurable and generative queer living. My study of the Posh Club, meanwhile, showed that participatory performance practices can also materialise better worlds for marginalised subjects whose positioning as queer exceeds considerations of sexual or gender identity. I will now summarise some more specific findings from Part II that affirm the conceptual framework articulated in Part I to the benefit of various kinds of queer children.

My case studies have focused on participatory performance practices that emerge from lived experience, operate relatively autonomously, adapt to changing conditions and routinely generate hope. These qualities are evident across a range of contexts, from public-facing performance events to vocational training schemes to projects conceived to address specific social exclusions. Like other Duckie projects referred to in this thesis, these case studies emerged from Duckie members' lived experience of social and cultural marginalisation, accrued expertise in producing nightlife performance events, understandings (personal to themselves or loved ones) of exclusions particular to younger LGBTQ+ people and older working-class people and desire to apprehend identifiable aspects of queer subjectivity in the past and future. They operated relatively autonomously by drawing on collective goodwill, low-cost pragmatism and critical navigation of civic and neoliberal economic structures. They operated adaptively by applying forms and processes developed in one context of marginalisation to other such contexts; by changing their own forms in response to participants' experiences and shifts in material contingencies; and by expanding their terms of operation to engage multiple conditions of marginalisation and those marginalised even within the projects' terms of operation. Participatory performance practices proved particularly helpful because, queerly constituted under particular conditions, they can enable empathetic and imaginative subjective agency and understanding as well as openness to unfamiliar relational and civic forms.

These projects valorised and fortified queer feelings, understandings, expressions, relations and agency. They made the means for sustainably producing these things available but not compulsory to participants. This provision and its outcomes routinely generated hope and materialised better worlds. I showed that these outcomes are powerfully supported by doing

family queerly, particularly by enabling material support and intergenerational transmission. Forms of material support provided included: food, drink and entertainment; vocational guidance and opportunity; convivial socialising on non-normative terms; and the funding and dissemination of archival and historical research. Forms of intergenerational transmission provided included: the communication of critical and affective understandings of past queer experiences, particularly lineages of socialising and performance; the application of existing social and cultural technologies to new conditions; and the cultivation of mutually beneficial reflexive forms of two-way heredity.

I also showed that these outcomes are powerfully supported by doing fun queerly. By enabling stimulating, absorbing and enjoyable activity in situations bounded in time and space whose stakes are perceived as low, these projects proved capable of intervening in existing structures and materialising new ones. Fun enabled resilience among normatively marginalised populations by enjoyably supporting hopeful collective agency and identity and critical understandings of inequitable contingencies. Fun also supported the formation of new non-normative structures by enabling low-stakes experimentation with the constructive capacities of normatively denigrated feelings, understandings and experiences. Fun's capacity to put into question what deserves to be taken seriously also opened up new understandings of the contingent relationships between work, pleasure, time and identity under neoliberalism. Queer understandings of family and fun also helped participants to navigate tensions and challenges related to these projects through, for instance, structures to manage conflict or lower stakes.

Reproductive queer futurity supports the reproduction of queer subjectivity, of hope and of specific hope-generating technologies. In demonstrating this, this project has established generative connections between the studies of participatory performance, queer, family and fun.

It has shown how thinking these fields together can generate mutually beneficial understandings regarding the materialisation of better worlds for marginalised subjects from the ground up. It has also laid the foundations for further critical work within and between these fields. My methodology has demonstrated the value of sustained observational engagement with participatory performance projects and all their participants, including producers, institutional partners, performers, other workers, guests, punters and volunteers. It is also my hope that, under present conditions of precarity and instability, this research will be helpful to producers, performers and members of marginalised populations seeking practical forms and processes to ameliorate the conditions of normative exclusion, oppression and erasure. I hope the terms *reproductive queer futurity* and *homemade mutant hope machine* – and the thinking informing them and my articulations of queer family and fun – might support both scholarly investigation and the generation, maintenance and reproduction of more homemade mutant hope machines to the benefit of more queer children's lived experience.

### **Further areas of research**

Several further areas of research present themselves. This thesis has made the most sustained argument to date for the breadth and value of the work done by Duckie since 1995. Further critical understandings could be developed regarding multiple aspects of the collective's past work. These include the content of performance work shown on Saturday nights at the Royal Vauxhall Tavern (RVT); large-scale productions beyond the RVT; the *Gay Shame* cycle; and the Duckie Family and QTIPOC Collective projects by and for people of colour. The projects considered in this thesis have continued to mutate since my period of observation in ways that would reward further research. The Posh Club operates at more sites around southern England and supports



further forms of participant-led expression. The 'vintage clubbing' cycle is ongoing, with a Vauxhall-specific project, *Princess*, planned for 2020 and the development by Duckie of an 'Archive to Events' strand to produce further events and potentially generate income. Arts organisations' operation within neoliberal funding landscapes could be further illuminated by attending to Duckie's current moves toward registered charity status and longitudinal crowdfunding strategies. The collective's taking over of the management of Home Live Art opens up opportunities to explore Duckie's deep and longstanding formal and institutional relationships to live art. There is also considerable scope for research into emergent, autonomous and adaptive forms and processes used by other artists and organisations to address creatively multiple forms of marginalisation.

Other questions emerging from my case studies suggest areas of further research. First, I have foregrounded the power of participatory performance projects structured around planned events to serve as homemade mutant hope machines. Could Duckie's methods also prove effective through forms that don't involve participatory performance events, or indeed envisaged outcomes of any form? Second, I have foregrounded the efficacy of reproductive queer futurity as a matter of *doing* rather than *waiting*. Under what circumstances might reproductive queer futurity be served by *waiting* as well as – or even instead of – *doing*? Third, I have foregrounded reproductive queer futurity as a matter of hopeful anticipation but what about conditions when this is acutely challenged by, for instance, high mortality? How might hopeful collectivity be mobilised in the shadow of death? The Slaughterhouse Club – Duckie's open-door, drop-in arts project for people living with homelessness and addiction – was beyond the scope of this thesis because it does not mobilise participatory performance forms. This very formal

divergence, as well as the material conditions of its operation, makes it a productive site on which to begin to address these particular questions.

Further critical investigation could also explore whether homemade mutant hope machines of the kind described in this thesis can continue to expand effectively or whether they operate optimally at smaller scales. This suggests the further question of whether the better worlds they materialise can constitute substantive structural alternatives to neoliberal forms or whether they eventually face inevitable constraint, cooption, failure or destruction. In the introduction, I quoted Jen Harvie's questioning of the credibility of participatory works that 'can only ever be temporary and limited, and which cannot remotely begin to compensate for the larger and would-be secure structures of social welfare that are simultaneously being dismantled and potentially destroyed'.<sup>4</sup> I've argued that Duckie's projects do valuably begin to offer such compensation without, I hope, occluding the contingency of that offer and the potential problems and challenges arising, for instance, from material and political conditions around funding and internal tensions around different ideas of loyalty or pleasure.

A further related question asks whether, through their embrace of strategies predicated on contingency, autonomy and adaptability, homemade mutant hope machines are themselves inherently neoliberal technologies.

The geographer David Harvey has suggested that

much of the Left right now, being very autonomous and anarchical, is actually reinforcing the endgame of neoliberalism. A lot of people on the Left don't like to hear that. But of course the question arises: Is there a way to organize which is not a mirror image? Can we smash that mirror and find something else, which is not playing into the hands of neoliberalism?<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> *Fair Play: Art, Performance and Neoliberalism* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), p. 3.

<sup>5</sup> David Harvey, quoted in Bjarke Skærlund Risager, 'Neoliberalism is a political project: An interview with David Harvey', *Jacobin*, 23 July 2016 <<https://www.jacobinmag.com/2016/07/david-harvey-neoliberalism-capitalism-labor-crisis-resistance/>> [accessed 16 August 2018].

Further longitudinal observation might indeed yield arguments that frame Duckie's socially engaged participatory performance projects (and others like them) as inadequate and complicit. My findings, however, indicate that Duckie navigates the conditions of neoliberalism in the service of positions that are not neoliberal; Duckie instrumentalises instrumentalisation, using the machinery of normative marketisation to promote queer collectivity. Where neoliberalism valorises competitive individualism and so-called 'creative destruction', including cultural amnesia, Duckie's projects promote mutual support and cherish existing and overlooked cultural forms. Rather than framing life as an alienated zero-sum game, Duckie structures it as a reciprocally interested collective undertaking meaningfully located within present structures of material and affective support and more expansive temporalities of past and future belonging and understanding. Addressing the needs of various kinds of queer children, Duckie's work insists that queer is not a phase, not by pretending entirely to overcome or erase problems and suffering but by offering ways to engage abjection, ameliorating some of its effects and mobilising others in ways surveyed above. Duckie's projects of reproductive queer futurity enable participants to experience at first hand an alternative to neoliberal capitalism. There is value in this regardless of the contingent uncertainties of such projects' longterm operation. Such projects enable different narratives about participants' lives to emerge, less predicated on metrics of normative inadequacy and disposability, more reflective and affirmative of their distinctive subjectivities, sensibilities and agency.

There is a sense of mission about Duckie's projects. As Duckie producer Simon Casson has said:

London's falling apart a bit, socially and culturally; and on a tiny scale, we want to do something about it. We know how to get a load of people in a room having a right

laugh. So now we want to do it with people who never go to the theatre, who struggle with being alive. I feel like it's utterly worth doing.<sup>6</sup>

There's an awareness here of how projects such as Duckie's operate around the edges and between the cracks of neoliberal capitalist edifices that themselves seem increasingly precarious. There's the belief that small things count, and the understanding that fun can build muscles and find application in conditions of abjection. There's an echo of the commitment, noted by Nicholas Ridout in relation to the 'romantic anti-capitalists' of the eighteenth, nineteenth and twentieth centuries, to pursue 'the realization, in the present, of a collective mode of life'.<sup>7</sup> And there's the urgent conviction that such ends are served by *doing* rather than waiting.

I argue that such projects pursued with such intentions have at least the potential to address the conditions of neoliberal marginalisation in more than inadequate or complicit ways. I locate the glimmer of something more substantive and enduring – something that is neither a mirror image of neoliberalism nor inevitably temporary and limited – at participatory performance events at which branches of the Duckie family tree begin to intertwine. These include Duckie's *Gay Shame* event in 2018, in the tunnel near the RVT, where Tap Cats – the dance troupe comprising older women that emerged from the Crawley Posh Club – performed to the cheers of thousands of partying queers. They include the Christmas edition of the Posh Club held at Bishopsgate Institute in 2016, where DHSS participants served as volunteers and one, a young performer of colour, was jarred into reconceptualising their own troubled family relationships after seeing older people of colour mingling happily with drag acts and same-sex couples. They

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<sup>6</sup> Casson quoted in Alexi Duggins, 'We could be heroes: six inspirational Londoners', *Time Out London*, 15 March 2015 <<https://now-here-this.timeout.com/2015/03/15/we-could-be-heroes-six-inspirational-londoners/>> [accessed 16 August 2018].

<sup>7</sup> *Passionate Amateurs: Theatre, Communism, and Love* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2013), p. 12.

include the plans for the next 'vintage clubbing' event, in which Vauxhall's promiscuous lineages of queer fun will be reanimated by bringing together people, forms, ideas and feelings related to multiple Duckie projects (including Saturday night punters and the RVT, various Posh Clubs and Duckie QTIPOC Collective) as well as grassroots trans groups and major arts institutions.<sup>8</sup> Such events, situated amid the cultural, social and material contingencies of the now, enable the small worlds materialised through individual projects to start imbricating, cross-fertilising and fortifying one another. They also offer chances for different generations to connect, though there is room for more programmatic support for this too.

Writing in the 1990s about gay city quarters, Lauren Berlant and Michael Warner noted that a 'critical mass' of 'publicly accessible culture' is required for queer life worlds to have any meaningful civic purchase.<sup>9</sup> Since then, the conditions enabling such critical mass to form, always fragile, have often been eroded in UK contexts by assimilation, gentrification and austerity. The individual and collective capacities of Duckie's community projects suggest at least the possibility of their restoration and the emergence of what I'd describe as a Duckie civics, reaching queerly across multiple facets of social, cultural, political and economic living. The collective has been asked to produce events for toddlers and the idea of a Duckie care home has been a semi-serious running gag for years. Duckie from cradle to grave, then? A new welfare model constituting a robust and sustainable alternative to market supremacy, humming with homemade mutant hope machines fuelled by queer kinds of family, fun and hope, supportive of all manner of queer children? Who would it be for? Who would pay for it? Would it fragment or implode? Could it ever actually work?

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<sup>8</sup> Duckie, 'Heritage Lottery Fund application for *Princess*', 2018, provided by producers.

<sup>9</sup> 'Sex in Public', *Critical Inquiry*, 24.2 (1998), 547-566, p. 562.

I don't know – and perhaps, in contexts appreciative of emergence and adaptation, such unpredictability need not cause surprise or concern. Perhaps it's enough for now to insist that counternarratives to neoliberalism are conceivable and desirable; that there's value simply in understanding that existing structures can be challenged and new ones generated; and beginning to consider, playfully and experimentally, how to enact that understanding. In Chapter Three, I mentioned Walter Benjamin's appreciation of *Spielraum*, or room-for-play, and the role of gambling within that. The gambling aspect of *Spiel*, Miriam Bratu Hansen suggests, reflects the value Benjamin recognised in alert, embodied present-mindedness and being instinctively 'open to chance and a different future'.<sup>10</sup> Like the period of upheaval in which Benjamin wrote, the present moment of neoliberal wobble might be a time for gambling, a time of openness to new gambits, if for no other reason than the increasingly evident inadequacy of what presently dominates. Ridout notes Benjamin's understanding of history 'in terms of rupture and possibility, rather than continuity and progress', and this might be fertile ground for reproductive queer futurity.<sup>11</sup> Indeed, in proposing experimental juvenile performance practice as the antechamber of a new world in his 'Program for a Proletarian Children's Theatre', Benjamin anticipates certain utopian, temporal and expressive understandings and applications germane to reproductive queer futurity.<sup>12</sup> Ridout notes, for instance, that the Program resists framing education as preparation for teleologically governed productivity; instead, Benjamin emphasises its capacity to disrupt chrononormativity 'at the level of the everyday'; through such education, supported by the 'unsentimental [...] pedagogic love' of

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<sup>10</sup> 'Room-for-Play: Benjamin's Gamble with Cinema', *October*, 109 (2004), 3-45, p. 8.

<sup>11</sup> Ridout, p. 63.

<sup>12</sup> 'Program for a Proletarian Children's Theatre' (1928/1929), in *Selected Writings Vol. 2 1927-1934*, trans. Rodney Livingstone, ed. by Michael W. Jennings, Howard Eiland and Gary Smith (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1999), pp. 201-206.

elders, children can usher in an unknown 'future that, in its reception in the present, takes place now'.<sup>13</sup>

Such concerns map neatly onto the playful processes of DHSS and also onto the promiscuous temporal mesh of the 'vintage clubbing' events and the fabulous doings of the Posh Club. Ridout strikingly characterises the refusal of Benjamin's children's theatre to commit to normative educational qualifications or theatrical productions as

a refusal that does not content itself with waiting, either: it must be active in its interruption of the logic in which history is progress made by work. It is not a matter of replacing work with doing nothing. What is crucial is that a determinate "nonwork" must substitute for work and thus, in a sense, negate it.<sup>14</sup>

Here we see an insistence on *doing*, not waiting, an articulation of the need to sidestep productive labour as the marker of a livable, mournable life and an intimation of how those two sites so carefully constructed under capitalism as sites of *not-work* – family and fun – might be mobilised to begin to forge new worlds on different terms. The outcomes of any such enterprise are uncertain – but certainties have no need of hope. Heather Love writes compellingly about the necessity of feeling backward as a way of honouring and understanding lingering past pains.<sup>15</sup> But *feeling forward* is important too as the affective engine of hopeful queer collectivity. Such feeling forward needn't be rose-tinted – it might involve apprehension or worse – but even feeling forward negatively implicitly testifies to a hopeful investment in a conceivable better alternative. In Baz Comics' *Tales of the Tavern*, for instance, an RVT punter has a nightmare in which the venue is derelict and

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<sup>13</sup> Ridout, pp. 59-60, 63.

<sup>14</sup> Ridout, p. 66.

<sup>15</sup> *Feeling Backward: Loss and the Politics of Queer History* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2009).

defaced; he awakens sad, distraught and even more resolute in defence of the site.<sup>16</sup> You can also feel forward through anger or tears.

Feeling forward is at the heart of reproductive queer futurity. In their feeling forward, the queer children of DHSS, QTIPOC Collective, the Posh Club, 'vintage clubbing' events and Duckie's other projects – all of us queer children who avow an investment in hopeful collectivity and the materialisation of better worlds – resemble the children of Benjamin's proletarian children's theatre. The 'radical unleashing of play' enables us to receive and transmit 'the *secret signal* of what is to come'.<sup>17</sup> We are the ones whose *doing*, here and now, opens a door onto the future. We are the ones to get things done.

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<sup>16</sup> 'Tales of the Tavern', Baz Comics <<http://bazcomics.com/tales-of-the-tavern/>> [accessed 16 August 2018].

<sup>17</sup> 'Program', pp. 205-206.



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## **Live performances (excluding Duckie events)**

*Jonny Woo's East London Lecture*, written by Jonny Woo, dir. by Douglas Rentoul  
(The Ditch, London, 20-30 April 2016).

*Kings Cross (REMIX)*, written and performed by Tom Marshman (Camden People's  
Theatre, London, 16-27 May 2017).

*Long Live Queen James!*, devised and written by Mark Ravenhill and Scottee  
(Banqueting House, London, 22 February 2017).

'Partyism Manifesto', written and performed by Lavinia Co-op as part of *Pride: Past,  
Present, Future* (Bishopsgate Institute, London, 6 July 2018).

*The Prime of Ms David Hoyle*, conceived by Ben Walters, devised and performed by  
David Hoyle, Thom Shaw and Ben Walters with guest performers (Chelsea  
Theatre, London, 20-21 November 2015 and 14-25 September 2016).

*We Raise Our Hands in the Sanctuary*, written and directed by Daniel Fulvio and  
Martin Moriarty (The Albany, London, 31 January-11 February 2017).

## Films

- 120 BPM*, dir. by Robin Campillo (Memento Films, 2017).
- Annihilation*, dir. by Alex Garland (Netflix, 2018).
- The Bad Seed*, dir. by Mervyn LeRoy (Warner Bros., 1956).
- Carnival of Souls*, dir. by Herk Harvey (Herts-Lion International Corp., 1962).
- Un chant d'amour*, dir. by Jean Genet (Connoisseur Video, 1950).
- Dreamgirls*, dir. by Bill Condon (DreamWorks Pictures/Paramount Pictures, 2006).
- Gigi*, dir. by Vincente Minnelli (Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer, 1958).
- Guess Who's Coming to Dinner?*, dir. by Stanley Kramer (Columbia Pictures, 1967).
- Finding Nemo*, dir. by Andrew Stanton and Lee Unkrich (Pixar, 2003).
- The LEGO Batman Movie*, dir. by Chris McKay (Warner Bros., 2017).
- Let's Make Love*, dir. by George Cukor (20th Century Fox, 1960).
- Modern Times*, dir. by Charlie Chaplin (United Artists, 1936).
- Pee-Wee's Big Adventure*, dir. by Tim Burton (Warner Bros., 1985).
- Quadrophenia*, dir. by Franc Roddam (The Who/Universal Pictures, 1979).
- Save the Tavern*, dir. by Tim Brunsten (Light Factory, 2017).
- United in Anger*, dir. by Jim Hubbard (Quad Cinema, 2012).

## Television programmes

- 'F.U.N.', *SpongeBob SquarePants*, Nickelodeon, 18 September 1999.
- 'Homosexuals', *This Week*, ITV, 22 October 1964 <<https://player.bfi.org.uk/rentals/film/watch-homosexuals-1964-online>> [accessed 16 August 2018].
- Soul Train* (Metromedia Square, 1971-2006).

## Songs

- Ager, Milton and Jack Yellen, 'Happy Days are Here Again', Leo Reisman and His Orchestra (EMI Robbins Catalog, Inc./Advanced Music Corp., 1929).
- Anka, Paul, 'One Man Woman/One Woman Man', Paul Anka and Odia Coates (United Artists, 1974).
- Arulpragasam, Mathangi Maya 'M.I.A.', Nate 'Danja' Hills and Marcella Araica, 'Bad Girls', M.I.A. (Interscope, 2012).
- Crewe, Bob and Bob Gaudio, 'Walk Like a Man', The Four Seasons (Vee-Jay, 1963).
- Egan, Raymond B. and Gus Khan, 'Ain't We Got Fun', Billy Jones (Edison Records, 1921).
- Fischerspooner, Michael Stipe and BOOTS, 'Have Fun Tonight', Fischerspooner (Ultra Records, 2018).
- Garratt, Jack, 'Worry', Jack Garratt (Island Records, 2015).
- Hatch, Tony, 'Downtown', Petula Clark (Pye/Warner Bros., 1964).
- Hazard, Robert, 'Girls Just Want to Have Fun', Cyndi Lauper, (Portrait, 1983).
- Jett, Joan and Kim Fowley, 'Cherry Bomb', The Runaways (Mercury, 1976).
- Lerner, Alan Jay and Frederick Loewe, 'Thank Heaven For Little Girls', Maurice Chevalier, (MGM, 1958).
- Lowe, David, 'Would You...?', Touch and Go (V2, 1998).
- Sernel, Chris, Madison Love, Hovey Benjamin, Jeff Lewis and Chris Miller, 'Friends Are Family', Oh, Hush! Feat. Will Arnett and Jeff Lewis (WaterTower Music, 2017).
- Phillips, Gretchen, 'The Queer Song', Two Nice Girls (Rough Trade Records, 1991).
- Prince, 'Nothing Compares 2 U', Sinead O'Connor (Warner/Chappell Music, 1989).
- Sedaka, Neil and Howard Greenfield, '(Is This the Way to) Amarillo', Tony Christie (MCA/Kapp, 1971).
- Sitek, David, Daniel Ledinsky, Erik Hassle and Adiam Feireiss, 'Fun', Blondie (BMG/Infectious Music, 2017).
- Williams, Pharrell, 'Happy', Pharell Williams (Backlot Music/i Am Other/Columbia, 2013).
- Wilson, Brian, Mike Love, 'Fun Fun Fun', The Beach Boys, (Capitol Records, 1964).

## Chronology of Duckie events mentioned in the thesis

This is not a complete list of a Duckie productions but a timeline of those mentioned in this thesis. More details can be found at Duckie's current website

<<http://www.duckie.co.uk/archive>> and the archived version of the website that ran between 1995 and 2014 <<http://duckie.harmsen.net/archive.php?submenu=old>>.

1995–

Saturday nights, Royal Vauxhall Tavern (RVT), London. Turns have included (among many others) Christopher Green, Marisa Carnesky, Ursula Martinez, Chloe Poems, the Gaeity Players (performing Victorian music-hall numbers), Diane Torr, Jackie Clune, Bette Bourne, John Cooper Clarke, Lois Weaver and Peggy Shaw, Regina Fong, Frank Chickens, Simon Munnery, Penny Arcade, David Mills, Vaginal Davis, Tim Etchells, Kiki and Herb, John Hegley, the Cholmondeleys and the Featherstonehaughs, Timberlina, Miss High Leg Kick, Lorraine Bowen, Lea DeLaria, Moira Finucane, Nathan Evans, Princess Julia, Richard DeDominici, Boogaloo Stu, Ridiculusmus, Kim Noble, Neil Bartlett, Black Elvis, Lavinia Co-op, Bird La Bird, Holly Woodlawn, Marawa the Amazing, Roy Kerr, La JohnJoseph, Bourgeois and Maurice, Oreet Ashery, Jonny Woo, Son of a Tutu, Dominic Johnson, Dina Martina, Gateau Chocolat, Mouse, Lazlo Pearlman, H. Plewis, Rikki Beadle-Blair, Bryony Kimmings, Stacy Makishi, Taylor Mac, Myra DuBois, Nando Messias, Frisky and Mannish, the LipSinkers, Meow Meow, Brian Lobel, Liz Carr, Carmelita Tropicana, Briefs, Figs in Wigs, Mamoru Iriguchi, Margaret Cho, Dynasty Handbag, Mat Fraser and Julie Atlas Muz, GETINTHEBACKOFTHEVAN, Ann Liv Young, Lady Rizo, Joey Arias, Sh!t Theatre, Christeene, Rocio Boliver, Adrienne Truscott, Lasana Shabazz, Oozing Gloop, Rosana Cade, Adam All, Kate Bornstein, Travis Alabanza, Rubyyy Jones and Victoria Sin. Artists in residence have included Lucy McCormick, Katy Baird, MisSa Blue, Marikiscrycry, Harry Clayton Wright, Anna Frisch, Scottee, Lucy Hutson, Professor Vanessa Toulmin, the Stylinquents, Dickie Beau, Neil Medlyn, Rhyannon Styles, Harold Offeh and Candoco Dance Company.

1996

*Wig 'n' Casino*, Market Tavern, London.

*Gay Shame*, RVT, London.

1997

*I Dream of Morrissey*, ICA, London.

*The World's First Lesbian Beauty Contest*, Café de Paris, London.

1998

*Vauxhall Pleasure Promenade*, walking tour, London.

*Gay Shame & Lesbian Weakness*, New Connaught Rooms, London.

*Upstairs Downstairs*, New Connaught Rooms, London.

1999

*Vauxhall Pleasure Promenade*, walking tour, London (reprised).

*The Girl Looked at Julie*, ICA, London.

*Gay Shame*, Fierce, Birmingham.

*Wig 'n' Casino*, RVT, London.

*The Youth Club*, RVT, London.

2000

*Explosion! The Rock 'n' Roll Ghosts of Soho*, walking tour, London.

*1954 Dancehall*, Rivoli Ballroom, London (part of *Nightbird* series).

*The Divine David On Ice*, Stream Ice Arena, London (part of *Nightbird* series).

2001

*Blowzabellas, Drabs, Mauks and Trugmoldies*, Brick Lane, London.

*Wow! Duckie Salutes Kate Bush*, ICA, London.

2002

*Ç'est Vauxhall!*, RVT, London.

*The Class Club*, The Brickhouse, London (part of *Nightbird 2* series).

2003

*Ç'est Barbican!*, Barbican Centre, London.

*Ç'est Vauxhall!*, Club Ego, Edinburgh.

2004

*Ç'est Barbican!*, Barbican Centre, London.

*Ç'est Duckie!*, Sydney Opera House, Sydney.

*Gay Shame*, The Coronet, London.

*Duckie*, The Arches, Glasgow.

2005

*Ç'est Duckie!*, The Lowry, Manchester.

*Ç'est Birmingham!*, Hippodrome, Birmingham.

*Ç'est Duckie!*, Hebbel-am-Ufer, Berlin.

*Ç'est Vauxhall!*, Thessaloniki, Greece.

*Gay Shame: The Suicides*, The Coronet, London.

*Duckie*, De La Warr Pavilion, Bexhill-On-Sea.

2006

*The Class Club*, Barbican Centre, London.

*Euroshame*, The Coronet, London.

*SOS* with David Hoyle, Soho Theatre, London.

*Magazine* with David Hoyle, RVT, London.

*Duckie Decade*, The Fridge, London.

*Keep the Faith*, Tate Britain, London.

2007

*Ç'est Duckie!*, PS122, New York.

*Ç'est Duckie!*, PAC, Tokyo.

*Ç'est Duckie!*, PAC, Kyoto.

*Magazine: The Reprint* with David Hoyle, RVT, London.

SOS with David Hoyle, Komedia, Brighton.

SOS with David Hoyle, Outburst, Belfast.

SOS with David Hoyle, Sydney Opera House, Sydney.

2008

*Liverpool is Burning!*, Adelphi Ballroom, Liverpool.

*Gay Shame Gets Macho*, The Coronet, London.

*Magazine: 3rd Edition* with David Hoyle, RVT, London.

*Token Black People*, RVT, London.

*Duckie*, Blackpool Tower Ballroom, Blackpool.

2009

*Gay Shame Goes Girly*, Brixton Academy, London.

*Queers and Old Dears: The Big Bexhill Weekend*, De La Warr Pavilion, Bexhill.

2010

*Duckie in France*, Tri-Postal, Lille.

*Readers Wives Fan Club*, RVT, London.

*15th Birthday Party*, Royal Festival Hall, London.

*Performance & Cocktails*, RVT, London.

*Duckie*, Latitude, Southwold.

*Gross Indecency*, Camden Centre, London.

*Queers and Old Dears: St. Valentine's Day Ball*, Battersea Arts Centre, London.



2011

*Lullaby*, Barbican Centre, London.

*Duckie*, Latitude, Southwold.

*16th Birthday Party*, Royal Festival Hall, London.

*Copyright Christmas*, Barbican Centre, London.

2012

*Queers and Old Dears: Weekend at Wilton's*, Wilton's Music Hall, London.

*Duckie*, Latitude, Southwold.

*The Tuesday Club*, Crawley.

*The Slaughterhouse Club* pilot, Vauxhall and Battersea.

2013

*Duckie Upstarts*, RVT, London.

*Duckie*, Latitude, Southwold.

*Duckie Goes to the Gateways*, Camden Centre, London.

*Vauxhall Bacchanal*, Southbank Centre, London.

*The Tuesday Club*, Crawley.

*The Slaughterhouse Club* pilot, Vauxhall and Battersea.

2014

*Shame 2014: Compulsory Entertainment*, Electric Brixton, London.

*Happy Birthday RVT*, various venues, London.

*Duckie*, Latitude, Southwold.

*Duckie in Sitges*, Sitges.

*The Posh Club*, Crawley.

2015

*Border Force*, Camden Centre, London.

*Duckie*, Latitude, Southwold.

*Duckie Homosexualist Summer School*, RVT, London, Chelsea Theatre, London,  
Latitude, Southwold.

*The Posh Club*, Crawley and Hackney.

*The Slaughterhouse Club*, Vauxhall and Battersea.

*Hackney Honky Tonk*, St Paul's West Hackney, London.

2016

*Lady Malcolm's Servants' Ball*, Bishopsgate Institute, London.

*Duckie*, Latitude, Southwold.

*Duckie Homosexualist Summer School*, RVT, London, Chelsea Theatre, London,  
Latitude, Southwold.

*Duckie Family*, Rich Mix, London.

*Duckie is 21*, Electric Brixton, London.

*The Posh Club*, Crawley and Hackney.

*The Slaughterhouse Club*, Vauxhall and Battersea.

*Palace of Varieties*, Waterside, Peckham.

2017

*50 Years for 50 Queers*, Hull.

*Duckie DeCrim: 1967*, RVT, London.

*Duckie Family Dinner*, Rich Mix, London.

*Duckie*, Latitude, Southwold.

*Queer Fun*, RVT, London.

*The Posh Club*, Crawley and Hackney.

*The Slaughterhouse Club*, Vauxhall and Battersea.

*Hackney Honky Tonk*, St Paul's West Hackney, London.

2018

*Duckie Family Legacy*, Rich Mix, London.

*Duckie QTIPOC Collective*, Rich Mix, London.

*Duckie*, Latitude, Southwold.

*Duckie Goes to Yorkshire*, The Trades Hall, Hebden Bridge.

*The Posh Club*, Crawley, Hackney, Elephant and Castle, Brighton, Hastings and Peterborough.

*The Slaughterhouse Club*, Vauxhall and Battersea.

## **Duckie archival material**

The following archival material kindly provided by Duckie producers. Assorted Duckie flyers, paraphernalia and archival materials are held at Bishopsgate Institute, London, where they are freely accessible without appointment.

Duckie, Saturday night flyers, 1995, 2010.

———, *Gay Shame* flyers, 2004-2009.

———, *Gross Indecency* flyer, 2010.

———, *Duckie Goes to the Gateways* flyer, 2013.

———, *The Posh Club* flyers for Hackney and Crawley runs, 2015 and 2016.

———, *Lady Malcolm's Servants' Ball* flyer, 2016.

———, *The Balls* (broadsheet produced as part of *Lady Malcolm's Servants' Ball*, 2016.

———, *Magpie* magazine, 2016.

———, *The Pop Up Posh Club & Portrait Party* flyer, 2017.

———, *The Posh Club* magazine, 2018.

———, *Gay Shame* flyer, 2018.

Readers Wives, *Gross Indecency* (CD produced as part of *Gross Indecency*), 2010.

Whitmore, Robin, *Gross Indecency: True Stories from the Gay Clubs of the Sixties* (booklet produced as part of *Gross Indecency*), 2010.

## Online resources published by Duckie

- '1954 Dancehall', *Duckie* (archived website) <<http://duckie.harmsen.net/generic.php?id=27>> [accessed 16 August 2018].
- '50 Queers for 50 Years', *Duckie* <<http://www.duckie.co.uk/archive/events/50-queers-for-50-years>> [accessed 16 August 2018].
- 'About', *Duckie* <<http://www.duckie.co.uk/about>> [accessed 16 August 2018].
- 'Archive', *Duckie* <<http://www.duckie.co.uk/archive>> [accessed 16 August 2018].
- 'Archive March 2009', *Duckie* <<http://duckie.harmsen.net/generic.php?id=94&submenu=old>> [accessed 16 August 2018].
- 'Battersea 2010/Bexhill-on-Sea 2009/Blackpool 2008', *Duckie* (archived website) <<http://duckie.harmsen.net/generic.php?id=102&submenu=queers>> [accessed 16 August 2018].
- 'The Big Sexy Show', *The Posh Club* <<http://theposhclub.co.uk/projects/celebrating-age/>> [accessed 16 August 2018].
- 'Border Force', *Duckie* <<http://www.duckie.co.uk/events/border-force>> [accessed 16 August 2018].
- 'Border Talk', *Duckie* <<http://www.duckie.co.uk/events/border-talk>> [accessed 16 August 2018].
- Brunsdon, Tim, 'The Posh Club – set up – stop motion', *Vimeo*, 24 March 2015 <<https://vimeo.com/123141884>> [accessed 16 August 2018].
- 'Clubs', *The Posh Club* <<http://theposhclub.co.uk/clubs/>> [accessed 16 August 2018].
- 'Duckie Archive 1995-2014', *Duckie* (archived website) <<http://duckie.harmsen.net/archive.php?submenu=old>> [accessed 16 August 2018].
- 'Duckie DeCrim: 1967', *Duckie* <<http://www.duckie.co.uk/events/duckie-decrim-1967>> [accessed 16 August 2018].
- 'Duckie Family presents Legacy', *Duckie*, *Facebook* event <<https://www.facebook.com/events/852492784933746/>> [accessed 16 August 2018].
- 'Duckie Goes to the Gateways', *Duckie* <<http://www.duckie.co.uk/vintage/gateways>> [accessed 16 August 2018].

- '*Duckie Goes to the Gateways* video', *Duckie* (archived website) <<http://duckie.harmsen.net/generic.php?id=156&submenu=old>> [accessed 16 August 2018].
- '*Duckie in Sitges*', *Duckie* <<http://www.duckie.co.uk/archive/events/duckie-in-sitges>> [accessed 16 August 2018].
- '*Duckie is Twenty One*', *Duckie* <<http://www.duckie.co.uk/events/duckie-is-21>> [accessed 16 August 2018].
- '*Duckie QTIPOC Collective*', *Duckie* <<http://www.duckie.co.uk/events/duckie-qtipoc-collective>> [accessed 16 August 2018].
- '*Duckie Upstarts*', *Duckie* (archived website) <<http://duckie.harmsen.net/generic.php?id=153&submenu=old>> [accessed 16 August 2018].
- '*Gay Shame 2018*', *Duckie* <<http://www.duckie.co.uk/events/gay-shame-2018>> [accessed 16 August 2018].
- Happy Birthday RVT* <<http://www.happybirthdayrvt.com/>> [accessed 16 August 2018].
- '*History*', *The Posh Club* <<http://theposhclub.co.uk/history/>> [accessed 16 August 2018].
- '*Impact*', *The Posh Club* <<http://theposhclub.co.uk/impact/>> [accessed 16 August 2018].
- '*Lady Malcolm's Servants' Ball*', *Duckie* <<http://www.duckie.co.uk/vintage/lady-malcoms-servants-ball>> [accessed 16 August 2018].
- '*London Promenade Trilogy*', *Duckie* <<http://www.duckie.co.uk/archive/events/london-promenade-trilogy>> [accessed 16 August 2018].
- '*Nightbird (2000)*', *Duckie* (archived website) <<http://duckie.harmsen.net/generic.php?id=14&submenu=old>> [accessed 16 August 2018].
- '*Nightbird (2002)*', *Duckie* (archived website) <<http://duckie.harmsen.net/generic.php?id=13&submenu=old>> [accessed 16 August 2018].
- '*People*', *The Posh Club* <<http://theposhclub.co.uk/people/>> [accessed 16 August 2018].
- '*The Posh Club*', *Duckie*, *YouTube*, 31 July 2014 <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BnGEhVGua4>> [accessed 16 August 2018].

'The Posh Club', Duckie, *YouTube*, 12 March 2016 <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SPDjpE6pgNA>> [accessed 16 August 2018].

'Posh Club Dance Club', *The Posh Club* <<http://theposhclub.co.uk/projects/posh-club-dance-club/>> [accessed 16 August 2018].

'Queer Fun', Duckie <<http://www.duckie.co.uk/events/queer-fun>> [accessed 16 August 2018].

'Queers and Old Dears', Duckie (archived website) <<http://duckie.harmsen.net/generic.php?id=106&submenu=old>> [accessed 16 August 2018].

'Readers Wives Fan Club', Duckie <<http://www.duckie.co.uk/archive/events/readers-wives-fan-club>> [accessed 16 August 2018].

'Saturday Night Turns 1995', Duckie (archived website) <<http://duckie.harmsen.net/clubnights.php?submenu=agenda&type=past&special=&year=1995>> [accessed 16 August 2018].

'The Slaughterhouse Club', report by Duckie for Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation and Thames Reach, 2013 <<http://duckie.harmsen.net/images/siteinfo/155.pdf>> [accessed 16 August 2018].

The Slaughterhouse Club, 'Change FM', episodes 1-4, *Soundcloud*, <<https://soundcloud.com/user-492185020>> [accessed 10 September 2018].

'Vauxhall Bacchanal', Duckie <<http://www.duckie.co.uk/archive/events/vauxhall-bacchanal>> [accessed 16 August 2018].

'Vintage', Duckie <<http://www.duckie.co.uk/vintage>> [accessed 16 August 2018].

'Volunteers', *The Posh Club* <<http://theposhclub.co.uk/volunteers/>> [accessed 16 August 2018].

'Weekend at Wilton's', Duckie (archived website) <<http://duckie.harmsen.net/generic.php?id=146&submenu=queers>> [accessed 16 August 2018].

## Duckie internal documentation

The following materials kindly provided by Duckie producers.

'Big Lottery Fund Reaching Communities fund Posh Club Stage Two application form', 2013.

'Ethics Policies', 2014.

'Big Lottery Fund Reaching Communities Stage One application', 2014.

'Big Lottery Fund Reaching Communities Stage Two application', 2014.

'DHSS application advertisement copy', 2015.

'DHSS video', 8 July 2015.

'West Sussex County Council funding application form', March 2015.

'Local Sustainability Fund application form', October 2015.

'Arts Council England research funding final application [Posh Club]', 2016.

'Application to Church Urban Fund Together Grant', 2016.

'The Posh Club - Testimonials from partners, stakeholders and guests', 2016.

'The Posh Club FAQs', 2017.

'ACE NPO application for 2018-2022', January 2017.

'Heritage Lottery Fund application for *Princess*', 2018.

## Surveys of participants in Duckie projects

I conducted the following surveys as part of my observational fieldwork:

Survey circulated to DHSS 2015 participants by email prior to the course  
(11 of 13 participants responded).

Survey circulated to DHSS 2015 participants by email after the course  
(6 of 13 participants responded).

Survey circulated to *Happy Birthday RVT* summer school 2014 participants  
by email a year after the course (3 of 14 participants responded).

Survey circulated to DHSS 2016 participants by email prior to the course  
(13 of 15 participants responded).

Survey hosted online and link sent to DHSS 2015 and 2016 participants in 2017  
(20 of 27 participants responded; NB the sum of 2015 and 2016 participants  
is 27 – not 28, as the sum of each year's figure might suggest – because one  
participant was present on both courses).

Duckie producers also kindly provided access to the following surveys undertaken by  
Emmy Minton on behalf of Duckie:

Survey of 111 Posh Club Crawley guests, 2015.

Survey of 100 Posh Club Hackney guests, 2015.

Posh Club Hackney Evaluation Questionnaire, 2015.



## Interviews with Duckie producers, artists and project participants

I conducted the following individual interviews in person as part of my research. The subject's relationship to Duckie is indicated after their name; initials, single names or descriptions of roles indicate anonymised subjects.

Annie Bowden	Posh Club producer	29 November 2016.
Tim Brunsden	Producer and videographer	10 December 2015.
Simon Casson	Producer	7 October 2015.*
Simon Casson/Dicky Eton	Producers	1 April 2015.
		2 April 2015.
		15 October 2015.
		20 July 2016.
		20 August 2016.
		9 September 2018.
Dicky Eton	Producer	11 September 2018.
Christopher Green	Performer	21 December 2016.
DHSS 2015 participants	Group interview	8 July 2015.
		18 July 2015.
DHSS 2016 participants	Group interview	9 July 2016.
Viv Evans/Tracy Frake	Posh Club venue coordinators	22 November 2016.
Posh Club volunteer	Hackney church volunteer	18 February 2015.
Posh Club guests	Hackney guests (group)	18 February 2015.
Posh Club guests	Hackney mother and daughter	18 February 2015.
Posh Club volunteers	Hackney volunteers (group)	4 February 2015.
Posh Club volunteers	Crawley volunteers (group)	8 November 2016.
Posh Club volunteers	Crawley volunteers (group)	29 November 2016.
James Hadley	Arts Council England officer	27 March 2015.
JL	DHSS participant	6 July 2015.
Krishna Isthia	Performer	10 July 2016.
LW	DHSS participant	10 July 2016.
Emmy Minton	Fundraiser	25 March 2016.

Tim Spooner	Designer	25 February 2015.
Lorraine Trevarthen/Phil Vine	Posh Club caterers	4 March 2015.
Niall Weir	Posh Club venue coordinator	18 February 2015
Mark Whitelaw	Director, producer	25 June 2015.
		10 December 2015.
		16 October 2016.
Robin Whitmore	Artist, designer, producer	10 December 2015.

*\* this interview conducted as an event at Quorum, Queen Mary University of London.*

I also draw on personal correspondence with Dicky Eton (22 August 2018) and Emmy Minton (2 August 2016 and 22 August 2018); and on the discussion between DHSS participants, producers and audience members following the showcase presented at Chelsea Theatre on 10 July 2016.